

## 'The Digital Hell': Dark Web in Mos'ad's *Kopimist* (2019) and Percy's *Dark Net* (2017) in Terms of Fuchs's Digital Capitalism and Digital Ethics

Amal Galal Mohammad Morsy\*  
[agm01@fayoum.edu.eg](mailto:agm01@fayoum.edu.eg)

### Abstract

The digital revolution has transformed global communication and lifestyles, but it has not altered capitalism's focus on wealth accumulation. Digital giants like Facebook and Google, for example, operate on profit-making policies similar to those of traditional capitalist organisations, but their commodities are their users' data, which puts users' privacy at risk due to this praxis of digital surveillance. Humans are dominated by digital capitalism and this, in turn, fuels the existence of a new world with certain rules, or what is known as digital ethics. Unfortunately, the existence of such rules does not provide a completely safe digital environment because some agents and companies violate these ethics, as exemplified in the dark web world. The danger of the dark web lies in the anonymity of its users' identities, a peculiar characteristic that makes it a haven for immoral and illegal activities, such as drug trade, weapons trafficking, and terrorist plots. This, in turn, produces an increasing threat to the security and stability of any society. Thus, this paper aims to assert the dangerous impact of digital capitalism on contemporary societies, elucidate the significance of digital ethics as an alternative for the common good, and raise awareness concerning the catastrophic consequences of the lack of such ethics in the dark web. Two representative novels from the Arab and English literature are selected and analyzed from the perspective of Christian Fuchs's critical theories of 'Digital Capitalism' and 'Digital Ethics'. The selected novels are *The Kopimist: The Dark Web* (2019) by the Egyptian novelist Ahmad Mos'ad and *The Dark Net* (2017) by the American author Benjamin Percy.

**Keywords:** *Dark Web; Digital Capitalism; Digital Ethics; The Kopimist: The Dark Web; and The Dark Net.*

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\* Lecturer of English Literature, Faculty of Arts, Fayoum University

## Introduction

The digital revolution has globally transformed communication and lifestyles. However, it has not altered Capitalism's focus on wealth accumulation. 'Digital Capitalism', as defined by Christian Fuchs, "is not a new phase of capitalist development but rather a dimension of the organisation of capitalism that is shaped by digital mediation" (*Digital Ethics* 222). Digital capitalist organisations like Facebook, Google, and Twitter, for example, operate on profit-making policies similar to those of traditional capitalist organisations, but their commodities are the data of their users, which puts users' privacy at risk due to their praxis of digital surveillance. Unfortunately, contemporary societies are massively dominated by digital capitalism, which "signifies the negativity of accumulation: the existence of injustices," as Fuchs states (*Digital Ethics* 41). This, in turn, necessitates the existence of an appropriate type of ethics for such a world, namely digital ethics, as Fuchss refers to. The term digital ethics refers to "the branch of ethics concerning the set of rules and moral guidelines that govern interpersonal behaviour between individuals and/or companies that is mediated (sic) by computer technology" (Gorbatai, "What is Digital Ethics"). However, the existence of such rules does not provide a completely safe digital environment because some agents and organisations may still obtain and market users' data or employ underhanded methods to entice users into dangerous practices. These illicit practices are unfortunately nurtured by the dark web.

The 'Dark Web', a term coined in 2009, refers to "the anonymous communication provided by cryptonetworks like 'Tor'" (Robertson et al. 95). Users get access to the dark web through specific anonymity networks such as The Onion Router (Tor), Freenet, or The Invisible Internet Project (I2P). The danger of the dark web lies in the anonymity of users' identities. Thus, it is mostly a haven for immoral and illegal activities such as drug trade, weapons trafficking, organ trade, infant pornography, terrorist plots, phishing attacks, etc. It is also a haven for those who escape any religious or political restrictions in their countries. This makes the term dark web associated with mystery, crimes, terror and the absence of digital ethics, a matter that "move[s] individuals and organisations out of their comfort zones" (Cohen 45). Accordingly, this paper aims to explore the dangerous impact of digital capitalism on contemporary societies, digital ethics as an alternative for the common good, and the catastrophic consequences of the lack of such ethics in the dark web. Two representative novels from the Arab and English cultures are selected and analyzed from the perspective of Christian Fuchs's critical theories of 'Digital Capitalism' and 'Digital Ethics'. The selected novels are *The Kopimist: The Dark Web* (2019) by the Egyptian novelist Ahmad Mos'ad and *The Dark Net* (2017) by the American author Benjamin Percy.

### **Literature Review**

Appeared during the 1990s, the term 'Digital Capitalism' owes much to Karl Marx's ideology on Capitalism. Through his landmark *Capital Volume 1*, Marx discussed how the mode of production in capitalist societies is a profit-based system. In any society, commodity

production (i.e., the object produced to be exchanged at a market) is based on two pillars: the market need for the product (i.e., the use value) and its pricing to be purchased by customers (i.e., the exchange value). The greater the need for the product on the market, the higher its exchange value. As a profit-based economic system, capitalism, in Marx's view, differs from this traditional process of commodity exchange. The main target of a capitalist society is to increase its capital, and this is commonly done through the exploitation of the proletariat class. Realizing the accumulation of wealth and the advancement of capital to achieve profits are pivotal targets on the capitalists' agendas. Ethics, which is supposed to be the basis of the relationship between the bourgeoisie class and its proletariat counterpart, is another significant issue addressed by Marx. Through his notion of surplus value, Marx brings attention to the inequitable exchange of labour for goods within the capitalist system, ultimately leading to worker exploitation. A worker is sometimes obliged to work for twelve hours, but his wage may equal only eight hours of his labour power. This, in turn, makes the worker unable to meet his basic needs for commodities and curtails his freedom, which strengthens an individual's feeling of alienation from his society.

