Kaleidoscopic leadership in contemporary democracies

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Democratic theory and leadership studies are closely related. Yet, the idea of democratic leadership is inherently paradoxical. Whereas the concept of democracy rests on the idea of popular sovereignty, that is self-government by an autonomous citizenry, and is based on a strong egalitarian ethos, the concept of leadership necessarily encompasses hierarchy and hence inequality. In a truly democratic society, the leader is the odd one out. Thus, at their theoretical extremes, political leadership and democracy are on rather bad terms with each other. This paradox is broadly recognised, both theoretically and empirically (e.g. Kellerman & Webster, 2001; Kane & Patapan, 2008; Ruscio, 2008; Kane, Patapan & ‘t Hart, 2009a). Political leaders must walk a thin line between offering the necessary guidance and imposing authoritarian rule. Several academic scholars have provided insightful studies that have shaped our understanding of the leadership-democracy nexus (e.g. Kane, Patapan & Wong, 2008).

However, most of these have not yet incorporated the theoretical diversity of understandings of democracy and the empirical variety in democratic systems. Discussions on the relationship between democracy and leadership tend to be rather one-dimensional because they tend to concentrate on the conflicting aspects of the relationship between leadership and ‘the’ idea of democracy. Consequently, democratic leadership scholars run the risk of overlooking the affinity between particular types of political leadership on the one hand and forms of democracy on the other and how it develops in changing socio-political contexts.

In contrast, this paper, in the tradition of Aaron Wildavsky, aims to elaborate on the theoretical and empirical kinship between different styles of leadership and different models of democracy. The focal question is: what does democratic leadership amount to in different types of democracy? It finds a starting point in Keane’s (2009) three-stage model of democratic transformation (moving from classic ‘assembly democracy’, to modern ‘representative democracy’, to present-day ‘monitory democracy’), which is combined with Hendriks’ (2010) four archetypical models of democracy (pendulum, consensus, voter and participatory democracy). We argue that political leaders increasingly operate in more hybrid forms of democracy, that is democratic regimes in which characteristics of different forms of democracy are combined, and for that reason are required to develop innovative political repertoires that could be characterised as ‘kaleidoscopic leadership’.

The structure of the paper is as follows. Section 1 elaborates on the paradox of democratic leadership. Section 2 presents the typology of democracies that we choose to use in the analysis of the affinity between types of political leadership and forms of democracy, the results of which are presented in Section 3. The final section, Section 4, provides an outlook for the future of democratic leadership, based on our assessment of how modern democracies function.

1. The paradox of democratic leadership

Many academic scholars have observed the tensions that are embedded in the term ‘democratic leadership’. Democracy is, literally, rule by the people, the contraction of ‘demos’ and ‘kratia’. In classic categorizations, by for example Aristotle, Plato, Polybios and Spinoza, this mode of government is contrasted with autocracy and aristocracy. ‘Rule by one’ and ‘rule by a few’ are said to be fundamentally different from ‘rule by many’, the latter of which rest on the ideal of self-government (Kane et al., 2009a, p. 2). Democracy is about an autonomous demos governing itself as a collective. This means that rulers who control the coercive power of the state need to be constrained. Authoritarian rule is the antithesis of democracy. For that reason, ‘the theory of
democracy does not treat leaders kindly’ (Ruscio, 2008, p. ix). This creates a serious dilemma for political leaders: ‘the more democratic leaders lead from the front, the less democratic they appear; the more they act like good democrats, the less they seem like true leaders’ (Kane, Patapan & ’t Hart, 2009b, p. 299).

Yet, at the same time, many have signalled that democratic societies in practice require leadership. Although not all may agree with Ruscio’s (2008, p. 5) claim that ‘a rejection of leadership is implicitly a rejection of democracy’ in the theoretical sense, most will be inclined to recognise the empirical adequacy of such a claim. Modern democracies depend on at least some kind of leadership. At the same time however, those leaders are looked at with Argus’ eyes, they are sometimes even distrusted, and checks and balances are institutionalised throughout democratic systems to keep leaders in check. The paradox of democratic leadership is, thus, not just a conceptual ambiguity: it carries substantial practical relevance. Political leaders in democracies face a multitude of demands, which are hard to reconcile. For that reason, several academic scholars have asked the question what being a democratic leader amounts to; how those involved can manage the unique challenges posed on them (e.g. Kane et al., 2008).

