# Polyphony in Miguel Barnet's *Biografía de un cimarrón*.

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Miguel Barnet's *Biografia de un cimarrón*, belongs to the diasporan African literary genre known as slave narrative. This genre is an essential part of the corpus of African-American and Afro-Caribbean literatures. However, Barnet's book is unique because it is one of the few texts of its type that describes the slave experience from an Afro-Caribbean perspective; both linguistically and culturally (in this case Spanish and modern Cuba). The book, originally written in Spanish, is a presentation of the recollections of Esteban Montejo, a 105-year-old African ex-slave, who lived as a slave and fugitive, in the wilderness, and as a soldier in the Cuban War of Independence (1895-1902). Barnet, a noted Cuban author is the originator of the tradition of *testimonio* (or testimonial) fiction in Latin American letters. He remains the genre's acknowledged master. The present text is oral, but it is transmitted as written, thanks to Barnet's editorial input.

> The purpose of this paper is threefold:
> (i) To discuss the genesis and the production of the text of Miguel Barnet's Biografia de un cimarrón,
> (ii) to examine the nature of the narrator's (in this case Esteban Montejo's) discourse, and
> (iii) to see how the interplay of several voices (polyphony) contribute to a reassessment of what Martha Cobb calls "that most abject of figures in literature, the slave" (36) in the narrative of power in black Cuban literature.

As a result of Miguel Barnet's editorial role, a triptych of embedded narratives is identifiable in Montejo's text: his subjective reality from which his personal story flows, the objective reality of Cuban colonial society and the larger and universal story of all enslaved and dominated people. Each narrative mirrors the other two in such a way that

contiguity is a defining quality of the work and also serves as a key to reading it.

Two versions of Barnet's work have been used in this essay. One is the translation by Jocasta Innes, The Autobiography of a Runaway Slave, published in 1968 by Pantheon. The other is Nick Hill's version, Biography of a Runaway Slave, published in 1994 by Curbstone Press. Judging from the titles, these translations themselves raise the problematic questions of: authorship, authenticity and interpretation. Also, the distinctions between history, biography and autobiography are blurred. The major concern here though, is to discuss the hero's perspective on the events that are the fabric of the text.

**I. Miguel Barnet as Textual Authority**

Slave autobiography in Afro-Cuban literature is really not new. It harkens back to Juan Francisco Manzano's accounts in the nineteenth century. The Autobiography of a Runaway Slave belongs to the literary genre broadly categorized by scholars as slave narrative. Miriam DeCosta-Willis, in her insightful essay, Self and Society in the Afro-Cuban Slave Narrative, states:

> The autobiography in its various forms--slave narrative, journal, diary, personal chronicle, and autobiographical novel--is one of the primary genres of Afro-American literature for a number of reasons: (1) it developed out of a very rich African oral tradition with a strong emphasis on cultural identity, communal experience, and tribal history, (2) its form (a first-person synchronic narrative was particularly appropriate for expressing the dialectical tension between the subjective consciousness of the individual and the objective history of the society, and (3) its theme (the search for self identity and freedom in a hostile society) expressed the existential and metaphysical ethos of the race. (6)

However, a close reading of Miguel Barnet's work, and Montejo's texts, leads one to conclude that both deviate from the first part of DeCosta-Willis's three-part categorization in a minor, but significant way.

The origin of this work as a literary text is a response to two of Miguel Barnet's needs as some critics have convincingly argued. First of all, The Autobiography of a

Runaway Slave developed out of Miguel Barnet's ethnological interests. According to David William Foster, "Barnet specifically introduces it as part of an ethnographic undertaking (and it was originally published in 1966 by the Instituto de Etnología y Folklore in Havana)" (51). In other words, Barnet was responding to an ideological need to fill the lacuna created by the absence of an authentic African perspective (complete with folklore and slave experience) within the master text of Cuban historical experience which David William Foster also identifies:

> [There] can be little question that Biografía has an ulterior social motive: the documentation of both the authentic folk culture of Cuba that the revolution sought to recover and the deplorable human conditions that justify the revolution and its subsequent programs. (51)

Secondly, the genesis of The Autobiography of a Runaway Slave and the choice of Esteban Montejo as autobiographical subject, reflect Miguel Barnet's personal need to reintegrate his self into the contemporary Cuban literary doxa and establishment. William Luis argues:

