



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Section: *Literary Theory and Criticism*

Maternal vision and tragedy in Faith Ben-Daniels' *Blue Ixora* (2018): A gynocritical reading

Esther Tontoh

Department of Languages Education, University of Skills Training and Entrepreneurial Development, Ghana

Email: tontohesther@gmail.com
 <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-1991-3613>

ABSTRACT

This study investigates maternal vision and tragedy in Faith Ben-Daniels' *Blue Ixora*, highlighting the importance of motherhood as a critical site of intuition, emotional intelligence, and culturally embedded knowledge in African women's writing. In a tradition where maternal insight is frequently undervalued or framed as purely sentimental, this paper positions *Blue Ixora* as a significant feminist intervention that reclaims maternal subjectivity as a powerful mode of knowing and ethical engagement. Anchored in gynocritical feminist theory, the study foregrounds women's voices, inferiority, and lived experiences, reading the mother figure as a bearer of visionary perception that transcends ordinary sight. It argues that maternal intuition in the text operates as an alternative epistemology, one that enables the mother to anticipate tragedy, interpret emotional realities, and guide her family through moments of crisis and loss. Methodologically, the study employs textual and thematic analysis, examining narrative voice, symbolism, characterization, and psychological depth to trace how maternal consciousness shapes the novel's moral and emotional landscape. The findings reveal that the mother's intuitive vision functions as a form of resistance to patriarchal rationalism, redefining authority within both the domestic and social spheres. Motherhood is thus represented not as passive endurance but as active knowledge production and moral leadership. The study concludes that Ben-Daniels' *Blue Ixora* portrayal of maternal vision reclaims women's experiential knowledge and resilience, offering fresh insights into female agency and expanding gynocritical readings of motherhood in contemporary African literature.

KEYWORDS: feminine, gynocritical, maternal, tragedy, vision

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Introduction

Motherhood has long occupied a central place in literary discourse, functioning not only as a biological or social role but also as a symbolic and epistemological framework through which societies interpret care, sacrifice, identity, and moral authority (Singh, 2026). Across cultures, maternal figures are frequently portrayed as emotional anchors within the family and community, embodying compassion, resilience, and intuitive understanding (Hsiao & Lu, 2025). O'Reilly, (2021) recognizes that maternal experience represents a distinct form of knowledge production one that emerges from lived realities, embodied care, and relational awareness. Rather than being just sentimental or instinctive, maternal perception is now understood as a complex form of emotional intelligence and cultural insight that shapes ethical decision-making and social relationships). Within literary studies, this evolving perspective has encouraged scholars to reconsider motherhood not simply as a domestic role but as a critical site of agency, interpretation, and resistance. In African literature, representations of motherhood frequently intersect with cultural traditions, communal ethics, and spiritual beliefs that shape women's experiences and identities. African women writers, in particular, have used fiction to interrogate dominant narratives that reduce motherhood to silence, suffering, or passive endurance. Instead, they portray maternal figures as thinkers, interpreters, and moral guides whose insights influence family and community life. Scholars such as Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi and Molara Ogundipe-Leslie emphasize that African feminist criticism foregrounds women's voices and lived experiences in order to challenge patriarchal frameworks that marginalize female knowledge. Acheampong (2025) further highlights the importance of epistemic freedom in African feminist theorizing, arguing that African women's writing contributes to the creation of alternative knowledge systems grounded in women's experiences and cultural realities. Within this critical framework, motherhood is often represented as a powerful cultural position through which women negotiate authority, nurture social continuity, and interpret crises within their communities. One theoretical approach that foregrounds women's creative expression and experiential knowledge is gynocritics, developed by Elaine Showalter. Gynocritics focuses on women as producers of literary meaning rather than just as objects of male representation. It examines women's writing through the lenses of female subjectivity, bodily experience, and cultural context, emphasizing how women authors articulate their own realities, anxieties, and aspirations (Showalter, 1979). Through this framework, literary texts become spaces where female consciousness and identity are explored and validated. Gynocritical readings therefore provide a critical lens for examining how maternal experiences such as intuition, emotional labour, and protective foresight function as forms of knowledge that challenge dominant patriarchal rationalities. Within contemporary literary discourse, scholars have increasingly drawn attention to the relationship between maternal consciousness and the representation of crisis, loss, and tragedy. Maternal intuition is often depicted as a form of visionary perception that enables mothers to sense emotional tensions, anticipate danger, and respond to complex moral situations. In this sense, tragedy becomes not only a narrative representation of suffering but also a framework through which literature explores the emotional, psychological, and ethical burdens associated with maternal responsibility. Such portrayals highlight the ways in which maternal awareness operates as both a source of insight and a site of emotional vulnerability within narratives that examine family conflict, social instability, and moral crisis (Rani, 2024). This study examines maternal vision and tragedy through a gynocritical perspective, with particular attention to how maternal intuition functions as a form of knowledge, emotional perception, and ethical awareness within literary representation. The study explores how maternal consciousness is constructed as a visionary mode of understanding that enables mothers to interpret emotional realities, anticipate crises, and respond to tragic circumstances. By situating maternal vision within the framework of gynocritical theory, the study seeks to contribute to ongoing discussions on women's experiential knowledge, female subjectivity, and the representation of motherhood in contemporary African literature.

