ORIGINAL ARTICLE

BY ANY CINEMATIC MEANS NECESSARY: SPIKE LEE'S MALCOLM X AND THE EXPERIMENTAL CINEMATIC NARRATIVES OF THE BLACK CIVIL RIGHTS STRUGGLE

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"We declare our right respected as on this earth… to be human being, to be given the rights of a human being in this society, on this earth, in this day which we intend to bring into existence by any means necessary"
Malcolm X

Abstract

This paper examines how Spike Lee's Malcolm X (1992) constructs visual cinematic narratives that reinterpret the Black civil rights struggle through performance and experimental form. It explores how Lee translates Malcolm X's biography into a visual story of resistance, using film language to re-create the movement's emotional and political energy. The study applies concepts from performance theory, postcolonial thought, and Black aesthetics to analyse selected sequences—particularly the prison conversion, Mecca pilgrimage, and closing montage with Nelson Mandela. Findings reveal that Lee's film goes beyond biographical reconstruction to establish a cinematic ritual of memory and liberation. His integration of montage, colour, sound, and gesture transforms history into a participatory experience of resistance. The viewer is not a passive observer but an active witness to the re-enactment of Black consciousness. The paper situates this creative approach within an African framework, showing how Malcolm X resonates with Nigerian discourses on identity, decolonisation, and freedom. It concludes that Malcolm X functions as both art and pedagogy. For Theatre and Film Studies, the film exemplifies how visual cinematic narratives can serve as performative acts that preserve cultural memory and inspire social action. Lee's work remains a living archive of liberation, linking the politics of race to the aesthetics of human agency.

Keywords: Spike Lee, Malcolm X (1992), Visual Cinematic Narratives, Performing Resistance, Black Civil Rights Struggle, Cultural Memory and Identity, Theatre and Film Studies Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Spike Lee's Malcolm X (1992) remains one of the most powerful cinematic representations of the Black civil rights struggle. The film presents the life of Malcolm X not simply as a biography, but as a visual and performative narrative that highlights the complexities of identity, resistance, and liberation. Through experimental cinematic techniques, Lee transforms historical events into a story that engages viewers emotionally, morally, and politically. While much scholarship has focused on the film in American or

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African American contexts, its relevance extends to African audiences, including Nigeria, where the politics of race, memory, and struggle resonate deeply (Labidi, 2021). This paper examines how Spike Lee constructs visual cinematic narratives to communicate resistance and human agency, showing that cinema can act both as art and as a tool for cultural reflection.

The film begins with a montage that combines archival footage, voice-over narration, and dramatic staging. This opening signals that Lee intends to blend history with cinematic experimentation. According to Arriaga Benítez (2021), the use of visual subtexts in film allows audiences to perceive meaning beyond the written or spoken word. In Malcolm X, the combination of archival images and stylised cinematography foregrounds the political stakes of the narrative, inviting the viewer to consider both individual and collective struggle. These techniques also establish the theme of human agency: Malcolm X's choices, growth, and moral development are emphasised not only through dialogue but through visual performance, gesture, and framing (Torregrosa, 2023).

To analyse this, the study employs concepts from performance theory, postcolonial thought, and Black aesthetics. Performance theorists such as Schechner (1988) and Turner (1987) highlight how ritualised action and embodiment convey social and political meaning. Fanon (1967) and Bhabha (1994) provide frameworks for understanding identity and resistance under colonial and postcolonial conditions. Similarly, bell hooks (1992) and Paul Gilroy (2016) offer insight into how Black aesthetics articulate memory, empowerment, and diasporic consciousness. By combining these theoretical perspectives, it becomes possible to see Malcolm X as a cinematic performance that dramatizes resistance, memory, and identity simultaneously.

Recent scholarship also underscores the ongoing importance of Lee's film for audiences beyond the United States. Studies from 2015 to 2024 emphasise how African and diasporic viewers read the film differently, drawing connections between historical injustice and contemporary struggles for social and political recognition (Anonymous, 2021; Rahmani, 2023). In Nigeria, for example, themes of racial and political self-determination resonate with broader conversations about governance, cultural memory, and the legacies of colonialism. These perspectives situate the film as more than a historical retelling; it becomes a lens through which viewers can engage with questions of agency, moral choice, and the ethics of resistance.

