(DIS)ORIENTATION IN PLACE: MOVEMENTS AND ENCOUNTERS OF THE PATHARS IN PENANG

SANJEH KUMAR A/L RAMAN

UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA

2023

(DIS)ORIENTATION IN PLACE: MOVEMENTS AND ENCOUNTERS OF THE PATHARS IN PENANG

by

SANJEH KUMAR A/L RAMAN

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

July 2023

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This thesis is not a product of solo act. I hope to never forget the many life lessons I learnt while completing this study. First and foremost, nothing can ever replace the unwavering love and support of my family, especially my parents, Raman and Saras who are my first teachers and from whom I have realized the meaning of ethics and perseverance, among other things. I cherish them for who they are because without their caring presence, this work would not have been possible. I would also like to record my appreciation to my supervisor, Dr. Safial Aqbar Zakaria for his unwavering patience, guidance and support of my effort and leap of faith into this study. My gratitude also goes to all my friends in the academia for their critical feedbacks and fruitful discussions that has contributed to this work. I am thankful for all the research assistance from the USM librarians and technical help from the management staff of HBP. I record my appreciation to the Vishwakarma-Pathar community who have generously assisted me with this study. Finally, I offer my deep gratitude to scholars of the past and present whose lives, ideas and work I have drawn inspiration from.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT ..... **ii**

TABLE OF CONTENTS ..... **iii**

LIST OF TABLES ..... **vii**

LIST OF FIGURES ..... **viii**

LIST OF APPENDICES ..... **xiv**

ABSTRAK ..... **xv**

ABSTRACT ..... **xvii**

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION **1**

1.1 Introduction 1

1.2 Background of Research 3

1.3 Problem Statement 5

1.4 Theoretical Framework 7

1.5 Research Question 12

1.6 Research Aim and Objectives 13

1.7 Expected Outcomes 13

1.8 Limitation of Research 14

1.9 Definition of Terms 15

1.10 Thesis Organization 17

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW **19**

2.1 Experiencing from the Inside 19

2.2 Place and Phenomenology 22

2.2.1 Place: An integral dimension of lifeworld 22

2.2.2 Building as lifeworld 24

2.2.3 “Home” and “at-homeness” 27

2.3 Phenomenology: An Episteme in Architecture 31

2.4 The need to move away from essentializing ethics 35

2.5 The Indian diaspora and Ethnopreneurs 39

2.5.1 Economic activities, urban government and modern temples in the diaspora 42

2.6 The Vishwakarma Narrative 46

2.6.1 Rendering activity into craftsmanship 49

2.6.2 Community 51

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY 56

3.1 Introduction 56

3.2 Underlying Paradigm 57

3.2.1 Phenomenological ethnography 58

3.3 Fieldwork Methods 61

3.3.1 Phenomenological interviews 62

3.3.2 Photovoice 65

3.3.3 Participant observation 67

3.3.4 Researcher as tool 69

3.3.5 Document analysis 70

3.4 Work Plan 72

3.5 Data Analysis Method 74

3.5.1 First layer of data: Detailed description 74

3.5.2 Second layer of data: Case studies 75

3.5.2(a) Life histories 76

3.5.2(b) Discourse analysis 76

3.5.3 Third layer of data: Producing theories 78

3.6 Positionality and Reflexivity 79

3.7 Summary 81

CHAPTER 4 ANALYSIS 82

4.1 A Unit of Analysis 82

4.1.1 Buildings are lifeworlds, but sites are palimpsests 84
4.2 Ideation of the Pathars' Shophouses 88
4.2.1 Spatializing the workplace 95
4.2.1(a) Workshop 99
4.2.1(b) Workstation 106
4.2.1(c) Domestication of spaces 112
4.2.2 Voices of (dis)orientation 117
4.3 The Pathars' Community Temple 135
4.3.1 Place of God 137
4.3.1(a) Form and space 137
4.3.1(b) Image and meaning 141
4.3.1(c) Activity and use 145
4.3.2 Insideness: Existential Essence of Place Experience 148
4.4 The Mandapa as Bhabha's Third Space 153
4.4.1 A shifting sense of identity 156
4.4.1(a) Lifestyle: Articulating cultural difference 158
4.4.1(b) Culture: Past and present 162
4.4.1(c) Social: Collective experience 165
CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION 168
5.1 Introduction 168
5.2 Interiority of the Pathar and the Production of Space 169
5.2.1 Representation of space 180
5.2.2 Spatial practice 180
5.2.3 Space of representation 181
5.2.4 Production of social space 182
5.3 (Dis)orientation in Place 185
5.4 Building community, spatializing "home" 193

5.4.1 From house to home 205
5.4.2 The institutionalized home 221
5.5 Third Space: A Basis for Cultural Meaning 227
5.5.1 Sites are palimpsests: Grid rationale 229
5.5.2 Community is built, not found 235
CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS 244
6.1 Conclusion 244
6.2 Recommendations 250
REFERENCES 254
APPENDICES
LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

LIST OF TABLES

Page

Table 2.1 Six architectural components and their turnover cycles (Brand, 1994). 26

Table 2.2 Ego types, place and its feature (Duc Tran, 2018). 30

Table 2.3 Phenomenology as an episteme in architecture (Avermaete, 2021). 31

Table 3.1 Excerpt from Interview 1 with Sai. 63

Table 3.2 Typology of phenomenological methodologies (adapted from Gill, 2020). 64

Table 3.3 Details of work plan and data collection 72

Table 3.4 The timeline for different study activities 73

Table 3.5 Thematic categories derived from data and the emerging theories. 77

Table 4.1 Changes on sites that marks Bala's memory and reality of his neighbourhood. 124

Table 5.1 Features of place and interiority of the body (Adapted from Duc Tran, 2018). 175

Table 5.2 English and Tamil words of the Pathars that belong to the realm of work. 191

Table 5.3 The unfolding of "home" as place experience. 200

Table 5.4 Parameters of lifeworld: Essential and Particular situations. 202

LIST OF FIGURES

Page

Figure 1.1 Theoretical framework of this study. 9

Figure 2.1 "The thinging of things" (Source: adapted from Heidegger's "The Fourfold").....21

Figure 2.2 Lifeworld contains a plurality of cultural worlds.....23

Figure 2.3 Sustaining and Undermining Aspects of "At-Homeness". (Based on Seamon, 1979: 87; 2010: 238). 28

Figure 2.4 (left) Norberg Schulz's diagram in *Existence, Space, and Architecture* (1971) and (right) Glissant's diagram of the Middle Passage in *Poetics of Relation* (2010).....35

Figure 2.5 Straits Settlements administrative setup, 1858–1867 (Sundara Raja, 2017). 42

