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Invisible Oppression and Female Resilience in Faith Ben-Daniels' *Mimosa: An Africana Womanist Reading*

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ABSTRACT

Faith Ben-Daniels' *Mimosa* offers a useful literary space for examining how oppression can remain socially obscured even when suffering is publicly visible. Taking the collapse of Mimosa Mart as its central point of departure, this article explores the institutional, domestic, and interpersonal pressures that deepen the crisis for victims and their families. Particular attention is paid to corporate negligence, failures of record keeping, bureaucratic delay, gendered expectations, and the emotional burden placed on women who are expected to hold families and communities together in moments of distress. Through close textual analysis, the discussion focuses on Yaa Saah, Naa Lamley, Akua Darko, Rosalind Grey, and the male and institutional figures with whom they interact. Read through *Africana Womanism*, the novel presents female resilience as a relational practice expressed through spiritual endurance, adaptability, sisterhood, intergenerational counsel, professional integrity, public testimony, and constructive collaboration. The article nevertheless treats resilience with caution. Endurance acquires ethical and political force when it protects dignity, restores visibility to those who have been ignored, and presses institutions towards accountability; it becomes problematic when it merely absorbs the consequences of injustice. By placing *Africana Womanism* in conversation with structural and symbolic accounts of oppression, the study contributes to discussions of gender, grief, institutional power, and communal agency in contemporary Ghanaian fiction.

KEYWORDS: *Africana Womanism*, female resilience, invisible oppression, *Mimosa*, African women's

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1. Introduction

African women's writing has repeatedly returned to the entanglement of gender, culture, family, power, and social justice. Writers such as Buchi Emecheta, Mariama Ba, Ama Ata Aidoo, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie show that women's subordination is rarely confined to spectacular or easily identifiable acts of violence. It may also be sustained through familiar social expectations: unequal care work, economic dependence, demands for respectability, institutional silence, and the assumption that women will preserve family stability even under unjust conditions. Critical work on African women's writing has consequently become increasingly attentive to the particular social worlds in which women negotiate constraint, rather than treating victimhood and resistance as fixed or mutually exclusive positions.

Faith Ben-Daniels' *Mimosa* (2015) brings these concerns into sharp focus through the collapse of *Mimosa Mart* in Accra. Kwabena 'Kobby' Nti reports for work on the day of the disaster, and his wife, Yaa Saah, arrives at the premises with items he has left at home. Her attempt to have him recognised among those trapped soon develops into a prolonged struggle over testimony, records, rescue, and institutional responsibility. The rubble is only one part of the crisis. Questions of emergency response, corporate accountability, compensation, public image, and the recording of victims determine how families experience the disaster after the building has fallen. For Yaa Saah, the public emergency is inseparable from economic pressure, marital guilt, spiritual consciousness, and the demands of kinship and community.

In this article, invisible oppression refers to forms of domination whose effects are real even when responsibility is dispersed or concealed by ordinary procedures. A person's testimony may be doubted; victims may be reduced to figures on a list; intimate relationships may carry pressures created by economic hardship; and women may be expected to bear grief while continuing to care for others. The collapse of the mart is unmistakably visible, yet the treatment of those affected reveals another layer of violence: the quieter processes through which some lives are recognised, some stories are believed, and some forms of suffering are allowed to count publicly.

Ben-Daniels also gives her female characters different capacities for action within this difficult social landscape. Yaa Saah refuses to let Kobby disappear from the official account of the disaster. Naa Lamley offers counsel, prayer, and emotional steadiness, while Akua Darko draws on her professional position as a journalist to resist the suppression of damaging information. These forms of agency resonate with key principles in Clenora Hudson-Weems' *Africana Womanism*, including strength, adaptability, spirituality, genuine sisterhood, respect for elders, family-centredness, ambition, and cooperation with men. The framework is especially productive here because it allows agency to be read within relationships and communal obligations, rather than measuring liberation only by separation from men, family, or cultural institutions.

The discussion is organised around two connected concerns: the ways *Mimosa* renders oppression within domestic, corporate, and public life, and the ways its women respond to suffering without being reduced to passive victims. The central argument is that oppression in the novel works through a network of pressures—economic precarity, institutional delay, corporate self-protection, public disbelief, and gendered expectations—whose force often lies in their normalisation. Female resilience emerges from equally varied practices, including persistence, spiritual interpretation, sisterhood, professional responsibility, negotiation, and collective action. Such resilience, however, cannot be allowed to excuse the structures that make extraordinary endurance necessary. Its critical value lies in the capacity to name injury, preserve dignity, and turn private suffering into a demand for public accountability.

