SARAH BALDWIN: A quick note before we start. This will be our last episode of *TrendingGlobally* for the summer. We're going to take a brief hiatus, but we'll be back with all new episodes in September. All right. On with the show.

From the Watson Institute at Brown University, this is *Trending Globally.* I'm Sarah Baldwin. Immigration's an inherently interdisciplinary subject. Why and how people move across borders brings up questions of economics, politics, culture, security, and history. On this episode, I sat down with Aileen Teague, Rawan Arar, and Almita Miranda, three post-doctoral fellows at Watson doing work on immigration. A historian, a sociologist, and an anthropologist, they were the perfect combination of guests to help me make sense of such a multifaceted topic. I started by asking Eileen, a historian, how the US war on drugs affects immigration between Mexico and the US.

AILEEN TEAGUE: A lot of times, when we're looking at US and Mexican anti-drug issues, I mean, we tend to focus a lot of our attention on what the United States is doing to keep Mexican or Latin American drugs out. We tend to focus a lot of our attention on the border itself. But I think that if we look at the longer history, and we look at what's going on-- what the United States is actually doing and supporting inside Mexico, the whole landscape of and the amount of importance that the border actually assumes in the larger US anti-drug strategy and their policies with Mexico, it sort of changes.

And you see this level of involvement that at the border is of course very significant and ostensibly militarized. But also you see that the US also has a very strong security presence inside Mexico over time, that again, are called different names, from the late 1970s to the present, that are at times arming Mexican counterparts. And sometimes these Mexican counterparts are what we would deem very corrupt.

And violence often is the result. But we don't really trace-- and when I say we, I mean just the kind of more common historical narrative-- and we don't account for a lot of these phenomena going on deep inside Mexico, and how they're actually connected to the violence that we've seen in the early 2000s on the border.

SARAH BALDWIN: Aileen, why did you become a historian, and why this area in particular?

AILEEN TEAGUE: I think two major things motivated my desire to become a historian, and then particularly focus on this topic. I mean, one is I spent a number of years serving in the Marine Corps. And it was always interesting to me, especially when you read some of these scathing critiques of US

policy, how disconnected they could be from some of the people that are on the ground. And that sort of disconnection really fascinated me. The US policy versus the people who-- versus the faces of US policy, and how that can look when you're working with counterparts from all over the world, and building these really special relationships.

My interest in interventionism as well was just that I was born in Panama near the Canal Zone. My family was stationed in Guantanamo Bay in the '90s. And I was stationed in Okinawa, and I went to the Philippines. And I was so shocked when I started to read about how other people conceptualize these spaces where I grew up. And kind of trying to bridge some of the scholarly work with what the experience was of actually living in some of these places, and what the politics were of intervention.

And as I started grad school-- which I came to grad school a little bit later, after I had finished my military service-- a lot of these questions of interventionism, I was fascinated by how they were entangled-- or how they manifested in anti-drug issues throughout Latin America, but particularly Mexico. And I'm looking at this longer history of how the so-called US war on drugs, which everyone-- it's very popular to say it's a failure now, but how that developed, and how in many ways, aside from the fact that it's not very popular to say, how it continues.

SARAH BALDWIN: When you said that US involvement within Mexico-- whether it's arming counterparts or however else battling, let's say, in the war on drugs-- that that often begets violence, what is the connection? Why does that lead to violence?

AILEEN TEAGUE: So for example, US policies in the late '70s and at times throughout the 1980s, the US supported Mexican aerial drug spraying inside Mexico. And that measure served to destroy both licit and illicit drug crops. And many of these aerial spraying operations were taking place in the same locations where many of Mexico's most powerful drug cartels today had their origins.

So we're seeing this increase in instability. And then we have to, I think, explore the question of what is causing many of these citizens in drug producing spaces to be incentivized to join drug cartels. And this is in the late 1970s and the early 1980s. And so this is what I mean. When you're looking at US involvement of certain security forces, and how at times US actors don't even necessarily know what some of the counterparts, what some of security counterparts, are doing with US anti-drug aid.

And this is where the production of violence gets particularly complicated. I mean, because

you have people that have been supported by the United States, who then turn out to be major drug traffickers or running second and third order illicit enterprises. And so this is just one example in the late 1970s, but as you get through the Mexican drug war that we know today that originates from around 2006 to 2010 under then Mexican president Felipe Calderón, these kinds of relationships that the United States is creating inside Mexico, they become increasingly complicated, and they kind of explode when you have this more modern drug war, to an extent that researchers looking at this topic can't really understand the different facets of them. And I think that what my work is doing is going back to how these relationships were constructed to begin with, and the political and social complexities that intersect with them.

SARAH BALDWIN: Is this tendency to use policies to sort of manipulate another government, a neighboring government, unique to the US and Mexico?

