

“MORE LIFE, MORE EVERYTHING”: DRAKE’S RELATIONAL PLACE

by

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*To Britanee and Eleanor*

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## ABSTRACT

Throughout his career, rapper and singer Drake has been intrinsically connected to place, specifically his hometown of Toronto, Canada. However, upon the release of his 2017 playlist project *More Life* Drake's music began to demonstrate global influences. Using Massey's theory of relational space, I provide a contextual analysis of Toronto and Drake as well as an analysis of his song "Madiba Riddim". Ultimately I establish that Drake's music demonstrates Massey's theory of relational place by representing the global and local relationships that occur within Toronto as well as outside of it and that give it a unique sense of place.

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED**

CBC	Canadian Broadcasting Association
CD	Compact Disc
DJ	Disc Jockey
DNA	Deoxyribonucleic Acid
FCAD	Faculty of Communication and Design
IRA	Irish Republican Army
MAGA	Make America Great Again
NBA	National Basketball Association
OVO	October's Very Own
R&B	Rhythm & Blues
TCDSB	Toronto Catholic District School Board
TDSB	Toronto District School Board
UK	United Kindom
USA	United States of America

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, the musician Drake (born, Aubrey Drake Graham) has become a giant of global proportions. With all of his major releases in the past 9 years reaching the #1 position on the Billboard Top Album Sales chart, Drake has consistently maintained the privileged position of an international social figure. In June 2019, Drake surpassed the Beatles for the second most Billboard Top 10 hits (36), now only preceded by Madonna.<sup>1</sup> Since 2018, Drake has also occupied the first place position for number of Top 10 singles released in a year, a record that had been previously held by the Beatles for 54 years.<sup>2</sup> Needless to say, Drake's influence is immense and his success is nearly unmatched.

Much of Drake's career has been focused around his expressed desire to represent Toronto. This desire is clearly demonstrated in his lyrical, sonic, and visual references to Toronto as well as his branding of the city as The 6 and himself as the 6 god, slang terms that are intimately connected to Drake, his music, and his local music label October's Very Own (OVO). Throughout his career, Drake has intentionally constructed an intrinsic relationship with Toronto to create the sense that he and the city are not only deeply connected, but are nearly synonymous. For over 5 years he has been the global

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<sup>1</sup> Gary Trust, "Drake Passes the Beatles For the Second-Most Billboard Hot 100 Top 10s," *Billboard*, 24 June, 2019, accessed July 23, 2019, <https://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/chart-beat/8517230/drake-most-top-ten-hits-hot-100>.

<sup>2</sup> Gary Trust, "Drake Claims 7 of Hot 100's Top 10, Breaking the Beatles' Record, As 'Nice For What' Returns to No. 1 For Eighth Week," *Billboard*, 9 July, 2018, accessed July 25, 2019, <https://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/chart-beat/8464454/drake-hot-100-record-nice-for-what-scorpion>.

ambassador for the Toronto Raptors, the city's local NBA team,<sup>3</sup> however even before acquiring this position he had already symbolically assumed the same position for the city as a whole. Writer Adrian Lee notes the achievements of Drake's primary producer Noah "40" Shebib in cultivating a "Toronto sound," an intentional feat that aims to represent and distinguish Toronto. Also collaborating with Drake as an executive producer is Oliver El-Khatib.

Shebib's contribution to Drake's music is immense, often comprising the role of executive producer as well as beat-maker. Because of this, the majority of the instrumental composition in Drake's music is credited to Shebib. Drake collaborates with Shebib in regard to overall artistic direction and which of Shebib's instrumental tracks are chosen to feature on any given project, but the majority of these tracks' composition and the specific identity of the Toronto sound is due to Shebib and the other local producers he collaborates with. Lee describes this sound specifically as involving "muted high-ends and scalped samples and mind-blowing snatches of drowned-out underwater R&B".<sup>4</sup> I have also identified specific characteristics of Shebib's Toronto sound, such as the playing of tracks and samples backwards (for instance, "Tuscan Leather"<sup>5</sup>), the speeding up and slowing down of samples such that the pitch and timbre is drastically adjusted (for instance, "Do Not Disturb"<sup>6</sup> and "Teenage Fever"<sup>7</sup>), and piano or keyboards

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<sup>3</sup> Robert MacLeod, "Rap Star Drake Joins Raptors Franchise as 'global Ambassador'," *Globe and Mail*, September 30, 2013, accessed Aug. 6, 2019, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/sports/basketball/nba-confirms-toronto-will-host-2016-nba-all-star-game/article14601067/>.

<sup>4</sup> Adrian Lee, "Drake's incomplete views from the Six," *Maclean's*, 29 April 2016, accessed Nov. 26, 2017, <https://www.macleans.ca/culture/arts/drakes-incomplete-views-from-the-six/>.

<sup>5</sup> Aubrey Drake Graham, "Tuscan Leather," released September 2013, track 1 on *Nothing Was the Same*, Cash Money Records, OVO Sound, Republic Records, and Young Money Entertainment, MP3.

<sup>6</sup> Aubrey Drake Graham, "Do Not Disturb," released March 2017, track 22 on *More Life*, Cash Money Records, Republic Records, and Young Money Entertainment, MP3.

<sup>7</sup> Aubrey Drake Graham, "Teenage Fever," released March 2017, track 14 on *More Life*, Cash Money Records, Republic Records, and Young Money Entertainment, MP3.

as the primary harmonic foundation (for instance, “From Time”<sup>8</sup>). Of course, there are many more specific characteristics of Drake and his production team’s iconic sound, which can be identified across artists signed to his local music label. However, apart from these specifics of production, there are broad characteristics that define and locate Drake’s music.

Increasingly Drake’s music shows considerable evidence of the cultures and musics that he is readily influenced by, specifically those of the African diaspora. The multiplicity of cultural influence that is found in Drake’s music, especially in his 2016 album *Views*<sup>9</sup> and his 2017 playlist *More Life*,<sup>10</sup> allows for it to be interpreted as a product of global connections and relationships. However, while his music is certainly globally focused, Drake and his public remain adamant that he lives and breathes Toronto. How then can both local and global coexist and even signify the same location?

Representing and recreating one’s local place is by no means an uncommon practice for most hip hop artists, however Drake’s mixing of the global and the local is a unique case. His strategy of place-making in his music can partly be explained by the fact that Toronto is itself a clear amalgamation of different cultures, ethnicities, languages, and histories with over half (51.5 per cent) of its population identifying as immigrants.<sup>11</sup> For Toronto, the local is so much comprised of the global that any rigid distinction between the two would be purposeless. Therefore, both Drake and his hometown present

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<sup>8</sup> Aubrey Drake Graham, “From Time,” released September 2013, track 7 on *Nothing Was the Same*, Cash Money Records, OVO Sound, Republic Records, and Young Money Entertainment, MP3.

<sup>9</sup> Aubrey Drake Graham, *Views*, released April 2016, Cash Money Records, Republic Records, and Young Money Entertainment, MP3.

<sup>10</sup> Aubrey Drake Graham, *More Life*, released March 2017, Cash Money Records, Republic Records, and Young Money Entertainment, MP3

<sup>11</sup> Julia Whalen, “Census 2016: More than half of Torontonians identify as visible minorities,” *CBC News*, 25 October 2017, accessed Aug. 6, 2019, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/census-visible-minorities-1.4371018>.

themselves as anomalies to traditional understandings of place that claim places to be introverted and essentialist with boundaries to exclude those outside.<sup>12</sup> Again, we are faced with the same question about the local and the global coexisting in a single locality. The key to understanding this phenomenon as well as Drake's embodiment of it can be found in geographer Doreen Massey's theory of relational space. In my thesis I will apply Massey's theory of relational space to Drake's song "Madiba Riddim"<sup>13</sup> from his *More Life* playlist to explain how it is possible for the local and the global to coexist and even strengthen each other. My analysis will render evidence of the functionality of Massey's alternative interpretation of space/place in order to better understand and value the connections between the global and the local.

Coming into fruition in the 1990s, Massey and her contemporaries theorized an alternative understanding of space and place that would take into account the ever-increasing and unavoidable globalization that would threaten the standard notions of place at the time. Instead of constructing a theory of space based on singularity, introversion, and restriction of identity, Massey's theory would be based on both global and local relationships and their processes. In this way, space and place could be seen as open, dynamic, plural, relational, and progressive. Massey's ground-breaking standpoint, named 'a progressive sense of place,' is now considered a dominant paradigm in geography.<sup>14</sup> The progressiveness of Massey's theory refers to a movement toward cultural inclusiveness and diversity and away from restriction and isolation.

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<sup>12</sup> Fuyuki Kurasawa, *Globalizations, Power, Marginality: Transnational Migrations and the Restructuring of the Urban* (master's thesis, Carlton University, 1995), 89.

<sup>13</sup> Aubrey Drake Graham, "Madiba Riddim," released March 2017, track 6 on *More Life*, Cash Money Records, Republic Records, and Young Money Entertainment, MP3.

<sup>14</sup> Marco Antonsich, "Grounding Theories of Place and Globalisation," *Tijdschrift voor economische en sociale geografie* 102 (2011): 331.

Even so, there still exist today opposing viewpoints that would look backwards to the bounded notions of place. One only has to scroll through recent news concerning the United States and its commander-in-chief, Donald Trump, to find evidence of these regressive notions. Bic Ngo, professor at the University of Minnesota, writes:

[Trump's] discourses allege that the American Dream is dead as a consequence of the problems immigrants bring to the United States. The United States is constructed as a nation that was once great when there were fewer immigrants. In other words, the United States was great when it was comprised primarily of Whites.<sup>15</sup>

Ngo also references Trump's campaign slogan and Nobel Prize-winning novelist Toni Morrison's biting response<sup>16</sup> to the racism of the Trump-era, stating that, "[Trump's] motto to 'Make America great again' barely veiled intentions to 'Make America White again'".<sup>17</sup>

It is precisely these notions that form the basis of regressive politics and places. Trump's slogan, which had already been used by President Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton for their 1980 and 1992 presidential campaigns, is inherently backward-looking as it seeks to revive America's past in order to reinstate it as an essentially White space. Upon his election, Trump's slogan was soon echoed by his several executive orders aimed at deporting and restricting immigrants.<sup>18</sup> This is very clearly the opposite of Massey's sense of place, posited on plurality, openness, and external as well as internal relationships that develop and as processes over time – progression rather regression. Therefore Massey's theory, though not totally accepted by all, provides a powerful and

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<sup>15</sup> Bic Ngo, "Immigrant Education Against the Backdrop of 'Make America Great Again'," *Educational Studies* 53, no. 5 (2017): 430.

<sup>16</sup> Toni Morrison, "Making America White Again," *The New Yorker*, 14 November, 2016, accessed July 27, 2019, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/11/21/making-america-white-again>.

<sup>17</sup> Ngo, "Immigrant Education," 430

<sup>18</sup> Ngo, "Immigrant Education," 430

alternative conceptualization of place that can be used to oppose the repressive politics of the MAGA era. Consequently, my application of Massey's theory for the analysis of Drake's progressive sense of place is relevant to current global sociopolitical events as it challenges popular regressive and oppressive politics. This thesis therefore asserts that Drake is a current and important political figure that represents an alternative to the regressive notions of place that have gained momentum in recent years.

In the second chapter, I will outline the aspects of Massey's theory that are integral to my own analysis of Drake, Toronto, and "Madiba Riddim". Included in this chapter is a general overview of the Jamaican dancehall genre Drake makes reference to in his song "Madiba Riddim". This overview will express the applicability of Massey's theory to dancehall.

Massey's three propositions found in the first chapter of her book *For Space* provide a clear basis for her theory;<sup>19</sup> this is also where I will begin in Chapter 2 as I lay the theoretical foundation for my thesis. Briefly, the three characteristics of space that Massey renders are, in her own words: "*First*, that we recognise space as the product of interrelations...*Second*, that we understand space as the sphere of the possibility of multiplicity in the sense of contemporaneous plurality...*Third*, that we recognise space as always under construction".<sup>20</sup> From these theoretical cornerstones I will build a framework using examples, some from Massey's writings and some from my own thought, to enforce and clarify Massey's theory. These examples will also provide

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<sup>19</sup> Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage, 2005), 9.

<sup>20</sup> Massey, *For Space*, 9.

evidence in support of Massey's theory, which, as I mentioned above, is in complete opposition to the traditional understanding of space and place.

Chapter 2 concludes with an analysis of dancehall, a music genre originating in Jamaican dance halls as an outgrowth of reggae. I will discuss key characteristics of dancehall that allow it to be easily analysed through the lens of Massey's theory. Most importantly, I will draw on Peter Manuel and Wayne Marshall's research concerning the riddim method,<sup>21</sup> a Jamaican system of recording and performance that dancehall implements.

The riddim method forms an integral foundation for dancehall music and also for my application of Massey's theory. The term 'riddim' refers to the instrumental track of a song overtop of which dancehall DJs would sing a one-or-two note melody. This practice had developed in the 1960s when DJs would interject throughout a popular song to hype up the crowd by encouraging them to dance, brag about themselves, and their sound systems. The riddims used in early dancehall were all taken from late 1960s reggae recordings such as "Real Rock," "Mad Mad," and "Full Up". Eventually, instead of featuring another song on the B-Side of a single, an instrumental version of the song on Side A would be included for the intended purpose of becoming a dancehall riddim. In the mid-1980s dancehall songs would feature original electronic riddims which would then follow the same pattern of dissemination through use and reuse.<sup>22</sup>

These patterns of creative commons are what Manuel and Marshall refer to as the riddim method. Dancehall's rhythmic ostinatos can appear in hundreds of other songs

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<sup>21</sup> Peter Manuel and Wayne Marshall, "The Riddim Method: Aesthetics, Practice, and Ownership in Jamaican Dancehall," *Popular Music* 25, no. 3 (2006): 447-470.

