Chapter 3. The sound of silence: silent ideologies in public services

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1. INTRODUCTION

Political ideology is generally seen to be very outspoken. Animated debates are considered the core of democratic decision-making. While a lot of ism's, such as liberalism, conservatism, socialism, and creationism, form part of the political debate, values and ideology in public service delivery are often not acknowledged or scrutinized. Public services are often presented as a matter of neutral implementation. We argue in this chapter that public services are far from ideology-free. Key to our argument is that ideologies can be loud or silent, and that silent ideologies in public service delivery do not get enough attention. Since they nonetheless have an effect on public service performance, it is important to expose those silent ideologies. This chapter studies three silent ideologies in fields for which we had case evidence available: frontline professionalism, technology and citizen participation.

In this chapter, we will explore the hidden ideologies of public services based on cases from the Netherlands. The first case follows up on the bottom-up approach of implementation (Hill and Hupe 2002). It is argued that silent ideologies have an impact on how frontline professionals actually use discretion. Silent ideologies are seen as the glue that holds the service together. The second case, the silent ideology of using technology in services delivery, fits into the top-down approach of implementation. While the use of technology is often seen as a neutral programming decision, we argue that there is a considerable amount of ideology involved. And the third case focuses on the relations between citizens and the state in public service delivery. Increasingly, the state is presenting itself as a partner to citizens. The increasing popularity of the co-production concept evidences this trend. The state wants to intervene and improve society, but it realises that it cannot do this alone. Therefore, the state appeals on the citizen. Yet, we argue that the silent ideology of partnership between citizens and the state may create new forms of exclusion. Before discussing the cases, we define the concept of a silent ideology

2. SILENT IDEOLOGIES: A DEFINITION.

Large and loud ideologies have been declared dead on several occasions. One of the best-known instances is by Francis Fukuyama who proclaimed the end of history after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The hegemony of the capitalist liberal system marked the end of different ideological worldviews (Fukuyama 2006). As early as 1960, Daniel Bell wrote a seminal work entitled 'the end of ideology' (Bell 2000). Bell sees ideology as a comprehensive closed system of beliefs that directs change towards the ideal society (Bell 2000: 400). Bell's theorem is that the old ideologies of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century have lost their appeal. This also applies to the older ideologies such as liberalism and conservatism, but the strongest decline is that of Marxism.

The crumbling of the comprehensive and loud ideologies paved the way for alternative forms of political and social cohesion and mobilization. At first sight neoliberalism seems to have filled the gap. Our economic and political institutions do indeed rely on ideas of economic neoliberalism such as individual freedom, market-growth and market mechanisms. Yet, neoliberal ideology only partly explains the institutions and functioning of politics and administration. If we focus on specific sectors such as healthcare or foreign policy, and specific locations such as neighborhoods or airports, other mechanisms that structure and normalize social behavior are found. These silent ideologies, these tacit shared visions, also shape politics and government.

Ideology has accumulated many meanings throughout history (Gerring 1997). Here, silent ideology is defined as a *shared and coherent, but silent vision of the good citizen, government and society*. This definition holds several characteristics.

First, ideology deals with how to organize society, and is therefore *inherently political*. Here, the concept distinguishes itself from notions such as worldview or belief system that can be a-political or even very personal. The political nature of ideology does not mean that it is restricted to the politics of political parties, parliaments and politicians. Political choices are often made outside of the realm of the political institutions, in the media, civil society and indeed, public service delivery for example. Secondly, ideology is *shared* by a group of people. Traditionally, social class was used to make a distinction between groups that are assumed to share a set of values. For instance, working class would support leftist ideologies. Today, social class is clearly no longer the only criterion to identify groups that may share ideology. For instance, Richard Florida (2008) describes the emergence of a creative, urban class, making a distinction between the 'have's and 'have not's in the creative economy. Others have documented ideological cleavages on ecological issues (Hajer 1997) or the support for post-material values (Inglehart 2008). The fragmentation of ideologies generally reflects a fragmentation of life spaces, which makes it harder to identify ideologies (Dalton 1996). Thirdly, ideology is *internally coherent.* It is a logical set of causal relations that are supposed to lead, ultimately, to an ideal society. Internal coherence also implies external contrast. Alternative ideologies are conceivable. Fourthly, ideology is *action oriented*. Ideologies do not cause action, but are a 'cause for action' (Mullins 1972).