Figure 2.6 The ceremonial gold and silver axes set next to a finger ring show their small size. (Photo credit: Sudarsan dasa Mahapatra, Goldie Photos, Jagannatha Puri, Odisha, 1996).....52

Figure 2.7 (From left to right) The descendants of *Vidyapati*, *Visvavasu* and then *Vishwakarma* touching the chosen tree with axes following which the tree is cut down. (Photo credit: Sudarsan dasa Mahapatra, Goldie Photos, Jagannatha Puri, Odisha, 1996).....53

Figure 3.1 Map of research design (adapted from Li Y, 2020).....57

Figure 4.1 "A unit of analysis" (adapted from Casey, 2009; Malpas, 1999; Relph, 1976/2008 and Simarmata, 2018).....83

Figure 4.2 The Pathars' buildings are lifeworlds that are tethered to the cultural worlds of local Indian diaspora (Source: researcher's own). 85

Figure 4.3 (From top to bottom) Variations to the internal layout of Pathars' shophouses in different locales in Penang. (N.T.S.) (Source: researcher's own). 94

Figure 4.4 *Spatiality of situation* of the Pathar that enables him to produce work, arises from his *body routines* and *time-space routines* (Source: researcher's own).....96

Figure 4.5 A key lived quality that affects *body-routine* and *time-space routine* of a Pathar (Source: researcher's own).....97

Figure 4.6 Workspace and metal-smelting space in Bala's shophouse. (N.T.S.) (Source: researcher's own). 100

Figure 4.7 Bala's private workspace layout. (N.T.S.) (Source: researcher's own). 101

Figure 4.8 Metal-smelting cubicle and moulding-shaping room in Surya's shophouse (First Floor). (N.T.S.) (Source: researcher's own).....102

Figure 4.9 Workspace in Surya's shophouse (Ground Floor). (N.T.S.) (Source: researcher's own).....103

Figure 4.10 Surya's private workspace layout. (N.T.S.) (Source: researcher's own). 104

Figure 4.11 Machine smeared with holy ash, is a common sight in the Pathars' workshop (Source: researcher's own).....105

Figure 4.12 Bala's nephew at work, in his workstation (Source: researcher's own). 106

Figure 4.13 Images of goldsmiths in Little India, Penang, from 1979 by Ooi Cheng Ghee. (left) A Pathar at work in his workstation. (right) Arrangement of workstations in the shophouse. (Image source: Ooi et al., 2011).....108

Figure 4.14 Goldsmiths at their average workstation a generation ago. (Image source: Ghosh et al., 2010).....108

Figure 4.15 Pathar's workstations placed on shophouse corridors in Little India, Penang. (N.T.S.) (Source: researcher's own). 110

Figure 4.16 A recomposed picture of a Pathar's shophouse in its heyday (Source: temple circular).....111

Figure 4.17 Middle space of the shophouse, adapted to children's study during the pandemic (Source: researcher's own).....113

Figure 4.18 Altars like this, that hold icons of veneration is commonly featured in a Pathar's shophouse (Source: researcher's own).....114

Figure 4.19 Ayudha Puja is a continuation of the Pathar's work schedule that also informs us of his habitus. It marks an intentional rest, and renewal of the individual Pathar's relationship to his equipment and craftsmanship (Source: participant).....116

Figure 4.20 Custom-made 916 gold jewellery. (From left) *Mangalasutra* pendants, *Navaratna* (nine gems) ring, and Blue sapphire ring (Source: researcher's own).....118

Figure 4.21 Bala's nephew working on a *mangalasutra* pendant (Source: researcher's own). 120

Figure 4.22 Bala's present-day neighbourhood layout (Source: researcher's own). 123

Figure 4.23 Bala's memory of his childhood neighbourhood layout (Source: researcher's own). 123

Figure 4.24 A much younger Bala with visitors, in his previous shophouse, which was demolished along with many other shophouses, to make way for Penang Times Square development (Source: participant) 125

Figure 4.25 Surya's present-day neighbourhood layout. (N.T.S.) (Source: researcher's own). 129

Figure 4.26 Panoramic view of the temple from Jalan Dato' Keramat and Jalan Kampung Jawa Lama intersection (Source: researcher's own). 135

Figure 4.27 The person-temple embodiment. (Adapted from Carmona & Punter,1997; Montgomery,1998; and Carmona et al.,2003).....137

Figure 4.28 Inventory of the core complex of the temple. (N.T.S.) (Source: researcher's own). 138

Figure 4.29 The vimāna (Source: researcher's own). 139

Figure 4.30 The gōpura (Source: researcher's own). 142

Figure 4.31 Programmed activities in the temple (Source: researcher's own). 145

Figure 4.32 A devotee engaging with the architecture of the temple (Source: researcher's own). 149

Figure 4.33 A devotee encounters images at punctuated centers of the temple complex while performing circumambulation (Source: researcher's own). 150

Figure 4.34 Spatial expression of the mandapa (Source: researcher's own). 153

Figure 4.35 Mandapa space use. (left) on regular days; (right) on peak days. (N.T.S.) (Source: researcher's own). 154

Figure 4.36 The mandapa as a Vedic ritual space during Vishwakarma Jayanti puja (Source: temple archive). 160

Figure 4.37 Musicians playing traditional percussions in the mandapa during Navarathri festival (Source: temple archive). 161

Figure 4.38 Stucco icon of Ramalinga on the façade of the mandapa, facing Jalan Dato Keramat (Source: researcher's own). 162

Figure 4.39 School uniform assistance to River Road Tamil School by the temple management in 2019 (Source: temple archive). 166

Figure 5.1 Ritualistic act of exchange between the clients and the Pathar (Source: researcher's own). 172

Figure 5.2 A Pathar's tools and workstation remain as "objects of utility" in the realm of sight where there are no interactions (Source: researcher's own). 174

Figure 5.3 Illustration of Lefebvre's "space triad". Social space is produced by dialectical interrelationships between representations of space, spatial practice and space of representation (Source: researcher's own). 178

Figure 5.4 Relationship between different social bodies (Source: researcher's own). 182

Figure 5.5 The temple chariot passing in front of Chettiars' kittangi, in Little India, Penang at the culmination of Navarathri festival; an activity that draws from the experiences outside the building sites. (Source: temple archive) 194

Figure 5.6 Homelike aspects of homeworld. (N.T.S.) (Source: researcher's own). 197

Figure 5.7 Threshold that guards and welcomes simultaneously. Jewellery display console that serves as the store-front, has steel barricade to guard the "insider" to this shophouse, while the "outsider" is monitored via a security camera (Source: researcher's own). 199

