# A Hip-Hop Introduction to Other Japans

> There's something I want people to understand. We are the way we are now,
> and did the things we did as teenagers because we've lived such messed-up lives.
> —Koki Mizutani, personal communication, 30 July 2009

*24 Bars to Kill* is about hip-hop performance by musicians from low-income neighborhoods in Osaka, Kyoto, and other areas in Japan's Kansai region, a distinctively working-class subculture with origins in aspects of Japanese society that are rarely visible to outside observers. I interpret this genre as an exhortation to lower-class youths to persist in realizing their goals, as a means for a select few of them to achieve their aspirations, and as a purposeful effort to represent Japan from marginal perspectives. Anarchy and Shingo Nishinari are two of the most accomplished performers of the style of Japanese hip hop that I call "ghetto/gangsta," a term inspired by the prominence of these keywords in the musicians' lyrics and everyday conversations. In common parlance this genre might be referred to as "hardcore" (*hādo koa*), a term rooted in the appeal of punk and hardcore rock to Japanese fans during the 1980s and 1990s. "Hardcore" is descriptive of ghetto/gangsta hip hop, yet it says nothing about Koki's concern in the epigraph: the experiences of stigmatization that have physically, emotionally, and aesthetically hardened the musicians, their peers, and their earliest fans. My intent in adopting the term "ghetto/gangsta" is not only to emphasize how frequently the two words appear in the lyrics of Kansai hip-hop musicians, but also to identify ghettos as places where gangstas are ubiquitous, and to suggest that becoming gangsta can represent individual agency in response to experiences of poverty and stigmatization. Proper understanding of the cachet that either term affords MCs requires that we consider the two terms in combination as different aspects of the same

phenomenon whereby members of marginalized populations in Japan claim hip hop as their own.

Anarchy grew up in Mukaijima Nyūtaun, a municipal housing project in southern Kyoto city's Fushimi ward.[1] These structures are monumental in comparison to their immediate surroundings and equivalent in scale to the largest structures in central Kyoto, with the exceptions of Kyoto Station and Kyoto Tower. Anarchy and his peers sometimes refer to their neighborhood as "MJ ghetto," an abbreviation of "Mukaijima ghetto." In "Home Sweet Home," Anarchy (2006b) raps about his home neighborhood with a mixture of affection, irony, despair, and pride in his professional accomplishments and his ability to bring the stories he tells to life. Shingo Nishinari is from Nishinari ward, a district in southern Osaka that is synonymous with illegal activities, poverty, day laborers, and labor activism. In "Ill Nishinari Blues" (Shingo Nishinari 2007) he raps about the neighborhood's illegal gambling dens and then launches a diatribe against the naivete of visitors who travel to Nishinari in the spirit of tourism.[2] In the simplest terms, this book examines narratives of Japan's "abandoned peoples" or *hōchimin* (放置民), a term of Shingo's coinage that refers to a number of populations occupying Japan's social margins. At the center of my analysis is the seeming paradox whereby these musicians succeed despite, but also partly because of, their humble origins.

These MCs' (rappers') lyrics depict in vivid detail the lives of the unemployed and the underemployed, the homeless, members of single-parent families, latchkey children, juvenile delinquents (*yankii*, *bōsōzoku*), ex-convicts, drug dealers, amphetamine addicts, day laborers, habitual gamblers, ethnic Koreans (Zainichi), gangsters (Yakuza), and descendants of hereditary outcastes (Burakumin). All of these figures are marginal from the perspective of mainstream Japanese, and all are disproportionately present in the Kansai hip-hop scene. Shingo's and Anarchy's biographies and performance practices differ in meaningful ways, but both MCs advertise their roots in low-income urban neighborhoods while expressing ambivalence toward their hometowns and the Japanese nation. Both musicians demonstrate the class consciousness apparent in "Home Sweet Home" and "Ill Nishinari Blues," and both originated from cities in western Japan's Kansai region, an area centered on a metropolis that encompasses the cities of Otsu, Kyoto, Osaka, Kobe, and Nara. Compared to the greater Tokyo metropolitan area, Kansai is smaller and can be thought of as a relative backwater of Japanese hip-hop culture and performance. Despite these obstacles, Shingo and Anarchy have achieved nationwide recognition among Japanese hip-hop fans and, in Anarchy's case, a degree of international exposure. Today Anarchy continues to expand his international fan base, and Shingo performs nationwide while remaining devoted to the slums where he grew up.

The song title "24 Bars to Kill" (R-Rated Records 2010) conveys the sense of urgency that aspiring performers from Japan's social margins feel, knowing

that they may have only one meaningful chance to prove themselves. American music producer Ski Beatz, composer of "24 Bars to Kill," granted permission for free and open use of this track to MCs from around Japan, many of whom have subsequently dubbed their own vocals onto it. Ghetto/gangsta MCs who succeed in "killing" twenty-four bars of 4/4 meter, the equivalent of about one minute in the main stage spotlight, begin to earn a reputation among their colleagues and then among an initial following of fans who grew up under similarly marginal circumstances. The most successful performers find ways to use the stigma associated with the terms "ghetto" and "gangsta" in ways that maximize personal and group gain.

Anarchy in particular has accrued an especially impressive list of career accomplishments. His promotional video for "Fate" (2008c), filmed in and around the Mukaijima projects, received nationwide acclaim in 2009 when it won the Space Shower Music Award for Best Hip-Hop Video. Based on anonymous online voting, these awards are benchmarks of popular opinion among Japanese hip-hop fans in Japan and elsewhere. Although we can never know the true identities or locations of individual or aggregate respondents, it is unlikely that Anarchy's video earned first place based solely on the support of hip-hop fans who grew up under similarly disadvantaged circumstances. Anarchy's other notable achievements include a cameo role as a street gang leader in *Tokyo Tribe* (2014), the big screen adaptation of the popular manga *Tokyo Tribes*, and regular appearances in *High & Low*, a late night serial drama about Japanese street gangs broadcast nationwide by Nippon Television Network. Anarchy attained premier status among Japanese hip-hop performers following the release of *New Yankee* in 2014, his first major-label recording with Cloud 9 Clique, a subsidiary of Avex Group, a business conglomerate (*zaibatsu*) headquartered in Tokyo. In 2016, he released *BLKFLG* [Black Flag], his second recording with Avex.

Shingo's relatively modest list of accomplishments reflects his easygoing personality and his steadfast commitment to his hometown. In 2009 he was featured in a television documentary on Nishinari ward and his life and performance, which was broadcasted nationwide during the nearly prime-time viewing hours of 4:00 to 4:30 on a weekday afternoon.[3] A large photograph of his smiling face, captioned "Don't give up" (*makenai*), adorns a public service billboard attached to the upper stories of a building located nearby Nishinari ward's central police station. This large, fortress-like structure was built in the 1990s in response to ongoing labor unrest (Gill 2001: 95), whereas Shingo's billboard advertises alternative sources of authority that stand in contradistinction to those of the police and the municipality. Shingo regularly volunteers at soup kitchens in the day laborers' neighborhood near where he grew up, and he is famous in his hometown as a local celebrity, neighborhood boss, and champion of the downtrodden. Nearly ten years older than Anarchy, Shingo has been performing and recording with Tokyo area musicians, the group MSC in particular, since the early 2000s. He is

currently signed with Showa Records, an independent label headed by Hannya, a senior figure in Tokyo's underground hip-hop scene who also grew up on the margins of Japanese society.

