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Towards Genre Classification in Anglophone West Africa Video Films: The Case of *Scorned* as a Woman's Film

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the woman's film within the context of Africa and African cinematography by examining the Ghanaian video film *Scorned* (2008), written and directed by Shirley Frimpong-Manso. It examines the themes, narrative structure, and cinematic style employed in the Ghanaian video film *Scorned* (2008), comparing it to the key elements of the 1930s – 1950s woman's film genre of Hollywood. We argue that *Scorned* follows the traditional genre of the woman's Hollywood movie while simultaneously subverting some of the ingrained conventions and expectations of that genre. The film merges and renegotiates the generic elements of the woman's film as represented in the Hollywood woman's film genre and melodrama by focusing on the underpinning ideologies, plot, and aesthetics in making visible the Ghanaian woman's experience and constructing a female consciousness. Such engagements can contribute to teasing out some of the generic elements, which could constitute the African woman's film.

Keywords: African film, Hollywood, scorned video film, woman's film.

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1.0 Introduction

This paper examines the popular Ghanaian video film *Scorned* (2008), by Shirley Frimpong-Manso to determine whether it fits into one of the earlier Hollywood genre categories - the woman's film. We do

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so by considering the thematic preoccupation, narrative and narrative structure, iconography and cinematic style employed in the film and comparing them with the key elements of the woman's film genre. In relation to West African video films, Haynes (2010) has suggested that one of the important areas to focus on where studies are concerned is film genre criticism, where he warns against the imposition of imported generic taxonomies on the videos without proper scrutiny and adjustment. He has further argued for "cultural humility and inductive procedures in approaching video film genres" (Haynes 2010) in West Africa. In response to Hayne's caution, new academic categories like the occult and oracle videos, Christian/Hallelujah/Pentecostal videos, epic videos, city and country videos, Ikemefuna videos, and Nollywood diaspora video have been proposed, in addition to borrowed western categories like drama, comedy, romance, melodrama, and horror. Our aim is to add to the discussion on genre and categorisation of West African video films, while observing Hayne's caution.

Genre studies generally provides a historically grounded method of establishing 'family resemblances' between films produced and released under widely differing circumstances, and of mediating the relationship between mythologies of popular culture and social political and economic contexts (Hutchings, 1995). However, within African film criticism, genre studies remains an under theorised area, especially when considering the video films produced in Anglophone West Africa. Existing classification frameworks in the field defined by the specificities of African history and other subject matter and style relate exclusively to the Francophone art films (Bisschoff, 2009, p. 27; Diawara, 1992). This brings into question their relevance to the current video productions in Anglophone West Africa (Sutherland-Addy, 2000; Ukadike, 2003), which in turn highlights the need for suitable categorisations, and provides justification for this paper and the contribution it makes to the academic debate and literature.

In the West, generic categorisation of popular art films utilise the framework where classification is "defined by the industry and recognized by the mass audience ... because film genres are by definition not just scientifically derived or theoretically constructed categories, but are always industrially certified and publicly shared" (Altman, 1999, p. 16). This approach cannot necessarily be transferred to the said video films because the whole process of categorisation by the West African video industry and mass audience is jumbled (Haynes 2010). Nonetheless, there are a few unique videos that are self-consciously produced according to or against specific Western generic models. One such video is the Ghanaian film, *Scorned* and one such generic model is the woman's film,³ which is discussed in detail in the next section. The rest of the paper is organised as follows: the next section discusses key literature on the woman's film and closely related material from which an outline of the elements that provide the parameters for analysing the film is drawn. Following that, section 3.0 provides a summary of the film's plot, which this is then followed by section 4.0, with four subsections. This section (4.0) provides a detailed analysis and discussion of the film under four key themes derived from the earlier discussion of the woman's film in section 2.0. The last section is the conclusion, which reiterates the point about the contribution of this paper to the academic discussion on categorising Anglophone West African video films.

2.0 The woman's film

According to Doane (1987) "[the] label 'woman's film' refers to a genre of Hollywood films produced from the silent era through the 1950s and early 60s but most heavily concentrated and most popular in the 1930s and 40s" (p. 3). It is essentially directed toward female viewers and, female subjectivity, female content issues and female spectatorship define it (Basinger, 1995; Neale, 2000; Gledhill, 1987;

³ One must be careful not to equate the woman's film to women's cinema, which Claire Johnston (2004) proposed in her essay, "Women's Cinema as Counter Cinema". Doane (1987) and Basinger (1995) in their invaluable studies theorize the woman's film based on a collection of films from the 1930s to the 1960s just before Feminism mounted its challenges. To draw distinctions and avoid confusion, Steve Neale (2000) at a point in his book refers to the former as "traditional woman's film" (p. 195). In addition, Doane states "that the 'woman's film' is not in any way radical or revolutionary" (1987, p. 296) and so by implication, there is a distinction.

