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Working Skin

MAKING LEATHER, MAKING A MULTICULTURAL JAPAN

Joseph D. Hankins

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Texas is an occasional but persistent part of the story this book tells. Much of the rawhide produced in West Texas in the last half of the twentieth century was sent to Japan to be processed into leather there. Chapter 2, “Ushimatsu Left for Texas,” touches on the ways in which Texas has lived in a Buraku' imaginary as a place that values rather than stigmatizes human involvement in meat production. And, finally, I too am from West Texas and have been well served by that romantic imaginary in conducting my research on the leather industry in Japan.

To begin this book I would like to relate a story explaining how I came to this project, an account more personal than a similar examination that happens in the conclusion. My reasons and motivations for engaging in this research are more diffuse, contingent, and motivated than this one story might indicate. However, this story serves as a convenient shorthand to open the central issues of my research.

When I entered my PhD program in anthropology in 2001, I intended to research language use, gender, and sexuality in Japan. In my second year I moved from Chicago to Yokohama for language study and had the good fortune of joining a “Minority Research Group” at the University of Tokyo. Led by sociology professor Fukuoka Yasunori, this group met monthly to discuss the research of graduate students and faculty working on minority-related projects. After a few months, Fukuoka invited me to accompany him and a handful of his students to a leather tannery in Tochigi Prefecture, north of Tokyo, to tour the facility and conduct interviews over a weekend. It was to be a brief study tour of Buraku-related issues. At that time I was aware of Buraku issues. I knew they were a group of stigmatized people in Japan, but I thought of myself as studying something very different. However, one
of my advisers in graduate school, Danilyn Rutherford, had repeatedly stressed the methodological value of accepting all invitations. In that spirit, I headed north with Fukuoka and a handful of his students.

When we arrived at the tannery in Tochigi, we were ushered into the main office to meet with the owner and manager. We went around the room introducing ourselves, and I could sense the curiosity building as my turn approached. Who was this obvious foreigner—white, redheaded, and six foot two—and why was he present? When my turn came, I introduced myself to the group as a graduate student in anthropology from the University of Chicago, and also as a native of Lubbock, Texas. At that point the manager of the tannery stopped me and said, "Lubbock? It's flat and dry and ugly there." While that is arguably the case, I was surprised that these men from a small town north of Tokyo would be at all familiar with an equally sized town in West Texas. I responded, "Well, yes, Lubbock is flat and dry and ugly, but how do you know that?"

It turned out that the majority of the rawhide used at this tannery came, in salted crates, from my hometown, shipped through Los Angeles to Tokyo and then up by train to Tochigi, to be tanned into leather there, 7,000 miles away from where it had started. A small group of the tannery management had traveled to Lubbock several years prior to tour ranches, feedlots, and slaughterhouses in the Texas Panhandle; they knew Lubbock was flat, dry, and ugly because they had been there. I was stunned by this information. Growing up in Lubbock, I had always been aware that the ranching and meat processing industry was large—anyone with a working nose is aware of the cattle, and the ranching heritage center around the corner from my house was a frequent destination on school field trips—but I had not anticipated that parts of the cattle in the feedlots outside my hometown, feedlots where high school friends of mine worked, might end up on the other side of the planet where I too then lived.

I typically narrate this moment as one of epiphany, a paradigm shift for my project: I decided to take contingency as a sign of providence, discard an examination of language use and gender, and instead take up a study of Buraku issues as they connected to global commodity circuits reaching as far back as Lubbock, Texas. "Providencia," however, is a gloss that deserves some unpacking: the ethical and political impulses it encompasses are deeply entangled with the ethical impulses that are part of the subject matter of this book.

Moving to graduate school from living in Seattle, where I had been part of the political protests against the World Trade Organization in 1999 and had worked with AmeriCorps VISTA and an anarchist collective, I had arrived convinced that I should—ethically and politically—be studying something related to myself rather than studying "the Other." Social justice should be less about helping someone less fortunate than about transforming a larger social system that privileges some at the expense of others; understanding one’s own position, particularly for someone relatively privileged, was a means of thinking about issues systematically and dismantling a system that entailed both oppression and privilege. My commitment to this belief, however, was reliant on a version of politics that over-valued individual experience as a primary source of knowledge production. The danger here would be entrapment in direct experience, that is, an insistence that a subject only has the authority to speak about their direct experience and nothing beyond that. As much as this position might grant the silenced a voice, it does so by confining that marked or marginalized voice. For me at the time, this position was more of a reaction against what I saw as anthropology’s (and, more broadly, any unmarked subject position’s) tendency to monopolize the discourse of others, that is, in more vulgar terms, the tendency for white people in the United States to speak for people of color,
straights to speak for queers, or anthropologists to speak for “natives.” My reaction against this tendency was instead to (attempt to) turn the anthropological gaze on myself, but in so doing I had only gotten as far as queer sexuality, still in Japan. What the tannery offered, then, was a way for me to take up an object of investigation that pushed the question of what it meant for me to be related to my object of study, perhaps breaking free of the trap of direct experience. Here was an industry tied to an economy that supported the town where I grew up.

This set of desires to study something “close to home” corresponds broadly with the expanding currency of ethnicity and locatedness that this book tracks but transposed to an unmarked white middle class in the United States—a desire for the unmarked to, in some capacity, mark themselves as regionally and perhaps economically, though rarely racially, rooted. In much the same way that it is currently appealing for my demographic to track our food from farm to table or to partake in the locavore or, more broadly, “locavore” movement, the rawhide connection between Lubbock, Texas, and stigmatized industries in Japan held too much of an appeal for me to pass by. I found myself, as a particular type of anthropological researcher, part of the same shifts in global capital and political representation that have made Buraku issues obtrude as an international political and ethical object of intervention. For reasons similar, they obtruded for me as an object of anthropological investigation.

In this book I do not dwell on this reflexive question from a vantage point of personal experience. I instead offer it as a way of thinking through the conditions that enable and shape my own disciplinary practices. In many ways, this consideration, along with the conclusion that considers at greater length the role a book like this has in Buraku politics, is meant as an explicit response to a challenge that, though decades old, has shaped my work as an anthropologist.

In his 1991 article, “Anthropology and the Savage Slot,” Michel Rolph Trouillot contends that anthropology grew out of a five hundred-year-long political, ethical, and economic process reliant on a notion of progress based across polities in the North Atlantic. The process frequently has its origin in the geographical moniker “the West” but, Trouillot argues, is more productively understood as a project of management and imagination rather than a geographical location. In order to propagate itself, this project of “the West” required both an idea of savagery against which to mark its own progress and an idea of expanded human potential to project a utopic future. Between the late 1800s and 1950, anthropology coalesced as the discipline of the noble savage, placed in a privileged position to deliver unto the project of the West precisely this kind of knowledge—the knowledge of Others, commensurate within the West either as savage signs of the West’s past or as indicators of utopic human possibility toward which that West could aspire. In either case, however, the Other that anthropology examined served primarily as evidence in an argument that the West was having with itself. Anthropology served as a vehicle for this geography of imagination, with little attention, Trouillot argues, to the ways in which it relied on a simultaneous geography of management, that is, with little attention to how these other places and people, frequently taken as bounded, discrete locales, were already connected to a Western project of economic, racial, and military domination of which anthropology was a part. Trouillot’s contention is that while these enabling conditions of anthropology have transformed, the discipline conducts itself as if these conditions were still the case—permanently reinscribing the savage slot and doggedly digging the hole of its own irrelevance. Trouillot leaves his anthropologist readers with a challenge: to break free of the savage slot.