Literature Review

Maternal Vision and Intuition

Maternal vision and intuition are increasingly recognized as complex and multidimensional capacities that emerge through relational, experiential, and culturally mediated processes. Rather than being viewed as purely instinctive or sentimental, maternal perception is understood across disciplines as a form of embodied and experiential knowledge developed through caregiving, reflection, and social engagement. In this sense, maternal

intuition reflects a mode of perceptive understanding that enables mothers to interpret emotional and social realities within family life. Bradley and Torris (2025) describe intuition as a deeply relational and embodied mode of knowing, emphasizing the role of emotional awareness and interconnectedness in shaping intuitive perception.

Koester et al (2010) demonstrates that maternal intuitive awareness emerges progressively during the first year of mothering as mothers learn to interpret subtle behavioural cues from their infants. This research challenges the assumption that maternal perception is simply innate, showing instead that intuitive awareness develops gradually through continuous relational engagement and experiential learning. Through repeated interactions with their children, mothers acquire increasing sensitivity to emotional and physical signals, enabling them to anticipate needs and respond appropriately. Subsequent scholarship further emphasizes the relational and emotional dynamics that inform maternal intuition.

Hilton and Egan (2019) argue that maternal caregiving responses are strongly influenced by mothers' attachment histories and their ongoing emotional engagement with their children. From this perspective, maternal intuition is not an inexplicable sixth sense but rather the outcome of accumulated relational experience and emotional attunement.

Similarly, Palkovitz and Copes (2017) situate maternal intuitive competence within family systems theory, demonstrating that what is often described as maternal intuition is socially learned and enacted within broader familial and cultural environments. These perspectives collectively highlight that maternal vision develops through both interpersonal relationships and socially structured caregiving practices. Feminist and African feminist scholarship expands this discussion by positioning maternal intuition as a legitimate epistemological resource grounded in women's lived experiences.

Busia (2018) argues that African women's narratives function as repositories of experiential knowledge, illustrating how mothers' everyday experiences encode cultural wisdom and social insight. Lavelle (2020) further introduces a temporal dimension to maternal consciousness, suggesting that maternal perception involves reflexive interpretation in which mothers draw on past experiences while anticipating future possibilities. In this sense, maternal intuition becomes a dynamic interpretive practice that connects memory, present awareness, and anticipatory foresight.

In a similar vein, Hsiao, Lu, and Lin (2024) conceptualize motherhood as a 'maternal forge,' emphasizing how maternal experiences cultivate emotional intelligence, relational awareness, and heightened sensitivity to interpersonal dynamics. The cultural and performative dimensions of maternal perception further complicate this understanding.

Kaundal and Itoo (2024) conceptualize motherhood as a performative identity shaped through repeated acts of caregiving and culturally embedded expectations. Their analysis suggests that maternal vision is not simply a natural ability but a form of perception developed through sustained engagement with socially constructed maternal roles. Complementing this perspective, Roberts (2017) introduces the notion of the "inner eye" within African aesthetic traditions, describing a mode of perception that transcends ordinary sight in order to apprehend deeper emotional, moral, and cultural truths. When considered in relation to maternal consciousness, this concept provides a compelling framework for understanding maternal intuition as a visionary form of perception capable of interpreting realities that may remain hidden to others

On the whole, these interdisciplinary perspectives reveal that maternal vision and intuition emerge at the intersection of experiential knowledge, relational engagement, social expectations, and interpretive awareness. Psychological and sociological research (Mercer, 1985; Hilton & Egan, 2019; Palkovitz & Copes, 2017) highlights the developmental and relational foundations of maternal intuition, while feminist and African feminist scholarship (Busia, 2018; Lavelle, 2020; Hsiao et al., 2024; Kaundal & Itoo, 2024) frames maternal perception as a culturally mediated and epistemologically significant practice. Roberts' (2017) philosophical perspective further deepens this discussion by conceptualizing perception as a form of visionary awareness that transcends ordinary sight. Collectively, these insights position maternal vision and intuition as credible and contextually grounded forms of knowledge that enable mothers to interpret emotional realities, anticipate emerging challenges, and navigate complex relational landscapes within family and society.