<sup>22</sup> Manuel and Marshall, "The Riddim Method," 449-452.

with different vocal tracks overtop of them, a practice that carries with it the implication of interconnectivity between songs which, at their foundation, share the same musical DNA. In Chapter 4 I apply Massey's theory of relational space to the riddim method to show how it too can be seen as a network of links and nodes just as Massey describes space.<sup>23</sup>

In the third chapter, I will provide evidence for Toronto as a relational place, demonstrating how it can be understood according to Massey's theory of progressive space and her three propositions. Throughout the overview of Toronto, I will draw connections to Massey's theory in order to establish Toronto as a node of interconnectivity on a local and global scale by virtue of its diverse and dynamic relationships. Massey's theory can be applied to any place one thinks of, but naturally Toronto is my focus since it is an essential context in which to understand Drake and an essential aspect of his music and career.

I will also provide further context on Drake, his position as Toronto's representative, and *More Life*. Drake's immense 2017 commercial release, which he has dubbed a playlist, boasts an internationally focused sound, containing generic references that span the globe and that often touch down at locales which are particularly important as homes to African diasporic communities. This multicultural aspect of Drake's music has been motivated by his intent to represent Toronto and its cultural diversity in his music. Drake's multicultural focus has been consistently growing since his 2013 release,

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<sup>23</sup> Doreen Massey, "Power-Geometry and a Progressive Sense of Place: Time-Space Compression and the Geometries of Power," in *Mapping the Futures: Local Cultures, Global Change*, ed. Jon Bird (London; New York: Routledge, 1993), 66.

*Nothing Was the Same*,<sup>24</sup> which featured Jamaican patois as slang – a vernacular that is a particular reference to Toronto’s Caribbean community and their influence on Toronto youth culture. Since then, Jamaican patois has proliferated throughout Drake’s music, becoming a defining characteristic of Drake and his hometown. *More Life* goes beyond cultural linguistic references and is the pinnacle of Drake’s cultural expansiveness in terms of musical genres, disseminating and celebrating these many cultural resources as far out as his popularity will reach.

Drake’s coveted position at the top of popular culture affords him the unique position of a social and, in our case, spatial influencer. Massey’s theory refers to this as mobility. In other words, those with mobility (a privileged and elite minority) are able to influence the relationships and movement of other people and groups. Those in this position of power can then use it to their advantage and increase their power, perhaps at someone else’s cost.<sup>25</sup> Drake holds just such a position, however I argue that as he increases his own power, he also empowers others who previously had none. The clearest example of this is Drake’s common practice of featuring lesser-known artists and their songs on his recordings and thereby introducing them to a wider, indeed global, audience.

Drake is not featured at all in three tracks of *More Life*, opting instead to give this space to three other artists (Jorja Smith, Sampha, and Skepta). This is not a gesture unique to *More Life*; in his sophomore album *Take Care* (2011)<sup>26</sup> Drake gives an entire track over to a then-up-and-coming Kendrick Lamar. He does this again in his fourth

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<sup>24</sup> Aubrey Drake Graham, *Nothing Was The Same*, released September 2013, Cash Money Records, OVO Sound, Republic Records, and Young Money Entertainment, MP3.

<sup>25</sup> Massey, “Power-Geometry and a Progressive Sense of Place,” 62.

<sup>26</sup> Aubrey Drake Graham, *Take Care*, released November 2011, Cash Money Records, Republic Records, and Young Money Entertainment, MP3.

album *Views* in 2016, dedicating a track to Toronto duo Majid Jordan whom he had recently signed to his own local music label October's Very Own. Drake also gives a generous amount of play time to the artists he features on his own songs. For example, in the song "Get It Together (feat. Black Coffee & Jorja Smith)"<sup>27</sup> on the *More Life* playlist, Drake is featured only in the chorus with Jorja Smith singing throughout the rest of the song. The original song was written and recorded by South African artists Black Coffee and Bucie and originally titled "Superman".<sup>28</sup> In the *More Life* playlist, Drake switches out Bucie's vocals for Jorja Smith's while keeping Black Coffee's original production almost entirely intact. In doing this, it is clear that Drake has taken opportunity to use his position of power to facilitate mobility for others, in this case Bucie and Jorja Smith. He moves Bucie out of the limelight and offers Jorja Smith a stab at it so as to build up her own mobility. At the same time Drake still heavily interpolates the original song which listeners have now most definitely been introduced to because of Drake's dissemination of it. Therefore, while Drake's mobility serves him well, it also serves others.

Not only does Drake mobilize and empower individual artists, he also does this for entire musical genres and, by extension, the cultures which created them. In Chapter 3 I discuss Drake's use of these musical and cultural resources in regard to the question of appropriation. Though complex and contentious, this subject can be navigated with the help of Massey's theory. Using this, I conclude that Drake and his music must be considered within the context of Toronto as a diasporic place. From a plurality of cultures Toronto has created another, authentic culture. This amalgamated culture is authentic

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<sup>27</sup> Aubrey Drake Graham, "Get It Together (feat. Black Coffee and Jorja Smith)," released March 2017, track 5 on *More Life*, Cash Money Records, Republic Records, and Young Money Entertainment, MP3.

<sup>28</sup> Black Coffee and Bucie, "Superman (feat. Bucie)," released 2010, Jellybean Soul, MP3.

because of its authentic cultural relationships that define it and the city in general. As a member of Toronto's diasporic place, Drake and his demonstration of Toronto's multiculturalism in his music is also authentic. To separate cultures that exist and co-exist within a multicultural society is to inhibit the cultural exchange and transformative relational processes that grant the society its unique sense of place. Separation of cultures also reinforces segregation and the notion that cultures are to be kept 'pure,' fixed, and untainted by other cultural influence. Instead of supporting these notions, Drake's music and representation of Toronto's multiculturalism, promotes cultural transfer and relational processes that unify and diversify Toronto's sense of place and identity.

This is the primary work he does in *More Life*, which features several genres throughout the playlist's 22 tracks. Most prevalent among these are UK grime, Caribbean dancehall, and South African house. It is this aspect of Drake's music that I will demonstrate in Chapter 4 through analysis of Drake's song "Madiba Riddim" and my discussion of dancehall and clan networks. What this analysis aims to demonstrate is that the relationality which Drake has orchestrated in his music is precisely the thing that gives it a unique sense of place and locates it as being 'of Toronto'.

My analysis of "Madiba Riddim" grows out of this contextual analysis of dancehall and the riddim method and leads to a discussion of how this same sense of interconnectivity and spatial networking is present in Drake's song. The song clearly references the relational web of the riddim method both through its title as well as its musical features. However, another relational web is referred to in the Xhosa clan name

‘Madiba,’ the clan of which Nelson Mandela was a part.<sup>29</sup> The Madiba clan can also be seen as a network of relationships, this time linked through genealogy to a common ancestor, similar to the way a riddim connects hundreds of other songs.

My analysis in Chapter 4 will make the argument for the existence of a relational space in Drake’s song “Madiba Riddim,” his *More Life* playlist, and his music in general. Considering Drake’s self-appointed position as Toronto’s representative, the relational space in Drake’s music can then be seen as a reflection of Toronto’s multicultural diversity and relationality. To conclude I will outline the ultimate implication of this finding, namely that Toronto is itself a product of relational space and is therefore further evidence of the validity and applicability of Massey’s theory, which exposes major liabilities in traditional theories of space.

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<sup>29</sup> “Names – Nelson Mandela Foundation,” *Nelson Mandela Foundation*, accessed July 9, 2019, [www.nelsonmandela.org/content/page/names](http://www.nelsonmandela.org/content/page/names).

## CHAPTER 2: MASSEY'S THEORY AND DANCEHALL'S RELATIONALITY

The primary value of Massey's theory on space and place is her acknowledgement of complexity based on the belief that space is necessarily constructed through complex interrelations. I have therefore derived the term 'relational space' from this essential characteristic of space (as well as Massey's own writing on "a relational understanding of the world"<sup>1</sup>) to refer to Massey's reading of space that is in counter position to notions of space that are based on fixity, stasis, and essentialism. Unfortunately, any term would appear to be a reduction of Massey's conceptualization because of its complex nature. However, it still stands that relationality is of primary importance in Massey's theory and that all other characteristics of space are birthed from and complement this key characteristic. In this chapter, I consider spatial relationality and its implications, identifying the concepts most essential to my own research.

In her book *For Space*, Massey lists three propositions for her theory. They are: 1. that space is based on both global and local relationships; 2. that space is heterogeneous by virtue of the spatial social interactions; 3. that space is in a constant process of construction that is never finished and always changing.<sup>2</sup> The distinction between space and place can be easily understood in these terms as well. If space is a web of heterogeneous social relations that are in constant flux, then places are specific intersections within this web where distinct combinations of these dynamic relationships

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<sup>1</sup> Massey, *For Space*, 10.

<sup>2</sup> Massey, *For Space*, 9.

occur.<sup>3</sup> The identity of a place is therefore not determined by any single identity or geographical boundary, but rather the uniqueness of the social relations that are carried out there and that extend far beyond restrictive borders. Out of the entirety of Massey's complex and broadly reaching theory, these three basic and foundational propositions will be most valuable to this thesis.

The first proposition can be seen as the first building block from which the other two propositions result. Standing alone, its premise is simple enough; however, when placed in juxtaposition to traditional conceptualizations of space, it is entirely novel. Massey considers space not as a surface on which people and places are set and already determined, but rather as a series of social interactions and practices. This means, without interrelationships there can be no space. The social relationships to which Massey refers include those that occur between members of a local place but also those relationships that reach beyond "what we happen to define for that moment as the place itself".<sup>4</sup> In other words, both local and global connections and relationships are important to the formation of a place. As Massey puts it, "the global is in the local in the very process of the formation of the local".<sup>5</sup>

Naturally, interrelationship requires plurality,<sup>6</sup> and so this becomes the second proposition. The point here is that several different social beings, groups, and histories coexist and relate to each other simultaneously to create place. This argues against the one-sided, essentialism of previous conceptualizations of place, for example the current

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<sup>3</sup> Massey, "Power-Geometry," 67; Doreen Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 120.

<sup>4</sup> Massey, "Power-Geometry," 67.

<sup>5</sup> Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender*, 120.

<sup>6</sup> Massey, *For Space*, 11.

essentialism that anxiously and violently asserts that America is a White space and any other identity is therefore a threat to the superior White homogeneity.<sup>7</sup> ‘Difference’ in terms of Massey’s theory means a multiplicity that contributes to the relational web of space instead of a distinction that could be used to constitute the exclusion of an out-group from the in-group or, in extreme cases, radical nationalism.<sup>8</sup> Concepts of difference, in-group, and out-group do not exist as anxious, negative divisions in Massey’s theory<sup>9</sup> since the multiplicity and broad scope of relationships are all considered and accepted as part of the place. Again, one can consider the outside (the global) as part of the local, rather than as being put in counterposition to it: “[the sense of a place] can come, in part, precisely through the particularity of linkage to that ‘outside’ which is therefore itself part of what constitutes the place”.<sup>10</sup>

Much of Massey’s theory is supported by various examples of specific places and the relationality that forms their identities. Massey uses her own local shopping centre, Kilburn High Road, to illustrate her theory of relational space where a multiplicity of connections to the outside are part of what creates a unique sense of place. Massey notes the street walls, post-boxes, and bottle depots that are covered with the letters ‘IRA’ and posters for a Bloody Sunday commemoration. Newspaper stands down the road sell papers from all around the world, sold by a Muslim man.<sup>11</sup> Massey’s description of Kilburn High Road illustrates that while this place may have its own unique identity, it cannot be reduced to a single interpretation that is unchanging and exclusive. Instead the

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<sup>7</sup> Morrison, “Making America White Again.”

<sup>8</sup> Massey, *For Space*, 12.

<sup>9</sup> Massey, *For Space*, 12-13.

<sup>10</sup> Massey, “Power-Geometry,” 68.

<sup>11</sup> Massey, “Power-Geometry,” 66.

sense of place found in Kilburn High Road is formed by a wide variety of global influences that exist in unique dynamic relationships to create a specific place unlike any other, though similarities and connections may exist.

Massey's concept and the global phenomenon that make it necessary are threatening to the traditional notions of place based on fixity and pure unitary identity. To admit and promote a sense of place that is not wholly one thing (one culture, one perspective, one past) is detrimental to the seamless, coherent identity that many places strive to construct. The presence of cultural resources and symbols that are not from within are often seen as intrusive, blemishing what is considered the once untainted and authentic culture that is native to the place.<sup>12</sup>

To address this point, Massey uses the example of 'the real France' one locates at an authentic Parisian café serving local food and drink supposedly akin only to Paris. The essentialist interpretation of 'the real France' is rooted in an imagined past where all of France's cultural identifiers were a product of introverted processes that never reached beyond its clearly demarcated borders. In her example, Massey humorously muses that this experience of France takes a certain degree of intentional blindness as one rushes past the hamburger joints in the airport (or across the street) where the sense of 'the real France' is compromised.<sup>13</sup> Anything that does not conform to the traditional, and often romanticized, notions and memories of a place are seen as disturbances to these notions. However, Massey notes that the cultural resources of France that are now regarded as foundational were once new themselves, constructed from various outside connections

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<sup>12</sup> Doreen Massey, "Places and Their Pasts," *History Workshop Journal* 39 (1995): 183.