To be sure, the conditions Trouillot describes have shifted. Anthropologists have found renewed public relevance as reporters on the plight of marginalized groups subjected to economic, social, and physical risk. The overtly colonial aspect of the “Western” project, which justified its propulsion with a civilized narrative, has shifted to a more liberal one, which justifies itself with a narrative of attending to those it wounds through misrecognition. These shifts have significant ramifications for how social difference is managed: the status of “wounded,” for example, is very different from that of “savage.” However, a fundamental logic animates both moments: in order for this project to sustain itself, it requires knowledge of those at its margins, knowledge that then is used in the pursuit of perfectibility, or at least self-improvement. As I elaborate throughout this book, the project of liberal modernity finds itself, in part, in the production of suffering subjects to serve as evidence in an argument it is having with itself. Anthropologists, here, are recruited to the role of what the philosopher Richard Rorty calls “agents of love,” tasked with portraying in intricate emotive detail different modes of being human so that liberalism can learn to be not simply more loving but more just. In this second moment, Trouillot’s challenge for anthropology, then, is to disrupt that reiterated logic of the savage slot instead of serving as a conduit by which liberal modernity learns its own limits.
In his article, Trouillot does not offer a resolution to this challenge, other than understanding the specificities of other peoples: to make them a lower-case other rather than reducing them all to the "Other" whose primary life is as evidence in the anthropologist's argument. In his book Global Transformations, however, he offers the beginning of a solution, fundamental to which is understanding how the geography of imagination that an anthropologist might trace is always already connected with a geography of management. He urges anthropologists to perform an anthropology that does not take other people as disconnected, bounded units but that instead demonstrates the connections among the imperatives faced by the anthropologist and the object of anthropological inquiry alike. He pushes, for instance, for an anthropology that would not merely understand bride wealth in Plateau State in comparison to bride wealth in, say, New Britain but that would take as essential to that understanding the fact that Plateau State is located in Nigeria and New Britain in Papua New Guinea, both set within imperial and economic transformations global in scope and intimately tied to the relevance of the anthropological gaze. Such an insistence, Trouillot argues, would challenge the empiricist tendency in anthropology to reduce the object of study to the thing observed; it would show the practices that create that thing. It would also necessitate addressing the epistemological status of the native voice, for anthropologist and "native" are always already interrelated. This is an anthropology that highlights connection or, as the anthropologist and cultural theorist Elizabeth Povinelli puts it, "co-substantiation." In the mode of the suffering slot, then, it is an anthropology that does not merely ask its reader to step into the experience of the wounded but, rather, shows how the lived worlds of the reader and the wounded are already intertwined.

Working Skin is fundamentally inspired by this challenge. This is an ethnography of the contemporary situation of the Buraku people. However, the project proceeds by pulling apart the practices, global in scope, that constitute that situation and render it available, tractable, and even pleasurable as an object of anthropological inquiry. This book is an examination of the labor involved in identifying, dismantling, and reproducing the contemporary Buraku situation; it is also an examination of the labor involved in overcoming this repeated refrain. Ethical orientations and economic relations are being formed and reformed in the tanneries of Tokyo, the offices of human rights workers, and the practices of Western ethnographers, all in ways that are linked together across geographical distance. This labor is part and parcel of transformations in the project of the West that are global in imperus and effect and that sit alongside the transformations in international Buraku recognition and political solvency that are the subject of this book. This is not a book that simply demonstrates that Japan is multicultural. Instead, I analyze how the incitement to multiculturalism disciplines both those who produce representations of social difference in Japan and those who are summoned as evidence in such a project. I show how the demands of liberal modernity arise in the work of Buraku laborers and the governmental and nongovernmental organizations that represent them. This is an attempt to trace the conditions that reproduce the logic of the suffering/savage slot, even as I position my own work within those conditions.

Most broadly, then, Working Skin is an examination of ongoing changes in global capitalism and styles of political representations, that is, in the geographies of management and imagination that, among other things, have enabled practices of anthropology such as my own. The conclusion, as I have said, returns to a more robust examination of the conditions of this book's production and its role in Buraku politics. With this prologue, however, I want to seed questions regarding these enabling conditions. How is it that at the same moment that Buraku issues become a recognizable object of international human rights and multicultural concern they have also become a renewed object of anthropological inquiry? How might radical transformations that are happening in the economic structure of stigmatized industries and nongovernmental political organizations relate to the sudden appearance of international funding for a scholarly project about stigmatized minorities in Japan, even in the midst of a larger decline in funding for "Western" projects that take Japan as their object of study? How is it that both Texan leather and Texan anthropologist ended up at the same tannery north of Tokyo?

I have several aspirations for this book. I hope that it will serve as an analysis of multiculturalism from the inside—of what grants purchase to this mode of producing and managing difference, of what possibilities it opens, and of what it might foreclose. This book is not normative in the sense that it provides a road map to some other alternative, but I do hope that a close read of the practices of multiculturalism and its relation to particular economic imperatives will serve as a useful tool for others to take up in their work toward other social arrangements. This book is the result of several years of working on and thinking about these issues, particularly motivated by a connection to the industries of my hometown. I hope my perspective
and analysis can enter into conversation with other people who struggle for Buraku liberation on a day-to-day basis and who have spent the majority of their lives working on and thinking about these issues. I also hope in doing this that my book might respond to Trouillot's challenge. Trouillot taught me my first class in anthropology in 2001. Shortly after that course ended, he suffered a debilitating set of aneurysms that left him incapacitated until he passed away in 2012. My attention to the savage slot is as personal as is my connection to Texas. This book is meant as a tribute to the challenges Trouillot posed to us in that class and the ways in which they have shaped my work as an ethnographer, scholar, and antiracist.

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the history of caste systems throughout Asia and over the course of his research had made friends with a Dalit (a word meaning "crushed," which refers to outcastes) scholar from India. The Dalit activist had a daughter a bit younger than Satō-san, and he, as did Satō-san’s father, hoped that the children would grow up friends. Satō-san and Sareae did just that. By the time they were fifty, they had visited each other close to thirty times and had co-organized Buraku study and solidarity tours to India. Satō-san had grown up very much thinking that he and Sareae faced a similar kind of discrimination, as Buraku and as Dalit, and that there was a lot each group could learn from the other.

Misato’s father owned a leather tannery in the central city of Himeji. He had inherited this tannery from his father, who had inherited it from his, who had inherited it from his, back four generations. Misato’s parents were heavily involved in the neighborhood liberation movement, and from a young age Misato followed her parents’ example. In Buraku summer camps and liberation classes in school, she developed strong ties with other kids from their Buraku neighborhood. When Misato turned fifteen, however, her father pulled her aside one evening and explained to her that the family was not actually Burakumin. Despite living in a Buraku, despite participating in liberation activities, and despite having worked in a traditional Buraku industry for over four generations, her ancestors were originally, Misato’s father explained, clothiers and had made kimono. Misato was shocked and ashamed, and even twenty years later, still living and working at the tannery, she had not told a single one of her childhood friends that she was not Buraku, for fear of being shunned.

Tanimoto-san was sixty-one years old and had spent the prior five years jumping through four different manual labor jobs in Tokyo, not keeping any of them long because of his temper and his tendency to show up slightly late and inebriated. Out of options and money, he went to the unemployment office and was introduced to a job in a leather tannery. He had never worked in a tannery or a slaughterhouse before but knew that the people who worked there were Burakumin and were supposed to be the lowest of the low. He wanted nothing to do with them or with their dirty, smelly work. However, lacking money, he didn’t have much of a choice and took the tannery job, with its relatively high hourly wage. But he took care not to talk to the other workers. He maintained his distance while working and during breaks, not wanting anyone to think that he was the same as them.

