African Urbanisms: Architectural Mobilities in the Long 20th Century

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This course will discuss architecture and urbanisation in Africa during the 20th century from the point of view of mobilities of people, resources, and ideas. Starting with imperial networks and their intersections with local ecologies, we will expand the focus to new geographies emerging in the wake of World War II. These included diasporic, transatlantic, and Pan-African exchanges, as well as those triggered by decolonisation, the Cold War, and globalisation. After discussing collaboration and antagonisms between actors mobilised in these networks and their impact on the built environment, we will focus on the city of Kumasi in Ghana, the former capital of the Ashanti Confederacy and the second largest city in independent Ghana. In particular, we will use Geographic Information System (GIS) technology to study architecture and urbanisation in and around the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science in Technology (KNUST). We will discuss the campus from its foundation by British and Asante elites in the early 1950s until today as deeply impacted by competing networks that straddled local, regional, continental, and planetary scales.

Course participants will:
- Discuss the variety of actors involved in urbanization processes, including "traditional" and colonial authorities, state institutions, entrepreneurs and religious leaders, African, European and Asian migrants, professionals, technicians, scholars, and laborers.
- Study the ways in which foreign expertise and resources were adapted, compared, and negotiated with local ones in a process that responded to political, economic, climatic, social and technological conditions.
- Learn about historical and current directions of African architecture and urbanism by means of readings and discussions with invited guests, including speakers from the continent.
- Develop a critical architectural historiography based on GIS technology: We will use GIS-software to compare archival plans and assess their impact on the development of Kumasi.
- Collaborate on the production of a database of Kumasi maps and plans; then each participant will use this database to develop their individual research project.