Despite the considerable attention the film has received, gaps remain in scholarship, particularly regarding the interplay of visual form, performance, and human agency within African contexts. Most studies emphasise narrative or biographical analysis, leaving the relationship between cinematic techniques and performative resistance underexplored. This study addresses these gaps by focusing on key sequences, including the prison conversion, Mecca pilgrimage, and the closing montage featuring Nelson Mandela. Each of these moments demonstrates how Lee employs visual cinematic narratives to construct a story of empowerment and social action.

In this way, the introduction situates the research within the fields of Theatre and Film Studies and diaspora studies, establishing the relevance of Malcolm X for Nigerian academic discourse. The next sections will outline the theoretical framework, survey existing scholarship, and analyse the film's visual and performative strategies to demonstrate how Spike Lee's work embodies resistance, memory, and human agency.

To understand Spike Lee's Malcolm X as a cinematic performance of resistance, it is important to first set out the theoretical perspectives that guide this study. Three main areas of thought provide the framework: performance theory, postcolonial theory, and Black aesthetic discourse. Together, these perspectives allow an analysis of how visual cinematic narratives, acting, and mise-en-scène communicate human agency and social resistance.

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Performance theory provides a lens for examining how human action and embodiment carry meaning. Schechner (1988, p. 45) argues that performance is not limited to theatre or ritual; it extends to social acts and representations that express cultural and political significance. Turner (1987, p. 27) similarly highlights how ritualised action produces shared understanding and reinforces collective values. In Malcolm X, these concepts can be applied to sequences such as the prison conversion and Mecca pilgrimage. Malcolm's gestures, speech, and bodily presence are not merely acting choices; they function as performative acts of liberation. The camera frames these moments deliberately, turning them into rituals that communicate resistance and moral agency. By combining performance with cinematic technique, Lee creates a visual and affective language that engages viewers beyond the literal narrative (Torregrosa, 2023, p. 349; Arriaga Benítez, 2021, p. 98).

Postcolonial theory complements performance theory by providing insight into the historical and sociopolitical dimensions of resistance. Fanon (1967, p. 112) emphasises how oppressed peoples assert identity and reclaim agency in the face of structural violence. Bhabha (1994, p. 57) shows how hybridity and cultural negotiation challenge dominant narratives. In the film, Malcolm X navigates multiple worlds: prison, the streets of Harlem, and Mecca. Each environment represents a different social and political structure, and his journey illustrates the struggle for autonomy and moral self-definition. Viewing these sequences through a postcolonial lens clarifies Lee's cinematic choices as acts of commentary on power, oppression, and freedom.

Black aesthetic discourse adds another layer, focusing on representation and cultural memory. Hooks (1992, p. 23) argues that Black artistic expression communicates both individual and collective consciousness, revealing histories and experiences often ignored in mainstream narratives. Gilroy (2016, p. 52) emphasises the transatlantic connections in Black culture, showing how diasporic experiences shape identity and resistance. In Malcolm X, these ideas appear in the use of colour, montage, and music. Scenes of mass protest, family life, and public speeches are crafted to convey both the immediacy of struggle and the historical weight of Black resistance. The film thus becomes a site where aesthetics, politics, and history converge to highlight human agency and collective empowerment (Labidi, 2021, p. 252).

Integrating these perspectives provides a robust conceptual framework. Performance theory allows the analysis of how embodied action communicates resistance. Postcolonial theory situates these actions within historical oppression and cultural negotiation. Black aesthetics foreground the ways visual and musical elements reinforce identity, memory, and political consciousness. By combining these lenses, the analysis moves beyond simple narrative description to examine the film's performative, visual, and ideological dimensions.

Recent scholarship supports this integrated approach. For instance, Anonymous (2021, p. 47) discusses how African films use visual narratives to convey human rights messages, emphasising the link between form and political meaning. Rahmani (2023, p. 375) shows that narrative entertainment can influence audience perception and moral reasoning, suggesting that cinematic strategies have persuasive power beyond storytelling. These studies underscore the importance of analysing both content and form when examining films like Malcolm X, which use visual and performative techniques to engage audiences intellectually, emotionally, and politically.

This framework also bridges the Literature Review, which will examine what scholars have said about Spike Lee's style, the film's historical accuracy, and its broader cultural significance. By setting out these theories first, it becomes possible to evaluate the literature critically, identifying gaps where African and Nigerian perspectives have been underexplored. Moreover, this framework ensures that the subsequent analysis is not only descriptive but also discursive and analytical, showing how cinematic form, performance, and human agency intersect to construct visual narratives of resistance.