But, many studies start from the core sense of democracy in its purest form, i.e. popular sovereignty, which presents leaders with an inherent dilemma for which there is no real resolution. The picture changes when we look at the various democratic institutions that exist and in which different, equally compelling conceptions of democracy have materialised. At this level, leadership and democracy can go together in reasonable harmony since some forms of democracy do indeed thrive under the guidance of certain types of leaders (see also McAllister, 2011, pp. 53-54). For this reason, we introduce a typology of types of democracy into the debate on democratic leadership. The current paper provides an overview of key studies that provide valuable insights for understanding the relationship between leadership and democracy in more detail and provides a number of illustrative cases that we believe are highly instructive for this purpose. First, however, the analytic framework is outlined in the next section.

2. Different understandings of democracy

For our analytic framework, we draw from the work of John Keane (2009) and Frank Hendriks (2010). Whereas the former provides a typology of democracies that springs from historical analysis, the latter provides a theoretically informed typology.

In his courageous attempt to write a new history of democracy, entitled The Life and Death of Democracy, John Keane arrives at a threefold distinction between types of democracies. He traces back the origins of this mode of government to the ‘juvenile’ popular assemblies of Mesopotamia that existed up to 4,500 years ago. These are considerably older than the Athenian democracies that academic scholars traditionally tend to consider as the first forms of democratic rule. Because of the crucial role of assemblies in the democratic process in these early days, he dubs the era the era of the ‘assembly democracy’. The basic principle thereof is unmediated self-government through popular councils.

Over time, and as democracy moves westwards, the idea of democracy gradually becomes strongly associated with the idea of representation. In the era of the ‘representative democracy’, the democratic process is characterised by popular elections, political parties and parliamentary representation. These mechanisms rest on the idea that the popular will is socially constructed in the sense that is has to be ‘represented’ in decision making, that is made present by representatives of ‘the people’ (see also Pitkin, 1967). The widespread establishment of chosen bodies of citizens means that democratic self-government of the demos attains a mediated nature.
In the early 20th century, however, the representative democratic model loses ground, Keane argues. The rise of totalitarian regimes and governments’ failure to continue to provide economic prosperity denoted the ‘fragility of democracy’. Consequently, the representative democracy faced a serious crisis in the first half of the 20th century, Keane postulates. This provided an impetus for the further evolvement of democracy into what Keane labels the ‘monitory democracy’, which he considers to be the third type of democracy. The monitory democracy is characterised by a multitude of checks and balances that have been established in addition to and sometimes outside of the representative regime. Elected bodies and political-executives, in the view of Keane, have become subject to extensive scrutiny by other actors, both institutional and social-political. These not only monitor the power, but also share power. Consequently, modern democracy has become historically complex.

There are, however, ways to get to grips with this complexity, at least in a theoretical sense. Whereas Keane suggests that the monitory democracy is a type of democracy, we are rather inclined to believe that it is more accurately described as a complex mix of different types of democracies. Some of the checks that have been placed on the representative regime, public referendums for example, rest on essentially different interpretations, or rather normative conviction, of what democracy should look like. Monitory democracy, we believe, combines characteristics of different forms of democracy. Analysing the monitory democracy from this perspective, in our view, fosters our understanding of what type of democracy the modern day democracy is.

For our analysis we use Hendriks’ theoretically informed typology of democracies. Inspired by the scholarly work of Mary Douglas, and in the research tradition of Arend Lijphart, Hendriks distinguishes between four ideal types of democracy: pendulum democracy, consensus democracy, voter democracy and participatory democracy. These models of democracy should be considered to be ideal types in the Weberian sense of the word, which can be used as analytic lenses with which we can study empirical democracies. No ‘real’ democracy is as pure as the ideal types one can distinguish theoretically; every democracy is characterised by elements from two or more ideal type democracies.

