

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Keeping you in the dark: the Bastille archives and police secrecy in eighteenth-century France

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Abstract

During the French Revolution, the Bastille prison had become synonymous with abuses of power and government secrecy. The Paris police had long exercised secrecy in its operations, but in the eighteenth century, they became a target of the revolutionaries as the most visible arm of a government that was seen as opaque but intrusive. Both the growing power of the modernising state and the rise of public opinion in this period contributed to changing attitudes towards government secrecy and to the valorisation of transparency in the political culture of the Revolution.

1. Introduction

Without intending to, the police, as the most visible and ubiquitous manifestation of state power and control in eighteenth-century France, played an important role in making secrets and secrecy suspect. Through their practices and in their use of the Bastille, the police laid the groundwork for the subsequent culture of transparency that flourished during the Revolution. By then, the Bastille's reputation as a place of horrors and terrible secrets had long been established. In 1790, celebrating the demolition of the Bastille and delivering a speech on the meaning of its scattered stones, Pierre-François Palloy, the architect in charge of the demolition, declared, 'These stones will no longer hear the cries of our oppressed brothers; they will no longer form the lugubrious vaults of dungeons, truly tombs for the living...'.¹ Models of the Bastille were then carved out of its stones and sent to several deputies, people of note in the capital and throughout the provinces, as symbols of the nation's freedom from tyranny.² Palloy called the Bastille the 'arrogant citadel', and in his many speeches on the prison which he helped disassemble he often tied its destruction to the overall task of the Revolution in 'spreading light, keeping an eye on public administrations and pursuing abuses'.³

The Bastille, however, had not always been synonymous with government abuses and secrets. Its reputation as a frightening state prison began under Cardinal Richelieu, (prime minister from 1624 to 1642), but in the eighteenth century, when the prison was fully within the purview of the police, it truly gained the reputation it had by the Revolution. The police made the Bastille the Bastille of legend, a place of violence but also many secrets.

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The factual circumstances of the prison were less important than its imagined horrors because of the public's fervent belief in them. This made them real in the sense that prisoners feared what might happen to them because of these rumours, and that deep anxiety coloured their perception and the public's perception of reality, and as a result altered it. Furthermore, the secrecy surrounding the prison fostered these rumours and helped spur the later culture of transparency that emerged in the Revolution, and the condition that made this possible in the eighteenth century – and not the seventeenth century when the government was just as, if not more, secretive – was the rise of public opinion. No one could deny the power of public opinion and the emerging public sphere, though scholars continue to debate ways of understanding it.

Scholars often divide the debate on how to understand the public sphere between public realm theory or a normative understanding of the public sphere represented by Jürgen Habermas and to some extent, Hannah Arendt; and the postmodern critique of that conception, especially that of Michel Foucault and Jean-François Lyotard. For Habermas, public opinion and the public sphere are sociological phenomena. Following Weber, Habermas conceives of modernity as a period of rationalisation, which developed through the use of reason. The rational way to deal with social and political issues was through publicity, and debates took place in a space of plurality and equality, a place, also for Arendt, of 'uncoerced deliberation' and the reaching of consensus. These rational debates took place in print media and in places like squares and cafes. For Foucault and Lyotard, the rise of public opinion resulted from epistemological shifts and changing power relations.⁴ In any case, a new force of public opinion helped create an environment where writers and thinkers began to consider a power outside of the state, and the intense secrecy of the state became a subject of interest. When both the Paris police and the notion of public opinion had grown in power and sophistication, writers began to discuss the merits of government transparency. More broadly speaking, as the police began to venture into areas it had not touched in previous centuries, notions of public versus private began to crystallise, and secrecy came to be a concept worth debating.

While the police believed that secrecy could help keep public imagination in check, secrecy instead gave the rumours new life and gave the public free rein in its speculations.⁵ The central argument of this article, then, is that the Paris police grew in size and sophistication as the French state did in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and they continued their strict practices of secrecy as a means of social control and leverage, but these practices intensified and deepened as the police gained more purview. And with little verifiable information, writers' and the public's imagination could run wild. Furthermore, there were those with an interest in spreading these rumours and the so-called black legend of the Bastille. Because of the Bastille's use as a deterrent for vociferous dissidents like Protestants and especially Jansenists, a supposedly heretical group within French Catholicism at the end of Louis XIV's reign and during the Regency, many of those who had been imprisoned there and many others who claimed to be published memoirs of the Bastille's abuses. These memoirs usually exaggerated the horrors of the Bastille to conform to their target audience's negative views of the French regime, as in the case of French Jansenists who published such memoirs

in the German lands or the Low Countries. One example are the famous memoirs of Constantin de Renneville, written early in the eighteenth century, that more or less established the so-called Black Legend of the Bastille with graphic descriptions of torture.⁶ By the century's end, the trickle of Bastille literature had become a flood, and famous figures like the comte de Mirabeau, the lawyer, Simon Linguet,⁷ and the fraudster and escape artist, the Chevalier de Latude, not to mention Voltaire, had all written poems, manifestos or memoirs decrying government abuses in prisons, especially the Bastille, not because they were oppressed Jansenists, but because, inspired by Enlightenment principles, they believed that the government's institutionalised secrecy left it prone to corruption and to committing abuses.

The police realised that public opinion could have a negative impact, (in their view), and spied on and arrested hundreds of illicit booksellers and authors while unwittingly tilting public opinion against the police.⁸ When the Bastille was originally used as a state prison in the early seventeenth century, or subsequently when Paris's first modern police force came into being in the 1660s under one chief, the use of secrecy in prisons and during interrogations and arrests never aroused concern. As the eighteenth century progressed, the public became a more fully formed concept, and public opinion was seen as a force for good.⁹ The idea of secrecy as a problem or hindrance to justice emerged, along with new ideas about privacy. A finer appreciation for personal privacy and private domestic space characterised the second half of the eighteenth century, and this informed complaints about police abuses in the decades before the Revolution.

The Paris police, because of its size and structure, was the first modern police force.¹⁰ Historians of the Paris police tend to agree that they were instrumental in French state formation, though few have dwelled at length on the police's masterful and sometimes excessive use of secrecy. For Steven Kaplan, the work of the police could and did benefit the populace, though they certainly were resented from time to time as well.¹¹ According to Alan Williams, the police of Paris reached beyond the traditional functions of defence and justice and took on new responsibilities for public order. One can track the progression of the French state by observing how the police began to control dimensions of life that it had formerly neglected. Williams believes that the police 'marked out a sphere of ambition and activity that enhanced its resemblance to a modern state; but in so doing it generated and exacerbated hostilities that would haunt it until the Revolution...'¹²

In Louis-Sébastien Mercier's *Tableau de Paris*, a famous series of vignettes on daily life in eighteenth-century Paris, the three most frequent critiques levelled against the police were common themes: they violated citizens' privacy, they were secretive and used secrecy to hide abuses, and most of all, the prisons where the police threw their victims were dark vaults of pain and horror. According to Mercier, the police had so many spies in so many places that as soon as two people were seen speaking together, a spy came near and tried to eavesdrop. They were also guilty of arresting the innocent as often as the guilty, whom they threw into dark, disease-ridden prisons guarded by dogs. The dungeons of the police were the 'receptacles of all horrors and human miseries', and vices were learned there, not corrected.¹³ Mercier asserted that it was impossible to write a history of the past three kings without discussing the Bastille, though the most interesting things would always be hidden because nothing came out of the abyss that was the

Bastille.¹⁴ Mercier also believed that the most common way a prisoner left the Bastille was through death.¹⁵ For Mercier as for many others, there was a connection between the intense secrecy the police maintained at the Bastille and violence or abuse of power.

From the beginning, the Paris police believed that secrecy, even terror, could be a useful tool in keeping a tumultuous population in check. If a prisoner, and the families of prisoners, knew nothing of his or her circumstances or possible release, their ignorance would only serve to augment their anxiety and render them more pliant and cooperative during police investigations. Secrecy was also useful in keeping public opinion from getting out of hand, or so the police believed. But sometimes the secrecy surrounding the Bastille, arrests, and police investigations was so elaborate and institutionalised that it came to be both a means and an end.

