

POLICING BLACK WOMEN: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTERNATIONAL LAW

This panel was convened at 2:00 p.m. on Thursday, April 7, 2022, by its moderator, Michele Bratcher Goodwin of the University of California, Irvine School of Law, who introduced the panelists: Karen Attiah of *The Washington Post*; Ana Paula Barreto of Afro Resistance; Aissatou Sene, independent consultant; and India Thusi of Indiana University Maurer School of Law.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS BY MICHELE BRATCHER GOODWIN

doi:10.1017/amp.2023.43

Welcome, everybody, to the American Society of International Law's annual meeting. It is my pleasure to welcome you to this very special panel on Black women, global human rights, and policing. My name is Michele Bratcher Goodwin. I am the host of "On the Issues with Michele Goodwin" at *Ms.* magazine and the executive producer of *Ms. Studios*. I am also a chancellor's professor at the University of California Irvine and a senior lecturer at Harvard Medical School.

It is my distinct honor and pleasure to bring to you an outstanding panel that will take us through the diaspora in matters of human rights and the policing and surveillance of Black women. Joining me today to stitch together very important and overlooked threads is Karen Attiah. She is a columnist for *The Washington Post*, where she was previously the *Post* founding Global Opinions editor. She is a devoted human rights advocate and a veritable international affairs expert, a former Fulbright awardee to Ghana, and a proud Ghanaian American based in Dallas, Texas.

I am also joined by Ana Paula Barreto, who is a proud Black Brazilian and longtime advocate for racial, gender, and reproductive justice. She is currently a Soros Equality Fellow and formerly a senior fellow at the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights for the People of African Descent Fellowship. She is also the director of the Transnational Birth Equity for Birth Equity Collaborative.

Also joining is Aissatou Sene. She is a dynamic feminist activist from Senegal who is devoted to fighting for women's equality and empowerment and against all forms of colonialism and racist oppression. She is also a very popular and successful fashion designer in Senegal and a former YALI Mandela Fellow for Northwestern University.

I am also joined by India Thusi. She is a professor of law at the Indiana University Maurer School of Law and a senior scientist at the Kinsey Institute. She examines racial and sexual hierarchies related to policing and is the author of *Policing Bodies: Law, Sex Work, and Desire in Johannesburg*. India is a prolific author, and she is currently a Fulbright Global Scholar.

It is a pleasure for me to be with you all today. I first want to open the conversation by asking you, what brings you to the subject of policing and Black women? It is something that has been traditionally overlooked. As people think about policing, they know very well that it has a Black male face in the United States and globally, but most often, concerns related to policing and Black women happen to go ignored, even though—and if we are thinking about the United States, but I want this to be a global conversation—the United States incarcerates more women than any other

country in the world, and disproportionately, they happen to be Black and Brown women. But I want to know what brings you to the table in this discussion.

I am going to start with you, Karen.

REMARKS BY KAREN ATTIAH

doi:10.1017/amp.2023.44

Thank you so much for having me and the opportunity to have this really important discussion with amazing women from around the world.

I would say as a journalist and as a Black woman, it is how you described it very perfectly in your introduction. I think it was very much the fact that policing, police brutality, and who has the right to protection and security, and even who has the right to defend themselves, has a male-dominated face to it, and there are male-dominated voices around the situation. So often, women show up in media stories as the grieving mother, perhaps as the one expected to grant forgiveness, perhaps absolution for the killing of the Black man by police. Very rarely did I see these outpourings concern, marches, or essays for when Black women were facing, again, not just outright police brutality, but also cases where policing failed to protect Black women from the whims and whimsies of misogynoir here in the United States.

For me, I have always felt that my job as a journalist and my job as somebody who has a platform in these spaces is to uplift that. Again, I am sitting here talking to you all from Dallas, Texas, and some may remember a few years ago the case of the Black teenage girl here in McKinney, Texas, who was seen on camera. That was one of my first pieces, speaking about how cruel it was, and yet just a few weeks later, there was another video of a police officer dragging a Black teen across a classroom. These images were happening, and I felt like I had to speak about it, to call it out.

So why do this? I do this because I have to. Who else really will?

MICHELE BRATCHER GOODWIN

That is a really great point to transition on, and I want to come back to you after being with our other guests, because I also wonder what it is like for you as a journalist to get a green light for the stories that are important to tell, because some people may think that given your success, you may be able to write about anything that you want, but it also seems to me that there have been deep barriers in media in terms of being able to present the stories that relate to Black women's lives.

India, I want to broaden this conversation to some of your work and this policing that encompasses Black women and Black girls, because also, the story that Karen is telling is a story about Black girls being policed and not just Black women. It was bad enough that it is Black women but also Black girls. I also want to expand that to the geographies of the body and the policing of sex and the body and your very important book, *Policing Bodies: Law, Sex Work, and Desire in Johannesburg*, which broadens the conversation internationally and also relates it to the body. Would you please unpack that a bit more for us what that policing looks like?

REMARKS BY INDIA THUSI

doi:10.1017/amp.2023.45

Thank you for the introduction, Michele, and, Karen, I really appreciated your remarks.

I think what really brought me to this topic is that I wondered to myself, what would it mean to bring intersectionality theory to criminal law theory and to policing scholarship and policing work, because what I observed was that when I was reading this work by a notable policing scholar,