

The Shared Mic: Conversations for the Ages

Episode 3: Sadru Nazarali and Ndumiso Gama

Salima Suleman: Welcome to The Shared Mic. I'm Salima.

Eric Storey: And I'm Eric.

Salima Suleman: Today on the mic, we have Sadru and Ndumiso talking about creating a community in Canada.

Eric Storey: Just a heads up. This is a conversation between two adults, they do use some language and talk about some topics that might not be appropriate for children.

Salima Suleman: Let's get into the conversation.

Sadru Nazarali: So tell me, how did you come here?

Ndumiso Gama: I was fortunate enough to meet a Canadian couple. They went to Swaziland to work, we got very close while they were there. We were doing things together all the time. And I was like their son over there. They have three daughters in Canada. And then when it was time for them to come back to Canada, they invited me to come and visit and promised me to if I liked it here, they'll find a way for me to stay. After that, student visa and then after that work permit and then permanent residence.

Sadru Nazarali: What did you do in Swaziland?

Ndumiso Gama: Mostly electronic stuff, volunteering for the Bahá'í community. That's probably how I met my parents. I've just been adopted actually. When you were with ... you met your spouse back in Tanzania, and then you came here together?

Sadru Nazarali: See what happened was I need to take you back a little bit. We knew each other for about 10 years before we got married. We got married in 1963. And then I went to college to do a degree in agriculture at the top premiere institution in Kenya. I finished it then specialized in tea plantation where I worked in the mountains in Tanzania. She went to study in England few years after that, the government decided to nationalize everything. So most people lost everything: businesses, insurance companies, houses and I was 27 years old. I said, that's goodbye. I was a Tanzanian citizen, born there, lost almost everything. So two of our friends from the same college came here on a tourist visa, 1971 June 5 I left Tanzania. I was coming here, I met her in London, went dancing for four days and then came here, passed my immigration, she followed me here. So that's the story and two years later we got married. If you look at the Indian community here, there's Indians from India, Indians from Pakistan, Indians from East Africa, Indians from Fiji, Indians from England, even from ... let's say for the

Indian from East Africa, they will be Muslim Indian and a Hindu Indian and a Christian Indian. And among Muslim Indians, we are the Ismaili or the followers of the Agha Khan, which you must have heard the name. I was one of the first four to come in Edmonton. We have 6000 here today, and I was involved in, I was heavily in the community work and still, there's a sense of belonging as you say. Now, one tip for you is with a small Swaziland community, if you end up community at large, so that's where your tentacles grow.

Ndumiso Gama: I would say I'm pretty good with networking on a personal level, but on a community wide approach, probably that's what I need to maybe focus on. I've tried, you know, getting together with some Swazis and it's tough. You know, I contact them and I want to get together with them and they just disappear and they are doing their own things and I do my own things and there's very few of us anyway. When you came to Canada, I think for you probably well there was nothing much to go back to in Tanzania as you said right?

Sadru Nazarali: I can't call it home, Canada is my home because we lost everything and political is still a mess right now. The socialist policy from China and that was my thesis actually, I believed in it. Where the fortune comes in my luck is I chose the right country, in the right city, in the right place. I tell my children how good the Canada is, the Canadians don't know. When everything is taken overnight from you, and there's one party state you will vote for judiciary or no. If they say no, the police comes at home and you heard about it in Africa. People said discrimination and this and that, it said that Canada is the least. In Canada mostly it's a fear of unknown for you to tell yourself who you are.

Ndumiso Gama: So you must be rich?

Sadru Nazarali: No, I can put things together.

Ndumiso Gama: That's what I'm trying to do right now. Because I don't have a job and I don't feel like looking for a job.

Sadru Nazarali: What do you want to do?

Ndumiso Gama: Put things together.

Sadru Nazarali: No, but what is your passion? I mean, you got to find an idea or a passion. What do you want to do? Everybody wants to be an entrepreneur. I said, yes, I am an entrepreneur because my father taught me from age 13. My first business was 14. What do you want to do? That's your first question.

