FRAMING THE WORK OF OUTSOURCED CONTENT MODERATION: A CRITICAL TECHNO-CULTURAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS IN THE CONTEXT OF DANIEL MOTAUNG'S CASE

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS/FOREWORD

The process of this thesis has been one of continuous iteration, reflection, and finding what could be appropriate paths of thinking, questioning as well as letting go of those directions that proved inadequate or somehow impossible. In other words, it has been a process of getting lost; which perhaps I needed, or it was necessary for me to draw lessons I was not yet able to draw both personally and academically. I am grateful to everyone with whom I have been able to share pieces of this journey. Formally, I am indebted and thankful for the attentive and committed supervision of my advisors, Dr. Nermin El-Sherif and Dr. Laura Karreman. Further, I would like to thank Dr. Evelyn Wan for generous consultation and inspiration from seminars I could part-take in during my studies. I thank Ruowen Xu for offering literature suggestions that informed and accompanied me along this process. And I thank Elle Zwinkels for reading through and offering valuable feedback on my draft. All of the support that I now recall and briefly mention here as well as that what I do not formally disclose here was critical for me in taking the steps along the process of this thesis.

Recently, when I was asked about what I am writing my thesis on and after disclosing that I focus on the work of outsourced content moderation, the person who asked responded by recalling the short story *The Ones Who Walked Away from Omelas* by Ursula K. Le Guin (informal conversation ASCA cities seminar, Spring, 2025). I read the story already some time ago but it was the conference paper written by Vandana Singh (2018) in which she responds to Le Guin that stuck in my memory. In the original text, Le Guin (1991) responds to William James by drawing a story upon the axiom that posits the happiness of all the inhabitants in the city called Omelas as contingent on the misery of one child hidden in a basement. Singh (2018), as a physicist and a fiction writer, responds by thinking through Omelas as a paradigm; for her, the paradigm is the conceptual structure underpinning Newtonian physics. If Le Guin's story invites the question of whether to leave Omelas or accept the bargain, Singh's text that thinks in relation to the effects of human-caused climate change reminds us that there are 'cracks' in the paradigm. In turn, Singh's framing suggests a question that is focused on how to engage with the cracks or how to relate to others in response to any lessons that we might draw from what these cracks express. While for Singh the human-caused climate change is the most noticeable crack in the Newtonian paradigm and the consequent version of 'our' Omelas, there are many forms of intertwined cracks that we might observe. In this thesis, I then try to think and respond to what Nancy Fraser (2018) termed the "social reproductive contradiction" (24),

which perhaps could be thought of as a crack that is inherent and of varied forms within capitalist economies and societies.

The process of this thesis then turned into a learning experience in the fact that to not only notice but also draw what could be an appropriate response to a form of 'crack' or a contradiction is not self-evident. The initial step of noticing and trying to engage with a form of contradiction came about with a significant scope of uncertainty or unclarity. It was then this uncertainty that invited me to look for concepts to draw on in order to arrive at what could be relevant questions and learning points. At that point, the research process had become one of learning how to read and write in spite of the persistent feeling that my approach might not add up to my motivations. In turn, my reading became distracted and my writing incoherent. This became the case out of the feeling that the direction I was taking might not be adequate in relation to the topic or the crack I nonetheless felt the urgency to listen for the kind of truth that it might express. In this way, the research process has been one of continuous questioning in an attempt to find an appropriate expression as informed by my position that you as a reader might learn more about throughout the text. I hope that you could find in this thesis some inspiration and relevant directions of thinking as well as scope for meaningful engagement with any of my unintended shortcomings that remain.

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Abstract

This thesis examines how discourses concerning the work of outsourced content moderation reveal socially reproductive labor as culturally and historically devalued in response to the technological and ideological context of the neoliberal platform economy. By content moderation, I refer to the work of filtering the circulation of content on social media platforms, which has been documented as organized into exploitative and harmful conditions of labor. In order to unpack how outsourced content moderation exposes a specifically devalued form of socially reproductive labor, I analyze the frames under which this work is discursively construed in a material that I associate with the case of an activist, public figure, and a former content moderator, Daniel Motaung. This case evolved from 2022 until the present, addressing the exploitative and harmful conditions of work at a Nairobi office of the outsourcing firm Sama, which used to provide content moderation services for the U.S.-based platform corporation Meta. In order to engage with this case, I take guidance in the perspective of critical-techno-cultural discourse analysis (CTDA). Based on this perspective, I then address how the frames that ascribe meaning, normative ideas, and values to the work of outsourced content moderation are informed by a specific ideological and technological context. To this point, I collected material in the form of newspaper reports together with promotions of digital platforms and outsourcing firms. On the basis of this material, I focus on how outsourced content moderation is framed within two distinct discursive contexts (a) investigative journalism and (b) platform corporations/outsourcing firms. As a result, based on the way that outsourced content moderation is framed in the material stemming from the discursive contexts associated with Motaung's case, I argue that it reveals a distinct form of social reproductive contradiction that is integral to the technological and ideological context of the neoliberal platform economy.

Key words: Outsourced content moderation, socially reproductive labor, social reproduction theory (SRT), neoliberalism, platform economy, Daniel Motaung, frame analysis, critical techno-cultural discourse analysis (CTDA)

INTRODUCTION

In their recent reports, investigative journalists exposed how, in the past year, the outsourcing firm Sama, formerly providing content moderation services for Meta, illegally dismissed its entire content moderation division based in Nairobi, Kenya. Recently, Sama's former moderators addressed both of the firms in a collective lawsuit responding to their renewed situation of economic insecurity, coupled with conditions of compromised mental health that resulted from their former employment (Musanga 2023a; Siele 2023; Linton 2023; Perrigo 2022a). This moment that expresses a scope of the exploitative practices under the present platform economy could be observed as a continuation of Daniel Motaung's case, which acquired prominent public attention in the previous years (Perrigo 2022a, 2023; Musanga 2022, 2023b). Motaung is a former content moderator employed by Sama who, in the past years, spoke out publicly about the work conditions in outsourced content moderation and became a recognizable public figure and an activist engaged in addressing labor rights violations in the industry (Perrigo 2022a, 2023). I center this thesis on what I read as Motaung's case, which involves the above-mentioned and corresponding events, creating discursive formations upon which it becomes possible to address the ideological factors undergirding the current exploitative and harmful organization of this work.

Drawing on existing research concerning outsourced content moderation it is possible to notice that Motaung's case and the event of illegal mass layoffs under Sama expose relations of labor that are not unique to these instances. Rather, as Alden Sajor Marte-Wood and Stephanie Dimatulac Santos (2021) point out, this contemporary organization of content moderation expresses the way that histories of labor exploitation and expropriation between specific places and their cultural contexts are currently restructured. While I stand with Marte-Wood and Santos on the point that content moderation is a kind of work that should no longer exist (119), I focus on this context of labor organization in order to unpack how specific tasks are under capitalist economies continuously devalued and restructured through novel means. As critical theory on relations in socially reproductive labor points out, the ways in which labor exploitation and expropriation are sustained rest on cultural and historical factors, reflecting specific ideological and technological formations (Bhattacharya 2018, 3). To this point, in reference to Motaung's case, which stimulates a discourse concerning the current organization of content moderation work, it becomes possible to address how structurally devalued forms of labor are reorganized under the contemporary technological and ideological context of neoliberal capitalism and the platform economy.

In dialogue with existing research on content moderation, Motaung's case exposes the organization, characteristics, and function of this work, which could be observed to reflect a form of labor that is theorized as 'socially reproductive.' Theory on socially reproductive labor is generally based on feminist critique(s) of Marxist conceptions of labor, pointing out how labor expropriation as endemic to capitalism is sustained in culturally and historically specific ways (Bhattacharya 2018, 3). This perspective on labor relations, as sustained on a cultural level in terms of narratives that ascribe meaning and possible justifications, I draw on as critical for providing an account of why and how outsourced content moderation is organized into an expropriative and harmful circuit of labor. To this point, I take guidance in the general conception of reproductive labor, as Laura Briggs (2017) defines it in terms of "the work necessary to the reproduction of Human life—not only having and raising children but also feeding people; caring for the sick, the elderly, and those who cannot work; creating safety and shelter; building community and kin relationships; and attending to people's psychic and spiritual well-being" (2).[1] More specifically and in line with Briggs, Nancy Fraser (2018) points out that distinct forms of capitalist societies by their orientation towards "unlimited accumulation" and simultaneous devaluation of socially reproductive labor continuously destabilize the processes on which the concomitant economies rely (22). By extension, this disposition of socially reproductive tasks under distinct forms of capitalist societies constitutes what Fraser theorizes as a "social-reproductive contradiction" (22).[2] In response, I align my perspective with Rae Jereza (2021) and Lindsay Bartkowski (2019), who situate the work of outsourced content moderation that entails filtering online content from circulation as a distinct form of how socially reproductive labor is degraded and organized in harmful ways. On this basis, I focus on how the case of Motaung and corresponding discursive formations draw frames that ascribe meaning and normative ideas to outsourced content moderation in a way that intersects with socially reproductive labor as culturally and historically devalued. Across the following chapters, I then address how the framing of outsourced content moderation both

[1] This definition of socially reproductive labor as put forth by Laura Briggs (2017) could be observed as aligned with what Maria Mies (1986) develops as a feminist concept of labor. As Mies notes "a feminist concept of labour has to be oriented towards the production of life as the goal of work and not the production of things and of wealth," in turn, pointing out the "production of immediate life" as the core objective of a feminist conception of work (217).

[2] More specifically, Nancy Fraser discusses contradictions to entail "crisis tendencies" that create for destabilization of an existing economic system (24). At the same time, Fraser points out how the social reproductive contradiction that is inherent in the structure of capitalist economies is often "muted, and the associated crisis tendency remains obscured" (24).

departs from and aligns with the existing theory on socially reproductive labor. In turn, I aim to clarify how this context of labor relations reveals the ways that social reproductive contradiction takes a distinct form in response to the context of neoliberal capitalism and its associated technological milieu of the platform economy.

RESEARCH QUESTION

How is outsourced content moderation framed under the ideological and technological context of the neoliberal platform economy in a way that reveals a distinct form of social reproductive contradiction?

In order to address this question, I draw on the following sub-questions:

a) How is outsourced content moderation framed across distinct discursive contexts that are associated with Motaung's case?

b) How is Motaung's case and corresponding discourse informed by the the technological and ideological context of the neoliberal platform economy?

c) How is outsourced content moderation framed within Motaung's case in a way that reveals a distinct form of socially reproductive labor as devalued?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK - SOCIALLY REPRODUCTIVE LABOR UNDER THE TECHNOLOGICAL AND IDEOLOGICAL CONTEXT OF THE NEOLIBERAL PLATFORM ECONOMY

a) Neoliberal platform economy as a technological and ideological context

What is theorized as the platform economy, I read as generally referring to the way currently large multinational corporations, known as platforms, have economically reorganized and commodified participation on the internet in the past decades. Tiziana Terranova (2022) describes the internet as having transformed into "a complex of privately owned online services that call themselves "platforms"" (5). For Terranova, the internet is now constituted as a "corporate platform complex," owned and controlled by a few large companies, such as, "Google/Alphabet, Amazon, Apple, Facebook/Meta, Microsoft, Alibaba and Tencent" (5). In line with Terranova, Sarrah Kassem (2023) specifies how the concomitant "platform economy" emerges from the internet and its socio-political, economic, and technological character (37). Kassem points out that what is identified as the "second generation" (45) of platforms evolved with the economic possibility for data commodification, resting on that concerning a form of social participation (Srnicek 2017, 40; Terranova 2000, 33). In response, what I draw on as the general key features of the present platform economy is a restructuring of the internet that centralizes control and power in the hands of a few large multinational corporations based on their capacity to commodify (online) social participation.

In turn, the present platform economy, as characterized by centralization of control and power on behalf of a few large private corporations, is theorized as a system that emerges from the broader ideological context of neoliberal capitalism. On a general level, according to the Marxist theorist David Harvey (2006), neoliberalism refers to a theory of political economy, holding that "human well-being can be best advanced by the maximization of entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework characterized by private property rights, individual liberty, free markets, and free trade" (145). On this basis, neoliberalism entails a transnational market deregulation, enabling the rise of contemporary platforms through technologies and infrastructure that capitalize on current socio-economic asymmetries while centralizing ownership and control (Terranova 2022, 5; van Doorn 2017, 901). By extension, the context of the platform economy, which is developed upon the capacity to commodify social participation, exemplifies neoliberalism as pertaining to and shaping cultural and societal

spheres of life (Srnicek 2017, 40; Rodríguez 2019, 115; van Doorn 2014). In this way, what is termed the neoliberal platform economy could be observed to describe a technological organization of sociality on a transnational level with the objective of maximizing monetary value and concomitant centralization of power within a few large private corporations that are known as platforms.

On this basis, neoliberalism is theorized as an ideology that reduces social relations to their capacity of generating monetary value, which is pointed out to reflect on a discursive level in terms of the associated narratives of justification. To this point, the way in which neoliberalism reflects on a discursive level could be observed as exemplified in the identities and narratives under which contemporary social media platforms present themselves to the public. Kassem (2023) points out that the second-generation platforms enshrine their economic model based on the commodification of social participation via an identity of a free public service (43-44). By proxy, the kind of identities and narratives under which contemporary platforms intend to justify their practices resonate with Jorge Juan Rodríguez's argument (2019), holding that neoliberalism secures its dominance by way of co-opting any possibly disruptive discourses (116).[3] In this way, some of today's largest platforms were established and continue to present themselves as promoting democratization, or forms of social emancipation on the internet, with novel possibilities for collective social engagement (Kassem 2023, 43-44). In response, the neoliberal characteristic of the present platform economy becomes expressed on a discursive level via the co-optation of discourses concerning forms of social emancipation that may otherwise become disruptive to the dominant logic of this ideological context.

b) The analytical perspective of social reproduction theory (SRT)

In response to the organization, function, and characteristics that outsourced content moderation entails under the neoliberal platform economy, I observe this context of labor relations to invite the analytical perspective of social reproduction theory. Firstly, if

[3] In particular, Rodríguez theorizes co-optation in the context of identity politics (103). By tracing the historical developments of neoliberalism in the United States, Rodríguez points out how the social and political potential of identity politics becomes co-opted and thereby distorted under the corresponding hegemonic formations. For the full argument and context, see Rodríguez (2019).

contemporary platforms generate economic value from the commodification of online social participation, it necessitates the work of content moderation that functions to filter the harmful, (in)appropriate, or what becomes banned content from circulation (Roberts 2019, 34). Tarleton Gillespie (2018b) maintains that content moderation is the key service and commodity that social media platforms offer to their users and their economic model relies on, while simultaneously it is the task that is, by the platforms, to the greatest extent disavowed (201). On this basis, Marte-Wood and Santos (2021) argue that "this double move, offering moderation and extracting data, becomes a defining feature" of how current social media platforms operate (103). By extension, the work of content moderation then fulfills a function that is 'reproductive' of the platform's mode of production that rests on the commodification of data from user participation. In this way, outsourced content moderation emerges to fulfill a kind of function that intersects with a specific organization and consequent characteristics of labor, which I observe to invite the analytical perspective of social reproduction theory.

Broadly, the analytical perspective of social reproduction theory (SRT) builds on a conception of the economic as a social relation. Tithi Bhattacharya (2018) unpacks the conception of the economic as a social relation in the following way: "the economy as we see it is, according to Marx, a surface appearance […] which is steeped in a rhetoric of equality and freedom" and, in that way "conceals a "hidden abode" where domination and coercion reign, and those relations form the pivot of capitalism" (71). In this way, SRT draws on a conception of the capitalist economy as a form of social relation, involving domination that is conventionally enshrined under narratives of equality or free exchange. More specifically, this form of domination is explained as, in turn, undergirding how surplus value is generated upon which capitalist economies are sustained.[4] By extension, the analytical perspective of SRT draws on this insight that recognizes what appears as the economic to rest on social relations that extend beyond and are obscured by the ways in which economic relations are formalized.

On the basis of conceptualizing the economic as a social relation, social reproduction theory then further specifies its focus based on the concept of labor power. As discussed by Bhattacharya (2018) the concept of labor power is drawn from a Marxist theory as referring to

[4] Here, Bhattacharya (2018) points out how SRT (social reproduction theory) draws on what is theorized as the labor theory of value (71). According to Bhattacharya, for SRT it is important to focus on "labor power" in terms of "its composition, deployment, reproduction, and ultimate replacement—and (b) the space of work, i.e., the question of labor at the point of production" (71). It is on the basis of this general perspective that I read SRT to address what Alessandra Mezzadri (2019) points out as "the need to account for the value-producing nature of reproductive realms and activities" (37).

the human capacity of engaging in 'productive' labor (3). Further, Bhattacharya specifies how in the Marxist perspective, labor power is theorized to exemplify a "unique commodity" insofar as its production extends beyond the formalized circuits of the capitalist economy (3). Therefore, following from the above perspective on the economic as a social relation, SRT then draws attention to the myriad ways that the human capacity to labor is 'reproduced.' More specifically, as Bhattacharya notes, SRT recognizes "the relation between labor dispensed to produce commodities and labor dispensed to produce people as part of the systemic totality of capitalism" (2). In response, this perspective on existing relations of labor focuses on how it is possible that labor power could be conceived as a 'unique commodity' in the first place. In other words, the analytical perspective of SRT directs attention to the varied ways in which reproductive forms of labor (e.g. domestic work) are historically and culturally devalued and, in turn, undergird the production of surplus value in formalized economic processes (Bhattacharya 2018, 2). In this way, if content moderation fulfills a form of reproductive function undergirding the platforms' economic model based on data commodification, SRT introduces an analytical direction, focusing on how this form of work is enshrined as devalued on a level that is not only economic but also cultural and historical.

More specifically, socially reproductive forms of labor are theorized to create a category that is enshrined as devalued upon narratives concerning social difference, such as gender and race, and the way it, in turn, intersects with class. As Nancy Fraser (2018) points out, "splitting off reproductive labor from the larger universe of human activities, in which women's work previously held a recognized place, they relegated it to a newly institutionalized "domestic sphere," where its social importance was obscured" (23-24). In addition, as Fraser specifies, the organization of reproductive tasks as 'outside' formal circuits of economic production rests on gender as a key axis of social difference that serves as an outlet through which "new, domestic ideals of femininity" (24) offer a justification to the structural subordination of specific forms of labor in relation to others. In dialogue with Fraser, Evelyn Nakano Glenn (1992) reveals how reproductive tasks should be understood as structurally subordinated not only in terms of gender but the ways in which race subtends the former (3). In response, SRT draws on the foundational insights from the study of reproductive labor as a gendered and racialized form to offer an analytical perspective, focusing on "the relationship between exploitation (normally tethered to class) and oppression (normally understood through gender, race, etc.)" (Bhattacharya 2018, 3). In this way, following from the above-discussed conception of the economic as a social relation, SRT directs attention to the ways that narratives concerning distinct intersections of social difference (gender, race, etc.) are mobilized to justify

or normalize structural subordination on an economic level (class) as expressed in specific socio-economic contexts.

On this basis, the perspective of social reproduction theory asks how specific forms of work are culturally and historically devalued and, in turn, are organized into exploitative and expropriative relations of labor that support formalized economic processes. According to Kalindi Vora (2015), the devaluation of socially reproductive labor is tied to its history of organization in terms of racialized and gendered hierarchies, whereby "service, care, and attention work are considered unskilled" and, thereby are posited outside formal circuits of production "as this was covered in contracts of marriage and servitude" (30). In this way, in line with the argument of Glenn (1992), reproductive labor as a gendered and racialized form could be observed as expressed in terms of the work's characteristics that conventionally involve varied kinds of service with concomitant scope of emotional and affective involvement (Vora 2015, 30). In response, reproductive labor is specified in terms of organizational structures that posit those who perform reproductive tasks as conventionally obscured from public appearance in privatized and occluded spaces (e.g. domestic work) (Bartkowski 2019, 70). As a result, reproductive labor could be observed as expressed not only based on its function of reproducing the human capacity to labor (labor power) but also in terms of the work's characteristics and its conventional organizational structures. In response, I then draw on the analytical perspective of SRT to focus on how outsourced content moderation intersects with reproductive labor as culturally and historically devalued in terms of narratives that concern the work's function, characteristics, and organization.

c) Socially reproductive labor under the neoliberal platform economy as a techno-discursive context

In response to the previous section that points out how outsourced content moderation intersects with social reproduction theory (SRT), in this section I unpack the ways that socially reproductive labor as culturally and historically devalued is theorized as restructured against the ideological and technological context of the neoliberal platform economy. On a general level, Jennifer Denbow (2024) theorizes how socially reproductive labor becomes devalued under neoliberalism in relation to the significance that is discursively ascribed to technological

innovation. Denbow conceptualizes an "innovation/reproduction binary," in order "to describe the dialectical relationship between the fetishization of innovation and the devaluation of reproductive labor, revealing how innovation has been constructed as a panacea to social ills" (3).[5] In response to Denbow, technological innovation could be observed as discursively construed in such a way that contributes to the contemporary devaluation of socially reproductive labor under the guise of technological solutionism. Conversely, the way in which socially reproductive forms of labor have become technologically reorganized informs the discursive currency of technological innovation as the answer to varied contemporary social problems. In this way, what Denbow theorizes as the innovation/reproduction binary refers to the dialectical relation between technological innovation as an answer to varied social problems with concomitant forms of reproductive labor that become devalued as a result.

In line with Denbow, Neda Atanasoski and Kalindi Vora conceptualize techno-liberalism to unpack the ideologies informing current forms of technological innovation, such as in robotics, AI, or automation in general. According to Atanasoski and Vora (2019), techno-liberalism refers to the ideology upon which technology is discursively construed as an alibi to the present gendered and racialized relations of labor (4). In this way, Atanasoski and Vora argue that under techno-liberalism, technological innovations, such as, in robotics, AI, or automation, become envisioned to free the human (liberal) subject from historically and culturally degraded tasks (4). By extension, the techno-liberal view ascribes technology with a promise to transcend gendered and racialized relations of labor, such as, in the past and present organization of socially reproductive tasks (Atanasoski and Vora 2019, 34).[6] Therefore, if according to Denbow (2024) technological innovation becomes under neoliberalism framed as a solution to varied problems of social reproduction, then Atanasoski and Vora (2019) stress how that also serves as a distinct form of discursive justification.

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[5] In line with the conception of Sarrah Kassem (2023), what is referred to as a dialectical relationship puts forth an analytical perspective on the material world as "bound by a totality of interdependent, interacting co-evolving internal relations and elements of processes of production, technology, humans' relation to nature, the reproduction of daily life, mental conceptions and social relations" (17). As Kassem discusses, attention to the dialectical relations between distinct co-constituting elements can help identify how a change in one of the elements influences the other (17).

