

Migration and Humanitarian Crisis: A Transnational Analysis of Cummins' *American Dirt*

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ABSTRACT

The present study explores the interconnections of migration and humanitarian crisis across borders through a transnational analysis of Cummins' (2020) American Dirt. Cummins is a renowned American fiction writer known for her works that explore trauma, justice and human resilience. Her acclaimed novel American Dirt (2020) draws on the migrant crisis at the U.S.-Mexico border and highlights the perilous journeys and humanitarian struggles of migrants seeking refuge. Using the close reading method of analysis, the study employs Vertovec's (2009) transnationalism theory that explores how transnational discourse enable migrants and diasporas to construct their own social fields that reshape belongingness, identity, culture and politics across borders. Vertovec's (2009) transnationalism explores how individuals and groups maintain relations and identities across national borders challenging traditional ideas of identity, community and belonging. The findings of the study reveal that American Dirt (2020) highlights migrants' struggle with danger, isolation and cultural barriers emphasizing their resilience and search for belongingness. Further the findings reveal the complex ethical dilemma, systemic injustice and power dynamics migrants face highlighting their struggle for survival and identity.

Keywords: Migration, Humanitarian crisis, Transnationalism, Steven Vertovec, American Dirt (2020)

INTRODUCTION

Migration is the movement of large numbers of people, birds or animals from one place to another. In contemporary times, it refers to the trend of displacement and movement made by individuals either with the hope to find more personal convenience or to better their material or social conditions. Rushdie (2002) explains the distinguishing features of our time regarding mass migration, mass displacement, globalized finances and industries. Several political and historical events are behind this mass migration that has picked up speed and volume since the second half of the 20th century. Migration takes several forms and can be caused by violence, economic instability, and persecution among the other factors. This kind of movement usually compels a strained change in the lives of those migrants, putting their identities and

belongings under pressure. In contrast, humanitarianism is an ethical and compassionate response to human suffering and a call for the protection and welfare of those in distress.

Humanitarian crisis refers to circumstances under which there is a general risk to life, physical well-being, health or basic survival beyond the coping capacity of the people and their communities (Martin, Weerasinghe & Taylor, 2013). Such crisis tend to have far-reaching effects on migration with many individuals displaced by the intensification of conflict, natural disasters or slow-onset environmental change. Staněk (2017) explains that humanitarian crises worldwide can be classified into two broad categories: those resulting from natural disasters and those initiated by human action. Natural disasters like earthquakes or tsunamis tend to produce instantaneous and extensive damage which overwhelms local capacity for effective response. Conversely, humanitarian crises resulting from human actions, especially armed conflicts are likely to have long-lasting impacts usually lasting years or even decades. The present study focuses on these vibrant and trending human issues to be critically analyzed from novel *American Dirt* by Jeanine Cummins.

Jeanine Cummins was born in Spain where her father Gene, was stationed as the US Navy officer. She migrated to America and got married to an Irish immigrant living illegally there. To her credit, there are four books: one memoir *A Rip in Heaven* (2004) and three novels; *The Outside Boy* (2010), *The Crooked Branch* (2013) and *American Dirt* (2020). Her writings frequently deal with the subjects of culture, kinship and grief. The plot of Cummins' *American Dirt* (2020) centers on a Mexican woman Lydia's voyage to the US with her son Luca. Their migration is not a choice but a means of survival, reflecting the harsh realities faced by many forced to flee violence and seek refuge. Along the way, they join other migrants, each with their own tragic stories, highlighting the shared human struggle for safety and a better future. The novel sheds light on the humanitarian crisis at the border, exposing systemic injustices, the exploitation of vulnerable migrants, and the lack of protection for those seeking asylum. At the same time, it portrays acts of compassion and solidarity, as migrants support one another and humanitarian aid workers offer relief, emphasizing the resilience of the human spirit in the face of adversity.

Cummins' (2020) *American Dirt* briefly depicts the migration experience of a Mexican woman and conforms to morally universal ideas, primarily due to the absence of personal depictions. Even the US-Mexico border now tends to dominate heated debates on human rights concerning the immigration agenda, the settling of refugees, and the granting of asylum to people with a special focus on Western governments. Migrants face numerous difficulties, such as dangerous travel, forced labor by middle persons, or deportation by law enforcement institutions in destination countries. These impediments not only affect their physical well-being but to a certain degree, even their mental well-being, in the sense of their effort to search for a better life. With such actualities depicted in *American Dirt* (2020), there is a need more than ever for better informed search and policies that advocate for migrants' rights.