> The Autobiography of a Runaway Slave is not without political motivation. Perhaps Barnet seized upon the story of Montejo as an opportunity to resume a public literary life…He may have stressed the independent and revolutionary aspects of Montejo's life as a way of overcoming bureaucratic censorship. Whatever the causes, the results were clear. After the publication of The Autobiography of a Runaway Slave, Barnet was not only reintegrated into the literary establishment, but he became an important writer. (485)

Regarding the production of the text itself, it is obviously the result of the collaborative effort between Montejo, the centenarian ex-slave, and Barnet, the interviewer and editor. The process of narration and the selection of elements that constitute the final text presented to the reader are therefore subject to two levels of intent-Barnet's and Montejo's. Indeed, Barnet, in his introduction to the English version of Biografía, not only describes his method and the reconstructions he undertook to achieve a coherent text, but also admits having concerns different from Montejo's:

> I inserted words and expressions characteristic of Esteban wherever they seemed appropriate. My particular concerns were the social problems of life under slavery… (7)

This editorial intervention clearly highlights the issue of textual ownership and authenticity. An immediate consequence is that the lines between fiction, autobiography and history are blurred, and we have a multiplicity of texts and voices.

The question of ideological neutrality then becomes moot, given that both Barnet and Montejo present two different and differing perspectives on the same reality: slavery. One could even talk of an ideological hierarchy. Without Barnet's ethnological and other motivations, Montejo's text would be nonexistent. Even though Montejo's story does come through, the choice of what is appropriate clearly implies control of the discourse of the work, and Barnet definitely has most of it as author-editor. Another consequence is authorial control. According to Elzbieta Sklodowska:

> La intencionalidad y la ideología del autor-editor se sobrepone al texto original, creando más ambigüedades, silencios y lagunas en el proceso de selección, montaje y arreglo del material recopilado conforme a las normas de la forma literaria. (379)
>
> [The intentions and ideology of the author-editor are superimposed on the original text; creating more ambiguities, silences, and gaps in the selection, arrangement, and telling of reproduced material. This process conforms to the norms of this particular literary form].

This editorial intervention raises some pertinent questions. Does the marginalized other really have a voice in the slave narrative since that narrative is the product of a whole culture whose mode of self-expression is the written/printed word? Whose text gets written? Whose voice really gets a hearing? In ideological terms, is it writing alone that confers presence and identity as far as the other is concerned? Does silence mean absence, loss of identity and death for the other, in this case Montejo? The last question is even more important given that, by virtue of Barnet's authorship of The Autobiography of a Runaway Slave and avowed editorial fiat, it is he who confers presence and actually gives life to Esteban Montejo. It is also pertinent to recall that Montejo is illiterate and thus has little control in making sure Barnet does not misrepresent his words.

In the light of what both Barnet and the critics cited have written, a preliminary

conclusion would be that a rewriting of the other is more the result of ideological goodwill, necessity, and choice expressed by a representative, in this case Miguel Barnet, of the dominant culture. It is less a question of existential necessity and choice on the other's part.

**II. Esteban Montejo as Writer and Narrator of His Own Text**

From the perspective of the marginalized other, the two principal elements that animate Montejo's text are his memory and voice. With these he generates his own discourse, through the same textual strategies of selection that Barnet (his editor-audience) uses, even though Montejo's choices are first-hand material derived from his life as a slave and stories told to him by his slave forebears. His real discourse is in the experiences he chooses to relate to Miguel Barnet. Thus Montejo not only creates and controls, but also participates in his own mythopoesis. At this point, Miguel Barnet simply becomes an agent of Montejo's memory as William Luis demonstrates:

> [Montejo] was aware of Barnet's interests.… Perhaps Montejo knew that he was the only living runaway slave in Cuba and that his activities were going to be recorded. He was conscious of his own grandeur and literary destiny. Montejo recognizes his own importance and sets the stage for controlling the narration… In spite of Barnet's diligence in verifying historical events, Montejo seized the opportunity to glorify himself and others. Montejo recreates his own life by choosing subjects, which would be of interest to his listener. (480)

Montejo's awareness thus attenuates Barnet's editorial intervention and any possible misrepresentations of his (Montejo's) views and words.

However, it must be mentioned in passing that Luis's speculations in the foregoing quote seem to impute bad faith on Esteban Montejo by questioning his motives and implying that he told his story for self-aggrandizement. Indeed, and ideologically, this appears to be an example of blaming the victim, in as much as the initiative that led to the writing of The Autobiography of a Runaway Slave was not Montejo's but Miguel Barnet's.

