



<http://www.diva-portal.org>

Postprint

This is the accepted version of a chapter published in *FINYARs årsskrift 2005*.

Citation for the original published chapter:

Frisk, L. (2005)

Charisma and Institutionalization in the Osho Movement

In: *FINYARs årsskrift 2005* (pp. 18-47). Umeå: FINYAR

N.B. When citing this work, cite the original published chapter.

Permanent link to this version:

<http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:du-1656>

Charisma and institutionalization in the Osho¹ movement²

Introduction

This article will focus on “charisma” and “institutionalization” in the Osho movement. I will discuss one article by the Canadian sociologist of religion Susan Palmer, where she presents the development of the Osho movement up to 1985. In doing this, she attempts to apply a model of four possible ways a living charismatic leader could respond to the process of institutionalization to different stages of the movement. Based on the development of the Osho movement, Palmer criticizes and refines this model, which was originally presented by the British sociologist of religion Roy Wallis in 1982.

Based mainly on an interview made with Sheela Birnstiel³, a key person in the Osho movement 1980-1985, a book written by her in 1996, and other sources like Lewis Carter’s sociological account of the movement written in 1990, I will question Palmer’s understanding of the developments of the Osho movement concerning charisma and institutionalization. I also aim at presenting and discussing the developments of the movement after 1985, based mainly on interviews with a number of Swedish people long engaged in the movement.

Charisma and institutionalization: the understanding of Max Weber

According to Max Weber, charisma means the recognition in someone of supernatural, superhuman, or other exceptional powers or qualities. In the field of religion, charisma is often legitimated by an alleged divine mission. The followers of a charismatic leader show him a complete personal devotion and obedience, and the leader, in his turn, is required to offer miraculous signs or proofs of his powers (Weber 1968).

In contrast to organizations and institutions, pure charisma, according to Weber, rejects all rational economic conduct and all formal appointments. There are no salaries, and the charismatic leader receives voluntary contributions from the followers. Also the followers share in use of material goods which the leader received as donation. There could, however, also in the charismatic structure exist a social structure with staff and material means adapted to the mission of the leader. The “purer” the charismatic authority is, however, the less could it be understood as an organization in the usual sense (an order of persons and things that functions according to a means-ends scheme) (Weber 1968).

But charismatic authority is naturally unstable, and can only be maintained in its pure form for a relatively brief period. The holder may lose his charisma: it may appear to followers that his powers have left him. He gains and retains authority only by proving his powers in practice, by bringing well-being to his followers (Weber 1968).

¹ I will refer to the movement as “The Osho Movement” throughout this article, as it is known today under this name. The charismatic leader, who died in 1990 and changed his name several times, I will call Osho as this was the last name he used. He will, however, sometimes be called Bhagwan in the interviews, as this was the name he was known by during the first half of the 1980’s. To be strict, both Bhagwan and Osho are rather titles than names (for a discussion on the origin of “Osho”, see Fox 2000: 34-35). The name Osho had from childhood was Mohan Chandra Rajneesh, and he was also widely known as “Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh” (Carter 1990: 40).

² Thankyou to The Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation for financing the project “New Religious Movements’ development over time”, a project of which this article is a part.

³ Interview made the 30th of November 2003.

A critical problem after the charismatic leader's death is to solve the succession problem. This problem channels charisma into the direction of legal regulation and tradition. Whatever the solution – i.e. appointment of a successor by the charismatic leader himself; hereditary charisma, or designation of a successor by the charismatically qualified administrative staff – pure charisma degenerates, and the solution chosen serves the needs of the privileged strata of the group to legitimize their social and economic conditions, and sanctify their rights (Weber 1968).

Genuine charisma comes eventually to an end because of the desire to transform it from a unique transitory gift to a permanent possession of everyday life, which brings in organizational features (Weber 1968). Weber calls this process, when charisma is transformed into a permanent routine structure, “the routinization of charisma” (Weber 1964: 363-373). The charismatic message will, inevitably, become a dogma, a doctrine, a law or a tradition. According to Weber, this comes to pass when interests in social and economic security become predominant among the followers (Weber 1968).

Roy Wallis: Responses to institutionalization by the charismatic leader

In the 1960's and 70's several new religious movements appeared in the Western culture. Researching one of them, The Children of God, Roy Wallis agrees with Max Weber that charisma is inherently unstable and tends to become institutionalized. The effort to spread the movement's mission beyond the first disciples introduces the need for mechanisms of coordination, supervision and delegation. The followers wish to ensure the maintenance of the collectivity, and this demand encourages the growth of an institutionalized structure. The followers will, as they grow older and rear families, begin to expect some predictability and stability in life, and will want structures supporting them holding positions to which they have been appointed (Wallis 1982).

But the emergence of a stable institutional structure will constrain both the followers and the leader. Roy Wallis argues that the process of institutionalization starts already when the charismatic leader is alive, and presents a model with four possibilities for the leader to respond to institutionalization:

1. **Acquiescence:** Institutionalization proceeds, and the charismatic leader, finding himself constrained, acquiesces to the situation.
2. **Encouragement:** The charismatic leader embraces the possibilities involved in institutionalization, and actively directs the process in such a way as to control it and utilize institutionalized structures to reinforce his authority.
3. **Displacement:** The institutionalization proceeds without clear recognition by the charismatic leader of what is occurring, until it is too late for him to reverse the situation, despite a strong antipathy toward it. The charismatic leader's absolute authority is gradually undermined as the day-to-day control falls increasingly into the hands of the administrative staff.
4. **Resistance:** The charismatic leader foresees the threat of institutionalization subverting his authority, and takes active steps to stop it. One strategy to do this is, according to Wallis, to continuously change the teaching, practices and also the persons in key positions. This strategy makes sure the followers' devotion is for the charismatic leader, and not for the teaching, and it directs the followers away from

mundane and routine consideration, giving a renewed sense of excitement and commitment (Wallis 1982).

Wallis argues, that it is common for new religious movements to oscillate between charisma and institutionalization. When the charismatic leader encourages liberation and de-institutionalization, new enthusiasm and energy are created among those who are committed, and administrative leaders who are a challenge to the movement are brought down. However, at the same time the continuation of the movement is jeopardized by too much liberty. New constraints and tough administrative leaders are required to channel and control the energies which have been released, to restore some uniformity of practice and belief, and to re-establish mundane procedures like printing and literature distribution, essential to the movement's economy. But as the new or reinstated old administrators begin to create order and stability once again, so, too, they begin to develop commitments to something other than the charismatic leader, to plans and structures of their own, to a particular fixed set of beliefs. They begin to create attachments and loyalties to their own person. They begin to make appointments of subordinate administrative leaders on the basis of their qualifications and experiences, rather than inspirational virtue. As the life of the movement again settles into a routine, much of the sense of adventure and excitement begins to diminish. And so the charismatic leader has to start a new wave of de-institutionalization, of movement and change. For the charismatic leader, says Wallis, it is important that the followers are devoted to himself, regardless of which teaching he gives – which explains the tendency of some charismatic leaders to often change their message. As already observed, to do this could be interpreted as a strategy to resist institutionalization (Wallis 1982).

Susan Palmer: The Development of the Osho movement 1970-1985 in the light of Roy Wallis model

Susan Palmer describes how Acharya Rajneesh – later Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, and still later Osho – begun initiating disciples in 1970, this event marking his transition from an intellectual critic of religion – he had an earlier career as a philosophy professor – to a spiritual master. At that time he lived in a small close community of devoted followers (Palmer 1988).

In 1974 Bhagwan, as he was now called, moved to Poona, where he founded the Shree Rajneesh Ashram. Western therapy groups, daily meditation and lectures were incorporated into the program. Between 1974 and 1978 more than 50.000 people tried the therapies at Poona. The fast-growing membership meant that Osho could no longer be personally available to his disciples, except for a small core group. Palmer argues that Osho at this time encouraged institutionalization. There was a core group of institution builders – among them Ma Anand Sheela⁴, an Indian woman who became his personal secretary in 1980. At the same time, however, Osho also prevented the formation of permanent offices, which (following Palmer) could be seen as a strategy of resistance to institutionalization. Osho became after 1979 more distant to his disciples – at least partly because of declining health (Palmer 1988).