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The combination of performance theory, postcolonial theory, and Black aesthetic discourse provides the tools to interrogate Spike Lee's Malcolm X as a visual and performative act of resistance. This framework foregrounds the interplay between cinematic form, human agency, and socio-political meaning, allowing the film to be read as both a historical account and a pedagogical tool. The next section, the Literature Review, will build on this framework by examining how scholars have analysed the film, its visual narratives, and its relevance to African and diasporic audiences.

Scholarship on Spike Lee's Malcolm X spans multiple fields, including film studies, performance studies, and African diaspora studies. Most studies agree that the film is a significant example of biographical storytelling and political cinema, yet there is less attention to its visual and performative strategies, particularly in African or Nigerian contexts.

This literature review examines three areas: Spike Lee's cinematic style, experimental visual narratives in resistance cinema, and African perspectives on diasporic memory and identity.

Research on Spike Lee's cinematic style emphasises his use of visual symbolism, montage, and performative staging. Torregrosa (2023, p. 347) highlights how costume and physicality contribute to character formation, noting that Denzel Washington's gestures and dress in Malcolm X encode both personal identity and social meaning. Arriaga Benítez (2021, p. 101) argues that visual subtexts—such as colour, framing, and movement—allow audiences to engage with ideological content beyond dialogue. Similarly, Ildırar (2015, p. 63) observes that continuity in cinematography functions as a visual communication system, creating a rhythm and logic that guides interpretation. These studies demonstrate that Lee's style is both formal and purposeful, conveying political and social messages through aesthetic choices.

Experimental visual narratives in resistance cinema offer another lens. Labidi (2021, p. 252) emphasises how visual storytelling in politically committed films mediates social critique and audience engagement. Rahmani (2023, p. 375) shows that narrative entertainment influences moral reasoning, suggesting that viewers can learn ethical and political lessons from cinematic techniques. Anonymous (2021, p. 50) extends this argument to African cinema, showing how filmmakers use visual and performative strategies to convey human rights messages. In this context, Malcolm X serves as an early model of cinematic experimentation that combines narrative, visual aesthetics, and performative strategies to communicate resistance and agency. These studies underline the importance of analysing form and technique, not only story content, to understand the film's impact.

However, much of the literature neglects the African and Nigerian perspective. While Lee's film is widely studied in the United States, there are fewer studies that explore its resonance with African audiences. The African diaspora is central to understanding Black identity in global cinema (Gilroy, 2016, p. 52). Hooks (1992, p. 23) stresses that Black artistic expression communicates histories and experiences that are often suppressed in dominant culture, making films like Malcolm X relevant for African audiences who share legacies of colonialism and resistance. Incorporating African perspectives highlights connections between historical struggles in the U.S. and postcolonial realities in Africa, showing how visual cinematic narratives can bridge continents and generations.

Several scholars also focus on the interplay of performance and visual narrative. Schechner (1988, p. 45) and Turner (1987, p. 27) describe how performance enacts social values, rituals, and collective memory. In Malcolm X, the prison conversion and Mecca pilgrimage scenes exemplify these principles, demonstrating how bodily performance communicates transformation, resistance, and agency. Torregrosa (2023, p. 351) notes that costume, posture, and gesture work together with camera angles to create layered meanings. These studies indicate that a focus on performance and embodiment is necessary to fully understand the film's political and aesthetic effects.

Despite these insights, gaps remain in scholarship. Most studies either emphasise narrative biography or historical accuracy without fully engaging with how cinematic form, performance, and visual subtexts together construct agency and resistance. Moreover, African and Nigerian perspectives remain underrepresented; leaving room for research that situates Malcolm X within local debates about identity, resistance, and cultural memory. This study seeks to address these gaps by analysing key sequences that combine visual and performative strategies, showing how Spike Lee's techniques engage viewers in both intellectual and emotional ways.

Existing scholarship establishes that Spike Lee's Malcolm X is a powerful example of political and biographical cinema. However, studies often underexplore the ways that visual cinematic narratives, performance, and audience reception interact, particularly outside the U.S. context. By integrating research on Lee's cinematic style, experimental narratives, and African diasporic memory, this study will examine how the film communicates resistance, identity, and human agency, filling a gap in Theatre and Film Studies, especially within the Nigerian academic context.

