Chapter 8
Migration and Social Suffering

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Abstract This chapter focuses on the suffering caused by being seen and treated as a migrant or asylum seeker. It establishes a parallel between this form of suffering and that experienced by people living in economically developed countries who have become economically "useless." It discusses some of the mechanisms leading to social suffering, namely those connected to pervasive doctrines, defined as a system of beliefs and values, and of social norms and social practices that permeate the structure of a society and influence social interactions. Finally, the chapter discusses a fictional depiction of the suffering of migrants: the movie *Bread and Chocolate* by Franco Brusati.

8.1 Introduction

The phenomenon of migration is typically discussed in terms of its economic and political consequences or, alternatively, from the point of view of the suffering that migrants experience both in their country and during the migration itself (the difficult journey, the arrival, the battle with bureaucracy, etc.). Seldom broached, however, is the suffering caused by being seen—and of seeing oneself—as a migrant, asylum seeker or alien (to use the controversial US bureaucratic term). This chapter focuses on this aspect while, at the same time, establishing a parallel with individuals who live in economically developed countries (i.e., the countries migrants aim to reach) and who have become economically "useless" (for example, the unemployed, the precariously employed and those who are retired).

These economically "useless" individuals experience a form of suffering similar to that of migrants; in both cases, their existence ceases to have any public relevance. The public and political spheres treat both sets of people from an exclusively economic point of view by discussing, for example, the costs of unemployment benefits, retirement benefits and spikes in immigration. Both migrants and "useless"

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individuals lose their humanity and become mere numbers, and their problems are described exclusively in terms of data. This chapter seeks to understand how this suffering is produced and how it can be avoided or reduced.

My argument will not follow a strictly normative perspective[1]; rather, it will start with a brief social diagnosis based on the way that both migrants and welfare recipients are treated in Western societies (Sects. 8.1 and 8.2). It will then move forward with an analysis of social suffering and its causes (Sect. 8.3) and discuss a fictional depiction of the suffering of migrants (Sect. 8.4).

8.2 "Deserving" and "Undeserving" Migrants

In recent decades, migration has played a major role in political debates throughout Europe, becoming one of the most important issues alongside unemployment and domestic security (with regard to both terrorism and cultural conflicts); it is frequently discussed in connection with both of these topics. This might explain why the discourse on migration usually evolves either from an economic perspective or from the point of view of social stability. At the same time, both its moral dimension (the suffering of the migrants) and its causal explanations (the reasons so many people migrate) are overlooked. The solutions that are presented in most cases concern the best ways of closing borders and stopping the stream of new arrivals. These, however, are solutions for the societies that receive migrants, not for the problems that provoke migration in the first place. There is something cynical in thinking that the real issue of migration consists of effectively regulating (or even stopping) the migratory influx while leaving untouched the reasons why people choose to face so much peril and pain to arrive in Europe. This cynicism plays a major role in intensifying the suffering faced by migrants in their journey towards what they consider to be a safe haven and a land of plenty.

Other forms of suffering also go unnoticed in the discussion on migration. We all know the plight to which migrants are subjected on their journeys across different countries and continents. They constantly risk death from the fury of elements (for example, crossing the Sahara, the Mediterranean or some mountain range in winter while wearing their summer clothes), from precarious means of transport (such as unseaworthy dinghies, the hollow bottoms of vehicles where they can hide, and overheated trucks or containers), or simply from human violence—often exerted by the very smugglers to whom they entrust their lives, by bandits roaming border regions (particularly in Africa) or by police and border patrols in both Africa and Europe.[2] Yet, even when migrants finally manage to reach their destinations, or at least a safe country where they can apply for asylum, their suffering continues.

[1] For a normative argument, see, among others, Angeli (2011), Ott (2016), and Velasco (2016).

[2] Among the many publications describing the odyssey of migrants, Carr (2015) is particularly rich in details and data.

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They then have to endure months or even years of legal limbo while living in overcrowded immigration centers. There, in addition to the suffering induced by the uncertainty of their fate and by the separation from their family and friends, they may suffer violence at the hands of their companions, their guards and even the local population.[3] Beyond all these forms of suffering, there is another form connected specifically to the fact that the society they have reached not only labels them as migrants but also seems to consider them as *nothing but* migrants. Instead of simply referring to a temporary status they happen to hold (they are migrating from place X to place Y), the word becomes a way of indicating their ontological status, of defining what they *are*. In other words, they cease to be people who are escaping war, famine, poverty and so on and become just plain migrants, as if the term refers to a way of being, not to the specific action of migrating.

Of course, nobody would use the word with this ontological meaning to refer to an academic who accepts a position at a university abroad, to a football player moving from one league to another, or to a manager holding a position in an international corporation and working successively in different countries. Although technically they are all moving from one country to another for economic reasons, and doing so mostly to improve their quality of life, they are normally referred to as expats, almost never as migrants and much less as *economic* migrants (which is actually what they are, in a strict sense).