This study focuses on the allied concepts of migration and humanitarian crisis in the context of belongingness for critical analysis of Cummins' (2020) *American Dirt*. Through the complex narratives of the harrowing experiences faced by migrants, the study attempts to uncover the various interplay of factors that are increasingly becoming a very serious issue worldwide. The main purpose of this study is to analyze the issues regarding migration and the humanitarian crisis arising at the US-Mexico border. This study seeks to investigate these issues by offering a close reading of various extracts from selected text *American Dirt*. Most important selected segments are: protagonist's escape from Acapulco, her perilous trip on La Bestia and her relations with fellow migrants and authorities. These excerpts not only serve to illustrate the real-life threats that the migrants confront but also the emotional and psychological trauma they face. Lydia and Luca's journey on La Bestia vividly illustrates the dangers and hardships of migration. Their interactions with other migrants highlight a shared collective trauma, emphasizing the emotional toll of their journey.

Research objectives

1. To explore the challenges faced by migrants especially Lydia as depicted in Cummins' *American Dirt*.
2. To examine the implications of migrants' experiences and the portrayal of humanitarian crisis as narrated in *American Dirt*.

Research questions

1. What transnational migrants' experiences and challenges do Lydia and her family face in their pursuit of belongingness and safety as depicted in *American Dirt*?
2. What are the ethical implications of humanitarian crisis as narrated in *American Dirt*?

LITERATURE REVIEW

People are motivated to form relationships and a sense of belongingness because they have basic human needs (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Smith and Guarnizo (1998) criticize the idea of transnational migrants as free-floating beings on the grounds that transnational practices are informed by opportunities and restrictions based on given places and historical moments. Instead of living in an unencumbered free space, transnational activities are translated into real social relations across the borders. Ahmed (1999) examines the relationship between migration and identity, focusing on how migrant communities reshape their identities through shared memories and collective acts of remembering. Using Asian women's literature in Britain, autobiographies, and migrant narratives, Ahmed challenges the idea that migration is solely about a lost sense of home, emphasizing instead that a shared feeling of estrangement helps build communal identities. Throughout history, artists and intellectuals have migrated either voluntarily or coercively to establish new lives in foreign lands. Said, a well-known Palestinian literary theorist and public intellectual serves as a prominent example. Having migrated to America as a young man, Said became a foundational figure in post-colonial studies and played a significant role in the Palestinian people's efforts to reclaim their cultural identity.

Pearson (2000) explains that American literature originated from three main groups: Native Americans with their oral traditions, Puritans with their religious writings, and Southern Planters with their practical narratives. Pearson notes that Native American literature was historically viewed as folklore, with its creation stories, hero tales, migration legends, and song lyrics valued more for their content than their artistic qualities. Baym (2003) emphasizes that humanitarianism is a key theme in American literature, with writers focusing on their shared human experience before national identity. He argues that American literature, shaped by democratic values, often reflects optimism and aims to support democracy. Since 1890s, realist writers have highlighted the human cost of America's progress, exploring themes like self-development, social struggles, financial stability, and national unity. While he acknowledges that literature cannot solve societal problems directly, he views it as a powerful tool for raising awareness and educating readers about themselves and the world, with real change requiring social and political action.

Darcy (2004) asserts that classic humanitarianism is rooted in humanity and compassion and underpinned by the concepts of impartiality, neutrality, and independence in order to deliver assistance on the basis of need only. He also underscores the relationship between humanitarianism and human rights as both endeavor to safeguard individuals from violence, forced displacement, recruitment of children, and denial of basic needs such as food and water. Gilmartin (2008) highlights the evolution of migration studies in geography, moving beyond traditional push-pull models focused on economic factors and quantitative methods. New approaches emphasize qualitative methods, exploring migrant identities, subjectivities and the link between belonging and mobility. Concepts like transnationalism, translocalism, and scales of

belonging from citizenship to place of origin provide deeper insights. Sellman (2013) examines Arabic and francophone North African literary narratives from the 1990s, focusing on migration to Europe amid shifting policies. The study explores how refugees, asylum seekers, and clandestine migrants portray Europe, highlighting the impact of migration policies on human rights and belonging. The works delve into themes of cannibalism, urban jungles, and woodlands to depict life beyond the political community. The dissertation argues that wilderness regions provide spaces for balancing bio-politics and rights-based citizenship, suggesting new ways of belonging through the exclusions imposed by forced migration.

Triandafyllidou (2016) tends to focus on policy systems such as the European asylum system but it is criticized for limiting the scope by focusing on legally defined groups at the expense of the complicated reality of migrants with humanitarian needs. Both humanitarianism and humanitarian migration intersect in their shared goal of protecting human rights, alleviating suffering, and promoting global stability, underscoring the need for inclusive, human-centered approaches that transcend legal definitions. Gatrell (2017) takes this further by emphasizing the functional elements of humanitarianism, such as taking care of prisoners and children, nourishing the poor, and catering to displaced populations, while focusing on interlinked issues such as poverty, security, and peace.