I begin my analysis of Japan' social margins in chapter 1 with ethnographic description of three lower-working-class neighborhoods in the Kansai area, and an analysis of what "ghetto" means in these contexts. These are places where Japanese hip-hop culture is born, the *genba* or "actual sites" of cultural production that Ian Condry (2006) locates primarily in nightclubs and recording studios. I consider the aforementioned genba peripheral compared to the generative genba located in low-income neighborhoods and other places where the urban environment resonates with hip-hop aesthetics, and where local youths are drawn to hip hop. Anarchy (2006b) alludes to these circumstances in the chorus of "Home Sweet Home," where he raps "the song playing now was born in this town" (see chapter 1). In chapter 2, I analyze the meanings of "gangster," "gangsta," and "gang star" in the context of Kansai hip-hop culture and the hypermasculine gender ideals of the performers and fans who embody these terms. I pay partic-



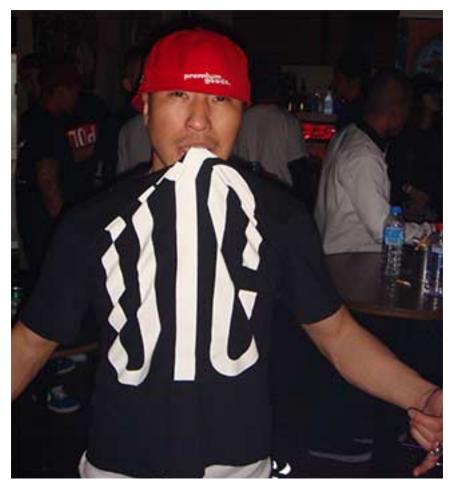**Figure 0.1.** *Anarchy warming up for the show, Hirakata, Osaka, April 2009. Photo by the author.*

**Figure 0.2.** *Shingo Nishinari, U-Stone, Otsu, Shiga Prefecture, May 2009. Photo by the author.*

ular attention to overlap between hip-hop performers and Yakuza, and to how these circumstances speak both to the malleability of Yakuza identity and to the extent to which Japan's social margins are increasingly receptive to hip-hop culture. Chapter 3 focuses on expressions of Zainichi identity in Kansai hip hop by members of Japan's largest ethnic minority group. Considering the marginalized status of ethnic Korean musicians, outside observers might expect them to employ hip hop as a means of advocating for social justice. I analyze the lyrics and performance practices of a number of politically minded Zainichi MCs, and discuss why this type of performance practice is not more widespread. In chapter 4, I explore how self-assertive, anti-establishment Kansai musicians reconcile their

relationship with the Japanese nation. Several practices stand out in this regard, including the use of Japanese "traditional" music, experimentation with right-wing discourse, reflexive self-scrutiny, and championing of national morale.

## Why Hip Hop?

Hip-hop culture and performance began to emerge as worldwide phenomena beginning in the 1980s. By now it is unremarkable that niche scenes exist on every continent except Antarctica. In recognizing that hip hop is no longer the exclusive provenance of African and Latino Americans, we should not lose sight of the often problematic racial and cultural politics entailed in the global diffusion of hip hop. In this context, Japanese hip hop is often interpreted as an unusual case study. Myths about racial homogeneity and a supposed egalitarian ethos rooted in widespread, middle-class affluence continue to be promulgated by social conservatives in Japan and accepted unquestioningly abroad, despite the onset of a well-publicized economic recession and the subsequent generalized sense of angst that began to emerge in the 1990s. Disparities between Japan's outward appearances and the everyday experiences of ordinary citizens around this time set the stage for the ascendancy of Shingo, Anarchy, and other musicians whose narratives of aspiration and achievement appeal to broad audiences, and who straightforwardly represent Japan as an unexceptional, postindustrial nation.

Based on the prevalence of ghetto/gangsta style in the Kansai hip-hop scene, I emphasize the musicians' home neighborhoods and socioeconomic status more than their race or ethnicity. The racial politics of Japanese hip hop and of Japan's preoccupation with, and ambivalence toward, black people and portrayals of black identity have received well-deserved attention.[4] I find analysis of socioeconomic status to be more productive in the case of the ghetto/gangsta subgenre than a more specific focus on race or ethnicity, in part because Japanese people rarely use these terms in everyday conversation. Most often neighborhood of origin serves as a proxy for socioeconomic status, as I began to notice shortly after moving to southern Kyoto in 1989. Racialized figures reside in the Kansai area's working class neighborhoods, public housing projects, and slums, and they are present in the narratives and life histories of the musicians I analyze in this book. But in a social context in which race and ethnicity are both fetishized and ignored, I take my friends, acquaintances, and research informants at face value and begin by considering their home neighborhoods and economic status.

When I introduce students in the United States to the music of Anarchy and Shingo, they sometimes ask why the MCs "chose" hip hop. This question is simple enough in one sense: why did they choose hip hop rather than dancehall, punk, speed metal, or some other subcultural or anti-authoritarian genre? But the implications of free choice this line of inquiry entails run counter to the performers' assertions that they became hip hop rather than chose it, in a conventional sense of the latter term. Perhaps it is more productive to consider how hip

hop resonated with these performers, their home neighborhoods, and the time period during which they came of age, and to think of hip hop as an involuntary response to these circumstances.

Condry (2013: 21) is skeptical of "resonance" as an explanation of the popularity of large cultural formations for a number of reasons, including that the concept fails to differentiate the "hits from also-rans." Whereas I agree with him that "resonance" fails to explain the popularity of anime outside of Japan, I use this term to analyze the appeal of ghetto/gangsta hip hop in part because the performers use these same terms themselves to explain how they became hip-hop musicians in the first place. My use of "resonance" more closely resembles Marié Abe's (2018: 4) in her analysis of *chindon-ya*, roaming advertisement bands, where she defines resonance as "the simultaneously acoustic and affective production of sociality" (2018: 4). Earlier she acknowledges a more fundamental sense of the word, "the capacity of sound to implicate all vibrating bodies and objects within its proximity" (Abe 2018: xxiii). Yet not all bodies and objects are equally responsive to a given sound. Those that are in tune with a given pitch or wavelength will resonate more readily than ones that are not, something musicologists term "sympathetic resonance." Hip-hop music reverberates in the housing projects and on the streets of Mukaijima, emanating from automobiles and apartments especially when these frequencies correspond neatly with those of nearby spaces, objects, and bodies. In a sense, hip hop is Mukaijima's soundtrack, an outcry from the Japanese ghetto (Busta 2014) that sometimes catches outside observers off guard. Yet hip-hop music becomes the soundtrack for tipsy, elderly day laborers once or twice a year when Shingo performs at the outdoor stage in Nishinari's Triangle Park. Human bodies that are attuned to hip hop's visceral beats and narratives of aspiration will resonate especially in low-income neighborhoods throughout Japan, but also in concentric circles outward as hip hop continues to reach middle-class audiences.

Anarchy (born Kitaoka Kenta) writes in his autobiography about the impact of his mother having permanently left his father's household when he was six years old: "I think my character changed when mom went away. At that point, in the instant that I became a single-parent child, I already was hip hop. *Adversity heated up my personality*" (Anarchy 2008a: 11–12, emphasis added). Anarchy's assertion that he "became" hip hop at such a young age merits attention especially considering that Japanese hip-hop performers continue to face accusations of cultural appropriation. The term "heated" is an apt description of residents in Japan's low-income neighborhoods, where individuals who can be gregarious, warmhearted, and sometimes hotheaded live beyond the reach of middle-class propriety and norms of indirect speech. One of my informants, the daughter of a Yakuza, related the words of her father regarding Zainichi: "They're like us, their souls are hot." Certainly around the time of his breakthrough as a hip-hop performer (2008–2009) Anarchy's onstage performance style can be described as

"heated" (see figure 0.1). Exaggerated tension was apparent in his normally alto voice, in the distended arteries on his neck, and in his fully tattooed forearms when he took to the stage as an experienced street fighter might stride toward his next melee. More recently Anarchy's onstage demeanor has become less bellicose yet equally self-assured as he maintains a steady tenor vocal range.

Anarchy's father is a tattoo artist, bar owner, and former day laborer who instilled in him from a young age the desire to stand out (*medatsu*) and be noticed by others (Anarchy 2008a: 54–56). His father acquired the nickname Lucky after he cofounded a rockabilly band during his early adult years even after his penchant for large, flashy American automobiles had already compromised his family's financial circumstances. Replacement parts for vehicles of this type were scarce and exorbitantly priced, yet Anarchy understood that his father's reputation as the only person who drove a custom-detailed Chevrolet pickup truck around southern Kyoto during the 1990s, despite the lagging economy, was an expression of pride for his father. As Lucky explained to him, "If you want to look cool in these sorts of ways, sometimes you've got to eat instant ramen at home" (Anarchy 2008a: 26).