Palmer, when describing the period of the movement between 1981-1985, follows closely the retrospective official version of the Osho movement. Osho was “in silence” (which means he did not speak publicly) between 1981 and 1984, and Palmer claims that the institution

⁴ This is the name given to her by Osho. Today she is known by the name Sheela Birnstiel.

builders were active during this time, and that Osho's response would conform to Wallis' description of Acquiescence. Palmer writes that Osho became increasingly unaware of the administrative decisions, the political struggles with local authorities, and also the innovations in religious life. In 1983 the religion "Rajneeshism" was announced, in a book written by Ma Anand Sheela, describing among other things rituals and different categories of ministers. Head of the religion of Rajneeshism was Ma Anand Sheela, and Palmer writes that she conferred upon herself titles like "Boddhisattva". Another sign of the routinization of charisma was, according to Palmer, the creation of permanent offices (Palmer 1988).

Palmer describes how Osho comes out of his silence in 1984, and how he in different ways, in this stage, resists institutionalization. He announces that there is no God, which elevates his own status to the next best thing, and he denounces all great religious leaders to whom he had referred favorably in the past. He claims to have founded the first and last religion, Rajneeshism, and that it is superior to all previous attempts. He also undermines the claims to charisma among his core group, by first reading out a list of one hundred people in the commune whom he pronounced enlightened – and then saying it was all a joke (Palmer 1988).

On September 13 and 14 1985 Sheela with a group of about 15 people from the core group around Osho left Oregon for Germany (Thompson & Heelas 1986: 29). On September 16 Osho held a press conference, where he accused "Sheela and her fascist gang" of several crimes, including poisoning attempts, salmonella food poisoning, wire tapping and financial abuse of 55 million dollars.⁵ Palmer interprets these crimes as the end result of an unsuccessful Displacement attempt, as Sheela by all means tried to preserve her exclusive access to her guru, and even wanted to replace him as the charismatic leader. Osho disassociated himself from her activities by publicly denouncing her, and disclaimed responsibility for everything Sheela had done. He accused Sheela of being criminal, inhuman and fascist (Palmer 1988).

On September 26, Osho told his sannyasins to stop wearing the colour red and the mala, the symbol of initiation. He announced the end of Rajneeshism, and burned all the copies of the book. He abolished the daily bowing ceremony, which had been part of Rajneeshism, and he attacked the large international communes by declaring being against centralization. He also stated he was not a guru any more, but just a friend to his disciples. He said he didn't want his movement to be institutionalized (Palmer 1988).

On October 27 Osho was arrested, accused of arranging false marriages and breaking immigration laws of USA. He was finally deported from the USA, and after some time returned to India. Rajneeshpuram closed (Palmer 1988).

In seeking to apply Wallis' model to the Osho movement, Susan Palmer comes to the conclusion that a fifth category, **Abdication**, beside Wallis' four, is needed. Palmer argues that Osho vacillated between the extremes of encouragement and resistance of institutionalization, until he, in 1985, as an extreme case of resistance renounced his role of guru and ended the religion of Rajneeshism. Palmer claims that this act delivered the death blow to the institutions of the movement, but that also the leader's authority was weakened. Palmer further wants to make a distinction between two aspects of charisma, the **Performer** and the **Pastor**, and argues that Osho had a desire for one aspect of charismatic authority,

⁵ Sheela was convicted to prison for these crimes, and was imprisoned for 39 months (Sheela 1996: 35). Also two other sannyasins in this group were convicted for similar crimes (Carter 1990: 237-238).

performance, but a dislike for the responsibility that leadership entails. Thus Osho worked against the institutionalization process because he did not want to assume the responsible, authorizing role. By abdicating, Palmer argues, Osho got rid of the responsibility, while retaining his devoted (rotating) audience (Palmer 1988).

The Story of Ma Anand Sheela⁶

Below is related the story of Sheela, based on the interview and also on her book. Initiated sources in the Osho movement have pointed out faults in the story, not only on an interpretational level but also on a factual level. One of the possible explanations may be that there is a time gap of 15-20 years between the events and the story, and that a narrative starts to live a life of its own with time.

That I in the following permit Sheela to present her story does not mean that I support it, nor that I agree with her interpretations. My purpose is not, in this article, to discuss which account is “true” (see the Discussion). My purpose is taking different perspectives into account, and I believe that some parts of Sheela’s story may throw some light on the questions in focus in this article: charisma and institutionalization.

Sheela Birnstiel, in the Osho movement known as Ma Anand Sheela, lived with Osho since 1972,⁷ and was his personal secretary between 1980-1985. Grown up in an agnostic intellectual upper class family, Sheela also had five years of Western university education in the US, was married to an American and had the attractive residential “green card” at the time she engaged in the movement.

Sheela very clearly asserts Osho’s charismatic appeal to her:

I met him first time when I was 16 years old. And from that moment something happened with me [...] I went to America for 5 years for studies. But he always remained in my thoughts all these 5 years. When I returned back, to visit my parents, one of the first questions I asked my father: Where is this man once you have brought me to?

[...]

Only one thing I knew after I saw him second time, that was in Bombay [...] – that if my life ends today I am fulfilled. It was a profound feeling that I did not want to leave this man [...] – and if I must leave, and it will all end, it will be OK. I was completely fulfilled inside myself. I guess his love that I felt was all for me, that had ... I needed no more, there were no more desires within me. I felt complete.

In 1972 Osho still lived in an apartment in Bombay, with just a few people around him – two care-takers, a cook, a body guard and a few relatives. He also had a secretary who lived two blocks away. Sheela describes how gradually more and more people started coming, how Osho’s apartment became too small, and how he finally decided to move to Poona. But after some time even the ashram in Poona became too small:

⁶ As Sheela is not a native English speaker, and today mostly uses German for communication, there are many grammatical mistakes in the quotations. I have neither corrected them nor pointed them out, as they are too numerous.

⁷ As her father had contacts with Osho, who was at the time an intellectual religious critic, much earlier, her first meetings with Osho had, however, taken place several years before.

And then suddenly there was a time when Bhagwan wanted to have a bigger ashram, because this ashram was too small. In Poona the premises were so small that we had [...] People were sleeping in three shifts. When one shift goes to work, the other goes to sleep. [...] It was mad. But these people needed accommodation.

The movement rented and was trying to buy an old palace in India with its surrounding land, to get more space, but at this time (at the end of the 70's), there was an emergency ruling in India, and very difficult to buy land. After several months of negotiating, they failed to buy this place:

And one day Bhagwan was very frustrated, the situation was getting desperate, with the living accommodation for his people, and he said ... One day I must have joked with him, and I said: Bhagwan, we go to America together. I find you a place in America. It was a joke I had made. ... and Bhagwan says to me: ... You start arranging in America.

There were also other problems in Poona, which contributed to the decision to move to the States:

... because of his controversial nature, because he spoke against the established religions, established values. He spoke against [in favour of] ... freedom of sexuality. These are all very sensitive issues for the average man, for the masses. There were a number of attacks on his body. And, he was almost isolated in his room. There was a time we thought in Poona, when he is there, then he can at least sit and walk around in his garden. So he did it first 3 weeks, til people found out how to climb the wall. Because he was not just harrassed by people who were against him, but his own fans. Everyone was not sensitive to his needs [...] There were also sannyasins, who were crazy enough to climb over the wall to go in and disturb him. So he remains isolated in his room: the outer pressures were increasing: there is no space: he has an agenda in his mind what he wants to do for his work. The politics kept changing. But he cannot change what he wants to provoke in the world. And he had started massive asthma. Because of the asthma and the coughing, he started developing back ache. Many hours he kept sitting in his chair because there is no place to move. For a while he did some training on the machines and stuff – but that wasn't the solution for him. And he developed this body [...]. And the back aches became such a massive problem for him. I even remember seeing him, and working with him, when he was lying flat on his bed. Because he was unable to move. And he walked only 2 metres to his toilet and the bed. And when that goes on for years – his diabetes was becoming in this time also a problem. And for diabetes everybody knows that exercises are major things. So [...] he was physically not well. Energies were his massive problem [...] asthma [...] back aches and coughing. [...]