2. Literature review

2.1 African Women's Writing: From Victimhood to Situated Agency

Criticism of African women's writing has gradually complicated earlier representations of women as primarily passive victims of patriarchal culture. The exposure of forced marriage, domestic subordination, sexual violence, economic dependence, and exclusion from public authority remains indispensable to feminist literary study. At the same time, readings centred exclusively on victimhood can obscure the historical, cultural, racial, and class conditions that shape women's lives differently across African societies. Ogunyemi's (1985) articulation of womanism was important in this regard because it placed gender alongside race, family, and communal survival. Ogundice-Leslie (1994) likewise insists on an analysis broad enough to include colonial history, economic inequality, political structures, and patriarchal custom. Together, these interventions encourage readings of women's oppression as socially layered rather than produced by a single source.

Kolawole's (1997) account of African womanism and Nnaemeka's (2004) formulation of nego-feminism

deepen this contextual approach. Kolawole foregrounds the cultural and communal grounds on which African women's identities are formed, while Nnaemeka draws attention to negotiation as a recurrent mode of feminist practice. Within this understanding, negotiation may involve compromise, coalition, persuasion, strategic silence, care, or the selective use of cultural values. None of these necessarily signals surrender; their significance depends on the conditions under which they are used and the ends they serve. Nkealah's (2016) warning against treating African feminisms as a single, homogeneous tradition is therefore particularly relevant. Place, history, language, class, kinship, and spirituality all affect how women's agency is imagined and exercised.

This body of scholarship has important consequences for literary interpretation because it widens the field in which agency can be recognised. Rebellion and individual autonomy are significant, but they are not the only forms through which a female character may act. Care, testimony, moral authority, professional competence, and the protection of others may also carry political weight. The difficulty is that these practices are rarely unambiguous. Care may sustain another person while becoming exhausting or compulsory; silence may be tactical in one situation and evidence of exclusion in another; endurance may protect a family yet leave an unjust institution untouched. Attention to such tensions prevents culturally grounded agency from being either romanticised or dismissed.

2.2 African-Centred Womanist Frameworks

African-centred gender theories emerged partly from dissatisfaction with approaches that treated Western feminist categories as universally sufficient for interpreting African women's experiences. Walker's (1983) womanism broadened feminist discourse through its emphasis on Black women's lives, wholeness, creativity, spirituality, and community. Ogunyemi (1985) developed a more specifically Black literary formulation, linking women's freedom to racial justice, family wellbeing, and social reconstruction. Ogundipe-Leslie's (1994) STIWANISM, Kolawole's (1997) African womanism, and Nnaemeka's (2004) nego-feminism offer different conceptual vocabularies, but each resists reducing African women's social realities to gender in isolation. Their differences are important; so too is their shared insistence that culture, history, community, and material conditions belong within gender analysis.

Hudson-Weems' Africana Womanism occupies a distinctive place within this field. The framework is organised around a set of interrelated principles that include self-naming, self-definition, family-centredness, genuine sisterhood, strength, adaptability, respect for elders, spirituality, nurturing, ambition, and cooperation with men (Hudson-Weems, 2004). For literary study, its usefulness lies in the emphasis it places on relational agency. A woman's empowerment may be visible in the protection of vulnerable people, the preservation of dignity, moral leadership, family responsibility, or the reshaping of communal relations. Such actions need not depend on the rejection of marriage, motherhood, kinship, or male companionship. This relational orientation makes the framework particularly suited to a novel such as *Mimosa*, where private grief continually intersects with family, community, and public institutions.

Africana Womanism has, however, generated important critical debate. Alexander-Floyd and Simien (2006) question whether its emphasis on racial solidarity, family-centredness, and compatibility with men can sufficiently confront sexism within Black communities. Their concern matters because cultural affirmation can become analytically limiting when communal harmony is privileged at the expense of women's safety or voice. The present study therefore uses Africana Womanism as a critical lens rather than as a set of unquestioned prescriptions. Family-centredness is distinguished from compulsory self-sacrifice, and cooperation with men is treated as productive only where women are recognised as intellectual and moral equals. Resilience is likewise evaluated according to what it makes possible: whether it challenges harm, redistributes authority, or simply leaves oppressive arrangements intact.