Doane 1987; Modleski, 1991; Langford, 2005). Basinger (1995) has outlined the critical elements of the woman's film, which will largely form the basis of our discussion in this paper. She notes that it is "about a woman, or a woman's life ... about love, marriage, men, sex, fashion and glamour and the need to make a decision about having a career or not (Basinger 1995, p. 9). It tells stories about rags to riches, riches to rags, unwed motherhood, spinsterhood, betrayal by a loved one ... the other woman, the need for sacrifice, and plain old girl meets boy in all its variations, including girl kills boy or boy kills girl" (Basinger 1995, p. 8). Also, it follows a woman "who is trying to deal with the emotional, social, and psychological problems that are specifically connected to the fact that she is a woman" (Basinger 1995, p. 20).

Generally, the woman at the centre of the narrative is passive but when she is given agency it is often in "response to trouble, or ... an act of sudden emotional or irrational behaviour" (Basinger 1995, p. 9). Consequently, there are plot twists as the woman is released from her "life of intense suffering" (Basinger 1995, p. 9). Since action is conventionally seen to be a man's prerogative, the woman's (re)action is seen as unrealistic, bizarre, dramatic or comic (Basinger 1995, p. 5). As part of her release, the woman has a Happy Interlude – her "small piece of action, her marginal territory of joy" where she is seen, for example "laughing her head off" and "dressed in fabulous clothes" (Basinger 1995, p. 8). The Happy Interlude or Bliss Montage is a visual presentation of happiness for the woman but Basinger (1995) suggests that, that does not last not only because of its two minutes running time but also because of the inevitable threat of trouble and repression (pp. 8-9).

It has been explained that because the woman's film sought to teach the "woman that marriage and motherhood were the right path, [the] movies had to show women making the mistake of doing something else", often something unacceptable (Basinger 1995, p. 6). By visualising something other than the expected, the woman was elevated but due to the genre's aim of inculcating in her what she ought to be, it was convenient that she was repressed. At the end of the narrative, she was "usually dead, punished, or back in the fold, aware of the error of her ways" (Basinger 1995, p. 6). Thus, while the woman's film provides "little releases, small victories – or even big releases, big victories", it reaffirms "the status quo for the woman's life" (Basinger 1995, p. 1), hence the "hokey finale"⁴. Though the woman is portrayed as being able to do anything, because the woman's film endorses and also undermines the woman's agency and achievement, she is always reminded of her biological role and place, hence she is made to "stay 'within the law'" (Basinger 1995, p. 17-25).

True to generic form in its conventional sense, the woman's film has its own familiar "plots and recurring filmic techniques" (Basinger 1995, p. 7), yet, at the same time many academic studies have noted its association with other generic forms (Doane 1987; Neale, 2000; Gledhill, 1987; Cook 1991). Doane (1987) notes that the woman's film "is not a 'pure' genre... It is crossed and informed by a number of other genres or types – melodrama, film noir, [musical, western, biopic], the gothic or horror film – and finds its point of unification ultimately in the fact of its address" (p. 284). Thus, while it focuses on the woman, the strategy of unification expands the boundaries of the genre to embrace a connection with other genres, showcasing the genre's richness and complexity. The genre's association with melodrama however, is what has attracted the most attention in film criticism.

The literature suggests that there have been discrepancies in the use of the terms 'woman's film' and 'melodrama' in film studies. Some scholars have defined the woman's film of the 1940s through to the 1950s as melodrama (see, for example, Klinger, 1994; Mercer & Shingler, 2004), seeing it primarily through the lenses of its seemingly most exemplary subgroup, the maternal melodrama (Doane 1987). Others suggest that the woman's film is a genre in the melodramatic genealogy (see, for example, Langford, 2005), thereby making the genre a subgroup under melodrama. A third group argues that the woman's film is a separate genre, with a related strand to melodrama (see, for example, Cook 1991,

⁴ This is a major generic element of the woman's film where the main female character or heroine is punished in the end, for contravening her traditionally assigned roles or engaging in activities that fall outside the society stipulated 'rules of correct behaviour' (Basinger, 1995; Lyden, 2003).