<sup>13</sup> Massey, "Places and Their Pasts," 182.

and influences that have now become established as essential, local cultural forms.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, the newer global connections and resources that occur at any given place and contribute to its identity are just as much part of the place as the older and more established ones; they are merely at a different point in the process of integration and acceptance.

This leads into the third and final point that space and places are in a constant process of becoming. This characteristic of space is a necessary outcome of the heterogeneous social processes that are continually being carried out through space. As Massey claims, her theory is “wary therefore about claims to authenticity based in notions of unchanging identity”.<sup>15</sup> The interrelations are never completed nor are they comprehensive.<sup>16</sup> While France and ‘Frenchness’ would not have been influenced by American fast food chains in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, it certainly is now. The global connection between France and the USA is qualified in a different way than it had been previously because of the introduction of this and other American industries new to the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Fixity and already determined identities are impossible since the complex web of social relations is constantly changing and dynamic. In this way, space includes temporality and is not the opposite of time, contrary to previous conceptualisations of the two.

## **JAMAICAN DANCEHALL**

Massey’s theory conceives of space as dependent on social processes where the

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<sup>14</sup> Massey, “Places and Their Pasts,” 183.

<sup>15</sup> Massey, *For Space*, 10.

<sup>16</sup> Massey, *For Space*, 12.

specificity of these processes is what defines place. Therefore, one could argue, as I intend to, that place can be created at instances that are beyond traditional geography, instances that cannot necessarily be located on a map. A sense of place can be created in a piece of music through the various relationships that occur within it and give it its distinctiveness. For Drake, the place he creates within his music is metaphorically Toronto and all of its relationships inside the city and outside of it. The primary relationship I will examine in this thesis is of Drake and Toronto to Jamaica. Drake makes international connections to Jamaica and other regions through the Caribbean-originated dancehall genre. This genre can productively be examined using Massey's theory and so before I examine the nature of Drake's relationship with Jamaica through dancehall, I will first establish dancehall as an inherently relational genre.

Dancehall as a social phenomenon grew in popularity around the 1950s. As one might imagine, the name is derived from the venues in which social dance events were held.<sup>17</sup> Since its inception, dancehall has grown into a distinct genre and as such, is characterized by much more than its venue. Known for its multiplicity of discourses (which are often contentious) on gender, violence, materialism, creative license, and celebration, dancehall is also a vessel for cultural dissemination that can challenge the social and political power structures that are often bent toward exclusivity and oppression.<sup>18</sup>

Donna Hope argues that dancehall "has developed into a cultural site for the

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<sup>17</sup> Sonjah Stanley-Niaah, "Kingston's Dancehall: A Story of Space and Celebration," *Space & Culture* 7, no. 1 (2004): 108; Sonjah Stanley-Niaah, "Negotiating a Common Transnational Space," *Cultural Studies* 23, nos. 5 and 6 (2009): 759.

<sup>18</sup> Donna Hope, "The British Link-Up Crew: Consumption Masquerading as Masculinity in the Dancehall," *Interventions* 6, no. 1 (2004): 104, 107.

creation and dissemination of symbols and ideologies that reflect and legitimize the lived realities of its adherents”.<sup>19</sup> The adherents and their lived realities that Hope refers to are generally artists hailing from the extreme poverty of Kingston’s ghetto; artists for whom dancehall represents their constant socioeconomic struggles. Sonjah Stanley-Niaah argues that dancehall’s effectiveness in representing its people to the world is largely due to the use of the Jamaican patois language.<sup>20</sup>

Stanley-Niaah also points out that performance, especially of reggae and dancehall in her case, is a network that connects nations and identities; a network that “tells stories about deep connections not just centered on national ties but diasporic and historical ones as well”.<sup>21</sup> In her conclusion, she asserts that in order to overthrow the oppression and confinement that no doubt came from a British hegemony imposing its prescribed identity and place, the performers of dancehall had to create their own space by adopting “a philosophy of limitless space and boundarylessness...for the reclamation, multiplication, and transcendence of space”.<sup>22</sup> Massey’s theory here clearly resonates and offers a remedy to the oppressive shackles of fixity and unitary identity, a conception of space that is boundless, expansive, and plural.

Elsewhere, Stanley-Niaah also writes about the Black Atlantic, a concept introduced by Paul Gilroy in his book *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*.<sup>23</sup> Gilroy’s seminal work describes a black diasporic culture whose identity is not set in either African, American, Caribbean, or British contexts, but all of these (and

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<sup>19</sup> Hope, “The British Link-Up Crew,” 107.

<sup>20</sup> Sonjah Stanley-Niaah, “Performance Geographies: From Slave Ship to Ghetto,” *Space and Culture* 11, no. 4 (2008): 357.

<sup>21</sup> Stanley-Niaah, “Performance Geographies,” 357.

<sup>22</sup> Stanley-Niaah, “Performance Geographies,” 357.

<sup>23</sup> Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

more) at once. Just like Massey's theory, Gilroy's concept of the Black Atlantic transcends traditional views of nationality, place, and culture and offers an alternative based on the expansive multiplicity of cultures. Stanley-Niaah alludes to Gilroy's research for the purpose of placing black music and performance, including dancehall, in this context of "inhabiting one or more cultures through established routes of memory, travel, representation or performance".<sup>24</sup>

Stanley-Niaah's reference to routes of memory echoes Anthony D. Smith's writings on nation and nationalism in *The Cultural Foundation of Nations*.<sup>25</sup> However, rather than conceiving of the nation as having a fixed centre within clearly demarcated borders as Smith describes in his outline of the civic-territorial concept of the modern nation,<sup>26</sup> Stanley-Niaah's (along with Gilroy and Massey's) conceptualization is the opposite. Every characteristic of the nation and the way it is formed is made to be extraverted rather than introverted: in this sense, the routes of memory are not simply bordered-off internal synaptic pathways but global synapses connecting spatial 'nerve cells'. Dancehall, as a vessel for cultural dissemination and the creation of a plural space, is inarguably linked to countless other cultural histories within the Black Atlantic. Therefore dancehall itself contains and also disseminates all of these cultural histories.

The plurality of this spatial expanse occurs within dancehall as a natural result of its intrinsic characteristics. In his article "Clashing Interpretations of Jamaican Dancehall Culture," Bibi Bakare-Yusef notes well dancehall's own inherent multiplicity:

I suggest therefore that dancehall culture is an inherently hybrid form, constantly mutating as it negotiates various elements of internal and external difference and reception. Rather than privilege any possible local interpretation at the level of

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<sup>24</sup> Stanley-Niaah, "Negotiating a Common Transnational Space," 757.

<sup>25</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *The Cultural Foundations of Nations* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2008).

<sup>26</sup> Smith, *The Cultural Foundation of Nations*, 12-14.

discourse and language, dancehall is revealed as an intrinsically complex material assemblage that does not and cannot valorize the category of the authentic. Rather than an analysis centered mostly on language and lyrical content, dancehall is in this way opened up as a political, economic, sonic, visual, haptic, and indeed olfactory phenomenon... Any distinctions between the authentic and the inauthentic, the pure and the impure, the insider and the outsider, fall away in the face of a constantly morphing assemblage of sound, words, movement, adornment, desire, and social economy of signs. Dancehall is grounded not only in the “politics of place” but in an avaricious interplay between alterity and difference. Dancehall absorbs external influences as much as it is absorbed by them. Rather than privileging a pure moment of interiority based on a singular local interpretation, a cacophony of interpretations is released within the material modes of the phenomenon.<sup>27</sup>

Place as it is constructed in dancehall, therefore, exemplifies well Massey’s theory of relational space, given its multiplicity, destruction of the distinction between internal and external through its relation to both, as well as its constant state of change. Even its origins, branching off from reggae around the 1980s to become a genre in its own right, can be interpreted according to Massey’s theory: dancehall began as an extension from reggae’s central stalk to create a distinct pathway while still being inseparable from the main, similar to a spatial network or relational web.

## **DANCEHALL’S RELATIONAL RIDDIMS**

Although scholars have delineated several general characteristics of dancehall that line up impeccably with Massey’s theory (those of multiplicity, dissemination, membership in an expansive network), a specific feature of dancehall can be identified to explain exactly how dancehall has gained these traits. “The riddim method”, as identified by Peter Manuel and Wayne Marshall in their article “The Riddim Method: Aesthetics, Practice, and Ownership in Jamaican Dancehall,” denotes the Jamaican system of

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<sup>27</sup> Bibi Bakare-Yusef, “Clashing Interpretations of Jamaican Dancehall Culture,” *Small Axe* 21 (2006): 167.

recording and performance found commonly in dancehall.<sup>28</sup> Riddims comprise the ostinato accompaniment to dancehall tracks over which DJs will vocalize (or, toast, as it is sometimes termed) an original text. As Manuel and Marshall point out, can appear in hundreds of dancehall songs that differ only in the vocal tracks on each.<sup>29</sup>

In the early years of dancehall, riddim tracks were taken from late 1960s reggae songs, such as “Real Rock” and “Mad Mad,” using either instrumental songs (“Real Rock”), the instrumental B-Sides of the reggae singles, or stripped-down re-recordings of the rhythm track by studio house bands.<sup>30</sup> As such, riddims came to be referred to by the name of the original song in which they appeared, even as they were widely distributed and included in hundreds of dancehall songs. Occasionally, if a new song garnered enough success, the vintage riddim used could take on another name, again the title of the new song (for example, the “Mad Mad” riddim may also be called “Diseases” or “Johnny Dollar”).<sup>31</sup> The use of riddims as public domain is a foundational aspect of dancehall and therefore allows the genre to be interpreted as a network of relationships. A single riddim can have hundreds of connections between the songs and artists who use it. As these connections are created the song is qualified and requalified in different ways. Here Massey’s theory of relational space takes us beyond traditional geography and into the heart of a musical genre where place is constantly being constructed. I will revisit this concept at length in my analysis of Drake’s “Madiba Riddim” in the fourth chapter of this thesis. However, first, further contextual analysis of Toronto and Drake are necessary.

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<sup>28</sup> Manuel and Marshall, “The Riddim Method,” 447.

<sup>29</sup> Manuel and Marshall, “The Riddim Method,” 447-448.

<sup>30</sup> Manuel and Marshall, “The Riddim Method,” 451.

<sup>31</sup> Manuel and Marshall, “The Riddim Method,” 455.

## **CHAPTER 3: TORONTO AND DRAKE'S INTERNATIONAL AMBASSADORSHIP**

### **TORONTO AS A RELATIONAL PLACE**

Toronto and its multi-cultural landscape provide countless examples that work with Massey's theory. In 1998, the city became a literal amalgamation, comprised now of the six municipalities Etobicoke, York, North York, East York, Scarborough, and Old Toronto. This in itself shows the city to be a plural place; there are several distinct parts all within and comprising a whole. Plurality in terms of demographics can also be argued. The United Nations Development Programme released a report in 2004 which stated that Toronto had the second-highest percentage of foreign-born population for major cities in the world, preceded only by Miami.<sup>1</sup> According to Statistics Canada's 2016 Census, 51.5 per cent of Toronto's population were immigrants.<sup>2</sup> With these rates, the city's motto 'Diversity, Our Strength' is highly appropriate.

This diversity can be seen clearly in the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), which covers all six boroughs of Toronto. The TDSB is the most ethnically diverse school board in Canada, with students from 170 countries speaking over 80 languages.<sup>3</sup> In his article on multilingualism in Toronto schools, Ranu Basu notes that in 2005 there were 57 heritage and language classes offered at 40 percent of the public elementary

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2004: Cultural Liberty in Today's Diverse World* (New York: UNDP, 2004), 99.

<sup>2</sup> Julia Whalen, "Census 2016: More than half of Torontonians identify as visible minorities," *CBC News*, 25 October 2017, accessed Aug. 6, 2019, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/census-visible-minorities-1.4371018>.

<sup>3</sup> Ranu Basu, "Multiculturalism Through Multilingualism in Schools: Emerging Places of 'Integration' in Toronto," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 101, no. 6 (2011): 1312.

schools in the TDSB and the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB).<sup>4</sup> Basu states that the multilingualism in these schools echoes the increasing diversity of culture in Toronto as well as an attempt to foster connections with a variety of cultures.<sup>5</sup>

Considering Basu's point, the TDSB and the TCDSB fit well with Massey's theory and are a prime example of relational place. These school districts form unique places by virtue of their multiculturalism afforded them by the global cultural connections that intersect at these schools and throughout the city. Furthermore, this diversity is constantly changing and growing due to changes in immigration policy which began in the 1970s.<sup>6</sup>

The progressiveness of place (social processes, growth, and change) is an integral aspect of Massey's theory. Just as the unique combination of relationships in a place provide it with a unique identity, the never-ending processes of those relationships, and the effects of those processes, also create a unique sense of place. For example, the multiculturalism that grants Toronto its unique diversity also results in unique issues for the city's school boards, such as lack of funding in the 1990s for schools needing to deal with the enormous task of welcoming and educating their diverse student body.<sup>7</sup> The huge influx of immigration to Toronto presents it with the challenge of social integration in its schools, a challenge which the city has, at times, been unable to meet.

The immense issue of social integration in Toronto is found not only in the schools but also in the social geography of the city. Mohommad Qadeer examines the

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<sup>4</sup> Basu, "Multiculturalism Through Multilingualism in Schools," 1315.