Politicians and officials use the latter term to indicate those who come to Europe looking for better economic conditions; this distinguishes them from asylum seekers or refugees,[4] who are trying to escape war or persecution in their countries of origin. In doing so, officials establish a distinction between "deserving" migrants, i.e., refugees who should be welcomed, at least until the situation in their countries improves (although in recent months, one can identify a mounting unwillingness in Western societies to grant them asylum), and "undeserving" migrants, i.e., those who are "just" looking for economic improvement.

The oddity is that one of the main tenets of capitalist ideology, i.e., the positive character attributed to the constant effort to improve one's economic condition, becomes a reason for morally condemning people who strive for such improvement to the point of risking their lives to reach Europe. An attitude deemed as laudable in skilled workers seeking economic improvement, such as managers, football players or academics, is condemned as an expression of reckless egoism in people coming from poor countries, independently of their skills and of whether they reach Europe by legal or illegal means.

[3] As seen recently in Italy and Germany, with far-right activists attacking and setting fire to immigration centers and throwing stones at buses transporting refugee women and children (see, among others: http://siracusa.gds.it/2014/11/03/avola-pietre-e-bottiglie-contro-il-centro-dei-rifugiati_256574/, http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/neo-nazi-gang-italy-refugee-carabinieri-la-spezia-far-right-facist-racism-a7716406.html and http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-39096833)

[4] In the bureaucratic language of the EU (which in this point differs from everyday language), asylum seekers are individuals who arrive in a country claiming that they are escaping war or persecution; once they get asylum, they are called refugees.

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In fact, most migrants are not even categorized according to their skills, particularly in the case of irregular ones. It does not matter whether you are a doctor or a day laborer; all that counts is that you have arrived in Europe illegally, whether you traveled in a dinghy, hid in a truck or container, swam across a river, or crossed a land border on foot. This simple fact makes you a specific kind of person and defines your identity; from this moment, you are just an illegal migrant living in legal limbo, with almost no real legal protection and certainly without the right to deploy your skills to make a living, for your status does not allow you to work *legally*. Therefore, you will at best carry out menial jobs, often at the mercy of your employers, who will profit from your lack of legal protection and may exploit you pitilessly.

A doctor, if he wishes to supplement the meager allowance provided by local governments to refugees, will be forced to work illegally as a day laborer harvesting, for instance, tomatoes in Southern Italy or oranges in Spain; said allowance may be just enough to survive, but not to live a minimally decent life—to have a cellphone to communicate with loved ones, to buy clothing of his choice, or to allow himself small luxuries, such as cigarettes, a beer or a bus ride to town. Being an illegal migrant means ceasing to be the person you used to be and leaving behind your specific personality, which is defined, among other things, by your education, your professional skills and your way of life.

Migrants who *do* receive refugee status have to fight to regain their personalities. They do not always get the right to work, and even less frequently do local governments recognize their formal qualifications (school and university degrees, professional training, etc.); therefore, even when they receive permission to enter the job market, they have to start a new career in a new field or work in the same field but at a lower level (e.g., a doctor working as a simple carer). While many people are willing to pay this price to stay in Europe or in a richer, safer country than their own, for others, this represents a setback that affects them not only materially (in their country of origin, their qualifications may have provided a certain affluence) but also psychologically (they might see their new job as a humiliating regression). Once again, they cease to be the person they used to be and become a new one. The respected doctor, whom everyone in his hometown held in high esteem, becomes a simple carer like any other who may get scolded by the client's relatives because he is not willing to do certain menial tasks.

In conclusion, being labelled as a migrant is not just about being given a legal status; rather, it is tantamount to entering a new ontological and existential dimension in which one's old personality changes and possibly dissolves, giving way to a new Self defined primarily by having abandoned one's country to move to another and only secondarily by the qualities that made up one's old Self.[5]

[5] See Ferrante (2015) and La Barbera (2015).

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8.3 "Deserving" and "Undeserving" Poor

The labelling suffered by migrants is not exclusive to this group. My use of the terms "deserving" and "undeserving" for migrants echoes a traditional way of classifying the poor; there is a long tradition of labelling entire segments of the population in these terms. I am referring to the traditional distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor, which has dominated the discourse on poverty in recent centuries (see Geremek 1994; Himmelfarb 1984, 1991; Somers and Block 2005). As remarked by Walker in the context of Tudor England, "The English word 'deserving' dates from this period (1576) and in 2013 was defined in the Oxford English Dictionary with reference to the 'deserving poor'" (Walker 2014, 11). In the case of the poor, the attribution of the label "deserving" or "undeserving" had an openly moral character. The poor were classified according to their willingness to help themselves by working: if they tried hard but nevertheless were not able to make ends meet, they might deserve to be helped by the public purse or by private benefactors; if, however, they were deemed to be exploiting the benefits of the social system, they deserved not help but punishment. And punished they were, at least in Britain, where they might have been condemned to prison, exile or forced labor, depending on the Poor Laws in force at a given time (e.g., the 1495 Vagabonds and Beggars Act, the 1572 Vagabonds Act, the 1575 Poor Act, the Elizabethian Poor Law of 1601 – which was the core of the so-called Old Poor Law – and finally the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, also known as the New Poor Law).

