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The Quotidian and Constitutive Practice of Police Brutality Against Indigenous People

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Sherene Razack, Settler Colonialism, Policing and Racial Terror: The Police Shooting of Loreal Tsingine, 28 **Feminist Legal Stud.** 1 (2020).

In *Settler Colonialism, Policing and Racial Terror: The Police Shooting of Loreal Tsingine* Sherene Razack gives voice to the settler colonial violence perpetrated against Loreal Tsingine, a 27-year-old Navajo women who was shot and killed by Austin Shipley. Shipley, a white male police officer, claimed he was trying to apprehend her for alleged shoplifting. The article, which is brilliantly and compellingly written (as is typical of all of Professor Razack's work) makes several claims. Most centrally, however, she asserts that racial terror – a violence done at both structural and individual levels – is at the very heart of the settler colonial project. In the North American context, the aim of the settler colonial project is the erasure, or in Razack's words the annihilation, of Indigenous peoples in the interests of white settlement and prosperity. It is a state sponsored and centuries-old endeavour manifested through, for example, land and resource dispossession, cultural genocide, legal discrimination, the carceral state, and the destruction of the social, physical and political infrastructures that serve Indigenous peoples health and safety. Razack begins her analysis by reminding us that settler colonialism is an ongoing project, one that requires the continual imposition of racial terror.

Racial terror, Razack explains, maintains white supremacy and protects white entitlement, but also reassures today's white settler subject that the imagined threat of racial otherness is contained. Settler colonialism is premised on the extraction not only of resources and lands but also through "everyday extractive relationships" that consolidate white superiority, among other things, by violating and annihilating Indigenous bodies. (P. 2.) Through a detailed excavation of the psychic underpinnings of the settler state, Razack reveals the way in which white identity is constituted through the continual reification of Indigenous peoples as a threat to 'the community'. She writes, "[p]olice shootings of Indigenous people and the legal response to police use of force (along with everyday settler violence) are a part of the racial terror that is a central part of settler colonialism." (P. 1.)

This anti-Indigenous violence constructs not only white settler subjectivity but also state institutions – like the police:

> If the extractive relations that are the basis of settler colonialism require and produce white subjects for whom Indigenous lands *and* bodies are the resource for white identity, policing is one site where white men and women (as well as those aspiring to whiteness), can enact and consolidate racial hierarchy on behalf of the colonial state with impunity. (P. 3.)

Razack weaves these insights into her dissection of white police officer Austin Shipley's account of what occurred in the killing of Tsingine. Shipley suggested he was trying to arrest her for alleged shoplifting when she came at him with "a pair of inch-long medical scissors." (P.2.) He outweighed her by 100 pounds. Shipley shot her to death. He argued that this was self-defence – that the 100 pound Tsingine with her pair of sowing scissors caused him to fear for his safety. Razack suggests that we, in fact, accept Shipley's assertion that he feared this Indigenous woman. This "fear of Indians" and the imagined threat they pose, she argues, supports a "white colonial masculinity" that imposes dominance in an effort to confirm settler subjectivity. (P. 3.)

The white settler project, Razack suggests, requires this violence both at an individual level (through the violence

perpetrated against Indigenous bodies) and at a societal level (through the dispossession of Indigenous lands and resources). The central function of the police is to protect this white property regime and the lethal violence that they deploy to do so is, if not sanctioned by law, certainly not censored. She reveals the way in which the exoneration of Shipley, who faced no legal consequences as a result of the killing, relies on a post-mortem construction of Tsingine as an unstoppable threat – a lethal "animal." (P. 2.) In killing Tsingine, Shipley was acting in accordance with the role of the police to protect white, settler subjects and their property from the perceived "animalistic threat" posed by the Indigenous other. (P. 18.) Razack argues that this type of police use of force, and the (lack of) legal response to it, exemplify the racial terror necessary to facilitate settler colonialism. This violence against Indigenous people "lies just beneath the surface of everyday settler life, and importantly, flows through institutions such as policing, embedding itself in everyday professional routines." (P. 2.)

And so Loreal Tsingine is dead – killed with impunity.

What I have offered here is a brief description of the theoretical framework that Razack brings to bear on one particular incident of racial terror. There is a richness to this piece, both in detail and analysis, that I have not fully captured in this review. Part of what makes Razack's work so extraordinarily insightful and compelling is her ability to integrate the minutiae and individual detail of white settler violence into her analysis of the structural perpetuation of racial terror, of the ongoing colonial project. In *Settler Colonialism, Policing and Racial Terror: The Police Shooting of Loreal Tsingine*, Sherene Razack demonstrates the deeply embedded, constitutive nature of police violence against Indigenous peoples. It is an exceptionally well-done excavation of, and illumination of, the way in which white settler society maintains power and hierarchy through violence.

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