Bendixsen (2018) explores how the Norwegian welfare state manages irregular migration by differentiating rights to employment, health care, and economic welfare based on migrants' status. This practice links welfare rights to immigration control, creating hierarchies of belongingness. The state uses the discourse of humanitarian exceptionalism to justify excluding certain groups from basic social services, portraying irregular migrants as an unwelcoming and apolitical. These distinctions support strict migration policies and shape future debates on who deserves access to rights, reinforcing insecure lives for marginalized migrants. Manzella (2018) in *Migrating Fictions* explores how citizenship, race, and gender influenced major internal displacements in 20th-century U.S. history, including the Great Migration, Dust Bowl, Japanese American internment, and migrant labor in the Southwest. She highlights how government-enforced movements restricted the laboring class, people of color, and women from accessing full citizenship rights. This ongoing struggle has shaped cultural legacies and migration literature.

Sakr (2018) uses an interdisciplinary approach combining biopolitics, ecocriticism, human rights discourse, heterotopia, and nightmare realism to analyze forced and covert migration in Blasim's short stories. He explores how Blasim portrays the intersection of borders, forests, and human/non-human life, envisioning futures beyond humanity for reclaiming human rights. It examines his narrative techniques to address both material and symbolic violence through a biopolitical-ecological lens while also considering the possibilities and limits of framing community and freedom of movement around environmental rather than national claims. Schwartz and Schwenken (2020) explore the link between non-essentialist notions of citizenship and solidarity in the context of migration. They examine how civil society makes efforts in the Europe and the initiatives taken in America to rethink societal systems to support racialized individuals, migrants, and non-citizens. The issue focuses on acts of solidarity both practical and symbolic while analyzing the attitudes, discourses, and social contexts behind them. The authors propose the concept of solidarity citizenship, emphasizing that inclusive solidarity emerges through collaboration, the creation of new identities, and the negotiation of differences, rather than being rooted in fixed, exclusive communities.

Mercado (2020) regarding *American Dirt* argues that while the story of a Mexican mother and her son fleeing violence resonates in Latin America, offers only a superficial depiction of migration. The narrative relies on morally universal themes rather than deeply personal experiences, ultimately failing to capture

the true suffering of Latin American women escaping abuse. Mercado evaluates the novel's social relevance, artistic merits, controversy, and discourse, particularly examining its feminist and border-related themes, which may become outdated in a rapidly changing society. Matousek (2022) notes that *American Dirt* attempts to highlight immigrant struggles and social injustices, including femicide, journalist murders and the dangers of migration. However, despite its intention to foster empathy, the novel over simplifies and distorts the complexity of border crossings, reducing the migrant experience to a singular flawed narrative. This exhaustive review of related studies provide enough space to locate research gap for the present study. This study focuses on the allied concepts of migration and humanitarian crisis in the context of belongingness for critical analysis of Cummins' (2020) *American Dirt*.

Theoretical Framework

This study applies Vertovec's (2009) theory of transnationalism as a comprehensive framework to examine the interconnections between migration and humanitarian crisis for the critical analysis of *American Dirt*. In contrast to traditional migration theories that focus on assimilation or linear movement from one state to another, transnationalism provides a more dynamic and multi-layered understanding of migrant experiences. It shifts the focus from the nation-state to individuals, networks, and communities who sustain ties across borders, allowing researchers to explore the complex humanitarian roles migrants play across multiple geographic and social spaces.

Vertovec (2009) defines transnationalism as "sustained cross-border relationships, patterns of exchange, affiliations and social formations spanning nation-states" (2009, p. 1). This definition is crucial for understanding how migrants today are not isolated from their countries of origin after resettlement but remain socially, economically, culturally and politically engaged in both sending and receiving countries. In the context of humanitarianism, this means that migrants are not passive actors but rather active participants in the well-being and development of their transnational communities.

Migration, in this framework, is not viewed as a one-way departure or a loss of national identity. Instead, Vertovec (2009) highlights how globalization, communication technologies, and transportation infrastructure allow migrants to sustain multi-stranded relationships. He explains that "enhanced transnational connections between social groups represent a key manifestation of globalization" (p. 2). This transnational presence enables migrants to send remittances, engage in volunteer work, participate in political activism, and contribute to social development efforts in their countries of origin all of which fall under the scope of humanitarianism. For instance, when migrants remit money to support family members or fund community projects, they are engaging in humanitarian acts. These remittances are not just private financial transfers; they carry collective and moral obligations embedded in kinship and community ties.

"Ethnic diasporas have become a central focus for attempting to understand the shapes and dynamics of transnationalism" (p. 4). Migrants are often located within dense diaspora networks that extend across the border. These networks facilitate important emotional and economic support, but they also complicate the structure of overlapping loyalties and divided social responsibilities, where migrants often struggle to incorporate entirely into the host community while also upholding positions and obligations related to their transnational ties, resulting in a fragmented sense of belonging. "The majority seem to maintain several identities that link them simultaneously to more than one nation" (p. 6). Many migrants occupy some space of double or multi-affiliation, with identity attachments to both homeland, and host-country. For some, that will produce an internal conflict and emotional stress between the two national identities

and the values, cultural practices, or expectations. “Emigrants increasingly are able to maintain or gain access to... rights in more than one country” (p. 13).