Figure 5.8 Essential situation of "home" (Source: researcher's own)..... 201

Figure 5.9 Bala, at "home" in his shophouse, surrounded by familiarity of his habitus, despite it being ruptured by personal tragedies (Source: researcher's own)..... 204

Figure 5.10 Krishna's father with another goldsmith, in the mandapa of their community temple (Source: participant)..... 209

Figure 5.11 Interior view of Sia Boay Market in 2001 from the site's chronological time line infographic board in Sia Boay Urban Archaeological Park. (Source: researcher's own) 215

Figure 5.12 Pathars and their families during a gathering in Kuala Lumpur in 2018 which included people who have moved out of Penang (Source: participant)..... 219

Figure 5.13 Upākarma (in Tamil: āvaṇi aviṭṭam) is a domestic ritual for the Pathars that has now shifted from homes to the temple. (left) Temple circular for Upākarma. (right) Men and boys of Pathar community during Upākarma observance in the temple (Source: temple archive)..... 224

Figure 5.14 "Grid" as a rational organization method has a unifying underlying structure even as each layout seem to have its own rhythm or scale (Source: researcher's own). 230

Figure 5.15 Nijku village, Kiambu, from Elspeth Huxley, A New Earth- An Experiment in Colonialism 1960 (Image source: Crinson, 2020).... 231

Figure 5.16 The layout of settlement around Fort Cornwallis, George Town in 1804 (Image source: Hassan, 2009). 232

Figure 5.17 Vehicles drive through the streets in Little India, while pedestrians wait to dart across. With no break in the streetscape, some people can be seen huddled under whatever little shade available (Source: researcher's own). 237

Figure 5.18 A Pathar in his workstation, placed on the corridors of a jewellery store in Little India, Penang (Source: researcher's own). 238

Figure 5.19 An elderly man, next to his wheelchair, washing himself in a corner, on Lebuh Pasar (Source: researcher's own)..... 239

LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX A	NEWSPAPER REPORT ON NAVARATHRI FESTIVAL CHARIOT PROCESSION (SOURCE: TEMPLE ARCHIVE).
APPENDIX B	TEMPLE CIRCULAR FOR NAVARATHRI FESTIVAL, 2019 (SOURCE: TEMPLE ARCHIVE).
APPENDIX C	A SAMPLE EXCERPT OF PHOTOVOICE ANALYSIS.

(DIS)ORIENTASI DI TEMPAT: PERGERAKAN DAN PERTEMUAN PATHAR DI PULAU PINANG

ABSTRAK

Komuniti Pathar dalam penghijrahan ke Pulau Pinang pada abad kesembilan belas, turut membawa warisan teknologi Vishwakarma yang kemudiannya membentuk enklaf penempatan komuniti ini melalui ideoskap and teknoskap yang membentuk kediaman, pekerjaan dan penempatan. Walau bagaimanapun, penghijrahan ini juga adalah ke tempat yang telah difikirkan dan dibina sepenuhnya sebelum ketibaan mereka. Fenomenologi kritikal sebagai episteme dalam kajian ini berguna bukan sahaja untuk menggali ideologi perkauman dalam seni bina moden yang mengiringi kolonialisme di Pulau Pinang, tetapi menggerakkan strategi metodologi untuk mempersoalkan alat penyiasatan untuk menonjolkan suara Pathar yang berada di pinggir. Kajian ini memulihkan pengalaman hidup Pathar di Pulau Pinang melalui kajian etnografi fenomenologi tentang dunia kehidupan mereka; bangunan dan tapak yang menyokong aktiviti harian mereka. Analisis kajian menghasilkan pergerakan dan pertemuan komuniti ini dalam rutin harian mereka, untuk mendedahkan pengalaman intim dan budaya mereka tentang tempat dan penghasilan ruang sosial. Jalinan kerja dan budaya Pathar dengan tempat bukan sahaja membolehkan penghasilan ruang sosial untuk komuniti Hindu tempatan, tetapi juga penciptaan semula apa yang boleh menjadi "rumah" dalam menghadapi bandar yang berubah dengan pantas. Keadaan penting “rumah” bagi orang Pathar menjelaskan bahawa sorotan ke dalam tempat membuka pemahaman fenomenologi tentang dalaman dan mendedahkan jalinan dinamik manusia dengan alam bina. Dalam menggunakan paradigma tafsiran kepada sebahagian besar sejarah lisan

Pathar tempatan, keturunan mereka dan ahli dunia budaya yang dikongsi, kajian ini menyumbang kepada usaha masa depan mengenai topik yang sama, yang berurusan dengan minoriti dan pengalaman kelas pekerja dalam seni bina. Naratif Pathar menambah nuansa kepada pemahaman kita tentang (dis)orientasi dalam tempat, penghasilan tempat dan bagaimana fenomenologi berguna untuk menyusun strategi intradisiplin untuk mengembangkan kaedah dan alat kritikal untuk menyerlahkan suara yang sering diabaikan dalam wacana seni bina di Malaysia dan rantau Asia Tenggara.

(DIS)ORIENTATION IN PLACE: MOVEMENTS AND ENCOUNTERS OF THE PATHARS IN PENANG

ABSTRACT

The Pathars in their migration to Penang during the nineteenth century, brought along their Vishwakarma techne heritage which subsequently shaped their enclaves, through ideoscapes and technoscapes that delineates their inhabitation, work and settlement. However, their migration was also into a place that was already fully ideated and built, prior to their arrival. Critical phenomenology as an episteme in this study is useful not only to exhume racial ideology in modern architecture that accompanied colonialism in Penang, but mobilizes methodological strategies to question tools of investigation to highlight voices of the Pathars which are on the margins. This study recovers the lived experiences of the Pathars in Penang through phenomenological ethnography study of their lifeworlds; the buildings and sites which support their everyday activities. The analysis of the study yields this community's movements and encounters in their everydayness, to reveal their intimate and culturally situated experience of place and production of social space. The Pathars' intertwinement of work and culture with place has not only enabled the production of social space for local Hindu community, but also the re-invention of what "home" can be in the face of a rapidly changing city. The Pathars' essential situation of "home" informs us that the inward turn of place uncovers a phenomenological understanding of interiority and brings to the foreground the dynamics of human intertwinement with their built environments. In using an interpretive paradigm to the largely oral histories of local Pathars, their descendants and members of a shared cultural world, this study contributes to future effort on

similar topics dealing with minorities and working-class experience in architecture. The Pathars' narrative add nuance to our understanding of (dis)orientation in place, placemaking and how phenomenology be useful to assemble intradisciplinary strategies to expand the critical methods and tools to highlight the often-overlooked voices in architectural discourses within Malaysia and Southeast Asian region.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

We are living in an age of rising hyper nationalism, increased corporatization, and emergence of market driven ideas. While our ancestors could deal with identity fluidity, we have grown to be embarrassed by our past. Works of artistic expression and books written by our ancestors are viewed as controversial, lewd or risky in the mainstream society. Where did all the nuances of pluralism, complexity and productive ambiguity go? What happened to us is “modernity”. When modernity arrived, we reconfigured the way we viewed and understood ourselves and our relationship with one another. When modernity arrived to our shores, it came in the form of modern colonial company and modern imperialism. It came in the form of the creation of hierarchical society with typologies and use of all the tools of modernity, all the pseudo-scientific tools, theories of polygenesis, racial difference, racial hierarchy and it hits us only to take away from us the vocabulary and the language we have had to understand to speak about ourselves and the world.

