

SUMAIYASYKES

Am I an immigrant?

- My story is different from that of an African immigrant in Europe. I came to Italy, almost 30 years ago, with my family. My father was a Tanzanian ambassador in Italy; we arrived in Rome in October 1998, 3 days before my 17th birthday.
- In 1999 I came to Faenza to study ceramics after having decided that I did not want to do political science at an American University in Rome.

Little did I know

that decision was going to haunt me for many years to follow! In 1991 my family left for Africa and I remained to complete my studies. My intention was to finish and go back to Zanzibar (Tanzania). But my destiny was different. I got married to an Italian man, we have two daughters of mixed race and we live in Faenza.

My life has been a long journey

- and sometimes I look back and wonder what it would have been like if I did not come to Europe.

I have been asked many a times if I feel Italian!?

- My response is no, but Italy is my home because my family is here. I have been accepted with respect and tolerance. Am I an immigrant? ...yes, for the time being. I say that because I was not forced out of my country for inconvenient reasons, such as poverty or war. And I intend to go back.

I must say living in Europe (Italy) as an African has not been easy:

- I think for some reasons it would have been easier in other European countries, such as France, Germany, Portugal, just to mention a few, mainly because of their histories...

Anyway, when I arrived in the small town of Faenza I felt like a fish out of the water!

- I have heard of foreigners who had difficulties in renting homes, getting good jobs and so on because of their race. But one learns to adapt in order to integrate into the society you find yourself in. In some cases I had to work harder to prove people wrong from whatever prejudice they had over Africans.

I was brought to respect others and to know that I was the most important person.

- And sometimes it has been a challenge as not everyone was willing to accept the difference!
- I am identified as an African, a person of colour or black: the irony of it all is that everyone identifies me the way they know, depending on what they hear in their homes about people of different races.

Twenty years later

- with a lot more immigrants, one could say the population of Faenza has accepted the fact of living with immigrants. My children go to school here, they have integrated well. But they will always be afraid of the unknown. I believe racism is in all of us. I say that because during our lifetime we experience the feeling of intolerance towards another being. The good thing is that we have the capacity to reverse the feeling by learning about people that are different from us.

Thanks goodness we live in the
21st century,

- when communication, transportation and other ways of getting around the world are much easier and affordable. So we open up to globalization