America was the obvious choice, because Sheela knew America since her university studies:

I knew America a little bit, I had a massive faith in American constitution - which was a failure. If I say today it was a big mistake. But I was naive, I was young then [laugh]. All young students thought American constitution is the top of the line.

A major problem was how to get a visa for Osho to the US. It was already planned to build a community there, but the only kind of visa possibly available for Osho was a visa for medical treatment, not a residential one.

- ... you had the idea [at the time] that it will be this commune?
- Yes, then it was ... that we are going to move into ... we are going to create the commune Bhagwan has been talking about. [...] But what the scale the commune will be, I still had no idea. I had still no idea then.
- But this you couldn't tell the immigration authorities, I guess, because as I understood Bhagwan got visa for medical treatment?
- It was, we could only say what was necessary. So ... But it wasn't a lie either.

Osho gave Sheela only very limited time to find a place for the new commune. In retrospect, this might have been a crucial mistake, as another of the movement's legal problems over the years to come, was the land use laws in Oregon, which did not permit building a large

community in this place.⁸ Sheela admits to not knowing anything about land use laws at the time:

We had no idea of the [...] land use laws when we came in. But there were enough legal [...] holes, through which one can walk. And we walked these legal [...] holes. For the size of the land they granted us 50 houses. Once we had the 50 houses on the land, then there is a law that allows you to create your own city. To create a city you need in America minimum 150 voters. 50 houses – that is 5 people in one house. No, 3 people in one house, 3 voters in one house. That is 150 people. [...] We created our city, we created our [...] And we became a self-government.

Sheela remains convinced that, had it not been for the Republican rule, things would have worked out well:

There were a somewhat acceptance, even in the government. When the democrats were the ruling party there was acceptance of the Rajneeshes. The moment Republican agenda came in, they started actively making laws against us.

Osho had a visa for medical treatment in the US, but the problem with the residential visa had to be solved:

... the immigration was a big problem for Bhagwan, it was a big threat against Bhagwan. Because he had not the green card, the residence status in America. America allows men of exceptional ability, or a religious leader to enter in America and lawfully abide as a local resident, can become a local resident, when they have no criminal record. Bhagwan never had criminal record. [...] But because it was Bush administration they were going to deny Bhagwan his status. Now the legal advisors says they don't accept Bhagwan as a religious leader. He is a philosopher. His degree is in philosophy. Therefore he is not a religious leader. Bhagwan said: Jesus was not even a philosopher. He too did not have a religious degree. But Jesus has established a religion. Good, Bhagwan says, Sheela, find out what constitutes a religion in terms of law. So then the definition of religion is: You should have a Bible. You should have a church or a temple. You should have a code of laws of morality. You should have religious festivals. Etc etc etc. So Bhagwan says: I'd create you a book of Rajneeshism. [...] So was grundet [founder] the religion of Rajneeshism. Religion of Rajneeshism should have academy of Rajneeshism. Academy of Rajneeshism should have a head of the academy of Rajneeshism, should have nominated priests of academy of Rajneeshism, and the Bible Book of Rajneeshism. This Bible will contain what this religion is. The man who always condemned all religion – established religion – was forced to establish a religion for his existence in America. You see, the religion is a necessity in this situation (interview 2003-11-30).

In this way, according to Sheela, the religion of Rajneeshism came into existence. It was against the original ideas of Osho, but they had to adapt to the US laws to get a residential visa for Osho. Here, Sheela's story contrasts sharply with Palmer's and the official account of Osho movement: according to Sheela, Osho himself was the creator of Rajneeshism, as a necessary step for him to get a residential visa.⁹

There are several testimonies that the Osho movement changed in several ways in Oregon. Suddenly huge amounts of work and money was needed to realize the visions of the movement (Gordon 1987: 152). Work replaced meditation as the main occupation for the disciples (Gordon 1987: 99). Work took place twelve hours a day seven days a week (Gordon 1987: 105). According to some observers Rajneeshpuram became more and more like an armed totalitarian camp. Visitors could not move freely on the ranch, and their behaviour was reported to the administration (Gordon 1987: 131-134; Carter 1990: 7-20; Fox 2000: 26).

Susan Palmer lays the responsibility for these changes on Sheela. To this, Sheela says:

⁸ See further Carter 1990: 119-120.

⁹ In this matter, Sheela's version is confirmed by sources inside the Osho movement. However, Osho later criticized Sheela for having misused her position in the religion to corrupt his movement.

There were no regulations in the commune which were not part of Bhagwan's vision. Bhagwan wanted that we work [...] 7 days work was part of our situation. So one can not say [...] today I don't feel like ... I want to go hear the birds. But it is the same in today's life. If you go in a work place, you have got to work. It is not a big conflict [...]. Here you have legally 2 days off – but in Bhagwan's institution work is a 7-day event. And it is not an individual right 2 days of 7 days – these are locally imposed rights. If you are born in a poor family, you have to work 7 days, in India. If you are born in a rich family you don't have to work ever. Others will work for you 7 days. So there is not a conflict (interview 2003-11-30).

After 1985 Osho claimed that he did not know how hard people had worked in the community, but according to Sheela this was not true. Sheela claims that one of the reasons why she became unpopular with some persons in the community, was that she had to reprimand the people who did not want to work (Sheela 1996: 234-238).¹⁰ Sheela describes further how she chose her closest workers not on the grounds of spiritual criteria, but on the grounds of work capacity. This goes well together with Wallis' reflections that administrators in a religious movement appoint subordinate administrative leaders on the basis of their qualifications, not their inspirational virtues:

Ich mochte keine Leute um mich haben, die gierig auf Bhagwan waren, auf seine Blicke oder auf die Erleuchtung. Für die meisten meiner Mitarbeiter war Spiritualität nicht das Hauptinteresse. Sie arbeiteten hart, weil sie ihn liebten. Sie wollten von ihm lernen. Sie waren bereit, Verantwortung zu übernehmen und hart zu arbeiten, anstatt ihre Zeit mit Träumen zu verschwenden. Sie waren bereit, alles zu geben, was sie in ihrem Herzen hatten, ohne etwas zurückzuhalten. Sie erwarteten keine Gegenleistung. Sie waren ihm und seiner Kommune hingegen. Das bedeutete harte Arbeit ohne Anerkennung oder Bestätigung (Sheela 1996: 16).

There was also a centralization of the movement taking place: minor centers around the world were ordered to close down, and the disciples to move into the larger communities, which were standardized to be like Rajneeshpuram as much as possible (Carter 1990: 159). According to Carter there was a failure to establish bigger communities, and as the smaller centres closed down, the movement became weaker (Carter 1990: 185). In the festival in 1984 there were only half of the number of participants compared to the year before (Carter 1990: 201). Sheela comments:

Rajneeshpuram is just the centre of our activities. But we must not forget the rest of the world. The other communes must function as good as Rajneeshpuram, because there will be also a day when we no longer is in Rajneeshpuram. He [Bhagwan] had also expressed a feeling that there may be a day when I am tired of just being in Rajneeshpuram – then I might want to travel [to] other communities. Then we should have similar standard, in other communities too. It was [...] also to take this desire out of people that only Rajneeshpuram is important.

But, beginning slowly around 1984, Sheela describes how her faith in Osho gradually started to decrease. Crucial factors were that his wish for material things became too excessive for the community to bear, and that his Valium intake had come to an extreme.¹¹ The last thing especially was a problem, because Sheela knew that the US government was trying to find legal problems for the community.

¹⁰ Several quotations from Osho's books confirm that he was in favour of working, but that work in itself never was his main goal. Both Sheela and Osho seem thus to have been positive to working, but Sheela's understanding of Osho might have become more extreme than he meant, fuelled by her position as the administrative leader.

¹¹ In her book Sheela explains further that Osho's doctor (a disciple) prescribed medicine for Osho and the people living in his house in the names of 15 fictive persons (Sheela 1996: 20-22). (This is of course Sheela's version, and is not supported by the Osho movement.)