Gledhill, 1987). These varying positions point to one thing: the relationship between the woman's film and melodrama cannot be overlooked. And the contrarities between these theoretical positions are valuable to our analyses, to show how *Scorned* reworks and renegotiates the forms in telling the Ghanaian woman's story.

It is also necessary at this point to mention that by virtue of the narrative structure and ideological implications that were dictated by the production code during the Hollywood studio era, the woman's film is not considered a feminist film. It has nevertheless served as an important source for Western feminist history in feminist film studies (Walsh 1986; Haskell, 1973; Doane 1987; Gledhill, 1987). Feminist theorists acknowledge that the woman's film in many respects is formally not different from other examples of films in the way they image and objectify women's experiences. In fact, Doane (1987) suggests that its "formal resistances to the elaboration of female subjectivity produce perturbations and contradictions within the narrative economy" (p. 13). In other words, because of its contradictory characteristics of paradoxically releasing the woman from social bondage and at the same time repressing her in a conventional "cautionary tale" closing or what is termed the "hokey finale", it makes the woman's subjectivity more synonymous with her objectification (Basinger, 1995, pp. 11-12; Doane 1987; Lyden, 2003). Arguing from a feminist perspective Doane (1987) further asserts that within the conventional narrative form, the contradictions can be renegotiated to facilitate the production of a desirable subjectivity for the woman (p. 13). It is within this cinematic renegotiation that *Scorned* reconstructs the woman's experiences and comes across as a revisionist genre film⁵ that is self-aware and self-reflexive of the woman's film and plays with the conventions and expectations of its audience.

3.0 Plot summary

Scorned (2008) tells the story of the twenty eight year old Dea Thompson who has been married for two years to the thirty four year old Orlando Thompson, the 'prestigious son' of the Reverend Minister. Despite his supposed Christian upbringing, Orlando becomes a monstrous husband who constantly abuses and maltreats Dea, eventually telling his father that he no longer loves her. It is revealed they were forced into marriage as a result of an unplanned pregnancy. Orlando's father, the Reverend thought it was a good idea at the time because he had a reputation to keep while Dea's mother, Mrs. Ocran thought she was ensuring a good future for her daughter because with a husband like that she was sure of security, money and prestige. When the film opens Dea is no longer pregnant as a result of suffering a miscarriage and Orlando feels trapped. The plot reveals he never loved Dea and has had a mistress, Violet, for as long as he has been married, with a promise to marry her immediately he gets divorced from Dea. One day, he returns home from work drunk because he found his mistress with another man and decides to attack his wife. In defending herself, Dea hits Orlando with an alcohol bottle he brought home and he ends up at the hospital in a coma.

Meanwhile, at the hospital Dea meets Bessa Hammond, a teacher whose wife, Soraya, a military officer has also been hospitalised as a result of an armed robbery attack at a bank where she had gone to withdraw money. Dea and Bessa become friends and soon begin to date even though their spouses are both still in coma. In the meantime, Dea learns that Orlando is entitled to two and a half million dollars; money left for him by his late mother that he would receive when he turns thirty-five and is married. The money however would go to his wife (Dea), if he dies before the time. The Reverend hires an unscrupulous self-proclaimed detective, Perry Burns to find out if Dea had anything to do with Orlando's accident. If he can prove her guilt, he can keep the money to refund the church money he has embezzled. Burns surreptitiously promises to leave Dea alone if she will part with fifty per cent of her inheritance should Orlando die. Unknown to Dea, Burns kills Orlando at the hospital with the intention of getting fifty per cent of the money. With the help of Violet, Orlando's mistress whom she discovers is

⁵ Giannetti (2011) identifies four main genre life cycles, which are: primitive, classical, revisionist and parodic (p. 359). He explains that at the revisionist stage, the genre conventions are used "to question or undermine popular beliefs" (Giannetti 2011, p. 359).

her childhood friend, Dea sets a trap to implicate Burns and Bessa who also has abandoned her because his wife pulled through her coma. Burns cannot find Dea when he goes to collect his share but instead finds Bessa who he believes might have killed Dea and taken the money. Burns attacks Bessa with a gun but in the struggle the gun accidentally goes off and kills him (Burns). Eventually, the Reverend is jailed for embezzlement while Dea gets her inheritance and decides to sponsor her younger sister's education abroad. She buys her mother a new home and car, and also gives Violet a cheque as they both toast 'to an unforgettable holiday and a better tomorrow.'

