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ABSTRACT

Representations of the first colonial “civil war” in Victoria’s reign: the Canadian rebellions in the English press (1837-38).

This article examines the various representations circulating in the British press of an unexpected and peculiar occurrence: a “civil war” which took place in the white colonies of Canada in 1837-38. In fact, the terms used to refer to the event varied according to the sources. English leaders and editorials reported on a “civil war” in the colonies, while American newspapers whose despatches were quoted *verbatim* in the English press, more often referred to “rebellions” or “insurrections”. By reflecting on such a discrepancy in the representations of this colonial crisis, we might wonder why what seemed to clearly have been short-lived insurrections rapidly controlled by the British army, were represented under the alarming colours of “civil war” in England, in the press and in official despatches. Combined to the frightful news from Canada, Victorian fears of the civil war were also heightened in 1837, by the representations of civil wars and revolution published by Edward Gibbon and Thomas Carlyle whose histories of the decline of the Roman Empire and the French revolution. The Canadian “civil war” was described as a threat to the harmonious working of the British parliamentary monarchy at home and in the Empire. It led the press, moderate and radical, to reassess the values of the “English” Constitution and the capacity of British colonists as well as “the mob” to work with it, at a timely period: the beginning of Victoria’s reign and that of her second Empire.

¹ Published in *Cahiers Victoriens et Edouardiens*, Teulié, Gilles (ed.), *Victorian Representations of War*, *Cahiers Victoriens et Edouardiens* no 66 Octobre 2007, Montpellier, Presses Universitaires de La Méditerranée, pp. 44-60

Representations of the first colonial “civil war” in Victoria’s reign: the Canadian rebellions in the English press (1837-38).

When Victoria became Queen in June 1837, her subjects had been living in a peaceful and war-free United Kingdom for twenty-two years, since 1815. The victory of the allied troops at Waterloo under the British command of Wellington in June 1815 had marked the end of two decades of Napoleonic wars¹.

Save the Jacobite rebellions of 1715 and 1745, as well as the short-lived rebellion in Ireland in 1798, the United Kingdom had not known any direct war or battles on its soil since the eventful Civil Wars and the revolutions in Ireland and Scotland which had accompanied the Glorious Revolution at the end of the 17th century. For the British therefore, wars involving their army or navy were always fought on foreign land, quite remote from their own domestic preoccupations. British people never directly experienced war in the course of the long 18th century, save through a few echoes of battlefields from America, India and revolutionary Europe. The reality of wars was kept at a safe distance, while its mimesis was represented in paintings or in a few published memoirs of celebrated generals.

Until the beginning of the 19th century, echoes or representations of wars were not always accessible to the general public. Celebrations of British victories or territorial conquests abroad remained quite confidential and reserved to the public of the Royal Academy where visitors could admire panoramic views of battles or scenes of gallant officers performing heroic deeds. Linda Colley notes that wars remained abstract for a majority of the population². This can be observed in the lack of popular and patriotic celebrations at home after the victory at Waterloo³.

At the beginning of Queen Victoria’s reign however, access to domestic and foreign news was more largely shared by the educated and literate population, which included the growing middle-class, as well as a portion of the artisan class. Foreign and domestic affairs were now largely and fully reported in newspapers and periodicals whose growth and rapid development had begun in the early 1830s. Newspaper, periodical and book reading accompanied and supported the growth of a new class of readers, the educated and well-informed member of

¹ That last series of French wars had only followed by a decade another long painful war, the American Revolution, which had marked the demise of Britain’s first colonial empire in America.

² Linda Colley, *Britons, Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (London: Vintage, 1992) 339.

³ To the exception of the aristocratic Georgian elite whose members had been on the battlefields, the masses of the people were more concerned by the general economic depression than by any celebrations of a British victory.

the middle-class public whose access to the vote and to better political representation in 1832, fostered growing concern for and involvement in British politics¹. This “structural transformation of the British public sphere” to quote Jürgen Habermas², remains the major social and political phenomenon of the late Georgian years. Newspapers in Britain had to adapt to the demand of the middle and upper-class readers for a wealth of political information, by providing them with copies of lengthy political debates taken from *Hansard*, copies of official despatches, minutes of evidence, Committees’ reports, as well as international news usually composed of pasted, translated reports from foreign newspapers³. In the 1830s and 1840s, newspaper editors gave the priority to official despatches or copies of foreign newspaper reports, which were transcribed *verbatim*, over actual editorials or leaders.⁴

In the course of this article, I would like to examine the various representations circulating in the British press of an unexpected and peculiar occurrence: a “civil war” in the white colonies of Canada. In fact, the terms used to refer to the event varied according to the sources. The handful of English leaders and editorials, whose number increased over the weeks when tensions were building in the Canadas, reported on a “civil war” in the colonies. On the other hand, American newspapers whose despatches were quoted *verbatim* in the English press, more often referred to “rebellions” or “insurrections”. By reflecting on such a discrepancy in the representations of this colonial crisis, we might wonder why what seemed to clearly have been short-lived insurrections rapidly controlled by the British army, were represented under the alarming colours of “civil war” in England, in the press and in official despatches.

A few months after Victoria’s accession to the throne, three successive rebellions broke in Lower and Upper Canada. The first ones occurred at the beginning of December 1837 in Lower Canada and in early January 1838 in Upper Canada. They were followed by another uprising in November 1838 on the border between the United States and Lower Canada. Though apparently rapidly controlled by the British troops based in Canada, these civil insurrections nonetheless came as a shock to the Victorians. These rebellions put a close to a time of peace as well as to the political and social consensus spread by the Whigs, according to which Britain had been protected from any domestic revolutionary threat, thanks to its parliamentary constitution and the protection of British subjects’ civil liberties. In the

¹ Richard Althick, *The Common Reader* (London: CUP, 1955) 70-75.

² Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962, Boston: MIT, 1989).

³ For instance, catering to the need of their readers for efficient and transparent information on Canada in January 1838, *The (London) Times* editorialists preferred including the “complete ministerial statement of the Canada case at one view for [our] readers who doubtless prefer it to a separate publication of the documents.”