<sup>5</sup> Basu, "Multiculturalism Through Multilingualism in Schools," 1316.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Murdie and Sutama Ghosh, "Does Spatial Concentration Always Mean a Lack of Integration? Exploring Ethnic Concentration and Integration in Toronto," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 36, no. 2 (2010): 294.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Anisef and Michael C. Lanphier, ed., *The World In A City* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 67.

distinct ethnic enclaves that exist in Toronto's suburbs in his article "Ethnic Segregation in Toronto and the New Multiculturalism." Qadeer observes patterns of ethnic residential concentrations such as "Sikhs in Malton, Chinese and South Asians in Markham and Mississauga, Caribbeans and Somalis in northern Etobicoke, Italians in Woodbridge, Jews in North York".<sup>8</sup> Robert Murdie and Sutama Ghosh use the example of Danforth Avenue as an ethnic enclave in Toronto. This main commercial street includes several Bangladeshi businesses and mosques, as well as offices for Bengali newspapers and community agencies.<sup>9</sup>

This segregation may seem to admit an inability to properly integrate Toronto's vast array of cultures into spatial relationships that would define the city, rendering Toronto a poor example for Massey's theory. However, Murdie and Ghosh argue that although ethnic residential segregation exists, many immigrant groups have gained what they call functional integration, referring to their mobility in labor and in housing status, although this is not the case for all ethnic groups.<sup>10</sup> Qadeer also claims that Toronto's residential segregation is rarely absolute and many ethnic groups encounter each other in the private realm as well as in the professional/functional realm that Murdie and Ghosh referred to.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, Toronto remains a prime example of Massey's concept of relational place since one can identify unique patterns of global and local social relationships as well as the unique effects of these processes, all of which contribute to the unique sense of place in Toronto.

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<sup>8</sup> Mohommad Qadeer, "Ethnic Segregation in Toronto and the New Multiculturalism," *Centre for Urban and Community Services Research Bulletin* #12 (2003): 2.

<sup>9</sup> Murdie and Ghosh, "Does Spatial Concentration Always Mean a Lack of Integration?," 305.

<sup>10</sup> Murdie and Ghosh, "Does Spatial Concentration Always Mean a Lack of Integration?," 308.

<sup>11</sup> Qadeer, "Ethnic Segregation in Toronto and the New Multiculturalism," 3.

This is not to suggest that Toronto is and always has been a diverse sociocultural paradise with no cultural conflict. Indeed, like many other North American European settlements, Toronto began as a ‘white settler’ society. Toronto was founded with a unitary religion, nationality, language, and culture: English speaking British Protestants, or The Orange Order. Anything outside of these specific characteristics was questionable and endangered the ‘peaceful’ cultural homogeny.<sup>12</sup>

The group that was the biggest initial threat to this homogeny were the Jewish immigrants that provided a foreign culture, language, religion, and identity.<sup>13</sup> Though there had been a Jewish presence in Toronto prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Jews became the largest non-British group there due to an influx of Jewish immigration occurring in the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At that time, rampant anti-Semitism pervaded much of Toronto’s narrow cultural viewpoint.<sup>14</sup>

Laws such as the 1907 Lord’s Day Act affirmed the Jews’ place as outsiders in Toronto. This act required the public to abstain from public activity on Sundays, except for churchgoing. As Paul Anisef and Michael C. Lanphier observe, the 1907 Lord’s Day Act legally qualified and jeopardized the Jew’s social status as they “worshipped on Saturday not Sunday, and did so in synagogues not churches”.<sup>15</sup> Anisef and Lanphier also provide the shocking anecdote about Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King who wrote in his diary just after the Second World War recalling the words of Goldwin Smith, an anti-Semite professor at the University of Toronto: “I recall Goldwin Smith feeling so strongly about the Jews. He expressed it at one time as follows: that they were poison in

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<sup>12</sup> Anisef and Lanphier, ed., *The World In A City*, 378.

<sup>13</sup> Anisef and Lanphier, ed., *The World In A City*, 377.

<sup>14</sup> Anisef and Lanphier, ed., *The World In A City*, 378-379.

<sup>15</sup> Anisef and Lanphier, ed., *The World In a City*, 379.

the veins of a community... the evidence is very strong, not against all Jews... that in a large percentage of the race there are tendencies and trends which are dangerous indeed".<sup>16</sup> Clearly, amicable multiculturalism was neither a characteristic of Toronto, nor of Canada in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Until 1961, 90 per cent of Toronto's immigration was from the United Kingdom and Europe.<sup>17</sup> This comes as no surprise, since the Canadian immigration policy that was in effect until well after the Second World War intentionally steered non-British and non-American immigrants away from urban centres like Toronto and toward labour industries. Railway construction, mining, lumbering, and farming were indeed the price of citizenship for ethnic minorities in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>18</sup> The Immigration Act of 1962 deliberately countered these policies by stating that it would not regard race, colour, national origin or country in matters of immigration, only a prospective immigrant's merit.<sup>19</sup> This act created a major shift in immigration by opening the gates to a much wider selection of countries and cultures, and its inauguration happened to coincide with Jamaica's independence from Britain and Britain's curtailing of Caribbean immigration. Consequently, many Caribbean immigrants left for Canada instead of Britain, making them the largest group of 'non-white' immigrants to benefit from the Immigration Act of 1962.<sup>20</sup> However, just as the Jewish community faced harsh discrimination, the Caribbean community were also victims of racism. Anisef and Lanphier note that Caribbeans and all African-Canadians faced "discrimination in

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<sup>16</sup> Anisef and Lanphier, ed., *The World In a City*, 379.

<sup>17</sup> Myer Siemiatycki and Isin Engin, "Immigration, Diversity and Urban Citizenship in Toronto," *Canadian Journal of Regional Science* 20, nos. 1 and 2 (1997): 78.

<sup>18</sup> Anisef and Lanphier, ed., *The World In a City*, 23.

<sup>19</sup> Anisef and Lanphier, ed., *The World In a City*, 398.

<sup>20</sup> Anisef and Lanphier, ed., *The World In a City*, 398.

employment and housing; alarmingly high school drop-out rates; insensitivity from cultural institutions; barriers impeding the establishment of community institutions; and disproportionate confrontations with police”.<sup>21</sup>

Anisef and Lanphier provide a pointed list of examples to give evidence to the claims of Caribbean and African-Canadian discrimination. Their list touches on the 60% high school drop-out rate among African-Canadian youth in the 1990s; the opposition from property owners and the North York city counsel against the Jamaican Canadian Association for the building of a new Jamaican Canadian community centre; and police shootings which killed eight African-Canadian men between 1988 and 1992.<sup>22</sup> Clearly, though Toronto has taken in a huge number of immigrants to the point where they now contribute to nearly half of its population, it has not always done so kindly.

My intent in conjuring up evidence of Toronto’s less-than-accommodating past is to explain an important distinction in Massey’s theory of relational place. Massey’s definition of place is not restricted to places that have achieved seamless multiculturalism (good thing, too, since it is doubtful such places actually exist). Cultural conflict, racial discrimination, and even brutal hegemony do not disqualify a place from being interpreted according to Massey’s theory. The point of Massey’s theory of relational place is only that places would be seen as intersections of a multiplicity of fluid social relationships, whether those relationships are amicable or not. The quality of the relationships is how places acquire their identity and uniqueness, how they can be defined for the moment. For example, Toronto’s multiculturalism was, and in some respects still is, a point of contention and hegemonic power struggles have been clearly present there.

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<sup>21</sup> Anisef and Lanphier, ed., *The World In a City*, 399.

<sup>22</sup> Anisef and Lanphier, ed., *The World In A City*, 400.

Though they may not be pleasant, the power dynamics within Toronto are precisely part of what defines the place. Evidence of power struggles only helps to qualify a place in Massey's theory, not disqualify it. Furthermore, the fitting applicability of Massey's theory to Toronto does not automatically suggest that Toronto has achieved multicultural harmony, but it does suggest that Toronto is particularly socially diverse and can therefore be interpreted and defined through Massey's theory because of Toronto's wealth of diverse social processes.

There are, of course, many more immigrant groups, besides the Jewish and Caribbean communities, that have suffered discrimination in Toronto. However, I have chosen to focus on these two partly because of their historic significance but also because Drake maintains a direct relationship with them both. It is public knowledge that Drake identifies as Jewish,<sup>23</sup> a faith passed down to him by his mother Sandi Graham. In his song "Still Here," Drake makes a play on words using his infamous slang term for Toronto, The 6, and strong Jewish symbolism to connect his private identity with the public city: "Whole lot of 6's but I'm still like/ Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Hallelujah/ 6 point star, lion of the Judah".<sup>24</sup> In this dual-layered reference, Drake makes a bold statement by placing his identity as a Jew in the same realm as his identity as Toronto's representative, the 6 god, therefore giving it the same immense value and importance.

Unlike his relationship to Toronto's Jewish community, Drake's relationship to the Caribbean immigrant community in Toronto is not a familial connection. As I will discuss in Chapter 4, Caribbean culture has been a major influencer in Toronto hip hop

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<sup>23</sup> Eric Rosenthal and Jeff Rosenthal, "The 8 Jews of Rap: Drake," *Complex*, 1 December 2013, accessed Aug. 6, 2019, <https://www.complex.com/music/2013/12/8-jews-of-rap-drake>.

<sup>24</sup> Aubrey Drake Graham, "Still Here," released April 2016, track 10 on *Views*, Cash Money Records, Republic Records, and Young Money Entertainment, MP3.

youth culture<sup>25</sup>. As a member of Toronto's multicultural society and its self-appointed representative, Drake is compelled to represent the Caribbean culture that is essential to the city's identity. Drake commonly uses Jamaican patois as slang and features Caribbean musical elements and methods, such as riddims, strongly in his music. This vital connection will be the primary focus of the musical analysis of Chapter 4.

### **DRAKE AS TORONTO'S REPRESENTATIVE**

From early on in his career, Drake has made it known that his intent for his music and his career is to represent Toronto. Drake's intent on this central matter has only become clearer as his career develops and his popularity continues to reach new heights upon each new release. An integral part of his vocational development was his co-founding, along with close collaborators Oliver El-Khatib and Noah "40" Shebib, of the Toronto-based music label October's Very Own (OVO) in 2012. Over its relatively short existence, OVO has become as much a music label as a brand, branching out into the fashion market, with store fronts located in both Toronto and Los Angeles. Although the brand's distribution is certainly international, Drake and his OVO team have positioned themselves as a localized operation, with a distinct Toronto sound spearheaded by producers and beat-makers Shebib and El-Khatib, and most of OVO's signed artists hailing from Toronto.

Throughout his career, Drake has made particular effort to make himself, his music, and his city virtually interchangeable. He has done this through numerous lyrical,

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<sup>25</sup> Lee, "Drake's Incomplete Views from the Six."

visual and sonic references to Toronto. In July 2014, Drake announced that his fourth studio album would be titled *Views From the 6*, stating that ‘The 6’ was a reference to Toronto.<sup>26</sup> This slang term is likely derived from Toronto’s 6 boroughs and the amalgamated city’s area code 416, which Drake has tattooed on his torso.<sup>27</sup> Upon its release, the front cover of *Views* (as it was later re-titled) featured a picture of Drake sitting atop Toronto landmark the CN Tower. The *Views*’ album art can easily be taken as a brag about Drake’s position ‘at the top’ (of the charts, of pop culture, of the social hierarchy, of Toronto)<sup>28</sup> as well as a prideful declaration of his allegiance to the city and his self-appointed position as the keeper of it, even its king as *Globe and Mail* writer Cathal Kelly affirms.<sup>29</sup>

However, Drake does not settle for the mere status of a king. Instead he sets his sights on a higher command. In 2015, after the announcement of *Views* but before its release, Drake released his mixtape *If You’re Reading This It’s Too Late*<sup>30</sup> with no announcement or publicity. In this project, which features countless uses of Toronto’s nickname, Drake deems himself the 6 god. In hindsight, it is clear that the release of *If You’re Reading This It’s Too Late* was intended as publicity in itself, as a measured step to prime Drake’s audience for what was to come: Drake as a 10-foot-tall deity, enthroned upon the CN Tower.

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<sup>26</sup> Andrew Hampp, “Drake Announces Fourth Studio Album ‘Views From the 6’ (Exclusive),” *Billboard*, 15 July, 2014, accessed July 9, 2019, <https://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/the-juice/6157617/drake-announces-fourth-album-views-from-the-6-exclusive>.

<sup>27</sup> Del Cowie, Laura Stanley, and Andrew McIntosh, “Drake,” last modified February 13, 2017, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/drake>.

<sup>28</sup> Hua Hsu, “The Self-Conflict Zone: Drake’s Perpetual Sadness,” *The New Yorker*, 16 May 2016, accessed Sep. 13, 2017, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/05/16/drakes-views-review>.

<sup>29</sup> Cathal Kelly, “King of Toronto,” *Globe and Mail*, 12 February, 2016, accessed July 9, 2019, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/sports/basketball/drake-nba-all-star-game-toronto-raptors-2016/article28746939/>.

<sup>30</sup> Aubrey Drake Graham, *If You’re Reading This It’s Too Late*, released February 2015, Cash Money Records, OVO Sound, Republic Records, and Young Money Entertainment, MP3.

