Chapter 5. Europeanising Spaces and the Fédération des étudiants nationalistes 1960-1963

The Fédération des étudiants nationalistes (FEN) was formed by Parisian university and lycée students in 1960. It would prove to be one of the intellectual forerunners of the French and European New Right, including such groups as GRECE, whose membership extended to Italy, Germany, Britain, Belgium, Sweden, Spain, Austria, the Netherlands and Czechoslovakia. The foundation of the FEN was in part a hostile reaction to the call of the Union national des étudiants de France (UNEF) at its 1960 annual conference for the French government to engage in negotiations with the FLN, for the purpose of ending the conflict in Algeria. The establishment of the Fédération was not simply an impulsive decision after this UNEF resolution, however. It had been conceived prior to this conference as a response to two longstanding concerns: first, to provide an organisation for young intellectuals who defended the cause of French Algeria and were disillusioned by the Fifth Republic; and second, to offer a legal structure for reviving those groups of the far right that had been deprived of legality.

It is striking just how pervasive Europe was in the group’s discourse, as is apparent in two foundational manifestos of the group, which remained constant touchstones: the Manifeste de la classe 60 (1960) and Pour une critique positive (1962). In the former we learn that

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4 Joseph Algazy, La Tentation néo-fasciste en France de 1944 à 1965 (Paris: Fayard, 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 insurrection by French settlers in Algeria.
members aspired to become ‘le Français de type nouveau sur lequel la Nation et l’Europe s’appuieront pour revivre et assumer leur destin.’\textsuperscript{5} In the latter the group complained about the lack of coherence of the French nationalist right and noted that Europe meant different or contradictory things to its various groups.\textsuperscript{6} So, what did it mean to the FEN? Before tackling this question one should guard against projecting into the group too great a degree of coherence and unity. After all, ideological divisions between factions advocating a nationalism grounded in a Europeanist ideology on one hand, and a francocentric understanding of nationalism based on a certain nineteenth century tradition on the other, led to a split in the group in 1964.\textsuperscript{7} The FEN is also contextualised within the history of the broader French and European far right, and its ideas about Europe. An emphasis is placed on the idea that the FEN’s discourse of Europe was produced in an intellectual and political climate in which they were widely considered to be on the wrong side of history.

The chapter identifies and examines four senses of Europe that suffuse the group’s archives and publications. First, an idea of a Europe of nationalism. Second, a Europe of imperialism, which was in fact integral to a Europe of nationalism. The contemporary consensus that Europe should decolonise and reconstitute itself as a self-contained unit was vehemently rejected. It is argued that in doing so, the FEN revealed that its highest priority was of a Europe of imperialism, a conviction that is conceptualised and theoretically examined in this chapter as an idea of a Europe in excess of itself. Third, the group proposed an idea of Europe in terms of its relation to the perceived fundamental importance of hierarchy, both within Europe and

\textsuperscript{5} EN, 1, dossier 1, Manifeste de la classe 60, 2.
\textsuperscript{6} EN, 1, dossier 1, Pour une critique positive, 11.
between Europe and the non-European world. Finally, the FEN’s vision of Europe was defined by a rejection of materialism and a counter-proposal for a Europe redeemed through its youth.

**Background of the FEN**

Of what significance is it to examine the actions and thought of the FEN, who were a marginal force in post-war French politics? It is argued here that the FEN represented a segment of a broader far right-wing tendency, in France and throughout Europe, which attached tremendous importance to the idea of Europe. Historians such as Mark Mazower have pointed to the Eurocentric character of fascism, especially in comparison with capitalism or Communism. But historiography in general has addressed the problem of the definition and variations of fascism more than its Europeanist component. 8 Eric Hobsbawm points to the strong attachment to a European ideal in the history of fascism, and suggestively notes that indeed this is ‘a phase in the development of the European idea on which historians of the post-war European community do not much like to dwell.’ 9 By critically analysing the use of Europe in the discourse of the FEN, this chapter aims to contribute to the redress of this neglect. As such, the relevance of the group to the historiographical debate about the precise nature and distinctiveness of fascism in relation to other far right politics is beyond its scope.

A second interesting point of departure in examining the discourse of the FEN lies in the fact that the currency of such ideas and ideologies was utterly depleted by the end of the Second

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World War. 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.’

The FEN was, furthermore, the inheritor of a broader far right that had lost its confidence that its idea of Europe and conceptualisation of European identity were to be vindicated in history. Robert Brasillach – a canonical source of inspiration for the organisation – concluded dejectedly in August 1943 that ‘there is no longer a fascist Europe.’ In 1945 the rightist novelist, Roger Nimier, drearily took stock of recent history: ‘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.’ Likewise, the Romanian émigré Emil Cioran’s 1949 memoir, written in exile in Paris, traced his path from a devotee of the cult of the irrational and admirer of Hitler and Codreanu in the 1930s to a disillusioned cynic.

What is more, there was a strong consensus that the kind of Europe that the FEN promulgated as a name in which to defend colonialism generally, and French Algeria in particular, was, so to speak, on the wrong side of history. Todd Shepard demonstrates the swift emergence and prevalence of the discourse of ‘le courant de l’histoire’, or the tide of history, in French political life at the close of the Algerian war, according to which decolonisation came to be accepted as inevitable. This is borne out by numerous irritated references to precisely this idea in the FEN archives and journals. General opinion had shifted a long way quickly from Mendès-

10 Mazower, *Dark Continent*, 143.
11 Ibid., 152.
France’s insistence before parliament, uncontroversial in 1954, that Algeria was France. As a
*Paris Match* editorial advised rejectionists of Algerian independence in February 1962, ‘History
can not be changed when History has already been written.’

