HOW TO WRITE ABOUT PLATFORMIZATION *from* AFRICA
a workshop

Call for applications to attend an intimate three-day writing workshop, hosted at the University of Cape Town and funded by Edinburgh University through the Africa-Edinburgh Catalytic Partnership Fund 2023/24.

Cape Town, 15-17 July 2024
Application deadline, 25 April 2024

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 for "How to write about platformization *from* Africa", a workshop whose title riffs off Binyavanga Wainaina's famous satirical essay "how to write about Africa".

STRUCTURE OF THE WORKSHOP

The 3-day programme is geared towards four interrelated objectives:

Objective 1: Reflecting on the craft of academic writing
Objective 2: Understanding and accessing the global academic publishing system
Objective 3: Developing a writing "style"
Objective 4: Creating and leveraging research networks for knowledge exchange, collective fundraising, and expanding international, Pan-African collaborations.

Draft programme (a more detailed one will provided in due course)

	Session 1	Session 2	Session 3
Day 1	Clarity, structure, standards	Peer-to-peer feedback	City excursion (Cape Town)
Day 2	Being reviewed/a reviewer	Realist, confessional, impressionistic	Building networks through writing
Day 3	Finding a voice (or voices)	Ficto-criticism	Building a publication plan

SPEAKERS AND ORGANIZERS

The workshop has been codesigned by Amir Anwar, Andrea Pollio, and Liza Cirolia, with three emerging African scholars: Alicia Fortuin (PhD candidate African Centre for Cities), Dennis Mbugua (post-doctoral fellow, British Institute in Eastern Africa) and Jack Odeo (PhD candidate, Stockholm University).

Guest speakers include Dr. Shari Daya (Humanities, University of Cape Town), Prof. Nancy Odendaal (African Centre for Cities, University of Cape Town), Dr. Michel Wahome (University College London) and others.

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 theme 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.)
    - 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.)
- We also encourage applications from different disciplines, including geography, development studies, labour studies, anthropology, and critical sciences more broadly.
- Priority will be given to Africa-based scholars.

WHAT COSTS DO WE COVER?

We will do our best to cover the cost of flights and accommodation for all participants. As we have a set budget, scholars based at well-resourced institutions may be asked to contribute to their travel costs. This will be attended to on a case-by-case basis. Where necessary, scholars can request reimbursements for additional travel costs, such as vaccines or visas, however, these too will be addressed on a case-by-case basis and budget dependent. For all participants, lunch will be provided during the days of the workshop, and there will be group dinners every other night.

TIMELINE

Deadline for submission: 25 April 2024
Response: 10 May 2024
RSVP/confirmation of attendance: 15 May 2024
Online pre-workshop: June 2024 (date TBD)
Event dates: 15-16-17 July 2024

HOW TO APPLY

Only applications submitted through the [online portal](#) will be considered.
The application form can be downloaded from the same online [portal](#).

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

English will be the teaching language
No hybrid participation is possible and participants must join for full three 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.