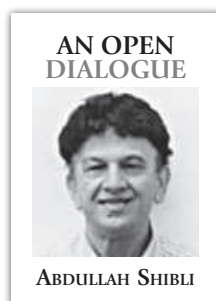


In a migrant's story, facts are truer than fiction



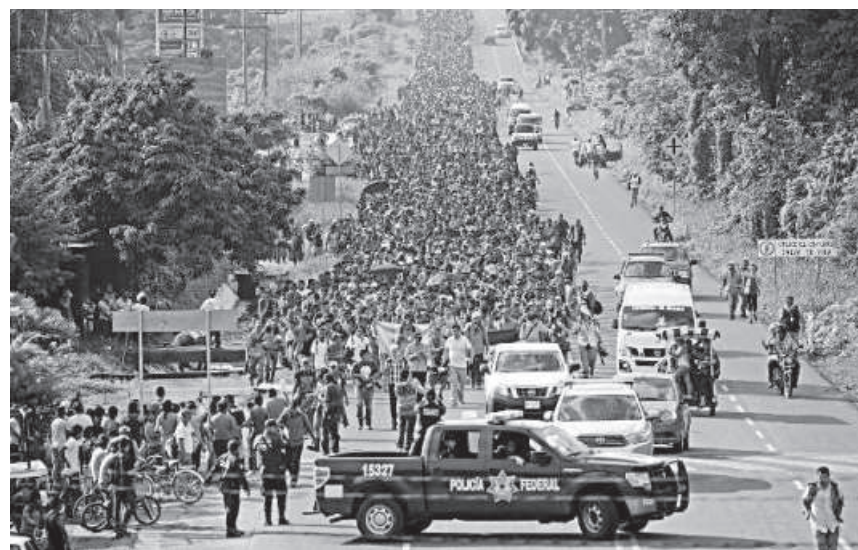
ABDULLAH SHIBLI

JEANINE Cummins, the author of the latest American best-seller novel "American Dirt", is taking a lot of flak for her story based on the experience of a Mexican woman

named Lydia and her eight-year-old son who flee their home and cross over to the USA. Several critics have pointed out that Cummins exploited the harrowing experience of an illegal migrant but at the same time used "harmful stereotypes". Some have even hinted that the novel glamorises the life of migrants and their struggles.

The criticism of insensitivity towards the plight of migrants who have been trying to enter the USA has been a major public issue in the recent past since the Trump administration launched a major operation to stem the flow of Latin Americans entering the USA illegally. While those who are waiting at the southern border to come to the USA do not face the extreme hardships that humans on the move at other locations face every day, the story of a migrant anywhere is a heart-breaking one. Whether we are talking about the migrants from war-ravaged Middle East, the hunger-driven droves in Yemen and East Africa, the Venezuelans temporarily living in Cordoba or, closer to home, the Rohingyas chased out of their own country, migrants are the modern equivalent of the Jews in exodus fleeing torment in ancient Egypt.

Regardless of the criticism of American Dirt, the central character in the novel has a lot in common with the typical Latin American migrant at the US-Mexico border seeking to get in. They are escaping danger or deprivation at their homeland, but also face incredible



Central American migrants walk along the highway near the border with Guatemala, as they continue their journey trying to reach the US.

dangers along the way. In December 2018, the Associated Press found in an exclusive tally that almost 4,000 migrants had died or gone missing in the previous four years after embarking on their journey through Mexico. That's 1,573 more than the previously known number calculated by the United Nations. "And even the AP's number is likely low—bodies may be lost in the desert, and families may not report missing loved ones who were migrating illegally." These Latin American migrants are among about 56,800 worldwide who died or disappeared over the same period, the AP found.

We all know that migrants anywhere face considerable risks. Unfortunately, migrants from Honduras, Guatemala, Belize, and El Salvador also have to cope with the danger of drug trafficking and gang violence in Mexico. More than 37,000 people have gone missing throughout Mexico because of this violence, with the highest number in the border state of Tamaulipas, through

which many migrants cross. "The sheer numbers of the disappeared, along with crushing bureaucracy and the fear of gangs, makes it difficult for families to track what happened to their loved ones," said the Associated Press report.

