

Chapter 2

Explaining Charisma: A Macro View

Weber on Charisma: The Introduction of the Concept to the Field of Social Power

It is through Weber's exposition of charisma in the sociology of religion and his historically based account of the nature of modernity that he forges what is for many writers the starting point for an appreciation of the concept.¹

The term charisma is derived initially from the New Testament where it was used to refer to the "gift of grace." It is the evidence of having received the Holy Spirit, as manifested in the capacity to prophesy, to heal or to speak in tongues. However, Weber's use of the term moves it well beyond this somewhat specific range of religious phenomena. With charisma, according to Weber, allegiance is owed to persons who possess charisma by virtue of their unique attributes and abilities. And it is these individual and specific features that result in the special allegiance shown by the followers of charismatic leaders.

The initial stimulus for his exposition of charisma was Weber's interest in the mechanisms by which power comes to be seen as legitimate by those to whom it is applied. When power is viewed as legitimate (a situation which can be contrasted with power that has to be enforced), those who possess power can be said to have authority. Weber recognized three types of authority: rational, traditional, and charismatic, each type representing a different claim to the legitimate exercise of power.² Unlike traditional, rational, or legal leaders who are appointed or elected under existing traditions and rules, a charismatic leader is chosen by the followers out of the

¹ Although it has been stretched far beyond its original meaning and context in many later treatments for example Shils's demystification of charisma (1965).

² Each of these types should be viewed as a "pure" or "ideal" type, that is, an extreme delineation of the chief characteristics of the phenomena it stands for and which may never be found in such a form in reality.

belief that he is extraordinarily gifted, and authority, based on charismatic grounds, rests on devotion to the exceptional sanctity, heroism, or exemplary character of the individual. It also rests on the normative patterns or order that are revealed or ordained by him. The charismatic bases of power are therefore personal:

The term 'charisma' will be applied to a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as not to be accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a 'leader.'³

In contrast to the tendency nowadays to treat charisma as a sole characteristic of the charismatic individual, Weber did in fact recognize the importance of the leader's validation by his followers. In this way, in order for a charismatic relationship to exist, the charismatic person must establish a relationship in which the governed submit because of their belief in his extraordinary qualities. But an important corollary of the charismatic leader's need for his claims to be validated is that, should his powers or abilities desert him, his followers will likewise abandon him and this implies that the relationships between the followers and their leader are not simple; they are complex, ambivalent,⁴ and can be volatile.

Since the leader has to be constantly re-approved, he needs his followers, and this dependency is tricky, since he does not wait for them to recognize him but sees it as their duty to make this recognition. Since the leader is capable of evoking a sense of belief, he can thereby demand obedience. According to Weber, this acknowledgment is, in a way, an "imposed expectation" of the leader since he believes it is their duty to obey him: "However, he does not derive his claims from the will of his followers, in the manner of an election; rather, it is their duty to recognize his charisma."⁵ In other words, potential charismatic leaders do not passively await recognition by their followers, but demand it. Weber says:

Every true leader in this sense, preaches, creates, or demands new obligations (...) recognition is a duty (...) but where charisma is genuine, it is not this which is the basis of legitimacy. This basis lies rather in the conception that it is the duty of those who have been called to a charismatic mission to recognize its quality and to act accordingly (...) No prophet has ever regarded his quality as dependent on the attitudes of the masses toward him. No elective king or military leader has ever treated those who have resisted him or tried to ignore him otherwise than as delinquent in duty.⁶

Reinhard Bendix has argued⁷ that the above passage suggests that both the recognition by followers and the leader's own claims and actions are fundamentally ambivalent because for the charisma of a leader to be present, it must be recognized

³ Weber *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* ([1924] 1947) p. 241.

⁴ They are not of a total mastery by the leader (since he needs his followers' constant recognition) yet once accepted as such, he gains mastery over the followers' beliefs, emotions, and actions.

⁵ Quoted in Runciman and Matthews (1978: 113).

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 242, 244.

⁷ In his 1968 essay, "Reflections on Charismatic Leadership."

by his followers.⁸ But even a personal devotion of followers is easily “contaminated” by the desire for a “sign” that will confirm the existence of charisma. In turn, the leader demands unconditional devotion from his followers, and he will construe any demand for a sign or proof of his gift of grace as a lack of faith on their part and a dereliction of duty.