In the eighteenth century, the notion of public opinion emerged as a kind of counterweight to the power of the state, and the police's secrecy fuelled rumours of abuses and then antipathy as the state never officially refuted tales of supposed abuses that, in the eyes of its detractors, had been hidden and facilitated by the police's secrecy. Drawing on police regulations, internal memoranda, and records of interrogations, the first section of the article delves into the elaborate efforts to maintain secrecy in state prisons as a form of terror to intimidate suspects. The second section of the article looks at the public's response in anonymous pamphlets and newspapers to the police's perceived abuses committed behind closed doors, and the third section of the article explores the difficulties encountered by government ministers attempting reform, difficulties mostly caused by the police's culture of secrecy. In the end, the police's draconian and strict secrecy led to inefficiency and public backlash, and the police became a symbol of government tyranny that the revolutionaries sought to tear down like the Bastille itself. Though there is a long and rich literature on the Paris police, this article will highlight the intense secrecy in police practices, which is not emphasised enough in scholarship on the police. An unintended consequence of this secrecy was the added fuel to the flames of the Revolution's political culture and its drive for transparency.

2. Methodical secrecy

By the middle of the eighteenth century, the Bastille was a dilapidated eyesore that stood in hideous contrast to the elegant plazas and other architectural achievements of the city. It sat, squat and unprepossessing, like a massive, black toad beside the St. Antoine gate, one of the entrances to Paris, and was a poor welcome to tourists who had come to see the beauty and marvels of the capital. It was staffed by three officers called the governor, the major, and the king's lieutenant; a handful of turnkeys, or jailors; a small corps of guards; and after the 1760s, retired soldiers called *bas officiers* (also a term for low-ranking, non-commissioned officers) who received a small stipend to guard the Bastille but mostly spent their time drinking and smoking in the courtyards. The fortress was surrounded by a moat that was no doubt foul-smelling from centuries of garbage. It was also falling apart. In 1774, when the drawbridge was being lowered to admit a carriage, one of the ropes supporting it snapped and the drawbridge fell into the moat, though luckily, as the major

reported to the chief of police that morning, no one was hurt.¹⁶ Louis XVI had made plans for its demolition and would have carried it out if the revolutionaries had not done so first.

Yet a prisoner, having been snatched from his or her home and brought to the fortress in the dead of night, confronted with the stern silence of the officers, and the empty courtyards lit by flickering torchlight, might still feel terror upon finding herself or himself in such a place. That vague terror coupled with the secrecy that everyone knew surrounded the Bastille, served to enhance its frightening reputation even while the actual structure was falling to pieces.

The rules and regulations of the Bastille concerning secrecy could fill volumes. The dossiers of the Bastille archives also include police notes during surveillance of suspects, internal memoranda, letters and requests from prisoners in the state prisons, and records of interrogations. Moreover, these dossiers include the strict rules for turnkeys and officers in prisons for maintaining secrecy. I then use printed pamphlets and newspaper articles, especially the popular revolutionary newspaper, *Révolutions de Paris*, some published anonymously during the *ancien régime* due to censorship, and some published by well-known journalists during the Revolution, to show the predominance of transparency in the political culture and how the practices of the police furthered the negative attitude of the public towards secrecy. These printed pamphlets and newspapers, whether anonymous or authored by famous journalists, were widely circulated and commented upon during the French Revolution. The reading public both in Paris and in the provinces were familiar with these pamphlets, especially the famous pamphlet by Pierre Manuel lambasting the Paris police, and were regular readers of the revolutionary press. Censorship was lifted when the Revolution broke out, and newspapers proliferated across the country. Since the mid-eighteenth century, literacy rates had been steadily rising, and newspapers were immensely popular during the French Revolution.

The officers and policemen who wrote rulebooks and manuals spared no detail and made every effort to create guidelines for every conceivable breach of security. They wanted to be sure that prisoners could not communicate with each other, with the outside world, or even with their jailors. Vague and ominous punishments were promised to turnkeys (or jailors) who disobeyed these strict rules or who were simply indiscreet.¹⁷ The secrecy seemed reasonable when a prisoner was a suspected spy, but prisoners who were held for criminal offenses like sexual perversions or practicing magic were subjected to the same rigorous restrictions, though, of course, those under the strictest security had further restrictions. Some prisoners were never even visited by the turnkeys and only the officers saw them.

Prisoners usually arrived at the Bastille at night. Likewise, prisoners were usually transferred or released at night, often very late. Burials of prisoners who died in the Bastille took place under cover of darkness as well.¹⁸ This practice of prisoners coming and going at night served to minimise the possibility of these activities being observed, and of interference from those who were sympathetic to a prisoner or seeking to communicate with him or her. Interrogations took place during the day within the prison, but transfers and arrests seemed to be the business of the night. Clearly, the police believed that night-time work facilitated the moving of prisoners who had fewer options if they absconded into the city in the middle of the night, the advantage of darkness notwithstanding. Darkness was an advantage

to the police, not the prisoner, and perhaps a night-time arrest also served to intimidate a prisoner more than being taken during the day. Inhabitants were also more likely to be at home in the evening hours or early in the morning.

A prisoner was usually brought by a police inspector, though sometimes another individual such as a military or provincial officer who had arrested the prisoner far from Paris brought him or her to the gates of the fortress. Occasionally, prisoners presented themselves with an order for their own arrest, especially if they were a nobleman who had found disfavour at court and who was ordered to turn himself in at the Bastille. For example, in 1727 the governor of the Bastille received a letter from a minister of the government about an army officer from Metz who was to turn himself in when he arrived in Paris. The governor was to hold him for a month without informing the prisoner, however, how long he was to be incarcerated. Ignorance of his fate was part of his punishment. The minister writing to the governor added, 'Send word to me the day that he arrives so that I can inform His Majesty'.¹⁹ The officer from Metz must have angered someone very powerful or misbehaved in such a manner as to attract the attention of those at court or of his own family who might have requested to have him punished in a way that taught him a lesson.

Then, after a prisoner had come through the gates, a bell was rung, and the courtyards were cleared of all personnel who might set eyes on the prisoner.²⁰ This precaution seemed to be observed for every prisoner that arrived. Once the prisoner was brought inside the structure, officers wrote down in a ledger his or her name, rank, and the date and time of the prisoner's arrival, unless orders had been given that a prisoner remain unnamed. Then the prisoner was conducted to a cell, the size and comfort of which depended on his or her rank and whether the police wanted to punish a prisoner with poor accommodations and little food for a few days.

Some prisoners received frequent visitors and letters. Historians owe a debt of gratitude to the Third Republic archivist who compiled and catalogued the Bastille's documents, Frantz Funck-Brentano. Funck-Brentano made it his life's work to debunk what he called the Black Legend of the Bastille. When he was not performing invaluable work sorting the documents that remained of the Bastille's archives, he was publishing studies in the Rankean vein of historical research, trying to prove with empirical evidence that the Bastille was not the horrible place that revolutionaries and Romantic-era authors would have everyone believe. Funck-Brentano argued that in the Bastille, as in the *ancien régime*, decisions were always made according to established custom, which served to curb abuses of power. He described the sorts of meals served at the Bastille and provided anecdotes and memoirs of prisoners who came and found favorable treatment despite their fears, though he had to admit that the best treatment and the best food was reserved for prisoners of rank.