While the very idea of punishing the "undeserving" poor might strike us as outrageous and unjust, a similar attitude has been adopted by many Western governments in recent decades towards the so-called "new poor," a group that includes the long-term unemployed; people with precarious, temporary jobs; unskilled and unemployable workers; and retired people whose benefits are too low to support a decent life.[6] Welfare reforms, such as Clinton's PRWORA and Schröder's Harz Reform, have transformed social benefits into services for which individuals have to qualify (Neubourg et al. 2007; Pinzani 2016). As soon as they apply for benefits, these individuals stop being citizens who are claiming their rights and become at the same time misfits begging for help and "customers" of state agencies.[7] Their situation is paradoxical: on the one hand, they are treated as passive recipients of public benefits; on the other hand, they have to be actively engaged to fulfill all of the conditions under which they are granted those benefits. In the case of unemployed people, besides having to prove that they qualify for benefits because they do not have a job or because their earnings fall below a specified threshold, they have to prove that they are actively seeking a job and, quite often, that they are not squandering the money they receive. In Germany, for example, state agencies are allowed to inspect

[6] On the "new poor" and the so-called "new social question," see the pioneering works by Robert Castel (1995, 2003); see further (Paugam 1991; Dejours 1998; Dubet 2006).

[7] The transformation from citizen to customer within the welfare state was described and deplored by Habermas (1975).

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recipients' houses to ascertain whether they are spending the allowance on luxury items or unnecessary goods.[8] Instead of having a right to social benefits, one has to prove that one deserves them, just like poor people in nineteenth century Britain.

In the case of benefit recipients, as well as in the case of migrants, individuals are reduced to a single aspect of their lives: migrating in one case and receiving public help in the other. As with migration, the causes that lead a specific person to apply for benefits are irrelevant: it does not matter whether this happens due to unemployment or to earning an insufficient income; what counts is that one is a recipient of public benefits. This condition is connected to four value judgments that are sometimes expressly stated in public discourse (even in official documents such as welfare reform legislation like the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 in the United States).

The first value judgment concerns the inability to govern one's own life. In our performance-oriented society, being unemployed or simply being poor is tied to a social stigma: one is not able to maintain oneself (and one's family) and therefore needs public help. The irony (or the tragedy) is that this also applies to people who *do* have a job, sometimes even more than one, but are nevertheless unable to attain a minimally decent life due to poor wages or to the absence of public assistance in fields such as health care and education. This is a well-known reality for many Americans (Ehrenreich 2001; Tirado 2014), but it is also becoming increasingly common in other Western societies and in developing countries such as Brazil due to the generalized loss of the purchasing power of wages, to the widespread precarization of work (part-time jobs, zero-hour contracts, etc.) and to dramatic reductions in social spending (Peck and Theodore 2001). Even having a job is no longer a sufficient condition for escaping poverty.

The second value judgment is connected to the first one and concerns the fact that benefits recipients are considered to be useless members of society, despite the fact that their dependency on welfare has different causes. They might be long-term unemployed people who have previously been active ("useful") participants in the economic system. They might be unskilled workers, whose lack of specific competence makes them less valuable in the labor market such that they find only odd jobs, which are often irregular and informal and always badly paid. They might be individuals born into poor families in depressed regions, with almost no formal education and no professional training. They might be retired persons who once participated actively in the economic life of society but are now descending the social ladder because their retirement benefits are too low. They could be women who are unable to access the job market due to a gender-biased division of domestic work that forces them to stay at home and care for their family (such unpaid work is usually not considered to be a "real" job).[9]

The third value judgment is also connected to the first and concerns the alleged dependency on state benefits that recipients develop. The idea seems to be that, once

[8] See http://www.hartziv.org/hausbesuche-vom-amt.html (last access on 11/27/2017).

[9] See the classical study by Pearce (1978). I would like to thank MariaCaterina La Barbera for calling my attention to this last point.