AILEEN TEAGUE: No, I think that a lot of-- I mean, this happens very similar to countries not having to do with anti-drug issues, with other kind of strategic issues. But Colombia is a really good parallel in Latin America and with anti-drug issues. I mean, so these sorts of things are not unique to Mexico. But the fact that the United States and Mexico share this 2000-mile-long border do make it kind of an exceptional situation in many cases.

SARAH BALDWIN: Similarly, Rawan, you study refugees and displacement and asylum and host countries from a sociological point of view. And I'm thinking about this interconnectedness that Aileen was talking about between two countries, with a flow of people across its border. And I've heard you say that to understand the refugee situation in the global south, look at the interests in the north. What do you mean by that?

RAWAN ARAR: I think the first point to make, if you want to understand the global refugee crisis, is to think about how the movement of people is not just arbitrary. And it's not just about geography. So the fact that most of the world's refugees-- according to the UNHCR, about 85% of the world's refugees live in the global south-- is not an accident.

This is part of a larger global system that, building off of what Aileen was saying, gives us insight into the interests of states, and how states can engage with one another and use migration as a tool to promote their own interests, whether that includes who is allowed to enter their territory, but also how resources are spent, how migration shapes the construction of a nation, or how that affects the development of culture.

And of course, as we've seen unfolding not just in the US, but around the world, the ways in which race and ethnicity tie into a national narrative are very consequential when it comes to immigration in general, and also when it comes to refugee issues.

SARAH BALDWIN: And how is the refugee crisis in Europe-- how does that shape what-- I know you study Jordan in particular. Or you've studied many countries, but in particular Jordan recently. So how does the refugee crisis in Europe shape what happens in Jordan?

RAWAN ARAR: So if you want to understand the global distribution of the world's refugees, I would recommend that you take a global perspective. So it's not an accident that most of the world's refugees live in the global south. This is part of a larger dynamic in which states in the global north invest and essentially pay money as donor states to major refugee host states that host most of the world's refugees. And these major refugee host states exist in the global south.

SARAH BALDWIN: May I say that I would wager that a lot of people in the US or in Europe probably think that their countries are the biggest hosts, are among the biggest hosts, of refugees globally?

RAWAN ARAR: And if that's the case, I think it has everything to do with the social construction of a problem. So when we talk about an issue, it's oftentimes very national centric, right? But in fact, in the United States, the refugees that come to the US go through a rigorous vetting and selection process that can take up to two years.

SARAH BALDWIN: Right, they're not asylum seekers. They are being vetted in their countries by the UN or--

RAWAN ARAR: And they're also invited to come to the US. They're vetted, they're invited. And when they get here, there is even-- for better or for worse-- a system through resettlement that allows refugees who come to the US to have access to some kind of social support.

And if I were to tie this in with some contemporary debates right now about migration, so many of the restrictionist conversations about limiting refugees has to do with integration. So when we receive refugees, will they be able to integrate? And as scholars will tell you, and people who work in this field on the ground, that actually being able to provide the kinds of resources that allow people to learn how to register their kids for school or use public transportation or have access to the basic aspects of what makes a community a community helps facilitate integration.

And so you can imagine how, when this conversation falls along partisan lines, we really

neglect the reality of what people need. So whether you're pro or against refugee immigration should not affect if you believe that refugees who are here should have access to, let's say, schooling, right?

SARAH BALDWIN: Aileen, what were you going to say?

AILEEN TEAGUE: No, I just thought that that was really nicely put. And hearing how Rawan was looking at refugee politics, I feel like you could take what she was saying about refugees and put in border policy.

SARAH BALDWIN: In the sense of interests?

AILEEN TEAGUE: Yeah, in the sense of partisan interests. And I thought that-- I mean, I love the phrase, "the social construction of a problem," because it seems like many of these refugee and border issues are definitely very socially constructed based on national interests. I think in the sense of US Mexico border policy, sometimes-- and I think Almita might have some insights on this. I mean, there is a hybridity there, because there are many border identities that are very heavily entrenched on both sides of the border.

But I think that that point is a really interesting one. And I just wonder, after hearing Rawan speak, what would it look like if border policies-- especially more recent border policies-- were spoken about in a nonpartisan sense, and we were able to kind of get to some of the real issues?

SARAH BALDWIN: Yeah. I mean, is it disingenuous? Is there a lack of honesty about why it's in one country's or one part of the world's interest to send refugees to another part of the world, or to receive refugees? Because those countries also receive aid. I mean, are those things talked about openly among policymakers?

