

Culture and traditional gambian dress

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**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

A) In a paragraph, describe the acculturation process that the author experienced and explain how her cultural identity changed. Catherine Pigott came from a Western background. In Africa, she experienced a dramatically different culture. At first, it must have been very difficult. There was little about her that appealed to the Gambian sense of femininity. She was far too thin by those standards. Consequently, she could not dance as they danced, dress as they dressed, or eat with the relish and gusto becoming of a Gambian woman.

Frankly, she was too thin. Her slim physique represented everything synonymous with poverty, drought and starvation. Her body was a cause of sadness for those who looked upon her. If she were to remain in Gambia, she would need to adapt to these rather foreign cultural expectations. Her new lady friends insisted she gain more weight, and made it a priority to help Catherine accomplish that goal. Pigott began to understand that “big truly is beautiful” in this part of Africa. Everyone looked favourably on a woman carrying weight on her hips and thighs.

A woman is beautiful if she has a round stomach and heavy, swinging breasts. This was not Catherine’s cultural ideal. In fact, she had difficulty eating as they did; for her, to eat with such delight and abandon was unattractive. Nevertheless, with time she gained weight, and slowly began to believe in Africa’s beauty image. She believed she was becoming more beautiful; she let go of the panic, shame and guilt-ridden resolves regarding her weight and eating habits. One day she clothed herself in traditional Gambian dress and made her way to the shops.

As she returned, she placed her newly purchased items on her head, and made her way back home, slowly, swinging her hips in the manner of the natives. She was transformed. Now, when she looked upon the skinny European tourists, she did not see an ideal; she saw something more skeletal than slim, lacking in shape and substance. Her ideal had changed. After only one year Catherine returned home. She was happy and comfortable with her body, but her family had nothing nice to say about her new weight.

Pigott returned to a land where fat is feared and despised. Before one month had elapsed she was already back at the gym, yearning to be slimmer and more fit. She was unhappy again; she had lost her Gambian freedom. Catherine's process of adopting the cultural traits and social patterns of Gambia was difficult, but it was genuine. By the time she left Africa, she was comfortable with her body; she had adopted an entirely new perspective. Unfortunately, she would revert to her older, less fulfilling, cultural ideals after returning home.