

The Journal as a European Space in Post-War Paris: the Fédération des étudiants nationalistes and Cahiers universitaires, 1961-1963

HUGH MCDONNELL

h.m.l.mcdonnell@uva.nl

ABSTRACT

This article examines the Fédération des étudiants nationalistes (FEN) and its journal *Cahiers universitaires* between 1961 and 1963 in the context of post-war Parisian political and intellectual life. These dates encompass the launch of the journal and the loss of French Algeria – a fundamental preoccupation of the group. The group's militancy on behalf of the maintenance of France's three North African *départements* was interwoven with its far right political orientation and its striking conceptualisation of Europe. This article analyses five strands of discourse about Europe that recur in the journal: a Europe of nationalism, a Europe of imperialism, a Europe of hierarchy, a Europe defined against materialism, and a Europe of youth. I will argue that these different conceptions of Europe are closely interconnected.

KEYWORDS

Cahiers universitaires, FEN, France, Algeria, far right, Europeanism

The Fédération des étudiants nationalistes was formed in 1960, partly as a hostile reaction to the new policy of the *Union nationale des étudiants de France* (UNEF) regarding France's ongoing war in Algeria.¹ At its annual conference, the UNEF had called on the French government to negotiate with the Algerian *Front de libération nationale* (FLN) in order to end the conflict. A key part of the FEN's activities was the publication of their journal *Cahiers universitaires*. The analysis of this overlooked aspect of post-war French society will proceed as follows. First, I will describe the history and purpose of the FEN. Second, it will explain why it is worthwhile to examine what was, after all, a marginal force in post-war French politics. To this end, the FEN will be located within the tendency of Europeanism in the history of the far right, a phenomenon that has been neglected by historians. Furthermore, I suggest that there is a certain value in looking at historical

¹ It should be noted that the French government did not recognise the conflict as a war until 1999. Moreover, Algeria differed from other colonies in that it was considered an integral part of France.

actors who have experienced defeat. Third, I will situate *Cahiers universitaires* in post-war Parisian intellectual life, where the journal played an important role as a space for articulating ideas about Europe. Finally, I will give a detailed analysis of the different strands of European discourse in *Cahiers universitaires*.

THE FÉDÉRATION DES ETUDIANTS NATIONALISTES

The FEN was not simply the product of an impulsive factional break after a disagreeable resolution by the UNEF in 1960. It had been in the making before that date in response to two longstanding concerns: first, to provide an organisation and ideological structure for young intellectuals who defended French Algeria and were disillusioned by the Fifth Republic. Second, to offer a legal framework for reviving those groups of the far right that had been deprived of legality.² A key aspect of the FEN's work in this regard was to develop its strength within the French university system.³

It should be noted that Europeanism was not the sole basis of the FEN's ideology. Indeed, this Europeanist nationalism was opposed by a current within the movement which advocated an exclusively franco-centric understanding of nationalism, according to a certain nineteenth century tradition. This tension lay behind a factional split in the FEN in 1964.⁴ Moreover, its anti-communism and anti-Marxism were intricately interwoven with the group's understanding of Europe, but it would perhaps be too much to say the two positions were perfectly coterminous.⁵

Although the FEN was not a major force in post-war French politics and it is more common to look at predominant actors in the emerging European community, there are two justifications for paying attention to the European discourse articulated in *Cahiers universitaires*. First, the FEN represented a segment of a broader far right wing tendency that attached tremendous importance to the idea of Europe. And yet, although some historians such as Mark Mazower have pointed to the Eurocentric character of fascism, especially in comparison with the universal ambitions of capitalism or communism, historiography in general has addressed this subject insufficiently.⁶ Eric Hobsbawm also points to the strong attachment to a European ideal in the history of fascism, and notes that indeed this is 'a phase in the development of the European idea on which historians of

² Joseph Algazy, *La Tentation néo-fasciste en France de 1944 à 1965*. Paris 1984 (192-193). The FEN functioned in part as a student wing and legal cover for the group Jeune Nation which was forbidden by government decree in May, 1958 after a series of attacks and violence, culminating in the 13 May insurrections by French settlers in Algeria.

³ For a discussion of French student unionism in general see Alain Monchablon, 'L'Apogée d'un mouvement syndical (1944-1962).' In : J.-P. Legois, Monchablon & R. Morder (eds.), *Cent ans de mouvements étudiants*. Paris 2007.

⁴ See Olivier Dard, 'L'Anticommunisme des nationalistes au temps de la République Gaullienne. L'exemple des héritiers de Jeune Nation.' *Communisme* 62-63 : 2-3, 2000, 137-152 (140-141).