⁴ *The Times*, January 12, 1838.

introduction to his 1848 Whig *History of England*, Macaulay self-righteously stated that the Glorious Revolution and its king-in-parliament settlement had been a starting point in the ascension of Britain towards “the auspicious union of order and freedom” from which had sprung “a prosperity of which the annals of human affairs had furnished no example.¹” If the Canadian rebellions were not taking place directly at home, at least rebels were threatening domestic peace in the white British colonies. Besides, this civil strife, which immediately attracted the curiosity of American and French newspapers, was clearly belying the atmosphere of self-congratulation that the Whigs – in office in 1837 – had been promoting abroad. At the core of Whig success was the progressive constitution with which they were ruling the country and which had protected them from any civil war or revolution since the Glorious Revolution. At the core of Canadian protest was a strong criticism against the same Constitution.

The wildest fears associated with “civil wars” circulated in Britain for a few weeks. In British minds, past civil wars seemed to naturally have led to revolutions in England, in America², in France. The general impression that history could only repeat itself, in North America again, filled debates in the Commons as well as newspaper reports. In a first part, we will see that the rise of the Canadian insurrections also coincided with the circulation of two history books in which two historians interpreted the dynamics of civil war and revolution. The prophetic narratives seemed to feed the lingering fear of Victorians that this colonial war would bring the subsequent demise of the second British Empire in America.

Being a month’s away by boat from the Canadian colonies, there was a clear lack of available direct news and accurate information in England. It was impossible for British newspapers to receive and publish frequent updates about the insurrectional situation in the colonies. They had to rely on colonial despatches or colonial newspapers. When the “civil war” actually started at the end of November 1837 in Lower Canada, the first echoes of it only reached England at Christmas. In the same way, news of its suppression were brought to the knowledge of English readers in the first week of January 1838, i.e. a month after the event. In the meantime, the distance between the *métropole* and the colonies led the government, as well as newspapers, to represent the “war” under the similar frightful colours of a revolution, as we shall see in a second part.

¹ Thomas Babington Macaulay, *History of England* (1848; Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1986) introduction, 51.

² The colonial context of these rebellions, North America, naturally led the metropolitan public to infer that Canadian colonists were re-enacting the American Revolution, which had also begun as a civil war. Indeed Jefferson had declared on July 4, 1776, “brethren in peace, enemies at war.”

The etymology of the word “representation” takes its full meaning in colonial circumstances as journalists or Cabinet ministers could only “re-present” the situation “by presenting a substitute of the thing in its absence”¹. A few months after the first insurrection, in August 1838, Lord Durham – appointed by the Queen to appease the Canadian colonies and to supervise the reestablishment of “order and good government” –, now freshly landed in Quebec, clearly stated in his first official despatch to London, that British newspapers and the Cabinet had been entertaining Victorian readers with false representations of the situation for lack of direct information, over the past months.

It is needless to point out the wide between this representation and the opinions on the subjects which were and probably still are, held by her Majesty’s Ministers; but since one who had the benefit of whatever information they possessed is nevertheless compelled to acknowledge that the truth as it now appears to him, differs so much from his previous conceptions of it. What can be inferred is that distance has precluded them from acquiring an accurate knowledge of the whole subject?²

According to Lord Durham, there had been a civil war, particularly in Lower Canada, but the causes of it had been wrongly interpreted due to the false colours in which colonial reports, private correspondence and *Patriote* or British Canadian newspapers had painted them. Durham’s so-called true interpretation of the first “colonial war” in the reign of Queen Victoria will be analysed in the last section of this article.

This short-lived insurrectional episode led by a group of Patriots, in the two main Canadian colonies, became the platform onto which Victoria’s subjects projected the various popular fears of the war that successive, though distant seventeenth-century English wars had raised in the nation’s memories. In other words, we are going to observe how this very first and unexpected colonial crisis³ taking place on “domestic” ground – by imperial extension –, in the midst of British subjects having received some measures of self-government, attracted the attention of a large reading public whose concern for their “neglected” white colonies seemed awakened overnight.

The first “civil war” taking place in white colonies since the independence of the American people, seemed to remind the Victorian public about the fragility of the British empire’s triumph, about the difficulties of conquering foreign populations, here French settlers, and more particularly it raised questions and doubts among the Whigs, about the capacity of

¹ F. R. Ankermit, *Historical Representation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001) 11.

² Lord Durham to Colonial Secretary Lord Glenelg, August 9, 1838, see Lord Durham, *Report on the Affairs of British North America*, edited by Sir Charles Lucas (1839; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912) vol. III, appendix to the Report, official correspondence, 123.

³ A colonial crisis whose resolution based on Lord Durham’s proposals left a lasting mark on the political organization of the second British Empire and in the process of nation formation in the Canadian dominion from 1867 onwards.

colonial subjects, British or otherwise, to govern themselves. Should the Constitution, the core of the political foundations of England and the English monarchy, be adjusted to colonial rule or were British colonies condemned to remain in a state of less-advanced civilisation? Did the constitutional tensions, which had been at the root of the so-called civil war in the colonies, herald the end of the so-called political consensus between classes at home?

I - Historical representations of civil wars in the first months of Victoria's reign.

When young princess Victoria became Queen on June 20, 1837, her subjects at home and overseas were more than happy to celebrate their new young monarch. Such was the general feeling, which was conveyed by the English newspapers in the course of the summer. For instance, in the first days of September 1837, *The Times* or *The Morning Chronicle*, both moderate newspapers, respectively Tory and Whig, gladly reported that in the course of the summer, the people of Quebec had gathered near their governor-general's residence to present an address to their Queen. *The Globe*, a radical newspaper, further included in a similar report about Quebec colonists¹, a letter addressed to the Queen by Lord Gosford, the governor-general of Lower Canada, written on August 7, 1837. Gosford congratulated the Queen and vowed obedience. In this official letter reproduced in *The Globe*, Gosford first described to the Queen the loyalty of a large majority of her subjects in Lower Canada who were greatly attached to the British constitution and to the mother country. However he also reminded her that a small portion of them was disturbing the proper work of the local government. Gosford restated his commitment to the task of eradicating what he described as "calamities" and he promised to "extirpate any abuse."²

In the course of the same summer, Queen Victoria furthered her royal education by following the recommendations of her uncle Leopold who from Belgium suggested she should read more history. True to her uncle's advice, Victoria had already studied Russell's *Modern Europe*, Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* as well as Clarendon's *History of the Rebellion* during the previous summer and she now completed her knowledge about English history by studying "the past thirty years". Indeed, King Leopold felt that she would do well "to go through the reign of George III, and to follow the various circumstances which

¹ "about 8.000 loyal subjects gathered in Quebec City to celebrate Victoria", *The Globe*, September 9, 1837.

