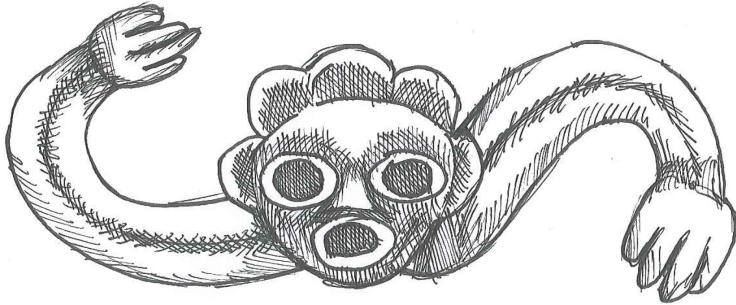




# Juracán: The Sacred Meteorology of Swamp & Storm



Juracán, Taíno zemi of swirling storms. Juracán is sent by Guabanex, the zemi of sacred rage, transformation, chaos and natural disaster.

Writing to Juracán from Borikén,<sup>1</sup> with Timucua<sup>2</sup> and Taíno<sup>3</sup> territory in my heart and body. Inspired by conversation with Lydianna L. Davila Colombo;<sup>4</sup> accompanied by the singing of roosters, rain, howling *satos*,<sup>5</sup> and the song “Huracán” by Maria Jose Montijo.<sup>6</sup>

Land is kin, creaturely, and home.<sup>7</sup> Land carries stories from before human time and of the nonhuman. Land knows the pleasure and struggles of our ancestors. The land has tasted our blood, sweat, and tears, sown like seeds in water and earth. They have birthed all of our cosmologies, songs, spirits, instruments, and medicines. Land is sustenance and we are sustenance unto the land.

My body is of lands of black water, swamps, and rivers of grass—born in Timucua and Seminole territory, where waters once flowed slowly downward into Lake Okeechobee and flooded to nourish the Everglades, a vast system of swamps and marshland. My body is also of lands of sweet water, limestone, caves, mountains, and peoples of the *campos*<sup>8</sup>—a body living in diaspora away from Borikén.

These geographies connect through a relationship to Juracán every solar cycle. Juracán is the Taíno zemi<sup>9</sup> of high winds, rains, and floods. They are the swirling storm that exists at the root of the etymology of the Spanish word *huracán*, or in English, hurricane.<sup>10</sup> The Everglades and Borikén, part of Taíno territory (along with

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<sup>1</sup> Borikén - native name of Puerto Rico; name given by the Indigenous Taíno.

<sup>2</sup> Timucua - one of the original peoples of central Florida.

<sup>3</sup> One of the Indigenous communities of the Caribbean, with communities in southern Florida and northern South America as well.

<sup>4</sup> Find Lydianna’s work at [@lydiannna](#)

<sup>5</sup> *Satos* - Boricua dogs of the streets.

<sup>6</sup> Watch María José Montijo’s “Huracán” music video on [YouTube](#)

<sup>7</sup> Language from the anticolonial queer ancestral futurism and place-based skills work of Pinar and So Sinopoulos-Lloyd of Queer Nature ([queernature.org](#); [@queernature](#))

<sup>8</sup> *Campos* - rural farms in Borikén.

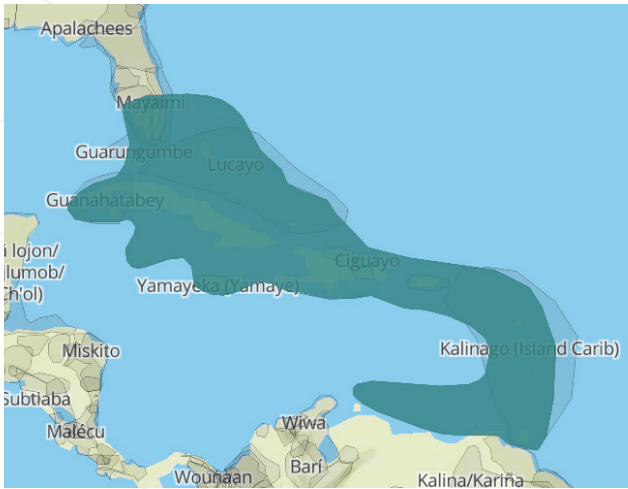
<sup>9</sup> Zemi (or cemi) - a spirit, guide, ancestor, or ecological being honored and revered by Taíno through faith, cosmology, crafts, stories, etc. There are multiple zemi that embody ecological spirits found across Taíno diasporic lands, from Florida through the islas of the Caribbean.

