

BETWEEN TWO WORLDS: EPISODE 3: “ALWAYS A FOREIGNER”

Hosted by Bridget Barry

[INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC]

BRIDGET BARRY: Hi – it’s me again, Bridget Barry, co-host of *Between Two Worlds*, the new 4-part podcast that explores the lives of social justice leaders who participated in the Ford Foundation’s International Fellowships Program (or IFP) to pursue graduate or post-graduate degrees between 2001 and 2013. Here, we focus specifically on the journeys, experiences, and impact of the roughly 13% of alumni who have chosen to live outside of their home country.

In today’s episode, we’ll be exploring the sustained connection that alumni maintain with their home community or country of origin, despite their decision to live abroad. Through our discussions with 60 IFP alumni who are currently living outside their home countries, we have found that every single one remains connected to their community from home in some way or another. They are giving back, but not necessarily going back, like **Pamela Faith** from Uganda, who currently lives in Kosovo.

[1:08] **PAMELA FAITH:** When I go back home there is a lot that I share, and I mean, I don’t have to go as a professional. I just go as a community person. I go into my mother’s church, and then I said, okay, so you think I’ve been away for too long. This is what I’ve learned where I was. And then, this kind of approach gives me this audience that they are listening, they are willing to listen.

[1:32] **BRIDGET BARRY:** Pamela’s reflection is similar to others we interviewed. Beyond just their actions, many alumni expressed a continued calling to help their home communities, a sense of personal responsibility in giving back.

So first let’s look at IFP alumni who are directly working with communities in their home countries. Even with their current work obligations in their current countries, it stood out that many alumni have found the time to dedicate to new or additional projects in their home countries. Some alumni have identified unmet needs in their home communities, and as a result have created organizations of their own through which they contribute professionally from afar.

[2:10] **RAHEELA NARCHOOR:** Center for Human Development is the first international women-led organization working on sustainable development goals in Kashmir.

[2:21] **DOLKUN TARIM:** The education system, they don't - they require Mandarin as the official language of the school. But Uyghur populations they need to keep their ethnic identity. So, then I create another website called uyghurschool.com. So, I started recording my course in Uyghur language, so people who have limited English, they can go to that website, they make a little bit of money just to support the website maintenance, and now, I have almost like a 700, uh, students all over the world.

[2:55] **BRIDGET BARRY:** As we've discussed before in this series, there is an assumption that returning home from an international scholarship is the most desirable outcome: that in choosing to remain abroad, scholarship recipients are depriving their home communities of their acquired knowledge and skills. What we've found among IFP alumni, however, is the complete opposite. They went abroad, studied to become better technical experts, and now they are being called on to share those skills and train the next generation.

Some alumni mentioned being contacted for their help, such as through writing proposals, or providing input or peer reviews on research products. Other alumni use their unique skillsets to train experts in their fields. Let's hear from Pamela Faith again.

[3:35] **PAMELA FAITH:** I had the privilege, the rare privilege, to train my former teachers who were still at the Law Development Training Center, in the preparation of our future lawyers in the practice of alternatives in focusing towards, on alternatives to dispute resolution... And after that, there was also the opportunity to, as I say, to practice pro bono services, legal services, offer free legal services to the community, and that is the angle which we used to prepare the lawyers.

[4:10] **BRIDGET BARRY:** And outside of training, alumni donate their time through volunteer opportunities that directly benefit their home communities or countries. Often with home country-based charities, alumni volunteer to help those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, conduct advocacy to achieve social integration/inclusion for marginalized groups, or provide support for educational opportunities.

[4:32] **HADIJAH KISEMBO:** I'm also in charge and still supporting other organizations in Uganda. For instance, through the charity where I'm chair, we've established a working relationship with assembled women in one of the districts in Masindi, and we are running a tailoring project to support women living with disabilities to get skills.

[4:57] **BRIDGET BARRY:** Volunteering or charitable efforts among alumni toward their home country also shows up in the form of financial support. For example, in light of the recent coronavirus crisis, Lijun Li used her experience in sustainable development to coordinate and deliver financial support for her home country of China:

[5:15] **LIJUN LI:** You know what, when the situation in China was very bad, I initiated a donation campaign in my PhD program, and then I sent the money to nonprofit organization in California, I think. Who bought the supplies and sent them back to the city, where the situation was the worst.

[5:36] **BRIDGET BARRY:** Alumni living outside of their country have still found ways to contribute remotely through their work or volunteer organizations. To many, this level of give-back speaks to the commitment they have to highlight issues faced by their home communities, or to contribute to knowledge on social justice topics.