[6] Atanasoski and Vora (2019) draw on the work of Ruha Benjamin (2016) who argues that in the current context that seeks to appear as 'postracial,' racialism is "first and foremost, a story of innovation" (2228). In line with, Benjamin, Atanasoski and Vora (2019) argue that the way in which technological innovation is discursively construed under techno-liberalism expresses a "racialized aspiration for proper humanity in the post-Enlightenment era" (10).

In this way, under techno-liberalism, discourses on technological innovation become a vehicle for co-optation of the ways that categories of social difference have been mobilized in efforts for social emancipation. In particular, what Atanasoski and Vora (2019) theorize as the techno-liberal alibi that is drawn on a promise of technology to enable transcendence of gendered and racialized hierarchies in relations of labor expresses how technology is discursively construed in the broader ideological context that Jodi Melamed (2006) theorizes as "neoliberal multiculturalism" (2). According to Melamed, neoliberal multiculturalism constitutes the current and latest stage of racial liberalism in how "multiculturalism portrays neoliberal policy as the key to a postracist world of freedom and opportunity" (2). Melamed argues that "postwar liberal racial formation sutures an "official" antiracism to U.S. nationalism […]" which "produces a situation where official antiracisms themselves deflect and limit awareness of the logics of exploitation and domination in global capitalism" (2). Here, Melamed aligns with Fraser's (2018) concept of "progressive neoliberalism," holding that emancipation becomes in this context redefined in "market terms" (33). In this way, what Atanasoski and Vora (2019) theorize as the techno-liberal alibi could be observed to express the way that socially reproductive labor is enshrined as devalued upon narratives of technology that serve as an outlet for co-optation of narratives concerning social emancipation.

In response to the ways in which reproductive labor is under the context of the neoliberal platform economy enshrined as devalued, content moderation outsourcing could be observed as a site that expresses the contradictions of this broader technological and ideological context. Marte-Wood and Santos (2021) note that the impossibility of rendering content moderation fully automated is the "fundamental contradiction" of the platform economy, that currently outsourced content moderators are positioned to embody (107). By extension, Marte-Wood and Santos gesture that this contradiction opens a possibility for contestation over how this form of work is devalued and consequently organized in expropriative and harmful ways (107). By extension, if content moderation outsourcing intersects with the category of socially reproductive labor in terms of its function, characteristics, and organization, it could be observed as a site at which restructuring of reproductive tasks as devalued becomes currently expressed. In response, I draw on the analytical perspective of SRT in order to unpack how discourses on outsourced content moderation reveal a distinct form of what is theorized as the social reproductive contradiction that takes shape in response to the ideological and technological context of the neoliberal platform economy.

Methodology

In order to address my general question concerning how discourses on outsourced content moderation reveal a distinct form of social reproductive contradiction, I undertake qualitative frame analysis with general guidance in what André Brock (2018) develops as critical-techno-cultural discourse analysis (CTDA). Brock conceives CTDA as a method that puts forth an analytical perspective focusing on the "interactions between technology, cultural ideology, and technology practice" (1013). I draw on CTDA on this general level, by way of focusing on how the 'technology practice' of outsourced content moderation work is organized in relation to the 'technology' of the platform (Facebook) and the 'cultural ideology' that undergirds labor relations within the neoliberal platform economy. More specifically, as Brock emphasizes, CTDA requires a basis on a specific strand of critical theory in reference to which the relation between technology, cultural ideology, and technology practice could be interpreted (1013). To this point, as I discussed above, I draw on the perspective of social reproduction theory (SRT) as a strand of critical theory focusing on how relations of labor are culturally and historically construed and, in turn, enshrined as devalued (Bhattacharya 2018, 3). Upon this general guidance in CTDA, I then focus on how the way that content moderation outsourcing as framed in the discursive contexts that I associate with Motaung's case, is informed by the neoliberal platform economy as both an ideological and technological context.

More specifically, in order to interpret the way that outsourced content moderation intersects with the category of socially reproductive labor on a discursive level, I draw on the approach of qualitative frame analysis. As theorized by Erving Goffman (1986), framing involves how meaning is ascribed to specific events, situations, or phenomena (10-11). In response, William Anthony Gamson and Andre Modigliani (1989) theorize frames as drawn from narratives that carry resonance within specific cultural contexts (5). In this way, frames serve not only to construe the meaning of its object but also its valuation and normative ideas concerning its treatment (Entman 1993, 52). In other words, frames are drawn in response to specific cultural ideologies and, in turn, create perspectives that may support or counter any of their corresponding ideological references. Based on the general perspective of CTDA, I then focus on frames as informed by a context that comprises both ideological and technological references (Brock 2018, 1013). On this basis, I draw on Motaung's case to analyze how outsourced content moderation is communicated in terms of frames that are drawn from the technological and ideological context of what is theorized as the neoliberal platform economy.

In order then to gather and select material that comprises my corpus, I draw on the above-outlined methodological guidance and the case of a former content moderator, activist, and public figure, Daniel Motaung. I take the case of Motaung as a general anchor to my material selection since it could be observed as a case from which a discourse concerning the current organization of content moderation outsourcing has developed since 2022 until the present. Based on Motaung's case, I discern two discursive contexts in which content moderation work acquires distinct framing. The first discursive context that I distinguish from Motaung's case is that of dominant platform corporations and outsourcing firms, which intends to justify the way that outsourced content moderation is currently organized. The second discursive context that becomes apparent from Motaung's case is that of investigative journalism, which aims to publicly expose the realities that the work of outsourced content moderation entails. In this way, based on Motaung's case as a general anchor to my material selection, I gather material from the two distinct discursive contexts of, on the one hand, platform corporations and outsourcing firms, and, on the other, investigative journalism.

More specifically, from the context of platform corporations and outsourcing firms, I gather and select material published by the platform corporation Meta and its former outsourcing firm Sama. This context becomes apparent from this case since Motaung was employed by Meta's outsourcing firm Sama and subsequently engaged in activism and public advocacy contesting how Meta/Sama organizes the work of content moderation (Perrigo 2022a, 2023). In turn, from the discursive context of investigative journalism, I gather and select reports of journalists that document the work conditions under Sama and its manner of organizing this work. To this point, I situate Motaung's case as initiated with the article that is based on Motaung's testimony, which was written by the investigative journalist, Billy Perrigo, in 2022. Therefore, insofar as the case of Motaung could be seen as unresolved, I gather and select material from the work of journalists who documented events stemming from this case, beginning in 2022 until the present. On the basis of this material, I then unpack how outsourced content moderation becomes framed in distinct ways, depending on the specific discursive context and the broader technological and ideological context of the neoliberal platform economy.

Drawing on this material, I address my general question concerning how outsourced content moderation, as framed in the case of Motaung, reveals a distinct form of what is theorized as the social reproductive contradiction. First, based on the perspective of social reproduction theory, I discuss how outsourced content moderation becomes framed in a way that ascribes values and normative ideas to this work in terms of its characteristics, function,

and organization. Second, I unpack how, based on the frames that I discern as developed within the two distinct discursive contexts, outsourced content moderation becomes communicated in a way that intersects with the category of socially reproductive labor. In particular, based on the discursive context of Meta and Sama, I unpack how content moderation is framed as a concern of public safety (frame 1), work that should be automated (frame 2), and a work that is socially emancipatory (frame 3). In the second discursive context of investigative journalism, I discern outsourced content moderation framed as an expropriative form of displaced labor (frame 4) and a work that is harmful on an affective level (frame 5). In this way, I unpack how the distinct perspectives of the listed frames intersect with the category of socially reproductive labor as distinguished in terms of its function, characteristics, or organization. By extension, based on my general guidance in the perspective of CTDA, I address how the frames that I discern across the two contrasting discursive contexts associated with Motaung's case reveal distinct facets of the form that social reproductive contradiction takes under the neoliberal platform economy as a technological and ideological context.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

I address my general question concerning outsourced content moderation as framed in the discursive context of Daniel Motaung's case across the following four chapters. In the first chapter, I outline how the current debate on socially reproductive labor intersects with that on content moderation outsourcing at the levels of organization, function, and characteristics of the work. In response, I situate my study in line with existing research that unpacks the ways in which cultural and historical arrangements in socially reproductive labor create the conditions of possibility for the contemporary form in which outsourced content moderation is organized. In the second chapter, I focus on the frames under which content moderation is communicated within the technological and discursive context of the platform corporation Meta. In this way, I discuss how in the context of Meta, content moderation intersects with reproductive labor in terms of the frames that communicate a narrative of public safety (frame 1) and a vision for the work as technologically automated (frame 2). Further, in the third chapter, I turn to the discursive context of content moderation outsourcing that brings together contrasting material from the outsourcing firm Sama and that of investigative journalists. In response, I discuss how content moderation outsourcing reflects a distinct form of socially reproductive labor in terms of its framing under narratives of social emancipation (frame 3), an expropriative form of labor displacement (frame 4), and a work that is harmful on an affective level (frame 5). In the fourth chapter, I discuss how the five frames that I discern across the distinct discursive contexts associated with Motaung's case intersect with socially reproductive labor at the levels of organization, function, and characteristics. On this basis, I conclude by discussing how the five frames reveal a distinct facet of the form that social reproductive contradiction takes against the context of neoliberal capitalism and the platform economy.

Chapter 1: Mapping the debate: content moderation and (SRT) social reproduction theory

In this chapter, I map existing academic debate concerning content moderation outsourcing in relation to that focusing on the theory of socially reproductive labor. In this way, I outline what I discern as the key points of intersection between the current studies on content moderation outsourcing and relations in socially reproductive labor. In particular, I point out how the current debate on content moderation outsourcing intersects with existing theory concerning socially reproductive labor in terms of the work's function, characteristics, and organization. Firstly, I discuss how content moderation is theorized in relation to the form of sociality that current social media platforms bring about. On this level, I unpack how content moderation reflects a form of socially reproductive labor in terms of its function of re-creating the possibility for social media platforms to commodify social participation. Secondly, I discuss how the existing debate on content moderation intersects with that on socially reproductive labor in terms of the work's characteristics that are pointed out as requiring affective, embodied, and intimate forms of labor. Thirdly, I turn to the discussion concerning how the current organization of content moderation via transnational outsourcing aligns with studies focused on re-arrangements of socially reproductive labor under the context of globalized neoliberal capitalism. On this basis and in response to the ways that the current debate on content moderation outsourcing intersects with that on socially reproductive labor, I situate this study, addressing how outsourced content moderation as discursively construed reveals a form of social reproductive contradiction against the ideological and technological context of the neoliberal platform economy.

1.1 Content moderation as a concern of public discourse and relations of labor

On a general level, content moderation could be observed as discussed with emphases on either a concern of public discourse as shaped by digital platforms or that of associated relations of labor. The former concern of public discourse emerges in response to numerous and prominent cases that document and contest social media platforms for enabling and exacerbating socially

and publicly harmful or dangerous situations across varied social, political, or cultural contexts (Gillespie 2018a; Gillespie 2018b; Gillespie and Crawford 2016). On this level, content moderation is discussed, in response to, for instance, the proliferation of hate-speech fueling varied forms of violent conflicts, bullying, (child) pornography, abuse of specifically vulnerable groups on the platforms, or manipulation of data in varied critical forms of public engagement (Gillespie 2018a; Siapera 2021; Breslow 2018). In turn, the latter concern of content moderation as a form of labor could be observed as emerging in response to recent works that document the labor conditions in outsourced content moderation offices. For example, documentary films, such as *The Cleaners* or *The Moderators* together with the work of journalists and ethnographers offer documentation, pointing out how content moderation is not only a concern of public discourse but also that of exploitative and harmful relations of labor (Riesewieck and Block 2018; Roberts 2019; Perrigo 2022a; Chen 2014; Cassidy and Chen 2017). In response, I observe content moderation as discussed, generally, with emphases on either how social media platforms shape public discourse or on the conditions of labor in the current organization of the work.

In order to situate this research in response to content moderation distinguished as either a concern of public discourse or that of labor, I take guidance from the work of Sarah T. Roberts in the context of media studies. Roberts (2019) outlines her ethnographic study as informed by the motivation to:

> raise awareness about the fraught and difficult nature of such front-line online screening work, but also to give the rest of us the information we need to engage with more detail, nuance, and complexity in conversations about the impact of social media in our interpersonal, civic, and political lives. We cannot do the latter effectively if we do not know, as they say, how the sausage gets made. (3)

In this quote, outlining the motivation for her study, Roberts points out the concern of public discourse, or "the impact of social media in our interpersonal, civic, and political lives" (3) as contingent on content moderation as a form of labor and its organization. In response, in the present study, I situate my focus on how content moderation is discursively construed and negotiated as a form of labor not as separate but rather as integral to the broader concern of public discourse as shaped by the working of contemporary digital platforms.

To this point, in line with the work of Roberts, Tarleton Gillespie conceives content moderation as definitional to the way (social media) platforms constitute and give form to public discourse. Gillespie (2018a) departs from the observation that, "how platforms are

designed and governed not only makes possible social activity, it calls it into being, gives it shape, and affirms its basic legitimacy as a public contribution. Platforms don't just mediate public discourse, they constitute it" (22). In this way, Gillespie introduces a conception of social media platforms as a technology that gives form to public discourse on the basis of how it facilitates the task of content moderation. As Gillespie notes, "moderation is there from the beginning, and always; yet it must be largely disavowed, hidden, in part to maintain the illusion of an open platform and in part to avoid legal and cultural responsibility" (22). By extension, this quote points to the way content moderation occupies a contradictory position; at once constituting a key service and commodity that digital platforms offer yet continuously disavow in order to evade the responsibilities associated with the complexity and socio-political implications that moderation entails. In turn, this perspective then aligns with Roberts, pointing out how content moderation as a form of labor and its organization is integral to the way social media platforms implicate public discourse.

On this basis, content moderation has been associated with concerns of visibility in relation to the designs and practices that obfuscate how the work is organized and the way that decisions concerning the circulation of content are made. Gillespie and Crawford (2016) unpack how the platform's key design features obfuscate the process of making final decisions over why some content is or is not permitted to remain present for circulation on the platform (413). According to Gillespie and Crawford, insofar as platforms by design obfuscate content moderation, it limits the scope of public discourse while protecting the platform corporations to make decisions without public interjection (419). In addition, Mary L. Gray and Siddharth Suri (2019) discuss content moderation as part of "ghost work" (7), referring to the current large-scale labor organization characterized by obfuscation via the designs and affordances of digital platforms. According to Gray and Suri, contemporary digital services, such as social media platforms or AI chatbots are dependent on human labor that is obfuscated by design, offering users an experience based on its appearance to function automatically (7-8). Further, in response to the way human labor is under current digital platforms obfuscated, Atanasoski and Vora (2015) point out how this socio-technical organization reifies devalued forms of labor as racialized which, in turn, normalizes any corresponding exploitative and harmful conditions (28).[7] In this way, based on how contemporary digital platforms distinguish between what is

[7] Atanasoski and Vora elaborate on what they mean by racialized labor under contemporary platforms as follows: "The disappearance and subsumption of human bodies and their reemergence in and through the informational milieu as transparent commodities can thus be understood as racialized not in the sense that

or is not visible to the average user, content moderation is stressed as a labor and function that is by design obfuscated, pertaining to questions concerning relations of labor as well as that on formations of public discourse.

In addition to the way content moderation constitutes a form of obfuscated labor, the broader organization of the work is discussed in terms of transnational outsourcing as part of neo-colonial labor distribution and associated forms of domination. To this point, Marte-Wood and Santos (2021) outline how the context of the Philippines, as one of the key places where content moderation work is currently outsourced, is based on labor circuits established during periods of U.S. colonial occupation (105; Roberts 2019, 193). In this way, Marte-Wood and Santos discuss content moderation outsourcing to exemplify a neo-colonial labor circuit that rests upon the history of a colonial relation between the U.S. and the Philippines, enabling platform corporations economic and cultural domination in terms of exploitation contingent on a labor force knowledgeable in English as well as cultural mores of the presumed users (105).[8] To this point, Roberts (2019) highlights how content moderation outsourcing coincides with and rests on the contemporary establishment of special economic zones, offering legal and economic protection to the outsourcing firms facilitating the labor force for current digital platform corporations (61-62). In this vein, Evelyn Wan (2021) in line with Roberts (2016) discusses how content moderation outsourcing is a part of broader forms of economic domination via transnational offloading of toxic waste (such as e-waste) to localities in the global South (2642). In this way, content moderation outsourcing is stressed to entail a displacement of the labor and associated responsibility in managing the course of public discourse on social media platforms via contemporary neo-colonial circuits of labor that rest on economic and, by proxy, cultural and social forms of domination.

In response to the macro level concerning the practice of transnational outsourcing based on current neo-colonial circuits of labor, content moderation is discussed as characterized by affective, embodied, and intimate forms of labor. To this point, Rae Jereza (2021) draws on interviews with content moderators to discuss the work in terms of haunting,

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only black, brown, or Asian bodies perform the degraded tasks; rather, the transparency of the commodity as dull or dirty labor is racialized in the ways in which it affirms a particular notion of human freedom, leisure, and happiness emerging from imperial modes of liberal governance" (28).

[8] The present form of neo-colonial organization of outsourced content moderation could be observed as part of a broader context of labor outsourcing developed with the rise of outsourced call center agencies. To this point, Jan M. Padios (2018) details how the outsourced work in call center agencies in the Philippines is "culturally constructed within the affective architecture of U.S. empire […]" (5). Even though outsourced content moderation is organized as part of the same industry facilitated by (BPO) business process outsourcing firms, the content and status of the work are distinct (Roberts 2019, 188).

noting that, "content moderators absorb social ills found on the internet into their bodies, which then become sites where the mundane and horrific converge, producing affective states that moderators manage with little to no support. Content moderators are haunted by their work, by the impossibility of resolution, closure or explanation even after they have quit" (9). In this way, in line with studies pointing out the emotional toll of content moderation, Jereza stresses how the current organization of the work involves a heavy form of embodied and affective labor due to the character of the task and its organization. Similarly, Wan (2021) points out how the affective labor in content moderation rests on the work's temporal organization. As Wan discusses "the constant flow of text, image, and video constitutes a durational experience of heavy emotional labor, where the feelings of the moderators must themselves be moderated and closed off to do the job," resulting in an emotional labor that develops gradually by a sustained commitment to the work (2640-2641). As a result, due to the nature of the work, content moderation is emphasized as not only involving economic and cultural forms of exploitation in terms of transnational outsourcing but also a relegation of the unpredictable harms stemming from the affective labor that the work requires.

In this way, based on the character of content moderation and its organization in terms of transnational outsourcing, this arrangement is discussed to entail a qualitative restructuring of work that has been associated with affective, embodied, or intimate forms of labor. Marte-Wood and Santos (2021) discuss content moderation as a form of "care work" that is re-structured under the contemporary capitalist context of the platform economy (116). According to Marte-Wood and Santos, "from the standpoint of the moderator, the position from which we are theorizing this labor, this work fundamentally depends on affective complexity, interpretative nuance, and emotional resolve; it is unequivocally care work" (116). However, as discussed above, the way in which content moderation is currently organized constitutes a qualitatively distinct form of care work that is informed by the logic and technological affordances of the contemporary platform economy. To this point, Marte-Wood and Santos discuss how content moderation constitutes care work that is reduced in complexity in order to serve the platforms' economic imperatives, resulting in a form of affective labor that involves a harmful character (113). In response, content moderators point out the harmful character of the work in terms of the inability to "help victimized individuals or groups depicted within the content itself," which requires engaging in the affective labor of having to desensitize from the content that moderators are required to perceive (116). In this way, content moderation is discussed as a harmful form of care work that emerges in response to the economic imperatives of digital platforms and their technological affordances.

In dialogue with the work of Marte-Wood and Santos, Rae Jereza and Lindsay Bartkowski situate the characteristics, function, and contemporary organization of content moderation to reflect a restructuring of labor, that is, theorized as socially reproductive. On a general level, Bartkowski (2019) attends to the history of socially reproductive labor in terms of domestic work to argue that "while scholars have done well to highlight the exploitative nature of content moderation and other contemporary forms of care work, a critical framework attuned to the history of domestic labor allows us to apprehend the conditions of their possibility" (68). In this way, Bartkowski points out how the present organization of content moderation under neo-colonial circuits of labor emerges from the way that socially reproductive forms of labor have been historically and culturally devalued and correspondingly economically exploited or otherwise expropriated. To this point, Jereza (2021) discusses how content moderation reflects socially reproductive labor at once in terms of its function of re-creating the possibility for platforms to commodify public discourse but also in terms of the work's organization, situating the workers with lack of agency and the need to bear the "affective burden" that the work requires (8). On this basis, the work of Bartkowski, Jereza, and Marte-Wood and Santos who situate content moderation as a distinct form of socially reproductive labor, puts further emphasis on how the conception and organization of this work are integral to the sociality and public discourse that, as Gillespie (2018) notes, the design of contemporary social media platforms "calls into being" (22). I then situate my research in response to this perspective, which spotlights the function, characteristics, and contemporary organization of content moderation to constitute a distinct form of socially reproductive labor, revealing how the work is currently devalued and organized under correspondingly harmful conditions.

1.2 Social reproduction theory (SRT): an economic form of exploitation in terms of labor relations as culturally and historically informed

In response to the perspective of Jereza and Bartkowski, in this section, I further outline how the above-discussed debate on outsourced content moderation intersects with that on socially reproductive labor. First, I unpack how the perspective of SRT builds on and complicates the Marxist conception of labor and the associated distinction between its productive and reproductive forms. On this basis, I discuss what is theorized as the social reproductive

contradiction that is inherent to distinct forms of capitalist societies (Fraser 2018, 22). In response, I turn to the way that SRT conceives of the relation between economic forms of exploitation as coinciding with oppression in terms of cultural factors, concerning, race, gender, sexuality, ability, and others (Bhattacharya 2018, 3). With this foundation, I discuss how existing debate concerning socially reproductive labor intersects with that on outsourced content moderation at the level of the work's function of re-creating the platform's capacity to commodify social participation. Further, I unpack how the theory on socially reproductive labor aligns with the work of outsourced content moderation as characterized in terms of labor that requires affective, embodied, and intimate forms of engagement. Lastly, I turn to the way content moderation reflects in the discussion on socially reproductive labor in terms of its organization by way of transnational outsourcing. In this way, I situate my study in response to the existing debate on socially reproductive labor and the way that intersects with the function, characteristics, and organization of content moderation outsourcing as discussed above.

