

**SOCIAL CHANGE AMONG DIGO MUSLIM WOMEN:
IMPLICATIONS FOR MISSION**

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation traces social changes among Digo women from the primal period to the contemporary society in Kenya. The study sets out to show that in primal Digo society, which was matrilineal; women were active participants in the life of the society. Women held high social, political, economic, and religious positions and they owned a significant amount of wealth through the matrilineal inheritance practice which was from mother's brother to his sister's children. The relationship of a sister and her brother and how the inheritance was handled is presented in Part I.

The arrival of Islam changed that by introducing a patrilineal kinship system and denying women the chance to actively participate in religious leadership through Islamic prayers and major ownership through inheritance. The roles of a woman were changed and her place in the public square was taken away, denying her the chance to participate in community decision making. Her social and economic level was lowered to a dependant because wealth was no longer inherited from a mother. This shift from a matrilineal to a patrilineal kinship structure parallels a similar shift that the historian W. Montgomery Watt describes in Arabia at the time of Muhammad.

When Digo society came under British colonialism and then the Independent Republic of Kenya, the domestication of women was continued through bureaucratic rules and practices which denied them documents such as the *kipande* "identity cards"

that allowed people to work in the new economic system. In addition Digo women were ruralized by being moved from their own land to what the colonial administrators termed, "African reserves," while the Digo men were allowed to travel from the reserves to find work in the farms of the colonial settlers or in urban settlements. British colonialism worked together with Arab Islamicists to affirm the importance of a patrilineal kinship system based on Victorian Christian teaching and Islamic theology. Thus the British unwittingly further subordinated the social position of Digo women and solidified them against Christianity. The conclusion lists recommendations for Christian witness among the Digo based on findings resulting from research among Digo women.

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