Lucky's life lesson appears to have made a profound impression on Anarchy, who exhibited a similarly performative ethos from a young age and, by the time he had entered middle school, began to exhibit characteristics of what he currently refers to as *hamidashimono* ("standouts" or "misfits"). In "Hamidashimono" (2017) Anarchy expresses sentiments usually associated with juvenile delinquents and other individuals who might go out on the town at night in search of a street fight wearing a brand new pair of Timberland boots and a baseball jersey tied around their forehead in the manner of a bandana. The first and third verses of "Hamidashimono" begin with the phrase "let the battle of the misfits begin!" while the second begins with "let the battle of the misfits continue!" Here he depicts hamidashimono as experienced, rakish street fighters, perhaps recalling his own transition into *bōsōzoku* (biker gang) activity during his latter teen years. Around this time he adopted a bleached, tightly curled "punch-perm" (*panchipāmu*) hairstyle for one critical week during the New Year holidays, a time when these gangs are particularly active, to attract attention and signal his readiness for a street fight (Anarchy 2008a: 164–170). The flashy hairstyle conveyed a sense of Anarchy's personal ethos of seizing the initiative when opportunities present themselves, and of actively creating opportunities when none are readily apparent. Anarchy left physical violence behind him years ago but retains hamidashimono identity in his hairstyle, tattoos, clothing, and overall demeanor.

During his teenage years Anarchy shared his father's fascination with an imagined "America" that they knew mostly through music and other mass-mediated popular cultural forms. Anarchy took an interest in skateboarding, joined his middle school's basketball club, and developed an interest in hip hop that paralleled Lucky's passion for rock music. When Anarchy began to spend

time away from home and get into fights, Lucky seemed to accept these behaviors as rites of passage. Anarchy (2008a: 54) recalls his father saying things to him from a young age that he construed as meaning that he "should become a juvenile delinquent." Riding with motorcycle gangs and street fighting are also types of performance, ones that share much in common with the motivations that inspire music performance. Whether taking the stage, entering into a street fight, or taking to the streets on noisy, customized motorized vehicles, performers create expectations that they have something enjoyable, satisfying, or perhaps meaningful to offer their audiences. Anarchy's appetite for public acknowledgement later facilitated his transition into music performance, and I suspect his early onstage freestyle mic battle competitors hardly stood a chance.

A final formative event in Anarchy's youth occurred during the year that he spent in the juvenile detention center in Kakogawa city in Hyogo Prefecture, the outcome of his arrest for having been the coleader of the bōsōzoku gang Team Anarchy, from which he took his stage name.[5] In the opening lines of the second verse to "K.I.N.G." he raps about his trajectory into juvenile delinquency and the emotional impact of his incarceration:

> No choice but to break the law
> got locked up in backwoods Hyogo . . .
> hiding from the guards, wrote lyrics
> that resonated with my heart. (Anarchy and Muro 2011)

Anarchy and his peers occupied a high-risk category for juvenile delinquency. His childhood friend Kazunari echoes Anarchy's sentiments in "K.I.N.G." in a scene from Anarchy's biographic video documentary in which Kazunari says that he had no choice but to shoplift snacks beginning as early as when he was in kindergarten (Cole and Turner 2013: 38.51–39.10). Elsewhere in "K.I.N.G.," Anarchy describes how he found inspiration after watching Zeebra, the godfather of the Japanese hip hop, perform on television while he was confined to the youth detention center (Anarchy and Muro 2011). In this moment Anarchy resolved to someday compose a "hit tune from the projects" (*itsuka danchi no uta de hittochūn*). In writing lyrics that "resonated with [his] heart," Anarchy demonstrates his goal of portraying the emotions of disadvantaged youths who face constraints that nudge them toward delinquency.[6] "K.I.N.G" depicts what has become a standard narrative in the life histories of American hip-hop performers, albeit one that is perhaps unexpected in the Japanese context. Hip hop provided Anarchy with an opportunity to take control of his life and to redirect his energy into creative pursuits. At the same time, there can be little doubt that Anarchy's time in juvenile detention enhanced his street credibility and his authenticity as a hiphop performer.

In early March of 2009 Anarchy began to realize his aspirations when the promotional video for "Fate" (Anarchy 2008c) won first place in the hip-hop cat-

egory of the Space Shower Music Video Awards, a nationwide competition based on popular vote, even though Anarchy's video was filmed in and around the Mukaijima projects, hardly a glamorous stage setting. His lyrics address the travails of life in the Mukaijima projects and Anarchy's desire to escape intergenerational poverty. In winning this award, Anarchy superseded a number of older and more established hip-hop musicians who had already attained nationwide fame, including some from relatively affluent families. A few of Anarchy's competitors in the 2009 competition were wealthy enough that they could have hired the services of A-list music producers from the United States. The ghetto boy from the projects had finally begun to receive the validation that he longed for. Even more significantly, Anarchy's newfound accreditation benefitted ghetto/gangsta MCs from around the Kansai area, facilitating blue-collar Japan's reclamation of a genre that had previously been populated by musicians from a much broader range of social classes. Not only have other ghetto/gangsta musicians been the beneficiaries of a "slight transfer of credit" (Goffman 1963: 28) due to Anarchy's ascendancy, but the broader cultural movement of ghetto/gangsta hip hop began to become visible to middle-class audience members who may have found themselves in dialog with the marginal psyche for their first time (see chapter 2). These developments can be attributed partly to the leveling effects of recession-era Japan, and to the emergence of a widespread sense of collective hardship beginning in the 1990s. Musicians who skillfully channel this zeitgeist have attracted diverse audience members.

To the extent that Anarchy chose hip hop, he did so because he perceived it to be best suited to his goal of representing life in Mukaijima. In his autobiography he writes,

> Hip hop was perfectly suited to people like us. Even in a place like [Mukaijima] we were spoken ill of behind our backs . . . I think that's the essence of hip hop. Ordinary people here look down on people who live like we do, and it still goes on today. "Don't look down on us," that's my deepest feeling at all times. I won't be looked down on, not in this world. That's my theme . . . I have to make it to the big time while being true to my roots in Mukaijima. It would be meaningless if I didn't. (Anarchy 2008a: 265–266)

Hip hop was an obvious choice because of the resonance that Anarchy identifies between the projects where he grew up and hip-hop culture. Most notably, Anarchy expresses how his experiences of stigmatization reinforced his resolve to achieve fame, or at least notoriety. I am not advocating an economically determinist model connecting neighborhood of origin to hip-hop culture. Many residents of Mukaijima are middle class, and the life trajectories of many of the area's disadvantaged residents do not involve hip hop. But many Kansai ghetto/

gangsta musicians employ causal if not deterministic logic in what appears to be a purposeful effort to authenticate their hip-hop credentials. One reason that some have succeeded in doing so is because, for them, hip hop was such an obvious choice that it was hardly a choice at all. This pattern has become widespread in localized, underground performance scenes in Kansai and elsewhere in Japan over the past fifteen years or more. Free choice plays a role in the interconnection of hip hop with ghetto/gangsta narratives and life histories, but, in my experience, the musicians will avoid admitting as much because to do so would compromise their aura of authenticity (see Lindholm 2008: 61).

The "gangsta" style of hip hop that emerged on the West Coast of the United States during the 1990s was particularly well suited to Anarchy's early onstage performance practices, which can only be described as pugilistic. The gangsta style is apparent in his strategy of entertaining but also partly intimidating audience members, who paid between ¥3,000 and ¥4,000 (roughly US$30.00 to $40.00) to see him perform. It is no coincidence that Anarchy's first full-length CD release is titled *Rob the World* (2006), a title that implies exploitation of his audience members. Yet Anarchy offers a range of audience members whatever it is that they want: a role model for disadvantaged youths, vicarious thrills for middle-class audience members, and abundant source materials for the ethnographer. The CD title *Rob the World* is best understood as an assertion that Anarchy, who personifies what his mentor Ryuzo terms a "musical gangster," has in the past sometimes employed forceful and possibly illegal means to earn a living (Ryuzo 2007: "Musikal Gangster"; see chapter 2). Even today Anarchy leans on his audience members in a mildly coercive manner that exhibits calm, clear-headed monetary calculus of the sort that we might expect from street-corner hustlers.