Generally, social reproduction theory is based on a feminist response to the Marxist conception of labor, which is pointed out as incomplete in its attention to the gendered dimensions in the distinction of labor as taking either productive and reproductive forms. Kalindi Vora (2012) outlines how Marx's conception of labor posits reproductive labor against the productive in a way that "if productive labor is understood as the investment of (socially averaged) labor time into an object for exchange, then reproductive labor is the energy put into making sure the person doing productive labor was able to return to work each day" (688). To this point, as discussed above, Bhattacharya (2018) points out how social reproduction theory (SRT) draws on the concept of 'labor power,' referring to the worker's capacity to return to work and continue in the commodification of their labor (2). By extension, SRT enables to problematize Marxist conception of labor power theorized as constituting a 'unique commodity' that is produced 'non-capitalistically' (8). In response, Bhattacharya points out how the "silences" around and the "underdevelopment" of labor power as a concept in Marxist theory constitute the point of departure for SRT (3). In this way, SRT draws on the conception of labor as undergirding the "systemic totality of capitalism" (2) in order to address the concomitant social relations as informed by factors of gender, race, sex, ability and others upon which labor power is reproduced in a manner that extends beyond formalized economic processes.

More specifically, the way in which social reproduction theory problematizes the concept of labor as developed within Marxist theory is discussed to rest on concerns over

valorization. To this point, Alessandra Mezzadri (2019) unpacks the critical insights concerning valorization as developed within what is referred to as the 'early debates' on reproductive labor (34). As Mezzadri discusses, the early debate on reproductive labor puts forth the insight that "social reproduction realms and activities are directly crucial to the structuring of processes of labour surplus extraction; expand rates of exploitation; and hence build (exchange) value" (38). In line with Mezzadri, Vora's analysis (2015) points out how this insight is critical for drawing attention to ways that reproductive labor as organized in relation to formalized spheres of production is restructured under contemporary technological contexts of globalized neoliberal capitalism (26). In response to the argument of Mezzadri and Vora, the insights of the early debate on socially reproductive labor concerning its devaluation as directly value generating within formalized spheres of production then forward a perspective upon which it is possible to point out the specific ways that labor is expropriated under distinct contexts of capitalist economies.

In line with the insights of what is termed as the early debate on socially reproductive labor, Nancy Fraser theorizes the ways in which distinct capitalist economies at once rely on and destabilize the circuits of social reproduction to constitute a social reproductive contradiction. As discussed above, Fraser (2018) articulates social reproductive contradiction as based on how capitalist economies at once depend on but simultaneously separate and disavow socially reproductive processes (24). In particular, Fraser notes that the "peculiar relation of separation-cum-dependence-cum-disavowal is a built-in source of potential instability," taking specific forms under distinct contexts of capitalist societies (24). In response, social reproduction theory attends to the ways in which such 'potential instability' is enshrined not only via economic factors but, such that are also cultural in character. To this point, Fraser notes that "capitalist societies have separated the work of social reproduction from that of economic production. Associating the first with women and the second with men, they have remunerated "reproductive" activities in the coin of "love" and "virtue," while compensating "productive work" in that of money" (24). In this quote, Fraser points out that gender constitutes a historically key axis around which the structural subordination of reproductive tasks has been justified. In the same vein, Bhattacharya (2018) unpacks how the focus of SRT lies in the way that reproductive forms of labor are normalized as devalued in terms of narratives concerning varied forms of social difference, such as gender, race, sexuality, ability, or others (3). In this way, what Fraser identifies as the social reproductive contradiction and the concomitant 'potential instability,' SRT then attends to the ways that it is enshrined in terms of socially reproductive labor as culturally and historically devalued.

More specifically, studies concerning labor relations in social reproduction highlight how reproductive labor constitutes a gendered and racialized form in terms of the characteristics that are ascribed to specific kinds of work. To this point, Vora (2015) discusses how reproductive labor is associated with tasks that typically involve varied forms of service rather than a commodity for exchange (30). By extension, reproductive labor has been studied prominently in the context of domestic labor and similar tasks involving affective and embodied forms of engagement. In particular, Glenn (1992) points out how narratives and assumptions concerning the nature of reproductive labor undergird justifications of reproductive tasks as distributed unequally along the lines of gender and race. According to Glenn, "racial ideology is not necessary to explain or justify exploitation, not for lack of racism, but because the justification for inequality does not have to be elaborated in specifically racial terms: instead it can be cast in terms of differences in training, skill, or education" (33). In this way, Glenn points out that reproductive labor constitutes a gendered and racialized form in terms of the meaning that is ascribed to the characteristics of specific tasks, which, in turn, creates a reference for justification of the work's devaluation. On this basis, socially reproductive labor as a gendered and racialized form is theorized as articulated in terms of the work's characteristics that typically involve varied kinds of service and concomitant forms of affective and embodied engagement.

Further, in addition to the theory pointing out the characteristics of specific tasks to create a reference for work as a gendered and racialized form, socially reproductive labor is discussed in terms of its organization as developed against the context of modern liberalism and concomitant forms of imperial domination. Focusing on the context of domestic labor, Bartkowski (2019) argues that "across various colonial and postcolonial contexts, women's work in the so-called domestic sphere has symbolically as well as materially furthered imperial expansion, both culturally and territorially" (68). In line with the work of Ann Laura Stoler (2006), Bartkowski (2019) points out how reproductive labor operates in the "domains of the intimate" in order to serve imperial forms of domination (68). By extension, this perspective concerning socially reproductive labor as pertaining to intimate spheres of life and, in turn, undergirding imperial domination aligns with Marte-Wood and Santos (2021) who point out content moderation as a specifically harmful form of "care work" organized under contemporary neo-colonial circuits of labor (110). In response, Bartkowski (2019), in line with the work of Vora (2015), unpacks how arrangements in socially reproductive labor as devised against the context of modern liberalism and concomitant imperial domination create varied forms of harmful labor conditions that operate in the seclusion of private and intimate spheres

of life. For instance, Bartkowski discusses how migrant domestic workers in the U.S. context were required to assimilate into the hegemonic cultural mores and suppress "any evidence of cultural, class, or racial difference" (68). In addition, Vora (2012) unpacks how the category of "labor" has been discursively construed against the context of imperial domination and the abolition of enslaved or unfree labor (692). By proxy, Vora points out how labor has been discursively construed in relation to assumptions and narratives concerning gender and race that served to enshrine a hierarchy in value between distinct kinds of work and obscure any associated forms of coercion (692). In this way, reproductive labor as a gendered and racialized form is stressed to emerge from and normalize harmful and expropriative labor arrangements as devised under modern liberalism and associated forms of imperial domination.

In response to studies concerning how socially reproductive labor is culturally and historically organized into harmful circuits of labor, the contemporary contexts of globalization and neoliberal capitalism constitute a reference for theory focused on how labor circuits in social reproduction are currently restructured. On a general level, Briggs (2017) in line with others, points out how neoliberalism as an arrangement in political economy diminishes social welfare and relegates socially reproductive labor onto individuals and, or families as a private concern (8-9). To this point, Fraser (2018) elaborates by arguing that under the neoliberal arrangement of privatization and commodification of reproductive labor, the effect becomes to "displace" it (34). In this way, Fraser outlines how reproductive labor under neoliberal forms of globalization becomes displaced "from richer to poorer families, from the Global North to the Global South" (34). In addition, this form of displacement of socially reproductive labor that is based on the neoliberal arrangements in political economy is pointed out to reflect on a discursive level. To this point, the historical and cultural context of neoliberal globalization is stressed to sustain the relegation of reproductive tasks onto distinctly disenfranchised groups in part on what is discussed above as the co-optation of discourses and endeavors for emancipation (Fraser 2018, 33; Melamed 2006, 1). In particular, as Fraser notes, the result is "a "progressive" neoliberalism that celebrates "diversity," meritocracy, and "emancipation" while dismantling social protections and re-externalizing social reproduction" (33). In this way, under the context of neoliberal globalization, reproductive labor is stressed as relegated to a private responsibility on the level of political economy, which is discursively enshrined in terms of co-optation of movements for emancipation against hierarchies in terms of gender, race, and others that culturally and historically normalize reproductive tasks as devalued.

In response, the above-discussed studies concerning content moderation outsourcing reflect in the discussion on socially reproductive labor as restructured under the current context

of globalized neoliberal capitalism. On a general level, as Bartkowski (2019) points out, the historical and cultural arrangements in socially reproductive labor could be observed as the conditions of possibility for the contemporary organization of outsourced content moderation work (68). In response, the way in which cultural and historical arrangements in reproductive labor create the conditions of possibility for contemporary organization of content moderation outsourcing could be observed in terms of the work's characteristics, function, and organization. On the level of the works' characteristics, content moderation reflects socially reproductive labor based on the way it requires an affective, embodied, and intimate engagement. Further, the current organization of content moderation in terms of transnational outsourcing intersects with the way socially reproductive tasks have been restructured under the context of a globalized neoliberal political economy. As Fraser (2018) points out, the contemporary organization of reproductive labor is characterized by "displacement," which reflects in terms of how content moderation is currently outsourced from localities of what is termed as the global north to specific places of the majority world (34). Lastly, content moderation reflects a form of reproductive labor in terms of its function of re-creating a space for social participation and its commodification under the current social media platforms (Gillespie 2018a, 2018b; Jereza 2021, 9). In response, I then situate my study based on the ways in which content moderation outsourcing intersects with the existing debate on socially reproductive labor as culturally and historically devalued. In turn, in what follows I address how outsourced content moderation as framed under the above-outlined discursive contexts reveals how socially reproductive labor is restructured as devalued in terms of the ideological and technological context of the neoliberal platform economy.

Chapter 2: Framing outsourced content moderation under the techno-discursive context of Meta

> increasingly platform managers are sensing a need to demonstrate their commitment to content moderation. Still, platforms continue to reveal little about their process, or how big a problem it is – Tarleton Gillespie

> These technologies are quite explicitly termed "enchanted"— that is, within technoliberal modernity, there is a desire to attribute magic to techno-objects – Neda Atanasoski and Kalindi Vora

In this chapter, I address how outsourced content moderation intersects with socially reproductive labor as culturally and historically devalued under the technological and discursive context of the platform corporation Meta. I turn to the context of Meta since it exemplifies a dominant social media platform corporation that requires the labor of content moderation and, as documented, perpetuates the present-day exploitative and harmful organization of the work (Perrigo 2022a; Gillespie 2020). Simultaneously, since Meta is publicly and legally contested in response to various instances of socially and publicly detrimental consequences of its platforms, the corporation publishes promotional materials to legitimize itself (Gillespie 2018a, 2020). It is in this material that Meta publishes with the intent to legitimize itself that the platform corporation construes frames in order to communicate the work of content moderation to the public. On this basis, I unpack how the frames under which Meta communicates the work of content moderation reflect a specific facet of the form that social reproductive contradiction takes under the ideological context of neoliberalism and the technological milieu of the platform economy.

More specifically, in order to unpack the frames under which Meta communicates the work of content moderation, I focus on its online promotional material in relation to the technological features of its platform Facebook. To this end, I examine Meta's online promotional material under its "transparency center," and Meta's "research" web section in relation to Facebook's technological feature of the 'flag.' At Meta's website and its transparency center, I unpack the headlines, descriptions, and visual accompaniments that create frames under which the platform corporation communicates the work of content moderation. From this discursive context, I select material that makes a reference to content

moderation by discussing its value, significance, and normative visions concerning the future of this task. Further, I turn to the design feature of the flag that shapes the current organization of content moderation and is documented as a technological aspect that is common across a variety of contemporary digital platforms (Gillespie and Crawford 2016). In response, I unpack how the platform's design choices create a specific technological context that informs the corresponding discourse on the work of outsourced content moderation. On this basis, I situate the frames under which Meta communicates the work of content moderation as informed by the technological and ideological context of neoliberalism and the platform economy.

Based on the above-outlined material, I address my general question across the following three sections. In the first section, I examine how the 'transparency center' develops a frame that identifies the work of content moderation as a promise of public safety (frame 1). In the second section, I unpack how the 'flag' serves as a technological feature that mediates the work of content moderation as currently organized. Finally, in the third section, I address how Meta's online promotional material construes a normative frame that communicates content moderation as a work that should be technologically automated. In this way, I unpack how the two frames: (1) a promise of public safety and (2) technological automation, are based on a co-optation of discourses that would otherwise disrupt the neoliberal logic underwriting how platforms under Meta operate. On this basis, I unpack my argument that framing outsourced content moderation under Meta reveals a dimension of the form that social reproductive contradiction takes under the neoliberal platform economy.

2.1 Frame 1: content moderation as a promise of public safety under Meta's "transparency center"

Meta's current "transparency center" is a continuation of its transparency report that was first published in 2013 and subsequently formed into a website to claim for the corporation an identity of a 'publicly responsible' enterprise. The documents published under the transparency report and the current center constitute Meta's public relations material in response to various and ongoing excesses of its platforms and the harms to public life that the platform's designs and operation involve (Gillespie 2020, 1). As currently documented, Facebook and other platforms under Meta (Instagram, WhatsApp) due to their design and implementation afford themselves to various forms of 'misuse' that may hinder critical forms of civic participation,

exacerbate varied socio-political conflicts, or carry damaging impact on specifically vulnerable groups who participate on the given platforms transnationally (Roberts 2019; Gillespie 2018a; Crawford and Gillespie 2016). As a result, Meta and previously Facebook has been contested over its manner of content moderation, resulting, in numerous and ongoing lawsuits or public hearings (Kari 2024; Gillespie 2020; Gillespie 2018a, 2018b). Therefore, in order to sustain its current economic model, Meta has been forced to present itself as 'publicly responsible,' which necessitates addressing the task known as content moderation. By extension, even though Meta to a large extent outsources content moderation to places affording low labor costs and, in turn, limits its liability to this task, the present "transparency center" reflects how the company simultaneously identifies with the task in order to legitimize itself (Gillespie 2018a, 201; Roberts 2019, 38). To this end, Meta's transparency center draws a frame that communicates content moderation as a promise of public safety (frame 1), in order to present the company as publicly responsible despite the various and ongoing excesses, hazards, and harms to public life that its economic model and platforms generate.

In this way, Meta's transparency center could be generally observed to emerge in response to the way that content moderation intersects with socially reproductive labor as discursively construed and organized under the technological and ideological context of the neoliberal platform economy. If the transparency center presents content moderation under a promise of public safety, this frame emerges to enshrine what Fraser (2018) discusses as the inherent contradiction that socially reproductive tasks entail under distinct contexts of capitalist societies (22).[9] In particular, what Fraser theorizes as the social reproductive contradiction is sustained insofar as the consequent inequality is normalized in terms of labor as culturally and historically devalued, such as, by way of gendered and racialized hierarchies (Bhattacharya 2018, 3). In the context of outsourced content moderation, the associated form of social reproductive contradiction could be observed as expressed in terms of the existing and emerging excesses in content circulation that result in public and legal contestation of Meta's platforms and their model developed upon the commodification of online social participation. In this way, Meta's transparency center and its frame that puts forth content moderation as a

[9]As discussed above, according to Fraser (2018), socially reproductive contradiction describes the way that "on the one hand, social reproduction is a condition of possibility for sustained capital accumulation; on the other hand, capitalism's orientation to unlimited accumulation tends to destabilize the very processes of social reproduction on which it relies" (22).

promise of public safety emerges in order to enshrine what is theorized as the social reproductive contradiction and the form it takes under the neoliberal platform economy.

To this end, Meta's frame that communicates content moderation as a promise of public safety is readily expressed in terms of the title and headline at the transparency center's homepage. First, the title of "transparency center" posits the contents of the website vis-à-vis what van Doorn (2015) theorizes as the "neoliberal audit culture," under which subjects/organizations legitimize themselves by way of performing or discursively constructing their identity as accountable (361-362). According to van Doorn, under neoliberal audit culture, "transparency" constitutes a criterion under which accountability and concomitant social and public legitimacy are articulated (362). In this way, the general title posits the contents of this website to substantiate Meta's legitimacy, which is in the current context documented as required in part by its users, commercial parties, or the public in general (Gillespie 2018a, 5). In addition, this general perspective is specified by the headline on the center's home page that describes Meta as "committed to giving people a voice and keeping them safe" (Meta n.d.). By extension, the title "transparency," which forwards the center as one that should support Meta's accountability is specified with the main headline that posits the corporation as protecting a specific form of public values. In this way, the title and the headline of Meta's transparency center creates a foundation for the frame that communicates content moderation as a promise of public safety.

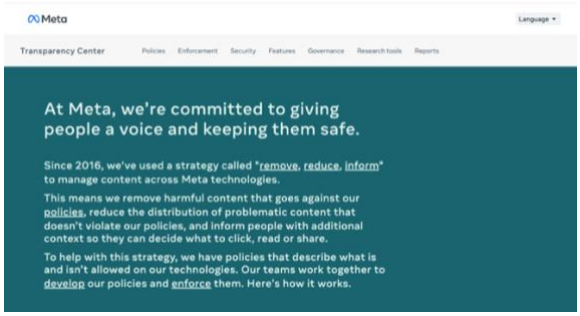

Figure 1. Transparency Center "Home page."

On this basis, Meta's framing of content moderation under a promise of public safety with the intent to publicly legitimize itself reflects a discursive co-optation of values that could be observed as associated with tasks of social reproduction. As Rodríguez (2019) argues, co-optation is a discursive strategy that is characteristic of neoliberal contexts in which the dominant ideology works "by encouraging that which upholds its dominance […] and co-

opting that which could be potentially disruptive" (116). In this way, in order for Meta to protect its dominant position as a social media platform, the corporation relies on co-opting and identifying with values and discourses concerning social reproduction that would otherwise contradict and disrupt its economic model and operation. In particular, Meta's identification with values associated with socially reproductive tasks could be observed in terms of the above-noted headline that claims a commitment to "giving people a voice and keeping them safe" (Meta n.d.). In this way, Meta identifies itself as motivated by distinctly public principles which, in turn, enables the corporation to co-opt values that have been associated with tasks of social reproduction. As Fraser (2018) points out, reproductive labor as a gendered form rendered such tasks as 'outside' formalized spheres of economic production and "remunerated "reproductive" activities in the coin of "love" and "virtue," while compensating "productive work" in that of money" (23). On this level, Meta's introduction to its transparency center could be observed to co-opt socially reproductive labor as a specifically gendered form together with the values that are associated with it. As a result, the headline introduces Meta's efforts to legitimize itself based on obscuring the company's economic imperatives (in terms of monetary gain) by way of identification with values that are associated with tasks that are socially reproductive in character.

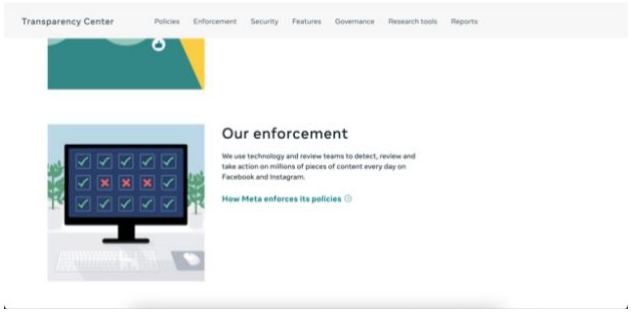

Figure 2. Transparency Center "Home page."

On this basis, if the frame that conveys content moderation as a promise of public safety is drawn on the co-optation of discourses and values associated with socially reproductive tasks, it requires correspondingly obscure the realities documented to characterize this context of work. At the transparency center, what is known as the work of content moderation is discussed in more detail after scrolling down on the website's homepage. Here, rather than content moderation, this task is described as "content review" and "guidelines enforcement" (Meta n.d.). On a general level, this description simplifies and contradicts what Roberts (2019) identifies as the qualities that characterize the task of content moderation. According to

Roberts, content moderation involves evaluation of the content's "nature […] intent […] unintended consequences […] and its meaning" (34). In this way, Roberts stresses the complexity and critical public significance of content moderation as a form of labor that involves interpretation and evaluation of the content on multiple levels. In response, this quality of content moderation that situates the moderator as a subject of labor which entails a critical public function is obscured under Meta's description of the work as a form of "content review" and "guidelines enforcement" (Meta n.d.). To this point, the terms of review and enforcement then posit the workers or technologies as performing a task that rather than content moderation involves a mere application of predetermined rules and guidelines. In this way, Meta dissociates the labor involved in content moderation from its public significance in order to secure and ascribe the public quality of content moderation to its own company/brand identity.

In addition to the description of content moderation as an enforcement of predetermined rules that disqualifies the complexity of the labor involved, Meta includes imagery that contradicts the material realities documented to characterize the work's current organization. This is exemplified by an image next to the title "our enforcement" (Meta n.d.), which depicts a computer screen in a setting that resembles a conventional office environment (see fig. 2). This image of a conventional office space then serves to cover over what is documented as in varied ways harmful material conditions in the present-day organization of content moderation work (Roberts 2019, 45-46). To this point, ethnographic studies and journalism documented content moderation as undertaken not only in conventional office spaces but also in varied temporary rented facilities or in the case of crowdsourcing, the work is pointed out as done in any place with sufficient connection to the internet (Roberts 2019, 45; Gray and Suri 2019, 53; Perrigo 2022a). In this way, Meta's visual representation of the work, in addition to the description that disqualifies the public character of content moderation as a form of labor, then obscures the material realities that are documented to characterize the work's contemporary organization.

In turn, the way in which Meta disqualifies content moderation as a form of labor together with obscuring the material realities of this work then undergirds the frame under which the corporation identifies itself with a promise of public safety. On the pages titled to explicate how the practice of "enforcement" works, it is possible to find texts that describe Meta deploying a large number of content moderators globally who ensure safety on its platforms (Meta n.d.). This description of the human content moderation workforce is accompanied by pages that discuss Meta's technology as the key deployed agent for the task (Meta n.d.). In these pages, Meta draws an emphasis on the quantity of workers and

technological efficiency as markers that should exemplify the initial promise of public safety on the platforms. To this point, in order for a quantity of workers and technological efficiency to support the promise of public safety, these markers could be observed to rely on the above-discussed conception of content moderation as "content review" and "guidelines enforcement" (Meta n.d.). That is, a conception of this work that dissociates public safety as contingent on content moderation as a form of labor which is inevitably composed of the moderators' material conditions and skills that inform the possibility of engagement in the complexity of the task (Roberts 2019; Jereza 2021; Bartkowski 2019). In this way, Meta's frame that holds content moderation as a promise of public safety rests at once on a disqualification and obfuscation of content moderation as a form of labor and its current organization.

In response, the way that Meta describes content moderation as a form of work to support the frame that communicates a promise of public safety rests on and reifies how socially reproductive labor is theorized as racialized. In particular, socially reproductive labor is theorized as racialized based on a recognition of skill, consequent distribution of autonomy, and the kind of relations that the conception of work forges as a result. As Glenn (1992) notes, "the division between "skilled" and "unskilled" jobs is exactly where the racial division typically falls" (37). As I outlined above, Meta draws a distinction of skill in content moderation by its description that posits the task as a form of "review" and "guidelines enforcement" (Meta n.d.). In this description, Meta then positions the moderator as a subject of labor who only performs the task of applying predetermined rules and guidelines. By extension, as noted above, this description dissociates the public significance of content moderation as contingent on the labor that content moderation involves.[10] In this way, based on this framing that positions content moderation as a form of unskilled labor, Meta then relies on content moderation as a racialized form of reproductive labor in order to identify itself as a publicly accountable company which is exemplified via technological efficiency and quantity of deployed workers. As a result, based on the discursive distinction that disqualifies the task of content moderation, Meta's frame that holds content moderation as a promise of public safety relies on and reifies content moderation as a specifically racialized form of socially reproductive labor.