Beyond *Views*, Drake continues to boast of his position as the 6 god but in less obvious ways. Rather than an explicit self-ordination in the form of a title or a clever photo, Drake chooses to demonstrate his power and use it to organize peoples and create something much larger than even himself. In his 2017 release *More Life*, Drake uses his position to act as a facilitator of international relationships that intersect within his music to create a unique sense of place that is undeniably Toronto.

### **DRAKE AS TORONTO'S INTERNATIONAL AMBASSADOR**

In an interview with DJ Semtex about the then-forthcoming *More Life* playlist, Drake states: “we’re all intertwined, afrobeats, Toronto, the Jamaican culture, dancehall, London, you know”.<sup>31</sup> Here Drake takes a quick inventory of the various connections that exist in the place-based music network of which Drake and Toronto are a part. Drake has made considerable and intentional effort to form connections to the place-based items on this list by incorporating their traditions, music, and language in his own music. Drake mentions afrobeats, a West African genre that fuses jazz, funk, and soul, likely in regard to his 2016 single “One Dance”<sup>32</sup> featuring Nigerian afrobeats artist Wizkid. Of all the cultural connections expressed in Drake’s music the most prevalent is his relationship to Jamaica via its linguistic and musical tradition. Therefore, while Drake is inarguably ‘of Toronto,’ he also moves outside of Toronto into the realm of international relations. It is

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<sup>31</sup> DJ Semtex, “Drake Meets Semtex for More Talk,” *Nation of Billions*, 19 February 2017, accessed Dec.10, 2018, <https://nationofbillions.com/drake-meets-semtex-for-more-talk-about-kanye-meek-mill-skept>.

<sup>32</sup> Aubrey Drake Graham, “One Dance (feat. Wizkid and Kyla),” released April 2016, track 12 on *Views*, Cash Money Records, Republic Records, and Young Money Entertainment, MP3.

implied that to represent one's local place is to do so 'outside' of it. Drake, like every artist before him who wishes to represent their hometown, communicates his representation to the world. However, Drake as an international representative is not as an anxious imperialist aggressor. Rather, he is motivated by the openness and extraversion that his city fosters so that he influences *and* is influenced by the international relationships he is a part of. Drake's international ambassadorship is therefore more fluid than if he sought only to represent the fixity of the local. As such, his international relations can often result in bringing home other cultural features that represent other locales to be added into Toronto's cultural mosaic.

For instance, Drake's musical connections to the UK can be observed throughout his 2016 and 2017 releases where he collaborates often with UK artists such as Kyla, Giggs, Jorja Smith, and Sampha in their respective genres of UK funky, grime, R&B, and Soul. However, the connection between Drake and the UK goes beyond collaboration. Immediately following his statement above, taken from his interview with DJ Semtex, Drake credits London grime rapper Skepta for making him aware of the intertwined web of musical influence and collaboration he refers to in the interview. In view of this, it is not surprising that Drake allots Skepta his own track on *More Life* and takes the backseat, not appearing in any way on the song.

It is also unsurprising that Drake features Giggs, another notable name in the London grime scene, on two tracks of *More Life* and even tries his own hand at the genre in his song "Gyalchester."<sup>33</sup> The similarities between Drake's music and grime hinge on their shared connection to Jamaican lingual traditions. The use of Jamaican patois as

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<sup>33</sup> Aubrey Drake Graham, "Gyalchester," released March 2017, track 9 on *More Life*, Cash Money Records, Republic Records, and Young Money Entertainment, MP3.

slang is a crucial element of Drake's music<sup>34</sup> as well as of UK grime. This commonality between Drake's music and grime is demonstrated clearly in the *More Life* track "No Long Talk (feat. Giggs)"<sup>35</sup> where both Drake and Giggs go back-to-back in patois-heavy verses. In Drake's verse, the tally amounts to at least 16 uses of 11 slang terms over 23 bars (a one minute verse in total). In Giggs' verse there are over 20 instances of Jamaican or Jamaican-British patois, at which point his language is more like Jamaican dialect than slang.

Both Toronto and London are home to large communities of Caribbean immigrants and there is a direct relationship between these immigrant communities. In view of this, we can see how the use of Jamaican-based language in both Drake's music and UK grime works as a locating device for Toronto and London alike by referencing the Caribbean communities that partially construct their respective sociocultural landscapes. For the traditional (white European) conceptions of Toronto and London, it may seem disorienting and even threatening to think that non-white cultural features such as Jamaican patois could signify either place. However, as the example above indicates, Caribbean culture has been as much a part of Toronto and London's identities and social makeup as the 'purist' and 'traditional' white European cultures have been. Drake's use

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<sup>34</sup> Notable songs include: Aubrey Drake Graham, "Controlla," released April 2016, track 11 on *Views*, Cash Money Records, Republic Records, and Young Money Entertainment, MP3; Aubrey Drake Graham, "Know Yourself," released February 2015, track 4 on *If You're Reading This It's Too Late*, Cash Money Records, OVO Sound, Republic Records, and Young Money Entertainment, MP3; Aubrey Drake Graham, "Star 67," released February 2015, track 8 on *If You're Reading This It's Too Late*, Cash Money Records, OVO Sound, Republic Records, and Young Money Entertainment, MP3; Aubrey Drake Graham, "Keep the Family Close," released April 2016, track 1 on *Views*, Cash Money Records, Republic Records, and Young Money Entertainment, MP3; Aubrey Drake Graham, "Free Smoke," released March 2017, track 1 on *More Life*, Cash Money Records, Republic Records, and Young Money Entertainment, MP3; Aubrey Drake Graham, "Get It Together (feat. Black Coffee and Jorja Smith)," released March 2017, track 5 on *More Life*, Cash Money Records, Republic Records, and Young Money Entertainment, MP3.

<sup>35</sup> Aubrey Drake Graham, "No Long Talk (feat. Giggs)," released March 2017, track 2 on *More Life*, Cash Money Records, Republic Records, and Young Money Entertainment, MP3.

of Caribbean language, which again is meant to signify Toronto and London, challenges the traditional conceptions of these places. At the same time, Drake also draws a direct line between Toronto and London so that they themselves are shown to be strikingly alike, connected, and even a part of one another, as Massey would insist.<sup>36</sup>

Of course, we cannot ignore the implicit reference that patois makes not only to Toronto and London, but also to its country of origin. Joseph T. Farquharson examines Jamaica's historic linguistic ideologies and their development as paralleled with reggae and dancehall music's increased incorporation of patois. In his article, he describes the prominence of British English in reggae (especially early reggae) as an indication of the imperialism that attempted to homogenize Jamaican culture and make it adhere to the British overlords<sup>37</sup>. However, once Jamaica gained independence from British rule in 1962 and could finally begin to define their own nationhood, the English-lexified Creole became progressively more present in the Jamaica's popular music, especially as that music was well-received locally and internationally, legitimizing Jamaican patois as a result.<sup>38</sup>

This ideological shift is paralleled by the emergence of the dancehall genre which, instead of attempting to negate British rule by using the language of the rulers (as reggae had done), utilized the local Creole to challenge the establishment and position itself as anti-colonialist.<sup>39</sup> Farquharson therefore concludes:

[D]ancehall music represents a musical and discursive space that is founded on the grassroots 'language nationalism' (Devonish, 2007:202) that has been emerging since the third quarter of the last century. The dominance of the

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<sup>36</sup> Massey, "Space, Place, and Gender," 120.

<sup>37</sup> Joseph T. Farquharson, "Linguistic Ideologies and the Historical Development of Language Use Patterns in Jamaican Music," *Language & Communication* 52 (2017), 7-18.

<sup>38</sup> Farquharson, "Linguistic Ideologies," 14.

<sup>39</sup> Farquharson, "Linguistic Ideologies," 11.

Jamaican language in dancehall reflects the ideological shift that made Jamaican the language that indexes national identity.<sup>40</sup>

Farquharson's argument is not only that Jamaican patois signifies Jamaica's national identity, but also that dancehall, because of its incorporation of patois, is a tool for the creation of a national space and a vessel for dissemination of that national identity.

I will reiterate my point on Drake's use of patois as a signifier of local and global place simultaneously and therefore a device to draw the kinds of relational connections Massey's theory outlines. These lingual/relational connections which are demonstrated in songs such as "No Long Talk (feat. Giggs)" have no indication of traditional in-group and out-group ideology since the cultural resources of the local are directly connected to the global, if not an inseparable part of it. In other words, Drake's patois lyrics signify Toronto and its unique socio-cultural climate (especially that of Toronto's hip-hop youth culture), but they also signify London as I stated above, as well as Jamaica and its identity, as Farquharson suggests.<sup>41</sup> Toronto, London, and Jamaica are therefore three distinct places that are connected globally through their shared use of language, eschewing any notion that places and their identities exist in isolation, with strict adherence to their singular, respective identities.

## **THE *MORE LIFE* PLAYLIST**

On October 23, 2016 Drake announced his new commercial project *More Life*, which he soon labeled as a playlist of all original songs by himself and his collaborators.

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<sup>40</sup> Farquharson, "Linguistic Ideologies," 17; Hubert Devonish, *Language and Liberation: Creole Language Politics in the Caribbean* (Kingston: Arawak Publications, 2007).

<sup>41</sup> Farquharson, "Linguistic Ideologies," 17.

In his statement on the 32<sup>nd</sup> episode of OVO Sound Radio, his label's show on Apple Music's Beats 1 radio station, he also announced his impending world tour "Boy Meets World Tour".<sup>42</sup> Only upon the release of *More Life* in March 2017 did the connection between these two events become obvious. The referential genres, collaborations, and musical samples found in *More Life* migrate between Jamaica, Nigeria, South Africa, the United Kingdom, the Bronx, Chicago, Atlanta, and of course, Toronto.<sup>43</sup> Most notably, Drake's immense global playlist pays homage to place-specific genres such as UK grime, Caribbean dancehall, and South African house. And so, as Brittany Spanos observes: "Titling his current European tour Boy Meets World feels like more than an early hint of what he would present with *More Life*".<sup>44</sup>

Several publications<sup>45</sup> observed Drake's "globe-trotting" and genre shuffling on his new playlist.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, it would be hard to miss since Drake himself explicitly draws attention to this purposeful aspect of the playlist. As he raps on "Gyalchester": "I switch flow like I switch time-zone".<sup>47</sup> Interestingly, the song's title is slang for Manchester Parish in Jamaica, itself a place whose very name alludes to the historic relational links

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<sup>42</sup> "OVO SOUND RADIO EP 32," OVO Sound Radio, Apple Music Beats 1, New York City, NY, Oct. 23, 2016.

<sup>43</sup> Brittany Spanos, "Drake's 'More Life' Playlist Is Redefining Borders of Blackness in Pop," *Rolling Stone*, 20 March, 2017, accessed Oct. 4, 2017, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/drakes-more-life-playlist-is-redefining-borders-of-blackness-in-pop-111729/>.

<sup>44</sup> Spanos, "Drake's 'More Life' Playlist."

<sup>45</sup> Jon Caramanica, "Review: On Drake's 'More Life,' the Creator Meets the Curator," *The New York Times*, 20 March 2017, accessed Nov. 20, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/20/arts/music/drake-more-life-review.html>; Jayson Greene, "Drake, More Life," *Pitchfork*, 22 March, 2017, accessed Oct. 4, 2017, <https://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/23048-more-life/>; Sheldon Pearce, "Mapping Drake's International Wave Riding on More Life," *Pitchfork*, 20 March, 2017, accessed June 23, 2019, <https://pitchfork.com/thepitch/1469-mapping-drakes-international-wave-riding-on-more-life/>; Rob Sheffield, "Review: Drake Lets His Playful Side Show on Sprawling 'More Life'," *Rolling Stone*, 22 March, 2017, accessed Oct. 4, 2017, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-album-reviews/review-drake-lets-his-playful-side-show-on-sprawling-more-life-108164/>.

<sup>46</sup> Greene, "Drake, More Life"; Pearce, "Mapping Drake's International Wave."

<sup>47</sup> Graham, "Gyalchester."

running between Jamaica and the UK, its once imperialist overlord. In this context, the name Manchester Parish is not mere allusion but a permanent marring of local identity by a hegemonic colonial power which, although it has long been removed, still holds some ounce of mocking authority. In this case, the slang term Gyalchester is an appropriate response. Gyalchester contains a mix of Jamaican patois (“gyal” meaning “girl” and therefore a clever play on “Man”chester) so as to acknowledge the historic global relationship but also to reclaim the place, and its name, by transforming it to adhere to the once-subordinate local culture and therefore taking away its hegemonic authority. Drake’s *More Life* does this same work in many ways, which makes “Gyalchester” a fitting name for a song within an expansive global playlist.

In a round table discussion on CBC Radio’s *The Current*, writer Amani Bin Shikhan refers to Drake as a “child of diaspora” in regard to his Torontonain multicultural and diasporic context. Shikhan states that Drake’s spatial context is evident in his music as he has often curated his various musical and cultural influences and featured them in his music.<sup>48</sup> Nowhere is this more evident than in *More Life*, which *Rolling Stone* writer Rob Sheffield described as “a masterful tour of all the grooves in [Drake’s] head”.<sup>49</sup> Throughout the playlist, with the help of over 30 producers overseen by executive producers Shebib and El-Khatib, Drake features the musics of the African diaspora spread throughout the Atlantic and brings people, places, and their global/local genres into focus. Here it is important to mention again that while Drake is in many ways the visionary for his projects, the realization of his visions are due in large part to the

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<sup>48</sup> Nora Young, host. *The Current: March 24, 2017*, “Drake’s global sound under fire for cultural appropriation,” transcript, aired March 24, 2017, on CBC Radio 1, <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/thecurrent/the-current-for-march-24-2017-1.4038259/march-24-2017-full-episode-transcript-1.4040727#segment1>.