Motherhood as a Site of Foresight, Perception, and Feminist Agency

Carbon (2026) posits mothers as active interpreters of emotional and social realities, exercising foresight and ethical engagement in family and social spaces. Naseb (2024) demonstrates that maternal figures in *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) anticipate crises and provide stability, showing how foresight is embedded in ethical and relational awareness.

Williamson et al. (2023) reveal that mothers navigate social pressures and relational dynamics through interpretive engagement, translating perceived cues into practical and moral decisions. Takševa (2018) frames maternal subjectivity as a site of knowledge production, where ethical reasoning and social responsibility intersect, highlighting the feminist dimensions of maternal agency.

Complementing these insights, Magoqwana and Maseko (2023) emphasize the cultural and intergenerational transmission of maternal knowledge, showing that maternal foresight extends beyond immediate family to community guidance.

Finally, these studies illustrate that motherhood is a profound locus of perceptive insight, anticipatory action, and socially grounded agency, combining foresight, ethical judgment, and feminist authority in domestic and communal contexts.

Tragedy, Crisis, and the Anticipation of Loss

Tragedy and crisis illuminate how individuals confront suffering, uncertainty, and loss, and maternal figures are often uniquely positioned to perceive and mediate these experiences (Poole, 2005). Naseb (2024) highlights that maternal awareness enables anticipation of misfortune, allowing mothers to interpret potential dangers and guide their families before crises fully manifest. This anticipatory perception reflects both emotional attunement and ethical engagement, positioning mothers as active participants in navigating misfortune. The emotional and psychological responses to tragedy are complex and multifaceted.

Walsh (2023) observes that individuals may experience anticipatory grief, heightened emotional distress, and identity disruption even before the occurrence of loss. For maternal figures, these responses are compounded by relational concerns, as mothers manage their own emotional experience while monitoring and supporting the emotional states of family members. In this sense, maternal perception functions as a dynamic and relationally informed process. Tragedy also demands moral decision-making. Maternal insight guides these decisions, integrating foresight, empathy, and relational awareness to navigate moments of uncertainty and protect family integrity.

Finally, the family and social consequences of loss extend beyond immediate emotional responses. Figley and McCubbin (2016) emphasize that catastrophic events disrupt family systems, altering communication patterns, emotional bonds, and established roles. Maternal perception mediates these consequences, as mothers interpret emotional cues, coordinate coping strategies, and help maintain family cohesion. Through such engagement, maternal insight connects the personal, ethical, and social dimensions of tragedy, demonstrating its central role in shaping responses to suffering. These studies illustrate that maternal vision operates at the intersection of anticipatory awareness, emotional responsiveness, ethical judgment, and relational authority. The study shows how maternal perception transforms tragedy from a purely disruptive event into a context for relational understanding and moral guidance.

Emotional Intelligence, Moral Leadership, and Cultural Knowledge

Maternal perception extends beyond caregiving to encompass emotional intelligence and moral leadership, shaping relational, ethical, and cultural decision-making within families and communities (Başgöl, Koç & Çankaya, 2025). Emotional intelligence theory highlights that the ability to recognise and regulate emotions is central to effective social and moral engagement, enhancing empathy, conflict resolution, and ethical judgement (Nyamori, 2024).

In the context of identity transformation, Jones (2024) demonstrates that mothers apply emotional intelligence to balance caregiving responsibilities, personal identity, and ethical decision-making, illustrating how maternal insight functions as moral guidance. Williamson et al. (2023) further show that mothers interpret social pressures and partner relationships through emotionally attuned frameworks, revealing that maternal subjectivity is enacted through relational decision-making rather than passive caregiving.

Takševa (2018) contends that motherhood is a site of active knowledge production, where ethical reflection and cultural engagement intersect, reinforcing maternal insight as a form of lived epistemology. Magoqwana and Maseko (2023) emphasise the cultural dimension of maternal wisdom, illustrating how mothers transmit communal knowledge, values, and social norms across generations, thereby functioning as custodians of cultural continuity and social authority.

Collectively, these studies position mothers as emotional and moral guides, whose culturally grounded insight contributes to family cohesion, ethical decision-making, and the intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge, linking maternal vision directly with emotional intelligence, ethical judgement, and communal leadership.

Theoretical Framework

Gynocritical Feminist Theory

A theoretical framework provides the conceptual foundation through which a research problem is interpreted and analysed. In literary studies, theory offers tools for interpreting how narratives reflect, resist, or reframe social norms and cultural values. Feminist theory, in particular, foregrounds gendered experiences and exposes the ways in which literature reflects or challenges power relations embedded within patriarchal societies. Gynocritical feminist theory is a strand of feminist criticism that centres women's perspectives, emotional consciousness, and epistemic agency, recognizing women's lived experiences as legitimate forms of knowledge in literary and cultural analysis (Showalter, 1979). Gynocritical feminist theory emerged as a critical gesture within feminist criticism aiming to shift scholarly focus from analysing women through male lenses to studying women's voices, subjectivities, and literary productions on their own terms.

