

Conclusion

The structuralist camp in sociology (structuralism, Marxism, and structural functionalism) and the action camp in sociology (symbolic interactionism, phenomenology, some versions of the Weberian perspective, and post-structuralism) have not done much to study the theoretical as well as the empirical interactions between structure and agency. This research situated itself right in the middle of these two main camps, and relied on dialectical sociological approaches (such as Peter Berger's version of phenomenology, and Anthony Giddens's structuration) as a point of departure for the analysis of charismatic leadership. Such an approach promoted a sociological understanding of the dialectical relations between structure and agency by illustrating these interrelations with regard to the phenomenon of charismatic leadership. It thus demonstrated and promoted an understanding of how charismatic leaders shape, and are simultaneously shaped by, structure and the social reality of which they are a part. In so doing, it also contributed to the empirical demonstration of how a dialectical approach can be a fruitful way of analyzing social reality, structure and agency.

Following such a dialectical treatment of charismatic leadership, we have used a case study approach to attend to the nature of both agency and structure and their interrelation with regard to charismatic leadership. In doing so, the case study method illustrated how it is possible to deduce indigenous insights into the phenomena's particularized aspects, as well as to generalize theoretical observations that transcend contextual particularities. This method hence promoted the study of both the particular and generalizable aspects of charismatic leadership's agency and its relations with contextual factors.

The extent to which the charismatic leaders were shaped by the structure is evident in a number of ways: in the way that it shaped the particular content of their ideas; in the frequency of occurrence of such leadership; in the intensity of the attributions, manifestations and relations of the followers; in the scope and latitude of social action and transformation; and in the particular forms whereby the various actors interact. This, however, is not to say that the context "makes" the leaders. If this were the case, we should have people like Kuo, Tay and Prema occurring in abundance.

The fact that we could only locate few such people suggests that there is something about these individuals that transcends structure and particularisms of context. These people's agency is "universal" in the sense that no matter what the particular circumstances are, they would always, by nature, engage with the reflection on and the negotiation of the underlying structure of their own society. This means that wherever we find charismatic leaders, even in much more "opened" contexts, they will still be engaged in their reflection on the basic underlying assumptions of their own society, and will negotiate its meta, man-made structure (and whatever its underlying social structure would be). However, since underlying basic assumptions vary among societies, the content of the leaders' ideas, as well as the particular ways whereby they engage with the particular meta-structure and its transformation, will differ.

Charismatic leaders engage with and negotiate the meta-structure of their societies and in that process construct an alternative social reality. The way they construct reality is unique and differs from the emphasis that constructivist theories accord to typificatory schemes, ongoing socialization, and reproductive patterning of structuration. Contrary to these mechanisms, charismatic leaders construct reality by negotiating with the mere meta-social structure and by redefining the basic social assumptions. Such reality construction is qualitatively different because it relies on the acknowledgment of the "man-made" origins of the underlying structure (that governs and generates structural patterns and typificatory schemes); it perceives the meta-social structure as mutable, contestable, debatable, negotiable, and workable; and thus, it reconstructs the very roots, origins and foundations of social reality.

Therefore, an interesting feature of the charismatic agency is that the articulation of an alternative social reality and meaning is always simultaneously intertwined with a juxtaposition and deconstruction of given basic social assumptions. It is hence essentially a constant, ongoing, simultaneous, dialectical process, both disrupting basic social assumptions and reconstructing alternative social meaning. In that sense, Tay's modern tropical architecture deconstructed professional Western architectural paradigms and, simultaneously, promoted an architecture that was coherent with the Southeast Asian context and meaningful to the young generation of architects. Similarly, Kuo juxtaposed his quest for the inclusion of the intangible dimensions onto social life with the dominant socio-political assumptions that tend to emphasize the pragmatic and economic dimensions to social collective identity. At the same time, he attempted a creative redefinition of social identity that would be meaningful to a young generation of theater practitioners and audiences alike. In like fashion, Prema deconstructed the paradigm of "untouchability" with regard to religious corpuses, and simultaneously synthesized various religious ideas into one spiritual/social belief system, thus promoting a philosophy and a way of life that was more meaningful for her volunteers.

We have also seen that the charismatic leadership agency constructs social reality by engaging people in a meta-thematic, philosophical discourse. As the three case studies suggest, in spite of the distinctness of the content of each leader's reality construction, there is a "meta-existential-content" that underlies all three cases. While all three cases are similar in that they encompass notions about the self, society and the world (as well as the links between these dimensions and social meaning and identity), each case represents a different reality contestation by focusing on a

particular spectrum from the wide range of existential dilemmas. Therefore, though they all contain meta-existential dimensions, their different contentions produce alternative versions of what social reality is, or should be. This meta-thematic emphasis relies on reflection, exploration, intention and choice. The deliberate, conscious, perceptual, and philosophical aspects emphasize the cognitive and reflective nature of the way that charismatic agency contests, negotiates, redefines and shapes its own social reality, and accords meaning to the term “homo-sapiens.” In keeping with Shmuel Eisenstadt’s theoretical postulations, we saw that the charismatic leadership agency indeed relied on institutionalized dimensions such as organizations, texts, designs and plays. However, these institutionalized dimensions promoted the charismatic leadership’s agency by enabling social platforms that particularly facilitated collective reflection, exploration and redefinition of human dilemmas, of basic social assumptions, and of social identity.