[10] This framing and associated conception of content moderation broadly reflect what Jodi Melamed (2015) theorizes as the process of racialization "in which forms of humanity are separated (made "distinct") so that they may be "interconnected" in terms that feed capital" (78).

In this way, Meta's public justification under the frame concerning a promise of public safety reflects one level at which the form of social reproductive contradiction that content moderation expresses is discursively obscured and normalized. As I outlined in this section, the way in which Meta enshrines the form of socially reproductive contradiction that content moderation entails rests on a discursive form of co-optation. By way of framing content moderation as a promise of public safety, Meta co-opts narratives that, in turn, enable the corporation to identify with qualities and values associated with socially reproductive tasks. In particular, the way in which Meta co-opts the values associated with social reproduction rests on a disqualification of content moderation into a form of labor that could be exemplified via a quantity of workers and technological efficiency. In this way, Meta dissociates public safety as contingent on the labor that the task of moderation involves, which posits outsourced content moderation as a specifically racialized form of labor.[11] As a result, Meta's framing of outsourced content moderation as a promise of public safety reifies how social reproductive contradiction is enshrined via forms of discursive co-optation that are drawn in response to the context of the neoliberal platform economy.

2.2 Outsourced content moderation as a "promise of public safety" in terms of its technological context

In this section, I zoom in on Meta's platform Facebook to unpack how the frame that communicates content moderation as a promise of public safety is developed against a specific technological context. Facebook's technological feature that is designed for the purpose of content moderation is the "flag" with its current version that is represented by three dots next to a piece of content (Facebook n.d.). This is a feature that Gillespie and Crawford (2016) point out is not unique to Facebook but rather is common across contemporary social media platforms (411). In particular, the flag or features that fulfill the same function with alternate

[11] What I refer to as a form of racialized labor I read in reference to what Atanasoski and Vora (2019) theorize as the "surrogate human effect" that constitutes the "racial grammar of techno-liberalism" (6). The surrogate human effect refers to a relation that undergirds the seeming autonomy of the liberal subject, even though this 'autonomy' remains dependent on the unfreedom of the surrogate (worker, technology, forced laborer) (5). On this basis, the narratives that serve to normalize or obscure this form of relation in a specific distribution of labor, I read to constitute it as 'racialized.'

visual representation have been built into the second-generation platforms since their inception (Gillespie and Crawford 2016, 411). In this way, the flag and its alternate versions could be observed to reflect the context of the neoliberal platform economy and represent a design choice that constitutes a technological context under which the work of content moderation is currently conceived and organized. In response, I unpack how the flag mediates the process of content moderation by distinguishing how each party involved is positioned to relate to the other in a specific way. On this basis, I address how Meta's frame that posits content moderation as a promise of public safety is informed by the way in which the feature of the flag mediates the process of content moderation.

Generally, the flag constitutes a design feature that in its characteristics could be observed as informed by the logic underwriting the broader ideological context of neoliberalism. In the explanation concerning the emergence of content moderation as a form of work, Roberts (2019) points out that the work is necessitated by the platforms' design which excludes any form of pre-screening of content that is uploaded (33). Therefore, if the platform's economic model rests on the commodification of user data then elimination of pre-screening constitutes a "business decision," serving to maximize generation of data and, thereby, monetary value from user participation (Roberts 2019, 33). In addition, Gillespie and Crawford (2016) maintain that the flag creates a socio-technical context that obscures the possibility for disagreements and negotiation concerning what is "offensive or acceptable," resulting in decisions made in ways that are not receptible to the users (413). By extension, the flag constitutes a feature that mediates the process of content moderation in a way that qualitatively limits the form and scope of public discourse on the platforms (Gillespie and Crawford 2016). In this way, the logic underwriting the broader ideological context of neoliberalism is expressed in terms of how the flag emerges as a feature in response to the platform's design aimed at maximization of data generation with the subsequent effect of limiting and distorting the scope and form of public discourse.

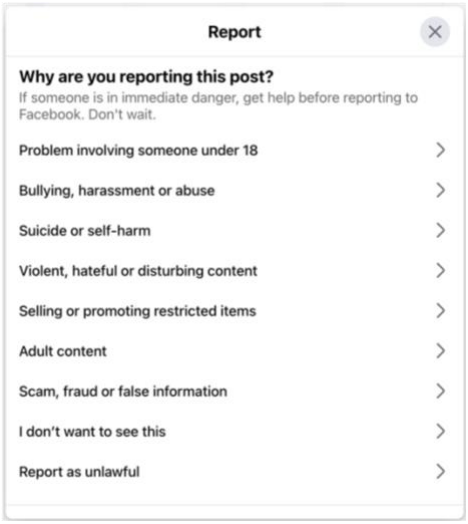

Figure 3. Facebook. Feature for reporting violating content for users.

More specifically, what is pointed out as a quality of the flag that limits the scope and form of public discourse could be observed to be based on the way that the feature mediates responsibility between each party involved in the process of content moderation. Firstly, the flag situates the user with responsibility in content moderation that spans to the extent of identifying and reporting possibly inappropriate content (Gillespie and Crawford 2016, 412). As it is visible on Facebook's current design, the user can identify possibly violating content in terms of specific predetermined categories and report it (see fig. 3). At the point when a user reports a piece of content, the flag confirms their responsibility as fulfilled and the user could choose to be notified about the final decision concerning the content's evaluation (Facebook n.d.). After a piece of content is reported, it may be evaluated either automatically or, depending on the content's nature, the piece is channeled to a typically outsourced content moderation worker (Gillespie 2020). In this way, the flag limits the scope of public discourse by foreclosing a possibility for negotiation over what constitutes (in)appropriate content, while, at the same time, the feature also supports the relegation of the responsibility for content's final evaluation to an obfuscated and outsourced content moderation worker. In turn, this socio-technical configuration between the user and the moderator serves Meta as the platform owner to withdraw its responsibility in the socio-politically complex process of content moderation.

Based on the way that the flag distinguishes responsibility between all the parties involved in the process of content moderation, the feature constitutes a socio-technical context undergirding Meta's public justifications. As I discussed above, Meta's transparency center frames content moderation as a 'promise of public safety' in order to identify itself as publicly

responsible. To this point, Meta construes and supports the frame of 'public safety' based on examples concerning technological efficiency and a quantity of outsourced content moderators (Meta n.d.). This form of Meta's public legitimization is developed against the socio-technical context that is informed by how the flag mediates the process of content moderation and the associated concerns of responsibility involved. As Gillespie and Crawford (2016) observe, the flag withdraws the possibility of public negotiation and disagreement by obscuring the process of content's final evaluation (413). In turn, it is based on this quality of the flag that obscures the process of content's final evaluation from public discourse that the feature supports Meta's conception of content moderation work as "guidelines enforcement" (Meta n.d.). Like the working of the flag, content moderation posited as guidelines enforcement supports the frame of public safety as contingent on the application of predetermined rules rather than a possibility for disagreement and negotiation. In this way, based on the way that the flag mediates the process of content moderation and distinguishes responsibility between all the parties involved, the feature creates a socio-technical context against which Meta construes the frame of public safety upon disqualification of content moderation as a form of labor.

In response, it is possible to observe how the flag mediates content moderation in a manner that is tied to socially reproductive labor as culturally and historically devalued in terms of the ways in which this form of work is conventionally organized. In particular, the flag constitutes a feature that limits the scope of public discourse on social media platforms in terms of its quality that undergirds how outsourced content moderation is currently organized in line with socially reproductive tasks as conventionally occluded from public appearance. If the flag obscures the process of content's final evaluation, the feature then not only serves Meta's privileged position to make editorial decisions without public interjection as Gillespie and Crawford (2016) point out, but also supports relegation of the labor and associated responsibility in content moderation by way of transnational outsourcing (Atanasoski and Vora 2015). Meta's practice of large-scale outsourcing of content moderation work to places that offer low-labor costs finds support in the flag and the platform's consequent interface that makes it publicly imperceptible to recognize who and how undertakes the work. In response, the feature expresses how the limitations and obstructions to public discourse under the socio-technical context of the social media platform are contingent on the way content moderation takes form in terms of reproductive labor as conventionally occluded from public appearance.

However, if the neoliberal model under which second generation platforms organize the task of content moderation continues to generate excesses in content circulation, it disturbs

how this task is configured as occluded.[12] By extension and in response to content moderation as an obfuscated labor under the socio-technical context of the platform, it creates for a distinct form of the way that socially reproductive labor could be observed as racialized. To this point, Atanasoski and Vora (2015) argue that the work of content moderation exemplifies how "the transparency of the commodity as dull or dirty labor is racialized in the ways in which it affirms a particular notion of human freedom, leisure, and happiness emerging from imperial modes of liberal governance" (28). On the one hand, this form of racialization of labor then rests on the way that the flag and the consequent platform interface obfuscates the moderator, rendering the labor and choices made as publicly imperceptible, or what Atanasoski and Vora term a "transparency of the commodity" (28). On the other hand, the user as a subject of the "human freedom, leisure, and happiness" (28) that obfuscation of content moderation affirms is in this context informed by the design of the platform as a technology that commodifies and gives form to public discourse. By extension, the working of Meta's platforms and their neoliberal model exemplifies how that affirms a kind of sociality that remains in varied ways 'disturbed' by the 'excesses' that the current organization of content moderation generates.[13] In this way, insofar as content moderation is organized in such a way that the platform generates excesses in content circulation, the position of the moderator as a subject of a specifically racialized labor remains disturbed and in possible need of public justification.

As a result, the feature of the flag that at once obfuscates and posits the content moderator as the responsible party for content's final evaluation, necessitates Meta to discursively legitimize itself at sites, such as the transparency center. As I discussed above, due to the ongoing harm to public and social life that is generated by the working of Meta's platforms, the corporation is publicly and legally required to legitimize itself. To this point, the current transparency center highlights how Meta legitimizes itself by way of co-opting discourses that may be disruptive to the logic upon which its platforms operate. In particular, Meta's frame that posits content moderation as a promise of public safety reflects how the company co-opts and identifies with values associated with tasks that are socially reproductive

[12] Sarrah Kassem (2023) characterizes the second-generation platforms as those that developed with the advent of Web 2.0 and the possibility for the generation of profit through "the commodification of data" (45).

[13] I use single quotation marks for the terms "disturbed" and "excesses" to signal their specific meaning. I intend to specify that what is socially excessive is not given but rather in this context takes shape in response to what becomes disruptive to the neoliberal governance of the discussed platforms. As documented, current digital social media platforms generate "excesses" with severe and destructive social, public, or political consequences.

in character. To this end, as I discussed above, Meta construes and supports its identity as publicly responsible upon a conception of content moderation as a form of unskilled labor that could be exemplified by technological efficiency and quantity of deployed workers (Meta n.d.). In response, I maintain that this conception of content moderation as a form of unskilled labor acquires support in the platform's socio-technical context that via the feature of the flag obscures the outsourced content moderator as the party that bears responsibility for the content's final evaluation. By extension, if the socio-technical context of Meta obfuscates content moderation as a form of labor that becomes publicly receptible only through its 'failure,' this disposition, in turn, requires Meta to co-opt discourses upon which the corporation construes its identity as publicly responsible.[14] As a result, Meta's co-optation of discourses upon which the corporation legitimizes itself as publicly responsible reflects the way that the form of social reproductive contradication which content moderation expresses is enshrined in reference to the flag, constituting a feature that is exemplary of the neoliberal platform economy as a techno-discursive context.

2.3 Frame 2: Content moderation as a work that should be technologically automated

In this section, I focus on how the first frame that intends to legitimize Meta by way of a promise for public safety rests on what I observe as a second frame that puts forth a normative vision holding content moderation as a work that should be technologically automated. Broadly, this normative frame could be observed as emerging in response to the way that content moderation is currently organized and discursively construed. According to Gillespie (2020), AI and automation technologies serve as a discursive frame under which platform corporations aim to justify themselves despite the ongoing harms and publicly detrimental consequences that their manner of operation and current models for content moderation involve (1-2). In response, in what follows I unpack how the frame holding content moderation as a work that should be automated undergirds what I discuss above as a co-optation of discourses

[14] I use single quotation marks to specify the meaning of failure. By failure, I refer to an instance of when content is moderated in a way that disturbs the neoliberal model of the platform. Therefore, it is not a failure in content moderation that rests upon an actual form of public engagement.

concerning values of social reproduction in terms of which Meta identifies as publicly responsible. In this way, I address how the normative frame positing content moderation as a work that should be automated under which Meta supports its public legitimacy reveals a dimension of the form that social reproductive contradiction takes under the neoliberal platform economy as an ideological and technological context.

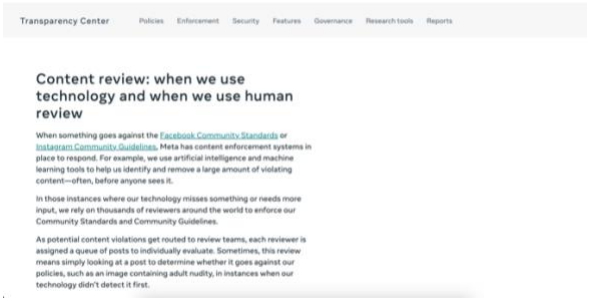

Figure 4. Transparency Center. "Content review."

Generally, the frame that posits content moderation as a work that should be automated is developed in Meta's texts that convey a vision for the future of this function and work. Meta's transparency center implies the frame by its emphasis on "technology," whereas the website's research section articulates the frame explicitly in terms of technological innovation and its potential for the future of this task (Meta n.d.). First, as part of the transparency center, on the page of "content review," Meta introduces technology, such as, 'AI,' as the agent that undertakes the majority of the work while positing human reviewers as standby support (see fig. 4).[15] By extension, this phrasing reflects how automation constitutes under Meta an ideologically preferred option even though, as documented, it remains impossible to render the task of content moderation fully informatic (Gillespie 2020; Marte-Wood and Santos 2021). On this basis, Meta further develops its vision for automation of content moderation under the research section of its website. In this section, in addition to the transparency center, Meta draws the frame positing content moderation as a work that should be automated by way of explaining a promise that technological innovation holds for the future of this task.

[15] I use single quotation marks for "AI" in order to specify the term as inappropriate in relation to the kind of technology that this term conventionally describes. I follow the work of Kate Crawford (2021), pointing out how AI is "neither artificial nor intelligent" in order to shed light on the material basis of this technology which is composed of human-embodied labor and a broad range of material support systems (8).

More specifically, Meta draws the promise of technological innovation to frame content moderation as a work that should be automated in its research blog post that explains what is termed as a potential of "generalized AI" (Meta 2021) for the future of this work. In the first part of the blog post, Meta describes how 'AI' despite its limitations already serves a key role in efforts to keep platforms safe for the users (Meta 2021). At the end of the first paragraph, after introducing the limitations of the current AI systems for upkeeping 'public safety' on the platforms,' Meta points out the following:

> Groups of bespoke systems result in high compute resources and maintenance complexity, which slows the process of updating systems to quickly address new, evolving challenges. But today, one of the biggest challenges in our integrity work is to build not more bespoke AI systems but fewer, more powerful ones.

This quote introduces the direction for the rest of the text which puts forth the term "generalized AI" to denote a technology that holds a promise for resolving what Meta introduces as technical issues in content moderation and, thereby, a concern of the corporation's "integrity" (Meta 2021). Based on this introductory line of the blog post, Meta then identifies its 'integrity' as a problem that is technological in character. On this basis of reducing a conception of integrity to a technological issue, Meta's blog post proceeds to explain how what is termed as "generalized AI" offers a promise of addressing ongoing issues in content moderation and the public concerns that it entails (Meta 2021). In this way, based on Meta's conception of its integrity as a technological problem, the frame that holds content moderation as a work that should be automated emerges to undergird the way that the company discursively legitimizes itself under the above-discussed frame, communicating a promise of public safety.

On this basis, the way in which Meta relies on a narrative concerning technological innovation in order to publicly legitimize itself is tied to the ideological context associated with the neoliberal platform economy. As discussed above, Atanasoski and Vora (2019) theorize technology as discursively construed in a way that serves as a "political alibi" by putting forth a promise to transcend the inequalities undergirding present transnational contexts of neoliberal capitalist production (4). To this point, in order to unpack the intersection between labor and technology, Atanasoski and Vora theorize a corresponding ideology of techno-liberalism (4). In particular, techno-liberalism is theorized as a political alibi insofar as "technological futures tied to capitalist development iterate a fantasy that as machines, algorithms, and artificial intelligence take over the dull, dirty, repetitive, and even reproductive labor performed by racialized, gendered, and colonized workers in the past, the full humanity of the (already)

human subject will be freed for creative capacities" (Atanasoski and Vora 2019, 4). In response, under techno-liberalism, technology and its innovations are construed to articulate a promise of taking on the culturally and historically degraded forms of labor and, thereby, transcend of the unequal relations of labor that are required and exacerbated by neoliberal contexts of capitalist production. By extension, technology is under techno-liberalism discursively construed to offer a promise of what is termed as the 'full humanity' of the liberal subject, which Meta as a platform corporation articulates in its blog post as an 'integrity.' In this way, the frame that posits content moderation as a work that should be automated rests on a techno-liberal narrative, offering a political alibi to the way content moderation as a form of reproductive labor is currently organized under the neoliberal platform economy.

More specifically, Meta's blog post reveals how the frame that holds content moderation as a work that should be automated acquires its (techno-liberal) political currency based on a specific conception of technology. To this point, Meta's blog post draws on a conception of "AI" and "generalized AI," which identifies either a "tool," "technology" or "system" that Meta discusses across the document as holding the promise for solving concerns over safety at its platforms (Meta 2021). On this basis, the blog post identifies AI as follows:

> Over the past five years, AI has become one of the most effective tools for reducing the prevalence of violating content, or the amount of violating content that people see on our platforms. (Meta 2021)

In addition, in this blog post Meta further construes AI as capable of learning and performing tasks without immediate human assistance (Meta 2021), thereby constituting a technology as an entity with a specifically defined autonomy. On a general level, this conception of AI then aligns with what Kate Crawford (2021) identifies as the current dominant conception of AI based on "the ideology of Cartesian dualism […] where AI is narrowly understood as disembodied intelligence" (7). In response, Crawford maintains that AI is "neither artificial nor intelligent," but rather constitutes a "registry of power" (8), according to which social relations and that of labor are distributed (Tacheva and Ramasubramanian 2023, 8). In turn, this conception of AI as a disembodied intelligence serves to discursively and technologically obscure the forms of embodied human labor upon which the existing systems of AI are documented to operate (McQuillan 2022, 13; Tacheva and Ramasubramanian 2023, 8). By extension, this general conception of AI as a form of disembodied intelligence, which constitutes in a specific way 'autonomously' functioning technology, supports how Meta

discursively justifies its practices under a narrative that is theorized as techno-liberal in character.

Further, on the basis of this general conception of AI, Meta's blog post draws a techno-liberal narrative and corresponding political alibi upon a discursive construction of technology as specifically 'enchanted.' Atanasoski and Vora (2019) stress that techno-liberalism rests on imaginaries of technologies as enchanted based on a desire for "emancipation from manual, repetitive, and unimaginative labor by turning the tools of work into the worker as pails and brooms (or the modern-day Roomba) move on their own" (18). By extension, enchanted technologies are under techno-liberalism imagined to replace the worker undertaking culturally and historically degraded tasks, such as the tasks identified as socially reproductive in character. In particular, Atanasoski and Vora unpack how technology is conceived as enchanted based on a quality to be at once in complete control of the human while performing tasks without the need for immediate human assistance or even with the capacity to intuit human needs or desires (6). In turn, technology is then construed to take on the role of the historically "unfree and invisible labor" drawn upon gendered and racialized hierarchies that undergird the seeming autonomy of the liberal subject (Atanasoski and Vora 2019, 6).[16] In this way, Meta draws on the general conception of AI as a disembodied intelligence in order to construe a form of enchanted technology that offers a promise to resolve the persisting 'excesses' in content circulation that the design of its platforms continues to generate.

More specifically, the way in which Meta construes technology as enchanted reflects in the promise that the company articulates by the term 'generalized AI.' To this point, the blog post describes a motivation for generalized AI as developed in response to the need to reach and moderate up to "billion posts per day" (Meta 2021). In this way, on the one hand, generalized AI is construed as a technology that can undertake the task of content moderation at a scope that is imagined as exceeding the labor of human content moderation workers. On the other hand, the blog post describes generalized AI as follows:

> More broadly, generalization is the path toward more intelligent AI systems that mimic the way humans learn. Rather than treating different tasks as completely

[16] What is meant by "seeming" autonomy of the liberal subject should specify that this form of autonomy is contingent on varied forms of (unfree) labor of others that is disavowed (Atanasoski and Vora 2019, 6). To this point, in reference to Atanasoski and Vora who draw on the work of Janet Jakobsen, I take guidance in the conception of the autonomous liberal subject as "a particular way to understand and inhabit human being — a subjectivity — in which the individual understands himself to be free when he acts without influence from others" (Jakobsen 2011, 25). This conception of the human as an autonomous liberal subject then obscures and disavows the myriad forms dependency on the labor of others (25).

> separate, our brains can look at an object or piece of content and instantly make connections in ever-changing contexts. Teaching machines to do this well is one of the hardest and most important opportunities in AI. (Meta 2021)

On this level, generalized AI is drawn as a technology that offers a promise to function qualitatively similar to humans by way of developing a sense of "intelligence" that was not possible with its previous versions. On this basis, Meta construes generalized AI as a form of technology that is 'enchanted' based on its capacity to work qualitatively similar to humans but exceed the limits of labor tied to the human (biological) body. As Atanasoski and Vora (2019) note, under a techno-liberal view, technologies acquire their "magic" from the capacity to "be completely controlled by humans, yet […] bypass human thought and labor" (18). In this way, Meta draws on the term generalized AI to denote an enchanted technology upon its promise of transcending the limits of human embodied capacity to think and labor in order to justify itself as publicly responsible.

On this basis, the blog post reveals how technological enchantment as a form of discursive political alibi is construed in response to the logic underwriting the neoliberal platform economy. In particular, the blog post introduces how generalized AI as a form of enchanted technology is motivated by what is implied as a need for scalability. The motivation for scalability is first introduced at the beginning of the text noting that:

> today, one of the biggest challenges in our integrity work is to build not more bespoke AI systems but fewer, more powerful ones. (Meta 2021)

Subsequently, Meta posits generalized AI as offering an answer for the need of scalability as follows:

> Increasingly, we're collapsing tasks, domains, and languages into single, larger systems, which improves systems across multiple dimensions: increasing performance, decreasing system complexity, and boosting iteration speed.

