

## PROPOSAL TO THE 2006-2007 PROVOST'S COMMON FUND

### RACE, SPACE, PLACE: THE MAKING AND UNMAKING OF FREEDOMS IN THE ATLANTIC WORLD AND BEYOND: INTERDISCIPLINARY CONVERSATIONS

#### Co-Convenors:

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#### Background and Vision:

The *question of freedom* has received much attention in the context of the exercise of power aimed at securing modern liberties and citizenship, an attention that, of course, also extends to its related tropes of 'human rights,' 'security,' 'development,' and even 'competitiveness' given today's neo-liberal world. But while these questions of freedom continue to clamor for our attention—especially given the debates surrounding the demise, diminution, relegation, or subversion of the sovereignties of nation-states from East to West, and the contemporary crises and confusion of political events marking Haiti's long march to freedom—the manifold conversations in response express a continued fragmentation, dissensus, even antagonism, of attitudes, orientations and analytical perspectives on these modern experiences of power and freedom. Indeed, there has been no new epiphany or convergence of wisdom in sight on this vexing issue for states, individuals, communities and 'societies,' despite the argued centrality of these *questions of freedom* to the very stability of the expansionist capitalist world economy in the Atlantic World and Beyond.

These experiences of modern power and the question of freedom have been first played out however in the context of the relational multidimensionality of Atlantic world history. Thus one may observe the relationality within the interstices of Atlantic regions, e.g., the rise and/or persistence of the slavery complex in Cuba and its 'coincidence' of decline on other Caribbean islands, in South America and the US South. In more recent times, since the 1980s, (marking the ascendance of a neo-liberal globalization), the relationality expresses itself in the demise of the banana industry in the Windward Islands and the Anglophone Caribbean, and its expansion in Latin America. The extension of Atlantic grounded and specifically modern concerns of 'freedom' to other spaces, races and places alerts us then to the idea of a 'relationality of being' culturally evolving across linked geographies at intersecting times. That is to say, the historical exercise of modern social power has given rise to particular intersections of geographies, spaces and places and sociocultural interlocutions and trans-locations of people. This has forced a need for a continuous re-examination of the iterative constitution of freedoms and unfreedoms in a modern Atlantic and world economy constantly in a state of flux.

Our project seeks to build our investigations on these Atlantic grounded relational histories, by focusing on the more vulnerable populations, primarily African, Native peoples in the Americas, and African and Asian-descended peoples as they strategize with their positions across cultures and experiences (primarily) within the broader spaces of the Atlantic world. By drawing on the relational histories approach, treating the Atlantic as a single unit of analysis, and treating its specific histories as the basis for "incorporated comparisons," it seeks to revisit perspectives on peoples' mobility and propositions about 'movements' and interrogate them from the angle of the "*making of homes*" and, correspondingly, '*home-lands*.' The project thus entails making an analytical shift from notions of freedom as absolute transcendence, to a discussion of this

experience of freedom as home staking movements involving entangled ‘rootings and routings.’ While a concern with homes and home lands is pervasive in the literature of diasporas, much of this literature take home-lands as a given fixed point. But what really constitutes the processes of making homes and home-lands? Through what kinds and forms of bodies, what selves, what forms of power-knowledge articulations are people and persons *made to be* and feel home settled? And, what are the stabilizers of these processes? Are they geographies? Sovereignties? Social geometries? Families? Economies? Subjectivities? Moralities? Culture? Modern governmentalities? Homes? Some of these? All of these? None of these? Moreover, if these stabilizers ‘exist,’ how stable are they? What are their destabilizers?

These questions stem from the assumption that the imagining and making of modern freedom and *home staking as a mark of the wellbeing and life of the subject* in modern spaces of power, was/is a complex process. It involves, but not in any necessary fashion, the presentation of defined alternatives to what was/is, or who or what we are or were, *and* more often than not, is an extension of the magnanimous claims of Westerners and others regarding rights, responsibilities and prerogatives. Thus, grasping freedom and, relatedly, the political, has always involved an envisioning and re-visioning of very partially developed concepts of freedom. And these calibrations and recalibrations on freedom presented in *home staking, and the subjects’ senses of power/vulnerability, security/insecurity, comfort/discomforting, rest/unrest and the satisfaction/disturbance of the soul* have been *worked out* by the histories of ‘double movements’ in the modern world. Such movements are/have been manifest in resistances, transgressions, parodies, ambiguous complicities or connivances, masquerades, violations, revolutions, migrations, social movements and many of the rebellions that have taken place throughout Atlantic spaces and beyond.

### **Core Questions and Concerns:**

These questions will be revised during the course of the workshops and the conference. But they are veritable guides to our inquiry into processes of freedom and unfreedoms and their interconnections across Atlantic time and space:

1. How do interlinked Atlantic places and spaces within, become transformed into spaces and places of belonging, rest, settlement?
2. What kinds of imaginations of freedom and unfreedom are woven into these making of places as articulations of home or spaces of settling, unsettling and re-settling in the hope of ‘modern freedom’ and how?
3. What kinds of agencies and ‘*movements*’ articulate and are articulated in the flows of bodies (social and material) and lives ( as subjects and objects) re/representing spaces as homes, places as homelands?
4. Why exactly and how, do those practices of and movements for *home staking* and dwelling *become* transformed into movements of violating/profane and leaving as well?
5. How do these sorts of practices and movements elaborate on the making of modern S/subjects and even the sorts of claims that can be anticipated on ‘citizenship’?
6. How has the 1980s served as a critical watershed generating new versions of freedoms tied to the untrammelled pursuit of a neoliberal globalization project, specifying the primacy of the market as the arbiter of the common good (s)?

