

## Pedagogy in the Postcolony: A Women's College in Urban Rwanda

Advanced Studio V, Fall 2019, Columbia GSAPP | Instructors: Sharon Davis & Tyler Survant

Program	A new campus for the Akilah Institute, a non-profit women's college based in Rwanda
Site	The neighborhood of Kiyovu in Kigali, capital of Rwanda
Issues	Pedagogical models, legacy of colonialism in Africa and interpretations of post-colonialism, African thought, developmentalism and the impact of foreign aid, representations of identity including race & gender, local and low-tech construction methodologies, relevance of regionalism, passive environmental strategies and the legacy of tropical modernism, the role of the architect



Urugo Women's Opportunity Center, Sharon Davis Design, Kayonza, Rwanda.  
Credit: Iwan Baan, 2014.

Studio	This year, 2019, marks the 25th anniversary of the Rwandan genocide, an event that devastated much of Rwandan society including the country's education system. In the aftermath, Rwanda had to rebuild not only its physical classrooms but also the content of its schooling. To accelerate its recovery, the post-genocide government (the Rwandan Patriotic Front, or RFP, which is still in power today) adopted a developmental approach, positioning the education system as a cornerstone of the country's economic development. The explicit mission of Rwanda's Ministry of Education is "to transform the Rwandan citizen into skilled human capital for socio-economic development of the country." Rwanda's education system has made many gains over the past two decades, yet the World Bank recently warned of Rwanda's "looming crisis of learning in basic education,"
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in part due to high dropout rates in secondary education, which is common among other African countries as well. Participation in tertiary education is also low, and disproportionately affects women, who are subject to sociocultural expectations such as early marriage, childcare, and domestic labor. A mere 7% of college-aged women in Rwanda are enrolled in university-level programs, according to the World Bank. The lack of an advanced degree limits a woman's access to high-wage employment opportunities.

Akilah

Enter the Akilah Institute. Founded in 2010, Akilah is the first women's college in Rwanda, offering two and three-year diplomas in Business Management & Entrepreneurship, Information Systems, and Hospitality Management, accredited by Rwanda's Ministry of Education. For the past nine years since its inception, the Institute has operated out of a leased space in an existing building in the neighborhood of Kiyovu in Rwanda's capital, Kigali. Akilah plans to nearly quadruple their Rwandan enrollment from 1,500 to 5,600 students and requires a new, ground-up campus to accommodate the entire student body under one roof, tailored for a "blended learning" educational approach where traditional face-to-face instruction combines with virtual, online teaching.

Using the neighborhood of Kiyovu as a site, and the Akilah Institute as a basis for program, students will consider the role of architecture today in supporting or challenging tertiary education agendas in Rwanda. Three research tracks—field, pedagogy, and representation—will inform our studio's approach to the project. **Field** considers the physical site in Kiyovu but also the site's socio-cultural context, informed by African history and current postcolonial thought. In what ways does a project in urban Rwanda differ from one in Europe, China, or the United States? How does architecture function in an East African context? **Pedagogy** considers the history of schooling, the legacy of colonial school design in sub-Saharan Africa, the instrumentalization of education, and current research on teaching methodologies. Students will analyze the program established by Akilah, potentially generating additional or alternative program requirements for the campus. How does schooling and the design of educational institutions expand or limit the critical consciousness of students? What role does the built environment play in a "hidden curriculum," the tacit lessons imparted through settings and practices? To what end does higher education exist? **Representation** studies the way in which architectural expression dovetails with political representation, and the implications for marginalized populations with restricted access to formal architecture. What forms did colonial architecture and tropical modernism take in Rwanda, and how does contemporary architecture there differ today? Are precolonial and vernacular approaches to building still relevant? What is the role of the architect in the global south? Does the architect have the agency to address social inequities through design?

## Travel

The studio does not have the opportunity to travel to Kigali, and students are unlikely to have familiarity with Rwanda or other African contexts. Furthermore, the legacy of imperialism and contemporary flows of global capital maintain an asymmetric core-periphery dynamic between the West and the rest, a relationship that, at least historically if not up until the present day, also has been bound up with constructions of racial identity. Thus, work in Rwanda by architects in the global north—and also in the global east, given China’s power and influence—has particular political ramifications. Students will grapple with their geographic, intellectual, and political distance as a basic premise of the studio, maintaining a reflective stance toward their own work.



Central Business District, Kigali, Rwanda, 2016. Credit: Derejeb.

## Guests

Various guests including Fatou Dieye, Karen Sherman, Yutaka Sho, and Ola Uduku will help give context to the concerns of the studio. **Fatou Dieye** is a resident of Kigali and Managing Director in Rwanda for PROECCO, a program that promotes climate-responsive building material production and off-farm employment in Rwanda. She is a former Team Leader in the Neighborhood and Affordable Housing Development Unit at the City of Kigali Office of Urban Planning, and a former Assistant Director at Columbia GSAPP. **Karen Sherman** is the president of the Akilah Institute, a member of the board of Every Woman Treaty, and former Africa Regional Director for Women for Women International. From 2014-16 she was a Senior Associate on Women’s Economic Empowerment

at the Institute for Women, Peace, and Security at Georgetown University. **Yutaka Sho** is co-founder and director of GA Collaborative, a non-profit architecture firm serving vulnerable communities in Rwanda since 2008. She is also Professor of Architecture at Syracuse University and researches, among other topics, development discourses in the global south. **Ola Uduku** is Professor of Architecture at Manchester School of Architecture and former Dean International for Africa at Edinburgh University. She has written extensively about the history of educational architecture in Africa, including in her recently published book, *Learning Spaces in Africa: Critical Histories to 21st Century Challenges and Change* (Routledge, 2018).



Akilah Institute, Kigali, Rwanda. Credit: Akilah Institute.

#### Schedule

Week 1	<i>Studio lottery and first studio</i>
Week 2	<i>Field lecture and research, Skype call with Fatou Dieye</i>
Week 3	<i>Field research, Skype call with Ola Uduku and meeting with Karen Sherman</i>
Week 4	<i>Pedagogy lecture and research, project development, meeting with Yutaka Sho</i>
Week 5	<i>Pedagogy research and project development</i>
Week 6	<i>Representation lecture and project development</i>
Week 7	<i>Production for mid review</i>
Week 8	<b>Mid review / Monday, October 21st</b>
Week 9	<i>Representation research and project development</i>
Week 10	<i>Project development</i>
Week 11	<i>Project development</i>
Week 12	<i>Project development and final pinup</i>
Week 13	<i>Prep for final review, Thanksgiving break</i>
Week 14	<i>Production for final review</i>
Week 15	<b>Final review / Wednesday, December 11th</b>

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- Representation
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Frampton, Kenneth. "Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance." *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster. (Port Townsend: Bay Press, 1983), 16-30.

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Urugo Women's Opportunity Center, Sharon Davis Design, Kayonza, Rwanda.  
Credit: Iwan Baan, 2014.