This study examines Spike Lee's Malcolm X (1992) using a qualitative, text-based approach focused on visual cinematic narratives and performance. The primary data source is the film itself, with particular attention to key sequences such as the prison conversion, Mecca pilgrimage, and the closing montage featuring Nelson Mandela. These sequences were chosen because they exemplify the interplay of visual form, performance, and narrative in conveying resistance, identity, and human agency.

The study applies concepts from performance theory, postcolonial theory, and Black aesthetic discourse to analyse the film. Schechner (1988, p. 45) and Turner (1987, p. 27) provide tools for understanding how embodied actions and ritualised performance convey meaning. Fanon (1967, p. 112) and Bhabha (1994, p. 57) offer a framework for interpreting struggles against oppression and the negotiation of identity, while hooks (1992, p. 23) and Gilroy (2016, p. 52) illuminate the role of Black aesthetics in shaping collective memory and diasporic consciousness. These frameworks allow the researcher to consider how cinematic techniques, acting, and visual design communicate both personal and political agency.

The analytic method combines scene analysis with visual narrative examination. This involves identifying camera angles, lighting, costume, mise-en-scène, and editing patterns to interpret how they contribute to the film's political and aesthetic message (Torregrosa, 2023, p. 349; Arriaga Benítez, 2021, p. 98). Performance analysis focuses on gestures, posture, voice, and interactions between characters, highlighting how human agency is enacted on screen. This approach aligns with previous scholarship on experimental visual narratives, showing how form and content work together to engage audiences intellectually and emotionally (Rahmani, 2023, p. 375; Labidi, 2021, p. 252).

Finally, the study situates the analysis within a Nigerian and African perspective, examining how the film resonates with local debates about identity, resistance, and cultural memory. This is necessary because most prior studies focus on U.S. audiences, leaving a gap in understanding how African viewers interpret the film. By combining theoretical, visual, and performative analysis, this methodology allows for a comprehensive study of Spike Lee's cinematic strategies and their significance for Theatre and Film Studies in Nigeria.

Analysis I: Visual Cinematic Narratives and Form

Spike Lee's Malcolm X employs visual cinematic narratives to convey the complexities of resistance, identity, and human agency. The film's visual design—its use of camera angles, montage, lighting, and colour functions as a narrative language that communicates meaning beyond dialogue or plot. Understanding how Lee constructs these narratives requires an examination of both formal cinematic techniques and their ideological implications.

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The opening montage of Malcolm X exemplifies Lee's experimental visual approach. Archival footage of racial violence in the United States is intercut with dramatized scenes from Malcolm's life, establishing a visual rhythm that highlights the tension between history and memory. According to Arriaga Benítez (2021, p. 98), visual subtexts allow audiences to perceive meaning that is not explicitly verbalised. In these opening sequences, the juxtaposition of documentary-style images with staged performance creates a sense of immediacy and historical authenticity, signalling that the film is both a narrative and a political statement. The audience is invited to interpret meaning through the interplay of images, rather than through traditional exposition alone.

Montage remains a key tool throughout the film. For example, the Mecca pilgrimage scene uses cross-cutting to show Malcolm X in a spiritual journey while simultaneously referencing struggles faced by African Americans at home. Ildırar (2015, p. 63) notes that continuity in visual storytelling ensures that viewers can follow narrative progression, even when time and space are compressed. Lee's montage is not merely technical; it is ideological. By visually connecting disparate spaces—prison, Harlem streets, and Mecca—he emphasises the universality of struggle and the global significance of Malcolm's personal transformation. This aligns with Gilroy's (2016, p. 52) argument that diasporic consciousness connects historical oppression to broader cultural narratives.

Camera angles and framing further contribute to visual narrative. Low-angle shots of Malcolm X during speeches convey authority and moral conviction, while close-ups during moments of personal reflection invite the viewer to engage emotionally with his transformation. Torregrosa (2023, p. 351) highlights how costume, posture, and gesture, when combined with framing, create layers of meaning. In the prison conversion scene, the camera focuses tightly on Malcolm's expressions and body language, allowing viewers to witness his intellectual and spiritual awakening. Such visual storytelling demonstrates how cinema can represent human agency through formal techniques, rather than relying solely on dialogue.

