

Signs as Metaphor and Metaphor as Sign: A Semiotic Analysis of *the Book of Amos*

Oluyemi Odunsi PhD

Department of English,
Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo.
oa.odunsi@acu.edu.ng
08037201843

and

Lydia Opeyemi Ajiboye

Department of English,
Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo.
kitaniyi303@gmail.com
08139598406

Abstract

Metaphor as a message in the communication process opens up new facets in understanding the unknown from the known within the semiotic or theosemiotic framework. The Biblical Book of Amos deploys natural, visual, and linguistic signs to instructively communicate Yahweh's warning and the inevitable consequences of unrighteousness among the Israelites. Extant works on the book Amos have been done from historical and exegetic perspectives with little attention paid to the theosemiotic messages and implications inherent in the book. This study, therefore, examined how God communicates warnings and the inevitability of judgment in the book of Amos with a view to identifying and analysing the structures and functions of signs and metaphors as divine communication strategies and their relevance to contemporary Nigerian society. Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic classification of signs (icon, index and symbol), and Michael Raposa's theosemiotic hermeneutics, which emphasises the experiential mediation of signs in religious experience, served as the theoretical framework. The study adopted a qualitative interpretive design. Data were purposively selected from the visions and pronouncements in Amos. These perspectives provide a multidimensional understanding of the prophetic text as both an objective revelation and a subjective interpretive encounter. Findings revealed that signs and symbols such as the locust, basket of fruit, fire, and plumb line served as semiotic instruments of divine warning and a call for repentance. The book highlighted the inevitability of God's judgment for those who rejected His warnings and hope for forgiveness. All of these were crafted as prophetic messages in Amos.

Keywords: *Theo-semiotics, imageries and signs, warnings, Book of Amos, Prophetic Communication.*

Introduction

Studies on prophetic literature in the Bible have traditionally centred on historical and pure theological interpretations. However, biblical scholarship has increasingly extended its tent to investigating the fact that prophets are not just carriers of divine instructions and messages but are also interpreters of a complex sign system. The signs, metaphors, imagery and visions they employ

are communicative vehicles and devices through which God conveys warnings and redemptive options and possibilities.

The book of *Amos* is one of the earliest and richest examples of prophetic communication in the Old Testament, offering a profound critique of social injustice and religious hypocrisy in Ancient Israel. It chronicles the prophecies and teachings delivered by Prophet Amos to the kingdom of Israel during the reign of King Jeroboam II and King Uzziah of Judah. Amos, a shepherd and a dresser of sycamore trees, came from Tekoa and ministered during a period of prosperity and moral decay in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. He was sent by God to deliver a message that is not only theologically deep but also rich in its use of signs and symbols. Amos employed the use of vivid signs of warnings to bring to light the nation's injustice, economic exploitation and spiritual decay. His prophecy came at a period of relative peace and prosperity, yet greatly known for systemic oppression, corruption and moral decadence. His prophetic messages were deeply semiotic in nature, combining verbal proclamation with symbolic visions to communicate divine intentions. Signs are fundamental elements in semiotics and human communication. Semiotics studies signs and symbols that are involved in the communication process, which allows the analysis of a metaphor from generation to interpretation. Signs, whether linguistic or extra-linguistic, point beyond themselves to reveal deeper layers of meaning, while metaphor functions as a discursive element that enables an apt understanding of abstract theological concepts through the use of concrete experiential ideas. In biblical texts, signs transcend mere linguistics or symbolic markers; they embody divine communication that serves as a mediator of God's intent. Amos's prophetic strategy relies heavily on the symbolic use of metaphors and imagery to convey God's impending judgment and the need for justice.

This study is anchored on the assumption that metaphor itself is a form of signification and that the use of signs in prophetic discourse often manifests metaphorically. Drawing on linguistic and semiotic theories, particularly Peircean classification of signs and Raposa's theosemiotic, this paper reveals the fact that signs and metaphorical elements in the book of *Amos* function as a mediator between the divine and human, highlighting the inseparability between metaphor and signs in prophetic discourse. In this sense, the signs and metaphors function not just as signs but as theosemiotic markers signalling warnings of impending judgment.

By analysing signs as metaphor and metaphor as signs in *the book of Amos*, this study contributes to the growing body of interdisciplinary scholarship, serving as a bridge between linguistics,

semiotics and biblical studies. It reveals the role of metaphorical signification and how linguistic structures are employed to encode, transmit and convey divine messages.

Statement of the Problem

The Book of Amos contains vivid prophetic messages in which signs and symbols are used to communicate warnings against social injustice, moral decadence, political corruption and religious hypocrisy in Ancient Israel. The language of *the book of Amos* is filled with vivid imagery, signs and metaphors that have been studied most times historically, literally rather than as distinctive elements of semiotic and linguistic meaning (Longman, 2021; Nogaski, 2020). Recent research in linguistics and semiotics laid emphasis on the fact that metaphors are not merely ornamental, but they are vital meaning-making mechanisms operating as signs that encode, mediate and communicate complex ideological and theological concepts. (Forceville & Urios-Aparisi, 2021). Despite this shift, inadequate attention is still given to the interrogation of the reciprocal relationship between signs and metaphor within semiotic processes. There has also been growing attention on metaphor and its interrelation with signs. Scholars such as Uwaegbute (2023) engaged in methodological questions as it relates to biblical studies, but the specific intersection between linguistics, semiotics and prophetic metaphors has not been fully addressed.

This study, therefore, seeks to address the need for a linguistic and semiotic investigation that treats metaphors in the *book of Amos* as both signs and meaning markers. This is necessary because the integrative approach will aid scholarly understanding of how metaphors in prophetic texts, such as *the book of Amos*, can function linguistically as signs, shaping theological meanings, communicating divine intents and audiences' understanding.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

This study aims to investigate the interrelation between signs and metaphors in *the book of Amos* by examining how metaphorical expressions act as semiotic signs and how signs are structured as metaphors within prophetic discourse using semiotic frameworks. The specific objectives are to:

1. identify the semiotic resources prominent in *the book of Amos*,
2. analyse the semiotic resources and their functions in the *book of Amos*.
3. examine these semiotic resources and their implications for contemporary Nigerian society.

Research Questions

1. What are the prominent semiotic resources in the book of *Amos*?

2. What semiotic resources are deployed in the book of *Amos*, and how do they function in constructing and communicating prophetic meanings?
3. What are the implications of the signs encoded in the semiotic resources of the book of *Amos* for the contemporary Nigerian society?