Montejo's discourse in the text has certain unique features. These include the

circumlocution typical in African languages (in this specific case Yoruba, as we will see); folkloric references to his African heritage and the haphazard, conversational tone of his discourse. These features as meager as they may seem, impose on Barnet's writing and editorial skills within the totality of the work. Their net effect on the attentive reader is to persuade her/him that there is another version of history. The logical and necessary textual and authorial questions that follow are: Who is the master narrator in this book, Barnet or Montejo? Is there a meta-narrative? If yes, then whose is it, Montejo's or Barnet's? Are both distinguishable, from a narratological point of view?

Mikhail Bakhtin's analysis of the prose genre, which is pertinent to the reading of The Autobiography of a Runaway Slave, leaves no doubt as to the ideological significance of Montejo's discourse, in as much as the text is concerned with the thematics of alterity. Bakhtin, in his Esthétique et théorie du roman, states that every discourse or narrative, whatever form it takes, whatever modes subsume it, is an attempt at presenting a world-view:

> Dans le roman, le locuteur est, essentiellement, un individu social, historiquement concret et défini, son discours est un langage social. . . . Le locuteur dans le roman est toujours, à divers degrés, un idéologue, et ses paroles sont toujours un idéologème. Un langage particulier au roman représente toujours un point de vue spécial sur le monde, prétendant à une signification sociale. (153)
>
> [In the novel, the narrator is, essentially, an individual—social, historically concrete, and definite. His discourse is social speech. The narrator in the novel is always, in varying degrees, an ideologue and his words are always ideological. Discourse peculiar to the novel genre therefore represents a specific perspective on the world. It lays claim to social significance].

Indeed it is by the process of this persuasive act of telling (such as Montejo does), that the reader is informed of the other's identity, and of his humanity. Montejo's *representation*, done with the minimum of resources -such as orality and fragmented memory- could then be seen as nothing but an ideological project that is in search of social relevance. As a result, the other ceases to be marginalized by claiming the attention and focus of the audience and by being the voice that nourishes the very existence of the

literary or historical text.

Esteban Montejo as a marginalized other starts his retextualizing activity by trying to constitute his social identity in spatio-temporal terms, using a two-pronged approach that involves the individual and the communal. The individual is described in terms of date of birth, name, parentage, ancestry and ethnic origin:

> I even remember my godparents telling me the date of my birth. It was the 26th of December 1860, San Esteban's Day, the one on the calendar. That is why my name is Esteban. My family name is Montejo, for my mother who was a slave of French origin. . . . My father's name was Nazario, and he was Lucumí from Oyó. My mother was Emilia Montejo. (18-19)

A brief commentary on the narrative structure of the above statement is in order. First, Montejo, in describing his birth and childhood, uses circumlocution typical of the African (in this case Yoruba) response to a request (by Miguel Barnet), such as 'tell me about yourself' that may have elicited such a response in the first place. Second, in Yoruba culture, such a univocal request is rarely made of an individual because both the questioner and the responding individual perceive the respondent in communal terms. Rather, one is led by a series of questions, in a call-and-response manner shown below, to self-identify in one of several ways:

> 'Whose child/wife/brother/sister are you?'
> 'From which clan/family do you originate?'
> 'Which is your household/village?'[1]

What is common to these questions is origin or one's roots - both symbolically and genetically because, in African culture, personhood is but part of a branch of the family, clan or village tree. A call-and-response approach is the standard discursive procedure in a situation like this. Even when an African is compelled to talk about himself, he does it by first evoking or invoking his ancestry, family or elders and this is what Montejo does in the quote in question. In Yoruba culture, this evocatory act is called *ìjúbà* or paying homage. Here again the self is contextualized in communal terms.

[1] I am Yoruba, from Oyo in southwestern Nigeria and could easily relate to Montejo's speech mannerisms.

From all this, Montejo literally becomes the text. The fuller meaning of the term autobiography, as used in the title of the English version of Biografía de un cimarrón, becomes clear. Etymologically, it is writing oneself, even though Montejo's technique is oral. The hero's voice is the text. Furthermore, autobiography becomes an introspective exercise or in narrative terms, auto-reflexivity. The other re-presents himself through memory, which serves as a kind of mirror in which he sees or looks at himself. The purpose of this approach is to say both to himself and to his audience "I have a past, a history --therefore I am somebody." A common-place state where we are all the sum total of our memories.