4.0 **Scorned: A revisionist woman's film?**

In this section, we analyse the film in detail, using key elements of the woman's film outlined by Bassinger (1995) and discussed in section 2.0 as a basis. Specifically, we apply the following four key themes/elements deciphered from the discussion about the woman's film: (i) The woman's experience as the central factor; (ii) Female consciousness mediated through resistance to male violence and power; (iii) The woman's moment of joy; and (iv) Female repression. Our analyses will show that *Scorned* fits within the mould of the 1930s – 1950s woman's film genre of Hollywood, but with some revisionist modifications.

4.01 The woman's experience as the central factor

As mentioned earlier, the woman's film is couched in terms of what are presumed to be major concerns of a woman's life: marriage, love, men, motherhood, and all the standardised 'feminine' things (Basinger, 1995, pp. 14-15). Most of these issues are very much alive in *Scorned*. The film opens with the soundtrack, 'Black Magic Woman' playing and shots of knives; peeling of potatoes; a knife cut and the oozing of blood, intercut with the opening credits, evoking as a generic marker a suspenseful narrative right from the beginning. The mise-en-scene demarcates a woman's space while the track registers the film's ideological position. When the film begins proper, Dea and Orlando are introduced in a way that makes it clear that Dea is in a difficult marriage.⁶ After Dea goes through the trouble of making dinner for Orlando, the following ensues upon his return:

Orlando: [pointing apathetically to the dining table] what do we have here?

Dea: [smiling] I made your favourite – chicken, potatoes and vege-sauce.

Orlando: Hmm, honey... [he pulls the plate of food] Honey, you spent the entire day cooking this, rubbish? [He then smashes the plate of food against a wall, instantly and symbolically shattering Dea's joyous welcome mood, then walks away].

Dea is left devastated and in tears to clean up the broken plate and the strewn food on the floor. The film subsequently uses a panning shot to reveal the mess, and a medium shot to reveal another finger cut with blood dripping. The shots reveal her crashed desire for happiness and the emotional drain; she has no fulfilment of love in the marriage. The introductory scene is very effective in enunciating the woman's problems; it is engaging, and manages to make Dea's woes the core issue right from the outset. The viewer is made to feel her pain and anguish drawing directly on melodramatic sensibility⁷ and confirming Walsh's (1986) observation that the woman's film is "quintessentially emotive" (p. 24).

The film seems to reinforce personal problems but at the same time cautions that aspirations for upward social mobility through marriage can affect women's happiness. Dea's mother thought pushing her daughter to marry the 'prestigious son' of the Reverend will afford her the 'prestige' and 'money'

⁶ Basinger (1995) has argued that the woman's film commonly works from the premise of a woman trapped in a wretched marriage, focusing on her marital problems because that is her life from her point of view. However films that portray a happy-marriage, are usually about men who are supported by their wives to be able to succeed in their businesses outside the home.

⁷ Mercer and Shingler (2004) have noted that one of the key ingredients of the melodramatic form is to evoke pathos in the viewer for the victim or the protagonist.

she never had but, as the film suggests, it becomes a hindrance to her happiness. Her low class status is rather duplicated in her marriage. Cinematically, her costume and movement as compared to Orlando's, mimic the image of the servant-master scenario. As a house wife, if it is her place to serve her husband, it is also the husband's place to reciprocate with love but, he denies her and instead threatens her with cruelty, thereby putting *Scorned* within the category of the "woman in suffering" film (Walsh 1986, p. 26). In the midst of this, her willingness to serve and unwillingness/inability to express her emotions make her situation pathetic. Laing (2007) refers to this as the "selected mutism" in the woman's film, which highlights some of the most painful and frustrating points about society and femaleness (pp. 28-29). In one sequence, the film rather uses non-diegetic music, Paul Simon's 'I Do It for Your Love' to express her emotions, thoughts and memories to make her "morally victorious" even if she does not express herself verbally (Laing 2007, p. 19). Here, the film discourse seems to suggest that Dea's suffering is undeserved given all the sacrifices she makes.