- I loved this man, but I never gave up my own integrity and dignity. Last year and a half, two years, I was always confronted with the issue of compromising my dignity and integrity. Bhagwan had given me the responsibility of protecting his commune against him. It is very important that you understand this. Bhagwan was a master. He demanded absolute surrender from his sannyasins. No one ever said no to Bhagwan. I was the only one from time to time who said no. And he accepted my no. Because he knew the no that I was saying was not from my ego. But it was my need to say no, for my reasons the way I understood his work, I understood him. And I understood my responsibility. He had explicitly told this in front of 5 people to me: Sheela, I give you the responsibility protecting my commune against me too ...
- I don't understand that?
- ... [...] against me – meaning even if he tells me something, to do against the commune, it is my responsibility to protect. He put me in this conflict: his excess for his cars, his jewelries, and his Valium intake had [...] in extreme, Where I had to take a stand against him, and say no, I will not do it. He wanted one Rolls Royce per day. I said: It is impossible, you cannot afford it. He wanted a diamond watch, costing 8 million Swiss francs. I said: We don't have that kind of money. And even if we had that kind of money, I would have to put you in legal difficulties, against the US government which is anyway looking for a reason to find you a problem.
- [...]
- ...I said: This will be not just a problem for your health if you are taking this amount of medicine, but it will be a [...] for us. He told me not to meddle ... not to interfere, and just [...] don't get involved. Now it was clear [...]. This kind of events were the problem.
- [...]
- And was this ... problems like with Bhagwan, were they coming suddenly or was it something which was growing over the years?
- [...] It started massive in –84 [...]. I had small ... small situations, they were there, but they were increasing it, but it started escalating after –84.¹²

Sheela believes Osho started these things out of boredom, out of a sense that his mission was finished:

- ... his demands for material things became way too excessive, and the excess would have costed disruption of the harmony of the commune. It would have cost massive financial problems.
- And why did he do that, do you think?
- He was bored now. His dream was to create a commune, to show the world how one can live in harmony without any boundaries of the nationalities and culture. And that dream had success. That was his life's dream. Now, he was bored. The dream came true – no more interest. And this lack of interest, he got involved with these other things.

Sheela describes how she was split between the loyalty for Osho and the loyalty for the commune:

- I loved this man. Imagine the conflict together with the responsibility, the loyalty that I had; for both the commune, for him. Those were not easy days for me. [...] I could not take the bread and the soup away from the commune, and give it to ... give it for this material madness. And I could not ... he will not accept my no. Then I have no choice, I must go. Then I left (interview 2003-11-30).

So in September 1985 Sheela decided to leave Rajneeshpuram. She had been sick for a long time and felt overworked. On top of this came, according to Sheela, Bhagwan's excessive wish for material toys and her alleged awareness of his drug use (Sheela 1996: 11-14). Tired and weary she sent a letter to Bhagwan:

Beloved Bhagwan.

I feel You should know what is going on with me. This time upon my return there was no excitement, infact a dragging. I feel better lately when I am away. Because of these feelings I had to be clear with myself and You.

¹² Osho started his public discourses again in October 1984.

I have been finding it very difficult to simply take responsibility for this community and its liabilities. The situation has reached the desperation point in me. My joy and pleasure has disappeared to the point of leaving or at least looking for a change of worship¹³.

There are other small solutions that come and go, but they seem insignificant compared to the situation on hand. I have not come across any other bright idea.

Please guide

Love

Sheela, 12th Sept –85 (Sheela 1996: 255)

Sheela was disappointed by his answer:

He sent a message with her [the other secretary] that if I need a break from work and [...] not happy here, I could go to Europe to German commune – one of the European communes – and work there and raise donations there. [...] That was not what I wrote in the letter and that is definitely not what I wanted to do either (interview 2003-11-30).

Sheela then decided to leave:

September 13, 1985

Beloved Bhagwan,

I want to thank you for offering me one of the most gracious and absolutely educational opportunities in my life.

With this letter, I wish to resign as your personal secretary with the same love and respect.

In love,

Sheela (Sheela 1996: 256)

However, as the people working with Sheela became aware that she would leave Rajneeshpuram, several of them also decided to leave. As they first had to sign over the documents and positions of the organization, most of them left the day after Sheela.

- So I didn't accept it [Bhagwan's proposal], then he asked my secretary to take the position as his secretary. She refused it, she said she is also leaving with me, which I did not know until that point. Then he got ... he was more unhappy, then he asked another two secretaries of mine to take the position and they both also refused and said they are also leaving with me. So he took the whole my administration, 25 people, didn't want continue to work without me [...], because they knew the inside madness of the organization [...].
 - And were their reasons the same as your reasons?
 - Exactly. Because they were confronted with the same conflicts that I was confronted with.
- [...]
- ... it must also have been a very big thing for them, to leave Bhagwan and go?
 - They were just crying for days. I decided on 11th to go. I left on 13th, and the night I was flying I couldn't stop my tears. And it wasn't just me, it was everybody else too. And it wasn't that I left in the middle of the night, packed my bags and ran away, no. 400 people came to me to the airport to say goodbye (interview 2003-11-30).

On September 16th Bhagwan accused Sheela and her group of several criminal activities, like planned terrorist actions against the American government and Rajneeshpuram community, theft of 55 million US dollars (Sheela 1996: 35-36).¹⁴

- And how did you react to that?

[Laugh]

¹³ In Osho language this means "change of work".

¹⁴ Initiated sources within the movement say that the moment Sheela left, individuals started reporting misuse of power and crimes. The reports were summed up and passed on to Osho. He called in the FBI to investigate, and Sheela was found guilty.

- I can laugh. I laugh ... what am I going to do? It is very obvious, Bhagwan was ... Bhagwan had a dilemma to the people: because I left it created a schism. Schism means doubt. Now he has to maintain his followings to him: he must talk against me. It is normal. And, average mind is very ready to accept negative: then think about when Bhagwan started talking negative, and a whole world was jealous of Sheela's [...] Sheela's position. Everybody wanted to be Bhagwan's secretary. Obvious close to Bhagwan ... they can be with Bhagwan as I was.

[...]

- But how do you feel about that? I mean you love Bhagwan, and then he comes with these things which put you to jail in 2-3 years?¹⁵
- Ja ja. I took this as the anger of a man who was very much in love. Simple. He was in love, he was angry. No woman had ever said no to him. Nobody ever said no to him, and this woman comes and say no, and not only no, takes the whole working machine with her. If you ever see a video of 14-15-16 September -85, you look at his face: he has never looked like that before. [...]. But that was not my purpose, to break him. It was also not my purpose to take the whole working crew with me.

Sheela is also disappointed that noone told Osho he made a mistake in accusing her of all these crimes:

- See, the problem is the people in the movement. They cannot have a movement without someone on a pedestal. And, the person who is on a pedestal, they cannot accept that person has made mistakes, or that person is not perfect. If he is not perfect they will not allow him to be on a pedestal. Unless he is on a pedestal, they cannot call themselves the disciples. So, by calling themselves the disciples, and calling themselves good disciples, they create a pedestal [...]. This whole system is a self recognition. I recognize you, you recognize me. Or I recognize myself to you. This is the conflicts all religions have: my God is better than yours. And to make this God better, they must have the devil. Because without the devil God cannot exist. Now, which honest Rajneeshee is there to say, Bhagwan made a mistake? Except Sheela there is none. But Sheela in the first place never had Bhagwan on a pedestal.

[...]

- ... Everyone [...] they all want to be enlightened. And a master who makes mistake cannot make you enlightened. Everybody has their own narrow interest.

[...]

- What I would say, if anything, anyone has to learn from it is recognize that creating pedestals and not accepting your own responsibilities creates a mess.
- This is interesting, because this is what all of the Osho people would say, whom I have interviewed. That what they learnt from the whole thing was just this.
- But if they have learnt this, then they would not put blame on Sheela [...] I have learnt that. I don't put blame on anybody. I have not just learnt the words from Bhagwan. I actually *live* his words. When they would have understood this, from Bhagwan, and when Bhagwan was accusing Sheela, they should have stood up in one army and said: Hey, Bhagwan, what are you doing? Stop it! But then they might have to give up their enlightenment, they might have to give up being a good sannyasin.