⁵ See *ibid.* (passim).

⁶ Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century*. London 1998 (xiv). For a discussion of the historiography of French Fascism see Robert Wohl, 'French Fascism, Both Right and Left: Reflections on the Sternhell Controversy.' *Journal of Modern History* 63:1, 1991, 91-98.

the post-war European community do not much like to dwell.’⁷ By critically analyzing the references to Europe in the discourse of the FEN, this article aims to redress this neglect. Second, the post-war defeat of the far right constitutes a productive point of departure. The interest in examining the far right Europeanist discourse of *Cahiers universitaires* lies precisely in the fact that the currency of such ideas was utterly depleted by the end of the Second World War. Indeed, as Mazower remarks: ‘Such was the shock of being subjected to a regime of unprecedented and unremitting violence that in the space of eight years a sea-change took place in Europeans’ political and social attitudes, and they rediscovered the virtues of democracy.’⁸

The FEN was the heir of a broader far right movement that had lost confidence that its conceptualization of Europe were to be vindicated in history. Robert Brasillach – a canonical source of inspiration for the organization – concluded dejectedly in August, 1943, that ‘there is no longer a fascist Europe.’⁹ Similarly, Roger Nimier drearily concluded in 1949 that ‘Nos amis sont morts. Nos espoirs sont ruinés. Ceux qui rêvaient à l’ordre nouveau connaissent la fraternité des ruines, le déchirement des nations pauvres et les seuls Européens du siècle dans la personne des cadavres sur les décombres.’¹⁰

What is more, there was a strong consensus that the FEN’s sense of Europe as a name in which to defend colonialism generally, and French Algeria in particular, was on the wrong side of history. Todd Shepard demonstrates the swift emergence of the notion of *le courant de l’histoire* (the tide of history) in French political life at the close of the Algerian war. Decolonization quickly came to appear to be inevitable. This is borne out by numerous irritated references to this notion in the FEN’s archives and in *Cahiers universitaires*. General opinion had shifted quickly from Prime Minister Mendès-France’s insistence before the Assemblée nationale, uncontroversial in 1954, that ‘Algeria is France’. A *Paris Match* editorial told rejectionists of Algerian independence in 1962 that ‘History cannot be changed when History has already been written.’¹¹

The analysis of the German historian Reinhart Koselleck is an apt point of departure for our examination of this nationalist student group. Koselleck makes a stimulating argument about the implications of historical failure:

The historian on the winning side is easily inclined to interpret short-term success in terms of a long-term ex-post teleology. Not so the defeated. Their primary experience is that everything happened otherwise than hoped or planned. They have a greater need to explain why something else occurred... in the short run history may be made by the victors. In the long run the gains in historical understanding have come from the defeated.¹²

⁷ Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: the short twentieth century, 1914-1991*. London 1995 (136).

⁸ Mazower 1998 (143).

⁹ *Ibid.* (152).

¹⁰ Roger Nimier, ‘Vingt ans en 1945.’ *La Table ronde*, No. 20-21 (August-September, 1945) cited in R. Girardet, ‘L’héritage de l’“Action française”.’ *Revue française de science politique* 4, 1957, 765-792 (792).

¹¹ Cited in Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization. The Algerian War and the Remaking of France*. Ithaca 2006 (99).

¹² Cited in Perry Anderson, *Spectrum: From Right to Left in the World of Ideas*. London 2005 (315-316).

The question arises whether Koselleck's insight is useful in making sense of how the FEN articulated its vision of Europe – an idea that incorporated regret and yet also an enduring commitment to a concrete political project. Perhaps the FEN's discourse corresponded better to Perry Anderson's counter-hypothesis: 'for all its force, Koselleck's argument is one-sided. In pointing to the epistemological advantages of the defeated, it overlooks their temptations. First among these are the lures of consolation.'¹³ One might add delusion. In any case, to examine the FEN's conception of Europe in *Cahiers universitaires* is to look into the self-understanding of a historical actor with its back up against the wall.¹⁴

POST-WAR INTELLECTUAL LIFE IN PARIS

Before turning to the specific ideas about Europe in *Cahiers universitaires*, it is important to establish the intellectual context in which it operated in post-war Paris up to the French withdrawal from North Africa, both in terms of the place of the journal as an intellectual space, and in terms of articulating views about Europe.

