



# Hurricanes and typhoons as colonial tempests

science, warfare and eco-translation in the making of huracán culture in Havana and Manila

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**TUESDAY, 21 October**  
Kloppenbergh Room  
Cohen Quad, Exeter College  
→ (Walton St, OX1 2HG)  
1.45pm refreshments  
2-3.15pm seminar

**Spanish Research Seminar**

On September 11, 1875, Catalan-Cuban Jesuit priest and scientist Benito Viñes Martorell published a hurricane warning in the newspaper *La Voz de Cuba*, in Havana. The first hurricane warning ever issued gave notice of the expected route and impacts of a storm that had formed in the Caribbean and signalled the beginning of modern Meteorology. This seminar discusses translatory movements in the sky and on the page by interrogating Catalan-Cuban contributions to huracán/hurricane culture in nineteenth-century colonial Cuba vis-à-vis similar developments in Manila, in the Philippine Archipelago. I explore the parallel evolution of meteorology and cultural representations of storms during the late nineteenth century in direct relation with the Cuba-Spain-Philippines-US war (1898–1902) and US military occupations. The cultural products and the example of eco-translation discussed in this seminar aim to answer the question about the place of both hurricanes and typhoons in the making of huracán/hurricane culture through an exploration of the relations between the Manila and Havana observatories. Their intellectuals' centrality within the configuration of Meteorology as a colonial discipline and their relentless work for protecting not only goods, but also lives, in the Caribbean and the Philippine archipelagos, reveal their contradictory roles moving between empires and territories seeking liberation. These intellectuals' paradoxical positioning shaped their scientific studies and their wider cultural production, which are the genesis of contemporary huracán/hurricane culture, a concept that I have proposed and explored in a wider project as the set of cultural representations and practices that people from diverse walks of life, and with different levels of vulnerability to disasters, have yielded to understand and survive the onslaughts of tropical storms and the still ongoing long-standing imperial tempest.

**Dr Yairen Jerez Columbié** works as Lecturer in Latin American and Caribbean Studies at University College Cork. She is the author of the monographic book *Essays on Transculturation and Catalan-Cuban Intellectual History* (Palgrave, 2021) and of the books of poetry *Fósiles de lluvia* (Betania, 2022) and *De corales* (Betania, 2024). Her recently submitted monographic manuscript *Hurricane Culture: for an Eco-Poetics of Relations beyond the Hispanic Caribbean* is under contract with University of Toronto Press.

The Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages encourages vibrant, dynamic and inclusive discussions in all its seminars. Robust exchanges of ideas and the airing of differing views are welcome. Participants are asked to be mindful of the tone they use during seminars and respectful of others.