Noteworthy, ethics has been a significant field of study for philosophers like Aristotle, Immanuel Kant, and Jeremy Bentham. It can be divided into two types: specific ethics, relevant to a particular discipline, and general ethics, shared by society or humanity as a whole. Aristotle's Virtue Ethics, for example, emphasizes ideal characteristics for moral behaviour, which can be developed through

education and habituation. A person is born with both positive and negative tendencies, and cultivating positive characteristics while discouraging negative ones is significant to becoming a virtuous person from Aristotle's perspective. Another prominent contribution to ethics theories is attributed to Immanuel Kant through Deontology. Kant's Deontology, derived from the Greek words *deon* (i.e., duty) and *Logos* (i.e., science), studies the relationship between ethics and duty, emphasizing the importance of applying ethics in all situations, regardless of their related consequences. Kant argued that the moral worth of an action done out of duty is not determined by the results but by the moral principle governing one's duty (20).

Thus, Deontologists are rational, moral, and dedicated to upholding moral standards, ignoring utilitarian consequences that Bentham's Consequentialism is structured on. Obviously, there is a distinction between deontologists and consequentialists. The philosophy of Consequentialism or Utilitarianism, led by Jeremy Bentham, associates between an action's morality and its consequences. In contrast, Kant's Deontology holds that morality is connected to the actions themselves rather than their consequences. When it comes to lying, for instance, a deontologist insists on telling the truth, as it is a moral obligation and duty, irrespective of any consequences. In contrast, a consequentialist evaluates the effects of lying, and if it causes harm, it is considered wrong. However, if no harm is done, it may be deemed acceptable and referred to as a white lie.

## **Theoretical Framework: Christian Fuchs's Digital Capitalism and Digital Ethics**

Christian Fuchs, the Austrian critical digital theorist and sociologist, is interested in examining the interaction between societies and digital media. His work on digital capitalism and ethics reflects his conviction that any theory of society must recognize the important role that knowledge and communication have played in the economy and society since the mid-20th century (Fuchs, *Communication and Capitalism* 2). In the age of information, the Internet and social platforms have dominated all spheres, and working without them has become unthinkable. This inevitable presence necessitated the emergence of what Christian Fuchs calls 'Digital Capitalism': "[a] part of capitalism that is organized around the production of digital commodities and digital products" (Fuchs, *Marxism* 71). Although companies like Google and Facebook rarely define themselves as profit-oriented companies, their actual businesses assert the opposite. These digital capitalists have the authority to monitor users' activities on the internet and, in turn, invest the data to achieve profits by profiling every user in a certain category based on his preferences. For example, if the user usually searches for the best brands of smart fridges through Google or clicks 'Like' on smart fridge pages on Facebook, later on, multiple ads about smart fridges will appear automatically. This activity of e-business has become a lifestyle. Although it may seem a privilege, for Alar Balkan, a cyborg rights activist, it is a kind of "manipulating behaviour" because "the next time you go to renew your insurance and your premium's double. And then when you ask them, 'Why have my

premiums doubled?' they say, 'Well, your smart fridge told us what you're eating'" (0:13; 0:51– 0.59).

Notwithstanding, Fuchs's theory of *Digital Capitalism* is greatly influenced by Marxian and Marxist-Humanist concepts of 'accumulation of capital' and 'use-value'. This suggests that corporations like Google and Facebook, on one hand, provide their digital services with the aim of generating profits and increasing their capital. On the other hand, they enable the users to communicate, get or exchange information, and accomplish business at any time, which satisfies the users' needs (i.e., use-value). Ironically, these capitalist entities do not introduce themselves as profit-driven companies, but rather their propaganda is based on their role in the 'use-value'. For instance, "Facebook...says that it 'helps you connect and share with the people in your life'. Twitter argues it allows you to 'connect with your friends—and other fascinating people'. These claims are not untrue, but only one side of the story," in Fuchs's words (*Reading Marx* 1). Indeed, they satisfy their users' needs (i.e., use-value), but at the same time they provide services for profits (i.e., exchange-value), potentially drawing attention away from their profit-oriented motives. In reality, like any capitalist organisation, Google and Facebook generate profits through the unpaid surplus-value.

'Surplus-Value' is a term that Marx utilized to describe the inequitable relationship between the workers' labour power (i.e., the working hours) and their actual wages. In the case of giant capitalist corporations like Google and Facebook, Fuchs believes that they

generate profits by marketing commodities that have unpaid surplus-value, which is a direct result of exploiting their users:

The two companies sell targeted ads with the help of algorithmic auctions. Users' online activities of clicking and viewing are the value-generating labour that yields the profits of companies such as ad-financed digital corporations such as Google, YouTube, and Facebook. Users create data, meta-data, comments, searches, views, likes, information and communication flows, and social relations. The use of Google and Facebook is a form of digital labour that creates a data commodity and surplus value. (Fuchs, *Digital Ethics* 71)

Fuchs perceives users of these digital capitalist corporations as unpaid digital workers exploited by such corporations to yield profits and achieve their capitalist agendas. This form of exploitation represents, in Fuchs's view, an "unjust" form of communicative and digital capitalism, where "Capitalism signifies the negativity of accumulation: the existence of injustices" (Fuchs, *Digital Ethics* 41). The impact of injustices produced by communicative and digital capitalism is identically embodied in the 'Dark Web', a world notoriously featured by the lack of what Fuchs terms 'Digital Ethics'.

