6 Self-reinforcing secrecy

Cultures of secrecy within intelligence agencies

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> You can talk about your work with colleagues from outside your section
> or team. But you cannot get into the fundamental issues … You can talk
> about an [ongoing] operation, but in general terms: "I'm running an opera-
> tion, it's going smoothly", you know. By doing so, you haven't told the other
> anything, but you have told him that things are going fine … That's the way
> you grow up. You're entirely moulded by the organisation. I wouldn't know
> any better.
>
> (Interview with a former employee of the Dutch Security
> Service cited in Braat 2012, p. 100)

Few sectors of the state bureaucracy are as secretive as the intelligence and
security services. Secrecy shields intelligence staff from direct accounta-
bility within and outside the organisation and provides them with greater
discretion in the performance of their professional tasks than most other
domains of state bureaucracies. What is the impact of such a high degree of
secrecy on the internal dynamics of an organisation? Scholars in intelligence
studies generally disregard secrecy practices as a separate object of study,
just as intelligence communities come to take secrecy for granted. The prac-
tice of secrecy features only implicitly in classical intelligence research,
which generally favours the anecdotal analysis of exciting intelligence op-
erations (e.g. Andrew and Mitrokhin 2000; Andrew 2010; Jefferey 2010). It
also features only indirectly in the literature on intelligence oversight and
accountability (e.g. Ott 2003; Born et al. 2005, 2011; Phythian 2007), despite
the pivotal significance of how agencies and oversight committees behave
within the constraints of secrecy. With a few important exceptions (Dew-
erpe 1994; 't Hart 2007; Moran 2013, 2015; Aldrich and Moran 2018; Aldrich
and Richterova 2018), intelligence studies show little interest in singling out
secrecy as a topic of research that might improve our understanding of how
intelligence communities function on a daily basis.

This chapter contributes to filling this gap. In doing so, I build on Georg
Simmel's classic sociological work on secret societies (Simmel 1906), and re-
search on secrecy in several types of bureaucratic organisations (Gusterson

1996; Costas and Grey 2016). I approach secrecy from an institutional perspective that emphasises the stable patterns of behaviour it induces. One of the important findings of this institutional approach is the phenomenon of goal displacement. This occurs when the means to achieve the critical goals of an organisation are transformed into goals in themselves. This chapter explores how secrecy is transformed from a functional means to protect intelligence sources and methods into an independent social force that reaches beyond its initial functional purposes. In doing so, I distinguish between, on the one hand, functional secrecy, that aims at protecting sources and methods and is legally bound and, on the other hand, social secrecy, which serves goals beyond the specific bureaucratic tasks of the organisation. I argue that the interplay between the two has an effect on the extent of secrecy within bureaucratic organisations in general, and intelligence communities in particular. As such, I conceptualise goal displacement of secrecy as a fluid process where functional and social secrecy increasingly intertwine, and the latter gradually comes to dominate the former with either strengthening or damaging effects on the initial goals of the organisation.

I present this hitherto underestimated phenomenon of goal displacement with regard to national security secrecy by analysing how secrecy affects the behaviour of employees of intelligence services. I analyse the organisational culture of the Dutch Security Service ("Binnenlandse Veiligheidsdienst") between the 1940s and 1990s, primarily relying on original, unpublished, in-depth oral history interviews with 37 former employees of the Dutch Security Service and archival research in the previously unexplored service's internal staff magazine.[1] The interviewees entered the service between 1951 and 1997, and were employed with the service for an average of 29 years. The focus on the personal narratives of service employees as well as the time span covered have two advantages for the present study. First, personal memories are an important historical source in reconstructing the evolution of the practices of national security secrecy and the patterns of behaviour and beliefs associated with it in intelligence agencies. Second, the lengthy period under research ties in with the assumption that secrecy as a socio-cultural phenomenon unfolds slowly over time and that, as such, we need a longer time period in order to understand its origins and changes (Pierson 2004).

