

## Lo Yiro - The Standing Stick

**This is the complete transcript of the video of Seckou describing the game Lo Yiro, which he experienced as a child. A story version is also included.**

Hi there. My name is Seckou Keita, and I am a Kora player, composer, a singer, a teacher, but also my background is a griot background. Griots are the musicians, the kora players, the singers, the storytellers, and they also play a very important part in West African society because they are just peacemakers.

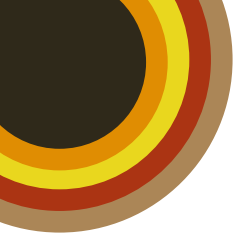
I would like to share a whole story, a griot story from where I grew up in the southern part of Senegal. This story has been going on and it's been happening for years. Up in the town, where elders usually get together to talk, anytime in the daytime, to talk some important decisions where they believe that words or the talk should not get into the kids ear at all, or the kids should not have a clue what those important decisions are, because they are kids. So, if you happen to be one of those kids, it happened to me, happened to many of my siblings, sticking around, standing out there when they're making decisions, either under the mango tree or in the living room, wherever in the yard of the house. If the child is standing up there, not helping, not supporting, not supposed to be part of the conversation and not even supposed to hear what those elders are making as a decision, they will look at you and tell you to go and get them what we call Lo Yiro, and Lo Yiro translates in English as the standing stick, because simply you as a child, you're standing there as a stick because you're not going to add onto the conversation, and they don't want you to hear the conversation either. So what can they do to get rid of you?

They have to use those technical words or play game words, or old-fashioned style of just telling you something that you will find out, not straight away, but days, months, sometimes years to come, or at your return.

So they will say to you, for example, it happened to me standing there, like my grandparents are sitting and then making some important decision that I should not get involved. And they said to me, 'Seckou, I'm standing there. 'Can you go to your auntie's place? About hours, sorry, about some kilometers away from the house, and ask her that we need the Lo Yiro'.

A Lo Yiro? In your head, go and get the standing stick, and in your head immediately, it won't make sense, because you're just think, a standing stick? That might be something that they call standing stick, something to do with a stick, but standing? This is really confusing words.

Then, up you go fast because you want to do the mission, maybe you want to come back to carry on standing there to hear the conversation. So you run fast you get to your auntie's place and say, 'Auntie, my grandparents (or my mom or my dad) have sent me to get the Lo Yiro from you, please.' And then she will look at you and go like, 'Oh, Lo Yiro? I used to have it here. Don't know what happened to Lo Yiro. I don't know what happened to that standing stick. Oh, I know your uncle, about a mile away from here. You know when you turn left there, might have it. Go and ask him.'



And then off you go. Boom, boom, boom, boom, run. And then you get to uncle's house and then knock, knock. 'Hello, uncle. My grandpa sent me to auntie's place, but auntie told me you might have the Lo Yiro that I'm looking for?'

And then uncle immediately, who knows the game very well, will look at you. 'Oh, the Lo Yiro. Oh yes, she gave it to me last time, but I gave it to your cousin's, uh, house, you know that cousin house that is like a two miles away, go and check it out. They're the last person that I gave Lo Yiro to.

And then you say, 'Okay', and off you go again. So this keeps repeating wherever you go, because the elders know why they send you to get that standing stick. It happened to me.

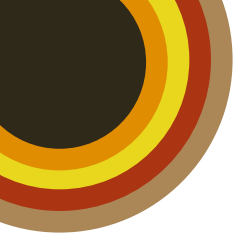
That standing stick is you! simply it's you so you are trying to find yourself in a way and that go around. And sometimes you get to another place that after like hours or whatever of time you spend, you get to some family house or relatives or cousin's house or even neighbor's house, they will feel like, oh, and they will ask you, 'Oh, so where have you been so far with this standing stick?' You say, I've been to uncle's house. I've been to auntie's, I see cousin so, so. And they know that you've been around a while. You might be thirsty, you might be hungry. They'll give you some food and give you something to drink, and then let you rest a little bit, and then you carry onto the journey again to the next journey.

By the time that you do that tour and talk to those aunties and uncles and cousins and friends and neighbors and elders around your village or around your area where you live, your parents, your family out there, your dad and mom or your grandparents, they will finish the conversation they wanted to do without you being standing there as a standing stick.

So, when you return, they are done, and you still come home with hands free. You have no standing stick with you because no one has it, and simply they teach you without telling you what's going on.

What that creates in this story, it creates for you to get out of people's conversation when they need it, because they don't need you to add or to take away. Second, what it does is create, create for you to gallivant in a day, but actually visiting your family, relatives around and saying hi to some people, you might even have a meal with them or drink or just a hi and then out. That created that, but also personally, it make you think as you walk. For me personally it made me think a lot.

