

## **Linking geographical and sociological interpretations: Place, society and Diwali around the world**

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### **Introduction**

This chapter looks at a festival held around the globe. The Diwali (also called Deepavali) Festival is “the annual festival of light celebrated every autumn around the world” (Independent, 2017). This event is internationally important and culturally significant, linking people around the world—suggesting how events reinforce imagined communities. Diwali offers much insight on places and societies because the shared festival tradition unites people around the world, with much research conducted on the festival (see Booth, 2012, 2015, 2016; Johnson, 2007; Johnson & Figgins, 2006; Kelly, 1998; MacMillan, 2008). This chapter offers a different perspective of events, using geographical and sociological conceptualisations to link events, places and societies. All of the previous chapters had focused on either a specific case, cases or offered regional context. This chapter widens the scope by focus on conceptual considerations used by geographers and sociologists, and how these explain Diwali around the world. It does not follow a traditional research paper format or a methodological approach, but the chapter does bring in examples to provide insight and evidence from online/media content on different places around the world to relate conceptual discussions.

Diasporas can showcase how we live in an increasingly fluid and mobile world, and it is significant events such as Diwali that may link and connect people around the world. Diwali also creates an aesthetic, a unique experience for those who participate in or witness the event. Each of these concepts are explored in this chapter in the subsequent sections. Content is blended to link conceptual understandings with points of evidence blended in to relate to pertinent geographical and sociological understandings. The final section then attempts to link each of the conceptual areas to show links across each of these complementing areas, to show how such a global festival can unite an imagined diasporic community.. Diwali has its traditions and origins in South Asia (MacMillan, 2008), and Kishore and Sehwat (2017) discuss the festival’s meaning: “Diwali or Deepawali means long rows of oil lamps, which are mainly put outside the house to welcome the Hindu goddess of wealth Lakshmi and the lord Ganesha – the god of prosperity and the remover of obstacles”. As the festival has expanded around the world through diaspora from South Asia its meaning has taken on global significance:

“Deepavali, or also known as Diwali, is a festival of lights celebrated by those of Hindu faith. It is one of the most important festivals of the year for the Hindus who celebrate by performing traditional customs at homes. Just like most major celebrations by other communities, Deepavali is a time for family reunions. Deepavali is an official holiday in Malaysia as well as in some Asian countries like India, Myanmar, Mauritius and in non-Asian countries like Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, Suriname as well as Fiji” (Wonderful Malaysia, 2018).

The above quote highlights the significance of the event in various places around the world as a result of migration and the staging and performing of the festival around the world. A discussion of diaspora and imagined communities in where this chapter now turns.

### **Diasporas and Imagined Communities: To Australia, Mauritius and the United States**

Diasporas refer to the mass migration of people from a place of origin (a country or region of the world). There are various push factors associated with why diasporas occur, may it be from war or genocide, or to seek better economic opportunities (Cohen, 2008). Diasporas are important to study in disciplines such as human geography or sociology because when people become mobile, they take with them their culture and sense of identity and may attempt to create or (re)create that in a new place (see Booth, 2016; Johnson, 2007). When we consider this from an event studies perspective,

people locating and attempting to express their culture and sense of identity not only becomes (re)created, but also staged and performed in a new place (Booth, 2015; Cresswell, 2004; Edensor, 2002; Langellier, 2010). Furthermore, and as will be discussed below, representations in the landscape act to stage or display symbolisms to further connect imagined communities (Edensor, 2002). In this sense, cultural events and rituals become a performance of identity to connect people with their home, as “public Diwali celebrations dot local communities around the world” (Rohit, 2015). When identities are staged and performed, it symbolises a connection with the place of origin, creating a sense of meaning or reference to ‘home’—thus connecting those in a (new) place with their place of origin (see Wise, 2011).

