

French Cultural Studies



Emmanuel Mounier and the Awakening of Black Africa

MICHAEL KELLY

University of Southampton

Emmanuel Mounier, Director of the Catholic review *Esprit*, was a pioneering participant in criticising French colonial activities. The debates of the 1940s were strongly framed by France's 'mission to civilise' its colonies, which was supported by universal humanist aspirations but was also criticised as masking policies of exploitation and oppression. The resulting tensions are well demonstrated by Emmanuel Mounier's book *L'Éveil de l'Afrique noire*, published after a visit to several areas of French West Africa in the spring of 1947, at a crucial moment in France's relations with its colonies. This article focuses on the components published in *Esprit*, *Combat*, and *Présence africaine*, which outlined the positive roles that France could play in the region, but warned against the dangers if opportunities were missed, and recognised the particular difficulties confronting the rising African elites. A closer examination of the discursive strategies he deployed shows that Mounier's frame of reference remained within the paternalist paradigm of republican humanism, and that he saw France's role as a duty to guide the development of Africa. However, in the myths and metaphors he adopted, a more radical vision can be identified, which expressed an underlying anti-colonialism.

Keywords: Africa, black, civilisation, colonies, France, humanism, Emmanuel Mounier, white

Supposez un père qui aurait manqué l'éducation de ses enfants, mais à qui une sorte de dernière chance donnerait un fils tard venu, et la possibilité de ne pas recommencer sur lui les erreurs qu'avec les autres il ne peut plus rattraper. Telle est pour nous l'Afrique noire. Le comprendrons-nous à temps? (Mounier, 1962: 249)

This introductory comment in Emmanuel Mounier's *L'Éveil de l'Afrique noire* (1948) both confirms and challenges colonial attitudes in post-war France. If his French readers would readily recognise the paternal relationship it assumes between France and its colonies, they might feel less comfortable with the suggestion that they had conspicuously failed in their paternal duties, and might wonder about the implications of the 'last chance' they were now offered. As director of the major intellectual review, *Esprit*, Mounier was an influential figure in the Parisian intelligentsia, whose own views carried considerable weight across a wide political spectrum. His thinking about the colonial context of post-war France revealed much of the historical and intellectual tension that was played out in the 15 or so years after the end of the Second World War.

Esprit in many ways typified the role that left-wing intellectuals played in the discussion of France's colonial role. Along with Jean-Paul Sartre's journal, *Les Temps modernes*, and a number of smaller publications, it articulated a non-communist stance, and was the source of some of the most rigorous criticisms of French colonial policy after the Second World War. Offering a left-wing Catholic perspective, it spoke out strongly, when it was not fashionable to do so, against serious colonial abuses in Indochina, North Africa and southern Africa.¹ *Esprit* had a stronger network of contacts in the colonies, which it had developed during the 1930s, by forming some of its more committed subscribers into a loose association of friends of the review. It had a wide circulation in Catholic seminaries and in teacher training colleges, including those based overseas. And the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had a standing subscription for a bulk order, which it distributed through its diplomatic services. Widely read in socialist circles, *Esprit* had an extensive following on the more progressive wing of the Christian democratic MRP party, who valued its doctrinal framework even when they did not follow its political prescriptions, as they conspicuously declined to do in the case of the colonies.

The review did not adopt a maximalist approach on decolonisation, and was convinced that the process of change would be better managed in stages. Its general approach was summed up in Mounier's short work of synthesis, *Le Personalisme* (1949):

Le fait colonial est en train de prendre fin. La justice ordonne aux métropoles de guider effectivement et loyalement vers l'indépendance ces peuples qu'elles se sont engagées à éduquer, et qu'elles ont parfois arraché à un équilibre politique qui valait bien le leur. (Mounier, 1962: 518)

This, in typical style, set the question on the level of long-term 'projets de civilisation', and although the invocation to justice was addressed in principle to all colonial powers, it was particularly aimed at France, whose civilising mission was in large measure to educate the colonial peoples, but whose

intention to guide them to independence was only reluctantly acknowledged in governing circles by the end of the 1940s.