Following Shils’s symbolic conceptualization of charisma, as well as with recent arguments of scholars in organizational behavior studies, who emphasize the link between charismatic leadership and self-concept,¹ our three cases also suggest that charismatic leadership is linked to the formation of identity and self-concept. However, other than suggesting the link with identity and self-concept, our cases suggest that the agency of charismatic leadership intrinsically and symbiotically grounds the self-concept within the social arena. That grounding may be a key factor in the understanding of the ability of such agency to mobilize people into social action, and engage people with their own society. In fact, it ties the particular, micro-level self with an entity that is bigger than their own selves: with their own macro society. By grounding the self concept within the social arena, people (leaders as well as followers) develop a sense of identity, of being at the active centers of the social system, and of having a sense of significant social participation in the shaping of their selves and their lives.

Singapore proved a tempting subject for empirical study for a number of reasons. First, research on charismatic leadership in the Southeast Asian context is scant – with the exception of monumental leaders like Mao, Gandhi and Sukarno, most of the studies on charisma rely on Western cases, most notably of business leaders. Second, studies that treat contextual factors relate to leadership in general but not to charisma. Third, research on charismatic leadership (in its pure Weberian sense as opposing and repudiating the power center) is scarce in one-party-dominant political contexts. Indeed, the very particular characteristics of the cases (or in Abbott’s words, the “idiosyncrasies of the cases”) were tremendously valuable to the conceptual generalizations of the relations between macro contextual factors, and charismatic leadership. In fact, they were so salient that they enabled an almost “laboratory”

¹ The most notable examples come from Shamir, House and Arthur (1993). But whereas these scholars also link charisma with self-efficacy and followers’ empowerment, the link to self-concept formation is more general in the sense that it enables the analysis of charismatic leaders who promote followers’ identity formation, though they may not contribute to their self-efficacy like Jim Jones who, for instance, created a deepening sense of dependency (Lindholm, 1990: 152) and Hitler who undermined the power of subordinates by promoting factionalism in the Nazi Party (Nyomarkay 1967; Lindholm 1990: 110–112).

type of inquiry, and facilitated the analytical clarity of the generalizable relations between context and charismatic leadership.

To start with, the unique socio-political context compelled us, in a way, to further clarify charisma's revolutionary aspect to suit cases with no obvious mass revolutionary movements or macro large-scale changes. In doing so, our research contributed a possible interpretation of the revolutionary aspect of charisma, as situated in the realm of ideas. Indeed, the emphasis in our research on ideas being a core aspect of the charismatic phenomenon is in accord with Weber's initial formulation of ideas as a core historical force, and with the recent emphasis on vision in the current leadership theories. However, the case studies show that the content of the charismatic ideas relates to underlying paradigms, basic social assumptions and the meta-structure of the particular social reality. It is in this respect that whereas various recent scholars have referred to the charismatic ideas as "uplifting," "raising" and pointing to "higher ideals," our research emphasizes the way in which charismatic ideas "go down," "go deeper," and "dive," so to speak, into the depths of human existence and to the underpinnings of social reality. In constraining contexts (but not only here in Singapore), it is in this nature of ideas as "cutting through the nub" of the meta-social reality, that the charismatic revolutionary aspect may be situated.

This also means that, ultimately, the revolutionary aspect is by definition relative and contextual because it can only be grasped vis-à-vis the underlying assumptions that it juxtaposes and deconstructs, and with the particular content of the discourse that is generated. As we suggested in Chap. 7, it is in this respect that charismatic leaders are "products" of the situation – not in the sense of being "created" by the situation, but in the sense of being assessed, and being perceived relevant, meaningful and revolutionary in line with the specific social system that they are contrasted to, and which they wish and attempt to transform.

The charismatic leaders not only confronted their particular power center and its assumptions, but also the basic social assumptions of the members of their own society and, therefore, their agency corresponded to the particular nature of the power center, and the nature of the society of which the leaders are a part. Tay Kheng Soon, for example, was perceived as "radical" not only because his ideas were articulated in a tightly-controlled political field, but also because he juxtaposed those ideas against the solid social and cultural inclinations towards Western paradigms. Kuo was perceived as "pushing the boundaries" not only because his quest to include intangible dimensions in the social identity question the power center's definition as to who is eligible to participate in the redefinition of collective identity, but also because this quest confronts the dominant orientation of the society towards economics and pragmatism as the most valid components of social identity. Similarly, Prema's mixture of religious themes into a synthetic philosophy was seen as one of "rebelliousness,"² not only because this eclectic philosophy is

² Prema says that with regard to her "stubbornness" in questioning the teachings of the Christian teachers in Sunday school: "Other children asked: 'Everybody accepts it, why can't you accept? Why is it so difficult? Why do you get yourself into trouble? (...)' So I was always a rebellious child. A difficult child. They called me: 'asking questions'" (1995: 2/240, 7/93).

critical about the dogmatic, exclusive nature of religious corpuses, but also because this mixture confronts people's perceptions about mundane life and spiritualism as unbridgeable.