In other cases, though, the police went to great lengths to restrict prisoners' communication with the outside world, and even the prisoners' access to information, making sure that the police could maintain control over the internal and external flow of information. If the police felt that a prisoner was dangerous, held sensitive information like a spy, or if the police wanted to provoke stress or anxiety, they could use lack of communication to exert pressure on a captive. Turnkeys were

instructed not to answer questions related to an individual's imprisonment.²¹ Families and friends of prisoners, and sometimes the prisoners themselves, found it extremely difficult to glean any information from the authorities about the terms of imprisonment, whether a prisoner might be transferred, or even the reason for the arrest. Many prisoners did not know why they had been taken until interrogations began. Often the police would not even confirm that an arrest had taken place and would answer no questions about an individual's disappearance. It was as if the prisoner simply ceased to exist, and the outside world was told to forget him or her. For example, when in October of 1773 the friend of a high-ranking prisoner asked after his welfare on behalf of the prisoner's sister, communications between the major at the Bastille and the chief of police, Sartine, made it clear that they simply decided not to reply. The major forwarded the letter of request to Sartine, adding 'I will not write a response'.²² The prisoner's sister, the abbess of the Abbaye de Ferrailles in St. Quentin, was a woman of rank herself, but at the top of her letter someone high in the police hierarchy, probably Sartine's secretary, had written: 'recommended to M. le Major not to reply'.²³ Similarly, the relatives of Quantelle du Duranville, a butcher sent to the Bastille in 1773, wrote to the authorities to learn the reasons for his imprisonment and the length of his confinement after they found that he had been arrested by the police. The police did not reply. Then the butcher wrote to the chief of police, asking permission to write to his parents to let them know that he was in good health. He assured Sartine that he had been warned to remain silent on the subject of his captivity, the reasons for his arrest, and even where he was being held, telling the chief of police that it would relieve his parents' sorrow only to receive some news from his own pen and to know that he was still alive.²⁴ The police dossier did not indicate whether or not the butcher received permission to write to his parents.

Through the control of letters, the police kept a tight grip on the flow of information while simultaneously conducting surveillance on prisoners. The police carefully read and redacted letters, and sometimes the chief of police found certain statements to be so reprehensible or imprudent that he threatened a prisoner with punishment if he ever found them again in a letter. If the chief of police was so inclined, he had the prisoner re-write the letter. In 1767, Sartine sent a redacted letter back to a prisoner with a note that he should 'only speak of what he needs without adding any commentaries or reflections'.²⁵ On other occasions, he simply refused to pass on the message, perhaps because a prisoner could not limit himself to only the most innocuous comments, or because the police believed it was too risky to an investigation for a prisoner to communicate at all. In May of 1767, Sartine wrote to the major, 'I am very displeased with the conduct of Demai, who calls himself Picard. Please inform him that if anything like this occurs again I will have him put in one of the dungeons'.²⁶ It is unclear whether the prisoner named Demai wrote an imprudent letter, was simply behaving badly in prison, or both, but he had angered the chief of police, and Sartine did not hesitate to threaten and punish prisoners, usually with 'bad lodgings' or being given only bread and water to eat for several days.

The turnkeys were the first line of defence in the police's system of secrecy and monitoring information in prisons, and they often were instructed to obfuscate and

keep prisoners in the dark, so to speak. The turnkeys' rules of silence helped the police maintain what they saw as the source of their power, their ability to have a monopoly on information. This may have served no immediate end, but the culture of secrecy in prisons reinforced these practices. Often prisoners had no way of knowing if their letters had been delivered or not. They could only wait and hope that their friends and relatives would be allowed to respond. The turnkeys and guards were instructed never to inform prisoners on this subject when asked. Turnkeys being the go-betweens for the prisoners and the officers of the Bastille, their cooperation in the maintenance of secrecy was essential, especially since they did not all reside in the fortress. The rules for turnkeys began, 'M. the governor requires of the turnkeys an inviolable secrecy in all duties they perform with regard to prisoners'.²⁷ Keeping secrets was their first and most important duty. They were expected to be able to read and write, to be polite, to be obedient to the officers, but above all else, to be discreet. They delivered the letters that the prisoners were meant to receive, prevented the ones that were illicit, and were expected to uncover prisoners' attempts to smuggle a missive out of the prison. One set of rules for turnkeys from 1784 gave them guidelines that sometimes seem obvious and others that seem excessive. For example, turnkeys were instructed never to leave keys in the towers, (all the prisoners were kept in the towers of the Bastille), and not to speak too loudly, especially near the cells where they might be overheard by prisoners, or near the gate where they possibly could be heard and observed by outsiders and passers-by.²⁸ They were also told to keep prisoners from escaping from their cells when they entered them to see to prisoners' needs, an injunction which seems to go without saying.

Surveillance was an important tool in enforcing this secrecy. Turnkeys were to follow prisoners when they had to leave their cells and move up and down the towers to make sure that prisoners did not drop any notes or letters for someone to find later. After serving meals, they were to pay attention to every dish to check if any marks or messages were made upon them, and if so to show them immediately to the officers. They had to regularly check the doors, windows, and chimneys, and to try out the grills with an iron hammer once a week, doing this activity preferably when a prisoner was out, usually at chapel. The turnkeys had to search the chapel and other places to see if prisoners hid any letters there, and watch workers if they had to come in for repairs to keep them from speaking or passing letters to the prisoners. Furthermore, the turnkeys were told to only speak about prisoners to the officers and no one else, and to refer to prisoners only by their cell number. '[Turnkeys] will never speak of what goes on inside the Bastille when they are out in the city, and will always be very careful as to the questions that are addressed to them', read one set of rules from the mid-eighteenth century.²⁹ A prisoner might be considered so dangerous that only the governor saw him, perhaps because the prisoner was a captured spy or someone who knew state secrets, though why so much secrecy was considered necessary was never recorded. Most of the time the officers and even the governor had no idea why a prisoner was being held. They received orders from the police and held a prisoner who was sometimes registered under a pseudonym, knowing nothing about him or her. It was the police commissioners, after all, who conducted

interrogations at the Bastille. It was the role of the staff to enforce the secrecy that the police found necessary to their operations.

As for the officers, they had strict guidelines to follow on isolating both prisoners and information about prisoners from the public, and there were pages and pages of rules that officers could refer to if they were in doubt. Article 7 in one set of rules from 1764 instructed the officer in charge 'not to let any person from outside speak to a prisoner without the express order of His Majesty or one of his secretaries of state' when the governor was not present.³⁰ These detailed rules and regulations, designed to provide for every contingency and danger, were no doubt set by the police to enhance their use of the Bastille as a handy tool for control and enforcement of public order. However, at the same time that the police were tightening the reins over the staff of the fortress to stamp out disorder in the city, they gradually loosened the rules concerning their own access to the fortress and the checks on their liberties and privileges in dealing with prisoners. Late in the seventeenth century, the chief of police had already gained permanent access to the Bastille, and never again had to ask permission of the king or the governor to come and go as he pleased. Louis XIV clearly believed it expedient to give the police greater leeway in the efforts to weed out unruliness and dangerous sentiments in a populace that elites had always considered violent and barely controllable. It was a populace that the police considered always on the verge of a riot if not carefully monitored.

By the eighteenth century, the police had made it even easier for them to make arrests without going through the usual bureaucratic formalities.³¹ In theory, every order for arrest that sent a prisoner to the Bastille was an order that came directly from the king. In the eighteenth century, though, it was clear that ministers and the chief of police made arrests under their own aegis. At the same time, the officers of the Bastille, usually the major, were expected to report to the chief of police when a prisoner arrived to confirm that the prisoner was in safe custody. The major of the Bastille was also required to help with police work; he was the one who held onto evidence that the police collected from a suspect's home or workplace, and he also forwarded prisoners' letters to the lieutenant general of police.

While the secrecy and generally forbidding atmosphere of the centuries-old fortress were designed to frighten the unruly and the general public into obedience, they inspired great curiosity as well as fear, enough for it to be mentioned several times in the regulations that the curiosity of the public might hinder the secret workings of the prison. By the end of the century, revolutionaries speculated that death by torture had taken place in the Bastille, though torture was quite rare as an interrogation technique by 1650 and had only been recorded being exercised a handful of occasions in the latter half of the seventeenth century.³² The rate of torture continued to decline in the eighteenth century, though it was still used throughout France. What files have survived and can be found in the archives, however, suggest that death by torture, while it could and did occur, was very rare.³³ Furthermore, death from torture would be considered 'accidental' as well since the purpose of torture was to elicit confessions and acquire names of accomplices, not to execute criminals.