Dea's pathetic marriage life is indeed the focus of the film, and though she and Orlando shared good times in the past, their marriage has become a pain because it was based on a mistake – a pregnancy that no longer exists. The underlying mystic shows that all the excitement of life – the passion, occurred outside the marriage rather than within it (Haskell, 1973, p. 156). By contrast, Bessa and Soraya's marriage questions the foundation of Dea's marriage and reinforces her pitiable life. Bessa and Soraya Hammond share the very love bond that Dea and Orlando lack. The film language suggests their marriage is based on genuine love and respect as opposed to the superficial attraction at first sight shared by Dea and Orlando. The film does not offer class distinctions in Soraya and Bessa's case however, strikingly, Soraya's profession as a captain in the army and a career woman stresses her security. Contrary to designated social roles where women engage in 'less dangerous jobs' if they must work outside the home and men in 'more dangerous jobs', here the film consciously shifts roles to demonstrate as in the woman's film, "[a] woman can be anything. She can do anything" (Basinger, 1995, p. 18). In a sense, the film presents two images of women: the suppressed wife who is confined to the house and maltreated and the liberated wife who leaves the house to assume a socially designated 'male role' and enjoys every bit of her freedom, thus providing a point of revision/departure from the woman's film.

Significantly, the film's juxtaposition of the situations emphasises Dea's unfortunate state, thereby evoking pathos from the viewer (Mercer & Shingler, 2004, p. 85). More importantly, associating Dea with pathos, sympathy and empathy solicits a type of over identification, which attributes the gaze to her (Doane, 1987, pp. 177-178). Basinger (1995) describes this as empowerment because in the woman's film, the woman's (heroine's) troubles matter and her problems are recognised and given attention (p. 17).

Doane (1987) notes that in the woman's film "identity is insured by the fact that it is the man who commits adultery, who steps outside the boundaries of marriage" (p. 119). In *Scorned*, Dea's problems are compounded by Orlando's involvement with 'the other woman',⁸ Violet, and the film suggests she is the reason Orlando maltreats Dea. Orlando enjoys sexual satisfaction with Violet and so her sexual expression results in Dea's sexual repression. In one scene, the film's cut from Orlando's sexual encounter with Violet to Dea's desolation highlights her many unsatisfied desires. Also, because of 'the other woman', Dea is almost always framed in isolated shots – sitting all alone, pretending to read magazines, sleeping alone or having breakfast alone. When she is framed in scenes with Orlando her traumatic state is accentuated as he continually inflicts pain on her. In one such scene, the *mise-en-scene* shows her at a sophisticated breakfast table, yet a close-up shot reveals she has a lot going on in her mind. Psychologically, one can read from her facial expression that she is tired of her abusive life but she cannot express it. Orlando is revealed in a medium shot smartly dressed, although ironically his actions are not gentlemanly as he pours his hot breakfast right into Dea's face. This act of domestic violence and suffering heightens the viewer's emotions and empathy for her. This clearly fits in with

⁸ As a melodramatic code, Cawelti (1991) identifies 'the other woman' as more of a villain, decadent and lustful while in the woman's film Basinger (1995) notes she takes over the protagonist's husband and makes her life unbearable.

Gledhill's (1987) suggestion that it is a crucial ingredient in the woman's film and melodrama for the victim to have a prolonged suffering to evoke empathy from the viewer and offer a sense of deserved victory when it finally comes.

4.02 Female consciousness mediated through resistance to male violence and power

Basinger (1995) hints that as a generic marker of sudden plot twist, the suppressive woman's passiveness usually turns into activeness at the point of immense trouble (p. 9), and the same happens in *Scorned*. When Orlando returns home drunk and attacks Dea, grabbing her by the neck, the viewer is very much aware of his intentions to end her life and be free from her. This marks the moment of intense trouble for Dea and she springs into action, reaching for the half-filled alcohol bottle and hitting him with it. Ironically, she is rather freed from him and her victory marks the end of her suffering and muteness and the beginning of her freedom and action – a symbolic re-birth. Subsequently she is framed in slow motion shots clearing the mess; drinking 'Stretton's London Dry Gin'; taking off her scarf from her head and slightly smiling away her pathetic life. Ferriss and Young (2008) describe this as an escape into a realm of possibility, which results in a re-defining and re-empowering transformation of identity. This characteristically marks her as the new woman, from whence, she is released to live outside the traditionally accepted female designated roles into a fantastic escapism exhilarating to women viewers because their problems are recognised and their desire to have a riotous freedom and have things better than the way they are off screen, are addressed (Basinger 1995, pp. 6-7).