In her foundational work, Elaine Showalter proposed gynocriticism as a methodology for highlighting women's narratives, emotional awareness, and experiential creativity as epistemically valuable (Showalter, 1979).

Contemporary gynocritical scholars expand this approach by demonstrating how women's individual and collective experiences generate interpretive frameworks that reveal cultural and psychological depth often marginalised in male-dominated criticism. For example, Al-Dory et al. (2019) illustrate how gynocritical reading allows critique of women's ontological experiences being and becoming in selected narratives, emphasizing the ways women's narratives articulate personal and social transformation (Al-Doory et al., 2019).

One core tenet of gynocritical feminist theory is its emphasis on women's subjectivity and lived experience as epistemic resources. Feminist critics argue that knowledge rooted in women's bodily experience, emotional labour, and relational roles should not be dismissed as purely sentimental but understood as ways of knowing shaped by social, cultural, and historical structures. This principle acknowledges that women's interpretive frameworks emerge through embodied experience and social engagement, not merely abstract reasoning. Support for this tenet is evident in critical works such as Maemunah and Rahmawati (2025), who use gynocritical analysis to explore the representation of women in popular cultural forms, demonstrating how female subjectivities articulated through song titles and lyrics render visible distinct emotional and cultural meanings in ways conventional criticism might overlook (Maemunah and Rahmawati, 2025).

A related principle emphasises emotional perception and relational awareness as meaningful interpretive capacities. Gynocriticism recognises that women's emotional consciousness formed through social interaction, caregiving, and everyday relational life can offer deeper insight into social tensions, moral dilemmas, and psychological complexity. Feminist analysis has shown that women's modes of perception are not irrational but instead informative and transformative in understanding human experience.

Situmorang and Satria (2025) demonstrate this by applying gynocritical reading to *The Bridges of Madison County*, showing how female narrative voice and emotional engagement shape interpretive meaning and critiqued gender norms within the text (Situmorang & Satria, 2025). Their work confirms that gynocritical approaches value emotional and experiential knowledge as powerful analytical tools in literary interpretation. Another tenet of gynocritical feminist theory is the attention to cultural and social context in shaping women's knowledge systems. Feminist critics have long argued that women's experiences are socially situated and that cultural norms, historical conditions, and communal structures influence how women interpret and respond to their worlds. Gynocritical readings foreground how cultural narratives about women's roles such as caregiving,

relational responsibility, and moral leadership are both produced by and produce cultural meanings. By analysing texts through this lens, scholars reveal how women's experiences are embedded in broader social contexts and how these contexts influence forms of knowing and valuation. (Mohammadi,2015)

In sum, these principles provide a robust framework for analysing maternal perception, emotional intelligence, moral agency, and cultural knowledge in literary texts. In relation to Maternal Vision and Tragedy in *Blue Ixora: A Gynocritical Reading*, this theoretical approach allows the study to interpret maternal vision as an epistemically valid form of insight grounded in lived experience, emotional awareness, and cultural situatedness. Gynocritical feminism enables the analysis of maternal intuition not as marginal sentiment but as meaningful interpretive consciousness that shapes responses to tragedy and crisis. Through this lens, maternal perspective becomes a site of embodied knowledge, moral engagement, and cultural continuity, providing critical access to women's experiences within literature and beyond.

Discussion

Synopsis of the novel

Maame Manu dreams of a beautiful garden filled with blue Ixora, but the scene suddenly turns into a disturbing flood of blue blood, symbolizing an unknown tragedy. She wakes with fear and a deep sense that something is wrong with her only son, Yoofi, who is preparing to travel back to school. Despite his reassurance and their affectionate farewell, her anxiety intensifies after his departure. She experiences strange physical and emotional disturbances and repeatedly tries to contact him, but receives no response. Unknown to her, Yoofi is beaten to death at a border post after refusing to comply with corrupt demands from officials. His body is taken to a hospital, where his death is confirmed, while authorities attempt to conceal the truth. Maame Manu's visions and nightmares grow stronger, foreshadowing the reality of her son's fate. She is eventually called to the hospital, where she finds Yoofi's lifeless body. Though overwhelmed with grief, she endures the pain in silence and takes him home, reflecting on the haunting image of the blue Ixora that symbolizes loss and tragedy.