The acute fear sparked by the Bastille's reputation, on the other hand, probably led to suicides. Suicides appear to have happened more often than accidental deaths from torture. When in 1704, a prisoner at the Bastille committed suicide, the

lieutenant general of police wanted the affair hushed up. He wrote, 'I believe it is best to say as little as possible on the subject of his death and its circumstances. And the same should be done when any such misfortunes occur at the Bastille. I have proposed that we keep knowledge of this from the public which is always prompt to exaggerate accidents of this kind and attribute them to abuses of government which they suppose but of course cannot be certain of'.³⁴ Whatever the cause of death, the rules were very strict regarding the handling of a deceased prisoner. In the same section that dealt with burials, the rules specifically addressed the governor and the officers, stating that they were to avoid the 'slightest deviation from the rules and discipline of the house, [i.e. the Bastille]', and that they ought to always be sure to 'punish very severely those who contravene them'.³⁵ Perhaps marks on the body might be misconstrued as evidence of torture, or the authorities had some reason to keep the identity of a prisoner a secret.

As mentioned above, the Bastille's reputation not only provoked fear but also curiosity. Regarding a prisoner's arrival, the rules read, 'Upon the arrival of a prisoner, whether it be night or day, the officer in charge will collect all his troop and have them withdraw to the guardroom, and he will make sure that the prisoner is not seen by anyone nor speaks to any living soul'.³⁶ If a prisoner arrived during the daytime, the sentinel on duty was to drive away any of the 'curious' who might gather to watch, which might also explain why they buried deceased prisoners at night since apparently curious citizens might gather to watch these comings and goings.

Even at the end of a prisoner's stay, the authorities did their best to enforce silence and to make sure that the rule of secrecy extended as far out from the prison as possible like an invisible web. Every prisoner who left the Bastille alive, whether to be set at liberty or to be transferred, was expected to sign a declaration promising never to reveal what he or she saw or heard in the prison. If a prisoner could not write, the declaration was read aloud and the prisoner was required to make an x or a cross in place of his or her name. The format of the declaration changed a little over the years, but mostly read as follows: 'Following the order of the King, I will submit myself to any kind of punishment if I speak or write on the subject of the prisoners with whom I was incarcerated and who were in the same tower'.³⁷ By the 1720s, the format of the declaration became more standardised and less ominous, though prisoners were always expected to obey and fear the king's reprisals if they broke their vow of silence.

One prisoner who famously broke this vow did so out of patriotism, as he explained, to unveil the governments' foul secrets. The lawyer, Simon-Nicolas Henri Linguet, publicly violated the vow after he left the Bastille, albeit from the safety of foreign shores. A writer and provocateur who was as famous as Voltaire in his day, Linguet also wrote on the evils of the Bastille and believed that all its secrets should be divulged to the public. According to Mercier, everyone knew of the 'famous Linguet' though no one knew his crime.³⁸ Writing in 1783, Linguet argued for the destruction of the Bastille, claiming that it contributed nothing to the pursuit of justice and that it only facilitated the arbitrary power and oppression of ministers who manipulated the king. Like Voltaire, he had had a turn at the Bastille for allegedly slandering someone prominent at court, and Linguet responded by writing a four-volume exposé of the Bastille's horrors. He told his

readers that all prisoners were required to swear an oath of silence before they were released from the prison, but in his introduction, he justified his violation of that oath. He wrote: 'Can I without scruple treat the several subjects which I have engaged to discuss? Can I in conscience let the public into the secret of the terrible mysteries into which the 27th of September 1780 [the date of his imprisonment] has initiated me? ...Because my hands have been unjustly bound, must my pen be restrained, too?'.³⁹ Linguet had been sworn to secrecy, and he knew that while this work might garner him fame and fortune, it was by its very existence a violation of that oath. According to Linguet, while it was dishonourable to fail to keep one's word, it was far worse to keep the secrets of a despotic regime. Writing from England where he had exiled himself to avoid another arrest, Linguet professed untiring, fanatical patriotism for his own country again and again.

All in all, the secrecy of the Bastille's administration was designed to help the police maintain control over the populace of the city. The police hoped to keep curiosity in check and provoke fear. They also wished to have control over the inmates whose knowledge or actions might be dangerous to the Crown, and over the staff who had contact with prisoners. Over time, though, the extreme secrecy of the Bastille's everyday operations turned into an end in and of itself as the rules became more elaborate, detailed, and recondite, sometimes with no apparent purpose. These practices of secrecy that kept even the most mundane activities hidden from the public continued up until the Revolution even though they had outlived their usefulness and only a handful of prisoners remained.

3. Secrecy, rumour, and reaction

As institutional secrecy continued to hold sway over the day-to-day operations of the Bastille, that secrecy also provoked the wave of rumours, legends, and anecdotes of hidden abuses going on in state prisons. By the end of the eighteenth century, the Bastille had become entrenched in the political imagination as a symbol of despotism, abuse of power, and cruelty, and the intense secrecy surrounding its operations played no small part in the creation of these rumours. The prison was hardly the place of horrors, especially by the eighteenth century, that everyone imagined it was, but what was important and lasting was the image of the Bastille, not the reality. Many writers moreover began to speak out against the practice of using *lettres de cachet*, secret orders for imprisonment issued by the king. They were perceived, like the Bastille, as both a symbol and an instrument of despotism. Much research on the *lettres de cachet* has shown that the orders for arrest were often of a form of mercy and a means of escaping the ordinary and harsh channels of justice. Families often solicited them to put away a black sheep like an abusive husband or dissolute son to safeguard the family honour but also to spare the family member in question a possibly brutal and public punishment.⁴⁰ Many noble families preferred the Bastille to insane asylums and hospitals which confined the homeless, prostitutes, and those deemed insane. Asylums like Bicêtre were far more unpleasant and often disease-ridden compared to the Bastille. On the other hand, *lettres de cachet* could and did rob individuals unjustly of their liberty and sometimes even damaged their lives and careers irreparably. The attitudes shifting against *lettres de cachet* only added to the public's growing perception of the Bastille as a terrifying place of

death and suffering, and that belief made it in a sense real. Thus, the police's regime of secrecy over the prison did serve to inspire fear in the inhabitants of the city as well as throughout the kingdom and even abroad, but fear – contrary to the hopes and designs of the police – did not always entail silence.

The letters written from the major at the Bastille, Chevalier, to the lieutenant general or chief of police, Sartine, about a certain prisoner revealed how by this period, the prison's sinister reputation had already spilled over France's borders. In fact, many of the spine-chilling memoirs decrying the Bastille's horrors were published abroad, read abroad, and then smuggled into France.⁴¹ In November 1765, the major wrote to Sartine of a distraught prisoner who only went by the name of Adam. The major told his superior, 'The prisoner named Adam does nothing but weep day and night and is inconsolable. As this prisoner is a German, he believes that he will be imprisoned to the end of his days being at the Bastille.'⁴² The major seemed more and more at his wit's end as to what to do with a prisoner who was on the verge of an emotional breakdown and perhaps suicidal, and at the same time he received little help or guidance from Sartine. Like the rest of the staff at the prison, he had no idea why the prisoner was there. In December of the same year, replying to orders he had received from the chief of police, the major wrote that 'it is first necessary that we know the reason for his detention, of which I am completely ignorant'.⁴³ Six months later, the prisoner still did nothing but shout and weep in his room and tell his jailors that he needed to return home to his father who was very ill. The major wrote in September 1766, 'This prisoner is in the most wretched state. If you saw him, you would feel pity for him. He does not cease weeping day and night, and does not want to eat'.⁴⁴ Writing at night, the major added that 'at this very moment he is shouting and screaming so loudly in his cell that we can hear him throughout in the fortress and even outside in the square'.⁴⁵ While he suffered no physical deprivation, the prison's fearsome reputation and his lack of knowledge of his own future served to exacerbate his anguish. Furthermore, the major wrote of one terrible night where the prisoner was screaming so loudly he could be heard outside in the street. Even if there was no torture, starvation, or cruel and terrible punishments of any kind taking place in the prison, what were the citizens of Paris to think when they could hear screams, wailing, and lamentations coming from the Bastille in the darkest hours of the night?