RAWAN ARAR: Yes, is it clear that the contemporary system of refugee management exists to uphold the interests of powerful states? Yes, that is very clear, and is entrenched in international law. In fact, the 1951 Refugee Convention initially was created with what is called a temporal and geographic limitation, which meant that refugees were fundamentally defined as people who were fleeing Europe at a certain time. And that definition was later expanded to include refugees outside of that time and space.

But we know as scholars that oftentimes these international conventions, they can't exist, they can't come into existence, without the support of powerful states. And so they are not going to

be created or signed and definitely not upheld if they don't meet the interests of powerful states. Now, actually this is a perfect juncture to recognize the difference between refugees and asylum seekers. Because refugees exist within this more carefully curated system, while asylum seekers are people who are seeking refugee status. They come to the borders of a nation and ask for protection.

And that's when you see what's called, quote, unquote, "the limits of liberalism" being pushed. Because you have people who are coming in need, and saying we need protection. And now it's up to US laws and also the American people to respond. And this actually fits in well with the other work of my co-panelists here, because we're talking about the US Mexico border. We're talking about people coming from Central America to seek asylum in the US.

SARAH BALDWIN: Well, since we're back in the US, and speaking about Mexico and the US Mexico border, Almita, you're an anthropologist. And you study Mexican mixed status families, both in Chicago and in Zacatecas in Mexico. And so those are families whose members are a mix, let's say, of US residents and citizens and illegal or undocumented immigrants, right? And so how does that mix affect an individual's status, let's say in the US, and what each individual can aspire to? Or how does it put the family at risk? What is the dynamic now in mixed status families?

ALMITA MIRANDA: So yes, I mean, I largely focus on undocumented Mexican migration. But similar to Aileen's point, in my work I largely interview members of Mexican mixed status families in Chicago, but try to trace the historical origins of their migration. So that even though my undocumented interlocutors came to the US in the mid '90s largely as a result of US economic interests, like the passing of NAFTA, as well as the increased militarization of the border in '94 and so on.

I try to also look at how these migrants are also members of longer migrant families. And so in many cases, my interlocutors, their grandparents came through the bracero program, which was a temporary guest worker program during World War II that then continued until 1964. And so that was deliberately done in favor of US agricultural interests. Later, some of these former braceros no longer having this temporary status, continued to come because of the large economic demand or labor demand on them.

But they came as undocumented people in the '70s and '80s which gets to Aileen's time frame. And it wasn't until the '90s then that we have a large influx of undocumented migrants that then settle here. So those are the people that I focus on, how this latest wave of undocumented Mexicans then start to form mixed status families. Because of the border

militarization, they're no longer circular migrants, as were their parents, right?

SARAH BALDWIN: Just remind us what circular migrants are.

ALMITA MIRANDA: Yeah. Well, with circular migrants-- at least in the case of Mexico-- they tended to come in the '70s and '80s during short periods of time, worked in the US, sent back remittances. But then they themselves also return. And so their families were in Mexico.

In the '90s, we start to see undocumented immigrants stay in the US, because they can no longer afford to make that trip back and forth. It's much riskier. It's costlier. Because the US started to create these streamline operation blockade on traditional ports of entry, like Tijuana or El Paso. So now migrants are then going into more desert-like conditions, like through Arizona, where that kind of journey increased the number of border deaths.

So then they're staying in the US, and then bringing their families here. And because there's no immigration policy that allows them to adjust their status, they've been forced to maintain that undocumented status throughout. And because their children are born in the US, they have US citizenship. So that's how you start to see the formation of mixed status families and their rights. Currently we have about 15 million people in mixed status families. So nearly half of the undocumented population are living in these households, where even though the children or some of the spouses may be citizens, the undocumented members don't have any legal recourse to adjust their status.

So really, after 9/11 and the creation of the Department of Homeland Security, there was much more attention being paid on internal enforcement. So whereas in the '90s with President Bill Clinton, while the focus was on the border, now we start to see the creation of ICE that's targeting communities, that's targeting households, that's separating families, that's deporting undocumented members of these mixed status families.

SARAH BALDWIN: And breaking them up.

ALMITA MIRANDA: And breaking them up, yes.

SARAH BALDWIN: And so now what did you say, 15 million?

ALMITA MIRANDA: 15 million people are living in mixed status families. But about 5 million undocumented immigrants and their children, their spouses--

SARAH BALDWIN: Many of whom might have wanted to go back to Mexico.

ALMITA MIRANDA: Yes. In fact, my own family, I was born into a mixed status family with my parents, who were undocumented in the '70s. They were able to adjust their status in 1996, which was the last immigration reform with a legalization program that we saw in the US. And so then we ceased to be mixed status, right? Had they not been able to adjust their status, we would still be in a mixed status home.

And that's what we're not seeing, I guess, from Congress and from political leaders, that there is no plan to allow undocumented immigrants to adjust their status, so that we don't continue to have these families living in legal limbo, which is the title of my project.

