

Ominous signs in selected Igbo novels

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Abstract

The study focuses on ominous signs in selected Igbo novels. The objective of the study was to analyse consequences of ominous signs on the major characters in the selected Igbo novels. The research design used was descriptive survey. Document observation of texts related to the subject matter was used to retrieve the primary data was sourced through the internet and other sources. Expert purposive sampling technique was used to select two Igbo novels as sample for the study. The semiotic theory of Ferdinand De Saussure and communicative theory of S. F. Scudder were used to analyse the data. This study revealed that ominous signs exhibit deep meanings and attest the main characters in the novels. The study concludes that literary artists create characters in their novels to x-ray the society and showcase the consequences of ominous signs on different characters in the society. Since all issues about ominous signs cannot be handled in this work, the study recommends that, the study on ominous signs be carried out in other genres of literature such as drama and poetry.

Introduction

Literature is a product of creativity. It is one of the greatest creative tools used by man to mirror his society. It is necessary for the growth and development of moral behaviour. It first and foremost exists in the oral form before its written form emerged (Finnegan, 1977). The origin of Igbo oral literature is not known, but its written form started in 1933 with Pita Nwana's *Omenụkọ* as the first Igbo novel. Literary artists are part of the society which they use their art forms to mirror and as such, the novel is a branch of literature that projects the socio-cultural and religious aspects of society. Ominous signs thus, become the socio-cultural aspects of society mirrored by the novel. Ominous signs can be positive or negative. The positive ominous sign indicate that something positive will happen while the negative signs indicates that something unpleasant is about to happen. Ominous signs are explored in both oral and written forms of literature. Authors of some Igbo novels use some ominous signs to form themes in their writings. In this research work, the ominous sign is the subject matter being considered from written perspectives.

Ominous signs are signs suggesting that something sinister is likely to happen. With the advent of civilisation, technology, Christianity and the evolution of the world as a global village, ominous signs are increasingly regarded as superstitious beliefs by some people. There is a need to document and preserve ominous signs as part of Igbo culture. A literary artist is part of his or her society and he or she knows his or her society, its pace, pulse, dreams and realities (Obidiebube, 2011), the cultural signs of his place and time in history and embodies them in his literary work. This study focuses on consequences of ominous signs on the major characters in *Ukpana okpoko buuru* and *Dinta*.

2. Literature review

This section review some of the theories relevant to the study, ominous signs, Igbo novel and culture. The contributions of different scholars towards this study are reviewed such as theoretical and empirically, summary of the literature review and theoretical framework.

2.1 Conceptual review

A conceptual review in any research is essentially significant because a review of necessary concepts helps researchers to unpack their thoughts in relation to the research topics.

2.1.1 Ominous signs

A sign is any phenomenon which designates an existent or perceived meaning for the interpreter of the sign. A sign may be taken account of in the real universe if it is something that has an existence (Boiles, 1982:24). When a sign is referred to as ominous, it indicates a sense of concern. Such sense of concern or anxiety appears due to the fact that an unpleasant situation is likely going to be suspected. For instance, in a situation where someone experiences excessive and constant pains, or that the food he or she consumed does not digest, such situations as they continue to occur could make the person worry, hence, an ominous sign of health challenge.

Ominous signs are significantly obvious and are experienced in various sectors, regions and cultures across the globe. In the health sector, according to Raghuram and Manassa (2019:8),

Diseases are diagnosed on the basis of ominous signs and symbols found in the patient. Based on this, it is on the account of the quality and quantity of such ominous signs in the patient that would determine the prognosis of the diseases of such a patient.

For the authors, such situations underscore how ominous signs suggest health related problems and conditions. Many religions and cultures have their different forms of ominous signs despite the level of globalisation and development in such areas of faith and human growth. Often, people refer to ominous signs as superstitions because of the nature of their omens and premonition in relation to their beliefs. These signs suggest either impending or non-calamitous incidents. Ominous signs also reveal information about calamitous incidents, although could be of certain tragic events or misfortunes.

According to Onukawa (2017:100), “ominous signs act as messages or information and are conveyed from one person to another, one community to another and one region to another.” The object forms for the transmission of these signs could be either animate or inanimate. For Onukawa (2017:110), animals such as birds, owls, pythons, dogs and plants such as iroko and kola nut could be considered as animate examples of ominous signs whereas elements such as rainbows, rocks, and thunder could be considered as inanimate examples of ominous signs. She adds that in some situations, dreams could act as a channel of transmitting ominous information and messages to a person or community. Illustrating further from the Igbo cosmology, Onukawa (2018:101) avers that sometimes, people receive their messages which are purely ominous signs through divination. In such cases, the person may dash his or her foot against a rock, or may experience the owl hooting on top of his or her roof. Not left out in this example is the general message from the early morning cock crow.

