



After the #MeToo backlash, an insider's guide to French feminism

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Poirier reflects on the open letter published in *Le Monde*, which was signed by 100 French women, including the film star Catherine de Neuve, and became news around the world. The letter suggested the Hollywood campaign was intolerant and promoted censorship, and that MeToo reflected a puritanical strain in feminism, and led to intolerance of those not politically correct. It asserted that 'rape is a crime, but trying to seduce someone, even persistently or cackhandedly, is not'. The letter provoked anger among feminists, with many younger French feminists accusing the signatories of being over-privileged and not caring about victims of rape and harassment. Poirier argues that, although the letter included clumsy and provocative wording, it did represent an important strand in French feminism, inspired by Simone de Beauvoir, which is still the mainstream position. It is opposed to a younger American-inspired movement, which is seen by more traditional French feminists as extremist, and leading to censorship of the arts. Poirier also points out that although the *Le Monde* letter is usually identified with Catherine de Neuve, its initiator was Abnousse Shalmani, a 41 year old Iranian refugee from Ayatollah Khomeini's regime, who had herself experienced rape, and who had found in French culture the inspiration to become free 'as a woman and a sexual being'. Shalmani said on French radio after the letter's publication that the signatories did not dismiss those who had the courage to speak out against Weinstein, or their struggle, but wished to 'add our voice' to the debate.

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