



Traveling and  
feeling  
to get foot on  
hides the snow  
like it all the  
salt of the  
sea and  
gentle and  
to receive my  
stories

# (HI)STORYTELLERS BREAKING BORDERS

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## Executive Summary

Stories--visual, auditive, written--are the matters with which we make the worlds we inhabit. Oftentimes, refugee stories tend to be stories of misery or about other's overcoming hardship told by proud 'hosts.' **(Hi)Storytellers Breaking Borders** is a virtual and COVID-safe space for the reflective art of five African refugees who discuss the concerns and beauty of the worlds they make in diaspora, in their quotidianity, memories, and dreams. Through photography, voice recordings, and creative writing, five members of the Madison Refugee Union will tell the stories currently moving them. Their art will be curated in a virtual gallery ([hi.storytellersbreakingborders.com](https://hi.storytellersbreakingborders.com)) which will be launched through an online event.

This project's contribution is centered on how Black creativity humanizes all the sensibilities of migration to narrate Afrodiasporic lives and to make Black futures. Afrodiasporic *history.telling* is a commitment to life and a way of breaking the Color-Line and the "documented-Line" that continue to enforce death. These "lines" are difference-producing borders. They divide people in terms of race and legal status and continue to endanger Black and Brown lives. Afrodiasporic (hi)storytelling is resistance that acknowledges that the current anti-Black climate is not location-specific and that solidarity to Black flourishing must happen for all on all homelands and places in between.

The organizing team are Grace Simbulan, Filipino Filmmaker and MA student in Southeast Asian Studies; Gioconda Coello, Ecuadorian Editor and PhD Candidate in Curriculum and Instruction and Kassim Rajab, Congolese leader of Madison Refugee Union. Together we will lead one COVID-safe in person workshop dedicated to technological training, one virtual photography workshop and one virtual creative writing workshop. There will also be by appointment consultation/discussion meetings as needed by the artists. The funding will make it possible to provide one laptop and one camera to each participant, facilitate workshops, and develop and promote the virtual gallery.

## Project Plan

In June 2021 we will contact the centers of Africana Studies and Humanities in the UW-system, and Madison's public media organizations to set up collaboration for promotion and the launch event. So far, Aaron Fei Assistant Director of the Public Humanities Center at UW-Madison and Lee Row host of the radio show World View at WORT have expressed their support. In July, we will reconnect with the members of Madison's Refugee Union who have agreed to participate in the project. Pierre Ramazani, Elia Matabishi, Nguza Rajabu, Salum Rajab, Safalani Rajabu are five young members of the union enthusiastic to tell their stories and to learn more about techniques of storytelling. We will have virtual meetings to discuss their vision of the virtual gallery and the creative and curation process. During the month of July, we will prepare the curriculum for the workshops. Grace and Kassim will prepare the curriculum for the technological and photography workshops. Gioconda will prepare the curriculum for the storytelling/poetry workshop together with Roberta Hill, Oneida poet and emeritus professor of the English department and American Indian Studies program of UW-Madison, who has expressed her interest in supporting the project. In August and September, we would deliver the workshops. The first workshop will be an in person event which will take place at Madison Refugee Union's office where they hold their monthly meetings. This is a COVID-safe space that allows physical distancing. For that workshop we will provide transportation for the five artists, and team. The workshop will take place during the time of their usual gatherings on Saturday mornings. The photography and storytelling/poetry workshops will be virtual through zoom and will take place during the Union's regular meeting time as well. During the months of September and October the artists will produce photography, recordings and narrations/poems for their gallery space. During this time Grace and Gioconda will have by appointment consultations with the artists to check in the progress of the work, as well as to discuss ideas or solve problems that may arise. November will be destined to the curation and design of the gallery and promotion of the site and launch event. Grace and Kassim will create and design the website. The artists and project's team will curate the virtual gallery. The whole team will work on the design of the poster and the promotion of the launch event through social media, radio, listservs and university billboards. We intend to launch the virtual gallery in early December.