Ideologies can be loud or silent. Loud ideologies are explicitly communicated. The moral goals and the coherence of the vision are written down, incorporated in curricula, captured on film, and symbolized. At the extreme end, it takes the form of indoctrination. Silent ideologies, on the contrary, are not explicitly communicated. The moral goals and coherence of the vision are not symbolized, but rather put to the test incrementally in day-to-day governance. The shared vision on the good society is naturally accepted, with tacit underlying political choices. Alternative visions are conceivable, but are not discussed. The acceptance within a group is sufficiently strong, and hence ideology is a basis for action. Yet, actions are only implicitly embedded in the ideological frame of reference. Institutional theory refers to this type of action formation as the logic of appropriateness (March and Olsen 2004).

3. IDEOLOGIES OF FRONTLINE PROFESSIONALS

Silent ideologies have an impact on how front-line professionals actually use discretion. Here we present some examples from the medical sector. The examples, prenatal diagnostics and genetic screening, demonstrate a similar ideological shift. The silent ideology of medical indication is challenged by another, also silent, ideology of choice and self-determination.

Doctors are often confronted with medical-ethical dilemmas (cases from Trappenburg 2012). While political parties have different ideological positions on medical-ethical dilemmas (Trappenburg 2012). Faith-based parties tend to oppose medical innovations, arguing, on religious grounds, that mankind should not interfere. On the left, parties stress the value of self-determination. Yet, notwithstanding the apparent ideological positions, only one medical-ethical issue, i.e. abortion, has led to a political conflict along ideological lines (Outshoorn 1986). Other issues could have led to ideological strife as well but, in practice, the Netherlands did not follow that path. Instead, medical-ethical dilemmas have been depoliticized and left in the hands of doctors. Instead of religious grounds or values of self-

determination, doctors used to be expected to determine ethical issues based upon medical indications. In recent years however, market-oriented reform in the public sector has changed this picture. Market-oriented reform also stresses the importance of choice in health services. As a corollary, the ideological pendulum seems to shift towards self-determination. Some examples.

Women have access to prenatal screenings for genetic diseases such as Downs' syndrome, Cystic Fibrosis, muscular dystrophy, and more. Many women decide to undergo an abortion when these diseases are diagnosed. The issue of access to prenatal diagnostics is also ideological. Should individual self-determination prevail? Women and partners decide which tests to perform and on the conclusions to be drawn from the tests. Or, alternatively, should it be the rights of the vulnerable unborn but imperfect life that prevail? Notwithstanding the potential for ideological fireworks, Dutch policies have been based on the depoliticizing pragmatics of medical risk assessment. Prenatal screening was offered when a) the disease was sufficiently serious to test, b) the risks of having the disease were high, and c) the tests were reliable enough. In practice, mainly women with hereditary diseases and older women were granted access to prenatal screening. The shift to market-oriented reforms and a culture of choice in health services, however, had led to an increase in prenatal screening, also by young, healthy, low-risk pregnant women if they chose to avail themselves of it.

A similar story can be told about access to (genetic) screening for adults. DNA research can evidence the propensity for certain cancers, blindness, deafness, or mental handicaps. Also in this case, medical indications rather than self-determination were decisive in the decision to have people screened. Medical evidence of societal benefits of screening drove the decision to support a screening. For instance, a screening for colon cancer will only be done when the screening would find as many cancers that would not be found otherwise and that can still be cured, so as to offset the overall costs of the screening. Again, the market-and-choice reforms have called this model into question. It is not societal health gains but rather individual rights that determine whether screenings are performed.

