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*Civilising Subjects* is an outstanding achievement, which, as Roy Porter has suggested, "does for colonial history what E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* did for social history".  

The departing point of Hall's study is, on the one hand, the "imperative of placing colony and metropole in one analytic frame", and, on the other, the notion that the complex dialectic relationship associating the two "went both ways, even if in unequal relations of power".  

The underlying assumption is that the metropole determined colonial developments as much as - and this is the book's main interpretative novelty - the colonial imagination informed notions of 'Englishness'. In particular, *Civilising Subjects* is deliberately carrying out and complementing Frantz Fanon's almost forgotten notion of a mutual constitution between coloniser and colonised. Whereas Fanon did not examine only the psyche of the colonised, Hall is specifically interested in the redirection of Fanon's focus, in shifting the attention from one end of the colonial spectrum to the other: since the colonial imagination had to forge a new man, "[s]ettlers had to become colonisers, had to learn how to define and manage the new world they were encountering".  

In other words, "Europeans made history and made themselves through becoming colonisers", because as Fanon writes and Hall quotes, Europe "is literally the creation of the Third World".

Hall inquires precisely in this direction, mapping the ways in which 'English' became inextricably intertwined with a colonising function. It is, in fact, an exploration of a constituent trajectory of modern England, of a strategic passage in which the coalescence of racial difference as an interpretative category took over and replaced constructions of human equality based on ideas relating to the family of man. Both test cases of *Civilising Subjects* - Birmingham and its Baptist constituency, and post emancipation Jamaica - are considered in the backdrop of a decisive shift in ideas about 'Englishness', a makeover that can be understood only by looking at the colonial scene and by appraising the evolution of colonial discourses.

The book is postcolonially divided into two mirroring parts that can be read and interpreted separately. Coherently, the title refers equally to two types of 'civilising subjects': one - more immediate - being the English Baptists, who had a particular impact in Jamaica's developments, and another - less apparent - being the extraordinary discursive place which is the English Caribbean; a location, it is argued, that has had a crucial role in the definition of the English civilisation. After all, as Hall summarises, "it was through the lens of the Caribbean, and particularly of Jamaica, that the English first debated 'the African', slavery and anti-slavery, emancipation and the meanings of freedom"; and "Jamaica occupied a special place in the English imagination between the 1780s and 1860s on these grounds".  

Jamaica, in an upsetting dialectic that aptly summarises Hall's narrative, emerges literally as a civilising source of England's modern political thought.

Whereas the centrality of colonial sovereignty in the formation and consolidation of the modern European mind and political thought have also been forcefully suggested in Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt's *Empire*, Fanon's notion that "without colonialism, there would

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3 ibid, p. 14.


5 ibid, p. 11.
have been no Europe" is here reiterated in a most authoritative way. The fundamental role of the Caribbean space in this process, resulting from Haiti's revolution as an authenticating and distorting mirror of European progressive transformations, has also been highlighted in other recent contributions, where the Caribbean has been positioned alongside the 'Orient' as a site for the discursive production of colonial alterity. The constituent nature of colonial sovereignty in relation to European developments is now an essential feature of colonial studies, and Civilising Subjects contributes meaningfully to this debate by providing a compelling example of this dialectic.

Hall's narrative does not deal directly with Australia, although, in the reconstruction of Eyre's career which constitutes the prologue to the book, constructions of Aborigines as 'children of the wild' are proposed in tension (at least in Jamaica's demoted Governor's imagination) with degenerated stereotypes of Caribbean emancipated blacks. Nonetheless, this book is useful for the appreciation of Australia's colonial imagination and its radically different trajectory from the English one. Despite their long-lasting tradition, Australia's humanitarians, as Henry Reynolds has demonstrated, never enjoyed a position similar to England's Baptist missionaries. Strategically, Australia's colonial projects mainly followed the period of Hall's inquiry or developed in a domain fundamentally alien to the Caribbean and its discursive production. Historically - and for apparent reasons, including the convict nature of its original settlements - articulations of Australianness have rarely defined Aborigines and a colonial imagination through particular notions of freedom and liberty associated with the freeborn Englishman. Besides, Australia did not have a Toussaint Louverture.

Here lies an outstanding difference between England and Australian colonial consciousness. Whereas Jamaica and England had mirrored each other during the strategic decades Civilising Subjects is concerned with, in Australia (as Bain Attwood has argued in The Making of the Aborigines - incidentally, another conscious transposition of E. P. Thompson's work in a colonial background) it was ideological constructions related to 'the Aboriginal' that were pivotal in shaping notions of Australianness. Yet, Australia's colonised 'other' was in no way projected in terms of emancipation (a notion underlying equality); rather, it was images of assimilation highlighting an intractable diversity that were consistently deployed. Whereas assimilation eliminates difference, emancipation disregards it, and this may help explaining why an Australian colonial consciousness has a great deal more than others positioned itself according to exclusionist notions of white supremacy.

The idea that a colonial imagination projected both internally (as outlined by Attwood) and externally (as suggested by Donald Denoon) was essential in the creation of an Australian mind is certainly not new, although this line of interpretation has been abandoned in recent years. While Denoon's argument to this end was rapidly superseded by a debate that, in fact, preferred to maintain Australia's historiographical isolation, the convincing reproposition of a colonial dialectic represented by Civilising Subjects could renovate scholarly efforts in a comparative direction.

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