In Weber’s writings, the charismatic leader has a mission or a task which “inverts all value hierarchies and overthrown custom, law and tradition.”⁹ Weber argues that success and failure contribute to this transitory nature of charismatic authority. Failure is a serious challenge to the charismatic’s authority since it reveals a less than superhuman character on the leader’s part: “Above all (...) his divine mission must ‘prove’ itself in that those who surrender to him must fare well. If they do not fare well, he is obviously not the master sent by gods.”¹⁰ Conversely, success confirms the powers of the leader and is therefore critical to sustaining charismatic authority.

In Weber’s eyes, charisma is usually a revolutionary force that involves a radical break with the preexisting order, regardless of whether that order is based on traditional or legal authority. While legal and traditional authorities are capable of a considerable degree of continuity (because of its institutionalization and its detachment from specific individuals), charisma can easily burn itself out. This is related to Weber’s view of charisma as contrary to bureaucracy. To him, they represent divergent positions in relation to rules, saying: “Bureaucratic authority is specifically rational in the sense of being bound to intellectually analyzable rules, while charismatic authority is specifically irrational in the sense of being foreign to all rules.”¹¹ Also, the absence of an administrative staff of technically trained officials (who could have helped to routinize the charismatic authority), contributes to its temporary and transitory notion.

Weber does argue that charisma can be routinized (e.g., in the preselection criteria for the successor, a choice of successor through revelation, designation, and so forth) but only at the cost of its depersonalization. No longer is it a characteristic that applies to a special individual but instead it becomes a quality that can be transferred or acquired, or is attached to a position in an organizational setting, adding to its bureaucratic attributes.

The question that arises here is whether Weber’s notion of charisma is relevant to an understanding of leadership in the modern world. Many scholars argue that the type of charisma he describes is not viable in modern societies. They rely for this argument on the fact that the examples Weber used were mainly from ancient societies and on Weber’s own predictions that charisma as a social historical force will wane with the onrush of modernity (and its omnipotent bureaucracy). However, Weber did not perceive charisma to be in the exclusive province of the past because,

⁸ Again, it is intrinsically ambivalent because the recognition of the leader in the ideal typical case is a matter of duty.

⁹ Weber ([1924] 1947), op. cit., p. 117.

¹⁰ Quoted in (in Runciman & Matthews, 1978: 243).

¹¹ Op. cit., ([1924] 1947), op. cit., p. 244.

along with many premodern illustrations (such as the prophets in ancient Judaism), Weber used other modern cases of charisma, one example being that of President F.D.R. Roosevelt.

Shils on Charisma: Introducing a Macro Symbolic Notion

Weber's elaboration of charisma was developed by Edward Shils by proposing a "sociological symbolic approach" that connects charismatic leadership to the question of social meaning, social structure, and power,¹² and the latter's view of charisma is more dispersed and less intense than Weber's theory. While Weber's writings imply that charisma as an attribution toward a certain individual has a temporary or transitory notion, Shils makes a systematic attempt to stretch the concept of charisma beyond the very specific meanings and concepts upon which Weber had concentrated.

Compared to Weber, who emphasized charisma as a temporary and individualistic phenomenon, Shils enlarges the scope by arguing that charisma can also be found in modern societies and in nonpersonal social entities such as permanent social structures like positions, organizations, and institutions. He treats charisma as a metaphysical quality attached to what is regarded as the center of society, and as a universalistic, common social characteristic of every society, in its everyday life.

This enlargement resulted in the reduction of both the intensity and extreme rareness of charisma, as they had been emphasized by Weber. Whereas Weber tended to view charisma more as an essentially revolutionary force, Shils proposed that it is present in the ordinary, everyday operation of the society, and as such, it does not necessarily imply a tendency to disrupt the status quo.

With this approach, the concept of charisma was demystified into a more mundane and common phenomenon, spread throughout various spheres of social life. But this treatment of charisma did not ruin its mystic notion altogether because in this treatment charisma is intrinsically connected to a symbolic realm of meaning. According to Shils, within the whole notion of charismatic attribution is a component of evoking awe and reverence. These two elements—awe and reverence—are invoked by "social objects" (institutions, symbols, or people) that help us understand the condition of man in the universe and the exigencies of social life and, as such, strike at the very heart of the need for symbolic social order. In other words, those persons, roles, and institutions possessing charismatic attributes embody the core or central values of the societies to which they are attached. They are therefore instrumental in helping people understand the nature of their social condition.