Literature Review

This literature review examines existing works on signs and metaphors with reference to prophetic texts. It also explores a theoretical framework from semiotics and cognitive linguistics. Furthermore, this review also considers studies that contextualise metaphor and signs in Nigerian scholarship, thereby situating *Amos* in the Nigerian academic discourse. Through the integration of these perspectives, the review provides a foundation for the understanding of the dual functions of language in *Amos* as metaphor within a semiotic framework, setting the stage for a linguistically informed investigation in prophetic communication.

Signs and Metaphors in Biblical Texts

In biblical scholarship, metaphorical language has been recognised as a central semiotic resource through which meaning is constructed and communicated. Brownsmith (2024) argued that metaphor in scripture functions as a complex cognitive and semiotic tool, enabling readers to understand complex and abstract theological concepts through the use of concrete imagery. Such works show that biblical metaphors like the “vine” and “light of the world” operate semiotically as signs to convey theological meaning within the structure of the narrative of the scripture. Within the context of religion and biblical studies, Nigerian researchers have explored metaphorical expressions in biblical and Christian discourse, highlighting the challenge of interpreting metaphors when literal readings predominate. For instance, Hundu (2025) carried out a study on the Gospel of John, examining how metaphors contribute to misunderstandings when readers fail to recognise their symbolic dimensions, illustrating how metaphor functions as a sign that bridges literal and figurative meaning in scripture. Nigerian research on metaphor in Christian sermons further reveals that metaphors in religious discourse reflect sociocultural ideologies and communicate moral and spiritual truths to local audiences (*Figures of Rhetoric in the Language of Nigerian Christian Sermons*, 2024). These studies reveal that metaphorical signs in biblical texts are embedded in cultural and interpretive practices that shape how communities understand divine messages.

Beyond explicitly biblical contexts, Nigerian studies on metaphor in language and cultural discourse contribute important insights into how metaphors function as signs in meaning construction. Omotayo (2023) carried out an analysis of conceptual metaphors in Nigerian Christian praise songs, demonstrating how metaphoric language encodes theological and cultural values in worship contexts, underscoring the semiotic richness of metaphor in religious communication. In the same vein, Igwedibia (2024) semiotic analysis of cultural signs in Nigerian contexts shows how signs acquire meaning through usage and interpretation within specific communities, supporting the idea that metaphorical signs in texts like Amos are culturally situated and interpretable within shared semiotic frameworks. While many Nigerian studies focus on metaphor in media, culture, or social discourse, their conceptual insights provide a foundation for analysing biblical metaphors as semiotic signs that operate in linguistic networks of meaning. Collectively, these studies show that metaphor and signification are interwoven processes: metaphors in biblical texts serve as semiotic signs that facilitate cognitive engagement with divine themes, and understanding these metaphors requires attention to both linguistic form and cultural interpretation.

Semiotics and Theosemiotics

Semiotics, as the study of signs and symbols, could be traced to the works of Ferdinand de Saussure (1983) and Charles Sanders Peirce (1955). It offers insights and a compelling framework for the construction and interpretation of language symbols and codes. According to Riera (2020), semiotics is understood as a triadic interaction between signs, context, and meaning. Frances (2021) reiterates that it is an interdisciplinary field that analyses how signs and symbols acquire meaning across cultures. Recent developments in semiotic theory have greatly enriched the study of religious texts and divine communication by moving beyond the structural model of sign systems to include ethical, ontological and communal dimensions. Semiotics is broadly understood as the study of signs and meaning-making processes. In theological discourse, this interpretive model has evolved into theosemiotics as first articulated by John Deely and further developed by Michael Raposa. Raposa (2020) articulated the concept of theosemiotics as a discipline which applies the insight of Charles Sanders Peirce's triadic semiotics, depicting that divine communication functions through symbolic mediation, ritual contexts and prophetic discourse, enabling human communities to encounter transcendent meaning through interpretive engagement. (Raposa, 2020; Raposa, 2022). Theosemiotics, therefore, as an interdisciplinary field,

bridges the gap between semiotic theory and theology, suggesting that divine signs can operate not only as communicative elements but also as spiritual catalysts shaping moral orientation, ethical responsibility and collective consciousness (Madu, 2023; Iheanacho, 2024).

While classical semiotics is focused on how signs signify, theosemiotics adds layers of ontological and ethical implication: sign is a mediation between human encounter with the divine to shape self-understanding and communal forms of life. Taqiyuddin (2020) applied theosemiotics theory to analyse Islamic Dawah messages, showing how the signer and communicator, symbol use and the audience response constitute the sign process.

In African and Nigerian biblical scholarship, there has been growing recognition of the usefulness of semiotic approaches for interpreting biblical texts in ways that resonate with contemporary social realities. Nigerian scholars argue that prophetic texts employ culturally embedded signs that speak powerfully to issues of injustice, leadership failure, and moral decay—conditions that remain prevalent in many African societies (Adamo, 2021; Olojede, 2020). Semiotics thus provides a methodological bridge between the ancient biblical world and modern African contexts by highlighting how signs function communicatively across time and culture. According to Olatunji (2022), semiotic interpretation enables African readers to uncover layers of meaning in biblical texts that speak directly to lived social experiences, particularly in contexts marked by political instability and economic inequality.

The Biblical Book of Amos

Recent scholarship continues to treat the Book of Amos as a paradigmatic prophetic text for studying prophetic rhetoric, social criticism, and religious ethics. Contemporary scholars emphasise that Amos is not primarily a collection of abstract theology but a tightly woven, rhetorically forceful corpus in which oracles, visions, and indictments cohere around a sustained critique of social injustice, legal corruption, and ritual hypocrisy (Davis, 2022; Akintola, 2021). Where older scholarship often separated historical-critical description from ethical application, newer work tends to read Amos both as a historically situated product of eighth-century BCE Israel and as a literarily sophisticated tract that stages infectious rhetorical strategies designed to make audiences perceive social realities as theological problems (Davis, 2022).

Central to the Book of Amos is the idea that divine covenant demands ethical obedience. Amos positions social justice as a theological principle, arguing that ritual worship without righteous living is unacceptable to God. Israel's exploitation of the poor, perversion of justice, and religious

hypocrisy violate divine standards, leading to prophetic warnings of imminent judgment unless repentance occurs (Akintola, 2021). Thus, the concept of prophetic warning in Amos functions not merely as prediction but as a moral summons, a call to societal reformation grounded in covenant ethics. This conceptual focus situates Amos as a text where spiritual fidelity and social responsibility are inseparable (Idemudia, 2024).