Shingo Nishinari (born Ikegami Shingo) also grew up in a single-parent household, but his mother's parenting style was quite different from Lucky's. Shingo's mother encouraged him to achieve upward mobility using an emotionally supportive parenting strategy evident in his song "Shosenpaigata kara no okotoba" [Wise words from the elders]:

> "No money left" mama sobs
> dad had left for good
> life's not going to be easy
> "don't lose heart because of these things
> there's love all around you." (Shingo Nishinari 2007)

Shingo and Anarchy both experienced the departure of a parent when they were old enough to fully understand that the decision was final. Both MCs mention the event in their lyrics, in Anarchy's case in the opening to "Fate" (Anarchy 2008b), indicating that both consider it to have been a formative childhood event. The primary difference between Anarchy's and Shingo's early socialization

from a gender-neutral perspective is that Shingo's mother gave birth to him at the age of forty. Shingo's mother subsequently suffered from chronic physical and psychological ailments that forced him to forego considerable personal freedom from a young age in order to become her primary caregiver, thereby honoring the neo-Confucian ideal of filial piety.

Shingo states that he "became addicted to hip hop at the age of sixteen,"[7] using the term "addicted" in the sense that he felt drawn to hip hop in deeply personal ways. Certainly hip-hop culture provided him with opportunities to escape daily routines without betraying his neighborhood roots. Shingo easily could have laid claim to having become hip hop from a young age, having grown up in Japan's most iconic ghetto (see chapter 1) in an area near Japan's most densely populated day-laborer neighborhood (*yoseba*). In a sense, his stage name already accomplished this for him because Nishinari has captivated the public imagination as a potent symbol of Japanese marginality at least since the labor unrest of the 1960s. At age sixteen, Shingo was an ambitious high school student-athlete who was soon to succeed in attaining entrance to university, quite a feat given his background and Japan's extremely competitive university entrance exam system.

After graduating from Tenri University in Nara, Shingo worked for a brief period as a salaried, white-collar corporate employee until the Kobe earthquake of 17 January 1995. This event precipitated a life crisis for Shingo at age twenty-three that was comparable in its impact to the time Anarchy spent in juvenile detention. Shingo wrestled with the choice of continuing along a white-collar career path or of dedicating his life to something that he considered more meaningful. He describes this time of uncertainty in the freestyle introduction to his first CD release, *Welcome to Ghetto*: "but things are really bad here in my hometown . . . which way should I go? earn a salary, or spit rhymes? . . . 'if others can do it, you can do it too' my mom always told me . . . that's why I always say 'look at me now!'" (Shingo Nishinari 2006: "Nagaya no hitorikko no dokurigoto" [Soliloquy of a tenement house boy]). The predisposition to stand out and attract attention evident in this passage is a personality trait that both he and Anarchy attribute to their early experiences of socioeconomic marginality. The words of encouragement offered by his mother exemplify her parenting style while acknowledging that a number of individuals who grew up in Nishinari have become successful performers and athletes. Most notable among these is Akai Hidekazu, an actor and former professional boxer who grew up in Nishinari and who is a close friend of Shingo despite a thirteen-year age difference. In a Voice TV News documentary on Nishinari ward and Shingo's life and music, Akai jokingly describes his affection for his junior colleague: "I could just about kiss him."[8]

Shingo's catchphrase, "look at me now!" (*ima ni mitokeyo*!) has dual connotations. It could mean "see where I'm at now, because I'm going to make it to the top," emphasizing Shingo's persistence and ambition during the late 2000s. It can also be interpreted as "see what I've already achieved (against overwhelm-

ing odds),” a meaning that has become increasingly relevant as he continues to attract nationwide mainstream exposure in Japan. “Ima ni mitokeyo!” demonstrates that, similar to Anarchy, Shingo adopted a performative ethos early in life that probably would have gone unfulfilled if he had chosen to remain a salaried corporate employee, or if Anarchy had ended up joining the ranks of the Yakuza.

Shingo speaks about his final decision to abandon white-collar employment and pursue music performance in the Voice TV documentary: “There’s an expression ‘entrust yourself to the passage of time,’ so why not ‘entrust yourself to the hometown’s breezes’ or ‘entrust yourself to the waves of the era’? If I’m going to accomplish these goals then my proper role in life is to be a rapper.”[9] The devastation of the Kobe earthquake in which more than six thousand people died was nearly unprecedented in scale in the postwar period, precipitating a massive relief effort. Andrew Gordon draws attention to the prominence of youths among the “small army of volunteers who assisted the victims” of the earthquake, and writes “volunteerism in general appeared on the rise in the late 1990s” (2003: 325; see also Stevens 1997). Swayed by the enormity of the disaster, Shingo decided on a course of action in keeping with the spirit of the times and appropriate to the Nishinari ethos of readily and willingly offering aid to those in need. After assisting in the effort to rebuild Kobe, he committed himself to advocacy for Japan’s “working poor” (see chapter 1). Shingo volunteers regularly at soup kitchens (*takidashi*) in Kamagasaki, a large yoseba located in Nishinari that serves the entire Kansai region. His rap style is distinguished by his relaxed, resonant baritone voice, and he incorporates moral and ethical teachings of Nishinari residents into his lyrics. Shingo embodies the neighborhood in his stage name, physical toughness, direct communicative style, and his consistent use of the working class speech register of the Kansai dialect (see figure 0.2).

Anarchy and Shingo differ in terms of biography, personality, and musical style, but neither musician “chose” hip hop in the conventional sense of making a selection from a menu of readily available options. By their own accounts, they *became* hip hop because it resonated with their experiences, ambitions, and the neighborhoods where they grew up. Both MCs downplay the degree of free choice entailed in this process, which is understandable given the socioeconomic forces that led them toward hip-hop culture.

## Kansai Ghetto/Gangsta Hip Hop

Compared to the relative affluence experienced by most Japanese during the 1970s and ’80s, circumstances during the postrecession 1990s began to mirror what marginalized Japanese were already accustomed to, as well as inner-city America at the time. It was during this decade that economic, social, political, and environmental factors coalesced to bring about the inception of Japan’s “second modernity,” an era characterized by a degree of risk and uncertainty unknown since the immediate postwar period (Yoda and Harootunian 2006;

Suzuki et al. 2010; Schmidt 2016; Avenell 2017; Abe 2018; see also Beck 1994; Beck and Grande 2010). Differences of degree between circumstances in Japan and the United States during the 1990s were readily apparent in the absence of a crack cocaine epidemic in Japan, while rates of violent crime remain much higher in the United States today despite an uptick in crime in Japan beginning in the 1990s (Leonardson 2006; United Nations 2014). Yet by focusing on Japan's low crime rates, we lose sight of the actual experiences of people whose lives were impacted by recession around this time. An epidemic of paint thinner inhalation abuse by juvenile delinquents pervaded Mukaijima and similar neighborhoods during the 1990s, reflecting a widespread sense of despair while deepening the personal crises of individual abusers. Drug pushers were widely reported to have maintained a ubiquitous and highly visible presence in Nishinari during Japan's "Lost Decade" (*ushinawareta jūnen*), while suicide rates among "ordinary" Japanese increased dramatically (Strom 1999). Qualitative similarities between Japan and the United States in these regards can be viewed as outweighing what are already widely recognized quantitative differences. Viewed in this light, Japan can be understood as yet another example of ordinary, late capitalist modernity, a perspective that is too often obscured by assumptions of sociocultural difference—to the detriment of international understanding of Japanese society.