This brings to mind Reinhart Koselleck’s remarks 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.’ 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 positive
project. On the other hand, perhaps the FEN’s Europe 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.’ One might also add delusion. Either way, to examine the FEN’s
conception of Europe is to look into the self-understanding of a historical actor with its back
against the wall. Evidently the FEN was itself constantly sizing up its future prospects. In the
*Manifeste de la classe 60* it reflected that,

Il est impossible au Français lucide de ne pas évoquer l’avenir avec appréhension. L’inadaptation
politique, technique et sociale de la France est flagrante. Entourée par des forces qui se
développent prodigieusement elle recule. Le doute, le désarroi et une morne résignation ont

16 Ibid., 316.
remplacé la fogue, l’esprit entreprenant et créateur qui jadis la caractérisaient [sic]. La plupart des nations de l’Europe occidentale semblent souffrir avec plus ou moins d’acuité des mêmes maux.\footnote{EN, 1, dossier 1, \textit{Manifeste de la classe 60}, 3.}

It should be noted however, that Koselleck’s thesis is cited as a point of contextualisation and a justification of examining the subject, rather than a thesis to test. To do so adequately would require an analysis of much more than merely the FEN’s discourse on Europe, however central this was in its ideology. As such it is beyond the scope of this chapter.

One should also be careful not to overstate this defeat of the reactionary right. Richard Vinen notes that the far right-wing press in post-liberation France provided institutional continuity to the movement and achieved surprisingly high circulation levels.\footnote{Richard C. Vinen, ‘The End of an Ideology? Right-Wing Antisemitism in France, 1944-1970’, \textit{The Historical Journal} 37/2 (June, 1994), 367.} In his study of neo-fascism in the post-war France, Joseph Algazy concludes that in fact there was an increased openness to fascist ideas in France between 1958 and 1963, in the context of the Algerian war.\footnote{See Algazy, \textit{La tentation néo-fasciste en France de 1844 à 1965}, in particular chapter 4, 133-244.} Nor should being on the wrong side of history be confused with insignificance; the FEN was highly visible, not least because of their confrontational public style. One of the most striking aspects of the group’s archives and journals is their constant and unapologetic reference to the group’s role in violent altercations. For example, during the group’s first annual national conference in Paris in 1960, its success in organising a violent counter-demonstration against an October 1960 UNEF initiative for a ‘day for peace in Algeria’ was recapped at length.\footnote{EN, 1, dossier 1, \textit{Informations Etudiantes. La journée du 27 octobre 1960}, 13-17.} In the course of that same conference, according to the FEN’s journal \textit{Cahiers universitaires}, confrontations in the street resulted in 2000 arrests.\footnote{EN, 1, dossier 3, \textit{Cahiers universitaires} (February, 1961), 25.}
Europe of Nationalism

There are instances when the nationalist ideology of the FEN seemed insular, almost indifferent to anything happening outside of France. The report of their second annual conference in Paris in 1961 states that, ‘nous sommes nationalistes français: nous avons dit ce qu’était la conception nationaliste de l’homme et de l’existence. Nous disons encore que nous sommes français, c’est-à-dire que notre existence humaine n’a de signification que dans le contexte français: au sein de la nation française.’ 22 Taken as a whole, however, the FEN archives and publications reveal a distinct stress on Europeanism, and so, at least qualify Raymond Aron’s assessment in 1964 that consciousness of the nation remained infinitely stronger than a sense of Europe. 23 The core FEN idea of a Europe of nationalism will be examined in two parts. Firstly, we will examine the consciousness of Europe that derived from the mutual practical support and connections between the FEN and equivalent far right nationalist student groups throughout Europe, and the appropriation of events throughout Europe to the cause of revolutionary nationalism. Secondly, we will analyse the FEN’s idea of a Europe in which nationalism was not only Europe’s principal characteristic, but its sole prerogative.

Trans-European Connections and Points of Reference

Pour une critique positive reflected with satisfaction on its trans-European connections, noting that ‘de nombreux contacts, des échanges d’idées, des conférences communes, ont montré une convergence de conceptions chez tous les militants européens.’24 Indeed, the FEN’s sense of the importance of Europe was fostered in large part by developing mutual links with equivalent far right student groups throughout the continent. Moreover, it took sustenance from their support, and also from the examples of the broader past and present European far right, as well as from movements like the Budapest uprising of 1956.

Comparable European far right nationalist student movements regularly attended FEN conferences, and each edition of Cahiers universitaires devoted a section to news from such groups. Special full-length articles were also devoted to these groups’ problems and prospects, and articles were shared and translated in each group’s respective publications, so FEN members were conscious in particular of comparable movements in Sweden, Germany, Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Belgium. A report in FEN presse in January 1962 succinctly encapsulated this trans-continental far right consciousness: ‘Le Dr Giacamo Gagliardi, représentant des associations nationales italiennes à Paris, a consacré à la F.E.N. un long article très sympathique publié dans les colonnes de “Réao” de l’organe “La Nation Belge”.’25

Further, the European horizons of the FEN were a source of sustenance in hard times on the domestic political battlefield. At the second FEN national conference in Paris in 1961, the case was made for upholding faith in nationalism as a force for radical change. For, ‘un seul militant qui possède à fond ces deux atouts peut redresser une situation catastrophique (renvoyer

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24 EN, 1, dossier 1, Pour une critique positive, 32.
Conversely, it was noted, the consequences of lacking such resolution and resilience were only too clear – such was the experience of the Spanish Falange after the death of its founder José Antonio Primo de Rivera. Elsewhere, the defeated uprising of Budapest in 1956 was enlisted as a tragedy in the cause of the same struggle of European revolutionary nationalism, while General Franco, Colonel Mascarro and his son were also transposed into the FEN’s struggle. In return, the FEN supported equivalent far right youth movements throughout the continent in the name of a common European project of nationalism. Listing groups in Belgium, Italy, West Germany, and Spain, the report for the 1962 annual conference notes the suggestion to send ‘un autre communiqué affirmant notre solidarité avec tous nos Amis d’Europe qui luttent pour le Nationalisme et la Civilisation occidentale.’ The FEN defined the West as European in soul, and as an extension of the European genius to the wider world through colonialism. It is difficult to square this definition of the West with the group’s disdain for the United States, however.