'Digital Ethics', also known as 'Computer Ethics', is "a philosophical field of study where ethics, communication studies, and computer science intersect" (Fuchs, *Digital Ethics* 12). It is "an ethics that studies the foundations of digital society and the principles and practices of morality in the context of digitalization" (Fuchs, *Digital Ethics* 14). Digital ethics, accordingly, focuses on how people behave while being



involved in a digital context and examines whether their practices conform to moral laws or not. When Fuchs was asked about which category of ethics his digital ethics belongs to, he stated that his "digital ethics is both a form of applied and general ethics that impacts the ethics of society and requires specialized insights for professionals who engineer, produce, and work with digital technologies and digital content" (6). It is a 'version' of applied ethics when it "studies morality in the context of computing and digital technologies" and is a form of general ethics "because almost all aspects of society have been digitalized and are shaped by digital technologies" (6). Like any field, the digital field has common principles, or what Fuchs refers to as the 'Digital Commons'. For Fuchs, "the rise of computing and the internet in society has come along with new forms of commodities and commons" ("The Ethics of the Digital Commons" 112).

Remarkably, Fuchs's concept of 'Digital Ethics' combines principles from Aristotle's Virtue Ethics, Kant's Deontology, Bentham's Consequentialism, and Marxist Humanism. It emphasizes the importance of developing digital ethics to provide a virtuous digital environment. Existence of illegal websites as Dark Web demonstrates the absence of digital virtues like honesty, self-surveillance, safety, and love for humanity. Fuchs believes that users should respect digital ethics as a duty and recognize privacy, honesty, and self-surveillance as absolutes or unconditioned commands that should be implemented for their own sake, regardless of their utilitarian outcomes. As for the impact of the consequentialist approach on Fuchs's digital ethics, Fuchs suggests that if a digitalization method yields more advantages than

disadvantages, it should be implemented (Fuchs, *Digital Ethics* 7). This approach, based on Bentham's Consequentialism, suggests that the advantages or disadvantages of a practice are determined by its consequences and should be supported if it aligns with digital ethics. Therefore, the advantages or disadvantages of the Internet and digital platforms depend on the consequences of the users' practices. If an individual's practice is controlled by digital ethics and has good outcomes, this form of digitalization should be supported. In contrast, the same form of digitalization that exists in the dark web has to be rejected because of its destructive and apocalyptic consequences for society.

Regarding the impact of Marxist-Humanism, Fuchs states that his approach aims to advance a Marxist-humanist ethics informed by Karl Marx's works (*Digital Ethics* 6). Cornel West represents an example of the powerful impact of Marxist-Humanism on Fuchss's ideas. West believes that the culture of any society is formed by some institutions such as family, schools, religious institutions, and communication industries. These institutions "promote particular cultural ideals" and practices that "focus on the formation of identity, the self, and how humans make meaning of themselves, each other and society" (Fuchs, "Cornel West and Marxist Humanism" 1231). Consequently, Fuchs adds Internet and digital platforms to these institutions due to their ability to "enable and shape human meaning-making" (1231). In addition, he believes that the relationship between individuals' practices and the digital world is inseparable and reciprocal, but he resists any form of exploitation of users and believes that justice and the common

good should be the standards for the society, the target that digital capitalists struggle against. Digital capitalists like Google and Facebook, in Futchs's opinion, resist the logic of the digital commons, as they are built on a class relationship between their owners and users. The digital common means collective ownership of digital platforms, which threatens the economy of these capitalist entities and threaten their power of digital surveillance (*Digital Ethics* 71-2). This digital surveillance, in Fuchs's perspective, threatens democracy, freedom of opinion, and individual's privacy and, in turn, prevents 'the digital commons'; a significant step for "advancing the common good and a good life for all humans" (75). The result is inevitably disastrous, as embodied in the dark web world.

### **Discussion: Critical Analysis of Ahmad Mos'ad's *The Kopimist: The Dark Web* and Benjamin Percy's *The Dark Net***

*The Kopimist: The Dark Web* (2019) (In Arabic: *Alnaasikh: Al Internet Almuthlm*) is a novel by Ahmad Mos'ad, an Egyptian novelist best known for gothic novels, fantasy, and science fiction, including *Behind the Scenes of Death* (2018), *The Kopimist: The Dark Web* (2019), *A Tuktuk from Hell* (2019), *Paradise of Cain* (2022), and *Blue Fall* (2023). Mos'ad's *Kopimist* tells the story of a young man who lives alone with his parrot due to his father's work abroad and his mother's death. He was born albino and deaf, which causes him to face a life of solitude. Despite his parents' efforts during his infancy to integrate him into the outside world by sending him to school, he was met with violence and bullying from the first day. This experience solidified his

belief that the outside world is not his place: "After my first day at the school, I returned with a wound on my forehead, above the eyebrow, and red bruises all over my body... Here I realized that the outside world is harsh and that it is not my right place," as he narrates (Mos'ad 10–11; *translation mine*)\*.