<sup>10</sup> “Juracán” will be used to refer to both the Zemi and natural phenomenon of hurricanes.

many other nations),<sup>11</sup> are connected via shared diasporas, shared communities of the Caribbean and global majority. My relationship to land begins with account-

ability to all stories that snake through the lands that make me as a multiracial trans-nonbinary neurodivergent Boricua (Taíno, Black, Spanish) raised in diaspora. Aspiring to a practice of *sacred meteorology*,<sup>12</sup> connecting the stories of lands that share the spirit and teachings of storm.

The *Communal Flower* beholds the land as “a space where we are established and that we physically embody. From a concrete perspective, we consider part of the territory to be the earth, the forest, the jungle, the water, the rivers, and all of the natural resources that we take, conserve, and defend in my community.”<sup>13</sup> To this, I offer reciprocity with the *more-than-human world*,<sup>14</sup> storms and Juracán, as a part of land and territory, as crucial to the natural landscapes and political movements they touch.



Taíno Ancestral Territory Map. Source: native-lands.ca

### *Apprenticeship to Diaspora & Juracán*<sup>15</sup>

*To be in diaspora is to be like Juracán, connecting territories across vast distances. The spirit of Juracán lives in me as resilience; they teach me how to move with a sacred rage to protect the land, to find how chaos nourishes. Through them I learn to belong to ancestral territory across distance. They call me to spin when I feel grief, to spin to access joy. To sing into places with echoes to feel the wind of my voice. They call me into grief, longing for what has been lost living in diaspora, while not forgetting my privileges of citizenship and a life off Borikén in the United States. Juracán connects me to my jibaro<sup>16</sup> grandparents (and the many generations of jibaros that birthed them). Juracán's connection to the geographies of Florida and Borikén inspires me to imagine coalitions and trust in the power of collaboration. They call me to care for the land—to never forget where I come from—even if getting back feels inaccessible sometimes.*

*My teachers tell me the land cares for us but is also available for care,<sup>17</sup> that our bodies can emulate natural phenomena that nourish landscapes, a practice called wildtending.<sup>18</sup> With our bodies, we can partially mirror events that are no longer moving in their pre-colonial rhythms due to deforestation, overdevelopment, colonization, and the criminalization of Indigenous land tending practices that support the more-than-human world.<sup>19</sup>*

<sup>11</sup> Other Everglades tribes include the Miccosukee, Calisa, Mayaimi, Tequesta, Jega, and Ais.

<sup>12</sup> Sacred meteorology - located between cosmology, ethnoecology, spirit and storm. jazmín calderón torres, 2021.

<sup>13</sup> Read "[La Milpa, the Origin of the Communal Flower](#)" by Parménidez Rodríguez, also known as The Shadow, in the Fluid Mutualism series.

<sup>14</sup> Abram, David. "The spell of the sensuous." *CSPA Quarterly* 17 (2017): 22-24.

<sup>15</sup> This language of apprenticing to the more-than-human world and spirit was learned from Pinar and So Sinopoulos-Lloyd. (n.7)

<sup>16</sup> Jibaro - Boricua peasant farmers of the mountains.

<sup>17</sup> The land themselves, Jeanette Acosta, Redbird, Dave Hage, Lauren Hage, Sam Edmunson and Will Scott of Weaving Earth: Center for Relational Education ([weavingearth.org](http://weavingearth.org)).

<sup>18</sup> Read *Tending the Wild: Native American Knowledge and the Management of California's Natural Resources* by M. Kat Anderson.

<sup>19</sup> Read *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Wall Kimmerer.



The peak of Borikén's El Yunque rainforest, where Yúcahu, zemi of creation, meets and slows Juracán.