2.3 Invisible Oppression: Structural, Symbolic, and Everyday Power

The language of oppression often brings to mind visible forms of harm such as assault, legal exclusion, forced marriage, or material deprivation. These forms remain central, yet social power may also operate through arrangements in which responsibility is difficult to locate. Galtung's (1969) account of structural violence is useful because it identifies harm produced by institutions and unequal systems even in the absence of a single identifiable aggressor. Young (1990) similarly approaches oppression as a set of institutional and cultural processes that generate exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural domination, and vulnerability. Bourdieu's (2001) concept of symbolic violence adds another dimension by showing how domination may be reproduced through language, judgement, custom, and expectations that come to appear ordinary or legitimate.

The term invisible oppression is used here to bring these strands of thought into a literary reading of

subtle and normalised forms of control. Public disbelief, bureaucratic delay, reputational pressure, guilt, unequal domestic expectations, and demands for respectability can all produce harm without announcing themselves as overt coercion. Their apparent ordinariness is precisely what makes them difficult to contest. In *Mimosa*, this logic is visible in the failure to record a missing worker promptly, the attempts to control the number of recognised victims, and the delay in granting authority to Yaa Saah's testimony. Administrative routine becomes consequential: while Kobby remains physically trapped in a highly visible disaster, the absence of his name from an official record threatens to make him socially invisible.

The same concept helps to illuminate the novel's domestic tensions. Yaa Saah's frustration with Kobby's unemployment grows out of financial strain and culturally familiar expectations about work, provision, marriage, and respectability. Her treatment of him can be damaging without being adequately explained as individual cruelty. Kobby is burdened by the ideal of masculine provision, while Yaa Saah carries the economic and emotional labour of keeping the household functioning. In this sense, precarity enters the marriage and is experienced through guilt, disappointment, and pressure. The intimate conflict does not erase personal responsibility, but it points beyond the couple to social expectations that organise their frustrations before the disaster occurs.

2.4 Female Resilience, Negotiation, and Communal Agency

Resilience in African women's writing is most useful as an analytical concept when it is separated from the simple celebration of suffering. It can describe the capacity to interpret adversity, preserve a workable sense of self, draw on social relationships, and act within conditions that offer few easy choices. Nnaemeka's (2004) emphasis on negotiation helps to account for agency that develops inside constraint rather than outside it. Hudson-Weems' (2004) discussion of strength, adaptability, spirituality, genuine sisterhood, and family-centredness similarly draws attention to communal and cultural resources through which women may survive crisis and shape its consequences.

Even so, the language of resilience raises difficult questions. A reading concerned only with a character's ability to endure may overlook the institution or relationship that created the burden in the first place. It is therefore necessary to ask what is being survived, who benefits from that endurance, and whether anything changes because of it. In *Mimosa*, Yaa Saah's persistence, Naa Lamley's counsel, and Akua Darko's journalistic intervention matter because they do more than demonstrate emotional strength. They restore visibility, create solidarity, circulate knowledge, and place pressure on structures that would otherwise evade accountability. This is the sense in which resilience becomes politically and ethically significant in the present study.

2.5 Scholarship on Faith Ben-Daniels and the Research Gap

Critical work on Faith Ben-Daniels' fiction remains comparatively sparse, a limitation that shapes the present study's point of entry. Ben-Daniels' (2022) critical essay on the supernatural in African literature considers its political, socio-economic, and cultural relevance. Although the essay does not analyse *Mimosa*, it offers a useful context for reading spirituality in the novel as a culturally meaningful way of knowing rather than as a decorative or irrational narrative element. Tontoh's (2026) study of maternal vision and tragedy in *Blue Ixora*, another Ben-Daniels text, identifies intuition, emotional intelligence, and moral leadership as important dimensions of female agency. Taken together, these studies suggest emerging critical interest in the author's treatment of spirituality, tragedy, gender, and women's knowledge.

What remains largely unexplored is the way *Mimosa* brings institutional harm into contact with gendered grief and culturally situated forms of female agency. Existing work does not provide a sustained reading of the novel through the combined concerns of invisible oppression and Africana Womanism. This article addresses that absence by examining how a public disaster exposes corporate and administrative violence, how grief becomes entangled with gendered emotional labour, and how women respond through testimony, spirituality, sisterhood, professional ethics, and collaboration. It also tests the affirmative language of Africana Womanism against a persistent danger: cultural values such as endurance, accommodation, and family commitment can support agency, but they can also become burdens when institutions rely on women to absorb the consequences of failure.