The kinds of trans-European networks and shared goals of the groups noted above did not in themselves constitute the FEN’s understanding of what Europe actually was, however. As such, we now turn to examine the FEN’s theoretical articulation of a Europe of nationalism which informed and drew from the practical convergence of these groups.

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26 EN, 1, dossier 2, Bulletin d’informations confidentielles. Rapport sur la seconde conférence nationale’, 7. Qeippo de Llano was a Spanish army officer celebrated for his achievements in Franco’s campaign in the Spanish civil war.
27 Ibid. José Antonio Primo de Rivera was executed by the Spanish republican government in the course of the country’s civil war.
28 EN, 1, dossier 2, FEN presse (no date but from early 1964), 4. Colonel Mascardo is known for his role in Franco’s army in the siege of Alcázar where his forces held out for 70 days against Republican forces. These then captured his 16 year old son and threatened to shoot him if Mascardo’s forces did not surrender. On the phone to his son, he instructed him that he must die like a patriot.
Theoretical and Ideological Basis of a Europe of Nationalism

The FEN saw France, and European nations in general, as beset by the same problems - political, technical, social lethargy, resignation and disarray. This was unbecoming of a Europe formerly characterised by creative energy and spirit.\(^{30}\) Accordingly, the *Manifeste de la classe 60* laid out clearly 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.’\(^{31}\) But this was not European construction as 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.’\(^{32}\) In this form of the nation, the FEN drew from the repertoire of populism to deploy the notion of ‘the people’ against the state. This connected back into the group’s attack on a Europe based on materialism, and its enthusiasm for spiritualism and creativity. It is also notable that while on the one hand the group insisted that the European nation was a timeless given, on the other hand its own discourse undermined any attempt to reify the nation. The nation that the FEN advocated was a particular transnational nationalist, fascist form. But in conceding that the nation was not a given and had to be grasped in the framework of some kind of form, the FEN conceded in a stroke that other forms of Europe were possible.

It was a point of doctrine for the FEN that, far from being in tension with each other, nationalism and Europe implied each other. In the aftermath of the Second World War and the onset of the Cold War, the FEN would react to American counsel that Europe should renounce nationalism with the insistence that nationalism was Europe’s very basis. The *Manifeste de la*  

\(^{30}\) EN, 1, dossier 1, *Manifeste de la classe 60*, 3.  
\(^{31}\) Ibid., 2.  
\(^{32}\) EN, 1, dossier 1, *Pour une critique positive*, 19.
*classe 60* advocated: ‘la défense de la pré-éminence européenne et la définition d’une forme nouvelle de vie politique fondée sur les conceptions nationalistes de l’existence.’

Of course, the idea had deeper roots than short-term US policy or the vagaries of contemporary global politics. The canonical authority of the preceding generation of the French far right was invoked to make this same point: ‘Drieu la Rochelle en doctrinaire et Robert Brasillach en poète contribuèrent à montrer le caractère européen du nationalisme.’

Crucially, nationalism for the FEN was not something which merely originated in Europe, or something whose best examples were in Europe. Nationalism was nothing less than a European prerogative and a defining characteristic of Europe. Non-European nationalism was thus a contradiction in terms. *Cahiers universitaires* attacked the idea that the nationalism of Angolan terrorists, Syrians, or Nasser, could claim commensurability with the Mazzini’s paradigm of a Young Europe of nationalisms.

FEN national conferences reiterated how local chapters should instruct their members to refute the claim of ‘“le réveil” des peuples de couleur.’ The notes for the second annual conference in Paris in 1961 refer to colonial ‘pseudo-nationalismes’ which would fail sooner or later, since they lacked any historical foundation. ‘Ce ne sont en fait que des séparatismes,’ petulant and ungrateful ones at that, one was led to believe. This was a doctrine that was maintained beyond the moment when French and European decolonisation had largely been completed. So in 1964 the FEN remained steadfast in its dismissal of the possibility of non-European nationalism, thereby insisting that nationalism was a defining element of Europe, which might at most be shared by peoples whose origins could be traced to Europe: ‘La mutation politique a imposé au Nationalisme une dimension
occidentale. Le Nationalisme doit être compris comme la philosophie politique des peuples blancs.’ In the same instance the permanence of Western civilisation was contrasted to ephemeral ‘pseudos-civilisations colorées’. This aversion to non-European nationalism was laying the ground for the FEN’s opposition to decolonisation, since independence movements took the nation as the form which decolonisation would lead to after independence. This leads us on to the group’s conception of Europe in terms of imperialism.

Europe of Imperialism

Another aspect of the FEN's advocacy of a Europe of nationalism was its integral relationship to imperialism. Indeed, it is argued here that for the group, imperialism was not considered supplemental to a Europe of nationalism. On the contrary, it was unconditionally integral to it. What were the implications of a Europe that interlinked nation and empire in this way?