The consequences for the Dutch health system are considerable. The introduction of market mechanisms has led to a substantial growth in the costs of healthcare. These rising costs are not caused by higher prices, but mainly by volume growth. Emphasis on the requests of the patient/client makes it difficult for general practitioners to hold on to standards, and protocols. Hospitals try to generate new demands, amongst others means, by initiating new specialized policlinics; including the likes of cough-policlinics, policlinics for falling injuries, for pain, and policlinics only for men.

It can be argued that the ideological shift in the health sector is emblematic for a deeper shift in society: the shift from decisions based on professional knowledge and experiences to decisions based on the compelling demands of stateless and anxious consumer-citizens. In the traditional model the doctor decides, case by case, who will be medically screened. Yet, we trust that this decision is based on expertise acquired through training and science. The demand-driven market-model runs counter to this expert-driven provision of services. Not evidence but customer demands drive service delivery. More than before, doctors now also have to relate to the wishes and demands from patients. Scientific discoveries and new technologies are added to the menu of health services where the citizen/customer chooses. In particular in highly specialized sectors such as medicine, with a sharp juxtaposition between expert and lay knowledge, the implications of the ideological shift are profound.

4. IDEOLOGIES OF INSTRUMENTALISM

The second perspective fits into the top-down approach of implementation. The case is the silent ideology of using technology in services delivery. Characteristic again is the absence of a debate (Van Est 2012). The argument being that technology is so easily accepted in government because it holds the promise of a socially engineered, prosperous and safe society.

Technological innovations have always driven societies in a very fundamental way. That is why the German sociologist Helmuth Plessner characterizes man as *'artificial by nature'* (quoted in (Van Est 2012, 85)). Our way of living is made possible by the technology that surrounds us. The realm of technological interventions in society is expanding throughout history. The information revolution after WOII has extended the focus of technology from dead nature towards living nature, including mankind. The scientific agenda reflects this aspiration of technology to control human nature: neurology, genetics, pharmacology and ICT. These technologies may affect our memory and personality, human reproduction and physical performance. Hence, they intervene with quite essential issues; the body, human consciousness and social interaction. Notwithstanding their fundamental extents, technological changes are seldom discussed politically and/or ideologically (Van Est 2012). They are perceived to be the natural course of progress. Yet, ideological questions, mainly concerning privacy, could be asked.

New technologies such as data mining, DNA-research and large-scale camera surveillance are increasingly supporting police and justice departments in combating crime. For instance the forensic use of DNA profiles is expected to substantially increase the number of cases solved. The coupling of large databases is another case in point of the impact of technology on investigation. Like many other governments, the Dutch government is coupling databases of social services with unemployment and fiscal databases to detect social and fiscal fraud. In recent years, police forces have also been coupling databases of automobile license plates with smart cameras that automatically scan cars for license plates that are blacklisted. On the agenda are systems of bio monitoring and unique identifiers (Vedder, A.H. e.a. 2007).

There is a general trend in these technological projects. A report by the Rathenau institute found that in the last decades, investigative services have changed in several respects and that these changes are mainly driven by technology (Vedder, A.H. e.a. 2007). Investigations are more easily extended to persons in the environment of a suspected person, but who are not suspected themselves. Increasingly, pro-active investigations based on risk-profiles are carried out. In order to do so, investigative services are able to use increasingly more personal data from other (semi-) public organizations. That data was not collected for investigatory purposes in the first place. Other organizations are increasingly being forced to collaborate in investigations. Legal impediments to these and other new techniques are gradually being removed.

The main ideological and politically relevant issue is that the privacy of individuals is at stake. Governments, but also private companies, have an increasingly detailed picture of individual people's lives and are able to act upon that information. It is thus somewhat surprising that most technological innovations in public services are not the subject of much political strife. If there is any debate, then it focuses on a single project or issue and not on the broader role of technology in society. We would argue that this absence of debate is caused by the conformation of technological innovation to the silent ideology of modernism and the

socially engineered society. Technological progress is almost naturally seen as social progress. Concerns with public values such privacy are quickly overshadowed by the substantial improvements in efficiency, quality and effectiveness of service delivery that can be achieved through technology.