² *The Globe*, September 9, 1837 quoting Lord Gosford's official despatch to the Queen of April 7, 1837.

brought on finally the present state of affairs.¹” The young queen seemed well acquainted with the history of previous wars, civil or revolutionary, English or foreign. She also seemed well aware of the fragility of her position as a female monarch at a time period when nationalist or radical strife seemed to flare up in other parts of Europe. After a conversation about Turkey and Russia with Lord Palmerston, Victoria mentioned to her uncle that her heart went to her “sister Queens” in Europe, wishing that something could be done for them, trapped as they were in the midst of civil wars and rebellions.

In August 1837, Lord John Russell wrote to Victoria about the recent elections in Britain, mentioning to her that “the near balance of parties” was going to make the task of ruling difficult but that he also rejoiced in the fact that “the circumstances of the country [did] not present any extraordinary difficulty.²” Russell’s representation of the country was limited to the immediate British Isles, as he referred to Ireland as the only source of potential tension. However, he concluded, “if difficulties should arise” he was certain that the House of Commons would form a majority, for “the maintenance of the constitution and the welfare of the country would be permanent objects to the majority of its Members.” In fact, the 1837 elections had returned four radical MPs in the House of Commons³. They would soon attack the government on its mishandling of the Canadian insurrections. In spite of the restless mind in which her lower classes were at home in 1837, Victoria’s first summer was harmonious and peaceful.

Victoria could have added to Edward Gibbon’s masterpiece *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, i.e. to her list of pre-requisite royal readings, *The French Revolution* published by Thomas Carlyle in May 1837. Though first published in 1788, Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* was already in its 8th edition by 1837⁴. In Victorian Britain, Gibbon’s work was read as a classic of historical writing. Carlyle described Gibbon and his contribution to history as “a kind of bridge, that connects the ancient with the modern ages”, thus underlining the echoes he found in Gibbon’s narrative about the contemporary situation of England. As for Thomas Carlyle, he published his *French Revolution* in 1837 and he adopted an unusual style to narrate well-known events, by imparting to the chronology a prophetic tone. Many reviewers noted that though Carlyle seemed to talk about the French

¹ King Leopold of Belgium to Queen Victoria, June 30, 1837, quoted in *The Letters of Queen Victoria, A Selection from Her Majesty’s Correspondence between the years 1837 and 1861*, edited by Arthur Benson and Viscount Esher (London: John Murray, 1908).

² Lord John Russell to Queen Victoria, August 15, 1837.

³ Messrs Hume, Leader, Harvey and Wakley.

⁴ The book was on the reading list for the civil examination and on the curriculum at Oxford and Cambridge.

Revolution, he was in fact commenting upon the contemporary situation in Great Britain. I'm going to posit that the "modern" reflections of these two historians on the state of Britain and of its Empire fashioned the representations of the Canadian "civil war" in the *metropole*.

According to Edward Gibbon, the Roman Empire's decline and fall had meaning and importance for contemporary society. At the end of the 18th century, Gibbon saw in his own narrative a source of reflections for "the philosophic reader of the present age" on the "decay of societies generally"¹. In 1788, when the book was first published, many of Gibbon's readers had interpreted the loss of America as an event portending the decline of the British Empire by finding analogies between Gibbon's narrative and the current situation². In 1837, modern readers could also find in the Canadian crisis, echoes of Gibbon's work. His interpretation of classical history rang all the more true to his readers as Gibbon analysed Rome's decline as having been brought by a series of civil wars, which reflected the impossibility for empires to preserve or extend into harmonious wholes. Civil wars occurred when conquered foreign populations could not be satisfied with their new rulers, however strong or lenient this new rule was, however enlightened the new system of government was. Indeed the Roman Empire had comprised "the most numerous society that has ever been united under the same system of government"³, but civil wars had been ineluctable. According to Gibbon, civil wars seemed to be a natural canker gnawing at empires. At the first eruption of civil wars in the history of the Roman Empire, Gibbon provided a universal definition of their dynamic:

The civil wars of modern Europe have been distinguished not only by the fierce animosity but likewise by the obstinate perseverance of the contending factions. They have generally been justified by some principle, or at least coloured by some pretext of religion, freedom or loyalty. The leaders were nobles of independent property and hereditary influence⁴.

Gibbon explained the fall of the Roman Empire, by evoking the flaring up of civil wars which did not seem to be preventable or curable as they were organized by aristocratic or bourgeois factions and launched under various pretexts. Even when Roman emperors like Severus had displayed some leniency towards those who had rebelled against him, – boasting that he had transformed the empire he had received "oppressed with foreign and domestic wars" into a peaceful one, leaving it according to Gibbon "in profound, universal and honourable peace" –,

¹ Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, eds Anthony Lentin and Brian Norman (1776-1778; Ware: Wordsworth Classics of World Literature, 1998) introduction.

² Edward Gibbon had been an MP under George III. He had supported the policy of Lord North with his vote during the war of American independence.

³ Gibbon, ch. 2, 48.

⁴ Gibbon, ch. 5, 101.

factions would still exist and be unsatisfied. Gibbon's contemporary reflection on Roman or modern European history indicated that no monarch or emperor, however liberal a constitution they ruled with, seemed to be able to appease civil wars since they were not a curable disease according to Gibbon: "Although the wounds of civil war appeared completely healed, its mortal poison still lurked in the vitals of the constitution."¹

Consequently, civil discord should not be allowed to spread. To prevent civil discord from generating a civil war, the emperor's army should be used against agitators in the early stages of tension. Civil discord or as a matter of fact disruption by Barbarians, should not be tolerated within the Empire and a firm control of those crises should limit their rampage. Gibbon's evocation of the powerful Roman Empire rang even more true to the ears of the Victorians than it had to those of the Georgians. The successful and liberal Empire of Rome, which Gibbon described in his book, was the exact replica of the British Empire at home and abroad in the summer of 1837.

[...] The Empire of Rome comprehended the fairest part of the earth, and the most civilised portion of mankind. The frontiers of that extensive monarchy were guarded by ancient renown and disciplined valour. The gentle, but powerful influence of laws and manners had gradually cemented the union of the provinces. Their peaceful inhabitants enjoyed and abused the advantages of wealth and luxury. The image of a free constitution was preserved. The Roman senate appeared to possess the sovereign authority, and devolved on the emperors all the executive powers of government².