Sheela also denies that there were any immediate threats of arrestation from the authorities, and that this would have been a reason for her decision¹⁶:

- But there was also danger that – I read – that you and Bhagwan would be arrested, since June, because of immigration difficulties?
- No. There were always, since -83, 1983, we had immigration officers coming in, we had tax officers coming in, to see if they find something that is not in order. Because we used to hear many things that they had been planning. To arrest me or Bhagwan to stop this organization from expanding. This situation was not unknown to me, not unknown to him. We had a huge legal machine in our house, legal department, which we had many many multilegal law cases in civil courts against disowning, against this, against that. Everybody was aware of Bush agenda. It was no secret, and everybody knows

¹⁵ Sic: Sheela spent 39 months in jail.

¹⁶ Carter (1990: 228-229) describes that arrests of the Osho leaders were likely for several reasons: for example claims of millions of dollar from the neighbours of Rajneeshpuram; a claim of misuse of trust funds lodged by an ex-sannyasin, fines for electrical code violations, etc etc. James Gordon (1987: 181-182) however, writes that in spite of trying to build up immigration, land use, and church-state cases, the material was not enough.

now, when Republicans do not like something, they can create much. They [...] ... they had a number of time tried to plant drugs on the ranch, but they didn't succeed because the whole organization, the whole teaching of Bhagwan is against drugs. They tried on taxes, it didn't work. Immigration they were trying on, but it didn't work because you saw the photos¹⁷. We had presented a massive amount of documentation to deal with.

Sheela denies all accusations:

- ... he created his sannyasins to testify against me. And government wanted that I be arrested. Government was very clear: I was the administration, the manager, for Bhagwan. I am out of there, then the movement falls apart. And it is exactly what was their wish. So they took the conflict of mine and Bhagwan and made their instrument. And to come up with charges against someone in America is not a difficult thing. You find 1 or 2 people and say that I heard Sheela say this or that, you are [...] conspiracy already. And all of the charges against me were conspiracies. It is also very interesting.
- Does it mean that they were not true?
- [...] not true. 100 %.
- None of them?
- None of them.
- OK. [...] So that means you think people witnessed against you because these charges [...] came from Bhagwan?
- Bhagwan actually told to the people because I have also known the people after ... Some of them even had come in the prison to visit me saying we are sorry. I have in prison received 10-15 pages letters from some sannyasins (interview 2003-11-30).

Sheela was convicted to jail for 39 months (Sheela 1996: 35), and after coming out of prison she says that Osho sent her a message that if she returned to him, he would give her back the same position and the same honour and respect as before:

- [But] I wasn't with him for honour, respect and position. I was with him because I loved him.
- And wasn't that his way of saying that he loved you too?
- Who knows? [laugh] He could come out and say [...] Sheela come back. He didn't say that: just I am sorry, come back.
- And he didn't do that?
- Maybe he did it, I don't know. [laugh] Not directly to me [...]
- If he had done that, had you gone back?
- No. [...] I would have said OK, it is OK, but [...] now I must start my life.
- Why?
- Somehow I must come to know myself also. I only knew myself through Bhagwan before. And 39 months in prison, one has ... comes to know oneself a bit better. And 14 years I worked for him. Now I will work for myself. Changes are anyway good.

However, Sheela still feels she lives with Osho – in fact that she is the genuine heiress of the teaching of Osho, and that the whole story was a teaching advice for her (Sheela 1996: 244-245). She feels that she has today realized Osho's teaching in her life (Sheela 1996: 224).

He is part of me (interview 2003-11-30).

Sheela thinks Rajneeshpuram closed because Osho had lost interest in his utopian community:

- It didn't have to close. It closed because Bhagwan had no interest in it, which was also a change. His dream was fulfilled, he lost interest, Sheela left, he reacted stupidly with accusations. [...] If he would have just accepted his anger, and allowed Sheela to leave quietly, nothing would have happened. It would have ... a new secretary would have come in, new things would have ... but for him was probably difficult to justify to people why Sheela left. And for him to probably say: I put her in this position.

¹⁷ Documentation presented by the Osho movement that Osho was in fact adopted long ago by Sheela's father (which would automatically give him a green card in the US).

- Why didn't he have an interest to make [...] live on, the community he created, and ...
- But it is with everybody. It is a common problem. Things are interesting in a moment. When one does not have interest; only desperate people continue without interest. [...] ... to create a commune was his active motivation of life. [...] Suddenly that motivation is finished. His interest is gone. [...] Bhagwan had spoken volumes before the creation of the commune. When one has created there is natural harmony around in the atmosphere, in the world, there is enough media attention. All that he wanted was ... was complete. He wanted to speak on different religions, different religious leaders. [...] And he spoke, he spoke, he spoke. Every day on a new thing. And beautifully he spoke. The commune is created, he doesn't have an interest in speaking ... He just started talking nonsense. Have you heard his last speeches, his last 1 ½ years speeches? Sometimes what he was talking [...] Sometimes I would sit in the lecture hall, and I was [...].
- When was that? In -84, -85?
- Exactly. More -85. He ... he tried to keep himself interested as he could. But he had no interest any more. All what his wisdom was, he had [...] it out in many different forms. There was no more to give. But there were always more people who wanted [...] One is tired of it. And one says, Hey, I have had enough, I don't want to do any more. And I think it might be his situation.

However, Sheela is not dissatisfied with the Osho movement:

- In spite of all that has happened to me, with Bhagwan, the movement, all that, I tell you, I haven't found one single wrong [...] in this whole thing. It was a genuine movement. It was a sincere [...]. There was a sincerity. Honesty. Maybe too honest that the world could not digest the honesty, or accept it. There were no bad people [...] they were intelligent people. [...] And I say this in spite of what the Osho movement has to say about me, in person, in spite of that I say. This is ... I know that. It is my experience (interview 2003-11-30).

The Development of the Osho Movement after 1985

In late 1985, after the fall of Rajneeshpuram, many people expected the movement to come to an end. Rajneeshism had disappeared, and the great communes around the world dissolved. Some disciples felt disillusioned, and some abandoned the movement (Fox 2000: 31).

But when Osho again settled in Poona, India, in January 1987, it became clear that it was much too early to predict the end of the movement. Gradually the Osho movement became more organized again. New buildings were erected, and new meditations devised. In Poona, the number of sannyasins and visitors started to increase once more (Fox 2000: 34).

Today the Osho ashram in Poona is one of the world's largest meditation resort. It has, however, changed its focus compared to the 70's. While before being a community, where people lived for longer periods, it is today more of a resort where people visit for shorter periods of time. The ashram in Poona has become one of the main tourist attractions in India. The emphasis on therapy has decreased, but meditation is still a major focus. The ashram is also more of a cultural center than before, with some emphasis on dance, art and theater. People are, however, still being initiated into sannyas. It is reported that hundreds of people are initiated to sannyas each month. Another change is the relationship with the Indian majority culture: the tensions from the 70's have virtually disappeared (Fox 2000: 39-41).

Before his death in 1990, Osho appointed an Inner Circle of twenty-one sannyasins to run the ashram. His wish was that all decisions should be taken by them in consensus (Fox 2000: 36). Fifteen years later, seven of the original appointed sannyasins still function. The other fourteen have been chosen anew by the inner circle itself (interview 2). A major challenge for the Inner Circle has been to what degree institutionalization should be encouraged. One

important way to access control of a movement is by trade marking. Around the year 2000, Trustees of the Osho International Foundation tried to trademark the name of Osho, to get exclusive rights and control over Osho's name and work. This resulted in an internal conflict in the movement, which was taken to civil court. However, the arbitrator ruled against the trustees and for the right of anyone to publicly use Osho's name (Fox 2000: 45).

Another important factor is the position of the dead founder, Osho. He has no appointed successor, and it could be expected that his position would become very elevated, as his position is unique in the movement. But the Inner Circle has chosen another way. Since the end of the 90's, Osho as a person is deemphasized. His pictures and empty chair have disappeared from the ashram. His birthday and enlightenment are no longer celebrated. Interpretations vary as to if this should be seen as a part of secularization, or if it is a deliberate attempt from the Inner Circle to prevent the path of Osho from becoming an institutionalized religion based on externalities (Fox 2000: 41-42).