Imperialism and a Europe of Nationalism

For the FEN, imperialism was constitutive of Europe, and however much it lauded France’s imperial feats and conquests above all, these were considered part of a common

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38 EN, 1, dossier 2, FEN presse (April 5, 1964), 7. Underlining in the original.
European enterprise which required mutual solidarity. In the *FEN presse* report on the second annual conference in Paris in 1961, one could read that,

la France est une nation impériale par excellence, elle seule a su éliminé [sic] les pires maladies d’Afrique et elle seule a su civiliser des populations à l’état primitif. Quand nous disons elle seule, nous le comprenons comme nation faisant partie de l’Europe et de ce fait nous savons le grand rôle colonisateur joué par le Portugal et la Belgique, notamment, en Afrique.9

If many thought of Portugal as a European periphery, for the FEN it was considered the last standing bulwark of the West by December 1962, because it stood alone against decolonisation and pursued its war in Angola.40

It is true however, that the cause of French Algeria occupied a disproportionate amount of the group’s energies. It was, after all, the initial *raison d’être* of the movement and its defence was, as the *Manifeste de la classe 60* put it, the ‘problème politique français numéro un’.41 But its prioritisation should not give the impression that the war was conceptualised as solely a French issue. Rather, it was understood as a European concern, an issue which touched on the definition of Europe itself. At the FEN’s 1960 annual conference the audience applauded a speaker’s invocation of *Algérie française* and its fundamental place in the West.42 This was a notable deviation from successive French governments’ pleas, under international pressure, that the Algerian question was an internal French one; and it also contrasts with the continuing memory of the conflict as a French national drama.43 In comparison with the European intellectual and dissident left, this right-wing Europeanist aspect of the Algerian conflict is less

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41 EN, 1, dossier 1, *Manifeste de la classe 60*, 13.
noted. In its first edition, *Cahiers universitaires* reported with satisfaction on student demonstrations and initiatives in Portugal, Italy, and Belgium on behalf of the defence of French Algeria and Western Civilisation. 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 que se posent désormais à elle, et celui de la sauvegarde de l’Algérie française est actuellement son point de cristallisation.’

Europe of Nation and Empire

What were the theoretical implications of thinking of imperialism as integral to an idea of a Europe of nationalism? In a review of a book about Atatürk and Turkish nationalism in *Cahiers universitaires*, its author was reproached for just one thing: he made ‘une distinction entre “impérialisme” et “nationalisme” qui nous semble sans fondement.’ There are two points to be made here. First, the reproach for distinguishing between imperialism and nationalism was representative of a consistent position of the FEN: a Europe of nationalism was to be understood as encompassing, or more exactly depending on, inclusion of its imperial possessions. Moreover, to link nationalism and imperialism so unproblematically evoked a Europe of stable domination. That this status quo was challenged was due only to colonial upstarts, encouraged by decadent European intellectuals and unchecked by weak-willed and irresolute politicians of ‘the regime’. In a period when the ‘tide of history’ argument was so strongly advocated as a reason to leave

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45 Ibid.
Algeria, the FEN’s vision offered a Europe and Europeanness that were stable, ordered and accepted.

Cooper and Stoler argue, however, that far from providing any settled sense of Europeanness, European imperialism depended on a ‘grammar of difference’ that had to be continuously and vigilantly reiterated and refined. Moreover, imperial practice never corresponded to a simple one-way projection of will and power, as the FEN suggested with its invocation of the heroic feats of colonels in the colonies. Rather, it continually wavered between incorporation and differentiation, at once binding specific groups to the colonial states whilst curtailing the aspirations of the ruled. Elsewhere, Cooper argues the crisis of European imperialism arrived precisely in this post-war period when it was overwhelmed by calls for equivalence as much as for independence – again, an important nuance that the FEN could not perceive.

It was no longer feasible to justify racial rule in the aftermath of Hitler’s Germany, or to extend newly demanded and expected social democratic provisions and the welfare state to the European empires. Cooper argues that this is a fundamental development that has been overlooked in historiography of imperialism. For there has been a tendency to fetishise independence and ignore the ways colonial domination was challenged within the imperial unit, by calling for the fulfilment of the promise of equality. The FEN archives reveal traces that

48 Ibid., 10.
50 Cooper, Colonialism in Question, 202. See also Connelly, A Diplomatic Revolution, 27. In his book, Connelly also demonstrates extensively that if explicit racist justifications were no longer acceptable, they were nonetheless common and important behind official closed doors.
support Cooper’s argument, though the organisation drew short of realising the same kind of conclusion. They show a clear sense of having to work within a political field which was decreasingly open to overt and crude racism. Accordingly, with exceptions, anti-Semitism was muted though apparent with references to cosmopolitan capitalism and invectives against the Rothschilds, just as books were included on lists of recommended literature with no mention of their unabashed anti-Semitic conceptualisation of Europe, such as the work of Henry Coston.\textsuperscript{51} Though there was less reticence about denigrating Africans and other racial groups, it was suggested, as a point of tactics, that it was advisable to refrain from the use of derogatory terminology such as ““métèques”, les noirs etc.’\textsuperscript{52} The quotation marks in references to the term ‘racist’ indeed implied frustration about the lack of currency of a deep-seated yet respectable antipathy to these groups.\textsuperscript{53} As for social democratic provisions, the group denounced any state support that was extended to African students, a point of contention that was dealt with in annual conferences and aired in their journals, for instance, in an article ‘Les étudiants d’Afrique noire en France.’\textsuperscript{54}

Second, the positing of nation and empire as unproblematically linked in a conceptualisation of Europe is particularly interesting in the case of French Algeria. Not only was it invoked as of special concern for Europe but it differed from other colonies in that it was treated as an integral part of French national territory. Shepard’s work \textit{The Invention of Decolonization} demonstrates how French colonial policy in Algeria agonised over constitutional

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\textsuperscript{51} EN, 1, dossier 2, \textit{FEN presse}, ‘Bulletin d’informations confidentielles. Rapport de la seconde conférence nationale F.E.N (II), 2. Typical of Coston’s work is his \textit{L’Europe des banquiers} (Paris: Librairie française, 1963). Curiously, it is notable that more overt examples of anti-Semitism tended to appear more frequently in \textit{Cahiers universitaires} than in the FEN archives and the internal \textit{FEN presse}.
\textsuperscript{52} EN, 1, dossier 1, ‘Méthode et organisation 1961 (1)’, 17.
\textsuperscript{53} EN, 1, dossier 3, \textit{Cahiers universitaires} (February-March, 1965), 23.
\textsuperscript{54} EN, 1, dossier 1, ‘Exposé de politique et de doctrine prononcé à la réunion de la première conférence nationale de la Fédération des étudiants nationalistes’, 11; EN 1, dossier 3, \textit{Cahiers universitaires} (March, 1961), 7-12.
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and legalistic formulae, in an attempt to navigate the contradictions of incorporation and
differentiation of French citizen and colonial subject. Shepard demonstrates that finally the
settlement of the Algerian conflict gave rise to a constitutional understanding of who was French
in terms of a much more rigid and differentiated ethnic European character, a conclusion that
Matthew Connelly also reaches in his important study of the Algerian war.