First, I will explain how the process of goal displacement increases our understanding of the impact of secrecy on the behaviour of employees of security and intelligence agencies. Subsequently, drawing on the historical material regarding the Dutch intelligence services, I identify the initial causes of goal displacement. I single out the "initiation ritual" on entering the service through a lengthy, sometimes unnerving vetting procedure, and the subsequent feeling it generated in employees that they were part of a privileged, tightly knit elite who "knew more" than those outside the service. Once put in motion, the process of goal displacement kept reinforcing itself. I indicate two factors that contributed to this process: first, the social

isolation that resulted from the secretive character of the work and, second, the strong emotional ties they developed to their close colleagues within a section or department. I conclude that secrecy in intelligence and security services reaches beyond its merely functional basis, entailing both positive and negative effects for the functioning of the service. In particular, I argue that goal displacement with regard to secrecy may strengthen the functioning of intelligence and security services through, for example, enhancing an *esprit de corps* and, thereby, fortifying the work ethos of the employees and their bonds of loyalty toward the services. Or it may have damaging effects by inducing fragmentation across organisational units, creating operational inefficiencies, "rigidities", "an inability to adjust readily" (Merton 1940, pp. 563–564) as a result of insufficient information sharing and lack of collaboration between in-groups and out-groups.

Given that any government agency whose tasks require strong secrecy is likely to experience goal displacing organisational processes, the findings of this study are relevant for understanding the operation of other Western intelligence and security services.

Secrecy and goal displacement

The process of goal displacement in bureaucratic organisations contributes to our understanding of how secrecy influences employees' behaviour and how it becomes deeply ingrained in intelligence communities. According to Robert Merton, goal displacement occurs when "adherence to the rules, originally conceived as a means, becomes transformed into an end-in-itself" (Merton 1940, p. 563). In the context of this research, "the rules" are those rules of secrecy designed to protect intelligence sources and methods for the sake of national security. Without such protection, intelligence and security services cannot function effectively, human sources are at risk and will not be willing to collaborate. When the process of goal displacement obtains, employees lose sight of this functional basis of secrecy. Rather than a measure designed strictly to protect sources and methods, secrecy becomes an organising principle of social life and "an immediate value in the life-organization" of the employee (Merton 1940, pp. 563–564).

As an organising principle of social life, as has been widely recognised in both classic and contemporary sociological literature (e.g. Simmel 1906; Costas and Grey 2016), secrecy is a powerful mechanism of inclusion and exclusion. Secrecy binds people together because the exclusive and exciting connotation of secret information gives "those who know" the impression of being part of a privileged elite. It convinces them of the crucial importance of their work, that they know best, and it strengthens their self-confidence. Those who do not know, on the other hand, tend to feel excluded; they either idealise the power of secret-keepers, the influence and efficiency of those who know, or they distrust their intentions (Braat 2016; Gusterson 1996, p. 80, Simmel 1906). Goal displacement occurs when such social dynamics

of secrecy come to dominate over its otherwise functional purposes. The presence of secrecy then continues on a primarily social basis, serving purposes such as the creation of an *esprit de corps* and the increase of individual or group status (see also Gusterson 1996, pp. 80–82), based on the feeling of being part of a small and privileged group with access to (highly) classified information. As secrecy in organisations becomes socially and emotionally deeply ingrained, the functional and the social bases of secrecy gradually intertwine. Consequently, the process of goal displacement embeds secrecy in "stable patterns of behaviour, that define, govern, and constrain action in daily practices" (March and Olsen 2008). Over time, these patterns come to be taken for granted as basic assumptions and eventually drop out of awareness (Schein 2017, p. 6): organisational secrecy then becomes the employees' second nature.

Secrecy and goal displacement in the Dutch Security Service

Legally, state secrecy has a *functional* basis. Dutch regulations governing state secrecy are comparable to regulations in other national and organisational contexts. The classification regime distinguishes confidential, secret, and top-secret levels, which relate to the amount of damage that disclosure could inflict on "vital interests of the state or those of its allies" (Besluit Voorschrift Informatiebeveiliging Rijksdienst Bijzondere Informatie 2013). These rather broad "interests" acquire more concrete meaning if we break them down into the types of information disclosure of which could inflict such damage, namely sources and methods of intelligence collection.

Sources consist of human sources, such as recruited agents or informants, and technical sources, such as intelligence obtained from telephone or internet taps. Disclosure of these sources will thwart operations and intelligence collection and, more importantly, endanger human sources. Human sources find themselves in a particularly vulnerable position, and exposure could lead to their death, as was the case with agents in the former Soviet Union or, more recently, inside ISIS who collect intelligence for Western intelligence services. They will only want to collaborate if the services can convince them that their identity will be kept secret. In that sense, scandals involving leaked information will negatively affect the ability of a service to recruit new human sources. Given that collaboration with the intelligence sources is a condition for the success of the service's operations, the identity of human sources and any information that could possibly lead to the exposure of this identity are usually classified as top secret.