The emotional outbursts of this prisoner seemed to be unusual judging from the major's letters, but tears and other signs of distress were still common. In the same year, 1765, the major wrote to the chief of police explaining that he forgot to return a prisoner's personal effects to him when he was leaving the Bastille because the man, who was not being released but transferred, 'was sobbing and groaning, which made me forget myself for a moment seeing him in that state'.⁴⁶ The major seemed to be someone who was moved to pity by the emotional state of the prisoners around him, and he certainly did his best to console them though that did little to stem the tide of fear and growing despair. The police methodically reported weeping during interrogations, which they always interpreted as a sign of imminent success in culling the information they were seeking. When in 1765 the police caught the valet of a man they feared was a spy, they interrogated the valet for several days while traveling from Calais to Paris. The police inspector who had

him in his custody, wrote, '...at first I could pull little from him to satisfy me... I used all the means at my disposal to gain his confidence while en route. Then, at night, while resting at the inn, I let him understand that his situation was dire. I saw him give a sigh... He began to shed tears. I pressed him vehemently'.⁴⁷ For the police, threats and intimidation were useful tools, but the fear and hatred they inspired lived well beyond a given day of interrogations and even beyond the existence of the prison itself. The police wanted to be feared since they believed that that fear inspired respect and facilitated order. The emotions of the prisoners that come out in interrogations and the letters of the Bastille's officers reveal how deeply that fear had become instilled in ordinary citizens who found themselves on the wrong side of the prison's walls. This is reminiscent of the case of the prisoner Adam who was filled with so much anguish because of what he *believed* might happen to him.

Knowledge of deaths at the Bastille, despite the police's secrecy, eventually spread to the public and only worsened the police's reputation, though they showed no signs of altering their practices of secrecy. Jean-Charles Le Prévôt, a lawyer who was arrested in 1768 for denouncing high-ranking members of the government as part of a large-scale conspiracy that he believed was taking place to create a grain monopoly, was in prison for over twenty years and wrote copious letters, tracts, and even a book manuscript because his jailors believed pen and ink would appease him and keep him from making trouble.⁴⁸ From prison, he wrote lengthy, vituperative letters denouncing members of the governments and especially the police, which only the police and his jailors read. None of his hundreds of letters and essays were ever delivered, and they remained in police files until the Revolution and then were moved to the Bastille archives where they reside to this day. Though he was imprisoned for decades, he had been able to stay in tune with the growing sentiment against government secrecy, and through his own experiences, he believed that secrecy enabled abuses. In one of his many rants against the government which he saw as debilitated by corruption, Le Prévôt claimed that the police did nothing to help the citizens of Paris or the nation at large. Le Prévôt wrote that the police 'conspire against the liberty of citizens, arrest them both day and night... At a simple denunciation from one of their spies, they abduct citizens and bring them to the Bastille...'.⁴⁹

Le Prévôt continued vilifying the police in his letter to the chief of police, relying once again on both rumours of the police and his own experiences to fill his pages of invective, saying, 'If it's true that...Sartine tyrannized more than forty thousand good subjects without Louis XV even being troubled by the fact, do not the souls of these innocent victims cry out to God for vengeance?'.⁵⁰ By his own account, Le Prévôt had been deprived of his freedom, 'without just cause, without having committed a crime, and without any semblance of a trial'. In another insulting note to the chief of police he wrote, 'You secretly take them from their homes with the help of your thugs and spies... You are dissipated; you extort and take from the royal treasury the finances that come from the people, you enrich yourself without shame and sell men and women to jailors to hold them in captivity, tyrannize them, devour them, some for several years and others for life if you suspect them of trying to unveil your injustices and your crimes...'.⁵¹ For Le Prévôt and for many others, secrecy made the abuses in the Bastille possible, and the police took conscious advantage of their cover.

When the Revolution erupted, the Old Regime, in the form of the Bastille's records, was forced to open its entrails to the public (as Jean-Paul Marat once put it), revealing evidence like human remains that were so frightening because they had been mysterious. The Bastille had become a sort of forbidden island in the capital, a place where time and reality were warped, where mysteries seemed to conceal deeper enigmas, and disappearances abounded. Believing that the Bastille had devoured living men, French citizens began to see secrecy as synonymous with despotism.

Along with the changing attitudes that came with the Enlightenment, the ossified customs of secrecy and the former regime's reluctance to officially deny any of the horrifying rumours helped lay the groundwork for the mania for transparency of the revolutionary period.⁵² This entrenched secrecy helped create a culture ripe and receptive to exaggerations of the Bastille legends as well as to the dangers of secrecy. It was also in this period that the need for transparency in the state became a favoured theme for journalists and authors.⁵³ From their perspectives, the state no longer had any right to keep secrets because it only used secrecy to carry out despotic aims. To them, governments used surveillance to control citizens, and while this could not be avoided, citizens could return the gaze and shine a light on the state to curb any abuses. As Jacques Pierre Brissot wrote in 1790 in the prospectus for the *Patriote français*, 'A free press is an outpost that watches out unceasingly on behalf of the people'.⁵⁴ Similarly, Marat believed that 'in a well-ordered state, freedom of the press must be unlimited for writers who keep an eye on public officials. And since plots against the nation are always concocted in darkness, since princes call no witnesses... and since they rarely sign their [written instructions], it should be permitted [for writers] to denounce them on the slightest evidence'.⁵⁵ As journalists, they had an essential role to play in a new regime of liberty and democracy. It was their role to shine light on everything, to show that transparency in the government, and a press without censorship, was both possible and necessary. Marat certainly decried the secrecy and opacity of what he saw as a despotic regime, and had the habit of not only denouncing particular individuals in print, but also of publishing their names and addresses.⁵⁶ Marat believed that governments, whether or not the gaze was returned, always had their eyes on the people, and if governments themselves were not kept under surveillance, they would easily realise their despotic designs.⁵⁷

Pierre Manuel's pamphlet, *The Paris Police Unveiled* (1793), which denounced the Old Regime police during the Revolution, echoed the sentiments of Marat, Mercier, and others, in believing that the police could do no right, and that transparency would protect the people from abuses. On the title page of the pamphlet was the motto: 'Publicity is the safeguard of laws and morality'.⁵⁸ Publicity, or transparency, protected the people, since according to the author, the police did anything but that. Before the revolution, he wrote, there was nothing too unjust or dishonourable to the police. It was true that the Paris police was seen as one of the marvels of the world, but Manuel insisted that the machine of the police was over-complicated, expensive, and despotic.⁵⁹ Moreover, the police penetrated unlawfully into family secrets, their only talent was spying, they privileged the rich, and ignored the real problems of the city.⁶⁰ Allowing the police their secrecy and all their broad powers had done nothing to benefit the people whereas

government transparency would ensure that these abuses could not prevail. By the radical phases of the Revolution, though, those journalists whose newspapers were still in print called for total transparency, even that of the citizen, since traitors and false patriots appeared to be lurking around every corner.