In response, both excerpts, the first stressing the need for powerful systems and the second articulating the quality of integrating a variety of tasks into one system, refer to the quality of scalability. As Gillespie (2020) notes, scalability in the context of content moderation could be observed as generally referring to "how the small can be made to have large effects; or how a process can be proceduralized such that it can be replicated in different contexts, and appear the same" (2). In turn, if under the context of the neoliberal political economy, platform

corporations grew to concentrate power and resources while generating economic value from the commodification of vast amounts of user data, scalability then becomes a quality of justification. In this way, in response to the neoliberal platform economy as an ideological and technological context, Meta construes generalized AI as enchanted upon its quality for scalability in order for the corporation to support the frame of a promise for public safety.

On this basis, Meta's reliance for justification in terms of generalized AI as a form of enchanted technology highlights how content moderation intersects with currently dominant discourses under which socially reproductive tasks are devalued. If Meta construes generalized 'AI' as a form of enchanted technology upon its capacity to bypass human capacities of labor and thereby solve the platform's need for content moderation, this framing identifies the associated form of socially reproductive labor as one that due to the need for scalability requires a technological solution. By extension, this discursive construction of generalized AI as the answer for Meta's continuous need for content moderation at scale reflects Denbow's (2024) argument concerning the devaluation of reproductive tasks under neoliberalism. According to Denbow, under contemporary neoliberal contexts, technological innovations are discursively construed as the preferred option to take on socially reproductive tasks and solve any associated social concerns (4). In consequence, what Denbow theorizes as the reproduction/innovation binary contributes to the way human labor of social reproduction is currently normalized as devalued and organized in harmful conditions (17). The case of Meta highlights how content moderation as a form of socially reproductive labor is construed to require a technological innovation since human labor is posited as insufficient for the scale that is assumed as necessary. In this way, the reproduction/innovation binary reflects in terms of how scalability constitutes a qualitative marker upon which generalized AI as a technological innovation becomes framed to constitute the preferred or only viable option for undertaking the task of content moderation.

In response, it is possible to observe how the frame holding content moderation as a work that should be automated reveals a dimension of the form that social reproductive contradiction takes under the neoliberal platform economy as an ideological and technological context. In particular, in line with Atanasoski and Vora (2019), Meta's framing that posits content moderation as a work that should (or would) be automated reflects how the form of social reproductive contradiction that the current organization of this work expresses is enshrined under a form of techno-liberal alibi. However, as currently documented, content moderation is impossible to fully automate and platform corporations such as, Meta and others rely on the human and embodied labor of (outsourced) moderators (Marte-Wood and Santos

2021; Jereza 2021; Roberts 2019). On this basis, outsourced content moderation could be observed as a specifically racialized form of socially reproductive labor based on the way that its current exploitative and harmful organization is obscured and normalized upon the promise of technological innovation. As a result, if the current organization of content moderation expresses a form of social reproductive contradiction, then Meta's normative frame for the future of this task reveals how specific narratives of technological innovation become construed as a justification that undergirds the logic underwriting the neoliberal platform economy.

2.4 Conclusion

Based on the above analysis, I maintain that outsourced content moderation as framed under the techno-discursive context of Meta reveals a form of social reproductive contradiction through renewed narratives of justification as drawn against the context of the neoliberal platform economy. In particular, I identified two frames under which Meta communicates content moderation in order to publicly legitimize itself. First, based on Meta's "transparency center," I unpacked the first frame that communicates content moderation as a promise of public safety. In turn, I concluded that Meta's framing of content moderation as a promise of public safety is construed upon a specific disqualification of content moderation as a form of labor. In response, the discursive context of the transparency center highlights how Meta co-opts values associated with tasks of social reproduction in order to articulate content moderation as a promise of public safety and legitimize itself. Second, I unpacked how the frame that articulates a promise of public safety is drawn against the socio-technical context of the platform, which I identified as exemplified by the feature of the flag. In response, I maintain that the flag mediates responsibility in the process of content moderation in a manner that creates a technological context, undergirding how Meta publicly legitimizes itself upon disqualification of content moderation as a form of labor. Third, I unpacked how the techno-discursive context of Meta informs the second frame that communicates content moderation as a task that should be technologically automated. In response, I concluded that Meta's framing of content moderation as a work that should be technologically automated articulates a techno-liberal political alibi, undergirding the former frame that communicates a promise of public safety. In this way, both frames, which either posit content moderation as a promise of public

safety (frame 1) and a work that should be technologically automated (frame 2) support Meta's co-optation of values associated with tasks of social reproduction in order to publicly legitimize itself. As a result, I maintain that content moderation as a form of socially reproductive labor is under Meta's framing enshrined as devalued upon a distinct form of discursive co-optation that reflects the broader neoliberal platform economy as an ideological and technological context.

CHAPTER 3: FRAMING CONTENT MODERATION IN THE CONTEXT OF TRANSNATIONAL OUTSOURCING: A HARMFUL FORM OF AFFECTIVE LABOR UNDER CO-OPTATION OF SOCIAL EMANCIPATION

> Abstract notions of "consent," "freedom," "choice," and "contract" have been produced and unequally distributed by modern liberalism, have been affirmed selectively for some through the disavowal of colonized and enslaved labor, and continue to write over contemporary conditions of force under other names – Kalindi Vora

In this chapter, I turn to the way that content moderation intersects with socially reproductive labor in the techno-discursive context of contemporary transnational labor outsourcing. Based on the case of Daniel Motaung, I focus on transnational outsourcing of content moderation through the case of the outsourcing firm Sama together with publications of investigative journalists covering the work conditions under this firm. Sama is a U.S.-based outsourcing firm that used to facilitate content moderation for Meta at its offices in Nairobi, Kenya, where Motaung was employed. In response, drawing on the material published by Sama and that of investigative journalists, I unpack the distinct frames under which content moderation is communicated within this discursive context. On this basis, I address how the frames that convey content moderation as an outsourced labor reveal a distinct form that social reproductive contradiction takes under the neoliberal platform economy as an ideological and technological context.

More specifically, in order to unpack how content moderation is framed within this context of transnational labor outsourcing, I analyze promotional material of the outsourcing firm Sama together with publications of journalists covering the conditions of work under this firm. I begin by attending to the material in which Sama frames content moderation as a form of labor in order to craft its public identity. To this point, I select Sama's promotional material at the sections of its website, such as, "About us" or "Why Sama," where the firm ascribes a specific significance and value to the kind of work it facilitates (Sama n.d.). Further, based on the journalistic coverage I gather from Motaung's case, I select and engage with the articles that construe a specific frame on content moderation as a form of labor. To this end, I select the initial article covering Motaung's case together with coverage of Sama's closure of its content moderation offices, since each of the reports draws on testimonies of (former)

moderators and, in turn, frames the work in a specific way. On the basis of this material, across the following three sections, I unpack how content moderation as framed in this context of transnational outsourcing reflects reproductive labor as restructured in terms of the neoliberal platform economy.

More specifically, in the first section, I zoom in on the promotional material published by Sama and unpack the frame holding content moderation as a form of labor that is socially emancipatory. In the second section, drawing on the selected articles by investigative journalists, I unpack how is content moderation framed based on its organization that involves an expropriative form of labor displacement. Further, in addition to this framing of content moderation outsourcing in terms of the work's organization, in the third section, I point out how the selected articles frame the work in terms of its characteristics as a form of labor. On this basis, I unpack how the articles frame content moderation as a specifically harmful labor due to at once, its organization, but also the nature of the task involving what is theorized as an affective involvement that impacts the worker on an emotional level. Based on the three frames that convey outsourced content moderation as a form of labor that is either socially emancipatory (frame 3), displaced (frame 4), or affective (frame 5), I discuss how the frames that I identify reflect socially reproductive labor as in a specific way culturally and historically devalued. In response, I argue that content moderation outsourcing as framed in the discursive contexts that I associate with Motaung's case reveals a distinct form of social reproductive contradiction that rests at the intersection of the work's characteristics and its organization.

3.1 Frame 3: content moderation outsourcing under a co-optation of 'social emancipation'

In this section, I address how in the contemporary context of transnational outsourcing of reproductive labor, content moderation is framed under a narrative of a work that is 'socially emancipatory.' I locate this frame as emerging from the context of promotional material published by outsourcing firms, otherwise known as BPO (business-process-outsourcing) that function as intermediaries supplying workers for varied tasks that companies or corporations seek to disavow (Roberts 2019, 20; Wan 2021, 2634). By drawing on the case of Daniel Motaung, I then turn to the promotional material and narratives published by and, in response

to the US-based outsourcing firm Sama, which, at its branch in Kenya, used to provide content moderation services for Meta (Sama n.d.; Perrigo 2022a). In response, I address how outsourced content moderation framed as a socially emancipatory work rests on a co-optation of narratives and values associated with tasks of social reproduction that would be disruptive to the neoliberal logic upon which firms, such as Sama, operate. In this way, I outline my argument that framing content moderation outsourcing as a work of social emancipation further reveals how socially reproductive labor is enshrined as devalued in terms of the ideological and technological context of neoliberalism and the platform economy.

On a general level, I observe the frame that posits content moderation under narratives concerning social emancipation as based on the kind of (public) identities that outsourcing firms, such as, Sama intend to cultivate. The case of Sama readily exemplifies the frame of social emancipation in its online promotional material that identifies the firm as an enterprise, providing jobs for groups in socio-economically compromised positions (Sama n.d.). Upon this narrative, at the moment of Sama's establishment, initially as an NGO, this firm has been celebrated across varied contexts to provide an example for "ethical" orientation within the present platform economy (Scholtz 2016; Hempel 2015). Even though Sama continues to identify as an "ethical AI" firm, this identity came under scrutiny after the publication of Motaung's testimony in TIME magazine in 2022 (Perrigo 2022a; Sama n.d.). Since the publication of Motaung's testimony in TIME magazine, which discloses exploitative and harmful conditions under Sama, the firm has been publicly and legally contested, eventually, leading to a closure of its content moderation offices and service for Meta in 2023 (Ambrose 2023; Perrigo 2022a; Musanga 2023a; Siele 2023; Linton 2023). In this way, despite the termination of its contract with Meta and the public scrutiny that the firm received, Sama continues to identify and present itself as an outsourcing firm that provides a form of social and economic emancipation to its employees (Sama n.d.). On this level, the case of Sama resonates with the broader context of content moderation outsourcing in which the work is presented as an opportunity for lucrative careers, development of skills, and associated forms of social mobility (Wan 2021, 2641; Padios 2018, 6; Sambuli 2022). On this basis, in response to Sama's framing of content moderation and the public reception the firm acquired with the advent of Motaung's case, in what follows I address how outsourcing of reproductive tasks and the concomitant forms of exploitation are under the neoliberal platform economy protected by narratives concerning socio-economic emancipation.

Firstly, turning to the case of Sama reflects how its operation is tied to specific places that become suitable for its operation while at the same time offering a discursive reference for

the firm to present itself and the work it facilitates in terms of social emancipation. In this case, the suitability of a place rests on its socio-economic, cultural, and technological factors. In the case of Nairobi, Kenya, which is one of Sama's locations as an outsourcing firm, the suitability of this place reflects on these levels. Since approximately 2010s, Nairobi has become a place with a growing "digital industry," coinciding with an infrastructure that enables firms, such as Sama to establish their content moderation offices (Wahome 2020; Poggaili 2016, 391; Guma and Monstadt 2021, 364). On a cultural level, Kenya is a multilingual country with English as one of its official languages which reflects in the firm's hiring practice of content moderators based on language skills (Perrigo 2022a). Third, Kenya's current socio-economic conditions enable Sama to outsource the work of content moderation for lower wages than in the North American or European contexts where Sama and its clients are mostly located (Perrigo 2022a; Musanga 2023a). In this way, Sama's operation in Nairobi could be observed to facilitate a labor distribution upon what is theorized as a neo-colonial form of domination, resting at once on socio-economic but also cultural and technological factors that make Nairobi a suitable place for contemporary transnational outsourcing firms. In response and despite the cultural and technological context upon which the firm relies, Sama discursively construes the place of Nairobi as characterized by economically compromised conditions in order to enshrine its practice of labor outsourcing and associated forms of domination as an emancipatory project.

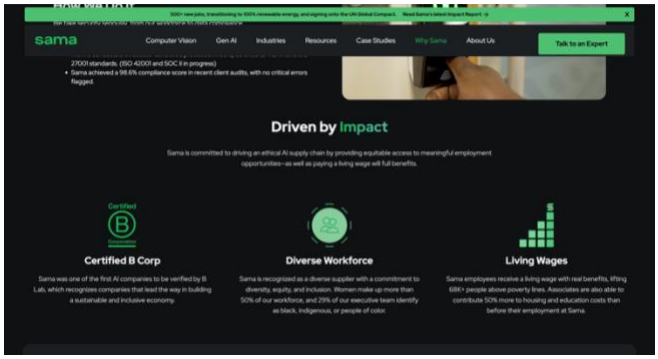

Figure 5. Sama's "About Us" page website section.

In order then to protect its practice of transnational labor outsourcing under the discursive context of the neoliberal platform economy, Sama crafts the frame holding content moderation as a form of socio-economic emancipation within its online promotional material. On the "About Us" page, Sama develops its brand identity based on a brief description of the firm's overall motivations (Sama n.d.). Here, Sama describes itself as motivated by "meaningfully improving employment and income outcomes for those with the greatest barriers to formal

work […]" (Sama n.d.). In this way, Sama generally identifies as a firm that intends to provide work to groups with compromised access to formal employment in terms of wage labor. More specifically, this identification reflects on the "Why Sama" page that presents three headings (see fig. 5). These headings stress that Sama promotes a "diverse workforce" together with economic security for which the company presents a corresponding accreditation (Sama n.d.). In this way, based on Sama's general description on its "About Us" and "Why Sama" pages, it is possible to observe how the firm identifies in a way that presents content moderation as one of the tasks that the firm used to facilitate as a form of socio-economic emancipation (Sama n.d.).

On this basis, similarly to the case of Meta's transparency center, Sama could be observed to co-opt narratives that identify the firm with values concerning social and public function. In particular, the way in which Sama identifies based on a co-optation of narratives concerning a form of social and public function reflects in the firm's description of its workforce as specifically "diverse" (Sama n.d.). Here, the firm identifies as motivated by an objective of providing formal employment to groups with compromised opportunities due to not only geographic location but also racial and gendered hierarchies (Sama n.d.). To this end, on its "impact" page, Sama notes that "women make up more than 50% of our workforce and 29% of our executive team identifies as black, indigenous or people of color" (Sama n.d.). In this way, by a description of its workforce as specifically 'diverse,' Sama identifies with a form of social and public function against the broader ideological context that Melamed (2006), in line with Fraser (2018), theorizes as "neoliberal multiculturalism" (2). As noted above, according to Melamed (2006), neoliberal multiculturalism constitutes the current and latest stage of racial liberalism upon the way that "multiculturalism portrays neoliberal policy as the key to a postracist world of freedom and opportunity" (2). Melamed argues that "postwar liberal racial formation sutures an "official" antiracism to U.S. nationalism […]" which "produces a situation where official antiracisms themselves deflect and limit awareness of the logics of exploitation and domination in global capitalism" (2). In response, Sama's descriptions of its workforce as specifically diverse together with its motivation to provide work to groups with compromised opportunities for access to formal employment then reflects a narrative concerning a form of 'antiracist' motivation in order to enshrine its practice of facilitating labor outsourcing to places that offer an economic advantage. In this way, Sama identifies itself by way of co-opting narratives concerning social and public function, which results in framing content moderation outsourcing as a form of social emancipation, expressing the broader ideological context that is theorized as 'neoliberal multiculturalism.'

More specifically, the way in which Sama presents the story of its founder Leila Janah then identifies the firm with an objective of social emancipation in terms of a narrative concerning the level of class. Sama introduces Janah's story in a separate section within the "About Us" page that presents the "principle" upon which the firm operates (Sama n.d.). The text begins by noting that "Leile's efforts were motivated by the same guiding principle: that in providing dignity through work, we can eliminate world poverty" (Sama n.d.). The subsequent section that presents Janah's background further specifies an identity against which the firm frames its practice as a form of social and public service. This section outlines the following:

> Leila, a child of Indian immigrants, was born in upstate New York, and raised in a suburb of Los Angeles. She attended the California Academy of Mathematics and Science where, during her senior year, she was awarded a six month scholarship to teach English in Ghana.
>
> There she witnessed what would become the singular motivation of her life's work: the tragedy of talented and hard-working people struggling in poverty solely due to geographical isolation from well-paying jobs. (Sama n.d.)

On the one hand, this excerpt that narrates Janah's background, discussing her Indian family heritage, upbringing and education in the U.S., and work experience in Ghana, emphasizes what could be seen as a form of 'multicultural' identity. On the other hand, the text situates Janah as a witness of "poverty […] due to geographical isolation from well-paying jobs," which distinguishes her position in terms of class (Sama n.d.). In this way, Janah's story identifies Sama with a class position of what Melamed (2006) theorizes as a "multicultural world citizen" (1), which affirms the firm as undertaking a socially emancipatory project; a form of social service as drawn against the broader ideological context of neoliberal multiculturalism.

On this basis of Sama's identification with its founder's 'multicultural' identity, the firm presents itself as a facilitator of an emancipatory form of labor not only on an economic but also on cultural and social levels. More specifically, this emancipatory character of labor that Sama draws on is articulated by way of presenting the work that the firm provides as "dignifying" (Sama n.d.). To this point, the "About Us" section introduces Janah's vision as follows:

> She believed that "the greatest challenge of the next 50 years will be to create dignified work for everyone." Leile founded Samasource in 2008 with the mission of giving work, not aid, by hiring workers in impoverished areas, training them in AI

> data annotation, and providing the technology to plug their skills into global digital economy where they could earn living wages. (Sama n.d.)

In response to this quote and based on the class distinction articulated by Janah's story, Sama then identifies as a provider of not only an economic opportunity in terms of wage labor but also a form of work that is remunerated on a level that is 'cultural.' By extension, Sama's emphasis on its motivation for providing a work that is dignifying resonates with the way that Fraser (2018) identifies reproductive tasks to be historically and culturally enshrined as economically devalued upon association with values, such as, "virtue" or "love" (23). In this way, in addition to Sama's claimed multicultural identity the firm frames content moderation and other tasks it facilitates as a form of social emancipation upon a narrative of labor offering both an economic but also cultural and social form of remuneration as articulated in terms of dignity.

More specifically, as it could be observed on Sama's website, the frame of socially emancipatory labor rests on a specific narrative of technology. If, as I discuss in the context of Meta, the platform corporation supports its public legitimacy upon a promise of public safety articulated in terms of technological innovation to offer a promise of taking on the task of moderation, this is no longer the case in the context of Sama. Based on the above discussion of Sama's framing of content moderation and similar tasks (such as data annotation for AI) within the platform economy, the firm no longer frames content moderation upon a promise of technological innovation to take on and solve the task. However, Sama could be observed to similarly draw what Atanasoski and Vora (2019) theorize as a techno-liberal alibi, but rather in terms of technology to offer an emancipatory site of labor. In this way, Sama's framing of content moderation and data annotation for AI as a work that is "dignifying" draws on a narrative of technology to articulate the firm as fulfilling a form of 'multicultural' or 'progressive' aspiration for creating work conditions that contest gendered and racialized hierarchies. In turn, the case of Sama highlights how in the context of content moderation outsourcing the firm identifies under a technoliberal alibi that articulates a promise of transcending gendered and racialized hierarchies upon a narrative of technology as offering an emancipatory site of labor.

In turn, Sama's framing in terms of social emancipation upon a distinct form of techno-liberal alibi reveals how outsourced content moderation intersects with the way in which socially reproductive labor is devalued under contemporary neoliberal contexts. To this point, the way that Sama ascribes a social and cultural value to the work it provides for contemporary platform corporations such as Meta and others reflects Denbow's (2024) conception of the

innovation/reproduction binary (3). According to Denbow, under neoliberalism "innovation has come to connote problem-solving, and powerful actors present it as a panacea, thus justifying the funnelling of resources toward innovation and normalizing the material deprivation of reproductive laborers" (2-3). By extension, as noted above, Denbow defines ""innovation/reproduction binary" to describe the dialectical relationship between the fetishization of innovation and the devaluation of reproductive labor, revealing how innovation has been constructed as a panacea to social ills" (2-3). In response, the case of Sama reveals how narratives concerning technological innovation serve to articulate outsourcing of content moderation as a form of socially reproductive labor that involves an emancipatory quality for the worker in terms of not only economic but also cultural values, as exemplified by the term "dignity" (Sama n.d.). This narrative of innovation then draws a distinct form of a techno-liberal alibi in order to enshrine content moderation as a socially reproductive task that is devalued and organized in correspondingly insecure and harmful conditions. In this way, Sama's framing aligns with Denbow's (2024) argument, reflecting how innovation is construed here "as a panacea to social ills" that normalizes "the material deprivation of reproductive laborers" (2-3) in the context of outsourced content moderation work. As a result, the way in which Sama frames content moderation outsourcing as a form of social emancipation reflects how under neoliberalism reproductive labor is enshrined as devalued in terms of narratives concerning technological innovation.

On this basis, the case of Sama and its framing of content moderation outsourcing under a co-optation of social emancipation reveals the manner in which reproductive tasks are enshrined as devalued and consequently outsourced under the neoliberal platform economy. Generally, the way in which social media platforms outsource the task of content moderation via firms, such as Sama into localities that offer an economic advantage, could be observed to follow the same pattern that Briggs (2017) identifies in the context of domestic labor under globalization of neoliberal political economy (98). According to Briggs, "by the 1990s, this shift in state, household, and business relations was producing a broad crisis of reproductive labor that families and households solved in different ways depending on income and their place in the global economy. The solution for a considerable number was to "off-shore" household and care work" (98). Similarly, as van Doorn (2017) and others observe, the advent of the platform economy restructured the devaluation of reproductive labor in terms of its technological milieu in order to serve the economic imperatives of contemporary platform corporations (907). In response to this context, the identity of the outsourcing firm Sama sheds light on a distinct form in terms of which the large-scale outsourcing of reproductive labor and

concomitant harm is discursively justified. As discussed above, the way in which Sama frames content moderation outsourcing under a co-optation of social emancipation reflects a discursive justification that is developed in reference to an intersection between the ideological contexts of techno-liberalism and neoliberal multiculturalism. By extension, I argue that the result constitutes a distinct form of what Atanasoski and Vora (2019) theorize as a techno-liberal alibi. This form of techno-liberal alibi becomes apparent based on the way that Sama construes technological innovation as providing an emancipatory site of labor that is framed to counter hierarchies based on social difference, such as, in terms of race and gender in relation to a specific place as preventing access to formal employment. In this way, the case of Sama reveals how the social reproductive contradiction in the context of outsourced content moderation under the neoliberal platform economy acquires a distinct form based on renewed co-optation of narratives concerning social emancipation.