While dual citizenship and transnational legal rights present possibilities but they also come with challenges. One of the greatest practical problems is coping with multiple bureaucracies, different legal systems and different eligibility. One of the biggest practical challenges is navigating different bureaucracies, legal systems, and eligibility criteria. This is particularly relevant in accessing health care, education, or property rights, where conflicting regulations between countries may delay or limit access. Vertovec (2009) emphasizes the impact of these economic exchanges by noting, “the relatively small amounts of money which migrants transfer as remittances to their places of origin now add up to at least \$300 billion worldwide” (p. 17). Migrants are often subject to the socioeconomic imperative of economically supporting the families and communities they have left behind. These remittances tend to act as lifelines during times of crisis, including natural disasters or economic crises and play an important role in poverty reduction and infrastructure development.

A central concept in Vertovec’s theory is diaspora consciousness, which refers to the complex identity formation that occurs among migrants. Rather than belonging to a single nation, transnational individuals often feel simultaneously connected to both their homeland and their host country. Vertovec (2009) states that migrants often live “here and there” and carry “several identities that link them simultaneously to more than one nation” (p. 14). This dual or multi-local consciousness gives rise to a sense of responsibility towards communities left behind. This sense of moral obligation often motivates migrants to engage in humanitarian projects, such as building schools, funding clinics, or organizing emergency aid during crises. Their transnational identity fosters an expanded view of community and belonging that goes beyond national borders. Migrants identify not only as citizens of their host countries but also as guardians of their transnational communities.

Vertovec (2009) also explores how transnationalism creates hybrid cultural identities, where the values, traditions and practices of multiple societies are blended. He calls this “a fluidity of constructed styles, social institutions and everyday practices” (p. 15). This blending creates new types of humanitarian awareness particularly among second-generation migrants and diasporic youth. These groups tend to have a distinct worldview regarding global inequalities and become engaged in international aid, development initiatives and rights-based activism. Through exposure to Western humanitarian values and customary cultural ethics of solidarity, many migrants acquire a strong sense of social justice, equity, and solidarity with vulnerable groups. Humanitarian efforts by migrants, hence, are not restricted to material donations but also involve taking an active part in volunteering, philanthropy and activism.

Transnationalism is also political in nature. Migrants also engage in political life in the host and home countries where they also vote, lobby, campaign and advocate. Vertovec notes that “a considerable amount of political activity is now undertaken transnationally” (p. 18). This has profound implications for humanitarianism, as political activism usually intersects with attempts to enhance human rights levels, deliver disaster relief, and assist disadvantaged groups. Most migrant communities mobilize and finance diaspora NGOs or work with foreign actors to redirect assistance and plead for their home areas in times of crisis. These activities demarcate the growing salience of migrant actors in international humanitarian networks.

Vertovec (2009) proposes the idea of translocality as the confluences of places migrants live by constant exchanges between home and host countries. These “translocal social fields” (p. 19) allow migrants to sustain strong emotional and functional ties to their places of origin. In humanitarian terms, this means

migrants do not see their support as charity but as an extension of their translocal identity their place in both worlds. This partially accounts for the persistence of migrant-led community aid, hometown associations and religious or cultural outreach programs. These organizations tend to bypass institutionalized state channels and embody community-based, culture-specific types of humanitarianism more accepted and effective in practice.

Textual Analysis

American Dirt (2020) is a novel by Cummins that tells the story of Lydia, a bookstore owner in Acapulco, Mexico, whose life is shattered when her journalist husband publishes an exposé about Javier, the head of a powerful drug cartel. In retaliation, Javier's men murder Lydia's family, leaving only her and her eight-year-old son, Luca, alive. The interconnected themes of migration, humanitarian crisis and belongingness provide a powerful examination of the migrant condition. *American Dirt* depicts the humanitarian crisis of migrants with the focus on Lydia and her son Luca as they escape Acapulco after their family is killed by a drug cartel. Their terrifying journey to the United States illustrates the sheer physical risk that migrants take from hopping La Bestia, a treacherous freight train used by so many to travel across Mexico, to dodge human traffickers and state agents. These experiences speak to the absolute necessity of humanitarian assistance, as the characters have to depend upon acts of solidarity by other migrants and sympathetic strangers for sustenance, shelter and direction.

Challenges migrants face as depicted in *American Dirt*

Several problems that the migrant people encounter in the search for a place to call home in Cummins' *American Dirt*. These challenges include, for instance, the physical risk as migrants have to make their crossing through hostile territories most of the time under the mercy of criminal organizations and corrupt officers. Other barriers include language and culture since migrants have to adopt new languages and cultures while at the same time having to deal with the loss of familiar cultural profiles.