The film, in various ways, simultaneously affirms and undermines some familiar plotlines associated with the woman's film to construct a satisfactory fantasy for its female viewers; it self-consciously subverts the conventions and expectations of the viewers. Doane (1987) suggests that it is only the man who survives in the situation of adultery in the woman's film. Yet, the film's narrative seems to imply that Orlando pays for his cruelty as well as infidelity as he lies helpless in his hospital bed, thereby going against the plotline of the woman's film and suggesting that the melodramatic supreme notion of reward for virtue and punishment for vice is rather at play here (Neale, 2000). In sticking with the plotline of the woman's film however, the victim is suddenly saved and can do whatever she wants. In one scene at the hospital, the film demonstrates Dea's newly acquired confidence to freely express her emotions. As Orlando lies motionless, she walks majestically toward his hospital bed and tells him holding his head: 'my love, things could have been so different. We could have been happy, made a family. But, you had to be like all men, [hitting his head] greedy and totally insensitive'. This is the first time in the narrative that Dea freely expresses her thoughts to Orlando, and even though he is in a coma and 'mute', it is still an opportunity for her to finally express her feelings.

The title of the film suggests Dea's subsequent actions become in part "a sweet revenge" still emphasising her subjectivity (Haskell, 1973). The narrative pattern intentionally sets her on a mission to gain back all she has lost – psychologically, socially, physically, romantically, as well as rewarding her financially. In so doing, the film intentionally sets in motion a latent struggle between the sexes which none of the male characters becomes aware of or takes seriously as they are blinded by their patriarchal privileges and rights. To accomplish the ultimate desire, the unexpected actions Dea pursues sometimes seem trivial, bizarre, memorable, dramatic or even comical simply because action *per se* is the man's prerogative and not the woman's (Basinger, 1995). Hence, she does represent a model of defiance. However, in the general ideological terms of the film, each of the actions fulfils her mission to gain back what she lost. As the title *Scorned* suggests the intensity of her suffering makes her stop at nothing 'to right all wrongs done her'. Her rights as the heroine of the woman's film to live "outside the rules of correct behaviour" seems to suddenly make things happen in her favour (Basinger, 1995, p. 6).

The film sequentially demonstrates her mission to regain her self-esteem and confidence after the long suppression. In the male-bashing scene, the film uses continuity editing to show the transformation that has taken place from earlier oppressive scenes where Dea was always alone or maltreated. When

her sister's boyfriend comes to take her out, she walks confidently to the young man and through a combination of making fun of him and insulting his manhood – “You're the guy she calls, ‘a little dick’” – she gets him to storm off angrily. Her action seems trivial and comic but important in a sense that it is a sign of reclaiming her self-esteem and confidence; she can express herself to men without fear.

Dea's display of confidence is not limited to her interaction with men, but extends to her sister Star, as well. Star is imaged as the impudently bold young woman who will not take ‘crap from any man’. She is twenty-three and feels she can do anything. In their first encounter she shows no respect to Dea because she believes that as her big sister she has not been ‘much of a role model’. But in her newfound confidence, Dea is not about to let that continue. When she angrily confronts Dea for chasing her boyfriend away, Dea sternly tells her: ‘this is the last time you open your filthy mouth to speak to me in that manner; I'm tired of your stupid attitude. You'll show me respect or to borrow your words, I'll teach you a lesson you will never forget.’ Dea's response is striking and leads to a sudden change in Star's attitude; she begins to demonstrate the culturally appropriate behaviour of respect that is expected from a younger sister. Dea's mother even commends her on her assertive stance, saying: ‘good one’. She psychologically regains her confidence and socially, her position as the elder sister in the family who deserves respect. As a generic marker Dea is allowed to live outside the accepted behaviour of showing respect to men and Star is denied being disrespectful to her elder sister. This demonstrates the complexities and contradictions at work in the genre of the woman's film, revealing its “cross-purposes” (Basinger, 1995, p. 13), which contradicts and re-affirms. Thus, in providing the fantastic escape for female viewers, the film at the same time appropriates decent behaviour and promotes female solidarity/comradeship, which is an important ingredient in the woman's film (Langford, 2005, p. 45).