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you receive public assistance, you lose the ability or willingness to earn your own living and are damned to live perpetually on state allowances: food stamps, housing benefits, child benefits, etc. While the data may show that this is sometimes the case, the real question is why so many people are unable to break the vicious cycle of poverty and state benefits.[10] The easy answer is to blame them for their situation: the anti-welfare rhetoric denounces the poor's laziness and cunning exploitation of the social safety net and uses stereotypes, such as the so-called "welfare queens",[11] to discredit the whole system of public benefits (Murray 1984). The moral tone of this third value judgment is more evident than in the case of the first one discussed above. While it is difficult to stigmatize hard-working people who earn insufficient wages as "undeserving" or "lazy," the same does not apply to individuals who live exclusively on social benefits for a long time. The very use of the term "dependency" firstly implies a lack or loss of personal autonomy (they become like minors, unable to make decisions concerning their lives) and secondly places these people in proximity to drug addicts (dependency on state welfare is sometimes compared to dependency on drugs: on this, see Fraser and Gordon 1994). In both cases, people living on public benefits are deemed to be irresponsible or morally reprehensible. This sometimes leads to the criminalization of the poor through laws that transform petty misdemeanors into serious crimes (e.g., evading fares on public transport, shoplifting groceries or driving an old car that is not in compliance with emissions requirements); these are misdemeanors to which poor people have to resort more often than "normal" people. It is therefore not by chance that in societies such as the US and Brazil, one can ascertain a direct correlation between the high number of poor people on the one side and an extremely large prison population on the other (Mitchell 2006; Wacquant 2009).[12]

The fourth value judgment concerns the legal status of benefits recipients. Far from being seen as citizens claiming their rights, they have to apply for social *services* that the state grants only if they fulfill specific requirements. To qualify, one must firstly prove to be really in need, which is quite humiliating: one must declare oneself as poor and admit that one is unable to guarantee one's own survival or attain a decent standard of living. Secondly, one has to prove one's good will and look actively for a job that will allow one to eventually leave the social program and renounce one's benefits. In other words, one has to prove that one deserves the benefits, which is the opposite of claiming one's rights. The state treats recipients not as citizens in the first place but as potential cheaters whose aim is to live at the expense of the taxpayers (as if recipients were not taxpayers themselves, at least in the form

[10] For empirical data from the 1970s on, see Pearce (1978), Ellwood and Summers (1986), Bagguley and Mann (1992), Chant (2006), and Prideaux (2010).

[11] While there are doubtless people who abuse and exploit the system of public benefits, their number is nevertheless extremely low, as shown by empirical studies such as those quoted in footnote 10.

[12] Along with poverty (and in concourse with it), race is of course a major factor that leads to the criminalization of entire groups. See the classical study Blumstein (1982); and more recently, Pettit and Western (2004) and Wacquant (2010).

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of paying indirect taxes, such as VAT). In addition to the humiliation of having to declare oneself officially unable to provide for oneself and one's family, poor people have to face the further humiliation of proving that they are not crooks.

There are similarities here to the status of migrants. In both cases, they are seen in the first place not as individuals with unique biographies who have happened to find themselves in their situation because of peculiar circumstances; they are rather labelled according to their relation to the state apparatus and to governmental bureaucracy, respectively, as welfare recipients and as migrants. Furthermore, they are implicitly or explicitly judged from a moral point of view with regard to their status. Are they migrating because they are escaping war or "just" because they want a better life and are pursuing economic success? Are they applying for benefits because their wages are not high enough or because they prefer to live at the state's expense instead of finding a job? In other words, are they "deserving" migrants/poor? Can they prove it? In both cases, they are expected to show that they are willing to abide by the conditions set for the "services" the state is granting them, including when these conditions are humiliating or even self-defeating (for example, when you bar migrants from formal employment as long as their legal status has not been firmly established, you force them to work illegally or to become dependent on state aid). In both cases, people are generally deemed to be parasitic scroungers living off public benefits, exploiting the wealth created by other, more industrious individuals.[13]

In the next section, I will discuss what lies behind these ways of conceptualizing what it means to be a migrant or a welfare recipient, to show that the above-mentioned similarities obey the same logic and are part of a wider ideology that plays a dominant role in Western societies. To do so, I shall return to the concept of social suffering.

8.4 Social Suffering as Systemic Suffering and the Stigmatization of Migrants and Poor People

What does the term "social suffering" refer to? The concept has been used to indicate forms of human suffering that have their roots in social behavior. The first formulation of the concept might be found in the category of "socially avoidable

[13] In recent years, right-wing parties have managed to introduce into public debate the argument that "we" should give preference to "our" poor over migrants, i.e., that we should distribute to the poor within our societies the resources we are using to deal with migration. The general rhetoric of "deserving" vs. "undeserving" migrants viz. poor has been transformed into the opposition between the weakest members of "our" societies vs. the rapacious migrants coming to "us" just to exploit our system of social benefits. UKIP, Lega Nord, Front National and other far-right parties often use arguments of this kind, claiming that preference has been given to migrant families when it comes to assigning public housing, or that more money per day is spent on an individual migrant than on one of "our" poor. This shift in the public discussion has created a diversion from the usual anti-poor rhetoric, which, however, is still very strong in countries where immigration is not yet a relevant phenomenon (e.g., in South America).