The argument, so far, has been that technology is so easily accepted in government because it holds the promise of a socially engineered, predictable society. This legitimization is partially unfounded (Van Est 2012). Permanent innovation makes the future unpredictable and opaque. Technological developments are subversive to existing conventions and objectives. The apparent struggle of public bureaucracies to give social media a place in communication strategies is a case in point. Technologies are a driver of transformation rather than safeguard of stability. This driver is self-sustaining; not politics, but technology itself is determining the pace and content of change. It can only do so, because it is endorsed by a modern silent ideology.

5. IDEOLOGIES OF PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN CITIZENS AND THE STATE

Our third case shows how silent ideology defines the relations between citizens and the state in public service. Increasingly, the state seeks to cooperate with citizens. This is associated with a more general trend towards cooperation in networks involving both public and private actors. It is argued that due to increasingly complex policy challenges and the changing capacity of governments to pursue collective interests, government needs to cooperate with others (O'Toole Jr, Meier, and Nicholson-Crotty 2005; Pierre and Peters 2000). The assumption is that cooperation leads to better service provision and more efficiency.

In the relations between citizens and the state, the increasing popularity of co-production evidences this trend. Co-production is not a recent phenomenon. The contemporary concept of co-production is defined in the early 1980s by American academics (Brudney and England 1983). Yet, it seems that the contemporary practice of co-production is both more intense and global (Bovaird 2007). Co-production between governments and citizens takes place in different areas of public services. For example: citizens cooperate with the police in neighborhood watch schemes, patients work together with health professionals to develop personalized medication schemes, participatory budgeting, speed watching, and peer learning are some concrete projects (see, for instance, the case catalogue of Governance International (2012) for more cases). One of the explanations for the increase in co-production initiatives is technological innovation and social media, which provide new means of involving citizens (Meijer 2012).

In promoting initiatives of co-production, government increasingly presents itself as a partner of citizens. The state is both activist, but also restrained. It wants to intervene and to improve society, but due to a lack of resources and support, it cannot do this alone. Therefore, the state appeals on the citizen (Peeters and Drosterij 2012). The combination of activism and restraint finds its expression in how citizens are being approached. For example, labor policies are increasingly focused on activation, with an emphasis on the responsibility of unemployed to take their fate into their own hands. In particular for European welfare states, the shift from 'passive' policies based on entitlements to unemployment benefits to 'active' labor market policies is quite fundamental. In 1985, The Netherlands spent €30 on activation policies for every €100 in unemployment benefits. Between 1994 and 2001, the activation policies expenditures rose to a point where they now exceed the benefit expenditures by 20% (Hupe and Van Dooren 2010).

Likewise, in the implementation of regeneration policies in disadvantaged neighborhoods, governments see citizens as partners. The former cabinet presented a picture of an ideal society where citizens take part in society as responsible and loyal participants instead of being passive subjects who only put forward demands and complaints against government. This view finds a translation in local policy. In recent years, citizens in many cities in the Netherlands have been given more room to take initiatives to improve their neighborhoods. These so-called 'citizens' initiatives' are assumed to strengthen the role of citizens in the public domain (Verhoeven and Oude Vrielinck 2012).

However noble these initiatives may be, the dominant discourse of partnerships between citizens and government conceals that citizens and government may have conflicting interests. The discourse of partnerships between citizens and government, in most cases, also implies that government expects citizens to behave in a specific way. Citizens are expected to act '*responsible'[act responsible, behave responsibly]*, that is: to contribute to social cohesion, to confront fellow citizens when they show asocial behavior, or to make the right choices in order to live healthy (Peeters and Drosterij 2012). In a similar way, citizens' initiatives that do not fit government plans or protest initiatives that seek to confront government are often seen as unproductive and therefore as not desirable (Van Dooren 2012). Citizens are partners on the state's terms. As a consequence, the silent ideology of partnerships between citizens and the state minimizes the voice of the 'irresponsible' and deviant citizen. The adagio '*you are either with us, or against us'* forms a barrier for new ideas and criticism to get accepted. The exclusion of the voice of some (groups of) citizens in the public sphere may finally lead to a decrease of legitimacy and democratic equality, which belong to the fundamental principles of democracy (Young 2000).