Scholars have adopted Anderson’s (1991) notion of nations as imagined communities (e.g. Harris, 2008; Shobe, 2008; Wise, 2011), where he suggests people are bound together vis-à-vis ‘horizontal comradeship’. This comradeship now expands beyond national borders (Carter, 2007; Wise, 2011) and staging and performing events such as Diwali in various locations (almost simultaneously). Smith (1991) suggested that nations are bounded entities, but in a nascent era of transnational movements, the nation is no longer bounded geographically, per se, but is fluid. In today’s world, as people have become increasingly fluid, and thus so have their identities, culture and rituals, social and/or cultural phenomena has become a mediator for which to connect people based on their (different) identity—bounded exclusively through the shared association of living in the same place. The culture of a place is a social construction of everyday life and at times, this becomes contested when people from different cultural background attempt to make their presence (see Gruffudd, 1999; Wise, 2015b).

Scholars have referred to imagined communities as the interconnectedness of national societies across borders (see Langellier, 2010), and such an understanding is present during the hosting of events where people from different backgrounds often unite to celebrate or consume what is on offer. For instance, people who have departed South Asia and settled in Australia, Mauritius and the United States bring unique elements of their culture. Each October or November (depending on the moon cycle) Diwali is celebrated, giving those in the new country a chance to experience and understand the relocated culture, to participate and consume this culture. It is however, important to look beyond the consumption of events to assess new local productions of events where cultural differences are also important, to recognise how migrants not only shape the current demographics of a place, but also to the future construction, production and staging of culture in that new place (see Edensor, 2002). In relation to transnational migrations and their contribution to a new local identity, coinciding with the rapid advances of globalisation, it is impressions and imaginations of their home or ancestral home that they have a significant personal or ancestral connection with (Wise, 2015a). Building on this point, Sarwal (2016) describes how families continue the ritual in Australia, as many are “continuing the tradition of celebrating Diwali along with major festivals of other communities.”

Other authors add further personal insight. In the United States, Rohit (2015) writes:

“in the Little India district of Artesia, Calif., the streets become illuminated ahead of Diwali. For millions of Indians who live away from India, celebrating Diwali is a way for them to stay connected to their roots. As the second most populous nation on earth celebrates one of the world’s brightest and most festive holidays, Indians on the subcontinent and around the world are gathering for a time of family, gifts, and reflection.”

While there is a strong connection to South Asia, particularly India as described here, Rohit (2015), speaking with one member of the community about the festival, describes how Diwali builds connections in communities across the United States:

“‘We now live in San Francisco and get to participate in the same traditions as I did growing up in New York,’ Sejal Patel Daswani told NBC News. Daswani grew up in New Jersey and now lives in the San Francisco Bay Area with her family. [She adds] ‘Our

children also participate in the grand Diwali celebrations and there are also special guidance annually with the timings, audio, and step-by-step instructions on how to do the Diwali puja [prayer]'. Dawani adds that Diwali helps her stay in touch with her Indian heritage".

Similar emphasis on connection is addressed in Australia as well:

"Wish you all a very Happy Festival of Lights, Diwali, which is celebrated in India with a lot of enthusiasm and bonhomie, is now being celebrated all around Australia by the Indian diaspora. Many cultural and traditional celebration marks the festival in all of the metro cities, of course Melbourne and Sydney with its growing Indian population takes the lead" (Kishore & Sehrawat, 2017).

In Mauritius, for instance, "the Indian influence can be felt in religion, cuisine, arts and music" and "is sometimes also referred as Chota Bharat (mini India)" (NewsGram, 2016). Such semblance of culture is expressed through influence, and years of Hindu presence in Mauritius led to a public holiday to allow those (Hindus and non-Hindus) who actively celebrate Diwali to partake in festivities. As a group of people settle, they begin to build influence, creating a rootedness in place (Godkin, 1980). This helps reinforce links between people from different backgrounds in such a geographically small, but multi-cultural, country. Kishore and Sehrawat (2017) articulate, "celebrating Diwali in Australia has its own charm as it's now a multicultural festival here where not only Indians but people from all different communities join in the celebration with a lot of enthusiasm".

Personal links help individuals and families connect with an imagined community. Makhijani (2017) offers some personal insight, speaking with a local resident:

"The rituals of Diwali gave me a strong sense of self; the traditions helped to reinforce both cultural and family values, and provided continuity and connection with my community [...] Now, as the America-born parent of a third-generation American child, I have an even deeper appreciation for the ways in which my parents continued the traditions of Diwali in the United States. This sort of cultural torch-passing is hard work, but I know how crucial these rituals were to my well-being and self-identity. I want to provide my daughter with the same security as well".

