

Cesare Battisti, the Murderer Taunting Italy

by *Barbie Latza Nadeau*

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Mac Margolis



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It's little wonder. For the better part of three decades, Battisti has topped Italy's shortlist of outlaws at large. Tried in absentia in 1993 and found guilty on four separate counts of murder in the 1970s, the former PAC operative escaped from an Italian jail in 1981 and has been on the lam ever since. Battisti has lived a mostly comfortable exile between Mexico, France, and finally Brazil. Following a brief stint in Mexico after his prison break, he moved to France, where he lived freely under the Mitterrand Doctrine, which sheltered Italian leftist rebels in France who were not involved in "bloody terrorism" and could show they had "broken links" with their terrorist groups. He reinvented himself as a crime novelist, penning well-received books about terrorist activities—one, *Buena Onda (Good Vibe)*, even fictionalizes his involvement in the four murders he was convicted of committing. When the Mitterrand Doctrine expired in 2002, and when France later agreed to ship him back to Italy, Battisti fled to Brazil. He is currently behind bars, but whether he stays there or walks is still an open question.

Battisti was arrested by Brazilian federal police in 2007, but released two years later when the Brazilian justice minister, headed by left-wing Workers Party loyalist and longtime Lula ally Tarso Genro, granted Battisti political asylum on the basis of his petition of "political persecution." The case ended up in the Brazilian supreme court, where it quickly hit a legal quagmire. While the high court voted to withdraw Battisti's asylum in 2009, putting him back in prison in Brasilia and theoretically clearing the way for extradition, it also ruled to leave the final word to Lula. Rome, sensing an opening, stepped up the pressure, but after sitting on the case for months, Lula finally demurred, ruling to keep Battisti on Brazilian soil.

Some attributed the jolting move to Lula's intoxicating 87 percent approval rating, which supposedly fueled his determination—or "megalomania," according to opposition leader Sergio Guerra—to stand up to pushy first-world powers. He might also have been swayed by Battisti's formidable international defense lobby, which bombarded the Brazilian media with odes to the Italian fugitive's innocence and claims of a right-wing conspiracy against him. Or it might have been simply the call of Lula's woolly past, the onetime union leader and leftist firebrand, obliged by circumstances to govern as a pragmatist and now suddenly free again to channel his days at the barricades.

The Brazilian supreme court will have another crack at the case when the full bench convenes in February. But in many ways the damage has been done. Last week Italian President Giorgio Napolitano wrote a letter to Lula's successor Dilma Rousseff, underscoring what he called Italy's "disappointment and bitterness" over the decision to protect the convicted murderer. Italy's foreign ministry calls reversing Lula's decision a "moral duty" and promises to take the issue all the way to the International Court of Justice in the Hague if necessary.

And now the European parliament in Strasbourg has jumped into the fray, unanimously approving a motion to back Italy's bid to bring Battisti back to Italy, even while admitting they have no real authority on what is seen as a bilateral issue between the two nations. Maurizio Massari, spokesman for Foreign Minister Franco Frattini, says returning Battisti is not about politics but justice. "A person who committed common crimes—four murders no less—must be returned to pay for his crime in the country where the crimes were committed," he told *The Daily Beast*. "We want him back in an Italian prison for a sense of justice for the families and for our country."

Barbie Latza Nadeau, author of the Beast Book [Angel Face](#), about Amanda Knox, has reported from Italy for Newsweek Magazine since 1997. She also writes for CNN Traveller, Budget Travel Magazine and Frommer's.

A longtime correspondent for Newsweek, Mac Margolis has traveled extensively in Brazil and Latin America. He has contributed to The Economist, The Washington Post, and The Christian Science Monitor, and is the author of [The Last New World: The Conquest of the Amazon Frontier](#).



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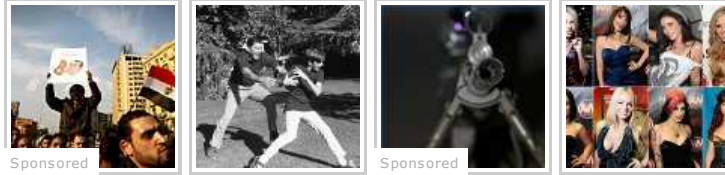
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Brazil has become a ludicrous contradiction. A third world swamp with a Justice system as credible as a \$5 hooker. How the Brazilians can grant political asylum to a four time MURDERER, and 'transform' a convicted criminal into a 'politically persecuted' victim - is mind boggling. The Brazilian cops recently raided a Rio drug infested slum and killed more than 25 drug dealers - but protect and shelter a criminal murderer who snuffed out four human beings in Italy, whilst 'victimizing' him as a political refugee? It hardly surprizes me that the Brazilians would recognize Hamas and Hizbullah terrorists and hostage taking criminals who call for the genocide of a legitimate minority State, in their charter- and now have a former anarchist with blood on her hands as "President".....what next? Manson for President?

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It has to do with the Lula's official visit to Italy on November 2008. At his arrival at the international airport of Rome, the Brazilian delegation was received by Mara Carfagna, Minister of Equal Opportunity, one of the lowest level ministers on Berlusconi government. Right there Lula and his wife Marisa Leticia felt hurt and "Itamarati" (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Brazil) felt that there was no justification for the fact that the leader of the largest Latin American country on an official visit to Italy was not welcomed on arrival by the Foreign Minister or by a minister on the same level. Italy government could care less about Lula arrival. It seems silly... but Lula's feeling was hurt.

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