Socialization of the "Homeless Mind". An Analysis of Contemporary Society through the Contribution of Peter Berger

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Abstract: Make a contribution to the socialization process debate, using Peter Berger's sociological perspective, is the goal of this paper. The making of consciousness after the modernization process – the era of the "homeless mind" (Berger, Berger, & Kellner, 1974) – is a very complex phenomenon to explain and it is a very relevant subject for sociology. Berger proposes a very innovative theoretical systematization in which is main the concept of meaning. The book that made him famous is the one written with Thomas Luckmann in 1966: "The Social Construction of Reality. A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge". Their study seeks to highlight the knowledge of common sense and social processes through this knowledge is built. The process of social construction of reality – according to the authors –, has a dialectical nature, which is made of three different moments but separable only analytically. These three moments are defined "externalization, objectivation and internalization" (Berger & Luckmann, 1991, p. 149). Of great importance to the stage of the internalization is the socialization process. So "the imposition of social patterns on behaviour" (Berger & Berger, 1975, p. 55) becomes a very remarkable phenomenon to be studied, especially in the contemporary society scenario where the traditional hierarchy of values has lost its stability.

Keywords: socialization, consciousness, secularization, choice

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Introduction

Peter Berger's work is very important for sociology because his research aims to upgrade the theoretical of Alfred Schütz[1] through really original contributions. As Berger remains "follower" of the pioneering work of Schütz, he can propose a very innovative theoretical systematization in which, however, is always main the concept of meaning. Perhaps, the book that made him famous is the one written with Thomas Luckmann in 1966: "*The Social Construction of Reality. A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*"[2]. This work, as it can easily be deduced from the title, was intended to establish new theoretical foundations for the sociology of knowledge. Their study seeks to highlight the knowledge of common sense and social processes through this knowledge is built. In particular, it aims to understand the reasons why men do not question the reality that surrounds them in every single moment of their lives. The process of social construction of reality, has a dialectical nature, which is made of three different moments but separable only analytically. These three moments are defined "externalization, objectivation and internalization" (Berger & Luckmann, 1991, p. 149). Of great importance to the stage of the internalization is the socialization process. For authors socialization is an "ontogenetic process […], which may thus be defined as the comprehensive and consistent induction of an individual into the objective world of a society or a sector of it" (Berger & Luckmann, 1991, p. 150). Especially in primary socialization, relationship with the so-called "significant others" (Berger & Luckmann, 1991, p. 151) deeply shapes the individual's conscience and, thing of great importance, for reasons related more to the affective aspect than to the cognitive one. Its own dimension is "highly charged emotionally" (Berger & Luckmann, 1991, p. 151). This fact has enormous implications, it is useful to analyze. So "the imposition of social patterns on behaviour"[3] (Berger, & Berger, 1975, p. 55) becomes a very remarkable phenomenon to be studied, especially in the contemporary society scenario where the traditional hierarchy of values has lost its

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[1] Alfred Schütz is the founder of phenomenological approach. See Schütz (1945, 1972, 2011).

[2] For comments on this work, see for example Rose (1967); Light Jr. (1967); Simpson (1967).

[3] A general overview of the social phenomenon in phenomenological terms can be found in Rafky (1971).

stability. The making of consciousness after the modernization process – the era of the "homeless mind" (Berger, Berger & Kellner, 1974) – is a very complex phenomenon to explain and it is a very relevant subject for sociology. So it is really important to understand, for the phenomenological perspective, that the dissolution of the religious authority causes the birth of a new man whose consciousness is, in short, no longer structured in accordance with a vision of the world of the traditional type[4]. To synthetize: contemporary world has a problem of legitimacy (Berger, 1973).

First of all, if we want to give a proper view of the facts, we should analyze the socio-historical process that caused this delegitimization of social institutions.