<sup>49</sup> Sheffield, “Review: Drake Lets His Playful Side Show.”

work of his producers, especially Shebib and El-Khatib. When discussing Drake's generic and cultural curation, Jon Caramanica describes Drake's emphasis on dance music's black roots, stating that "Drake's [musical range] is international and diasporic," even going so far as to label Drake equal parts ethnomusicologist and collaborator.<sup>50</sup> As Caramanica suggests, Drake is not simply a neutral examiner from an outside vantage point, rather he is actively involved in this musical diaspora and takes on the moral responsibility of spokesperson and disseminator. His position then becomes one of authority and power as he sends these diasporic musical traces out to the whole world.

### **DRAKE'S SHARED MOBILITY**

I would like to focus for the moment on Drake's position of authority and power in order to unpack what it means for the diasporic communities whose lingual and musical traditions he curates. Much of Drake's position can be examined through Massey's understanding of mobility. For Massey, mobility has to do with having power in regards to local and global interconnections. As Massey describes it: "some are more in charge of it than others; some initiate flows and movement, other don't; some are more on the receiving end of it than others; some are effectively imprisoned by it".<sup>51</sup> Massey suggests that the mobile are those in positions to communicate internationally through flights, email, and conference calls, those controlling social perceptions through film, news, and music. Those with mobility can use it to their advantage to bolster their mobility further. Therefore, the more their power grows the more it *can* grow.

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<sup>50</sup> Caramanica, "Review: On Drake's 'More Life'."

<sup>51</sup> Massey, "Power-Geometry," 62.

Drake boasts of his mobility both explicitly and implicitly throughout *More Life*. Again, his brag in “Gyalchester” about switching his rap flow like he switches time-zone would certainly be considered an explicit reference to his mobility. Another, more implicit reference occurs at the end of the tracks “Jorja Interlude” and “Fake Love”<sup>52</sup> with a sound-bite from a then-current video of Drake’s acceptance speech for the 2016 American Music Awards Favorite Artist category on November 20, 2016. Drake used his speech to plug his playlist project *More Life*, which at the time was still forthcoming. After four months of the video circulating world-wide and gaining the sought after publicity across the internet, a brief recording of Drake’s plug appeared on the playlist. This gesture is also an assertion about Drake’s mobility. It reminds the listener of Drake’s viral internet presence and influence, which allows him to increase his power as much as he exercises it. Through his mobility he is able to give publicity to himself and his projects, which in-turn grant him greater mobility.

There is no question that Drake is part of the mobile elite, influencing culture and utilizing his power for his own gain. Of course, the morality of Drake’s position can easily come into question considering that mobility is often a catalyst for power imbalance. As Massey observes: “the mobility and control of some groups can actively weaken other people. Differential mobility can weaken the leverage of the already weak”.<sup>53</sup> On the March 24<sup>th</sup> episode of CBC’s *The Current* with Nora Young, Mark Campbell, a senior researcher at the Faculty of Communication and Design (FCAD)

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<sup>52</sup> Aubrey Drake Graham, “Jorja Interlude,” released March 2017, track 4 on *More Life*, Cash Money Records, Republic Records, and Young Money Entertainment, MP3; Aubrey Drake Graham, “Fake Love,” released March 2017, track 20 on *More Life*, Cash Money Records, Republic Records, and Young Money Entertainment, MP3.

<sup>53</sup> Massey, “Power-Geometry,” 63.

Forum for Cultural Strategies at Ryerson University and the founding director at Northside Hip Hop Archive, argues that Drake has the power as an iconic public figure to change power relations and mobilize those without mobility. Campbell suggests that Drake has the ability (or, in our case, mobility) to feature less well-known artists with smaller fan bases on his projects in order to expand their audience and market success.<sup>54</sup>

I would extend Campbell's argument to apply to whole cultures not just individual artists. Drake, by virtue of his position as an internationally known pop star and therefore a massive socio-spatial influencer, has the mobility to globally disseminate music from less-mobile cultures, and empower them to share in the same position of power and mobility that he occupies. Drake's success, which is attested to by his chart statistics that have now exceeded that of The Beatles' more than once, gives him the rare opportunity to influence and expose people to cultures that would otherwise be ignored. Drake has used his music as a vessel and his success as a catalyst to bring these oppressed cultures into relationship with the dominant cultures that previously ignored them. Although Drake's position is certainly self-serving in some respects, it is clear that he also honors and mobilizes people and cultures that have long been undervalued and disempowered.

Not only does Drake use his music and success to form relationships between cultures where none previously existed, he also alters relationships and their particular power-dynamics. It is important to clarify here that this shift in power-dynamics is initially a metaphorical act played out in Drake's music by his choice to foreground the music of the African diaspora rather than that of the dominant White culture. However,

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<sup>54</sup> Young, "Drake's Global Sound Under Fire."

this metaphor quickly becomes reality as Drake's international success carries these once-immobile cultures to the far reaches of the globe and to the top of the charts, above white folk who have long occupied these positions. This is the shared mobility I speak of – cultures that were previously restrained and unable to gain access to places and, in this case, audiences outside of their immediate circle, now suddenly in positions of cultural influence and able to traverse the globe.

By mobilizing cultures that have historically been subordinate to one hegemonic power or another, Drake flips socio-spatial hierarchies and radically adjusts power relationships, a change that may otherwise only happen over a long period of time, if at all. As I discussed earlier in the chapter, uneven power relations are a source of specific definition for a place. Naturally, since power relations are still relationships, they still specifically qualify a place by their own specific, although unequal, quality. Therefore, Drake's disruption of power relations through the mobilization of the immobile does not disqualify a place from being defined, rather the opposite. Since the existence of dynamic relationships and their particular qualities is what defines place, Drake's redefining of the relationships that exist between the dominant (white European male) and subordinate groups (the African diaspora) actually redefines place and creates it anew.

This is how Drake creates place in his music, through the dissemination of cultural and musical features, which give power and mobility to peoples and cultures that previously had none. This in turn disrupts hierarchical relationships and redefines them, thereby redefining place. Constructing and celebrating place is a common priority in hip hop. As hip hop scholar Murray Forman observes, the tension and desolation that exists in many urban spaces, motivate many of the youth to create, through hip hop, their own

spaces by claiming mobility, renaming neighborhoods, and referencing specific places in order to gain agency over them.<sup>55</sup> Elsewhere, Forman also argues that hip hop in general provides an ideal setting for studying how place is created because of its “prioritization of spatial practices and spatial discourses that form a basis of hip hop culture”.<sup>56</sup> Drake’s globally focused playlist affirms and even exceeds Forman’s observations since its basis and primary focus is on spotlighting specific localities and bringing them into relationship with one another for the creation and definition of a unique multicultural place; one that represents Toronto, Drake’s ultimate priority having taken it upon himself to be an ideal representative and embodiment of his hometown.

Of course, taking on the role of representative for a diasporic city such as Toronto, and then to represent it in one’s music can be a challenging, and often contentious, task. Questions of appreciation vs. appropriation circle around this subject seeking to determine Drake’s moral standing. The CBC Radio round-table discussion<sup>57</sup> I mentioned previously centres on these questions. Panel guest and writer Sharine Taylor predicts that fair use based on proximity could prove to be problematic where artists begin to ignorantly appropriate other cultures based on their proximity to them rather than honouring these cultures in respectful ways that show proper credit and understanding. While this is a valid concern, Amani Bin Shikhan proposes that the question of appropriation is more complex especially in the context of a diasporic place, such as Toronto. Shikhan suggests that there has never been a single black Torontonian

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<sup>55</sup> Murray Forman, “*The ‘Hood Comes First’*: Race, Space, and Place in Rap Music and Hip Hop, 1978-1996 (doctoral dissertation, McGill University, 1997), 21-22.

<sup>56</sup> Murray Forman, “‘Represent’: Race, Space, and Place in Rap Music,” *Popular Music* 19, no. 1 (2000): 66.

<sup>57</sup> Young, “Drake’s Global Sound Under Fire.”

identity, that it is defined by its complex diaspora instead of a single, pre-existing identity. He goes on to suggest that the mixing of cultures, especially within diasporas, is not new:

Part of the conversation that really frustrates me is this insistence that this is new, this mixing of language, this mixing of cultures and this real...normalization of...diasporic experience. And I think diaspora wars...are sort of ignorant to that fact. The fact that this has been ongoing, culture has always been a mixture of people, it has always been a mixture of language, it has always been a mixture of different experiences.<sup>58</sup>

Shikhan's statement echoes Massey's argument against the imagined pasts that are used to construct a sense of authentic, pure, and singular identity in a place. Massey concludes, the same as Shikhan, that cultural transfer and amalgamation is a fact of any locale. She argues that any cultural feature that is seen as essential and part of the 'real' identity of a place was once new itself, that the identity of a place is something that develops and changes over time as relational processes introduce some new cultural features and ignore other older ones.<sup>59</sup>

Shikhan also argues that to assume what people in a particular place can and cannot do is problematic because it is ignorant to the nature of the relational processes that occur there. It is ignorant to the fact that a beneficial multiculturalism could have been occurring for several years. Toronto must be understood within its context as a diasporic place. Through the coexistence of various cultures it has formed another from which Toronto can be defined. Toronto's diasporic culture, which mixes Jamaican patois with English and reggae with rap, is authentic because of its authentic relationships. Drake is a part of Toronto's diasporic relationships and therefore his demonstration of

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<sup>58</sup> Young, "Drake's Global Sound Under Fire."

<sup>59</sup> Massey, "Places and Their Pasts," 182.

Toronto's multiculturalism is also authentic. Furthermore, this is an authenticity not based on unchanging identities, which Massey's theory is wary of.<sup>60</sup>

Shikhan warns against holding preconceived notions about appropriation because it can cause further separation and cultural ignorance, which he believes happens enough already: "a lot of times we're contained within our smaller sort of cultural communities and don't really engage with one another in meaningful ways".<sup>61</sup> To prevent relational processes and shared experiences is to move away from a progressive sense of place and move toward a sense of place where segregation and essentialism are upheld as the ideal. In fact, attempting to disallow cultures to influence and be influenced by other cultures could potentially pose the risk of enforcing regressive cultural fixity where authenticity is based on rigid identities. Therefore, instead of appropriation, the cultural references in Drake's music serve to foster meaningful cultural relationships in the Toronto diasporic context in which Drake is authentically situated and must be interpreted.

Applying Massey's concepts to Drake and his music is highly appropriate and reveals essential aspects of the music's work and value. In Drake's *More Life* playlist, all of Massey's concepts can be identified and used to analyse how Drake constructs the place of Toronto in his music. *More Life* features a wide array of collaborative relationships with each song being the product of a collective of producers, musicians, and writers, often from several different places with their own musical histories. These musical histories, specifically those of the African diaspora and even more specifically of Jamaica, can be heard in the playlist's generic variety. The purpose of Drake's cultural curation in the *More Life* playlist is to create, first within the music and second within the

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<sup>60</sup> Massey, *For Space*, 10.

<sup>61</sup> Young, "Drake's Global Sound Under Fire."

‘real world’, a place that represents Toronto, being clearly constructed and defined by its local and global relationships that exist in a world-wide network. Although Massey’s and Drake’s extraverted sense of place seems to contradict traditional notions of spatial definition, there are already others beside myself who have observed its functionality. As Rob Sheffield states: “the more expansive [Drake] gets, the more himself he sounds”.<sup>62</sup> Considering Massey’s theory of space and place and Drake’s work on *More Life*, this statement could ring truer than Sheffield may even know.

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<sup>62</sup> Sheffield, “Review: Drake Lets His Playful Side Show.”

## **CHAPTER 4: SPATIAL NETWORKS WITHIN “MADIBA RIDDIM”**

### **ANALYSIS OF “MADIBA RIDDIM”**

In the title of the song “Madiba Riddim,” Drake clearly signifies the dancehall riddim method by taking on its traditional nomenclature. However, the other significance in the title has to do with another relational tradition, this time associated with South Africa. A respectful acknowledgement of South African anti-apartheid revolutionary and President, Nelson Mandela, is shown through the reference to Madiba, the name of the clan of which Mandela was a part. According to the Nelson Mandela Foundation, a clan name is more important than a surname and its use is considered to be polite.<sup>1</sup> The title of “Madiba Riddim”, therefore, places two cultural traditions side by side in a unified partnership, a concept well-suited for a song making reference to revolutionary Mandela.

With advancements in digital technology in the 1980s, original riddims began to be produced through the use of digital keyboards, sequencers, drum machines, and now personal computers.<sup>2</sup> Likely because of this shift in riddim production, riddims in recent years have become more complex, making them difficult to write out in staff notation.<sup>3</sup> Drake’s “Madiba Riddim” certainly falls under the most recent trend of complex layered riddims. While the detailed complexity of the song and its overall musical aesthetic, due to producers Frank Dukes, Nineteen85, and Charlie Handsome, is impressive, it presents a problem for visual representation, especially considering it exists exclusively as a sound recording. Manuel and Marshall offer an alternative solution to musical analysis of songs

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<sup>1</sup> “Names – Nelson Mandela Foundation.”

<sup>2</sup> Manuel and Marshall, “The Riddim Method,” 452-453.