Such a cruel experience prompted his parents to have him homeschooled, and thus he became more and more isolated. In that solitary life, his parents' unwavering devotion and his computer were his only sources of comfort. He was indulged by his father, who was a computer engineer, in the world of computers when he was seven years old due to his father's belief that computers are the future. Therefore, since his childhood, the Internet has become the

only world where he feels a sense of belonging, and the moment of logging in to this world means "the beginning of fun" (Mos'ad 19). In addition, the Internet has become more than a world for entertainment for him because he mastered its skills and secrets until he became one of the most skilled hackers, a matter that makes him a target for one of the dark web companies, namely *The Black Crew Hackers* (B.C.H.), to implement digital illegal tasks. Notably, the real name of Mos'ad's albino protagonist is unknown, as he is first introduced to the reader as The Copyist, and after being hired by the B.C.H., he is called The Kopimist. It seems that Mos'ad prefers to make his protagonist have an unknown identity to prepare him for a world that is mainly structured

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\* All quotes from Mos'ad's *Kopimist* in this paper were translated by the author.

on anonymity (i.e., the dark web), the world that is described in Benjamin Percy's *Dark Net* as the "digital hell" (Percy 151).

Benjamin Percy, the American author of *The Dark Net* (2017), *Red Moon* (2013), *The Wilding* (2011), and *The Dead Lands* (2015), depicts the danger that threatens contemporary societies beyond the digital world through what is called the dark net or the "incubator for evil," as he describes (Percy 151). Unlike Mos'ad, who prefers one protagonist to increase the intensity of his thrilling actions, Percy uses four characters with unique backgrounds and experiences. Even though some of these characters have no inclination to enter this demonic world, it is through the dark web that they are brought together. The first character is Hannah, a young blind girl who unfortunately suffers from Retinitis Pigmentosa. Although she is only twelve years old, she behaves in a responsible manner like adults. She was given a high-tech visual prosthetic device called Mirage to enable her to see. This device not only enables her to see but also puts her in danger, as she becomes able to see things that others cannot. Soon enough, she finds herself in a chase with demons, which requires the help of her aunt, Lela, to transcend such danger.

Lela, the second character, is a journalist who finds herself in a perplexing story that no one wishes to face. She is known for her aversion to computers and is therefore called "a Luddite" (Percy 3). Suddenly, her unrelenting journalistic pursuit of facts leads her to an intriguing story that nobody wants her to reveal. While preparing a press report on the sale of a house owned by a serial killer, she discovers a group digging its basement to find a mass grave containing

skeletons not of humans but of strange creatures like beasts. Taking a skull from such remains brings her and her family many troubles from the demons' side. Mike Juniper is the third character in Percy's thrilling novel. He is portrayed as "an ugly man... with the close-together eyes, craggy brow, and weak chin that bring to mind a 50,000-year-old cave dweller" (Percy 43). He runs The Weary Traveller, a homeless shelter that provides various services to its residents. His steadfast dedication to monitoring and caring for The Weary Traveller's residents is so great that he is seen as insane for being solely responsible for it without any help. The fourth character is Sarin, an old woman characterized by her contradictory character. At the time she has a phobia of death, she is portrayed as a brave woman and the "monster[s] hunter" (133). She plays a significant role in the recovery of Juniper and Hannah from the demonic infection that was about to end their lives.

A Futchsian analysis of Mos'ad's *Kopimist* and Percy's *Dark Net* reflects how the themes in both novels endorse Futchs' critical views on Digital Capitalism and Digital Ethics. Although they belong to different cultures, both authors portray how contemporary societies are possessed with and exploited by the digital capitalist entities (such as Google, Facebook, YouTube, etc.) to achieve certain capitalist/profitable agendas. Percy, for example, believes that "Facebook and Google track your browsing habits, your buying habits, your location, your race, gender, religion, age, orientation, and custom-fit their ads accordingly" (141). Ironically, digital companies like Google and Facebook, for instance, define themselves as non-profit organisations whose primary goal is to maximize the "Use-Value" for

their users. Indeed, the users are able to communicate and obtain the information they need (i.e., Use-Value), but at the same time they are exploited to achieve what Futchs refers to as the 'Surplus-Value'. In other words, such companies employ their users to achieve financial profits from the ads, which are basically decided by the users' preferences, without sharing the profits with those users. Users in this case are unpaid labour based on Fuchs' perspective. The rejection of such exploitation is embodied in the character of Lela in Percy's novel. She refuses to be exploited by the digital capitalists to achieve their 'Surplus-Value'. For this reason, she does not use any digital platforms like Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram. Maintaining her privacy is a priority, and she prefers not to be bombarded with tailored advertisements from such companies.

However, exploiting the users to increase wealth from ads is not the only form of exploitation because some of these digital capitalists may be a pathway for third-party applications to access the accounts and personal data of the users, violating any terms of privacy they declare on their websites. This can be exemplified through the lawsuit filed by AG Racine against the CEO of Facebook, Mark Zuckerberg, for "misleading statements and practices regarding third-party application access to consumer data" (OAG 16). Zuckerberg discovered in 2015 that Cambridge Analytica, an advertising and data analytics company, was able to access Facebook users' data through a specialist they hired and use the data in activities related to their political advertising campaigns. However, he did not disclose the truth to the public and considered it a hypothetical incident, which forced him later to pay one

hundred million dollars to settle the charges against Facebook. This illicit practice done by Cambridge Analytica through Facebook is the cornerstone of what is known as the dark web, where specialists and professional hackers are hired to implement illegal activities.