A growing strand of scholarship in Africa and Nigeria has made particularly persuasive claims about the contemporary relevance of Amos. Several Nigerian scholars and clergy-scholars have argued that the socio-economic and religious conditions Amos denounces—elite accumulation, exploitation of the poor, judicial perversion, and sacrificial religiosity devoid of justice—bear an uncanny resemblance to systemic problems in many African states today (Akintola, 2021; Dogara, 2021; Opade, 2023). Akintola's close reading of Amos 5:21–24, for example, situates the prophetic critique of moral performance in explicit conversation with Nigerian church practices and public life, arguing that Amos provides a prophetic paradigm for clergy and lay leaders to press for social justice (Akintola, 2021). Dogara (2021) and Opade (2023) likewise read Amos as a resource for public theology, showing how the text's indictments can be translated into civic critique and pastoral praxis in contexts of corruption and unequal wealth distribution.

A conceptual feature that makes the book of Amos distinct is its use of symbolic vision, imageries and metaphors to communicate divine instruction and warnings. Metaphors and signs such as the locusts, fire, plumb line, and basket of summer fruit operate as divine signs that reveal Israel's moral decay and impending destruction (Smith, 2023). Within a semiotic and theological frame, these visions serve as divine communicative acts through which Yahweh discloses His moral expectations and decisions to His prophet, who then interprets them for the community. The symbolic imagery reinforces the conceptual theme that divine revelation often appears not as abstract doctrine but as visual, ethical, and rhetorical signs designed to provoke interpretation and response (Madu, 2023). Moreover, the Book of Amos conceptualises warnings and restoration as complementary elements of divine purpose. Although the dominant tone is one of warning and impending punishment, the final chapter introduces hope and covenant renewal, revealing that divine warnings aim not at annihilation but at purification and ultimate restoration of God's people (Iheanacho, 2024).

Finally, recent contributions caution against simplistic appropriation. While Amos is widely read as a prophetic mirror for contemporary governance failures, methodological reflections urge that

such use be hermeneutically disciplined—attending to historical distance, the book’s rhetorical conventions, and the theological particularities of covenant language (Davis, 2022; Raposa, 2020). Raposa’s theosemiotic perspective (2020) is often cited in this context as a corrective: treating Amos’ visions and oracles as semiotic acts helps interpreters preserve the text’s internal logic while responsibly discerning parallels for modern application.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study draws upon Charles Sanders Peirce’s triadic theory of signs and Michael Raposa’s theosemiotics, providing a robust framework for analysing metaphors and signs in the Book of Amos. These theories are particularly suitable because they provide a multidimensional analysis of linguistic, cognitive, and theological dimensions of prophetic discourse.

Charles Sanders Peirce’s Classification of Signs

Peirce (1931–1958) conceptualises a sign (or representamen) as something that stands for an object to an interpretant—the effect or understanding produced in a mind. His theory is triadic, consisting of representamen, referring to the form the sign takes (e.g., word, image, sound), Object depicting that which the sign refers to (e.g., divine justice, social corruption). And the Interpretant is the understanding or meaning derived from the sign by an interpreter. Peirce further classifies signs into three categories based on how they relate to their objects namely Icon which relates to sign in term of resemblance (e.g., a roaring lion in Amos symbolizing danger), Index relating to signification by causal or existential connection (e.g., a plumb line indicating judgment) and symbol referring to signs derived through convention, law, or learned association (e.g., the “basket of summer fruit” symbolizing impending doom). Peirce’s framework allows this study to systematically identify and categorise the metaphoric and semiotic resources in Amos, linking linguistic forms to their referents and cognitive effects. By doing so, metaphors are not just aesthetic or rhetorical devices—they become structured signs whose meanings can be analysed in a precise, semiotic-linguistic manner.

Michael Raposa’s Theosemiotics

Theosemiotics extends Peircean semiotics into the theological domain, focusing on divine communication through signs. The key principles in theosemiotics are divine intentionality. All signs in sacred texts are understood as purposeful vehicles of divine meaning. Interpretive

mediation, which reiterates the fact that human interpretation is essential; the interpretant is influenced by theological and contextual knowledge and the Integration of natural and supernatural signs. Signs may be material, linguistic, or spiritual, reflecting both observable reality and transcendent truths.

Raposa's approach is particularly considered suitable for analysing prophetic texts like Amos, as it emphasises the semiotic dimension of divine messages. It situates the metaphors and symbolic signs within a theological framework, recognising their role in communicating moral, social, and spiritual lessons to the audience.

The combination of Peirce's semiotic classification and Raposa's theosemiotics is highly complementary: Peirce's classification of signs provides a rigorous semiotic and cognitive-linguistic structure for categorising signs and analysing how metaphors function in language, while Raposa adds a theological and interpretive layer, recognising that in prophetic texts, signs are not only linguistic tools but also vehicles of divine communication. A combination of these two frameworks allows a holistic analysis where each metaphor in Amos can be identified as a type of sign (icon, index, symbol) through Peirce, interpreted for its theological meaning and moral implications using Raposa's theosemiotics.

This dual framework ensures that the study addresses both the linguistic semiotics of metaphors and their religious-theological significance. Thus, aligning to understand how signs and metaphors communicate divine messages in Amos.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research design with a focus on textual and semiotic analysis guided by the principles of semiotic theory. Qualitative research is considered appropriate because the study aims to investigate and interpret signs and metaphors as complex semiotic resources in the book of Amos. This allows for an in-depth analysis of the linguistic, semiotic and theological functions of metaphors and signs in Amos. The book of Amos is chosen for this study because Amos is known for its rich use of metaphoric and symbolic language, and it is theologically and socially relevant. It is comprehensive, which allows for a systematic and thorough analysis. The population of the study is the biblical text of Amos, found in the Old Testament. The entire nine chapters of Amos and 146 verses serve as the textual sample for this study. But some selected verses that are rich metaphorically are selected and analysed, thus providing a comprehensive analysis of the semiotic and linguistic features of the text. Purposive sampling is considered

appropriate for this study because it allows for focus on relevant data, and it allows the researcher to select only the verses that are rich in metaphorical and semiotic content. It aids efficiency in analysis and helps alignment with the Amos 1:1-2:16- The Prophecies against the Nations research objectives. The selected verses are:

Amos 4: 7-Natural signs (withheld rain) as instruments of divine warning

Amos 5:18-24-Symbolic expressions of the analogy of the day of the Lord

Amos 7:1-9- Visions of locust, fire and plumb line

Amos 8:1-3-The basket of fruit as a sign of the end

Amos 9:1-10- The collapsing sanctuary as a final sign of warning

These selected texts represent the semiotic core of Amos's messages and are sufficient for in-depth interpretation.