Juracán continues to reveal the land's urgent need for care in a time of mounting climate change that disproportionately impacts the lives of the global majority, the poor, women, mothers, youth, queer and trans folks, people with disabilities, folks without homes, migrants, Black and Indigenous folks, and folks of color. While I speak on the poetics of Juracán, it is critical to cite and acknowledge the gravity of environmental racism, abandonment, and trauma experienced by folks who have survived catastrophic hurricanes such as Maria, Irma, Sandy, Katrina, and Imelda. Juracán rages in response to 500 years of colonial violence, white supremacy, capitalism, and ecological exploitation while wreaking havoc on the lives and homes of the peoples they touch. This is a tender complexity.

The strengthening of Juracán is a sign the land is grieving the violence that they have experienced themselves. The land hears this grief; the land has the capacity to hold our grief.<sup>20</sup> The land is a body that has been abused alongside many of our Black and Indigenous communities. Juracán is throwing their hands back at the violence of white supremacy, imperialism, capitalism, deforestation, monocrop agriculture, and ecological extraction. They are acting as an immune system protecting and in reciprocity with the rest of the land.

### **Apprenticeship to Fire & Wood**

*Big fire out of relationship with Indigenous land tending practices brings grief, destruction, and trauma. But fire is needed to birth the cypress trees that hold our swamps together. The cypress who provide homes to the egrets and gators who are the architects of the Everglades. My body has learned how to be a fire prescribed to the land that regularly occurred on Timucua and Taíno territories.<sup>21</sup> Hands reaching to remove dry herbs and grasses that catch ablaze easily for weaving or medicine making.<sup>22</sup> Fire tending matters in Laguna Cartagena in Borikén as well; the fire is needed in both my homes. To be like fire, I knock dead limbs off pine trees in the swamp to prevent a wildfire from climbing into the canopy in the future or from becoming too vast. Being fire feels sweaty, like getting splinters, like falling deep into the breath, like sore hands. Sometimes it feels like desperation, but we do it for the birds.*

While climate scientists cannot yet prove hurricanes are more frequent than ancestors experienced across the Caribbean and Turtle Island,<sup>23</sup> hurricanes are growing in power<sup>24</sup> with stronger winds, increased precipitation, as well as higher storm surge and flooding due to sea level rise.

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<sup>20</sup> The life and work of brontë velez strongly informs my relationship to grief. They are a trans-disciplinary artist, Creative Director of Lead to Life and a Core Educator at Weaving Earth. See their work at [@littlenows](https://www.littlenows.com).

<sup>21</sup> A practice multiple tribes of California and Florida used to conduct to tend the land, allow for plant succession, to replenish weaving and herbal materials, and to prevent massive wildfires.

<sup>22</sup> Learned from the prescribed fire work of Yurok, Karuk and Hoopa Tribes of northern California.

<sup>23</sup> First Nations name of the United States according to Haudenosaunee and other Indigenous peoples.

<sup>24</sup> Emanuel, Kerry. "Evidence that hurricanes are getting stronger." Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences 117, no. 24 (2020): 13194-13195.

Juracán's pathway has profound metaphorical and spiritual synchronicities. Beginning their formation off the west coast of the continent of Africa, Juracán follows the arc, or the wake of the Middle Passage, a wake as in Christina Sharpe's notion of "the path behind a ship, keeping watch with the dead, coming to consciousness."<sup>25</sup> Juracán proceeds most frequently up through the Black Atlantic<sup>26</sup> from the Caribbean through Florida, then withers up the Eastern Seaboard<sup>27</sup> or up through Gulf of Mexico into the South<sup>28</sup> of Turtle Island.

### Apprenticeship to Earth & Seed

*I move with the spirit of my ancestors—the smallness of seeds in my hand and compost made from my family's eaten aguacates,<sup>29</sup> coffee grounds, and the skins of our batatas.<sup>30</sup> Planting yucca as an offering to the land, honoring them as a plant that knows how to live through the winds of Juracán. It feels like wet soil. Like hearing the land speak their truths through the blooms of flowers or the songs of birds. Like sustainable farming. Like learning the animal tracks and signs or what plants the bees love. Like planting root vegetables, potato, cassava, and malanga to remind Juracán to be easy on us, to rest, to leave us with food. Like advocating for the water back. Rooting gently, with curiosity, uncertainty and care. Tapping into the cellular memory, that body has reciprocity and care to offer up and back to the land.<sup>31</sup>*



jazmin with the headwaters of the Everglades in Timucua Territory. Photography by River Bourne.

Most of the Everglades has been drained and dried for the development of sugar cane plantations south of Lake Okeechobee, one of the largest producers of sugar for the United States—an act that motivated the embargos on Cuba's sugar.<sup>32</sup> The southern coast is at risk of rising sea levels that are putting folks of color, migrants, and poor people at risk of losing their homes. Most of our sugar is grown in the dried beds of the Everglades, polluting water streams and the Gulf Coast with high levels of phosphorus that induce red tide, resulting in water that harms human bodies and mass marine animal death including Florida manatees, dolphins, fish, alligators, etc.<sup>33</sup> This causes a ripple effect in the ecologies and ecosystems it touches at large. The Everglades need their water and mangrove trees back; this would decrease the effects of storm surge,

<sup>25</sup> Sharpe, Christina. *In The Wake: On Blackness and Being*. Duke University Press, 2016. Inspired by conversations with brontë velez (n.19).

<sup>26</sup> Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness*. Verso, 1993.

<sup>27</sup> Thinking of Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, etc.

<sup>28</sup> Thinking of New Orleans, Louisiana and Houston, Texas.

<sup>29</sup> Aguacate - coming from the Nahuatl (Indigenous language of Central Mexico): ahua-catl, aguacatl, auacatl. Now used in Spanish for avocado.

<sup>30</sup> Batatas - Taíno word for sweet potato now used in Spanish.

<sup>31</sup> Pinar and So Sinopolous-Lloyd have reacquainted me with my creaturely. They gave me the gift of the language of belonging; that my creatureliness belongs to and is of the land (n.7).

<sup>32</sup> Grunwald, Michael. 2006. *The Swamp: the Everglades, Florida, and the Politics of Paradise*. Riverside: Simon & Schuster.

<sup>33</sup> Ariza, Mario Alejandro. 2020. *Disposable City: Miami's Future on the Shores of Climate Catastrophe*.



flooding, and chaos caused by Juracán and would reduce the risk of sea level rise in areas like Miami, Florida.<sup>34</sup> In fact, hurricanes are also known to increase the productivity of mangrove enclaves in the Everglades, revealing a reciprocal relationship when in balance.<sup>35</sup>

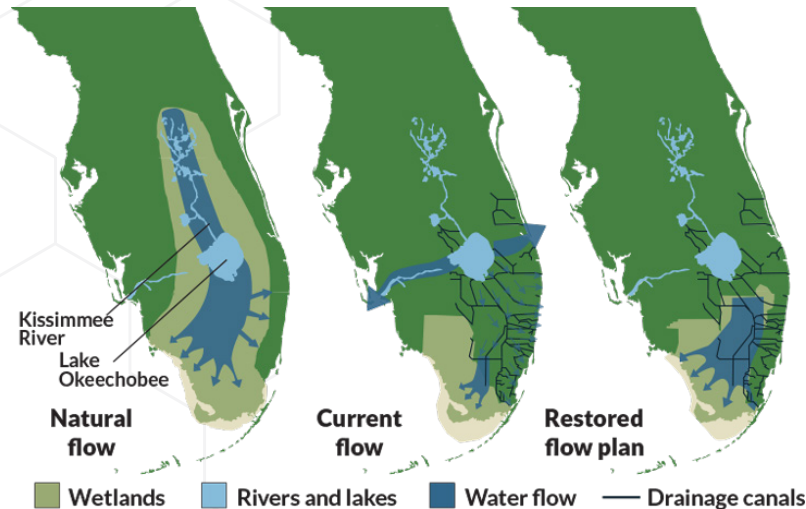
Disenfranchised by its status as a colonial territory of the United States, the

peoples of Borikén are experiencing mass dispossession through disaster capitalism. This vulnerability is driven by hundreds of years of colonial occupation by the Spanish and United States and more factors such as exploitative labor laws, a food system dependent on importations, an illegal 74 billion dollar debt on the economy, an exploitative tourism industry, crypto-pirates<sup>36</sup> who are stressing the power grid to mine cryptocurrencies and avoid taxes, the privatization and centralization of power, and one of the worst urban water systems in the country. Access to land, regenerative farming and decentralized power systems are more urgent than ever. *El Departamento de la Comida de Puerto Rico*<sup>37</sup> is a powerful example of Boricuas responding to this call through small-scaled, decentral-

ized, local food projects. This work in Borikén is an inspiring model of “what agro-ecological, small scaled food communities on the frontlines of climate change, capitalism, and colonialism, can do in favor of our collective wellbeing.”<sup>38</sup>

### Apprenticeship to Water & Stone

*Moving like water that carries seeds, I hold a moist willow cutting<sup>39</sup> and place them into the bank of a river to prevent erosion, to sustain the flow of water supply to the swamp and forest. I float in the poza<sup>40</sup> formed by Borikén limestone to face my fear of vast ocean, to feel connected to my ancestors whose bones birth the reefs and bioluminescence.<sup>41</sup> I hold my breath, ducking under to listen. Offering my trust, I float off the coast of Timucua territory, to feel the space between my body and the pozas of home. While kayaking the black waters of the Everglades, I*



Source: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Jacksonville District

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Castañeda-Moya, Edward, Victor H. Rivera-Monroy, Randolph M. Chambers, Xiaochen Zhao, Lukas Lamb-Wotton, Adrianna Gorsky, Evelyn E. Gaiser, Tiffany G. Troxler, John S. Kominoski, and Matthew Hiatt. "Hurricanes fertilize mangrove forests in the Gulf of Mexico (Florida Everglades, USA)." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 117, no. 9 (2020): 4831-4841.

<sup>36</sup> Cryptopirates - disaster capitalists who build wealth by using or mining cryptocurrency and relocate to Puerto Rico to avoid taxes.

<sup>37</sup> El Departamento de la Comida de Puerto Rico - "a non-profit collective that acts as an alternative agency in support of small-scaled, decentralized, local food projects." See [eldepartamentodelacomida.org](http://eldepartamentodelacomida.org).

<sup>38</sup> Quote from El Departamento de la Comida's website (n.37).

<sup>39</sup> Cutting - a propagatable piece of a plant that is able to root again in water or soil.

<sup>40</sup> Poza (Spanish) - a natural pool of water in this case.

<sup>41</sup> Inspired by Mosquito Bay, Biekes and Gumbs, Alexis Pauline, and Adrienne M. Brown. 2020. *Undrowned: Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals*.



Floating in poza of Mar Chiquita in Borikén, Taíno Territory.  
Photograph by Emma L. McCann. Courtesy of the author.

*learn that the mangroves need oysters to grow and protect the shores. I am grateful for dark waters that allow me to see myself reflected.*

✱  
✱

The waters have come home; dams and canals that altered the flow of the Everglades have crumbled. Gentle fire continues to caress the swamps and cypress. Alligators carve pathways down from Lake Okeechobee, carrying snowy egrets on their backs. The black water is everywhere their ancestors were, covering the dry earth, spreading nourishment across the land. At the shore, among the roots of mangroves, oysters grow quietly. The wild winds continue to swirl seasonally over the swamps and Borikén. Their howls come with less fever, their rains bring nourishment, a fierce *limpia*,<sup>42</sup> dousing the land and its creatures.

—jazmín calderón torres



**jazmín calderón torres (they/elle)** is a trans-nonbinary Boricua called to tending land through their jibaro lineage. They move through a creative practice that is constantly connecting stories and scholarship across mediums—from agroecology to music to films. They are currently a Producer, Creative Strategist at Lead to Life: A People's Alchemy for Regeneration, where they collaborate and tend to grief caused by state sanctioned violence through community, land tending, fire, gathering, ceremony, and speculative media and film making. They studied Art Practice, New Media and Ecosystems Management and Forestry at UC Berkeley. They have apprenticed to Applied Ecology, wildlife track & sign, bird language, fire tending / fire by friction, wild tending, ecosystems restoration, plant medicine, and agroecology with various teachers (Weaving Earth, Wilderness Awareness School, Ancestral Apothecary, MESA, Soul Fire Farm, Planting Justice, etc.).

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<sup>42</sup> Limpia - a spiritual and ceremonial cleansing.