In Year II or 1794, a journalist of *Révolutions de Paris* suggested that the *sans-culottes*, the radical working class of Paris, form committees of surveillance to keep an eye on their own sections of Paris, leaving the 'guilty with no hope of escaping punishment', and defended a proposal to search the homes of private citizens to be sure that no one was hiding anything counter-revolutionary in nature. He wrote, 'The gazes of a people that are fixed upon the Republic must only fall upon objects that elevate the soul... This precaution of purging the interiors of houses of all the foolish emblems of the credulity and servitude of our fathers will only seem petty to those who have not studied the human heart to its depths'.⁶¹ By this period, those who kept secrets, or who wanted to safeguard their privacy, now appeared sinister to the revolutionaries. It would be better to sacrifice one's privacy than to leave oneself vulnerable to suspicion, and it would be better for the entire populace, so these authors argued, to accept surveillance and even participate in it to expose traitors and criminals. The numerous surveillance committees in the capital and in the provinces, the encouragement of denunciation of neighbours and even family members, and the frequency of these denunciations reveal the strong grip that the drive for transparency held in the minds of revolutionaries.⁶² By the time of the Terror, transparency had come to rule the day, and anyone who claimed that it was being taken too far was liable to be suspected of counter-revolutionary sentiments.

4. The obstacles to reform

The government during the Old Regime was not unaware of all the complaints and criticisms levelled at the police and state prisons. Because the tide of public opinion was turning severely against the police after the 1760s, the government began in earnest to think of projects of reform. A central figure in the efforts for reform was Guillaume-Chrétien de Lamoignon de Malesherbes, the son of an elite family of jurists and later minister of the king's household under Louis XVI. Malesherbes was a lawyer who became a powerful, reform-minded minister in 1775.

When Malesherbes became a minister, he was riding on a wave of popularity. He was backed by the hopes of many that he would reform an overly elaborate system that left much leeway for abuse, but one of the most difficult obstacles to his reform project was the institutional secrecy of the police and their prisons, and this often included the valuing of secrecy for its own sake. Other obstacles were related to this institutional secrecy: the inefficiency of these government offices and lack of communication between them. At the beginning, he was determined to enact reforms and interviewed many prisoners himself, trying to learn the reasons for their imprisonment, if it was possible that they be released, and what their greatest grievances were. The imprisoned lawyer, Prévôt, mentioned above, recalled being visited by Malesherbes in July of 1775. Malesherbes eventually decided against releasing Prévôt, probably upon hearing from his jailors and the police that he was mad. But even if Malesherbes did not push to have the prisoner released, he

clearly believed some of the critiques of the treatment of prisoners and released many after having spoken to them.

The overwhelmed minister found not only several cases of mismanagement but also terrible ignorance or deliberate obfuscation in his research into reasons for arrest. Secrecy in prison had always been a matter of course, but when Malesherbes began to investigate he realised he lacked the basic information that would make reform feasible. Lack of communication between government branches had created a tangled paper trail as well as a dearth of valuable information.

In September 1775, Malesherbes wrote to the governor of the Bastille asking about the prisoners whose names were written on an attached list. He requested that the governor send him 'a copy of the order from the king in which the prisoners on the attached list were ordered to be arrested and detained at the chateau of the Bastille. This document will greatly facilitate the investigation into the reasons for which they were deprived of their liberty'.⁶³ No one could tell the minister to his satisfaction why those on the list had been imprisoned. The staff of the Bastille certainly had no idea. They were never told the reasons for arrests.

In the years that followed, Malesherbes' successors made little headway because of this culture of secrecy. In 1776, a minister and secretary of state wrote to the governor of the Bastille for the same kind of order of arrest 'in order to ascertain if the orders emanated from my department which is unlikely considering there is no trace of these orders in my office'.⁶⁴ According to what little records they could find, the orders for arrest had most likely come from that minister's office though he could find no record of them nor remember the reason for the arrests. The government did not give up, though, trying to investigate the reasons for their arrests. In 1778, a minister sent a letter to the governor of the Bastille saying, 'Monsieur, the king wishes to be informed of the number of prisoners who are currently detained in the chateau of the Bastille, which you command, by virtue of the orders expedited by the secretaries of state in the War Department. Upon receiving this letter, please send me a list with their names and the date of the orders'.⁶⁵ The minister believed the orders for arrest had emanated from the War Department, but when the governor of the Bastille wrote to that department to receive a confirmation of those orders, a secretary wrote back that 'there was no prisoner sent to the Bastille with an order from the king countersigned by the secretary of state of the War Department'.⁶⁶ The minister in charge of reform, the governor of the Bastille, the king, and the entire War Department with all the powers at their disposal could not uncover the reasons for the arrest of the prisoners who were being investigated. The police might have known, and these ministers no doubt asked the police for information, but the police apparently kept their own counsel, perhaps resenting incursions from other members of government.

Carrying out reforms and investigating into prisoners' stories became nearly impossible when the necessary records were simply unavailable and departments did not communicate with each other, or at least communicated badly. Secrecy had become so deeply rooted that the staff of the Bastille maintained it even when there were few prisoners and little to hide in an age where the public pushed for reform. A century earlier, when the officers of the Bastille began to keep records of prisoners, demanding that the government lay its workings bare to the people or even to an educated elite was unthinkable. In the eighteenth century, when

well-intentioned ministers and officials attempted reform, motivated by the values fostered by the Enlightenment, they discovered an opaque and overly complicated system whose barriers to the flow of information hampered reform and even efforts to retrieve records. Not only was the bureaucracy inefficient and perhaps inept, but institutionalised secrecy rendered it even more so.

5. Conclusion

On 17 July 1789, Bayard, the president of the bureau of the district of St. Etienne Dumont, wrote that one of his patrols ran into a group of dragoons and ordinary citizens wandering the streets, ‘carrying the keys to the Bastille through the city and beating a drum to assemble the people. This troop was arrested by one of our patrols and the keys are currently being kept in the church’.⁶⁷ Though Bayard saw the behaviour of these citizens wandering the streets with stolen keys as an illegal or perhaps dangerous activity, others clearly believed that it was more dangerous to prevent patriotic citizens from parading the keys around the city as trophies in the fight against tyranny. Bayard added, ‘The bureau believes that it would be appropriate to allow the troop to promenade with the keys in Paris all while taking the necessary precautions of making sure they are placed each evening at the Hotel de Ville. It appears it would be difficult to refuse the troop this satisfaction’.⁶⁸ Bayard and many others who occupied a tenuous and precarious position of authority in the early days of the Revolution found themselves walking the thin line between maintaining order and supporting the dramatic shift in power and attitudes that they were witnessing.

Like the keys to the Bastille, its documents were valuable artefacts as well as evidence that the authorities hoped to preserve, though they did not demand their return. Learning how many of the Bastille’s documents had been taken during the confusion and excitement of the 14 July Revolution, authorities publicised requests to those who had documents in their possession to return them to a depot where they could be preserved for posterity. Some private citizens also published what they found, or claimed to have found, in the bowels of the Bastille. As one journalist wrote, ‘It is useless to number the immense collection of ... registers of imprisonment and other materials that are useful for the service of history that have been found in the Bastille’.⁶⁹ In a collection of documents supposedly found in the Bastille, someone included a poem by an anonymous but patriotic author entitled ‘The Dawn of Liberty, or Despotism Expiring’, which described in florid language his or her sentiments on the secrecy of the Bastille. In an apostrophe to prisoners of the Bastille, the poet lamented: ‘Cruel Despotism! What! For having not pleased/ Those great in name but otherwise abject and base/ Secretly in this place they stole your life away/ They confined you. Strange barbarity!/ These appalling dungeons where you lived in horror/ Where the deep silence only inspired terror/ Where the sun began and ended its course/ Without the daylight ever reaching you!’.⁷⁰ A cruel despotism that inspired only terror – these words capture exactly how the revolutionaries viewed the police, and how their records and registers became the archives of despotism.

The Paris police believed that secrecy was useful and necessary to keep the imagination of the public in check. As this article has shown, the strictly enforced secrecy of the police fed rumours about abuses in royal prisons. When prisoners died in the Bastille, the authorities wanted it kept as quiet as possible. Burials of

prisoners always took place at night to avoid curious onlookers. Prisoners were buried in the nearby churchyard, or sometimes in the governor's garden. These were some of the corpses that were found in 1789 and 1790 and that had excited the revolutionaries during the demolition of the fortress. In the Old Regime, secrecy had evolved from a useful tool in keeping the population subservient to royal power, to an inconvenience and even a hindrance for that same government, because, in the end, a culture of secrecy at the Bastille made possible the stories that galvanised revolutionaries to tear it down.