Data Analysis and Discussion of Findings

The section presents the analysis of the metaphorical expressions and semiotic resources identified in the book of Amos using Peirce's classification of signs (icon, index and symbol) and Raposa's theosemiotics as the analytical framework. The analysis focused on how signs and metaphors function to convey divine, social and ethical messages and how relevant these signs are to the contemporary Nigerian society. The discussion of the findings integrates with existing literatures highlighting patterns, recurring themes and interplay between metaphor and signification.

Excerpt One

Amos 1:3-5

“Thus says the Lord: for three transgressions of Damascus, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because they have threshed Gilead with threshing sledges of iron...”

This passage brims with vivid metaphors employing acts of violence and destruction that act as signs that the audience can relate to experientially. The metaphoric signs in the passage include: “Three transgressions... even four” “Threshing Gilead with iron sledges” “Fire sent upon the house of Hazael” “Breaking the gate bar of Damascus” “Cutting off the ruler and the sceptre-holder” “Exile to Kir”

These signs can be classified in to Iconic Sign (sign of resemblance)

Threshing Gilead with iron sledges: This sign is highly iconic because it resembles the physical act of threshing grain at the threshing field, but has metamorphosed in to violent image. It creates

a mental image of despair and devastation where the threshing of grain is transformed into a battering of a city, depicting inevitability.

Fire-consuming palaces: Fire visually mirrors destruction and devastation. It transforms luxury and power into ashes, an image of absolute devastation and destruction beyond repair. Even the palaces that are considered symbols of pride and power are not spared. These icons mirror the moral condition of Damascus and the consequences awaiting it.

Indexes (signs of causality): The indexical signs in Amos 1:3-5 present a vivid sequence of divine judgment where metaphors and signs are used to point to larger realities beyond themselves.

Fire sent by Yahweh indexing divine response to injustice as punishment, pointing back to sin. They point to Yahweh's active judgment. The flames from the fire are the resultant effect of divine actions, depicting that God is the reason behind the destruction.

Broken gate bars depicting defeat of military power and the loss of security. They are direct evidence of the city's conquest. They point to the failure of human defence and security confidence against the divine mandate.

Exile of the people: This is an index of divine punishment. They were forcefully removed from their homeland, depicting the link between sin and its effect. It reflects covenantal violation and divine judgment.

Symbols (Signs by Convention): The Prophet in Amos 1:3-5 employs the symbolic signs that convey the meaning through cultural, moral and covenantal conversation.

“Three... four transgressions”: This repeated phrase is a numerical symbol depicting fullness of sins and transgression. It shows that the transgression of the Israelites has reached its peak and cannot be ignored.

Gate bars: This symbolises security and authority. It invariably represents the collapse of these structures.

Sceptre-holder represents kingship and political authority. These symbolic signs depend on cultural and theological understanding to reflect how they carry evidence of meaning. The text in Amos 1:4-5 warns that rulers who misuse power are subject to divine corrections.

Theosemiotic Analysis

Michael Raposa's theosemiotics views divine revelation as a combination of signs through which God communicates meaning, warning, and moral demand within historical contexts. In relation to Amos 1:3-, it reveals that God is the Ultimate Sign-Giver who communicates to humans through

the use of signs. In Amos 1:3–5, Yahweh functions as the intentional communicator, using metaphoric language and prophetic speech as divine signs. Also, it shows that signs are a medium of moral communication. Raposa emphasises that divine signs are ethically charged; they demand interpretation and response. The violent threshing becomes a sign exposing moral corruption. The fire and exile function as corrective signs, calling attention to justice. Therefore, the signs in Amos are not arbitrary punishments, but meaning-laden warnings. In theosemiotics, meaning emerges through God’s intentionality, the mediation of the prophet and the audience’s interpretation. The signs from a theosemiotic operate at three levels, that is, the past, which refers to the violence already committed, talking of Israel’s inability to adhere to divine warnings, showing the prophet’s admonition for them to pay attention to the warnings being issued, and the future reflecting the effect of their lack of adherence to warnings. This aligns with Raposa’s idea that divine signs collapse time, making future consequences morally present.

Amos 1:3–5 presents a structured semiotic warning system, icons depicting violence and destruction, indexical signs pointing to divine causality and symbols encoded in theological and cultural meaning. Through a theosemiotic lens, the passage functions as divine communication aimed at moral accountability, revealing Yahweh as a God who speaks through historical events, symbolic language, and prophetic warning signs.

Excerpt Two

Amos 4: 6-11

“I gave you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and lack of bread in all your places, yet you did not return to me, says the Lord

And I also withheld rain from you when there were still three months to the harvest; I would send rain on one city...”

Amos 4:6–11 contains a series of signs that showcase divine warnings addressed to Israel. Unlike Amos, whose focus was on foreign nations, the message in Amos 4:6-11 was directed to confront God’s own people. Each verse recalls a past calamity sent by Yahweh, followed by the refrain “yet you did not return to me”, emphasizing Israel’s persistent nonchalant attitude to divine signs.

The metaphors and signs identified in the passage are: Cleanness of teeth (famine) – v 6, Withheld rain and drought – v.8, Blight and mildew – vs.9, Locust devastation – v.9, Plague like that of Egypt – v.10. Each of these signs acts as a communicative element of warnings and not a mere judgment. The signs are semiotically classified into

Icons (Signs of Resemblance): The iconic signs in Amos 4:6-11 are:

Cleanness of teeth: This resembles hunger, absence of food, famine and poverty.

Withheld rain: This mirrors agricultural barrenness and lifelessness.

Blight, mildew, and locusts visually resemble decay, destruction, and loss.

The iconic signs reflect suffering, despair and devastation, making the warning concrete and experiential.

Indexes (Signs of Causality): The indexical signs that abound in the passage are:

Famine and drought point to divine displeasure linked to covenant violation.

Plagues and military defeat

Each of these signs points backwards to Israel's sin and looks forward to possible repentance

Symbols (Signs by Convention): In Amos 4:6-11, the symbolic signs that are inherent in the passage are:

Rain, which signifies divine blessing and life.

Egyptian plagues depicting judgment and reversal of salvation history.

Sodom and Gomorrah stand for ultimate judgment and moral collapse.

“A brand plucked from the fire” showing narrow escape and unmerited mercy. These symbols rely on Israel's shared theological memory.

