

# TRIBUTE TO DOKPESI AND THE GAZEBO MYSTIQUE

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**E**zomo Anthony Aleogho Ayaoghena Dokpesi loved the gazebo in his beautiful Abuja residence. It is made of big rafters and roofed with thatch. A gazebo like the one in Dokpesi's vast compound is a small building in a house that affords a wide view of the surrounding areas. He ate suya, groundnut and roasted fish. He drank and relaxed there. He loved choice wines and champagne. The workaholic found great pleasure in unwinding at the gazebo by hosting family members, friends, associates and loved ones there. No one was left

out. He would sing and dance. Sunny Ade's music was his favourite. He would laugh. Nay, guffaw. It was a place for us to taunt and tease each other – me jokingly calling him "my son and my boy whom I paid his school fees, trained and married for with my hard-earned money". Him derisively, but jokingly, telling me "You baga; you bush boy who would shiver before me and could not even dare enter my lush office or room in the 80s". All and everyone present would laugh. We usually cracked their ribs with such nostalgic jokes. So, coming to the gazebo on that June

16, 2023, for "A Night with Ezomo @ The Gazebo", was particularly traumatic for me. I could not dance or sing. I was completely numb. I was transfixed like an insect rendered immobile by some powerful chemicals. So, was it really true the Oghierumhoa of Weppa Wanno Kingdom and Araba of Oshoroland would not get up from somewhere to dance with us. Just anywhere from the shadows? Where was he? I looked around. Imagine for a moment, the scene of a helpless and hapless child looking around for his mother. Dokpesi was nowhere. I broke down. I cried like a baby. Uncontrollably. Publicly. I was inconsolable. I had no shame. Shame? Ha, I conquered it there and then. Reason vacated its seat. Emotions took over. I was broken. Other attendees came to my aid. But not so fast. Some of them equally broke down and joined me in letting out pent-up emotions. Sen Kassim Oyoyo, Lina Okakpu, Mina Horsfall, Barr Ter, Vera Ovhighie and others who were consoling me joined. They themselves wept like babies. Oh death, where is thy sting? You shameless death that wears a hideous monstrous visage, why are you so cruel, so unfeeling? I wiped my tears. I left for my nearby home in distress. Like a rain-beaten chicken. I left the Gazebo Mystique. Then, this write-up was finally triggered when a friend and kinsman based in Atlanta, USA, Alily Akhigbe, sent me the Ezomo's outing and speech during the D A A R Communications 4th Award night in December, 2021. Just one and half years ago! I listened to it. Carefully. He was



speaking as if he were still alive. Powerful. Boisterous. Effervescent. Brutally frank, as ever. Luminous. Bubbling with the "sap of life like a yam tendril in the rainy season", as Chinua Achebe once called it in "Things Fall Apart". He narrated how I rained blows on him physically at a meeting with a consortium of banks at Marina, Lagos, when he had broken down and cried. The government had engineered the banks to take over DAAR over its debts, many of which were not even due for payment. He had wept. He narrated how I descended on him publicly, there and then, raining blows on him, telling him he had committed no crime by borrowing money to run DAAR Communications. He looked at me like a child unto his mother, wiped his eyes and steadied himself for the remaining portion of the meeting. We won at the end of the day. Successive governments never relented in trying to kill his entrepreneurial and political spirit. They all failed. Woefully. I won virtually all his and DAAR's cases up to the Supreme Court. Kanu Agabi, SAN, also led me to defeat the government in the criminal charges of alleged embezzlement of security funds against him. We won at the Federal High Court (Tsoho CJ) and the Court of Appeal. He was completely discharged and acquitted. So, Dokpesi died without any blemish. He was given a clean judicial and moral bill of health by all courts in Nigeria.

Dokpesi's humility which he wore like a second skin was infectious, as he bowed for me, every and anyone at the award night, where I was given the "Legal Icon" award. So, watching this video, I again broke down. Even now, I am still crying. Ha, Ezomo, why? But, why? Adieu. Farewell, Iyokpamhe.

Compatriots, let us not mourn, but celebrate this African Octopoidal septuagenarian; this legend; this colossus. It was Calpurnia, wife of Julius Caesar, in William Shakespeare's Julius Caesar, who, while begging her husband not to venture out on the Ides of March (the day he was later assassinated), made the following memorable speech: "when beggars die, there are no comets seen; the heavens themselves blaze forth the death of Princes". High Chief Anthony Aleogho Dokpesi, OFR, easily fits into this narrative. Surely, in Dokpesi's transition, comets were seen. Because he was a Prince of peace, even the heavens blazed forth his death. He also fits into Julius Caesar's own reply: "cowards die many times before their deaths. The valiant never taste of death but once". I will end this tribute by quoting Mark Anthony in the same Williams Shakespeare's Julius Caesar, when he said of Brutus: "His life was gentle and the elements so mixed in him that nature might stand up and say to the world, "this was a man".

In the words of 1 Corinthians 15:55. "O death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory?" Haruk Murakami (a contemporary Japanese writer) was right when he said, "Death is not the opposite of life, but a part of it". He was probably right, for Aleogho merely transmitted from mortality to immortality.

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Let me tell you how the host of heaven now see Dokpesi. They are in the words of Max Lucado (a Christian preacher and author): "We see a hearse; we think sorrow. We see a grave; we think despair. We hear of a death; we think of a loss. Not so in heaven when heaven sees a breathless body, it sees the vacated cocoon and the liberated butterfly". Thus, Dokpesi vacated his worldly cocoon of mortality and got liberated like a butterfly into God's bosom of immortality. Know ye today that what we owe Dokpesi is not to mourn him, but to keep his memory alive. For, as George Eliot, a famous English author most aptly put it,

"our dead are never dead to us until we have forgotten them". Ezomo Dokpesi, we will never forget you. You will forever live in our hearts. Be happy with the Lord till we meet on resurrection day to part no more. For his very large Ezomo Dokpesi clan that he left behind; his teeming friends, admirers, associates and loved ones across the world, may the good Lord give you the heart and fortitude to bear this irreparable demise of our dear father, brother, friend and compatriot. Adieu Iyokpamhe. Farewell Ikuekhamhe. Goodbye humanist. Okiakhue, Agene 1.



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