Revealingly, this was absolutely no consolation whatsoever for the FEN, which retained
the ambition to regain Algeria and its empire, just as Alsace-Lorraine had been a temporary loss.
Referring to the loss of Algeria its notes on method and organisation for 1963 lamented that
‘Nous n’avons plus rien à défendre, plus rien à conserver… plus d’Occident. Plus rien. Nous
sommes au-delà de la défense.’ 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’. Accordingly, one need not read literally the FEN’s
apocalyptic prognosis of a decolonised Europe routed and subjugated by the Soviets or the
masses of the Third World. Not once did it try to make a serious argument for the strategic and
defensive value of its colonies. Instead, this was symptomatic of the extent to which it staked
European identity on expansion.

55 Shepard, The Invention of Decolonization, 19-55 and passim.
56 Connelly, A Diplomatic Revolution, 285.
57 EN, 1, dossier 1, Méthode et organisation 1963 (1), 1.
nationale’, 6.
Europe and Original Violence

If for the FEN the idea of Europe was validated by this tight connection between nation and empire on the one hand, it problematised it on the other. According to Étienne Balibar, ‘in a sense, every modern nation is the product of colonization.’\(^{60}\) Likewise, Dipesh Chakrabarty refers to Eugen Weber’s classic work *Peasants into Frenchmen*, citing his argument that the modernisation of France was something akin to ‘internal colonialism’.\(^{61}\) However, as Chakrabarty reads it, for Weber the foundational violence of the state was justified and redeemed in a teleological reading of history, an argument that the FEN was precluded from making, since it rejected this as the very basis of the arguments of those advocating leaving Algeria, as we have seen.\(^{62}\)

The FEN insistence on linking nation and empire so tightly was revealing of the kind of argument that Balibar and Chakrabarty make. And highlighting the foundational violence of the nation was hardly conducive to the idea of a Europe the FEN painted – one of natural, timeless nations, unproblematically ordered and essentially peaceable. This was problematised all the more in time of colonial war, particularly in the context of the Algerian war and the violence to which it gave rise both in Algeria and the mainland. To borrow and adapt Terry Eagleton’s reasoning, one reason why colonial violence was so disturbing for France and Europe was that it reminded one of the violence that lay at the heart of one’s own state.\(^{63}\) It is argued here that the

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\(^{60}\) Cited in Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization*, 17.


common thread of violence that connected nation and empire in the FEN’s Europe lay behind the group’s markedly ambiguous attitude towards violence, as it arose as an issue which had to be accommodated in their conception of Europe. At times it was glorified and exalted in satisfied reports of attacks on other student groups, and in citations of figures like Drieu la Rochelle and Georges Sorel and their ideas on the role of force. Many references were also made to the necessary connection between violence and civilisation. And one can surmise from its reverence for Drieu that the group would have approved of his remark in 1927 in his *Le Jeune Européen*: ‘Nothing is ever accomplished without bloodshed… I look forward to a bloodbath.’

Furthermore, Joan of Arc was quoted on the front cover of *Cahiers universitaires*: ‘la paix on ne l’aura qu’au bout de la lance.’ Likewise, the journal dismissed the supposed opposition of French people to violence as non-existent and mocked calls for non-violence.

At other times, however, violence seemed much more a source of embarrassment. Belgian colonial violence in the Congo was widely considered to have been the most reprehensible example of European imperialism, and so the FEN references to this episode are instructive. They did not so much justify Belgian colonial atrocities as deny them. Colonialism in general was ‘n’est pas du tout une extermination scientifique de tout ce qui est non-blanc! C’est tout simplement Brazza conquérant le Congo sans un coup de fusil.’ Moreover, the group insisted that blacks in the Congo were dying out before the arrival of the Belgians, so that contrary to whatever Lumumba and his decadent European supporters might say, the Congolese were much indebted to Europe and Europeans. Likewise, the killings of October 1961 in Paris

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64 Cited in Mazower, *Dark Continent*, 21.
67 For just one of many examples, this one interestingly directed at a royalist group see EN, 1, dossier 2, *Fen Presse; Bulletin d’informations confidentielles. Rapport de la seconde conférence nationale F.E.N. (II), 4.
69 ‘Rapport sur la seconde conférence nationale’, 5.
were completely ignored, while those of protestors at Charonne in February 1962 were downplayed and compared unfavourably with the sufferings of fascists in Paris in February 1934.\footnote{EN, 1, dossier 3, \textit{Cahiers universitaires} (March-April, 1962), 26. On 6 February 1934 an anti-parliamentary street demonstration was instigated by far right forces that culminated in a riot on the place de la Concorde, and the police shooting into the crowd. 16 people were killed and around 2000 injured.} Tellingly, although it recommended the literature of its apologists and lauded its activists, the FEN continually distanced itself from the OAS.\footnote{See for example EN, 1, dossier 2, \textit{FEN presse} (October 5, 1962), 7; EN, 1, dossier 2, \textit{FEN presse} (5 April, 1964), 15. Joseph Algazy notes that in fact the group was implicated in OAS activity. See Algazy, \textit{La tentation néo-fasciste}, 192.} The FEN instructed its members that if they were called fascists it only went to show firstly how baseless were the arguments of their opponents, and secondly one should either respond by laughing or kicking them.\footnote{EN, 1, dossier 1, ‘Méthode et organisation [1960]’, 8.} It is precisely the transparent contradictoriness of this advice that can be read as a sign of how the group was self-consciously undercut in its advocacy of its idea of Europe by its ambiguity towards violence.