The Kopimist in Mos'ad's novel and Cheston in Percy's are examples of such hackers who are hired to implement illegal tasks. Mos'ad and Percy have a shared interest in exposing the dark side of the digital world and its potential for criminal activities. Mos'ad, for example, chooses the name of the Kopimist for his protagonist after being hired by a dark web company, the B.C.H. "The Kopimist is derived from *Kopimism*, a new religion founded by Isak Gerson in 2010 and is popular among hackers, especially in Sweden. This religion opposes the idea of copyright, advocating for the accessibility of information for everyone" (Mos'ad 25–26). Similarly, Percy portrays the dark web as a place where personal information is easily manipulated. It is a world that is mainly structured around the destruction of any ethics. In addition, the dark web world in both novels is associated with ambiguity, darkness, and the presence of demons wearing black scary masks to cover their faces, and their appearance is always associated with crows, blood, and flies.

Moreover, Mos'ad Kopimist and Percy's Cheston embody a violation of what Futchs refers to as general and private digital ethics. Both lack such a sense of deontological ethics and are more concerned with their own interests than the common good. The Kopimist's suffering from bullying as well as being dismissed from university drives him to loneliness and later on to the dark web world. Likewise, Cheston is



portrayed as a corrupt and invasive person who is obsessed with violating others' privacy. Being isolated from the outer world and a dismissed student from his faculty, the same as the Kopimist, he finds in the dark web the typical world he has been searching for. Thus, he willingly accepts the offer from Cloven, the demonic representative of the Undertown, Inc., to implement illicit online services. It seems that Moss'ad's Kopimist and Percy's Cheston similarly attempt to avenge the outer world and are exploited by the digital capitalist entities embodied in the dark web companies. Shamefully, the more they distance themselves from digital ethics, the more confidence the dark web representatives have in them. The Kopimist, for example, hacks a private hospital's system, causing catastrophic losses, and is subsequently promoted by the B.C.H. Similarly, Cheston's willingness to take on any task for the Undertown, Inc. leads to more illicit services and much trust on him from the demons. Both characters' commitment to the ambiguity of the dark web world makes them welcome and trusted, as they do not question the reasons behind their assigned illegal tasks. In essence, they simply do what they are told to do.

Masterly, both writers elucidate how the presence of the dark web representatives causes a radical transformation in the lives of their characters. For example, Mos'ad's Kopimist engages in both good and malicious activities before joining the B.C.H. He is therefore known as "the gray-hatted hacker" among his peers (Mos'ad 26). However, his life takes a dark turn when he discovers the dark web. The devilish figure that appears in the dark web, dressed in black with a crow-like mask, foreshadows the moral decay and ruin that await him. It is a

world that is basically devoid of ethics and ruled by the ugliest forms of capitalism. Thus, Mos'ad aims to accurately portray the reality of the dark web by emphasizing its peculiar devilish characteristics. The dark web thrives on the anonymity of its members' identities as exemplified in the appearance of the B.C.H. leader whose real identity remain unidentified and only referred to as the Sad Satan. In addition, Mos'ad provides his readers with an honest account of the various types of immoral activities that occur on the dark web, including drug and organ trafficking, arms dealing, terrorism, as well as unimaginable crimes. The members of this world are driven by their evil and capitalist tendencies, behaving without any ethical or moral constraints. The Sad Satan's words to the Kopimist serve as a stark reminder of the undeniable dominance of this digital realm: "I am the Satan; I do what I want when I want; I surround you from all directions; I know what you do not even know about yourself—your fears, your crazy dreams" (Mos'ad 27). The world of digitization has ensnared humans and continues to exploit them relentlessly, only for achieving certain capitalist gains.

Abandoning ethics is therefore the license to join the dark web world. Mos'ad prepares his readers for this meaning through the scene of the fighting crows. When the black-clad devil first appears to the protagonist, two crows appear fighting in the middle between the devil and the Copyist (the name of The Kopimist before being hired by the B.C.H.), a fight that results in the killing of one of them. The killer, then, digs a hole that gradually expands to accommodate the corpse. This scene, symbolically, recalls the scene of the first murder witnessed

by humanity when Cain killed his brother Abel, and he did not know how to bury his brother's body, so God sent a crow in front of him to dig a hole in the ground to teach him how to bury his brother's corpse. When the black-clad devil orders the protagonist to dig a similar hole to bury the corpse he carries on his back, he shockingly discovers that the man he is burying is a man with "a pale, white-skinned face and features that I know well, topped by white hair at the head and eyebrows. Here I am! It is my dead body" (Mos'ad 13). He buries himself; he buries his own dead body!

Two meanings can be inferred from this scene: first, belonging to the dark web world requires that a person be devoid of any virtue by burying all moral principles that might prevent him from advancing in this corrupt world. Second, success in modern digital capitalism allows individuals to harm others by expropriating their data and even murdering them if necessary. The task entrusted to The Copyist is to hack a site on the dark web. This site belongs to "a huge organisation that works in everything and trades in everything, and they have the weirdest activities that [he] can imagine: witchcraft, superstition, drugs, theft, murder, human organ trade, prostitution" (Mos'ad 28). Strangely enough, The Copyist receives no financial reward for implementing such a task, and here The Copyist represents what Futchs referred to as 'Surplus-Value', as he is exploited to achieve financial gains for a digital capitalist entity without sharing the 'Exchange-Value'. In addition, the matter goes beyond the exploitation of The Copyist; his father was held hostage to force his son to implement the assigned task.

