



## International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy

# Book Review

### Willem Bart de Lint (2021) *Blurring Intelligence Crime: A Critical Forensics*. Singapore: Springer

ISBN: 978-981-16-0351-8

---

**David A. Hughes**

University of Lincoln, United Kingdom

This book, written in remarkably short order between March and October 2020, offers a highly sophisticated theorisation of the central problem of our time: intelligence crime. This is transnational crime committed by shadowy actors in the highest echelons of power who know how to manipulate national security apparatuses to advance agendas that benefit themselves while inflicting near unimaginable harm on others. Committed on a scale almost defying comprehension, yet somehow remaining 'invisible', unpunished and under-analysed, intelligence crime and the means of its concealment have attracted far too little scholarly attention. In *Blurring Intelligence Crime*, Willem de Lint makes a vital contribution to remedying that problem.

His point of departure is that 'mainstream criminology is dominated by state-centred attributions of crime such that some of the most egregious and wilful harms remain under-investigated' (de Lint 2021: 6). Whereas such harms are often referred to under the category of 'state crimes', de Lint points to 'deep state networks' as the agents responsible (de Lint 2021: 9). For example, just as NATO's covert Gladio network was behind the 'strategy of tension' in Cold War Italy, so the author opines that 'the war on terrorism is stoked and inflamed arguably more from within than from without by authorities who are dependent on the controlled production of "unease"' to maintain their rule (de Lint 2021: 8). A 'select group of national security actors' operating under the aegis of those networks orchestrates 'intelligence crime', whose covert nature makes it hard to know and define (de Lint 2021: 9, 11). De Lint also coins the term 'apex crime' (others would use the term 'false flag') to refer to a 'watershed event in which the state or government names itself or the national interest as the victim and one of its primary opponents as the likely offender, thus, providing a government narrative that is mediated through official sources' (de Lint 2021: 9). To make sense of these types of crime, de Lint founds the new subfield of 'critical forensics', which in Foucauldian style 'examines the conditions under which disciplinary, organisational or political interests intrude upon, influence and challenge expert jurisdiction and craft principles' (de Lint 2021: 5). A fourth neologism, 'intelligence blur', refers to 'the distortions of authority concerning knowledge and discovery' in cases of intelligence or apex crime. *Blurring Intelligence Crime* is, thus, as theoretically

innovative as it is intrepid in seeking to ‘encourage greater scepticism about self-serving government accounts’ that mask the crimes of the powerful (de Lint 2021: 16). Yet, given that ‘forensics is the application of scientific methods to problems of law’ (de Lint 2021: 22), one wonders to what extent the fundamental purpose of forensics is undercut by a ‘critical’ approach that shifts the focus away from scientific methods and objective truth about crime towards considerations of power (and what de Lint calls ‘power-knowledge’).

Existing literature on criminal justice (Chapter 2) is premised on a rule of law paradigm in which miscarriages of justice typically rest on unwarranted political intrusion into an otherwise expert and impartial domain. The case of the Birmingham Six is a classic example (de Lint 2021: 29). Alternatively, scientific findings may be misrepresented in an adversarial system where there is not always ‘equality of arms’ (e.g., rich people can afford lawyers who know how to ‘play the game’ better than their opponents; de Lint 2021: 26). Institutional shortcomings may be dismissed by blaming ‘bad apples’ or isolated failures (de Lint 2021: 28). Crime scenes may be manipulated to remove evidence that might contradict official narratives; the hierarchy of investigatory command matters (de Lint 2021: 30–31). The system is biased against low-level criminals, whereas crimes involving ‘powerful state or corporate actors in pursuit of a tacit government objective are more susceptible to false negative prosecutorial error’ (de Lint 2021: 37). Careerism means that employees generally wish to avoid coming into conflict with the leadership of their organisation, which in turn will not want to challenge political leadership (de Lint 2021: 41–42). But while such explanations may suffice ‘for the vast majority of cases’, they are ‘inadequate where national security actors exercise sovereign discretion’ (de Lint 2021: 40). This minority class of cases forms the object of analysis for the rest of the book.

The tendency of intelligence crime to evade the rule of law is the subject of Chapter 3. De Lint argues that because sovereign vitality is to be defended at all costs, ‘executive actions undertaken at the behest of the sovereign cannot be criminal’ (de Lint 2021: 58). The door is thereby opened to Type 2 crimes ‘carried out by intelligence agencies or authorised intelligence agency actors or assets’, which are not subject to parliamentary or judicial oversight and typically follow a pattern of cover or compartmentalisation so that any connection to executive or sovereign sponsors can be denied (de Lint 2021: 57). They involve ‘the manipulation of dark criminal networks in the service of state agendas’, whereby perpetrators are protected while whistleblowers are punished (de Lint 2021: 58, 67). Importantly, they are ‘among the most prolific and deadly types of crime in recent modern history’, and here de Lint lists a range of such crimes committed by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) that have cost millions of lives and destroyed entire societies, from Indonesia and Vietnam to Chile, Guatemala and Rwanda (de Lint 2021: 59–60). Intelligence crimes are, thus, anything but ‘a minimal, unavoidable aberration’ as per liberal democratic ideals; rather, they ‘[exploit] the authority and legitimacy of the sovereign nation-state’ to do unspeakable harm, often involving the recruitment of ‘arms and drug traders, guerrilla units, mercenaries, terrorist organisations and outlawed political organisations’ (de Lint 2021: 68). The ‘popular compulsion not to believe that the authorities may be harmful or malign’ is, therefore, utterly misguided (de Lint 2021: 67). Although de Lint makes some crucial observations in this chapter, its Schmittian overtones with respect to the state of exception do need to be highlighted, along with the problematic nature of invoking the Nazi jurist (who features twice in the reference list) in the name of ‘critical’ theory/forensics (cf. Chandler 2008).