3. Theoretical Framework: Africana Womanism

Clenora Hudson-Weems developed Africana Womanism as an autonomous, African-centred framework for interpreting the experiences of women of African descent. In Hudson-Weems' (2004) formulation, race, culture, history, family, spirituality, class, and gender are interconnected dimensions of social life. Gender is therefore

important without being assumed to be the single or universally dominant explanation for women's oppression. For a literary text such as *Mimosa*, this emphasis is valuable because the female characters' choices are made within marriages, kinship networks, workplaces, spiritual understandings, and public institutions. Their agency emerges through these relationships rather than apart from them.

Hudson-Weems identifies eighteen characteristics of the Africana womanist, although not all are equally prominent in *Mimosa*. This study concentrates on strength, adaptability, genuine sisterhood, spirituality, family-centredness, respect for elders, ambition, and male compatibility because these principles recur most clearly in the experiences of Yaa Saah, Naa Lamley, and Akua Darko. Strength is read as the ability to continue acting under pressure, while adaptability concerns shifts in strategy when circumstances change. Genuine sisterhood draws attention to reciprocal support among women, and spirituality provides a language for forms of knowledge and endurance that exceed material explanation. Family-centredness and respect for elders locate individual decisions within kinship and intergenerational responsibility. Ambition concerns the pursuit of advancement beyond the private self, whereas male compatibility makes room for cooperation between women and men where such cooperation respects women's judgement and autonomy.

These principles are not treated as virtues whose value can be assumed in advance. The novel itself gives reasons for a more cautious application. Family can be sustaining, but family obligation may also ask too much of a woman who has already received little support. An elder may offer wisdom without having the right to invalidate a younger woman's anger. Partnership with men can enable effective public action, yet it becomes meaningful only where female knowledge is heard and taken seriously. The analysis therefore asks what each principle does within a particular scene: whether it enlarges a woman's room for action, repairs a damaged relationship, protects dignity, or quietly reproduces another form of pressure.

Africana Womanism remains the study's principal interpretive framework, while three supplementary concepts help to clarify the institutional forms of power to which the female characters respond. Galtung's (1969) structural violence draws attention to harm embedded in systems; Young's (1990) account of oppression as institutional process clarifies the production of marginality and powerlessness; and Bourdieu's (2001) symbolic violence helps explain the everyday language and assumptions through which domination acquires legitimacy. Used alongside Africana Womanism, these concepts make it possible to read both sides of the novel's conflict: the social processes that render suffering less visible and the culturally grounded practices through which women seek recognition, support, and justice.

4. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative interpretive approach centred on close reading of Faith Ben-Daniels' *Mimosa* (2015). The novel serves as the primary text, while scholarship on African womanisms, oppression, and Ben-Daniels' writing provides the conceptual and critical context. The analysis attends to characterisation, dialogue, narrative perspective, imagery, conflict, and the movement between private experience and public institutions. These formal and thematic features are read together in order to show how the novel constructs both the experience of oppression and the possibilities of response.

Passages were selected purposively from episodes most directly connected to the study's concerns. These include Yaa Saah's search for Kobby; her exchanges with Naa Lamley and members of Kobby's family; the conduct of *Mimosa* Mart's owners and managers; Akua Darko's involvement as a journalist; and President Benedict Konin's response to the disaster. The reading is organised around two broad clusters. The first considers corporate negligence, victim erasure, bureaucratic delay, reputational management, gendered emotional labour, and moral pressure as mechanisms of invisible oppression. The second examines spiritual endurance, adaptability, sisterhood, intergenerational counsel, professional integrity, public testimony, and constructive collaboration as forms of resilience and agency.

The analysis is thematic rather than statistical. Short quotations from the novel are interpreted in relation to their narrative context, with page references taken from the 2015 edition cited in the manuscript. No interviews or survey data are involved because the study is concerned with literary representation rather than empirical claims about human participants. Fictional characters are consequently not treated as direct sociological evidence. The interest lies instead in how Ben-Daniels' narrative organises cultural meanings around gender, grief, power, responsibility, and justice.