Modern society: the issue of secularized consciousness

The birth and development of modern forms of life are closely linked to the wider process of secularization[5]. The achievement of a new type of consciousness reflects the rise of the bourgeois class. This class, composed especially by merchants, bankers and craftsmen – that is, new urban classes – structure their identities in opposition to the interests and ethos typical of Ministers of the Church. In general, sociology has been devoting much space to the analysis of modern society. Thousands of pages have been written on the subject by countless scholars belonging to several schools and traditions of thought. Admittedly, it is almost unthinkable to be a sociologist – at least in the academic sense – without having focused about the issue of modernity birth and affirmation of modern society (Berger & Luckmann, 1995). Peter Berger is absolutely no exception to this rule.

An excellent contribution to this specific topic comes from a work written by this author in partnership with Brigitte Berger and Hansfried Kellner. In "*The Homeless Mind*" the authors are concerned with analyzing the process of modernization trying to detach their points of view from any ideological schemes. The authors argue, rightly, that it is impossible to make accurate sociological analysis of modern times by moving from a

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[4] We can find an attempt to apply Berger's theory to the analysis of relationship between religious beliefs and socialization in Cornwall (1987).
[5] An updated opinion on the subject is in Berger (2001).

linear and progressive perspective of history. Similarly, it would be pointless to proceed in the analysis with the *a priori* conviction to really know – a position relying on the knowledge of the common sense – what modern society is. To achieve the goal of a scientifically appropriate analysis, it is therefore necessary to consider modernity as a "social fact": a "historical phenomenon". In this way, it is possible to deal with the subject "modernity" for what it is: a phenomenon, because it was born historically, which may be destined to run out. If the variables which caused it, they will weaken or even disappear, the "modernity" will leave the social scenario with them too (Berger, Berger & Kellner, 1974, pp. 11-12).

As the authors say, the problem of modern society has often been faced, especially since the Second World War, in close relationship with the matter of the economic dimension. From this parameter, many theories were built then – together with a number of keys terminological tools – to face the problem of modernity in a rather one-sided, the economistic fashion. The complex phenomenological issue of modernity has been consequently turned into a problem of economic modernization and development. As the authors point out, it is necessary, however, to mark an important distinction. These two terms are often confused as they are reduced only to the economic dimension. In this way – due to ideological reasons often unaware – they express a strong value judgment, whether positive or negative depending on the political positions of different scholars (Berger, Berger & Kellner, 1974, p. 13).

Clearly, speaking about modernity in these terms imply a partial and biased worldview. This position immediately causes a problem of stigmatization. Societies do not meet these requirements becomes *ipso facto* a backward society. Having said this, it would be stupid – as the authors say – to "throw the baby out with the bathwater" and renounce to the analytical value of a notion of modernity because of its economistic drift. The concept of modernity is an accurate and useful tool widely helpful, if used well, to analyze social transformations. What is important, for the purpose of an adequate sociological analysis, is to give a clear definition of the modernization process. According to the authors, modernization should be understood *"as the institutional concomitants of technologically induced economic growth"* (Berger, Berger & Kellner, 1974, p. 15). In this sense, they talk about "modern society" exclusively as a stage of a social process characterized by a bigger or a minor relevant economic and technological growth. In addition, it must be taken into

consideration the aspects related to the political institutions, above all those ones related to the birth of the modern state and the bureaucracy. In a second step, where the modernization has already spread, "institution of technological production and bureaucracy, together and separately, […become] primary agents of social change" (Berger, Berger & Kellner, 1974, p. 16). The authors also point out, they do not intend to pinpoint monocausal explanations but, they want to broader their analytical perspective by taking into account the non-economic variables, which are involved with the process of modernization. The transformations of the social hierarchy give raise to a new vision of the world. The widespread awareness of belonging to classes disconnected from the bonds of tradition – especially religious basis – causes the success of a new way of being in the world. Modernity is the social scenario in which a new form of consciousness comes to light. This consciousness, product of the development of the technique too, is separated from the natural world and from the transcendental realm and is the basis for the individual as we still understand it today.