This above narrative reinforces that sense of imagined community when faced with difference in a new place, as well as preserving a strong sense of identity (to both self and community). It is also that strong connection with 'home' that becomes apparent when addressing the notion of imagined communities, as further detailed in the following quote linking connections between the United States and India:

"The then President of the United States, George W Bush, started Diwali celebrations in the White House in 2003. Later, Barack Obama too followed the path of his predecessor when it came to Diwali celebrations. In 2009, Obama lit a traditional lamp in the East Room of the White House on the festive occasion. A year later, his wife Michelle Obama delivered a warm speech on the night of Diwali. "This holiday is celebrated by members of some of the world's oldest religions not just here in America but across the globe. Diwali is a time for celebration. As Barack and I learned during our visit to India, it's a time to come together with friends and family, often with dancing and good food," she said" (Little India, 2017).

This section has shown how the Diwali Festival is interpreted through notions of imagined communities and links between the origin and new places where culture is performed. The next

section builds on the community focus, by looking at how this relates to sense of place and sense of community.

### **Sense of Place and Sense of Community: Life in Malaysia and Singapore**

The geographical notion of sense of place has been widely discussed among geographers and has been discussed in earlier chapters. Agnew (1987) describes place as location, locale and sense of place. Location refers to a geographical position, impacted by settlement, history and the surrounding environment. Locale refers to the setting or sociological space where interactions (at events) occur. Sense of place is sought and understood vis-à-vis lived experiences—where unique bonds between people and place are experienced (see Rose, 1995). This point is relevant to understandings discussed by McMillan and Chavis (1986) on sense of community (discussed later in this section). It is important to consider both collective representations, reflective of community and interpersonal feelings that express insightful meaning. Basso (1996, p.57) states that “places and their meanings are continually woven into the fabric of social life.” Dunham (1986) adds insight here on the notion of community, in relation to place, and processes that help make and define place. Sense of place thus complements understandings surrounding personal perceptions of being, or one’s commitment, to a group (Coulton et al., 2011; Larsen & Johnson, 2012).

A sense of place refers to a sense of belonging, socially and emotionally, through collective attachment. Bringing this insight together, Rose (1995, p.88) offers a concise statement, noting sense of place:

“is the phrase used by many geographers when they want to emphasize that places are significant because they are the focus of personal feelings ... to refer to the significance of particular places for people. These feelings for “place” are not seen as trivial; geographers argue that senses of place develop from every aspect of individuals’ life experience and the senses of place pervade everyday life and experience.”

To reinforce the notion of sense of place and Diwali:

“Before the day of the festival, Hindu families throng Little India to gear up at the district’s many bazaars and snap photos of the stunning street light-up. The monumental installations, Instagram-worthy decorations and bright festive lights will stand in the neighbourhood for about a month after Deepavali, so there’s plenty of time to celebrate with the locals [...] To enmesh yourself with the Hindu community, follow the Silver Chariot procession, held twice in the lead-up to Deepavali. Devotees tow a silver chariot that houses an effigy of the goddess Sri Drowpathai Amman all the way from the Sri Mariamman Temple in Chinatown—it’s the oldest of its kind in Singapore—to Little India” (Visit Singapore, 2018).

Perhaps, adding to this understanding, it is useful to consider Tuan’s (1974, p.4) notion of topophilia, for instance, refers to the “effective bond between people and place.” We have seen in several studies from the literature that events can help create such an effective bond when common cultural events are staged and performed (see Johnson, 2007; Johnson & Figgins, 2006; Kelly, 1998; Wise, 2015a). Tuan’s (1974) underlying conceptualizations have been acknowledged by many social and cultural geographers seeking to unveil human experiences to forge an understanding of spaces deemed meaningful to individuals. Therefore, places where social congregations occur allow insight into a community’s sense of place (Basso, 1996; Wise & Harris, 2016). A general thought among humanist geographers, or more contemporary neohumanist geographers, is ‘place’ is created through personal meanings and social interactions (Adams et al., 2001; Simonsen, 2012).