Theosemiotic Analysis

Theosemiotics views divine revelation as God's self-communication through signs embedded in lived experience, especially signs that are ethically charged and demand interpretation. Applying this to Amos 4:6-11, it reveals the fact that God as Communicator through history. In the passage, Yahweh communicates not primarily through verbal speech but through natural events such as famine, drought, plague, and war. These events function as divine signs, intentionally placed within Israel's experience to provoke moral awareness. Signs are also viewed as invitations, revealing that divine signs do not coerce; they demand response and interpretation. The repeated refrain “yet you did not return to me” highlights Israel's failure not because the signs were unclear, but because the people refused to interpret them rightly. The signs were warnings meant to restore the relationship, not merely to punish. Furthermore, from a theosemiotic perspective, the progressive accumulation of signs intensifies their communicative force. Each calamity builds upon the previous one, increasing interpretive pressure. This is an indication of the fact that meaning emerges not from one sign alone, but from the network of signs. Amos 4:6–11 presents a dense

theosemiotic system of warnings portraying Yahweh as a persistent communicator, using historical crises as meaningful signs aimed at ethical transformation and restored relationship.

Excerpt Three

Amos 5:18–24

“Alas for you who desire the day of the LORD! Why do you want the day of the LORD? It is darkness, not light

As if someone fled from a lion, and was met by a bear; or went into the house and rested a hand against the wall and was bitten by a snake...”

The metaphorical signs in Amos 5:1-24 include:

The Day of the LORD as darkness, not light (vs. 18, 20)

Flight from danger only to meet another threat (vs. 19)

Divine rejection of festivals and sacrifices (vs. 21–22)

Silencing of songs and music (vs. 23)

These signs warn against religious hypocrisy and announce impending judgment. Semiotically, they can be classified into:

Icons — Signs of Resemblance: Iconic Signs in Amos 5:18–20

In Amos 5:18–20, the prophet employs iconic signs—images that resemble the reality they signify to convey divine judgment and the consequences of moral failure. These signs are visually and conceptually vivid, creating immediate cognitive and emotional resonance with the audience.

Darkness Instead of Light (Amos 5:18): The phrase “darkness instead of light” resembles the experience of sudden obscurity. It is not merely metaphorical; it evokes sensory and emotional understanding, allowing the audience to “feel” the absence of guidance and hope.

Man Fleeing from a Lion and Meeting a Bear (Amos 5:19)

The imagery of a man fleeing a lion only to encounter a bear resembles the experience of escalating danger and inescapable peril. The sequence mirrors real-life anxiety and tension, making the divine message concrete and apprehensible.

Snake Biting in the House (Amos 5:19)

A snake biting someone in their house evokes immediate fear and danger in a supposedly safe environment, resembling the real-life experience of betrayal or threat within familiar spaces.

Indexes — Signs of Causality:

In Amos 5:18–20, the prophet employs indexical signs—events or actions that point causally or existentially to a larger moral or divine reality. Unlike icons, which resemble their objects, indexical signs signal their objects through relational or causal connections, making them powerful indicators of divine judgment.

Dark Day of the Lord (Amos 5:18) “the dark day of the Lord” points directly to God’s impending judgment. The darkness is not merely descriptive; it signals the existential reality of divine intervention, indicating that God’s wrath will disrupt human expectations.

Rejected Sacrifices (Amos 5:22)

God’s rejection of sacrifices signals that rituals alone cannot substitute for righteous conduct. The act of offering sacrifices points causally to the emptiness of religious acts without moral obedience.

Silenced Songs (Amos 5:23)

The silencing of songs at religious festivals points to divine displeasure, causally connecting empty praise with God’s rejection. Music, a normal expression of worship, becomes an index of spiritual failure when disconnected from righteousness.

Creative Insights

The indexical signs in Amos 5:18–20 create a moral and theological map of consequences:

Symbols — Signs by Convention, as highlighted in Amos 5:18-24, are:

Day of the LORD symbolising divine reversals of what things used to be, it further depicts divine judgment

Festivals and offerings signifying Israel’s religious system.

Noise of songs, which is a symbol of superficial worship.

Theosemiotic Analysis

God communicates not only through words but through signs embedded in lived reality. In Amos 5:18–24, metaphors and imageries functions s divine warning signs that reveal God’s ethical priorities. It reflects that divine signs often supersede human assumptions. Israel expects the Day of the LORD to signify victory and light; God re-signifies it as darkness and danger. This reversal functions as a corrective sign, exposing misinterpretation rooted in injustice. Divine signs are invitational rather than coercive. Theosemiotic framework also recognises that signs lose meaning when severed from ethical truth. By saying that sacrifices and ritual actions cannot bail Israel out, it shows that religious signs without justice become semiotically empty. The rejection of worship is not divine absence but relational protest. God’s refusal to accept rituals functions as a sign of a

wounded relationship, aiming to restore moral alignment rather than annihilate the people. Amos 5:18–24 presents a powerful system of warning signs. Through a theosemiotic lens, the passage portrays God as a meaning-giving agent, using symbolic language and ethical demands to warn that justice and not ritual constitutes true covenant faithfulness.

Excerpt Four

Amos 7:1–9

“This is what the Lord GOD showed me: he was forming locust at the time the latter growth began to sprout (it was the latter growth after the king’s mowing).

When they had finished eating the grass of the land, I said, “O Lord GOD, forgive, I beg you! How can Jacob stand? He is so small...”

In Amos 7:1–9, the prophet presents a series of visions that communicate divine judgment through vivid imagery. These visions employ iconic, indexical, and symbolic signs, each serving as a semiotic vehicle for theological and moral instruction.

Iconic Signs

Iconic signs mirror the reality they signify, creating a visual and conceptual likeness that allows the audience to intuitively grasp God’s message.

Locusts (Amos 7:1–3)

The swarm of locusts resembles complete ecological devastation, mirroring the destruction they bring upon crops and livelihood. The imagery is immediate and tangible, creating a sensory experience for the audience.

Consuming Fire (Amos 7:4–6)

Fire resembles total annihilation, visually representing the destruction of both natural and social structures. It conveys the intensity and immediacy of divine wrath.

The Plumb Line (Amos 7:7–9)

The plumb line resembles moral alignment, a visual analogy to measure uprightness. Though simple, it creates a clear cognitive map: the nation is being measured against divine standards.

Destruction of High Places (Amos 7:9)

High places visually represent corrupt religious and social structures. Their destruction iconically mirrors the collapse of idolatrous or unjust systems.

Indexical Signs

Indexical signs point causally to reality, signalling divine action through relational or existential connections.

Agricultural Destruction

Points directly to the social and economic consequences of moral failure. Famine, crop loss, and ecological devastation signal divine disfavour.

Fire Reaching the Great Deep

This indicates that no human domain is beyond God's reach. Divine judgment penetrates even the deepest and most secure places, reinforcing moral accountability.

