



## The Newlywed's Window: The 2022 Mukana Press Anthology of African Writing

**Mukana Press, Editor**

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*The Newlywed's Window is an insightful, empathetic short story collection that focuses on women and LGBTQ+ people across Africa.*

*The Newlywed's Window* gathers twelve compelling stories by contemporary African writers, most of which address the experiences of women across the cultures of the continent.

With some stories that are realistic and literary, and others that delve into magical realism and speculative fiction, this collection opens with a woman in labor who, having paid for a private hospital, hopes for some level of care; instead, she receives little attention, and enters into a battle of wills with a trio of ill-equipped nurses. In another story, a paternal aunt is beaten as the narrator's mother stands by, watching and judging, her silence serving as tacit approval. The daughter sees the hypocrisy in her mother's actions and makes sly comment. Indeed, the relationships between mothers and daughters act as ballasts in several stories: sometimes, the women share their burdens; in other places, they create their burdens.

Compelling introductions of supernatural elements mark the collection, too. It includes a visit from the Daya Zimu, a spelled picture frame, and a curse of endless rain. Though its antagonists spring from otherworldly sources, they also reveal human beings' complexity—the ugliness of bullying, a child desperate to understand her origins, and a mother eager to protect her child.

Sexuality also threads through the stories. In one, a Catholic man writes to his mother, sharing his decision to stay in Ireland, rather than return to Nigeria. And in "The Newlywed's Window," a woman contemplates what marriage would be like for her, thinking that she would become lost within its institution. From her perch at her window, she tries to use the details of the street below to overshadow marriage's traps—until the open window across from hers becomes too tempting to ignore. Here and elsewhere, these stories show people struggling against sexism, racism, class, colorism, and homophobia.

Set in locations including Nigeria and Tanzania, these stories ably reveal sites like rough-and-tumble taverns and the busy streets of Zanzibar. In such places, people question the social demands for shame that are placed upon those who happen to be poor, ugly, or attractive. In a measured way, the entries wonder whether it is wrong for a woman to own her future and the rights to her body, too. Such provocative questions illuminate these tales, as their memorable characters either learn from their inquiries or struggle against them.

With empathy, the insightful contemporary short story collection *The Newlywed's Window* focuses on women and LGBTQ+ people across Africa.

CAMILLE-YVETTE WELSCH (July 5, 2022)

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