

## Putting Finnegan on Trial: Anaañ Ekoñ And Affioñ Drama as Evidence Against Orientalist Generalisation and Colonial Epistemic Violence

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*Abstract— This paper puts Ruth Finnegan’s 1970 universal claim that “drama does not exist in Africa” (Finnegan, 1970, p. 508) on trial. Finnegan did not write on Anaañ drama at any time and never cited John Cowan Messenger’s Anaañ ethnography. In this discourse, she encounters Messenger’s evidence for the first time in the academic court. Read through Edward Said’s Orientalism (1978) and Gayatri Spivak’s epistemic violence (1988), her universal delegitimation is exposed as discourse produced through selective ignorance, not data. Her Eurocentric criteria constructed African cultures, including Anaañ, as absence by measuring performance against European proscenium theatre, despite Messenger’s 1959 documentation of Ekoñ [Messenger’s “Ekong”] and Affioñ [Messenger’s “Affiong/Offiong”] among the Anaañ/Oron. Messenger recorded Ekoñ with staged conflict, role-played characters, plot, arena staging, audience judgment, and social control. He also recorded Affioñ, teenage courtship drama enacted through dance with plot, character, and conflict. In Anaañ language, the people are Anaañ and the drama is Affioñ, meaning “the moon.” Messenger maintained colonial naming and orthography for academic consistency in 1962 and 1971 publications. This paper introduces Messenger’s Anaañ evidence into the discourse for the first time to refute Finnegan’s universal claim that “drama does not exist in Africa” (Finnegan, 1970, p. 508). African scholarship delivers the counter-verdict: Ogunbiyi (1981) asserted “Ibibio [Anaañ] drama [Ekoñ and Affioñ] surpasses... modern European drama” (p. 23). Contemporary Ekoñ and Affioñ performance confirms Messenger. The implication is methodological: African theatre studies must reject universal claims about “Africa” and center specific ethnographies like Anaañ Ekoñ and Affioñ. The subaltern speaks in Anaañ by its right name.*

**Keywords:** Anaañ drama; Ekoñ, Affioñ; Finnegan; epistemic violence; universal claim; Messenger.

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## NOTE ON ORTHOGRAPHY

This paper uses the approved Harmonised Orthography of Anaañ Language (2022) for all Anaañ terms: Ekoñ, Affioñ. When quoting Messenger 1959, 1962, 1971 or Ogunbiyi 1981, original colonial spellings appear in quotation marks followed by the harmonised spelling in square brackets, e.g., “Ekong” [Ekoñ] and “Offiong” [Affioñ]. This practice maintains citation integrity while restoring linguistic accuracy. For clarity, after the first bracketed correction, subsequent mentions in paraphrase use only the harmonised spelling Ekoñ and Affioñ unless a direct quotation is required.

## INTRODUCTION

Ruth Finnegan’s 1970 assertion that “drama does not exist in Africa” (Finnegan, 1970, p. 508) is a universal claim made without engagement with Anaañ performance. Finnegan did not write on Anaañ drama at any time and never cited John Cowan Messenger’s ethnography of Anaañ Ekoñ and Affioñ. In this paper, she encounters Messenger’s Anaañ evidence for the first time in the academic court.

This paper places Finnegan’s universal claim that “drama does not exist in Africa” (Finnegan, 1970, p. 508) on trial by introducing Messenger’s 1959 documentation of Anaañ drama as forensic evidence. Using Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) and Spivak’s epistemic violence (1988), the paper demonstrates how a universal denial made without field engagement erases specific cultures like Anaañ by default. A critical intervention is restoration of name and orthography: colonial ethnography recorded Anaañ performers as “Anang Ibibio” and teenage courtship drama as “Offiong.” In Anaañ language, the people are Anaañ and the drama is Affioñ - “the moon.”

The trial proceeds with Messenger as witness, Ogunbiyi as African counsel, and contemporary Anaañ performance as living testimony.

## FINNEGAN’S UNIVERSAL CLAIM AS ORIENTALIST GENERALISATION WITHOUT ENGAGEMENT

### **Said’s Orientalism and Speaking for Africa Without Evidence**

Said (1978) argues Orientalism operates by speaking for the Orient without engaging its actual practices. Finnegan’s claim that “drama does not exist in Africa” (Finnegan, 1970, p. 508) is Orientalist generalisation: a continental denial made without field engagement with Anaañ performance. Finnegan did not write on Anaañ drama at any time and never cited Messenger’s 1959 ethnography. In this discourse, she encounters Messenger’s Anaañ data for the first time.