6. FUNCTIONS AND DYSFUNCTIONS OF SILENT IDEOLOGIES IN PUBLIC SERVICES

In the absence of an unambiguous moral compass provided by traditional ideologies, the need for other binding mechanisms increases. Silent ideology is such a mechanism. By keeping certain issues out of the public and political debate, we also avoid social and political unrest and the uncertainty that comes with it. Sometimes, it appears to be more comfortable not to discuss things. The cases show that there is still a great deal of ideology in politics and administration, but that this ideology often remains unspoken. Silent ideologies reconcile state and society behind tacit conventions and modes of service delivery. Logic of discipline is speaking from the silent ideologies, which discipline the behavior of citizen, policy makers, as well as frontline professionals (Roberts 2011).

The next question is whether the silence of ideology is problematic? The absence of conflict may be beneficial in 'keeping things together', in providing guidance. The case of the health sector shows that the ideology of health services based on medical indication contributed to fairness and equity in the system as well as to cost control. Taboos and organizational myths may indeed be functional to align employees who have to perform in ambiguous and complex settings and are confronted with many and often conflicting demands (Brunsson 1989).

Yet, the 'silent' character of ideologies also has a downside. The obviousness of silent ideology leads to depoliticization, coagulation of policies and practices in service delivery and a decline of public debate. As a result, innovation in public services may be hampered. Critical voices are not heard, and if they are heard, they are not understood if they do not fit

into the silent frames of reference. The confident belief in progress through technology for instance seems to stand in the way of a genuine political debate about the role of technology in society. Maybe we miss out on some important side effects of technological change because technology assessments are not taking the ideological side of the coin into consideration. Or take the gradual erosion of the ideology of expert professionalism by market preferences and consumerism in health care. Notwithstanding the fact that this shift seems to be quite fundamental, the implications of this shift have not really been discussed politically. Silent ideology can, particularly in the long run, jeopardize a good and responsive operation of public services, a rich public debate, and an active public sphere.

7. IDEOLOGICAL CONSTRUCTION and DECONSTRUCTION

Silent ideologies are highly institutionalized and thus assume a taken-for-granted character. Silent ideology motivates, legitimizes and integrates action, without this action being interpreted within the ideological framework. In this way, silent ideologies give direction and stability. Yet they are also changeable, as the cases show. So the question is how that change occurs. What are the mechanisms behind ideological construction and deconstruction?

One mechanism is to debunk silent ideologies through confrontation. Actors with alternative ideologies clash with the silent ideology. Silent ideologies become loud in their own defense. The cases we discussed above have not (yet) been confronted. Yet, other examples can easily be found. Margaret Thatcher's exclamation that society does not exist clashed with the ideology of the welfare state in the 1970s. Recently, some European leaders forcefully attacked the thus far largely silent ideology of the richness of a multicultural society, intermingling groups of different ethnicities and cultures. German Chancellor Angela Merkel proclaimed the 'failure of the multicultural model', the former French president Sarkozy called the rioters in the French 'banlieues' (high rises around cities) 'racaille' – translated as scum - that needs to be cleaned off the streets. And why does the slogan 'change', an evergreen in political campaigning, work well in certain instances and not in other contexts? We would argue that it is because the concept of 'change' runs counter to a silent ideology that gives meaning to an otherwise hollow concept. Political actors use frames in a political struggle. Frames work because they rely on and/or confront existing ideological images. Successful framing is a form of ideological conflict in practice. Rather than in abstract ideological debates, ideology is tested in day-to-day political conflict. The very few ideological debates on the introduction of technology in society are about concrete incidents or instruments.