3.2 Frame 4: content moderation outsourcing as an expropriative form of labor displacement

In response to the above-discussed frame that is drawn on a co-optation of social emancipation, in this section, I unpack how the advent of Motaung's case introduces a frame exposing content moderation outsourcing as an expropriative form of labor displacement. This frame that conveys content moderation as displaced could be traced to the initial article, which the investigative journalist and technology correspondent Billy Perrigo (2022a) wrote for TIME magazine based on Daniel Motaung's testimony concerning the work conditions under Sama. In this article, Perrigo draws on testimonies of Sama's former content moderators together with documentation concerning the levels of pay, documenting the socio-economic conditions of content moderation workers under Sama's Nairobi branch. In addition to this initial article of Motaung's case, I discuss reports of investigative journalists that similarly to Perrigo's article frame the work conditions in outsourced content moderation in terms of the moderators' testimonies concerning the way that the work conditions influence their lives beyond the workplace. In this way, I unpack how the selected reports introduce a frame that holds outsourced content moderation as an expropriative form of labor displacement based on a

perspective focusing on the moderators' position in terms of social class.[17] On this basis, I address how this frame that posits content moderation outsourcing as an expropriative form of labor displacement reveals a dimension of social reproductive contradiction in terms of the way that this work is organized.

Firstly, I trace what I refer to as Motaung's case to the publication of Perrigo's investigative article in TIME magazine that discusses testimonies concerning the work conditions in the context of outsourced content moderation under Sama. In this article, Perrigo (2022a) draws primarily on an interview with Motaung and his experience as a former outsourced content moderator as well as an initiator of collective efforts to organize for improved work conditions under Sama. After its publication, the article acquired significant public attention, such as, in terms of being shortlisted for the Orwell Prize in 2022 and currently listed in Perrigo's online portfolio as one of his best works (billyperrigo n.d.). More specifically, what I read as Motaung's case develops in succession to the article's publication when Motaung together with the Nzili and Sumbi Advocates and the NGO Foxglove filed a lawsuit addressing Meta and Sama for labor rights violations on multiple levels (Dark 2022; Njanja 2022; Musanga 2022). With the advent of Motaung's lawsuit, subsequent events then stimulated discourse addressing and contesting the organization of content moderation on a transnational level, eventually leading to a closure of Sama's content moderation services, while the legal case remains currently unresolved (Perrigo 2022a, 2022e; Musanga 2022; Musanga 2023a; Njanja 2022). On this basis, in what follows, I unpack how the frame holding content moderation as an expropriative form of labor displacement emerges from the course of Motaung's case, beginning with Perrigo's initial article and subsequent reports.

In particular, the way in which Perrigo's article draws the frame that conveys outsourced content moderation as an expropriative form of displaced labor rests on a contextualization of the work conditions in terms of the moderator's testimonies that situate the work within the context of their lives. After a general introduction of Sama as a firm and its content moderation service for Meta, the article discusses Motaung's testimony concerning how he arrived at the job. In particular, Perrigo (2022a) points out that Motaung, as a recent

[17] Generally, I take guidance in Bhattacharya's (2018) conception of class. According to Bhattacharya, "in thinking about the working class, it is essential to recognize that workers have an existence beyond the workplace. The theoretical challenge therefore lies in understanding the relationship between this existence and that of their productive lives under the direct domination of the capitalist" (69). In response, I discuss how the journalists' framing explicates this relation between the moderators' 'productive' lives and their existence beyond the workplace setting.

graduate from a university in South Africa applied for the job via an online advertisement offering a position under Sama and Facebook with incomplete information concerning the tasks involved in this position. Perrigo writes that:

> Daniel Motaung was a 27-year-old university graduate from South Africa looking for his first job […] Motaung, like many other moderators TIME spoke with, says he had little idea what content moderation involved when he applied for the job […] After he accepted and arrived in Kenya, Sama asked him to sign a non-disclosure agreement, and only then did they reveal to him the type of content he would be working with daily. By then, he felt it was too late to turn back.

In this way, drawing on Motaung's testimony, Perrigo discusses how Sama, as an outsourcing firm, facilitates the workforce necessary for its services for Meta in a way that involves misleading hiring practices coupled with the firm's legal protection in terms of non-disclosure agreements (NDA). Similarly, corresponding accounts of journalists that draw on testimonies of Sama's former moderators discuss how they arrived at the job based on motivations to develop new careers and a form of economic security, which were misguided through the firm's hiring practice (Musanga 2023a; Siele 2023; Njanja 2022). In this way, the reports by Perrigo, Musanga, and Siele draw the frame that posits outsourced content moderation as an expropriative form of labor displacement by discussing how the moderators' motivations for the development of careers and economic security were displaced via the firm's misleading hiring practices.

More specifically, by drawing on the testimonies concerning how moderators arrived at the jobs, the frame that holds content moderation as a displaced labor is based on attention to the moderators' class position. To this point, in addition to the discussion of Motaung's testimony concerning the way he arrived at the job, Perrigo's (2022a) article documents the levels of pay that moderators receive under Sama. In particular, the article points out the imbalances in pay that exist in comparison with moderators in distinct places. By extension, this perspective puts emphasis on how moderators under Sama are susceptible to the firm's misleading hiring practices based on class in relation to the place in which the firm operates (Perrigo 2022a; Musanga 2023a; Sambuli 2022; Siele 2023). Similarly, journalists covering the event of Sama's closure of its entire content moderation division draw attention to the moderators' class position by documenting the renewed scope of insecurity following the firm's mass layoffs (Musanga 2023a; Siele 2023; Kiplagat 2023). Specifically, this coverage stresses the

renewed scope of socio-economic insecurity facing moderators due to what is documented as the firm's illegal denial of the moderators' salaries (Musanga 2023a; Siele 2023). For example, the journalist Mukanzi Musanga (2023a) in an investigative article for open Democracy notes that:

> The workers, who remain legally employed by Sama and Meta, say they are unable to afford food and rent, and have resorted to an online crowdfunding campaign to make ends meet.

Musanga and others stress how the way that Sama organizes content moderation rests not only on misleading hiring practices but also on illegal layoffs, leaving employees in situations of renewed scope of socio-economic insecurity. In this way, Perrigo's article, similarly, to the reports documenting Sama's closure of its Nairobi content moderation office, frames Sama's organization of content moderation as an expropriative form of labor displacement based on the moderators' position in terms of class.

In response, the way outsourced content moderation is framed as displaced labor upon expropriative organizational practices aligns with the debate on socially reproductive labor, which is theorized as culturally and historically devalued and consequently positioned outside formal circuits of economic production. In particular, social reproduction theory points out how reproductive tasks that produce the 'unique commodity' of labor power are structurally positioned beyond the formal economy upon justifications drawn in terms of narratives concerning race, gender, and other forms of social difference (Bhattacharya 2018, 8). In response, Mezzadri (2019) points out how the 'early' feminist debate on reproductive labor builds on the insight that what has been distinguished as reproductive tasks, re-creating the capacity to labor (labor power), are in contrast to productive forms of labor based not on exploitation but expropriation of labor (35). By extension, reproductive labor is theorized to constitute a category that is informed by a conventional way of organizing that involves an expropriation of labor power via its displacement from formal economic circuits of production (Mezzadri 2019, 34; Vora 2015, 31). In response, even though content moderation is organized as wage labor, framing the work's organization either in terms of misleading hiring practices or illegal mass layoffs aligns with the theory on socially reproductive labor as informed by an expropriative displacement of labor power that is related to, yet obscured under the formal economic circuits of production.

In this way, the frame that posits content moderation outsourcing as characterized by a displacement of labor power extends the analysis concerning moderation as organized under

contemporary systems of transnational labor outsourcing. Existing analysis on outsourcing of content moderation could be observed to focus on the macro level, pointing out content moderation as a displacement of the task via neo-colonial labor circuits based on transnational economic domination (Roberts 2019; Breslow 2018; Wan 2021; Marte-Wood and Santos 2021). On this level, the discussion of content moderation outsourcing refers to the work's organization as characterized by a displacement concerning the task of moderation and associated forms of responsibility that platform corporations seek to disavow. In response, the reports that I discuss here point out how displacement of content moderation on the macro level in terms of transnational outsourcing is contingent on an expropriative displacement of what is theorized as labor power.[18] As I discussed above, framing content moderation outsourcing as contingent on a displacement of the capacity to labor (labor power) is based on attention to the moderators' class position that is pointed out in terms of testimonies concerning their lives beyond and in relation to the workplace setting. In this way, the prism of class highlights displacement not only in terms of transnational outsourcing as based on the platform's disavowal of the task that moderation entails but also how that is contingent on an expropriative displacement of the capacity to labor.

On this basis, framing how outsourced content moderation is organized through a displacement of labor power brings into purview the way that socially reproductive labor is expressed as a gendered and racialized form in response to the context of the neoliberal platform economy. If socially reproductive labor is theorized as culturally and historically expropriated and contested along the lines of race and gender (Glenn 1992, 3; Vora 2015 30), the reports that I discuss in this section in relation to Motaung's case introduce a contrasting perspective. Rather than focusing on the moderators' position as informed by the axis of gender, race and other factors of social difference, the reports that I discuss here focus on the level of class. However, in response to this point of attention, the context and progression of Motaung's case highlights how this perspective enables the journalism to problematize and contest the way that content moderation is organized based on restructuring of reproductive labor as informed by gendered and racialized hierarchies. In the context of Motaung's case, this scope of contestation could be observed as articulated on a legal and discursive level. To this point, Motaung's lawsuit alleges Meta/Sama for labor rights violations in terms of "forced

[18] In reference to the work of Bhattacharya (2018), I draw on the conception of labor power as referring to the human capacity of labor which is contingent on a myriad forms of support that extend beyond the formalized sphere of the economic circuits of production (3).

labor" and "human trafficking" addressing how the capacity to labor is under Sama displaced in an expropriative manner (Njanje 2022). Similarly, the instance of Sama's closure of its content moderation offices and subsequent documentation concerning the denial of salaries together with practices of blacklisting, resulted in a collective lawsuit that established the actions of Meta/Sama as illegal (Musanga 2023a; Kiplagat 2023; Siele 2023). In response, framing outsourced content moderation as a labor circuit that is based on an expropriative form of labor displacement sheds light on class as a prism that enables the journalism to expose otherwise obscured realities in terms of how this work is informed by restructruing of gendered and racialized hierarchies against the neoliberal platform economy.

In this way, framing content moderation in terms of the moderators' class position and concomitant displacement of labor power labor enables the journalism to problematize how content moderation as a form of socially reproductive labor is under the current context discursively enshrined as devalued. As I outlined above, in the context of Sama, content moderation is enshrined as devalued in terms of the co-optation of narratives concerning how race, and gender in relation to class as tied to specific regional contexts inhibit specific groups from access to formal employment (Sama n.d.). On this basis, Sama presents itself as a firm that contests the way specific groups as defined in terms of their gender or race are culturally and historically obstructed from accessing formal job markets (Sama n.d.). In turn, this frame that holds content moderation as a socio-economically emancipatory work becomes problematized in part through the framing that is based upon narratives situating the organization of this work within the socio-economic context of the moderators' lives. By extension, based on this framing that pays attention to the moderators' socio-economic positions, it is possible to point out how the way that content moderation is enshrined as devalued aligns with Vora's (2015) analysis concerning outsourcing of reproductive labor under contemporary neoliberal contexts. According to Vora, in the contemporary contexts of labor outsourcing of reproductive tasks, such as the work in call center agencies, "the category of labor continues to function to write over contemporary conditions of force under other names" (28). In this way, framing outsourced content moderation in terms of how the work is organized based on an expropriative displacement of labor power rests on class as the prism that problematizes Sama's co-optation of narratives concerning labor in order to present its operation as a form of social emancipation.

3.3 Frame 5: Outsourced content moderation as a harmful form of affective labor

In addition to the above-discussed framing of content moderation with attention to the work's organization by way of displacement of labor power, the coverage of Motaung's case introduces a frame that is drawn based on the moderators' accounts concerning the characteristics of this task. This frame exposes the organization of outsourced content moderation based on testimonies that focus on the characteristics of moderation as involving a harmful form of emotional and affective labor. Across this section, I then unpack how the journalism covering Motaung's case frames content moderation outsourcing as a specifically harmful form of affective labor. More specifically, I point out how the frame positing outsourced content moderation as a harmful form of affective labor is developed based on moderators' accounts that concern the nature of the task in relation to their class position and corresponding socio-economic situations. By extension, I discuss how this framing aligns with the theory on socially reproductive labor as distinguished by specific forms of emotional and affective labor (Vora 2015, 31; Jereza 2021, 10). In response, I argue that framing outsourced content moderation in terms of its characteristics in relation to the moderators' class position reveals the form of social reproductive contradiction within the neoliberal platform economy in terms of the harmful affective labor that this work entails.

Firstly, the frame that situates the affective nature of content moderation as part of the work's organization by way of transnational outsourcing and concomitant forms of economic domination could be observed as developed in the last section of Perrigo's initial article on Motaung's case. In this section, Perrigo (2022a) discusses Motaung's account concerning his experience after he was fired from the job. In particular, the article ends by stressing that Motaung:

> had a traumatic experience, and that he still gets flashbacks. He expects to carry the burden of that trauma with him until the day he dies. "That sort of thing can change who you are," he says. (Perrigo 2022a)

In this way, Perrigo concludes the article that documents content moderation as organized through misleading hiring practices and exploitative compensation with Motaung's testimony, concerning the lasting, harmful, and unpredictable emotional impact that content moderation entails. Specifically, in order to arrive at the concluding section that discusses the work's

emotional harm, Perrigo builds on testimonies of anonymized moderators who disclose the process of content moderation work under Sama together with the established mechanisms of control. In this way, Perrigo draws a frame that communicates the severe, unpredictable psychological and emotional harms from this work as a consequence of the broader political economy in which content moderation is by way of transnational outsourcing organized into a specific form of work.

Based on this general frame that is developed in Perrigo's article in terms of Motaung's testimony, it speaks to the way content moderation is theorized as a specific form of affective labor. As Jereza (2021) discusses, the context of content moderation requires to clarify the distinction between what is theorized as emotional and affective labor. To this point, Jereza draws on Arlie R. Hochschild's (1983) conception of emotional labor as referring to an engagement of changing a situation in relation to corresponding feelings or the other way around of changing feelings in terms of the situation (4). In contrast, Jereza points out in reference to work of Ben Anderson and Paul Harrison that affect is theorized as not reducible to emotions although emotions are part of it (4). More specifically, affect is theorized here as that which "'interrupts, unsettles, and haunts persons, places or things'" in a manner that emerges from specific social contexts (Jereza 2021, 4). On this basis, Jereza theorizes the context of content moderation to constitute an affective labor "not only because they manage emotional or bodily states, but also because they absorb and then manage the affective: the jarring confluence of the horrific, banal, overtly political and seemingly mundane in a global capitalist economy, which, in the case of content moderation, does become embodied" (4). In response, on a general level, the above-discussed account of Motaung that concerns the need to cope with "flashbacks" (Perrigo 2022a) resulting from the work, then exemplifies this form of embodied labor of "managing the affective" (Jereza 2021, 4). In this way, the frame that posits content moderation as a harmful form of affective labor broadly aligns with Jereza's perspective that exposes content moderation as characterized by an embodied labor informed by the function of this task and its contemporary organization.

On this basis, in line with the framing developed by Perrigo, articles that document Sama's mass layoffs further unpack the scope of harmful affective labor that outsourced content moderation involves at the intersection with the moderators' class position. To this point, the journalist Mukanzi Musanga (2023a) draws on a testimony of Sama's former moderator, Edward Lubega, who is a member of the discontinued content moderation division under Sama. In particular, Musanga notes that:

> Lubega told openDemocracy he was pushed to the brink of suicide in June. He opened up to his colleagues who were concerned about him and advised him to seek professional help.
>
> "The doctor said that I needed inpatient care but I did not have the money," Lubega said […] "I have a seven-year-old daughter in Kampala and I have been unable to take care of her for the last six months. I'm even scared of calling her because I feel like I have failed her as a father," he said.

By drawing on Lubega's testimony, Musanga frames content moderation outsourcing in terms of how the affective labor that the work requires, impacts the moderators in relation to class and concomitant socio-economic situations. Therefore, based on the way that the articles by Perrigo and Musanga narrate moderators' class position and corresponding socio-economic situations in terms of testimonies concerning the affective nature of moderation, it exposes a specifically harmful character of content moderation as a form of labor.

In this way, based on the two above examples that discuss outsourced content moderation in terms of the affective labor that the work entails in relation to the moderators' socio-economic situations, the reports draw a frame that intersects with the category of socially reproductive labor as distinguished by the characteristics of a task. As Vora (2015) points out, socially reproductive tasks are typically characterized by varied forms of service and associated emotional and affective labor (30). In this way, on the one hand, the reports that I discussed above expose content moderation as a form of socially reproductive labor based on the characteristics of the task that requires an affective involvement on behalf of the moderator. On the other hand, the reports that cover Motaung's case point out how the affective labor of content moderation takes on a specifically harmful form. To this point, in line with the above-discussed accounts, the report by the journalist Martin Siele (2023) further reveals how the affective nature of content moderation influences the moderators' lives beyond the context of the work setting. To this point, Siele discusses the account of Kuana Malgwi, noting:

> Right from training, I started experiencing anxiety and panic attacks," she said. "I went into depression, and I'm still battling it and anxiety today. [The job] changed my life more than I thought […] You become paranoid [after watching such content]. It affects other relationships in your life, how you socialize and relate to people.

Other testimony of an anonymized moderator that Siele includes stresses that:

> Maina, who had worked for Sama since 2019, told Rest of World […] "I have a phobia of crossing certain roads. I can't do certain things because of what I see. When I sit in the house alone at night, I keep thinking of certain graphic videos that I saw. (Siele 2023)

In this way, Siele, in line with Perrigo and Musanga, draws a frame that posits content moderation as a form of labor that harms the moderator on an affective and emotional level, impacting their private lives, such as in terms of capacity to maintain and develop relationships with others. By extension, this framing aligns outsourced content moderation with other forms of socially reproductive labor that are theorized to compromise the worker's autonomy in terms of a capacity to delineate any separation between the context of their work and beyond.

Furthermore, this framing that points out the harmful character of content moderation as a form of labor could be obsereved to intersect with theory on socially reproductive labor as restructured under the technological context of globalized neoliberal capitalism. As noted above, content moderation is framed to involve a form of affective labor that extends beyond the compensated time frame of the workplace setting and, in turn, pertains to the moderators' private lives. To this point, Vora (2015) discusses how such a characteristic of a contemporary work setting speaks to the concept of reproductive labor. In particular, Vora draws on her analysis of outsourced call center agencies to argue that based on the affective nature of a specific task and its organization, the worker needs to engage "in both productive and reproductive labors" in order to sustain their commitment to the work (31). By extension, Vora notes that the "requirements of such work intrude on the laboring subject in ways that radically compromise any sense of "autonomy" or "separation of spheres" presumed by both liberal and Marxist discussions of workers within Western societies" (31). In response to Vora's analysis, the above-discussed framing of content moderation in terms of the ways that the affective labor of the work pertains to the moderators' private lives, exposes the scope of compromised autonomy in the context of content moderation with the consequent impossibility to separate between what has been theorized as the spheres of work and beyond.[19] To this point, what Jereza points out as the need to "manage the affective" (4) reflects in the way that content

[19] To this point, I draw on Vora's (2015) argument, holding that "to accurately follow value's production and accumulation therefore requires attention to the nature of autonomy in a given production setting" (42). In response, framing outsourced content moderation in terms of the affective labor that the organization of the work requires exposes the form and characteristics of compromised autonomy that this context of labor relations involves.

moderation is framed to compromise the moderators' autonomy due to the nature of the task and its organization. In this way, framing content moderation in terms of the affective labor that the task requires, aligns with the analysis that points out how socially reproductive labor is restructured under the current context of the neoliberal platform economy in a manner that compromises the worker's autonomy and, in turn, creates for a specific form of expropriative distribution of labor.

On this basis, the frame that posits content moderation as a harmful form of affective labor expresses the material realities that take shape in response to the way this form of work is conceived and organized under the corresponding ideological and technological context. As I noted above, content moderation is framed as a harmful form of affective labor based on testimonies concerning how the work influences the moderators' lives beyond the workplace setting, such as in terms of maintaining/developing personal relationships or undertaking daily routine tasks. These testimonies speak to Jereza's (2021) discussion concerning how the structure of the work prevents the possibility for emotional resolve and, in turn, requires managing the affective (4). As Jereza discusses, the way in which the work structure of content moderation prevents the possibility of emotional resolve rests on the strictly delimited scope for response to the content only in terms of its possible deletion from circulation (9).[20] For instance, moderators interviewed for *The Cleaners* documentary point out the disturbing feelings that result from the work structure which prevents them to respond to the content in a manner they would find appropriate (Riesewieck and Block 2018). Similarly, as discussed above, the accounts of moderators interviewed from the context of Motaung's case stress how the work requires them to engage in the labor and complexity of emotional resolve beyond the context of the workplace setting. In this way, framing outsourced content moderation in terms of the harms that are based on the form of affective labor involved, highlights the way that the ideological and technological context underpinning this work pertains to and shapes the moderators' material realities.

In this way, the frame that exposes outsourced content moderation as characterized by a harmful form of affective labor reflects a form of epistemic violence that Paulo Ricaurte points out as structural to the technological and ideological context of the neoliberal platform economy. Ricaurte (2022) draws on a general conception of epistemic violence as referring to

[20] In reference to the work of Aneesh Aneesh (2012), this frame that sheds light on the harmful form of affective labor that is involved in this work articulates a distinct form in which the lifeworld of the moderators, composed of "social interaction, understanding, and experience" (515), is colonized by the overarching systems.

the practices and processes of "appropriating possibilities for self-representation" (730). By extension, Ricuarte argues that processes of "datafication […] algorithmisation of culture and society […] and automation are processes of epistemic violence on a large scale" (730). [21] The work of outsourced content moderation is imbricated in these processes which could be observed to reflect in terms of the logic underlying the above-discussed design feature of the flag. As discussed above, the flag distinguishes responsibility between all the parties that are involved in the process of content moderation. In particular, this feature then situates the moderator as occluded from public appearance while simultaneously positing them as the responsible party in making the final decision about any specific piece of content.[22] In turn, this technological disposition of content moderation enables platform corporations to limit their liability to the politically and socially critical and complex task of moderation by offloading it onto the outsourced content moderation worker (Gillespie 2018a, 21). In response, content moderators testify to the harmful form of affective labor that the work requires based on the strictly compromised possibility for emotional resolve (Jereza 2021, 9). By extension, this compromised possibility for emotional resolve could be observed as tied to the work structure that rests on the neoliberal logic in terms of which the moderator is able to engage with any piece of content only to the extent that it serves maximization of monetary value upon commodification of user data (Marte-Wood and Santos 2021, 103).[23] In this way, framing outsourced content moderation as a harmful form of affective labor exposes the logic underwriting the neoliberal platform economy to shape social relations in a way that is contingent on a form of epistemic violence resting on outsourcing of the responsibility to moderate public discourse into conditions that strictly compromise a possibility for negotiating an adequate manner of doing so.