Chapter 4 applies many of the preceding theoretical considerations to the case of 9/11, presented as an ‘apex crime’. For example, de Lint considers chains of command at the crime scenes in New York, Washington DC and Shanksville, Pennsylvania, as well as the management of those crime scenes and anomalies such as the failure to request the National Transportation Safety Board to conduct formal investigations into any of the four alleged plane crashes (de Lint 2021: 85). He correctly claims that the 9/11 Commission was ‘an instrument of whitewash from the top’ and notes the inadequacies of official reports in, for instance, explaining the destruction of the World Trade Centre complex and in neglecting to mention the ‘availability of fighters to shoot down any of the hijacked planes’ (de Lint 2021: 96–97). The strongest part of the chapter is de Lint’s recognition that no exculpatory evidence was gathered on

behalf of the accused, implying a lack of due process as well as human rights violations (de Lint 2021: 99). However, a peculiarity of the chapter is the number of times the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) is mentioned without any commentary on potential FBI malfeasance or the FBI's potential role in managing public perception of the crime. For example, de Lint appears uncritically to accept FBI claims with respect to the so-called 'dancing Israelis' (de Lint 2021: 86). He observes the lack of autopsies at Fresh Kills Landfill, noting, 'there were 20–30 FBI agents' present (de Lint 2021: 89). He cites Senator Orrin Hatch's claim two hours after the attacks that the 'highest levels of the FBI and of the intelligence community' had briefed him that 'this looks like the signature of Osama bin Laden' (de Lint 2021: 89). All human remains from the Pentagon were, he notes, 'under continuous custody' by the FBI (de Lint 2021: 89). An FBI overrule was responsible for a 'departure from protocol' in the search of the UA93 crash site. One might reasonably expect 'critical forensics' to implicate the FBI directly in the 'apex crime' of 9/11, rather than taking the kind of hedging approach criticised elsewhere in the book.

Chapter 5 addresses intelligence crimes committed by Western/Israeli intelligence, underscoring the transnational aspect of that intelligence network, and unusually (for an academic text) going 'beyond what is politely considered acceptable in relation to the allegations of wrongdoing by "us"' (de Lint 2021: 118). Three case studies are presented: the *Rainbow Warrior* case in which the French secret service blew up a Greenpeace ship in New Zealand in 1985 to counteract Greenpeace anti-nuclear activism; a double assassination in broad daylight by CIA operative Raymond Davis in Lahore, Pakistan, in 2011, whose likely mission in de Lint's view was to 'orchestrate terrorism' to 'push the Global War on Terror around the global chessboard' (de Lint 2021: 124); and the 'possible case of honeytrap or sex-espionage' involving Jeffrey Epstein and Ghislaine Maxwell, who are treated as probable Mossad agents. In all three cases, which give the lie to the popular conception that "'we" stay within the parameters of rule, jurisdiction, and mission', criminal investigations were impeded/misdirected, and there were 'departures from the standard procedures of robust investigation and forensic recovery and discovery' (de Lint 2021: 125–126). The key lesson, drawn at the start of the next chapter, is that when 'we' are the perpetrators of intelligence crime, 'trust replaces public scrutiny of criminal actions, so that it may make sense to say that criminal justice investigation pauses silently at the portal of national security' (de Lint 2021: 139). Noam Chomsky spent decades making a similar argument with respect to the incapacity of Western social science to recognise 'our' crimes abroad, yet refused to touch 'apex crimes' at home, such as the John F. Kennedy assassination and 9/11. There is an urgent need for social scientists to push beyond Chomsky's limitations and to follow in de Lint's path of exposing intelligence and apex crimes for what they are.