RAWAN ARAR: Almita, listening to what you're saying, it just makes me think about how much we talk about immigrants as individuals and not as families, and how that shapes not just the debate, but again, the ways in which we understand immigration fundamentally. Almtia, have you found that your focus on family leads people to ask you different kinds of questions about immigration than they would if you were talking about the same topics or the same policies, but only focusing on the individual?

ALMITA MIRANDA: I think often when we talk about undocumented migration now, people tend to just focus on the individual. So we have 11.3 million undocumented immigrants living in the US. But they forget that each of those individuals are parts of families and parts of communities. So really, we're talking about many more million people involved in this immigration debate.

SARAH BALDWIN: Aileen, what were you going to say about that?

AILEEN TEAGUE: Just two quick points to kind of bring it back a little bit to a historical perspective. I mean, despite the fact that there is this shifting focus on who can come in, especially around the family, I mean looking at the longer history of US immigration policy-- I mean, for most of its history, it's been largely focused on the family and family connections. And so this sort of shift and discourse of now, it's relatively new.

And then if you go back to alternative frameworks as well, which in the 1920s, these policies were established around quotas from whatever country you came from. And then in the 1960s, I think it was 1965, 1966, the policies then become more about these familial links. And they have been relatively successful since then. And so I guess one is looking at the longer picture, and then also seeing if we can kind of take that history to go back to what Rawan was

saying, to see if we can kind of de-escalate some of the partisan politics of this.

SARAH BALDWIN: Can I ask you, Rawan, why did you become interested in studying refugees and flows and the politics behind it?

RAWAN ARAR: I think I've always been interested in questions of home. And I've always-- I mean, when you're a kid too, you think about social issues and homelessness. And you think, I don't understand how we can live in a world where things like that exist. And I think as a child, I was always kind of obsessed with that question. And refugees are very much tied to-- I mean, they are people who have had to flee their country, and have had to leave their homes. So it's in many ways homelessness on this different scale, in which they become the responsibility and part of what the international community must respond to, and not just what the national community responds to.

And on a personal note, I come from a family where I have a refugee history too. And so most of my extended family lives in Jordan. I'm Palestinian Jordanian. I've spent my whole life traveling between the US and Jordan, and have seen multiple refugee groups come in and out of Jordan. So my family being Palestinian, I was there in 2006 when Lebanese refugees came in and then left. I spent a year in Jordan when Iraqi refugees were coming in and left. And then by the time I started grad school, the Syrian crisis also started. So in many ways, it's been the story of my life.

SARAH BALDWIN: So interesting. And Almita, I know we talked about this a little bit, but can you talk a little bit about how your personal experience sort of informed your scholarship?

ALMITA MIRANDA: Yes. I mean, as I mentioned before, I grew up in an immigrant Mexican household in Chicago actually. And so immigration or the topic of immigration was just part of my everyday life. But it really wasn't until 2006 when I was an undergraduate at Northwestern that I was part of and participated in the large immigrant rights protests. The first one of those was in Chicago on March 10.

And that really opened up my eyes to the debate that was going on, how determined US politicians were in criminalizing undocumented status or undocumented immigrants. And I became much more involved with local grassroots immigrant rights organizations in Chicago, with whom I continue to work now in my fieldwork. And so I began those relationships in 2006, and then went on to grad school and continued to follow families then returning to Mexico. So

yes.

SARAH BALDWIN: Do you consider yourself an advocate and an activist as well as an academic?

ALMITA MIRANDA: I guess you could say that. I always say, I'm not sure if I'm an activist, because those are really big shoes to fill. And I certainly admire all the work that grassroots activists do on the ground for sure. I do think that especially with anthropologists, we aim to really look at the effects of policy, of history, of political economy on the ground. And those are the richness of doing fieldwork, especially long term or longitudal fieldwork.

So we often forget about mixed status families once they're not in the US. And so that also drove my research to look at transnational networks, at returnees in central Mexico. But yes, I mean, immigration has been very much part of my narrative.

SARAH BALDWIN: All three of you, thank you so much for coming in and talking to us today. This was so interesting.

AILEEN TEAGUE: Thank you.

RAWAN ARAR: Thank you.

ALMITA MIRANDA: Thank you.

SARAH BALDWIN: This episode of trending globally was produced by Dan Richards. Our theme music is by Henry Bloomfield. I'm Sarah Baldwin. You can subscribe to us on iTunes, Stitcher, Spotify, or your favorite podcast app. If you like what you hear, leave us a rating and review on iTunes. It really helps others find the show. For more information about this and other shows, go to watson.brown.edu. Thanks for listening. We'll be back in September with new episodes of *Trending Globally.*