

## The concept of Aburokyire

To begin with, I want to talk about the term Aburokyire as applied at home. Generally, the term is used to refer to foreign lands. This could lead to misunderstanding in the minds of many, however.

Broadly speaking, a country like Nigeria or Togo or Uganda, could, from the point of view of someone in Ghana, be regarded as Aburokyire. It is no secret, however, that hardly anyone who speaks of Aburokyire at home ever has any of the countries mentioned above in mind. Instead, Aburokyire has become synonymous with the countries of the western industrialised world. For someone like you, Aburokyire stands for the dwelling place of the white man, who is generally regarded from our perspective as being extremely wealthy.

Few people of your age and level of knowledge about things of this world are aware that Aburokyire, even in the strict sense of its meaning, is made up of several countries. That brings to my mind the experience I had during one of my stays at home.

Whilst I was visiting Amantia, an elderly woman approached me with a piece of paper in her hand. It contained the address of someone (it turned out to be her son) living in one of the countries of Aburokyire known as the United States of America. The elderly resident requested me to visit her son and extend her greetings on my return. What she was not aware of was the fact that Germany where I resided was an entirely different country from the US. Not only are the two countries several thousand kilometres apart, the two are also separated by a huge mass of water, known as the Atlantic Ocean.

Indeed, Aburokyire, just as in the case of Abibiman, or Africa, does not consist of a single country but of several different nations. Apart from the two countries I just referred to, other countries of Aburokyire include England (Enyiresi-Aburokyire), France (Frenkye Aburokyire), Portugal (Portugiisi Aburokyie), and so forth.

In the minds of many people at home, the term Aburokyire could as well be interchanged with terms like 'great wealth', 'paradise on earth', 'luxury' and 'enjoyment without end', etc. This thinking, in my opinion, has helped to engrave various illogical presumptions, conclusions, inferences, etc., in the minds of many individuals at home.

I have in the meantime come to realise that what I have just said is true not only of citizens of Ghana but also of those living in several areas of the developing world. The reason why this is so, is something we could better leave for the experts in such matters—sociologists, political scientists, philosophers, or whatever terminologies those who have made it their task to study human behaviour have coined for their areas of research.

If only matters would end there! But no! The false assumption referred to has given rise to further false associations, presumptions, generalisations and whathave-you. One such presumption, in my opinion, has come about because there has been an inclination, false as it is, to import a 'mathematical' supposition— because country A is very wealthy, Mr or Mrs Z living there must be very wealthy as well—into the discussion.

Drawing that conclusion is not only misleading—it is also potentially dangerous. Let's even assume that 99.9% of residents of Country A are indeed wealthy. That could still mean that 0.1% of them have to struggle hard to make ends meet.

There is no question that the countries under consideration are far richer than, for example, a country such as Ghana. The average citizen here is also far wealthier than his or her counterpart in Ghana. It is still true to say that there are a considerable number of natives here who also have to struggle to make ends meet.

Their situation could be even more frustrating: in a society where the great majority are poor, one tends to console oneself with the thought that he or she is not alone in the boiling pot. Not so in a situation when circumstances force one to go by foot in an environment where the majority are riding on bikes!

The contrast becomes even clearer when the average individual who has travelled from a place like Ghana in search of greener pastures abroad is placed side by side with the average resident. If only what I am trying to allude to would penetrate deep into the mind of many a person at home whose relatives have made it here! Only then would they, hopefully, come to the realisation that moving from Tema in Ghana to settle in Hamburg will not turn one rich overnight. Or does

the association stem from the fact that both cities happen to boast harbours? Do persons back home entertaining inflated expectations about their next of kin here imagine that they could, in a fashion, enter a ship in Hamburg and make away with several gold bars piled up in them? Why, then, the need to fly that far to Germany? They might as well try their luck in some of the ships docking at the harbour in Tema!

Unfortunately, many a person at home sees in Aburokyire a kind of paradise on earth, a place where money literally floats on the street! This picture of the western world as a world that abounds in wealth is, unfortunately, so much entrenched in the minds of so many at home that it is difficult to imagine that it could ever be eradicated.

I must admit, however, that prior to my arrival here, I also nurtured that illusion of abundant wealth about life here. Does this attitude have something to do with our colonial past? I think the question does not entirely miss the target! I recall the time when I was growing up at Mpintimpi. On those rare occasions when the vehicle of a person of European descent happened to pass by or even stop in the village to purchase some foodstuff, all the children in the village—including myself—rushed out of our homes and ran after the passing vehicle or surrounded the European who had stopped in the village, and began to cry on top of our voices: “Oburoni koko, kye me kapere; oburoni koko kye me kapere!” (White person, please give me a penny; white person, please give me a penny!)

This idea of the poor Africans beseeching the wealthy and generous European to shower presents on them has not, I suspect, completely deserted some of us. Some have coined the term ‘beggar-mentality’ in regard to the African to describe this curious attitude.

A new aspect of our tendency to look to others for solutions to our problems emerged after citizens from our country began to arrive here. All of a sudden people at home came to regard their relatives and friends as well-to-do’s who were in the position to provide for all their monetary and material needs—thinking, perhaps, that there exists in Aburokyire a magnetic force that helps to draw abundant hard currency into the pockets of whoever lives there; or perhaps that money rains down on residents from the skies, a kind of manna, one might say: they expect their relatives and friends here to grow rich overnight. It is in the light of what I have just said that you might perhaps come to terms with what I am about to narrate.

Not long ago a student arrived here from Ghana on an exchange programme that was to last for about four months. The scholarship attached to the programme was just enough to cover his

boarding and lodging. In the end he hardly had money left for anything else. Barely two weeks after his arrival here the first letter reached him from home. It came from his father:

*Dear son,*

*Greetings from your father. Immediately after your departure I was suddenly taken ill. I need to be sent to hospital for treatment. Unfortunately, no one in the family is in a position to bring up the needed money. You would do well to come to my aid immediately—or you will not see me alive again.*

*The rest of the family extend their greetings.*

*I am your father.*

A second letter followed on the heels of the first. This time it was the turn of one of his nieces:

*Dear uncle,*

*I need to acquire some textbooks. They are very expensive to buy here. [The letter went on to list the books in question.]*

*I will be grateful if you could buy them for me when you return to Ghana.*

*It is me, your niece.*

The third letter to arrive within the first two weeks of his stay in Germany came from his best friend. He wrote to express his thanks to the Almighty for the safe arrival of his best friend on the soil of Europe. After dwelling a while on issues of general interest he went on to ‘business’—

*Please be so kind as to buy me a camera and a walkman when you return to*

*Ghana!*