From the above, it is crystal clear that the concept of the ominous sign is clearly defined in the Igbo culture. However, these signs could vary from one place to another according to the culture of that particular community but the sense it gives remains unchanged. There are some communities in Igbo land such as Awka, Umuoji, Nkpor Agulu etc where ominous signs are used to communicate the public offenders who violate abominations of such communities and how the impending calamities would befall them.

Often, they face the consequences alone or with the community. When the ominous signs preceding unpleasant and calamitous events or circumstances are experienced by the victim(s), it is said that they precede disastrous or ill-fated events whereas when experienced by person(s) that are not victim(s) of the occurred disastrous event such as the community or the immediate family, it is seen as post ill-fated events which all *replete* the Igbo existence (Chinweuba, 2021; Adibe, 2008). In this study, ominous signs are signs suggesting or indicating of something unpleasant or misfortune that is likely to occur.

2.1.2 The Igbo novel

Literature refers to the artistic or imaginative oral or written works in prose or verse. Every culture has its literature. Onyekaonwu (2001) defines Igbo literature as a body of literary works comprising prose, poetry, drama expressed or written purely in the Igbo language. The definition of the novel has been controversial and elusive. Some scholars like Mbah and Mbah (2007:268) define the novel as “any narrative fiction of book length, typically representing character and actions with some degree of realism”. However, there is no general agreement about what a book is as different writers define a book using different parameters.

Focusing on the contributions of Igbo writers to the development of African literature in African languages, Emenyonu (1978) defines the Igbo novel as “any novel written in English or Igbo language by people of Igbo origin or ancestry.” This definition was frowned at by some Igbo literary scholars like Ugonna (1979) and Nwadike (1995). Ugonna (1979:3) asserts that “each language is the best medium of expressing the worldview and the way of life of the people using the language of the people”. He clarifies that a people’s thoughts expressed in foreign language lose their originality. Nwadike (1995:53), in support of Ugonna (1979) states that: “These novels are works of cultural re-affirmation, the emphasis being the recreation of some old and modern institutions, practices, patterns of relationships and material culture of pre-colonial and postcolonial Igbo”.

The Igbo novel, according to Ugonna (1979) and Nwadike (1995), is a literary work written in the Igbo language which addresses itself to the issues of Igbo philosophy and worldview. According to Ugonna (1979:30), “it is only those texts of Igbo novels, poem or drama written or at least translated in the Igbo languages that are regarded as Igbo novels”. The first Igbo novel emerged in 1933 with the publication of Pita Nwana’s *Omenuko*. Through *Omenuko*, Pita Nwana did not only project the Igbo culture but also promoted the Igbo religion. Numerous Igbo novels have been written by different Igbo scholars. For the purpose of this study, the Igbo novel is a literary work written in the Igbo language by an Igbo authors for the Igbo people.

In summarising the definition of Igbo novel, Ikeokwu (2005:390) notes that the basic considerations are, “language meaning and its variety, traditionality as well as volume and length.”

2.1.3 Culture

Okafor and Emeka (2004) define culture as all knowledge, beliefs, customs, values, ideas and skills available in a society and by which the society can be compared to or differentiated from others. Mondin (2004) asserts that man has always produced culture because he is essentially a cultural, and not a natural being. According to him, at the moment of birth, nature hardly gives man the essential means to be man, and assigns him the task of making him and forming him so as to fully realise his being through culture. Okere (2005) posits that culture gives a community both a sense of reality and dignity, integrity and continuity, security and cohesion, and by his culture, he is identified. In other words, culture

is an umbrella term which includes the social behaviour and norms found in human societies as well as the knowledge, beliefs, arts, laws and custom.