Maternal Vision as Intuitive Knowledge

In *Blue Ixora*, maternal vision is not presented as mere instinct or emotional excess; rather, it is constructed as a valid and reliable form of knowledge. The narrative consistently demonstrates that Maame Manu knows before she is told, and this knowing emerges through symbolic, emotional, and bodily channels that challenge conventional definitions of rational knowledge. The dream in which 'the petals had all turned into a blue pool... They were bleeding blue' (p. 2) is not simply decorative imagery but functions as a coded form of knowledge. The shift from beauty to violence signals an intuitive apprehension of danger. At this point in the narrative, there is no factual evidence of harm, yet the dream already encodes the reality of Yoofi's fate. This suggests that maternal vision operates ahead of empirical confirmation, positioning it as a predictive and interpretive system of knowing. This knowledge is further reinforced through Maame Manu's physical and emotional responses. When 'her knees felt weak' and she is overwhelmed by unexplained fear (p. 9), the text locates knowledge within the body. The absence of visible cause does not invalidate her perception; rather, it highlights the limitations of external, rational frameworks that fail to recognize embodied knowledge. Her body registers truth before the mind can articulate it, indicating that maternal intuition is both affective and cognitive.

Importantly, Maame Manu herself asserts the authority of this knowledge when she insists, 'I feel heaviness in my heart' (p. 32). This is not uncertainty but conviction. Her refusal to accept alternative explanations demonstrates that maternal intuition carries epistemic weight which is something to be trusted, not dismissed. The narrative validates this position by ultimately confirming her fears, thereby aligning intuitive knowledge with factual truth. The culmination of this epistemological framework appears in her vision of Yoofi 'covered in blood... blue Ixora... they separated me from my son' (p. 42). Maternal vision becomes fully revelatory. What was previously symbolic and bodily is now rendered into a clear image of reality. The separation enacted by the Ixora mirrors the irreversible loss she is yet to confront physically, reinforcing the idea that maternal knowledge precedes and interprets lived experience. Thus, the text firmly establishes maternal vision as a legitimate form of knowledge, which is intuitive, embodied, and symbolically mediated, yet ultimately accurate.

In doing so, *Blue Ixora* challenges dominant, patriarchal notions of knowledge that privilege logic and empirical evidence, instead foregrounding maternal intuition as a powerful and reliable way of knowing.

Emotional Perception and Psychological Depth

Maternal intuition, in *Blue Ixora* is constructed not just as instinct but as a deeply emotional and psychological capacity through which the mother perceives, processes, and anticipates crisis. The narrative reveals that Madame Manu's awareness is rooted in an intense interior sensitivity that allows her to sense danger even in the absence of visible evidence.

To begin, her emotional perception is internalized and expressed through bodily experience. The moment when 'a sharp hollow scream... [is] coming from... deep down within her body' (p. 10) illustrates how distress originates from within rather than from external stimuli. This suggests that maternal intuition operates at a psychological depth where emotions are not simply felt but embodied. The scream, emerging from her inner being, reflects a subconscious recognition of impending tragedy, thereby positioning emotional perception as an early warning system. Furthermore, this psychological depth is intensified through the profound connection between mother and child. When 'her screams made her whole body vibrate... she could hear his voice screaming for help' (p. 11), the narrative establishes a metaphysical link that transcends physical distance. In this moment, maternal intuition becomes a channel of shared suffering, where the mother psychologically participates in her son's experience. This reinforces the idea that maternal perception is relational, grounded in an emotional bond that enables her to access realities beyond her immediate environment.

In addition, the text employs powerful symbolism to depict emotional breakdown and psychological overload. The image that 'she could no longer feel her heart beating... her heart was oozing blue blood and petals' (pp. 22–23) represents a collapse of emotional stability. This shows that, the heart traditionally associated with life and feeling is transformed into a site of fragmentation and excess. The fusion of 'blood' and 'petals' merges pain with earlier symbolic imagery, suggesting that her psychological state is overwhelmed by a grief she cannot yet fully comprehend. This moment highlights the burden that accompanies maternal insight, as knowing is intertwined with suffering.

Moreover, Maame Manu repeated attempts to reach Yoofi depicts emotional distress. 'Maame Manu tried to call over and over again... on the verge of breaking down into tears' (p. 32) demonstrate how emotional perception manifests as persistent anxiety and tension. Despite the reassurances of others, she remains psychologically unsettled, unable to dismiss the intuitive signals she experiences. This persistence emphasizes her resilience; although she is emotionally strained, she continues to seek connection and confirmation, navigating the uncertainty with determination.

Therefore, through these portrayals, internalised distress, relational connection, symbolic breakdown, and emotional persistence in the novel presents maternal intuition as a complex psychological capacity. It highlights not only the depth of emotional perception but also the burden and resilience that accompany it, ultimately affirming that a mother's emotional awareness is both meaningful and profoundly insightful.