These are not aberrant individual experiences. Each of these anecdotes highlights some aspects of a group of people in contemporary Japan. The word "Burakumin" literally means “people of the neighborhood,” where min refers to “people” and buraku “neighborhood.” It is a euphemism, however, for a group identified by an occupational, a spatial, or a genealogical relation-

ship to historically stigmatized labor such as meat and leather production. It is a group whose members, like the aforementioned Satō-san, sometimes know they are classified as Buraku and in other times, like Yuko, have no idea. It is a contagious category, capable of traveling along any of its defining characteristics: by change of job (e.g., Tanimoto-san’s case), by residence (e.g., Mika and Isamu’s situation), or by marriage (e.g., Yuko and Keisuke’s situation). And it is a categorization that is hard to shake completely once one has contracted it. As the previous examples indicate, it is a category capable of marshaling avoidance, embarrassment, disgust, affiliation, and pride. These strong emotions animate the day-to-day aspects of life, steering decisions about where to live, where to send one’s children to school, whom to date, and where to work.

Recognizing someone as Buraku can be a tricky matter. The stakes are high, the evidence shifting, and not everyone who might be recognized as Buraku understands themselves as Buraku. This is not a form of social difference that consistently calls out physical or linguistic qualities to mark itself, as does race or sex. Instead, it relies on family registries, labor and residential records, family stories, and workplace and neighborhood gossip. Each of these sources of evidence has its own legal and social underpinnings, its own material trappings, its own history, and its own regional idiosyncrasies. Over the past forty years in particular, each of these has shifted as traditionally stigmatized industries such as leather tanning have left Japan for more lucrative shores and family and residential registries have become less publicly accessible and track back fewer generations. With these shifts the number of those unaware of themselves as perceived Buraku has grown, and the ability for anyone to recognize someone as Buraku has diminished. The trick of recognition, then, is not simply being able to marshal evidence that someone is Buraku. It is also getting people like Yuko, Mika, Isamu, and Tanimoto-san to respond to the hail of that identification as much as Satō-san or Misato might. To recognize someone as Buraku, to assert that any individual, family, or neighborhood is stigmatized in this way, means relying on shifting sources of evidence as much as it levies formative expectations on who might be considered Buraku.

There are patterns to recognition. The Japanese government estimates the number of Buraku people at almost 1.2 million; the premier Buraku political organization, the Buraku Liberation League (BLL), estimates that number at close to 3 million. The government only counts people who are residents of Buraku neighborhoods that registered with the government in the latter.
half of the twentieth century, the BLL extrapolates a number from historical records, tracing lineages of "outcastes" from the Tokugawa period. The government's metric is based on residence and sits within imperatives to show that it is proactively addressing Buraku issues, a set of imperatives born, in part, of a long history of political organizing on the part of Buraku organizations. The BLL's standard is one of lineage and residence and sits within the imperatives of liberation, the contours of which have changed over the century of Buraku organizing as the political organization revises its understanding of subjection alongside its solidarity work with, for example, labor movements, ethnic Korean and Chinese political organizations, and international human rights organizations. Inasmuch, then, that recognizing someone as Buraku makes demands of those recognized and the materials used to render judgment, it also has implications for those doing the recognizing. It calls on political, ethical, and economic imperatives and is grounded in the day-to-day activities of people such as government officials and BLL activists whose job it is to produce representations of the Buraku situation in Japan.

This book examines the formative labor of this recognition—its conditions, its demands, and its possibilities. Situated always in between—between those recognizing and those recognized, between people and their ethical commitments and economic dependencies, between a stigmatized people and those objects summoned as evidence of that stigma—recognition is a practice of forging relationships, and it is a practice intimately intertwined with the distribution of psychological and physical well-being, economic vitality, political viability, and ethical obligation. This book examines one particular pattern of recognition, one particular mode of inscribing and managing social difference, which I refer to as "multiculturalism."

Multiculturalism has become a buzzword of sorts in millennial Japan, for state programs and social commentators on Japan alike. In the past decade the Japanese government has made strong efforts to support tabunka kyōsei (multicultural coexistence), a phrase that typically refers to social difference on the basis of citizenship and national status. In 2006 the Ministry of Internal Affairs proposed the "Plan for Tabunka Kyōsei Promotion in Local Communities," and as of April 2010, it reported that 96 percent of prefectoral governments, 100 percent of the governments of specifically targeted cities, and 41 percent of all cities had implemented such a plan for fostering the inclusion of "foreigners." This program does not include those who might already hold Japanese citizenship, such as the Buraku or the indige-
one language, one culture, and one race.”¹¹ These comments, Burgess notes, met with little controversy and received little attention in the mainstream Japanese press. In this context, it is by no means self-evident that Japan is a multicultural nation-state, either in terms of sheer numbers of racial or ethnic others or in terms of how difference is managed in government policy. It is precisely in this context, pitted against a hegemonic discourse of homogeneity, that claims of multiculturalism as both a state of affairs and an aspiration make sense.

In some ways multiculturalism can serve as an avenue for groups such as the Buraku to demand recognition and resources. Describing themselves as one of several minority groups in Japan allows the Buraku to make demands on UN actors and domestic and foreign scholars, for example. In other ways, this new multiculturalism boom reinscribes Buraku invisibility: the government’s tabunka kyōsei programs, which see difference through the lens of national affiliation, leave little room for groups like the Buraku to assert themselves. Indeed, these programs have come about only after the end of a set of laws that directed government funds to registered Buraku neighborhoods and organizations, an end that the government justified in 2002 by declaring that Buraku discrimination was over. Taking advantage of such tabunka programs would take enormous work on the part of Buraku political organizations to rework definitions of difference to include so-called internal minorities like the Buraku or resident Koreans.

In either case, claiming and critically engaging the tools of multiculturalism require disrupting standard patterns of recognition and instating new ones. It takes challenging the established procedures for the management, regulation, support, or neglect of human life and establishing new imperatives in their place. This uphill struggle requires much more labor as the signs that mark people as Buraku become more elusive and the numbers of people unaware that they might be perceived as Buraku grow.¹² The labor to transform the bases of recognition has a reciprocal effect: it simultaneously transforms those who undertake it and those who might be recognized as evidence of difference. In the Buraku situation, the nongovernmental organization (NGO) worker and the tannery worker alike are recast in the struggle to represent a multicultural Japan. As Buraku political organizations attempt to render Buraku issues legible and pressing on national and international stages, they apply themselves to a labor that requires devotion and ethical commitment. That labor also requires particular habits of work, leisure, concern, and intimacy. At the same time, as these actors frame Buraku issues in new contexts, they rely and make demands on those who would appear as Buraku, those with purported connections to labor considered unclean. This tension, between the labor of representation and the labor represented—a tension I refer to throughout the book as “the labor of multiculturalism”—shapes the lives, aspirations, and prospects of those who stand on either side. In these moves, this labor gives shape to a Japan that is modern and multicultural.