In this book, Peter Berger, Brigitte Berger and Kellner Hansfried's further fundamental intention is to analyze the making of consciousness in the modern era in a dialectical process which links this dimension to the macro level of the institutionalization process. Obviously, this research is performed by the authors from a phenomenological perspective. Phenomenology analyzes this problem in a particular way, giving much importance to the inextricable relationship that holds together the individual with the social dimension: "Society is viewed […] as a dialectic between objective givenness and subjective meanings – that is, as being constituted by the reciprocal interaction of what is experienced as outside reality (specifically, the world of institutions that confronts the individual) and what is experienced as being within the consciousness of individual. Put differently, *all social reality has an essential component of consciousness*. The *consciousness of everyday life* is the web of meanings that allow the individual to navigate his way through the ordinary events and encounters of his life with others. The totality of this meanings, which he shares with others, makes up a particular *social-life world*" (Berger, Berger & Kellner, 1974, p. 18).

As already Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann state in their book, sociology should not deal with the social construction of theoretical consciousness; rather, it must analyze the making of the "pre-theoretical

consciousness" (Berger, Berger & Kellner, 1974, p. 18). By the latter sociology has to deal with the daily life of human beings rather than deal with the sphere of ideas. A large part of men knows nothing of the great theoretical systems or philosophical but still – and sometimes with minor existential doubts! – lives quietly in the world. However, the modern consciousness has a particular way of looking at things in the world-of-life. The sociology of knowledge – the authors reaffirm in this book – has to deal with the social construction of different matrices of meaning, through them people signify their lives. To this purpose, we need to investigate the different cosmologies where people of different periods are embedded, namely the frameworks of meaning, which are omnicomprehensive and historically-specific – what the authors call "*symbolic universe*" (Berger, Berger & Kellner, 1974, p. 21) –, embrace the life of men by protecting the structure of society from chaos. In specifying the original theoretical position adopted, the authors point out their purposes: their approach is different from the Marxist and Freudian one and from the American social psychology. While considering both useful analytical tools, they prefer a theoretical approach able to describe "structures of consciousness 'from within' and […the way in which these structures are linked] to the objective meanings of institutional processes given 'from without'" (Berger, Berger & Kellner, 1974, p. 24). In this way, for the authors, it is possible to better understand changes of "existing social conditions" (Berger, Berger & Kellner, 1974, p. 25). So it is crucial to underline, at a phenomenological perspective, that the weakening of the religious meanings causes the emergence of a new existential condition. A new type of consciousness that can no longer rely on the matrix of meaning that the traditional world offered previously. In another important work by Berger, we can find many important reflections on this topic[6] – that is the issue of secularization. In *The Social Reality of Religion*, the author discusses this problem by placing it in close relation with the problem of legitimacy. As usual, he looks for distance himself from an ideological view of the problem. It is important – Berger continues – to study the process of secularization in a perspective that is free from value judgments. The relevance of secularization for the Western world has to certainly be recognized. It is remarkable to identify the socio-historical origins of this phenomenon in the context of Christianity itself too. All this, however,

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[6] An interesting critical discussion on the subject will be found in Kline III (2001).

maintaining an equidistance from the phenomenon: it is irrelevant for purposes of the scholar to tell whether this phenomenon represents an improvement or a worsening of the social existence conditions (Berger, 1973, pp. 112-113).