Methods, the second type of information that services keep secret, concern the means by which services collect intelligence. They include, amongst others, following or observing individuals, interception of phone calls, emails, and other forms of communication, putting eavesdropping devices in someone's home or car, and covertly accessing computers or other devices (hacking). Disclosure of the use of these means in a specific operation will

obviously obstruct the operation of the services. Just as with regard to intelligence sources, keeping the intelligence methods concealed is a functional necessity for the success of the service's operation.

From functional to social secrecy: the recruitment process

Below I argue that the daily operation of the Dutch Security Service, governed by the principle of functional secrecy, triggered social processes that led to goal displacement whereby the initial functional purposes of secrecy came to intertwine with its social aspects.

Within the Dutch Security Service, an initial cause of goal displacement of secrecy was the lengthy and at times unpleasant recruitment process of new personnel. It depended heavily on personal connections, infringed on people's personal lives, and eventually led to their initiation into a distinct, affectionate organisational culture.

While between the end of World War II and the 1960s, the service recruited new employees on the basis of personal connections (wartime resistance groups, family, friends, and acquaintances) and professional connections (colleagues in other security and intelligence agencies, the armed forces, and the police), from the 1960s the service started recruiting through anonymous newspaper advertisements. The new format of the recruitment process would guard –so it was hoped – the service against hostile infiltration, and it stemmed from a general reticence in mentioning the service publicly. For future employees, this recruitment process developed into an "initiation ritual", which contributed to strengthening the value personnel placed on their admission and on the service that had admitted them.

Cryptic advertisements, almost always anonymous, in the intellectual left-wing magazine *Vrij Nederland* and the daily newspaper *NRC*, called upon people "with social political interests" and, in some instances, "intelligent by nature" or "academic", to work for "a large office" or "a government organization in the western part of the country" (Engelen 2007, pp. 58, 61–62). Candidates who decided to apply for the cryptic vacancy were not specifically motivated to work in intelligence. A then-candidate remembered his reasons for applying as "I thought, well, yeah … it kind of drew my attention" (Braat 2012, p. 17). After a candidate had sent his application letter to a PO box number, he or she had to wait for a long time to receive an answer. The answer would arrive in a brown envelope in order to ensure that the postman would be unable to see the contents of the letter, should he decide to hold the envelope up to the light. The letter noted that the candidate was expected at Kennedylaan 25 in The Hague. For many residents in The Hague, it was an open secret that the Security Service was based at this address. For example, in the telephone directory the petrol station on the other side of the street helped its customers by mentioning that they would find it "opposite the Security Service", and the driver of number 11 tram alerted his passengers, as he was nearing the stop outside the headquarters, "all Security Service

employees may descend!" (Braat 2012, p. 17). A former candidate remembered how he took a taxi to get to his interview at Kennedylaan 25:

> When I told the taxi driver where I wanted to go, he said: "Sir, that is the most secret building in the entire city of The Hague". I asked him: "Why is that so?" "Well, sir, I am not allowed to say, but it's very secretive". So, the taxi driver had prepared me for its secretiveness. And then I arrived at a yellow brick building … with lots of antennas on the roof. And that's when it occurred to me [where I was going].
>
> (Braat 2012, p. 17)

Once inside, the service revealed to the candidates where they were. Reactions differed. Many remained indifferent being unfamiliar with the service's existence; others were startled. The first conversation was usually very friendly. The second meeting, on the contrary, was, deliberately, intimidating, personally intrusive, and included an interview with an entire committee. The ensuing vetting process, and the psychological and medical tests could last for months, even up to a year and a half. Moreover, during the entire process, the candidate was kept in the dark about the nature of his future position (Braat 2012, pp. 17–18).

This lengthy, uncertain, and intrusive procedure can be seen as a bureaucratic kind of initiation ritual into the organisation (see also 't Hart 2007, p. 56). It served both security and social purposes. It aimed at "unnerving, disciplining, and transforming" the candidate (Gusterson 1996, p. 74). Those who had successfully withstood the process were encouraged in their belief that they belonged to a privileged and distinctive few, comparable to the process of hazing freshmen students who aim to become members of a student organisation. Observing classification protocols and secrecy rules became a way of confirming the privileged membership of an organisation that employees valued and held in awe. In this way, the onerous hiring procedure initiated a process through which secrecy, from a means to protect sources and methods, would be transformed into a social force serving the membership of an elite group.