Tragedy and Moral Responsibility

Tragedy in the narrative is not treated as an event but as a force that reshapes moral awareness, particularly within the maternal figure. The progression from uncertainty to confirmation marks a turning point where emotional intuition gives way to irreversible reality. This is evident in the clinical declaration, 'He will not be... Time of death, 1:00 am' (pp. 19–20). The cold, detached tone of this statement contrasts sharply with the depth of loss it signifies, emphasizing how institutional language often strips tragedy of its human weight. For the mother, however, this moment transforms intuition into undeniable truth, forcing a confrontation with loss. Moreover, the narrative expands tragedy beyond personal grief into the realm of moral accountability. The assertion, 'we cannot just make this go away! The boy is dead!' (p. 37), introduces a strong ethical dimension, highlighting the tension between truth and concealment and tragedy demands responsibility which cannot be silenced or dismissed without moral consequence. This moment shows a broader critique of systems that attempt to obscure wrongdoing, suggesting that tragedy exposes not only loss but also ethical failure. This sense of injustice becomes even more pronounced in the recognition that they had killed him, but there was nobody to answer her questions' (p. 70). The absence of accountability intensifies the mother's experience, transforming her grief into a silent confrontation with systemic neglect. Her response is not one of outward protest but of inward endurance, still this restraint does not diminish the ethical weight of the situation. Instead, it reinforces her role as a moral center, one who recognizes injustice even when it remains unresolved.

Furthermore, the warning, “Pray that you never meet a Jean and end up unaccounted for...” (p. 73), extends the tragedy into a broader social critique. It situates the boy’s death within a larger context of corruption and unchecked authority, where individuals can be erased without consequence. This statement shifts the focus from individual loss to collective vulnerability, suggesting that such tragedies are not isolated but systemic.

Conclusively, tragedy operates on multiple levels: as personal loss, as moral crisis, and as social indictment. It shapes maternal consciousness by deepening awareness, sharpening ethical perception, and reinforcing the mother’s role as a silent yet powerful witness to injustice.

Maternal Subjectivity and Female Agency

Maternal subjectivity in the narrative is constructed as a position of authority grounded in lived experience, emotional depth, and decisive action. Instead of being portrayed as passive or overwhelmed by circumstance, the mother emerges as a figure whose voice, choices, and perceptions actively shape the meaning of events. Her interiority is not silenced; instead, it becomes the foundation of her authority.

To begin, her assertion, ‘I want to speak with my son’ (p. 30), signals more than concern it reflects a claim to relational authority and knowledge. This insistence resists any attempt to downplay her fears or dismiss her concerns as irrational. In this moment, maternal subjectivity challenges external voices that seek to normalize the situation, affirming that her perspective carries weight and legitimacy.

Furthermore, her agency is reinforced through action. The moment when ‘Maame Manu quickly grabbed the phone...’ (p. 48) demonstrates urgency and control. She does not wait passively for information but actively pursues it, indicating that maternal knowledge is not only intuitive but also investigative. This movement from perception to action underscores her role as an agent of truth, unwilling to remain in uncertainty.

In addition, her authority becomes most evident in the aftermath of tragedy. Her declaration, in effect, that she is ‘only paying... a last visit’ and that “my son is ready to go home now’ (p. 70) reflects a decisive reclaiming of control in a situation dominated by institutional power. Instead of submitting to the impersonal procedures surrounding death, she reasserts her maternal role by determining what happens next. This act transforms her from a figure of loss into one of moral leadership.

Moreover, her insistence that ‘she made them put him in his clothes... without allowing them to tear up the clothes’ (p. 70) highlights a deliberate preservation of dignity. In this instance, agency is expressed through care, precision, and resistance to dehumanization. She refuses to allow her son’s body to be treated as an object, reinforcing her authority over his identity even in death. This quiet but firm control challenges institutional practices that often disregard emotional and cultural significance.

In conclusion, maternal subjectivity is not only acknowledged but empowered. Through assertion, action, and moral clarity, the mother resists passive roles and patriarchal assumptions that undermine women’s voices. Instead, she stands as an agent of knowledge and ethical authority, demonstrating that maternal experience is both intellectually and morally significant.

Cultural and Spiritual Embeddedness

The narrative situates maternal perception firmly within a culturally and spiritually informed framework, revealing how intuition, dreams, and symbolic imagination operate as forms of knowledge deeply rooted in African communal values. The mother’s visions and responses are not isolated psychological phenomena; they are shaped by culturally mediated understandings of life, death, and ethical responsibility.