Representation and meaning are also important to acknowledge because social and cultural geographers have focused on case-specific studies (Cresswell, 2004). Each study attempts to make

sense of the everyday experiences of a particular group of people and meanings embedded in particular places (Larsen & Johnson, 2012). This is a point to suggest for such research on Diwali going forward, and while it is beyond the scope of the chapter to focus on a case, a comparative analysis of community cases focusing on a festival such as Diwali needs to be considered. Building on the work of Tuan (1974) and insight from the collection by Adams et al. (2001), nascent humanist thought is concerned with social and material constructions, adding validity to the multiplicity of contexts and representations involved to better understanding sense of place. With this perception, evolving complexities, heterogeneity, and juxtapositions of community are increasingly apparent when considering a contemporary notion of sense of place (see Larsen & Johnson, 2012; Wise, 2015c).

In acknowledging critical perspectives pertaining to alternative notions of place, such as in place/out of place, Cresswell (2004, p.47) notes “the ‘outside’ plays a crucial role in the definition of the ‘inside’”. To this regard, Diwali can help create, or (re)create, a sense of belonging, or togetherness, and striving to be ‘in place’ is reinforced through relative social and cultural practices. Nonetheless, in this era of transnational movements, staging and performing identities in another place allows groups of people to create a sense of place and connect with their home, by creating spaces, performing rituals or attending events they identify with—that originate from their homeland or ancestral homeland. Events and festivals are central to this ideology, and participating in or celebrating them remains a vital component of people’s identity when settling and residing in a new place. Decorating a home to symbolize festivities or gathering to celebrate Diwali helps people connect with place, and build a sense of community.

According to McMillan and Chavis (1986, p.19), “a clear and empirically validated understanding of sense of community can provide the foundation for lawmakers and planners to develop programs that meet stated goals by strengthening and preserving community.” McMillan and Chavis (1986) presented a definition and theory of sense of community based on four conditions: membership, influence, integration or fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connections. The first condition, membership, is essential, given communities are often defined or recognized by geographical boundaries (Agnew, 1987; Suttles, 1972). For instance, both Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and Singapore have specific areas of each city known as ‘Little India’ (The Asian, 2017; Wonderful Malaysia, 2018). However, this directly contradicts some of the arguments made above, where the notion of imagined communities does not place boundaries on membership, as associations are shared around the world. Dunham (1986) framed social processes of place relevant to the attempt to be part of a wider collective group, without forgetting the very places where people forge a sense of community (see also Wise, 2015d). This is apparent in the case of Diwali where

“the Indian Cultural Fiesta has forged a strong bond within the various ethnic Indian Communities in Singapore. This celebration has created a platform to showcase the multitude of Indian traditions, customs, heritage and practices. This rare display of unity is not found anywhere else in the world and is only unique to Singapore’s heritage as a respected multi-cultural society. This level of integration has encouraged many cultural festivities” (Little India Singapore, 2018).

The second condition, influence, involves individual and collective contribution (or social capital). Influence can also be based on political, socio-economic or culture bias—as these contributing variables provide the overarching structures of influence. García et al. (1999) mention, politics (especially), have a profound (and powerful) influence on communities. Integration and fulfillment of needs come into context in numerous community case studies to position how influential factors/variables reinforce individual and group networks (see Jenkins, 2008). Furthermore, reinforcement acts as a motivator of social behavior and “it is obvious that for any group to maintain a (positive) sense of togetherness the individual-group association must be rewarding for its members” (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, p.12). García et al. (1999) support this conceptualization because integration and fulfillment can promote and sustain a greater sense of community, so “collective

needs can also be fulfilled” (García et al., 1999, p.731). While schools and various other institutions including churches, community halls and pavilions, event spaces represent places of integration (where people gather to celebrate and perform Diwali rituals). To bring out this point on uniting, an article in *The Asian* (2017) notes Diwali “is a day for people to come together and celebrate with open houses, fireworks, and delicious Indian delicacies”. Each of these examples allows members of the community to organize and structure their needs to fulfill community goals—to create a sense of community.