Shils's approach to charisma is very much related to the human need for meaning and order, which forms a human predisposition to accept and legitimize charismatic leadership. And this conceptualization partially bridges the gap between charisma

¹² See his 1965 essay, "Charisma, Order and Status" and his 1968 essay, "Charisma."

as an extraordinary event or quality and as a constituent element of any orderly social life. The search for meaning, consistency, and order is not something extraordinary, like something that exists only in extreme disruptive situations or among pathological or rare personalities. The search exists in all stable social situations even if it is focused within some specific parts of the social structure (like in the hands of a few in power) and not only in times of crises. In other words, this approach addresses charisma as a fundamental part of every “normal” society and not as a phenomenon related to disturbed phases of crisis or revolution. In Shils’s words:

A great fundamental identity exists in all societies and one of the elements of this identity is the presence of the charismatic element. Even if religious belief had died, which it has not, the condition of man in the universe and the exigencies of social life still remain, and the problems to which religious belief has been the solution in most cultures still remain, demanding solution by those who confront them. The solution lies in the construction or discovery of order (...) the need for order and the fascination of disorder persist, and the charismatic propensity is a function of the need for order.

Whether it be God’s law or the society as a whole or even a particular corporate body or institution like an army, whatever embodies, expresses or symbolizes the essence of an ordered cosmos or any other significant sector thereof awakens the disposition of awe and reverence, the charismatic disposition.¹³

This idea has been explored by Smuel Eisenstadt, who seems to agree with Shils’s underlying assumptions on the symbolic nature of charisma. He argues that the human need for meaning is linked to the egoistic wishes of human beings¹⁴ and that a very important part of human needs seems to consist of their quest for and conception of the symbolic order, of the “good society,” and of the quest for participation in such an order. This calls for a rather special response from those who are able to respond to this quest. Therefore, the charismatic quality of an individual, as perceived by others or by himself, lies in what is thought to be his connection with some very central feature of man’s existence and the cosmos in which he lives. The centrality coupled with intensity makes it extraordinary, and thus charismatic.

Charisma’s centrality is constituted in its formative power in initiating, creating, governing, transforming, maintaining, or destroying what is vital in man’s life. Shils argues, “That central power has often, in the course of man’s existence, been conceived of as God, the ruling power or creator of the universe, or some divine or other transcendent power controlling or markedly influencing human life and the cosmos within it exists.”¹⁵ In other words, the “center” is represented as a distinct aspect of any institutional framework and as the structural locus of the macro societal institutionalization of charisma.

According to Shils, the close relation between charisma and the power center is rooted in the fact that both are concerned with the maintenance of order and with a

¹³ In Shils’s (1965) essay, “Charisma, Order and Status,” p. 203.

¹⁴ See his 1968 work, *Max Weber: On Charisma and Institution Building*, and his 1995 book, *Power, Trust and Meaning*.

¹⁵ Shils, op. cit. (1965: p. 201).

provision of some meaningful symbolic and institutional order. The contact with the center can be attained through various ways and not only through the incumbent of positions in the power center. The symbolic center of the society can be touched also through reflective wisdom, through disciplined scientific penetration, artistic expression, forceful and confident reality-transforming action, and other possible forms. Shils says:

This contact through inspiration, embodiment or perception, with the vital force which underlies man's existence, his coming to be and passing away, is manifested in demeanor, words and actions. (...) The person who through sensitivity, cultivated or disciplined by practice and experience, by rationally controlled observation and analysis, by intuitive penetration, or by artistic disclosure, reaches or is believed to have attained contact with that "vital layer" of reality is, by virtue of that contact, a charismatic person.

The attributional aspect and the divine nature of the charismatic attribution are emphasized by both Shils and Weber. But Shils suggests that the roots of divinity are related to the symbolic and power center of society, and he argues that Weber was referring to a very special form of charisma that occurs relatively infrequently, while normal charisma is an active and effective phenomenon, essential to the maintenance of the routine order of the society.

Seeing the demise of pure personalized charisma in advanced societies, Shils suggests that the sheer size, complexity, and power of modern bureaucratic organizations engender, in the individual, a sense of mystical wonder and "awe" toward those who hold positions of power and responsibility in these omnipotent systems. According to Shils, then, charisma has not died out in modern societies but rather has adapted itself to the predominant social form of bureaucratic organization (as in charisma of the office).