Parisian intellectual life was at its apogee in this period and journals played an important part in this brilliant intellectual scene. Jean-Paul Sartre's monthly *Les Temps modernes* is only the most famous example of this trend.¹⁵ Other journals such as *Esprit*, *Les Lettres françaises*, *Combat*, *Preuves*, or *Europe* were also highly renowned, albeit in varying ways and among different audiences. Other journals circulated less widely but were nonetheless often intellectually or politically important. *Droit et liberté*, the organ of the MRAP (Mouvement contre le Racisme, l'Anti-Sémitisme, et pour la Paix), offers an instructive example. In his examination of this group, Jim House highlights the central role played by French Jews of Central or Eastern European origin in mobilizing solidarity with persecuted Algerians in the metropole. Their work might be thought of as a quiet but timely riposte to the kind of guarded, closed and hierarchical understanding of Europe, of which their co-Parisian students in the FEN were but one instance.¹⁶ Journals were also an integral part of the intellectual and political life of immigrant communities in Paris, as two examples illustrate: *Solidaridad Obrera* among exiled anti-Francoist Spaniards, and *Kultura* in the Polish community.

Whilst not exaggerating the claim, since French intellectual life could be intensely self-regarding and parochial, discourse about Europe was a noteworthy trend in these periodicals. This was the case whether Europe was directly invoked, as for instance in *Preuves*, which was explicitly founded on the premise of advocating a democratic and anti-communist Europe, or implicitly through discourse about issues that implied an under-

¹³ *Ibid.* (316).

¹⁴ For an interesting discussion of political theory about conceptualizing defeat, see Gopal Balakrishnan's discussion of Machiavelli and, secondarily, Carl Schmitt, Antonio Gramsci and Bertold Brecht in 'Future Unknown. Machiavelli for the Twenty-First Century.' *New Left Review* 32, 2005, 5-21.

¹⁵ See Anna Boschetti, *Sartre et 'les Temps modernes': une entreprise intellectuelle*. Paris 1985.

¹⁶ See Jim House, 'Memory and the Creation of Solidarity During the Decolonization of Algeria', *Yale French Studies* 118-119, 2011, 15-38.

standing of Europe – for instance, decolonization, the Cold War, and the emerging European political community.

Another way in which the journal should be understood as a European space is its essential role as a forum for the rhetorical articulation of intellectuals' commitments.¹⁷ Rhetoric is here to be understood in its traditional sense as a description of the world, but also an intervention into it, or a means to change it. Certainly, description of, indictment of, and prescription for Europe are some of the most apparent features of *Cahiers universitaires*. It is ironic that the term 'intellectual' had first been uttered as a term of abuse by Maurice Barrès, himself an important figure of reference for the FEN, so as to denounce the likes of Zola and Léon Blum for their defence of Dreyfus.¹⁸ There is a specific tradition of far right journals in Paris. *Je suis partout*, edited by Brasillach between 1937 and 1943, was one of the most widely read newspapers in occupied France with a circulation of 300,000 readers.¹⁹ Richard Vinen notes that the far right-wing press in post-liberation France provided institutional continuity to the movement and achieved respectable circulation levels: the figures for *Ecrits de Paris*, *Rivarol*, and *Paroles Françaises* ranged from 30,000 to 100,000.²⁰

The intensity and importance of student intellectual life and activism in this period are often underestimated. This is perhaps because it is overshadowed by the student movement of 1968, and also because it is thought of as merely a rite of passage, rather than having a serious stake in public debate. In her study of *Les Temps modernes*, Boschetti uses Pierre Bourdieu's concept of the field to argue for the relational strategies of intellectual actors. Student intellectual life can be described as a sub-field and student journals are thus to be understood as competing both against each other in terms of mobilizing and appropriating symbolic capital and intellectual authority, and also as aspiring to influence the broader agenda of Parisian intellectual life. If *Cahiers universitaires* was aimed at a student audience, it was for the purpose of winning hegemony among French students, as a step towards the FEN's reshaping society at large. One is reminded of the remarks of historian Frederick Cooper, who states that in examining intellectual life in the post-war period 'one cannot escape its political engagement, the sense among intellectuals that what they said mattered.'²¹ Koselleck's insight about perspective and defeat is perhaps complicated here. For the FEN was not in the business of reflectively withdrawing to draw up a historical balance sheet of a defeated far right. Rather, it intervened in the Parisian student field and in broader Parisian intellectual life with serious ambitions to reshape French society in the future. We will now turn to examine the specific invocations of Europe in *Cahiers universitaires*.