Uniting the first three mentioned conditions is shared emotional connections, the final condition of sense of community outlined by McMillan and Chavis (1986). Building on Sarason’s (1974) focus on interrelationships, participation and well-being, these variables are especially important to consider the making of and sense of place. García et al. (1999, p.731) build upon previously addressed conceptualizations of shared emotional connections, noting people often discuss their history, celebrate achievements or unite, whereas Clark and Wise (2018) argue it is participation that is a critical driver in increasing well-being and community connections. Collective emotions are supported through contact, interactions, bonds, investments, culture, or beliefs—thus shared emotional connections that reinforce belonging (Brittan, 1973). In Singapore, people have the option to

“chase the scents of floral garlands and incense while browsing through stalls hawking gold jewellery, traditional snacks, embroidered sari (traditional Indian womenswear) and ornamental decorations. Enjoy a musical performance under the stars while getting an intricate henna tattoo done. Or simply park yourself at any of the neighbourhood’s many coffee shops with a mug of teh tarik (pulled milk tea) to watch one of the most beautiful festivals in Singapore blossom to life” (Visit Singapore, 2018).

In Malaysia, Hindus “usually open their houses to guests, friends, and neighbours to feast”, and while the event is celebrated in particular communities, many of the major shopping malls are “decorated with an array of colourful lights and Deepavali decorations” (Kuala Lumpur, 2018). This helps reinforce a sense of place and wider associations with the event across the country to strengthen the experience.

Poplin (1979, p.5) states that “community has been used to refer to a condition in which human beings find themselves enmeshed in a tight-knit web of meaningful relationships with their fellow human beings.” Warren (2004, p.54) notes that “the systematic study of community has developed around the general focus of shared living based on common locality. In a sense the community is the meeting place of the individual and the larger society and culture”, and their performances help connect them more holistically with performances taking place elsewhere and afar, expanding the geographical focus and spectacle each October or November. In Singapore, and Malaysia, reinforcing sense of place and community happens by detailing current opportunities to unite locals. At the time of writing, points of emphasis to create a sense of togetherness and sense of place were promoted through: Deepavali street light-up; photo taking points; Tusker’s Kingdom (baby elephant statues majestically rooted to the grounds of Little India); UTSAV Street Parade; Deepavali Festival Village; Deepavali Art Exhibition; and let’s light up Little India (Little India Singapore, 2018). The information presented on the Little India Singapore (2018) website aims to create a sense of unity and promote activities for families to connect, celebrate and consume culture. Additional activities including learning about art at the Indian Heritage Centre, tying flowers, Rangoli (form of art where patterns are made on floors, living rooms or courtyards with colored rice, dry flour, sand or flower petals) and music (Little India Singapore, 2018). Each of these add elements in the form of festival aesthetics and the formation of unique cultural landscapes.

### **Festival Aesthetics and Luminating Landscapes: From Britain to Guyana, Oman to South Africa**

Holt (2017) describes Diwali as “a bright and beautiful celebration—and one of the most important celebrations in India and its diaspora”, where communities get together and light up the night landscape, creating a festival aesthetic and spectacle. Perhaps Cosgrove (1984, p.13) phrased it

best when he suggested the study of landscape represents “not just the world we see, it is a construction, a composition of that world—landscape is a way of seeing the world”. Although the event only lasts five days, Diwali is a way of celebrating places by lighting up the night landscape with lights to create aesthetic displays of culture and performance, to help exemplify the experience. Edensor (2002) would add the notions of staging and performing culture to this to connect the traditional and commercial displays of an event such as Diwali for those who actively practice the event, to those in the destination who can consume this imported cultural tradition, respectively.