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[21] For the concept of epistemic violence, Ricuarte (2022) cites the work of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. In reference to the work of Spivak (1988), I read epistemic violence as broadly referring to a compromised capacity of knowledge formation and its enunciation depending on the specific subject position(s) vis-à-vis the existing hegemonic and, or colonial symbolic and material order (281).

[22] This technologically mediated position that is occupied by the moderator, constitutes a design decision based on which Atanasoski and Vora (2015) theorize content moderation as a form of labor that is racialized (28). For the full argument, see Atanasoski and Vora (2015).

[23] The way that monetary imperatives of (social media) platforms are legally protected in the work structure of content moderation rests on the now well-documented (e.g. Perrigo 2022a) practice of non-disclosure agreements (NDA). In this way, the NDA that legally prohibits moderators from disclosing their work experience beyond their workplace exemplifies one form of epistemic violence that the present organization of content moderation involves.

In this way, outsourced content moderation framed as a harmful form of affective labor reveals what is theorized as social reproductive contradiction in terms of the way that the structure of this work exerts control and harm pertaining to the intimate spheres of the moderators' lives. Bartkowski (2017) unpacks that the way in which outsourced content moderation intersects with socially reproductive labor as a gendered and racialized form is, in reference to the work of Stoler, tied to how imperial domination (symbolically and materially) rests on exertion of control over the intimate spheres of life (68).[24] In this way, Bartkowski argues that outsourced content moderation rests on and re-creates the gendered and racialized form of domestic labor system in novel ways (76). In line with the argument of Bartkowski, as I discussed in this section, framing outsourced content moderation as a harmful form of affective labor exposes the work structures (its mechanisms of control and organization) to pertain and exert harm to the extent of the intimate spheres in the moderators' lives. By extension, this frame points out that outsourced content moderation aligns with socially reproductive labor as a gendered and racialized form that is shaped by the "imperial modes of governance" (Atanasoski and Vora 2015, 28; Aouragh and Chakravartty 2016; Kwet 2019) stemming from the ideological context and the technological milieu of the current platform economy.

3.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, each of the distinct frames that I discussed in this chapter posits outsourced content moderation in a way that reveals a dimension of the form that social reproductive contradiction takes in response to the discursive contexts associated with Motaung's case. In the first section, I began by addressing how under the discursive context of the outsourcing firm Sama, content moderation becomes framed as a form of social emancipation. In turn, I unpacked how this framing is drawn based on a co-optation of narratives concerning social difference, such as gender and race in reference to the ideological context theorized as neoliberal multiculturalism (Melamed 2006, 2). In response, I maintain that the case of Sama exemplifies how content moderation as a form of socially reproductive labor is under the

[24] More specifically, Ann Laura Stoler (2006) argues that the "domains of the intimate" are sites of embodied and affective relations that undergird subject formation upon which material and symbolic forms of imperial domination take shape (2). For the full argument, see Stoler (2006).

neoliberal context of the present platform economy enshrined as devalued upon a co-optation of narratives concerning social emancipation. In the second section, I unpacked how the investigative journalism stemming from Motaung's case frames content moderation outsourcing based on documentation of the work's organization via practices that displace the moderators' capacity to perform the labor involved. In response, I maintain that framing content moderation based on testimonies concerning the work's organization by way of transnational outsourcing and corresponding practices of labor distribution (e.g. misguiding hiring practices, illegal mass layoffs) aligns with socially reproductive tasks theorized as involving distinct forms of labor expropriation. In the third section, I addressed how the journalism covering Motaung's case frames content moderation outsourcing in terms of the work's characteristics as involving a specifically harmful form of labor on an affective level. By extension, I discussed how framing content moderation as a harmful form of affective labor aligns with the theory on socially reproductive labor as distinguished in terms of labor expropriation that pertains to the affective, embodied, and intimate levels. In response to the three sections, I concluded that content moderation as construed under the three discerned frames reveals distinct dimensions of the form that social reproductive contradiction takes in the context of transnational labor outsourcing under the neoliberal platform economy.

CHAPTER 4: FRAMING OUTSOURCED CONTENT MODERATION AT THE INTERSECTIONS OF ITS FUNCTION, CHARACTERISTICS AND ORGANIZATION

In this chapter, I discuss how the frames that I identify to communicate outsourced content moderation across the distinct discursive contexts associated with Motaung's case reveal how socially reproductive labor as devalued is restructured against the context of the neoliberal platform economy. On a general level, I observe outsourced content moderation to express a distinct form of socially reproductive labor in terms of how the organization, characteristics, and function of the work is framed in relation to a specific discursive context. In response, I unpack how the frames that I identify create a distinct perspective on outsourced content moderation as a form of socially reproductive labor based on a specific intersection between the three discerned levels (see fig. 6, 7). In this way, I address how specific intersections between the organization, characteristics, and function of the work inform the frames that in relation to their discursive contexts generally, on the one hand, either justify and obscure or, on the other hand, expose the realities of outsourced content moderation work. In response, in what follows, I discuss how framing outsourced content moderation reveals a distinct form of social reproductive contradiction in terms of specific intersections between the work's (a) function (b) organization, and (c) characteristics as tied to the neoliberal platform economy as an ideological and technological context.

DIAGRAM: SOCIAL REPRODUCTIVE CONTRADICTION IN TERMS OF FRAMING ON THE THREE LEVELS OF FUNCTION, ORGANIZATION AND CHARACTERISTICS.

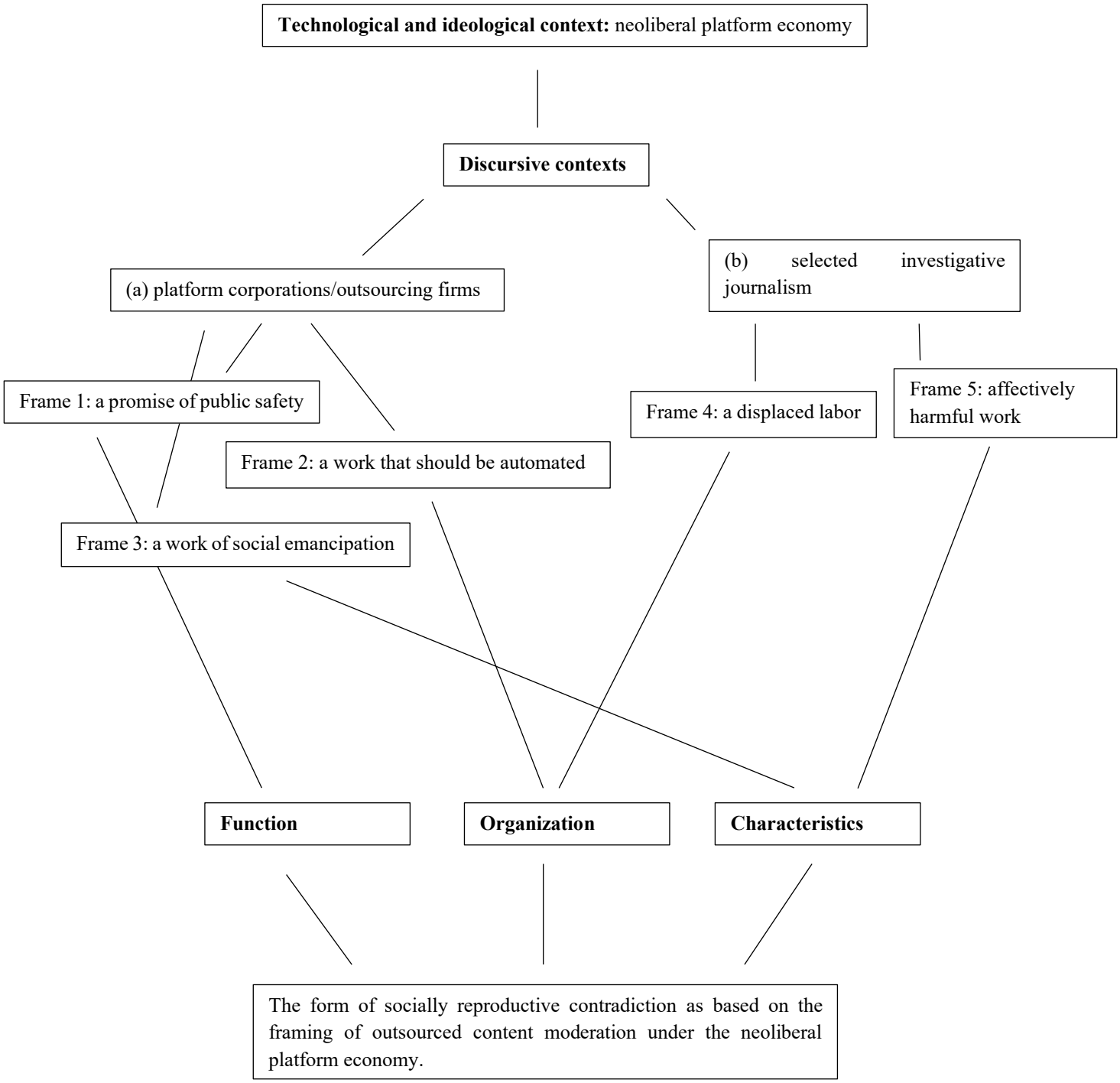

Figure 6. Diagram: Framing content moderation in terms of function, organization, and characteristics as an expression of a socially reproductive contradiction.

Figure 6. Rationale

The above diagram should illustrate and summarize all of the five frames that I identified and discussed across the above chapters.

As I discussed in the second section of my theoretical framework, the levels of function, characteristics, and organization serve as a reference in the way that socially reproductive labor is theorized as culturally and historically devalued. The above diagram should offer a summary that details how each of the frames reveals outsourced content moderation as a distinct form of socially reproductive labor based on the three levels of function, characteristics, and organization.

Three levels of function, characteristics, and organization:

1. Based on the broad conception of Laura Briggs (2017), I draw on socially reproductive labor as defined in terms of its 'function' as referring to the quality of a specific task that is oriented towards reproduction of "Human life" (2). More specifically, I recognize this function as theorized to become compromised under capitalist economies to the extent of re-creating 'labor power' or the capacity of engaging in 'productive labor' (Bhattacharya 2018, 3).
2. On the level of characteristics, I draw on socially reproductive labor as defined in terms of the qualities that a specific task involves, such as, distinctly affective, embodied, and intimate forms of labor (Vora 2015, 30; Jereza 2021, 8).
3. On the level of organization, I draw on the theory that distinguishes socially reproductive tasks as conventionally organized in a way that is occluded from public appearance and extends beyond formalized circuits of economic production (Bartkowski 2019, 68; Mezzadri 2019, 38).

Frame 1: a promise of public safety	Framing content moderation as a promise of public safety under the discursive context of Meta is based on the level of function that, in turn, posits this work as characterized by specifically unskilled labor that obscures the realities of labor circuits informed by the work's current organization.
Frame 2: work that should be automated	Framing content moderation as a work that should be automated is based on the level of organization, which is drawn on a techno-liberal assumption that posits the function of content moderation and the associated characteristics of the task as ideally technologically automated.
Frame 3: work of social emancipation	Framing outsourced content moderation as a work that is socially emancipatory is based on the level of characteristics, which results in justification of the work as currently organized upon co-optation of discourses in reference to the context of neoliberal multiculturalism.

Figure 7. Table that summarizes the frames from the discursive context of Meta/Sama as based on specific intersections between the levels of function, organization and characteristics.

Frame 4: a displaced labor	Framing content moderation as an expropriative form of labor displacement is based on attention to the organization of the work, which reveals the harmful form that the characteristics of the work and its function take under the neoliberal platform economy.
Frame 5: a harmful form of affective labor	Framing content moderation as a harmful form of affective labor is based on attention to the characteristics of the task, which reveals the form of labor expropriation involved in the way that the work is organized in terms of its function under the neoliberal platform economy.

Figure 8. Table that summarizes the frames from the discursive context of investigative journalism as based on specific intersections between the levels of function, organization and characteristics.

The tables should offer a summary and a reference for the dicussion that I present in the following sections of Chapter 4.

4.1 Framing content moderation outsourcing at the intersection between its organization and the characteristics of the task

In this section, I discuss how outsourced content moderation as framed within the two discerned discursive contexts associated with Motaung's case reveals a form of social reproductive contradiction in reference to the intersection between the work's organization and its characteristics. On the one hand, the level of organization in the context of outsourced content moderation is discussed by Bartkowski, noting that this work evokes "the spatial organization of nineteenth-century domesticity in which racialized servants worked, lived, and cared out of sight" (70). On the other hand, Jereza (2021) discusses how this organizational context reflects in the characteristics of content moderation that align with socially reproductive labor as distinguished in terms of affective and emotional involvement. In response to the analysis of Bartkowski and Jereza, I draw on the above discourse on outsourced content moderation to discuss how the characteristics of the work are framed in relation to its organization. First, the intersection between the characteristics and organization of work is expressed in the frame that holds outsourced content moderation as ideally technologically automated (frame 2). In contrast, in the context of investigative journalism, this intersection is visible in the frames that expose content moderation as a work involving an expropriative form of labor displacement (frame 4) that is tied to a harmful form of affective labor (frame 5). On this basis, I discuss how the three distinct frames reveal the form that social reproductive contradiction takes in reference to the organization and characteristics of outsourced content moderation under the neoliberal platform economy.

Firstly, the frame that posits outsourced content moderation as organized in terms of expropriative displacement of labor (frame 4) aligns with the theory concerning the organization of social reproduction as taking shape in response to the globalization of neoliberal political economy. As Briggs (2017) points out, neoliberalism diminishes social welfare which relegates reproductive tasks to families and individuals as a private concern, while opening renewed spaces of precarious or informalized employment (15). In the same vein, Fraser (2018) unpacks how the structural effect of neoliberalism on reproductive labor is to displace it "from richer to poorer families, from the Global North to the Global South" (34). This pattern of 'displacement' of reproductive tasks could be observed as illustrated in terms of the way that both user activity on social media and the work of content moderation which makes the former possible are theorized to resemble the cultural and historical arrangements

in reproductive labor (Jarret 2014, 19; Jereza 2021, 13). If both, user activity and content moderation could be described as a form of reproductive labor, this arrangement then exemplifies what Fraser terms as a displacement that creates "ever longer global care chains" with, consequently, renewed forms of "care gaps" and associated conditions of insecurity (34). In response, the frame that exposes the organization of outsourced content moderation as an expropriative displacement of labor reflects the way that reproductive labor is theorized as restructured vis-à-vis the broader context of globalized neoliberal political economy.

Socially reproductive labor /Outsourced content moderation	4: a displaced labor	5: a harmful form of affective labor
Function	Social class and place	
Organization	Social class and place	Affective labor and social class
Characteristics		Affective labor and social class

Figure 9. Table 3: Frames 4-5 (investigative journalism) at the intersection between content moderation and socially reproductive labor.

More specifically, as I discussed above, content moderation is framed as displaced labor based on documentation concerning the process of transnational outsourcing which posits the work's organization at the intersection with the nature of the task that moderation involves (see fig. 9). In the context of investigative journalism covering Motaung's case, the organization of content moderation is framed as based on displacement of what is theorized as labor power, which is articulated in terms of misguided ambitions for development of careers, social mobility and socioeconomic security (Perrigo 2022a; Musanga 2023a; Siele 2023; Sambuli 2022). To this point, journalists frame the organization of content moderation outsourcing based on testimonies that disclose the moderators' unawareness of the task's nature, or a promise for explicitly distinct positions, which eventually led to that of content moderation. On this level, content moderation outsourcing could be observed to reveal reproductive labor as structurally devalued in terms of framing that is based on attention to the way that the moderators' class position intersects with the nature of the task that moderation involves (see fig. 9). To this

point, content moderators' testimonies point out how they arrived at the position due to socio-economic motivations, ending up taking on tasks that they did not sign up for and which left them with harms not only on an economic but also on embodied and emotional levels. In this way, the context of content moderation outsourcing highlights how displacement of socially reproductive labor under the neoliberal platform economy takes a distinct form in terms of the way that class intersects with the characteristics of the task involved.

Socially reproductive labor /Outsourced content moderation	Frame 1: a promise of public safety	2: work that should be automatized	3: work of social emancipation
Function	Public discourse	Enchanted technology	Social emancipation
Organization		Automation technologies	Transnational outsourcing
Characteristics	(Un)skilled task	(Un)skilled task	Emancipatory task

Figure 10. Table 4: Frames 1-3 (Meta/Sama) at the intersection between content moderation and socially reproductive labor.

In contrast to the way that outsourced content moderation is framed as characterized by an expropriative displacement of labor, the discursive context of platform corporations and outsourcing firms draw on the intersection between the work's characteristics and organization to introduce renewed narratives of justification. As discussed above, in the discursive context of the dominant social media corporation Meta, content moderation is discursively construed as a kind of work that should be ideally technologically automated. This narrative that posits technological automation as the preferred manner of organizing the task of content moderation exemplifies what Atanasoski and Vora (2019) theorize as a techno-liberal view drawn against the neoliberal logic of the platform aimed at maximizing the capacity for commodification of user data (Srnicek 2017; Kassem 2023). By extension, the frame that holds the organization of content moderation as ideally automated serves to justify the size at which current social media

platforms operate by articulating a promise for fulfilling the task of moderation via narratives concerning technological innovation. However, in order for platform corporations, such as Meta to draw this frame that puts forth the techno-liberal vision for automation of content moderation, it rests on assumptions concerning the characteristics of the work (see fig. 10). In line with Atanasoski and Vora (2019), this frame assumes content moderation as a specifically unskilled task that requires a worker who can perform work without human assistance but in complete control of the "human" conceived as a liberal subject (34). In this way, the assumptions concerning the nature of content moderation as a task intersect with the way that socially reproductive labor is theorized as a gendered and racialized form based on distinctions between what constitutes skilled and unskilled work (Glenn 1992, 37). By extension, Meta's techno-liberal frame draws on the characteristics of content moderation in order to put forth a normative vision concerning the work's organization which reifies socially reproductive labor that is theorized to constitute a gendered and racialized form.

In addition, as discussed above in the discursive context of the outsourcing firm Sama, the techno-liberal frame that intends to justify the contemporary organization of content moderation acquires further iterations. In particular, Sama's framing of outsourced content moderation reflects how the techno-liberal currency of technological innovation enables Sama to present the characteristics of outsourced content moderation as socially emancipatory (Sama n.d.). In this way, the manner in which outsourced content moderation is currently organized becomes framed in the context of Sama under justifications that are focused on the characteristics of the work, described as "dignifying" (Sama n.d.). By extension, Sama's framing exposes a distinct form of a techno-liberal narrative that is developed in response to the ideological context of neoliberal multiculturalism (Melamed 2006, 2). In line with Melamed, as Fraser (2018) discusses, this framing entails restructuring of social emancipation in "market terms" (33), which becomes apparent in the context of Sama in terms of the qualities that the firm ascribes to the characteristics of content moderation as a form of work. By extension, Sama's framing exemplifies a form of co-optation of narratives concerning social emancipation which the firm projects onto the characteristics of the work in order to justify its current organizational structures. In response, based on the framing of outsourced content moderation within the discursive context of Sama, it is possible to observe how the intersection between the work's characteristics and organization creates a reference for a further iteration of the techno-liberal narrative that posits technological innovation to epitomize social emancipation.

On this basis, outsourced content moderation as framed at the intersection between its organization and characteristics reveals a dimension of the form that social reproductive contradiction takes under the neoliberal platform economy. On the one hand, this intersection informs the frames that are developed in the context of investigative journalism, exposing the work as a form of socially reproductive labor that is displaced together with an expropriation of labor pertaining to the intimate and affective levels (Fraser 2018; Vora 2015; Jereza 2021; Bartkowski 2019). On the other hand, the techno-liberal frames that are developed in the discursive contexts of Meta/Sama, draw on narratives concerning technological innovation in order to frame the characteristics of outsourced content moderation in a manner that would justify how the work is currently organized. By extension, this framing that intends to justify the way that outsourced content moderation is currently organized reflects what Denbow (2024) identifies as a dialectical relation between innovation and reproduction, furthering how reproductive tasks are devalued under neoliberalism (2-3).[25] To this point, as discussed above, the neoliberal context becomes visible in the framing of outsourced content moderation in terms of the way that narratives concerning technological innovation serve as an outlet for co-optation of social emancipation. In this way, outsourced content moderation, as framed in response to the intersection between the work's characteristics and its organization in the two distinct discursive contexts, reveals a form of social reproductive contradiction in terms of what Denbow theorizes as a dialectical relation between innovation and social reproduction.

[25] Jennifer Denbow (2024) argues that "hypervaluation" of technological innovation and devaluation of reproductive labor rather than distinct and separate is dialectically related; thereby one side materializes in effect of the other (3). For Denbow, the conceptualization of innovation/reproduction binary helps to explain "how neoliberalism has manifested in the United States" (3).

4.2 Social reproductive contradiction in the framing of outsourced content moderation in terms of its function

In this section, I turn to the way that the above-outlined frames on outsourced content moderation shed light on a form of social reproductive contradiction in reference to the function that outsourced content moderation is organized to fulfill. As noted above, on the level of function, socially reproductive labor is broadly theorized as distinguished in terms of an orientation towards re-creating "Human life" (Briggs 2017, 2). By extension, this function then becomes expressed in terms of the characteristics that are associated with reproductive labor as involving distinct forms of intimate, affective, and emotional engagement (Vora 2015, 31). In response, based on the discourse associated with Motaung's case, I discern two contrasting frames that are drawn in reference to this intersection between the function and characteristics of outsourced content moderation. In the discursive context of Meta, this intersection is expressed in the frame (1) holding content moderation as a promise of public safety (Meta n.d.). In contrast, in the context of investigative journalism, the function and characteristics of this work reflects in the frame (5) which exposes the harmful form of affective labor involved. On this basis, I discuss how framing outsourced content moderation at the intersection of its function and characteristics expresses the way that socially reproductive labor as culturally and historically devalued is restructured into the neoliberal platform economy.