Abakare (2009) says that culture is the way of life, shared and learned behaviour of a people. It includes everything one thinks, does and has as a member of a society. It includes the idea, values, beliefs, literature, religion and philosophy of the people. It also includes the rules by which people guide their behaviours and material objects that are found among them. Culture presupposes the existence of a human society and provides the necessary skills for making society work. Culture exists in society only because society is like a stream; it flows from generation to generation. In his view, Chinagorom (2012) opines that culture is a people's way of life. The Igbo language is part of culture which is communicated through the language of the community. This informs the statement that language is embedded in culture and culture is transmitted through language. The Igbo language is a special language for special people. Culture is a product of a rational being like man. Man is therefore the maker or creator of culture. It is that pattern of behaviour and thinking that people living in social groups learn, create and share. It is that which helps people to distinguish one group of human beings from others and distinguish humans from animals. In his own contribution, Amaegwu (2013) defines culture as the human capacity to express in symbols, for one and for others. It refers to the reactions and relations of individuals and human groups with their environment and their interaction with it. In this study, culture means the ideas, custom and way of life of a particular people or society.

2.2 Theoretical studies

This section reviews some relevant theories in literature, especially with regard to the present study. Some of these theories are: Semiotic theory and communicative theory. These theories are detailed below.

2.2.1 Semiotic theory

Several scholars in the past have added a lot to the field of semiotics which has been very useful to different audiences e.g. Ferdinand de Saussure (1913) as well as the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce (1914), Elam (1980), Barthes (1969) Chandler (2002), Umberto Eco (1976) among others. The idea of semiotics emerges from Saussure's study of linguistics. Saussure's idea is to introduce a science that discovers the true nature of language systems in what he refers to as semiology. He argues that to see the true nature of language system, one must first consider systems of the same kind. He further posits that rites, custom and tradition can be perceived as signs that communicate and as such, a new perspective of language is created.

Igbeaku (2020:156) citing Peirce (1985) notes that the word 'semiotics' derives its origin from a Greek word '*semeion*' signifying 'signs,' which means something that stands for something else. There are three connected terms, according to Peirce (1985) which are both irreducible and minimal constitutive elements in the study of semiotics, namely: signs, objects and interpretant. As a matter of choice, Peirce refers to the study as 'semiotics', whereas Saussure prefers the use of 'semiology'. However, there is no room for confusion as both words mean the 'study of signs' where signs consist of things which determine other things (its interpretant).

2.2.2 Communicative theory

Communicative theory is propounded by S. F. Scudder in the year 1980. It states that all living beings existing on the planet communicate although the way of communication is different. Animals communicate through sounds and several movements to indicate that they are hungry or unhealthy or need medical attention. A mother would never understand that her

child is hungry until the child cries. Crying is again a form through which the child communicates that he or she is hungry and needs food. The same applies when he or she is injured, where he or she uses crying again as a tool to communicate his or her pain and need for urgent medical attention. Hence, the universal law of communication theory says that all living beings whether they are plants, animals, human beings communicate through sound, speech, body movement, gestures or in the best possible way to make others aware of their thoughts, feelings, problems, happiness or any other information. This theory is relevant to this study because ominous sign is a communicative process through sign.

2.3 Empirical studies

Here, the empirical studies are reviewed in relation to the present research to create the gap to be closed by the present study.

Nwadike (1999) works on “The Ominous in Contemporary Igbo Literature”. The objective of the study is to show that literature is a response to what happens in the society. The author brings in signs and portents in his work to make for realism and reality. The findings of the study reveal that the ominous, as a world-wide phenomenon, comes in various forms, according to people’s world views and beliefs. In some cases, the ominous gives warning with the sole purpose of saving people from danger if the affected individual can read and interpret the handwriting properly and take precautionary measures. The study concludes that the ominous are the natural ways of transmitting information to us. If we are able to read and discern the barometers of the spirit correctly, we can get saved by adjusting to the right sides of life, for to be forewarned is to be forearmed. Both studies are centred on ominous signs in Igbo literature, but the present study differs in its focus on ominous signs in selected Igbo novels.

Eze (2010) looks at “The Ominous in Igbo Drama”. The objective of the study is to show that these signs are presented in various forms in different cultures and field of studies. The researcher adopts the mythological approach in her work. The findings of the study reveal that in Igbo culture, there are myths, not mere superstitions which people respect and revere. They are in various forms in different cultures of the world. Like Eze’s study, the present study is focused on ominous signs in Igbo literature, but it differs in its focus on selected Igbo novels.