Plumb Line

It functions indexically, pointing to Israel's moral deviation; the visual tool is both metaphorical and causally connected to the reality of impending judgment.

Symbolic Signs

Symbolic signs depend on cultural or theological conventions, conveying meaning through shared understanding.

Locusts

This symbolically represents God's corrective authority, not just ecological damage. They signify divine intervention in human history.

Fire

Fire symbolises moral purification, divine wrath, and corrective action against social and religious corruption.

High Places

High places represent idolatry, ritual corruption, and false religious confidence. Their destruction signals God's rejection of superficial piety and establishes moral and covenantal accountability.

Theosemiotic Analysis

In Raposa's theosemiotics, divine revelation occurs through meaningful signs embedded in experience. In Amos 7:1–9, God intentionally shows Amos the visions; revelation is visual, symbolic, and interpretive, not merely verbal, stressing that divine signs are not deterministic. The first two visions (locusts and fire) are open signs—their outcomes change in response to Amos' intercession. This reveals a relational semiosis in which human response participates in meaning. The plumb line marks a theosemiotic shift. Unlike earlier signs, it is non-negotiable. God declares, "I will spare them no longer." It is a sign of finality. In Raposa's terms, the sign now functions as

a final interpretant: Israel has been measured and found deficient. Theosemiotic framework shows that divine signs are fundamentally ethical. The plumb line does not measure ritual performance but moral alignment, justice, righteousness, and covenant faithfulness. Judgment arises not from ignorance but from persistent refusal to realign. The progression of signs illustrates Raposa's idea that divine signs begin as invitations before they translate into warnings and end as judgments when consistently ignored. Thus, the visions trace the limits of mercy within moral responsibility. Through a theosemiotic lens, the passage portrays God as a communicative and relational judge, whose signs aim first at repentance but ultimately declare judgment when ethical disorder becomes irreversible.

Excerpt Five

Amos 8:1–3

*“This is what the Lord God showed me- a basket of summer fruit
He said,” Amos, what do you see?” And I said, “A basket of summer fruit”
Then the LORD said to me, “The end has come upon my people Israel; I will never again pass
them by...”*

Amos 8:1–3 presents one of the most arresting prophetic visions in the book: a seemingly benign image—a basket of summer fruit—is transformed into a chilling announcement of finality. The passage dramatises how ordinary objects become semiotic vessels of divine judgment, where metaphor functions not as ornament but as a revelatory force.

Iconic Signs

Iconic signs operate through resemblance, enabling the audience to grasp divine meaning through sensory and experiential likeness.

The Basket of Summer Fruit

The basket of summer fruit is iconic because it resembles ripeness, fullness, and seasonal completion. Visually, it evokes abundance and harvest; semiotically, it mirrors a condition that has reached its natural end.

Wailing Instead of Songs (Amos 8:3)

The reversal of joyful temple songs into wailing is iconically powerful because it resembles emotional inversion—celebration collapsing into grief.

The soundscape shifts from harmony to lamentation.

Worship becomes mourning.

This auditory image allows the audience to hear judgment, not merely understand it intellectually. The resemblance between grief and wailing makes the message visceral: joy cannot coexist with injustice.

Dead Bodies

The presence of dead bodies strewn in silence is an iconic sign of total devastation. Death here resembles the final collapse of social order and human dignity.

The image confronts the reader with stillness, absence, and rupture.

Life has ceased where it once flourished.

Theologically, this icon announces that divine judgment is not abstract—it leaves visible, corporeal traces in human history.

Indexical Signs

Indexical signs point to meaning through causal or existential connection, directly linking the sign and the resultant effect.

Ripe Fruit

Ripe fruit functions indexically by pointing to temporal inevitability. Ripeness is evidence that a process is complete.

It indicates that judgment is not arbitrary but causally linked to accumulated injustice.

The fruit's condition points beyond itself to a moral reality.

The fruit does not threaten; it testifies.

“The End Has Come”, Declared by Yahweh

The divine declaration is a direct index of irreversible judgment. It signals a decisive shift in divine-human relations. The utterance itself points to action already set in motion. Language becomes performative—what is spoken enacts reality.

Symbolic Signs

Symbolic signs derive meaning through cultural, religious, and theological conventions shared between the prophet and audience.

Summer Fruit

Summer fruit represents completion, fullness, and expiration. In Israel's agrarian consciousness, summer fruit signals the end of the agricultural cycle. It conventionally signifies abundance. In Amos, it is subverted to signify moral exhaustion and divine closure. Thus, blessing becomes indictment.

Temple Songs

Temple songs symbolise accepted worship and covenantal harmony. Their transformation into wailing signifies the collapse of ritual legitimacy. Worship divorced from justice loses its meaning, sacred sound becomes hollow noise. This symbol reinforces Amos's broader critique: ritual cannot mask moral failure.

Silence

Silence functions as one of the most profound symbols in the passage. It symbolises divine withdrawal, shock, and finality where prophetic speech once thundered, there is now absence.

Theosemiotic Analysis

From theosemiotic perspectives, God communicates through signs embedded in ordinary experience. The basket of fruit, which is an everyday object, becomes a divine sign, showing that revelation can emerge from the familiar. Earlier visions allowed interpretive openness through prophetic intercession. However, the sign yields a final interpretant: "I will never again pass by them." This marks a point where semiosis culminates in decisive meaning; the warning has become judgment. Raposa emphasises that divine signs are ethically saturated. The fruit is "ripe" not agriculturally but morally, meaning that Israel's exploitation, injustice, and religious hypocrisy have matured beyond correction. Temple songs turning into wailing illustrate semiotic reversal and a breakdown of semiosis. Worship no longer signifies communion; in the same vein, music no longer signifies praise. In Raposa's terms, the religious sign-system collapses because it no longer aligns with ethical reality. Furthermore, silence functions as a negative sign—not the absence of meaning, but the completion of meaning. God's communicative patience has ended; no further interpretation or appeal is invited. Through a theosemiotic lens, the passage portrays God as a communicator whose signs move from invitation to final declaration, warning that when ethical corruption fully ripens, judgment is no longer deferred.

Except Six

Amos 9:1–10

"I saw the LORD standing beside the altar, and he said: Strike the capitals until the threshold shakes and shatters them on the heads of all the people; and those who are left I will kill with the sword; flee away, not one of them shall escape"

Amos 9:1–10 brings the prophetic drama to its climactic intensity. Here, judgment is no longer mediated through warning alone; it is enacted, pursued, and executed. The passage is saturated with semiotic force, where vision, movement, and pursuit become signs of an inescapable divine presence. God is no longer distant—He is watching, advancing, and acting.