Hendriks’ typology springs from a juxtaposition of two distinctions between different types of democracies. First, Hendriks distinguishes direct democracies from indirect democracies. This distinction “concerns the question of who makes the decisions in democracy: the citizens themselves, through self-determination (direct democracy), or caretakers, delegates or trustees, through representation (indirect democracy)” (Hendriks, 2011, p. 48). When we combine this distinction with a second one between aggregative and integrative democratic decision making, that is between “a ‘counting heads’ process of aggregation in which a simple majority is decisive’ and ‘an integrative, ‘talkative’ process of conferring, seeking for the widest possible consensus and voting down minorities as little as possible” (Hendriks, 2011, p. 48), we arrive at the following typology:

Table 1: Models of democracy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aggregative (majoritarian)</th>
<th>Integrative (nonmajoritarian)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indirect (representation)</strong></td>
<td>Pendulum democracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Direct (self-governing)</strong></td>
<td>Voter democracy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Source: (Hendriks, 2010, p. 27)
In pendulum democracies electoral competition between (mostly) two competing political parties results in a continuous alternation of power. After each election, the winning political party dominates the executive positions and makes the decisions. Citizen participation in the political process is mainly limited to casting votes. In voter democracies, however, the aggregative nature of the pendulum democracy is combined with unmediated popular rule, rather than with representation. Citizens take part in the democratic decision making directly by casting their votes in plebiscites. Such widespread, direct participation can also be found in participatory democracies. Yet, in this type of democracies, citizens’ participation in the political process takes the form of taking part in deliberations that seek broad consensus in the decision making, rather than casting votes. Participatory democracy, thus, combines the direct citizen involvement of the voter democracy with the integration of a multitude of interest and normative positions. Such an integrative process of democratic decision making is also characteristic for consensus democracies. Yet, in this type of democracies decisions are made by representatives that citizens have designated, by popular election or otherwise. Consensus democracies are characterised by consultation, compromise and consensus seeking.

These four models of democracy can be used to study the affinity between types of political leadership and forms of democracy, in attempt to better understand what contemporary democratic leadership in a ‘monitory democracy’ amounts to. For our analysis, we first describe the affinity between leadership styles and the individual models of democracy. Then, we analyse what kind of leadership fits best with the more hybrid forms of democracy that have come into existence.

3. The affinity between types of political leadership and forms of democracy

3.1. Leadership in assembly democracies

According to John Keane (2009), the first stage of the history of democracy was dominated by ‘assembly democracy’, in essence self-government through public gatherings, assembling often out in the open. He argues that this form of democracy goes back some 2000 years before Athens, but this is still its strongest and best-documented example. We have a relatively good picture of how the demos, the citizens of Athens, have dealt with its kratia, its government through the People’s Assembly, the Council of 500, the Magistrates, the Law Courts and the many rotating ‘offices’ of the Athenian polis (Finer, 1997; Hornblower, 1992). This is not the place to go into its details, but it should be noted that the democratic reforms of Cleisthenes (round about 500 BC) strongly encouraged ‘the rule by many’, while discouraging in many ways the ‘rule by a few’ (oligarchy), let alone ‘the rule by one’ (monarchy). Offices with power routinely rotated and were in most cases staffed by lot, a major exception being the military strategoi who could in fact be elected year after year. This is how, for example, Pericles developed a strong and long-time leading position. (Thucides even felt that Pericles acted as an arrogant monarch.)

But also in many other ways could political leadership flourish in assembly democracy, which at first sight seems to be anathema to leadership. This is important to note, because assembly democracy still lives on in different guises, not only in the world of ideas, but also in the real world of democracy, as the next two subsections evidence. The Athenian assembly democracy presented a context in which demagogues (literally people-leaders) could flourish (Finer, 1997, p. 361). Aristotle analysed the rhetorical tools – using ethos, pathos and logos – with which seasoned orators would lead their fellow citizens. Plato’s negative assessment of ‘mob orators’ in Athenian ‘theatocracy’ gave demagogy a bad name to many, although Finley (1977, p. 21) argued that these people-leaders were actually ‘structural to the system’, in the sense
that it could not function without them. On the same grounds, Keane (2009, p. 41ff) suggests that Athenian democracy was not really ‘direct democracy’, but this is only true if direct democracy is conceptualised as a political system in which all functions are performed by the demos as a whole, which is truly impossible. Here we see direct democracy more conventionally as a system in which not representatives of the citizenry, but the amassed citizenry itself has the ‘political primacy’, the mandate and the tools to make decisions for the polis. In such a system ‘symbolic’ or ‘aesthetic’ representation (Pitkin, 1967; Ankersmit, 1996) is indeed highly important, but this in itself does not bring representative democracy. Let’s take a look at the two types of direct democracy that we distinguish.