In contrast, when the aim is to pin blame on official enemies, such as Russia, Iran and China, their criminality is simply assumed and held to be in violation of the West's 'rules-based international order', as de Lint argues in Chapter 6. Again, three case studies are offered: Flight MH17, which broke apart while flying over the separatist-held territory of eastern Ukraine in July 2014, killing all 298 people on board; the poisoning of former Russian double agent Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia in Salisbury, England, in March 2018, allegedly using the chemical weapon Novichok; and the alleged chemical weapons attack in Douma, Syria, in April 2018. In all three cases, de Lint argues, the forensic record is 'permanently compromised' as a result of reliable protocols for collecting and analysing evidence having not been followed (de Lint 2021: 162–163). Meanwhile, the establishment media, academia and industry authorities, as well as an ever-expanding network of organisations, including Bellingcat, Cambridge Analytica, the Institute for Statecraft, the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats and a politicised Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, have colluded in the 'intelligence smear' against official enemies in the face of serious, evidence-based doubts raised by a handful of non-corrupt academics and investigative journalists. 'The present state of international criminal justice', de Lint concludes, based on the corruption of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, is in danger of becoming 'a mockery of itself' (de Lint 2021: 163). One might also highlight the threat to academic integrity, as the embedding of academics into intelligence structures such as the ironically named 'Integrity Initiative' leads to the production of propaganda masquerading as social science. As for

the establishment media and its affiliates, their corruption has been graphically exposed by the COVID-19 debacle.

Chapter 7 explores how liberal democratic opinion and the public record of intelligence crimes are manipulated to 'provide support to an official narrative' and legitimise certain policy choices (de Lint 2021: 173). A useful history of attempts by US intelligence agencies to surveil the population, target dissidents and manipulate public opinion using information operations is provided on pp. 175–176. Readers who are less familiar with this area might be surprised by the tight coordination of intelligence agencies, public relations firms and the establishment media in working to manage public perception. Such efforts have only become more sophisticated over time, with new organisations such as SCL (the parent company of Cambridge Analytica), the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats and the Israel Project all working tirelessly to skew public perception in the desired direction (de Lint 2021: 176–178). De Lint also draws attention to the maintenance of secret archives in 'covering up key information' relating to, for instance, the John F. Kennedy assassination and 9/11, and the pattern of blaming intelligence failures for such events instead of treating them as intelligence crimes. Liberal media and political institutions, he notes, 'are at risk both as recipients and producers of malicious propaganda' that stokes fear and works to create the illusion of 'settled facts' about official narratives (de Lint 2021: 185). To an extent not understood by the public, all experience of culture and politics today is passed through an 'intelligence filter' that blurs (and thereby conceals) intelligence crime (de Lint 2021: 193). A 'deep politics' is at work, with a transnational intelligence network acting covertly 'to mobilise the compartmented national security bureaucracy to force anti-democratic policy choices' (de Lint 2021: 187). This is how, for instance, Israel has been able to achieve such sway over US foreign policy.

The conclusion makes explicit what should perhaps have been stated in the introduction: 'intelligence is essentially covert conspiratorial transactions supported by the state' (de Lint 2021: 221–222). *Pace* Richard Hofstadter's *The Paranoid Style in American Politics*, 'a significant segment of government is engaged in the "paranoid style"' (de Lint 2021: 215, emphasis in original, cf. Hofstadter 1965). It is a matter of 'a ruling elite or class' engaging in 'the expropriation of valued resources (including labour) for private profit' (de Lint 2021: 208). Intelligence crime is key to this. Criminal 'dark actors' or 'dark actor-networks' act with 'a motive, plan and a furtiveness' to accomplish their goals, undermining liberal institutions in the process (de Lint 2021: 210). Yet, official narratives are 'reproduced as if unproblematic in academic discourse', and criminologists have remained generally uninterested in addressing intelligence crime (de Lint 2021: 204). The dearth of scholarship on intelligence crime has allowed 'conspiracy' discourse to thrive, with any serious questioning automatically being conflated with preposterous conspiracy theorising and written off as 'the musing of a crazy ignoramus' (de Lint 2021: 222). De Lint himself, ironically, is not immune from this tendency: writing in the era of 'build back better', he dismisses the idea that 'the Covid pandemic is a plot to establish a new world order' as an 'irrational conspiracy theory', thus, revealing the tremendous power of psychological operations to close down unwanted avenues of inquiry (de Lint 2021: 214). Still, it is to be hoped that de Lint's book will go some way to helping academics understand that intelligence crimes and the use of psychological operations to conceal them warrant urgent investigation. To turn a blind eye to those crimes, having read his book, is in some small way to be complicit in them. To produce propaganda disguised as social science to help facilitate those crimes is unashamedly to collaborate with the perpetrators.

*Correspondence:* David A Hughes, School of Social and Political Sciences, University of Lincoln, Brayford Pool, Lincoln LN6 7TS, United Kingdom. [dhughes@lincoln.ac.uk](mailto:dhughes@lincoln.ac.uk)

## References

- Chandler D (2008) The revival of Carl Schmitt in international relations: The last refuge of critical theorists? *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 37(1): 27–48. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0305829808093729>
- De Lint WB (2021) *Blurring intelligence crime. A critical forensics*. Singapore: Springer.
- Hofstadter R (1965) *The paranoid style in American politics and other essays*. New York: Alfred Knopf.

*Please cite this book review as:*

Hughes DA (2021) Review of *Blurring intelligence crime. A critical forensics* by Willem Bart de Lint. *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy* 11(1): xxx-xxx. <https://doi.org/10.5204/ijcjsd.2169>

Except where otherwise noted, content in this journal is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International Licence](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). As an open access journal, articles are free to use with proper attribution.  
ISSN: 2202-8005