Montejo's orphanhood, which he cleverly evokes, is but another symbol of the marginalization and exile that define the condition of *otherness*. He uses the same circumlocutory African speech pattern, as is his wont, throughout the text. Referring to his parents, he states:

> They also told me my parents had died in Sagua. Truth is that I would have liked to meet them, but because I saved my skin, I was unable to. If I had come out of the woods they [slave traders] would have caught me on the spot. . . . Blacks were sold like piglets….I never met my parents… but this is not sad… (19)

The effect is to generate pathos in his audience. This unsolicited elaboration shows that speech for the African, or the Afro-Cuban such as Montejo, is truly a communal phenomenon. This has both an ideological and ethical dimension –co-opting our interlocutor into our lives, and in the process, making them appreciate our humanity. It is more than just reiterating history or narrating facts. Here, Bakhtin's concept of dialogism comes to mind. Present behind the anonymity of the sign 'slave' is a thinking, feeling, human referent, as both quotes demonstrate.

Regarding the communal approach, Montejo's philosophy and world view are contained in two elements: ideology and metaphysics. Ideologically, his abhorrence of slavery and oppression is expressed through his yearning for freedom. He is constantly on the run, like the biblical Cain. The dehumanizing consequence is that Montejo is a morally and socially stunted individual because he never really develops any lasting

relationships. Little wonder then that trust and loyalty are values absent in him. However, fierce individualism and love of freedom motivate his participation in the War of Independence.

His metaphysics is encapsulated in his world view, which is not only pantheistic, animist and even fatalistic, but essentially African in its form:

> The long and short of it is that I know everything depends on Nature. Nature is everything. Even what you can't see…because we're subjects of a God… The strongest gods are the ones from Africa…I don't know how they allowed slavery. (17-18)

This attitude is signaled from the start and continues throughout the work. References to various African myths, beliefs and folklore abound in the work. In the eyes of a westernized Miguel Barnet, this world-view has a "poetic, surrealist slant" (8) as expressed in the introduction to the English version of the work. However, Montejo's references to African folklore and mythology can be viewed in two closely related ways: a) He uses them for the ideological purpose of valorizing them above Christian Catholicism. For example, he constantly portrays the agents of Christianity--the priests--in the most negative light possible and with resentment. b) His references to both Christianity and Catholicism are less the expression of religious conviction than the acceptance of a reality, in as much as both are part of the master narrative of the dominant ideology of the slave masters. In this regard Jean-Pierre Tardieu's perspective is pertinent:

> [Cela] n' est pas dú à une réflexion théologique ou á un acte de foi, mais à l'acceptation d'un fait accompli et indépendant de sa propre volonté. Le profond malaise d'Esteban est dû au fait que le christianisme est la religion des esclavagistes. Certes, il ne l'avoue pas ouvertement, mais de nombreuses réflexions tout au long de son autobiographie mettent ce sentiment en exergue, á tel point. . . . qu'il se transforme en ressentiment (43-47).
>
> [Montejo's acceptance is not the result of a theological reflection; nor is it an act of faith. It is the recognition of a situation independent of his control. Esteban's profound discomfort comes from his awareness of a fact: Christianity is the religion of the slave masters. While he certainly

> never openly admits this, throughout the text, several musings of his highlight his feelings such that they, taken together, become a major source of resentment].

The general effect of this double approach is that we see the creation of a personal myth (Montejo's) couched in a heroic narrative. The best expression of this can be found in Montejo's positive valorization of the Lucumís; slaves belonging to his own ethnic and cultural stock, the Yoruba. He invariably portrays them as rebellious, courageous, freedom loving, and spiritually and morally superior to other groups in Jocasta Innes' version of Biografía (32-36). Again, narrations of his experiences; whether as a *cimarrón*, a freedom fighter, or simply, as a human being, generally depict him as someone who has survived against all dehumanizing odds. His heroism is inherent in his telling. His creation of a personal myth is a conscious ideological choice, in terms of its constituting elements, as I have attempted to show. It is as if one were reading about a great mythic figure and his exploits, eventual triumph, and heroism (See Luis, p. 480).

In a larger context The Autobiography of a Runaway Slave, as a re-textualization of the other, the reader is reminded of the hero epic. In the seminal mythography of Joseph Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces, the hero, chosen by destiny, undergoes a rite of passage which he must survive by force of personality (10). Survival then has metaphysical ramifications both for the individual and his society because it is a transcendental act. Thus, Montejo, like all mythological heroes, has to defeat death (of slavery) to be reborn into a higher level of being. He becomes *Afuwape,* the hero of the Yoruba Ifa epic, whose name literally means 'he who endures by virtue of character'. The rite of passage is characterized by the tripartite process of separation, initiation, and return. Herein is the full import of mythopoesis!