3.1.1. Leadership in voter democracies

The general logic and some of the crucial institutions of Athenian assembly democracy are clearly evident in the Swiss version of assembly democracy, which has in its turn influenced the Swiss version of referendum democracy – both highly ‘direct’ in line with the conventional definition. At the kantonal level of Switzerland, only two small ‘Landesgemeinde’ still decide on the most important public matters through a communal show of hands, but at the local level no less than 80% of the Swiss municipalities make decisions in this manner. They do this without representative institutions that are common in most municipalities in western countries, but not without ‘symbolic representation’ or political leadership, of sorts. A leading role cannot be claimed on the basis of a formal position, it has to be earned in the fundamentally horizontal context of the assembly.

The Swiss system of referendums and initiatives, which has grown strongly since the 19th century, can be seen as a continuation of direct democracy with new and additional means – the small-scale, low-tech show of hands of assembly democracy being turned into the large-scale, more refined way of aggregating votes in plebiscites. Referendums and initiatives are truly direct in the sense that the amassed voter, and no one else, ultimately decides about substantial issues. The decision is not delegated to politicians or parties, but Kriesi (2005) has convincingly shown that these are nevertheless crucial in providing the heuristic cues (who is for/against?) and arguments (what is for/against?) that form the basis for the public decision. The weight of elite-provided substantial arguments turned out to be relatively big in the particular Swiss context.

With its New England Town Meetings (a version of assembly democracy not at all confined to the East coast) and its initiatives and referendums in many states, the United States has been called Switzerland’s “Twin Republic” – much bigger now, but impressionable earlier on (Von Arx, 2002). There are, however, differences, many of which have to do with the fact that voter democracy is combined with a dominant consensus democracy in Switzerland, and a dominant pendulum democracy in the US (see later sections). In the Swiss context, leadership roles are more often assumed by ordinary citizens, committed journalists, alarmed scientists, retired civil engineers, or anyone else with an aptitude for political organizing. In the American context private money plays a much bigger role. The (Californian) referendum democracy is even said to be dominated by an ‘initiative-industrial complex’ (Zakaria, 2003), in which direct legislation is written under the auspices of private interests, paying for the collection of individual votes.

Political leaders in voter democracy are usually private actors, challenged to move equally private citizens as voters. Whether they act in a more ‘commercial’ context (California) or in a more ‘public’ context (Switzerland), initiators in voter democracy are expected to be effective and responsive brokers of political movement in settings that are fundamentally horizontal and individualistic. They must rally support for a point of view on the public market of ideas. Some
will call such brokers Pied Pipers. Advocates of voter democracy prefer to draw their metaphors from the domain of the free professions – brokers, advocates, professionals who deal with free citizens. The Californian organization that initiated the recall that was to be the downfall of governor Davis and was to usher in former movie actor Schwarzenegger went by the name of “People’s Advocate” – and that is perhaps the best job description of a political leader in voter democracy.

Leadership roles that would suit consensus democracy or pendulum democracy will not be accepted ‘just like that’ in voter democracy. People who act patronizingly or high-handedly (‘just listen to me’) will meet with resistance here. Compared to participatory democracy, however, voter democracy does not cultivate aversion to people who take the lead per se. If only they do so in a way that is appropriate in the eyes of the assertive individuals that are their grassroots or audience.