From the very beginning, the dream of ‘blue Ixora... millions... dancing... then turning into blood’ (pp. 1–2) establishes a spiritual-symbolic mode of perception. It shows that, the imagery of the blue flowers serves multiple cultural and spiritual functions: it signals impending misfortune, evokes a sense of communal mourning, and reflects the symbolic language through which tragedy is apprehended. The transformation of the flowers from beauty to blood shows how maternal vision synthesizes sensory, emotional, and symbolic knowledge to anticipate crisis, blending intuition with culturally embedded motifs. This intertwining of spiritual and cultural frameworks is further illustrated when Maame Manu exclaims, ‘Tufiakwa! We cancel it in Jesus name!’ (p. 42). The invocation of spiritual protection demonstrates how maternal foresight is interpreted and acted upon through the lens of faith. In this moment, religious practice and cultural belief converge, reinforcing the legitimacy of her intuition and signaling the mother’s reliance on communal and spiritual resources to

navigate uncertainty. Maternal knowledge, therefore, is inseparable from the cultural and spiritual frameworks that shape interpretation, moral reasoning, and emotional resilience. The occurrence of blue *Ixora* imagery throughout the text; flowers, blood, and petals also serve as a culturally coded symbol for death, grief, and moral consequence. These repeated motifs do more than evoke aesthetic resonance; they embed maternal perception within a shared cultural lexicon of loss and suffering. By linking intuitive insight to culturally recognizable symbols, the narrative highlights the collective dimensions of maternal knowledge, showing that foresight and ethical engagement are socially and spiritually informed.

Finally, the expression of grief through traditional and culturally intimate acts, such as when she ‘slowly began to hum his favorite lullaby’ (p. 70), exemplifies how maternal mourning integrates cultural practice and spiritual sensibility. The lullaby functions as both a personal act of consolation and a culturally grounded ritual of care, bridging the mother’s inner emotional life with her communal identity and ethical responsibility. This act affirms that maternal perception is embedded in lived, culturally mediated experiences, where intuition, spirituality, and ethical engagement intersect. In this way, maternal vision is revealed as a culturally and spiritually situated form of knowledge: one that interprets signs, navigates potential crises, and expresses grief in ways that resonate with both personal and communal values. The mother’s insight is not merely instinctive; it is informed by tradition, faith, and the symbolic codes that structure understanding within her cultural world.

Representation of Motherhood in Contemporary African Literature

In contemporary African literature, maternal figures are often depicted as complex, ethically aware, and emotionally resilient, and this is clearly reflected in the narrative of *Blue Ixora*. The novel presents motherhood not merely as a biological or domestic role, but as a deeply reflective, morally and emotionally engaged experience, situating maternal vision within the broader framework of African women’s writing. The novel foregrounds the intimate bond between mother and child, highlighting both attachment and care. For instance, when Maame Manu says, ‘Oh my son, I always hate it when you have to go’ (pp. 7–8), the narrative captures the tenderness and emotional investment inherent in maternal love. Similarly, her insistence, ‘Don’t forget to call me...’ (pp. 8–9), illustrates her protective vigilance and the ethical responsibility she feels for her child’s wellbeing even at a distance. These moments reveal the mother as a figure whose moral and emotional attention shapes her engagement with the world, reflecting the literary portrayal of mothers as ethically and emotionally attentive agents.

The novel also emphasizes the sensory and emotional depth of motherhood. The mother’s reflections on missing ‘his hugs... his scent’ (p. 63) emphasizes the continuity of maternal care across physical absence, demonstrating an enduring emotional connection that sustains ethical and protective consciousness. This focus on sensory memory and emotional resonance conveys the resilience and insight that African literature often attributes to maternal figures, framing them as psychologically and morally astute. The narrative further illustrates maternal endurance and ethical strength in the face of tragedy. When Maame Manu observes her son’s lifeless body and ‘smiled at Yoofi’s lifeless body... planted a kiss on his forehead’ (p. 70), her action embodies the integration of grief with moral and emotional responsibility. The mother’s capacity to maintain dignity, ritual, and care despite profound loss signals a portrayal of motherhood that is both resilient and ethically grounded a hallmark of contemporary African literary depictions.

Finally, reflective consciousness and symbolic interpretation are integral to this representation. Maame Manu’s remark, ‘I am thinking about the garden of blue *Ixora*...’ (p. 74), illustrates her reflective engagement with symbolic meaning and grief, situating maternal perception within a culturally and emotionally layered framework. Maternal vision encompasses not only ethical and emotional awareness but also cultural and symbolic insight, connecting personal experience to broader communal and literary discourses. Through these dimensions, *Blue Ixora* portrays mothers as resilient, insightful, and morally attuned figures, contributing to feminist and gynocritical discussions in contemporary African literature. Maternal experience is elevated to a site of ethical, emotional, and cultural knowledge, demonstrating the literary valorization of women’s interiority and agency.

Reflections of Gynocritical Theory in *Blue Ixora* (2018)

Gynocritical theory, as formulated by Elaine Showalter, emphasizes the exploration of women’s subjectivity,

the validation of female experience as knowledge, and the cultural and ethical contexts in which women's lives are situated. *Blue Ixora* exemplifies these principles through its portrayal of Maame Manu, a mother whose consciousness, intuition, and moral reasoning drive the narrative's emotional and ethical landscape.

