

How Dare the French Do This?

by Phyllis Chesler



I know that France deported so many of its Jewish citizens, including the wealthiest of Jewish art patrons, to Drancy and from there to be murdered in Auschwitz. And I also know what the French did in Algeria. So this is a “smaller” incident, and yet, and yet:

How dare the French airport police detain, search, terrify, and demoralize opera great, Pretty Yende, just because she’s Black—or because, as the authorities say, she lacked “a one-time visa” to visit France? She is a refined young woman, no doubt very well dressed, known to hundreds of thousands of opera fans—why pat her down, remove her cellphone, and detain her for nearly three hours? A trooper, the Milan-based Yende nevertheless sang for a French audience the very next evening

in “La Sonambula,” one of Callas’s signature roles.

The first time I heard her sing at the Metropolitan Opera House I was amazed, aghast, at her shining beauty, ebullience, timing, merriment, good nature, and superlative voice. This is truly an episode worthy of an opera: Royalty and Beauty brought low by either bureaucratic indifference or by race-based suspicion. Is this part of Macron’s new (and perhaps necessary) policy towards Muslim Islamists? Or is it France in Algeria over and over again? Why can’t airport officials be trained in recognizing what may be “different” but is not dangerous? The Israelis know how to do this at their airport. Here’s what South-African born Yende herself had to say about this on [Instagram](#). Reading it broke my heart.

“They took all my belongings including my cellphone and told me to write down phone numbers of my close family and friends to call with a landline phone they had on the retention cell, they said they were going to take me to a ‘prison hotel’ in the meantime while they looked at me like I was a criminal offender...I was stripped and searched like a criminal offender and put on the retention cell on terminal 2B customs control Charles de Gaulle, Paris. It was cold in there, there was no light at the beginning, cold and grey and they left me there alone with the landline phone and a piece of paper they gave me to write down phone numbers of those I could call, most of them refused to address me in English, there were more than 10 police officers I could hear talking and laughing down the hallway...

Police brutality is real for someone who look like me. I’ve always read about it on the news and most of my brothers and sister end up being tortured and some fatal cases make headlines and dead bodies suddenly appear with made up stories. I am one of the very very luck ones to be alive to see the day today even with ill-treatment and outrageous racial discrimination and psychological torture and very

offensive racial comments in a country that I've given so much of my heart and virtue to and (am) still determined to do so as a legal International citizen on the global stage community. I'm still shaken thinking that I am one in a million who managed to come out of that situation alive because of one phone call I thought of at the time as I was in shock and traumatized and couldn't believe what was happening to me."

Pretty: This admirer weeps for you, and with you, and hopes that you demand and receive justice from the French authorities.