3.1.2. Leadership in participatory democracies

There is a line that runs from ancient Athens, and assembly democracy more in general, to the more aggregative forms of voter democracy that we dealt with above; but there is also a line that – via Rousseau, Marx and others on the Old and New Left – goes to more transformative or developmental forms of participatory democracy (see Held, 2006, p. 187ff). Traces of participatory democracy can be found in many places: in the Paris commune, in the Israeli kibbutzim, in the New Social and Political Movements that have grown since the 1960s, in the experiments with communicative and deliberative democracy, with participatory planning and budgeting, with mini publics and citizen committees that have developed later on (Hendriks, 2010, p. 109ff).

One of the most powerful reproaches that Schumpeter (1934; see also Brooker, 2005) made to participation thinkers like Rousseau is that they lack a proper understanding of the leadership function in democracy. In participatory democracy, authority does not descend from the top down, from competing leadership, but it rises up from the bottom, from an undivided base. In the practice of participatory democracy, less strict than the theory, leadership roles appear to be feasible but tend to be modelled not on the role of the decisive leader who takes decisions on behalf of others, but rather on the role of the inspirational coach or guide: someone who teaches others but is also aware that these others – the ones at the base – have to walk their own walk. One could think of the way in which inspirational leaders like Ghandi and Mandela coached and guided the movements, which saw them as their leaders, but which had to lead themselves for lots of the time also. Less grand, but instructive is the example of Roel van Duijn, instigator and chief ideologist of the ‘Provo’ and ‘Kabouter’ (Pixie) movements in Amsterdam (1966-1971). As self-proclaimed ‘Opperkabouter’ (‘Chief-Pixie’), Van Duijn attracted the type of resistance and bickering that not seldom accompanies leading figures in participatory democracy.

Participatory democracy is, more than any of the other models of democracy, averse to leaders who might get disengaged from the base, which is supposed to be the beginning and end of everything. All sorts of constructions have been devised to prevent this from happening in organizations and movements that are sympathetic to participatory democracy. Decision-making rules in New Social Movements often demand virtual unanimity, or at least massive majorities, before going along with those who try to take a lead. The German Grünen, like to work with rotating chairpersons, and their political leaders often come in two (not one in the lead, please!). Michels (1925), however, has shown that oligarchisation is almost inevitable in large organisations, even in those on the Left that adhere to a participatory ideology, much to their own discomfort. Freeman (1980) has shown that in movements like the American women’s
movement the oligarchisation may be hidden, but nevertheless discernable. To prevent an ‘Animal Farm’ (all pigs are equal, but some pigs are more equal than others) from developing, counterweight is often sought in hyper-accountability: a permanent demand of accountability to those at the bottom who insist on joining in (Hood, 1998).

An exceptional leadership role may develop in the more radical political movements inspired by Rousseau or Marx. As an exception to the rule, so indirectly also a demarcation of it, one extraordinary person may be singled out as the shining example, the personification of the lesson that is yet to be learned by all other pupils progressing on the road towards advanced understanding; the one radiant sun shining its light on a cloud of equal stars orbiting around it. An extreme example would be Mao Zedong, the great helmsman inspiring the cultural revolution in the communist ‘People’s Democracy’ of China (Chang & Halliday, 2005). Another example would be Robespierre, champion of democracy and participation à la Rousseau as well as instigator of the ‘Terror’ following the French Revolution (Scurr, 2006). The latter examples testify that leadership in the more extreme expressions of participatory democracy can also become highly problematic.

3.2. Leadership in representative democracies

Other than the idea of direct democracy, the idea of representative democracy inherently implies leadership because it rests on the principle of collective representation of citizens’ interests in the decision making. This, however, does not mean that all representative democracies digest leadership particularly well, or that democratic leadership amounts to the same thing in different representative democracies. In this respect, there is a substantial difference between leadership in pendulum democracies and leadership in consensus democracies.

3.2.1. Leadership in pendulum democracies

Of the four models of democracy that we outlined above, pendulum democracy arguably provides the best breeding ground for strong political leadership. The ‘winner-takes-all’ electoral system fosters competition between a limited number of political parties, which provides a strong impetus for individualised political leadership. It necessitates having a recognizable ‘face’ for one’s political party, especially in a mediatised society (see also Langer, 2007; cf. Karvonen, 2010). This is not only the case during election time, but also in between elections. In pendulum democracies power, particularly executive power is concentrated in the hands of a few. It thus has a strong elitist ethos. Political leadership is therefore an important aspect of this type of democracy.