Firstly, one of the principles of gynocritical theory is foregrounding female subjectivity. In the novel, Maame Manu's inner perceptions is seen as the primary lens through which events are understood. This is evident in her experience of the transformed bathroom: 'the room was gone... in its place was a dark, big hole' (p. 10). The collapse of physical space into darkness is less about literal reality and more about her subjective processing of fear and impending loss. The narrative privileges her consciousness, allowing readers to inhabit her psychological and emotional space. This aligns with gynocritical theory's focus on female interiority as a site of meaning-making, where women are not passive observers but active interpreters of their worlds.

Secondly, another principle is the validation of maternal experience as knowledge. Maternal intuition is portrayed as a legitimate epistemological tool in *Blue Ixora*. Maame Manu's ability to sense that something is amiss with her son is grounded in her detailed knowledge of his routines and emotional patterns: 'she recalls Yoofi's habits, his consistency in calling, and his emotional patterns' (pp. 32–33). Her insight is relational and experiential, rather than empirical, reflecting the epistemic value of women's lived experience as a core concern of gynocritics. The novel affirms that maternal perception, when attentive and cultivated, is capable of accurate and consequential knowledge, positioning her understanding above dismissive or patriarchal authority.

Also, exploring emotional and ethical awareness is another principle. The emotional depth of Maame Manu is not simply for dramatic effect; it serves as a guide for ethical action. Her declaration, 'I need to speak with my son!' (p. 23), comes amidst psychological distress but demonstrates moral urgency and responsibility. Gynocriticism emphasizes that women's interiority and emotional reasoning are central to understanding ethical choices. In the novel, emotions operate as epistemic and ethical tools allowing Maame Manu to navigate crises, interpret danger, and respond decisively. Emotional perception is thereby reframed as a form of ethical literacy rather than vulnerability.

Again, challenging patriarchal narratives is another principle. The narrative actively subverts traditional patriarchal hierarchies by situating maternal intuition above institutional authority. While officials, border agents, and other figures obscure or delay truth, Maame Manu's insight remains unshakable. Her refusal to accept rationalized dismissals, such as the claim that Yoofi is merely asleep (p. 32), positions her maternal vision as morally and epistemically superior. Through this, the text challenges dominant societal structures that often marginalize women's voices, emphasizing that maternal perception and ethical authority can resist and correct institutional failures.

Finally, cultural and spiritual contexts of female experience is another principle of gynocriticism. Maame Manu's experiences are deeply intertwined with African cultural and spiritual frameworks, illustrating the gynocritical concern with socially situated female knowledge. Memories of Yoofi buying her a mug with his first earnings (p. 21) evoke cultural practices of reciprocity and familial duty, amplifying her current anxiety with moral and emotional resonance. Similarly, communal support from neighbors and figures like Auntie Araba situates motherhood within a collective, culturally embedded framework. Spiritual responses such as invoking protection in the face of symbolic visions reinforce the idea that maternal intuition is both personal and socially grounded. Maternal knowledge is thus inseparable from cultural and spiritual reality, demonstrating how women's subjectivity is shaped and validated by their context. Through Maame Manu, *Blue Ixora* embodies the core tenets of gynocritical theory: it foregrounds female subjectivity, validates maternal experience as epistemic, explores emotional and ethical reasoning, challenges patriarchal norms, and situates maternal perception within cultural and spiritual frameworks. The text not only portrays a mother navigating personal tragedy but also exemplifies how women's lived experiences can drive narrative meaning, offering insight into resilience, morality, and culturally grounded knowledge.

Conclusion

So far, Faith Ben-Daniels' *Blue Ixora* redefines motherhood as a dynamic site of knowledge, ethical insight, and emotional perception, moving beyond passive or sentimental portrayals. Through a gynocritical lens, the study centers maternal subjectivity, validating women's lived experiences and interior consciousness as essential to understanding family, community, and tragedy. Maternal vision emerges as a distinct form of knowledge,

enabling mothers to anticipate crises, interpret emotional realities, and exercise moral leadership across domestic and social spheres. This study shows that maternal intuition in African women's writing is more than instinct, it is a tool of resistance, agency, and cultural wisdom that challenges patriarchal rationalism and reshapes literary conceptions of motherhood. By reclaiming the mother's voice, *Blue Ixora* illuminates the psychological and ethical complexities of maternal experience, while expanding contemporary feminist and gynocritical discussions of female agency, resilience, and moral authority. The novel highlights the transformative power of maternal vision, showing how mothers navigate tragedy, ethical dilemmas, and social responsibility, and inviting readers to appreciate the mother as a visionary, morally grounded, and culturally anchored figure.

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