Iconic Signs

Iconic signs in this passage function through visual resemblance, allowing divine judgment to be grasped through sensory immediacy.

Eyes as Flames of Fire

The image of Yahweh's eyes burning like fire is powerfully iconic. Fire resembles penetration, intensity, and exposure.

Sweeping Gaze

The sweeping gaze of Yahweh iconically resembles total surveillance and relentless pursuit.

It moves across land and sea, height and depth.

No spatial refuge remains intact.

The resemblance communicates omnipresence in motion: divine judgment is mobile, intentional, and exhaustive.

Net Capturing the Exile

The net is iconically effective because it resembles entrapment and inevitability.

Once cast, escape is impossible.

Movement only tightens confinement.

The image dramatises exile not as chance displacement but as deliberate divine capture.

Sword Executing Judgment

The sword iconically resembles decisive violence and final authority.

It cuts, separates, and terminates.

It does not warn—it concludes.

Here, the sword embodies the finality of judgment, transforming abstract justice into visible execution.

Indexical Signs

Indexical signs point through causal and existential connections, linking divine intent directly to human consequence.

Flaming Eyes

Indexically, the flaming eyes point to active divine scrutiny. Their intensity signals that judgment is not pending—it is already underway. The gaze itself is evidence of action. Seeing becomes the first movement toward consequence.

Falling into the Net

Falling into the net is an existential index of inescapable consequence. The fall is not symbolic only; it is causal. Moral failure leads directly to capture. This indexically underscores Amos's theology: sin sets traps before judgment ever arrives.

Symbolic Signs

Symbolic signs in Amos 9:1–10 rely on religious and cultural conventions, transforming familiar objects into theological statements.

Altars

Altars symbolically represent worship, mediation, and divine encounter. Yet in this vision, the altar becomes a site of judgment rather than refuge.

Sacred space offers no immunity.

Ritual cannot shield injustice.

The shattered altar symbolises the collapse of false religiosity, exposing worship divorced from righteousness.

Fire

Fire symbolically conveys divine holiness, purification, and wrath.

It destroys, but it also reveals.

It signals God's refusal to coexist with moral corruption.

In Amos 9, fire is no longer corrective alone—it is decisive.

Net

Symbolically, the net represents total control and sovereign capture.

Nations that once hunted are now hunted.

Human mobility is overwhelmed by divine strategy.

The net symbolises the reversal of power: those who ensnared others are themselves ensnared.

Theosemiotic Analysis

Divine signs in theosemiotics are viewed as being embedded in historical and relational experience. In Amos 9:1–10, God's presence cannot be avoided, making every action and location a site of ethical accountability. The imagery (flames, net, sword) functions as communicative

warnings, not abstract threats. Yahweh's flaming eyes are not merely observational but moral evaluators, detecting injustice and sin. The sword and net signify consequences of unrepentant wrongdoing. God's proximity to the altar (v.1) underscores the relationship as the medium of semiosis: worship is meaningful only when aligned with justice. Worship not accepted by God and done in the way prescribed by Him triggers divine warning, highlighting the interpersonal ethics between God and Israel. Amos 9:10 underscores that even insiders ("sinners among my people") cannot evade scrutiny, reflecting the universality of ethical responsibility. Theosemiotically, the passage portrays God as a relational and communicative judge, whose warning signs integrate imagery, ethical evaluation, and covenantal expectation, culminating in a declaration that judgment is both inevitable and morally necessary.

Relevance of Metaphors and Signs in the Book of Amos to the Contemporary Nigerian Society

The book of Amos is embedded with signs and symbolic representations that are very relevant to the contemporary Nigerian Society. These tapestries of divine signs communicate God's displeasure towards a society that is trailed by extreme moral decadence and injustice. Viewing this from a semiotic lens and applying it to the Nigerian society reflects a similar scenario marred by political, moral and spiritual crisis. For instance, the use of cleanness of teeth and lack of bread in Amos 4:6-8 transcends its literal meaning of food scarcity to represents a profound spiritual and moral emptiness, the children of Israel suffered physical hunger due to their hypocrisy and injustice, there was also a famine of compassion and righteousness, perpetrated by the actions of those in the upper class in the society. Relating this to the contemporary Nigerian society, it manifests in perverse poverty, hunger and economic inequality despite the Nation's abundant resources.

Similarly, the sign of locust as used in Amos 7:1-9 serves as a metaphorical image for forces that consume the fruit of people's labour. The locust is an iconic sign representing destruction. In consonance with the Nigerian society, it aptly describes the devouring effects of corruption and insurgency that are devastating the Nigerian economy and society. Likewise, funds meant for the development of the country are swallowed by political bigots and elites at the expense of the citizens, leaving them impoverished and hopeless. The locust also finds its equivalent in the parasitic systems and individuals that drain Nigerians' collective wealth, leading to a recurring circle of hardship and underdevelopment (Adeleye, 2021).

The sign of “Fire” in Amos 7:4-6 signifies purification through destruction. It sends a message that corruption and injustice inevitably attract consequences. Semiotically, fire operates as a symbolic sign of divine anger and social breakdown. In Nigeria, the frequent communal crisis, conflict, terrorism, kidnappings and clashes can be seen as contemporary indicators of fires consuming the moral and civic foundations of our nation. Also, Plumb line (Amos 7:7-9) is a sign that represents God’s standard of justice and divine measurement. In Nigeria, this can be seen in the rising call for transparency, good governance and moral accountability. The activities of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) and Electoral Tribunals are public outcry over electoral irregularities, economic crimes and mismanagement and can be regarded as a modern expression of the plumb line signalling a collective yearning for ethical alignment.

Finally, Amos' vision of the basket of summer fruit in Amos 8:1-2 represents a nation whose judgment has reached its peak. The fruit denotes the ripeness of sin and the urgency of divine judgment. In Nigeria, this image finds a parallel in the frustration of the populace, leading to unrest and expression of dissatisfaction. Events such as the #ENDSARS Protest of 2020 and the continuous wave of agitation, such as the #ENDBADGOVERNANCE Protest, can be interpreted as signs of the inevitability of judgment and the readiness of a nation that is ripe for reckoning, a point where accumulated injustice reaches its breaking point.

The signs of judgment in the Book of Amos are not just relics of ancient Israel's history, but they are active communicative codes that reappear in modern Nigeria. This underscores the fact that divine judgment is timeless. As the people of Israel faced judgment for neglecting the poor and oppressing the weak, Nigerian society, likewise marred by inequality, injustice, corruption and social unrest echo the same warning.