This symbolic approach to charisma established a new framework for its analysis and consequently influenced a whole generation of sociologists. Clifford Geertz, for example, showed how kings used rituals and symbols of power to evoke a connection with the social center,¹⁶ and in *The Spellbinders: Charismatic Political Leadership*, A.R. Willner used a symbolic approach to study charismatic leaders at the macro level of society and showed how the leaders' charisma is correlated to their ability to symbolically evoke and invoke core social values and myths.

But not everyone accepted Shils's approach, and it was subjected to a detailed critique by Joseph Bensman and Michael Givant who argued that he "stretches the idea of charisma to such a degree, and in such a way, that it encompasses a host of different manifestations and becomes almost indistinguishable from the notion of legitimacy, of which charisma was only one expression according to Weber."¹⁷ They also argued that such a conceptualization loses its personalized dimension, which is one of the core arguments in Weber's treatment of charisma.

¹⁶ See his *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973).

¹⁷ See their 1975 essay, "Charisma and Modernity: The Use and Abuse of a Concept."

Eisenstadt on Charisma: Introducing the Institutional Dimension

In most of the literature on charisma,¹⁸ the stages of social changes and institutionalization are separated, referring to institutionalization as the aftermath of change or the succession of charisma. In fact, Weber argues that charisma's essence is its opposition to institutions and rules. He also refers to the problem of a routinization of charisma as the stage where charisma cannot operate any longer through the personification of the leader and must undergo transformation to develop into a different type of authority (such as traditional or legal), for it to continue to exist.¹⁹

Against this tendency to separate charisma and institutionalization and to see the latter as a successor to the former, Eisenstadt has argued that charismatic leadership is in fact impossible without the application of different modes of institutionalization and that although order and change may be analytically distinct, in reality, they interact closely.²⁰ His treatment introduces the relation of charisma to order and institutions and not only to change or to unstable forces, and he argues that creativity and freedom (of which charismatic leadership is one example) do not exist outside the institutional framework, saying:

The antithesis between the regular flow of organized social relations and of institutional frameworks on the one hand, and of charismatic qualities and activities on the other, is not extreme or total (...) While analytically this distinction between 'organized' routine and charisma is sharp, this certainly does not imply total dichotomy between concrete situations.²¹

While it is common to find the terms "routinization" and "institutionalization" being employed interchangeably in the literature on charisma, Eisenstadt argues that institutionalization is not a "post-mortem" phenomenon, but a process through which charismatic leaders (or their successors) try to retain the original vitality of charisma. Thus, institutionalization does not refer to the aftermath of charisma but to its operating social mechanisms while emerging and "in vivo." Although charisma is regarded as juxtaposed to stability and institutions, charisma is treated as a phenomenon which actually acts and maintains itself via institutionalization. By institutionalization mechanisms, he refers not only to concrete formal institutions but also to different forms of formalization, including initial social patterns or what Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman have called "typificatory schemes."²²

¹⁸ With very few exceptions – see for example Bradley's (1987) research on the organization of communities with or without charismatic leaders.

¹⁹ See Weber ([1924] 1947) op. cit.

²⁰ A point implied also by Kanter's (1984) analysis of leaders as "Change masters," and the techniques that they use to implement change. It is also implied by Schein in his treatment of leadership's construction of organizational culture (1985) and by Giddens (1984) in his notion of structuration as an ongoing process of intertwined change and patterning of structure.

²¹ See *Max Weber: On Charisma and Institution Building*, p. xx.

²² In *The Social Construction of Reality* (1969), p. 29.

This is a “revolutionary” treatment of charisma, particularly in the light of Weber’s emphasis on the noninstitutionalized, anti-institution nature of charisma. It treats institutionalization as an essential mechanism for social phenomena to operate at all. The institutionalization of charisma, according to this view, is inherent in its nature, and the organizational and institutional mechanisms are regarded as essential also in the initial stages of the emergence of leadership as well as throughout the ongoing process of social change itself. Eisenstadt, for example, argues that the leader works through a group or a band that institutionalizes itself, as well as through the institutionalization of the charismatic mission and symbols that have to be institutionalized at least partially, in order for the leadership to be effective.²³ Eisenstadt says:

The test of any great charismatic leader lies not only in his ability to create a single event or great movement, but also in his ability to leave a continuous impact on an institutional structure—to transform any given institutional setting by infusing into it some of his charismatic vision, by investing the regular, orderly offices, or aspects of social organization, with some of his charismatic qualities and aura. Thus here the dichotomy between the charismatic and the orderly regular routine of social organization seems to be obliterated.²⁴