There are many different definitions of the term "secularization" but in order to proceed with a fruitful approach for the social sciences, it is necessary – the author affirms – to try to propose a definition as precise as possible and as free as possible from the value judgments. A long tradition of thought – both Catholic and, conversely, Enlightenment – is likely to distort research on this: in general, depending on the position that deals with this continuum, from more conservative to the most liberal, it will throw light on the matter differently. Hence, on the one hand, conservatives see in the process of secularization a negative disintegration of community ties and a weakening of solid hierarchy of values and traditional social structure. Liberals, on the other hand, see in the process of secularization a carrier of emancipation from the rigid patterns of conduct of the pre-modern society. It is therefore essential for Berger to explicate the terms of the issue through a precise definition of the phenomenon: secularization is that process which result represents on the up and up society areas subtracted to religious government. More and more sectors of cultural production free themselves from the influence of institutions and religious symbolic. In the case of the Western world it is clear that this emancipation was accomplished to Christianity expenses. However, secularization invests the wholeness of social life: consciousness itself becomes an object of this process. As a result of secularization, more and more human beings have been living without the help of the framework of meanings that religions had provided them for centuries (Berger, 1973, p. 113). The process of secularization causes a radical transformation of the world view. In fact, in pre-modern societies – namely, not yet secularized societies – men live in a sacred world. There is no separation between the transcendent and the earthly: the divine sphere embraces the existence of human being. There is a lack of distinction between the "cosmic order" (Berger, 1973, p. 119) and the human order, continually refreshed through ritual practices: ultimately, there is a permanent correspondence between the Earth's plane and the Heaven's plane. A transgression of these twin planes – for example caused by a lack of respect for a sacred object – causes an ontological fracture of the traditional order: chaos invades social life insofar society should be once more "nomized" (Berger, 1973, p. 120). As a result, in pre-modern

societies every mundane phenomenon assumes a higher meaning which transcends all possible attributions of meaning that are merely empirical. Consequently, the whole social order is strongly legitimized because it is anchored to the supra-empirical. Yet, the Judeo-Christian tradition – a main example of pre-modern world view in sociology which is based on monotheistic and historic view and on a radically transcendent God – carries within itself the key elements for the secularization of the world. And so, while in pre-modern societies the social order is strongly legitimized, in secularized societies the opposite is true. For this reason – even under the blows of a growing rationalization of social life – the solid hierarchy of values that used to regulate forms of human life traditional organization is bound to dissolve. In this sense, the existence of the human being is exposed to the increasing penetration of the doubt. The secularization of the world – as Berger states – has undermined the plausibility that held the social reality and its shared definitions. The collapse of the religious system has produced effects both on the level of individual consciousness that, dialectically, on the macro level of the social structure. On the individual level, a radical uncertainty affects man on issues related to the field of religion. On social level, he meets a much larger religious offering, based on also very different worldviews; so there are "reality-defining agencies that compete for his allegiance or at least attention, and none of which is in a position to coerce him into allegiance. In other words, the phenomenon called 'pluralism' is a social-structural correlate of the secularization of consciousness"[7] (Berger, 1973, p. 131).

And so, while on the one hand we find in the modern industrial society a greater choice – and therefore freedom – that men couldn't enjoy in pre-modern society, on the other hand this large freedom is a source of legitimacy crisis scenarios in the social structure and in its value hierarchy. In other words, when devoid of transcendent supports, modern cosmology entails to contradictory process: while on one side it creates enormous opportunities for individuals, on the other side it is likely to induce different forms of alienation[8]. That is to say, the price that people must pay for their freedom lies in a *compulsory* quest for the meaning of their

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[7] An in-depth analysis of the competition between different religious worldviews and socialization process, in a comparative perspective between the theoretical position by Peter Berger and other explanatory paradigms, it can be found in Jelen & Wilcox (1998).
[8] For this concept in the terms of Berger see Berger & Pullberg (1965).

existence. This search is as difficult because many agencies promise to give meaning to experience cannot guarantee an omnicomprehensive matrix of value. Then, this situation is at the same time a source of crisis and opportunity for people. It is clear that the process of secularization is the result of a long and gradual socio-historical path. Many variables have to occur over time before this process can be fully realized. In particular, according to Berger, the increasing rationalization of society and the growing diffusion of massive technologies of all kind have played a key role in the process of secularization. The modern *homo oeconomicus* is indeed required to rationalize its activities: worldly practices thus become the only bearers of meaning and, consequently, consciousness gives meaning just to them. Scientific thinking becomes dominant and expels from the world every supra-empirical question which, alas, becomes meaningless[9]. In modern society, the achievement of the central State, the progressive development of the dynamics of capitalism, the strengthening of the means of transport and means of communication (that are shrinking the world) spread a rational *ethos*, more akin to a highly bureaucratized society. For these reasons, in modern society one of the main issues is what Berger calls the "problem of plausibility" (Berger, 1973, p. 131): the social construction of meaning can no longer be based on value systems that are certain and indisputable. The universe of meanings that belongs to the religious dimension weakens dramatically, and loses any credible *nomos* that could be tied to ultimate meanings of existence. This unusual condition involves decisive implications especially on a psychological level, even if not only at that level. The institutional structure of modernity is no longer able to give effective meaning to human conduct, insofar as it becomes reasonable to expect several practical repercussions on the level of social action. Again, we can identify in this state of affairs a potential scenario of freedom as well as one of *anomia* (Berger, 1973, pp. 112-156). The new state of consciousness initiated by modern society causes a radical transformation of the way of being in the world. This unprecedented existential dimension is one of the core elements of the consciousness of the modern individual who produces decisive psychological implications. According to Berger, religion in this peculiar social configuration becomes a matter of personal choice. The metaphysical certainties that previously