Discussion of Findings

The analysis of the selected passages from the Book of Amos reveals that prophetic discourse is semiotic in nature and metaphorical in function. The findings reveal that signs in Amos are not just ornamental devices but communicative elements and meaning making device. The Book of Amos deploys a coherent and progressive use of metaphors and symbolic signs through which divine warnings and ethical expectations are communicated. Across Amos 1:3–5; 4:6–11; 5:18–24; 7:1–9; 8:1–3; and 9:1–10, prophetic warnings are not just conveyed through verbal speech but through a dense network of semiotic signs that combine iconic signs, indexical causality, and

symbolic convention. This confirms the view that prophetic discourse in Amos functions as a semiotically structured form of moral communication, rather than as isolated oracles of doom.

From a semiotic perspective, the findings show that icons play a vital role in making ethical failure perceptible. Symbolic signs such as threshing with iron sledges, famine, drought, locust invasion, consuming fire, darkness, plumb lines, ripe fruit, and inescapable nets provide visual experiences that the audience can recognise and emotionally process. This aligns with semiotic scholarship that emphasises the power of iconicity in grounding meaning in real-life experiences (Santaella, 2022). In Amos, icons function as experiential warnings, enabling the audience to “see” the consequences of injustice before they fully unfold.

In addition to iconicity, the findings reveal that indexical signs show a clear cause-and-effect relationship between Israel’s ethical failure and divine response. Famine, drought, plague, military defeat, exile, and societal collapse consistently index covenantal violation and social injustice. The repetition of disasters in Amos 4:6–11, each followed by the refrain “yet you did not return to me,” reiterates the indexical logic that suffering is not random but points back to moral and relational breakdown. This confirms African biblical scholarship, which argues that prophetic warnings operate within a moral universe where actions produce discernible consequences (Madu, 2023; Ihenacho, 2024).

Furthermore, symbolic signs in Amos rely on Israel’s shared theological and cultural knowledge to communicate judgment and warning. Symbols such as the “Day of the LORD,” the plumb line, temple festivals, sacrifices, music, summer fruit, the altar, fire, sword, and the land itself function by convention rather than resemblance. These symbols depict covenantal meanings that would have been immediately intelligible to the original audience. For example, the plumb line in Amos 7:7–9 symbolises divine moral measurement, while the basket of summer fruit in Amos 8:1–3 symbolises finality through wordplay and seasonal expectation. This aligns with the claim that prophetic warnings are culturally embedded signs, not abstract theological concepts (Okele, 2021; Olatunji, 2022).

When interpreted through the lens of theosemiotics, particularly the framework proposed by Michael Raposa, the findings demonstrate that the signs of warning in Amos function as relational and ethical communication from God. Raposa’s theosemiotic approach emphasises that divine signs are not merely informational but invitational, calling for interpretation, response, and moral transformation. In Amos 4 and 7, this openness is evident in the possibility of repentance and the

efficacy of prophetic intercession. The disasters function as warnings rather than final judgments, indicating that divine semiosis remains open to reinterpretation and change.

However, the findings also reveal a significant theosemiotic shift in Amos 8:1–3 and 9:1–10, where signs no longer invite response but announce finality. The ripe fruit vision, the silencing of songs, mass death, and the inescapable reach of divine judgment signal what Raposa describes as the closure of interpretive possibility, a point at which signs yield a final interpretant. At this stage, divine communication no longer seeks repentance but declares judgment as ethically unavoidable. This progression highlights the balance between divine patience and moral accountability within prophetic semiosis.

Another key finding is the collapse of ritual semiosis in Amos 5:18–24. Festivals, sacrifices, and music that are normal signs of worship and divine favour are rejected by God because they are disconnected from justice and righteousness. From a theosemiotic perspective, this reveals that religious signs lose their meaning when severed from ethical reality. Worship without justice becomes semiotically empty, reinforcing the prophetic insistence that true devotion must be embodied in social practice (Frances, 2021; Opara, 2023). The findings further indicate that the Book of Amos presents divine warning as a meaning-laden communicative process. Icons make warning visible, indexes establish moral causality, and symbols encode covenantal meaning. Through these signs, God is portrayed as a persistent moral communicator who warns, invites, measures, and ultimately judges when ethical disorder becomes entrenched. This confirms that prophetic warnings in Amos function as a theosemiotic system aimed at ethical restoration, rather than mere predictions of destruction.

In contemporary applications, especially within the Nigerian socio-religious context, these findings remain highly relevant. The prophetic critique of injustice, corruption, and ritualised religiosity without ethical substance mirrors current societal challenges. The semiotic logic of Amos suggests that social crises may function as warning signs demanding moral reflection and transformation, rather than being dismissed as accidental misfortunes (Ihenacho, 2024; Madu, 2023).

The discussion of findings demonstrates that the metaphoric signs as a semiotic resource in Amos are complex, theologically rich, and ethically urgent. Interpreted through Peircean semiotics and Raposa's theosemiotics, these signs reveal a God who communicates through history, symbols, and lived experience, calling society toward justice, righteousness, and covenantal responsibility.

Conclusion

This study has revealed that the prophetic discourse of the book of Amos is fundamentally semiotic, with signs and metaphors operating as interconnected linguistic and theological resources for divine communication. Through a systematic linguistic analysis grounded in Charles Sanders Peirce's triadic classification of signs and Michael Raposa's theosemiotic framework, the study has demonstrated that metaphor in Amos functions not merely as decorative language but as an active signifying means through which moral judgment, covenantal expectations, and social critique are conveyed.

The findings reveal that iconic, indexical, and symbolic signs are strategically deployed across Amos's visions and prophecies to transform abstract theological realities into concrete experiential forms. In this way, metaphor becomes a site of moral encounter, while signs function as interpretive bridges between divine and human understanding. The study, therefore, affirms that signs in Amos are metaphorically charged, and metaphors themselves operate as semiotic acts.

Furthermore, the integration of Peircean semiotics with Raposa's theosemiotics has further shown the communicative intentionality behind prophetic signs. Divine signs in Amos are not passive representations but meaning-making instruments designed to provoke ethical awareness and communal accountability. Even where judgment appears inevitable, the signs retain a communicative function, exposing injustice and challenging misplaced religious confidence. This complementarity of linguistic structure and theological purpose underscores the suitability of a semiotic-linguistic approach to biblical texts.

In conclusion, viewing signs as metaphors and metaphors as signs provides a robust analytical lens for understanding prophetic communication in Amos. This approach not only deepens interpretive insight into the text but also affirms the enduring relevance of prophetic semiotics in engaging issues of justice, accountability, and ethical responsibility within both ancient and contemporary contexts.

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