## Audience Analysis

Through the workshops, website and launching event for **(Hi)Storytellers Breaking Borders**, we expect to reach to the African refugee community, Africana and Black movements, intellectuals, artists and students, non-governmental organizations, university students and Madison's academic and non-academic community at large. As discussed in the executive summary, our project will focus on (hi)storytelling through three main media (i.e. visual, auditive, and written). This is a strategy to break borders, politically, linguistically and conceptually, and simultaneously a way to engage with audiences of different ages and backgrounds. Being the gallery placed in the virtual we hope as well to reach communities concerned with migration and creation of life, thought and art in diaspora.

## **Project Timeline**

This project stems from an already established relationship with the Madison Refugee Union. The five artists have already confirmed their participation in the project. We've secured initial funds to set the project in motion. This timeline outlines our plans on how to produce the effects the project promises on both the refugee community and the audiences we've identified.

### **May-June 2021**

Contact centers of Africana Studies and Humanities to set up launch event collaboration.

### **July 2021**

Connect with the five artists via Zoom

Develop the curriculum for the workshops

Secure website domain and hosting

### **August 2021**

Buy the computers and cameras

Workshop for technological training

Workshop on photography

### **September 2021**

Workshop on poetry/storytelling

### **September - November 2021**

Artists work on their portfolios for the website launch

By appointment consultations

### **November 2021**

Curation of virtual gallery

Promotion of the launch event and virtual gallery on social media, radio, university listservs

### **December 2021**

Virtual Gallery Launch Event

## **Marketing**

- **UW Programs Listservs, Websites, and Facebook pages:** We will connect with programs and centers in UW-system to promote the website launch. Some centers/departments we plan to engage with are: African and African Diaspora Studies at UW-Milwaukee, African Studies Program at UW Madison, DesignLab, the School of Education, the Arts Institute, Arts History, Center for the Humanities, Institute for Regional and International Studies (IRIS)
- **Social Media:** We will create social media accounts (Instagram, Facebook, etc.) for the project **(Hi)Storytellers Breaking Borders** and we will maximize these platforms to document and update people about the schedule of workshops, sample works of

participants, and participant portfolios which all lead to the website launch. We plan to create and post content twice a week to maintain our social media presence.

- **Flyers/Posters:** We will strategically post flyers and posters on billboards at the places of gathering of Madison's Refugee Union, in the university's departments and centers about the website launch. The posters will be designed to intrigue people and use either the QR code or a website link we'll provide in the poster.
- **WORT 89.9:** WORT is a community radio station broadcasting to South-Central Wisconsin and Grace is currently writing and presenting news for their Sunday news program **World View**. She has already communicated our plan to use this platform to advertise the project.

### Key Personnel

**Grace Pimentel Simbulan** is a graduate student in the Center for Southeast Asian Studies at University of Wisconsin-Madison. She is also a documentary filmmaker from Manila, Philippines. Her first mid-length documentary film received funding from the European Union as part of their project entitled "In Defense of Land and Life: Addressing Human Rights Concerns of Indigenous Peoples in Resource Conflict Areas".

The experience and knowledge she obtained through her years in the Indigenous community became her driving force in pursuing graduate studies at UW Madison where her research explores the pressures, counter pressures, and negotiations that lead to the adoption of projects for Indigenous women and children in the Philippines.

Grace is one of the contributors to the book, *Indigenous perspectives on Future(s) and Learning(s): Taking Place* (Routledge, 2020). Her chapter focuses on dreams and dream sharing as critical means of documenting and passing on Indigenous knowledge.

**Gioconda Coello** is a doctoral candidate in the department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Her research is interdisciplinary and looks at the history of ideas in education and their relation to the politics of being, Indigenous, Brown and Black lives and environmental education in Latin America and Southeast Asia. Her work has appeared in *Revista Asia-America Latina*. She is co-editor and contributor of the book *Indigenous perspectives on Future(s) and Learning(s): Taking Place* (Routledge, 2020), and of the special issue *Growing up anti-Black in Latin America and the Caribbean* (KIPUS 2<sup>nd</sup> semester 2021).