Firstly, as discussed above, in the discursive context of investigative journalism, the characteristics of content moderation are expressed in the frame that exposes the work as a harmful form of affective labor. In order to develop this frame, the reports that I read in the previous chapter draw on testimonies concerning how the moderators' class position intersects with the nature of the task. On the basis of this framing journalists then expose the way that outsourced content moderation requires a form of affective labor stretching beyond the compensated time of the workplace setting. By extension, this frame that holds content moderation as a harmful form of affective labor exemplifies what Jereza (2021) points out as an intersection between moderation and a specific form of socially reproductive labor. According to Jereza, content moderation constitutes a form of socially reproductive labor not only due to its function of re-creating the possibility for user participation on the platforms but also in terms of the affective labor that moderators need to undertake in order to sustain their commitment to the work (10). In this way, framing content moderation in terms of how the nature of the task intersects with its function extends the above discussion concerning the work's organization, highlighting how content moderation outsourcing exemplifies a form of

socially reproductive labor as structurally displaced into the workers' private and intimate lives beyond formal the circuits of economic production.

Based on this frame that exposes outsourced content moderation as organized in a way that entails a displacement of the harmful affective labor pertaining to the moderators' private lives, this perspective aligns with the conception of socially reproductive labor as structurally posited outside economic spheres of production. This framing then reveals that the way in which outsourced content moderation is organized involves a specific form of labor expropriation that, in turn, exemplifies a form of socially reproductive labor which is theorized as marked by a duality under distinct contexts of capitalist societies (Vora 2015, 31). As Vora discusses in reference to the conception of Leopoldina Fortunati (1995), reproductive labor "has a dual nature under capitalism because it represents itself and its subject-bearer as nonvalue, yet it simultaneously functions to siphon the value it produces into capital through the ability of the "productive" worker to return to work each day" (31). In line with this conception of socially reproductive labor as characterized by a 'duality,' outsourced content moderation as framed in reference to the affective labor that the work entails in terms of the moderators' class position then exposes the form of labor expropriation involved. In this way, framing outsourced content moderation in terms of the affective labor that is required by this work expresses how socially reproductive labor as devalued is in this context restructured against the forms of valorization undergirding the neoliberal platform economy.

On this basis, the way in which outsourced content moderation is framed upon the intersection between its function and characteristics in the context of investigative journalism exposes the material realities that are otherwise obscured under the first frame of public safety put forth in the discursive context of Meta. As discussed in the second chapter, Meta frames content moderation under a promise of public safety which the firm exemplifies via the number of employed outsourced content moderators together with narratives concerning technological efficiency (Meta n.d.). In this way, Meta's framing of content moderation draws a conception of "public safety" as divorced from the labor that moderation entails. In other words, under Meta's framing, content moderation as a form of public safety refers uniquely to the context of the users which is drawn as separate and thereby not contingent on the material conditions of the moderators.[26] In this way, in line with the discussion of Atanasoski and Vora (2015), the

[26] This framing exemplifies what Nancy Fraser (2018) discusses as the position that socially reproductive tasks take under distinct forms of capitalist economies (24). As Fraser discusses, socially reproductive labor as organized under capitalist economies is characterized by a "peculiar relation of separation-cum-dependence-

way in which Meta frames content moderation in reference to the intersection between the work's function and characteristics aligns with reproductive labor theorized as informed by gendered and racialized hierarchies that are distinguished in terms of skill and consequent forms of autonomy (28; Glenn 1992, 37). In turn, framing outsourced content moderation as a harmful form of affective labor exposes the material realities that remain otherwise obscured based on how the function of this work is expressed in framing that rests on assumptions concerning reproductive tasks as distributed along gendered and racialized hierarchies.

As a result, the intersection between the work's function and its characteristics constitutes a reference for conflicting frames that reveal the form that social reproductive contradiction takes under the neoliberal platform economy. Here, the form of social reproductive contradiction becomes visible in terms of how the function of the work that is framed under narratives of public safety is exposed as structurally contingent on the severely harmful affective labor that outsourced content moderation involves. By extension, based on the way that the frames which expose outsourced content moderation as displaced (frame 4) and affectively harmful labor (frame 5) speak to the level of function then exemplifies what Wan (2019) theorizes as the "necropolitics of digital culture" (251).[27] As Wan discusses in reference to the work of Achille Mbembe (2019), the necropolitical "refers to the politics of death and dispossession that comes with the extraction of a population's labour and reproductive power" (251).[28] In this way, framing of outsourced content moderation based on attention to the function and characteristics of the work, exposes what is theorized as the necropolitical dimension that is structural to the broader context of the neoliberal platform economy.

On this basis, the frames that are drawn in the discursive context of investigative journalism reveal the necropolitical dimension of the form that the social reproductive contradiction takes under the neoliberal platform economy. As noted above, according to

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cum-disavowal" creating "a built-in source of potential instability" (24). For the full argument, see Fraser (2018).

[27] In particular, what Evelyn Wan theorizes as the "necropolitics of digital culture" is developed in reference to the material composition of contemporary digital culture that involves violent labor circuits in mining and consequent extraction of rare minerals from the earth (253).

[28] Achille Mbembe develops the concept of the necropolitical in reference to Michel Foucault's concept of biopower. As Mbembe (2019) discusses, if in terms of biopower, the power of sovereignty is tied to the capacity of letting to live or die, necropolitical seeks to account for what place "is given to life, death, and the human body" in the contexts of politics that exercise "the right to kill" (66).

Fraser (2018), social reproductive contradiction refers to the way that the orientation of capital towards unlimited accumulation continuously destabilizes the reproductive forms of labor upon which the economy relies (24). In response, on the one hand, if outsourced content moderation expresses a form of social reproductive contradiction, it becomes obscured under the frames developed in the context of Meta/Sama that draw a distinct narrative that exemplifies what is theorized as a techno-liberal alibi. By extension, as I argued above, this framing draws a narrative of justification that is developed upon a promise of technological innovation that serves as an outlet for co-optation of social emancipation. On the other hand, the frames that I identify as drawn based on the intersection between the function and characteristics of outsourced content moderation in the context of investigative journalism, reveal how the form of social reproductive contradiction that is structural to the neoliberal platform economy entails a necropolitical characteristic. In this way, framing outsourced content moderation in reference to the intersection between the function and characteristics of the work then reveals what Denbow (2024) theorizes as the dialectical relation between innovation and reproduction (3) to entail a necropolitical dimension as configured against the context of the neoliberal platform economy.

Conclusion

I began this thesis by asking how outsourced content moderation is framed under the ideological and technological context of the neoliberal platform economy in a way that reveals a distinct form of what is theorized as the social reproductive contradiction. Based on the above-discussed discursive contexts of platform corporations/outsourcing firms (Meta/Sama) and investigative journalism that I associated with Motaung's case, I identified five frames that reflect outsourced content moderation as a form of socially reproductive labor which is in a specific way degraded and consequently organized into a harmful circuit of labor. In the discursive context of the platform corporation Meta and its outsourcing firm Sama, I discussed outsourced content moderation as framed in a way that intersects with socially reproductive labor in terms of renewed narratives that intend to justify the work as devalued and organized into harmful conditions. To this point, I unpacked how content moderation becomes framed in terms of narratives drawn based on a confluence between technological innovation and a co-optation of social emancipation. In contrast to this framing that aims to enshrine the way that content moderation is devalued and currently organized, I discussed how investigative journalism develops framing of outsourced content moderation based on attention to the intersection between the work's organization and its characteristics. By extension, I discussed how the frames that are developed in the context of investigative journalism expose a renewed scope of harm based on attention to the affective labor that the work requires in relation to its organization and the associated class position of the moderators. In response, I concluded that each of the five frames that I identified as tied to the two distinct discursive contexts associated with Motaung's case reveals a specific dimension of the form that social reproductive contradiction takes under the neoliberal platform economy.

More specifically, as this research shows, outsourced content moderation expresses socially reproductive labor as devalued in terms of the way its function, organization, and characteristics become framed within the mentioned discursive contexts. In the context of investigative journalism, outsourced content moderation reflects a form of socially reproductive labor under the frames that expose the work in terms of expropriative labor displacement (frame 4) together with a harmful form of affective labor (frame 5). By extension, this framing aligns with Vora's (2015) discussion of reproductive labor as a gendered and racialized form based on the work's characteristics of harmful affective involvement that structurally extends beyond the formal context of economic production (30-31). Conversely,

the present organization of content moderation as wage labor reflects in the frames that intend to obscure and justify the concurrent harm of this work as composed of severely compromised conditions of mental health that (former) moderators testify to as tied to their work and associated economic situations (Musanga 2023a; Perrigo 2022a; Siele 2023). In this way, content moderation outsourcing as framed within the discursive context of Meta and Sama exemplifies a form of what Atanasoski and Vora (2019) theorize as a techno-liberal alibi (4). Outsourced content moderation as framed under a techno-liberal alibi becomes visible, on the one hand, in the visions that aim to justify the present organization of the work upon narratives of technological innovation promising a future in which this work will be fully automated (frame 2). On the other hand, insofar as such a vision was not realized, what is theorized as a techno-liberal alibi, promising a transcendence of current gendered and racialized hierarchies, is articulated in terms of co-optation of social emancipation (frame 3). On this level, the characteristics and organization of outsourced content moderation constitute an intersection that provides a reference for the distinct frames that reveal socially reproductive labor as a specifically gendered and racialized form.

In this way, each of the frames that I discussed above highlights a distinct facet that reveals the form that social reproductive contradiction takes under the corresponding technological and ideological context of the neoliberal platform economy. As I discussed above, outsourced content moderation could be observed to express a social reproductive contradiction in terms of its function and consequently publicly visible excesses resulting from the sociality that contemporary platforms bring forth. In response, I maintain that the way in which content moderation expresses this contradiction stimulates techno-liberal narratives of technological innovation that articulate and support the frame holding a promise of public safety (frame 1). However, as I noted above, insofar as content moderation is not possible to fully automate, technological innovation as a narrative of justification becomes expressed in terms of co-optation of social emancipation, reflecting the broader context that Melamed (2006) in line with Fraser (2018) theorizes as neoliberal multiculturalism (1). In this way, the form of social reproductive contradiction that content moderation outsourcing expresses in response to the neoliberal platform economy highlights frames that articulate renewed narratives of justification that rest on tying together technological innovation with a co-optation of narratives concerning social emancipation.

On the basis of the frames that I identified within the above-discussed discursive contexts associated with Motaung's case, it is possible to observe the way that outsourcing of content moderation work constitutes a specific form of neo-colonial labor circuit, which

highlights some of the limits of my analysis. As Roberts (2019) discusses based on her ethnographic study in the Philippines, the organization of outsourced content moderation exemplifies a neo-colonial circuit of labor based on a system that furthers histories of U.S. imperial domination through novel means (196; Kwet 2019). To this point, Marte-Wood and Santos (2021) explicate how outsourcing content moderation to the Philippines on behalf of U.S.-based platform corporations creates a technological restructuring of histories in colonial modes of labor exploitation and expropriation (108). In response, based on the methodological guidance that I take in my analysis, it is possible to point out limits to which I explicate the histories underlying how the operation of outsourcing firms, such as Sama in the context of Nairobi, Kenya creates a distinctly neo-colonial circuit of labor. In this way, the perspective of my analysis is limited in explicating how content moderation outsourcing constitutes a specifically neo-colonial circuit of labor based on a diachronic focus that could further unpack the histories underlying operation of firms, such as Sama in Nairobi as a contemporary possibility.

Further, beyond the limited diachronic scope of my analysis as tied to Nairobi as the place that Motaung's case brings into purview, the perspective of my analysis reflects limitations in terms of addressing the case material as expressing a renewed form of resistance. Since its inception, the case of Motaung constitutes a collective and transnational form of resistance addressing the harms imposed by the organizational structures of this work. Even though I engaged with what I discern as the frames that may be considered to undergird formations of resistance, I do not unpack Motaung's case as one that exposes instances of building renewed forms of coalitions and solidarity amongst workers and organizations within the platform economy on a transnational level (Hanspal 2022; Linton 2024; Keenan 2023a). If, as van Doorn (2017) discusses, the historical context underlying the formations of the neoliberal platform economy could be characterized by a general deformation of "international labor solidarity" (901), Motaung's case may highlight an instance of a renewed scope to which such a structural disposition becomes contested. Therefore, in response to the character of my case material and the perspective of my analysis, I then discern attention to Motaung's case as an instance of transnational resistance and its broader historical context as two limitations that become visible to me based on the methodological guidance and the consequent analytical focus that I drew across the above chapters.

As I outlined in my section on methodology, I drew my analysis with general guidance in critical-techno-cultural discourse analysis (CTDA) in order to undertake qualitative frame analysis as informed by a specific ideological and technological context. In this way, the frames

that I identified and discussed across the above chapters offer an insight into the way that socially reproductive labor is restructured as devalued against the context of the neoliberal platform economy. By extension, the above-discussed limitations of my analysis are, in part, based on my general engagement with CTDA. As I noted above, I drew on CTDA based on its analytical perspective, focusing on the "interactions between technology, cultural ideology, and technology practice" in dialogue with a specific strand of critical theory (1013). On this basis, I focused my analysis in terms of the above-discussed material that I selected from the two discursive contexts associated with Motaung's case. As a result, based on the analytical perspective of qualitative frame analysis together with general guidance in CTDA, I observed that my analysis remain limited in terms of a diachronic focus together with a consideration of Motaung's case as a form of collective transnational resistance.

Finally, based on the two observed limitations, I would like to point out a possible direction for further research. Generally, as I discussed above, the perspective of social reproduction theory (SRT) that conceives of the economic as a social relation could be observed to invite an account that is integrative of the ways that content moderation is organized as a form of labor in theory concerning the sociality that, as Gillespie (2018a) notes, contemporary platforms bring into being (22). In other words, the perspective of SRT invites a direction that treats (outsourced) content moderation as a form of labor that not only shapes the social formations on behalf of platform users but is also a distinct part of this social formation. Even though I take guidance in the perspective of SRT across the above-outlined analysis, given my methodological guidance with the associated case study and material selection, it creates corresponding limitations in the analytical depth that I develop. Therefore, insofar as the contemporary organization of content moderation as a form of labor exposes a distinct form of what is theorized as the social reproductive contradiction, following further in terms of SRT may invite to explicate the significance of this labor arrangement as structurally related to the varied social and political formations taking place in response to the working of the digital (social media) platforms. In other words, this perspective points towards unpacking and explicating the ways in which specific social/political/economic formations that are currently taking shape under the present digital platforms are contingent on the culturally and historically specific form of degradation concerning social reproduction that outsourced content moderation exemplifies.

Therefore, drawing on social reproduction theory, I suggest that this theoretical perspective offers guidance to deepen the accounts concerning the kind of sociality that the contemporary context of the neoliberal platform economy brings forth. In this way, if the

current organization of content moderation is situated as a distinct part of the sociality that takes shape under the neoliberal logic of current social media platforms, this perspective opens a space to account for the public formations (and their distinct forms of destructiveness) in this context as based on their material conditions. In this way, I read this perspective to invite innovative research directions that can further address what Roberts (2019) already pointed out as an objective of her ethnographic research on the work of outsourced content moderation. As Roberts notes, the objective of her study was "to give the rest of us the information we need to engage with more detail, nuance, and complexity in conversations about the impact of social media in our interpersonal, civic, and political lives. We cannot do the latter effectively if we do not know, as they say, how the sausage gets made" (3). This direction, however, may ask for bringing together distinct theoretical perspectives and, in turn, drawing innovative methodological forms of research engagement in order to develop an appropriate approach. For example, that could entail developing textual analysis of artistic and documentary works together with ethnographic research as exemplified by the work of Vora (2015).[29] In this way, the perspective of SRT may enable further research that can reconstruct and account for the kinds of social relations and their ecologies that materialize despite the obstructions and obfuscations introduced by the monetary imperatives of contemporary digital platforms. In conclusion, I suggest that social reproduction theory may offer a foundation that arguably invites innovative approaches to research with the intention to account for and imagine alternatives out of a deeper purview of the destructiveness to public and social life that the neoliberal platform economy brings forth.

[29] In this work, Kalindi Vora (2015) focuses primarily on the context of outsourced call center agencies and transnational surrogacy developed via outsourcing firms connecting clients in the United States with call center agents and surrogate mothers in India.

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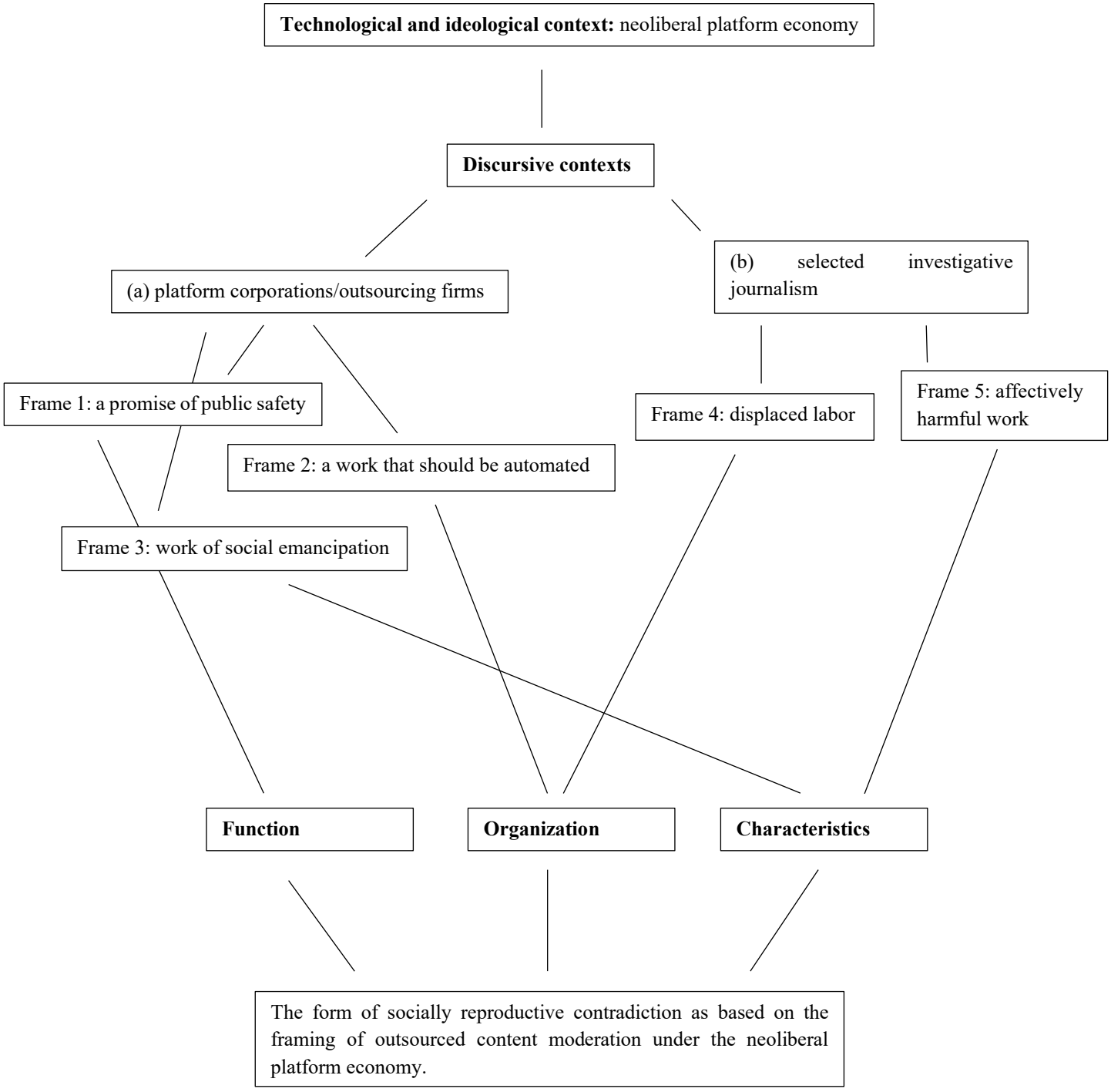
APPENDIX

DIAGRAM: SOCIAL REPRODUCTIVE CONTRADICTION IN TERMS OF FRAMING ON THE THREE LEVELS OF FUNCTION, ORGANIZATION AND CHARACTERISTICS.



Appendix 1. Diagram: Framing content moderation in terms of function, organization and characteristics as an expression of a socially reproductive contradiction.

Appendix 1. Rationale

The above diagram should illustrate and summarize all of the five frames that I identified and discussed across the above chapters.

As I discussed in the second section of my theoretical framework, the levels of function, characteristics, and organization serve as a reference in the way that socially reproductive labor is theorized as culturally and historically devalued. The above diagram should offer a summary that details how each of the frames reveals outsourced content moderation as a distinct form of socially reproductive labor based on the three levels of function, characteristics, and organization.

Three levels of function, characteristics, and organization:

1. Based on the broad conception of Laura Briggs (2017), I draw on socially reproductive labor as defined in terms of its 'function' as referring to the quality of a specific task that is oriented towards reproduction of "Human life" (2). More specifically, I recognize this function as theorized to become limited under capitalist economies to the extent of re-creating 'labor power' or the capacity of engaging in 'productive labor' (Bhattacharya 2018, 3).
2. On the level of characteristics, I draw on socially reproductive labor as defined in terms of the qualities that a specific task involves, such as, distinctly affective, embodied, and intimate forms of labor (Vora 2015, 30; Jereza 2021, 8).
3. On the level of organization, I draw on the theory that distinguishes socially reproductive tasks as conventionally organized in a way that is occluded from public appearance and extends beyond formalized circuits of economic production (Bartkowski 2019, 68; Mezzadri 2019, 38).

Frame 1: a promise of public safety	Framing content moderation as a promise of public safety under the discursive context of Meta is based on the level of function which, in turn, posits this work as characterized by a specifically unskilled labor that obscures the realities of labor circuits informed by the work's current organization.
Frame 2: work that should be automated	Framing content moderation as a work that should be automated is based on the level of organization, which is drawn on a techno-liberal assumption that posits the function of content moderation and the associated characteristics of the task as ideally technologically automated.
Frame 3: work of social emancipation	Framing outsourced content moderation as a work that is socially emancipatory is based on the level of characteristics, which results in justification of the work as currently organized upon co-optation of discourses in reference to the context of neoliberal multiculturalism.

Appendix 2. Table that summarizes the frames from the discursive context of Meta/Sama as based on specific intersections between the levels of function, organization and characteristics.

Frame 4: a displaced labor	Framing content moderation as an expropriative form of labor displacement is based on attention to the organization of the work, which reveals the form that the characteristics of the work and its function take under the neoliberal platform economy.
Frame 5: a harmful form of affective labor	Framing content moderation as a harmful form of affective labor is based on attention to the characteristics of the task, which reveals the form of labor expropriation involved in the way that the work is organized in relation to its function under the neoliberal platform economy.

Appendix 3. Table that summarizes the frames from the discursive context of investigative journalism as based on specific intersections between the levels of function, organization and characteristics.

The tables should offer a summary and a reference for the dicussion that I present in the following sections of Chapter 4.