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How is co-leadership enacted in the Green Party of Aotearoa New Zealand?

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ABSTRACT

This research report explores the enactment of a gender-balanced co-leadership throughout the organisation of the Green Party of Aotearoa New Zealand. This small-sized political organisation has had representatives in parliament since 1996. Its experimental model of a male and a female sharing positions arose out of the social movements of the baby boomer generation. Gender-balanced co-leadership was devised as an exception to the norm of a single leader (frequently presented as a heroic man). The metaphor of theatre is used to frame a description of the stage-managed performance of Green Party political co-leaders. I show how co-leaders have been portrayed over the life span of the party as if they were characters in play. The re-presentation of co-leaders is illustrated by images, primarily taken from the party magazine. Experiences of the enactment of this co-leader model are interpreted through five interviews with key informants who have all held formal positions of authority within the organisation. I provide an auto-ethnographic account as a party insider illustrated by snapshots. The Green Party's co-leadership model has endured over 25 plus years. By virtue of longevity it has demonstrated a viable way of sharing position power between two genders in a political party. Sharing positions in this organisation requires a significant investment of effort to maintain the desired presentation of the relationship. The lead actors are constrained to conform to the stage-setting. Parliamentary politics imposes isomorphic forces of order and hierarchy. The enactment of co-leadership has become increasingly gender stereotypical. Gender-balanced co-leadership is an experiment that has become a conventional routine.

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Politics is a relational process. This has been a work in progress over several years which began as a critique of heroic leadership, meandered through a cathartic drama and ended as a new beginning. This report is an inadequate prelude to the full symphonic complexity of leading in a social and political movement. My gratitude to the supervisors who have guided me from the conception to the completion of this research; namely Dr Andy Asquith for his wit, Dr Farah Palmer and Dr Suze Wilson for their guidance and A/Prof Craig Prichard for his erudition. Thanks to John Chapman for his evocative photographic contribution. I am grateful to Vernon Tava and Anne-Elise Smithson who aided my partial recovery from campaign management.