**Kassim Hussein Rajab** left Congo due to war conflict at an early age, finding asylum in Uganda. While living in Uganda and due to his languages skills--Swahili, Luganda, Lingala, Kiwira, English and French--he became an interpreter and translator for InterAid (a branch of UNHCR Uganda) and later for Refugee Law Project funded by the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS). As part of his work with HIAS in Uganda he facilitated workshops to young people on life assistance and sexual education and he created a youth soccer team. In 2018 he arrived in the U.S. where he continues to collaborate with HIAS. He is founder and leader of Madison's Refugee Union, a grassroot and mutual aid organization that serves African refugees.

### Financial Plan/Budget

Name of Item	Cost	Unit/s	Total	Notes
Website	\$180	3 years	\$180	Securing a (.com) domain & hosting will make it easier for people to find us and participate in the online event. It's also easier to manage this.
Digital camera with camera case, SD Card, and battery	\$150	5	\$750	We will purchase DSLR cameras on Amazon. <a href="https://www.amazon.com/Canon-PowerShot-Digital-Camera-Stabilization/dp/B019UDHOMO/ref=sr_1_3?dchild=1&amp;keywords=digital%2Bcamera&amp;qid=1614787000&amp;sr=8-3&amp;th=1">https://www.amazon.com/Canon-PowerShot-Digital-Camera-Stabilization/dp/B019UDHOMO/ref=sr_1_3?dchild=1&amp;keywords=digital%2Bcamera&amp;qid=1614787000&amp;sr=8-3&amp;th=1</a>
Laptops	\$300	5	0	In kind donation
Food	\$20	10	\$200	For the first COVID-safe in person technological training workshop.
Transportation	\$15	10	\$150	For the first, COVID-safe in person technological training workshop.
Virtual Gallery design	\$500	1	\$500	Website creation and design
Poster/Flyers Printing	\$100		\$100	Promotion at community centers, Madison's Refugee Union spaces and UW's billboards.
Miscellaneous			\$120	Notepads, pencils, highlighters, paper, prints
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>\$2,000</b>	

### Troubleshooting

The main challenge we face at the moment is receiving the financial support to ensure the materials needed to the motivated storytellers. We seek support driven by that enthusiasm and the commitment to have the art and stories of underserved and often silenced communities expressed powerfully and loudly.

When the project takes off, we anticipate that technological issues might arise in terms of operation of equipment, file management, etc. This is why we have set up a workshop for technological training and be connected and available virtually for problem solving.

### Recent Work Sample

Grace has a decade of experience as a documentary filmmaker and photographer. She was part of the project entitled “In Defense of Land and Life: Addressing Human Rights Concerns of Indigenous Peoples in Resource Conflict Areas” funded by the European Union where she produced a mid-length documentary film entitled “Traces of Awakening” <https://vimeo.com/129522528>. Drawing on eight years of sharing with the Aeta community in northern Philippines, she produced the feature-length documentary film "A is for Agustin" <https://vimeo.com/356409187>. She has also published a chapter in the book *Indigenous perspectives on Future(s) and Learning(s): Taking Place* (Routledge, 2020).

Gioconda Coello has worked as editor in research teams for 4 years. She is editor of the special issue *Growing-up anti-Black in Latin America and the Caribbean* (KIPUS 2nd semester 2021). Exploring the archive of personal experiences, she contributed to the issue with the article “‘Cuscunga Black’ and the ‘Black man’ in quotidian literatures.” She is co-editor of the book *Indigenous perspectives on Future(s) and Learning(s): Taking Place* (Routledge, 2020). She contributed to this volume the chapter Kichwa Stories of Future(s) drawing on archival research and oral histories.