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[9] To better understand in what sense Berger interprets the theme of disappearance of transcendence in the modern world, see Berger (1974).

lied outside of the individual and that had a compulsory nature, now belong to the domain of the individual conscience. What was once perceived as objective, now becomes an expression of subjectivity. Even the sacred events of the life of Jesus Christ – in the example of the author – are shaped in a psychological way and belong to "the consciousness of the believer. Put differently, the *realissimum* to which religion refers is transposed from the cosmos or from history to individual consciousness. Cosmology becomes psychology. History becomes biography" (Berger, 1973, p. 168).

It should now be clear, as a result of what we have so far argued that social life, after modern turning, gives shape to a complex configuration, full of hidden ambivalences.

This will be the subject of next paragraph.

"*From fate to choice*": the existential condition of contemporary man

From the beginning, one of the main themes at the core of social sciences has been the study of the organization forms of human life in the absence (partial or complete) of religious institutions. Many questions attach to this problem: how can the social structure regulate relations among its parts – and then at the micro level: how will they dispose relations among people – without the support assured for centuries by religious normativity? How can the family keep its indissolubility[10]? How can the father and the mother still recognize their roles and their functions? How education will preserve its effectiveness and legitimacy? How can the capitalist economy not invade every aspect of social life? How can the spiritual life still have a place in a world devoid of values (or rather, in which economic value is predominant)? And, more generally, how can men orient themselves in a world that does not know absolute norms and, in turn, how can they resist the vortex of relativism?

These issues have now been of the main interests of sociology nowadays. Today, even more, they have taken on such a scale that it is impossible to overestimate their importance.

The contemporary social scenario can be seen as a "pluralistic situation" (Berger, 1981, p. 31): this historically new condition – at least in its radical,

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[10] It is possible to find an interesting point of view on the matter, always starting from the Berger's work, in Weigert & Hastings (1977).

contemporary form – is certainly the result of a long socio-historical process that has untied the hierarchy of the values of the religious cosmology and the traditional society's values too. It is true "that the peculiarity of modern pluralism is its linkage with an overall weakening of the meaning of human institutions, and this in turn is related to secularization as an ideological feature of modern technological culture […]: pluralism is not only an external social fact, but it is an internal psychological fact" (Berger, 1981, p. 32).

In this kind of social configuration, every aspect of community and individual life becomes a matter of "preference" (Berger, 1981, p. 33) to the extent that even the decision of the religious orientation – which is exemplificative of a paradigmatic prescription in the traditional society – becomes a *personal will*. On the one hand, this condition of things is certainly expression of a genuine liberal regime; on the other this condition causes several problems concerning especially the moral universe. Everything today is a *matter of choice*. Modern society, actually, shows a transition "*from fate to choice*" (Berger, 1981, p. 34). This kind of society provides a range of choices whose extent was unthinkable before, not only referring the material possibilities. The number of social institutions increases enormously since society itself has become a very complex entity. The same process of multiplication of choices affects the human consciousness. What was once perceived as a matter of inescapable fate, now becomes a matter of individual will. Religion, as well as the totality of the experience of the other fields become matters of choice and no longer ascribed status from the birth. This is certainly a revolutionary condition if compared to the greater part of human history (Berger, 1981, p. 34).