Place images, settings and landscape features are significant areas of research in tourism and geography (e.g. Kirillova et al., 2014; Maitland & Smith, 2009; Williams & Lew, 2015), but there is also a need to consider the transformation of urban landscapes for the purpose of events and festivals as well (see Wise & Mulec, 2015). Gammon and Elkington’s (2015) collection on landscapes of leisure offered nascent insight into how spaces transform and spectacles emerge. Because meanings embedded in landscapes are complex, they are shaped to define a place’s identity and heritage (see Daniels et al., 2011; Wylie, 2007). Aesthetics, and the presentation of aesthetics, are vital towards forging (new) images of places; moreover, cultural and natural landscape features greatly assist how we understand aspects of aesthetic design and/or representation (Kirillova et al., 2014; Weaver, 2009). It has been acknowledged that aesthetics enhance experience (Gabrielsson & Juslin, 1996), and during Diwali the displays at night stimulate the senses by lighting the landscape, through the sounds of music and taste of food, all to symbolize culture and identity, and to reinforce heritage and tradition. Senses are important, as detailed: “such a lovely sight, the Belgrave Road area of Leicester is bathed in twinkling lights every autumn for Navratri and Diwali celebrations. It’s a visual spectacle not to be missed” (VisitEngland, 2018). Furthermore, the Manchester Diwali event is:

“a spectacle of drumming, lanterns, music and dance [...] It’s a first for Manchester and indeed any Diwali Mela event-Spark! the amazing LED drummers from Worldbeaters led a vibrant procession of music and dance with hundreds of participants carrying lanterns around Albert Square. Illuminated figurines held by members of the Manchester Indian Association, coupled with an eclectic mix of costumed paraders created an intimate early evening spectacle” (Walk the Plank, 2016).

Knudsen et al. (2015) suggest there is not only a need to construct an understanding of aesthetic concepts based around place and landscape, but it is important to explore how aesthetic meanings are communicated, and during Diwali it is through lights, sounds and tastes, with similar displays performed in Britain and Guyana.

Schein (1997, p.660) mentions landscape interpretation is a “specific exercise that requires interrogating the role of landscape in social and cultural reproduction, as well as understanding the landscape within wider social and cultural contexts,” emphasised through some of the content in the above section on sense of community. Likewise, landscapes are consumed and experienced based on what the scene is conveying to the interpreter, oftentimes based on how it engages senses (Wylie, 2007). In this sense, cultural phenomena associated with Diwali unites those later generations born in a new place with those how have recently migrated (with the ancestral homeland and all cultural performances in between). As for meanings produced through events and festivities, the identity being celebrated—or consumed—is a cultural texture, or a layer of the landscape, now embedded and performed, to locate understandings of place, identity and community (Adams et al., 2001; Wise, 2014). According to Tuan (1976, p.4) “the landscape is largely a product of human effort.” In addition, Clouser (2009, p.7) suggests, “the power of a landscape can be seen in its ability to mould thoughts, evoke memories and emotions reinforce and create ideologies, and to relay to the world the values and priorities of place.” Diwali as a celebration does just this.

A focus on aesthetics is largely missing from the events and festivals literature, but much context can be borrowed from tourism to build a conceptual understanding. According to Postrel (2003), the age of aesthetics has arrived—and the focus is becoming increasingly important. According

to Creighton (2011) on Diwali: “spectacle is employed in the display of lighted diyas, which are at the same time symbols and a ritual of religious faith.” Persaud (2018) notes that:

“Diwali, which literally means a row of lights, is celebrated on the 15th day of the Hindu month of Kartik. It is the darkest night of that month and is conducive to the twinkling lights that illuminate every nook and cranny. Worship of the goddess Maha Lakshmi is the main focus of Diwali. The aspirant performs Lakshmi puja and seeks her blessing for material and spiritual fulfillment. The festival encourages the participation of the entire family and it has long been the custom in Guyana for everyone in the home to gather in front of their Lakshmi murti at dusk chanting prayers and mantras before emerging to light their first diya.”

From this description, the lighting of the place helps illuminate the landscape, which in turn creates a unique event aesthetic. Persaud (2018) adds, “thousands of Guyanese of every stratum of society and cultural belief throng the roads to witness the processions of beautifully decorated and illuminated vehicles depicting the theme of Diwali” which reinforces the event as a spectacle.