Thus, he agrees to implement the task, and from now on, his title will be The Kopimist rather than The Copyist.

The Kopimist successfully hacks the target website and is then forced to complete four phases until he becomes blackened with crows' blackness. He must survive or die while trying; even if he survives, he will never be as he was before. The visitor to the dark world is always a loser, either losing his life or losing his moral principles. He must use one of the alternatives offered to him in each of the four stages. He only has twenty-four hours in the first phase to go to a grave and retrieve an organ from a recently deceased person or spend the night inside the grave, so he chooses the first option. In the second stage, he has two choices: either to kill a cat and drink its blood, or to slay his parrot and cook it within six hours. Of course, he chooses the first option because it is impossible for him to sacrifice his cherished parrot. Unfortunately, while he is chasing the cat, he accidentally kills his parrot. The options then get worse and worse with the start of the third stage, in which he chooses either to cut off one of his limbs or to hang his neck in a rope for 30 seconds, and the time specified is 60 minutes, so he chooses to hang his neck with a rope. Then the fourth stage starts, and he has two options: either to kill a person and cook part of his body or to be killed. Ten hours are specified to implement this task, so he kills Shawkat, the thug who has always bullied him for his disability and used to threaten him for money. By reaching this stage, the change in the Kopimist's personality becomes evident, as he is no longer the same as before. He is now wearing a gray T-shirt stained with the blood of the murdered

Shawkat, and he cuts off the tongue of the dead man to cook it while listening to music.

After completing these four stages, the Kopimist discovers that the Sad Satan is one of the leaders of the B.C.H., who have kidnapped his father to coerce him into joining their organisation. Consequently, his life becomes an ultimate evil, characterized by merciless killing and obedience. The one who once refused to hack any websites of hospitals is now implementing a mission set by the organisation to disable the cooling system of the organ preservation refrigerator in a private hospital. Such a cruel task sends thousands of people to death. As a result, he becomes a trusted member and is now tasked with finding the three lost parts of a book titled "The Heart of Satan," believed to be written by Satan himself. This task forces The Kopimist to roam some villages and cities in search of the lost parts of the book—a task that transforms him from a hacker of websites to a magician who runs after the Devil's book—a hideous transformation that turns the lives of Benjamin Percy's characters upside down, too. In one of his interviews, Percy tried to draw attention to the looming danger lurking in humanity and its increasing catastrophes day after another, namely digitization of our lives:

Right now—with every swipe of a screen, every click of a mouse—you're feeding information into an algorithm. Right now—when you post a photo or tag a location on social media—you're willingly giving up vulnerable data. Right now, you're reaching for your phone, your fingers always twitching distractedly for it, because it's digital cocaine, a prosthetic

cerebrum. Right now, private cameras—on phones, on laptops—are being auctioned off by pirates online, so that someone might be watching you right now without your knowledge. Right now, Siri or Alexa is listening to everything you say. Right now, malware can be stored in human DNA. (Burmeister)

Ironically, users of the Internet think that they enjoy freedom by accessing unlimited information and services. The reality, however, indicates that they are enslaved and exploited due to their entire submission to such 'digital cocaine', as Percy describes. They are obsessed with and possessed by the digital world to the extent that the average person checks their phones eight-five times a day, despite being asleep for half of that time (Percy 154). In an attempt to attract people's attention to such reality, Percy introduces readers to the dark side of the digital capitalist world, namely the dark net, where "jihadists from ISIS requesting funds and volunteers... a supposed assassin who will kill anyone for a fee" (168). Characters like Hannah, Lela, Juniper, and Sarin are forcefully involved in such a world of darkness with "one foot in this world, one foot in the other" (133). The demons' presence in these characters' lives make them look monstrous like the "Frankenstein's creature[s]", as Juniper describes (126).

Hannah, for example, describes what happens when she starts using the Mirage device. Strange creatures with red eyes appear to her, coming from a dark tunnel with great ability to dominate everything in preparation for what they call the 'Zero Day'. Destruction and perdition await everybody, not only Hannah, and are expected to prevail in every place because "Dark Net knows no borders" (Percy 18). Addressing

such danger requires people with strong will, or, in other words, a deontological attitude. Hannah belongs to this type of people. From the very beginning of the novel, she is depicted as a strong and special girl. in spite of her young age. She only needs the required weapon to participate in the warfare against the demons of the dark net. Hannah's weapon is the Mirage Port, which allows her to see beyond the visible world. The coming war is not physical but digital, and Hannah must rely on her aunt, Lela, to help her transcend this traumatic transformation in her life. The demons chase Hannah and then kidnap her to force Lela to surrender and give them the skull they are searching for. Moreover, one of the demons infects her with his black shawl, which causes her a state of severe fatigue and makes the presence of Lela inescapable.