4.03 The woman's moment of joy

As Basinger (1995) has pointed out, one of the key elements of the woman's film, which is also exclusive to the genre, is the Happy Interlude or the Bliss Montage. This is cinematically achieved through visual aesthetics that signal to viewers that the leading lady is indeed released from domestic and social bondage and is having a fulfilling time of her life (Basinger, 1995, p. 8). In *Scorned*, the Happy Interlude or the Bliss Montage shows the delight of Dea's ‘makeover’, which marks her transformation from an “unattractive” to an “attractive and fashionable woman” (Basinger, 1995, p. 8). The sequence, involves diegetic soul music⁹, ‘Respect’ playing on a sounds-system in Dea's bedroom, a panning shot that reveals different kinds of clothing and accessories and an integration of various medium and close-up shots of Dea dressed in different fashionable clothes, dancing, singing along, and even smoking a cigar. The music and the visual convention of fashionable clothing are self-assuring; they emphasise Dea's new identity. Though, the sequence is brief, the visual presentation demonstrates Dea's moment of absolute joy and delight, in line with the dictates of the Blissful Montage. In addition, not only does the sequence serve as “a kind of display window” to women's keen interest in fashion and glamour (Doane, 1987, p. 27), or “an exclusory dialogue between [the] female image and [the] female spectatorship” (Bruzzi, 1997, p. xix) but, significantly it shows Dea's transformation and the evolving new drive in her character exemplified in subsequent scenes where her fashion choice adds to her new outlook and freedom (Basinger, 1995).

In *Scorned*, Dea's new attitude and fashion consciousness become vehicles that facilitate her romantic escapades, confirming Basinger's assertion that “fashion and glamour are fundamental to a woman's definition” and attractiveness (1995, p. 114). In an immediate scene change after the Bliss Montage, Bessa whom Dea coincidentally met at the hospital earlier tells her, ‘you look different, [pausing and admiring her]... in a very nice way.’ Being on a mission to treat her husband with contempt as he did to her, Dea sensing a kind of possible interest soon ignores her marital status and works her way into Bessa's life. He is not aware of her mission but takes advantage of Soraya's accident to indulge in an

⁹ Music plays a crucial role in evoking women's passion and express non-verbal emotions both in the woman's film and melodrama (Basinger, 1995; Mercer & Shingler, 2004).

extra-marital affair. It can be suggested that Dea's sexual engagements with Bessa fulfils the purpose of the woman's film where the protagonist experiences "an escape into a purely romantic love, into sexual awareness, into luxury or into a rejection of ... [prescribed] female role" (Basinger, 1995, p. 13).

4.04 Subverting female repression in *Scorned*

Essentially, *Scorned's* broader ideological position to right the wrongs done the heroine works in Dea's favour and subverts the element of female repression that is common to the woman's film. In one sequence demonstrating their sexual escapades, the visuals as well as the accompanying sound track, 'Romantic Notions' illustrate the revival of the sweet and loving notions of romance dying in her. The joyful and playful mood in which she non-verbally expresses her sexual sentiments as well as the track reinforces her satisfaction. She enjoys romantic company with Bessa as compared to the lonely and tormented scenes with Orlando. Doane (1987) notes that as a generic marker, "[if] a woman does commit adultery..., she must die" (p. 120), but *Scorned's* narrative contradicts this. As the film portrays, Dea 'has suffered enough and [she] deserves more than a fair share' of everything she lost. Hence, though it may sound perverse, in terms of the story it is realised by living outside the rules of logical narrative construction (Basinger, 1995, p. 6). So, she does not die but instead receives financial gain. She is not rewarded for her infidelity but for the suffering and anguish she endured.

In appropriating Dea's financial benefits and economic independence the reward is not handled as a straight forward given, and the film acts out the woman's intelligence as well as her form of heroism. The only time Dea learns about the existence of the inheritance is when her mother informs her about it. Yet, right from the outset, Orlando's father, the Reverend is portrayed as putting in place mechanisms to possibly keep the money to defray his debt. There is no meeting between Dea and the Reverend but his intentions are played out as he hires a 'detective' and approaches Violet to find evidence to implicate Dea in Orlando's accident. In a tensed scene between Dea and the Detective, the following conversation ensues:

Detective: Mrs. Thompson, let me tell you exactly how this looks like. I have you on tape saying how much your husband beats you and I'm sure the Reverend Minister will testify to that, if it came to him keeping the money for himself. Your whereabouts on the night of your husband's accident is still unknown and of course there is your steaming affair barely two months after your husband goes into coma. I'm sure it doesn't say much but it does sure say you don't give a shit. And of course there is this money issue which I'm sure you're going to say you don't know much about but trust me I can build evidence against you so high up you will not only end up losing that money but you will be staring at those dingy walls of Nsawam Prison for fifty years to life imprisonment.

Dea: [Laughing and clapping for him] Wow! You know, you got me there for...a second. Go ahead; build your evidence because I have nothing to hide. Now, get out [pointing to the door].