Framing is a strategy of political communication (Lakoff 2001). Frames and issues come and go in accelerating news cycles. The volatility of the news stands in sharp contrast to the relative stability of ideology. Nevertheless it is exactly silent ideologies that come to the surface in this public debate, they come under attack, and they can defend themselves. When frames disappear, it is also silent on the ideological front. An ideology can escape relatively unscathed from the public arena, but they can equally easily be changed fundamentally. After the ideological turmoil, the ideology of multiculturalism in Europe seems to transform to a more mono-cultural ideology (see Vertovec and Wessendorf (2010) for an overview of what they call the multicultural backlash). A policy implication is that immigrants are increasingly required to assimilate to European norms and values. The impact is also felt in service delivery. There is controversy around public servants wearing headscarves, but there is also an

impact on the provision of education and language knowledge required. It is also conceivable that a silent ideology disappears without a clear alternative to replace it. Ideologies that are repeatedly attacked from different angles are less likely to remain quiet.

There is also another, less visible way silent ideology can change. Instead of debunking through conflict, there is a gradual erosion of the ideology and quiet sedimentation of a new ideological framework. These gradual changes occur at the frontline of public services rather than in the political arena and are therefore particularly relevant for public services. In policy sciences, this ideological consensus in policy sectors is identified by terms such as advocacy coalitions (Sabatier 1988) or discursive coalitions (Hajer 1997). In the case of the health sector, the gradual and partial shift from professional judgement to consumerism has taken place slowly but steadily through the behaviour of doctors at the frontline. Marketization and consumerism have lead to an increasing tension between their professional standards and ethics and the demands of the critical and compelling patient-consumers. It was only after the costs of the system increased substantially that the ideological shifts became apparent and became subject of political debate.

8. CONCLUSION

Almost half a century ago, Paul Simon wrote The Sound of Silence, conveying the idea that also the unspoken speaks. In public services too, seemingly neutral and widely accepted practices are embedded in a vision on how society should look and what role public services have to play. We call these unspoken visions silent ideologies. Three cases from the Netherlands have been discussed. First, we argued that the ideology of rationality in evidence-based medicine suppressed the conflict between self-determination and pro-life standpoints in ethical dilemmas such as abortion and genetic screening. Secondly, we discussed how the ideology of instrumentalism leads to an uncritical acceptance of new technologies. Thirdly, we argued that the discourse of co-production holds a silent ideology of partnership between citizens and the state. By making an appeal to the 'responsible' citizen, this ideology may conceal conflicting interests of citizens and the state.

Sometimes silent ideologies prove to be effective, as shown in the case of the health sector where the ideology of health services based on medical indication contributed to fairness and equity in the system as well as to cost control. Even so, we believe that it is important to expose silent ideologies. Some of the dangers of silent ideologies have been addressed in this chapter. Ideology appears to be far from absent in public services. Our main argument is that silent ideology leads to de-politicization and a decline of public debate. As a result innovations in public services may be hampered and negative side effects of public policies not addressed. In other words, silent ideologies may have a negative effect on the quality of service delivery. Also, concerns with public values such as privacy can be overshadowed by a strong and unchallenged belief in the possibility of substantial improvements in efficiency, quality and effectiveness of service delivery as was shown in the case of technology. And finally, we are concerned about the effects on democracy. Silent ideologies leave little room for critical voices. This may lead to the exclusion of ideas and of some groups of citizens in the public sphere, something that may ultimately undermine the legitimacy of democracy.

This contribution can be considered to be a first step in addressing silent ideologies and their workings. To deepen our knowledge about the effects of silent ideologies on the quality of public services, the securing of public values, and the functioning of democracy, further

research needs to be done, also on the effects of silent ideologies on the choices that public managers, frontline workers and street level bureaucrats make in every day practice.

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