There are also indications with regard to the ways that the context shapes the latitude, scope and nature of charisma: for example, its interactions, behavioral manifestations, social transformations and the articulation of views. We saw that social action seemed to enjoy greater latitude at the micro and meso levels of society, and we also saw a clearer social influence in these two levels of analysis. However, the latitude for social action at the macro level of society is much more confined, and therefore the leaders' social influence at that level was harder to be identified.

There are also indications to suggest that contextual factors effect the frequency of idiosyncratic charisma. The impediments placed on alternative authority in general, including charismatic leadership, result in there being a smaller number of idiosyncratic charismatic leaders. At the same time, some contextual factors reinforce charisma attributions towards outstanding people, precisely because of their scarcity. This means that the reinforced attributions are a corollary of the constraining context and can only occur in constellations where only few people stand out. Therefore though contrast-effect processes of impression formation may reinforce charismatic attributions, they cannot generate charisma (once again, the context therefore cannot "make" leaders, but to a large extent can shape the particular intensity of the social attributions towards the leaders).

It is also the case that the intensity of idiosyncratic charisma seems to be effected, for example, in the smaller number of followers (due to contextual restrictions on collective organized action); in less overt manifestations of followership (because of both socio-cultural and political factors); in the inclusion of negative attributions towards the leaders (because of collective, compliant tendencies to brand extraordinary, revolutionary people as "controversial" or as "trouble makers"); and in the loss of personal charisma (because, in an efficient and successful system of co-optation, idiosyncratic charisma may automatically transform into "office charisma").

Also the scope, degree and nature of the processes of social transformations seem different from what the current literature on leadership suggests. Rather than abrupt, total, dramatic processes of large-scale structural reformation, the social transformations are confined more to a type of action that relies on a constant, ongoing "exploitation," "manipulation" and the "taking advantage" of tiny structural gaps, cracks or niches within the tight structure. These charismatic leaders must make painstaking efforts to work out delicate, feasible measures to cope with system-conservative political pressure while conducting their activities in the negotiation or breaking of system boundaries. The more they intend to deviate from existing boundaries, the more risky their business becomes, and the more delicate they have to be in their social action.

This type of social action requires absolute mastery and knowledge of "the rules of the game," of "knowing thy enemy," and of acting as "smooth and shrewd operators." The usage of terms such as "exploitation," "taking advantage," "opportunism," and "manipulation," may sound "negative." Indeed, such a "Machiavelistic" conceptualization of charismatic leadership does not agree with the "idealistic" treatment of

extraordinary leaders in the current organizational behavior literature. A more “value-free” interpretation of this type of action would therefore refer to the leaders’ ability to work within utmost constraining contexts, and it would thus be more accurate to see their agency in terms of an ongoing “negotiation” with the underlying social structure a negotiation where the power center itself participates, even if not willingly so. In other words, these leaders exploit little cracks; expanding, amplifying, and broadening them into social spaces that offer the participants a meaningful way to engage with their own structure, and with their own social reality.

Contrary to the “universal” assumptions with regard to extraordinary leadership in the recent leadership theories (see Brynman, Stephens, & Campo, 1996.) it seems that specific contextual factors may result in unique patterns of charismatic interaction, social action and transformation. These contextual propositions are not in agreement with the current “universal” leadership paradigm, and suggest that a reflective perspective is first and foremost required to be willing to resurrect our conventional convictions³ on charismatic social action. In this study charisma did not result in clearly defined and obvious manifested ways, but rather unique patterns of indirect and ambiguous interaction, ambivalent and passive-aggressive modes of discourse, and restricted social action and change.

Our research observations in this field suggest that the study of charismatic leadership in centralized, constraining contexts, requires an approach that takes antinomies, paradoxes, latency, liminality and ambivalence, as part and parcel of such social action,⁴ and can locate, identify, diagnose, interpret and account for such patterns. Such an understanding of social action and change posits a real challenge for positivistic and quantitative research because it differs from the “tendency in behavioral science to read mass behavior directly from statistical abstracts on income, caloric intake, newspaper circulation, or radio ownership” (Scott, 1985: 38). Even within qualitative approaches there is still a need to further conceptualize, operationalize and methodologically clarify ways of analyzing such patterns, and in fact, our research points at the need to further develop such language and tools.

³ In particular relation to cultural variances, Bond (1991: 1–2) says that whenever empirical findings stem from the given paradigms, people may “claim that the investigator did not adequately understand the culture examined, that the measures distorted the real cultural phenomena, or that the interpretations of the results are biased. The typical response is thus to dismiss the researcher’s findings.”

⁴ Moscovici says, for example, that “one can visualize a purely public compliance without any private acceptance, as illustrated, tragically, by concentration camps, and a private acceptance without public manifestation as witnessed by secret societies and, during certain epochs, Christian heresies” (Moscovici 1980: 211).

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