### **Project Goals**

The goals for our project are five fold:

1. To deepen our understanding of the vexed *question of freedom* through conversations on the *genealogy of modern freedom* and, in particular, *its presence in 'e/race/ing of spaces—in—places,'* as well as its *presenting in "making-of-spaces for homes-in-places."* Given our grounding of freedoms in home staking movements, these conversations on the *genealogy of modern freedom* will have as their material object an interest in the "articulation of discourses of property" (including whiteness as property) in past and present capitalist culture. This line of investigation we believe will aid understanding the contemporary breaks or ruptures and discontinuities in the sense of modern freedom and facilitate a better grasp of the implications of these transformations for political practice.
2. Moreover, we wish to sharpen these conversational enquiries on the genealogy of modern freedom by proposing a context of *C/creolization* in Atlantic spaces, which interprets socio-cultural processes there as entailing transformations of modern power or governmentality—that is, the ways in which various projects by their policies and agendas shape the conduct of institutions and people.
3. To enact critical dialogues that will reconfigure the study of racial formation across dominant disciplinary and identity categories. For example we aim to destabilize the often-assumed coherence of black, indigenous etc. in order to mark the ways in which those terms emerge historically and contingently through the particular exchanges of passage through and home-making in the Atlantic world.
4. To bring together a select number of people working on these global processes and freedom and unfreedoms (and its related tropes) in a comparative frame from sites in the U.S., Caribbean, Pacific, Africa and India. This would allow us at once to forge intellectual linkages with people and programs here at Duke and with colleagues and institutions of higher learning in those places as well.
5. To contribute, through an edited volume and other writings, to the literature on the reconfiguring of the Atlantic and its incorporated "Beyonds" through notions of freedoms and unfreedoms. Our long term aim is to institutionalize conversations among people in varied disciplines concerned with philosophical, legal, political, historical, socioeconomic, sociocultural or artistic, as well as ethical ideas about *'property' as land, territory, possession, etc., facilitating freedoms, mobility and movements for home (home-land) making.*

### **Long Term Projections:**

This project must be conceived as a multi-year initiative/strategy. We aim to apply for grants like the Sawyer Seminar proposal, and Ford Foundation support to further facilitate interdisciplinary conversations that would lead to curriculum changes, institutional exchanges between students (postdocs) and faculty at other Atlantic institutions of higher learning, and the joint pursuit of research projects as well, both here at Duke and across the Atlantic and its beyonds. Ultimately we would like to propose a center made up of joint working groups on the model of the Fernand Braudel Center of Binghamton University, which thrives on individual projects within collective enterprises, known as working groups.

### **Project Components:**

The core group of participants (see below) will meet regularly in the Fall/Spring of 2006-2007. Working from a list of core texts—to include seminal writing by scholars who will be invited to

participate in the conference to be held in late Spring 2007—we engage and elaborate on the question of the Atlantic as a unit of analysis as well as the processes related to the making and exercise of freedoms and unfreedoms.

We will host a 2-day spring conference where we will invite noted scholars within the Atlantic and its Beyonds, whose work addresses these questions via geographical and theoretical intersections (See Appendix 1). This will constitute the basis for an edited volume which will combine chapters on macro processes and also on case studies as well.

Participants will make the findings of their projects available on the AAAS website primarily, as well as on other Duke department/program websites via links.

These conversations we anticipate will also support the goal of developing a large grant proposal for long-term institutionalization of the project.

**Initial List of Potential Core Participants:**

*(All of these individuals have research interests related to the project theme. Several have already commented on this proposal and are very enthusiastic about participating in this project)*

AAAS Faculty

Patricia M. Northover (Development Studies- Visiting from SALISES, UWI)

Susan Thorne (History)

Mary Hovsepian (Sociology)

Barry Gaspar (History)

Tina Campt (Women Studies)

Walter Mignolo (Institute of Global Studies and Romance Studies)

Rob Sikorski (International Studies)

John French (History)

Ester Gabara (Romance Studies)

John Lasch (Latina/o Studies)

William Noland (Art and Art History)

Antonio Viego (Literature)

**Potential Invited Speakers (tentative):**

Thomas Holt (University of Chicago-History) *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor and Politics in Jamaica and Britain 1832-1938; The Problem of Race in the Twenty First Century*  
 Julie Saville, (University of Chicago-History), *The Work of Reconstruction: From Slave to Wage Laborer in South Carolina 1860-1870*

Saki Sassen (University of Chicago-Sociology) *Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages; Global Networks, Linked Cities*

Achille Mbembe (University of the Witwatersrand) *On the Postcolony*

Tejaswini Niranjana (Center for the Study of Society and Culture-Bangalore, India) *Mobilizing India: Women in Trinidad Music*

Walter Look Lai (University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Trinidad-History), *The Chinese in the West Indies 1918-*

Arturo Escobar (UNC-Chapel Hill-Anthropology) *Encountering Development*

Anne Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things; Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule*

Orlando Patterson (Harvard-Sociology) *Freedom: Freedom in the Making of Western Culture*

Louis Chude-Sokei (University of California, Santa Cruz-Literature) *The Last "Darky": Bert Williams, Black on Black Minstrelsy, and the African Diaspora*

**Select Bibliography:**

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- Foucault, Michel, (1991) "Governmentality" in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, edited by Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press)
- Gilroy, Paul (1993) *Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press)
- Hall, Stuart 1997, 'Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities,' in Anthony King (ed) *Culture, Globalization and the World System: Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity*, Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press
- Harvey, David (1990) *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell).
- Mbembe, Achille (2001) *On the PostColony* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press)
- McMichael, Philip (1990) "Incorporating Comparison Within the World-Historical Perspective: An Alternative Comparative Method," *American Sociological Review* 55: 385-97.