

- **Your story 'Behind Our Irises' made me shiver. What motivated you to write it?**

Hello I am Tlotlo Tsamaase and I am the writer of poetry, short stories and architectural articles. And the question I have reads as: 'Your story BEHIND OUR IRISES made me shiver. What motivated you to write it?'

Thank you. I'm so sorry I made you shiver. 'Behind Our Irises' was actually a fusion of many ideas. When Wole Talabi sent me an email requesting a story for the Africanfuturism anthology, I wondered what I could write for him. And typically when I write a story, sometimes I may have an idea that I have to fill this world with plot and characters and that idea is sufficient enough to execute.

So, I looked at a couple of shelf projects. And basically the first paragraphs of the short story comes from a shelf project. It's about the character's eyes, irises changing colour, with a surveillance system in them. And I was like: OMG, what kind of story would this be? I started wondering what would the consequences be of having a surveillance system implanted in a person's mind? Who would be in charge of the surveillance system in them? What would they be gaining from it? And who would be having the surveillance system in them? It felt very difficult then to execute it as it was because I didn't know who would be the characters. Who would be the villain?

And so I looked at the other ideas that I had. I'd always been interested in writing an exposé about how businesses tend to take advantage of people's economical status. For their advantage, and for profit and for their own gain. Normally, these people... they never have a choice but to sign for this job because they need to make a living, despite how little the salary is to make a living from, and they stay trapped in this job and the environmental situation of that job is just very terrible for them.

I have just also really read a lot about how you see some first-world countries establish some businesses and use African labour or third-world-country African labour to create their products. And when you look at these factory workers, the types of living situations they have or the work environments they are working in, it's just very terrible. They experience sexual harassment. The pay is very little. And they literally have no choice, but to accept this job because that's the only job that they can get. And they really have no one able to support them.

So that was the second part. And that's when I started to see a character manifest in the story. Because I know just living in my own country Botswana, I always hear age mates are finding it very difficult to get a job, even though they graduated and they got a good GPA. And even when they get jobs, they face many issues at it.

So suddenly I knew what I needed to write, whereby this woman who has been struggling to get a job and finally gets a job. But the way that this job traps her into it, gives her a very low salary, which means that she's unable to invest in herself or save the money to be able to sustain herself and be independent. So she really has to rely on this job.

The other thing, I was also looking at how some establishments tend to like to cherry pick for diversity appearances. And I wondered if you had an establishment that

could actually mine data from its workers in order to check these diversity requirements, so that they could win awards. I wondered what kind of story that would be. That how 'Behind Our Irises' came up. Thank you so much. Bye.