Hence, according to Eisenstadt, institutionalization is also inherently embedded in the need for the reconstruction of the new transformation because a crucial aspect of the charismatic personality or group is not only the possession of some extraordinary, exhilarating qualities but also the ability to reorder and reorganize both the symbolic and the institutional order. In other words, he refers to the leader’s engagement with the construction of reality, not only with its deconstruction but also with the institutionalization of a new order. In his view, this engagement is a crucial aspect of charisma.²⁵

Reflecting on the Major Sociological Explanations of Charisma

Indeed Weber’s introduction of the concept to the social analysis of influence triggered a whole new appreciation of the leadership studies, and it forged what is for many writers the starting point for an appreciation of the concept. However, as William Friedland and Serge Moscovici both argue,²⁶ Weber’s concept of charisma

²³ Bass mentions Chang’s paper (1982) where Mao Tse-Tung is mentioned as an illustration to the argument that institutionalization does not bring routinization as Weber maintains. Rather, in fact, charismatic leadership such as Mao’s was legitimized, reinforced, and maintained through institutional efforts.

²⁴ See *Max Weber: On Charisma and Institution Building* (1968), p. xxi.

²⁵ Also, Burns (1978) argues that true leadership is not merely symbolic or ceremonial: “The most lasting tangible act of leadership is the creation of an institution – that continues to exert moral leadership and foster needed social change long after the creative leaders are gone” (1978: 454).

²⁶ See Friedland’s (1964) essay, “For a Sociological Concept of Charisma,” p. 18 and Moscovici’s *The Invention of Society* (1993) pp. 125, 221–222.

has not been very useful to sociology because Weber dealt with charisma more as a psychological than a social phenomenon. (According to Weber, allegiance is owed to persons who possess charisma by virtue of their unique attributes and abilities as perceived by their followers.) On the other hand, with the exception of Shils, Eisenstadt, and Geertz, who separately employed charisma as a concept to analyze power in terms of the symbolic social order,²⁷ sociological studies have been neglecting the concept of charisma, and it was never incorporated into other major theoretical sociological discussions.

Weber's emphasis on the subjective element in the attribution of charisma forged a "mythological" aspect in charisma whereby the ontological condition of the phenomena is referred to as being more of a social fantasy than of a real objective "social fact" (to use Durkheim's concept). This made it even harder for charisma to be incorporated in sociological analysis. This notion has even been treated by some researchers (e.g., James Meindl)²⁸ as an extreme subjective phenomenon: a mythical fantasy constructed totally in the followers' minds, having nothing to do whatsoever with external and objective reality. In this approach, the charismatic leader himself is not relevant at all: only the follower's attributions creating his image and acting accordingly. This conception of leadership (termed also as the "romance of leadership") is grounded on the human "fundamental attribution error,"²⁹ which results in a biased preference to understand important but ambiguous and causally indeterminate events in terms of salient individual factors which can be plausibly linked to these events. This leadership, according to this explanation, is a convenient explanatory category, and nothing more. In other words, the leader's behavior or personality may have very little to do with the charismatic effect—an effect that derives primarily from its "mythical" aspect.

However, even if charisma is a myth (which it is not), myth itself is not a matter for sociological indifference, least of all because myth and ideas represent social constructions of reality and because they enfold potential transformational social power. In Moscovici's words: "It is a proven truth that an idea, no matter what form it assumes, has the power of making us come together, of making us modify our feelings and modes of behavior and of exercising a constraint over us just as much as any external condition. It matters little if it appears irrational, dissenting, and even having undergone censorship." Thus, the mythical attribution to leadership cannot serve as a serious academic excuse for not including the analysis of the phenomena in social or sociological frameworks of analysis, since as Moscovici argued, "even if charisma is no more than a word, if we accept its existence whilst knowing

²⁷ Shils's essay, "Charisma, Order and Status" (1965), Eisenstadt's *Max Weber: On Charisma and Institution Building* (1968), and Geertz's "Centers, Kings and Charisma: Reflections on the Symbolics of Power" (1977).

²⁸ See his 1990 essay, "On Leadership: An Alternative to Conventional Wisdom" and his earlier 1985 essay, "The Romance of Leadership" coauthored with Ehrlich, S.D. and Dukerich, J.M.