British directly elected mayors, like Middlesbrough mayor Ray Mallon, provide an illustrative example of how leaders are positioned in pendulum democracies, because they are the prime political leaders of their local government. They have a considerable amount of statutory powers and tend to dominate the council and the administration in what Mouritzen and Svara (2002) would label a strong-mayor system.

In pendulum democracies, leadership has an institutionalised nature, but is also appreciated by the electorate. The aversion to leadership that is characteristic for democracies is less manifest in pendulum democracies, because decision making in this type of democracy necessarily means deciding for others, namely those that have lost the electoral battle. In this type of democracy ‘power over’ trumps ‘power to’ (see Stone, 1989).

In The British presidency: Tony Blair and the politics of public leadership Foley (2000) provides an insightful account of what leadership in a pendulum democracy amounts to, in which he
suggests that Prime Minister Blair’s political leadership was of an almost presidential nature. Barbara Ferman’s (1985) comparative study of mayoral leadership in the United States provides an insightful analysis from the domain of local government.

One of the main risks of political leadership in consensus democracies is that of a discrepancy between the public desire for public leadership and political leaders’ actual abilities to make a difference. Although pendulum democracies provide considerable room for political leadership, executive leaders still operate in a complex environment that keeps them in check. Leaders’ control over decision making and over the resources of finance is not unlimited (see Yates, 1977; Greasley & Stoker, 2008). Further, over the last decades the interdependencies between public actors, and also between public and private actors, have increased considerably (Kickert, Klijn & Koppenjan, 1997). Other than citizens may expect, even strong leaders are not always in control. Consequently, strong political leadership may amount to an inherent disappointment to the citizenry, which may undermine the authority of public authorities.

3.2.2. Leadership in consensus democracies

Contrary to pendulum democracies, the consensus democracies of for example Austria, Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland provide an “unfavourable biotope” for strong political leadership (‘t Hart, 2005, p. 234). Consensus democracies are characterised amongst others by a separation of power, the existence of strong checks and balances, institutionalised interdependencies between different public actors and by practices of consultation and coalition building (Lijphart, 1968; Hendriks, 2010). These leave little room for ‘acting boss’.

The President of the Swiss Confederation provides an insightful example: although the president chairs the Federal Council, (s)he is a typical primus inter pares, not having been granted any special powers that other six councillors do not have. The office of head of state is vested in the collective body of the Federal Council, rather than in a single person. Further, the presidency is kept in check by a system of rotation. As such, the President of the Swiss Confederation has a rather weak position (see Kriesi & Trechsel, 2008, pp. 69-80), which is indicative for consensus democracy’s aversion to individualised, strong leadership.

Consensus democracies traditionally are inhospitable to the very idea of individualised political leadership, to paraphrase Kellerman and Webster (2001, p. 487). Rather, consensus democracies are characterised by consultation, compromise and consensus seeking. And although the characteristics of consensus democracy generally are of a more institutional nature, rather than of a behavioural one (Andeweg, 2001, p. 120; 2000, p. 513), decision making in consensus democracies typically is of a collective style.

Yet, since the principle of representation underlies consensus democracies, leadership is an important function in consensus democracies too. Consensus democracies’ leaders tie interests together; they represent a particular party or social movement in the integrative process of decision making. Further, they fulfil a crucial role in seeking consensus with other actors. Leaders in consensus democracy thus build bridges, within as well as between interest groups (‘bridging’ and ‘bonding’ in Putnam’s (2000) terms). Community building, and the formation of collective identities, is an important function performed by the leaders in a consensus democracy (see also Bryson & Crosby, 1992). Thus, although ‘leaders’ in consensus democracies are traditionally approached with caution and are generally mistrusted, democratic leadership in the form of ‘keeping things together’ is crucial. Former Dutch prime minister Wim Kok was renowned of this ability to do (te Velde, 2002). Likewise, the former mayor of Amsterdam, Job Cohen was highly respected for being able to build bridges between different communities in the difficult times that followed the murder of filmmaker Theo van Gogh (see Hajer, 2009, pp. 76-96). The ability to do is
still perceived as being an important aspect of Dutch mayoral leadership (Cachet, Karsten & Schaap, 2009).