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suffering," used by Barrington Moore (1978) to indicate suffering that could have been avoided if certain social actors (individuals or institutions) had acted differently or had not omitted specific actions to prevent it. Classical examples are offered by war, racial or religious persecution, the unjust distribution of resources during natural disasters, etc.[14] Although all of these examples are doubtless provoked by humans, not every form of man-made suffering deserves to be considered "socially avoidable suffering." Not all suffering is avoidable, and not all avoidable suffering is *socially* avoidable. In the cases we are discussing, some social actors are undeniably responsible for provoking the suffering of migrants and poor people. These groups may suffer through the way officials treat them, or through the laws and rules established by specific governments and governmental agencies. If these agents stopped acting in a specific way (e.g., humiliating or harassing migrants viz. benefit recipients), certain forms of suffering (e.g., feeling humiliated or harassed) could be avoided.

However, social suffering has a social dimension not only because it happens within society or because it is caused by social actors or by unequal power relations between social actors; it is also provoked by the very way in which society is organized. Thus, its removal demands not just that some actors are held responsible for it, or that some forms of power (economic, political, etc.) are redistributed more equally, but that the structure of society itself is modified. In this sense, social suffering can be defined as systemic suffering, i.e., as a form of suffering that is produced by the specific way the social system is constructed and functions. This is not tantamount to attributing the responsibility for systemic suffering only to economic or political structures; there is always an ideological dimension involved. The mechanisms leading to systemic suffering are explained as follows.

(a) Systemic suffering implies the existence of a specific societal structure and an ideology that offers legitimacy and normative orientation to that structure. I shall call this ideology a *pervasive doctrine*,[15] i.e., a system of (i) beliefs about the world and of (ii) values based on these beliefs. This system must be coherent enough to be mobilized to describe and explain potentially every aspect of human life; furthermore, it offers the basis for a system of (iii) norms and (iv) practices that aim to shape or reshape human life according to the mentioned beliefs and values. Examples of pervasive doctrines are most (if not all) religious creeds, since normally they do not limit themselves to explaining the relationship between the individual and a transcendent dimension (some deity or spiritual sphere) but also aim to regulate every aspect of the individual's life in her relation to nature as well as to society (in both the private and the public

[14] Moore (1970) discusses these and similar examples, although the term "socially avoidable suffering" does not appear.

[15] I am aware that the term "doctrine" can be seen as vague. However, I think that the term "ideology" would raise major problems, e.g., it could give the impression that the mentioned system of beliefs and values, of norms and practices, is somehow the result of manipulation or aims at hiding the real power relationships within society. Doctrine seems to me to be more neutral since it allows for the possibility that even those who first formulate and defend it believe in its validity.

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spheres). Another example of a pervasive doctrine is the neoliberal version of capitalism, which has become dominant in recent decades in Western societies. Of course, differing from religion, capitalism did not come into being with the explicit goal of becoming a dominant, pervasive doctrine. There were no founders, no defenders of orthodoxy, and there was no fight against heretical views or heterodox forms of the main doctrine. Capitalism came about as an economic system for producing and exchanging goods and only later on has it developed the specific system of beliefs, values, norms and practices necessary to guarantee its survival and its global diffusion.[16] In other words, capitalism works because enough people are convinced that it is the best economic system, or the only feasible one, or the most natural one.

(b) To provoke systemic suffering, the pervasive doctrine must first become dominant within a specific society. Of course, a doctrine may cause suffering when it is held by only a minority or small group – as has been shown spectacularly by some appalling examples involving religious sects.[17] Although pervasive doctrines are born as plausible solutions to specific problems,[18] they tend to become inflexible and therefore to cause more problems than they solve. Pervasive doctrines can be highly plastic and react to the transformations of reality they themselves have contributed to provoking. A good example of this is capitalism itself, with its astonishing capacity to draw new strength from its frequent crises. More often, however, they become like a corset, suffocating society and individuals so that the latter cannot see any alternative to the given reality and no solutions to the problems they are facing.

(c) Although every pervasive doctrine tends to expunge all other doctrines from the societal reservoir or absorb them to make them compatible with itself (Christianity is a good historical example of this), society is not necessarily organized around a single pervasive doctrine. The coexistence of different doctrines within a single society can be relatively peaceful or can stir up internal conflicts, which may even lead to the disaggregation and collapse of that society, as in religiously, ethnically or ideologically motivated civil wars. When neoliberalism took hold as the dominant doctrine in Western society, it offered a solution to the problems provoked by the hitherto dominant doctrine, namely Keynesianism. Now that the solution has created further problems (for example, increasing inequality, the impoverishment of large sectors of the labor force, and psychological suffering as a result of precariousness and uncer-

[16] The classical work on the relation between capitalism and its characteristic pervasive doctrine, its "spirit," is of course Weber (1905). See also Boltanski and Chiapello (1999).

[17] For example, the mass suicides of Jonestown (1978) or Rancho Santa Fe (CA) (1997). Studying these cases might be interesting to understand how pervasive doctrines work: how they take hold of every aspect of their followers' lives, how they immunize their followers against alternative ways of thinking and living, how they become unquestionable for their followers, and how they sometimes succeed in convincing outsiders and neutral observers of their legitimacy (this is particularly evident in the case of religious creeds, which seldom if ever are subject to open criticism).