The police had practices of secrecy built into their apparatus from their inception, but the rise of public opinion in the eighteenth century created a new atmosphere where writers and thinkers began to think of government secrecy as a topic worth debating. Moreover, those who decried secrecy usually advocated transparency, an important feature of the political culture of the Revolution. During the Revolution, the police underwent drastic changes, though the new government realised that they could be useful in conducting surveillance on citizens suspected of counter-revolutionary sentiments. The aversion to government secrecy continued in subsequent regimes. Napoleon Bonaparte, though perfectly willing to obfuscate and bend the truth to his ends, portrayed himself and his government as transparent, policing the secrecy of others. When his chief of police foiled an assassination attempt against him, the police found proof that this was a royalist plot, but Napoleon insisted on blaming the attempt on Jacobins (the party of Robespierre) seeking to revive the Revolution. He deliberately pointed the finger at the wrong party, all while portraying Jacobins as secret plotters, and himself as a transparent and therefore legitimate ruler.⁷¹ Transparency had become a way to signal legitimacy. Citizens demanded this quality in a government, and leaders like Napoleon deftly used the language of transparency even if they elided the actual practice of it.

Notes

1 Bibliothèque historique de la ville de Paris, Pierre-François Palloy, *Discours à Messieurs les membres du Directoire des Districts, Cantons et des Municipalités du Département* (1790) CP 5252.

2 See Héloïse Bocher, *Démolir la Bastille: l'édification d'un lieu de mémoire* (Paris, 2012).

3 Bibliothèque historique de la ville de Paris, Pierre-François Palloy, *Discours prononcé à la société de Sceaux l'unité, 10 Frimaire, Fête de la raison* (Year II) CP 5252.

4 See Jürgen Habermas, *The structural transformation of the public sphere: an inquiry into a category of bourgeois society*, trans. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, 1991). See also Dana R. Villa, 'Postmodernism and the public sphere', *The American Political Science Review* 86, 3 (1992), 712–21; Michel Foucault, 'On politics and ethics', in Paul Rabinow ed., *The Foucault reader* (New York, 1984), 373–381; Ashley Woodward, *Lyotard and the inhuman condition: reflections on nihilism, information, and art* (Edinburgh, 2018); Jean-François Lyotard, *La condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir* (Paris, 1979); Hannah Arendt, *The human condition* (Chicago, 1969).

5 For more on the imagination and rumours in pre-revolutionary France, see Jan Goldstein, *The post-revolutionary self: politics and psyche in France, 1750–1850* (Cambridge, 2005). For literature on the history of secrecy in the early modern period, see Gérard Vincent, 'A history of secrets?', in Philippe Ariès and Georges Duby eds., *A history of private life, vol. V*, transl. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, 1987), 145–283; Daniel Jütte, *The age of secrecy: Jews, Christians, and the economy of secrets, 1400–1800*, transl. Jeremiah Riemer (New Haven, 2015); Timothy McCall, Sean Roberts, and Giancarlo Fiorenza eds., *Visual cultures of secrecy in early modern Europe* (Kirkville, 2013); Jon Snyder, *Dissimulation and the culture of secrecy in early modern Europe* (Berkeley, 2009); Georg Simmel, *Sociology: inquiries into the construction of social forms*, transl. and eds. Anthony J. Blasi, Anton K. Jacobs, and Matthew Kanjirathinkal

(Boston, 2009); See Barry Coward and Julian Swann eds., *Conspiracies and conspiracy theory in early modern Europe: from the Waldensians to the French Revolution* (Burlington, 2004); and Peter R. Campbell, Thomas E. Kaiser, and Marisa Linton eds., *Conspiracy in the French Revolution* (New York, 2007).

6 See Constantin de Renneville, *Souvenirs d'un prisonnier de la Bastille*, Albert Savine ed. (Paris, 1998). For more on Jansenists in eighteenth-century France, see Monique Cottret, *Jansénismes et Lumières: pour un autre XVIII^e siècle* (Paris, 1998); Catherine Maire, *De la Cause de Dieu à la cause de la nation: le Jansénisme au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris 1998); Brian Strayer, *Suffering saints: Jansenists and convulsionnaires in France, 1640–1799* (Brighton, 2008).

7 Simon Nicolas Henri Linguet, *Memoirs of the Bastille. Containing a full exposition of the mysterious policy and despotic oppression of the French Government, in the interior administration of that state-prison. Interspersed with a variety of curious anecdotes. Translated from the French of the celebrated Mr. Linguet, who was imprisoned there from September 1780, to May 1782* (London, 1783), 8–9.

8 Most of the sources for this article come from the Archives of the Bastille in the Bibliothèque de l' Arsenal in Paris, France. The other archival sources come from the Bibliothèque historique de la Ville de Paris which houses both private letters and official documents from the revolutionary period. The Archives of the Bastille are where most of the police dossiers from the *ancien régime* are kept, in remarkably good condition. See Funck-Brentano, *Catalogue des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque de l' Arsenal* (Paris, 1892). See also Funck-Brentano, *Légendes et archives de la Bastille* (Paris, 1898); Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink and Rolf Reichardt, *Die Bastille: zur symbolgeschichte von Herrschaft und Freiheit* (Frankfurt am Main, 1990); see also Monique Cottret, *La Bastille à prendre: histoire et mythe de la forteresse royale* (Paris, 1986); Héloïse Bocher, *Démolir la Bastille: l'édification d'un lieu de mémoire* (Paris, 2012); Vincent Denis, *Une histoire de l'identité: France, 1715–1815* (Seysel, 2008); Arlette Farge and Michel Foucault, *Le désordre des familles: lettres de cachet des Archives de la Bastille au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris, 1982); Michel Foucault, *Discipline and punish* (New York, 1995).

9 See James Van Horn Melton, *The rise of the public in enlightenment Europe* (Cambridge, 2001); Arlette Farge, *Dire et mal dire: l'opinion publique au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris, 1992); Lisa Jane Graham, *If the king only knew: seditious speech in the reign of Louis XV* (Charlottesville, 2000); Sarah Maza, *Private lives and public affairs: the causes célèbres of prerevolutionary France* (Berkeley, 1993); Jürgen Habermas, *The structural transformation of the public sphere: an inquiry into a category of bourgeois society*, transl. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, 1991); Roger Chartier, *Les origines culturelles de la Révolution française* (Paris, 2000); Lynn Hunt, 'The many bodies of Marie-Antoinette: political pornography and the problem of the feminine in the French Revolution', in Dena Goodman ed., *Marie-Antoinette: writings on the body of a queen* (Milton Park, 2003), 117–139; Dena Goodman, 'Public sphere and private life: toward a synthesis of current historiographical approaches to the old regime,' *History and Theory* 31, 1 (1992), 1–20; Mona Ozouf, 'L'opinion publique', in Keith M. Baker ed., *The French Revolution and the creation of modern political culture, vol. I* (Oxford, 1987), 980–997.

10 Alan Williams, *The police of Paris, 1718–1789* (Baton Rouge, 1979), xvi–xvii.

11 Steven L. Kaplan, 'Note sur les commissaires de police de Paris au XVIII^e siècle', *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 28, 4 (1981) 669–86. See also Catherine Denys, 'The development of police forces in urban Europe in the eighteenth century', *Journal of Urban History* 36, 3 (2010), 332–44. Marc Chassaing, *La lieutenance générale de police de Paris* (Geneva, 1975); Vincent Milliot, *L'Admirable police: tenir Paris au siècle des lumières* (Ceyzérieu 2016); and Vincent Denis, *Une histoire de l'identité: France, 1715–1815* (Seysel, 2008); Vincent Denis, Vincent Milliot, Emmanuel Blanchard and Arnaud-Dominique Houte eds., *Histoire des polices en France: des guerres de religion à nos jours* (Paris, 2020).