Kirillova et al. (2014) focus on aesthetic attributes as elements of beauty, specifically how aesthetics are embodied to create perceived images. What is “observed by Hindus, Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists all over the world, celebrations are known for being vibrant and colourful, often featuring elaborate firework displays and the lighting of candles and lamps” (Schofield, 2014). To Ely (2003), terrain, and what covers the terrain, constitutes the aesthetics of a place, now more often than not a product of modern times. Scenery itself is reminiscent, and for tourists or outside onlookers, stimulations, captured visually or imagined through transcribed narratives, are associations of picturesque beauty. Such beauty found in narratives of natural or cultural landscapes define romanticized images of places, or aesthetic pleasures and experiences, are now embedded in places like Oman that has such a large population from South Asia. Wang et al. (2008) focus on aesthetic values, or feelings people have about certain landscapes, and the creating of symbolic landscapes in South Africa during Diwali contribute to the values of rituals and culture—linking imagined experiences through displays of light. Aesthetic notions become omnipresent, seen in promotional materials to enhance the event spectacle (Maitland & Smith, 2009; Weaver, 2009). When we consider the landscape and aesthetic displays, the lighting of the night landscape is the symbolism of the event, taking on the same meaning and creating a visual spectacle in each place, from Britain to Guyana, Oman to South Africa, as well as across South Asia and into Singapore and Malaysia, or Australia, Mauritius and the United States.

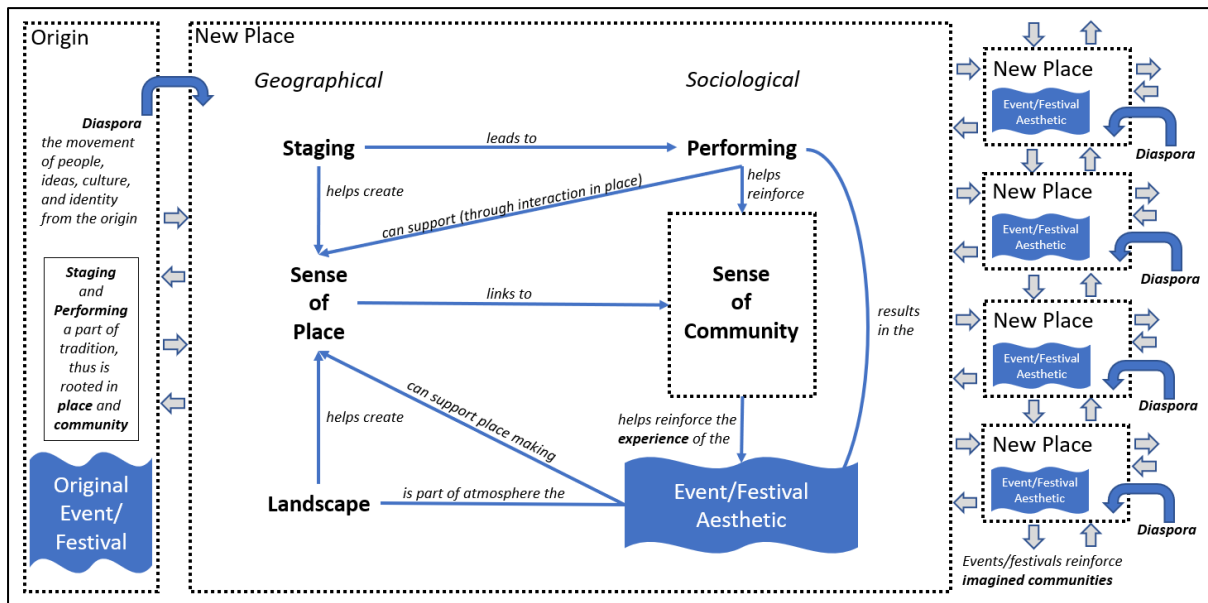
### **Discussion: Linking Conceptualisations**

While Diwali is celebrated around the world, the narrative in each of the articles above address similarities across the different sections. The conceptual diagram presented in Figure 16.1 shows the connections across the points addressed in this chapter. A key consideration here is the practical overlaps, when we consider sense of place and the community, landscapes in this case are created and (re)created, and these are the spaces where interactions occur. The point of using different examples supported by online/media excerpts was to show how Diwali is truly a global event. This helps offer insight into imagined communities, sense of place and staging events to illuminate the cultural landscape for the duration of the festival. Thus, each of the abstract areas discussed above are dependent upon interactions, and this is where the notions of staging and performing identities are golden threads linking the geographical and sociological conceptualisations.