5. Discussion

5.1 Disaster, Corporate Power, and the Production of Invisible Victims

The collapse of *Mimosa* Mart provides the novel with its most dramatic image of violence, yet the moral crisis extends beyond the fallen building. Ben-Daniels is equally concerned with the institutions that decide how the event will be narrated, whose loss will be counted, and what forms of responsibility will be acknowledged. Death and injury result from the collapse itself, but subsequent decisions about compensation, public relations, rescue, and record keeping deepen the vulnerability of affected families. Rosalind Grey's concern for the company's reputation is especially revealing because it shows how corporate language can turn the disclosure of injury into a threat to business rather than a demand for accountability.

"After all, my company still puts food on the table of many people ... bad press isn't good for us." (Ben-Daniels, 2015, p. 186)

Rosalind's statement shifts the moral centre of the discussion from the victims to the company. By invoking the jobs the business provides, she casts criticism as potentially harmful to the wider public and makes accountability appear almost ungrateful. Read through Bourdieu's notion of symbolic violence, the language of economic contribution gives corporate self-protection a socially responsible appearance. What is at stake, then, is not simply bad publicity; it is the power to decide which account of the disaster will circulate. Rosalind's role also complicates any assumption that female identity automatically produces solidarity with other women. Ben-Daniels separates ethical agency from biological sex by showing that women, too, may exercise institutional power in ways that silence vulnerable people.

Kobby's absence from the recognised list of victims makes the politics of visibility more concrete. Yaa Saah knows that he entered the building, yet her knowledge has little practical force until it is accepted by those controlling the official record. When Edward eventually asks for Kobby's name and adds it to the list (Ben-Daniels, 2015, p. 142), an apparently routine administrative act becomes a question of social existence. To be named on the manifest is to become countable: a person for whom rescue, mourning, and compensation can formally be pursued. Young's (1990) account of powerlessness is relevant here because Yaa Saah possesses vital knowledge without possessing the institutional authority that can convert that knowledge into an official fact. Her repeated cry, 'My husband is in there!' (Ben-Daniels, 2015, p. 4), should therefore be read as more than panic at the scene of a disaster. It is testimony offered against an emerging institutional absence. The narrator's question, 'Why wasn't anyone listening to her?' (p. 14), sharpens the distinction between having a voice and being granted authority. Yaa Saah is physically present and audibly speaking, yet the systems around her are slow to recognise what she knows. Invisible oppression takes shape in that delay, where disbelief and procedure can marginalise a person's truth without anyone issuing an explicit command for her to remain silent.

5.2 Economic Precarity, Marriage, and Gendered Emotional Labour

The strain within Yaa Saah and Kobby's marriage predates the collapse. Kobby's unemployment places pressure on a household in which Yaa Saah is already carrying the immediate economic burden, and her frustration pushes him towards finding work. Her behaviour is at times harsh, but the novel situates that harshness within a wider economy of expectation. Masculine respectability is tied to provision, while the practical responsibility for keeping the household stable falls heavily on Yaa Saah when Kobby cannot fulfil that role. Both partners are therefore caught in different forms of pressure: Kobby experiences the shame attached to unemployment, and Yaa Saah confronts financial strain together with the demand to keep everyday life functioning.

The marriage shows how a public economic problem can be translated into private emotional conflict. Unemployment enters the home as anxiety, disappointment, guilt, and the need to motivate another person. Yaa Saah earns income, worries about survival, and becomes responsible for pushing Kobby towards employment; after the collapse, that earlier pressure returns to her as guilt because the job she encouraged him to take has placed him in danger. The emotional management of the household is thus added to its economic management. Much of this labour remains unnamed because it is treated as part of what a wife is simply expected to do.

Once the building collapses, Yaa Saah's earlier anger is overtaken by fear. Her insistence that Kobby is asthmatic and that 'the dust will kill him' (Ben-Daniels, 2015, p. 4) reveals the intimacy of her knowledge even in the midst of marital conflict. Care, frustration, dependence, regret, and commitment exist together. *Africana* Womanism is useful precisely because it allows the marriage to be read as a relationship shaped by social and economic pressures, rather than forcing the characters into a simple opposition between male oppressor and female victim. Such a relational reading does not excuse hurtful conduct. It makes visible the conditions under which affection and harm can become entangled.

5.3 Trauma, Spirituality, and Adaptive Endurance

Yaa Saah experiences the collapse not only as a physical emergency but also as a psychological and spiritual rupture. Dreams, bodily sensations, and her sense of connection with Kobby carry the disaster beyond the boundaries of the mart itself. In one scene, dust and darkness appear to fill her surroundings as she calls his name (Ben-Daniels, 2015, p. 107). The imagery brings the disaster site into her interior world: although Kobby's body is trapped beneath the rubble, the experience of entrapment is reproduced emotionally in Yaa Saah's consciousness. Trauma, in this sense, moves through intimacy.