Indeed with the benefit of hindsight, the 1830s' Whigs could analyse the American Revolution as ineluctable since the colonists had not been granted the constitutional right of representation that could have saved the stability of the first British Empire. In the 1830s however, the Canadian colonists already had a Constitutional Act and they benefited from the greatness of the English constitution at least in terms of representation. In 1837, it seemed that "the image of the free constitution was preserved" throughout the white British Empire in the same way as it had been preserved in the empire of Rome. And yet, as Gibbon ominously reminded his contemporary readers, the great Empire came to its demise:

It is the design of this and of the succeeding chapters, to describe the prosperous condition of their empire; and afterwards, from the death of Marcus Antoninus, to deduce the most important circumstances of its decline and fall: a revolution, which will ever be remembered, and is still felt by the nations of the earth.

It would not be fair to sum up Gibbon's complex analysis of the fall of the Roman Empire to this simple connection between civil wars and barbarian attacks on the empire. However such was the general apprehension and interpretation of his work by Victorian middle-class

¹ Gibbon, ch. 5, 103.

² Gibbon, ch.1, 3.

readers. This might explain the promptness of the colonial authorities, at home and in Canada, to first condemn then dismiss the political demands of the reformers and radicals in Lower and Upper Canada, in the months prior to the insurrections. It was announcing civil discord which when it came, was also promptly crushed by British troops whose number had been increased in preparation for a civil war. In his first despatch to the colonial office on August 9, 1838, Lord Durham admitted that the British authorities in Canada had panicked and provoked the first insurrection: “The consequent rebellions, although precipitated by the British from an instinctive sense of the danger of allowing the Canadians full time for preparation, could not, perhaps have been avoided.¹” The fear of civil war was clearly felt in Lower Canada governor-general’s correspondence before he tendered his resignation to Lord Russell in October 1837 who immediately replaced him by an expert military man, Sir John Colborne.

For those reading Carlyle’s *French Revolution* in the course of the summer 1837, they must have been taken aback by the violence, which oozed from Carlyle’s representation of well-known events. The reader was plunged into the reality of bloody scenes of insurrection and seized by the closeness with which he experienced the violence of the French mob. Carlyle proposed to his contemporary readers a revised narrative of the French Revolution, which according to him had begun as a civil war whose dynamic he uncovered for the Victorians. Indeed, Carlyle unusually resorted to the present tense to thrust his reader into the thick of action. His purpose was to admonish them and to thrust them into “the bodily concrete coloured presence of events” and to force them to make up their minds². In the 1830s, the French revolution was still a thing of horror to the educated readers, associated with the evil of brutal violence perpetrated by the French mob egged into action by radical leaders. The French revolutionary dynamic had already been well explained by Edmund Burke. The French peasantry being uneducated they had been easily manipulated into revolution by a handful of radical leaders and demagogues who attacked the natural rulers of France, the aristocracy. Since Burke’s narrative of the French revolution, the French had always been typified as the enemy at war, whose national character betrayed his natural envy and jealousy towards the progressive British. Carlyle further described the French as seeking revenge for ages of cruelty.

¹ Lord Durham, *Report*, p.22.

² A.L. Le Quesne, « Carlyle », *Victorian Thinkers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) 44.

Carlyle did not deny the horror and the violence of the revolution. He devoted pages to it in a series of lurid sketches and incisive imagery¹, portraying “the destructive wrath of Sansculottism”. But he took no side. Instead, he composed his narrative of the events in order to show that all the horrors of the revolution were no more than the natural outcome of all that had happened before. “The menacing growl of the unfed poor” could be explained by the detachment and abuse of the ruling class of France, which had forgotten its responsibilities towards those over whom they were commissioned to rule. The revolution in Paris had started with some lynching and street rioting, i.e. civil discord, but Carlyle seemed to prophesise the ineluctability of insurrections of the kind in any country, in any similar circumstances when the ruling class was forgetting the principles of equal justice and responsibility: “Horrible in lands that had known equal justice. Not so unnatural in lands that had never known it.”²

These implicit messages were not missed by readers and reviewers who did not see the pre-civil war situation of France as placed at some comfortable distance from 1837 England. The sympathy with the suffering and neglected poor that runs through the early books of *The French Revolution* is unmistakably the result of Carlyle’s observations in the streets of London and in the countryside, in the early 1830s when depression was again hitting England hard. A.L. Le Quesne notes that throughout the 1830s, the consciousness of social distress is one of the most consistent themes of Carlyle’s correspondence³. He saw the neglect of the working classes by the ruling classes as bound to lead to some catastrophe similar the French revolution. The lack of access to representation as well as the lack of responsibility towards the welfare of the people that liberal or conservative MPs alike repeatedly displayed since 1832, was fostering political and civil tension in England, of which the Reform bill riots of 1832, the persecution of the Tolpuddle Martyrs in 1834, the anger of the unfed poor fostered by intellectual debates over free trade versus Corn Laws⁴, seen in the rise of Chartism in 1837, were clear signs that animosity between classes might soon lead to a civil war on English soil.

It must have been a strange combination of events therefore for British readers well versed in Carlyle’s prophetic text, when in the fall of 1837, rumours, then news, were brought home of civil discord, of riots in the streets of Montreal and of *Patriote* meetings in the neighbouring villages. Carlyle had reminded his readers that the French mob, peasants essentially, was

¹ Thomas Carlyle, *The French Revolution*, edited by A.H.R. Ball (1837; New York: Dover Publications, 2005), introduction, xv.

² Carlyle, 134.

³ Le Quesne, 49.

⁴ “Who are they that [...] when we ask for bread, and a maximum fixed-price, treat us with lectures on Free-trade in grains? Can the human stomach satisfy itself with lectures on Free-trade?”, Carlyle, 245.

easily fired up by radicals, and transformed into fierce *Sansculottes* when their rights were baffled, or equal justice forgotten by the ruling class. In Lower Canada, French settlers, suddenly described as an uneducated and backward looking race in local British newspapers, were now reported in official despatches, as agitating for more representation in the Executive Council in Lower Canada, criticizing the British government for its nepotism and oligarchy in colonial appointments, blocking the progress of British business in Montreal and the advance of British colonization in the colony. Such were the new lights in which the Patriot Party and their unconstitutional demands were represented in British newspapers, from September 1837 on. Doubly embarrassing for readers who had read Carlyle between the lines, was the support that the four radical MPs as well as some prominent Whigs like Roebuck or Brougham, immediately brought to the *Patriotes* whom they saw as legitimate in their demands for more responsible government. Indeed, taking side with the Canadians against the Whig government in Parliament, these MPs also incited the working classes to follow in the footsteps of the *Patriotes* in voicing their own political demands before the British Parliament. For Victorian readers, between September 1837 and January 1838, the threats of civil wars, which were almost daily represented in their newspapers, came from two fronts, abroad and at home, as Gibbon and Carlyle seemed to have prophesied.