<sup>3</sup> Manuel and Marshall, “The Riddim Method,” 457.

with this kind of complexity that exist only as recordings.<sup>4</sup> In their article, charts are used to present the rhythmic components and patterns of riddims, rather than traditional notation. I have also used this method in my own analysis to visualize the music. Furthermore, part of my intent for the use of charts instead of staff notation is to conceive of this music not as part of the Western art tradition of music and musical notation, but rather as part of another tradition, be it popular music in general or dancehall music specifically.

A basic rendering of the riddim is presented in Table 1. There are seven regular components, or layers, of the Madiba riddim, which have been presented on the chart. What is excluded from the chart is the ambient echo of the non-text singing placed far back in the mix and of course the consequential timbres of the riddim's unified parts. Furthermore, this chart is not comprehensive in the sense that it does not consider the many slight variations the Madiba riddim undertakes throughout the song, a feature of the riddim that is no doubt indebted to the endless possibilities of digital production. Instruments periodically drop out and change in timbre to thin the riddim's texture (for instance, verse 2 and the third line of the chorus) and occasionally only half of the riddim's measures are played. Sufficient to say, this chart is not a comprehensive visualization of the Madiba riddim, and yet even so it is amply complex.

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<sup>4</sup> Manuel and Marshall, "The Riddim Method," 457.



measures these ‘irregular’ beats sound on. For example, the double sticks sound on the fourth 16<sup>th</sup> note of beat two in mm.1, whereas in mm.3 they do not sound until the fourth 16<sup>th</sup> note of beat three. Again, the four-measures of the riddim add to its complexity and place it appropriately within the most recent trend of densely layered dancehall riddims.

Despite these opaque layers, one feature of the riddim is clear. The presence of the clave rhythm can be heard distinctly in the combination of the bass/drum and the claps. The clave is also present in the sticks, though these are quite far back in the mix and only heard clearly in the first two measures of the song. The significance of this is that the clave is a rhythmic concept found throughout the Caribbean, with origins in sub-Saharan musical traditions.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the clave is also present in many dancehall riddims. Manuel and Marshall provide charts that show a basic breakdown of the quintessential dancehall riddim and the default dancehall drum pattern of the late 1980s and 1990s.<sup>6</sup> In both charts, the clave can be seen split up amongst parts of the drum-set, just as it is split up in “Madiba Riddim”.

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<sup>5</sup> Katherine Hagedorn, "Clave," *Grove Music Online*. 16 Oct. 2013, accessed Aug. 27, 2019, <https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.ezproxy.library.dal.ca/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-1002248920>.

<sup>6</sup> Manuel and Marshall, “The Riddim Method,” 457.

Beat in 16 <sup>th</sup>	1		+		2		+		3		+		4		+	
note	C			C			C				C		C			
division																
with clave																
Sticks	X	x	x	X	x	x	X	x	X	x	x	X	x	x	X	x
Claps				X			X					X				

Tabel 2 Reduction of the Madiba Riddim measure 1, ‘Sticks’ and ‘Claps’. Clave pattern is indicated by ‘C’. Rhythmic emphasis in ‘Sticks’ is indicated by a capital ‘X’.

Table 2 demonstrates the beats where a clave pattern occurs in the Madiba riddim, measure 1. Here it is shown that the rhythmic emphasis and sounding of the sticks and claps closely coincide with the clave pattern, especially in the first half of the measure. While there is some variance between the clave and the pattern found in the sticks and claps of the Madiba riddim, the strong similarities are undeniable. Therefore, the Madiba riddim uses a crucial element of the dancehall genre, connecting Drake to African and Caribbean musical traditions, a gesture highly appropriate for a song whose title poses this very concept.

To move beyond the charted features of the Madiba riddim, I will begin with acknowledging again the contributions of Drake’s producers. “Madiba Riddim” is in a minority of songs in Drake’s catalogue not produced directly by Shebib. In his place are producers Frank Dukes (Adam Feeney), Nineteen85 (Anthony Jefferies), and Charlie Handsome (Ryan Vojtesak). In this next section of the analysis, I will discuss the qualitative aspects of “Madiba Riddim” and its distinct sound, which cannot be interpreted on a chart.

“Madiba Riddim” begins with a quick African-style guitar riff played with a slight dampened effect that gives the guitar a liquescent, smooth but shimmery sound with soft low tones and clear high tones. The guitar jumps between these effortlessly and almost too quickly to grasp before they slip away again. The guitar riff is played in some form throughout the song, even as other instruments lessen or disappear completely from the mix. The riff is played in its entirety only in the first two measures of the song before the double sticks usher in the rest of the instruments (barring the sticks and the shuffle which begin the song with the guitar). Once the other instruments are introduced into the mix the guitar riff moves from the front of the mix to a more middle ground as the bass’ quarter note beat dominates.

After the two measure introduction, the guitar changes to a slightly more digitized sound. What I mean by this is that some subtle tones are missing from the original guitar riff as though to reduce it down to only the ‘most important’ parts. The effect is similar to a poor quality sample where not all of the information transferred over when the file was imported. Some pitches sound clipped and cropped resulting in a more electronic and jumpy sound. The effect works quite well for a dance song with the guitar’s high tones sparkling in the off-beats between the bass’s hypnotic beat.

Oddly, though “Madiba Riddim” is complex and quick with an especially overpowering bass, the song does not sound hectic. In fact, I would go so far as to suggest that it is relaxed and even ethereal. This is largely attributed to the African slack guitar’s effortless phrasing, but also to the intermittent background singing that is drowned in what seems to be endless layers of echo effects so that it floats above and between the instruments like a calm summer breeze.

The background vocals are unhurried, often sliding into pitches on the off-beats and pick-ups, sometimes leaving a measure of space between voicings. The melody is simple and only uses the pitches of a pentatonic scale. The most complex aspect of the background vocals is the extent to which they are altered by digital effects, and even this is cleverly masked by the effects chosen and the placement of the vocals in the mix. On close listen, the first motive sounds closer to a keyboard than a human voice for two reasons: volume tapering (or fading in/out) and the clipping of the pitch shifting. By this I mean that the new pitch seems as though it is shifted to prematurely or as though it sounds while the old pitch is sustained for a moment by the echo effect used. All of these characteristics lend the background vocals a leisurely air that colours the rest of the song in the same way.

Notably, Drake himself sings rather than raps on this song, a decision likely made upon hearing the riddim track created by Frank Dukes, Nineteen85, and Charlie Handsome, and wanting to match its quality. Furthermore, Drake's singing is not simply a pitched rap as he is sometimes inclined to (like, for instance, his pitched rap in "Gyalchester", and "KMT"<sup>7</sup>), instead Drake has opted for a full melody with variation to distinguish pre-chorus, chorus, and both verses. The closest Drake comes to rapping in this song is the rhythmically driven melody of the pre-chorus that rapidly repeats pitches (two in particular out of only five).

Though the sections are distinguished in Drake's melodic variation, the song plays out in a relatively unbroken fashion. It is not actually unbroken, however the constant riddim, especially the actually unvaried bass drum, plays unceasingly giving the

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<sup>7</sup> Aubrey Drake Graham, "KMT," released March 2017, track 15 on *More Life*, Cash Money Records, Republic Records, and Young Money Entertainment, MP3.

impression of an unvaried continuum. There are no traditional musical ‘cues’ or ‘lead ins’ in the riddim to signify an approaching section change, like an instrumental build up toward a chorus. In fact, the riddim does the exact opposite of this before the chorus, actually cutting out and dampening parts of the instrumentation while still maintaining its integral skeleton. This bare-bones version of the riddim occurs most notably in the second verse where it is used more extensively, lending this verse the most distinguishability. Besides this, the ambient background vocals are included and excluded from the mix in subtle ways to indicate impending section changes; however the background vocals are so successful in their ambience that their changes are difficult to trace even as they affect the texture of the song as a whole. Sufficient to say, any changes that occur in “Madiba Riddim” are generally inconsequential as they are dominated by the overpowering continuity of the riddim.

The riddim’s continuity is due in large part to the unchanging bass drum hammering out every quarter note beat without fail. Even in the sections where the riddim’s instrumentation is paired down, the bass drum never changes in quality or regularity. The riddim as a whole manages to keep its integrity throughout the song; however the bass drum is literally unchanged. In this way, the continuity of “Madiba Riddim” is akin to a dancehall playlist or mixtape where a single relentless beat or riddim continues playing even as songs change. Manuel and Marshall observe this phenomenon in dancehall; dj’s playlist, pirate CDs, and music label’s official mixtapes often group songs with the same riddim together so that they play through continuously. Occasionally, music labels will even release a collection of song segments, each only

about a minute long, with a single riddim playing through them all.<sup>8</sup> “Madiba Riddim” has a similar effect as the vocal sections of the song come and go as the riddim remains relatively unaffected. Furthermore, because Drake’s vocal sectional changes have little to no effect on the riddim and are recorded over top of it almost as an afterthought; he places emphasis on the riddim as the dominant feature of the song. Of course this is only to be expected as the song’s title does the same thing. Therefore, it is clear that Drake and his producers have intentionally chosen to feature the Madiba riddim, the primary aspect of the song that links it to an external place within a global spatial web.

This is not to say that Drake’s vocals and lyrics are inconsequential and do not warrant analysis of their own. Rather, the lyrics of “Madiba Riddim” can also reveal compelling evidence of the song’s spatial relationality. The most obvious evidence of this is the casual use of Jamaican patois as slang in the pre-chorus:

I seen man turn fool for the money  
one too many times  
I seen some girls turn they back  
on they best friend from time”.<sup>9</sup>

Though the potency of the patois is nowhere near that of “No Long Talk (feat. Giggs)”, its presence is still notable as a multicultural signifier that signifies Jamaican culture as well as Torontonian culture.

As I mentioned earlier, Toronto’s Jamaican community has held a crucial position in the city through its sizable contributions to the local hip-hop scene’s youth culture in

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<sup>8</sup> Manuel and Marshall, “The Riddim Method,” 455.

<sup>9</sup> Graham, “Madiba Riddim.” Although I trust that even those unfamiliar with Jamaican patois can decipher the meaning, the translation is: I’ve seen guys become fools for money/one too many times/I’ve seen some girls turn their backs/on their old friends.

general. Not the least of these contributions is the dissemination of Jamaican patois into the youth culture's slang vernacular. The dissemination is so widespread that it has now come to represent the place of Toronto as well as the people who reside there. Just as it can assume Brathwaite's label of nation language,<sup>10</sup> a language that signifies the people, in Jamaica, it has also assumed this label for Toronto and its hip-hop youth culture. Though these two instances are not mirrors of each other, it is inarguable that patois, given its prominence in Toronto society, is a significant tool for constructing a distinct identity of place in Toronto. Given the Jamaican community's notable position in the Toronto music scene, it comes as no surprise that Jamaican patois would have this effect. In fact, this is in agreement with Brathwaite's concept of nation language and its connection to music. As he states: "the very necessary connection to the understanding of nation language [i.e., Creole] is between native musical structures and the native language. That music is, in fact, the surest threshold to the language which comes out of it".<sup>11</sup> At the most basic level we can take Brathwaite's observation of the connection between music and language and apply it here to Toronto's hip-hop scene and the Caribbean-infused slang of the scene's youth culture. Drake and his music therefore have an integral role to play in the dissemination and creation of this nation language, which in turn leads to the creation of place in Toronto through its relational connections to Jamaica. I would even argue that the inclusion of Jamaican patois in his music is a calculated decision for Drake as he recognizes the power language holds in constructing a distinct identity of place which he can then successfully represent, having wielded the

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<sup>10</sup> E. K. Brathwaite, *History of the Voice: The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry* (London: New Beacon Books, 1984).

<sup>11</sup> Brathwaite, *History of the Voice*, 16.

very tool used to create the place.

The lyrics of “Madiba Riddim” cover familiar thematic territory for Drake: suspicion of his friends and acquaintances who may want to overthrow him or take advantage of his power and wealth. While Drake has addressed this concern several times in the past, “Madiba Riddim” stands out as a call for reconciliation rather than paranoid vengeance. In the chorus Drake’s lyrics state his mistrust and need for ‘distance’ in the relationships he suspects. However, immediately following this, Drake states his desire to be taught how to love the offending party again.

In verse 1, Drake also expresses his resilience to whatever betrayal or heartbreak his relationships may bring him: “My heart is way too frozen to get broken”.<sup>12</sup> At first, this lyric seems to suggest that Drake has hardened his heart against his relationships in order to protect himself. A similar figure of speech is found in his aggressive 2015 song “6 Man”: “My heart is cold/ It’s probably ‘cause I come from the snow”.<sup>13</sup> Though Drake does not reference Canada or Toronto by name, the reference is nearly explicit. I would argue that Drake’s ‘frozen heart’ metaphor in “Madiba Riddim” functions in the same way as a reference to his northern heritage and that the line in “6 Man” supports this reading. However, the two metaphors differ in terms of the sense in which they are meant.

In “6 Man,” Drake boasts about his own success at the expense of others and makes his hostility known: “You know the truth, this not pretend, I’m not your friend/ Not your guy, I’m not your buddy, show no lovin’”.<sup>14</sup> In this context, Drake’s cold heart

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<sup>12</sup> Graham, “Madiba Riddim.”

<sup>13</sup> Aubrey Drake Graham, “6 Man,” released February 2015, track 12 on *If You’re Reading This It’s Too Late*, Cash Money Records, OVO Sound, Republic Records, and Young Money Entertainment, MP3.