Okafor (2014) studies “The ominous, prophetic and ritualistic phenomena: Predominant motifs in selected works of Igbo contemporary playwright”. The objective of the study is to show the uniqueness of these writers which people tend to overlook while reading such works. The study adopts the theory of myth propounded by Emile Durkheim. The findings of the study reveal that authors make use of these phenomena in their works to explore the culture and traditions of the Igbo people which form the common motif of their plays. Igbo cultures are not mere superstition, they are myths in Igbo which they respect and reverence. They are in various forms in different cultures of the world. She concludes that omens, prophecies and rituals are so prominent in the life of both traditional and modern Igbo man that the authors became interested in projecting them for the documentation and preservation of these Igbo core values for posterity. Okafor’s study is related to the present work in its focus on ominous signs. However, while Okafor focuses on the ominous, prophetic and ritualistic, the present study is on ominous signs in selected Igbo novels.

Onukawa (2017) studies “The ominous as a medium of communication in traditional Igbo society”. The objective of her study is to investigate the ominous signs and events, and to show that it is a mystical traditional medium of communication in Igbo culture. The findings of her study reveal that, ominous sign is a traditional medium of communication between the mystics and human beings and ominous messages are transmitted through animate and inanimate elements. Also, the messages of ominous signs and events are

revealed by the oracle through divination. The study recommends that the work will supply future researchers adequate data on the ominous signs in Igbo culture and also assist them in comparing mystical experiences and practices in various climates and cultures of the world. Both studies are associated with omens but while Onukawa focuses on ominous communication, the present study is on ominous signs in Igbo novels.

Ebubechineke (2022) looks at “Eshishi iru ụjụ na nkwenye ndị Obeleagu Ụmana”. The objectives of the study are to examine the ominous signs that signify death in the traditional belief of the people, to know the various names given to the ominous signs and to animals, to find out the meanings of the ominous signs and proffer solutions to the impending dangers that would accompany the signs; to find out how both the traditionalists and Christians handle ominous signs; to find out how relevant and effective the ominous signs are in the face of modernism. The study adopts descriptive research design. The study reveals that even in the face of civilisation and Christianity, the ominous signs are still relevant and have not relented in playing their roles in their belief system. Again, the ominous sign appears to anyone using any type of animal. Abominable acts attract ominous signs when the gods can no longer contain the atrocities. The appearances of ominous sign stand for the truth, retaliation, justice and fair play and exposure of the wicked people. The study recommends that people should live uprightly so as not to attract the ominous signs to themselves, family and the entire community. The study is related to the present work because both of them are on ominous signs. They differ because while the previous study focuses on “Eshishi iru ụjụ na nkwenye ndị Obeleagu Ụmana” (method of meaning and belief in Obeleagu Umuna) the present work focuses on ominous signs in selected Igbo novels.

2.4 Summary of the literature review

Some key concepts of this study were reviewed. Some empirical studies and theoretical studies related to the present study were also reviewed. The literature so far reviewed, show that previous scholars like Nwadike (1999), Eze (2010), Okafor (2014), Onukawa, (2017) and Ebubechineke (2022) study ominous signs focusing their attention on different perspectives from that of the present study. The previous studies are related to the present study in the sense that the present study has to do with ominous signs, but they differ from it because none of the scholars has carried out a research on ominous signs in the selected Igbo novels.

2.5 Theoretical framework

In this study, ominous signs in Igbo society require effective combination of theories to provide solid foundation for their analyses. Having reviewed various theories that are related to the topic of the study, semiotic and communicative theories are adopted as theoretical framework for the study. When something has the ability to convey a particular meaning or sense, it shows that it is capable of interpreting a sign which can be considered as either being significant or signifying something to the receiver. This is made possible if the object or item has the ability of being interpreted, given its inherent meaning and sense. In the interpretation of semiotics, Chandler (2002) remarks that signs, seen as the object of study for semioticians, can be in the form of words, sounds, images, objects and gestures.

The semiotic theory is one of the major theoretical instruments used in analysing and accounting for signs and symbols in linguistic and literary studies. The semiotic theory points to such use of signs and symbols as media for the transmission of a form or the transference of habits embodied in the object to any interpreter, so as to constrain the interpreter's behaviour. Semiotic theory primarily accounts for the production, transmission and interpretation of signs of different kinds used in literatures and expressions. Therefore, the semiotic theory is suitable for the study.

Secondly, communicative theory is another theory for ominous sign. Communicative theory states that every living organism communicates another living organism of his kind through a unique method. The theory fits into the study because human beings communicate each other with the help of different words, letters, humans, symbols, pictures or gestures.