Some of my creations, that foot step that I spend hours or half a day or day going to places, create time to think all the things, because then you stop even thinking about - it's not even thinking that they send you to get the standing stick, but something's created because you get bored of walking around and musically – for me it helped me a lot to think. I'll even be singing along when I walk around. And also it has created for you to notice when you grow up or after a while, and if they have done it to many people, you heard the secret. You know that when some people are sitting and chatting, not even your elders or family, that they need their privacy, you should leave them alone without them telling you what to do.



## Story of Lo Yiro – The Standing Stick

In Senegal, West Africa, there is a secret game that adults play, when children are hanging around and trying to listen in to their conversations. In this re-telling of the story, Seckou, is 7 years old.

Seckou was bored. There was no-one at home today, except him and his grandparents. He had fed the goats, played with his pet pigeon for a while and eaten some mangoes. He picked up a djembe and started to play, but his grandfather told him to stop. Some elders were coming to the house for an important meeting, and his grandfather didn't want the sound of the drums to disturb their conversation.

Seckou watched as members of the community gathered, giving their salaams\* as they walked into the house. The meeting started. He could hear his grandmother's voice coming from the living room and the sounds of agreement murmuring in the background. Seckou was curious. 'What are they talking about?', he said to himself.

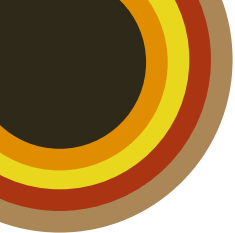
He went into the house, and stood by the side of the door, just out of sight of his grandparents and tried to hear what everyone was saying. He leaned in further to be able to hear, when suddenly he heard his grandfather's booming voice. 'Seckou'. Seckou sheepishly came into the doorway, in full view of all the elders, who were now looking at him. 'Seckou I need you to do something important for me. Go to your Aunt Coumba's house and ask her to give you the Lo Yiro. I need it quickly. Off you go'.

Seckou was confused. Lo Yiro? Standing Stick? What is that? He thought to himself. He didn't want to leave the conversation, but his grandfather had said it was important. His aunt only lived a few kilometres away. If he was quick, he could get back before the meeting had finished. So, he pulled on his shoes and ran off to his Aunt Coumba's house.

When he got there, he said 'Hello Aunt. My Grandfather needs 'Lo Yiro'. He asked me to fetch it. Can I have it please?' Coumba looked at him and said, 'Oh, Lo Yiro? I used to have it here. I can't remember what I did with it. Oh, I know your uncle Moussa has it. The one up the road about a mile away from here. Go and ask him.'

So Seckou ran off to Uncle Moussa's house. When he arrived, very tired from all the running, he said, 'Hello uncle. My grandpa sent me to Aunt Coumba's place, but auntie told me you might have the Lo Yiro that I'm looking for?' His Uncle, who knew this game very well, said 'Oh, the Lo Yiro. Oh yes, your aunt gave it to me last time, but I gave it to your cousin, you know Astou who lives on the other side of the river. Go and check it out, she is the last person that I gave Lo Yiro to'. 'OK' said Seckou.

This time he slowed down and walked to Cousin Astou's house. The sun was beginning to go down and there were birds singing high up in the trees. Seckou made up a song and hummed it as he walked. Finally, he arrived at Astou's house. 'Hello Astou', said Seckou. 'I'm looking for Lo Yiro.



Grandfather sent me to Aunty Coumba's house and Aunty Coumba sent me to Uncle Moussa's house, but Uncle Moussa says he gave it to you. Can I have it please? Astou looked at Seckou and said 'Wow! You've done a lot of travelling today looking for Lo Yiro. Sit down and eat with me.' Seckou ate fish and rice and drank lots of water and sweet bissap\*\* juice. When it was time to go, Astou said. 'Go back home now and tell grandfather that you cannot find Lo Yiro. I'm sure he'll understand.' So Seckou walked home, humming the tune in his head.

When he arrived home, the meeting was over, and all the elders had left. His grandfather saw him coming down the path. 'I couldn't find Lo Yiro, Papa, I'm sorry'. Don't worry said his grandfather. Come and sit down and tell me all about your day. So Seckou told him all about Aunty Coumba, Uncle Moussa and the food he had with cousin Astou, and he hummed the song he had made up in his head. Grandfather took his kora. Together, they plucked the strings and began to put the song to music.

Many years later, watching other children go looking for Lo Yiro, Seckou sat back and smiled. 'Now I get it', he said to himself. 'That standing stick. It was me all along!'

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\* Salaams – this is a shortened version of Asalaam Alaikum, used as a greeting by many people around the world

\*\* Bissap is a juice made from dried hibiscus flowers

NB: The Lo Yiro song is included as one of the resources

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