<sup>14</sup> Graham, “6 Man.”

is intentionally cold-blooded, so to speak. However, as stated above, the context of “Madiba Riddim” is quite the opposite with Drake singing: “Gonna have to teach me how to love you again/ God knows I’m trying”.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, the frozen heart imagery must be interpreted as something other than callousness; here, the reference to Canada and Toronto is vitally important. Drake’s frozen, or northerner, heart allows him to be resilient to heartbreak and the dissolution of relationships. In this sense, Drake has been taught relational resilience because of the relational context of Toronto, which fosters inclusivity and tolerance in a wide range of cultural relationships. Drake demonstrates this northerner attitude of cultural inclusivity throughout his catalogue in his collaboration with other artists and their musical traditions. Specifically, he demonstrates this inclusivity in “Madiba Riddim” through the inclusion of both Caribbean and South African references.

Drake’s metaphor is an appropriate, although subtle, acknowledgment of Toronto’s multicultural relational place and its benefits. Relational resilience is also an appropriate concept for a song which bears the name of an antiapartheid revolutionary and that implements musical traditions that draw relational connections to several different places. While there is a noted absence of any explicit politics expressed in the lyrics (something listeners would expect given that “Mandela” and “politics” are often synonymous), this by no means weakens the reference or suggests ignorance on Drake’s part. The very fact that Mandela is *not* used as a political lightning rod places more emphasis on the relationality implicit in the clan name. Though Mandela’s personal philosophy is certainly integral to the song, Drake has chosen to broaden his focus to the

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<sup>15</sup> Graham, “Madiba Riddim.”

*entire* clan family. The name Madiba does not signify only one man and his achievements, rather a network of individuals, unified together in a multifaceted identity. This concept is not unlike Drake and Toronto's multicultural relationality. Both Drake and Toronto are akin to Nelson Mandela's own philosophy and the philosophy of the Riddim method which creates a network of recordings through the free use of musical materials as 'public domain'.<sup>16</sup>

## **CLAN AND RIDDIM NETWORKS**

The most striking aspect of the riddim system is the viewing of riddims and their recordings as public domain, especially in the early days of dancehall. The wide distribution and use of riddims, though not always without contention and litigation,<sup>17</sup> can be seen as forming a network of creative commons with links connecting hundreds of recordings that share the same riddim DNA. In this way, riddims foster membership among the recordings that use them, like a clan.

Of course, my point in expressing the riddim system in these terms is to draw comparisons between the riddim method, Massey's relational network of space, and also the familial clan network that is referred to in the name 'Madiba.' According to Massey's theory, the identity of a place is based on its relational links both internal and external. Therefore, places become better defined as these links become more numerable and well qualified. The same could be said of the riddim system where riddims become better known and better defined in the mind of the listener, as they are more widely distributed

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<sup>16</sup> Manuel and Marshall, "The Riddim Method," 464.

<sup>17</sup> Manuel and Marshall, "The Riddim Method," 464-465.

and are linked to more songs. These outlying songs can be expressed as nodes in the network of the riddim, where the original song the riddim appeared in is the central node of the network.

The illustration of a network with nodes and links could also be used to map out the genealogy of a Xhosa clan, for instance, the Madiba clan. We could imagine the central node of this network as the ancestor from which all clan members take their clan name; in this case, Madiba a Thembu chief who ruled in the 18<sup>th</sup> century would assume this esteemed position at the centre of the clan network.<sup>18</sup> Branching off from here are countless other family nodes with different surnames, like the Mandela family, all linked together through innumerable extended bloodlines, all sharing in one bloodline through their relationship with the central node. The parallel here is that Madiba, the chief ancestor, acts as an original riddim, the Madiba riddim so to speak, with several songs descending from it.

Another aspect of Massey's theory that is demonstrated in the clan and riddim networks is the implication of change and growth of the networks. In the case of the Madiba network, we can assume that this network will be added to as descendants grow older and new families are made. The links between family nodes will also change in quality as the clan members' relationships progress or diminish over time. In the same way, a riddim network would never be considered complete and existing in a fixed state of being. Rather, we can expect that any given riddim network would continue to produce new nodes as new recordings that use the riddim are made. Even in the event of copyright law that requires permission to be granted from the centre in order for a riddim to be

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<sup>18</sup> "Names – Nelson Mandela Foundation"

used, there is still a great chance that the riddim network in question would continue to develop and change. The power difference in this case would only work to qualify the network relationships in another unique, although oppressive, way.

With these illustrations, we can begin to understand the similarities between the riddim method, South African clan names, Massey's theory of relational space, and "Madiba Riddim". In "Madiba Riddim" Drake has used two symbols that can both be interpreted as networks. Concepts of plurality and unity are strongly evident in the song title alone, itself a perfect example of a unified plurality. When placed in the full context of the *More Life* playlist and Drake as a representative of Toronto and Canada, the imagery of the clan and riddim networks acts as a metaphor for the relational network of Toronto as a multicultural place. As Drake is motivated by his desire to accurately represent and invoke the essence of Toronto in his music and career he is lead to curate cultural symbols that signify a complex of networked relationships that resemble Toronto's cultural plurality and place.

### **THE RIDDIM METHOD BEYOND "MADIBA RIDDIM"**

Drake has not arbitrarily selected the Jamaican riddim method as a symbol of Toronto's relational place; nor are Caribbean cultural traditions without real significance in the Toronto cultural context. The Toronto hip hop scene has a strong connection to Jamaica and Jamaican culture by virtue of the large Jamaican community that has made considerable contributions to it. Writer Adrian Lee notes: "[Toronto] is a diverse melting pot, and so a Caribbean sound has long been a big part of Toronto hip-hop ... Drake is

staking claim to both the past and present of Toronto’s hip-hop sonic palette”.<sup>19</sup> Drake has clearly expressed his desire to represent his hometown and place Toronto’s unique cultural palette on the map through his music. Consequently, he uses sonic elements that are derived from this palette. As Lee would agree, the use of the Caribbean cultural traditions and symbols in his music serves to locate and legitimate Drake and his music as being “of Toronto”.

Caribbean cultural elements are not merely token occasions in Drake’s catalogue. Far from being a ‘one-off’ experiment in “Madiba Riddim,” the riddim mentality can be observed in several other tracks in Drake’s catalogue, even those that precede his enthusiastic incorporation of Caribbean cultural symbols in his music (roughly 2015-2017). Caribbean cultural traditions are vital to Drake’s music and his identity as a Toronto icon. For instance, the title track<sup>20</sup> of Drake’s 2011 album *Take Care* has a long lineage before it ever came to be included in Drake’s repertoire. The original song “I’ll Take Care of You,”<sup>21</sup> written by Brook Benton and recorded by Bobby Bland, has undergone many re-workings since its release in 1959, taking on new life beyond itself. Drake’s involvement in the “Take Care” network, comes via Jamie xx’s remix of Gil Scott-Heron’s cover.<sup>22</sup>

Sufficient to say, the link from the original song to Drake’s “Take Care” is extremely indirect, though not insignificant. Drake’s “Take Care” is removed three times from the original (or third-generation, to continue on with the familial metaphor);

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<sup>19</sup> Lee, “Drake’s Incomplete Views from the Six.”

<sup>20</sup> Aubrey Drake Graham, “Take Care (feat. Rihanna),” released November 2011, track 5 on *Take Care*, Cash Money Records, Republic Records, and Young Money Entertainment, MP3.

<sup>21</sup> Bobby Bland, “I’ll Take Care Of You,” by Brook Benton, released 1959, Duke Records, MP3.

<sup>22</sup> Gil Scott-Heron and Jamie xx, “I’ll Take Care Of U,” by Brook Benton and Jamie Smith, released February 2011, track 13 on *We’re New Here*, Young Turks and XL Recordings, MP3.

however the relationship between the two is vitally important to the expansion and definition of the network. It is this aspect of Drake's "Take Care" that is most applicable to Massey's theory of relational space, especially her third rumination that space is in a constant state of construction, ever fluid and shifting. For 60 years, Benton and Bland's original song "I'll Take Care of You" has multiplied and spread out into different forms throughout an ever-changing and expanding network. Drake's version of the song makes it clear that it has become much more than a stand-alone recording. Drake uses samples of Jamie xx's remixed cover to produce the beat and overall form of "Take Care", similar to the way riddims are implemented in the songs that use them as their foundation.

Of course, sampling is by no means a technique exclusive to Drake and is certainly used by other artists not attempting to make connections with Caribbean culture and the riddim method. However, "Take Care" differs from mere sampling in the sense that Drake did not opt to sample an original song nor did he only use the sample briefly. Instead, he chose to essentially use a song that had already been worked and re-worked for decades as the groundwork for his re-imagining of it. Again, while sampling of songs, even extensively, is common in hip hop and is not unique to the riddim method, the widespread network that "Take Care" is a part of is closer to the relationships of a riddim network than the one-dimensional relationship between original song and sample. Years before the release of "Madiba Riddim," Drake's 'riddim mentality' was clearly demonstrated in his music.

I would argue that Drake's mentality is largely influenced by the city he so eagerly represents. Toronto, with its foreign-born population accounting for over half of its total population (51.5 per cent), boasts of a multicultural climate that rivals most major

cities.<sup>23</sup> Inherent to this cultural multiplicity is a spatial network with many links and nodes spanning the globe, from which and to which experiences, perspectives, and traditions are carried. Far from being an isolated unitary place, Toronto and its spatial identity are an amalgamation of other places and identities that mutually exchange cultural resources.

This clearly plays out in “Take Care,” “Madiba Riddim,” and Drake’s career as a whole. Implicit in his ever-growing catalogue are large musical networks that resemble the spatial and cultural network of Toronto. Therefore, Drake’s representation of Toronto goes beyond the incorporation of sonic elements akin to the cultures that reside in the city. Instead, Drake’s representation of Toronto and its multiculturalism is more abstract in nature: cultivating musical material and traditional creative methods that contain broad internal *and* external connections that are essential to its identity.

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<sup>23</sup> Whalen, “Census 2016”; Murdie and Ghosh, “Does Spatial Concentration Always Mean a Lack of Integration?,” 294.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

In this thesis I have applied Massey's theory of relational space to Drake's musical output, with specific focus on his song "Madiba Riddim," in order to examine how he creates a distinct sense of place in his music. The place he creates in his music is one that specifically mirrors Toronto's multicultural diasporic nature. Not only has Drake explicitly stated that he intends for his music to represent Toronto and its people, evidence of this can be found through an analysis of the vast relational networks that he implements and incorporates in his music.

According to Massey's theory and the evidence that supports it, space is made up of interrelations just like the ones found in Drake's music. Massey's theory argues that space is a complex web of relationships that is never fixed or complete but rather in a constant state of change due to the plurality of relational processes that establish it. Places, therefore, are the intersections of these relationships and are defined by the unique dynamics of these relationships.

This alternative perspective of space and place is in total opposition to the traditional viewpoint which characterizes space and place as Being, that is to say, that every place has its own separate, internal, and essential identity and history. That places are only distinct through the preservation of a pure and authentic past and the enforcing of inside and outside, domestic and foreign, local and global.<sup>1</sup> Massey's theory exposes the problems with such a viewpoint, namely that any romanticized notion of an authentic past or present from which a single influential identity emerges is ultimately false. Such conceptions are anxious imaginings that vainly strive to fabricate an introverted sense of

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<sup>1</sup> Massey, "Space, Place, and Gender," 119; Massey, "Power-Geometry," 64-65.

idealism that offers security and protection from the demonized other and the terror of difference. In reality, as Massey's theory admits, places are instead articulations of relational multiplicity and this has always been true.<sup>2</sup>

Considering Massey's alternative theory of space, I have examined Drake's music and the global cultural plurality it boasts. This multiplicity is especially clear in his playlist *More Life*, which was instantly recognized as being global in its generic scope. This characteristic of *More Life* is demonstrated strongly in the song "Madiba Riddim". My analysis of this song is informed by a contextual analysis of the Jamaican dancehall genre, specifically its use of Jamaican patois and the riddim method. I have presented evidence of the genre's inherent relationality that is accomplished through its creative methodology rooted in the riddim method, its dissemination of cultural features, such as Jamaican patois, as well as its membership in the broader socio-cultural context of the African diaspora.

The context of dancehall's relationality is integral to an understanding of "Madiba Riddim" as the song associates itself with this generic tradition. Drake's song not only references dancehall's riddim method and the relational networks that it creates, but also Nelson Mandela and the Madiba clan of South Africa. My analysis shows the consistency between these two references, namely that they can both be thought of in terms of relational networks, and therefore spatial networks, since relationality is spatiality.<sup>3</sup> The inclusion and pairing of these spatial networks reveals, on a micro level, the existence of relational space in Drake's music. Furthermore, because plurality and relationality is clearly evident throughout Drake's music, the findings within "Madiba Riddim" can be

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<sup>2</sup> Massey, "Places and Their Pasts," 183.

<sup>3</sup> Massey, *For Space*, 9.

applied on a broader scale to Drake's global *More Life* playlist as well as his musical catalogue in general.

By his own acknowledgement, as well as that of the public at large, Drake and his music are Toronto. He is motivated by his desire to represent Toronto in his music and career which results in him intentionally using his position of mobility and power to initiate global relationships within his music. The result is a collection of works that demonstrate a multiplicity of genre and culture. This should come as no surprise since Toronto is inarguably a place defined by its diasporic population and their global relationships. Through his implementation and inclusion of these kind of relational networks within his music, Drake and his music have become known as definitively Torontonians. Finally, this conclusion supports Massey's theory that space and places are made up, not of singular identities in isolation, but rather of a complex plurality of relationships and their processes.

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