The southern flank of the USA has witnessed several humanitarian crises in recent years, regardless of the best attempts of the NGOs, the press, and civil society to head off major disasters like in the Middle East. Most of the migrants who flock to the US border originate from the Central American republic of Honduras where decades of misrule, corruption, and marauding gangs have created a living hell for 10 million Hondurans. They cross over to Guatemala and El Salvador before they can enter Mexico. The Hondurans, who often travel in a caravan for safety and camaraderie, are joined by other Latin Americans mostly from neighbouring countries. It is common knowledge in the USA that an average citizen of these countries is a victim of violence, pillage,

government atrocities, repression, and economic deprivation. It would not be an exaggeration to suggest that the "northern journey" is perilous for these people, who are only trying to save their own lives.

"People move to survive. They move in search of food. They move away from danger and death. They move towards opportunities for life. Migration is tied to the human spirit which seeks adventure, pursues dreams, and finds reasons to hope even in the most adverse circumstances. Such movement affects the communities [that] migrants leave and the communities that receive these migrants. This movement also impacts communities along the route of transit," states a report titled "Ethical Dimensions of Migration, Diversity and Health" published by the Faculty of Public Health in UK.

US government agencies, Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and Border Patrol have cracked down hard on the movement of migrants at its southern border. Between October 2018 and May 2019, it was reported that 444,309 Central Americans were caught at the border, which is double the 223,564 apprehended in all 12 months of the fiscal year 2018. Over 80 percent of those apprehended are families with children or minors travelling alone.

Take the case of a mother of two minor children who faced insurmountable obstacles on a border crossing known as the Gateway to the Americas International Bridge last November. Laura walked, rode, and travelled by other means from Nicaragua, stood on the pavement of the bridge over Rio Grande between Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, and Laredo, Texas, all without nearly any protection from the elements and freezing temperature. For three days, she and her children have been waiting in a no-man's land between these two countries.

"They said that they were going to

let us through but that it's full inside," Laura said as a CBP agent standing on the Gateway Bridge a few feet away from her was checking documents. A dozen adults and small children were bundled up, single-file, in front of her. It was gusty, and they had tied their blankets to the side of the bridge as a makeshift curtain. A Salvadoran woman in line next to Laura glanced at the city behind her, among Mexico's most dangerous, and said, "No, no, we cannot go back."

Mexico's President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO) is in a very difficult situation thanks to his neighbour in the north, President Donald Trump. In the past, refugees, asylum seekers or desperate Latin Americans hoping to reach the USA have been able to use the US-Mexico border as the gateway. Now, after the USA threatened the Mexican government with dire consequences should the latter fail to stop the desperados from crossing over to the USA, President Obrador has been obliged to resort to some extraordinary measures to stem the flow to the north. The current US administration has threatened not only to cut any foreign assistance to Mexico, but also to hurt the Mexican economy in other ways if the refugees are not forcibly turned back and blocked from travelling through Mexico to reach the US border. Advocates for migrants say that the Trump administration has all but slammed the door on migrants fleeing violence and persecution, exposing children and other vulnerable populations to grave risks.

In a press briefing on October 2019, Mark Morgan, the acting CBP commissioner, declared, "If you come to our borders with a child, it's no longer an immediate passport into the interior of the United States."

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PROJECT SYNDICATE

Building cooperation in an unsettled world



BORGE BRENDE

THE world is at a turning point, with power shifting and dispersing in ways that signal the emergence of a new multipolar era.

In the resulting turbulent global environment, opportunities to compete or cooperate are increasing across several domains. In areas such as the economy, technology, and the environment, the question is whether parties will seek progress toward common objectives or strategic advantages over competitors.

For much of the post-Cold-War era, issues like trade, scientific research, and climate change were largely insulated from considerations of global competition. For example, the US and Chinese economies prospered together for 20 years, boosting market and investment opportunities for others through an open global system of finance and trade.

Similarly, the Internet boom of the early part of this century was made possible by a common and easily accessible platform that stood largely apart from national rivalries. As a result, the number of people worldwide using the Internet increased exponentially, from just over 400 million in 2000 to approximately two billion in 2010.

And even during the Cold War, governments and other actors managed

to set aside strategic competition in order to address global issues such as the environment. Most notably, the widening hole in the ozone layer spurred collective climate action. Beginning with the 1987 Montreal Protocol, and over the course of subsequent decades, states reduced their use of chlorofluorocarbons to the point that the atmosphere is now expected to recover.