Esprit played a pioneering role in the early debates on decolonisation (Winock, 1996: 335–54). The journal was initially supportive of proposals to replace the former empire by the new *Union française*, based on new relationships and reciprocal rights and duties. At the same time, in July 1945, it gave voice to the scepticism of Léopold Sédar Senghor, who demanded equality in practice rather than warm words which would not change anything. The review followed closely the collapse of hopes for a settlement in Indochina, with frequent invocations to reach an honourable agreement within the *Union française*, but a growing criticism of governments which were dragging France into what Hubert Beuve-Méry (1948) called ‘a dirty war’. The failed insurrection in Madagascar in March 1947 was followed by vicious and prolonged repression, the nature and extent of which was described and denounced in a special issue of the review (February 1948). But it was North Africa that attracted the most attention from the review. A series of articles in the spring and summer of 1947 was devoted to the theme of ‘Preventing the war in North Africa’. Though French actions and inaction in Morocco and Tunisia were giving cause for concern, Algeria appeared as an urgent problem, with deteriorating relationships in the country felt likely to be compounded by the introduction of a new status for Algeria (September 1947). This was the beginning of a long campaign, in which *Esprit* figured as one of the leading critics of French government policies and actions in North Africa, and provides the context for Mounier’s suggestion, in the passage quoted at the head of this article, that France had made irretrievable errors in respect of its other colonies, and had a last chance to make a success of its role in Black Africa.

The mission to civilise

France’s traditional ‘mission civilisatrice’ encapsulates the project of the French state to bring the benefits of modern civilisation to its present and future colonial possessions. The term is particularly associated with the leaders of the early Third Republic, most notably Jules Ferry (Ageron, 1985; Blanchard and Lemaire, 2003). In common with much of the republic’s symbology, the term combines secular and religious connotations, linking the virtues of modernity with overtones of a proselytising missionary vocation.² No doubt the main point of the concept is to give moral and historical legitimacy to French colonial expansion, but it also served to provide an ideological framework within which colonial administrators developed and justified their policies (Conklin, 1997).

The precise content of the civilising mission cannot easily be defined, since it refers to a concept of civilisation as a very broad ideal, combining elements from many streams that have flowed into French notions of that

country's cardinal virtues. But as it emerged from the high water mark of Third Republic colonisation, it strongly reflected the humanism and universalism of the late nineteenth century. In the comprehensive account of colonial thinking offered by Alain Ruscio (2002), two themes are of particular importance. The first, humanism, was initially based on the recognition of common humanity across many races, and assumed the superiority of the White Man. More recently racial differences have been replaced by the recognition of a diversity of cultures and civilisations. The second theme, protection, sometimes expressed as the 'White Man's burden', includes the duty to protect 'young' colonial peoples as they 'grow up'. While the metropolitan power is committed to educating these peoples, and helping them to make progress, it also needs to protect them and protect itself from their less civilised tendencies, such as violence, cannibalism, laziness and corruption. Both of these themes are critically articulated in Mounier's text.

The civilising mission remained the dominant French conception, and was reasserted after the Second World War, first by Charles de Gaulle, and then by other governing groups, especially the Christian democrats, who proved to be the most determined advocates of re-establishing France's control over its overseas territories. It played a significant role in the political development of colonial activities, not least because the governing political parties (Gaullists, socialists, communists, Christian democrats) chose, as Andrew Shennan points out, to focus their attention 'both above and beneath policy: either on large doctrinal issues ... or on tactical issues raised by the party's participation in ... Government' (Shennan, 1989: 89).³

Colonial issues generally attracted very limited interest in French political life in the post-war period, and the lack of focus on policy was reflected in a succession of poorly attended parliamentary debates and ambiguous legislative measures (Michel, 2000). The gap between high doctrinal principles and practical outcomes widened sharply during the post-war decade as the principle of bringing civilisation to the colonies was subordinated to the higher principle of restoring France's position in the world, and therefore reasserting French control over its pre-war colonial empire. The contradiction between these two principles was made more complex by the different circumstances affecting different colonies during the war. Some had been under Vichy government, while others had declared for the Free French. Some had sent significant forces to fight with the French, while others had not. The difficulties were sharpest where France had lost control during the war, especially in South-East Asia, where the French administration had been ousted from Indochina by Japanese forces, and the government in Paris sought urgently to regain control by military force. Moreover, the long lines of communication had traditionally given the French government's officials on the ground a very high level of autonomy from Paris.

As a result, discussion of the colonies in France tended to veer sharply

between the detailed analysis of immediate current events and consideration of the philosophical underpinnings of entire civilisations, without a strong focus on the intermediate zone of policy and its implementation. This provided an ideal context for intellectuals, who on the one hand were specialists in philosophical issues, and on the other hand had a long tradition of investigative journalism and reportage. With some notable exceptions, they were less directly engaged in the spheres of policy-making and governance, but were often highly valued by policy-makers for their ability to provide a broader intellectual context for policy.

Mounier in Black Africa

By comparison with other areas, sub-Saharan Africa was distinctly on the periphery of political concerns. France's possessions in 'Black Africa' were grouped into two adjoining federations: French Equatorial Africa (Afrique Équatoriale Française, AEF) and French West Africa (Afrique Occidentale Française, AOF). They tended to be viewed as areas where the French colonial presence was least problematic and most benign.⁴ French West Africa, to which Mounier made an extended visit, grouped eight territories: Côte d'Ivoire, Dahomey (now Benin), French Guinea (now Guinea), French Sudan (now Mali), Mauritania, Niger, Senegal and Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso). The federation was initiated in 1895, and was ruled by a governor-general based in Dakar. During the Second World War the AOF supported the Vichy government until November 1942, when it accepted the authority of de Gaulle's Free French movement.

Mounier visited West Africa in the spring of 1947, on a cultural mission supported by the newly formed Ministère de la France d'Outre-mer, which replaced the old Ministère des Colonies in 1946.⁵ He flew into Dakar (Senegal) on 12 March via Casablanca, and returned by the same route on 23 April. During his six-week trip, Mounier made visits to six of France's eight territories in AOF as well as to Cameroon, Liberia and Sierra Leone.⁶ His itinerary included a programme of lectures in schools and cultural centres, and meetings with groups of African intellectuals.⁷ On his return he reported his conclusions in various forums over the remainder of the year. He began with a talk in his weekly radio programme on 'les valeurs politiques dans la France nouvelle', broadcast on the French overseas service (30 April 1947), and with a series of feature articles in the daily newspaper, *Combat* (18–30 May 1947). He published his travel diary in the summer numbers of *Esprit* (July and September 1947). And a long Letter to the Editor, Alioune Diop, appeared in the first issue of the new journal, *Présence africaine* (November–December 1947). Most of this material was then collected and published in volume form the following year, as *L'Éveil de l'Afrique noire*, in Seuil's 'Esprit' collection.⁸

In discussing Mounier's presentation of his experiences and analysis, it

will be useful to draw on the framework proposed by Henri Lefebvre, which offers an effective way of relating textual material to its social and historical context. Drawing on concepts derived from the linguistic theory of André Martinet and Roman Jakobson, Lefebvre distinguishes three dimensions of language – paradigmatic, syntagmatic and symbolic – each of which needs to be taken into account when deciphering a message (Lefebvre, 1966). These dimensions provide a helpful approach to the different areas of Mounier's text.⁹

Recording experiences

Mounier's radio broadcast had the title 'L'Éveil de l'Afrique noire', which was eventually adopted as the title of the publication in volume form. The title exhibits some of the ambiguities inherent in Mounier's approach. This is readily revealed by a paradigmatic analysis, which examines the alternatives from which a given element in the message has been selected. The choice of 'L'Éveil de l'Afrique noire' was preferred to 'L'Éveil du continent noir', which was used as the running title for the ten articles published in *Combat*. The difficulty with the word 'continent' was that it might imply that the whole of Africa was black, which would conflict with French perceptions of North Africa. At all events, it is clear that blackness was the primary concern. The title does not identify a geographical area such as West Africa, or a political area such as French West Africa, or French colonial possessions in Africa, but rather generalises the discussion implicitly to the whole of 'black' Africa.

Blackness is in fact a major theme of the travel diary, which forms the first part of the volume, and reflects Mounier's first-hand perceptions, albeit undoubtedly revised for publication. This is clear in his early impressions on awaking in his hotel in Dakar the morning after his late arrival: 'Je vais à la fenêtre. Beaucoup de Noirs, peu de Blancs' (Mounier, 1962: 252). This is not a surprising reaction, but an understandable initial culture shock for someone arriving from the relative ethnic homogeneity of 1940s Paris. However, throughout the diary, Mounier maintains a careful distinction between the White and Black people he encounters, frequently using capital letters. Toward the end of his stay, giving a lecture in Kankan (Guinea) he notes:

Autre surprise: au milieu de ma conférence, sortie générale des Noirs. Qu'ai-je dit? Rien de grave. On m'avertit à l'oreille: je suis entré en pays musulman, et tous vont à la prière. Ils rentrent cinq minutes après. (Mounier, 1962: 299)

In retrospect, one might wonder at Mounier's surprise, since he had already spent a month in Africa at this stage, and was generally interested in the religious attitudes of the people. However, his perception of the event is reported principally in terms of the behaviour of Blacks.

At times, as an alternative to Blacks, Mounier refers to Africans and to Africa, which is contrasted with Europe or more rarely the western world (Mounier, 1962: 256). He also makes frequent use of the term 'indigène' (native) to refer to places, customs and occasionally the people he encounters. On a few occasions, he identifies people with their country, where an important distinction is to be made between different types of black Africans. This is illustrated most strikingly in an episode on his arrival in Liberia:

Au débarqué, je vois venir à moi un tirailleur sénégalais, casquette sur la nuque, sourire aux lèvres, main tendue. Il n'y a pas tellement de Français au Libéria, ce doit-être mon homme. Il a son genre après tout sympathique:

- Tu viens me chercher ?
- Oui missié.
- Monsieur Mounier?
- Oui, missié.
- Tu es le chauffeur du Ministre de France?
- Oui, missié. (Mounier, 1962: 294)

The fact that the man is apparently Senegalese in anglophone Liberia makes it important to specify his country rather than his colour. Mounier also makes the assumption that he can communicate in French, because his attire is that of an infantryman in the French colonial army. In the event, it transpires that he is not the ministry chauffeur, and with the help of a third party Mounier discovers that the man has merely been responding affirmatively out of a sense of compliance: 'Principe: il faut toujours répondre oui à un Blanc, pour lui faire plaisir, après on verra bien' (Mounier, 1962: 294).

The man's status as a Senegalese then recedes and he become simply a Black. Mounier then follows this account with an anecdote underlining the tendency of Blacks generally to agree with Whites in any circumstances. This example, among many others, suggests that the racial distinction between Blacks and Whites remains the predominant paradigm in Mounier's account. It may be noted that, in the second part of the book, originally published as feature articles in *Combat*, the use of the term 'le Noir' is less predominant. The word is more often used without the capital letter, and more reference is made to 'les Africains' in preference. This section also makes greater use of adjectives relating to the specific African country, not least because the articles are arranged to provide individual analyses of the countries in turn.

The Liberian episode also reveals the way in which the racial paradigm is embodied in language. The *tirailleur's* ultimate inability to communicate effectively in French triggers his reversion from an almost French Senegalese to a mere Black. For Mounier, the spectrum of black humanity ranges from

the users of native languages to the fluent French speakers. The *tirailleur* falls in the middle of this range, indicated by Mounier's transcription of his responses in the phonetic approximation characteristic of the 'petit nègre' mode ('oui, Missié'). Mounier also uses the familiar 'tu' form of address, suitable for social inferiors and children. At the lowest end of this range are the native-language speakers, of whom Mounier becomes aware when he awakes on his first morning in Dakar: 'Est-ce ce pépiement ouolof qui annonce ici le matin, comme ailleurs le chant des oiseaux?' (Mounier, 1962: 252). Since Mounier lacks the ability to understand their language, the speech of the local people appears to him as sound without meaning. He therefore assimilates it metaphorically to the morning chorus of birds, suggesting that the Wolof speakers are felt subjectively to be almost a part of the natural world, rather than the human or social world.

At the other end of the human-linguistic range, on the same day, Mounier describes his meeting with a group of black intellectuals, led by Alioune Diop. They are planning to launch the literary and intellectual review *Présence africaine*, and he is impressed that they speak 'un français impeccable, pétillant, nuancé' (Mounier, 1962: 253). In his diary, he extensively reports their reflections on the Black soul. Similarly, he includes in his text a long extract from a memoir by a student of the École Normale des filles de Rufisque, describing in carefully crafted and poetic French her memories of childhood in her home village (Mounier, 1962: 258–60). This was the work of the young Mariama Bâ, who later wrote the acclaimed novel *Une si longue lettre* (1979). She graduated in 1947 from her teacher training course at Rufisque, shortly after Mounier's visit. From the intellectual elite to the non-francophone natives, the degree of linguistic fluency corresponds closely with their level of recognition as people, and it appears to a large extent that Mounier implicitly measures the humanity of black people by their ability to speak French. This perhaps is the underlying logic of the concept of 'les évolués', which Mounier criticises as ridiculous (Mounier, 1962: 305), but which he cannot avoid using. The educated African elite have not merely 'developed', but have 'evolved': access to education is implicitly equated with biological evolution towards the status of humanity.