Just before the year 2000 it is estimated that the Osho movement had around 300 information and meditation centers around the world, with strong connections to the ashram in Poona (Fox 2000: 42-43). Since the year 2000, when Fox wrote her book, several Osho centers around the world have closed, among them the Swedish center in Stockholm (interview 2). The reasons in at least the Swedish case were economical; less people were coming while the rent became more expensive (interview 4). The problem with decreasing amounts of people coming to the Osho centers seems to be an international problem. One reason is that meditational activities have become more accessible in the culture as a whole, so there is a certain degree of competition from other activities (interview 4). I would, however, argue that the main reason for the decreasing amount of people is related to the subject of control and institutionalization (Frisk 2002). In all Osho-centers a negative hiv-test is still needed to participate in most activities, since Osho's predictions in 1984 that aids would eradicate large parts of humanity (Gordon 1987: 131-134). This condition has become an effective barrier for reaching new people. As you need a recent negative hiv-test to participate in a single meditation, there is not much chance for new people to discover the Osho movement. And as this regulation comes from Osho himself, it cannot easily be changed.

Osho is no longer in the body, and this fact seems to have influenced the Osho movement in several different ways. One important thing that has happened since his death is that some of his disciples have claimed to have become enlightened. Many former disciples of Osho today gather around these new charismatic leaders. It is judged by several front figures in the movement in Sweden, that the majority of the Osho disciples today listen to other spiritual masters who are in the body (interview 2, interview 3). These new charismatic leaders are, however, not allowed to give spiritual guidance in the ashram in Poona – there the (today materially non-existent) empty chair of Osho is protected (Frisk 2002).

Some Osho disciples emphasize that the movement is today more individualized than before. One disciple calls the movement today an organism, while before being an organization. Osho, when in the body considered the leader, a kind of father-figure, is today conceived of rather as a source of inspiration. The individual has to take responsibility for himself in another way (interview 1).

There is no longer any formal Osho center in Sweden¹⁸ – but there are six institutes which are deeply influenced by Osho and which attracts a lot of people. As they are not formal Osho centers, there are no demands for hiv-tests to participate, and to some degree also other inspirational sources influence the activities (interview 2). One such institute is Ängsbacka, which each summer gathers around 1.000 people for a one week festival. At Ängsbacka, many of the new charismatic leaders, senior disciples of Osho, usually appear, side by side with representants from other spiritual traditions. Another well-known institute in Sweden is Baravara, which is more faithful to the original Osho tradition. In the beginning of 2005, altogether 2.000 people had taken the introductory courses at Baravara (e-mail 2005-02-07). A similar development, with successful institutes outside the organized Osho tradition, could be seen in other countries also (interview 2).

The Osho tradition is therefore today to a great extent carried on outside the organized Osho movement. The expectation in the long run could be that the Osho elements in these places will become weaker, when the first generation Osho disciples today running these institutes will no longer be there. As the institutes do not follow the regulations originating from the mother organization in Poona, they will probably be subject to changes in the future, under inspiration from other spiritual traditions.

Discussion

Generally the official version of the Osho movement about what happened in Rajneeshpuram has been accepted as the truth: Susan Palmer's interpretation is only one example. The most important factor which would support this version is that Sheela and other people in her group were in fact convicted to jail for exactly the accusations Osho launched at them. The conclusion would therefore be close at hand that they were true.

Leaving the alleged criminal activities aside, still there are some parts of Sheela's story which are interesting from the point of charisma and institutionalization. In the light of her story I will in the following attempt an alternative interpretation of the developments in the Osho movement during the first half of the 80's. I do not claim Sheela's story is the "true" story. Most likely, Sheela's story as well as the Osho movement's story are both partially (not necessarily in equal parts) reflecting what "really" happened. Memory is selective, as well as the stories we choose to present to other people about a certain event. Our own interpretations of the significance of events vary, depending on our background, wishes, intentions and strategies to reach certain goals. It is very common, in presenting reality constructions, to leave out certain facts and emphasize other facts. Stories, both "true", could for this reason alone appear very different. To get a more complete picture, it is therefore important to take multiple constructions of social reality into account.

In the following, I will first discuss the role of Osho in what happened in Rajneeshpuram, and point to interpretations which might support some parts of Sheela's story. Secondly, I will discuss Sheela's defection in the light of her own story, and, thirdly, discuss how ideological elements in the Osho movement might have contributed to certain directions for the movement. Finally, I will sum up with a general discussion about charisma and institutionalization in the Osho movement, also taking into account recent developments.

¹⁸ There is a small group running an Osho Meditation Center, keeping up the meditational practice once or twice a week in a rented place, but it does not own its own premises.

The role of Osho in the development in the Osho movement between 1981-1985

One crucial question, where the two stories differ radically from each other, is whether Osho initiated or at least knew about the developments in Rajneeshpuram, or not.¹⁹ According to Sheela, he was the initiator of all changes, she just performed his decisions. According to Susan Palmer, Osho became increasingly unaware of the administrative decisions and even the innovations in religious life, to the extent that he was finally more or less displaced by the administrative staff.

However, several observers, beside Sheela, document that Osho was not ignorant about what happened in Rajneeshpuram (see for example Fox 2000: 48-49, or Milne 1987: 228). Critics claim that he could simply not have failed to notice for example the machine guns, or the fact that Rajneeshpuram was run like a concentration camp, and that he could have stopped the development at any time (Fox 2000: 49).

An argument for his being away from organizational questions has been his silence between 1981 and 1984. In response to this, some sources point to possible legal reasons for Osho appearing to be away from organizational decisions at that time. Carter describes that Oregon has very strict rules against churches influencing secular institutions. An important obstacle for legally incorporating Rajneeshpuram as a town was that church and state seemed inappropriately mixed up. To claim separation between religion and secular institutions, Osho as the head of the religion could not openly interfere with how the community was organized and ruled (Sheela 1996: 229). Thus his silence, and apparently being away from organizational decisions, filled a legal purpose at the time.

Another argument for Osho's active involvement in the decisions in Rajneeshpuram, is that there is no doubt that he wished to build a utopian community. To build a utopian society, the basic components in institutionalization – rational organization and a functioning economy – are simply necessary. Without hard work and a structured organization, Rajneeshpuram would not have accomplished what it did in such a short time. After Sheela's defection, however, Osho seems to have felt that the institutionalization had gone too far. Religious movements typically oscillate between charisma and institutionalization, and as the institutionalization pendulum had swung to the extreme in one direction, it was very natural that Osho at this time initiated actions to again revive his charisma. But that he acted against institutionalization at this point does not necessarily mean that he was unaware of and negative to the institutionalization process before that.

Palmer interprets the creation of the religion Rajneeshism in 1983 as an important mark of routinization of charisma. There might, however, be arguments for perceiving Rajneeshism in other ways. The most important argument is that the creation of a religion, with priesthood, rituals and other aspects of an institutionalized religion, is basically against the basic ideas of Osho. Ideologically, the movement claims to be against all kinds of belief systems and "isms" (Rajneesh 1988a: 319). Osho differs between religiosity, which he says has nothing to do with belief systems or organizations, and religion, which is limited by these. Religiosity is rather an individual experience of truth, like an experience of taste (Rajneesh 1988b: 248-249). The most important threat for the commune at the time was that Osho would not be allowed to stay in the country. Sheela's version – that the creation of Rajneeshism was a planned strategy

¹⁹ Please observe that I am here not at all discussing the illegal criminal activities of Sheela, but only the organizational changes of the Osho movement.

to get a residential visa for Osho – is very trustworthy, especially as it is supported by other sources. It is also clear that Osho was not ignorant about Rajneeshism: he spoke in positive terms about his religion when he came out of silence in 1984 (see for example Rajneesh 1988a: 35). Rather than seeing Rajneeshism as an element of institutionalization, I would, with Sheela, interpret it as just a legal necessity for the movement at the time.

Roy Wallis describes four possible ways a charismatic leader could react to institutionalization. A simpler way of conceiving his classification is as a spectrum from encouragement to resistance. Palmer describes Osho as oscillating between the four categories, but during 1981-85 mainly being in the two middle ones, not liking and finally not even knowing about the institutionalization process. I would like to question, particularly, if “Displacement”, as Palmer claims, is the accurate category. I think there are indications that Osho at the very least knew about the institutionalization, and that he probably also at least passively encouraged it. Thus it is reasonable to think that Osho had, at least to some extent, a more active role in the process than is described by Susan Palmer and the movement itself.