Not coincidentally, it was during the 1990s that ghetto/gangsta musicians began to attract audiences appreciative of their "rags to riches" narratives. The performers' audience appeal can be attributed in part to the empathy MCs elicit from audience members through a sense of shared suffering in the context of widespread economic recession, and to the musicians' perseverance as they resolve to pull themselves up out of poverty "by their bootstraps." Social scientists typically describe Japanese society as tending toward sociocentrism, thus consensus and group membership are valued over individual accomplishment, or so the story goes. Yet unquestioning acceptance of ideas of Japan as a group-oriented society can blind us to the ways in which Japanese people exhibit individuocentric qualities, and the converse is true of purportedly individuocentric America (Lindholm 1997). Anarchy and Shingo collaborate with other musicians onstage and in the recording studio, but they are primarily active, and thought of, as solo musicians.

Both MCs readily disavow that their accomplishments are solely their own. They credit their colleagues, fans, and childhood friends, thereby depicting a collective success story, and they make frequent use of first-person plural pronouns to emphasize the collectivity of their undertakings. When the MCs engage in image management of this type, they indicate that collectivist social values remain intact in Japanese society, but perhaps this is one reason behind the appeal of the individualist qualities of ghetto/gangsta hip hop. The opportunity to push the limits of cultural mores offers a degree of freedom inaccessible to audience members who adhere to mainstream social norms. As a result, individuals who succeed

by breaking the rules may attract audience members who adhere to normative behavior precisely because they do not enjoy such liberties.

Ghetto/gangsta hip-hop musicians may hold broader appeal to middle-class audience members independent of recent socioeconomic developments and Japanese social norms. Erving Goffman (1963: 116) asserted that the existence of marginalized populations enables "normal" people to identify the types of behaviors that are expected of them. This symbiotic relationship between normal and marginal can lead ordinary people to become fascinated by celebrities and other charismatic figures who grew up in stigmatized neighborhoods, individuals whom mainstream Japanese might otherwise be inclined to look down upon. Perhaps in this context, fascination and disparagement exist in a synergetic relationship rather than mutual exclusivity. Thus middle-class Japanese can keep their values and mores intact, yet derive vicarious thrills as audience members in the nightclubs while witnessing the ascendency of Anarchy and Shingo (see chapter 2).

These two MCs represent a nationwide movement of hip-hop culture originating from low-income neighborhoods in Japan. Musicians from these areas are making their voices heard around Japan, and are beginning to attract attention from abroad. Ghetto/gangsta hip hop is fundamentally different from earlier forms of Japanese hip hop, when many high-profile musicians came from middle-class, or even wealthy, families. Zeebra, Anarchy's role model during his incarceration, was born into an elite family of hotel magnates, and his grandfather owned the Empire State Building during the 1990s. Zeebra and his colleagues K Dub Shine and Uzi first became acquainted as classmates in private school systems in the Tokyo area. Rapper Kreva, originally of Kick the Can Crew fame, is a graduate of Keio University and its feeder school system. Many established figures in Tokyo's underground hip-hop scene around this time were from less privileged backgrounds, but the majority of musicians with mainstream exposure were from middle-class or elite family backgrounds. With ample resources at their disposal, these MCs and DJs were able to embrace or reject hip-hop culture as it pleased them, according to their own timelines. Shingo and Anarchy were less fortunate, but succeeded as hip-hop performers, despite their limited resources, in part because of they had few other options. In a sense, hip hop in Japan came of age with these two MCs. The musicians are well aware that they can earn money and prestige while attracting audiences who prefer reality to the artifice of pop idols and pop rap. In Japan as elsewhere, the impact of reality TV and an appetite for realistic depictions of everyday life are increasingly apparent.

The stories that Shingo and Anarchy tell are valuable because they depict aspects of Japanese society that continue to evade international attention outside of academia. The MCs depict stigmatization in the Japanese context, the processes whereby entire classes of people are symbolically branded as worthy of contempt (Goffman 1963) and thereby marginalized, meaning excluded from full participation in civil society. Institutionalized inequality in Japan is evident

in the placement of public housing projects in lowland districts on the periphery of urban centers, in areas remote from tourist destinations. The Japan National Tourist Organization and other agencies in charge of public image maintenance carefully select photographs they consider appropriate for overseas observers. Buddhist temples, Shinto shrines, annual festivals, cherry blossoms, autumn foliage, traditional architecture, and landscaped gardens are standard fare, while working-class neighborhoods and blue-collar Japan should be conspicuous in their absence from official narratives. Japan scholars have been working for more than two decades already to correct the record (Dale 1990; Befu 2001; Hane 2002; Lee et al. 2006; Weiner 2009a), but to little avail in terms of international perceptions of Japanese society. The musicians who inspired this book intervene in this process by speaking directly and forcibly to widespread audiences about the extent to which Japan is truly unexceptional.

In Japan as elsewhere, ghettos are usually conceived of as both literally and symbolically dirty. At times and in certain specific locales, Nishinari and Mukaijima truly are, or have been, littered, decrepit, and malodorous. Yet the symbolic impurity of these locales is more significant in the context of Japanese society, where the indigenous Shinto preoccupation with purity coalesced with the Buddhist value placed on exhibiting kindness to all living things. The result of this syncretism was the emergence of outcaste classes during the medieval period that were codified during the Edo period (1603–1868) and then officially eliminated in 1871. Yet ideas about purity and pollution remain pervasive in Japanese society, as does discrimination against the descendants of the hereditary outcastes and others who are associated with dirt and filth in the public imagination. The terms of derogation, and the identity of the subjects of derogation, continue to shift. Japan's ghettos are no longer populated nearly exclusively by the descendants of butchers, leather tanners, cobblers, executioners, and undertakers—all trades that historically were considered to be ritually polluting. Today the residents of stigmatized neighborhoods include an array of marginal figures, all of whom suffer by association with their place of origin because of a cultural preoccupation with dirt. Laborers on excavation crews identify themselves using the derogatory term *dokata* (dirt person) when surrounded by coworkers, yet my foreman during a brief period in 1993 recommended the more neutral *doboku sagyōin* (engineering works laborer) for everyday use. Both terms begin with "dirt," but the latter is less offensive because it is comprised of a pair of compound nouns with three Sino-Japanese characters mediating between 土 (*do*, dirt) and the final syllable 員 (*in*, worker). Excavation is low prestige work in any cultural context, but it retains connotations in Japan that result from historical beliefs about purity and pollution. Public policy-makers, social conservatives, and mainstream Japanese still manipulate this cultural preoccupation with dirt as a means of justifying, at least to themselves, the persistence of social hierarchy and inequality in Japan. DJ KD—Koki's childhood friend, an established figure in the Kyoto hip-hop

scene, and one of my key informants—grew up in Fukakusa, one of southern Kyoto's rougher neighborhoods. KD complained to me that municipal authorities avoid allocating public funding for infrastructure improvements in low-income neighborhoods, and he expressed a desire to communicate his frustration to municipal bureaucrats that it was their ancestors who had marginalized those of Fukakusa's current residents.

The stories Anarchy and Shingo tell are rooted in the Kansai region, an area that is culturally distinct from Tokyo and its surroundings and that challenges Tokyo's symbolic hegemony in representing the Japanese nation. The imperial household was located in Kyoto for over a thousand years prior to 1869, and the city is still idealized as symbolically central to Japanese identity. Osaka was Japan's main center of commerce before Edo (now Tokyo) emerged as the world's largest city in the late seventeenth century (Gordon 2003: 23). Classical arts, performance genres, and trades of the Edo period had previously taken form and flourished in Kansai. Kyoto was never bombed during World War II and, as a result, lines of social and economic division that predate the modern era are still apparent in its urban landscape.

Inequality in Japan is not specific to the Kansai region, but it exists here in some unique ways. Nishinari ward in Osaka is Japan's quintessential ghetto. Yamaguchi-gumi, Japan's largest Yakuza organization, is headquartered in Kobe, a port city adjacent to western Osaka. Japan's largest populations of Burakumin are in Kyoto and Osaka, and its largest population of ethnic Koreans is in Osaka (Gordon 2003: 154). Members of all three of these groups are present in Japan's ghettos and in the Kansai hip-hop scene, although many musicians choose to conceal their marginal identities. Shingo and Anarchy rap about themselves, their experiences, and also about Japanese society and the Japanese nation. In doing so they represent Kansai as the real Japan, themselves as real Japanese men, and their music as real hip hop.