This truth has felt like a growing, but theoretical, irritation to Lydia over the last couple of years, an affront to her contemporary feminine autonomy. But today it feels like a very real noose around her neck. She may have managed their escape from Acapulco for now, but she knows they're still trapped in Guerrero state, and she can feel the roadblocks all around the periphery of her mind, closing in on them. (Cummins, 2020. p.63)

Lydia's journey in *American Dirt* illustrates the difficult realities of migration and its profound emotional impacts. Although she escapes danger on a physical level, she remains constrained by emotional and mental challenges, representative of the larger migrant experience of negotiating real and imaginary boundaries. Cummins uses metaphors and imagery to convey Lydia's trepidations and precarious position in the world and to provide a potent expression of the everyday struggles migrants witness and the inner fortitude they must possess to truly survive. Through Vertovec's (2009) theory of transnationalism, one gets to know how the multiple identities that the migrants perform and their transnational experience are interconnected. Lydia's first theoretical annoyance at her being an independent woman is a reflection of problems she experiences from the larger world globally and trying to maintain a unique sexual self in a patriarchal nation. This turns into an actual noose that is around her neck, symbolizing what is bad and what is limiting that is out there at the national and international levels. The imagery explores the mental constraints faced by migrants, reflecting how their journeys are fraught with constant negotiation of identity, safety, and belonging across multiple spaces.

It's unusual in a culture where adult children take care of their aging parents that Lydia's mother even had a savings account. Indeed, owning an ATM card made Abuela something of an anomaly among her peers, even in a robust urban economy like Acapulco's, even among Mexico's solid and growing middle class. (Cummins, 2020. p. 112)

In these lines, Cummins delves into the socioeconomic realities of Mexican culture, specifically as they pertain to financial habits and familial care giving. The fact that Lydia's mother possesses an ATM card and savings account which reflects changing economic independence and family structures in Mexican homes. While Abuela has access to her finances and is different from many elders, it also illustrates the infrequency of financial autonomy among the elderly, particularly in urban Acapulco. Vertovec's (2009) views regarding transnationalism also endorse the same fact that Lydia's mother has an account and defies conventional roles of filial obligation in which elderly parents are cared for by their adult offspring. This alteration is in line with the impacts of globalism and the development of economies on the conventional family structure since the pluralism of the current Lydia family may adopt the aspects of financial dealing from other nations. Furthermore, Lydia's mother's status as an anomaly among her peers within Acapulco's urban economy and Mexico's middle class underscores broader socio-economic trends influenced by transnational flows of ideas and practices. Cummins' portrayal provides complexities of socioeconomic change and cultural adaptation within Mexican society, highlighting the relevance of transnationalism theory in understanding the dynamics of migration, globalization and social change.

"Has your spontaneous migration resolved the immediate threat to your safety and wellbeing?"

Lydia hesitates, because everything she's ever thought about protecting Luca has changed now. She doesn't want him to be afraid." (Cummins, 2020. p. 132). Cummins explores Lydia's complicated feelings and choices as she deals with the immediate danger to her safety and that of her baby, Luca. It's evident that Lydia is struggling with how to strike a balance between keeping Luca safe from harm and making sure he knows they're in danger. Her reluctance to respond to the question indicates her inner struggle and the knowledge that their impromptu migration hasn't made their dangerous predicament any less dangerous. The stark reality of their situation is highlighted by Lydia's desire to protect Luca from danger and her understanding that he must be aware of it. The mental struggle a mother has between her need to shield her child and the terrible reality of their situation is expertly captured by Cummins. Vertovec's (2009) also endorses the same that the migrants are engaged in and have continued to interface with people, events or activities that are transnational in nature hence affecting their identities and experiences. That Lydia did not immediately respond when asked how the safety threat was solved demonstrates the multi-faceted nature of their migration experience. Her conflict stems from the struggle of the responsibilities and positioning she has within her family; she is trying to protect her son, Luca while making sure that he is aware of the fact that they are in a risky position. Lydia's struggle highlights the transnational fluidity of social interactions in the following lines:

Sometimes the working men throw snacks up to the migrants on top of the train before it leaves, or refill their water bottles from a nearby hose. Other times, it's as if the men have been warned not to aid the migrants, like they're invisible on top of the train, and those times are like careful choreography, all pretending not to see or be seen. (Cummins, 2020. p. 170-171)

Cummins vividly portrays the diverse responses that migrants receive from working men as they travel on top of trains. Cummins highlights small acts of empathy and solidarity, like offering snacks or water, to emphasize the need for mutual support among migrants. She also critiques how external forces, such as the government and society, shape perceptions of immigrants. Analyzing the concept of transnationalism described by Vertovec's (2009), it is possible to state that such gestures as working men offering a glass of water to migrants and filling their water bottles with it may be viewed as examples of compatriot support and allied feelings belonging to the culture of transnational social fields. But the striking instances in which the males appear to disregard the migrants highlight the impact of outside forces, such government or society conventions, in molding people's attitudes towards migrants. Transnational power structures can be used to examine this, as social dynamics and policies in both the sending and receiving nations can affect how migrants are treated. The fact that these incidents are described as careful

choreography, draws attention to the systematic character of the marginalization and apathy that migrant communities experience illuminate the intricate relationship that exists between transnational linkages, power dynamics and societal views towards migration.