Colour and lighting also play narrative roles. Lee uses muted tones in early sequences to represent hardship and oppression, while warmer, brighter palettes appear during moments of spiritual and political awakening. Arriaga Benítez (2021, p. 101) emphasises that colour is a critical part of visual subtext, shaping audience perception of tone, mood, and thematic significance. In Malcolm X, this deliberate use of colour and lighting reinforces narrative themes of transformation, resistance, and empowerment. The viewer perceives not only the story being told but also the emotional and ideological weight behind each scene.

Another notable visual strategy is Lee's use of long takes and tracking shots. These techniques create a sense of immersion, placing the audience within the narrative world. According to Labidi (2021, p. 252), visual immersion is crucial in politically committed cinema, as it encourages viewers to engage with the ethical and social stakes of the narrative. For example, the closing sequence, which features a montage of civil rights leaders, uses extended tracking shots and dissolves to connect Malcolm's personal journey to collective struggle. The audience is drawn into the broader social and political context, reinforcing the connection between individual and collective agency.

Visual narratives in Malcolm X also intersect with temporal and spatial experimentation. Scenes are often non-linear, juxtaposing different moments of Malcolm's life to emphasise thematic resonance rather than chronological sequence. Rahmani (2023, p. 375) notes that such narrative strategies can guide moral reasoning, as viewers are prompted to consider cause-and-effect relationships and ethical dilemmas. By structuring the film in this way, Lee invites active engagement, requiring viewers to interpret connections between historical events, personal transformation, and social action.

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This focus on visual form does not exist in isolation from performance. Schechner (1988, p. 45) and Turner (1987, p. 27) argue that performance and ritual are integral to meaning-making. In Malcolm X, visual cinematic narratives frame performance, guiding the audience's attention to gestures, expressions, and embodied action. This synergy between form and performance amplifies the communicative power of the film, transforming it into a medium where political and personal agencies are enacted visually and experientially.

Spike Lee's Malcolm X demonstrates that visual cinematic narratives are essential for understanding the film's ideological and aesthetic impact. Through montage, camera angles, colour, lighting, and spatial-temporal experimentation, Lee constructs a visual language that conveys resistance, transformation, and human agency. These strategies allow audiences to engage with the film intellectually, emotionally, and ethically. The next section, Analysis II: Performing Resistance and Human Agency, will examine how performance and embodiment further articulate these themes, linking visual techniques to enactments of resistance and moral agency.

Performing Resistance and Human Agency

While visual cinematic narratives provide the structural and aesthetic framework for Malcolm X, it is the performance of resistance and human agency that animates the film. Spike Lee's use of acting, gestures, and embodied presence conveys the moral, political, and personal dimensions of Malcolm X's life. This analysis focuses on key sequences—prison conversion, street activism, public speeches, and the Mecca pilgrimage—to show how performance functions as both narrative and social action.

Performance theory provides the foundation for understanding how embodied action communicates meaning. Schechner (1988, p. 45) argues that performance encompasses any human action that conveys cultural and social significance, extending beyond theatre into everyday life. Turner (1987, p. 27) similarly notes that ritualised actions shape communal understanding and ethical engagement. In Malcolm X, Denzel Washington's physicality—his posture, gestures, and facial expressions—turns private introspection into a public performance of resistance. The prison conversion scene is particularly illustrative: Malcolm's contemplative posture, pacing, and engagement with religious texts show a gradual internal transformation that foreshadows his later activism. Through performance, Lee conveys not only the intellectual awakening of Malcolm but also the embodied assertion of human agency.

Spoken language and delivery are equally significant. Washington's speech patterns, pauses, and vocal intensity convey authority and moral conviction. Torregrosa (2023, p. 351) highlights how combining vocal delivery with camera focus intensifies the communicative impact of key scenes. For example, during Malcolm's public speeches in Harlem, low-angle shots combined with close-ups of expressive gestures reinforce the sense of moral authority and collective empowerment. These performances situate Malcolm as a symbolic and real agent of resistance, linking personal transformation to communal struggle.

Resistance as enacted through performance is closely tied to social and political context. Fanon (1967, p. 112) emphasises that oppressed individuals assert identity and agency in opposition to structural violence. In the film, Malcolm's physical confrontations, street-level organising, and public debates visualise Fanon's theory in practice. By performing acts of resistance, Malcolm not only confronts oppression but also communicates strategies of self-definition and collective mobilisation. The synergy of performance and narrative form ensures that these moments are both aesthetically compelling and politically instructive.