Shingo and Anarchy challenge us in the West, and Japan observers everywhere, to consider why it is that the existence of bad-boy-style hip hop in Japan is surprising to us in the first place. Our impulse to view Japan as culturally unique is derived from fairly standard forms of ethnocentrism and Orientalism (Said 1978), yet when we idealize exceptionality to explain everything from Japan's success (economic) to its failures (economic, disaster mismanagement), we are asserting that Japan is of little relevance to our own experiences. Exceptionality becomes another type of marginality. Why should we not expect inequality to appear in similar forms in different postindustrial societies? And, from the American perspective, might our skepticism in this regard be the result of our avoidance of responsibility for the extent to which we have remade Japan in our own image beginning in the postwar period? Too often we accept myths about "the Japanese," all the while ignoring the ways in which Japan has become similar to other industrialized nations.

In analyzing the appeal of ghetto/gangsta hip hop and the musicians' diverse career outcomes, I pay particular attention to the means whereby they succeed in converting their street-corner cultural capital into a degree of audience appeal that transcends social class. Shingo and Anarchy are successful in large part due to their charisma, temperaments, and biographies, but they could not have succeeded without an ability to exchange their street credibility for common currency. Anarchy did so when he used his reputation as a bōsōzoku gang leader to help launch his career as a hip-hop MC. He then drew on his local notoriety as a bona fide gangsta rapper to attract the attention of independent music production agents, leading to increased exposure outside of Kyoto and, eventually, to his victory in the Space Shower competition and a major label recording contract. Likewise, Shingo draws on the power with which an imagined Nishinari grips the public imagination to advertise himself as a true ghetto boy and authentic hip-hop MC. He makes occasional references to his "tough boy" past but is equally comfortable in any stage setting whether small or large scale, underground or mass mediated.

Both Anarchy and Shingo draw upon their street credibility and the rapport that they created with their earliest audiences, usually members of their own socioeconomic status, to create a critical mass of buzz factor that eventually attracts the attention of broader audiences, including recording industry executives and other industry gatekeepers. The term "wicking" is descriptive enough of the process whereby Anarchy and Shingo draw on their personal backgrounds to "fan the flames" (Kelley 2004) that illuminate their paths toward fame and notoriety. Essentially, this process depends on the performers' charisma and skill in aligning their performance practices with trends in popular sentiment.

## The Field Experience

*24 Bars to Kill* is based on my personal experiences and research opportunities in Kyoto and the Kansai area, beginning in 1989. During my earliest sojourn I lived in Kyoto's Minami ward, an economically and ethnically diverse neighborhood in southern Kyoto, where I took an interest in the margins of Japanese society. Signs of a nascent Kyoto hip-hop scene began to emerge in 1994 when Club R&R in the Sanjo-Kiyamachi nightlife district first attracted attention for its hip-hop theme and complete DJ setup of double turntables and mixer. Two years later, around the time R&R closed, club Viva opened with a hip hop and R&B theme. Owner DJ Prince remains a senior figure in the Kyoto hip-hop scene, whereas reggae vocalist and erstwhile hip-hop MC Kurtis Fly had already been active since 1976 and was well on his way to earning his current honorific title, King Kurtis. Low-rider vehicles of a distinctly West Coast style, put on display by car enthusiasts from neighboring Shiga Prefecture, lined the east side of Kawaramachi street on Saturday evenings. Hip hop had arrived in Kyoto, a true backwater in this regard, a decade later than in Tokyo and the nightclubs

near U.S. military bases in Japan. My first long-term stay in Japan ended in the summer of 1995.

In late 2000, I returned to Japan to begin formal research on the Kyoto hip-hop scene. Living in northern and then central Kyoto, I focused on the local underground hip-hop performance scene for nearly two years. My research on the broader Kansai scene began in November of 2008 and lasted for an eventful nine months, during which I gained personal access to Shingo and Anarchy. By that time I was much more interested in the neighborhoods from which ghetto/gangsta hip hop originates and how the performers' socioeconomic status informs their onstage performance practices. I made shorter visits to Kyoto and Osaka during the summers of 2014 and 2017 to review developments in the Kansai hip-hop scene. This book is both a longitudinal study of the Kansai scene and a snapshot from the late 2000s, when Anarchy, Shingo, and other ghetto/gangsta performers were beginning to break through to nationwide fame among Japanese hip-hop fans. In total, I had lived in Japan for eight and a half years by the time I completed the formal research in the summer of 2009.

My first experience living in Kyoto was fairly typical of recent college graduates from the United States except that I lived in Minami ward, separated by seven kilometers from the foreigner community in the northeast of the city. Minami ward extends from Kyoto Station at its northern boundary to Fushimi ward, where Mukaijima is located, to the south. Minami ward is a mixed income area compared to the more consistently blue-collar Fushimi, but it is still distinctly on the wrong (southern) side of the Shinkansen tracks. Higashikujo in the eastern part of the ward is home to most of the city's ethnic Koreans, several of whom were my English students and a few of whom I remain close friends with. Higashikujo is home to at least one Yakuza office and a sizeable portion of the city's Burakumin. The house I rented was in Kisshōin in western Minami ward, an area where some residential addresses historically were associated with Burakumin (see De Vos and Wagatsuma 1967). During the early 1990s, a small cluster of ramshackle dwellings remained in western Kisshōin on the banks of the Katsura River, underneath the Shinkansen rail bridge. This was one of very few remaining clusters of antique buildings remaining from the pre–World War II Burakumin squatters' neighborhoods, tucked away out of sight from the street and visible only from the bicycle path alongside the river. Today, residents of this miniature shantytown still access their homes either from the riverside or from the street by way of narrow, uninviting alleyways that barely accommodate a single pedestrian pushing a bicycle.

Minami ward is home to many working-class families and was frequented by conspicuous numbers of Yakuza, yankii, and bōsōzoku during the early 1990s. At this time I traveled around Kyoto by bicycle, when Japanese drivers were not yet acclimated to sharing the road with cyclists, Japanese or foreigner. I narrowly avoided confrontations with aggressive drivers on more than one occasion, an ex-

perience widely shared by my friends in Kyoto's expatriate community. Yet I suspect that these incidents happened more frequently to me in Minami ward than they did for the majority of foreigners who lived in northern sections of the city. These experiences left me with a sense of dissonance between myths of Japanese homogeneity, which privilege the manners and behavior of white-collar members of the middle class, and the reality of blue-collar Japan that I observed around me in Minami ward. Why did my presence on the streets of southern Kyoto sometimes evoke xenophobic reactions from working-class Japanese, when white male Westerners in Japan purportedly enjoy a preferable foreigner status in Japan?

On returning to research the Kyoto hip-hop scene in 2000, I realized that I would have ample opportunity to ponder this question. I found considerable stylistic diversity within what remained a nascent performance scene, but also a prevalence of self-proclaimed "gangsta" musicians and fans. Determined to learn what "gangsta" meant in this context, but not entirely comfortable being around people who self-identify as such, I was in something of a bind. I had been warned away from certain areas, including Higashikujo and Mukaijima, during my first sojourn, and a neighborhood-based study seemed impossible in large part due to my own fears. I focused instead on onstage performance, where my presence in the nightclubs was justified by a simple economic transaction, or so I hoped. Yet audience members are also performers, with heightened interest in how they are perceived by others. At times I was clearly viewed as an intruder in the nightclubs, and on a few occasions I was confronted by young men who appeared ready to answer any perceived slight with their fists. These individuals represent a type of Japanese masculinity that differs considerably from the *sarariiman* ideal of *gaman*, meaning emotional reserve and stoicism (Hidaka 2010; LeBlanc 2010). Similar to Anarchy, Shingo, and other ghetto/gangsta hip-hop musicians, these audience members exhibit a "hard" type of manhood[10] that is manifest physically in their muscular and often tattooed forearms, emotionally in their hot tempers and use of English profanity, and aesthetically in the booming rhythms of their music of choice. This type of exaggerated manhood or "hypermasculinity" is central to ghetto/gangsta class consciousness and to the ways that the musicians and fans represent Japanese identity (see chapters 2 and 4).