The semiotic and communicative theories are used to press the point that ominous signs exhibit deep meaning that facilitate understanding of the message of the work across cultures. Both theories are related to this work since it deals with signs and symbols in the Igbo novel. In ominous signs, signs and dreams are part of it. Its relation to literature that needs consideration, is the fact that in literary works, some Igbo authors portray human signs and symbols in their expressions of ideas, thoughts and feelings. These signs in Igbo culture are part of human nature. The relation between omens and signs is often neglected. It is this neglect that causes problem in the society and the society shows *laissez-faire* attitude towards it.

3. Consequences of ominous signs on the major characters in *Ukpana okpoko buuru* and *Dinta*

Characters are the agents who act out the incidents in a literary work. They are vehicles by which the author conveys to his audience, his view of the world. Character is the name given by the author while the idiosyncratic behaviour refers to characterisation (Okanume, 2019). A character in a narrative is a person endowed with moral disposition and qualities that are expressed in what he says and what he does. On the other hand, characterisation according to Msimang (1986) is the sum total of the technique employed by an artist in presenting characters in a literary work so that such characters are perceived by the readers or audience as persons endowed with moral disposition, as well as physical quality.

3.1 Characters in T.U. Ubesie's *Ukpana okpoko buuru*

3.1.1 Obijiofọ

Obijiofọ is a native of Ifite-Amaeke. He is not the king of Ifite-Amaeke, but his community respects him a lot. He has two sons called Jideofọ and Obiora. Obijiofọ is a very intelligent man and cares for his community. He is a philanthropist and Odogwu himself. He loves his people so much. He does not want anybody that will bring shame to their community. He wants peace and progress in his community. He does not support evil. He fights to wipe out the evil in his community with his children. Unfortunately for him, they kill him but before he dies, he encourages his sons not to relent in fighting at the battle. He sheds tears concerning the unpleasant situation in his community. He goes to Obi Udeaja, the king of Ifite-Amaeke and narrates the insults and bad names they receive from their neighbouring towns. If Agangwu town want to discuss thieves, they will call Ifite-Amaeke, likewise other neighbouring communities. If there is any thief in the community, they will come to Ifite-Amaeke. All these negative references give Obijiofọ the courage to discuss with Obi Udeaja on the way forward. To save the situation, the king of Ifite-Amaeke is to be part of it. After this discussion, he summons the community at the village square and warns Ndị Odogwu to be careful on how they disgrace the community. They never cared about what the king says rather what Obijiofọ says keeps them uncomfortable.

The Ndị Odogwu decides to leave the community. They settle in a forest with their families, building their own houses. They name that place Ifite-Ukwu and have Mr. Okoye as their king. They say that they do not want to have anything in common with Ifite-Amaeke.

Obijiofọ together with his children travels to Umuarọ after killing about seven of Ndị Odogwu that come inside his house to attack them. They lived there for more than one year.

Obijiofọ tells his children that they will embark on the night's hunting expedition. His children and others dissuade him from embarking on night's hunting expedition with them because of his age as they were anticipating an attack from their enemies, the Ndị Odogwu, but Obijiofọ bluntly refused. On their way to the night's hunting expedition, Obijiofọ narrates some stories to them. He instructs his children to bury him with his gun if his enemies kill him. His children were extremely shocked and immediately, there comes the cry of the owl, (ikwiikwii) thus;

Ozugbo ọ na-akọchara ha akụkọ ndị a, ikwiikwii bere ụrịa. Ihe a meturū Jideofọ n'obi nke ukwu, o wee si nna ya, ka ha laghachiwe azụ, ma ọ jurū ajū. Ka ha na-arū ụka, ikwiikwii bere ọzọ. Ndị mmụọ agbaala ama ike ha, ma onye ha chọrọ igbu, ha na-ebu ụzọ mee ya o nwere anya ahughị ụzọ, o nwere ntị anughị ihe (28-29).

Immediately he finishes narrating these stories the owl starts to cry loud. Jideofọ deeply realised it and told his father that they should go back but he refused. As they were arguing, the owl (ikwiikwii) cried again. The spirits have signified enough of the impending danger, but whom they want to kill, they first render him as one who has eyes but cannot see and ears but cannot hear (28-29).

The cry of this bird is an ominous sign indicating danger ahead. Obijiofọ refused to listen to his children. This bird does not cry at all times but whenever it cries, everybody would be at alert, knowing fully well that there is danger. Its persistent cry last night should have been enough warning of an impending danger, but when a puppy is about to die, it does not perceive the odour of faeces.