Ben-Daniels' (2022) discussion of the supernatural in African literature provides a relevant context for this aspect of the novel. Yaa Saah's spiritual experiences are not presented simply as an escape from material reality. They become ways of interpreting uncertainty and preserving a connection to Kobby at a time when institutional information is unreliable or absent. Hudson-Weems' (2004) emphasis on spirituality helps to explain why these experiences matter within an Africana Womanist reading: they provide Yaa Saah with a culturally intelligible resource for endurance without removing her from the material struggle taking place around the disaster.

Spiritual meaning does not, however, alter the novel's tragic outcome. The announcement that 'Kobby was pronounced dead at 4:00 p.m.' (Ben-Daniels, 2015, p. 212) rules out an easy equation between faith and miraculous rescue. What survives is Yaa Saah's capacity to keep acting in the face of uncertainty and, later, loss. Her resilience is therefore better understood as a way of living through trauma than as evidence of emotional invulnerability. Spirituality gives form to hope and grief, helping her to persist in demanding recognition and eventually to rebuild a sense of self after Kobby's death.

This is one of the points at which the novel's account of resilience becomes most ethically demanding. Yaa Saah's adaptability deserves recognition, but the conditions that require such extraordinary endurance remain open to criticism. The narrative can honour her strength while still asking why a bereaved woman must compensate for failures of rescue, record keeping, and corporate responsibility. Africana Womanism is most productive here when it keeps those two questions together: how women draw on cultural and spiritual resources to survive, and how the surrounding social order places burdens on them that should never have been necessary.

5.4 Genuine Sisterhood and Intergenerational Counsel

Naa Lamley offers one of the clearest examples of genuine sisterhood in the novel. Her support for Yaa Saah combines emotional presence, practical counsel, and prayer without taking control of Yaa Saah's experience. When she says, 'I will be home, praying for you' (Ben-Daniels, 2015, p. 74), she acknowledges what she can and cannot do while remaining available to another woman in crisis. Sisterhood is therefore grounded less in sameness than in accompaniment: each woman brings the resources she possesses to a relationship of care. Naa's advice concerning Kobby's relatives also introduces the Africana Womanist principle of respect for elders and the complicated value of family-centredness. She urges Yaa Saah to involve the family despite Yaa Saah's sense that they have not supported her, reminding her that 'family must count for something' (Ben-Daniels, 2015, p. 104). The advice carries cultural authority, but the narrative leaves room for Yaa Saah's resentment. Respect for an elder does not require the cancellation of a younger woman's grievance, especially when family obligations have been unevenly fulfilled.

The scene is valuable because it prevents family-centredness from becoming an abstract ideal. In *Mimosa*, kinship has to be made meaningful through responsibility, communication, and care; the existence of family ties alone does not guarantee support. Naa's intervention attempts to reactivate a fractured network around Yaa Saah at a moment when isolation would deepen her vulnerability. Family-centredness becomes constructive when it enlarges the resources available to her rather than merely asking her to overlook neglect for the sake of appearances.

Yaa Saah's endurance is thus partly collective. Her ability to continue does not arise from private strength alone but from the prayers, words, presence, and guidance of another woman. Ben-Daniels presents resilience as something that can circulate through relationships, especially across generations. This representation accords with Hudson-Weems' emphasis on genuine sisterhood and communal survival while also reminding the reader that support is an active practice, not simply an identity shared by women.

5.5 Akua Darko, Professional Integrity, and Public Female Agency

Akua Darko shifts the novel's treatment of female agency into the public sphere. Unlike Yaa Saah, whose authority must be fought for at the disaster site, Akua already occupies a professional position that gives her

access to information and public discourse. As a newspaper editor and a trusted associate of President Benedict Konin, she possesses expertise that can influence how the crisis is understood beyond the immediate circle of victims. Her significance lies in the independent judgement she brings to that position. The state may need her assistance, but her professional authority is not created by the men around her.

Rosalind Grey's attempt to discourage damaging publicity places that independence under pressure. Akua's refusal to let corporate reputation determine the terms of reporting turns journalism into a practice of accountability. In *Africana Womanist* terms, the episode can be read through self-definition and ambition: Akua refuses the role corporate power implicitly offers her, that of a compliant woman who protects another influential woman's interests. She defines professional responsibility through truth, public welfare, and the need to keep the victims visible.