\textbf{Europe of Hierarchy}

Naturally colonialism was a system predicated on hierarchy. But the extent of 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 \textit{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.\textsuperscript{73} 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 conceptualisation of Europe, we will examine two aspects: the hierarchy of European nations within a composite Europe; and the hierarchy of Europe and the non-European world.

**Europe of Internal Hierarchy**

For the FEN, Europe itself was a composite unity, to be sure, but it was one in which France occupied the most important position. One might conjecture, incidentally, that the group’s contempt for Vichy’s ‘Révolution nationale’ stemmed from dissatisfaction with the Nazi Europe in which French fellow-travellers had deludedly insisted on France’s central importance to the reconfigured continental order.\textsuperscript{74} We have already seen how France was seen as the European imperial power \textit{par excellence}, though this did not preclude respect for and admiration of other European imperial nations. Similarly, while other European student nationalist groups were warmly welcomed at the FEN conferences, it was noted with satisfaction that the Belgian delegation recognised that France was the greater nation.\textsuperscript{75} This was a self-image cultivated by the FEN. The \textit{Manifeste de la classe 60} referred to the remarks of (unnamed) foreign poets and

\textsuperscript{73} EN, 1, dossier 1, \textit{Manifeste de la classe 60}, 5. Marcel Bigeard was a highly decorated French military officer who had served in the Second World War, Indochina and Algeria.

\textsuperscript{74} See the entry for ‘Révolution nationale’ in EN, 2, dossier 2, ‘Dictionnaire d’un militant’, \textit{Europe action} (May, 1963), 76. On French fellow traveller hopes for France in the the New Nazi Europe, and the lack of German reciprocation, see Julian Jackson, \textit{France: The Dark Years, 1940-1944} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), passim.

\textsuperscript{75} EN, 1, dossier 1, ‘Méthode et organisation 1963 (2)’, 21.
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.’”\textsuperscript{76} Moreover, potential contributors to party organs were instructed that ‘si vous citez des auteurs connus, réservez votre recherche aux auteurs français; il y en assez qui ont dit de bonnes choses chez nous.’\textsuperscript{77} Members were told that ‘l’aventure révolutionnaire de la seconde partie du XXème siècle en Europe se joue en France, et les acteurs sont des Français.’\textsuperscript{78} Such statements were indicative of the FEN’s assertions of the appropriate place of France within the ranks of European nations.

Hierarchy of Europe and the Non-European World

FEN statements and publications stressed natural order and hierarchy, and this was never more apparent than in its conceptualisation of the non-European world. We have already seen that nationalism was defined as solely a European possession. \textit{Pour une critique positive} added that the organisation of humanity was the responsibility of European man.\textsuperscript{79} The group continually repeated that non-European nationalism was a delusion and contradiction, thoughtless iconoclasm and the option for anarchy and war over peace and order. Naturally, such nihilism was encouraged and exploited by Soviet Imperialism, and high finance and rootless big capital.

\textsuperscript{76} EN, 1, dossier, 1, \textit{Manifeste de la classe 60}, 9.
\textsuperscript{78} EN, 1, dossier 1, ‘Méthode et organisation 1963 (1)’, 2.
\textsuperscript{79} EN, 1, dossier 1, \textit{Pour une critique positive}, 15.
This kind of rhetoric was directed outwards at non-Europeans, but such classifications rebounded to the metropole, and inflected how one conceptualised and understood Europe. In this sense, the quote above from the *Manifeste de la classe 60* in which a street sweeper, a Congolese and a prostitute are conflated, supports Cooper and Stoler’s contention that class categorisation was ‘racialized to the core’. Incidentally, it can be taken that the aspect of social critique in Henri Cartier-Bresson’s photograph of black street sweepers on the Champs-Élysées would have been lost on the group.

Moreover, the example 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 more suited to credulous non-Europeans. But the invocation of the Congolese and the prostitute suggested foreignness and dirtiness, each amenable to sanitisation. In this instance, the aggressive championing of Europe and Europeanness by the FEN paradoxically flourished through what it denounced as non-European. It called for a Europe to come that thrived on its own incompleteness. In borrowing Balibar’s argument about the dynamics of racism, and by situating it next to the FEN’s continual warnings of the internal enemy, we can conclude that the FEN championed not Europe as such, but perpetual Europeanisation. Balibar argues that,

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

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81 I am grateful to Claude Cookman for this reference, personal correspondence.
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.\(^4\)

The paradox that Balibar presents here is one whereby racism undercuts the nation by reducing
the ‘true’ inhabitants of the nation. At the same time, the multiplication of categories will end up
rebonding and attacking those within the nation who are said to belong. In other words, locating
the true, European French is a fruitless task. This dialectical movement undercut the task, laid
out for this new 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.\(^5\)

The idea of a Europe that exists in a steeply hierarchical position in relation to the non-
European world as rigorously asserted by the FEN, was arguably defended all the more because
of the group’s ambiguity towards violence that we examined above. For often, violence in the
name of Europe against non-European peoples was facilitated and legitimated by precisely that
categorisation. As Cooper and Stoler argue, ‘social taxonomies allowed for specific forms of
violence at specific times. How a person was labeled could determine that a certain category of
persons could be killed or raped with impunity, but not others.’\(^6\) If, then, Europe and non-
Europe and the European and non-European were to be redefined, and the taxonomies that had
defined them overturned, Europe risked accepting retrospective culpability for its violence
against non-Europeans that those previous and now discredited categorisations had facilitated.