²⁹ A term coined by Leo Ross in "The Intuitive Psychologist and his Shortcomings: Distortions in the Attribution Process" (1977).

little or nothing about its nature, has not the time come to acknowledge that we have been subscribing to a fascinating myth? It certainly contains myth. But myth itself is not a matter for indifference.”³⁰

Shils’s approach was seminal in reframing charisma in a macro perspective.³¹ His macro perspective introduces charisma’s social agency and suggests that even if charisma is undoubtedly a personal relationship (resting upon individual characters), its nature still contains a sociological dimension, which, importantly, represents the central social core values, central principles, and social foundations that order the construction of reality. It places charisma studies in a macro perspective that enables the study of the relations between the leader and the society, as well as the interactions between the leaders and the macro structural context (both influencing and being influenced).

Furthermore, the symbolic dimension that he suggests, between charisma, core social principles, and the human quest for meaning,³² is extremely significant in constructing a meaningful sociological framework for the analysis of charisma. Such a framework enables a study on charisma that can expound from the typical tendency to explain leadership by describing the mere traits and behaviors of the leader and his influence on the followers.

Following one line of argument, Shils’s symbolic conceptualization of charisma would seem to offer a “second-degree” theoretical construct. This view comes from Billy J. Calder who says that all too often social science theory confuses first-degree constructs with those of the second degree.³³ The scientific confusion stems from the simplistic elevation of the explanations of everyday life (which actually represent the people’s nonscientific efforts to understand and give meaning to their world) into a scientific status. According to Calder, the systematic and consistent use of everyday thought (with only minor redefinitions) consequently led to a simplistic analysis of leadership. For example, the study of leadership in terms of defining what the leader’s traits, behavior, style, tasks, and the like are, is a kind of first-degree theoretical construct that does not achieve a real scientific development of the understanding of what leadership is about.

Eisenstadt’s approach is significant to the reconceptualization of charisma as part of ordinary life. It reframes the seeming paradox or dichotomy between charisma and institutionalization so that instead of just being juxtaposed, charisma and institutionalization presuppose and complement each other. This conceptualization may suggest that charismatic leaders do not oppose institutions per se. They perhaps oppose the specific and concrete content and ideas of specific institutions but do not

³⁰ The quotes in this paragraph come from pages 115 and 125 of Moscovici’s *The Invention of Society* (1993).

³¹ As we have said in Chap. 1, this is still severely lacking in the new genre of leadership theories.

³² For example, the suggestion that objects that exhibit charismatic attributes function to help us in understanding the condition of man in the universe and the exigencies of social life (Shils, 1965: 203).

³³ Calder bases his arguments on Cicourel’s (1964) and Schutz’s ([1932] 1967) criticism of social science. See his “An Attribution Theory of Leadership” (1977).

categorically oppose institutions as such. Their agency at least acknowledges the inevitable leaning on institutionalizational mechanisms as such. For one, we would guess that charismatic leaders do not oppose efforts that pattern and objectify their vision. This is a strong suggestion that charismatic leadership, eventually (or even, initially), engages in some kind of organization and institutionalization throughout. It is impossible otherwise to understand charisma without taking these processes into account.

One problem with regard to the approach of both Shils and Eisenstadt is that they seem more suitable for the study of leaders who preserve social order and are less useful for the study of social change, particularly those of a revolutionary type. In this respect, there seems to be a great departure from Weber's original formulation of charisma as revolutionary.³⁴ Although theoretically, both writers suggest that the symbolic framework caters to social transformational cases, even the sociological studies that followed their approach³⁵ place more emphasis on order (by pointing to the interactions between the leaders and the social symbolic center), and less on processes of social transformation. This is more so with regard to social changes of the revolutionary type, which seem to be a distinctive aspect of charisma.

Willner even makes special effort to reinterpret Weber's writings in light of the symbolic approach to show that it is possible that Weber himself was implying that charisma can be linked also to social order and its preservation and not only to revolutionary breaks. In her discussion on the definition of charismatic leadership, she attests that there is a very common error in the understanding of Weber's ideas regarding charisma, where his ideas are treated as a state of definition rather than a theoretical state. And she says that unless proved, Weber's suggested definition is a theoretical proposition that is still subjected to verification, "to lock these propositions immutably into the definition is to deprive us of the chance to test their validity."³⁶

From this point of departure, Willner argues that some of Weber's discussions about the conditions and enactment of charisma were mistakenly regarded as part of the definition. The condition for its emergence, a requirement for its maintenance, a probable consequence, and some of the modes by which a charismatic leader exercises authority were unfortunately, and mistakenly, incorporated by some scholars into the definition of charismatic leadership itself. For example, the assimilation of the mission or the distress situation as part of the definition is a mistake, since they are possible explanations of its origins, and not part of its definition. The same holds for the revolutionary phenomenon: it is a possible consequence of charismatic leadership and not part of its definition.