II - The Canadian “civil wars”: the consequence of constitutional tensions in the colonial assemblies.

The situation in the two main colonies of Canada did not seem to be on the mind of Lord Russell in August 1837, though the Assembly of Lower Canada, which was dominated numerically by the Patriot Party (or *Parti Patriote*) had once again refused to vote the Civil List in June 1837. The majority of Canadian MPs (French and English colonists alike) were discontented with the local policies led by the Executive Council, composed of members appointed by the British governor. The council defended the vested interests of the British merchants whose policies (the selling of public land to private British companies, favouring British emigration by private companies...) were regularly opposed by the Assembly defending the interests of the colonists of Lower Canada, whatever their national origins.

The Canadas had never clearly represented any source of concern for the metropolitans before the rising of constitutional tensions in both Lower and Upper Canadas in the course of the years 1835-36. As far as Whig political leaders were concerned, the colonies had been granted

great measures of self-government¹, for which Canadians should be thankful, all the more so as the majority of Lower Canadians were former French settlers who had been abandoned by *ancien regime* France in 1763².

After the 1791 Constitutional Act, each province was governed by a representative popular Assembly, while a Governor-General was appointed by London and dispatched to the colony. There he nominated a small number of prominent colonists to assist him, thus forming his Executive Council. The Assembly had to approve the Civil List and was able to control land sales, while the Executive Council could veto some of the Assembly's decisions if they found them unconstitutional. In return, all the bills that came from the Council had to be approved by the Assembly. The so-called Whig constitution was only partially implemented in the colonies and this "colonial" version slowly began to create major political conflicts, which conflated, into the insurrection and rebellion of December 1837 in Lower Canada and of January 1838 in Upper Canada. Both Lower and Upper Canadian reformers and radicals in each provincial Assembly now asked for responsible government, in order to control the work of the Executive Council, seen as too despotic or oligarchic by many old and new British settlers.

In 1834, Louis-Joseph Papineau, the leader of the *Parti Patriote* and speaker of the Assembly in Lower Canada, submitted a list of grievances³ to the British Parliament, appealing to the Whigs' "equal justice". Lord John Russell in reply to these grievances, sent a group of experts to Lower Canada to examine the political situation, but their conclusions only led the British Parliament to dismiss the "92 resolutions" of the *Patriotes* and to confirm the Executive Council in its legitimacy and supremacy. In 1835, therefore the Assembly continued its obstruction of the work of the colonial government, by withholding the wages of its appointed British officers, judges and sheriffs. Support against the British Parliament's autocratic decision even came from colonial British magistrates who had been appointed by the Governor, thereby proving that Patriots were not all of French origin. These magistrates

¹ In 1791, British subjects, of French, British and American origins, jointly demanded measures of self-government, which were granted to them by a Constitutional Act. The Quebec colony was divided into Lower Canada, mostly populated by *Canadiens*, and Upper Canada, under the rule of a Tory clique, the former Loyalists.

² After the Treaty of Paris, for the first time in the history of their Empire, the British had had to rule over a foreign population of conquered white settlers. In 1774, in order to preserve the loyalty of the colonists amidst revolutionary tensions in the American colonies, the Quebec Act had been voted allowing the *Canadiens* to preserve their customs and ancient rites. Practically, the former French settlers were granted the use of their old code of laws, the maintenance of French in public places and court as well as the practice of the Catholic faith. When the Americans declared their Independence in July 1776, Quebec colonists remained loyal to the British, fought along British troops and welcomed Loyalists who migrated away from the American colonies to settle near York in British territory.

³ The Patriot Party was adopting a method already used by the American Congress in 1774

tended their resignation in disagreement with the unconstitutional practice of the British Parliament. Their resignation was supported by Roebuck, Brougham and O'Connell in the London press and in Parliament. From then on, those prominent MPs never stopped criticizing Russell's colonial policies, enlisting the support of some radical and Chartist associations in London. In March 1837, Lord Russell asked Lord Gosford to appropriate provincial revenues without referring to the authority of the elected assembly in order to pay the Civil List¹. Thus confirmed in their unrepresentative autocratic governing rule, Lord Gosford and the loyal British settlers who did not support the *Patriotes* launched into a public campaign of anti-*Patriote* teasing, supported by local loyal newspapers and seconded by a Tory faction, the Doric Club.

Between September 1837 and the actual insurrection of the *Patriotes* in the last days of November 1837, Lord Gosford tended his resignation to Lord John Russell when he realized the popular antagonism he was coming up against, he was replaced by Sir John Colborne, commander-in-chief of the British troops in Lower Canada. Gosford and Colborne were the main witnesses whose accounts the London Cabinet had to anxiously rely on, while news of the heightening of local tensions came to England.

As early as September 1837, Gosford sent warnings to the Colonial Office that Montreal and the surrounding villages were resounding with an insurrectional atmosphere. In fact, he was referring to public meetings organized by *Patriote* speakers who could not sit in the Assembly anymore since sessions had been suspended. Those animated meetings during which French was spoken, were represented in the official despatches and the local press, published by Tory and Whig papers, as "calls to arms" addressed to the uneducated French peasantry, ready to listen to the calls of radical demagogues. At this stage, the radical English press, *The Globe* for instance, reprinted the speeches delivered at these meetings by the two *Patriote* leaders, Louis Joseph Papineau and Wolfred Nelson. Readers could clearly perceive that the *Patriote* leaders were reformers complaining about an unconstitutional situation in the colonies and looking for solutions to stop this political crisis. English reformers seemed to be the support the moderate leaders, Papineau and Nelson, were ultimately seeking.

However, on November 6, 1837, the printing office of *The Vindicator*, the *Patriote* newspaper that had represented for the foreign press the main source of *Patriote* information in English, was ransacked and destroyed. The only newspapers left in Quebec to report on the situation in Lower Canada were British loyalist newspapers. Street battles ensued opposing the "Doric

¹ These developments were subtly touched upon by Lord Gosford in his letter of August 1837 to the Queen.

