

RELEASED: Thursday 30 August 2018



## FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT: The French Letter with guest reporter Annabel Crabb

Airs 8.00 pm Tuesday September 4 on ABC TV and iview

Is it ok for a man to proposition a woman in the street or at work? Some leading French women say yes. In Paris, guest reporter Annabel Crabb asks what happens when #MeToo rubs up against Pepe Le Pew.

Hollywood's blockbuster #MeToo movement took the world by storm, giving voice to women and causing powerful men to hit the speed dial to their lawyers and PR agents.

Then it met the French resistance.

More than 100 prominent French women – including screen goddess Catherine Deneuve - signed the now famous “Le Monde Letter” denouncing #Metoo. They pledged to “defend a freedom to bother as indispensable to sexual freedom” and sympathised with “men who’ve been disciplined in the workplace... when their only crime was to touch a woman’s knee or steal a kiss”.



So what is it about sex and seduction a la francaise? Does #MeToo threaten a proud libertine tradition that differentiates France from stitched-up Anglo-Saxon culture? Or do such ideas belong to the bygone era of lustful cartoon skunk Pepe Le Lew?

Reporter Annabel Crabb goes to Paris to interrogate the Le Monde women and their critics from the French #MeToo movement, as well as some mildly confused males.

“Women like to be protected,” says ex-porn star, radio host and Le Monde signatory Brigitte Lahaie.

“Wanting to be equal to men takes away this possibility of feeling protected and nurturing sexuality, desire and eroticism.”

Crabb asks how that view squares with a recent government survey of female public transport users. How many respondents reported having been harassed while travelling? 100 per cent.

The Macron Government has pledged a new era of equality for women and has introduced a controversial on-the-spot fine for sexual harassment in public. But it balked at the last minute in its attempt to introduce a legal age of consent in France for the first time.

“Rape is minimised in France. Most people think it’s not such a big deal,” says Adelaide Bon, a writer and former actress who was raped as a child.

Scientist and philosopher Peggy Sastre co-wrote the Le Monde letter. She spies danger in the naming and shaming promoted by #MeToo and its French counterpart *Balance ton Porc* – “Call Out Your Pig”.

“We must not go back to some medieval logic,” she says. “It leads to witch hunts, to a lot of excesses, to a lot of people wrongly accused.”

Young YouTube star Marion Seclin, whose anti-harassment videos go viral, dismisses Sastre and the other Le Monde signatories as the old guard of French womanhood.

“I don’t need someone to open the door for me or pay for my dinner because I earn my own money,” she says.

**Annabel Crabb explores France’s struggle with sex, social mores and national identity in *The French Letter* on Foreign Correspondent at 8 pm Tuesday September 4 and 1.30 pm Friday September 7 on ABC TV and at 7.30 pm AEST on Saturday September 8 on the ABC News Channel; also on iView.**

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# Media Release

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