Second-largest city in Mexico. State capital of Jalisco. Population: one and a half million. People. All across the top of the train, migrants prepare to disembark. They wake their friends, stuff wadded-up jacket pillows into their bags; they tighten the straps on one another's backpacks. (Cummins, 2020. p. 206)

Cummins' provides an actual depiction of the stressful life of migrants riding trains in Guadalajara, the second-biggest city in Mexico. The depiction of refugees getting ready to disembark emphasizes how temporary their trip was and how necessary it was to travel. Through transnationalism theory, the description of Guadalajara, Mexico's second-largest city and the state capital of Jalisco, provides a backdrop for understanding the urban environment where migrants find themselves. The actions of waking friends, packing belongings, and assisting each other with backpacks illustrate the communal aspects of migration and the reliance on peer support. The relation depicted in this case is not unusual in the nature of the complicated value systems existing within the migrant societies and their interaction with the global culture. Vertovec's theory also focuses on negotiation of identities and role in the transnational social fields and hence, Luca's discomfort indicates some of the relational tensions within the migrant community. While the migrants are waiting to leave, the way that they help each other to pack their things and adjust the straps of the backpacks speak to transnational social interaction because despite coming from different countries, they are all working together as a collective unit.

"The worst will either happen or not happen, and there's no worry that will make a difference in either direction" (Cummins, 2020. p. 323).

The line emphasizes acceptance of anything which is beyond one's control and reflects an optimistic mindset. The lines emphasize that stressing about the uncertainty of the future is pointless, as it won't change the results of the uncertainty. It advocates living in the present moment obtaining some peace regarding the uncertainty that exists, and focusing on what is controllable while accepting that there is uncertainty about the things that are not controllable. This type of perspective encourages intentional but not apathetic detachment from anxiety as a way of navigating uncertainties of life. Vertovec (2009) presents a detailed approach on the nature and life of migrants who move from one nation to another and the hardships they encountered. This line recognized that some effects are outside of their control and shows that they assume such risks. This perspective is understandable given the legal, social and economic risk forming and often uncertainty that characterizes the daily existence of migrants as well as the source and recipient countries. The compartmentalization of work and worries is discouraged and instead a problem-solving technique is embraced whereby migrants address matters as they occur and keep their attention on issues that can be acted upon. Migrants can lessen personal stress and more effectively manage uncertainty when they share responsibilities and resources. This pragmatic policy is necessary for survival and adaptation for transnational migrants mostly because they concentrate on the urgent and material concerns because legal documentation, work and family reunification are crucial concerns for these people.

"Each hill looks like it would take a half a day to walk up, and a half a day to walk back down. The migrants file downhill in El Chacal's wake". (Cummins, 2020. p. 382).

The valleys and hills symbolize the difficult journey that migrants face. The constant and sometimes impossible tasks that migrants endure are shown by this imagery. El Chacal is a figure of guidance or leadership who symbolizes both the hard realities of the trip and leadership. Within Vertovec's (2009) perspective, these lines can be analyzed as the description of the migrants as traveling in El Chacal's wake as a group highlights the emergence of a transient yet important social structure. This movement

serves as a prime example of social morphology, in which a group of people get together to form a network connected by a common migration experience. The migrant group's silent procession down the hill implies that they have a profound understanding that goes beyond their individual identities and country of origin. This suggests the existence of a transnational social field. These people are linked by their common experience of traveling to the United States. Walking up and down hills is a physical act that is representative of transnational behaviors is regarded as requiring a large amount of time and effort.

Implications of humanitarian issues as depicted in *American Dirt*

Cummins takes the readers through the treacherous journey towards the United States through the story of a Mexican woman and her young son, Lydia and Luca who are escaping from cartel violence in Mexico. This story takes such concerns deeper into ethics aspects of their humanitarian and migration issues. Based on such issues, *American Dirt* creates a more inclusive discourse on moral and humanitarian issues of the modern migration crises and puts a human face to the suffering of the migrants.

She doesn't know how Javier found them. Or why. Did he mean only to scare the shit out of her? To spike her grief with terror? Or to warn her, to soil the purity of her anguish with his weird, revolting compassion? (Cummins, 2020. p. 53).