Club” to the “*Fils de la Liberté*”, while regular troops requested by Sir John Colborne, converged towards Montreal from the neighbouring colonies, thus almost doubling the size of the battalions already posted in the province. Sir John Colborne declared martial law and sent out warrants to arrest the *Patriote* leaders who according to him were getting ready for a “civil war”. On November 23, on December 1 and 10, Colborne sent his lieutenant-generals to attack and arrest armed *Patriotes*, supposedly in training camps, while they were in fact hiding in villages. First defeated then twice victorious, the well-trained British troops quickly rounded and arrested the insurgents, setting fire to the farms where they were hiding. However high suspicion and fear that more rebels were getting ready for war, as well as rumours that American patriots were crossing the border to defend the cause of the rebels, led the British army to search houses and to arrest men and women without warrant¹. Determined to prevent a civil war, the British forces went on a rampage of looting and burning of farms and houses in *Patriote* strongholds in the Montreal area. 58 people died, 60 farms were destroyed, 850 men were arrested, 58 condemned to death, others to deportation to the West Indies or Australia². 3000 colonists had joined the rebels. 6000 regular troops had been posted in the province. Three weeks after the last rebellion in Lower Canada, rebels led by MacKenzie, an Upper Canada patriot described as a radical by the Tory press, tried to seize Toronto with militiamen³. As all the British troops had been sent to Montreal where civil discord was supposed to take place, Sir Francis Bond Head, Upper Canada Governor, had had to count on the support of local British colonists, former regiment men, to recapture Toronto.

III - Representations of the Canadian “civil war” in the British newspapers

It seemed that the Canadian rebellions excited passions in Parliament, but also in the nation if one can judge by the numerous representations of the “civil war” which circulated in the standard and quality press in the last months of 1837 and the first month of 1838. The intensity of the representations seemed to be heightened by the actual distance with the colonies, by the lack of reliability of the sources, as well as by the radical agitation at home which anticipated and followed the repression of the “civil war” in Lower and Upper Canada. Regular news from the Canadian provinces began to be published in London newspapers in September 1837, when intelligence about the suspension of the House of Assembly came through American and Canadian newspapers. Lord Gosford had complied with the decision of

¹ John Colborne had also suspended the Habeas Corpus.

² Cornelius Jaenen, *History of the Canadian Peoples* (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman Ltd, 1993) 404.

³ They too had to take refuge in the United States after three days of battle. They were welcomed in Buffalo by American Patriots.

the British Parliament for now and he had obeyed Lord John Russell's "ten resolutions" in declaring he would seize the revenues of the province to pay the arrears of the Civil List. From the month of September onwards at least until the patriotic *Vindicator* could not be printed anymore, the quality and standard papers in London kept their source of information separate. *The Times* and *The Morning Chronicle* would read the loyal British newspapers from Quebec, while the radical *Standard* and *Globe* would publish extracts from Papineau's address before the suspension of the Assembly, Lord Gosford's answer, as well as *Patriote* meetings' speeches¹ which they copied from *The Vindicator*. Readers of the latter newspapers could clearly understand from the various extracts of Papineau's addresses in the Assembly that the colonial constitution was not working to the benefit of the colonists².

Once the *Patriote* source became unavailable in November 1837, the one and only official version of the insurrections, which was provided to the British readers was that of the British party, which was free to propagate rumours³. In other words, rumours of "civil war" were first reported by the British press in early December 1837 when the first descriptions of ambush in villages, violent clashes in Montreal were brought by the official Quebec press and Sir John Colborne's official despatches and his lieutenants Weir and Wetherall's heralding that "the flames of civil war (are) bursting forth."

For instance, in December 13, 1837, not yet aware of the so-called insurrections, *The Times* published some extracts of a private letter written by "a State Officer in service in Montreal" informing friends in England that Lower Canada was in a state of war. He was just referring to the street riots, which had involved the *Patriotes* and the Doric Club. The officer working for the British party, described the situation in Montreal as on the brink of civil war though no call to arms had been made by the *Patriotes*, contrary to his statement:

This country is now a scene of insurrection and riot, the rebels are hourly increasing in number and threaten to extirpate every individual that will not support their infamous Radical measures

¹ « Vous tous à qui l'égalité des droits de l'homme est cher, quelques soient vos origines, votre langue et votre culte... notre commune patrie est exposée aux oppressions et aux abus. », Papineau's address at a public meeting in Septembre, quoted in *The True Sun*, Octobre 30, 1837.

² « L'assemblée exprime son étonnement de ce que le gouvernement anglais, au lieu de se montrer menaçant et de recourir à des mesures extrêmes, n'ait pas pensé d'abord à faire disparaître les causes réelles qui amenaient le refus de la Chambre. Nous ne pouvons nous empêcher de regarder ces mesures comme une violente attaque contre les droits du peuple et ceux de la Chambre, contre ces droits et privilèges que la Constitution a voulu lui donner et que tout partisan de cette constitution doit vouloir maintenir. », Papineau's speech in the Assembly on August 18, 1837, quoted in *The Globe*, Septembre 14, 1837.

³ On the use of British propaganda in Lower Canadian newspapers, see Françoise Le Jeune, « Patriotisme nord-américain ou nationalisme canadien-français ? Les rébellions canadiennes de 1837 », *Du patriotisme aux nationalismes (1700-1848)*, Bernard Cottret ed. (Paris: Creaphis, 2002) 169-186.

[...] This rebel force in the first instance was led on by Papineau, a violent French radical, it is now led by some Irish miscreants, who have neither principle nor property to lose¹.

News of the uprisings reached London on Christmas Day 1837. Rumours of civil war spread rapidly. The “Papineau faction” was about to “rob us of this beautiful colony”, suggested *The Times*². This was a civil war of the kind described by Gibbon, which pitted the government against one or more factions, challenging its sovereignty, under a fallacious pretext, under the command of middle-class radical leaders like Papineau described as “a needy lawyer, a fomentor of sedition, a crafty and cowardly agitator.”³

The rebels were also immediately described as “descendants of French settlers” who entertained “towards the English settlers or ‘Britishers’, the ancient national feelings of hatred and envy, and that too in degree of virulence which it is evident cannot be softened by time, nor frequent intercourse, nor the application of conciliatory measures.” The Whig ideal constitution which had been granted to the British colonists in Canada and which was designed to bring harmony and good government, was shattered to pieces by uneducated French demagogues. The “Papineau faction” was described as “a bloodthirsty troop” led by “traitors to the constitution”. The enemies were represented as “the party of French origin, speaking the French language actuated by the most determined hatred and jealousy”; while they had pretended all that time to be a party “of liberty and justice.”⁴ In a very powerful leader written on December 25, 1837, one of *The Times* editors irritated by the news of a “civil war” finally erupting in Canada – and infuriated by the actual enthusiastic reaction of the four radical MPs upon hearing the news of the rebellion, in the House of Commons –, represented Canada as overturned by bloody French revolutionaries who had declared “open, formal, irrevocable war upon the crown and supremacy of England”. In clear patriotic Tory rhetoric, the editor blamed Lord John Russell’s Whig cabinet for their lack of control over the colonies when civil discord could still have been stifled. He stated that “instead of recalling the seditious in that province to a sense of duty”, they had “given rise to fresh insolence, more outrageous threats” and “systematic preparations for a ‘general and bloody war’”, letting the French rebels “roll the Royal Standard of England in the dust.”