It is for these reasons that, according to Berger, in the contemporary world, in terms of the construction of the meaning of our lives, we can define ourselves "heretics"[11] (Berger, 1981, p. 34) in the original acceptation of the term: for us, adhering to a tradition that does no longer involve developing a sense of *obligation* in making a choice. Paradoxically, today even an Orthodox – as the author cleverly notes – can *choose* to be, and this choice is not necessarily the outcome of an imposition derived from the tradition or a kind of the course of the action prescribed by social institutions. Clearly, this particular configuration implies a constant state of "uncertainty" (Berger, 1981, p. 34): in strictly phenomenological terms we

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[11] See also Berger (1979).

are witnessing a dissolution in social life of the "taken for granted" (Berger, 1981, p. 35).

What Peter Berger says about religion in contemporary society extends to all areas of social life. Therefore, in many ways, a condition of *existential market* takes shape, for any aspect of our life amounts to a choice between different options, among them there is no significant difference in terms of value – and here the term value ought to be intended in the moral sense – but only a difference in terms of price. The hierarchy of values of the pre-modern society has been replaced by a cosmology of the market, based on consumption. Indeed, "religion in our society is a typical consumer product. It is consumer patterns that determine its marketing process. It should not be surprising if this religious economy bears further resemblance to the secular economic matrix within which it exists" (Berger, 1963, pp. 88-89).

It could be evident from the above, the possible complications that the socialization process may encounter in contemporary society.

This will be the topic that will be discussed in the final paragraph.

Socialization difficulties in today's society: so many possibilities, so much uncertainty

Traditional society knew very few socializing agencies. What was being transmitted to the baby from an early childhood is confirmed constantly throughout his adult life. The religious system – as Berger and Luckmann say (1991, pp. 149 and ff.) – held together the totality of meanings in a comprehensive scheme. So, family, education, values, were embedded into a coherent matrix of meaning that kept them together for life. No doubt about what was right to do. And this state of things was true both for routine matters of daily life, and for those marginal. Every moment of life as well as any role to play in society, were clear, unquestionable and stable. The distance between subjective meanings internalized during the socialization process and the shared definition of reality was so small that the objectivity of the social world was taken for granted. So even the identity of each individual component of the community was steadfast, as social institutions had a high degree of legitimacy. To paraphrase the title of a work by Peter Berger to which we have already referred, in traditional society *mind had a home*.

Become a member of contemporary society, maintaining stable and conscious identity of its role in the community, it is a much more difficult. This problematic is closely related to the process of socialization. In fact, the stage of secondary socialization is all the more complex as the specific society where this process takes place is layered: "secondary socialization is the internalization of institutional or institution-based 'sub-worlds'. Its extent and character are therefore determined by the complexity of the division of labour and the concomitant social distribution of knowledge" (Berger & Luckmann, p. 158). The problem in contemporary society is that the entire social world internalized during primary socialization is continually questioned in the time of secondary socialization. The existence of so many agencies of socialization gives shape to a very fragmented economy of meanings. Since the socialization – as we have already mentioned at the beginning according to Berger – is a process based much more on the affective dimension of the cognitive, this fragmentation causes profound psychological implications[12]. In phenomenological terms the problem that arises is that different definitions of reality – all equally legitimate, that is to say all legit poorly – struggle with each other, causing a weakening of "plausibility structures" (Berger & Luckmann, 1991, p. 175) of the universe of meanings. In a complex society such as contemporary, the socialization process can become problematic because "the institutionalized distribution of tasks between primary and secondary socialization varies with the complexity of the social distribution of knowledge" (Berger & Luckmann, 1991, p. 166). Ultimately, in order to a successful socialization, the internalized world needs to assume the appearance of unavoidability. The success of this process is much simpler for the phase of the primary socialization since "the more 'artificial' character of secondary socialization makes the subjective reality of its internalizations even more vulnerable to challenging definitions of reality, not because they are not taken for granted or are apprehended as less than real in everyday life, but because their reality is less deeply rooted in consciousness and thus more susceptible to displacement" (Berger &

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[12] The phenomenon of sect membership in contemporary society can probably be explained as an extreme reaction to this state of psychological uncertainty. See Berger (1984). It is also possible that the success of some contemporary religious movements can be considered an answer to the existential precariousness typical of the advanced modern society. A reading of the religious revival is in Berger, Davie & Fokas (2008). See also Berger (1969).