From functional to social secrecy: social isolation and the turn inward

Working with classified information and observing rules of secrecy constrained employees' social life with family, friends, and acquaintances. Revealing the Security Service as their employer would make employees vulnerable, to blackmail, for example, and could possibly endanger service sources and methods. Many maintained silence on the service by making up a convincing cover story and attracting as little attention as possible. Depending on the number of operational interests involved, the use of cover stories meant Security Service employees led double lives.

A common cover story for many employees was that they worked for the Ministry of the Interior, which, strictly speaking, was not a lie, since the Ministry was responsible for the service. But as soon as others wanted to know more, these employees easily found themselves on slippery ground. Unfamiliar with the Ministry, they had to remain vague on the location of their fictional job, its nature, and their colleagues, without sounding secretive, which would arouse curiosity. For example:

> During the first fifteen years at the Service, I always said I was working at the Ministry of the Interior as some kind of organizational expert, and that I was trying to make municipalities work more effectively and efficiently. Well, if you add that you are part of an interdepartmental working group, your audience has definitely lost attention and you can then continue talking about something else again. You see, you had to make the story as boring as possible.
>
> (Braat 2012, pp. 83–84)

Another way to do this was the commonly used amplification that the employee worked at the Ministry's HR department. However, nearly everyone found himself in a situation where he was asked whether he knew a real employee from the HR department. "We all encountered such awkward moments, and then, you can't do otherwise than come clean" (Braat 2012, pp. 84–85).

Not everybody could use the Ministry as cover, though. For example, a former watcher, whose work entailed following and observing individuals, explained why she could not possibly pretend to work at the Ministry:

> As a watcher it was almost impossible to think of a suitable cover story … You would arrive home and leave home at weird moments. And sometimes you had this car and another time another car, or you were picked up by different people. Or you were carrying heavy bags with equipment, that you needed for an operation the next day. On such occasions you had to walk back and forth to your car twice to get all the bags out and the next day all the bags back in again. Well, you see, you cannot say then: "I'm a civil servant at the Ministry of the Interior".
>
> (Braat 2012, pp. 82–83)

Operational employees had to be more creative in their cover stories. A former agent handler, who regularly waited in cafes to talk with agents, had an inventive way of averting curiosity. When someone asked him what he did for a living, he first said he preferred not to talk about his work, because he disliked it. If the other insisted: "Ok, you really want to know? I deal in coffins". With that, he hoped the other would prefer to talk to someone else.

Security Service employees not only sustained a fictional job to the outside world. They also created an uninteresting image of themselves that did

not correspond to their interests and personality. Undoubtedly, this further hampered the creation and maintenance of social relations outside the service.

The necessity to lead a double life also had adverse effects on employees' families. According to oral traditions within the service, in the early post-war period some male employees managed to keep the identity of their employer hidden from their families during their entire career. Only at their farewell parties, when their family was allowed to be present, was the family told where they had been working all those years. Even if, in most cases, wives were aware of their husbands' employer, they often knew little about the nature of the job, or why their husbands sometimes had to work irregular hours. This caused distrust. Apparently, it had led to so many marital problems that the first head of service, Louis Einthoven, organised a meeting for all operational employees' wives to explain what their husbands were generally occupied with and that the job sometimes required evening or night work.

The rules of secrecy governing daily operations also detached them from a social life outside the service. As I show below, this social dissociation made them turn inward and seek within the service a substitute for the social life they missed outside it. Social isolation and the sense of discomfort experienced outside the service made them depend emotionally even more on their colleagues. Thus, secrecy, the mechanism confirming one's membership in the social community of the intelligence services, acquired a social significance that extended beyond merely a means to the protection of sources and methods.

From functional to social secrecy: *esprit de corps*

Nearly all those interviewed remembered a "convivial atmosphere" inside the service, a tight, closed and rather hierarchical community, with a "for God and Country feeling" (Braat 2012, p. 23). An interviewee remembered:

> Back then, the Service stole my heart, even if I often disagreed with what they were doing, that the culture was old-fashioned, etc. The people became dear to me.
>
> (Braat 2012, p. 23)

For some, the service had a romantic feel to it. Certain aspects of the job evoked awe and strengthened its employees' sense of elite membership. An employee who started working with the counter-intelligence department remembered his first day at the department in 1966:

> I was supposed to report to the head of department [C: the counter-intelligence department], and back then, this was Piet Gerbrands. And Gerbrands was a war hero and specialist on the Dutch East Indies …

