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Biafra's forgotten children.

The claim that Gabon's president Ali Bongo is actually Nigerian has shone a spotlight on a subject not many were aware of, that of the children airlifted out of Biafra, and Nigeria, some never to be reunited with their families. Now they are adults.

In his latest book titled Nouvelle Affaires Africaine (New African Affairs), French writer Pierre Péan claims that Gabonese president, Ali Bongo is not actually from Gabon and that he is of Nigerian heritage. He claims that Ali Bongo was adopted from the secessionist state...

of Biafra during the bloody Nigerian Civil War by Omar Bongo, the now deceased previous Gabonese president and father of Ali Bongo.
Pierre Péan's charge led Ali Bongo's opposition to demand a DNA test from the president. Péan also claims that Bongo presented a forged birth...

certificate during the 2009 elections & that the elections were rigged, stating that the real winner was Andre Mba Obame.
Ali Bongo's heritage & background has become a serious issue of contention for some, & has led to protests in Libreville over Bongo's legitimacy as president.

According to the Constitution of Gabon, no one born to foreign parents can be president. It should be clear that these are all unsubstantiated claims. Ali Bongo ascended to the presidency in the 2009 elections, following the death of his father Omar Bongo who was President of...

Gabon for almost 42 years.
The drama of Ali Bongo's background is having an indirect effect. It brought the spotlight on an issue that many people (Nigerians included) aren't aware of: the issue being the transport of children out of Biafra to other African countries during the..

Nigerian Civil war.
(Western coverage of the Nigerian Civil War began a trend in reporting of famines and wars in Africa that we are yet to be

rid of: anonymous half-naked individuals with no voice of their own, weak and emaciated with hollowed-out features, kids with extended...

stomachs, etc.)
As part of the strategy taken against Biafra, Yakubu Gowon and the Nigerian military implemented a blockade that stopped food and medicine getting into Biafra. The Nigerian military government intended to starve Biafra into defeat. The blockade affected the most..

vulnerable: the elderly and children. Thousands of children died from starvation and malnutrition. At one point, an estimated 1,000 children were dying daily. In fact, visages of the war to the world outside of Biafra were images of heavily malnourished and distended bellies of..

kwashiorkor-stricken children. These images created a rallying cry for action and humanitarian relief.
Humanitarian relief efforts from Western Christian groups and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) became paramount for the survival of Biafrans.

Empathetic groups coordinated and worked together to deliver food and medicine to Biafran civilians in an effort to save innocents, risking their own lives in the process. Many were cut down trying to circumvent the blockade enacted by Nigeria.

These were clandestine flights and secret missions taken out in the darkness of night in an effort not to alert the Nigerian military. This was known as the Biafran Airlift.
While it is widely known that these humanitarian missions occurred, what isn't as widely known is that...

many orphans and malnourished children were airlifted out of Biafra to relief camps in various African countries. Most of the children were airlifted to relief camps and feeding centers in Gabon, Ivory Coast, and Sao Tome.

Many Biafran children were nourished back to health in these camps.
Sadly, following the war, the Yakubu Gowon admin did not take the steps to return these children back to their families. It was simply not a priority for the Nigerian govt and their displacement is not discussed.

It's like it never happened. Displacement of the Igbo people from the war in general is not discussed. It's a hot button issue the Nigerian government refuses to acknowledge or address, even today.

Prior to the onset of the civil war, thousands of Igbos were killed in Anti-Igbo Pogroms across Northern Nigeria. Millions more fled, abandoning homes, businesses and employment in order to survive. They were all displaced. This was why Biafra wanted to secede from Nigeria.

The United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees (UNHCR) was able to identify 3,911 children who were airlifted out of Biafra. They were returned to their parents, surviving relatives and foster families in the event that no blood relatives remained.

Despite the herculean efforts by the UNHCR, there are still scores of children unaccounted for. In addition, the identity and complete numbers of children who died in the relief camps, those who were abandoned in their host countries and those

who were too young to identify...

themselves is not actually known. To date, many Igbo families don't know what became of their children or if they even survived.
The US based non-profit group Igbo League has undertaken the task of identifying and, if possible, reuniting these children – who are all adults now –

with their loved ones. The project is known as the Echezona Project. The Echezona Project aims to identify all parties involved in the Biafra Airlift program in order to create a database of all the children taken to relief camps.

Their goal is to cross-examine their compiled database with the UNHCR's database of the children who were returned to their families. In addition, locating burial sites of children who did not survive in the relief camps is also part of the agenda, so that DNA analysis can be...

conducted in order to at least bring some closure to many families.
While the Igbo League is a fine and noble organization, in an ideal world a non-profit should not be leading the movement to reunite these children (now adults) with their families, Nigeria should.

Like many things in Nigeria, the government has failed to address issues affecting its own citizens. Those who don't learn from the mistakes of the past are bound to repeat them. Is Nigeria learning? Will Nigeria remember Biafra's forgotten children?

Probably not in this lifetime. Lest we forget, it was a Nigerian govt that tried to starve them all to death in the first place. Acknowledging the existence of the forgotten Biafran children would mean that the Nigerian govt would have to acknowledge her war crimes as well.

Culled from https://t.co/hfwZCEx08S

End. #Nigeria #NigerianHistory #Biafra #NigeriaBiafraWar #NigerianCivilWar #Igbo #Biafrans