Many revisionist historians believe that modernity is the outcome of the interrelated dynamics of capitalism, slavery, and imperialism (Beckert, 2015; Buck-Morss et al., 2009; Gilroy, 2007; Mehta, 2007; Robinson, 2000; Davis, 2017). European colonial expansion, as well as the emergence of racial subjugation, mercantilism, and industrial capitalism, necessitated the establishment of notions of human difference and inequality. Addressing the significance of architecture in global modernity requires not only incorporating materials, buildings, and designers

from around the world, but also dealing with the intrinsic centrality of race. It necessitates a clearer understanding of how colonial brutality and slavery were interwoven with logic and progress-oriented cultural narratives and practises. Even as modern architects presumed members of society living in thoroughly standardised social housing, school systems, transportation terminals, government facilities, sectors of the economy, and private homes in the "first world," those on the "dark side of modernity," justified as racial subordinates, continued living in substandard spaces created through the expropriation of labour, land, and resources. Racialization and racial inequality in modern architecture have an impact on the underlying understanding of what it means to be modern. By recognising race as a unique concept within the history of architectural thinking, the stark violence and injustice of modern architecture's historical antecedents can be addressed. As such, critical phenomenology can reveal what is beyond a historian's documentation in architectural discourse, bringing to light voices that have been marginalized. Critical phenomenology accustoms us to others' disorientation and merges their embodied experiences into discourse in order to uncover what architecture can do about today's unseen bodily, organisational, and ideological hegemony roles.

1.2 Background of Research

The study of place and space, in relation to architecture, is needed to understand how the daily lives of people whose homes are interrupted by not only colonization, but many of the repercussions of it, like uneven development, or social inequalities. This process of interruption not only disorientates people, but pushes them to move and leave their familiar communities, and home where they have lived for generations to find other meaningful places where they reconstruct and rediscover their homes. Many of the Indian goldsmith businesses that operate as ethnopreneur enterprises in Penang today hint us to revisit the Pathars' movement into Penang and their subsequent resettlement, just as many other artisan and labouring classes did during the colonial period, and how these resettlements look like today in the face of spatial effects of development of the city or global capitalism that translates into population shift within Penang itself. While the Pathars' presence in George Town is well-known today, there is a gap in knowledge about the Pathars' migration, as a cultural phenomenon during British colonialism, how their lives were affected by architecture in Penang, and how future generations managed to negotiate their place, spatially through architecture. The research and investigation take critical phenomenology's position as an episteme in architecture seriously in attempt to optimise architectural discourse and historiography. This research takes the concept of lifeworld as a unit of analysis to contextually uncover the lived experiences within places that the Pathars move and encounter their world. The broader areas of this research are the attempts to disclose the racial logics embedded in colonial architecture in Penang, by combining a close analysis of visible evidence in the Pathars' place and space that structures and brings meaning to the way they have reacted to their experiences of disorientation and subsequently steered their labour to

re-interpret meaning to work-live and community engagements. This is followed by the manifestation of Homi K. Bhabha's Third Space and its relevance for the enunciation of cultural meaning in a postcolonial society like Malaysia.

1.3 Problem Statement

While there are many studies on Indian communities in Malaysia and their transnational movements during British colonialism, there has been very little study that highlights the subjectivities of culturally distinct sub-ethnic groups who despite their differences, bind together as Indians in Malaysia till today. There has been no study on how these sub-ethnic groups renegotiate their identities while occupying place for themselves in Malaysian architecture. The Pathars in Penang are one of such sub-ethnic group, who are also part of a much larger group of Vishwakarma community that trace their heritage back to southern India where they represent traditional artisanal communities who have left behind a permanent imprint in terms of material culture and technē heritage (Raman & Zakaria, 2021). The innovative ways in which the Vishwakarma community sought to mediate, subvert, or re-position themselves in terms of social stratification through their origin myths, rituals, and outlooks, following the impacts of British colonialism and formation of nation-state, is what makes their narrative so intriguing. The movement of Pathars; the traditional goldsmiths, into Penang was heavily backgrounded by not only British colonialism, but also the cultural and economic implication that gold standard held in transnational trade, accumulation of asset or "cultural asset" (Amirthalingam & Lakshman, 2010) by the working class, and a significant shift in community life of artisans and craftspeople who lived in the colonies.

According to Goldberg (1993) one of the results of Western experiences under imperialism is that Western modes of perceiving, communicating about and experiencing the world are deeply entrenched in racialized discourse. By disclosing racial rationale within our established histories, discussing missing history that comes from the agency of subaltern voices in the social construction of spaces, and

writing race back into our understanding of modern architecture, this study is also critical of its methodology, including the neutrality of the tools of investigation in architecture and the long-held assumptions about archives, evidence and hermeneutical methods. Therefore, by taking the potential of critical phenomenology as an episteme, this study utilizes phenomenological ethnography to not only write the narrative account of the Pathars in Penang, but also to analyse the absences and silences in the documentation collected from the margins.

This study is not only an attempt to recover the repressed racial formations of modern architecture, but also to relate architecture to larger contexts of cultural values, beliefs and memories that accompany diasporic communities, like the Pathars following their migration and resettlement in Penang. In order to integrate an expanded notion of race itself, that includes socio-economic and cultural determinism, into architectural discourse, there is a need to include a wider range of academic discipline. As such, this study takes postcolonial theory of Homi K. Bhabha and Henri Lefebvre's theory on the production of space, as a rubric which is useful to overcome the barrier that comes with the hegemonic role of canonicity in architectural theory and thinking. The Pathars shifting identities in Penang suggest that race has phenomenological effects on how bodies inhabit space which can be directly measured in the social experiences of specific groups. The phenomenological experience, that is resultant of the orientation towards race has potential to address how race has relation to many key concepts in architecture such as representation, nationalism, urbanism and placemaking politics. This study, in considering the agency of the voices on the margins, can be useful to highlight the structural position of migrants, racial minorities and noncitizens which occupy an

ontological and operative logic to modern cultural differences that still remain latent in critiques of modern architecture.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

The research paradigm of this study is interpretivism. Interpretivism contends that the world is a complexity of many realities, subjectively understood according to the beholders' values and relationships through certain social, historical, and cultural contexts, rather than that reality is objective and independent of beholders' observation. (Creswell, 2013; Hammond & Wellington, 2012; Lincoln & Denzin, 2011; Yin,2014). The ontology of this study is the existential lives of Pathars in Penang and how the environment touches them. The literature reviews unpack how the dominant use of phenomenology in architecture discourse essentializes human experience and argues on ways to adopt critical phenomenology as a wholistic tool in this study Taking critical phenomenology as an episteme, this study is about uncovering how differences and subjectivities, shape the Pathars' experiences in their built environment. To be able to do so, the literature contributes to the understanding of buildings as place, by unpacking phenomenological understanding of place using key terminologies. This in turn, helps to form the theories that help to interpret the data from the study to form a phenomenological account that can explain the existentialia of the Pathars in Penang not merely as an isolated case, but the position of Pathars in Penang itself resulted from movements of people within British colonies during the period of Western colonisation in the nineteenth century. The literature reviews the history of Vishwakarma craftsmen in southern India, the evolution of their trade from temple urbanism; traced to similar craftspeople in Puri, a temple town in Odisha, located on eastern India, hinting us to also see the

background of their cultural interconnectedness with the subjects in this study. This study takes the following theories to form the framework to this study:

1. “Accept the critical potential of ‘encounter’ as a concept” (Ash and Simpson,2016; Wilson, 2017).
2. Critical phenomenology offers opportunities to revisit and revise placemaking lexicon and introduce new concerns and points of emphasis into placemaking scholarship (Guenther, 2019; Kinkaid, 2021). Critical phenomenology highlights the subjectivities of “relational identity” instead of insisting on a “root identity”.
3. Place and Phenomenology theory to discuss environmental embodiment:
    a. Buildings are a dimension of lifeworld (Seamon, 2020; Seamon, 2018).
    b. “Home” and “at-homeness” are important aspects of lifeworld (Blunt & Dowling, 2005; Gitlin, 2003; Mallett, 2004; Manzo, 2003; Moore, 2007; Rioux & Werner, 2011; Seamon, 2010). On the experiential nature of “home” (depart-return): “Places stay put. Their image is one of stability and permanence” (Tuan, 1977, p.29), “Home is an intimate place” (Tuan, 1977, p.144), “…home is the focal point of a cosmic structure. Such a conception of place ought to give it supreme value; to abandon it would be hard to imagine.” (Tuan, 1977, p.149).
4. The Production of Space by Lefebvre (1991).
5. Third Space by Homi Bhabha (1994).

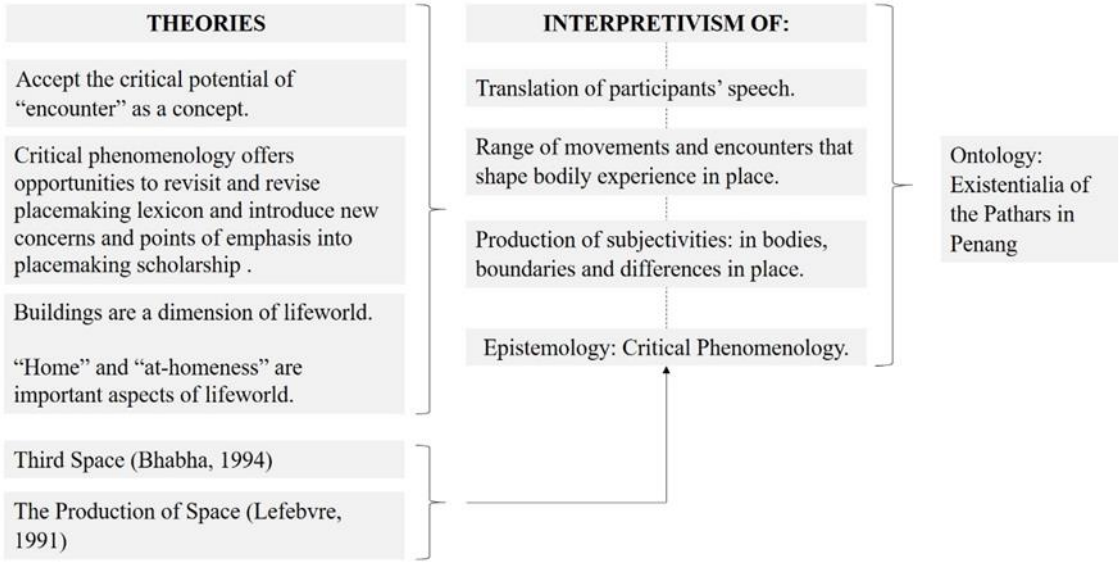

Figure 1.1 Theoretical framework of this study.

In architectural discourses, the normativity of root identity remains an assumed element of phenomenology. Root identity is also ingrained in many local placemaking and architectural practices. This is the result of an ethical project that assumes an ideal subject in the design or discourse outcome: one that is intrinsically colonizing, enlightened, heterosexual, male and able-bodied, and whose orientation has functioned as the unspoken premise and goal of architectural phenomenology. There is a scarcity of literature on the impact of colonial system in British Malaya. Alatas (1977) and Lee (1991), might be two rare cases who discuss on this. "The Malay ruling party inherited the rule from the British without a struggle for independence such as that which took place in Indonesia, India, and the Philippines. As such there was also no ideological struggle. There was no intellectual break with British ideological thinking at the deeper level of thought" (Alatas, 1977, p.152). Therefore, critical phenomenology, as an episteme and a method, raises many queries about the lived experiences of power and oppression, and the role of quasi-transcendental social structures that shapes and influences these experiences (Guenther, 2019).

The theories that form the framework to this study encourage the researcher to focus on historically specific individuals and inquire about the meaning of "social categories" by accepting the concept of "encounter" as having potential. According to Wilson (2017), social attitudes, discourses and categories limit the "encounter". Thus, by locating the "encounter" in a specific community-place, history and power relation where it finds expression, the researcher can recognize the existential continuity, structure and systemic categories like race as organizing rationales of socio-spatial orders that function beyond individual bodies and identities. According to Ahmed (2007), questioning hegemonic orientations entails more than just creating a phenomenology of regulated disorientation. Instead, Ahmed (2007) proposes that our primary task should be to approach disorientation (Norwood, 2018). To comprehend the subject, one must expose oneself to disorienting experiences. "What different modalities of the human come to light if we do not take the liberal humanist figure of Man as the master-subject but focus on how humanity has been imagined and lived by those subjects excluded from this domain?" (Weheliye, 2008, p.321).

In recent years, the scholarship of critical phenomenology has broadened and revised Merleau-Ponty's concept of body schema to account for themes of embodiment, space and differences. "Critical phenomenology is focused on intersubjectivity as a field of power and a realm inflected with symbolic and social difference and inequality" (Kinkaid, 2021, p.4). Critical phenomenology has been expanded in the following areas that can resonate back to architectural discourse.: racism (Ahmed, 2007; Clare, 2013; Lee, 2014), racial-schema, experience of disability (Diedrich, 2001; Weiss, 2017; Park & Yoon, 2018; Jones, 2022), epistemic and ontological limits of home and interiority (Trigg, 2018; Seamon, 2018; Seamon 2020). Ethnography data is useful to provide historiography to phenomenological

finding. This study merges critical phenomenology with ethnography, for phenomenological ethnography can provide a holistic data by expanding the canon and archive commonly used in architectural discourse.

1.5 Research Question

Many contemporary scholars have turned their focus to the effect of racial discourses on global networks of power beyond national boundaries, demonstrating the mutual systemic positions of racial minorities around the world. This suggests that contemporary cultural differences have an ontological and operative rationale which is still deep seated in criticism of modern architecture (Cheng et al., 2020). As such, the presence of the minority-diasporic community of Pathars in Penang invites us to revisit the impact of architecture on their lives. The narrative of the Pathars, who are also part of the Vishwakarma craftsmen community is not only useful to understand the ideological struggle of Indian art, architecture and mode of knowledge generation against Eurocentric bias but also to bridge the cultural continuity in many Indian enclaves around Penang, following the communities' movement and establishment of places in Penang and beyond. The ideological struggle of Indians post-independence is not limited to India alone, but can be traced in the spaces of diasporic community like the Pathars, where visible evidence is seen in the architecture produced within this community's cultural domain. By focusing on the sociological narratives of experience, emotions, memory and nostalgia of individuals across generations of the Pathars, the researcher is led to the following questions:

1. How does architecture nurture or interrupt existential lives of Pathars in Penang?
2. What are Pathars' lived experience of environmental changes in their everyday space?
3. Have the everyday uses, experiences and meanings of places that these goldsmiths encounter and interact with, changed over historical time?

4. How does a building sustain or undermine the lives and needs of these goldsmiths?

1.6 Research Aim and Objectives

Aim

The aim of this research is to discover the existential lives of Pathars in Penang by encountering their lived experiences and lifeworld.

Objectives

1. To critically explore the lifeworld of Pathars in Penang through a phenomenological ethnography study.
2. To analyze the environmental embodiment of these goldsmiths to reveal their experience of environmental and place dimensions of the lived body.
3. To establish conceptual foundations from phenomenological ethnography that stresses on historical contexts and critical phenomenological accounts of Pathars that is necessary to revisit the traditional narratives of architectural placemaking.

1.7 Expected Outcomes

The existential lives of the Pathar are described as a continuing narrative account, while capturing the centrality of the buildings that they inhabit and interact in. Mental maps, schematic sketches, tables, illustration and photographs are presented to accompany the analysis and discussion. The narration attempts to capture subjective details of the everyday and habitual routine of this community. The final outcome is to uncover the crux of existentialism of the Pathars in their place experience.

1.8 Limitation of Research

Some drawbacks to this study are, firstly, the lack of precedence for local Malaysian context. Many terms used in scholarship that is structured around the subject of this study stemming from outsider's perspective, have structured definitions and empirical interpretations of local culture. They subsequently take on a homogenous, monolithic, and essentialist conceptualization. Therefore, writing about the subject that requires these terms is an exceedingly difficult task. The COVID pandemic and prolonged lockdowns also affected the work schedule. Thereby the researcher had to incorporate online meeting tools as an alternative.

1.9 Definition of Terms

1) (N.T.S.): not to scale.
2) Alienworld: Alien cultures, alien humanities, alien way of life that we are not able to relate to, which are out of the "homeworld".
3) At-homeness: A phenomenological concept that helps to integrate the lived dimensions of home; the taken for granted situation of feeling completely comfortable and intimately familiar with the world in which one lives his everyday life.
4) Dakshināyana: Sun's southward motion from summer solstice to winter solstice. The duration in which all domestic Hindu festivals happens.
5) Devasthānam: "place of God". Refers to the temple.
6) Dvārapālaka: The gatekeepers in Hindu temple architecture.
7) Existentialia: Plural form of "existentiale". A Heideggerian concept of the essential element of being.
8) Garbagraha: The main chamber of the temple (*sanctum sanctorum*).
9) Gōpura: The monumental, ornate gateway tower in a south Indian temple complex.
10) Home: A specific physical, personal, social, cultural and political dimension but, experientially, is lived as a human and environmental home.
11) Homeworld: The intersubjective, geohistorical world, which is also normatively familiar to us, that we approach intuitively.

12) In-the-world: Or “being-in-the-world”, is a theory of existence by Heidegger to emphasize how purposefully oriented human existence is as a state of being.
13) Kalācharam: Compound word of “kalā” (*art*) and “ācharam” (*method*). Though the word roughly translates as “culture”, it also means the art, aesthetics that sets motion to a set of actions that contributes to the Pathar’s way of life.
14) Kittangi: The Chettiars’ “warehouse” that functions similar to the present-day concept of SOHO (small office home office).
15) Lifeworld: A person or group’s everyday world of taken-for-grantedness normally unnoticed and thus hidden as a phenomenon.
16) Murai: Delineates method, technique and practice within the gold craftsmanship of the Pathar.
17) Samskāra: Vedic reformatory rituals performed one by one from the time of conception until death for purifying a human being.
18) Tāmbula: Betel leaves and areca nuts. Commonly exchanged in formal meetings.
19) Vimāna: The monumental roof structure over the garbagraha.