> But what really impressed me and what kind of confirmed my romantic
> impression of the Service: Gerbrands, mantled in an army jacket and sit-
> ting with his bottom on his desk, was having a very important telephone
> conversation. And I thought: so, that's how it is. I would almost say: the
> world of Peter Stuyvesant. But this was the world of counterespionage.
>
> (Braat 2012, p. 24)

"Generally speaking", a former employee, who entered the service in 1977,
remembered that "the atmosphere was better here than with the average
organization" (Braat 2012, p. 59). There was much small talk, gossip, many
practical jokes, and social gatherings in tiny offices. An employee remem-
bers how, during lunch breaks, he and his colleagues would move their desks
to a corner and play football in their office. Another remembers how, after
office hours, they would linger on and have drinks in their office (Braat
2012, pp. 60–61). The staff magazine gives an impression of the staggering
number of formal and informal associations colleagues created to seek each
other's company after office hours. For example, in 1953, there was a chess
club, pool competitions, bridge evenings, photo competitions, very active
book clubs, a shooting club, a volleyball club, a table tennis club, a philat-
ely club, and colleagues joined up to swim and play football. A couple of
years later, the employees' association founded an excursion committee, a
canteen committee, a cultural committee, a debating group, and a party
committee. Particularly between the 1970s, when a new generation of em-
ployees replaced the post-war generation, and the end of the 1980s, the staff
magazine was a bottom-up platform that brought together colleagues, both
horizontally and vertically, and created a space for the expression of criti-
cism and enjoyment. Management encouraged this amicable atmosphere, as
shown by a number of speeches and letters in the staff magazine from heads
of service between the 1940s and 1980s (Braat 2012, pp. 61–62).

The similar backgrounds of personnel further solidified an *esprit de corps*.
During the initial post-war period, the predecessors of the service, the Na-
tional Security Bureau ("Bureau Nationale Veiligheid") and the Central Se-
curity Agency ("Centrale Veiligheidsdienst"), consisted of employees with
varying experiences in resistance groups. In later years, both this resistance
memory and a Protestant Reformed character remained prominent traits
of the organisational culture of the service, strengthening its tightly knit
community.

This isolation from a broader social life created a closed professional
environment in which they sought each other's company, and developed
feelings of friendship and mutual support. This closed workspace made the
employees feel safe (Costas and Grey 2016, p. 28) and produced, sustained,
and reinforced feelings of personal loyalty between colleagues (see also
Braat 2018). The *esprit de corps*, in turn, strengthened the organisational
principles of the services. The social dimension of secrecy reinforced the
observance of secrecy rules even when it was not strictly necessary. In effect,

while secrecy continued to be a means to protect intelligence sources and methods, its social effects stretched much further, and, in this sense, contributed to the process of goal displacement.

Two levels of goal displacement

The process of goal displacement took place not only at the level of the entire organisation, but also at the level of separate departments and sections within the service. This means that each department and section had its own organisational identity and culture, initially shaped by the functional "need-to-know" principle, and later, as I illustrate below, consolidated by secrecy as a powerful mechanism of inclusion and exclusion.

Until the beginning of the 1990s, the Security Service consisted of five main departments, roughly: ACD for administration, B for political extremism (communism), C for counter-intelligence, D for internal security, and E for a number of remaining tasks. Department C, the counter-intelligence department, focused on potential or actual spies. In the words of an employee of department C, it embodied "the real craft of intelligence work", an assumption presumably related to the principal role of spy catchers in spy fiction. C had the reputation of being dynamic, tough, and romantic, certainly up until the 1970s. The department attracted "adventurers, the more colourful characters that could not remain seated behind a desk, and who preferred to go out onto the streets, who went to talk to people" (Braat 2012, p. 116). An employee who had made the transition from department B, that focused on political extremism such as communism, to department C, described the difference between the two as follows:

> It's just very different when you're pursuing a Russian diplomat ... than when you're working with a [human] source who, once every two weeks, goes to a meeting of the Dutch communist party. That's just fundamentally different work.
>
> (Braat 2012, p. 116)

Department C was more sparing with its intelligence than other departments. For example, the Security Service annual reports contained little information from department C because, as a former employee recollects, "they always started talking very secretively about the Soviet Union and communists" and then refused to share information. Moreover, a former employee from an analytical department said, "they hardly knew anything substantive about those topics" (Braat 2012, p. 117).

