

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the Study

Space, in its most basic sense, refers to the areal extent on the earth's surface in and around where humans live and carry out their activities (Fellmann et al., 2013:487). Space can also be interpreted as a social product and a reflection of existing power relations within a society. Therefore, the experiences of marginalized groups are inseparable from how urban spaces are structured and lived in (Lefebvre, 1991:26). Los Angeles is an urban region in Southern California characterized by large-scale metropolitan development (Soja, 1989:191). In Los Angeles, spatial planning has always been exposed to inequalities of race, gender, sexuality, and class. This is even more of a common phenomenon within communities positioned at the margins of the city (Soja, 2000:407). Analyzing a city through their perspective should open possibilities to uncover overlooked forms of exclusion as well as strategies of survival.

Cultural texts such as films are bound to represent lived conditions and social realities, as they provide insights into the conditions of particular groups (Hall, 1997:4). Films should consequently become valuable sights for studying how inequality and identity are experienced and negotiated. As the story is centered around marginalized people going about their day in urban Los Angeles, *Tangerine* (2015) provides helpful sights on this. The film therefore becomes an appropriate medium for reflecting on how space is experienced and contested by marginalized communities.

The city's background context must be understood before proceeding to analyze the film's social implications. Los Angeles is understood as one of the United States' most conspicuous sites of inequality, in which is characterized by dramatic divides across wealth, ethnicity, and geography (Davis, 1990:232). Freeways, policing mechanisms, and recurring cycles of gentrification have historically determined the city's spatial development as to generate both opportunities and marginalizations. Urban expansion in Southern California has routinely amplified racial and class-based segregation (Pulido, 2000:15). Through its placement within this urban environment, *Tangerine* (2015) puts itself on a wider discourse concerning inequality and how urban existence takes shape in Los Angeles.

*Tangerine* (2015) is an independent film by Sean Baker that was shot entirely on iPhones that follows two people of color, trans sex workers named Sin-Dee Rella and Alexandra through a single day on Christmas Eve in Los Angeles. It starts with Sin-Dee learning about her boyfriend and pimp's unfaithfulness. That prompts Sin-Dee to search for him, and later his affair partner, across the city. This intersects with Alexandra's aspirations as a performer and the experiences of Razmik, an Armenian taxi driver. *Tangerine* (2015) received telling recognition for its contributed perspective of urban trans lives and also for its novel use of mobile technology. Among its accolades were the Gotham Audience Award, an Independent Spirit Award for Best Supporting Female (awarded to Mya Taylor), and the Jury Prize at Deauville (EW, 2015; MUBI, n.d.).

Henri Lefebvre's idea of the production of space is the major framework. Space is being framed not as passively existing but as socially constructed and contested (Lefebvre, 1991:26). Another important angle is the social positioning of marginalized communities. Marginalized communities are understood as social groups systematically excluded from mainstream society through structural inequalities. The category includes yet not limited transgender individuals, sex workers, immigrants, and people of color (Hooks, 1990:152). Situating the concepts together can give light on how spatial dynamics in Los Angeles shape the experiences of its marginalized populations in *Tangerine* (2015).

This research seeks to explore how those systematically disadvantaged by the existing system are being depicted and constructed, and how their everyday spatial dynamics in Los Angeles are portrayed in *Tangerine* (2015). Utilizing Lefebvre's concept of the production of space as the major theoretical framework, this research puts its focus on how urban Los Angeles is constructed through characterization, dialogue, and cinematography. This research seeks to identify how cinematic space reflects and organizes the experiences of trans individuals, sex workers, immigrants, and people of color.

## **1.2 Research Questions**

The following are the two primary questions addressed in the discussion.

1. How are marginalized communities constructed through the intrinsic elements of *Tangerine* (2015)?
2. How does *Tangerine* (2015) illustrate the production of space among Los Angeles's marginalized communities (transgender individuals, sex workers,

immigrants, and people of color) through Lefebvre's theory of the production of space?

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

Based on the research questions, the following are the objectives of this research.

1. To explore the construction of marginalized communities through the intrinsic elements of *Tangerine* (2015).
2. To understand how *Tangerine* (2015) illustrates the production of space among Los Angeles's marginalized communities (transgender individuals, sex workers, immigrants, and people of color) through Lefebvre's theory of the production of space.

### **1.4 Scope of the Study**

The scope of this study is to examine *Tangerine* (2015)'s spatial depiction urban Los Angeles from the perspectives of marginalized communities, namely transgender individuals, sex workers, immigrants, and people of color. This is executed through Henri Lefebvre's theory of the production of space, specifically the spatial triad. Narrative elements are also analyzed in the beginning to identify the construction of the mentioned identity groups and to form a strong basis for further interpretation, which includes the theme, character and characterizations, theme, plot, setting, and conflict. This should open up new understandings around the space and marginality discourse.