Today, however, issues once marked by partnership now risk becoming frontlines of strife. Global economic growth is expected to weaken in the near term—a situation made worse by the fact that trade is being used as an instrument to pursue geopolitical advantage rather than joint prosperity. Moreover, unlike the depletion of the ozone layer, the melting of the Arctic ice cap has not served as a clarion call for more ambitious climate action. Instead, states see an opening to compete for the natural resources and trade routes opening in the far north. And as for technology, the benefit of a common global communications platform is now at risk, owing to the possibility of "decoupled" US and Chinese communications systems operating on separate 5G networks.

But these developments do not necessarily mean that we should resign ourselves to a period of geopolitical competition rather than cooperation. The expanding nature of geopolitics—with power dynamics operating across new domains—also means that new actors are exerting influence. As a result, a diverse set of parties can shape the



Amidst the potential dangers of a technological "cold war" between the United States and China and the possibility of a fractured global order, there is an urgent need for multilateralism.

PHOTO: REUTERS/ALY SONG

course of international relations.

For starters, rising and mid-size powers are responding to the possibility of a fractured global order by reasserting the need for multilateralism. France and Germany are working with other like-minded countries to forge an Alliance for Multilateralism, which aims to boost international cooperation

in areas such as digitalisation and climate change. In Africa, states are strengthening economic ties through the African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement, which will bring together 54 African Union member states and encompass over USD 2 trillion of GDP. In Southeast Asia, meanwhile, ASEAN member states are taking steps

to strengthen regional partnerships and integration, and intend to sign the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership later this year. This trade agreement, which also will include China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand, will cover an estimated 45 percent of the world's population and create the world's largest trading bloc.

Non-state actors are also in a position to exert increasing influence. Today, global businesses account for an important part of the world's economic output, and private-sector leaders are increasingly committing themselves to looking beyond short-term profit. Last year, for example, 87 large companies announced that they would work to help limit global warming to 1.5°C. And many CEOs are speaking out about the potential dangers of a technological "cold war" between the United States and China, or the decoupling of the two countries' economies.

While the changing nature of global power may tempt some actors to seek advantage through confrontation, the expanding field of stakeholders offers the possibility of a course correction. With the geopolitics of the new era currently in flux, there is still an opportunity to steer the world toward cooperation and away from potentially damaging competition.

Borge Brende, President of the World Economic Forum, is an author of the new report Shaping a Multiconceptual World. Copyright: Project Syndicate, 2020. www.project-syndicate.org (Exclusive to The Daily Star)

QUOTABLE Quote

CAROL ANN DUFFY,
(Born December 23, 1955)
British poet and playwright

Poetry, above all, is a series of intense moments - its power is not in narrative. I'm not dealing with facts, I'm dealing with emotion.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 1992 title role for Nicholson
- 6 "Damn Yankees" role
- 10 Opera songs
- 11 Fleet-based
- 12 Skating spots
- 13 Without break
- 14 Solitary
- 15 Infrequent
- 16 Quarter-back Manning
- 17 Fan's cry
- 18 Toe count
- 19 Voicemail contents
- 22 Eschew
- 23 Big-scale movie
- 26 Spa treatments
- 29 Concealed

DOWN

- 1 Apollo Theater setting
- 2 Baltimore team
- 3 Like Sibelius
- 4 Bogus
- 5 Braying beast
- 6 Turner of movies
- 7 Conspicuous
- 8 Joust need
- 9 Mayflower name
- 11 Burger request
- 15 Droop
- 17 Wasn't cautious
- 20 Total
- 21 Place to relax
- 24 Paid no attention to
- 25 Upper limit
- 27 Be litigious
- 28 Swift
- 29 Traffic jam sounds
- 30 Ridiculous
- 31 Evil spirit
- 35 Splinter group
- 36 Japanese sport
- 38 Scoundrel

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

A	M	P	L	E	S	H	A	F	T	
P	O	L	A	R	N	O	B	L	E	
P	R	E	P	O	S	I	T	I	O	N
L	O	A	T	E	D	G	O	D		
E	N	T	W	I	N	E	A	D	O	
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S	E	D	G	E						

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott