

# ELAINE PENAGOS

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## EDUCATION

Emory University, Atlanta, GA

**Doctor of Philosophy, Religious Studies**

**2022**

Defended June 23, 2022

Area of Concentration: American Religious Cultures

Dissertation: "Santería Poetics: Africana Continuity through Afro-Cuban Religious Narratives"

Dissertation Committee: Dianne M. Stewart (chair), Ramona Beltran, María Carrión, Michelle Gonzalez Maldonado, and Gary Laderman

- My dissertation contributes to African diaspora, Caribbean, and Latinx religious studies, transnational histories, and art-based research methods. The raw material for this project is the body of *oricha* stories known as *patakís* within *La Regla de Ocha*, more commonly known as Santería. I argue that the changes in *oricha* stories from a continental African context to the Diasporic and Caribbean/Latin American context reveal that these religious narratives function as archives in which practitioners document their lived experiences by grafting them onto the mythologies of their divine. Using the *patakís*, my dissertation also posits a retheorization of syncretism, arguing for a theory of localized religious poetics that recognizes the agency of communities who reshape their religious practices to survive and thrive in adverse conditions. My dissertation greatly expands on and enriches scholarly understanding of this literature by addressing it, not from a purely literary or philosophical point of view, demonstrating how the *patakís* conceal a history with theo-sociological importance for practitioners of Santería and devotees from oppressed or marginalized diasporic communities in the Caribbean and Latin America.

University of Denver, Denver, CO

**Master of Arts, Religious Studies**

**2017**

Area of Concentration: Lived Religion

University of Miami, Coral Gables, FL

**Bachelor of Arts, Honors in Religious Studies**

**2014**

Minor: Sociology

## TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Emory University, Atlanta, GA

**Visiting Assistant Professor**

**Fall 2022 – Spring 2023**

Department of Religion

- Afro-Cuban Religions and Cuban Identity (Fall 2022)
- African Heritage Religions in the Caribbean (Fall 2022)
- African Gods in Popular Culture (Spring 2023)

Emory University, Atlanta, GA

**Guest Lecturer**

Emmanuel Lartey, Spiritual Care in African Religious Traditions

**Fall 2019 & 2021**

Axel Presas, Ancient West African Religious Systems in the United States

**Fall 2021**

Sara McClintock, Studying Religion at Emory

**Fall 2022**

Texas Christian University

**Guest Lecturer**

Shari Mackinson, Understanding Religion: Black American Faith

Fall 2022

Emory University, Atlanta, GA

**Teaching Assistant/Associate**

Gary Laderman, Religion and Sexuality

Fall 2017

Jill Robbins, Interpreting Religion

Spring 2018

Dianne Stewart, African Religious Cultures

Fall 2018

Gary Laderman, Sacred Drugs

Fall 2020

Emory University, Atlanta, GA

**Facilitator**

Emory College Online Teaching Strategies, Religion and Classics Cohort

Summer 2020

PUBLICATIONS

**“How We Heal: Genealogical Narratives of Healing Among San Lázaro Devotees.”** Peer-reviewed. Special issue on Genealogies of Healing: Black, Indigenous, and People of Color Stories, Studies and Strategies of Resistance and Transformation, *Genealogy* 5, no. 18 (February 2021), <https://www.mdpi.com/2313-5778/5/1/18/htm>.

**“Teaching Religious Traditions Through Place: A Case for Place-Based Associative Pedagogy in Orisha Traditions.”** *Practical Matters* 12 (June 2019), <http://practicalmattersjournal.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Penagos-Teaching-Religious-Traditions.pdf>.

**“Belief and the Cult of San Lázaro.”** Invited. In *The Oxford Handbook of Caribbean Religions*, ed. Michelle A. Gonzalez (Oxford University Press, forthcoming 2022–23).

PUBLIC SCHOLARSHIP

**“¡Por Fin!”** In *CO-VIDA 19: Life-sustaining conversations from the HTI community*, HTI Open Plaza (December 2020), <https://www.htiopenplaza.org/content/por-fin>.

**“Pedagogical Justice in the Wake of Two Pandemics.”** Wabash Center Social Justice and Civic Engagement blog series (December 2020), <https://www.wabashcenter.wabash.edu/2020/12/pedagogical-justice-in-the-wake-of-two-pandemics/>.

**“Dangerous Pedagogy: Takeaways from Taking Sacred Drugs.”** Co-authored with Gary Laderman. In *Sacred Matters* (December 2020), <https://sacredmattersmagazine.com/dangerous-pedagogy-takeaways-from-taking-sacred-drugs/>.