The *Combat* reports

Mounier's ten feature articles in the daily newspaper *Combat* appeared in the second half of May 1947 under the running title *L'Éveil du continent noir*, and formed the second part of the volume published in 1948, under the general title 'Problèmes d'Afrique'. They present a political and cultural analysis of the current state of development in West Africa, and develop a view of the process of awakening. A syntagmatic analysis, focusing on the sequence in which elements occur in a message, provides a helpful approach to this section of the work. In particular, it helps to reveal a direction of movement which underlies the historical perspective within which Mounier was working.

The meaning of 'éveil' is explained by Mounier in terms of the aim of his book: 'j'ai simplement voulu donner le tableau d'un peuple en train de s'éveiller, et de poser le premier pas dans l'histoire universelle' (Mounier, 1962: 249). This suggests that Africans are not awakening from sleep (which would be a 'réveil') but are awakening for the first time, leaving their previous pre-conscious stage to take their first steps on the stage of history. This is intended as a positive and future-oriented vision, though it clearly casts previous history as a period of unconsciousness. What happened in the past is in some sense discounted, since the Africans were not 'there' or at least not awake to what was happening. Being in some kind of vegetative state, the Africans were outside the domain of 'universal history', and perhaps therefore somewhat less than fully human. The mode of temporality is clearly mapped against the stages of child development. The 'first steps' into history evoke those of an infant taking its first unsteady steps as a toddler. The notion of 'éveil' resonates strongly with theories of education, in which teachers work to awaken the various aptitudes the child will need as it develops towards maturity. This is emphasised in the passage quoted at the head of this article, evoking the negligent father who has made a mess of his children's education.

Child development and education in fact provide the dominant framing metaphors for the entire account. The first essay in this second section is entitled: 'L'Afrique devient-elle majeure?', to which the answer is clearly that the process of attaining maturity or majority is in its early stages. An elite is developing, he argues, but it is not clearly embedded in either African or European culture. Its members are scattered and isolated and they overestimate their own capabilities. In particular, they are open to dangers arising from mixing the power conferred by European education with African social traditions such as a passion for public affairs, a high esteem for individual personalities or a facility for fine-sounding words.

Mounier concludes that the education of African peoples towards an independent and democratic future needs to be a gradual process, taking all the necessary time. He pays particular attention to the controversy over the 'rural schools' scheme, which was ostensibly aimed at giving a relevant vocational education to the children of African farming communities. The scheme was rejected by black political representatives because the schools were seen as exploiting the labour of pupils, who were forced to work long hours in the fields. Mounier's response is that the abuses need to be eliminated, but that the idea is so good that it should be extended to the French countryside. He is strongly aware of the difficulties that need to be overcome and the time that will need to be taken, but he believes there should be a long-term commitment to succeed. He takes a similar view of other areas where France is bending its efforts towards African development, including literacy and mass education, material infrastructure, machinery and equipment, and political institutions. In all of his discussions it remains

an underlying assumption that the responsibility for protecting and developing the African peoples lies with France, and that it is the French governing elites, suitably enlightened, who should set the pace. Consequently, if the past appears a nebulous zone from which Africa is only just emerging, the future appears to extend a long way before maturity and independence should be envisaged.

The temporality of Mounier's presentation is closely related to the difficulty experienced by the French intellectual elites in discussing the history of France. The recent past, especially the dark years of the Second World War, was difficult and painful to discuss at this time, and there was a strong tendency to look resolutely to the future. This difficulty was compounded by the overwhelming need of the French state to restore its pre-war status, especially in respect of its colonial empire. In that context, a perception of the present moment as a new beginning with a long future stretching ahead enabled the immediate past to be largely disregarded.

