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Barratt, M. J. (2015). Drugs on the dark net: How cryptomarkets are transforming the global trade in illicit drugs [book review]. *Drug and Alcohol Review*, 34(4), 458-459.

Criminologist James Martin has written the first academic book about the phenomenon of cryptomarkets or 'dark net markets', which provide the digital infrastructure for the trade of illicit drugs via anonymising software and cryptocurrencies. The book is a sole-author short format of four substantive chapters plus introduction and conclusion. It is addressed to an academic audience while using non-specialist language, making it accessible to a broader audience, including students. Martin draws from his own observational research of cryptomarkets which he makes sense of through the lenses of critical criminology and nodal governance.

In the introduction, Martin states that this book was written in response to "the growing sense of alarm amongst some sections of the commentariat regarding the potential dangers associated with the online drugs trade" (p. 3). He observes, correctly in my view, that while it is clear that cryptomarkets are associated with a range of serious harms, it is a more productive line of inquiry to ask "whether cryptomarkets present a more or less harmful alternative to the conventional illicit drugs trade?" (p. 4) While there is no simple answer to this question, and more research is undoubtedly needed to tease out these comparisons, this book provides frameworks through which such future work can take place. As such, it is particularly valuable to those researchers who are increasingly paying attention to cryptomarkets as objects of study.

Martin situates the idea of the cryptomarket within three frameworks: cybercrime, nodal governance, and online community. Using Wall's (2007) three generations

of cybercrime, he categorises cryptomarkets as second-generation cybercrime, in that they depend upon, and are significantly transformed by, global computer networks. Critiquing the commonly held view of cryptomarkets as spaces where 'anything goes', Martin situates cryptomarkets within concepts of nodal governance (Shearing & Wood, 2003). Informal governance regularly emerges in situations where more formal institutions are either underdeveloped or absent. Martin demonstrates that cryptomarkets operate as informal governing nodes, as expressed by their social structures which include hierarchical community roles and rules about appropriate goods and behaviour towards others. Furthermore, sense of community and shared identities characterise much of the interactions observed in cryptomarket discussion forums. Signs of community may indicate a more resilient cryptomarket, one that is better able to regroup after site closures, attacks from hacking and scams, and threats posed by law enforcement.

Following the theoretical positioning of cryptomarkets, Martin describes their operation as gleaned through online observation, presents a comparison between conventional (offline) drug markets and cryptomarkets, and examines cryptomarkets from the law enforcement perspective. These pages go some way towards answering the question he originally poses: that whether cryptomarkets are more or less harmful drug distribution mechanisms depends on your perspective. From the user perspective, the benefits of cryptomarkets appear to outweigh the harms: physical violence associated with street-based markets can be avoided, and user feedback systems ensure that vendors are motivated to retain market share by providing a superior product and service. From a law enforcement perspective, cryptomarkets may be more difficult and resource intensive to investigate, and their operation 'in public' openly defies prohibition, leading to further calls for crackdowns.

In these comparisons between cryptomarkets and conventional drug markets, I would have liked to have seen a discussion about different types of conventional

markets. While it may be simpler to make a dichotomous comparison between online and offline drug trading, the nuances of drug market interactions are important if we are to fully assess the positives and negatives of the emergence of cryptomarkets. For example, the claim that use of cryptomarkets must be associated with less risk of physical threats (violence) compared with conventional markets implies that there is a threat of violence posed by the latter market form. In the situation where illicit drug trading is occurring in closed social networks through 'social supply', where violence is absent (e.g. Taylor & Potter, 2013), is this really the case?

I also found Martin's definition of cryptomarkets to be slightly over-inclusive. He defines a cryptomarket as "an online forum where goods and services are exchanged between parties who use digital encryption to conceal their identities" (pp. 2-3), then notes that cryptomarkets are distinguishable from other sites due to their reliance on the Tor network, third party hosting, use of postal service to deliver goods, decentralised exchange networks, and use of cryptocurrencies. I would add that cryptomarkets are characterised by use of a digital marketplace - that is, they are not simply chat rooms or discussion forums where trades are arranged through private messaging. Cryptomarkets may also use other anonymising networks, for example, I2P, although Tor is the most commonly used at this time.

Despite these minor concerns, I highly recommend this book for scholars and practitioners interested in the opportunities and challenges of drug cryptomarkets.

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