¹⁷ Tony Judt, *Postwar. A History of Europe since 1945*. London 2007 (785); George Steiner, *The Idea of Europe*. Tilburg 2004 (29, 35).

¹⁸ Tony Judt, *The Memory Chalet*. London 2010 (113).

¹⁹ Cited in Imogen Long, 'L'Épuration: The Intervention of Simone de Beauvoir.' In: J. Wardhaugh (ed.), *Paris and the Right in the Twentieth Century*. Newcastle 2007 (196).

²⁰ Richard C. Vinen, 'The End of an Ideology? Right-Wing Antisemitism in France, 1944-1970.' *The Historical Journal*, 37:2, 1994, 365-388 (367).

²¹ Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question. Theory, Knowledge, History*. Berkeley/Los Angeles 2005 (54).

A EUROPE OF NATIONALISM

On a practical level, *Cahiers universitaires* demonstrated a keen sense of trans-European nationalism. Each edition devoted a section to news from equivalent far right nationalist student groups throughout Europe. Full length articles were devoted to these groups' problems and prospects, and articles were shared and translated between their respective publications. *Cahiers universitaires* readers were thus aware of comparable movements in Sweden, Germany, Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Belgium. But the FEN's invocation of a Europe of nationalism was more theoretically developed than this kind of mutual interest and encouragement, and it was indeed the purpose of *Cahiers universitaires* to serve as a forum for such theoretical substantiation.

The FEN saw France, and European nations in general, as suffering from the same problems – political, technical, social lethargy, resignation and disarray. This was unbecoming of a Europe formerly characterized by creative energy and spirit.²² Such was the message of the group's foundational manifesto (the *Manifeste de la classe soixante*) which was continually referenced in *Cahiers universitaires* and reproduced and reworked in its September-October 1962 edition. Furthermore, the *Manifeste* laid out the intention to participate at the student level in working towards the goal of 'la reconstruction de la France et de l'Europe de demain.'²³ But this was not European unification conceived along the lines of increasing intergovernmental cooperation: 'ce ne sont pas les accords économiques qui unifieront l'Europe, mais l'adhésion de ses peuples au Nationalisme.'²⁴ What was at stake here was a rejection of *étatisme* in the name of populism and insistence on creativity and spiritualism as the bases of belonging. This is a theme to which we will return in our examination of the FEN's rejection of materialism.

Far from being in tension with each other, nationalism and Europe implied each other. During the aftermath of the Second World War and the onset of the Cold War, the Americans insisted that Europe should renounce nationalism. The FEN objected to this advice by stating that nationalism was Europe's very basis. Of course, this idea had deeper roots than short term US policy or the vagaries of contemporary global politics. The canonical authority of the previous generation of the French far right was invoked to make this same case. Pierre Drieu la Rochelle and Brasillach, for instance, were cited as having convincingly demonstrated the European character of nationalism.

A further point that needs to be stressed is that nationalism for the FEN was nothing less than a European prerogative, so that non-European nationalism was a contradiction in terms. *Cahiers universitaires* attacked the idea that the nationalism of Angolan terrorists, Syrians, or Egyptian president Nasser, could claim commensurability with Giuseppe Mazzini's paradigm of a Young Europe of nationalisms.²⁵ In fact, the FEN insisted that 'le Nationalisme doit être compris comme la philosophie politique des peuples blancs',

²² Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques. Centre d'histoire de l'Europe du vingtième siècle. Fonds 'Etudiants Nationalistes', 1, dossier 1, *Manifeste de la classe 60* (3). (Hereafter abbreviated to F. EN).

²³ *Ibid.* (2).

²⁴ F.EN, 1, dossier 1, *Pour une critique positive* (19).

²⁵ F.EN, 1, dossier 3, *Cahiers universitaires*. January-February 1962 (8).

whilst the permanence of Western civilisation was contrasted to ephemeral ‘pseudos-civilisations colorées.’²⁶ Two things should be emphasized here: the term ‘the West’ was for the FEN an expression of European values and did not imply any concessions to the importance of the United States. Secondly, this aversion to non-European nationalism was, of course, laying the ground for its opposition to decolonization. This leads us on to the second conception of Europe in *Cahiers universitaires* – the idea of a Europe of imperialism.