In these lines, the internal struggle is depicted and elaborated where Lydia struggles to understand Javier's actions. In the first sentence there is emphasis on Lydia as a frail character and on Javier as the constant threat. It also builds a general state of fear and fluidity from the Progressive's standpoint. His intentions are not well defined and this only serves to fuel this confusion. The questioning that ensued is rhetorical thus, brings to focus the psychological state of Lydia. The juxtaposition of terror with compassion is useful to depict the evil and good sides of Javier. The use of informal and violent language to describe her state of terror as 'scare the shit out of her' is effective to stress on how much. The notion that he was attempting "to spoil the purity of her anguish" suggests that the man was out to further worsen the condition of the woman he had killed by tormenting her mentally as well. Using Vertovec's (2009) views, these lines explore migration, mobility, and interpersonal interactions. Javier's pursuit of Lydia symbolizes the complexities of modern migration, where people navigate transnational power structures. His ability to follow her across different spaces highlights fluid boundaries and global connections. Lydia's struggle to manage multiple identities and affiliations in intercultural settings reflects the challenges of understanding these dynamics.

"Most people she would ordinarily turn to for help are dead, and even if they weren't, asking for help is akin to walking into a friend's kitchen wearing a suicide vest. The risk of her very presence seems too selfish to consider" (Cummins, 2020. p. 63).

These lines depict the protagonist's dilemma as well as the ethical implications seeking assistance when things are unsafe. The lines highlight the danger of seeking help, as it risks harming both the seeker and those who assist. The use of the word selfish underscores the protagonist's ethical dilemma between self-preservation and protecting others. Vertovec's (2009) views also endorses these complex dynamics of transnational experiences. Because of violence or displacement, established support structures are disrupted, and the protagonist's situation symbolizes the rupture of social networks frequently experienced by transnational migrants. The comparison of seeking help to wear a suicide vest in a friend's kitchen underscores the moral dilemmas in cross-border interactions, where individuals must weigh personal risk against responsibility. Vertovec's investigation of the ways in which transnational people reconcile their loyalty and identities is reflected in the protagonist's internal conflict between the need to survive and his sense of duty to the community.

All her life she's pitied those poor people. She's donated money. She's wondered with the sort of detached fascination of the comfortable elite how dire the conditions of their lives must be wherever they come from, that this is the better option. That these people would leave their

homes, their cultures, their families, even their languages, and venture into tremendous peril, risking their very lives, all for the chance to get to the dream of some faraway country that doesn't even want them. (Cummins, 2020. p. 106)

The above text is written from a third-person perspective, focusing on a character who represents the comfortable elite. This highlights the theme of sacrifice and desperation, showing that migrants are willing to risk everything for a chance at a better life. Transnationalism captures dynamics of the superstructure of relationships focusing on the everyday unbroken interaction and identity beyond geographical borders. The paragraph discusses the strong push factors such as poor living conditions that make the risky journey seem like a better option that force migrants to flee their home nations. Despite the fact that the destination countries are unwelcoming, Vertovec's (2009) paradigm looks at both these push and pull elements. He believes that real involvement with international concerns calls for more than monetary contributions rather, it demands solidarity and a more profound, sympathetic understanding. The sympathy and alms given by the character indicate a narrow, disengaged kind of involvement that falls short of bridging the gap between the rich and the underprivileged. It also ignores the underlying causes and systemic problems that migrants encounter.

"As Rebeca reveals what scraps of story she does have to Luca, he starts to understand that this is the one thing all migrants have in common, this is the solidarity that exists among them" (Cummins, 2020. p. 190).

The following line emphasizes the idea of migrant solidarity by highlighting the fact that, although having different backgrounds and life experiences, migrants are united by their shared sufferings. Rebeca and Luca's story-sharing becomes a means for the migrants to connect develop empathy, and develop an association of community. Vertovec's (2009) views reveal that migrants' lives and their management must be understood in a global context where people and communities are doing so in multiple, interrelated social, economic and cultural fields. In this regard, the gesture made by Rebeca to tell her story to Luca is evidential of how the migrants stay connected regardless the distances, physical and geographical. Rebeca can also be credited for this since she describes her experience and challenges faced when migrating and in her home country. The fact that Rebeca is so comfortable as to share her life problems with Luca speaks a lot about the transnational relationships that are built among migrants across national lines.

They understand that the best-case scenario now is to be captured by a man who obeys the dictates of his uniform, a man who will detain them and process them, and then erase. Their entire journey, and send them back to wherever they started. (Cummins, 2020. p. 250)

These lines capture the extreme inconsistency and despair felt by migrants trying to enter a safer territory. They know that in the best of circumstances, all of their hard work will be for nothing, and they will be returned to where they started. Their story reflects Vertovec's notion of transnationalism, where people live in several social worlds at the same time, as an endeavor to mediate and cross over several nations. This idea is expressed in the lines that there is such concept as transnational social space, however immigration system disrupts it. The migrants are attempting to build or maintain a relationship of the countries of origin and the countries of their residence. Their arrest and deportation, on the other hand, upend these international networks by bringing individuals back into a single national framework and wiping out their attempts at integration or interaction. Vertovec's theory also addresses the structural constraints faced by migrants, such as legal and bureaucratic barriers. The dictates of his uniform stand for such restrictions, which affect the performance of the transnational migration. The enforcement of immigration laws exemplifies how state mechanisms can impede the fluidity of transnational movements and connections.