Akua also expands the novel's meaning of resilience beyond personal survival. Her response to the disaster depends on the ethical use of institutional position. Investigation and publication move suffering from the private space of bereaved families into the arena of public scrutiny, where questions of responsibility can no longer be easily contained. Her agency is simultaneously professional, civic, and moral. Through Akua, the novel suggests that institutions are not only sites where oppression occurs; they can also become spaces from which women contest concealment when they retain independence of judgement.

The contrast with Rosalind is crucial. Both women are influential, educated, and positioned close to institutional power, yet their choices lead in different directions. Rosalind works to manage information in defence of reputation and profit, whereas Akua uses information to widen public knowledge of the disaster. The distinction prevents an idealised reading in which women are assumed to be naturally communal or automatically resistant to oppression. What matters in the novel is the ethical use of power. *Africana Womanist* agency is therefore better understood as a practice of responsibility than as a quality guaranteed by being female.

5.6 Working in Concert with Men: Partnership and Its Conditions

The cooperation between Akua Darko and President Benedict Konin provides the novel's clearest illustration of male compatibility. Benedict's admission, 'Akua, I need your help' (Ben-Daniels, 2015, p. 162), is significant because it acknowledges both the limits of political office and the value of Akua's independent expertise. Their relationship offers an alternative to models of empowerment that imagine women's advancement only through opposition to men. Here, public action becomes possible through an alliance between political authority and journalism, provided that the woman's professional competence is recognised rather than subordinated.

Benedict's request does not cast him as Akua's rescuer. He turns to an authority that she has already established through knowledge, integrity, and public credibility. Reciprocity is therefore central to the scene. Each figure brings a different institutional resource to the crisis, but Akua's judgement remains her own. Read in this way, male compatibility describes cooperation without requiring female dependence, and it allows the partnership to contribute to a shared communal objective without dissolving Akua's professional autonomy. Elsewhere in the novel, Yaa Saah's experience reveals what happens when such reciprocity is absent. Her difficulty in having her testimony taken seriously at the disaster site shows that cooperation cannot simply be assumed because women and men occupy the same public space. Emergency and administrative structures can still marginalise female knowledge. Male compatibility is therefore meaningful only under conditions of listening, respect, accountability, and some willingness to share authority. The contrast keeps the principle from becoming a sentimental claim about gender harmony.

Placed side by side, Benedict's reliance on Akua and the institutional disregard initially shown to Yaa Saah provide a useful measure of social responsibility. One relationship recognises a woman's expertise; the other delays recognition of knowledge that could affect a victim's fate. Ben-Daniels thereby gives male compatibility a critical function. It is not merely a description of men and women working together, but a way of asking whether collaboration actually respects women's voices and contributes to communal justice.

5.7 From Private Grief to Public Agency

Yaa Saah's development across the novel is best understood as a movement from private grief towards public agency. At the beginning, those around her can dismiss her speech as the distressed cry of a desperate wife. She nevertheless continues to name Kobby, question the incomplete victim record, engage public attention, and connect her own loss to that of other affected families. Through this persistence, grief becomes more than an inward emotional state; it develops into a form of civic testimony.

"So I too, a woman, a kindergarten teacher with no family, can start a positive revolution?" (Ben-Daniels, 2015,

The question marks an important moment of self-recognition. Yaa Saah has neither political office nor wealth, and she identifies herself through the apparently ordinary social position of a kindergarten teacher. Yet she begins to see that testimony and persistence can have public consequences. Her reference to a 'positive revolution' links personal ambition to communal change. By insisting that Kobby and other victims be properly recognised, she moves beyond the immediate desire to save her husband and participates in a wider struggle over truth and accountability. This widening of purpose aligns closely with Africana Womanism's emphasis on agency that strengthens the community as well as the individual.

Her self-description also unsettles assumptions that meaningful political agency belongs primarily to elite institutions. Ben-Daniels locates the possibility of public intervention in an ordinary citizen whose authority initially rests on little more than what she has witnessed and what she refuses to stop saying. Kobby's eventual death, however, prevents this development from becoming a straightforward story of triumph. Recognition arrives too late to undo loss. The novel therefore preserves the difference between gaining a public voice and receiving justice in time.