**MAKING LEATHER, MAKING A MULTICULTURAL JAPAN**

In the preface I described how a visit to a tannery north of Tokyo that uses rawhide from my hometown in Texas prompted my study of Buraku issues. Following that tour, the sociologist who had organized the event invited me along to a set of oral history interviews he was conducting with Buraku activists and residents in a town in Chiba prefecture, east of Tokyo. Over the next several months, Professor Fukuoka Yasunori and his collaborator, Professor Sakurai Atsushi, generously let me sit in on their interviews, to learn from them and their interviewees, and to ask the occasional question. One pattern to people’s histories immediately became clear: many people from this Buraku neighborhood were raised not knowing that they could be considered Buraku. Furthermore, many of these people, even people active in the local branch of the political movement, had never told their children that they too could be considered Buraku. Here were people potentially marginalized by others but unaware that they belonged to a stigmatized group. Many of the interviewees had been harassed in elementary and middle schools by classmates whose parents had told their children not to play with kids from this Buraku neighborhood. The interviewees faced this harassment thinking that they were facing it alone, with no knowledge that they were connected to a group of people scattered across the archipelago and with a centuries-long history.

This tendency is not limited to the residents of a neighborhood in Chiba. In the ten years since those initial interviews, I have conducted over twenty-eight months of fieldwork, spent a year and a half working as an intern with an international NGO founded by the BLL, the International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism (IMADR), and six months as an apprentice in a small tannery in eastern Tokyo that occasionally uses
rawhide from my hometown in Texas. Across those venues and across the past decade, I have encountered numerous people who, like Yuko in the vignette that opened the chapter, spent many years not knowing that other people perceived them as Buraku. It is a tendency with which the political movement has struggled for the past century, and it is one that is heightened by recent changes.

This widespread tendency, which I found so striking in the early months of my research, highlights a deepening conundrum of the contemporary Buraku situation. Across the same span of time that the genealogical, spatial, and occupational markers that point out people as connected to stigmatized industries have, on the whole, become more elusive and opaque, the imperatives of multiculturalism in Japan have intensified. A multicultural mode of managing difference has become almost given, gaining force as a commonsense rebuttal of the myth of Japanese homogeneity. Buraku political actors, then, find themselves balancing the possibility of renewed traction through multicultural representation even as their constituency is less interested in and less capable of recognizing itself as Buraku.

People like Yuko, Isamu, Mika, and Tanimoto-san, as well as Satō-san and Misato, are all invested, whether they like it or not, in being Buraku. Satō-san and Misato have known themselves as Buraku since they were children, and they have learned to hold that identity with some pride, though Misato now worries that it is not hers to hold. Tanimoto-san, forced to work in a Buraku occupation and therefore potentially thought of as Buraku, does his best to keep that identification at bay. Yuko must deal with being told that she is and always has been from a stigmatized group. Suddenly, whatever she may have learned in school about Buraku issues, or more likely about the Tokugawa period caste system, is supposed to be somehow relevant to her. Similarly, Mika and Isamu must deal with their new status as Buraku, not as something that was there without their knowing all along but as something more recent and, they might hope, more expungeable from their record. As these vignettes indicate, some people actively choose to take up their social positioning, others might seek to disavow it, and still others have no idea of it at all. Faced with this constituency, the political problem for organizations like the BLL becomes, in part, how to cultivate interest and affiliation among a group of people who understand themselves as Buraku in no uniform manner, if they understand themselves as Buraku at all. How might one cultivate volitional individuals equipped with the knowledge, interest, and ethical commitment to choose to hold tightly to this investment?

And how does one do that so such a commitment arrives in the form of authentic choice rather than coercion?

This staging of ethical obligation, authenticity, and volition is not simply directed at a Buraku constituency. Buraku political organizations also seek to transform public perceptions of Buraku and other stigmatized groups. To do so, they must equip that public with both the knowledge and the desire to engage actively with these issues, a task made that much more difficult as the markers that point people out as Buraku become increasingly intangible. The public must be taught to be aware of and concerned by discrimination against a people who are becoming harder to track, and that concern also must appear authentic rather than imposed. This type of work requires a lot from those political activists who undertake it. It requires long hours at work, specialized skills, and substantial financial resources; it requires networks with other NGOs domestically and abroad, and connections to politicians and journalists; and it requires an ethical resolve to continue to labor in the face of increasingly difficult odds. "The labor of multiculturalism" entails all of these potential transformations—of the Buraku constituency, of a broader public, and of those who labor for Buraku liberation. It is the labor directed at securing a Buraku position within multicultural Japan, even as the conditions that capacitate such a position, in some regard, fall apart.

This conundrum sits at the intersection of transformations in global capital and political argument. The changes in each are not coincidental. They both rely on an increasing emphasis on individuals as self-determining. The opening of the Japanese leather market to international trade expresses an increasing prioritization of market exchange among individuals understood as free. Restricted access to family and residential records that now track back fewer generations similarly emphasizes the priority of an individual as self-determining rather than subject to the constraints of family or residence. The turn to multiculturalism requires the cultivation of authentic, volitional individuals empowered to choose their associations. This convergence of transformations serves as the condition of possibility for the problems of the contemporary Buraku situation. At the same time, the labor required to face this conundrum calls on and reworks these conditions: it allows for particular understandings of economic and political shifts as much as it relies on them.

The tension between political argument and economic organization is not the only guise this tension takes. The labor of multiculturalism sits nestled
between the work of representation and work represented. Located in between, it drives the relationship between the two, creating meaningful distinctions and relations across this proposed divide. Such a division occurs in multiple forms, which I explore throughout the book. The economic sits against the political here, as we saw earlier. Similarly, factory labor stands against the labor of NGOs, material labor is pit against an immaterial labor of care, and each side is gendered, the factory labor cast as masculine, the NGO labor cast as feminine. There is also a temporal divide in which Buraku issues might be seen as a holdover from a purported feudal period, standing in contrast to the minority issues of today. On a smaller historical scale, the industrial capitalism of the factory sits against a postindustrial capitalism of the NGO work, and political tactics such as denunciation are felt as anachronistic compared to more recently developed human rights seminars. Similarly, constraint is set up against freedom, the former thought to be characteristic of a feudal past, the latter of a modern present or future.

Different contrastive relations such as these run throughout the contemporary Buraku situation, sometimes mapping neatly onto each other and other times not. These divisions are simultaneously the conditions that capacitate the labor of multiculturalism, and they are divisions called on, accentuated, muted, or transformed by this labor. The relationship across these divides is never given ahead of time; it is not one of neat causality. Rather, in the labor of multiculturalism, the relationship is worked and reworked, granting form and content to that which stands on either side: what counts as economic, masculine, material, anachronistic, or constraining is given shape in this labor. The task of Working Skin is to provide an ethnographic exploration of this tension, in all of its guises, between the making of leather and the making of a multicultural Japan.

HISTORY OF THE BURAKU PRESENT

Working Skin both relies on and enables a particular understanding of the long, intertwining relationships among political and economic forces in the Buraku situation. These forces have been in the making at least since the beginning of the Meiji period (1868) and have undergone significant transformation during that time. These changes have reached a peak in the decades since the late 1970s, in turn radically transforming the stakes of what it means to be Buraku and what it means, for Japan, to have a Buraku minority population.