In Montejo's case, separation is in the contiguous historical realities of an orphaned childhood and slavery. The totality of his experiences as a result of these could be read as the initiatory aspect. The Autobiography of a Runaway Slave and Montejo's narration (especially his abundant references to his African origins, through cultural

artifacts, both linguistic and folkloric, as the very fabric of this text) could be conceptualized as his return from death and the non-identity, which slavery, both as a commercial and an ideological enterprise, has imposed on him and his race. His return (textually), has both existential and metaphysical implications. It is life-affirming in the face of an ideology that has systematically denied the other for centuries with all the enthusiasm and vigor it could muster. It suffices to recall Montejo's statement in Nick Hill's version of the work: "Blacks were sold like piglets" (19).

**III. Polyphony in the Re-textualization of the Other**

Ideologically, Esteban Montejo's text is a veritable palimpsest because underlying it are other texts, namely memory and culture, which in themselves function as repositories of civilization. Montejo's various linguistic references to African culture and folklore confirm this fact. Each one of these can lead the reader to the original and specific language, culture, and place in Africa. In this respect, two authors that readily come to mind are Roger Bastide the French anthropologist and Julio Garcia Cortez, whose book, The Osha: Secrets of the Yoruba-Lucumi-Santeria Religion in the United States and the Americas : Initiation, Rituals, Ceremonies, Orishas, Divination, Plants**,** is written from the perspective of a practitioner of Afro-Cuban santería.

Thus, Montejo's role is twofold: to provide a repository of racial memory and to be a spokesman for the *other*. In his voice we hear the voices of not only his African ancestors, but those of all enslaved and marginalized people. He becomes the *griot* or *portavoz* (literally, voice bearer). His discourse becomes, according to William Luis, "a communal activity in which others participate" (482). Montejo himself seems to admit this when in The Autobiography of a Runaway Slave he states:

> What the old men enjoyed most was telling jokes and stories. They told stories all the time, morning, noon and night, they were at it constantly. There were so many stories it was often difficult to keep track of them, you got so muddled up. (161)

The work effectively becomes polyphonic. There is narrative filiation between what Montejo has been told by his godparents and the old black slave at the mill,

amongst others. All this he appropriates and incorporates into his own discourse; which in turn is appropriated by Miguel Barnet, re-presented as his own ethnographic text, and which subsequently becomes Montejo's biography/autobiography. According to Mikhail Bakhtin:

> Dans le roman, l'homme qui parle et sa parole sont l'objet d'une representation verbale et littéraire. Le discours du locuteur n'est pas simplement transmis ou reproduit, mais justement représenté avec art et… représenté par le discours même (de l'auteur). (155) See Luis, p. 480.
>
> [In the novel, the narrator and his words are the object of a literary and verbal representation. His discourse is not simply transmitted or reproduced, but represented artistically by the very discourse of the author.]

Miniaturization or *mise en abyme* is also related to the concept of polyphony. It is the telescoping or, framing of a text into subtexts based on specific narrative perspectives. Thus, Esteban Montejo's story or text is thematically a telescopic version of Cuba's development as a nation vis-à-vis its colonial masters--Spain and the United States—especially when viewed in terms of the hegemonies of oppression, exploitation and hardship. Personal mythmaking is but a step to national mythmaking. Indeed, the ultimate paean to Montejo and his Lucumís is Cuba's adoption of Santeria as the national religion, even though the avowed official ideology is communism. There seems to be no contradiction since both celebrate the community and the communal as their central ethos.

Ideologically then, the work would be part of the Castro régime's mythopoesis whereby Montejo's odyssey becomes that of Cuba's, in its journey towards nationhood and sovereignty. Modern Cuban history shows that it evolved from Spanish colony and slave territory to a client state of the United States, until 1959 and the Castro revolution. Since then, in reasserting itself, it is a 'given' that Cuba as a nation has not only faced economic blockade and embargoes by successive American governments, it has also been politically undermined by a conservative and right-wing exiled population in the United States -- most of whom are aided and abetted by successive American administrations.

Thus, The Autobiography of a Runaway Slave becomes a series of texts: parallel and contiguous at the same time. In the context of alterity, all are brought together by Montejo's telling to be the testimony that confers voice, authority, identity and presence on a hitherto silenced and denied other--the story of empowerment.