¹ Extracts of a private letter from the family of a State officer on service at Montreal, *The Times*, December 13, 1837.

² *The Times*, December 25, 1837.

³ From a correspondent, *The Times*, December 25, 1837.

⁴ *The Times*, December 11, 1837.

Clearly, the editors of *The Times*¹ were representing to their readers the worst scenes of Carlyle's French revolution with *Sans culottes* taking up arms against the lawful system of the English monarchy. The French *Canadiens* who, like their descendants, had ingrained in their character, jealousy and envy, were attacking the properties of British settlers, baffling order, justice and liberty, which the Constitution represented. The Whigs had clearly mishandled the colonial situation, had neglected the faithful British colonists and as a result, England was about to lose its North American empire. What was even more to fear, according to the Gibbonian overtones of the editorialist, was the infectious poison that the Canadian civil war was spreading in England.

Indeed, the radical press, and the radical MPs in the House of Commons, not yet aware that the insurrection had been fiercely repressed, still imagined a different scene. They represented the victorious outcome of this popular uprising against British autocracy in the pages of *The Globe* on December 25, 1837 and heralded the end of military repression in the colonies and at home. They depicted the *Patriotes* as deprived of their constitutional rights and clearly having "been pushed into taking up arms by Sir John Colborne" who had alarmed London by suggesting a civil war was being fomented, thus enabling him to call up for more troops. According to Messrs Leader and Wakley's speeches in the House reported in the radical *London Despatch*, this war was "not a Canadian quarrel anymore, nor a quarrel between the authorities and the people, nor between the English and French party, nor between a majority and a minority party." What the MPs had to vote on, Mr Leader suggested, was whether England wanted to launch into a civil war against its own subjects, which could not be defended upon any constitutional principle. A *Times* editorial criticized the radical leaders who were openly rejoicing in the "misfortunes which it was presumed by such gentlemen had already befallen some detachments of British soldiers engaged in self-defence, against the rebellious murderers who had assailed them."²

On January 1, still lacking any reliable news from Canada, the radical MPs organised a meeting³ which was reported as seditious and anti-monarchic in *The Times* and *The Morning Chronicle*. While *The Globe* supported the radical MPs in their call to uphold the just cause of the Canadians by asking the masses to demonstrate outside Parliament, the Tories saw in the meeting the preparation of a civil war in England.

¹ They were basing their remarks on the debates held the previous day in the House.

² "Report following the communication of Lord John Russell on the disastrous events in Lower Canada", *The Times*, December 25, 1837.

³ The four MPs met with Chartist members at the Crown and Anchor Inn in London.

A meeting called to encourage rebellion, and to strip the people of England of their spirit of loyalty, and that detestation of sanguinary treason, by which only a deliberate and armed outrage upon the majesty of the Empire can ever be put down. They [Hume and Leader] made speeches to inflame the French Canadians still more against the country – to justify them in their own eyes and in those of mankind for shedding the blood of British subjects engaged in the service of their lawful Sovereign and to persevere stubbornly in the infliction upon Englishmen of all the calamities of a civil war¹.

For readers of *The Times*, civil insurrection seemed to be around the corner of British streets too. On January 5, *The Times* was relieved to publish the news that “the civil war in that province was considered at an end.” Little did they know that similar insurrections had flared up in Toronto, where radicals had taken up arms and tried to seize the town. The *Canadiens* were not alone in rebelling against British authority, which indicated that politics not religious dissensions or war between races were at the root of the civil uprising.

Lord Durham’s representation of the “civil war” as a war of races.

Though Lord Durham was asked to take up the mission of pacifying the Canadas as early as the first days of January 1838, he did not leave the *metropole* before May 1838². Lord Durham was appointed Governor-general of all the British colonies in North America by the Whig cabinet, a mission for which he received full regal powers to impose martial law and to govern with the help of a special appointed council while the Assemblies in the two Canadian provinces were still suspended. During the time he spent preparing his mission before his late departure for the colonies, Durham acquainted himself with the various ministerial correspondence between the former Lieutenant-governor, Gosford, and Lord Glenelg, the Colonial Secretary, as well as with Sir John Colborne’s reports on the suppression of the civil war. In other words, he had formed his own representation of the colonial situation, before he actually set sail for North America by acquainting himself with the “official” views of the British party on the state of the province and the causes of the civil war. In his *Report on the Affairs of British North America* published in February 1839, Durham clearly admits having changed his mind on the true causes of the “civil war”, after reading the official accounts and observing the situation in Quebec. As a Whig having supported the Reform Bill in 1831-32, he had first believed that the tensions in both provinces, had been caused by the flaws of the colonial constitution, which did not include any form of responsible government. If the explanation was still valid for him, as this main constitutional shortcoming needed to be

¹ “Important intelligence on seditious meeting in London”, *The Times*, January 5, 1838.

² He arrived in Quebec City in the second week of June 1838 and he was recalled in November 1838, shortly before another uprising on the Lower Canadian border which was quickly stopped by John Colborne and his regiments.

worked on in the short-run by offering British settlers responsible government, he analysed the cause of the “civil war” with a more prejudiced mind. Far from denying the appellation “civil war” to describe the recent insurrections, he sought to find an explanation for it, which was meant to reassure the public at home. Durham had to explain that the Canadian civil war and its subsequent violent military repression, which could be seen as intolerable to the eyes of democrats, had been justified. Durham had to represent to the Victorians a more threatening reason than that of a mere political opposition having degenerated in insurrection, brought about by a defect in the constitution.