That unresolved difference gives Yaa Saah's 'positive revolution' its moral force. Her persistence exposes institutional failures, but it should not be turned into an inspirational narrative that makes those failures disappear behind admiration for her courage. The political value of her resilience lies precisely in what it reveals about the conditions that demanded it. Ben-Daniels can affirm an ordinary woman's capacity to intervene in public life while simultaneously indicting the structures that required repeated insistence before her testimony was taken seriously.

5.8 The Limits of Accommodation and the Ethics of Resilience

The novel also invites caution about treating every act of endurance as an Africana Womanist achievement. Yaa Saah adapts to crisis, remains connected to family, listens to an elder, seeks cooperation, and draws on spiritual hope. These practices can protect dignity and sustain community, yet each can become burdensome if detached from questions of reciprocity and justice. Family-centredness becomes troubling when it requires her to overlook neglect; strength becomes oppressive when it is used to justify leaving institutional failure for her to absorb. The same cultural values that sustain a woman can, under different conditions, increase what is expected of her.

A useful distinction, then, is between accommodation and ethical negotiation. Accommodation leaves injustice largely undisturbed, whereas negotiation works within limitation while attempting to change what the limitation produces. Yaa Saah does not simply suffer in private: she presses for Kobby's name to be recorded, seeks wider attention, and turns grief into a claim on public responsibility. Naa Lamley's counsel is constructive when it expands Yaa Saah's network of support rather than suppressing her anger. Akua's partnership with Benedict is empowering because her expertise remains visible and respected. Across these examples, the ethical quality of resilience depends on whether it creates room for agency or merely asks women to endure more gracefully.

This reading responds directly to the concerns raised by Alexander-Floyd and Simien (2006) about the possible limitations of Africana Womanism. The framework remains productive when its communal values are treated as dynamic social practices rather than as obligations that women must fulfil regardless of circumstance. Family, spirituality, cultural continuity, and cooperation with men acquire value when they protect life, recognise women's knowledge, and contribute to justice. *Mimosa* makes the point sharply: community is not secured by controlling information or hiding victims. It is sustained through truth, care, reciprocal responsibility, and accountability.

6. Conclusion

Faith Ben-Daniels' *Mimosa* places a spectacular public disaster beside quieter forms of social and institutional harm. The collapse of *Mimosa* Mart is immediate and visible, but much of the novel's ethical force comes from what follows it: incomplete or manipulated victim records, corporate concern with reputation, delayed recognition, public disbelief, economic strain, and the expectation that women will continue to manage grief alongside family and communal responsibility. These pressures show how oppression can work through routine procedures, ordinary language, intimate relationships, and apparently reasonable obligations. Visibility, the novel suggests, is never simply a matter of being present at the scene; it depends on whether institutions are willing to recognise a person's name, testimony, and suffering.

The experiences of Yaa Saah, Naa Lamley, and Akua Darko make resilience equally complex. Yaa Saah persists through spiritual conviction, adaptability, testimony, and a growing sense of public purpose. Naa Lamley

contributes the resources of sisterhood, prayer, and intergenerational counsel. Akua Darko uses professional independence and public authority to resist concealment. Their actions show that resilience in the novel is relational: it is produced through networks of care, knowledge, work, and cooperation rather than through solitary toughness. The men's roles further complicate the picture, since collaboration becomes valuable only where female competence and judgement are genuinely recognised.

Africana Womanism provides a productive framework for reading these forms of agency because it takes family, spirituality, sisterhood, communal responsibility, ambition, and cooperation seriously as parts of women's lived and literary worlds. Its application in this study has nevertheless required critical qualification. Cultural values cannot be assumed to be liberating simply because they are culturally grounded, and resilience cannot become a language through which suffering is made admirable while negligent institutions escape scrutiny. In *Mimosa*, endurance has its strongest ethical meaning when it restores visibility, protects dignity, creates solidarity, and converts grief into a public demand for responsibility.

The study therefore contributes to scholarship on African women's writing in two related ways. First, it develops invisible oppression as a useful category for connecting structural power with the everyday processes through which recognition, authority, and responsibility are unevenly distributed. Second, it extends the still limited criticism of Ben-Daniels' fiction by reading *Mimosa* as a Ghanaian narrative in which disaster, gendered grief, institutional accountability, spirituality, and communal agency are closely intertwined. Further work might place the novel alongside Ben-Daniels' other fiction or examine how contemporary African writing represents disaster, spiritual knowledge, public memory, and the struggle to make hidden forms of suffering legible.

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