[18] On this point, they resemble what Rahel Jaeggi (2014) defines as "forms of life."

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tainty), more and more people are feeling uncomfortable and have begun the search for other pervasive doctrines. Some think they have found it in old-style nationalism and protectionism, others in authoritarianism or xenophobia. Nevertheless, they still seem to accept neoliberal beliefs, values, norms and practices. In a mixture of neoliberal and conservative perspectives, individuals reject cosmopolitanism and even globalization but usually insist on values such as individual responsibility for one's life, individual striving for economic success, and mistrust of government and the state (cf. Brown 2006). The concept of pervasive doctrine helps us to understand how it is possible that world visions that are in mutual competition or even that contradict each other may coexist within the same society, and even within the same individual.

(d) The suffering produced by a pervasive doctrine is not always easy to detect. On the contrary, since its roots lie in a widespread belief in that doctrine, people are often unable to connect their own suffering with the doctrine they otherwise accept as valid or even to perceive their situation as somehow harmful to them. Marxists usually recur to the notion of "false consciousness" to designate this phenomenon: its victims are not even aware of the oppression or alienation from which they are suffering and believe that there is nothing wrong with their life. It is not that they have been coercively indoctrinated; rather, they have been socialized in an environment in which the pervasive doctrine is deemed unquestionable (this is typically the case with religion) or has been naturalized (as in the case of capitalism in all its versions). When faced with the suffering that pervasive doctrines cause, people defending those doctrines may deny altogether the doctrines' responsibility (while at the same time blaming individuals for their suffering or attributing its causes to personal problems), or they may rationalize it (by appealing to allegedly "natural" mechanisms and by denying the social causes of suffering).

In the cases we are discussing, namely the suffering of migrants and "useless" people living on benefits, we face a clear case of systemic suffering based not only on how society is structured (i.e., in the position these people occupy in the social fabric or in the economic system) but also on society's dominant pervasive doctrine, which at present is neoliberal capitalism. According to this view, everyone is responsible for their own life and opportunities (Kelley 1998). As I argue, such a view translates into blaming welfare recipients for their situation. However, the kind of globalized capitalism advocated by neoliberalism represents the major cause of such a situation because it provokes economic crises that result in the annihilation of jobs through outsourcing and delocalization. It also advances the delocalization of labor in which states compete by undercutting each other in offering good conditions for enterprises while weakening labor regulations and workers' rights. As we have seen in the case of underpaid workers, having a job under such conditions may not be sufficient to guarantee a decent quality of life or even survival.

On the one side, we have a system that demands that individuals care for themselves through work; on the other side, this same system destroys jobs and lets wages decrease dramatically. Individuals who get caught in this quandary are mostly

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unaware of the double bind that causes their suffering. The neoliberal solution to the dilemma consists in presenting precariousness as something positive. The lack of continuity in one's job life is described as an expression of one's freedom to choose among different options and to accept new challenges. Dependence on the contingent situation of the labor market, which may force one to accept zero-hour contracts or unpaid internships, is presented as individual autonomy, while dependence on state benefits is seen as a lack of autonomy. The suffering provoked by uncertainty is blamed on one's lack of capacity to take advantage of the chances offered by the market to secure one's own standard of living. When people become unemployed or even "useless" because of changes in modes of production or because of the delocalization of labor, they are blamed (and blame themselves) for their uselessness, as if it depended on some personal weakness and not on economic circumstances.

In the case of migrants, the situation is complicated by the fact that the neoliberal doctrine gets intertwined with, and at the same time comes into conflict with, another pervasive doctrine that is still strong in Western societies, namely the doctrine that sustains the existence of the nation state. According to this doctrine, national borders should be guarded to guarantee the safety of the citizens within them. The national community should be protected from external enemies but also from unrestricted immigration, since this could disturb the balance of the social arrangements on which the society is built.[19] These ideas are opposed to the neoliberal view, according to which borders are irksome barriers to free trade and economic globalization. In this sense, migrants are paradigmatic neoliberal subjects: they are willing to abandon their home, country, status and occupation to find a better economic situation, and they are willing to adapt and accept almost any employment, no matter how demanding and how badly paid—a circumstance mentioned in the frequently heard argument according to which migrants do not "steal" work from locals because they are willing to do jobs no local worker would accept. By migrating to countries that have a more developed economy, people are following the neoliberal imperative that demands that individuals take responsibility for their economic situation even at the cost of giving up their former life. But, as we have seen above, this willingness to adapt to any circumstance that might lead to some material improvement clashes with the idea that economic migrants do not deserve admission into developed countries.