Section EJ, the section that recorded, listened to, and transcribed wiretaps from microphones, radios, and telephones, arguably had an even more distinctive culture. Functional secrecy was at the origins of this distinctiveness, while its isolation from the rest of the service drove the process of goal displacement.

Section EJ was located alone on the fourth floor of the Kennedylaan 25, behind a locked door with a sign "ACCESS STRICTLY PROHIBITED". If an employee from an operational department needed intelligence from a wiretap, he would arrive at the locked door and press a bell. A hatch would open, and he would only see two hands, while he was asked what he was looking for. Behind the locked door was "a very long and narrow corridor with, on both sides, a large number of booths where people with large headphones were doing obscure work", a former employee of EJ recalls. At the beginning of the 1960s, the section consisted of about 20 men: technicians, audio-typists, and translators. The majority by far were elderly men from the former Dutch East Indies, with experience in, for example, the telegraphy or radio services of the colonial armed forces. In the 1950s and 1960s, the section's main language was Malay and "they improved the atmosphere by bringing Eastern delicacies and self-made sambal, everything in clouds of krètèk cigarettes smelling of cloves". The physical isolation from the rest of the service, critical to ensure the "need-to-know" principle, strengthened and preserved a sense of togetherness within the section.

Until the 1980s, EJ was shrouded in mystery, and EJ employees hardly knew the rest of the Security Service. They had different working hours than their colleagues in other departments, and they were hardly visible within the service. Access was prohibited because inside, in theory, employees from outside EJ would be able to see the tapes that might give them an impression of the amount of wiretapping the service was involved in. Given the need-to-know principle, this information would make them unnecessarily vulnerable.

Finally, an extreme form of secrecy-based compartmentalisation within the Security Service was EXIII, the 13th section of department E, responsible for physically observing and tailing individuals at the request of the operational departments. As with EJ, functional secrecy physically isolated the section from the rest of the service, and social secrecy had, in turn, become the main force sustaining this persisting isolation. As such, the distinctive identity of EXIII contributed to reinforcing the process of compartmentalisation of the service.

Until the 1980s, the watchers of EXIII, responsible for following and observing individuals, were located in a separate building, away from the Security Service headquarters, for a number of security purposes that former employees did not want to disclose. Security Service employees generally did not know any of their colleagues of EXIII, and vice versa. In EXIII slang the service was called "the Fortress" or "the Joint", for which they worked directly but where they never set foot. "I worked for the Security Service", a former EXIII employee explained, "but I actually worked for EXIII". "I did not really feel like a Security Service employee", another recollects. The need-to-know principle further increased the emotional distance *vis-à-vis* "the Joint": the operational departments provided the watchers from EXIII with only a minimal amount of operational information to carry out their work. As a result, EXIII employees hardly knew anything

about the purpose of observing or tailing specific individuals. Until the 1980s, a former EXIII employee remembers, "they kept us ignorant" and that often irritated the section (Braat 2012, p. 123). As a consequence of this physical and emotional separation from headquarters and the nature of their work, EXIII employees knew each other thoroughly, and this fostered and preserved a strong sense of belonging amongst each other.

The watchers from EXIII were "jacks of all trades" or "chameleons". They had to keep a close eye on their object, the surroundings of their object, their colleagues, traffic, and their equipment. Besides cycling, driving, walking, the watchers often waited, sometimes endlessly, in cafes, apartments, bushes, the streets, and in cars:

> We would gather in the morning at 7 AM or … 8 AM. First, we would drink a coffee and have a chat, or we would head off straight away to some East German diplomat and wait until he would drive to the embassy or consulate. Well, then we would leave him there, because he would go inside anyway. We would all have coffee together. And after a while we would head back [to the embassy or consulate] and hope that his car would still be there, and we would then wait the entire day [for him to come out]. During that time, you would occupy yourself with learning something, reading the newspaper or a magazine. You would stay close to your car, or drive around, or in either case do something that would make you blend into the street scene.
>
> (Braat 2012, p. 124)

In the 1950s, EXIII consisted of about ten, less educated, handy, young men with inconspicuous appearances. In later years, the average educational level rose, as in the rest of the Netherlands, but EXIII continued to attract the same type of hands-on individuals. They had the reputation of being rough and rowdy. As one former watcher explains, the watchers of EXIII were in tune with each other:

