

***Laali Tattoos: Making the Design***

**Yoruba transcript:**

Òdòbìnrin: Kí le lèyí te n se ìyá Umar?

Arábìrin: Laali ní mo n se, laali laali laali but kìn se permanent one le lèyí.

Òdòbìnrin: Okay.

Òdòbìnrin: This is local laali.

Òdòbìnrin: Okay, so tòn bá fẹ se elèyé ní permanent, se o lè se permanent or kò lè se permanent.

Arábìrin: A lè se, a lè fi elèyí se permanent.

Òdòbìnrin: Okay.

Arábìrin: Èyí tí wọn fí n se permanent ni oní machine.

Òdòbìnrin: Okay.

Arábìrin: Or abéré tí àwon olden days mother wa tí wọn maa n lò but elèyí local one ní.

Òdòbìnrin: Okay.

Arábìrin: Kì se permanent one a lè fi elèyí se oní permanent one yen.

Òdòbìnrin: Okay, so elèyí báwo ló se ma last sí, báwo ló se maa pé sí.

Arábìrin: Elèyí at least ó péjù ọ̀sẹ̀ méjì.

Òdòbìnrin: Okay.

Arábìrin: But tó bájé pé tọ̀wọ̀ ni ọ̀sẹ̀ kan péré l'oun ma pé sí, tara, tesè yen ko tí e maa tún pé tó ọ̀sẹ̀ méjì, or nígbámí o tún, o depend laara cream tí èyàn bá n lò, torí kánípé bi toning cream yen ni, i maa n jé kó ma tètè fade.

Òdòbìnrin: Okay.

Arábìrin: Tó bájé pé ordinary cream ni, á jé kò last bí two weeks before kó tó gbọ.

Òdòbìnrin: Okay, so àwon wò ló maa n se elèyí gangan, sé àwon Yorùbá ni àbí àwon Hausa, àbí àwon Ibo naa maa n se.

Arábìrin: Se rí laali, kin sá nípé gbogbo culture ní won n se, mostly àwon Indian àwon ni won se or àwon Arab àwon ni won se jù but àwa believe nípé anything tí àwon Arab bá n se or àwon Hausa bá n se, àwon Arab yen àwon naa ma n se then anything àwon Arab bá ti sé àwon Hausa maa n believe nípé, o won right, so tá won naa bá se kò bad and anything tí àwon Hausa bá se tí àwa naa ri a ma n believe nípé, ó wà religion or something, so bi nísinsín, bi nsin a believe nípé laali yi ewé ni so ta bá se kò bad so kò sí **tribe** tí kin se. So a lè decide whether **tribe** báyi ni n se gbogbo **tribe** lo lè se laali, kò sí nkan tó burú ju nítorí wípé ewé laa fi n se.

Òdòbìnrin: So eni mix anything pèlú e, ewé nkan naa ni ewé àti omi.

Arábìrin: Hmmm à n fi àwon nkan mix e, à n fin nkan mix e, torí a lè use ordinary ewé yen káma fí draw re, ama fi àwon nkan a fi n mix e, but nkan tó wà níbí laali nípé is very easy tí èyàn ó fí mò, ntorí iyen laa ma n believe wípé eni tóbá fè se, tó bá fè mò níparè, agbodò kọ nísé naa ka tó so in and out laali yen fun.

### **English translation:**

Young Girl: What is this that you are doing, Umar's mother<sup>1</sup>?

Woman: *Laali* is what I am doing, *laali, laali, laali*, but it is not a permanent one that I am doing.

Young Girl: Okay.

Woman: This is a local *laali*.

Young Girl: Okay. Can you make it a permanent one or can it not be done permanently?

Woman: We can't make this one permanent.

Young Girl: Okay.

Woman: The ones that can be made permanent are done with a machine.

Young Girl: Okay.

Woman: The type that women did in the olden days, but this is a local type.

---

<sup>1</sup> The woman is addressed as Umar's mother because in Yoruba culture women are addressed by their children's names.

Young Girl: Okay.

Woman: It is not a permanent one, but we can use it to make a permanent one.

Young Girl: Okay. For how long can this last, for how long can it stay?

Woman: This particular one will stay for at least two weeks.

Young Girl: Okay.

Woman: But if it is the one done on the hand, it will stay for a week. The one done on the body or legs stays for like two weeks.

Young Girl: Okay.

Woman: But it also depends on the type of cream the person is using, because if it is a toning cream, it will make it fade away quickly.

Young Girl: Okay.

Woman: But if it is the ordinary cream, it will last for like two weeks before coming off.

Young Girl: Okay. So who are the ones who do this in particular – is it the Yorubas, or the Hausas, or the Igbos?

Woman: This *laali* you see here, let me just say every culture does it, mostly the Indians and the Arabs. Hausas believe that anything the Arabs do is right, so they do it too like the Arabs. We also emulate the Hausas; we believe it is religious, for example, this *laali*, we believe that it's a leaf, so if we do it, it is not a bad thing<sup>2</sup>. We can't point to a particular tribe but all tribes because there is nothing bad in it because we use the leaf to do it.

Young Girl: So you don't mix anything with it, just the leaf and water?

Woman: We mix other things with it; we mix other things with it because we cannot use ordinary leaf to draw it. We mix it with other things, but one thing about *laali* is that, it is very easy to know; because of that we believe that anyone that wants to do it, who wants to know about it, we must teach her the job first before we can tell such a person the ins and outs of the *laali*.

---

<sup>2</sup> Permanent tattoos carry a stigma in Yoruba culture, but *laali* is seen differently because it is made from a leaf.

**About CultureTalk:** CultureTalk is produced by the Five College Center for the Study of World Languages and housed on the LangMedia Website. The project provides students of language and culture with samples of people talking about their lives in the languages they use every day. The participants in CultureTalk interviews and discussions are of many different ages and walks of life. They are free to express themselves as they wish. The ideas and opinions presented here are those of the participants. Inclusion in CultureTalk does not represent endorsement of these ideas or opinions by the Five College Center for the Study of World Languages, Five Colleges, Incorporated, or any of its member institutions: Amherst College, Hampshire College, Mount Holyoke College, Smith College and the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

© 2013 Five College Center for the Study of World Languages and Five Colleges, Incorporated