The Buraku population is managed as a minority group in Japan not simply through techniques of race or ethnicity—though at times these are used—but instead through associations with particular types of labor. As the vignettes that open this chapter indicate, the Buraku population is amorphous beyond any direct lineage back to the senmin (abject classes) of the Tokugawa period. With the promulgation of an edict in 1871 the new Meiji government officially abolished these groups, rendering them, at least on paper, the same as any other beimin, or "commoner." Since then, the contours of this group have grown increasingly blurry, even as the variety in the types of stigmatized jobs across regions within Japan has decreased. Police, street performers, or bamboo artisans, all professions that in parts of Japan were at one time stigmatized, have lost that stigma. Instead, over the past century, leather tanning and meat production have become the gravitational center of this category of person, even as, formally, this group lost both its monopoly on these trades and the economic security that that monopoly provided. That centripetal pull has resulted in Buraku lives characterized not only by economic hardship and social discrimination but also by employment that overlays acute immediate danger, for example, the threat of fingers lost to sharpened blades or skin burned by caustic chemicals, with long-term chronic hazards of breaking physical labor and chemical exposure. It has also left those inheritors of now-peripheral stigmatized trades such as bamboo work less susceptible to both the hazards and the potential joys of being recognized as Buraku.

Working in a stigmatized industry has never been the sole means by which a person might be constituted as Buraku. Living in neighborhoods that housed stigmatized industries, or being related to someone who fell into these categories, likewise rendered someone potentially recognizable as Buraku. The examples at the beginning of this chapter illustrate each of these possibilities: forced to work in a tannery, Tanimoto-san takes great care to guard against being seen as Buraku; Mika and Isamu are refused employment because they, unwittingly, live in a neighborhood stigmatized as Buraku; Keisuke’s family forbids his marriage to Yuko because they believe her family is Buraku. These types of employment, residence, and kin relations subject Buraku people to heightened risks—physically, emotionally, and economically. Managing the hazards of one’s stigma, then, has meant managing one’s occupation, residence, and kinship ties, as much as it has meant...
managing the information and reaction surrounding those relations. Conversely, protecting oneself from the conflagration of this stigma has meant fearing, and resisting, proximity with Buraku people, especially as coworkers, neighbors, and family members.

Since the late 1970s the contours of the Buraku condition have changed dramatically. Occupations such as leather and meat production have steadily decreased in number in Japan, coming to a head in the first decade of the twenty-first century. In 2005 the World Trade Organization (WTO) met in Hong Kong. One of the outcomes of its meeting was the intensification of pressure on the Japanese government to remove domestic regulations protecting commodities associated with the tanning industry. This industry has enjoyed relative immunity to the increasing liberalization of the Japanese economy since the 1960s. Until the late decades of the twentieth century, factories remained small and specialized, foreign workers scarce, and the leather largely domestic. This immunity was in large part due to late 1960s legislation—the Special Measures Law—that aimed to ameliorate the effects of discrimination against this and other stigmatized industries. In 2002 the legislation protecting stigmatized industries expired, leaving the Japanese Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry (METI) amenable to the demands of the WTO in a way that it had not been before. The end of this act also cut funds to Buraku organizations across the country, leaving them less capable of organizing around these issues. Around the same time (2003–5), the Japanese Environment Ministry, in coordination with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, raised standards for wastewater effluvia. These changes, combined with METI’s removal of regulations protecting the leather industry, have dramatically decreased the viability of leather production in Japan.

During the same time period, political and legal shifts in Japan reformed attachments between people and the neighborhoods in which they resided, which made it harder to recognize a person as Buraku by the location of their residence. Concurrently, reforms in family law have reflected and promoted an increased emphasis on the nuclear family, even as public access to government information about family lineage has been restricted. In total, this set of changes—in industrial labor, family residence, and family registration—has radically reconfigured the conditions and hazards that make people recognizable, to others or to themselves, as Buraku. The first Buraku-led political organization, the Suheisha (1922), defined Burakumin primarily by genealogical ties. As of 1997 the BLL granted membership to those who lived in or were raised in a Buraku neighborhood. There is a shift here from genealogy to residence, but in all cases these ties have become harder to ascertain. In more extreme cases, formerly trackable indications have given way to no markers whatsoever, except for the act of labeling itself. It is here that gossip and hearsay gain purchase. These changes perhaps herald the end of residence, kinship, and occupation as primary determinants of Buraku identity, and instead experiences of discrimination, and I would argue, pride, come to serve as the basis for Buraku identity.

With these global and national transformations, the hazards facing Buraku people are undergoing a sea change. For some, the physical dangers of factory work have faded, thereby putting into greater relief the violence of systematic economic hardship, exacerbated by the disappearance of these jobs. For others, however, no longer visibly marked by the scars that come with hazardous factory labor, it suddenly becomes much easier to “pass” as non-Buraku. The possibility of escape from stigma and discrimination opens up before them. Buraku individuals then are presented with dramatically different ways of being Buraku: not visibly marked, they find themselves able to make different decisions about where to send their children to school, where to work, whom to marry, and in what communities to live. While they might still be identifiable as Buraku by their official family registry (koseki) or the location of their ancestral homes (bonseki), these people see the possibility of a life untainted both by the danger of arduous labor and the violence of discrimination. For them, however, this possibility is attainable on one condition: the surrender of their Buraku identity.

That surrender comes at a political cost. At the same time that Japan’s leather industry is liberalizing, Buraku political organizations have met with recent and unprecedented international success. Their founding aim is to eliminate structures of discrimination against Buraku people and thereby dismantle the balancing act that Buraku individuals must navigate—that is, to make it possible to simultaneously live a life free of violence and physical harm and claim a Buraku identity. Indeed, the political organization considers the denial of Buraku identity to Buraku people a form of violence. This balancing act is compounded by the post–Asia-Pacific War ideologies of a homogenous Japan that stress the similarities among Japanese citizens and deny the presence of ethnic, racial, and other minority groups in Japan. BLL strategies in this struggle for Buraku identity are manifold but recently have been channeled into two tracks: first, garner the support of international human rights organizations and mechanisms as a means of putting pressure
on the Japanese government to enact antidiscrimination legislation (something Japan has never had); second, cultivate and celebrate a Buraku cultural identity that would challenge the stigma associated with this category of person. In pressing this agenda, the Buraku liberation movement also creates an image of a multicultural Japan, poised in political and ethical juxtaposition against the image of a homogenous Japan.

Aware of the impending end of special legislation supporting Buraku communities and industries, and aware too that this would herald the end of municipal and national funding, the BLL succeeded in 2002 in having the United Nations introduce a new category of discrimination, "Discrimination Based on Work and Descent." What exactly this discrimination is, how it should be investigated, and how it might be addressed have been topics of heated debate within the United Nations and among affected communities such as the Buraku and the Dalit of South Asia. This category breaks new historical ground in establishing a framework in which the Buraku, defined by labor more than by ethnicity or race, are recognizable as a minority on an international level. This change sets the Buraku firmly on the international stage alongside other minority groups and allows them to enter into discussions, in newfound ways, of discrimination, violence, and subjection with racial, ethnic, indigenous, and gendered groups.

Put differently, labor, as described under "Discrimination Based on Work and Descent," is becoming an identity category. It is becoming recognizable in the same terms as race, ethnicity, and other categories tanged up in the cultural politics of multicultural recognition. As a result, the possibilities for solidarity and for marshaling international support have expanded exponentially, and Buraku political organizations have found new allies in their struggle against systematically being refused marriage, employment, and education, and being vilified in graffiti and on the Internet.