> Remember: sometimes we were stuck together in a car for thirteen or fourteen hours in a day. So, you knew everything about each other! What else could you talk about? We had been standing on the Museumplein in Amsterdam [where the Soviet consulate was located] from 8 o'clock in the morning, and we would still be there at 11 in the evening! Not everyone is able to do such a thing. You should be able to do this without going crazy. Because that Russian didn't come out. He didn't come. So, there you were … We were a really tight group of people. And we were teasing and fooling each other constantly, we would inflate small imperfections in someone's character … and we wouldn't do so for malicious purposes, but just to stay busy, to tease. And you would get your jokes in return, you could definitely say that.
>
> (Braat 2012, p. 125)

Another watcher remembers that in EXIII there was "a lot of cheerfulness, it was a very homogenous group of people, a kind of family". In the following years, and especially from the 1980s onwards, EXIII attracted more women, contrary to the rest of the Security Service. It did so for practical reasons; for example, a man and woman waiting in a car attracted less attention than two men in a car, and women blended easier in certain environments than men. Unsurprisingly, in some instances, romantic relationships resulted from these working circumstances, sometimes secretly extramarital relationships. More commonly, however, the watchers went out sailing together, played volleyball, went out shooting, cycling, and fishing. They had their own EXIII song and logo, and nobody understood their jokes.

These explicit cultures and identities within the service illustrate that the process of goal displacement of secrecy became a persistent feature of the service's organisational culture. The process of goal displacement encouraged an *esprit de corps* within the departments and sections, stimulating employees' commitment to the job, and operational efficiency within sections. However, the process also led to organisational fragmentation, which had negative effects on the functioning of the service. Thus, even though it contributed to greater commitment to the job and operational efficiency at the level of the sections, it also produced competition, distrust between colleagues, and operational inefficiency, as I illustrate below.

The negative effects of goal displacement

Whereas the functional basis of secrecy centred on the "need-to-know" principle, the process of goal displacement made information sharing a matter of departmental networks and sympathies. On a functional basis, the "need-to-know" principle restricted information sharing within the Security Service. It meant that, despite having official clearances to access a certain type of information, one could only access it with a professional need-to-know. With each employee knowing as little as needed, the service aimed to protect the identity of agents, other sources, and methods. The less an employee knew, the less vulnerable he would be in a case of losing information, being forced to provide information to a hostile party, and the less damage he would cause if he intentionally leaked information. A former employee responsible for internal security, who entered the service in 1966, defended the significance of the need-to-know principle:

> Every security service is infiltrated [by a hostile service]. Every service has a mole in its ranks. They are all undermined … except our Security Service? And then we [in internal security] said to each other "that's impossible!". Somewhere in this large building there is bound to be a mole amongst us. At least one … That's why I still am, now old and grey, against a relaxation of the need-to-know principle.
>
> (Braat 2012, p. 98)

The need-to-know principle might seem straightforward. However, with the resulting goal displacement, daily practice proved recalcitrant, creating more breeding ground for the presence of secrecy on a social basis. How could one know what the other needed, if one did not know what information the other had? To what degree did the other really need the information to do his work? And who had the last say: the one who could provide the information or the one who had requested it? In practice, the decision whether to share information was less related to a rational, functional consideration that weighed the pros and cons; rather, it was embedded in the existence of different identities and related sympathies within the Security Service. This dimension of goal displacement hindered collaboration between departments and led to inefficiency (Braat 2012, pp. 100–102).

The fragmentation of the services and the internal barriers to information sharing between its various departments led to situations, in which, as a former employee recollects, "the right hand did not know what the left hand was doing". This caused unnecessary overlaps and duplication in the operational work of the departments and undermined the quality of the work of the service. At times, the service would spend too much time on particular operational projects. As a former employee, who joined the service in the 1970s, recounts:

> Well, in my memory [this need to know principle] was very prominent at the time, and perhaps it was – actually, I am quite sure about this – just exaggerated. It definitely obstructed collaboration between colleagues, and certain wheels were reinvented about five times, because you did not know that your neighbour had already done so. So, I think that, on the one hand, the awareness of "need to know" was very strong, which as a whole is a good thing, of course. But I also think that its effects, on a day to day basis, have been disadvantageous in many ways.
>
> (Braat 2012, p. 100)

Another offshoot of functional secrecy, equally disruptive to the efficient functioning of the services as the fragmented culture of information sharing, was resorting to secrecy as a mode of power across separate departments and between colleagues. For example, some employees were secretive about trivial information unrelated to national security, such as friendships between colleagues. "If you were really secretive about such trivial stuff, it would generate distrust. Some people had integrated secretive behaviour into their character and used [their exclusive access to information] to compete with colleagues", remembers a former employee who entered the service in 1966. A rogue counterpart to the regular personnel magazine published an article full of denunciations in 1988 of "unsavoury power blocks and pacts … that did not collaborate, but sabotaged each other's work, with bosses who confuse their own interests with the general interest of the Service" (Braat 2012, p. 102).

