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Africa

Unbridled exploitation in the digital sector

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The multinationals are not only plundering Africa's natural resources, which are essential to the manufacture of computer hardware, they are also exploiting the continent's workers under extreme conditions.

The advent of artificial intelligence (AI) requires downstream identification of a huge mass of data to enable algorithms to improve their efficiency. To carry out these tasks, almost 90% of high-tech companies resort to outsourcing.

Content identification

In the French-speaking world, cost savings are estimated at over 30% for companies based in Morocco, Tunisia or Mauritius, and 50% in Madagascar. Madagascar is home to almost 250 BPO (Business Process Outsourcing) agencies.

Working conditions there are deplorable. French radio station RFI reported on employees' experiences: "The trainers come up behind us. If they think you're taking too long to process a simple image, they give you a warning. If it happens a second time, they send you straight back. If, for example, you haven't finished the 200 tasks you were supposed to do in a day, you have to keep going. And that's not counted as overtime." [\[1\]](#)

As for wages, they start at around 90 euros a month and can go up to 500 euros for highly qualified employees. Alongside this tedious work of identifying data, other BPOs [business process outsourcing] offer moderation services. They are used by major social networking companies such as Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, Twitter and others.

Danger to mental health

Sama is one such BPO company based in Kenya. Its employees spend entire days processing ultra-violent content, including murder, torture and sexual violence against women and children. They tag it, feeding it into the algorithms of social network filters and artificial intelligence. The consequences for their mental health are serious, amounting to post-traumatic stress disorder. At no time did the Kenyan company set up psychological support structures for its employees.

Worse still, in order to carry out the moderations in the local languages, Sama recruited young, often poor, graduates from various countries in East and Southern Africa. It brought them to Kenya without warning them of the real nature of the job. The company spoke only of administrative work, omitting the question of the daily confrontation with online hate that they would have to endure. Once in Kenya, these young workers were trapped.

Resisting and organising

An initial complaint in May 2022 against Meta, Facebook's parent company, and its subcontractor Sama was

launched by former employee Daniel Motaung. The complaint focused on working conditions, pay issues and the lack of psychological support.

Other complaints followed when Sama ceased its moderation activities and dismissed the employees. The Kenyan court has suspended the dismissals pending a ruling.

At the same time, 150 employees set up the first African union of content moderators, despite the employers' policies of intimidation. Other employees, such as those at Majorel, the company that took over TikTok's moderation activities, have announced their decision to join the union.

Although despised by the major social networking groups, moderators play an essential role in combating online hate. Failings can have dramatic consequences. Another trial is taking place in Ethiopia against Meta. During the war in Tigray, calls for the murder of a Tigrayan university professor living in the capital Addis Ababa circulated for several days on Facebook. Despite his representations to the social network, the messages continued to circulate. He was shot by his killers.

*Translated by **International Viewpoint** from [l'Anticapitaliste](#).*

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[1] RFI, 12 June 2023 "[L'intelligence artificielle gagne du terrain en Afrique](#)".