MIASA Public Lecture Series 2026

“Plotting Sovereignty, Staging Liberation”

Speaker: Professor Kenny Cupers

Merian Institute for Advanced Studies in Africa
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Zoom link via: https://miasa.ug.edu.gh/event/public-lecture-cupers/

What can the limits of postcolonial land restitution tell us about our planetary crisis today? Scholarship in architectural, urban, and environmental history has become increasingly planetary in scope, yet it has rarely engaged issues of land and sovereignty that postcolonial and African historians have long studied.

This talk develops earthmaking as a framework — attending to the slow and sticky infrastructural reorganization of land, labor, and ecology in the postcolony. Drawing on collaborative fieldwork with original performers of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's and Ngũgĩ wa Mirii's ***I Will Marry When I Want*** (1977) and archival research on the forced resettlement village of Kamĩrĩithũ in Kenya's former White Highlands, it traces how the plot, the plantation, the theatre, and the play became paradoxical instruments of postcolonial sovereignty.

The intervention is twofold: if the plantation rather than the city is the world-making spatial form in much of the global South, our analytical focus must reorient accordingly. And if the most precise theory of plantation afterlives was produced on an open-air stage before the bulldozers arrived, we must reckon with whose knowledge counts as analysis of our planetary crisis — and from what ground.

Professor Kenny Cupers

Kenny Cupers is Professor of Architectural History and Urban Studies at the University of Basel, where he co-founded and leads the Urban Studies division. Trained as an architect, urbanist, and historian, his research examines how built environments, infrastructure, and design articulate social, political, and ecological transformations in African and European societies. His work combines archival research with visual and spatial analysis, and is driven by collaborative forms of knowledge production.