Lela, a woman known for her hatred for modern technology, becomes a threat to dark net demons who plan to dominate the city. A turning point in her life occurs when she finds a mass grave containing strange creatures' skeletons and skulls while conducting a press report about the sale of a serial killer's home. As a result, she and her family (her lonely sister and her niece Hannah) face difficulties from demons who want to restore the skull that she gets from the remnants of the grave. Lela's life before this accident was like an endless race - a type of life that is entirely dominated by work, and it is only work that makes her feel happy. Additionally, she used to tell people the truth, but after encountering the demons, she is left without a logical explanation for what is happening. Percy skillfully uses Lela's colleague, Josh, to illustrate the disastrous effects of the digital world

on people's safety and privacy. For instance, Josh describes to Lela how in the digital age "everyone is code. Everything is code. People are being fed intelligence now...They're possessed" (Percy 154). The so-called dark web has emerged, therefore, to tighten such a possession by the digital capitalists to achieve wealth accumulation. It is the place where users find "anything nasty or forbidden. ... It's the red light district, it's the torture chamber, it's digital hell," in Josh's words (100).

Unfortunately, the Undertown Company, led by the demons, owns extensive real estate on the dark web. They plan to take control of the city on what they call "the Zero Day" and, therefore, seek professional hackers to assist them, and Cheston proves to be a good catch for them (Percy 150). Cheston is negatively possessed and obsessed by the digital world to the extent that he feels "as if his mind is a circuit board and his veins are cables that course with electricity and information" (15). Being a corrupt hacker enables him to be entrusted by the Undertown Company. Notably, Percy enables his readers to perceive the spoiled nature of Cheston by comparing him to Derek. Unlike Cheston, Derek is a good hacker who chases vicious figures on the dark web. He believes that the dark net is a digital nightmare and the gateway through which the demons come from Hell to the world to make humans live in torture. In addition, Percy depicts Cheston as the watchman in Jeremy Bentham's *Panopticon*, which symbolically represents the digital capitalists that watch out their users' activities and exploit them by violating their privacy, ignoring digital ethics. In addition, Percy increases the category of those who are deprived of ethics and contribute to the empowerment of the dark web, including



Cheston, a hacker, and Jeremy Tusk, a philosophy lecturer at Portland State. Tusk, who is inhibited by demons, kills homeless people and performs rituals to communicate with them. His body transforms into a puppet controlled by the demon, and he appears as a shadow man at night, leaving a mark on his victims. He murders for pleasure and purpose in the name of darkness until he is murdered by Sarin (Percy 64).

Remarkably, Percy uses Juniper's character to maintain natural equilibrium by highlighting the battle between good and evil. He, together with Hannah and Lela, plays a significant role in ensuring the triumph of good over evil. Juniper's inherent love for goodness can be traced back to a significant incident in his childhood. When he was swimming in the ocean, he almost drowned, but his father was able to save him by performing CPR until he came back to life. This moment acted as a turning point in Juniper's life and played a crucial role in the plot of the novel as well. Since this accident, Juniper has been viewed as a miracle child and a little angel with light surrounding him. His parents believe that this light is from heaven, and the Cornerstone minister has officially declared him a miracle little boy. As a result, everyone is eager to hear his story. Although most of this story is untrue, except for the light, Juniper kept on telling it because people liked it and wanted it to be true. In fact, Percy uses Juniper's fake story to introduce a representative from the dark web world. While Juniper was sharing his personal story with reporters and listeners, he noticed an unfamiliar man with a pale and twisted face lurking around. This stranger's odd behaviour made Juniper feel uneasy. The stranger pushed

Juniper to share a story of pain and despair rather than the story of the heavenly light. He was left feeling unsettled by this encounter.

Like the ability of the Sad Satan in Mos'ad's *Kopimist* to control the protagonist's life and body, this strange creature in Percy's has the same power to paralyze Juniper's organs. The threat of such a strange creature came true when Juniper discovered he was a cancer patient. Telling his parents of his disease and being disappointed by their utilitarian reaction to investing the news of his disease in the media for financial profits, Juniper leaves them and decides to spend the rest of his life helping the homeless. With the appearance of Sarin, an old woman who has a phobia of dying, Juniper will transcend his traumatic experience of cancer. She will pull something strange that spread throughout his body, reminding him of the demon that he once encountered in the hotel. Being fully recovered from cancer with the help of Sarin, Juniper decides to devote all his life to helping people and for this reason he constructs The Weary Travellers. In addition, he feels he is beholden to Sarin and later accompanies her at her meetings with strange people who look like "the companions of the dark, the guardians of the gates of hell" (Percy 52). Notably, Sarin's role in Juniper's life is the same as Lela's in Hannah's life. In addition, Sarin is described as the "monster hunter" (133) due to her role in the recovery of Juniper and Hannah when they got infected by the demons. A woman with a resisting spirit and the ability to encounter and defeat the demonic presence in others' lives, Sarin represents the role model for Hannah to pursue the struggle against the evil coming from the dark web.

As noted through the analysis of both novels, humans are captivated by digital advances, and this captivation increases day by day. This, in turn, requires strengthening digital ethics to overcome the evils resulting from digital capitalism. It is the deontological tendencies within characters like Juniper, Hannah, Lela, and Sarin that urge them to struggle against the demonic presence of the dark web agents. It is also the deontological tendency, although it fluctuates, inside The Kopimist that enables his self-realization at the end of the novel when he encounters the devilish masked person who stole the three parts of *The Heart of Satan*. This scene greatly embodies the message of Mos'ad's novel, the same message shared by Percy as well, that "on the dark internet... all human beings are scoundrels and deceivers in their true nature, trading in the flesh of their brothers in humanity in every possible way, whether they are alive or dead" (Mos'ad 46). In fact, this dark world is a true copy of the dark side in humans, as echoed through the words of the masked man to The Kopimist: "I am you; the voice I speak with is your voice, and the body in front of you is your body. In fact, I am an improved copy of you" (169). It is a copy that came as a result of two opposites: human intelligence versus the absence of ethics.

