

Title

Interview Mamuna Bintu al-Shaban

Creator

Owusu-Ansah, David

Al-Shaban, Mamuna bintu

Description

Mamuna Bintu al-Shaban tells a personal story about the struggles of education for Muslim girls in Ghana but most importantly, she tells of the benefits that secular education provides for those who sustain the interest.

Interview with Manuma Shaban [Muslim female and teacher at the Azariya School]

Location: Kumasi Tafo (Mile Four Azariya School Complex)

Subject of conversation: Muslim schooling for girls

Language used: English

Interview Conducted by David Owusu-Ansah

Persons present: Dr. Gabrielle Lanier (took pictures)

Thursday 7/ 20/06

Opening statement/question: Manuma, you have heard what we have talked about [with Shaykh Kamil, who is director of your school]. We talked about education [about the nature of (Islamic education and Christian) even more especially with the secular education where some parent don't want their girls to go to school anyway. But when they start [their education from K-1] the number of girls in the school system are equal to the number of boys, but by the time they get to the JSS Junior Secondary School [middle schools] and especially by the SSS (Senior Secondary School [High School]) the number of girls has declined, and by the time they arrive at the university, the number of girls has declined considerably. But when you think of Muslim education, the perception has been that Muslim women are more suited for not going to school [but more suited to trading and being wives]. Can you tell us more about this condition? [Can you] tell us about your background and about how you got to where you are now?

Answer: Now, I am a graduate teacher by profession. I managed to get to this position but really my Dad was literate and all the people from my father's house are literate except only one of my aunts who did not go to school. My Dad started out as having only Arabic education and he was sent to a village to teach Arabic [at Islamic Quranic schools] but as he was teaching the Arabic, he developed interest in learning the English language. So realized that he must stop teaching the Arabic and go to [secular] school. So he started that from Class 6 [K-6] and by the time he finished his teacher's education he had three children (I being the third of the children). He was stationed to teach in the Ashanti Region at the town of Wiamease. I started my primary education there and by the time I reached the middle school, my father left the country to Nigeria where he attended their university to read law and came out as a lawyer. He died in the 1990s. I went to

Diversity and Tolerance in the Islam of West Africa
(<http://westafricanislam.matrix.msu.edu>)

secondary school but there was a break in my education because I had a child. Afterwards, my mother encouraged me to continue my education so I went to Okomfo Anokye Secondary School and later on to Tetrem Secondary School and by 1994, I had completed my secondary education. From there, I went to St. Monica's Teacher Training College from 1994 through 1997, then I started teaching school in that year and taught for 4 years. In 2001, I returned to school at Winneba [University of Winneba] where I completed the program with a 2nd Class Upper Division. I started teaching at this school [The Azariya Islamic School in Kumasi] in September 2005.

Question: My colleague Dr. Gracia Clarke met you for the first time in the group of other women. Can you tell us a little bit about that group of women? What do they do [and what are they about]?

Is there an organization to which that they belong?

Answer: Not really. They come to this place to study Arabic [as adult Arabic programming] and after classes, they go back home. They are part of the adult education program of the Azariya School program-forming the women's group as there is also a male adult Arabic education program.

Question: Who is teaching them the Arabic language?

Answer: Their fellow women but the majority of that group of women are petty traders and they have their own businesses.

Question: Now, this school here [the Azariya program in its normal academic programming] is divided into classes. There are separate classes for boys and girls. Who teach these students and what level do you teach?

Answer: I teach at the Junior Secondary School (JSS) 1, 2 & 3 levels and I teach both boys and girls [in their separate classes].

Question: In the girls classes, are they taught only by female teachers?

Answer: They are taught by both male and female teachers.

Question: Do women teachers teach at the boys' classes?

Answer: Exactly.

Question: The Shaykh talked about 12 separate classrooms for girls in this school. How come that there are so many girls in this school?

Answer: Now, our parents see the importance of education for their girls. They used to have that primitive idea that if girls went to school [especially the Christian schools] the girls will even stop praying as Muslims. They had another idea that schooling was a waste of money. They wanted to use that money to buy clothes for themselves and cooking bowls so that when the girl-child [early puberty] is going to marry, they will give these things to the girl-child to go into marriage. But now they see that what they used to do was not the best investment in their girls. Now they have realized that they have to use that money to educate their girls [because when that educated] girl starts working, she can provide for herself those [material] things. So when you go to our Zongo [Muslim communities] now, you will see that these mothers have come to realized the importance of educating their daughters so they now send them to schools.

Question: Who got [these mothers to] start thinking [positively about educating their daughters]?

Answer: It started from somewhere. When you go to my village of Wiamoase for example, my sisters who have had the opportunity to go to school are examples. People see us and when we married we did not ask our mother to give us anything and yet we are living well [because of our education]. Our mother is now weak and she cannot work so we are taking good care of her. And those parents who did not allow their girls to go to school are there too. Nobody is taking care of them [compared to how we are doing for our mother]. So people see this [positive impact of education on us]. There was a neighbor who forced her daughter to get married early, but as this mother observed our successes, this same mother force her girl back to school and that girl is now a teacher and teaching at this school. So some people are taking the chances. We also do talk to these women when we have social gatherings and they are beginning to understand [the usefulness of girl-child education].

Question: Is this talking to mothers something that is done by an organization such as those belonging to the Federation of Women's Organization?

Answer: Yes, but others who are not members of such organizations still take it upon themselves to do so. Whenever I meet with mothers, I speak about the issue of education even though I do not belong to any organization.

Question: So there is opportunity for girls at this school?

Answer: Yes, but there is still cases where a girl-child in Class 6 [K-6] will come and tell you that she is going to get married off even though these girls are being sent to school, some of them are not completing their programs.

Question: What does the school do about such cases?

Answer: Really we will try to talk to the parents but if they are adamant then we cannot do anything. I know of a girl that I just heard is going to be married off. So I have told the girl that when she is confronted she should refer the parents to me.

Question: But in your case, you had a child before you completed school but that was not because your parents forced you to marry-you did it to yourself?

Answer: Yes.

Question: You went to secondary school, you did a post-secondary education and teachers' education at St. Monica's College which was an Anglican school. Were you able to cover your head as you do now at the Anglican college when you were a student? Were there conditions that did not allow you to behave as a Muslim. Do you think that these regulation are things that parents should be concerned about that it might change the Islam of their children?

Answer: Really at St. Monica's College, the problem we had was that we had to get up very early and do a whole lot of duties before you go for devotion. That was the time that we [as Muslims] needed to pray. But they [the school authorities] would not want to see you pray [in the Muslim way] because St. Monica's School was an Anglican school. They also had uniforms for the girls that did not cover the hands and not long enough but since it was a girls school we did not worry much about that dress code. But there is a school in the Central Region that I heard is preventing the Muslim girls at their school from a lot of things that are changing the life-style of the Muslim girls at the school. So we wrote letters in protest to the Central Regional Minister, but they change some of the rules but some still remain. We have therefore told the parents that this is not the only school, and if they are not satisfied with the rules then they should look for another program for their wards.

Question: Is there anything that you heard from our session with Shaykh Kamil that you want to comment upon? And also please can you give us your full name?

Answer: My name is Mamuna Shaban

Statement: Do you know Rashid Shaban? He was research assistant to Enid Schildkrout who wrote the book titled *History of the Zongo*. And also do you think that we missed anything in the conversation with Shaykh Kamil?

Answer: No [to both questions]

Statement: Then we will like to thank you very much for helping is along today. We are very
Diversity and Tolerance in the Islam of West Africa
(<http://westafricanislam.matrix.msu.edu>)

grateful.