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Brazil's Leaders Set Lower and Middle Classes Against Each Other

2/9/2014

“In Brazil there is a saying: ‘A good thief is a dead thief,’ ” journalist Nicole Froio writes at The Guardian. “These words have never been more relevant in today’s Brazilian class-ridden landscape, where prejudice, violence and racism run free.”

Froio continues:

The last week has been full of violent acts in Rio de Janeiro. Once again, police and protesters clashed during a protest in the centre of the city. A few days earlier a teenage boy was beaten, stripped naked and tied to a lamp post by a group of vigilantes for allegedly mugging people in the street. A video of a white man pre-emptively accusing a black, poorly dressed youth of intent to mug him has gone viral. All Brazilians, black and white, rich and poor, are terrified of the aggressive atmosphere. The confrontations are no longer people versus authority; they have become people versus people.

And senior media figures have backed the vigilantes taking justice into their own hands. This week Rachel Scheherazade, the SBT news anchor, said their actions were “understandable”, and that if people were pro-human rights they should “do Brazil a favour and adopt a thief”. She made these declarations on national primetime TV.

To many people, the statistics justify the violent backlash, Froio writes. Between 2007 and 2013 more than 33,000 people were murdered in Rio de Janeiro. 1,070 were killed as a consequence of being mugged. More frighteningly, she says, 5,412 people died in conflicts with the police.