**IV. Cultural artifacts in the text**

Cultural artifacts in this book can be classified into two broad categories, linguistic and non-linguistic, for the purpose of clarifying their significance to the 'uninitiated' (or non-Yoruba[2] reader). More than anything else, these artifacts give the term autobiography (in Jocasta Innes's English version) its full etymological power because Montejo makes them come alive, even after more than a century of separation from his Yoruba and African origins. Not even the worst kind of dehumanization can annihilate the profound and irrevocable mark of culture on an individual. Thus, culture is affirmed as a fundamentally transcendent and spiritualizing experience. It is profoundly indelible.

Traces of African languages abound in Montejo's narration. It seems that Miguel Barnet, as ethnographer, has not fully discussed the cultural implications of these, not withstanding his avowed socio-historical sympathies. His footnotes are inadequate, especially for the uninformed reader. For example, Barnet is strangely silent on the cultural importance of Montejo's Yoruba ethnicity-- which in itself is a veritable text--especially given its relevance in modern-day Cuban culture and spirituality. Cuba is officially an atheistic society (it is communist), yet santería, a syncretic offshoot of Yoruba traditional religion, is practiced by an overwhelming majority of today's Cuban society. Yoruba influence also permeates Cuban (and Afro-Caribbean) religion, music, languages, and food. It is the ultimate symbol of resistance and survival against Euro-American slavery, colonization and domination. These linguistic traces powerfully illustrate the inter-related concepts of palimpsest and polyphony. They describe layers of

[2] See also Simon Kirby. *Function, Selection and Innateness: The Emergence of Language Universals.* Ph.D. Thesis. University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK. 1996. Internet. April 21, 2004. URL: http://www.ling.ed.ac.uk/anonftp/pub/staff/kirby/thesis

text or voice underlying other texts and voices--a multiplicity of perspectives. The following examples, while orthographically different from their African cognates, are linked to the different African languages still in use today:

> From Yoruba: *amala, chekete, Oggun, Yemaya, obi, Alafia*.
> From Hausa: *sunsundamba. Sunsu* is Hausa for bird.
> From Central and East African (Bantu) languages: *nganga, nkise, mayombe, mambise, musungo.*

African foods such as 'farina de amala', (*amala* is still a staple diet in Yoruba land: a yam flour porridge of harder consistency) and *chekete* (fresh corn beer), attest to the power of memory and also make Montejo's narration more than just literary realism. They are residual elements of the trans-Atlantic passage from Africa to the New World of Afro-Hispanic Cuba.[3] Daily rituals of personal hygiene such as evoked in Innes's The Autobiography of a Runaway Slave (31-32) also give authenticity to Montejo's telling. For example, the 'chewing stick' is the most common device in dental and oral hygiene, particularly in Yorubaland.

In fact, it has a widespread usage in many non-Western cultures of Africa, Asia and the Middle East. Dental research has proven the medicinal ability of the different barks and sticks to cure certain oral diseases. Confirming what these peoples have always known before the advent of modern Western science, Christine D. Wu, a professor of periodontics at UIC College of Dentistry, Urbana, Illinois states:

> It is generally accepted that oral hygiene maintenance through regular removal of dental plaque and food deposits is an essential factor in the prevention of dental cavities and periodontal disease. Methods for oral hygiene vary from country to country and from culture to culture. Despite the widespread use of toothbrushes and toothpastes, natural methods of tooth cleaning using chewing sticks selected and prepared from the twigs, stems or roots from a variety of plant species have been practised for thousands of years in Asia, Africa, the Middle East and the Americas. Selected clinical studies have shown that chewing sticks, when properly used, can be as efficient as toothbrushes in removing dental plaque due to

[3] Cabrera, Lydia. *Anago/Vocabulario Lucumi: El Yoruba Que Se Habla En Cuba* (Coleccion Del Chichereku En El Exilio) Miami, FL. Ediciones Universal, Reprint edition (June 1986).

> the combined effect of mechanical cleaning and enhanced salivation. Chewing sticks are obtained from the roots of various plants [in] African, Asian and Middle Eastern countries. . . Some survey results have shown that people who use the chewing stick have fewer cavities and healthier gums. . . . Researchers have also found that the sticks contain chemotherapeutic agents that inhibit plaque formation.[4]

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[4] Christine D. Wu, I.A. Darout, N. Skaug. "*Chewing sticks: timeless natural toothbrushes for oral cleansing"*. Journal of Periodontal Research, Volume 36, pg. 275, October 2001.

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