In a similar vein, the BLL has experienced recent successes in mobilizing the category of race to their advantage. In 2005 it helped coordinate the visit to Japan of the UN special rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance. This visit culminated with the release in February 2006 of the first report on the cultural status of minority groups, racism, and xenophobia in Japan. The Buraku feature prominently in this report: their history is charted, their cultural specificity is investigated, and their characteristics are compared and contrasted with the indigenous Ainu, resident Koreans, and Okinawans. This is a more standard multicultural framework, and, working in concert with "Discrimination Based on Work and Descent," it establishes labor as a social category and as a potential indicator of authentic culture, that is, of a bounded group with characteristic patterns of behavior. Forms of leatherwork and meat processing are increasingly claimed as evidence of such a Buraku culture, when requested by UN and other foreign visitors. These UN-level moves—the creation of a new category of discrimination and the release of the special rapporteur on racism's cultural report—are but two of several indications, at many levels domestic and international, of the entrenchment of multicultural recognition in a previously "homogenous" Japan.

As the Buraku have garnered increasing international attention as a labor-based "minority group" among other minorities in Japan, Buraku politics have shifted. A new set of ethical imperatives and new strategies for the management of discrimination and violence have been established, granting content to Japanese multiculturalism. Both individuals and Buraku organizations accept more and more as a matter of course that Buraku difference ought to be recognized and characterized as minority difference, and that other minority groups ought to be accepted and worked with as potential allies. Furthermore, with this entrenchment of multiculturalism, the Buraku group, as a minority, comes to need an authentic and a historically demonstrable cultural center, and those demands for authenticity arrive naturalized under the guise of simply recognizing facts on the ground. These ethical obligations provide an avenue for insisting that Burakumin need not shy away from shameful scars or stigmatized labor. Instead, they can claim those characteristics with pride, to be shown off as they attend festivals highlighting traditional Buraku culinary forays into intestinal soup or artisanal showcasings of drum-making and cobblerly, alongside corresponding Korean and Ainu displays. These strategies for dismantling structural discrimination and ameliorating attendant psychological violence are both indicative of a new moment for the Buraku liberation movement and productive of new possibilities for the elimination of structural subjection. However, their effectiveness hinges precisely on a set of dangerous labor practices that are now disappearing.

Taken together, these two interrelated sets of changes—in the contours of the Buraku people and in their political representation—are giving new shape to the stakes of the contemporary Buraku moment. The vitality of transnational categories of discrimination, the well-being of individuals and groups, and the cultural capital commanded by modern, liberal nation-states
are all affected by this tension between the increased solvency of political argument regarding labor and the waning presence of such stigmatized labor. On a first level, as signs of being Buraku fall away from Buraku individuals, discursive norms and legal codes on both the international and national levels hang in the balance. The work of Buraku political organizations, the possibilities of national antidiscrimination legislation, and the efficacy of solidarity movements all consist in the changing movements and aspirations of Buraku subjects. Similarly, the categories of race, caste, and culture are all made and remade in the daily actions and political movements of Buraku people.

On a second level, people themselves—whether they are leather workers or political organizers (Miaka, Tanimoto-san, or Sarō-san)—are placed at risk within these global transformations. The ability of leather workers to care for and support themselves and each other frequently relies on jobs that bring to them and their families the risk of physical harm and unwanted social pressures. In turn, Buraku political organizations rely on the workers to perform these jobs as a sign of culture, and at the same time they hope to enact legislation that might alleviate the economic and social woes accompanying such occupations. The financial stability and ethical fulfillment of these political organizations and their ability to employ their workers depend on their capacity to do this work effectively.

On a third level, the status of Japan as a multicultural nation-state also hangs in the balance. The work involved in asserting Japan’s multicultural status requires that Buraku political actors produce signs of a Buraku minority meant to sway national and international actors and to fulfill what they see as their own ethical commitments. In doing this, those actors create the grounds for international audiences such as the United Nations, foreign scholars and activists, and funding agencies to recognize Japan as a nation-state equipped with the trappings of multiculturalism. These framings group Buraku people both alongside other “minorities” in Japan, for example, resident Koreans, Okinawans, or the Ainu, and alongside other groups internationally, for example, the Dalit of South Asia, the “caste” people of Kenya, or caste workers in Yemen. Inasmuch as these groupings introduce new (and perhaps contrasting) obligations of similarity and solidarity, they also characterize Japan as a multicultural nation of a kind with other multicultural nations. The currency of this multicultural status depends on the production of convincing representations of groups like the Buraku as minority populations.

WORKING SKIN uses “the labor of multiculturalism” to understand these broad-ranging stakes across individuals, organizations, and governments. Focusing on the interaction of the circulation of political argument with economic transformation, I investigate the distributions of care, vulnerability, trepidation, shame, and pride that characterize the current Buraku situation. I do this in the hope of showing how multicultural disciplines and dominates the lives of people both at the margins and at the center of the nation-state, and in examining this, I perhaps provide fodder for alternatives.

THE LABOR OF MULTICULTURALISM

My argument about “the labor of multiculturalism” unfolds in this book across three thematic sections. These sections are meant to build a set of interlocking arguments, namely: (1) that the labor required to produce convincing signs—whether they are arguments, cultural artifacts, moral judgments, or even types of people—always has a reciprocal effect of transforming those who labor; (2) that multicultural recognition is a particular liberal mode of governing social difference centered on a staged tension between freedom and obligation; and (3) that globalization can be productively understood through the embodied practices that allow for movement and commensuration across arenas of action. Each of the sections examines a particular moment in the labor of multiculturalism—from the concrete work of the tannery and NGO, to the political strategizing in domestic arenas, to the labor required to produce an internationally recognizable minority group commensurate with other groups around the world. My first argument serves as the basis for the following two. The global circulation of styles of political argument and economic forms is a product of human labor that renders such arguments and forms meaningful and powerful in context.

LABOR AND THE WILLFULNESS OF THINGS

The premise of my investigation is simple: the production of convincing signs—whether they are arguments, cultural artifacts, moral judgments, or even types of people—takes labor, and that labor transforms its object and subject alike. I place particular emphasis on the form that labor takes. In order to make money, Tanimoto-san is placed in a position where he must
apply himself to tanning leather under factory conditions. He moves raw
skins from pallet to barrels filled with tanning chemicals and back out. He
must chart the path of the skins, keeping track of the timing along the way.
Over time he develops an eye for how the skins are oriented, and his body
acquires a muscle memory, allowing him to grab the tail end of the skins and
slang them with more and more fluidity. He becomes more familiar with re-
cording times and gains an intuition for how long is too long for a skin to sit
in a chromium bath, calibrated against the temperature of the day. This dis-
ciplined labor, this work, leaves marks on his body. Particular muscles and
abilities are emphasized and developed while others are not required for the
tasks at all. Furthermore, he risks losing a finger or splashing caustic chemi-
cals into his eyes, as well as other hazards such as the long-term effects of
exposure to known carcinogens. Commuting to and from the tannery, ven-
turing out into surrounding neighborhoods for lunch, he travels paths that
could indicate to onlookers his status as stigmatized. Beyond his body
proper, working at a leather factory leaves traces on his record of employ-
ment, which might enable other people to track him as Buraku, and it also rewrites
his relationships with these others. As he makes leather, Tanimoto-san
transforms himself, but not necessarily under conditions of his choosing
and not always in ways of which he is immediately aware or initially inten-
ted.