"This woman has trapped us here; she has gone to call la policía; she has gone to get someone more worse than la policía, now, this will be the end for us, why did I trust her, why didn't we keep running" (Cummins, 2020. p. 294).

These lines depict the characters' lack of faith and their fear seeing that they are helpless refugees who want to escape being caught. It's on this note that Lydia in particular feels this mistrust and anxiety. According to Vertovec's (2009) view, the characters are trapped between their instincts to conceive security and their instincts to avoid police. Within the transnational networks that refugees depend on for assistance and survival, the woman's possible betrayal signifies a breach of trust. In this particular setting, migrants including those constituting Lydia's family move through their journey by means of transnational practices, capital, and social relations that are resource dependent and exist beyond national borders. But as they run into mistrust and animosity from state officials and locals, their experiences also highlight the drawbacks and difficulties of transnationalism. The fear expressed by Lydia reflects the precariousness of migrant lives and the constant threat of violence and persecution. It underscores the power dynamics at play within transnational spaces where migrants are often vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

She wishes for the armor of her small makeup pouch at home, hanging by its drawstring from a wooden hook in the family bathroom, but the bewilderment is almost comforting; perhaps no one would recognize her from Javier's photograph after all. (Cummins, 2020. p. 327).

These lines represent the protagonist's inner turmoil and the ethical dilemma she encounters when escaping danger. The clinical meaning of the word 'armor' with emphasis on the flowing nature of the word draws attention to the woman's readiness to confront possible danger within the desire for shield. Almost a hint of comfort can be felt through specific details such as her small make up pouch in her past familiar normal routine life. The makeup bag which is carried along is used to symbolize her past and the need for order and stability in her life. Analyzing these lines in the context of Vertovec's (2009) views, one can define the complex interconnection between the native country and the current life conditions in another, faraway country as seen by a character. The presence of only the small cosmetics bag symbolizes that the character maintains connection to the native country even if physically present in a different country, it brings the reminders of everyday objects and actions. This desire for familiarity amidst upheaval reflects the transnational ties that individuals often maintain with their homeland, seeking comfort in familiar objects and routines even when far from home. The mention of 'Javier's photograph' highlights the transnational nature of the character's experience, as she navigates the challenges of migration and displacement while maintaining ties to her homeland.

"Because again: Why? If they are violent men, if they know her or recognize her, and decide to trade her life for a small fortune, she will find out soon enough" (Cummins, 2020. p. 349).

These lines depict struggles of Lydia's conscience and ethical dilemma that she experiences in her situation. This highlights the fact that despite human being on the move, there is always lot of risks involved especially for those who are running away from risky situations. This refers to the ethical issue which Lydia struggles with. In Vertovec's (2009) views, Lydia's fears of the men being violent are the kind of transnational social fields migrants deal with. That is why violence in this case is not contained within the geographical borders of a country as it affects people on the move like Lydia. Maintaining and recreating safety in new contexts could also be recognized as affected by Lydia's identity and previous experiences, and thus stress the migrants' identity as a result of the origin and destination cultures. The focus of the storm within the story relates to Torres deciding to exchange one's life for a small amount of money; the same is an illustration of the plight of migrants across borders. This vulnerability is not only of geographical character but also of the social and economic processes influenced by transnational tendencies.

CONCLUSION

Cummins' *American Dirt* (2020) explores the struggles migrants face through Lydia and her son Luca's journey, highlighting physical risks, language barriers, xenophobia and the constant threat of surveillance. The novel explores how migration reshapes identity, culture and relationships while emphasizing both solidarity and systemic exclusion in the quest for safety and belonging. This study examines the ethical complexities of migration through Lydia's journey, highlighting how survival often clashes with morality and how migrants face mistrust, fear and exploitation. Using Vertovec's (2009) perspective on transnationalism, *American Dirt* reveals how systemic injustices and bureaucratic obstacles hinder migrant integration, highlighting the divide between distant observers and those living the harsh reality of displacement. This study illustrates how Lydia's journey reflects the struggles of migrants who, driven by cartel violence and the failure of local institutions in Mexico, seek refuge in the United States while navigating fragmented social structures. The novel highlights the emotional and physical displacement migrants face, emphasizing how moments of compassion and solidarity create temporary but vital connections, ultimately showcasing the resilience and hope necessary for survival and community-building.

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