According to him, therefore, the root of the Canadian civil war, which he insisted would remain the one and only occurrence of the kind in the British Empire, was to be found in “a war of races”. Durham became convinced that the demands for an improved colonial constitution could be easily adjusted. This was a minor problem compared to the more dangerous and ever-present threat of civil wars contained in the presence of the French population in Lower Canada.:

[...] For the peculiar and disastrous dissensions of this Province, there existed a far deeper and far more efficient cause – a cause which penetrated beneath its political institutions into its social state, – a cause which no reform of constitution or laws, that should leave the elements of society unaltered, could remove; but which must be removed, ere any success could be expected in any attempt to remedy the many evils of this unhappy Province. I expected to find a contest between a government and a people; I found two nations warring in the bosom of a single state, I found a struggle, not of principles, but of races¹.

According to Lord Durham, the “peculiar” dissensions had developed between the progressive entrepreneuring British race living in Lower Canada and the backward-looking, conservative French race whose ingrained jealousy for the successful British settlers had led them to develop bitter feelings, which overflowed and brought Canada on the brink of civil war. Durham firmly declared that all threats of war or civil discord would be removed when the British government succeeded in “terminating the deadly animosity that now separates the inhabitants of Lower Canada into the hostile divisions of French and English.”²

Durham’s recommendations were designed to counteract the prophecies of Gibbon and Carlyle, to keep England safe from “civil strife”, at home and in its colonies. Durham sounded reassuring in his *Report* when he led the Queen to believe that Britain was preserved from “civil war”. Indeed the Canadian incident was attributable to remediable causes:

¹ Lord Durham, *Report*, 17.

² *ibid*

Our happy immunity from any feelings of national hostility renders it difficult for us to comprehend the intensity of the hatred, which the difference of language, of laws and of manners, creates between those who inhabit the same village, and are citizens of the same state¹.

Civil war would be eradicated according to Durham when the French element would be definitely removed from the British colonies. To preserve the harmony of the most important dominion of the British Empire, cultural uniformity had to be imposed. French rites and rituals, the root of the problems, should be slowly “eradicated” by *Anglicization*, according to Durham’s expression. There was no need to impose any English tradition forcefully; the political union of the two Canadas would necessarily swamp the French settlers into a majority of British settlers. The latter now in office would after a while, receive measures of responsible government leading the colonists to take full responsibility in their domestic affairs. The English Constitution, which guaranteed order and good government to the colony, would also attract further emigration from the British Isles. “I am of opinion that this great object can be legitimately effected without violence to Canadian rights, and in strict accordance with the soundest principles of constitutional government”, Durham stated in the first pages of his *Report*.

Durham also convinced his readers that the rampant French problem should be solved urgently as threats of civil discord had only been kept away by the army for a short while. Voting the political union of the two colonies was the most efficient means, Durham suggested, to counteract the French, under the condition that the British colonists received responsible government shortly afterwards. By representing the Canadian situation in a state of civil discord, Durham was bringing home a lesson to Whig (and Tory) policy-makers on the greatness of the English constitution, which he saw as the keystone to develop a great Empire. Metropolitans should not believe, as Radicals had tried to suggest, that the English constitution was at fault; or as the Whig Cabinet had believed it at times, that the British colonists were not able to rule themselves. The Constitution still worked perfectly at home and would work in Canada once conditions were provided for it to work successfully. It would bring back order and “Englishness”. Emperor Severus might have been right after all in upholding “the free constitution” in conquered lands as Gibbon’s prophecy was contradicted by Durham’s solutions to rule over a liberal Empire. In the conclusions of *his Report on the Affairs of British North America*, Durham stated that liberal-minded British colonists seeking to bring progress to their colonies in the form of British emigration, British investment and

¹ Lord Durham, *Report*, 19.

the development of trade with Great Britain, should deserve the use of the full Constitution composed of representative and responsible government:

It is time to reward this noble confidence, by showing that men have not indulged in vain the hope that there is a power in British institutions to rectify existing evils, and to produce in their place a well-being which no other dominion could give. It is not in the terrors of the law, or in the might of our armies, that the secure and honourable bond of connexion is to be found. It exists in the beneficial operation of those British institutions which link the utmost development of freedom and civilization with the stable authority of an hereditary monarchy, and which, if rightly organized and fairly administered in the Colonies, as in Great Britain, would render a change of institutions only an additional evil to the loss of the protection and commerce of the British Empire¹.

In fact, Durham set up a series of principles for the building of a successful and lasting Empire, in which steady Dominions could develop once fully “anglicized”. However his system did not apply to non-white settlements, as British readers would soon find out in 1857 when they came across the news of the Sepoy Rebellion, the next great instance of civil discord in the Victoria’s Empire.

In his masterpiece *A Study of History*, British historian Arnold J. Toynbee developed a system called “Challenge and Response” to account for the dynamics behind the progress of societies over the centuries. In his system, he credited defeat with mobilizing the energies of a nation². Insurrections in Canada did not lead to any physical defeat for the British, save that of their Whig colonial rule. Indeed the “civil war” was interpreted by Durham as a check on the British Empire’s progress and more particularly on the triumphant mood in which the *metropole* had felt in 1837. This political defeat therefore represented what Toynbee called “the stimulus of blows”, i.e. one of the first stimuli that set historical action into motion. In this particular case, the British Empire and its rulers had to look at the flaws of their budding imperial system, by searching for middle or long-term factors to account for or perhaps explain the unexpected accident³. Being thus forced to reaffirm the basis and the principles of their own constitution – mainly the concept of responsible government, they drew new lessons from history and from the dynamics of nations’ development which fed and inspired their motivations in empire building and imperial planning during Victoria’s reign. Besides, through the representations of some armed uprisings in Canada in the light of “civil wars”, contemporary debates on the extension of the franchise, the access to self-government of new

¹ Lord Durham, Report, 263.

² Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History* (Oxford: OUP, 1954) “Challenge and Response”.

³ Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Culture of Defeat, On National Trauma, Mourning and Recovery* (New York: Henry Holt Cie, Metropolitan books, 2001) 4.

populations in the Empire, led to a public debate over the principles of the English Constitution¹, here reassessed.

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¹ John Stuart Mill furthered the debate in *Considerations of Responsible Government* (1860) and *On Liberty* (1861) by selecting examples among the British colonies in order to illustrate his theory on a people's capacity to understand or to work with « responsible government. » According to him only advanced civilization could benefit from it, which was not the case of every British colony in 1860.