

A Response to MeToo

By Petra Quixley

‘Sexual violence holds no race, no colour or class, but the response to sexual violence does.’¹ The words of Tarana Burke, the founder of MeToo back in 2007, exemplifies the movement as an outlet for women of colour, to change the culture of silence after sexual assault. Now appropriated by the women of Hollywood, women all over the world have taken to #MeToo to share their experiences of sexual violence and assault in an effort to change laws and combat abuses of power. However, there has been a backlash. Women who consider Western law and culture to be supportive of victims of such crimes, and appropriately harsh on perpetrators, have spoken out against a movement they consider ‘infantilized women and denied them their sexual power.’²

From the woman whose boss
made an inappropriate comment,
to the one brutally assaulted,
dissenters feel that MeToo is felt
to have denigrated the
experience of real rape victims
while simultaneously victimising
womankind.

‘Rape is a crime’ is among the opening lines of the open letter to Hollywood sent by a collective of 100 prominent French women who feel the MeToo movement has gone too far. With a President that declared the country ‘sick with sexism,’³ France has seen a simultaneous clamp down on male behaviour and an outpouring of scorn against the MeToo

movement by French celebrities, who declare that it ‘goes beyond denouncing abuse of power.’ Marlène Schiappa (French politician serving as the Secretary of State in charge of Equality between Women and Men) explains:

“It’s a cultural problem. Some things have been accepted for years, for generations. People have thought, ‘Oh well, that’s just the way it is, boys will be boys.’”

But the reaction of French women suggests they enjoy French culture and see no need for the changes they have been witnessing. Such changes include anti-harassment laws which allow police to register on-the-spot fines for perpetrators of verbal harassment. This include cat-calling and whistling, which while unpleasant, are considered by many, to be unworthy of an up to €750 fine. While on-the-spot fines do exist in other countries such as Finland, the law applies only to physical, and not verbal harassment. A law in Sweden proposes that people should seek agreement to sexual encounters ahead of time via an app, to be sure of consent. They appear not to have considered the fact that, not only does this prevent either party from changing their mind at the last minute, but it labels the man as the aggressor and the woman the victim, while ignoring the larger issue surrounding the 10% rise in rape cases across the country in the last year.⁴ Vilified by the media and forced to apologise to sexual assault victims, Catherine Deneuve addresses real concerns for French women within the open letter, who are experiencing a cultural change, alongside changes to

¹ Tarana Burke speaks to CNN, 11th January 2018

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<https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/01/france-me-too/550124/>

³ <http://www.france24.com/en/20180310-france-gets-serious-laws-sexual-harassment-transport-metoo-gender-pay-gap-fines>

⁴ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-5283339/Number-rapes-Sweden-10-year-figures-reveal.html> <Accessed 14/ 04/ 18>

their laws. Deneuve says the implementation of MeToo in France has caused a new sexual Puritanism in which women are considered delicate and unapproachable, easily offended and most likely to fear the man that propositions them, whatever his manner.

The implications of MeToo also go beyond addressing abuses of power. Michelle Cottle writes 'public shaming has eclipsed due process,' referring to the fact that accusations against men are being immediately taken up by the media with only the word of the other party as evidence. This new age of 'guilty until proven innocent' has been damning and even fatal for some men who have been wrongly accused of these crimes. Others have had their name dragged through the mud, to be later cleared, having had their lives published for the world to read.

Described as a 'witch hunt and a threat to sexual freedom'⁵ this new wave of media accusations supports a woman's right to speak up, yet fails to support a man's right to a fair trial.

Although many celebrity cases have yet to see the inside of a courtroom, they have suffered the loss of their income due their employers wishing to distance themselves from the accused. According to Hillary Clinton, 'sexual assault victims should be heard and believed;' but at what cost for the men they accuse?

The MeToo movement and the rise in fear of a 'rape culture' in the West (a culture that supports or ignores rape or assault) has led to a further widening of the gap between the sexes. However, with an active condemnation for sexual assault and appropriately harsh sentences for offenders, the West does support those

who speak out. While MeToo was originally conceived for those who feel unable to speak out, the worldwide nature of the movement has caused many to consider it not just unnecessary, but blatantly man-hating. Its collectivist nature 'demonises an entire gender for the actions of a relative few'⁶ and is a threat to a fair system of justice.

⁵ Michelle Cottle

⁶ Paul Joseph Watson speaking on Sexual Puritanism