

PART TWO
Kulu Mele's



Celebrating 50 Years
(1969–2019)

**Past, present & future from
Dorothy & John Wilkie
& 50+ contributors**

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Ogun is the guardian of truth

Facundo Harris

In most instances the patakis have allegorical meanings. And that is one of my biggest beefs: The way this has been shared by academics. To dumb down the essence of the practice [shows] a lack of vision. This gives the idea that this is the product of unsophisticated people. And nothing could be farther than the case. When you talk about folklore you are talking about a **belief or philosophical system which is sophisticated**. When you talk about practice in more recent times, before the slave trade to the information age. For a philosophical system to allow people to withstand all they experienced and still be alive and well and still be alive and able to grow. There is **something very substantial** [that people had to hold onto] to undergo all of those changes. That is saying something. When you really look at the whole thing, [this philosophical system] dates back to thousands of years before the slave trade. **Something real. Very real.**

One thing I've been upset by is a fairy tale depiction of the Orishas, with almost like fairy tale characters. Some of this also comes from western interpretation of the character of Oshun who is turned into [a] western love goddess. Turned into the holy / loose woman [type]. **Oshun is the deity of civilization**. Why is this not known? She is also associated with rivers. Most cities got sited at river sites, so Oshun [has ancient connection to development of civilization, cities, and culture.] Ogun is not a divine human, associated with a war god. Which Ogun is not. **Ogun is the guardian of truth**. A village is the setting for the Oshun and Ogun pataki. Supposedly, the village or town is suffering depression. Or backwardness. They were being attacked physically and were under threat of extermination by some other hostile people. They knew Ogun had the secrets they could [use to] defend themselves and become a stable society. [The pataki is] an existential means. For Ogun to be brought from isolation into society. For subsistence [to continue. For people] to be able to survive. Other orishas tried to get him out to [mend] civilization.

Yoruba practice is a green way of life. Teaching people to live in alignment with nature. For the most part, each Orisha represents a force in and of nature, not just [something] held in awe because [of its] magnificence and mystery. Because all these forces are interconnected and there is a relationship to everything in God's creation. So where does man fit? There is a natural connection to life force and life forces and rivers. There is an interconnectedness. And our job as humans [is] to learn to **live in alignment with nature**. Global warming is a perfect example of man at war with nature.

Part of the problem is that all of these patakis are meant to be interpreted allegorically. It causes you to pursue other sensory perceptions. To help you interpret. The more you look at it, the more you see and get more and more. You see a simple story. Different layers [appear and it] continues to grow over time, with living with it. One of the beauties of this practice of religion is that **it is essentially experiential** and [your] other senses help you fine tune your understanding. Our understanding grows and deepens. Some things that come out of Yoruba theology [are] about how people are supposed to react. And what are some ways nature guides us and shows us?¹

¹ Facundo was one of the first African Americans to be initiated into Lucumí. A learned and respected practitioner and leader, Facundo has played important roles in the development of Philadelphia drum and spiritual culture. His influence extends widely. In 2012, he gave a presentation at the national meeting of the Association of Black Psychologists, speaking on how African theology is used to address personal and social dysfunction. He was working on a book. We planned for him to give a public talk as part of the Ogun & the People project, to contextualize the project and explain how pataki work and live in peoples' lives. He and I arranged a phone call to prepare. I asked what he thought people should know about the pataki and the project. As he answered, I took down his words. He was unable to make his presentation. Facundo passed on April 10, 2019. We lament his loss. These notes offer glimpses of his vision and teachings. They are included here in his honor, in remembrance, and as grounding orientation for this work. Gratitude. Respect. *Ashe*.



Facundo on conga. Dottie to right. Photo courtesy John Wilkie.

Baba Ronald Facundo Harris (1946-2019)

People remember that he started drumming on his brother's bongos when he was nine. Facundo studied Cuban, Haitian and Brazilian rhythms with drum masters Robert Crowder, Sonny Morgan, and Garvin Masseaux and by the time he was 14, he was drumming for the John Hines School of Dance. A track star at Overbrook High School, he divided time between music and athletics. Baba Osejeman Adefunmi, the first African American to be initiated into Yoruba priesthood, gave Facundo his very first spiritual reading and told him that he too would be a babalawo. After being drafted and playing in the Army band from 1965-1967, Facundo was initiated in 1969. Lino Polo Gonzales (his godfather in Orisha), and Mayegun Awo of Ife (godfather in Ifa) were among his spiritual teachers, along with Juana Menrique, Poncho Mora, Delfine Gomez and family, Ed James, Chris Oliano, Julito Collazo, and Chief Bayo Ogundijo. He credited the power of the drum as an energy source which fueled his spiritual and musical quest and played a crucial role in his own process of self-discovery.

—Biography adapted from materials prepared by Osubi Craig, April 11, 2019.