3.1.2 Jideofọ

Jideofọ is the first child of Obijiofọ. He understands his father very well, but cannot challenge him. He does not exchange words with him. Having a strong father like Obijiofọ, he never disagrees with him. One day, Obijiofọ brings out his fishing hook. He uses it to kill a big fish in the river and brings it into their boat. He says to his children, "myself will not eat this fish, as well as you people because when you see what will kill you, you have to shun it", thus;

Mgbe Maazi Obijiofọ jisiri ike sebata ya n'ugbo, ihe a o kwuru ekweghi Jideofọ aghota. Jideofọ chọwa ka ọ juo ya ajuju otu ihe agbado ya n'akpiri. O were Jideofọ anya na ụbọchị adighi mma (29).

When Mr. Obijiofọ tried hard and brought it inside their boat, Jideofọ is confused about his statement. If Jideofọ attempts to ask him a question, something hooks him on the throat. It was clear to Jideofọ that the day will be a misfortune (29).

For something to hook Jideofọ on the throat shows ominous sign but his father is too weak to notice this sign. Jideofọ is aware of the ominous signs, the cry of the evil bird, but having a strong father that sticks to his policy, he does not know what to do and how to challenge him. Jideofọ tells his father not to join them in the hunting expedition as an old man but he cannot listen to him.

3.2 Characters in J.C. Maduekwe's *Dinta*

3.2.1 Ntịnrū

Ntịnrū is a great hunter. His wife is Ọludi. The marriage is blessed with two children, Kanelechi and Ọhiakara. Kanelechi is the female while Ọhiakara is the male.

Ntịnurū over-heard the spirit children discussing their secret missions onto earth and how they will become his children, thus;

M wee tōsie ntị n'ala ike, ka m mara ma m ga-aghōtacha ihe ha na-ekwu n'uka ha na-akpa. Otu n'ime ha wee sikwa n'ọnụ ahụ pụta, gbagharịa sị na ya ga-eje. Na ya ga-eje! Na ya ga-eje ngwa ngwa otu a chọrọ, lōtakwa. Olee ebe ị ga-eje? "E-hee, aga m eje n'ụlọ nwoke ahụ a na-akpọ Ntịnurū." Dinta ahụ na-abịa n'ọhịa mgbe dum were egbe na-agbachicha anyị ntị. Aga m eje n'ụlọ ya. Olee otu ị ga-esi lōtakwa? Ọ zaa sị, "Ọ bụrụ na mụ eruo, aga m agba mbọ too ọsọ ọsọ, lụọ di, ụbọchị m ga-ala na be di m agụ ga-apụta n'uzọ tagbuo m, anwụọ m lōtakwa (90-91).

I listened very carefully to know if I can understand what they were saying in their discussion. One of them comes out from the hole, runs around and said that she will go. That she will go, that she will go quickly as expected and return. Where will you go? "E-hee, I will go to the house of that man called Ntịnurū." The hunter that comes into this forest every time, and uses his gun to disturb us. I will go to his house. How will you come back? She answered, "if I get there, I will try to grow fast and get married, on the day of my traditional marriage, a leopard will appear on the road and devour, then I will die and come back" (90 - 91).

The changeling (ogbanje) children were discussing how to come to Ntịnurū's house and become his children. Ntịnurū hears it and gets himself prepared for them. It is an ominous sign for these spirits to speak out on what to do in the real world. Then they later fulfill their missions but did not die as they planned. For the fact that. Ntịnurū hears their plans help him to get read for action.

The voice resembles as if he is in a dream. But it is very clear that he is not in a dream. Some minute after, one of them come out from the hole moves around hence;

A jua ya nke mere, ọ sị, aga m eje! Aga m eje! A jua ya ebe ọ chọrọ ije. Nke ahụ echeghi echiche ọbụla wee za sị, "N'ụlọ Dinta ahụ na-agba anụ n'ọhịa ebe a ụbọchị dum. Aga m eje n'ụlọ ya." A jua ya otu ọ ga-esi lōghachikwa, ọ sị, "Aga m eto ọsọ ọsọ, wuo ụlọ, ụbọchị m ga-ekpuchi elu ụlọ m, agwọ ubi ga-esi n'elu ụlọ m ahụ maputa bịa taa m, anwụọ m lōtakwa." (91).

