

SOMEWHERE LAST FALL, EARTH WELCOMED ITS EIGHT BILLIONTH HUMAN, MARKING THE LARGEST NUMBER OF OUR SPECIES TO LIVE ON THE PLANET AT ONCE.

1 No one knows exactly the time or place this landmark was reached or who number 8,000,000,000 is.

2 In November the United Nations bestowed the honor on an infant born in Manila, but baby eight billion could have been any one of the roughly 12 million infants born that month around the world.

3 She could've arrived in a hospital in Tokyo, on a farm in Wyoming, or in a bomb shelter in Kyiv. He could've been delivered in a refugee camp in Rwanda, a village in the Amazon, or an isolated town in the Arctic.

4 Number eight billion could even have been Eziaku Kendra Okonkwo, a six-pound girl born in Abuja, Nigeria, on November 12, 2022, the second child of Kenneth and Amara Okonkwo.

5 Nigeria is a reasonable guess since, with 224 million people, it's Africa's most populous country.

6 Thanks in part to modest health-care advances, infant mortality has decreased to 72 deaths per thousand live births and life expectancy has inched up to 53 years (though both

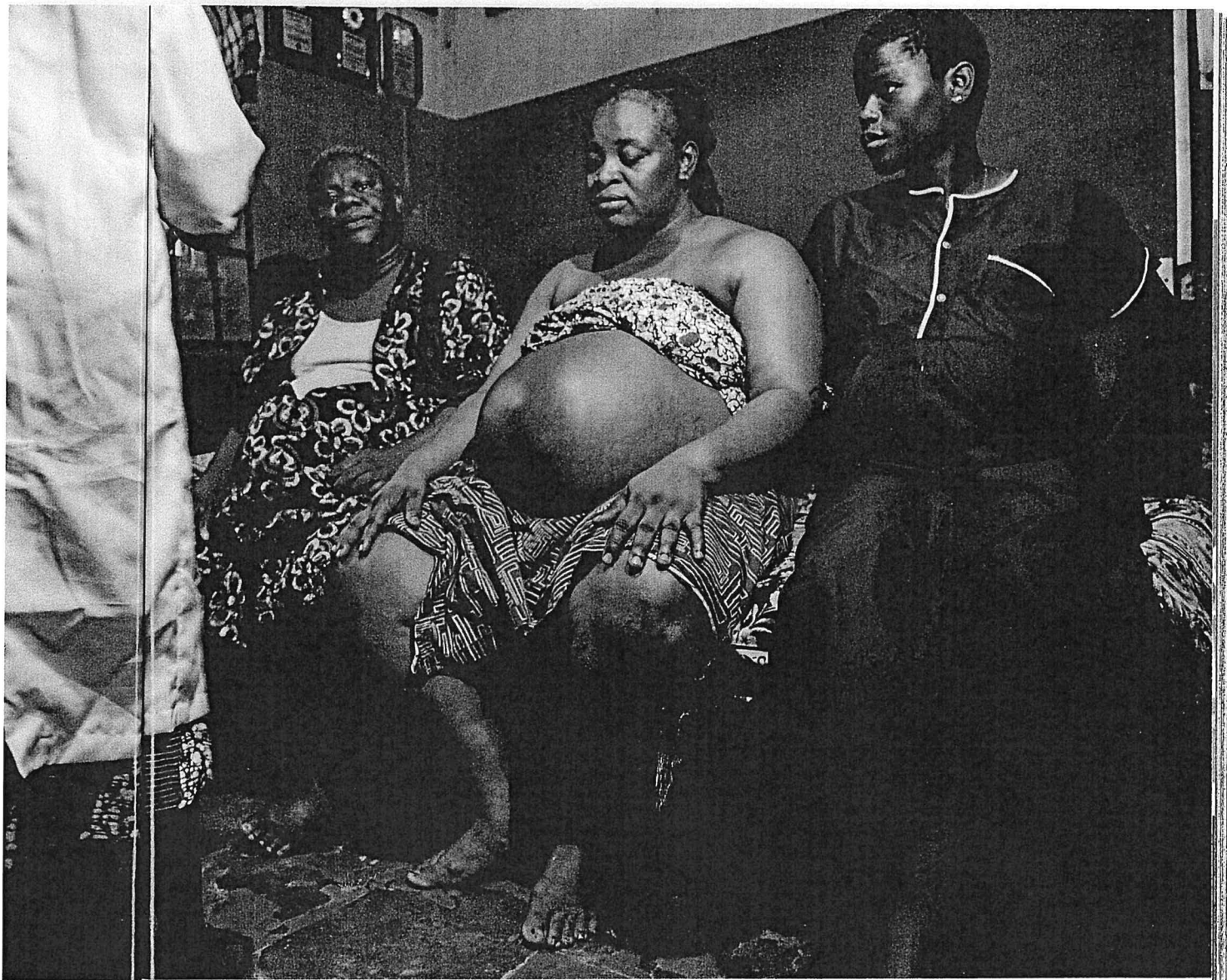


The National Geographic Society, committed to illuminating and protecting the wonder of our world, has funded Explorer Yagazie Emezi's photography in Africa since 2020.
ILLUSTRATION BY JOE MCKENDRY



BIRTHING THE NEXT GENERATION

Expectant mothers wait to see Itoko Ebiere (in lab coat), who's worked as a midwife for 35 years. Though Nigerian health care has seen some improvement, one in 175 mothers still dies in childbirth because of a lack of health facilities and trained medical staff.



these figures still fall far below UN goals).

Those and other factors, combined with traditions favoring large families, have created one of the world's fastest growing populations. By 2050—when Eziaku will be 28 years old—Nigeria, with just about one-tenth the land of the United States, is projected to hold 377 million people, becoming the planet's third most populous nation, just ahead of the U.S. and behind only India and China.

Assuming she stays in Nigeria, what will Eziaku's country look like? One way to visualize it is to imagine every American moving into Texas and Oklahoma and spilling over into the western half of Louisiana. All the Californians and New Yorkers, all the New Englanders, Midwesterners,

and Southerners, along with every man, woman, and child from all the other states, including Hawaii and Alaska—everyone crammed in. Picture it? OK, now add another 39 million people, roughly the population of Canada. All these people will bring their cultural preferences, their politics, and their religious practices. They'll all need food, jobs, transportation, water, sanitation, electricity, health care, schools, and so forth. That's what statistics say Nigeria will look like halfway through the century.

Statistics are crucial for projecting the future, but they're also detached from the human beings they're supposed to represent. So let's look into the future of Nigeria, my home country, through the eyes of Eziaku, who will grow

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