Conclusion

Drawing on empirical material covering almost 30 years of the Dutch Security Service, I have argued that intelligence communities trigger mechanisms that contribute to displacing the functional goal of secrecy to a social one. In other words, national security secrecy in intelligence and security services goes beyond mere functionality; it is transformed from a means to protect sources and methods into an end in itself. I have isolated the initial causes of goal displacement – the initiation ritual, including the vetting process and the ensuing feeling of being part of a privileged, tightly knit community which "knew more". And I have demonstrated that, once put in motion, the process of goal displacement reinforces itself through dissociation from social contacts outside the service and the creation of distinctive identities and cultures within the service.

Merton argued that goal displacement has negative effects on the functioning of the organisation, such as rigidities and the inability to adjust readily. This study has indeed identified a number of negative consequences, demonstrating that the culture of secrecy that emerges when secrecy is subject to a process of goal displacement, hampers collaboration across sections and departments, leading to organisational fragmentation, competition, and distrust between colleagues. The decision to share information is dependent on informal networks and sympathies. Nonetheless, the study has also qualified Merton's claim by pointing to positive effects of goal displacement. It has revealed that social secrecy may strengthen organisational efficiency at lower organisational levels. More concretely, this research shows that social secrecy contributes to a sense of belonging between colleagues and enhances collaboration and efficiency in the restricted environment of a section. The privileged access to secrets strengthens the self-confidence of the initiated staff and convinces them of the significance of the job that needs to be done. Through secrecy, the organisation initiates and socialises new employees into the organisation, it creates unity and, as such, improves efficiency. As such, goal displacement of secrecy strengthens operational flexibility and efficiency.

The mechanism of goal displacement explains why secrecy may become socially and emotionally deeply engrained in intelligence communities. Over time, its "stickiness" raises the (emotional) costs of alternative choices, making secrecy an integral part of the organisation's imprint. Hence, incentives for greater transparency typically must come from above and from the outside. In the Netherlands, in 1989, the then head Arthur Docters van Leeuwen undertook a large reorganisation of the Security Service. By doing so, he shook up the social basis of secrecy that had become so firmly embedded in the distinctive identities in sections and departments. The reorganisation of the services he initiated slowed down the process of goal displacement. The new organisation model propagated more information sharing – employees were supposed to be part of several teams that could

swiftly be deployed to counter new threats ('t Hart 2007, p. 58). It meant that information had to be shared more easily on a "need to share" basis – which emphasises the operational advantages of sharing information – instead of "need-to-know" basis, with colleagues from other departments and sections. Hence, employees had to distance themselves from their former exclusive loyalty towards their department and section, and its related identity and culture. Instead, they had to develop several loyalties and trust in the other (the "outsider" within the service). This proved a less straightforward process than Arthur Docters van Leeuwen had hoped. Many in the service were resistant to the reforms. Their reactions showed that secrecy, if subjected to goal displacement, had contributed to rigid, "sticky" feelings of loyalty to specific groups within the service.

This research covers historical material up to the end of the 1990s. Since the end of the Cold War and increasingly so after 9/11, the calls for more openness in governance have forced a widening of transparency within intelligence services. Oversight and accountability mechanisms have connected intelligence communities more explicitly to their political and societal environments with the effect that intelligence and security services explain and justify their work more regularly to politicians, journalists, and bureaucratic partners. This has potential implications for the internal functioning of intelligence agencies and may affect the mechanism of goal displacement. Further research is needed to examine the process of goal displacement with regard to national security secrecy since then.

Note

1 Throughout this chapter I do not refer directly to these primary sources. Rather, I refer to my book where these primary sources appeared in first instance: Eleni Braat, *Oude Jongens, de Dingen die Voorbij Gaan … Een Sociale Geschiedenis van de Binnenlandse Veiligheidsdienst, 1945–1998* (*Of Old Boys, the Things that Pass.. A Social History of the Dutch Security Service, 1945–1998*), Zoetermeer: Algemene Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdienst 2012. The book was commissioned by the Dutch Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD). It is unclassified, available online and in various libraries. The book is not commercially available.

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