Structural global inequality is the major driving force behind poverty and migration. It is a consequence of neoliberal capitalism, which has led to the creation of tax havens, to the worldwide imposition of WTO rules and to global competition among states to attract investors by reducing labor regulation, undercutting workers' rights and offering fiscal discounts. It is also linked to nation-state capitalism through colonialism, imperialism and WTO rules that give unjustified advantages to rich countries. The two dominant pervasive doctrines in Western societies have therefore provoked the very situation that migrants are trying to escape. The economies of

[19] Some authors use the word "immunization" to describe this attempt at defending nationals against foreigners. See Brossat (2003) and Lorey (2015).

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their home countries have often suffered under the pressure of the global market or under the imperatives of international agencies, such as the World Bank and the IMF. In many cases, the policies imposed by these global actors have resulted in the disruption of local economies, so that even when the national economy of a country has improved, the benefits of this process are unequally distributed and new poverty has been created in specific regions or among certain groups. In this case, individuals tend to find themselves in a quandary since they are generally not allowed to find an individual solution for their problems: just as welfare recipients cannot find jobs (or jobs with decent wages) because such jobs are not available on the market, migrants often are not able to improve their economic situation by moving to another country because rich societies do not accept them. While they live in their countries, they are subjected to the imperatives of globalized capitalism, but as soon as they try to reach the heartlands of capitalism (Europe, the USA and Australia), they are faced with the logic of the closed nation state. According to this logic, they are not individuals legitimately looking for economic improvement but only a threat to internal stability from several points of view (economic, cultural, social and religious). They are tolerated within a society only as far as their economic contribution is relevant for its members, but as soon as they cease to participate actively in economic life, they become useless and a burden that society tries to shake off by revoking their residency permits.

Both migrants and welfare recipients suffer under the very way Western society is structured and under its dominant pervasive doctrines and their contradictory messages. They are described generally as useless people who have to prove that they deserve to be helped by the state or by society (through asylum and residence permits or through social benefits). Redefining the discourse on migration and on welfare would be an important first step towards eliminating some causes of social suffering. Although pervasive doctrines are deeply intertwined with social context, this redefinition would at least have the effect of unmasking the ideological mechanisms at work and pointing out the real causes of migration and poverty in our societies.

8.5 Instead of a Conclusion: When Fiction Meets Reality

The film *Bread and Chocolate* by Franco Brusati (*Pane e cioccolata*, 1974) represents the ordeal of an Italian migrant in Switzerland. It depicts what it means to be an illegal migrant from a poor country who tries to make a living in a rich country. Although it is more than 40 years old, it is sadly still timely. It is not too difficult to imagine an African or Middle Eastern migrant in the same position as Nino Garofoli, the Italian waiter who escapes poverty in his country and moves to an affluent society, where he is met with hostility, experiences humiliation and is forced to go through a process of degradation that culminates in a powerful scene among people who live in a henhouse and have almost lost their humanity.

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In the first half of the movie, we see Nino working hard in a luxury restaurant, where the rich customers scarcely notice him but for his occasional mistakes, for which they scold him. He dreads such moments because to get a full-time job and a permit to stay in Switzerland, he has to compete with a Turkish waiter, his roommate in the miserable accommodation the management of the restaurant provides for its workers. The logic of the labor market plays worker against worker – in this case, it leads migrants to enter a reciprocal conflict in a way that mirrors the competition among states to attract foreign companies. Although Nino acknowledges the Turk as a fellow human being whose suffering and longing for a better life he understands and shares, he is forced to compete with him –a competition that leads him to act in a way he later regrets.

His emotional life leads to further suffering. Before going to sleep, Nino conducts imaginary dialogues with his family, whose creased photo is his only link to home. Swiss people treat him coldly and with suspicion. Even children show open hostility towards the loquacious, dark haired foreigner. The only person with whom he manages to establish some intimate ties is a Greek woman, Elena. While Elena has a residency permit as a political refugee (the movie is set in a time when Greece was suffering under the infamous military regime of the "colonels"), her young son Gregori has to remain permanently at home and hide in the closet when visitors call because he is in the country illegally. For this reason, the beautiful Elena is seeing Rüdiger, an ugly middle-aged Swiss man who works for the immigration office and whom she will eventually marry, even though she evidently loves Nino. Eventually she manages to obtain a residency permit for Gregori as well. The three migrants are all suffering: the child because he has to conceal himself at home instead of leading a normal life, Elena because she has to hide him and because to save her son she has to marry a man whom she finds "kind" but whom she obviously does not love, and Nino because he sees that Elena is willing to sacrifice their love to save her son. She is an example of how being a migrant can lead one to carry out desperate measures and to act against one's feelings for the purpose of achieving legal or economic security.