Sheela's defection

According to Sheela's own story, her defection was not an escape from criminal actions, but rather the culmination of a longer process of doubt which started around 1984. It is clear from other sources also that there at this time was a progressing schism between Osho and Sheela. At least from 1984, they seem to have had different visions and perceptions of reality – a fact which alone might explain the doubts that Sheela experienced. Sheela was the active, driving organizer, accomplishing what she (at least retrospectively) interprets as the will of Osho. Osho is quoted as saying, in November 1984, that Sheela rarely hears what he says to her, and that she interprets everything according to her own mind. He criticizes her for laughing at meditation, only think about work, and being power hungry (Viha Connection magazine). There also seems to have been a certain degree of competitiveness between Sheela and other people close to Osho at the time (see for example Appleton u.å.: 70-71). The day after Sheela left, Osho claimed that it was her jealousy that made her poison other people close to him (Osho LT).

Sheela's story could well be interpreted as a typical case of a charismatic leader losing his charisma. According to Sheela, she was not happy in the movement as before, and Osho thus failed to fulfill the primary condition of a charismatic leader: the well-being of his followers. Wallis points out, that at times in a religious movement when institutionalization is encouraged, the administrators create order and stability, but also commitments to other things than the charismatic leader. Sheela and her administrative group is here a typical example: as Sheela describes, they developed commitments to the community itself. When forced to choose between the community and the wishes of Osho, his charisma was no longer strong enough for them to choose Osho. Doubts of the charismatic leader are, like most social phenomena, socially contagious, and it is not uncommon in religious contexts that a key person's defection leads to group defections.

How credible are Sheela's reasons for defection? According to her own story, Sheela defected because of Osho's excessive wish for material toys, and his medicine use. She refers to him as being bored, his vision fulfilled.

Osho's love of material luxury is well documented (see for example Fox 2000: 19). His teaching was that the kingdom of God is the kingdom of the rich (Rajneesh 1988a: 101). "I teach luxury, I teach richness" (Rajneesh 1988a: 35). That a conflict between Osho and Sheela, who had the economical responsibility for the commune, could have developed for this reason, is not difficult to imagine. It seems not to have been the first time Osho and Sheela had different opinions on how to spend money. In a lecture from November 1984 Osho complains about Sheela:

I asked Sheela for something and she refused, telling me that there is no money, that we are spending so much on roads, on houses, on irrigation. But she never realizes that I ask her in order to see where her heart is. She says no to me, but yes to the houses, the roads and the irrigation (Viha Connection magazine).

The contrasts of charisma and institutionalization are here clearly pronounced by Osho himself.

Sheela did not accuse Osho of using illegal drugs, only an excess of medicines. Several sources, beside Sheela, document that Osho (at least from time to time) used Valium as well as nitrous oxide (see for example Fox 2000: 48). Against the background of his physical problems, it is easy to understand that he might have needed some amount of medicines. Sheela accused, however, other people in Osho's house of also using illegal drugs. It is known that Osho's longterm "caretaker" Vivek, a British woman, had been a drug user before her involvement in the Osho movement, and sources inside the movement claims that she also had some relapses during the years in the movement (interview 2). Thus there might have been some use of medicines and even drugs in Osho's house, and one possible interpretation is of course that Sheela's defection process, already under way since a long time, influenced her interpretation of this knowledge.

Several independent sources document that Osho is changed when he again starts speaking in 1984. He seems to have lost much of the poetry and creativity which characterized his early lectures (interview 2), and his ideology is changed. That the interpretations of the reasons for this change vary, could surely be explained by the interpreters different positions and conceptions of the context. Susan Palmer interprets this change as resistance to institutionalization, a strategy to get the movement again in Osho's hands. Sheela interprets the change as due to boredom, that Osho was not interested in his work anymore. A third interpretation is that he was depressed because of the problems with Sheela and the changes she initiated in the movement (interview 2). Supporting the last interpretation is that, when back in Poona, Osho again in his lectures displayed the same creativity as before going to the US, and again attracted a large number of visitors to his ashram.

Sheela's defection caused a very strong reaction from Osho. It is clear that he is very disappointed. The day before she leaves, he talks in a lecture about her letter that she no longer feels good in Rajneeshpuram. He says that of course she feels better in Europe, as he is now talking in Rajneeshpuram, and she gets no attention there (Osho LT 2:23).²⁰

The day after Sheela left, he condemns the whole group in very strong words, saying that Sheela betrayed and deceived him. Not until that day has he come to know about her crimes

²⁰ Sheela does not mention that Osho said this. She tells that Osho, in response to the letter, suggested her to go back to Europe and work in the communities there – which he, in his turn, does not say a word about in the lecture. This might be a typical example how stories are selective – Osho's story may contain one part, and Sheela's story another part: Osho's original message might well have contained both parts.

(Osho LT 2:25). This is followed, some days later, by the bonfire of the book Rajneeshism, denouncing the red clothes, and denouncing his role of guru.

Structurally, Osho's actions the days after Sheela's defection had important functions in the organization. Realizing that the institutionalization under Sheela having swung far to one extreme, Osho attempted in several ways to revive his charismatic authority and again get the movement in his hand. Functionally, the stamping of the defectors as fascist, evil and criminal effectively stopped others to follow them and thus cause a mass defection. By burning the Rajneeshism book and Sheela's clothes, Osho very radically distanced himself and the movement from the defecting group and the institutionalization. Functionally, the defectors came to fill the role of being responsible for whatever had gone wrong in the movement.

The role of the ideology of the Osho movement

One of the crucial factors which contributes to the directions in which a religious movement develops over time, which also Roy Wallis points out, is the ideology of the movement. In the case of the Osho movement, it twice – both in Poona and Oregon – developed high tension to the surrounding society. Much of the reasons could be traced back to the movement's – in the eyes of society – controversial ideology. The core theme in the Osho movement is to resist all belief systems and ideologies. Man is seen as being born enlightened, but early becoming programmed by society. Through therapy, man can then become “deprogrammed” and free from conditioning (Rajneesh 1988a: 319). As the goal of the movement is to free oneself from the constraints of society, there is an inherent ideological potential for tension and conflict. As long as the movement is individually oriented – like it is today – it hardly comes to open conflict. But at the times the movement has had collective utopian visions – in Poona 1 and Oregon – there have been conflicts with the surrounding society.²¹

The sociologist Lewis Carter discusses, that many of the reasons for the conflicts between the Osho movement and society in Oregon stems from the sannyasin goal of dropping norms and constraints acquired through prior socialisation, and the Osho disposition to live-in-the-moment, reflected in the movement's disregard for consistency. As Carter writes, a spiritual leader may be tolerated by his followers in displaying frequent doctrinal shifts, but immigration services, land-use boards, tax officials and other regulatory institutions, are less tolerant of such changes. In some cases, discrepancies in expressions of intent (as intent of visiting the US) are culturally defined as fraudulent or criminal (Carter 1990: 124-5).

Osho's way to teach was much through paradox and a behaviour entirely at odds with traditional images of enlightened individuals (Fox 2000: 6). While this behaviour may have been conceived of as a teaching device by his disciples, when the movement applied the same technique to people outside the movement conflict was a fact. In Oregon, especially Sheela was well known for her arrogance in handling the local people. Sheela herself, however, explains that her arrogance was a role play created for her by Osho, for the purpose of getting attention and publicity (Sheela 1996: 230-231).

Many of the movement's actions, and clashes with the surrounding society, could be explained by these different points of departure, together with outer pressures and the necessity to live up to legal requirements. To this category could be brought not only the

²¹ Sheela had key positions in both these eras, and a contributing reason for the conflicts was also her way of handling the surrounding society, which increased the tensions to society.

visum strategy, but also the land use strategy of the movement in Oregon, the fake adoption of Osho by Sheela's father, marriages of foreign Osho sannyasins to American sannyasins for the purpose of being able to stay in Oregon, and the creation of the religion Rajneeshism. "We used the laws intelligently", said Sheela (interview 2003-11-30).

Charisma and institutionalization

Several interpreters point out that there is no clear boundary between charisma and institutionalization. Pure charisma, without *any* kind of institutionalization, has a very short span of existence. And in institutionalization there are often aspects of charisma present. Charisma can hardly exist without institutions, and the process of institutionalization is fed by charisma. There are also forms of institutionalization that by different means try to preserve the charismatic qualities (Palmer 1988).