One implication of the FEN’s sense of Europe’s place in the world was that what was
objectionable was less inferior rank than the upstart or parvenu. Indeed, far more energy was
spent in denigrating the idea that non-Europeans should aspire to have a nation, thus disrupting

\(^5\) EN, 1, dossier 3, *Cahiers universitaires* (September-October 1962), 9.
established order, than in demonstrating their supposed racial inferiority. In this regard Hobsbawm’s analysis is instructive:

Social revolution, and especially colonial rebellion, challenged the sense of a natural, as it were a divine or cosmically sanctioned superiority of top people over bottom people in societies which were naturally unequal, whether by birth or by achievement. Class wars… are usually conducted with more rancour from the top than from the bottom. The very idea that people whose perpetual inferiority is a datum of nature, especially when made manifest by skin colour, should claim equality with, let alone rebel against, their natural superiors, was an outrage in itself. If this was true of the relation between upper and lower classes, it was even more true of that between races.  

Hobsbawm’s point suggests a useful refinement in analyses of ideas of Europe and of European identity: to look not only at what is said but in what terms and with what degree of commitment and investment. One cannot properly understand the FEN discourse about Europe without noting how high it raised the stakes of the survival of the continent as an imperial force, indeed a Europe in excess of itself. It is thus instructive to pick up one point of the Marxist analyses that the group so despised and which informed much of the anticolonial critique they dismissed. As The Communist Manifesto had it, world-historical conflicts ended ‘either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.’ Such was the degree of the FEN’s disdain for social inferiors that one has the impression that the group would prefer the second option were it not for the fact that a reconstitution of world society, and Europe’s place therein, was already by definition ruin. Rancière’s concept of ‘dissensus’ is again useful in understanding this situation. The premise of colonial peoples as represented by decolonising movements was that they were capable of managing their own affairs through the

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independent nation form just as Europeans were able to, thus producing an equalisation that was disruptive of the hierarchies established by European colonialism and nationalism.

**Europe of Anti-Materialism and Europe of Youth**

This section first analyses the theme of the rejection of materialism in the FEN’s idea of Europe, which set the continent apart from, and in opposition to, both the United States and the Soviet Union. Secondly, it examines its notion of a vanguard of European youth in the fight for the Europe that the group counter-proposed.

**Europe of Anti-Materialism**

Ostensibly the FEN’s insistence on hierarchy coexisted with a commitment to humanism, albeit of a particular ‘virile’ kind.\(^9^9\) This underpinned the FEN’s hatred and rejection of ‘hyper-materialism’, whether liberal American or Soviet Communist, both of which, they contended, were contemptuous of man.\(^9^0\) *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

\(^9^9\) EN, 1, dossier 1, ‘Méthode et organisation 1963 (1)’, 2.

This self-destructively liberal Europe contrasted to the Europe of nationalisms as the ‘porteur des valeurs créatrices et spirituelles de l’occident.’ Liberal and Marxist materialisms were seen as offshoots of the Enlightenment, which the FEN rejected in varying degrees from the crass to the more nuanced. On one instance, *Cahiers universitaires* noted that the Portuguese academic establishment had been battered by the nefarious influence of Enlightenment thought. Happily, though, the country’s institutions of higher learning were now recovering under Salazar’s fascist regime.

For the FEN, liberal democracy and Marxism were equally guilty of reducing man to his economic activity, amputating him of a part of himself. In doing so, both violated ‘tendances fondamentales de la vie humaine et de la culture.’ This was linked to the group’s critique of technocracy as coercive and deforming uniformisation, underpinned by inauthentic cosmopolitanism which was an attack on Europe rather than a variant interpretation of it. Accordingly, *Cahiers universitaires* devoted the best part of its December 1962 edition to attacking these characteristics that they perceived as being institutionalised in the emerging European political community. Under the title ‘Ce qui cachent les institutions européennes’, the FEN suggested that this Europe of the political status quo was not any kind of Europe at all. To this crass conception of community, the FEN counter-proposed that the task was to subject the economy to a ‘printemps européen’.

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92 EN, 1, dossier 1, *Pour une critique positive*, 9.  
95 EN, 1, dossier 1, *Pour une critique positive*, 18.  
97 EN, 1, dossier 1, *Pour une critique positive*, 17.
it also indulged in rhetoric of a timeless European identity. For the Manifeste de la classe 60 had so loaded its rhetoric as to claim ‘l’homme ne prend sa signification qu’au sein d’une communauté naturelle qui, pour nous Français, revêt la forme privilégiée de la Nation.’ If man only had meaning in a natural community, it followed that man was absolutely insignificant if communities were arbitrary and constructed. The FEN staked everything on denying the original flaw that undermined its claim to a Europe of nationalisms which was natural and timeless.

Another key aspect of this rejection of the Enlightenment was the French Revolution and the democratic tradition. To this effect the group pointed to the damage wreaked by the Jacobin legacy, and scorned the slogan of ‘liberté, égalité, fraternité’ as ‘autant de mythes et de plaisanteries à éliminer.’ Democracy was constantly invoked as an idea that cut the ground under the feet of a Europe worthy of the name, by facilitating and inciting challenge to natural order. In the FEN vision of Europe these ideologies were not deemphasised but rather judged incommensurable – ‘entre la démocratie et les nationalistes il s’établit ainsi un dialogue des sourds.’ 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.’

The archives demonstrate many instances of resentment of the label fascist as a term of denunciation. Yet members of the FEN were told not to refer to themselves as fascist more on tactical grounds, rather than a principled rejection of this anti-Enlightenment tradition. In fact

98 EN, 1, dossier 1, Manifeste de la classe 60, 5.
99 EN, 1, dossier 3, Cahiers universitaires (February, 1961), 5.
100 EN, 1, dossier 1, ‘Méthode et organisation 1963 (2)’, 28. See also EN, 1, dossier 3, Cahiers universitaires (May, 1962), 5.
102 EN, 1, dossier 3, Cahiers universitaires (January-February, 1962), 11.
103 EN, 1, dossier 1, ‘Méthode et organisation 1963 (2)’, 28.
it was often invoked quite positively despite these instructions. A review of what became a canonical text of the European far right, Maurice Bardèche’s *Qu’est-ce que le fascisme?*, in *Cahiers universitaires* in 1962 argued that the public was scandalously misinformed about the nature and achievements of this movement. If its history was not flawless, on balance it was an honourable foundation on which to imagine and to build Europe.\(^{104}\)

The ‘materialist’ notions of Europe that the FEN scorned, then, were to be countered by a form of nation that would constitute a creditable Europe. The task of European youth was to fight for a Europe characterised by traditional aesthetic categories of Romanticism – spiritual essence, creativity, organic community.