A EUROPE OF IMPERIALISM

While it is true that French Algeria was the FEN’s key issue regarding imperialism, this too was invoked as a European concern. This was a notable deviation from successive French governments’ pleas that the Algerian question was an internal French one. It also contrasts with the continuing memory of the conflict as a French *national* drama.²⁷ Accordingly, *Cahiers universitaires* reported with satisfaction on student demonstrations and initiatives in Portugal, Italy, and Belgium in defence of French Algeria and Western Civilisation.²⁸ In response, the journal noted: ‘Nous saluons nos amis et nous sommes heureux de constater que toute la jeunesse européenne prend conscience de tous les problèmes qui se posent désormais à elle, et celui de la sauvegarde de l’Algérie française est actuellement son point de cristallisation.’²⁹ It was in the same spirit that for *Cahiers universitaires*, Portugal was by December 1962 the last standing bulwark of the West, since it alone stood against decolonization and pursued its war in Angola.³⁰

To grasp the nature of the FEN’s advocacy of European imperialism, it is crucial to bear in mind that it was integrally related to its understanding of European nationalism. Imperialism was not considered supplemental to a Europe of nationalism, it was absolutely necessary for it. A review of a book about Turkish nationalism in the January-February 1962 edition of *Cahiers universitaires* illustrates the nature of what the Europe of the FEN was, and what it was not. The author of the book in question was reproached for making ‘une distinction entre “impérialisme” et “nationalisme” qui nous semble sans fondement’.³¹ The positing of nation and empire as unproblematically linked in a conceptualization of Europe is particularly interesting in the case of French Algeria. Not only was French Algeria invoked by the FEN as of special concern for Europe, but it differed from other colonies in that it was deemed to be, in fact, not a colony at all, but rather an integral part of French national territory. Todd Shepard describes how French colonial policy in Algeria agonized over constitutional and legalistic formulae, in an attempt to navigate the contradictions of incorporation and differentiation of French citizen and colonial subject. This was inherent in a situation in which European settlers inhabited a

²⁶ F.EN, 1, dossier 2, *FEN presse*. 5 April 1964 (7). Underlined in the original.

²⁷ Shepard 2006 (57). See also Matthew James Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria’s Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era*. Oxford 2002.

²⁸ F.EN, 1, dossier 3, *Cahiers universitaires*. February 1961 (19-20).

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ F.EN, 1, dossier 3, *Cahiers universitaires*. December 1962 (2).

³¹ F.EN, 1, dossier 3, *Cahiers universitaires* January-February 1962 (31).

land deemed French but in which the vast majority of the indigenous Arabs and Berbers were denied equal rights of citizenship.³² Shepard demonstrates that the final settlement of the Algerian conflict gave rise to a constitutional definition and understanding of who was French in terms of a much more rigid and differentiated ethnic European character. Revealingly, this was no consolation whatsoever for the FEN. Much as it fulminated against and denigrated non-European peoples, it was far more immediately concerned with regrouping, so as to work for the reversal of the loss of French Algeria and the French empire. Hence *Cahiers universitaires* reported in December 1962: ‘Nous n’avons plus rien à défendre, plus rien à conserver... plus d’Occident. Plus rien. Nous sommes au-delà de la défense.’³³

The significance of this understanding and defence of imperialism is that the Europe that the FEN invoked was necessarily and constitutively in excess of itself. That is to say that if Europe was to be worth anything at all, it had to extend to and dominate in the non-European world. Europe only emerged in this imperial, non-European surplus, otherwise it signified nothing more than, as Jean-Paul Sartre described it in a different context, ‘un accident géographique.’³⁴

A EUROPE OF HIERARCHY

Colonialism was, of course, a system predicated on hierarchy. But the importance of hierarchy in the FEN discourse about Europe – not only between Europe and the non-European world but also within Europe – merits an examination of the concept in its own right. The *Manifeste de la Classe 60* unambiguously laid out its place as a central tenet of the values of the FEN:

Nous rejetons la conception démocratique de l’homme, individu anonyme qui abdique de sa personnalité et de sa valeur devant l’absurde et injuste loi égalitaire par laquelle un Bigeard est rabaisé au niveau du dernier balayeur du quartier, un Pasteur à celui d’un analphabète originaire du Congo et la mère de la famille à celui de la prostituée.³⁵

Within national borders the commitment to hierarchy stressed a rejection of democracy and the existence of a natural hierarchy devoid of class conflict. In terms of what was significant about hierarchy and the conceptualization of Europe, we will examine the hierarchy of European nations within a composite Europe, and then the hierarchy between Europe and the non-European world.

For the FEN, Europe itself was a composite unity, to be sure. But it was one in which France occupied the most important position. We have already seen how France was viewed as the European imperial power *par excellence*, though this did not preclude respect for and admiration of other European imperial nations. This self-image was culti-

³² Shepard 2006 (19-55 & passim.).