He was asked what happened, he said I will go! I will go, I will go. He was asked, where he would like to go? He did not think about the answer and said, in the house of Dinta that kills animal in the forest everyday. I will go to his house. He was asked how he will come back, he said, "I will grow very fast and build a house. On the day of roofing my house, snake will come from that roof and bite me. Then I will die and come back" (91).

But he is able to change their destinies by killing both the lion and the snake. The author gives certain names which are not only meaningful but also are closely related to the actions of the characters concerned to their individual behaviours.

Ntịnurū was able to handle the evil forces attempting to attack him without sharing it with anyone until he successfully destroyed all the challenges before his children, Kanelechi and Ọhịakara. Ntịnurū is a resilient, powerful, brave and patient man in the novel.

3.2.2 Kanelechi

Ntịnurū's daughter is Kanelechi. She is one of the spirit children in the forest that later becomes Ntịnurū's daughter. Later she got married. She wanted to fulfil her promise to the spirit children on the day of her marriage but her father refused. On her way to her husband's house, something terrible happened as she and her mates are approaching her husband's house, thus;

Lekwa otu agū ka ọ na-ekwota ọsọ, ihu bụ ya naanị iwe iwe. Tutu onye ọbụla agbalaga, oke mkpu dara ebe ahụ. Ọ dighị onye maara ihe a na-etiziri mkpu: Ọ bụ n'ihu ụda egbe dachiri onye ọbụla ntị? Ike ọsọ wee gwū ụkwū ọbụla. Anya ọzọ onye ọbụla weliri elu bụ ihu okwu (nkịta) ka ọ nọ n'ihu agū. Ha abụọ na-anwari. Ha abụọ n'ọgụ. Ntịnurū wee gbara ọsọ ruo ha ahụ, mīrī mma dī N'isi egbe ya sūgbuo agū ahụ, o nwūọ (58).

Look at a leopard running speedily, its face is furious. Before everybody runs away, there was a scream. Nobody knows why there was the scream. Is it because of the sound of the gun that rendered everybody deaf. Every leg got tired of running. Leopard they saw or because of the sound of a gun that made everyone deaf? Everybody became tired of running. As people looked up again, they saw a dog standing in front of the leopard. Two of them were fighting, Ntịnurū ran close to them, pulled the bayonet on the butt of his gun and stabbed the leopard. (58).

Ntịnurū, the great hunter saves the family from shame. A leopard coming out to attack Kanelechi on her way to her husband's house is an ominous sign. For a leopard to come out is a sign as written by Maduekwe (1975) indicating danger.

In Igbo society, when such a thing happens, there must be a solution to it. There are fathers like Ntịnurū in Igbo society today. They care more for their families especially their children. They go the extra miles to protect their families from being harmed. Sometimes, they prefer or say, let that death kill them first instead of their children. This happens more where it concerns their children.

3.2.4 Use of ominous signs

Ominous signs reveal information about calamitous incidents, although some of these information could be of certain tragic events or misfortune. Onukawa (2017:100) opines that ominous signs act as messages or information and are conveyed from one person to another, one community to another and one region to another. The object forms for the transmission of these signs could be either animate or inanimate. Literary artists frequently use ominous signs in order to include special meaning for special effect in creating their literary works. Some of the ominous signs can be favourable or unfavourable. It can be good or bad.

In such cases, the person may dash his left foot against a stone or may experience the owl hooting on top of his roof. Other examples are the message from the early morning cock crow, sudden appearances of some creatures like crocodiles, pythons in great numbers in somebody's compound and bees in large numbers in somebody's compound at unusual time signifies danger in Igbo belief. Some natural phenomena like lighting, thunder, cloud and rain, signify ominous signs.

Ubesie (1975) in his novel, *Ụkpāna okpokọ buuru* leads the readers into the actions. Obijiofor goes on hunting expedition with his children. But his children pleaded with him not to go with them but he refused. There is one evil bird that normally cries out and each time this bird cries out (owl) somebody will die thus,

Ọ dị otu nnụnụ a na-akpọ kwa afọ kwa ọnwụ site n'uzọ o si ebe akwa, maka na ihe ọ na-ebe yiri ka ndị obodo si akpọ mkpukpọ, ma ha jee isi kwa afọ kwa ọnwụ. Nnụnụ a adighi ebe mgbe dum, ma oge ọbụla o bere onye ọbụla kee aji n'ume, mara na ọdachi ga-adị. Ihe niile o bere n'ọnụ n'abalị ụnyaahụ ezuola ime ka ụkpana mara na okpokọ nọ nso, ma ọnwụ na-egbu nwa nkita adighi ekwe ya n'isi nsi (28)