Messenger documented Ekoñ [“Ekong”] and Affioñ [“Affiong/Offiong”] among Anaañ communities with full theatrical structure in 1959, eleven years before Finnegan’s 1970 universal denial that “drama does not exist in Africa” (Finnegan, 1970,

p. 508). The violence of Finnegan's claim is in its scope: by declaring "drama does not exist in Africa" (Finnegan, 1970, p. 508), she rendered Anaañ theatricality invisible without ever examining it. This is Orientalism through omission and universalisation (Said, 1978).

### **The Epistemic Violence of Universal Denial Without Fieldwork**

Finnegan operationalised drama using Eurocentric indices: written script, proscenium arch (Finnegan, 1970, p. 508). Having not written on Anaañ drama and never citing Messenger, she applied these criteria universally when she claimed "drama does not exist in Africa" (Finnegan, 1970, p. 508). This is epistemic violence through scope: a universal claim that makes specific knowledge unthinkable. Messenger's Anaañ evidence existed in 1959, but Finnegan's continental denial, made without citing or engaging him, archived Anaañ drama-as-law [Ekoñ] and drama-as-moon [Affioñ] as absence by default.

### **Section Conclusion**

Finnegan's claim that "drama does not exist in Africa" (Finnegan, 1970, p. 508) is discourse produced through selective ignorance. She did not write on Anaañ drama, never cited Messenger, yet her universal denial erased Anaañ Ekoñ and Affioñ that Messenger had documented. In this paper, she encounters that evidence for the first time.

## **INTRODUCING MESSENGER'S ANAAÑ EVIDENCE INTO THE ACADEMIC COURT**

For the first time in this discourse, Ruth Finnegan encounters John Cowan Messenger's Anaañ ethnography as evidence against her universal claim that "drama does not exist in Africa" (Finnegan, 1970, p. 508).

### **The Witness: Messenger 1959, 1962, 1971**

Messenger (1959) documented Ekoñ ["Ekong"] drama among Anaañ communities with: 1. Staged conflict with plot structure: offense, crisis, performance, judgment, sanction. 2. Role-played characters representing social roles. 3. Arena staging with audience as judge. 4. Function as social control and jurisprudence. This evidence existed in print in 1959, but Finnegan did not write on Anaañ drama and never cited it. In this academic court, Messenger testifies for the first time against Finnegan's 1970 claim that "drama does not exist in Africa" (Finnegan, 1970, p. 508).

### **The Second Witness: Affioñ**

Messenger also documented Affioñ ["Affiong/Offiong"], recorded as "Offiong" using 1950s Efik orthography maintained for academic consistency (Messenger, 1959, 1971). In Anaañ language, Affioñ means "the moon." He recorded theatrical structure: exposition through dance of attraction, conflict with rival or parent, climax through dance competition, resolution by community acceptance. Teenage performers role-play characters. This is plot, character, conflict, resolution enacted through embodied performance.

Finnegan did not write on Anaañ drama and never cited this evidence. In this discourse, Affioñ enters the court as Exhibit B. Finnegan's universal claim that "drama does not exist in Africa" (Finnegan, 1970, p. 508) is refuted by Anaañ teenage drama with full theatrical structure that she never engaged.

### **The Colonial Context of the Evidence**

Messenger recorded Anaañ performers as "Anang Ibibio" and spelled the drama "Offiong" following 1950s colonial linguistics. While the nomenclature reflects its colonial moment, the ethnographic data on performance structure is sound. This paper introduces Messenger's data while restoring Anaañ and Affioñ to the record. Finnegan encounters both the evidence and the colonial context of its recording for the first time here.

### **Section Conclusion**

Messenger's Anaañ evidence enters the academic court through this paper. Finnegan, who did not write on Anaañ drama and never cited him, now confronts ethnography that refutes her 1970 claim that "drama does not exist in Africa" (Finnegan, 1970, p. 508) on its own terms.

### **AFRICAN COUNSEL: OGUNBIYI'S VERDICT**

African scholarship enters the court as counsel. Ogunbiyi (1981) directly rejected Finnegan's universalisation that "drama does not exist in Africa" (Finnegan, 1970, p. 508). Where Finnegan claimed absence, Ogunbiyi argued "Ibibio [Anaañ] drama [Ekoñ and Affioñ] surpasses the slippery, fluffy smoothness of what passes for modern European drama" (1981, p. 23).

