

Dreux Richard, *Every Human Intention: Japan in the New Century*

New York: Pantheon Books, 2021. 419 pages. Hardcover, \$28.00. ISBN 9781101871119.

The first part of *Every Human Intention*, “Diaspora,” opens in a Tokyo love hotel following an encounter between a Nigerian man and a Japanese woman. The former is Prosper Anyalechi, an immigrant whose movements in Tokyo, Sendai, and Lagos thread together the problematics of racism, family, labor, and the law. The latter is an unnamed young woman who presents an ambivalent mix of intrigue and peril for Prosper and the men like him. What might have remained an ordinary, albeit deliberately concealed, interaction assumes greater significance due to its timing—March 11, 2011, the same date as Japan’s tragic triple disaster of an earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear reactor meltdowns at Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. After a call from other hotel guests prompts a police officer to take him into custody, the officer tells Prosper that disasters can make people act foolishly—though he also insists that not all Japanese people are “racial discriminators” (15). The many layers of this moment encapsulate Dreux Richard’s vision for *Every Human Intention*—an in-depth portrayal of intersecting private moments that reveal “Japan’s national character” (8) amid the profound social, demographic, and political changes of the past decade.

Over three distinct storylines, Richard evokes a multifaceted portrait of Japan, where upheaval and transition force people in the country into murky pathways where eventual reprieve from struggle and moral ambiguity remain uncertain. In part 1, “Diaspora,” Richard focuses on a community of Nigerian immigrants, whom he met at detention centers, on the streets in red-light districts, and at African community events. Richard reveals the social and economic circuits that link together visa brokering, non-authorized nightlife work and export businesses, and detention—and their impacts on immigrants themselves and their Japanese spouses and children.

Part 2, “Decline,” traces the contours of depopulation and economic stagnation in Wakkanai, a city in rural Hokkaido. Richard follows the foot traffic of a municipal census-taker; the life story of Steve Tamaki, a man in his sixties who returned to Wakkanai to care for his ill mother after decades of living in California; the construction of a rest home (an elder-care facility) in the town’s new train station; and the perspectives of nursing staff at the rest home. These narratives explain the town’s pragmatic pivot away from its aspirations as tourist destination toward an economy that capitalizes more directly on its aging population. Finally, part 3, “Reform,” enters the meetings and offices of the Japan Atomic Power Company (Genden) and the Nuclear Regulatory Authority to investigate the politics of nuclear safety before and after the 2011 Fukushima nuclear accident. Richard documents the scientific assessments of fault lines and earthquake-proof architecture that preceded the disaster and politicization of scientific expertise amid the process of restarting the nation’s reactors in the years after.

The scope of *Every Human Intention*’s storytelling and depth of detail establish Richard as a reporter who is talented at developing connections and fostering intimacies with interlocutors across a diverse range of communities. As a text for teaching, in my view, the book’s strength lies in the lessons it offers about the craft of writing. Richard translates his interlocutors’ everyday experiences into fleshy scenes while dexterously alternating between his own absence and presence as a narrator. In this way, I see *Every Human Intention* as a helpful guide for teaching the principles of ethnography to undergraduate and graduate students—particularly as a conversation starter about

writing thick description, relationship building, mapping out social networks, and unfolding long and complex storylines.

Yet while *Every Human Intention* models excellence for immersive storytelling and literary nonfiction, as journalistic writing, it deviates from the standards expected for scholarly ethnography. I offer this comment not to reinforce presumed binaries of investigative journalism versus ethnography or literature versus academic research, but rather to parse out aspects of the book that make it problematic to adopt uncritically as an academic resource. Except for the book's introduction and afterword, Richard offers limited commentary about the connections across his three cases.

The book's unannounced shift to rural Hokkaido in "Decline"—after seventeen prior chapters in the world of Tokyo's Nigerian immigrants—is jarring. I kept searching for a clear connection across these very different stories. What I eventually surmised was that Richard wanted these stories to stand on their own as snapshots of the daily negotiations people undertake amid disaster, decline, and marginalization in post-Fukushima Japan. Richard suggests that these stories present a view of Japan that is typically underexplored or unseen. In many respects, his claim holds accuracy. But by omitting annotation and analysis, he obscures the acts of interpretation that all authors engage in when *creating the frame* for their storytelling. Moreover, as he travels across different storylines, the chronology of events sometimes becomes muddled. This problem was especially glaring in "Reform," a section that by virtue of its relatively technical content, needed greater clarity of timeline.

What I found more concerning about Richard's slippage between narrative flourish and analysis, however, was its ethical ramifications. In a particularly troubling moment, Richard alludes to a false accusation of sexual assault levied against Prosper by the unnamed Japanese woman. Richard describes this woman as "young enough" to live with her parents and to "confess what had happened if she came to regret it, but in the version her parents would hear, the role of her consent might diminish" (13). Despite the seriousness of this claim, he offers no further context or explanation—leaving it unclear if the young woman ever voiced such accusation, if Prosper explicitly verbalized his fear of potential accusation, a combination of the two, or if Richard's intention was to evoke a more figurative interpretation, where tropes around consent and veracity stand in as character description.

Along similar lines, by neglecting to comment on gender demographics of Nigerian migration while exclusively focusing on Nigerian men, the text contributes to existing sexualized representations that persist across the globe, including in East Asia—of Black and brown masculinity standing in contradistinction to and in conflict with women's innocence (Bhattacharyya 2009; Cheng 2021). I found myself wondering how differently a queer ethnographer might approach the task of "translating" Japan (8) to their readers. What I suspect is that such a writer might find it impossible to share their insights without explicit recognition of how the ethnographer's social position is irrefutably wedded to the shape of the story itself.

REFERENCES

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