³⁴ Also, Bensman and Givant (1975) argue that Shils's approach is in total contradiction to Weber's "pure-charisma," since pure charisma, in the Weberian sense, may have order to the extent that it has coherence, but pure charisma inevitably and by definition attacks the "order" of the society. And even Geertz's approach (1977), which is derived directly from Shils, agrees on this matter, suggesting that it is not just involvement with the center that may engender the attribution of charisma – but also oppositional involvement with the center.

³⁵ See for example, Geertz (1977) and Willner (1984).

³⁶ See her *The Spellbinders: Charismatic Political Leadership* (1984) p. 10.

Willner's position is that these aspects of charisma can be regarded as antecedents or contributory factors or consequences of the typical emergence of charismatic phenomenon. In the same line, she argues that social revolutions are a possible consequence and not part of the definition. Her conclusion, therefore, is that there can be atypical cases of charismatic leaders who seek to preserve³⁷ a prevailing social order from falling apart (or who seek to revive one from the past, or in Shils's terms, to symbolize the current order).

In trying to show that Weber viewed charisma as a phenomenon that could engage in the presentation of order, Willner suggests that slight modifications in the translation of Weber's writing contribute to some other errors in the translation. While the translation emphasized more the notion of change,³⁸ she argues that a more accurate translation could have stressed the possibility of the linkage between charisma and order, with charisma as the symbolization, manifestation, or revelation of order.³⁹ Her retranslation (and reinterpretation) of Weber's writings reinforce the notion of charisma as being linked to the symbolic representation and preservation of the social order.⁴⁰

The approaches of both Shils and Eisentadt incorporate the study of charisma in a sociological macro perspective (such as in the power center, existential dilemmas, social structures and organizations, and others) much more than was the case in Weber's approach. But all the three major sociological approaches to charisma still require elaboration, clarification, and validation with regard to the nature of the relations between charisma and the context. As we argued in the introduction, the treatment of such an area is well within the discipline of sociology but has been still substantially neglected.

In the next two chapters, we will conceptualize a framework that would enable a sociological study of charisma that looks at both the macro and symbolic aspects as well as human, individual intervention, and social transformations and change generated by micro-level agency. The framework will rely on Shils's and Eisenstadt's symbolic approaches to charisma and integrate Weber's revolutionary

³⁷ Her argument is in agreement with Oomen's (1968: 86) suggestion that it is possible to see charisma as linked to order and not only to change.

³⁸ According to Willner, the first original German passage, in which Weber defines charisma, was translated somewhat more than literally, using the word "normative", which has no equivalent in German. But this does stress more the connotation of "created" or "shaped" which, while not incorrect, does not clearly suggest an already created or established order. Willner argues that if the German text had been translated somewhat more literally, it would have been very clear that Weber specified two specific possibilities: the "revealed order" (that which the charismatic projects) and the "created order" (that which the charismatic has established).

³⁹ She relates to the passages in Weber ([1924] 1947), pp. 202–208.

⁴⁰ Burns would have probably agreed with such an interpretation but for other reasons, to him, charisma as the "revealed" order does not mean, by definition, stability because order can be very dynamic in preserving or expressing the governing rules of structure (Burns, 1978: 415–416), a view similar to that of Giddens (1984).

aspect. This emphasis is in line with current treatment of exceptional leadership by scholars of organizational behavior (whether that leadership is termed as “visionary,” “transformational,” or “charismatic”) as consistently correlated with values, ideals, meaning, and organizational change.⁴¹ In doing so, it will also incorporate the conceptualizations of Peter Berger and Anthony Giddens with regard to the nature of social reality as being intrinsically dual and dialectical.⁴²

⁴¹ See Sashkin (1988); Burns (1978); Bass (1985); Avolio Bruce (1995); Bruce and Gibbons (1988) Avolio Bruce and Bass Bernard (1988); Conger (1988, 1989); House (1977); Shamir, House, and Arthur (1993).

⁴² See Berger’s (1967) *Invitation to Sociology: A Humanistic Perspective* and his 1981 title *Sociology Reinterpreted* and Giddens’ *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (1984).



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