Europe of Youth

As an antidote to the Europe of materialism that the FEN rejected, the group proposed putting faith in the revolutionary and redemptive role of youth to renovate France and Europe.\(^{105}\) A report on method and organisation for 1960 reiterated that the FEN aspired to be the vanguards of such a movement. It noted that the group was not ‘un simple regroupement passager dû aux circonstances, mais bien la concrétisation de l’aspiration profonde de la jeunesse française à la vie, acceptant en pleine lucidité le combat qui, seul, éliminera les forces destructrices de la Nation et de la Civilisation. Le rôle de la Fédération des Etudiants Nationalistes dans l’avenir

\(^{104}\) EN, 1, dossier 3, *Cahiers universitaires* (March-April, 1962), 29. Bardèche’s work was a landmark text in the evolving thought of the French and European far right, in which an attempt was made to repackage fascism in a respectable form, which involved distancing it from its Nazi and Italian Fascist legacies. J.G. Shields, *The Extreme Right in France: From Pétain to Le Pen* (London: Routledge, 2007), 101-102.

\(^{105}\) EN, 1, dossier 1, ‘Méthode et organisation [1960]’, 1.
doit être déterminant… c’est d’elle que sortiront les jeunes cadres de la Nation et de l’Europe rénovées. We saw earlier that the support of European youth for French Algeria was applauded. The same article continued: ‘C’est la consécration dans les faits de toute une génération qui saura s’unir demain par-dessus les plans, les marchés, les trusts et sans qu’il y ait besoin d’être une assemblée européenne.’ Moreover, explicitly rejecting the hugely popular film Les Tricheurs and its representation of ennu stricken and nihilistic teens in St-Germain-des-Prés, the FEN pointed instead to a European youth of common resolve, heroism, dynamism and taste for action shown on the streets of Budapest, Algiers and Paris. After defeat of the French Algerian cause in 1962, internal notes for 1963 demonstrate the retention of the goal of ‘l’édification d’une Jeune Europe unitaire des politiques nationalistes.’

The extent of the importance attached to youth was demonstrated by the group’s warning that to network with older activists, even of comparable far right political convictions and suitable conceptions of Europe, was ‘semé d’embuches et c’est avec la plus grande circonspection qu’il faut s’y aventurer.’ When making this case for the role of youth the rhetoric was intensified accordingly, as shown in one example from Cahiers universitaires in 1961: ‘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 ainés sont là pour les aider et les soutenir.’ Likewise, members were instructed that youth had always proved of great importance in determining periods of French history. A list of corroborating names included

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106 Ibid.
107 EN, 1, dossier 3, Cahiers universitaires (February, 1961), 19-20.
109 EN, 1, dossier 1, Manifeste de la classe 60, 12.
110 EN, 1, dossier 1, ‘Méthode et organisation 1963 (1)’, 2.
111 EN, 1, dossier 1, ‘Méthode et organisation [1960]’, 21.
112 EN, 1, dossier 3, Cahiers universitaires (May-June, 1961), 6.
‘Jeanne d’Arc, Condé, Louis XIV, Corneille, Bonaparte, le Duc d’Aumale, les Généraux de la Révolution, les conquérants de notre Empire.’\textsuperscript{113} By May 1962 when it was clear France was on its way out of Algeria, \textit{Cahiers universitaires} included on the inside cover Hubert Lyautey’s invocation of French youth and the recognition that ‘dans l’Histoire des peoples, des batailles plus perdues encore ont été regagnées. Et je me sens plein de courage.’\textsuperscript{114} One thinks back to Koselleck’s thoughts about being on the wrong side of history, but the FEN’s rather apocalyptic evaluation of Europe’s prospects would lead one to qualify Koselleck’s conclusion about the possibilities that defeat entailed for understanding history.

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 form of a nationalist Europe 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 possession. Imperialism was unconditionally integral to this Europe of nationalism which in turn insisted on a rigid sense of hierarchy both within a composite conception of the continent, and between it and the European world. Finally, we examined the rejection of materialism not only as a basis of an idea of Europe but as radically incommensurable with a populist version of Europe’s natural

\textsuperscript{113} EN, 1, dossier 1, ‘Méthode et organisation [1960]’, 7.
\textsuperscript{114} EN, 1, dossier 3, \textit{Cahiers universitaires} (May, 1962).
characteristics and place. Ultimately the vanguard in the struggle for this Europe was European youth, within which the FEN conceived of itself as an elite example.

The chapter has argued that these were not different conceptions of Europe but the same core Europe of nationalism. However, it has also contended that of these various strands, by far the most important for the FEN was a Europe based on imperialism, a Europe defined paradoxically by the very condition of being in excess of itself. It is interesting that the FEN put such rhetorical weight on this specific point. To do so was a gamble in the sense of retaining its credibility as a force to fight for a certain conception of Europe, should the disaster it foresaw emanating from decolonisation not come off. This was quite possibly a factor in the group’s dissolution 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: ‘Ainsi la jeune Europe, fondée sur une même civilisation, un même espace et un même destin, sera-t-elle le foyer actif de l’Occident et de l’ordre du monde. La jeunesse d’Europe aura de nouvelles cathédrales à construire et un nouvel Empire à édifier.’115

115 EN, 1, dossier 1, Pour une critique positive, 20.