³³ F.EN, 1, dossier 1, ‘Méthode et organisation 1963, 1’(1).

³⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre, ‘Orphée noire.’ In: *Situations III. Lendemain de guerre*. Paris 2003 (231).

³⁵F.EN, 1, dossier 3, *Cahiers universitaires*. September-October 1962 (3). Marcel Bigeard was a highly decorated French military officer who had served in the Second World War, Indochina and Algeria.

vated by the FEN when, for instance, the *Manifeste de la classe 60* quoted foreign poets and thinkers: ‘L’Europe sans la France serait un corps sans tête et peut-être aussi sans Coeur’, and ‘Dans une Europe réconciliée, la France reprendra sa mission de nation-chef.’³⁶

FEN statements and publications that stressed natural order and hierarchy were most conspicuous in their conceptualization of the non-European world. We have seen that nationalism was defined as a European privilege. The group continually repeated that non-European nationalism was a delusion and a contradiction. It was seen as thoughtless iconoclasm characterized by a preference for anarchy over peace and order. Naturally, the FEN insisted that such nihilism was encouraged and exploited by Soviet imperialism, and high finance and rootless big capital.

Interestingly, this kind of rhetoric rebounded to the metropole, and in turn inflected how one conceptualized Europe. In this sense, the quote from the *Manifeste de la classe 60* in which a street sweeper, a Congolese and a prostitute are conflated, supports the contention of Cooper and Ann Stoler, that class categorization was ‘racialized to the core.’³⁷ Moreover, it reveals an ambiguity between a natural and stable hierarchy on the one hand, and a hierarchy that was amenable to, and could be refined by, purification, on the other. Menial work like sweeping roads was necessary in Europe and those who performed these functions should know their place, without Marxist illusions.³⁸ But the invocation of the Congolese and the prostitute suggested foreignness and dirtiness, each amenable to sanitization. In this instance, the aggressive championing of Europeanness by the FEN flourished through what it denounced as non-European. By borrowing Etienne Balibar’s argument about the dynamics of racism, and by situating it next to the FEN’s repeated warnings against the internal enemy, we can conclude that the group championed not Europe as such, but perpetual Europeanisation.³⁹

The racial-cultural identity of ‘true nationals’ remains invisible, but it can be inferred (and is ensured) *a contrario* by the alleged, quasi-hallucinatory visibility of the ‘false nationals’: the Jews, ‘wogs’, immigrants, ‘Pakis’, natives, Blacks... In other words, it remains constantly in doubt and in danger; the fact that the ‘false’ is too visible will never guarantee that the ‘true’ is visible enough. By seeking to circumscribe the common essence of nationals, racism thus inevitably becomes involved in the obsessional quest for a ‘core’ of authenticity that cannot be found, shrinks the category of nationality and de-stabilizes the historical nation.⁴⁰

The paradox that Balibar presents here is one whereby on the one hand racism undercuts the nation by reducing the ‘true’ inhabitants of the nation. At the same time, the multiplication of categories will end up rebounding and attacking those within the nation who are said to belong, a dialectical movement that undercuts the task, laid out for this new

³⁶ *Ibid.* (7-8).

³⁷ Frederick Cooper & Ann L. Stoler, ‘Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda.’ In: *Tensions of Empire. Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*. Berkeley 1997 (9).

³⁸ F.EN, 1, dossier 3, *Cahiers universitaires*. February 1961 (10).

³⁹ See for example F.EN, 1, dossier 3, *Cahiers universitaires*. January-February 1962 (10).

⁴⁰ Etienne Balibar, ‘Racism and Nationalism.’ In: E. Balibar & I. Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*. London 1991 (60).

youth elite in the *Manifeste de la classe 60*, to work for the unity of the nation that would lead a new Europe as they conceived of it.⁴¹