Institutionalization may express in several different forms, but invariably means building some kind of organization, a structure, although there may be different means and different levels of control. Beyond a certain point the message and authority in a religious movement have to be clearly defined to avoid the risk of the movement falling apart. Its tasks have to be rationally organized as the movement becomes bigger, and it needs an economical base to be able to grow.

I support the basic view of Palmer that the Osho movement has oscillated between the extremes of encouragement of and resistance to institutionalization, and I in fact believe that this oscillation is to be seen in most new religious movements. Institutionalization, in some form, is often encouraged as the movement grows, the members grow older, or the leader dies – and is again resisted as the initial idealism, joy and spontaneity diminishes or the leader's authority becomes undermined. Thus the religious movement can go through different phases or stages of different degrees of encouragement of and resistance to institutionalization.

In this paper I have questioned Susan Palmer's interpretation that Osho was unaware of the institutional changes between 1981-1985, and also that he was victim of a displacement in 1985. I have instead attempted the interpretation that he, more or less passively, encouraged institutionalization during his silence, and that he, after Sheela's defection, in radical ways tried to revive his charismatic authority.

In this connection, I also want to question Palmer's category Abdication. I do not think Osho actually abdicated in 1985; rather that his "abdication" was part of his attempt to revive his charisma by distancing himself from the authoritarian character the movement had displayed through Sheela. In practice, Osho continued to fulfill a charismatic function until his death in 1990 – and still does to some extent.

Susan Palmer emphasizes the interrelatedness between charisma and institutionalization. She discusses that there are forms of institutionalization trying to preserve the charismatic qualities. This is valid also after the charismatic leader's death. While Osho's charisma is on a lower key today than when he was alive, he is still definitely the charismatic leader. Since 1985 Osho is not formally called a guru, and his disciples claim to be more independent of

him, especially since his death. But there are definitely still strong charismatic qualities present in the movement.

Ideologically, the Osho movement's attitude to institutionalization is problematic because of the negativity towards organized religion. This hesitation manifests in the movement's development in recent years. There is an institutionalized movement centered in the ashram in Poona, which is struggling to keep control in different ways. At the same time, there is also an awareness of the dangers of organized religion and institutionalization, and a resistance of giving Osho a petrified role. There also seems to be a somewhat acceptance of the independent so-called "bridging centers" which have independent organizations and basically do what they want. An interesting development is the new charismatic leaders, coming from the range of Osho's close disciples, operating outside the organized Osho movement. Charisma in a purer form seem to have been transferred to them.

On a low engagement level, the Osho movement seems to be more spread than ever before. Few people are full time engaged, as in the hey-days of the 70's and 80's. Many more are, however, partially engaged, but often more with practical activities than with ideology, and with the charismatic leader at a safe distance.

Osho is undoubtedly one of the greatest new religious leaders of the second half of the 20th century, having a great and lasting impact on the whole cultic milieu. The organized Osho movement, centered in the ashram in Poona, is the focal point, but is probably as a whole having much less influence than the Osho elements outside it. The situation could maybe be compared to the Theosophical movement (born in 1875), which today has three international organizations, with altogether 30-40.000 members. The impact Theosophy has had on the whole unorganized New Age cultic milieu is, however, immense. In this way, the development outside the organized Theosophy has been much more important than the development inside. This is true also for the Osho movement, and will probably be even more true in the foreseeable future.

Conclusion

I have in this paper discussed the developments of the Osho movement between 1981-1985, criticizing Susan Palmer's interpretation, and taking parts of the story of Sheela, Osho's secretary who defected in 1985, into account. I have also discussed the developments of the Osho movement after 1985. Focus has been on charisma and institutionalization. I have stressed the importance of taking multiple social constructions into account, and how parts of Sheela's story could fit in with other sources and with theoretical understandings of charisma and institutionalization.

I basically argue for Osho having had a more active role in the developments of Rajneeshpuram between 1981-1985 than is usually described. He may have been more passive than Sheela claims, but also more active than the claims of the movement. Thus Osho could be conceived of as, at least to some extent, encouraging institutionalization at the time.

Sheela's defection could partly be understood as the end result of a long-term conflict between Osho and Sheela, because of her, as the administrative leader, commitments also to the organization and community. Osho's very strong reaction to her defection could functionally be interpreted as an attempt to again revive his charisma.

I have also questioned the relevance of Palmer's category "Abdication", and argued for the interpretation that Osho never abdicated: also this was a strategy of reviving his charisma and gather his disciples around him. Osho continued to fulfill a strong charismatic function until his death, and still does, although to a lesser extent since his death.

Much of the Osho activities today are taking place outside the organized Osho movement, actualizing the problems with control and institutionalization, especially in a movement ideologically against organized religion. The expectation is for the centralized organization to still be there in the foreseeable future, but for the real growth of Osho elements to take place outside the organized Osho movement. Here the new charismatic leaders, emerging from the senior disciples of Osho, will play a role, pointing to the importance of living charisma.

References

Printed material

- Appleton, Sue (no year). *Was Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh Poisoned by Ronald Reagan's America?* Cologne, West Germany: The Rebel Publishing House.
- Carter, Lewis F. (1990). *Charisma and Control in Rajneeshpuram. The Role of Shared Values in the Creation of a Community*. The Arnold and Caroline Rose Monographs Series of the American Sociological Association. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Fox, Judith M. (2000). *Osho Rajneesh*. Studies in Contemporary Religion. Torino: Signature Books in cooperation with Cesnur.
- Frisk, Liselotte (2002). "The Satsang Network: A Growing Post-Osho Phenomenon", *Nova Religio*, 6 (1): 64-85.
- Gordon, James S. (1987). *The Golden Guru. The Strange Journey of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh*. Lexington, Massachusetts: The Stephen Greene Press.
- Milne, Hugh (1987). *Bhagwan: The God that Failed*. Ed. Liz Hodgkinson. New York: St Martin's Press.
- O'Dea, Thomas (1962). "Five Dilemmas in the Institutionalization of Religion", *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 1 (1): 30-39.
- Palmer, Susan (1988). "Charisma and Abdication: A Study of the Leadership of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh", *Sociological Analysis* 49 (2):119-135.
- Rajneesh, Bhagwan Shree (1988a). *From the False to the Truth. Answers to the Seekers of the Path*. Cologne, West Germany: The Rebel Publishing House GmbH.
- Rajneesh, Bhagwan Shree (1988b). *Yaa-hoo! The Mystic Rose*. Cologne, West Germany: The Rebel Publishing House GmbH.
- Sheela (1996). *Tötet ihn nicht!* München: Walter Shinagl.
- Thompson, Judith & Paul Heelas (1986). *The Way of the Heart. The Rajneesh Movement*. New Religious Movements Series. Series Editor Peter B. Clarke. Wellingborough, Northamptonshire: The Aquarian Press.
- Wallis, Roy (1982). "Charisma, Commitment and Control in a New Religious Movement" pg. 73-140 in Wallis, Roy (ed.) *Millennialism and Charisma*. Belfast: The Queen's University.
- Weber, Max (1964). *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*. Ed. and with an introduction by Talcott Parsons. New York: The Free Press.
- Weber, Max (1968). *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. New York, Bedminster Press.

Electronic material

E-mail Baravara 2005-02-07

Osho: From Bondage to Freedom, chapter 1, “To be ordinary is the most extraordinary thing in the world”, <http://www.osho.com/Main.cfm?Area=Magazine&Language=English> 2005-02-20).

Osho LT 2:25: Last Testament, vol. 2, chapter 25,
<http://www.osho.com/Main.cfm?Area=Magazine&Language=English> 2005-02-20

Osho LT 2:23: The Last Testament, vol. 2, chapter 23, “Religion is just rubbish”,
<http://www.osho.com/Main.cfm?Area=Magazine&Language=English> 2005-02-20.

Unprinted material

Interview 031130 with Sheela Birnstiel.

Interview 1

Interview 2

Interview 3

Interview 4

Viha Connection Magazine, “From Unconsciousness to Consciousness 1, discourse 20, November 19th, 1984”