One of the main risks of leadership in consensus democracies is that it lacks decisiveness. A somewhat extreme example is the 1699 introduction of the *liberum veto* in the Sjem, the representative body of nobles that laid down the laws in the Polish monarchy. This principle of unanimity had a disastrous effect on the functioning of the representative democracy, because it practically rendered the Sjem unable to pass any legislation (Keane, 2009, pp. 257-263). The lack of decisiveness as a consequence of the search for consensus is a particular shortcoming in the light of the call for stronger leadership that can be heard throughout Western Europe (Borraz & John, 2004; Larsen, 2005, p. 208; Bäck, Heinelt & Magnier, 2006). Over the last decade or so we have seen attempts to strengthen (local) political leadership throughout Western Europe through institutional change in response (Leach & Wilson, 2002; Borraz & John, 2004; Steyvers et al., 2008).

What is more relevant for the current paper is the rise of new ways of working in consensus democracies that amount to a presidentialisation of leadership. An insight example in this respect is the rise of the Belgian city of Antwerp’s mayor Patrick Janssens since his coming to office in 2003 (e.g. Van Aelst & Nuytemans, 2007): in a context that is riddled with (institutional) checks and balances, Janssens manages to position himself as the undisputed leader of the Antwerp local government and arguably the city.

4. Towards kaleidoscopic democratic leadership?

Although we have provided a number of empirical examples above, the previous sections have mainly discussed the theoretical affinity between different forms of leadership and different forms of democracy. This raises the question what contemporary democratic leadership amounts to. John Keane postulates that since 1945 a ‘post-representative democracy’ (Keane, 2009, p. xxvi) has developed, which is characterised by the emergence of a multitude of ‘extra-parliamentary’ power-monitoring institutions. According to Keane, these have changed the meaning of democracy as such into public scrutiny and public control of decision makers (Keane, 2009, p. xxvi).

For public leaders this means that they are under constant and intense scrutiny by a variety of public and private actors, which makes it ever more difficult to generate, and especially maintain, authority. Authorities are constantly monitored by a diverse set of forums that can become very active and inquisitive. ‘t Hart (2001) even speaks of an ‘inquisition democracy’, which evokes images of a ferocious pursuit of public leaders. Keane (2009, p. 857) uses a more gentle metaphor for the ‘chastening of power’, namely that of Lemuel Gulliver trapped by the Lilliputians, strapped down by a large quantity of little ropes. Although the metaphor is an insightful one, it could easily misrepresent important aspects of contemporary democratic governance. Boundary-defying, Houdini-like, leadership is far from absent in modern day society: the Italian prime minister Berlusconi provides just one example (see also Keane, 2009, p. xxxi). Moreover, recent structural reforms such as the introduction of elected mayors have strengthened the position of executive leaders throughout Europe. Neither have authoritative ways of working been eliminated, even from consensus democracies (e.g. Karsten, 2012). The universal applicability of Keane’s metaphor can thus be questioned.

More importantly, we are inclined to question the validity of Keane’s claim that “democracy is morphing into a type of democracy radically different to that our grandparents may have been lucky to know” (Keane, 2009, p. xxvii). Conversely, we argue that modern day democracy is a hybrid mix of different types of democracy rather than a new type of democracy on its own, since it is mainly a combination of elements or characteristics of the ‘older’
democracies. The checks and balances that indeed are being installed, in the form of recall procedures for example, find their origin in the traditional alternatives for representative democracy. More in general, there is an empirical trend towards hybridization of democracies throughout Europe (Hendriks, 2010; Loughlin, Hendriks & Lidström, 2011; Hendriks & Michels, 2011): democratic innovations are introduced into the traditional democracies of Europe that ‘pull’ them in other directions than their traditional, mainly representative orientation. Consequently, Europe’s democracies obtain a more hybrid nature, that is: they increasingly combine characteristics of different forms of democracy.