Luckmann, 1991, p. 167). At any rate the goal of every society – authors continue – is to preserve the ordinary definitions of reality from possible crisis of meaning. So the routinization of everyday life becomes the process that most contributes to the stability of meanings. But, for this, it is necessary that strong legitimacy is recognized to the social institutions. In the terms that we used before, we might say that they should have a nature of unavoidability. This "social process of reality-maintenance" (Berger & Luckmann, 1991, p. 169) becomes much more problematic to be taken as successful, if, for example, family, religion, or more generally the social agencies that historically transmit their meanings to social actors are in crisis. The increase of agencies of socialization – especially those related to the world of media – causes a proliferation of definitions of reality, often in sharp conflict with each other. In simple terms, if at home my family taught me to conform my way of dressing to the places I frequent, and television instead sends the opposite message, is very likely that the definition of reality be weakened. This is true even more because the family institution, can no longer count on the unshakeable support of religion – the institution which more than any other has legitimized it – loses much of its authority. The difficulty of preserving the shared sense of reality in contemporary society, also depends on the fact that in situations where the sense is in crisis, men cannot resort to collective rituals whose meaning is strongly shared. Of course this does not mean they do not exist modern rituals – and indeed certainly there are – but it is not recognized the legitimacy that they had in traditional societies. This delegitimization is caused by the presence of multiple "counter-definitions of reality" (Berger & Luckmann, 1991, p. 185) to whom humans are constantly exposed. In a so prismatic situation, "unsuccessful socialization may be the result of different significant others mediating different objective realities to the individual. Put differently, unsuccessful socialization may be the result of heterogeneity in the socializing personnel" (Berger & Luckmann, 1991, p. 187). Basically the very wide margin of choice that individuals have achieved in contemporary society, makes them at the same time "homeless minds". More the range of possibilities is broad, more the certainty of having made the right choice – both from a rational point of view and from the affective – it is revealed weak and poorly founded. If the hierarchy of values is taken into the vortex of relativism becomes increasingly uncertain to say what is right and what is wrong. Freedom of action and thought it pays with a constant uncertainty: "the possibility of 'individualism' (that is, of individual choice

between discrepant realities and identities) is directly linked to the possibility of unsuccessful socialization" (Berger & Luckmann, 1991, p. 190). This state of affairs is closely linked to the increasingly complex social stratification and to the effects that this stratification has on the formation process of individual identity (Luckmann & Berger, 1964, pp. 332 and ff.). For example, "the looseness of the class structure contributes to a relative *uncertainty* of status" (Luckmann & Berger, 1964, p. 334) and, this thing, involves remarkable social and psychological implications. If the job embedded individuals into a solid framework of meanings, today the dissolution of a shared hierarchy of professional status – as Berger and Luckmann affirm – causes a weakening of the identity definition. More social structure becomes fragmented and subject to rationalization, more it becomes difficult to attribute a comprehensive meaning to social existence. Individuals are in fact in the presence of abstract entities, impersonal, which have the sole purpose of accomplishing specialized and anonymous functions. So it is physiological that functional substitutes of traditional institutions try to compensate for what these can no longer offer. In fact, "to satisfy the need for 'essential identities' an identity market appears, supplied by secondary institutions. The individual becomes a consumer of identities offered on this market, some of them of reasonable durability others so subject to fashion that one can speak of planned obsolescence" (Luckmann & Berger, 1964, p. 337). As the authors state, the typical social mobility of highly industrialized societies causes further problems to the individual identity formation as the displacements – both physical and symbolic – that this mobility involves, causing an uprooting from the communities where the individual's socialization is accomplished. "This causes an interesting reversal of the original socialization process. The norms that were originally internalized are now externalized once more, that is, they are located outside the self as belonging to the past or to others from whom one has become alienated. There appears a cleavage between past and present identity, with the former now being reinterpreted in terms of the latter" (Luckmann & Berger, 1964, p. 337).

