

Elizabeth Pérez

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**Academic Specialization:** Religions of the Afro-Atlantic World

**Teaching Competence:** Competent to teach theory and method in the History of Religion(s); comparative religions; colonial and contemporary Latino/a and Latin American traditions (Brazilian Candomblé, Venezuelan Maria Lionza, 'folk' Catholicism, popular religion in Mexico from the conquest to the present day); Afro-Caribbean religious formations (Haitian Vodou, Cuban Santería, Jamaican Rastafarianism, Puerto Rican Espiritismo); African-American religion in the U.S.; and Black theology. Syllabi available for courses entitled "African Christianities," "Spirit Possession, Ritual Mediumship, and Gender," and "Religion and Nationalism in the African Diaspora," among others.

**Education:**

University of Chicago Divinity School 1999-present

Ph.D., History of Religions, expected Winter 2009

Dissertation Title: "Returning to the Drum: Conversion and Healing in an African-American Santería Community"

Dissertation Committee: Bruce Lincoln, Stephan Palmié, and Martin Riesebrodt

Doctoral Examinations: Special Area, Religious Formations of the Afro-Atlantic World; History of Religions/Classical Theory, Anthropological Approaches to Religion; History of Religions/Contemporary Theory, Critical Approaches to Religion; and a Modern Theological System: the Black Theology of James H. Cone.

Orals Paper: "Yemayá, Regla, and Representation in Afro-Cuban Santería"

University of Chicago Divinity School 1997-1999

M.A., History of Religions

Hampshire College, Amherst MA 1993-1997

B.A., Double Major in Cultural Studies and Religion

**Honors and Awards:**

University of Chicago Center for Gender Studies 2007-2008

Dissertation Fellowship

Ford Foundation 2006-2007

Dissertation Fellowship

University of Chicago Martin Marty Center Dissertation Fellowship (for doctoral research)	2005-2006
University of Chicago Center for the Study of Race, Politics, and Culture Graduate Research and Travel Grant	2005
Wabash Center Fellowship in Pedagogy and the Study of Religion	2005
University of Chicago Doolittle-Harrison Fellowship, to conduct archival research at the Florida International University Wolfsonian Library on images of Afro-Cuban women from the early 20th century	2003
Illinois Consortium for Educational Opportunity Program (ICEOP) ICEOP Award for minority students possessing academic excellence and significant financial need	2001-2005
University of Chicago Center for Gender Studies Ruth Murray Essay Prize, for “Red Medicine: Women and the Politics of Ifa Divination,” named “the best essay written in the areas of women’s studies, feminist criticism, or gender studies”	2001
Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation Andrew W. Mellon Fellowship in Humanistic Studies for the study of religion	1997

### **Professional Engagements and Experience:**

Visiting Instructor in Religion (one term only) Carleton College, Northfield MN Teaching two courses, “Goddesses” and “Religion and Music in Cuba”	Spring 2010
Instructor, Newberry Library Seminars Program Newberry Library, Chicago IL Teaching one course, “The Virgin of Guadalupe: Myth, Icon, and Vision”	Fall 2009
Visiting Assistant Professor, Temporary Faculty Replacement Carleton College, Northfield MN Taught four courses, including “Religion and American Culture,” “The Virgin of Guadalupe: History, Devotion, and Material Culture” and “Vodou: a Haitian Religious Tradition in Historical Perspective”	Winter/Spring 2009
Instructor University of Chicago Taught one course, “Gender and Religion in the African Diaspora”	Spring 2008
Senior Editorial Assistant History of Religions journal	2004-2007

Handled day-to-day operations, including correspondence with book reviewers and manuscript authors; proofread articles for content; acted as liaison between authors and faculty Editors; produced four issues annually for UChicago Press

Teaching Intern Fall 2005  
University of Chicago

Completed a teaching internship for a College Civilizations Core course entitled, “Colonizations,” on the making of the Afro-Atlantic World

Translator and Interviewer Fall 2004  
Conifer Research, Evanston IL

Conducted ethnographic fieldwork concerning public transportation among recent immigrants and Spanish-only speakers in Chicago’s Latino community

Research Assistant 1999-2001

Acted as research assistant for Moshe Shaltiel-Gracián, independent scholar and novelist: translated medieval legal documents from Spanish and French, and carried out intensive archival research on early modern Sephardic Judaism

### **Publications:**

In preparation: “The Architectonics of Conversion: Building a Home for African Spirits on Chicago’s South Side,” for the *Radical History Review*, forthcoming.

Review: *Sàngó in Africa and the African Diaspora*, by Joel E. Tishken, Toyin Falola, and Akintunde Akinyemi, for *Journal of Religion in Africa*, forthcoming.

Review: *Worldview, the Orichas, and Santería: Africa to Cuba and Beyond*, by Mercedes Cross Sandoval, for *New West Indian Guide* 83, nos. 3 & 4 (December 2009), forthcoming.

Review: *Where Men are Wives and Mothers Rule: Santería Ritual Practices and Their Gender Implications* by Mary Ann Clark, for *New West Indian Guide* 80, nos. 3 & 4 (December 2006): 303-05.

Review: *Lydia Cabrera and the Construction of an Afro-Cuban Cultural Identity*, by Edna M. Rodríguez-Mangual, for *Journal of Latin American Anthropology* 11, no. 2 (November 2006): 480-85.

“Color Beyond Race in an Afro-Cuban Religion,” in *Sightings*, a subscription-based electronic publication of the University of Chicago Martin Marty Center, April 27, 2006, [http://marty-center.uchicago.edu/sightings/archive\\_2006.shtml](http://marty-center.uchicago.edu/sightings/archive_2006.shtml).