This process is not limited to the immediately concrete task of producing
leather. Buraku political organizations such as IMADR are concerned with
creating signs of the presence and vulnerability of minority populations in
Japan. They maintain networks with these different populations, track their
numbers and instances of discrimination, and generate reports to the Japan-
ese government, to UN representatives, and to the Japanese public. In
order to do so they must become familiar with interviewing techniques, de-
velop writing skills for multiple audiences and language skills beyond Japanese,
and potentially sit long hours at a computer or spend sleepless nights franti-
cally preparing for a press conference, worrying that they might not be doing
quite enough to combat discrimination. In so doing they transform their
skill sets and their bodily habits, exercise and cultivate an ethical orienta-
tion, and render themselves recognizable to people in other positions, for
example, a UN special rapporteur, as NGO workers. Again, like Tanimoto-
san, the IMADR employee transforms herself in the work of representing
minority groups in Japan, also not always under conditions of her own
choosing and not always in ways of which she is immediately aware or ini-
tially intended. Each of these laborers sets out to make a particular thing,
whether it is leather or a description of Buraku discrimination, and in the
process they make themselves. The transformative power of labor in these
two examples, which I explore in greater detail in chapter 1, is not limited to
the making of individuals. Through the actions of its workers, IMADR
itself becomes recognizable as a kind of organization; likewise, the tannery
becomes evidence of a Buraku minority or Japan becomes a multicultural
nation-state.

My approach to labor here, which undergirds my analysis throughout the
book and which I elaborate on in much more detail in chapters 1 and 2,
speaks to two divergent strands within social theory that examine the pro-
ductivity of human action. On the one hand, I draw from insights of the
performance theory and linguistic anthropology, that language use accom-
plishes things in the world, only one of which is conveying referential con-
tent. Consider the distinction between the person who offers an “excuse me”
as they accidentally bump into you on the bus and the person who shoves by
with a gruff “get out of my way.” The first is legible as polite, the second as
rude. In using language, constructed under conditions not of their choosing,
people make and remake themselves, transforming their relations with other
people and qualitatively building who they are. This insight need not be lim-
ited to language use; indeed, that such alone might be enough to signal that
the shover is rude, though perhaps less rude than the one who combines the
shove with the gruff command. Throughout this book I pay close attention
to differences in the specific tools that actors use to create things and through
which they transform themselves.

Here I speak to a different lineage of social theory, that of the study of
value in conversation with the work of Marx. Marx masterfully demon-
strates the transformative powers of human labor, its sensuous material force,
and its relation to social relations, using capitalism as his analytic crucible.
He distinguishes humans from other animals in their capacity to envision in
advance a product they seek to create. His canonical example here is the ar-
chitect and the bee, with the architect first setting out a design of a building
and then working to produce it, and the bee simply working and in the pro-
cess of that work creating a hive.27 However, humans produce more than
simply the object they seek to create. As we have seen, they also produce
themselves, embedded in a web of relations with others. In laboring, in estab-
lishing a durative relationship with an object, they also create something

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products of human action, guide and shape the labor, bolster some forms of labor into habituated conduct, shove others into occasional contingency, and outright preclude other forms altogether. Chapter 1, "Of Skins and Workers," examines the labor on the part of the NGO and tannery workers that goes into producing convincing signs of being Buraku. Chapter 2, "Ushimatsu Left for Texas," serves as a counterpoint, examining the political and social life of the nonproduction of such signs, with a particular focus on how stigma constrains and allows forms of life—particularly realized in relations of kin, space, and occupation—for people who pass much of their lives unrecognized as Buraku.

The Governance of Multiculturalism

The 1871 promulgation of what would come to be known as the Emancipation Edict abolished formal distinctions between the "abject classes" (senmin) of society and "commoners" (heimin). In so doing, it liberated the senmin from their status as abject, from the restrictions on their clothing and use of public space, from their tax-exempt status, and from their occupational designations (and security). This formal dismantling of social hierarchy, then, was a trade-off: the erstwhile senmin achieved formal equality as citizens with an attendant loss of economic security. Despite this formal assertion of equality, however, the problem of their difference persisted. In some places, rather than being designated as heimin in family and residential records, these people were marked as shin-heimin (new commoners), or kyū-eta (former eta, one of the "abject classes"), and were still tracked as different. Similarly, while the law abolished formal distinctions, social norms and mores were slower to change, on the part of erstwhile senmin and nonabject people alike. This group difference persisted alongside the promulgation of a formal, legal principle of individual equality, seeding one of the foundational tensions of the liberal, modern nation-state.

Historian Kurokawa Midori traces this tension between the principle of equality and the politics of difference through Buraku political history in her 1999 book, *Ika to Dōka no Aida: Hisabetsu Buraku Ninshiki no Kiseki (Between Dissimilation and Assimilation: The Trajectory of Buraku Recognition)*. She demonstrates how the management of Buraku difference informed the development of modern citizenship, with particular attention to how that management is complicated by the ambiguities of the Buraku category. She points out that while this tension has been part of Buraku history...
since the Meiji restoration, it, in line with the history I traced earlier, has become particularly infected by identity and cultural authenticity since the 1980s. It is in these decades that the tension in rights, between equality and difference, takes on cultural stakes. Not only, then, can recognition potentially fail, but its failure can constitute a blow to one’s own authentic self, striking, as the political theorist Charles Taylor puts it, a “grievous wound.”

Multiculturalism is a form of governance that aims to ameliorate these wounds. It seeks to provide to groups cast as different the recognition they seem to properly deserve. This governance consists of disposing of the relationships among people and things in a manner deemed correct and ethical. This is the formative labor I examine. It involves the distribution of resources, but it is framed in terms of recognition. Part of the quandary of multiculturalism, as inheritor of this tension between difference and equality, is to ever maintain a respect for individual authenticity even while working to shape groups—in the case of minorities, into recognizable populations centered on an authentic cultural core; in the case of the nation, into a collective where citizens are concerned by those wounded by misrecognition or exclusion and choose to work to ameliorate those wounds. This tension, between freedom and obligation, runs through Buraku politics as its leaders seek to cultivate a constituency able and willing to recognize itself as Buraku as well as a broader public that is attentive to and actively working against discrimination. In these political tasks, they must cultivate authentic individuals whose desires and ethical commitments must appear to stand prior to any such cultivation.

Across the book I work through specifics of the Buraku situation to portray the tracity of multiculturalism in Japan; here, let me provide a quick gloss. In Japan, multiculturalism has arisen as a tool in a struggle against the specter of homogeneity that has haunted Japan since the Asia-Pacific War. It consists of a cultural politics organized around two related tensions: one, that between social relations that are read as constraint and social relations that are read as freedom; and two, that between individual equality and group specificity. Multiculturalism recognizes groups that can demonstrate both a cultural core and social harm. Multiculturalism demands vigilance. To be properly multicultural requires being on the lookout for new groups to recruit to the list, and always anxious that some groups are left out. It is a never-ending process, perpetually looking for another group whose wounds will be assessed and remedied. In short, it main-

In looking for these groups, however, this vigilance rarely examines the group cast as the norm, the forces that regulate and police the boundaries and habits of that default group, instead looking to those positioned on the margins. Building from my argument about labor, I contend that multiculturalism, as a historical technique of managing social difference, disciplines and transforms the groups it includes as much as it might the groups that it excludes.