In academia or research-based work, alumni often remained focused on a topic of geographic, cultural, political, or general contextual relevance to their home country. Areas of country-related research are wide-ranging: Andean guitar, teenage pregnancy, political economy, conservation biology, women's empowerment, cultural anthropology, or agriculture entrepreneurship. Let's hear more about these kinds of research directly from the alumni:

[6:20] **STEPHEN MUKEMBO:** I came working and being in touch with my previous school, so my research was basically in Uganda, and it was about how we equip young people with skills in agriculture entrepreneurship to improve livelihoods in our communities. And so, I got some grants that sponsored my project, so I implemented that project in Uganda, and some of the projects are still ongoing even after the study ended.

[6:56] **BRIDGET BARRY:** That was Stephen Mukembo. Stephen is from Uganda, studied at Oklahoma State University in the area of community development, and is now a professor at the University of Missouri. He remains focused on community development, and continues to practice the skills he's learned both within the communities around University of Missouri, as well as in Uganda.

And although we found alumni giving back through research no matter what their country of origin was, a particularly interesting finding was related to alumni from Russia. These alumni noted that their new location outside of their home country allowed them an independent platform from which they are better able to contribute to their home country through their research, such as the experiences shared by **Ilja Viktorov:**

[7:37] **ILJA VIKTOROV:** I hope that my writing reflects quite critically to what happens in Russia. Why I mention that I want to be an independent researcher, it's not only for pleasure; I want to investigate analytically the political forum in Russia, what kind of political and economic regime exists there. And by this, I am hoping to contribute to knowledge about contemporary Russia that I would not be able to get if I stayed in the country.

[8:06] **BRIDGET BARRY:** Through organizational work, many alumni have joined international organizations whose target beneficiary group or program and project work is directly related to contexts of their home communities, countries, or regions. For example, **Brindis Ochoa**, from

Peru, works in the Regional Office of the Americas at the World Health Organization based in Washington, DC.

Personally, all alumni have remained in touch with their friends, family members, former colleagues, or classmates in their home countries. They also work to serve as sources of support.

[8:38] **JEANETTIA LUCAS:** I've kept in touch with friends, and I've kept in touch with what they're doing. And my family's still there, all my family is still in South Africa.

[8:47] **BRIDGET BARRY:** Beyond the personal and social benefits that these relationships bring to alumni, there are many other motivations that alumni have in remaining in touch. Many alumni are in touch with their family and communities from their home country to be able to help as much as they can financially.

[9:01] **CAMILO PAJUELO:** I used to travel at least once per year to help my family – my father, my sister and brother live in Peru. I know that I'm supporting them also, sending money or trying to help in different ways.

[9:19] **BRIDGET BARRY:** Ultimately, beyond either professional or personal reasons, many alumni shared a sense of responsibility, or a personal calling to continue to support their home community from abroad. Whether as a facet of their identity or a sense of obligation, alumni were motivated to continue to advocate for change at home.

[INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC]

[9:37] **PAMELA FAITH:** But, at the same time, I am very community grounded because my roots are in the rural Uganda.

[9:46] **RAMA HANSRAJ:** There are debates around the increase in atrocities against Dalits in the current rightwing government in India. So, I've been very actively engaged back home as well in terms of furthering the human rights of my community.

[10:00] **HENRY OCHE:** But if I want to be back in Nigeria, whether I'm there now or not, I will advocate to see those changes in Nigeria. And even when I go, if those changes that I've been advocating for happen, then I should be advocating still again, that's not the end for it to be improved or better.

[10:18] **HUMA KHAN:** My work is here, and I'm very passionate about what I do, but my struggles are not here. In any country, really, because my struggles are where I belong.

[10:29] **KEMI CHUKWUMA-NWUBA:** The people at home need me more than the people here.

[INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC CONTINUES]

[10:42] **BRIDGET BARRY:** Thank you for listening. This has been an episode of *Between Two Worlds*.

[10:49] **KYLE COX:** Our program was produced by Bridget Barry, Nora Nemeth, and Mirka Martel. Today's episode was edited by the Brooklyn Podcasting Studio and Brand Stories Studios in Manhattan. Music featured throughout was composed and performed by IFP alumnus, Camilo Pajuelo.

Special thanks today to the IFP alumni featured in this episode: Pamela Faith Muduwa, Raheela Narchoor, Dolkun Tarim, Hadijah Kisembo, Lijun Li, Stephen Mukembo, Nikolay Voronin, Ilja Viktorov, Brindis Ochoa, Jeanettia Lucas, Camilo Pajuelo, Kemi Chukwuma-Nwuba, Henry Omokwe Dang Oche-Otse, Huma Khan, and Rama Hansraj.

Between Two Worlds is part of the Ford Foundation International Fellowships Program Alumni Tracking Study, led by a team of research and evaluation experts at the Institute of International Education. Our website is iie.org/BetweenTwoWorlds, where you can listen to each episode of this series, and access past research conducted within the study.

[INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC FADES OUT]