Ogunbiyi's bracketed [Anaañ] and our bracketed [Ekoñ and Affioñ] correct the record that Finnegan never engaged. African scholarship refuses universal claims about "Africa" and insists on specific ethnographies. Ogunbiyi speaks for Anaañ drama that Finnegan did not write on and never cited.

## **LIVING TESTIMONY: CONTEMPORARY ANAAN̄ PERFORMANCE**

The final witness is contemporary practice. In Oruk Anam and Abak in 2024-2026, Anaañ communities still perform Ekoñ to stage and resolve disputes. Teenage performers still enact Affioñ as courtship drama under the moon.

This living testimony confirms Messenger's 1959 documentation. Finnegan did not write on Anaañ drama and never cited Messenger, yet Anaañ performance continues to deliver the verdict against her claim that "drama does not exist in Africa" (Finnegan, 1970, p. 508). The subaltern speaks in Anaañ, even though Finnegan never engaged that speech.

## **DISCOURSE ANALYSIS: THE VERDICT**

### **Charge: Orientalist Universalisation Without Engagement**

Finnegan is guilty of Orientalist universalisation. Said (1978) critiques continental generalisations made without field engagement. Finnegan did not write on Anaañ drama at any time, never cited Messenger's Anaañ ethnography, yet claimed "drama does not exist in Africa" (Finnegan, 1970, p. 508). In this paper, she encounters Messenger's Anaañ evidence for the first time. The universal claim collapses because it was made in ignorance of the very evidence that refutes it.

### **Charge: Epistemic Violence Through Universal Denial**

Finnegan committed epistemic violence by making a universal claim while ignoring existing Anaañ ethnography (Spivak, 1988). Anaañ performers staged Ekoñ and Affioñ, but Finnegan's claim that "drama does not exist in Africa" (Finnegan, 1970, p. 508) made this knowledge unthinkable, even though she never wrote on Anaañ drama and never cited Messenger. The violence is in claiming to speak for all of Africa while remaining silent on Anaañ.

### **The Verdict**

The academic court finds: 1. Messenger's Anaañ evidence on Ekoñ ["Ekong"] and Affioñ ["Offiong/Affiong"] refutes Finnegan's claim that "drama does not exist in Africa" (Finnegan, 1970, p. 508). 2. Ogunbiyi's African scholarship rejects her generalisation. 3. Contemporary Anaañ performance confirms drama exists. Finnegan's claim is overturned not by her analysis of Anaañ drama, which she never undertook, but by Anaañ evidence she ignored.

### **Implication**

African theatre studies must reject universal claims about "Africa" made without engagement with specific ethnographies. Finnegan did not write on Anaañ drama. This paper introduces Anaañ Ekoñ and Affioñ into the discourse to show why her claim that

“drama does not exist in Africa” (Finnegan, 1970, p. 508) fails. Scholarship must start from cases, not continents.

## CONCLUSION: FINNEGAN ENCOUNTERS ANAÑ EVIDENCE FOR THE FIRST TIME

Ruth Finnegan’s 1970 universal claim that “drama does not exist in Africa” (Finnegan, 1970, p. 508) is overturned by evidence she never engaged. Finnegan did not write on Anaañ drama at any time and never cited John Cowan Messenger’s ethnography. In this discourse, she encounters Messenger’s Anaañ evidence for the first time in the academic court.

Messenger (1959, 1962, 1971) testified: Ekoñ [“Ekong”] exists as drama-as-jurisprudence. Affioñ [“Offiong/Affiong”] exists as drama-as-aesthetics. Ogunbiyi (1981) testified: Anaañ drama [Ekoñ and Affioñ] surpasses European models. Contemporary Anaañ performers testify: Ekoñ and Affioñ continue.

Final note: Anaañ and Ibibio. The drama is Affioñ- “the moon.” This paper uses the approved Harmonised Orthography of Anaañ Language: Anaañ, Ekoñ, Affioñ. Colonial spellings appear in brackets only when citing Messenger or Ogunbiyi for citation integrity. Finnegan did not write on Anaañ drama and never cited him, yet her 1970 claim that “drama does not exist in Africa” (Finnegan, 1970, p. 508) erased Anaañ by default. This paper introduces Anaañ evidence into the discourse for the first time to overturn that erasure.

Finnegan’s universal claim is finished. Anaañ drama speaks by its right name. The subaltern spoke in Anaañ all along.

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