My approach here complements and diverges from the preexisting literature on minorities in Japan. Over the past three decades, there has been a noticeable increase in English-language literature on minority populations in Japan. Much of this work voices the projects in terms of shattering the myth of Japanese homogeneity. As I asserted previously, the idea of Japan as being an ethnically homogenous nation-state only gained institutional purchase following the war, amidst postwar assertions of Japanese-ness. The project of resistance inherent in the majority of the work on minorities in Japan can only make sense in this historical and social context. The literature on minorities in Japan, however, tends to elide its historical conditions of possibility and to assume an ahistorical fixity in their object of argument, that is, “minorities.” Sociologist John Lie even goes so far as to assert that “Japan has always been multiethnic.” In these analyses, there is little attention paid to why it is possible or even necessary now to explain difference in Japan in terms of serial, distinct, and equilibrated (and arguably homogenized) minority groups; how culture and woundedness, with its attendant sympathetic attention, has become the standard of minority authenticity; or how an additive model of identity, or “multiple discriminations,” can be seen as an appropriate analytic for people who “belong” to several different minority categories simultaneously. In fact, the naturalized analysis of this minority literature perforce precludes an examination of the enabling historical conditions of its own categories of thought, and in so doing renders itself incapable of, and disinterested in, analyzing the effects of this particular conceptualization of difference.

This academic literature is clearly and instructively parallel to changes within Buraku political argument. As the Buraku political movement experiences greater levels of success in obtaining recognition on an international level, it does not merely create new political, ethical, and material conditions for the Buraku people or for those who work in its name. It also creates a narrative of the Japanese nation-state as a multicultural one. International
recognition of the Buraku minority, either through categories of race, ethnicity, or class, or newer categories of labor, enables the recognition of Japan as multicultural. This situation is partially ironic. As my conclusion elaborates in more detail, in these political venues, the Buraku people are being reconstituted not simply as a source of shame but instead as evidence of the status of Japan as a modern and multicultural nation-state. Recent academic literature reliant on a definition of multiculturalism based on the serial arrangement and recognition of minority identity is as much a symptom of this shift as it is an analysis of it. It creates it even as it reflects on it.

The stated objective of the BLL is to liberate the Buraku subject, that is, to stage an engagement with Buraku identity as an individual choice: a Buraku person should be able to choose how to make being Buraku relevant to their own life, relieved of the threat of discrimination or labor hazards. Key to this process of staging liberation is an understanding of how the essence of Buraku is located. Chapter 3, “Locating the Buraku,” examines the primacy of ties of kinship, occupation, and residence in determining who is Buraku and who knows themselves as such, the way those ties have changed over time, and how these ties distinguish Buraku stigma from racial stigma. I elaborate on this argument by looking at two forces affecting the locations of Buraku: an environmental critique of Buraku industries that furthers their disappearance and the spatial marginalization of Buraku communities, and a private detective industry that attempts to capture those fading signs for paying clients. I trace the conflicting ethical orientations at the heart of this struggle for a Buraku subject choosing to be such. Chapter 4, “A Sleeping Public,” shifts the emphasis to Buraku political strategies for a concerned public composed of individuals who choose to be attentive in a clearly delineated manner. Two tactics in this process are the “denunciation session,” a public verbal shaming of those who discriminate against Buraku people, and the “human rights seminar,” a public forum organized to advertise and discuss the importance of human rights and respect for minorities. Tracing out the connections between these two forms of politics, I show how multiculturalism and human rights, as abstract universal ideals, are made and remade in concrete settings.

Movement, Solidarity, Sympathy

In 2006 a small group of Japanese sanitation workers and Buraku activists traveled from Tokyo to Chennai, India, to meet with a group it saw as a po-
Part of “the labor of multiculturalism” is the laying of this foundation of movement. Over the past decades, there has been a tremendous amount of scholarship arguing that contemporary globalization is marked by an increased rate and prevalence of circulation and exchange, and anthropologists have increasingly turned their attention to the problematics of transnational circulation, how to understand the long-standing analytical bifurcation between economy and culture, and how to think about boundaries within a globalized framework. In the midst of this profusion of academic literature, the materialist, pragmatic bent of “the labor of multiculturalism” offers a concrete methodology to think about movement and its codification into more systematic circulation. Attending specifically to the movement of discursive activity, recent scholars of linguistic anthropology have cautioned against the temptation to view the movement of a text as a simple matter of production, transmission, and reception, arguing that such a line of thought tends to reify both text and context. Instead, they pursue an alternative line of inquiry that is attentive to how actors frame one text as related to another. As linguistic anthropologist Susan Gal argues, what we perceive as movement is “more precisely a repetition or imitation of forms that are framed, reflectively and in retrospect, as being the same thing again” or as instantiations of an ideal, a genre: a sonnet, a wedding. In this model, the movement of ideas, words, or organizational forms can be understood as the outcome of activity that frames discursive events as repetition or instantiation.

The work of Marx provides a strong reminder that these insights need not be left to the negotiation of discursive signification alone. Gal's analysis of circulation focuses solely on the movement of what she calls “discursive activity.” Her argument rests on an initial separation of such discursive activity from other such things as people and objects: “Persons may circulate by moving bodily from place to place, as at a party or in migration. Objects may circulate by being moved or exchanged from person to person, as gift, commodity or entitlement. But signs, messages and practices—discursive activity—only seem to move in this way.” Having singled out discursive activity, Gal then proceeds to develop the argument that the circulation of discursive activity is always an achievement that requires semiotic labor. I contend, however, that similar commensurating labor is as necessary in the case of people and objects as it is in the case of discursive activity, and her analysis of linguistic phenomena is equally instructive when it comes to people and objects. In moving, people engage in different types of activity, creating themselves and being interpreted in newfound ways.

The final two chapters of this book examine transnational solidarity projects as a way of ethnographically grounding and developing this argument about the movement of people, words, and things across national, economic, and racial boundaries. In particular I focus on solidarity as a project of cultivating sympathy: a feeling with rather than a feeling for. I investigate the standards that allow for the Buraku to feel alongside the Dalit and, likewise, the abstract ideals called on as UN representatives and other actors at a distance respond to the Buraku situation with concern or anger. In these projects, such standards are asserted, questioned, and refashioned. At times they are even placed in jeopardy. My approach provides an immanent view of social structures and institutions created in movement. Rather than bifurcating social life between a macro plane of broad significance, such as capitalism, bureaucracy, or neoliberalism, and a micro plane of interaction, I argue that such scales of social life are themselves products of the framing labor of creating texts and contexts, an orientation that crucially guides the methodological orientation of this book.

Across these three interlocking sections of the book, I slowly build my analysis of “the labor of multiculturalism.” As an analytical insight, “the labor of multiculturalism” frames changes in the category of labor over the past three decades. As a methodological entry point, “the labor of multiculturalism” directs one's attention to the material and symbolic processes through which categories of identity, convincing political arguments, and ethical commitments are simultaneously codified and vivified. As an ensemble, “the labor of multiculturalism” serves as a practice-focused intervention for understanding how changes in global circulations of capital intersect with circulations of political mobilization to create and mitigate the possibilities and risks of the contemporary Buraku situation.

The experiences, anxieties, and desires of people like Mika, Yuko, Tanimoto-san, or even Satō-san and Misako are not aberrant. Nor are the experiences and political and ethical priorities of the IMADR NGO worker, the BLL activist, the UN representative, or the foreign researcher. All of these orientations, grounded and material in lived lives, are tied to each other across borders that traverse bodies, neighborhoods, and nations. The ethical and affective orientations spanning these lives are tied to each other, at times delicately and at times robustly, in a transnational web that constitutes...
contemporary Buraku issues. *Working Skin* traverses that web, delving into the lives of people who live as Buraku and people who work in the name of Buraku, and shows how, as they work through the dual skins of leather and multiculturalism, they grant force to categories of life and difference, with transformative effects for themselves, for their communities, for Japan, and beyond.

**PART ONE**

**Recognizing Buraku Difference**