By contrast with the initial discussion of Africa's long-term prospects, the remaining articles describing different countries appear as a series of snapshots, frozen in time. Senegal is presented as suffering from the uncertain outcomes of its annual campaign to bring in the groundnut harvests, and the excessive influence of Islam, but has the most highly developed political and intellectual elite. Dahomey is the Latin Quarter of the AOF, but is perilously distant from Dakar and surrounded by large foreign colonies, the British territories of Nigeria and the Gold Coast. Ivory Coast is the most ruthlessly exploited of France's territories in the area, tensions are high and the left-wing Houphouët-Boigny is in the ascendant. Guinea is the land of harmony and moderation, and though rather neglected has the potential to be a point of stability. French Sudan has been the object of large-scale but unsuccessful experiments in irrigation engineering along the Niger, but this has not noticeably disturbed life in the colony. Togo was ruled by Germany and Britain before becoming French, and it has developed an enterprising and multilingual culture, but remains desperately starved of investment. Liberia stands out as a dire warning: the Afro-American former slaves who took over the colony a century earlier have proved more rapacious and oppressive toward the natives than any white Europeans, and the country now appears to be a conduit for American influence in the region. The series omits Mounier's visit to the British colony of Sierra Leone, which is described in his travel diary as offering a contrast with the close centralised control exercised in French colonies. The British, by contrast, take a liberal view and on day-to-day matters largely leave the natives to govern themselves, whether as a result of policy or lack of interest.

These thumbnail portraits have helped to form perceptions of some of the countries concerned, which have continued into the post-colonial period, but their main purpose was to give a clear message to a Parisian readership that the colonies of West Africa were valuable and worth attending to.

Mounier was at pains to emphasise that the future was as yet undecided, and that the French elites had the ability to shape it by the choices they now made. He made supportive comments about the role of French cultural initiatives, including those of the Institut français d'Afrique noire (IFAN) and the Alliance française.¹⁰ And, in a concluding comment, he suggested that while the black population were as yet unready to take charge of their own affairs politically or technologically, the French authorities should begin to offer them responsibilities in more limited aspects: 'Il dépend de nous de semer ici, dès l'origine, les germes d'une communauté fraternelle, ou les grains fous de la discorde' (Mounier, 1962: 332). His comment reiterates the perception that this is a time of 'origins', when things are just beginning, and confirms the theme of growth over a long period of time. However, his initial recognition of how poorly France has managed its other colonial areas lends a sense of foreboding to the possibility that the outcome in Africa might well be discord rather than fraternity.

Addressing the new African elite

The final text in *L'Éveil de l'Afrique noire* was published in the first number of *Présence africaine*, and is in the form of a letter to its editor, Alioune Diop.¹¹ The section is usefully approached from the perspective of its symbolic dimensions, drawing out its 'myths', in Barthes's terms, or in Lefebvre's terms the socially constituted networks of associations to which a message may refer, comprising patterns from memory or history which a society has charged with imagination, emotion and meaning (Lefebvre, 1966; Barthes, 1957). Mounier offers his friendship, support and advice to Diop, who he suggests is building a 'Eurafrican' civilisation. He emphasises that the young generation, to which Diop belongs, will always be torn between its African and European affiliations. He counsels them to be patient in developing the new world with the best values of both continents, and in particular not to abandon their African roots. Ultimately, he does not believe that Africa's struggle is one of race, but rather a social, economic and moral struggle.

Three main networks of symbol or myth pervade Mounier's text. The first is the myth of youth. This is congruent with the theme, discussed above, of childhood development. It is not based on the literal age of the African intellectuals, since the age differences were not noticeable. In March 1947, Mounier was 41, still a young man in terms of the French intellectual elite, but speaking rather from the vantage point of age and experience. Senghor was also 41, and Diop slightly younger at 37. The theme of youth was instead based on the relative age of African civilisation. Related to this is his emphasis on the current generation of African intellectuals, torn between Europe and Africa and destined to pick their way through the pitfalls confronting a new elite. They are young in the sense of being the first generation of African intellectuals. Mounier suggests that it will need several

generations to create a 'une vraie classe dirigeante', and warns Diop's generation about the perils of rushing too quickly to assume this mantle (Mounier, 1962: 336).