“An All Too Present Absence: Fernando Ortiz’s Work on [the Afro-Cuban secret society] Abakuá in its Sociocultural Context,” co-written with Stephan Palmié, in *New West Indian Guide* 79, nos. 3 & 4 (December 2005): 219-28.

“The Tragedy of the *Ñáñigos*: Genesis of an Unpublished Book” by María del Rosario Díaz, co-translated with Stephan Palmié, in *New West Indian Guide* 79, nos. 3 & 4 (December 2005): 229-38.

Review: *Santería Enthroned: Art, Ritual, and Innovation in an Afro-Cuban Religion*, by David H. Brown, for *History of Religions* 45, no. 2 (November 2005): 185-88.

Review: *Creole Religions of the Caribbean: An Introduction from Vodou and Santería to Obeah and Espiritismo*, by Margarite Fernández Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, for *Journal of Religion* 84, no. 4 (October 2004): 670-72.

Review: *Rastafari: From Outcasts to Culture Bearers*, by Ennis Barrington Edmonds, for *Journal of Religion* 84, no. 3 (July 2004): 500-02.

Review: *Rara!: Vodou, Power, and Performance in Haiti and its Diaspora*, by Elizabeth McAlister, for *Journal of Religion* 84, no. 2 (April 2004): 336-38.

Review: *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba*, by J.D.Y. Peel, for *Journal of Religion* 82, no. 3 (July 2002): 493-94.

“Yemayá, Regla, and the Fetish in Afro-Cuban Santería,” in *Chicago Art Journal* (Spring 2002): 17-34.

“Artworks: The Midnight Buffet,” co-written with Andy Rotman, *Public Culture: Society for Transnational Cultural Studies* 13, no. 2 (Spring 2001): 329-31.

“Triumph of a ‘Failed Medievalist’: Menocal’s Fresh Perspective on the Middle Ages,” *Scripta Mediterranea* 19-20 (1998-99): 63-65.

### **Selected Conference Papers and Guest Lectures:**

“When ‘On the Ground’ Means ‘On the Floor’: Conducting Ethnography of Religion in the Space of the Kitchen,” AAR Annual Meeting, Montréal, November 2009, forthcoming.

“The Body as Temple: the Materiality of Lucumí Religious Conversion,” as part of the lecture series *Black Atlantic Religions: Mobile Bodies and Living Traditions*, sponsored by the Center for Black Diaspora at DePaul University, May 2009.

“Concrete Gods and Ghetto Oranges: Relocating ‘Religion’ in African-American Religious History,” Columbia University, February 2009.

“Building a Home for African Gods on Chicago’s South Side,” as part of the University of Pennsylvania Religious Studies Colloquium, November 2008.

“Women’s Work, Ritual Labor: Cooking and Conversion in Ilé Laroye,” University of Chicago Gender and Sexuality Studies Workshop, February 2008.

“The Architectonics of Conversion,” for the panel, “‘Turning Back’ to Conversion: Identity, Space, and Power in Religious Transformation,” AAR Annual Meeting, San Diego, November 2007.

“Serving Afro-Cuban Gods on Chicago’s South Side: Healing and Conversion to Santería in One African-American Community,” Conference of Ford Fellows, Washington DC, October 2006.

“Afro-Cuban Women in Labor: Slaves, Spirits, and the Virgin of Regla,” Smith College, Northampton MA, December 2004.

Lecture on the use of chromolithographs in Haitian Vodou for a course entitled, “The Power of Icons,” Amherst College, Amherst MA, December 2004.

Two guest lectures on Santería as an Afro-Cuban religious and aesthetic system for a course entitled, “Introduction to World Religions,” Smith College, Northampton MA, December 2004.

Inaugural lecture, “Envisioning Vodou: Haitian ‘Art’ Forms and Historical Memory,” for the Department of Philosophy and Religion, Central Michigan University, Mount Pleasant MI, November 2001.

“So That No White Man Would Hear: Oshún and the Yorùbá in Cuba,” for the Nueva Generación conference, “Latina/o Colonial, Postcolonial Subjects: Exploring the Body, Religion, and Identity,” Harvard University, Cambridge MA, April 1999.

### **Languages:**

Spanish: raised bilingual; advanced reading, writing, and speaking ability; French: very good reading ability; German: basic reading ability; Yorùbá: beginning-level reading and speaking ability.

### **Professional Memberships:**

American Academy of Religion (AAR)

Society for the Anthropology of Religion (SAR); Appointed the SAR’s student representative to the American Anthropological Association (AAA) for 2008-09

Association for the Study of the Worldwide African Diaspora (ASWAD)

Association for the Sociology of Religion (ASR)

### **Performance and Poetry:**

*Dancing Graves: the Story of an Afro-Cuban Family on the West Side*, developed in collaboration with artist/scholar Jadele McPherson, a multimedia event featuring songs and dances traditionally performed in Afro-Cuban religious ceremonies. This original production also incorporated sound pieces on such tragedies as Hurricane Katrina in order to inspire a community-wide reconsideration of collective responses to death-dealing catastrophe, and public commemoration as an effective form of moral-ethical action. (Premiered October 18, 2008, at the University of Chicago; awarded a 2008 UChicago UnCommon Fund Grant.)

Poetry in *Telling Tongues: A Latino/a Anthology on Language Experience*, Louis Mendoza and Toni Nelson-Herrera, eds. (National City: Calaca Press, 2007), 45.

Poetry in award-winning anthology *El Coro: A Chorus of Latino and Latina Poetry*, Martín Espada, ed. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), 110-13.

**Community Service:**

Volunteer Translator and Simultaneous Interpreter for the Midwest Immigrant and Human Rights Center

**References:**

Available upon Request