1.10 Thesis Organization

This thesis is composed of six chapters. The parameters and variables that will be highlighted in the study are introduced in Chapter 1 Study Background. The study's problem statement, research questions, research objectives, and expected outcomes are also outlined in this chapter. Chapter 2 Literature Review, reviews literature that comes from multidisciplinary studies of anthropology, postcolonial-diasporic studies and critical phenomenology to highlight the positionality of Pathars in Penang as a continuation of both their cultural heritage and lives that got disrupted by colonialism. This chapter argues why critical phenomenology is necessary as an episteme in architecture, just as much as it is vital to uncover the nuances that arise out of subjective human experiences in place. Chapter 3 Methodology, starts with the explanation on the underlying paradigm to this study. This is followed by the explanation on fieldwork methods employed and the procedure of data analysis. This study is of qualitative nature and utilizes phenomenological ethnography as method. The phenomenological interviews were accompanied by photovoice. This was accompanied by participant observation and document analysis. The data analysis was carried out in three stages: detailed description, case studies (life histories, discourses) and producing theories. Starting with the “unit of analysis” that sets direction to the analysis of this study, Chapter 4 Analysis unpacks the Pathars lifeworld through their inhabitancy in their buildings; the shophouses and the community temple. The analysis of the community temple’s space use is also made through the lens of Third Space theory by Bhabha. Chapter 5 Discussion puts forth the theoretical arguments to the findings. The dynamics of space in the shophouses are analysed using Lefebvre’s theory, which leads to the evolving identity of the community temple of the Pathars. Third space theory of Bhabha is used as a way to

understand the meaning of cultural meaning that arises from the conception of space/place dichotomy in relation to aspects of "at-homeness" that shapes the deepest existential experience of place. The researcher also discusses the emerging notion of "home" that the Pathars have reinterpreted through the encounters with place experience. Chapter 6 Conclusion and Recommendation presents the conclusion and recommendations from the research findings, theoretical and practical implications, limitations and strength for future studies. Overall, the researcher has unpacked the interrelationships between migration, acts of resettlement and sense of place as a continuous process of becoming that is fostered by acts of encountering and creating activities through architecture.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Experiencing from the Inside

Architecture, as applied arts and technology, is essentially, the physical demarcation of an inside from an outside. All of us begin inside, in the womb. Even when birth brought us outside, we are still inside; inside the room, inside the building that holds the room, inside the building on the site, the site in the city, the city in the region, the region in the country, the country in the world. Although from birth onwards, we are all forever inside some space and outside some space, the primacy of experiencing architecture itself remains one of being inside. “Inside refers to a physical location that is somehow separated, physically or symbolically, from another physical location that is exterior to it. The locations of inside and outside generate different spatial experiences and, by association, suggest different mental orientations toward the world. And so, we use the spatial and experiential distinction between inside and out to help structure our understanding of the world and the actions that follow” (Johnson, 1987, pp.30-7). The places we occupy with our bodies that we fill with memories and aspirations becomes another kind of inside called the “being” of human occupancy. In understanding “being” in architecture, we look at how pioneering phenomenology philosophers have explored its etymological concepts.

“The truck driver is at home on the highway, but he does not have his shelter there; the working woman is at home in the spinning mill, but does not have her dwelling place there; the chief engineer is at home in the power station, but he does not dwell there. These buildings house man. He inhabits them and yet does not dwell

in them, when to dwell means merely that we take shelter in them" (Heidegger, 1977, pp.143-4).

"Dwelling" and "building" are related as ends and means. As long as we think about this, we tend to take "dwelling" and "building" as two separate activities. But in Heidegger's writing, "building is in itself already dwelling." Ultimately, Heidegger is making the argument that *bauen* (building), *wohnen* (dwelling), and *sein* (be) point to the same act, because they share their etymologies in German. The basic feature of "building", "dwelling" and "being" reveals itself to us as soon as we reflect on the fact that human existence is based on "dwelling", in the sense that mortals reside on the earth. In this "Primal Oneness", all four (earth, sky, the divinities and mortals) belong in one unity. Heidegger developed and characterized "The Fourfold", inspired by the poetry about nature and beauty by Friedrich Hölderin (1770-1843), a German poet. Heidegger in discussing "The Fourfold" describes that, "human being consists in dwelling and, indeed, dwelling in the sense of the stay of mortals on the earth". To elucidate further, "on the earth" already mean "under the sky" and both of these mean "remaining before the divinities" and fosters a "belonging of interbeing with one another". Not only does our "being" as humans belong to one another, our "being" belong with all other beings on earth as well. Heidegger called life, *das sein* ("being"). Much of Heidegger's philosophy is devoted to trying to wake us up to the fragility of our lives. Once we are aware that we and all other living things share this finite, fragile state called "being", we might learn to identify more with them, recognizing our universal kinship with all living things and the earth itself. This feeling of unity comes when we realise how much are all of us, the entities on earth are connected. However, usually we tend to separate ourselves from these "others". This happens due to the continuous "chatter", which Heidegger

termed, *das gerede*, of routine life in modern society, that tends to drown our senses and lead to separation that results from escapism. Heidegger urges us to see the interconnectedness of life and to emancipate ourselves from the chatter by focusing on the intensity of our "being" and to live "authentically", or as Heidegger termed *eigentlichkeit.*

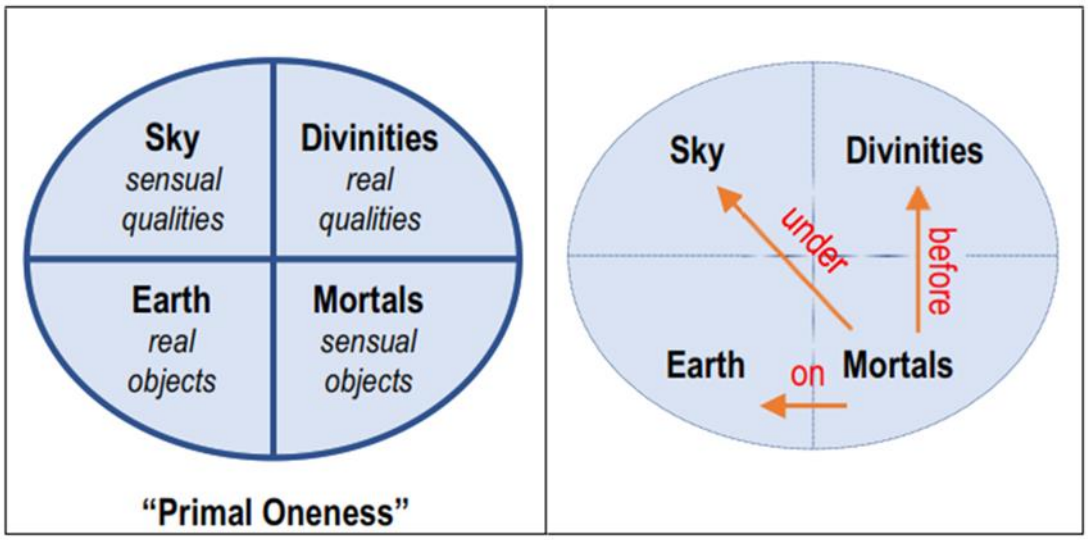

Figure 2.1 "The thinging of things" (Source: adapted from Heidegger's "The Fourfold").