A EUROPE OF ANTI-MATERIALISM

Ostensibly the FEN's insistence on hierarchy coexisted with a commitment to humanism, albeit of a particular 'virile' kind.⁴² This underpinned the group's hatred and rejection of 'hyper-materialism', whether liberal American or Soviet communist. Both, they contended, were contemptuous of man.⁴³ *Cahiers universitaires* thus expressed the following sentiment: 'Nos vœux à nos Amis d'Europe qui combattent, chacun dans leurs pays, pour que se réalise cette Europe, libérée du démocratisme libéral, véritable berceau de la civilisation vis-à-vis des deux blocs matérialistes américain ou soviétique.'⁴⁴ For the FEN, liberal democracy and Marxism were equally guilty of reducing humans to their economic activity and depriving them of everything else that defined them. In doing so, both violated the 'tendances fondamentales de la vie humaine et de la culture.'⁴⁵ This was linked to the group's critique of technocracy as coercive and deforming uniformisation. They also denounced inauthentic cosmopolitanism, which was considered to be an attack on Europe far more than a variant interpretation of it.⁴⁶ Accordingly, *Cahiers universitaires* devoted the best part of its December 1962 edition to attacking these characteristics in the emerging institutions of European political community. Under the title 'Ce que cachent les institutions européennes', the FEN suggested that this Europe of political integration was not any kind of Europe at all, but a crass and credulous conception of community.⁴⁷ One sense in which this emerging European political community was bound to clash with FEN sensibilities was its obviously constructed nature as a response to political and economic necessities of post-war reconstruction, as opposed to something spiritually rooted.

A correlate of the FEN's rejection of Enlightenment doctrines was a denigration of the French revolution and the democratic tradition. To this end the group pointed to the damage wreaked by the Jacobin legacy, and scorned the slogan of *liberté, égalité, fraternité*.⁴⁸ Democracy was constantly invoked as an idea that cut the ground from under the feet of a Europe worthy of the name, by facilitating and inciting a challenge to natural order. In the FEN vision of Europe these ideologies were not deemphasized but rather judged incommensurable – 'entre la démocratie et les nationalistes il s'établit ainsi un

⁴¹ F.EN, 1, dossier 3, *Cahiers universitaires*. September-October 1962 (9).

⁴² F.EN, 1, dossier 1, 'Méthode et organisation 1963,1' (2).

⁴³ F.EN, 1, dossier 2, *FEN presse*, 'Bulletin d'informations confidentielles. Rapport sur la seconde conférence nationale' (5).

⁴⁴ F.EN, 1, dossier 3, *Cahiers universitaires*. January-February 1963 (3).

⁴⁵ F.EN, 1, dossier 2, *FEN presse*, 'Bulletin d'informations confidentielles. Rapport sur la seconde conférence nationale' (7).

⁴⁶ F.EN, 1, dossier 1, *Pour une critique positive* (18).

⁴⁷ See F.EN, 1, dossier 3, *Cahiers universitaires*. December 1962.

⁴⁸ F.EN, 1, dossier 3, *Cahiers universitaires*. February 1961 (5) ; F.EN, 1, dossier 3, *Cahiers universitaires*. May 1962 (5).

dialogue des sourds.’⁴⁹ Further, ‘on ne peut voter chaque soir pour savoir, chaque matin, à quel pays on appartient, car la nationalité n’est pas un fait volontaire. Nous la trouvons dans notre berceau en naissant.’⁵⁰

In response to this utterly unsatisfactory interpretation of Europe, the FEN insisted on a Europe of nations defined by spiritualism, creativity, and organic natural community – notions that drew heavily on the aesthetic categories of Romanticism. This was presented not as an alternative, superior Europe, but as an irritated reiteration of what uniquely defined Europe. The self-destructively liberal travesty of Europe contrasted in their view to the authentic Europe of nationalisms as the ‘porteur des valeurs créatrices et spirituelles de l’occident.’⁵¹ In this regard the frankness of an article in *Cahiers Universitaires* in 1962, ‘Qu’est-ce que le fascisme?’ is curious, since the FEN instructed its members not to refer to themselves as fascist, on tactical if not principled grounds.⁵² The article argued that the public was scandalously misinformed about the nature and achievements of this movement.⁵³ If its history was not flawless, on balance it was an honourable foundation on which to imagine and to build Europe.

A EUROPE OF YOUTH

Youth was a conspicuous term of reference for the FEN, as it was often for the far right generally. This was an image fostered by the successes of far right students in the 1930s, whilst the execution of Robert Brasillach bequeathed it what Alice Kaplan describes as ‘the James Dean of French fascism.’⁵⁴ But youth took on a specific importance for the FEN with regard to its Europeanist ideology in terms of its implications for agency in history. Youth served as an antidote to a key notion that characterized the period of decolonization: the idea that the tide of history would inevitably bring independence in the colonies. There was no single landmark moment comparable to British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan’s ‘winds of change’ speech in South Africa in 1960, but nonetheless it was an idea that found acceptance around the same time in France. This idea was vociferously contested by the FEN, and irritated references to it recur constantly in their archives and in *Cahiers universitaires*.