I returned to Kyoto in November of 2008 with a sense of urgency, having allotted myself only nine months to complete fieldwork. Beginning at the nightclubs I expanded my personal network to the extent that I became something of a fixture in the local club scene. I frequented street-fashion retail shops to gather flyers advertising onstage performances, including the shop owned by Ryuzo, Anarchy's mentor and a leading figure in the early Kyoto and Osaka hip-hop scenes. When I first met Hiroki, a.k.a. Dirty Kid, at this shop in December of 2008, I was beginning to suspect that it would be impossible to fully understand the onstage performance of self-described "bad boys" without knowing more about their home neighborhoods. Hiroki, who clearly was one of these youths,

stood stock-still and wide-eyed, holding my gaze until I looked away. Later I learned that he had recently been released from prison. After I identified myself as a researcher of the Kansai hip-hop scene, Hiroki began to take interest in me and identified himself as a member of Ghetto Super Stars (hereafter GSS), a group of mostly younger, aspiring hip-hop performers. As we exited the shop, I learned that he was from Mukaijima, as are nearly all other GSS members. On one occasion, I had viewed the Mukaijima projects from afar before turning my bicycle around and heading home, well aware of the neighborhood's reputation as home to large numbers of amphetamine addicts. I proffered the term "concrete jungle" as a tentative description of his neighborhood, eliciting emphatic agreement. Apparently I had passed the first in a series of tests that earned me Hiroki's friendship and, eventually, access to Mukaijima and Anarchy, his childhood friend and mentor.

The second test followed a calculated decision to accompany Hiroki and his friends to their jobs as demolition workers beginning in March of 2009. Dressed like Hiroki and his coworkers, I helped out when I could, stayed out of the way of the heavy machinery, and paid close attention to the conversation during our rest periods. After reading Anarchy's autobiography (2008a), I realized that I had been working alongside many of his friends and younger adherents. I gained my coworkers' respect in part because I had prior experience as a manual laborer in Japan, and I became a competent *kaitai* (demolition) laborer in what my coworkers seemed to think was short order. Before long, my younger coworkers were asking me for advice on how to proceed, and the heavy machinery operators realized that they could convey their instructions most effectively by directing them to me. My newly earned street credibility carried considerable weight because it was derived from my performance at demolition job sites, referred to as *genba* in a generic sense of the word. These sites rival the housing projects and hip-hop performance venues in their significance in the everyday lives of my informants. Demolition job sites are locations where hip-hop culture is generated in the exchange of knowledge and critiques of the performers and their music. More broadly, these genba engender aspirations in the day laborers that they may someday obtain employment that entails better working conditions, perhaps in a capacity related to their local hip-hop scene.

One day after work in March of 2009, Hiroki and I headed to Anarchy's apartment in Mukaijima, a communal space that he shares with GSS, and Anarchy returned home shortly thereafter to find me sitting in his living room. He joked that he thought for a moment that their friend Sam Cole, also a white American, had returned to Kyoto, and then asked me if I had ever seen him perform onstage. When he learned that I had never seen him perform solo but had already purchased all of his commercial recordings, he presented me with a stack of ten CDs of Japanese hip hop and R&B from his personal collection. Two weeks later, Anarchy selected several outfits of street apparel from his ward-

robe for me, admittedly so that he and his peers could be seen in public with me without losing face. Perhaps Anarchy had been expecting me, having previously been solicited by a publishing house and a documentary film production crew.[11] His willingness to assist in my research can be attributed first and foremost to his generosity, but also to his aim of broadcasting his narratives of daily life in Mukaijima.

Thus began a brief but intense period during which I had direct personal contact with GSS and, finally, with Anarchy and DJ Akio, music producer Bugzy, and Ruff Neck, the group that Anarchy began performing with. Ruff Neck is comprised of a quartet of MCs—Anarchy, Young Bery, Naughty, and JC—with DJ Akio on the turntables, all of whom had previously been members of Team Anarchy and all of whom are members of GSS in its broadest sense. I had previously seen Ruff Neck perform in Kyoto in May of 2002 when they opened for Boo-Yaa T.R.I.B.E., a Samoan American gangsta hip-hop crew from Carson in southern Los Angeles. This was an eventful evening with the sounds of a fistfight emanating from backstage at one point (it turns out JC was one of the two individuals involved), audience and performers exchanging "Westside" hand gestures associated with West Coast gangsta hip hop in the U.S., and a body-blow delivered to me by an audience member who apparently thought that I was standing too close to his girlfriend. In the end, I failed to summon enough courage to introduce myself to Ruff Neck, even though the group fell squarely within my research parameters. JC and I briefly made eye contact, but he still appeared agitated from the earlier incident, and I was reluctant to approach him. The overall experience at the club that evening was quite daunting, and I did not yet fully appreciate the significance of Ruff Neck performance practices in relation to their home neighborhood of Mukaijima. Also, I was curious to see if Gangsta Ridd and other members of Boo-Yaa T.R.I.B.E. would answer my questions. They did so willingly, confirming my understanding that they were connected to Japan, and arguably more widely known there than in the United States, because they are related to the now retired sumo wrestler Konishiki. Gangsta Ridd was emphatic in setting the record straight that they were "brothers," not cousins, and I decided not to ask for a tutorial in Samoan kinship terminology.

I first met Shingo Nishinari in December of 2008 on an evening when he was scheduled to perform at a small nightclub in Kyoto managed by my friend Takashi, a key informant whom I had known since 2000, when I began researching Japanese hip hop. Takashi made dinner arrangements for Shingo at a nearby restaurant and included me on the guest list. At one point during the meal, Shingo paused in conversation to say that he would assist my research "if I wrote the truth." Shingo's amenability to my research aims can be attributed to his unselfish, affable character and to his objective of spreading public awareness of the plight of Nishinari residents. I knew little about him at the time because my earlier research had been limited to the Kyoto hip-hop scene, and at one point

Shingo said that I had "taken too long" to learn about him and his music. Shingo has been active in the Osaka hip-hop scene since the late 1990s, and an established figure in the Kansai scene since at least the mid-2000s. It became glaringly obvious that I knew little about his music, as Shingo pointed out, when I clumsily mentioned that I would like to go "sightseeing" in Nishinari. Shingo halted conversation again to explain to me why I had misspoken, and once it was clear to him that I understood my transgression, the group conversation resumed almost uninterrupted. Later I realized the full extent of my naivete after studying the lyrics to "Ill Nishinari Blues" (Shingo Nishinari 2007; see chapter 1) in which Shingo spoke directly to my subjectivity: "Don't come here in the spirit of tourism." I have spent time with Shingo on a number of occasions, most recently in July 2017, and we remain on good terms, with relatively open channels of communication despite repeated missteps by me.

My first meeting with Anarchy may have been the main achievement of my fieldwork, while my first meeting with Shingo was partly the fruits of my prior labor researching the Kyoto scene. Hiroki, a member of Anarchy's junior cohort (albeit one he describes as "like a younger brother" [Cole and Turner 2013]), arranged my first meeting with Anarchy. My main accomplishment up to this point was to have earned Hiroki's friendship and respect. The introduction to Anarchy followed rather easily, perhaps too much so, considering that our relationship deteriorated in part because I assumed rather early on that I was already on a solid footing with him. In retrospect, I had achieved only tentative access to him and Ruff Neck, a status that was much more tenuous than I realized at the time. Takashi remains a steadfast friend and indispensible facilitator of my field study, especially by having introducing me to Shingo, but I had already earned Takashi's friendship and trust over the course of nearly eight years prior to my first meeting with Shingo in 2008. Takashi is ten years Shingo's senior, and his recommendation probably carried considerable weight. Shingo treats me with kindness and generosity, but he deliberately keeps me guessing about my status as an outside-insider in the Kansai hip-hop scene. At times, he tests me to see if I really understand what life is like for Nishinari residents, or tries to trick me into thinking that he knows very little about the world outside of Japan. Most often, Shingo challenges my ability to discern whether or not he is joking.

