



Zaynab Alkali

Novelist and Professor

Nigeria

One of the first female novelists from northern Nigeria, Zaynab Alkali was enthusiastically welcomed in the male dominated Nigerian literary scene. Her widely read novels focus on the position of African women in patriarchal Africa.

Zaynab Alkali was born in 1950 in Tura-Wazila community of Borno State, Nigeria. She was educated at Nigerian educational institutions such as the Queen Elizabeth Secondary School in Ilorin, Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria, and Bayero University in Kano. She was the principal of Shekara Girls Boarding School in Kano. Throughout her career, she held various positions: an assistant lecturer at Bayero University in English and African literature, senior lecturer in English at University of Maiduguri, and coordinator of English and general studies in Modibbo Adama College, U.of Maiduguri. She is currently engaged in research at Bayero University.

Alkali's father converted to Christianity in his forties and in 1960s, she herself converted to Islam. She feels that both Christianity and Islam have influenced her. In 1971 she married Dr. Mohammed nur Alkali, director- general of Nigerian Institute of Political and Strategic Studies, Jos, Nigeria. They have six children.

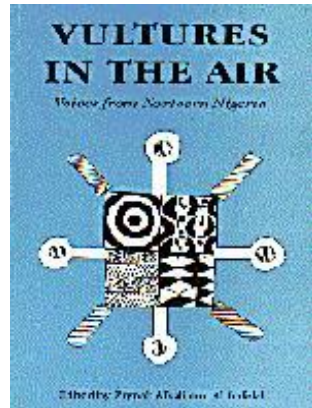
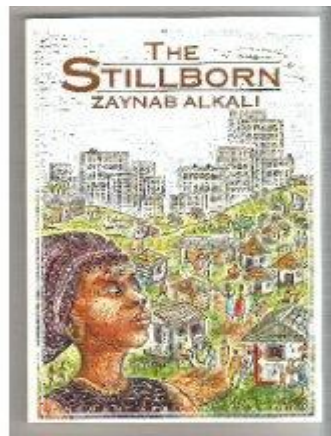
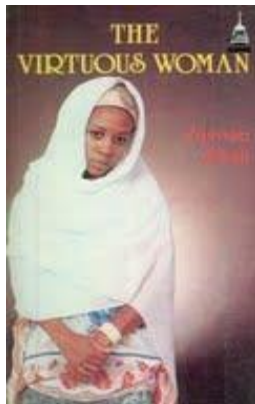
HER MAJOR WORKS:

- Zaynab Alkali's first novel is *The Stillborn*, published by Longman in 1984. It won the Association of Nigerian Authors prize for prose fiction in 1985. The novel is set in Nigeria and explores challenges facing Li, a young Nigerian woman as she tries to balance her family life and her own need for economic and emotional independence.
- Alkali also published three stories in German: *Salzlose Asche (Saltless Ash)*, *Das eigene Lieben (The Survivor)*, and *Haus des Schreckens (House of Horror)*. *Saltless Ash* has been published in *Heinemann Book of African Women Writers* in 1993.
- Her third novel *The Cobwebs* is about the maturing of Nigerian women and touches on problems of child-brides, and the negative consequences of unemployment and child abuse. Alkali considers this to be her most important work. In her essay, "Feminism, A Radical Theme in West African Literature," Alkali calls for a new feminism which

emphasizes the improvement of social, economic, and political status of women. She rejects the western idea of feminism as based on strict gender equality and often, an anti-male stance. Alkali's feminism reflects that of many African writers who, through their writings, struggle against cultural traditions and class privileges that have prevented women's progress.

- In an interview, Alkali acknowledges the influence of Chinua Achebe, Ngugiwa Thong'o, Catherine Cookson, Ernest Hemingway, and Flora Nwapa.

"In all her works, Alkali offers a rare insight into life for Muslim women in northern Nigeria. Not content with simply showing how things are, Alkali builds a vision for a better life based on economic independence, self-sacrifice, and solidarity between men and women." (as quoted on pp. 42-43 in Pushpa Parekh and Siga Jagne (ed.) *Post Colonial African Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook* –see link)



LINKS:

Link to Post Colonial African Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Sourcebook ed. Pushpa Naidu Parekh and Siga Fatima Jagne, Greenwood Press: Westport, CT. 1998. pp. 40-43

http://books.google.com/books?id=lvI-Xw5CJdwC&pg=PA40&lpg=PA40&dq=Are+Zaynab+Alkali+novels+good%3F&source=bl&ots=51_CUip2N4&sig=RbLONkSaWu4oGDaeHwB8gRA8zTg&hl=en&ei=7FWySqD3Ioe4M5KS-LsL&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=10#v=onepage&q=&f=false

Link to "Gender Issues in Zaynab Alkali's Novels" by Adetayo Alabi in Childhood in African Literature: A Review, ed. Edred Durosimi Jones and Marjorie Jones. African World Press: Trenton, NJ, 1998. pp. 22-

27http://books.google.com/books?id=WEArQ7PQgw4C&pg=PA22&lpg=PA22&dq=Are+Zaynab+Alkali+novels+good%3F&source=bl&ots=2YoTy1QSM1&sig=TSa7BlafQpYUAZf97spifEIPGM&hl=en&ei=7FWySqD3Ioe4M5KS-LsL&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=5#v=onepage&q=&f=false