There is a bird called *kwa afọ kwa ọnwụ* (year in year out death), because of its pattern of cry. The pattern of its cry resembles the manner the community shout out when they want to say *kwa afọ kwa ọnwụ*. This bird does not cry at all times, but whenever it cries, everybody would be at alert, knowing fully well that there would be a death. Its persistent cry last night should have been enough warning to warn the grasshopper that the hornbill (its predator) is around, but when a puppy is about to die it does not perceive odour of faeces (28).

In the middle of the night, those people that accommodated Maazi Obijiofo in their house pleaded with him not to go for this hunting expedition, Obijiofo refused. He took his two sons, Jidefo and Obiora and they left with their canoe for hunting. Obijiofo met his death at that forest where the Ndị Odogwu camped.

Again, Obijiofo tells his children so many stories about his youth days. How strong he is, that he goes to many wars and wins also, killing so many strong animals with his gun. That if anyone kills him, they should also kill the person. Jidefo thinks about these sudden stories their father is telling them but he cannot understand, thus;

Ozugbo ọ na-akọchara ha akụkọ ndị a, ikwiikwii bere ụra. Ihe a meturu Jidefo n'obi nke ukwu, o wee si nna ya ka ha laghachiwe azu ma ọ juru aju ka ha na-arụ ụka, ikwiikwii bere ọzọ. Ndị mmuo agbaala ama ike ha, ma onye ha chorọ igbu, ha na-ebu uzọ mee ya o nwere anya ahughị ụzọ; o nwere ntị anughị ihe (28-29).

Immediately he finishes narrating these stories the owl starts to cry loud. Jidefo deeply realised it and told his father that they should go back but he refused. As they were arguing, the owl (ikwiikwii) cried again. The spirits have signified enough of the impending danger, but whom they want to kill, they first render him as one who has eyes but cannot see and ears but cannot hear (28-29).

Obijiofo's children were no longer comfortable with their father but there is nothing they could do because their father is a very strong man. Jidefo understood the ominous signs and that made him not to be comfortable, but their father who is supposed to read the handwriting on the wall pretended not to know.

In *Ukpana okpokọ buuru*, Obijiofo refused to listen to the cry of the evil birds but his children knew the danger of that evil bird. Obijiofo saw the ominous signs, an impending danger but he does not want to listen to it. He died as a result of not reading the handwriting on the wall. Ufomba one of the Ndị Odogwu died because of lying and a mysterious snake bites him and his wife to death.

In *Dinta*, Ntinuru hears the discussions of the recycling death changeling (ogbanje) and prepares for the battle. It is an ominous sign for a lion to come out just like that, moving towards Kanelechi and a poisonous snake to come out moving towards the direction of Ntinuru's son, Ohiakara. But Ntinuru defeated them by killing both the lion and the poisonous

snake and reclaimed his children. He knows his destiny and work towards it to achieve it without distractions.

4. Conclusion

The novel is a sub-genre of literature that mirrors the society by projecting the socio-cultural aspects of the society. It helps to solve the problems of life. The Igbo author knows his or her society and does not write anyhow. There is meaning about life or dominating ideas which the author wants their readers to deduce from his or her work. The semiotic and communicative theories as used in this study have clearly revealed that ominous signs exhibit deep meaning and help one to understand the message of creative works across cultures. Igbo culture has valuable insights to offer about the ultimate reality. The authors of the selected novels showed that ominous signs have deep meaning and transcend messages which help people to avoid some mishap in their lives if heeded to. The study concludes that artists apparently use ominous signs in their works with a view to documenting and preserving the Igbo cultural values for posterity.

5. Recommendations

The study recommends that, the consequences of ominous signs on the major characters be carried out in other genres of literature: drama and poetry. Also, other researchers can look at other aspects of ominous signs. Ominous signs are prominent in the lives of both traditional and modern Igbo man. The authors were interested in projecting them for the preservation of these Igbo core values. This research recommends a deep and critical study of traditional practices, instead of condemning the traditional practices embedded in them. Finally, the government should establish commissions and centres for cultural studies to facilitate the documentation of different ethno-cultural values. Through this means, our traditional values including the moral values about culture would be preserved and improved.

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