The idea of civilisation is the second main symbolic theme. Mounier constantly refers African development to the level and scale of an entire civilisation, and in that sense he takes France's civilising mission very seriously. He contrasts the emerging 'Eurafrican' civilisation of AOF to the long-established civilisation represented by France, and suggests that the development of the former is likely to take place on a similar timescale to that of the latter. To emphasise this point, he evokes the roots of French civilisation in earlier civilisations: Rome, Greece, Asia and even perhaps Atlantis (Mounier, 1962: 336). He emphasises the value of European civilisation: 'Je ne crois pas à la fin de l'Europe que certains prophétisent déjà. Elle porte beaucoup de fautes, mais elle a assumé le poids du monde dans cette première époque de l'humanité' (Mounier, 1962: 335). He thus sees Europe as having taken over the burden of humanity's first stage of development, but as still developing and growing. Younger civilisations have a great deal to learn from Europe, he suggests, thinking not only of Africa but also the bustling young civilisation across the Atlantic. This version of France's civilising mission is not so much about bringing French civilisation to Africans as about enabling them to develop their own civilisation, no doubt in partnership with France. The implications are equally long-term. Civilisations rise and fall over centuries, and the new 'Eurafrican' elite need to think about the long and painstaking task of building a viable culture and civilisation over that kind of timescale.

The third network of symbolism is the theme of awakening, which implicitly and explicitly pervades the entire work. In this section, Mounier draws on the image of Europe awaking a Sleeping Beauty: 'Il n'est pas douteux qu'elle ait éveillé l'Afrique à son avenir comme le jeune prince est venu délier les chaînes du sommeil aux bras et aux pieds de la Belle au bois dormant' (Mounier, 1962: 335). The use of this reference presents a more complex view of Africa's awakening than the image of a child's awakening to consciousness. Sleeping Beauty was after all the daughter of a king, who had passed her childhood in the royal palace, and was on the brink of maturity when put to sleep by an enchantment. It is not clear who might have played the role of the wicked witch in binding Africa to sleep, though at different points in the book Mounier's comments suggest that medieval Islam might be the prime suspect:

Il faut compter enfin avec le grand obstacle que l'Islam présente à l'émancipation africaine. Partout où il pénètre, il étouffe l'initiative, l'énergie, la créativité. En maintenant la femme en état d'infériorité systématique, il paralyse l'épanouissement d'une civilisation plus souriante. (Mounier, 1962: 314)

The emergence of Africa into a new civilisation would therefore seem to be

gained at the expense of a conflict of civilisations. Mounier recognises that sub-Saharan Islam is weaker than its more northerly counterpart, and that many of its religious leaders support the French administration. Nonetheless, it is possible to see in his remarks a rising anxiety about its religious and social influence, for which the deteriorating situation in North Africa clearly provides the major context. Conceivably, this was a consideration in the French administration's preference for giving posts of responsibility in predominantly Muslim Senegal to black citizens transferred from Martinique, a predominantly Catholic French colony.

No doubt it would be unwise to seek too exact an analogy between a fairy tale and the contemporary reality. However, the invocation of symbolic narratives such as *Sleeping Beauty* does mobilise networks of myth, and it is helpful to remember Lévi-Strauss's point that myths are tools for thinking (Lévi-Strauss, 1962). In this sense, the symbols Mounier uses may give access to more dimensions of his thought than are conveyed in his explicit arguments. Hence, while the myth of *Sleeping Beauty* casts France in the role of the valiant prince who goes on to marry the princess, it also carries the assumption of a more equal relationship between the two. And if the princess is of marriageable age, she must have a higher degree of maturity than Mounier otherwise ascribes to Africa.

Changing metaphors

In a rich and complex text such as *L'Éveil de l'Afrique noire*, it is difficult to identify a single message that encapsulates Mounier's argument. And perhaps to do so would run against the grain of Mounier's thinking, which sought to capture the complexity of situations and point to lines of reflection rather than to recommend specific actions or policies. In Shennan's terms, it is above the level of policy: he is concerned to identify the alternatives and ask pertinent questions rather than to propose specific answers. As a result, his analysis is less trenchant, more balanced, and perhaps more ambiguous than his contemporary Jean-Paul Sartre (see Sartre, 1964). This is characteristic of much of Mounier's writing, but is given further complexity by the nature of the published text, which combines three different types of writing, with at least three different audiences. The travel diary, published first in *Esprit*, addresses a community of French Catholic readers, ranging from more left-leaning socialists to centre-right Christian democrats. The articles published in *Combat* address a mainly Parisian readership based in the professional classes. And the letter to Diop is primarily aimed at an audience of intellectuals with an African background or at least a close interest in the continent.