12 Alan Williams, *The police of Paris, 1718–1789* (Baton Rouge, 1979), xvi–xvii.

13 Louis Mercier, *Tableau de Paris, vol. I*, (Amsterdam: [s.n.], 1783–88), 184; *Vol. III*, 264–6.

14 Mercier, *Tableau de Paris, Vol. III*, 287.

15 Mercier, *Tableau de Paris, Vol. III*, 289.

16 Bibliothèque de l' Arsenal (henceforth BA) MS 12435.

17 BA Reglements et consignes: consigne du service pour les porteclefs MS 12602.

18 Ibid.

19 BA MS 12602.

20 BA Reglements et consignes: consigne du service pour les porteclefs MS 12602.

21 Ibid.

22 BA Dossiers des prisonniers (1773) MS 12435.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 BA MS 12509.

26 Ibid.

27 BA Service des porteclefs MS 12509.

28 Ibid.

29 BA Reglements et consignes: Consigne du service pour les porteclefs MS 12602.

30 Ibid.

31 See *Histoire des polices en France*, 112–134.

32 Lisa Silverman, *Tortured subjects: pain, truth and the body in early modern France* (Chicago, 2001).

33 Ibid.

34 Elise Dutray-Lecoin and Danielle Muzerelle eds., *La Bastille, ou, L'enfer des vivants: à travers les archives de la Bastille* (Paris, 2010), 165.

35 BA Reglements et Consignes MS 12602.

36 Ibid.

37 BA Sortie des Prisonniers MS 12581.

38 Mercier, *Tableau de Paris*, Vol. III, 290.

39 Simon Nicolas Henri Linguet, *Memoirs of the Bastille. Containing a full exposition of the mysterious policy and despotic oppression of the French Government, in the interior administration of that state-prison. Interspersed with a variety of curious anecdotes. Translated from the French of the celebrated Mr. Linguet, who was imprisoned there from September 1780, to May 1782* (London, 1783), 8–9.

40 See Brian Strayer, *Lettres de cachet and social control in the ancien regime: 1659–1789* (PhD thesis, The University of Iowa: Proquest Dissertation Publishing, 1987). See also Claude Quétel, *Une légende noire: les lettres de cachet* (Paris, 2011), and Quétel, *La Bastille: histoire vraie d'une prison légendaire* (Paris, 1989).

41 See Quétel, *Une légende noire: les lettres de cachet* (Paris, 2011); see also Elise Dutray-Lecoin and Danielle Muzerelle eds., *La Bastille, ou, L'enfer des vivants: à travers les archives de la Bastille* (Paris, 2010).

42 BA Dossier des prisonniers MS 12507.

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.

46 BA MS 12507.

47 BA MS 12245.

48 The famine plot was a common conspiracy theory in eighteenth-century France. See Steven A. Kaplan, *The famine plot persuasion in eighteenth-century France* (Philadelphia, 1982); Kaplan, *Le pain, le peuple et le roi: la bataille du libéralisme sous Louis XV* (Paris, 1986); E.P. Thompson, Florence Gauthier and Guy-Robert Ikni eds., *La guerre du blé au XVIIIème siècle: la critique populaire contre le libéralisme économique au XVIIIème siècle* (Montreuil, 1988); Cynthia Bouton, *The flour war: gender, class and community in late ancien regime French society* (University Park, 1993). For works on rumor, see Lisa Jane Graham, *If the king only knew: seditious speech in the reign of Louis XV* (Charlottesville, 2000); Arlette Farge and Jacques Revel, *The vanishing children of Paris: rumor and politics before the French Revolution* Transl. Claudia Miéville (Cambridge, 1991).

49 BA Dossier des Prisonniers MS 12351.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid.

52 See Marisa Linton, *Choosing terror: virtue, friendship and authenticity in the French Revolution* (Oxford, 2013); Idem., *The politics of virtue in enlightenment France* (New York, 2001); Lynn Hunt, *Politics, culture, and class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley, 1984); Timothy Tackett, *The coming of the terror in the French Revolution* (Cambridge, 2015); Jean-Clément Martin, *La terreur: vérités et légendes* (Paris, 2017); Antoine de Baecque, *La révolution terrorisée* (Paris, 2017); Hugh Gough, *The terror in the French Revolution* (New York, 2010).

53 For example, the revolutionary journalist, Jean-Paul Marat, often decried government secrecy and associated it with despotism and monarchical government more generally in his newspaper, *L'Ami du peuple*, and his anti-royalist diatribe, *Les chaînes de l'esclavage*. See Marat, *Les chaînes de l'esclavage*, ed., Michel Vovelle (Paris, 1988).

- 54 See J. Gilchrist and W. J. Murray eds., *The press in the French Revolution: a selection of documents taken from the press of the revolution for the years 1789–1794* (New York, 1971), 17. See also Hugh Gough, *The newspaper press in the French Revolution* (Belmont, 1988); Jeremy D. Popkin, *Revolutionary news: the press in France, 1789–1799* (Durham, 1990).
- 55 Jean-Paul Marat, *Les chaînes de l'esclavage*, ed., Michel Vovelle (Paris, 1988), 144.
- 56 See *The press in the French Revolution*, ed. J. Gilchrist and W. J. Murray, 17.
- 57 Marat, 23, 236.
- 58 Pierre Manuel, *La police de Paris dévoilée* (Paris, 1793), frontispiece.
- 59 *Ibid.*
- 60 *Ibid.*
- 61 *Révolutions de Paris* (3 August to 28 October 1793), 89.
- 62 See Colin Lucas, 'The theory and practice of denunciation in the French Revolution', *Journal of Modern History* 68, 4 (1996), 768–85, 780. See also Jacques Gilhaumou, 'Fragments of a discourse of denunciation (1789–1794)', in Keith Michael Baker ed., *The French Revolution and the creation of modern political culture*, vol. 4 (Oxford, 1987), 986–1007. For a recent article that deals with transparency in the early revolution, see Katlyn Carter, 'The *Comités des recherches*: procedural secrecy and the origins of the French Revolution', *French History* 32, 1 (2018), 45–65.
- 63 BA MS 12852.
- 64 *Ibid.*
- 65 *Ibid.*
- 66 *Ibid.*
- 67 Archives de Paris 4 AZ 719 in 4 AZ 15.
- 68 *Ibid.*
- 69 *Révolutions de Paris* (12–17 July 1789), 15.
- 70 *Recueil de pièces intéressantes sur la Bastille* (Paris, 1790), 12.
- 71 Isser Woloch, *Napoleon and his collaborators: the making of a dictatorship* (New York, 2001), 71–3.

French Abstract

A la Révolution française, la prison de la Bastille était devenue synonyme d'abus de pouvoir et secret gouvernemental. La police parisienne avait longtemps gardé ses opérations secrètes, mais au XVIIIe siècle, ses interventions sont devenues la cible des révolutionnaires dénonçant le bras visible d'un gouvernement considéré non seulement comme opaque mais intrusif. A cette époque, l'Etat se modernisant gagnait en pouvoir, alors qu'en même temps montait l'opinion publique, ce qui contribua à faire évoluer les mentalités à l'égard du secret gouvernemental et à valoriser la transparence au sein de la culture politique de la Révolution.

German Abstract

Während der Französischen Revolution war das Gefängnis der Bastille zum Inbegriff von Machtmissbrauch und behördlicher Geheimniskrämerei geworden. Die Polizei von Paris war bei ihren Einsätzen seit langem im Geheimen vorgegangen, aber im 18. Jahrhundert wurde sie unter den Revolutionären zur Zielscheibe und galt als der hervorstechende Arm der Regierung, der als undurchsichtig und zugleich aufdringlich angesehen wurde. In diesem Zeitraum trugen sowohl die wachsende Macht des sich modernisierenden Staates als auch der Aufschwung der öffentlichen Meinung dazu bei, dass sich die Haltung zur behördlichen Geheimhaltung änderte und Transparenz in der politischen Kultur der Revolution eine Aufwertung erfuhr.