# Audio file

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00:00:03 Announcer

The Missouri State Journal, a weekly program keeping you in touch with Missouri State University.

00:00:10 Sofia Perez

Stories about the United States’ southern border with Mexico are making headlines almost daily. However, little is said about those migrants and their journey through Mexico. Doctor Judith Martínez is an assistant professor in the modern and classical languages department at Missouri State University. Her research focuses on forced migration and violence. She recently collaborated with scholars from 13 universities across the world to publish the book “Central American Migration in the 21st Century. Martínez's chapter is called “The Central American Migrant: Mexico the Never-Ending border, she focuses on the socio-political context in Mexico and the journey through Mexico of Honduran, El Salvadorian and Guatemalan migrants.

00:00:51 Dr. Judith Martínez

I think of myself as somebody who is a forced migrant. I do like the phrase from Jack Ransier making visible what is invisible. That's what I'm trying to do with my research. I'm trying to talk about things that exist, but to go deeper and see what really goes underneath that nobody talks about.

00:01:09 Sofia Perez

Martínez explains that people in Central America leave their home countries due to extreme poverty, violence, crime and corruption. She explains that people seek to cross the border to exchange their labor for money.

00:01:20 Dr. Judith Martínez

People, mainly from Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala. Those are the three main countries that are pushing their people out, so we'd like to say that it's really a system of expolsion because they're not leaving their country because they want to leave their country, they're leaving their country because they're being pushed out. They're uprooted. I love this definition of poverty from Saskia Sassen and she says the word poverty has changed over the years. In the past, poverty meant to have a little piece of land with a few chickens or some cattle and then a house out in the country. But right now, poverty has shifted to really mean that you have nothing but your body. The only thing you have to offer is your labor. So then people leave their countries because they can't find a way to provide for themselves or for their family basic needs because the United States offer the best rate exchange of labor, they seek to cross different borders so that they can arrive to the United States. The other things that encourages people to leave their countries is that they fear for their lives because there's a lot of violence, a lot of gang violence, a lot of guerrillas, small wars against each other. Once they are uprooted, we talk about the American dream and we talk about people coming to the United States and what their life is going to look like when they come here and build that longer wall or build a taller wall and we have all this, you know, controversial debate. We don't talk enough about their journey through Mexico. Mexico is a huge country. It could be a bridge, or it could be hell. It could be a resource, or it could be purgatory. When you fear for your life and you already know you might die, people are not afraid to cross different borders to risk their lives because they're already in danger. Mexico itself is struggling with a lot of corruption. It's struggling with a lot of crime. It's struggling with a lot of war against or for drugs. So I think it is important to take this into account because when you add something as forced migration, you know people that are coming in and trying to navigate the country trying to find some temporary job temporary housing. This adds to the infrastructure problems that Mexico already has. We're not prepared to receive more people, especially in the cities, so then this creates a very chaotic environment, but also an unwelcoming place for Central Americans. You would think that because we speak the same language, we would be friendlier with forced migrants when they come in. But people are afraid of what they don't know. They're thinking we already have too many problems now, you add the immigration problem.

00:03:53 Sofia Perez

Martínez speaks of the hardships that migrants face when crossing through Mexico.

00:03:57 Dr. Judith Martínez

When people are crossing, they are taken advantage of where they are sold to other people so that they can profit from them. This is one of the main points that the forced migrants become really a commodity, a very specific prey and a very specific type of business for especially the cartels. The cartels are expanding their business and now they're also profiting from the vulnerable migrant that has nothing but their body. We have a lot of migrants that keep disappearing. We have a lot of migrants that are still being assassinated. We have a lot of migrants that have just basic needs not being met and this is a matter of human rights it regardless of legal or illegal or document or undocumented. We can't have children being mistreated or being starved or being abandoned because they're undocumented. They're human beings, and they should be given the basic needs, regardless of the place that they are, we are responsible for those children.

00:04:55 Sofia Perez

That was Dr. Judith Martínez. The book “Central American Migration in the 21st Century” can be found online from the University of Arizona Press. I'm Sophia Perez. For the Missouri State Journal.

00:05:05 Announcer

For more information, contact the Office of Strategic Communication at 417-836-6397. The Missouri State Journal is available online@ksu.org.