Ritualised and symbolic performance further communicates human agency. Turner (1987, p. 27) notes that rituals transform ordinary actions into meaningful social acts. The Mecca pilgrimage sequence exemplifies this principle. Malcolm's walking, bowing, and

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interaction with pilgrims are carefully choreographed and captured to convey spiritual and social transformation. This embodied ritual emphasises the universality of human agency and cross-cultural solidarity, connecting the African American struggle to a global moral and political consciousness (Gilroy, 2016, p. 52). Performance here becomes a visual and moral medium, demonstrating that resistance is enacted as much through action as through words.

Intersection with Black aesthetic discourse reinforces these performances. Hooks (1992, p. 23) argues that Black artistic expression communicates histories and identities often marginalised in mainstream culture. Labidi (2021, p. 252) notes that performance in politically committed cinema conveys social critique while fostering audience empathy. In Malcolm X, the integration of music, gesture, and visual framing in performance sequences situates Malcolm's actions within a broader Black diasporic memory. For example, scenes of community organising feature ensemble performances where collective gestures, chants, and movement dramatise shared resistance. These sequences exemplify how human agency is both individual and communal, enacted through performance in ways that educate, inspire, and mobilise.

Audience engagement is central to the film's performative strategy. Rahmani (2023, p. 375) observes that narrative entertainment can influence moral reasoning and encourage reflection on ethical and political dilemmas. In Malcolm X, performance invites the audience to witness transformation, experience moral tension, and understand the stakes of social action. The embodied performances, enhanced by visual cinematic techniques, create an immersive experience that encourages viewers to consider their own agency and responsibility in social contexts.

Finally, connecting performance to historical and social reality reinforces its impact. By portraying Malcolm's agency through both individual gestures and collective actions, the film aligns personal transformation with political struggle. This approach foregrounds the interdependence of visual narrative and embodied action: cinematic form frames performance, while performance enacts ideology. As a result, Lee's film demonstrates that human agency in the face of oppression is both a performative and visual phenomenon, mediated by cinematic techniques, narrative structure, and social context (Schechner, 1988, p. 45; Turner, 1987, p. 27).

Malcolm X exemplifies how performance communicates resistance, identity, and moral agency. Through acting, gestures, voice, ritualised movement, and collective enactment, the film brings to life both the personal and political dimensions of the struggle. Performance, in combination with visual cinematic strategies, transforms the film into a pedagogical and affective medium, linking individual awakening to collective social action. The next section, Discussion and Synthesis, will integrate the analyses of visual form and performance, exploring how these elements jointly articulate human agency, resistance, and diasporic memory.

DISCUSSION AND SYNTHESIS

Spike Lee's Malcolm X demonstrates that meaning in cinema arises not only from narrative content but also from the interplay of visual form and performance. The analyses of visual cinematic narratives and performing resistance show that the film's power derives from the integration of camera techniques, montage, colour, lighting, gesture, and embodied action. These elements combine to construct human agency, enabling the audience to experience and interpret the ethical, political, and social stakes of Malcolm X's journey.

Visual cinematic narratives establish the structural and ideological framework. Montage, cross-cutting, and framing create rhythm and continuity while allowing for thematic juxtapositions across space and time (Arriaga Benítez, 2021, p. 98; Ildırar, 2015, p. 63). For instance, the juxtaposition of prison introspection with public activism conveys the continuity of personal and social transformation. Colour and lighting emphasise mood and symbolic

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meaning, guiding the audience's emotional and cognitive engagement (Arriaga Benítez, 2021, p. 101). Such visual strategies operate as a language of resistance, providing a platform for performance to enact agency.

Performance transforms the visual framework into a lived, embodied experience. Denzel Washington's gestures, posture, and vocal delivery communicate moral and political conviction (Torregrosa, 2023, p. 351). In key sequences such as the prison conversion and the Mecca pilgrimage, performance demonstrates the enactment of agency, illustrating Fanon's (1967, p. 112) assertion that resistance requires both internal transformation and external action. Similarly, Turner (1987, p. 27) and Schechner (1988, p. 45) emphasise that ritualised and embodied actions encode social values and ethical reasoning. In Malcolm X, these principles are visible in the choreography of movement, communal gestures, and performative rituals, which communicate collective as well as individual agency.