## 1.5 Previous Studies

Research on *Tangerine* (2015) has primarily centered on trans representation and queer embodiment, with no studies directly connecting the film to Lefebvre's spatial theory. Macintosh (2023), in *Melancholy, Respectability, and Credibility in Sean Baker's Tangerine*, situates the film as a milestone in trans cinema, showing how it resists victimization narratives while critiquing the marginalization of trans sex workers. Similarly, Yep et al. (2019) analyze the film through a "transing" framework that delves into themes of transsubjectivity and transrelationality. More studies approach the film through temporality and marginality. Maćzko (2024), in *Identity in the In-Between: Narrative Temporality and the Queer Experience in Tangerine and Moonlight*, connects queer temporality and the instability of the marginalized characters' lives. Gaffney (2022) on the other hand deconstructs the depiction of anti-homonormative strategies in *Tangerine* (2015) and other queer films. His research shows film's perspectives that challenge political respectability towards the marginalized groups it portrays. These research prove the film's role and contribution in reframing trans representations contra the normative sociocultural understandings.

Several studies on films have also applied Lefebvre's spatial concept in multiple settings. Trifonova (2013), in *The Production of Space in the Franchise City Film*, traces how globalization works in redefining cinematic depictions of the urban environment. Kuhlenbeck (2006), applies the theory to analyze how film space functions as a discourse that forges social relationships and identity formations in *Space as Discourse in Japanese Story*. These demonstrate how

Lefebvre's theory can be mobilized to read spaces depicted in films as something socially and culturally produced.

More studies have investigated the human experience of space. Li (2025), in *The Spatial Production and Underlying Writing of the Film Black Dog*, uses Lefebvre's spatial triad to dig into how cinematic spaces reflect the lives of those living in industrial towns. Yılmaz (2023), in *Cinematic Space in Dystopian Narratives: Social construction of home in the film High-Rise*, analyzes the notion of "home" and how it becomes an arena for power struggles in the dystopian setting of *High Rise* (2015). These research prove Lefebvre's framework's recognizable flexibility within diverse contexts of film. However, an engagement with *Tangerine* (2015) through Lefebvre's theory remains absent, which creates a room this research intends to fill.

The limited research combining *Tangerine* (2015) with Lefebvre's theory of the production of space gives an opportunity for more exploration. While existing research have discussed trans representation, queer temporality, and cinematic space separately, none have fully examined how marginalized communities in the film produce and negotiate space within the area of Los Angeles. The research therefore intends to bridge object- and theory-based discussions by utilizing Lefebvre's framework to analyze *Tangerine* (2015), with the diverse existing works act as important foundation.

## **1.6 Methods of the Study**

There are three aspects in Methods of the Study: data and the sources of data, method of data collection, and the method of approach.

### **1.6.1 Data and the Sources of Data**

The research uses a library research approach to focus on *Tangerine* (2015) as the object of analysis. Both primary and secondary data sources are utilized. The primary data comes from the film itself, closely examined for the narrative and cinematography elements. The secondary data is drawn from books, journal articles, and academic papers that discuss the dynamics of marginalized groups analyzed in this research (transgender individuals, sex workers, immigrants, and people of color), spatial and urban issues, and Los Angeles as the site of reference. These sources form the basis of the research.

### **1.6.2 Method of Data Collection**

Data are collected using a methodical approach of classification, interpretation, and analysis. To assure a complete understanding of the content, the approach starts with repeated watching process of the film. After that, the data are transcribed into written form for more precise examination. Once transcribed, the material is categorized according to the research topic in order to address the research questions. The categorized data are then analyzed and synthesized with the theory to make sure meanings are contextualized accurately. Finally, conclusions are derived from the analyzed data.

### **1.6.3 Method of Approach**

Objective approach is being utilized to carry out this research. The approach focuses on the work itself rather than the author or audience (Abrams, 1953). This is executed by understanding the narrative elements and cinematography with the use of theory to draw interpretations. Lefebvre's production of space is applied as

the major theory. The theory views space as a social construct shaped by existing practices and power relations (Lefebvre, 1991:26). The theory acts as a guide to understand how urban Los Angeles depicted in *Tangerine* (2015) is shaped by forces that influence the lives of marginalized communities.

## **1.7 Organization of The Writing**

### **CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION**

The first chapter of this thesis presents the background of the study, outlines the research problems, states the objectives, reviews previous studies, defines the scope of the study, and explains the organization of the writing.

### **CHAPTER II INTRINSIC THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This chapter provides the intrinsic theoretical framework to investigate “The Production of Space Among Los Angeles’s Marginalized Communities in *Tangerine* (2015)”.

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### **CHAPTER IV RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This chapter shares the findings and discussions based on the research problems identified in the thesis.

## **CHAPTER V CONCLUSION**

The final chapter contains the conclusion that comes from the research.

