



# WRITING PLATFORMIZATION

## from **AFRICA:** a workshop

*Call for applications to attend an intimate four-day writing workshop, hosted at the University of Cape Town and funded by the British Academy. This is the second workshop in a series of workshops on this theme.*

**When:** 24<sup>th</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup> February 2025

**Where:** Cape Town

**Application deadline:** 04 October 2024

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### THE RATIONALE

From short-term rentals to last-mile logistics, in the last decade scholars have charted the wide-ranging impacts of digital platforms and platformization processes. However, just like in other fields of inquiry, platform research has been bedevilled by deep asymmetries in knowledge production and circulation, often privileging the voices of scholars based in well-resourced Western universities.

Despite this, scholarship on digital platforms is increasingly diverse, with many contributions coming from Latin America, China, India and South-East Asia more broadly. With very few exceptions, however, African and Africa-based scholars have remained “off the map” of international debates. Since 2008, there have been 2410 publications on platforms according to the Web of Science database. Yet, only 38 publications refer to Africa either in the abstract, keywords or the text, with the vast majority of these publications by authors based outside the continent.

Nevertheless, African cities and African economies are experiencing rapid and deep transformations engendered by the ubiquity of platformization processes, including some, such as mobile finance, that are almost exclusively unique to the African context. In fact, several multi-site study research projects based in European and North American universities have included examples and case studies in the African continent, illustrating the pervasiveness and transformative impacts of digital platforms. Many early-career researchers in Africa have had the chance to collaborate on and participate in platform-research projects, gathering data, conducting interviews, and performing ethnographic fieldwork, but their voices in the global publishing machine have been limited to being listed as co-authors, as research partners, or as field assistants.

While rejecting the extractive and often exclusive nature of the academic-journal complex, we recognize the importance of writing and publishing for Africa-based scholars. The intention of this workshop is therefore to engage in creative and generative ways with platform writing; connect interested scholars with publishing opportunities; strengthen the network of platform scholars working on and in Africa; and fill the gaps in the geographies of knowledge that are currently represented in the scholarly debate. A total of about 15 people will be selected.

## HOW TO APPLY

- Only applications submitted through the [online portal](#) will be considered.
- The application template can be downloaded via [this form](#) and completed offline (to be submitted through the portal).
- For application-related questions please contact: [andrea.pollio@polito.it](mailto:andrea.pollio@polito.it)

## STRUCTURE OF THE WORKSHOP

The program will run from Monday to Thursday (with people arriving on Sunday and departing on Thursday evening or Friday). The 4-day programme is geared towards five interrelated building blocks:

- **Building block 1:** Centering Africa in platform debates. We aim to advance our shared conversation on digital platforms. As such, a series of inputs are designed to outline these debates.
- **Building block 2:** Network building. We aim to develop a strong network of scholars writing on digital platforms from the African perspective. By engaging with each other's work and enjoying time together, we aim to personalise the network. This building block will include dinners and a field trip where we have a chance to engage informally.
- **Building block 3:** Understanding academic publishing and writing for journals. We will unpack the basics of publishing, including how to select a journal, engage with reviewers, and structure your paper. Everyone who would like will also be allocated a mentor to help them with their paper.
- **Building block 4:** Experimenting with different forms of writing. Here we will write in different registers, for example realist, confessional, impressionistic and ficto-criticism. We will explore how these various styles might add to our writing.
- **Building block 5:** Writing as embodied practice. There are several activities aimed at understanding writing and an embodied practice. This will include allocating time for writing, structured in different ways. It will also include meditation.

## SPEAKERS AND ORGANISERS

The workshop has been co-designed by Dr. Amir Anwar (University of Edinburgh), Dr. Andrea Pollio (DIST, Torino/ACC, University of Cape Town), Dr. Liza Cirolia (ACC, University of Cape Town); Dr. Shari Daya (Humanities, University of Cape Town); Dr. Tammy Wilks (Humanities, University of Cape Town); and Dr. Michel Wahome (University College London).

Guest speakers (to be confirmed) include Dr. Shari Daya (Humanities, University of Cape Town); Prof. Nancy Odendaal (African Centre for Cities, University of Cape Town). Prof. Dodzi Tsikata (School of Oriental and African Studies, University of Legon, Ghana); Dr. Michel Wahome (University College London).

## SPECIAL ISSUE

For those who are interested, there will be the possibility of contributing to a Special Issue. We have a



partnership with [Platforms & Society](#), a new open-access academic outlet that has, in its manifesto, the goal of fostering more cosmopolitan and geographically diverse scholarship on platforms. Through this collaboration, which has been approved and encouraged by the editorial team, the participants will get access to the behind-the-scenes of academic publishing, as well as the opportunity to contribute to a special issue dedicated to platform research in the African context.

## **CRITERIA FOR BEING SELECTED**

- Scholars must be undertaking a PhD or within five years of completion of their PhD; scholars in the first year of their PhD must show evidence of substantive data collection or conceptual development towards their projects.
- Have a genuine interest in platform research and writing from an African perspective.
- We encourage applications from scholars working across different domains of platform research, including but not only, the platformization of:
  - **Labour** (eg. e-hailing, on-demand, data workers, etc.)
  - **Economies** (eg. real estate, tokenization of land, logistics, fulfilment, ecommerce, etc.)
  - **Culture** (music streaming, creative work, etc.)
  - **States** (eg. sovereign digital currencies, blockchain titling, identification systems, etc.)
  - **Everyday life** (mobile money use, remittances, microinsurance, etc.)
  - **Business development ecosystems** (eg. venture capital pipelines, startup hubs, etc.)
  - **Geopolitics** (eg. international standards, foreign aid, etc.)
- Scholars must have a paper they are actively working on and are willing to work on during the workshop
- We also encourage applications from different disciplines, including geography, development studies, labour studies, anthropology, and critical sciences more broadly.
- Priority for funding will be given to Africa-based scholars
- If you attended the first workshop in 2024, you will not be considered for this workshop

## **TIMELINE:**

- **Deadline for submission:** 04 October 2024
- **Response:** 18 October 2024
- **RSVP/confirmation of attendance:** 01 November 2024
- **Event dates:** 24 – 27 February 2025

## **WHAT COSTS DO WE COVER?**

- There is no cost to attend the conference.
- For those joining from outside of Cape Town, we have a budget to cover some travel expenses (hotel and flights). Priority for funding will go to Africa-based scholars. Please indicate in your application the funding support you require.

NB: We do not cover visa costs, travel to and from the airport, or vaccinations.

## **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

- English will be the teaching language
- No hybrid participation and must join for full four days
- For those who require a South African visa, letters will be provided. However, it is the responsibility of the applicant to gather the necessary travel documents.



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**More info on our website:** [www.africancentreforcities.net/  
writing-about-platformization-from-africa-workshop-2/](http://www.africancentreforcities.net/writing-about-platformization-from-africa-workshop-2/)