One could argue that the hybridisation of democratic models requires a hybridisation of leadership styles. The expectations and demands regarding political leadership are indeed highly diverse. Leadership has to show a common face on one stage, and superior qualities on another. It has to be tough in one arena, and sensitive in another. Yet, different leadership roles can not be simply ‘employed’ by a single individual leader at the same time since the characteristics of different leadership styles are to some extent conflicting. The strong, individual, authoritative leader can hardly be a team-playing, primus inter pares at the same time. Mediocre leadership, which finds the lowest common denominator of different leadership styles, provides no real solution since, as we have shown, every type of democracy requires a different type of leadership that provides a particular type of guidance. The paradox of hybrid democracies is that they require a form of leadership that combines contradictory ways of governing. We believe that there are two pathways along which this paradox can be resolved, both of which are a form of what can be called ‘kaleidoscopic leadership’ (‘t Hart & Ten Hooven, 2004), that is a political repertoire that combines values from different types of democracy.

First, hybrid democracies may require institutional settings in which multiple leadership roles are embedded. Rather than keeping a single leader in check through extensive scrutiny, leadership constellations may arise in which several leaders provide counteracting checks and balances for each other’s positions and leadership roles. In the institutional make-up of the European Union, for example, different bodies (the European Parliament, the European Commission and the European Council) perform different leadership roles and often compete with each other. The rise of relatively strong aldermen for public safety in the Netherlands provides another interesting example. They take on the political leadership role in a policy area that has gained considerable social and political saliency whilst operating alongside the Dutch mayor who has a formal and still mostly apolitical responsibility for maintaining public order.

Such institutional settings differ from that of a consensus democracy in the sense that they do not rest on the principle of consensus seeking, but, like pendulum democracy, on that of competition for leadership between leaders that fulfil different leadership roles. The rise of such leadership constellations entails the simultaneous strengthening of different leadership positions and thus implies a conception of leadership that allows for shared or dispersed rather than collective leadership.

Alternatively, the kaleidoscopic nature of contemporary democratic leadership may be embedded in single positions. The Dutch mayoral office provides an insightful example. Notwithstanding the fact that the formal appointment procedure of mayors in the Netherlands has remained very much the same over the years, the office of mayor in the Netherlands was and is subject to serious changes. One of the results is that the position of the mayor has considerably politicised due to the increased influence of the municipal council on the appointment and staying in office of the Dutch mayor. The selection procedure, which nowadays comes down to a de facto appointment by the council, makes room for ‘desired mayors’, that is mayors that fit in the context and political-administrative culture of the municipalities and their respective ambitions (Cachet, Karsten & Schaap, 2011). The traditional appointment by the Crown, which nowadays only operates de iure, left less room for such mayors. Municipal councils are likely to
choose those leaders that fit the ‘profiles’ the former have drawn up, in which they specify what the preferred characteristics of their future mayor is. Mayors are more likely than before to be appointed to perform a specific task, ranging from the management of a major reconstruction of a city centre to restoring local government integrity (Cachet et al., 2009): the mayor as a ‘project manager’ is on the rise. Such mayors have a ‘sell-by’ date that coincides with the duration of their project and they are more and more expected to make room thereafter for another mayor. The nature of mayoral leadership may thus vary along with the changing needs that the local community expresses. Contrary to what Dutch mayors are sometimes inclined to believe, it is highly unlikely that an individual mayor can perform all leadership roles (see Cachet et al., 2009). Yet, a municipality that first benefited from the strong leadership of an authoritative mayor, the following years may benefit from the weaker leadership of a facilitative mayor. Consequently, the nature of mayoral leadership may constantly change within the same institutional setting and in that way become kaleidoscopic.

Similar to how democracies benefit from hybridization when the mixture of different types of democracy leads to the establishment of productive checks and balances (Hendriks, 2010; 2011, p. 58), contemporary democratic leadership may benefit from attaining a more kaleidoscopic nature, in order to enable democratic leadership to deal with the hybridization of democracy.
References