The letter to Diop concludes with a vision of unity between the peoples of Europe and Africa. Mounier suggests they are in the same boat, shaken by the same winds and, faced with the looming threat of atomic warfare,

'tendus vers un seul espoir commun aux hommes de toute peau' (Mounier, 1962: 338). The articles from *Combat* end on the sombre conclusion that this fraternal community depends on whether the French in Africa can take a sufficiently progressive approach. But the travel diary ends on a more radical note, taking the final stage of Mounier's journey as a metaphor. Coming into Casablanca, Mounier's aeroplane lands in fog, misses the runway and runs into the sand. They are obliged to change aircraft. Mounier concludes: 'Ainsi s'ensable l'Europe dans sa colonisation. Elle y fit de grandes choses. De moins grandes aussi. Mais l'histoire a tourné. Il faut changer d'appareil' (Mounier, 1962: 304).

The diagnosis strongly implied is that Europe in general, and France in particular, needs to abandon colonialism forthwith. This is not entirely consistent with the gradualist policy generally outlined in the body of the diary and urged in the letter to Diop. It is more radical too than the position later outlined in *Le Personnalisme* (1949) that the colonial era is drawing to an end. Perhaps this is a case where the metaphorical level of thought has run further and faster than the explicit thinking developed in the work. One might be entitled to feel that Mounier's struggle with the paradigms and myths of colonial thinking have raised more questions than they can find answers to. The resulting intellectual fog bedevils the 'mission to civilise', and, although he cannot announce it more explicitly, his conclusion appears through his metaphors: that the time has come to abandon the colonial project, and the intellectual and cultural framework that goes with it.

Mounier did not live to see the debacle of the French colonial empire as it unfolded during the 1950s, but he continued to try to reconcile his humanist philosophy with his instinctive anti-colonialism, and one of his last acts before his death in the spring of 1950 was to prepare an issue of *Esprit* carrying the title 'L'humanisme contre guerres coloniales'. The title is a call to battle, but it seems too optimistic an affirmation of the French humanism whose internal conflicts Mounier so clearly showed in his work on Africa.

Notes

1. This is also discussed in the article by Nicola Cooper, this issue, p. 000.
2. This point was suggested by J. P. Daughton in a contribution to the discussion list H-France on 16 June 2005.
3. The omissions are mine. In the passage quoted, Shennan is specifically referring to the socialists, though the same point can be extended to the other governing parties.
4. For further details of French activities in West Africa, see Ajayi and Crowder (1987); Biarnès (1987); Boahen (1989); Chafer (2002).
5. This was largely a change of name, the main difference being that the new ministry lost responsibility for territories which became *départements* for administrative purposes in 1946.
6. The territories of AOF he did not visit were Upper Volta and Niger.

7. The summary of practical arrangements for the visit is based on details mentioned in Mounier's published reports (Mounier, 1948).
8. Detailed references to the initial publications can be found in the bibliography published in the collected works (Mounier, 1963).
9. This analysis is developed in my book on the cultural and intellectual rebuilding of France after the Second World War (Kelly, 2004: 34).
10. The IFAN was an institution for West African research founded by the French administration in Dakar in 1936, with branches in the other territories of AOF. Now renamed the Institut fondamental d'Afrique noire, it is a Faculty of Cheik Anta Diop University, Dakar. The Alliance française, which is still present in a large number of countries, was founded in 1883 as the 'Association nationale pour la propagation de la langue française dans les colonies et à l'étranger'.
11. The chapter title is 'Lettre à un ami africain', which has led some commentators to suppose erroneously that the letter was addressed to Léopold Sédar Senghor, with whom Mounier was also friendly (see Amela, 2002).

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FRENCH CULTURAL STUDIES 17(2)

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Michael Kelly is Professor of French and Head of the School of Humanities at the University of Southampton. *Address for correspondence:* School of Humanities, University of Southampton, Southampton, SO17 1BJ, UK [*email:* m.h.kelly@soton.ac.uk]