When Nino loses his job to the Turkish man (for having urinated in the street under the outraged gaze of a Swiss couple he did not notice), he also loses permission to stay in the country and becomes "an illegal." He boards a train but is filled with scorn and rage at meeting other returning Italians who sing popular songs in which the Italian sun is celebrated against the cold Swiss sky. One of them cries emphatically that he does not give a damn about Switzerland and its wealth, but it is evident that this is a cry of desperation, of someone who is not willing to admit that he was vanquished and is trying instead to depict his defeat as a victory. Nino gets off the train and looks for help from an Italian millionaire he met at the restaurant, but the rich man deserts him just as he has already done with the workers in his factories, which he has mismanaged and brought to bankruptcy. As a result, Nino is left penniless. He seeks out an old friend who is still living in barracks with other Italian workers, as was usual at the time for many immigrants in Switzerland and Northern Europe. Suffering here is explicit: they feel homesick and alone, although

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they try to escape their sadness by singing vulgar cabaret songs while dressed in drag. Nino leaves the barrack after having bitterly reproached his friends for passively accepting their situation and for deluding themselves that they can have fun at the expense of their own desperation.

Once again Nino escapes deportation and finds illegal work through a dubious intermediary. This time he joins a family of eight that makes a living by killing and plucking chickens. To save money, they live in a former henhouse. They squat, half bent over, and have become more and more similar to their victims. They have fun by imitating chickens with scary realism, and Nino realizes by watching them that they have in fact mutated into beings who are no longer human: they have renounced any ambition, self-respect and hope for a better life and are barely surviving instead of leading a real life. In a culminating moment, we see them watching in awe from behind the chicken wire as the young, blond, beautiful scions of their rich landlord bathe naked in the river. The luscious music of Bizet's first symphony underscores the insuperable gap that divides the two worlds: on the one side, the calm gestures and quiet self-confidence of the rich locals, and on the other, the gawking and frantic gesticulating of the poor immigrants, who peep at the beautiful rich people with adoring gazes while hiding in their den. The chicken people are a paradigm of "false consciousness," convinced as they are that their situation is not degrading and that others should rather envy them ("Don't care what people say!" they repeat to Nino. "They are just envious"). Their adoration for their rich young masters is a prime example of ideological blindness nourished by the naturalization of their situation and by the internalization of the stigma attached to them by society. They are poor, they are foreigners, they are illegal migrants, and therefore, they are worth less than the locals—they are less than human.

In a last attempt to gain acknowledgment from the locals, Nino dyes his hair blond. Indeed, people start greeting him in the street, children smile confidently to him, and he no longer feels like an alien. He enters a pub to have a beer (which an Italian waiter serves to him) and watches an Italy vs. England football game with a bunch of locals. The Swiss at the pub are not blond and beautiful like the rich youths of the former scene. Rather, there is something animal-like in them: they form a pack united by a strong contempt for the Italians, and their faces are distorted by hate while they insult the Italian players and jeer at them when they lose the ball or commit a foul. Nino joins in the booing and jeering, but when Italy scores a goal, he cannot control himself and exults wildly, revealing himself as an impostor. He then leaves the room and smashes his head through a mirror in an act of self-contempt.

This time he cannot avoid deportation. He boards the train to Italy, and once again, he decides that he cannot bear it: his singing compatriots and their music and the poverty at home. He pulls the emergency brake in a tunnel and comes out of the darkness clutching his suitcase, looking around with a gaze in which desperation and challenge are intertwined.

Nino's suffering is multilayered. He suffers from his own incapacity to find a place to live and a community to fit into. He cannot bear his fellow Italians and their songs, through which they try to delude themselves that Italy is better than

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Switzerland. He cannot like the Swiss, who despise him as long as he does not *look* like them and join them in their hatred of the Italians. His expression in the final scene is also a look of desperation for himself. He will not give up, but certainly his ordeal will continue because, in the eyes of all the Swiss people he comes into contact with (a police commissioner, his boss and the *maître de table* at the restaurant, the children and maids in the park, the pair who saw him urinating on the street and the crowd in the pub), he is just this: an Italian migrant. For them, this defines him enough to justify their contempt for him. Swiss society tolerates him as long as he works (in menial jobs) to benefit its citizens, but as soon as he becomes unemployed, he is no longer welcome and has to leave the country immediately, regardless of the reasons that led him to act in a specific way and end up in a certain situation.

Nino's suffering as a migrant (first as a legal one and then as an illegal one) mirrors the suffering of millions of individuals who have shared his destiny and abandoned their country to find a better life—at least economically. At the same time, it is the same suffering experienced by people who are struggling to find a job that allows them to lead a decent life—those who face a social reality clearly divided into haves and have-nots in which those who are privileged are not only economically privileged but also for the mere circumstance of having been born in a rich country (they may not be rich, but they have the right passport and therefore have access to possibilities denied to others). In this social reality, migrants and "useless" people cease to be individuals with feelings and unique biographies and become instead an annoying bunch of scroungers who threaten the well-being of the industrious local people, according to the dominant pervasive doctrine of Western society. Unmasking this doctrine and revealing the suffering it causes is a necessary first step towards social change and global justice.

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