**“A Saint for the Pandemic.”** In *CO-VIDA 19: Life-sustaining conversations from the HTI community*, HTI Open Plaza (May 2020), <https://www.htiopenplaza.org/content/a-saint-for-the-pandemic>.

**“Prayers for Sale.”** Photograph series in Wabash Teacher’s Corner (April 2020), <https://www.wabashcenter.wabash.edu/resources/teachers-art-corner/>.

ACADEMIC PRESENTATIONS

**“Poetics/Not Pathology: The (Re)Forming of Afro-Cuban Religious Narratives”**

African Diaspora Religions Unit, American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting

2021

**“Santería Poetics: Africana Continuity through Afro-Cuban Religious Narratives”**

Cuban Heritage Collection Goizueta Fellows Forum,

University of Miami, Coral Gables, FL

2021

**“Pedagogical Justice in the Wake of Two Pandemics”**

La Comunidad of Hispanic Scholars of Religion,  
American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting

2020

**“Synthesizing Evidence using Arts-Based Methods”**

LGS-SOAR Program (Laney Graduate School Summer Opportunity for Academic Research)  
Emory University, Atlanta, GA

2020

**“Sacred Communities and Communing with the Sacred”**

Roundtable presentation at Global Communities of Practice LUCE Seminar  
Emory University, Atlanta, GA

2019

**“The Cult of San Lázaro and Babalú Ayé: Faith and Healing in Latinx Culture in Miami”**

Race and Resistance panel presentation at DU’s Research and Performance Summit  
University of Denver, Denver, CO

2017

**“Reclamation: Liberating the Orisha”**

Digital image series presented at Occupying the Academy: Being, Thinking and Doing  
Decolonization Faculty and Student Symposium  
University of Denver, Denver, CO

2016

**“The Pressure Cooker”**

Digital Story presented at Gifts from Grey: Journey, Embodiment, Survivance  
University of Denver, Denver, CO

2016

**“The Afro-Cuban Response to the Restrictions of Being Mary:**

*The Madonna-Whore Dichotomy, Ochún and Our Lady of Charity”*

IRISE Graduate Paper Competition

University of Denver, Denver, CO

2016

**AWARDS, GRANTS, DISTINCTIONS, & HONORS**

Lilly Endowment Hispanic Theological Initiative Dissertation Fellowship

2021

Phi Kappa Phi Dissertation Fellowship

2021

Goizueta Graduate Research Fellowship, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami

2021

Emory College Online Teaching Strategies (ECOTS) Fellow, Emory University

2020

Global Communities of Practice LUCE Grant, Emory University

2019

Emory Graduate Diversity Fellowship, Emory University

2017

Theta Alpha Kappa Faculty Representative’s Award, University of Denver

2016

Student Spotlight, November, Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences, University of Denver

2016

IRISE Graduate Paper Competition, University of Denver

2016

Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences Student Research Grant, University of Denver

2016

Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences Dean’s Scholarship, University of Denver

2016

Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences Dean’s Scholarship, University of Denver

2015

Religious Studies Department Clift Award, University of Denver

2015

Theta Alpha Kappa Award, University of Miami

2014

The Goizueta Foundation Cuban Heritage Collection Undergraduate Scholar,  
University of Miami

2013

SERVICE

Emory University, Atlanta, GA

**Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship Faculty Co-Coordinator** August 2022 – May 2023

Assist in the administrative functions of the program, including recruiting and mentoring underrepresented minoritized students who want to pursue a Ph.D. in Mellon-approved fields in the arts and sciences. Work with grant administrators to ensure budget adherence. Provide oversight and help develop programming for a series of academic and professionalization seminars.

Emory University, Atlanta, GA

**Centro Latinx Advisory Board Member** August 2019 – July 2022

Work collaboratively with a twelve-member board to advocate for space and programming support for the Latinx community (students, faculty, and staff). Make decisions about the use of the Latinx identity space use and financial support for student organizations.

Emory University, Atlanta, GA

**Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship Graduate Mentor** August 2018 – May 2022

Help fellows with writing, strengthening their arguments, and preparing them for regional and institutional conference presentations. Assisted and guided students with professional development, including applying to graduate school, Internal Review Board (IRB) preparation, and grant and funding applications.

Emory University, Atlanta, GA

**Program Assistant for the Voluntary Core Curriculum** August 2019 – August 2021

Coordinate lecture series events held every semester; maintain departmental website with course offerings, faculty member information, and event information.

MEMBERSHIPS

AAR (American Academy of Religion)

ARC (Art, Religion, and Culture)

HTI (Hispanic Theological Initiative)

Phi Kappa Phi (National Honor Society)

Theta Alpha Kappa (National Honor Society for Religious Studies and Theology)

LANGUAGES

Spanish – native speaker, read/write with high proficiency