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The Making of Ncha Nkota (Igbo Soap)

By Kosisochukwu Nzeribe

Ozikoro.com · Anthropology and Ethnography · 6 min read

FEATURE
IMAGE

The product shown is the Natural Nigerian Lemon, Lime & Alpha Hydroxy Acid Black Soap, designed to brighten the complexion, exfoliate, and moisturize the skin. Photo credit; Bella360 Beauty Supply and Salon

Article image · caption retained from the published Ozikoro article

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The image displays raw African Black Soap, also known as Alata Samina or Ncha nkota. Photo credit; Etsy.

Ncha, an indigenous soap traditionally made by the Igbo people of southeastern Nigeria is more than just a cleansing agent. It reflects indigenous knowledge, resourcefulness, and the use of locally available materials to create a product deeply embedded in Igbo cultural life. Also known as ncha-nkota in the Igbo language, this soap belongs to the broader family of African black soap, which has been produced for centuries across West Africa using ash and plant oils. While the best-known black soaps are often associated with the Yoruba Ose-dudu, the Igbo ncha has its own unique production methods, materials, and cultural meanings within Igbo communities. This essay examines the traditional production process of ncha, its local ingredients, methods of manufacture, and cultural significance in Igbo society, with specific reference to authentic practices from Igboland.

01

Origins and Cultural Context

The production of ncha is rooted in pre-colonial craft industries across Igboland and has long been associated with women's economic activity and small-scale artisanal industries. Historical accounts note that soap making was one of several indigenous crafts practiced alongside pottery, weaving, and hide work, which contributed to local economies well before modern industrialization.

In Igbo communities, ncha served not only as a personal hygiene product but also played roles in ritual purification, community cleansing ceremonies, and traditional health practices. Because it was derived from natural materials, users often attributed ncha with gentle cleansing and beneficial skin-care properties, a belief that continues in both rural and urban settings. Today, ncha is sometimes marketed commercially, but its production and use remain anchored in traditional craft knowledge.

SOURCES

References

The article's own bibliography, set as it appears in the record.

01 Ash from burnt plant materials: This is the most important ingredient because it supplies an alkaline substance necessary for saponification, the chemical reaction that turns fats into soap. Traditionally, ashes are obtained by burning the remnants of plant parts such as palm fronds, palm bunches, and other agricultural waste.

02 Palm oil and palm kernel oil: These plant-derived oils serve as the fatty base in the soap. Their high oil content makes them ideal for producing soap that not only cleans but also moisturizes the skin. Palm oil can be obtained from fresh palm fruits, while palm kernel oil comes from the seed of the palm fruit.

03 Water: Clean water is used to dissolve the ash and to mix with the oils during the cooking process.

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