By the time I concluded my research, I knew that my friendship with Shingo would endure, whereas my status from Anarchy's perspective was unclear. Perhaps the longevity of my relationship with Takashi led to the solidity of my relationship with Shingo, whereas my brief association with Hiroki led to the fragility of my association with Anarchy. Ironically, another factor may have been the relatively lengthy period of time that I spent in the company of Anarchy and GSS, resulting in ample opportunity for me to commit verbal gaffes. My fleeting blue-collar credibility offered no assurance that a white, middle-class researcher from New England could smoothly negotiate cultural and class differences. Anar-

chy and I have not communicated since August of 2009, but this is understandable considering his fame, his personal drive to acquire wealth, and the enormity of his personal network. In order to achieve his ambitions Anarchy has no choice but to be highly selective about whom he will accept a phone call from.

## The Ethnographer's Bag

Considerable scholarly attention has been given to the "ethnographer's path," to the "network of informants and contacts that the researcher engages" (see Sanjek 1990: 398–400, cited in Stewart 1998: 34), whereas the ethnographer's bag has received little attention. While conducting field study, I carried research tools and materials that included tablets of lined paper for field notes, a digital voice recorder, digital camera, and an electronic Japanese–English dictionary in a laptop computer bag. These most basic items are essential to field study, but the bag itself can obstruct ethnographers' efforts to build rapport with their informants. Slung over my shoulder, the ethnographer's bag was a nuisance at the nightclubs, where most club-goers use coin lockers to secure their belongings during peak hours. Yet any research tool can become an urgent necessity at a moment's notice, and unexpected turns in the ethnographer's path may require a hasty exit, making it highly impractical to secure the bag and its contents for any length of time. Most importantly, the ethnographer's bag arouses curiosity and suspicion as to the nature of its contents, as I learned one evening in early 2009.

I was at the club Black Boxxx, currently the location of Octave, in Kyoto's Sanjo-Kiyamachi nightlife district, when Miya, a childhood friend of Anarchy's and an ex-member of Team Anarchy, made it clear that he wanted to know what was in my bag. Miya and I were on good terms. We had first met at Whoopee's (now defunct) several months earlier when he, visibly intoxicated, purposefully planted himself in front of me. A self-introduction was obviously in order, after which he identified himself as Zainichi-chōsenjin, an ethnic Korean "resident" of Japan affiliated with North Korea (see chapter 3). I told him that my wife's parents had managed to escape the North during the Korean War, eliciting an expression of approval from him. In approaching me that evening at Black Boxxx, he was in part performing the role of an unofficial enforcer while advertising himself as someone to whom the standard rules of conduct do not necessarily apply. I had seen him behave in this manner on a number of earlier occasions, and I was accustomed to his bluntness.

When I opened my bag to allow him to inspect its contents, his demeanor shifted immediately from suspicion to joy. Fortunately, I had brought Anarchy's autobiography *Itami no sakubun* [Composition of pain] with me that evening. Miya is a significant figure in the book, especially in the passages related to Team Anarchy around the time that the gang disbanded (Anarchy 2008a: 194–199). Once he was satisfied that I understood who he was, Miya advised against carrying my bag at the clubs and then dropped the matter. This encounter demon-

strates the importance of including a few novelty items or conversation pieces among its contents. The ethnographer's bag is a necessity, but the attention it can attract is not always welcome, and thievery is always a concern. Sometimes it may lead to the field researcher being mistaken for a blundering tourist, which is how I felt on more than one occasion.

## Ethnography as "Hustling"

Ethnographic fieldwork entails fundamental asymmetries. Too often the field-worker-informant relationship benefits the former when they present or publish their results while bringing no tangible benefits to their informants. Field researchers may end up in a contest of cost/benefit analysis with their informants or, from a street-corner perspective, we may find ourselves trying to out-hustle each other. At least in the ghetto/gangsta context, our informants often estimate or recalculate the extent to which they benefit from cooperating with the field researcher. Our informants may sometimes view the researcher-informant relationship as a contest between hustlers, especially in Mukaijima, Nishinari, and similar neighborhoods, as well as at the clubs and in and around the nightlife districts. This dynamic may have a detrimental effect on the relationship and research outcomes, but not necessarily so. At times the hustle of ethnography intensifies the field researcher's interactions, yielding results that more passive methods might have missed. Our endeavors are often met with ambivalence at best, and sometimes with skepticism or suspicion. Our informants' concerns are well founded given anthropology's historical legacy of subservience to colonial interests, and inequities remain in the field-study process despite increasingly reflexive methodologies and a robust applied anthropology subdiscipline.

Sometimes informants benefit from assisting in our research, as my Mukaijima informants seemed to understand when they pursued opportunities to employ their English language skills. Informants may enjoy interacting with us, or take satisfaction in helping us spread the word about their life histories and aspirations. They may perceive relations with the field researcher as a means of enhancing their own prestige, but most often the fieldworker-informant relationship is based on friendship, in which case asymmetric power relations are less of a concern. Ethnographers occasionally benefit from the altruism of casual acquaintances and, if we play the role of guest tactfully enough, we may be the recipients of considerable hospitality or even largesse.

Anarchy is a shrewd businessman, and his ultimate concern is whether, and how much, he will benefit from a relationship. Considering the size of his personal network and his financial obligations to support his father and grandmother, it is understandable that he operates on the basis of such a strict calculus. Yet Anarchy represents the role of the generic informant well enough, albeit in exaggerated terms. He is a former juvenile delinquent whose academic performance and classroom conduct during middle school ensured that his teachers

considered him ineligible for high school entry. I expect that, at some point, he began to wonder why he was helping me with my research. After all, he had already achieved nationwide fame, he was the subject of a documentary film, and sales of his autobiography were earning him modest returns. As anthropologists, ethnographers, and fieldworkers, our informants are often not as well educated as we are, and they may be quite conscious of and sensitive to these considerations. I suspect that, at times, we may be viewed as a type of white-collared hustler.

## Notes

1. The Japanese term *nyūtaun* (newtown) refers to large clusters of relatively uniform public housing, most often administered by municipal or prefectural governments.
2. The title "Ill Nishinari Blues" is derived from "Ill Street Blues" (Kool G. Rap and DJ Polo 1992) which in turn was derived from *Hill Street Blues*, a 1980s TV series about crime and poverty in inner-city America.
3. Mainichi Broadcasting System, Voice TV News *Kiwamon*, 10 July 2009.
4. For works specifically addressing racial politics in Japanese hip hop, see Cornyetz 1994, Condry 2006, and Thomas 2016. Works addressing racism against black people and the fetishization of blackness in Japanese society include Russell 1991 and 1998, Kelsky 1996, Wood 1997, and Sterling 2010.
5. The name Team Anarchy was derived from the Sex Pistols (1977) song "Anarchy in the U.K." Anarchy (the MC) is well aware of the meaning of the term "anarchy."
6. Most obvious among these constraints are those in educational settings. Teachers may subconsciously or otherwise exhibit low expectations of children from disadvantaged family backgrounds. Students internalize a sense of inferiority imposed on them by their teachers and classmates, in many cases ensuring that the child's education does not extend beyond middle school.
7. Ultra Naniwatic MCs, "Okonomi Tengoku," 2006.
8. Mainichi Broadcasting System, Voice TV News *Kiwamon*, 10 July 2009.
9. Ibid.
10. See Buruma 1984 for a discussion of the "hard" (*kōha*) versus "soft" (*nanpa*) typology of "Japanese masculinity."
11. These prior collaborations resulted in Anarchy's (2008a) autobiography, *Itami no Sakubun* [Composition of pain], and in the video documentary *Danchi no Yume: Dreams of the Projects* (Cole and Turner 2013).