In Figure 16.1, the new place in the conceptual diagram could be any of the countries discussed above. If we consider the United Kingdom as a new place and the other new places being Singapore, Oman, Guyana and Australia, there are links that connect people in these places, to show how events and festivals help reinforce imagined communities. The event is developed in the place of origin, where it is traditionally staged and performed. When diaspora occurs, the movement of people



along with their culture and ideas are brought to the new place and (re)created. As outlined in this chapter, there are both geographical and sociological considerations at play. The staging, in a new location leads to the culture or ritual being performed. Both staging and performing the festival helps create and support a sense of place. Performing helps reinforce a sense of community, and a newly found sense of place links to a greater sense of community (Wise, 2015c). The performing of the event or festival results in the event or festival aesthetic, and a sense of community helps reinforce this because it can enhance the experiences for those participating. The landscape is part of the atmosphere that also helps create the aesthetic, and both of these based on their geographical presence help support place making, which helps reinforce a sense of place, because the event or festival is being staged in an actual new place.



**Figure 16.1.** Conceptual connections to reinforce imagined communities and diaspora between places staging and performing, sense of place and sense of community, and the landscape and event/festival aesthetic.

### Concluding Remarks

Agnew and Duncan (1989) debated locality, or locale, in their collection to integrate sociological and geographical imaginations of place and society. Poplin's (1979, p.10) approach made this apparent. People interact and therefore have to "adjust and adapt to their territorial milieu." (Poplin?) Other geographers have noted, as individuals and members of a society, we conform to and shape our understanding of space and place by establishing ourselves along with finding comfort and familiarity in our physical and perceived surroundings (see Sack, 1997; Tuan, 1974). Relationships among people are often rooted in a place and forged through common practices, values, exercises or actions, each an attempt to establish a mutual sense of belonging (Suttles, 1972). Territorial bases and/or locations refer to the geographical implications that serve as the physical setting (Poplin, 1979). To address the international linking of the festival, Rohit (2015) suggested in an interview that:

"Medha Jaishankar, the daughter of an Indian diplomat, told NBC News she grew up experiencing Diwali around the world. She was born in Delhi, but has celebrated Diwali in East Asia, Eastern Europe, the United States, as well as in India. Jaishankar now works as a film executive in Hollywood, but the Indian holiday stays with her and is a welcomed celebration."

Whilst (geographically) relevant, boundaries are used to define or signify membership (McMillan & Chavis, 1986); focusing on a place encourages us to spatially identify points among the (often) exclusive boundaries, defining membership and where social cohesion is deemed most significant. However, imagined communities transcend this. Behavioural geographers will argue people identify with certain points through cognitive references (Barkowsky, 2002; Downs & Stea, 2005; Larsen & Johnson, 2012; Sack, 1997; Wise, 2014), linked to social spaces and the performances they are involved with to connect them with others—especially in the very space(s) where an event takes place and by those celebrating elsewhere. When needs are fulfilled and shared emotional connections are spatially referenced, and when identity and culture is staged and performed, this signifies why both geographical and sociological approaches help lead to multidisciplinary understanding of place and community. This chapter relates to similar understandings addressed in previous chapters where an event is founded in one place, then staged and performed elsewhere—and in this case around the world. As people with a shared sense of identity migrate around the world, festivals such as Diwali hold deep religious and spiritual connotations for Hindu, Sikhs and Jains.

This conceptual chapter shows how Diwali is a truly global event that is celebrated in numerous places to unite people under a shared festival tradition. In future research it may be worth further exploring in a more case-by-case basis or comparative analysis the role and interactions of different places and the festival tradition. Moreover, each conceptual point can be further explored and elaborated on through fieldwork at Diwali events around the world. Each area outlined in this chapter offers a relevant framework to consider when researching cultural events in general, especially events celebrated by diasporic communities in multiple locations around the world.

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