The synthesis of visual form and performance also facilitates audience engagement. Rahmani (2023, p. 375) argues that narrative entertainment can shape moral reasoning, and Lee's film achieves this by combining aesthetic and performative strategies. Viewers are encouraged to witness transformation, interpret ethical dilemmas, and reflect on their own social agency. This immersive engagement is further amplified through Black aesthetic discourse, which situates the film within historical and diasporic memory (Hooks, 1992, p. 23; Gilroy, 2016, p. 52). The convergence of visual narrative and performance creates an affective and intellectual space where audiences can experience the stakes of oppression, resistance, and empowerment.

Moreover, the film's relevance to African and Nigerian audiences is significant. While much scholarship focuses on U.S. perspectives, this study highlights that the themes of identity, liberation, and collective struggle resonate across postcolonial contexts. African audiences can interpret Malcolm's actions through familiar frameworks of resistance and agency, linking historical struggles in the African diaspora to local socio-political realities. The integration of visual and performative strategies ensures that the film communicates these connections effectively, bridging geographical and temporal gaps while foregrounding shared human experiences.

In essence, the discussion illustrates that Spike Lee's cinematic approach cannot be fully understood through narrative analysis alone. It is the interdependent relationship between visual form and performance that produces meaning, conveys agency, and enacts resistance. The film exemplifies how cinema can be both an artistic and political medium, using aesthetics and embodied performance to communicate complex ethical and social realities. This synthesis confirms that Malcolm X is not merely a historical biopic but a pedagogical and experiential text, where viewers learn, reflect, and engage with the principles of moral and political action.

The combination of visual narrative and performance transforms Malcolm X into a dynamic medium for exploring human agency, resistance, and diasporic consciousness. This synthesis provides the foundation for the Conclusion and Implications section, which will summarise findings, highlight the significance for Theatre and Film Studies, and suggest future research directions.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Spike Lee's Malcolm X exemplifies how visual cinematic narratives and performance work together to communicate resistance, human agency, and identity. The analyses have shown that the film's formal techniques—montage, camera angles, lighting, colour, and spatial-temporal experimentation—create a visual language that conveys ideological meaning beyond dialogue (Arriaga Benítez, 2021, p. 98; Ildırar, 2015, p. 63). At the same time, performance—through gesture, posture, voice, and ritualised action—transforms these visual strategies into lived, embodied experiences (Schechner, 1988, p. 45; Turner, 1987,

p. 27). Together, these elements allow audiences to witness the enactment of human agency and resistance in ways that are intellectual, emotional, and ethical.

The study also underscores the relevance of Malcolm X for African and Nigerian contexts. While much of the scholarship focuses on U.S. audiences, this analysis highlights how the film resonates with postcolonial struggles, collective identity, and local debates about social and political resistance. By framing personal transformation alongside collective action, Lee's film models how individuals and communities can assert agency within oppressive structures (Fanon, 1967, p. 112; Gilroy, 2016, p. 52). This has important implications for Theatre and Film Studies in Nigeria, suggesting that cinematic analysis should consider both visual narrative and performative embodiment as vehicles for social commentary and ethical engagement.

Furthermore, the synthesis of visual and performative analysis demonstrates that Malcolm X is more than a historical biopic. It is an experimental cinematic text that educates, inspires, and provokes reflection. Audiences are encouraged to engage critically, observe ethical dilemmas, and consider their own roles within systems of oppression (Rahmani, 2023, p. 375; Hooks, 1992, p. 23). The film's aesthetic and narrative strategies operate simultaneously as pedagogy and political intervention, bridging gaps between historical memory, diasporic consciousness, and contemporary social issues.

In conclusion, Spike Lee's integration of visual cinematic narratives and performance establishes Malcolm X as a powerful example of how film can articulate human agency, resistance, and identity. For Nigerian and African scholars, the film provides a model for exploring the intersections of form, performance, and ideology in cinematic texts. By examining both the structural and embodied aspects of storytelling, researchers can uncover the ethical and political dimensions of film that resonate across time and space.

As Malcolm X himself once asserted, "Education is the passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today" (X, 1965, p. xx). In this context, Lee's cinematic narrative prepares viewers to understand, reflect, and act—bridging history, performance, and human agency in a visual language that continues to inspire resistance and transformation.

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