Therefore, life is a conscious experience that we have through our bodies while we carry out conscious acts. Being experienced is a first-person, experiential quality that is crucial to the existence of the existential phenomenon. Maurice Merleau-Ponty reveals the intricacies of daily life and the details of the everyday that result from human interaction with the environment, while Martin Heidegger deals with the "big picture" of existentialism by examining the grandeur of "being."

2.2 Place and Phenomenology

Phenomenology is well suited for addressing many of the concerns and issues that arise while researching place since it is a philosophical method that begins with everyday human experience. Phenomenology of place insists that, existentially, place is not the physical environment apart from the people associated with it but, rather the indivisible, normally unnoticed phenomenon of people experiencing place (Casey, 2009; Janz, 2017; Malpas, 2018; Seamon, 2018a; Seamon, 2018b; Stefanovic, 2008). Place, therefore in phenomenology offers a way to articulate, precisely lifeworlds that marks of centers of human meaning, intentions and comportment (Casey, 2009; Relph, 1976; Malpas, 2018). According to Seamon (2020), as lived experience, place attachment is a complex, multivalent phenomenon that can vary individually, socially, culturally, environmentally, temporally, and historically.

2.2.1 Place: An integral dimension of lifeworld

Lifeworld is a person or group's everyday world of taken-for-grantedness normally unnoticed and thus hidden as a phenomenon (Finlay, 2011; Seamon, 1979; Toombs, 2001; van Manen, 1990). Subsequently, one integral dimension of the lifeworld is place, which can be defined as any environmental locus that gathers individual or group meanings, intentions, and actions spatially (Casey, 2009; Malpas, 1999; Relph, 1976). The existential crux of place experience, according to Relph's book *Place and Placelessness* (Relph, 1976), is "insideness". To put it another way, the more thoroughly a person or group feels themselves inside a setting, the more that environment becomes a place existentially. The deepest feeling of place attachment and identity is what Relph called "existential insideness"; a circumstance in which a person or group feels so at home and at ease in their surroundings that

they are unaware of its significance in their life unless it or the people alter in some way. “Phenomenologically, the lifeworld is the everyday realm of experiences, actions, and meanings typically taken for granted and thus out of sight as a phenomenon. Unless it changes in some noticeable way, we are almost always, in our typical human lives, unaware of the lifeworld, which we assume is the way that life is and must be” (Seamon, 2017, p.1).

It should be noted that within a given lifeworld, there is the existence of plurality of cultural differences. This gave rise to two concepts; “homeworld” a normative familiar that develops as we grow and “alienworld”, a world different from our “homeworld” and cannot be related to as we experience their strangeness and unfamiliarity.

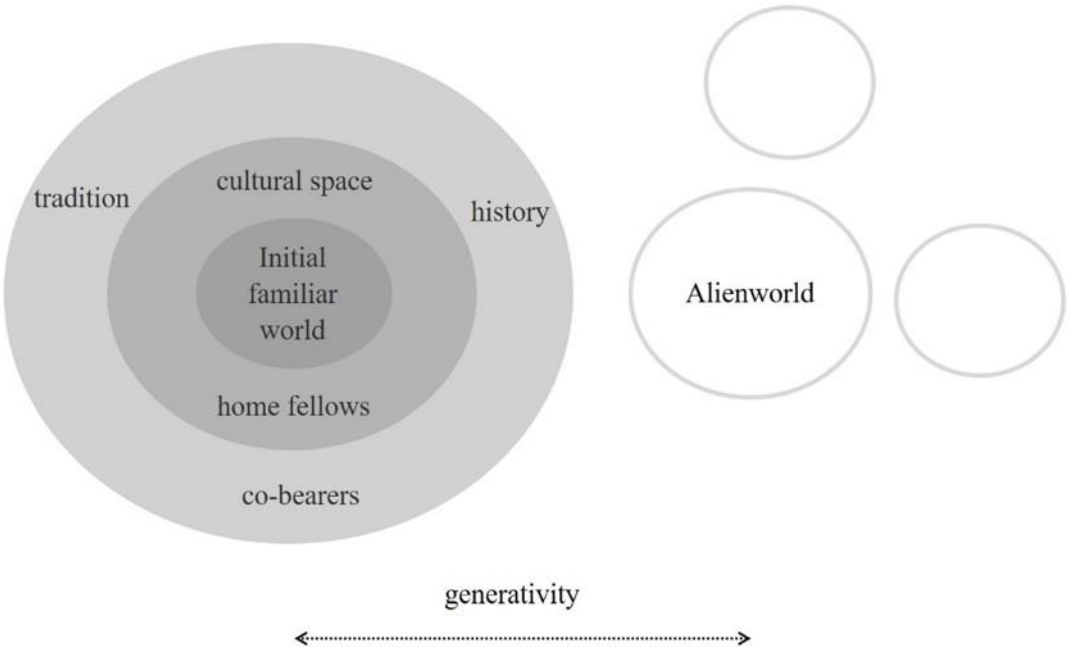

Figure 2.2 Lifeworld contains a plurality of cultural worlds.

Husserl in investigating the substructures of the overall theme of lifeworld, discussed the plurality of cultural worlds. Hence, he introduced the notions as

"homeworld" *(Heimwelt)* and "alienworld" *(Fremdwelt)*. "Homeworld" is the intersubjective, geohistorical world, which is also normatively familiar to us, that we approach intuitively. In the beginning our familiarity is limited to the closest surrounding (like family, our home, immediate neighbours, local people, et cetera). This later on expands to a cultural world (a cultural space with language that we communicate with other "home fellows"). Feeding into this cultural world is the past (tradition and history). If we scrutinize this carefully, we realise how our present world is largely shaped by the activities of the previous generations. While continuing this narrative, we become "co-bearers" of this "homeworld" that we have also contributed to by the lived experiences of our everyday structures and practices. Out of this "homeworld", are alien cultures, alien humanities, alien way of life that we are not able to relate to – "alienworld". By allowing the defamiliarization and encountering "alienworld", we allow for generativity; a concern for establishing and guiding the next generation. The typically unquestioned acceptance of the lifeworld is what phenomenologist Edmund Husserl called the "natural attitude", because of which we habitually assume that the world as we know and experience it is the only world (Finlay 2011; Seamon, 2021; Carr, 2021; Dreher, 2021).

2.2.2 Building as lifeworld

Seamon (2017) investigates how buildings carry out the functions of places. He proposes three functions for them: as lifeworlds, architectural atmospheres, and environmental wholeness sustainers. Buildings have an important role in sustaining human behaviours, meanings, and experiences, therefore phenomenological analysis of their roles stands to reason.

Phenomenologist, Donohoe (2017) explains that "we are called through these hermeneutics of buildings that allows us to read the ways in which buildings are used