

## **Traditional African Theater : The Case Study of The Gambia and Senegal**

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Traditional African theater have survived in spite of the intrusion of modern culture and theater from outside Africa. Although the British, French, and Portuguese theater and drama educational touch on the continent have influenced most aspects of Africa, yet several African communities and cities still hold the their traditional treasure of "generation-to-generation" medium of entertainment. The special oral nature of the African people and their theater elements embedded in "orature" have been the major thrust for the survival of traditional theater, drama, culture, and history. In The Gambia and Senegal, the Wolof and the Mandinka (both are major ethnic groups in the sub-Saharan Africa), for instance, traditional artists do their performances in public. The uniqueness of their performance lies in mnemonic, body language, rituals, and audience participation. These characteristics permeate African traditional theater and drama. Traditional theater has been a vehicle for social changes on the continent. Its relationship with the African world view and religious beliefs make it similar in some aspects to Greek or Hellenistic theater. In British colonized Gambia and French colonized Senegal, like in any parts of Africa, traditional theater and drama pieces belong to the community and religious groupings. In the modern time when classroom education has inflicted foreign culture and ideas on different forms of entertainment in Africa, teachers encourage their students to experiment with both traditional and modern forms of theater. Thus, African students read works of writers like William Shakespeare, act out scripted drama, and at the same time, or interchangeably, keep the tradition by engaging in traditional theater during festivals and other special occasions. The blending often occurs, especially when performers target educated class of audience. Traditional, most performers are not seen as writers. Rather, they are seen as repertoire or oral warehouse of verbal and body entertainers. Their role in reshaping their communities and in keeping the tradition alive make them relevant in African theater and drama.