## **Conclusion**

Digital capitalism is a profit-driven system the same as traditional capitalism, but its impact is greater. The traditional capitalists used to exploit their workers through extra unpaid working hours, but in the case of digital capitalists, the workers are the users of the Internet who

are, unconsciously, employed to generate profits for the digital companies through sponsored ads, and their personal data may be exploited for the benefit of illegal websites. A world that is mainly structured upon the anonymity of its users' identities and the absence of ethics, the dark web is a product of digital capitalism and an ideal marketplace for all illegal practices and services that would otherwise be prohibited in a more regulated setting. Thus, Christian Futchs resists the exploitation and domination of users by the digital platforms and applications that may violate, or let a third party violate, their users' privacy by hacking their personal data or monitoring their online activity in order to exploit them in sponsored advertisements to achieve profits. In addition, Futchs observes that in the modern world, it is crucial to uphold ethical principles when it comes to online interactions. This includes a commitment to the principles that govern communication and interaction between people and/or institutions via computers and the Internet. By acting in a responsible and ethical manner, we can help build a more just, fair, and equitable world for everyone.

A significant step to achieve this, in Futchs' viewpoint, is to establish public digital platforms under the supervision of the state or society as a competitor to the platforms owned by individuals such as Facebook, Twitter, and others, in an attempt to ensure cybersecurity and justice among members of society and reduce electronic crimes. The survival of any society requires adherence to ethical norms rather than keeping up only with technological advances. Thus, searching for alternative funders under the supervision of governments to consolidate

digital ethics seems like an ideal means of protection. Cybersecurity has become one of the main pillars of ensuring national security in any country. The danger is no longer expected from an enemy waiting on the borders but from an invisible capitalist might behind the digital screens with unlimited capabilities. This is the message that Mos'ad and Percy masterly convey through their novels. Humans are now possessed and obsessed by digital power, and, therefore, they may be prey to illegal practices like those conducted in the dark web world. Only virtuous and deontologist characters in both novels managed to struggle against this demonic world of the dark web. This type of character can be described as digital ethics protectors or survivors of the 'digital hell.'

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"الجحيم الرقمي": الإنترنت المُظلم في رواية "الناسخ" لـ أحمد مسعد و"الشبكة المظلمة" لـ بنيامين بيرسي في ضوء نظريتي "الرأسمالية الرقمية" و "الأخلاق الرقمية" عند كريستيان فوكس

ملخص

علي الرغم مما أحدثته الثورة الرقمية من تغيير جذري في وسائل التواصل وأساليب الحياة، لكنها لم تغير تركيز الرأسمالية على تراكم الثروة، حيث تعمل الشركات الرقمية العملاقة مثل فيسبوك وجوجل - على سبيل المثال- وفقاً لسياسة تحقيق الأرباح المشابهة للسياسة التي تتبعها المنظمات الرأسمالية التقليدية، لكن سلعا في هذه الحالة هي بيانات مستخدميها، مما يعرض خصوصية المستخدمين للخطر بسبب هذا التطبيق العملي للمراقبة الرقمية. ولا شك أن الرأسمالية الرقمية تهيمن على البشر، وهذا بدوره يغذي وجود عالم جديد بقواعد معينة، أو ما يُعرف "بالأخلاق الرقمية". ومن المؤسف القول بأن وجود مثل هذه القواعد لا يضمن توفير بيئة رقمية آمنة تماماً لأن بعض الوكلاء والشركات ينتهكون هذه الأخلاقيات، كما هو الواقع في عالم الويب المظلم. ويكمن خطر الإنترنت المُظلم في عدم الكشف عن هوية مستخدميه مما يجعله ملاذاً آمناً للأنشطة غير الأخلاقية وغير القانونية، مثل تجارة المخدرات، والاتجار بالأسلحة، والمؤامرات الإرهابية، وهذا بدوره يؤدي إلى تهديد متزايد لأمن واستقرار أي مجتمع. ومن ثم، هدفت هذه الورقة البحثية إلى تأكيد التأثير الخطير للرأسمالية الرقمية على المجتمعات المعاصرة، وتوضيح أهمية الأخلاق الرقمية، ورفع مستوى الوعي بالعواقب الكارثية لعدم وجود مثل هذه الأخلاقيات في شبكة الإنترنت المظلمة. ولتحقيق هذه الأهداف، تم اختيار روايتين من الثقافتين العربية والإنجليزية وتحليلهما من منظور نظريات كريستيان فوكس النقدية حول "الرأسمالية الرقمية" و"الأخلاق الرقمية". والروايتان المختارتان هما: "الناسخ: الإنترنت المظلم" (٢٠١٩) للروائي المصري أحمد مسعد، و"الشبكة المظلمة" (٢٠١٧) للكاتب الأمريكي بنيامين بيرسي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الإنترنت المظلم؛ الرأسمالية الرقمية؛ الأخلاق الرقمية؛ "الناسخ: الإنترنت المظلم"؛ و"الشبكة المظلمة".