At the same time, media and peer group acquire great importance during socialization – especially the anticipatory one – which increasingly undermines the authority of the family and exposes the new generations to stereotyped behaviour patterns. These dynamics are closely linked to the capitalist system based on consumption: even the identity formation, in

some sense, reflects this state of affairs (Luckmann & Berger, 1964, pp. 338-340).

Conclusion

According to the Weberian tradition, the lesson he gives us – among others – is not to create value judgments about social phenomena. The fact that Berger emphasizes this aspect has a very deep significance, given his biography[13]. Peter Berger, during his total production, refrained from taking apocalyptic or favourable positions towards the studied object. He tried always to be equidistant from the analyzed phenomena. He never had a preliminary position to defend the goodness of his work. He changed his views as deemed necessary in the years, especially on the topic of secularization[14]. By definition, contemporary society is a complex society, but therefore, it is very difficult to analyze it or to hazard some predictions about its future scenarios. The phenomenological approach developed by the author, however, is a very useful toolbox to try an adequate analysis of the social reality. His studies, focused mainly on the problem of meaning, are a very effective contribution of knowledge to the study of human behaviour. In all his works – the general sociology ones, and the sociology of religion and knowledge too – can be found theoretical tools, essential to the analysis of social processes that are taking place today, right before our eyes. The issue of socialization – as we tried to show in this article – was approached by the author in phenomenological terms. Often in works together with other authors, Berger was able to offer a very original vision of this issue, contributing to its better understanding. The study about more general phenomena – such as those related to the transformation of world views – cannot do without a deep sociological knowledge of the socialization process and its transformations. For these reasons, to study changes of the universes of meaning through which individuals intersubjectively construct social reality is, basically, a scientific research

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[13] A "sociological" autobiography is in Berger (2011).
[14] See for example, Berger (1996/1997). For a brief reconstruction of Peter Berger's thought and on his changes about this subject, see also Köhrsen (2012). A recent research on the desecularization of the world that takes into account Berger's theoretical change is in Lagrange & Matthews (2014).

on the socialization of the world. The social world – its institutions, its hierarchies, its definitions of reality, and so on – in Western society is not more strongly legitimated. This is because the institutions that have to socialize newcomers no longer have much authority. A whole hierarchy of values has weakened. Dissolution of religious systems, the crisis of the scientific plausibility, the proliferation of agencies of socialization, new scenarios related to the extraordinary expansion of the media: with this complicated social situation has to deal the socialization process today. By applying category proposed by Peter Berger: contemporary man is in a situation of "free market" (Berger, 1963, p. 79). In the world inhabited by the homeless mind, education plays a fundamental role. In an era, where the relativism of values is inversely proportional to the legitimacy, values transmission of being together is a very complicated task, and – especially for this reasons – education system cannot ignore it[15].

It is worth noting in this respect – also as a way to address the issue in non-apocalyptic terms – that this unusual condition implies a deep sense of crisis but at the same time an extraordinary wealth of opportunities. Once again, the future lies in the hands of men and we can only rest on their choices: this is the weight and honour that modern society casts upon us – a legacy, it is worth emphasizing, that is very precious and fragile. We believe that, following this last consideration, Peter Berger – whose production is focused this essay – would agree.

We think, in conclusion, that this contribution can contain some elements of originality as it allows to face the hard problem of socialization in phenomenological terms. In this way it is possible to put renewed attention on the process of conscience formation in the contemporary world; an issue – given the fragmentation of meaning in the current social scenario – of the utmost importance.

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[15] For an analysis of schooling, from a perspective not so far from the one developed by Berger, see Theobald & Manus (1991).

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