Detective: You don't fool me. Now this problem ain't gonna go away unless I make it. So I'm giving you seventy-two hours to bring me in or else I will bring the Reverend Minister onto you like a leech and he will be more than happy to nail you on the cross. [Sarcastically] Have a splendid night. Ta taa.

The scene is significant narratively, as it makes Dea and the viewer fully aware of the Reverend's evil intentions and also the Detective's corrupt motives. Orlando is not dead at this point; hence, the Reverend's orchestrations and the Detective's motives reinforce their assumption or wish for his death. The situation strikes a chord with the female viewer who is familiar with the unending plight of the wife of the seriously sick man or the widow in the Ghanaian society. How most of the time family members, both male and female of the sick man or the deceased who feel empowered by patriarchy (belonging

to the man's side) always want to take away everything from the hapless woman or widow even when a Will says otherwise.

On the other hand, the scene conceals Dea's plans and intentions from the Detective as well as the viewer, putting her in absolute control of the narrative and emphasising her subjectivity. She calculatingly puts in place measures to keep everything that belongs to her as the Will stipulates, yet the film's cutting conceals her plans. It is not until the end that her flashback reveals her plan to outmanoeuvre both the Detective and the Reverend. That in the end their masculinity is subverted through drastic defeat and female bonding is greeted with absolute victory is worth noting. The Detective dies for his greed and desire to take what is not his, and the Reverend is imprisoned as a result of embezzling church money. There is also an inadvertent suggestion that the Reverend's punishment is due to his wicked intentions and machinations to leave Dea penniless. There is a clear recognition of where guilt and innocence lie (Gledhill, 1987). In the end, the film seems to celebrate female power and bonding as mother and daughters dance, and Dea and Violet toast to the victory. The final soundtrack, 'Daa ke daa'¹⁰ re-emphasises Dea's subjectivity and self-assurance.

5.0 Conclusion

As a narrative constructed by a female filmmaker, about a female protagonist, told from a female point of view, for a female viewer, the merging of the two generic forms: woman's film and melodrama, urges one to see the ideological position in refashioning the woman's identity in *Scorned*. The film overtly acknowledges its generic self-awareness and revisionist stance by placing the woman at the centre of the narrative, capturing her ability to survive the harsh world and moulding her desires to her advantage. It subverts the generic marker of the hokey finale and treats the woman with an exceptional appeasement. The woman's film is about the woman and for the woman; it celebrates her "struggle for honour and justice" (Walsh, 1986, p. 24), and that is what *Scorned* does. The narrative construction of *Scorned* logically subverts the usual unhappy ending or the hokey finale found in the woman's film where the heroine pays a high prize for stepping outside her traditionally assigned roles or her engagements outside 'the rules of correct behaviour' and instead opts for a melodramatic ending where poetic justice occurs (Basinger, 1995; Lyden, 2003). This is a deviation from the genre/narrative convention of the woman's film and can therefore be seen as revisionist. In *Scorned*, those that pay the prize for evil are the men. Of more significance though, is the female protagonist's ability to survive the harsh world and mould her desires to her own advantage. Her capabilities in this regard are critical in the film's ideological representation, offering its women viewers what Geraghty (1991) calls "utopian possibilities" (p. 112). Dea's transformation from a pathetic low life to one of glamour and control at the close of the film enables women to imagine and vicariously experience an ideal world in which values traditionally associated with them are given space and expression (Geraghty 1991; Basinger, 1995). *Scorned* in the mould of the woman's film, easily reaffirms the woman's desire for a better life.

Based on our analysis, we would argue that *Scorned* was produced simultaneously in line with and in contradiction to the generic conventions of the woman's film. By focusing on the correlation between the ideology and thematic motifs, narrative, and film techniques, we conclude that the film merges and renegotiates the generic elements of the woman's film and melodrama. To conclude, we return to Hayne's (2010) call for new and appropriate genre classifications in categorising the Anglophone West African Videos and suggest that such readings as we have discussed above, can contribute to teasing out some of the generic elements which might constitute a borrowed but revised generic classification called the African woman's film. Such analysis can also contribute to and enhance the discussion on genre and the categorisation of video films in the burgeoning Anglophone West Africa video film industry.

¹⁰ As a non-diegetic musical representation, 'Daa ke daa' literally means 'everyday and everyday'. It is sang from the perspective of a woman who tells her abusive and unappreciative husband not to break her heart if he no longer loves her.

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