Against this purportedly irresistible force of nature, the FEN insisted on the priority of will and action to shape history, and readers of *Cahiers universitaires* were instructed that youth had always proved of great importance in determining periods of history. Canonical figures of the French right like Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, Abel Bonnard, Cardinal de Richelieu, Drieu la Rochelle, Joan of Arc, and Maurice Barrès were quoted on the front cover of respective issues of *Cahiers universitaires* to reiterate this claim. By May 1962, when it was clear France was on its way out of Algeria, the journal included

⁴⁹ F.EN, 1, dossier 3, *Cahiers universitaires*. May-June 1961 (6).

⁵⁰ F.EN, 1, dossier 3, *Cahiers universitaires*. January-February 1962 (11).

⁵¹ F.EN, 1, dossier 1, *Pour une critique positive* (9).

⁵² F.EN, 1, dossier 1, ‘Méthode et organisation 1963 (2)’ (28).

⁵³ F.EN, 1, dossier 3, *Cahiers universitaires*. March-April 1962 (29).

⁵⁴ See Alice Kaplan, *The Collaborator: The Trial and Execution of Robert Brasillach*. Chicago 2000 (234).

on the inside cover Hubert Lyautey's invocation of French youth, his call for steadfastness and courage and his conviction that 'dans l'Histoire des peuples, des batailles plus perdues encore ont été regagnées. Et je me sens plein de courage.'⁵⁵

The extent of the importance attached to youth was demonstrated by the group's warning against interacting with older activists, even those with comparable far right political credentials and who held suitable convictions about Europe. To engage with these types was 'semé d'embuches et c'est avec la plus grande circonspection qu'il faut s'y aventurer.'⁵⁶ This insistence on the priority of youth was often underscored by elaborate rhetoric. As one text from *Cahiers universitaires* in 1961 put it: 'Les luttes gigantesques de l'antiquité et du Moyen Age, celle de David et Goliath, de Siegfried et du Dragon sont à la mesure des seuls jeunes. Les aînés sont là pour les aider et les soutenir.'⁵⁷

Interestingly, the *Manifeste de la classe soixante* referred to the immensely popular depiction of ennui stricken and nihilistic teenagers in St. Germain des Prés in the 1958 film *Les Tricheurs*. Dismissing its representation, the *Manifeste* offered instead a European youth of common resolve, heroism, dynamism and taste for action, as shown on the streets of Budapest, Algiers and Paris.⁵⁸

CONCLUSION

What is particularly characteristic of the discourse of the FEN, is its invocation of Europe with regret rather than expectation, and yet also with a sense of purposefulness that this regret might be channelled into a positive project, as they conceived it. We have seen that the core FEN idea of a Europe of nationalism combined practical trans-European connections and networks and points of reference, a guarded and jealous invocation of the exclusiveness of nationalism as defining Europe and also, more importantly, as its exclusive right. Imperialism was integral to this Europe of nationalism which in turn insisted on a rigid sense of hierarchy. Finally, we examined the rejection of materialism as radically incommensurable with Europe's natural characteristics and place. Ultimately, the vanguard in the struggle for this Europe was European youth, within which the FEN conceived of its members as elites and examples.

We have seen that the traditional sense of rhetoric as a description of the world and an intervention to change it, exactly characterizes the FEN's engagement with the question of Europe through its journal. Ultimately however, *Cahiers universitaires* suggests that this kind of rhetorical performance does not sit well with Koselleck's insight about the advantage of defeat, precisely because it is a register biased against its full acceptance, and hampers thoroughgoing theoretical retreat, reflection, and renewal. Moreover, it is interesting that the FEN invested such rhetorical energy in the case that Europe without empire was sunk. To do so was to gamble its credibility as a force to fight for its concep-

⁵⁵ F.EN, 1, dossier 3, *Cahiers universitaires*. May 1962.

⁵⁶ F.EN, 1, dossier 1, 'Méthode et organisation [1960]' (21).

⁵⁷ F.EN, 1, dossier 3, *Cahiers universitaires*. May-June 1961 (6).

⁵⁸ F.EN, 1, dossier 3, *Cahiers universitaires*. September-October 1962 (11).

tion of Europe, should the disaster it foresaw emanating from decolonization not come off. This was quite possibly a factor in the group's dissolution and that of *Cahiers universitaires* by 1967. After all, it was somewhat implausible that its members could bear the weight of this kind of rhetoric for very long in a France absolutely determined to put its imperial past behind it.

•> HUGH MCDONNELL *is currently completing his doctorate at the University of Amsterdam. His thesis is entitled* Europeanising Spaces in Paris, 1950-1962.