Ndumiso Gama: One thing is recycling, that I'm passionate about plastic.

Sadru Nazarali: I'll tell you what you recycle. You find somebody who knows solar, find a way where you can make a used refrigerator solar powered, will make tons of money sending it to Africa. That's a business plan.

Ndumiso Gama: Exactly. In fact, I went to, I don't know if you've heard about the Canton Fair in China. They have it ... it's funny because while I was there, I was mostly focusing on the solar exhibitions, and I have some contacts, and stuff like that. And that's what I was focusing most on. I looked at NAIT, I still have to find out more information about it because based on what I saw, like for example, if you wanted to take this solar program, you have to be like an electrician, sort of like an extra skill that you need. So when you came to Canada, you came with your family?

Sadru Nazarali: Nope. We are two friends from the same college. Good friends, we left because of nationalization, then a decree came six months before we left that you can't take out more than 4000 shillings. That's 267 dollars. So that's all I had when I left the country, June 5, 1971. We stayed three days in Beirut, two days in London ... But so what happened was there were two kinds of Ismaili: the millionaires from Uganda who had left big bucks, and the \$4,000-ers. Our name was \$4,000-ers, the guys who had left with 4000 shillings. And we didn't do a visa, tourist visa and I was told by a lot of people, including one lawyer the prairie provinces where there is agriculture. The two of us came by bus. There's another Indian friend who came here a month earlier and so we stayed with him for six months of torture. Immigration, couldn't work underground, boiled eggs, six boiled eggs, 11 sandwiches.

Ndumiso Gama: What did you do as in job-wise?

Sadru Nazarali: Nothing, couldn't work. We had to pick up strawberries illegally one day and my hand frozen. Second day, we went to a car wash and it rained so there's no car. We didn't know that. So there's no money, but we're very proud. I never backed, I've never gone to USA. We applied for immigration in Edmonton. Three months later, I passed and I had a work permit before I got my non-immigrant applied for landing status, so I could work. My first job was in Ardrossan here, cleaning chicken shit for 261 bucks a month. I stayed for four months had a thousand dollars and never look back and came to the city and things change.

Ndumiso Gama: I was lucky because for me I didn't need money. My parents pretty much took care of everything. The only challenge I had was like you probably have a little bit of pride. It was hard for me to ask for money. If I ran out of money, I remember one time my father ... he was just tired of telling me to let them know that I need money when I'm out. I preferred you know, going to close friends, to their family right and work. I was doing all gardening and sometimes some friends wanted their basements to be cleaned. I would go there ... any job I'll take anything and then don't pay even landscaping. I didn't know how to landscape but if I even learned to landscape, I did a landscaping project for one friend and he paid me well. Not that I

needed the money but yeah, I needed to work, I needed to be resourceful. So it was very frustrating that I couldn't work and stuff. It is for you. It was three months.

Sadru Nazarali: No, it was nine months in, I started working in the insurance business. Sometimes the guy upstairs looking after ... I went ... into the Royal Bank building on 10th floor with a parka smelling of chicken. I was one hour late, a guy by the name of George Highland, was my mentor. He said how many people do you know? I said four. I told him hire me for a month and don't pay me. I still have an agency. I got my pension when I was 47. It was a company which gave pension after 20 years, respective of your service, based on your production. I was one of the top producers in town. I have a question for you. You seem to be excited about business. You don't seem to take the next step of the relay race. Get an idea, not one but three or four, put some time there. I remember a friend of mine, buying Wendy's, I said go and work there. He had never worked in the restaurant. Three days he comes back to me and says you are the best friend I ever had, I can never go into the restaurant business. The second guy went to the Wendy's, he loved it, he's got five locations ... one of the top Wendy's franchises in town. Where do you fit in? What do you want to do? Find ideas that say thousands.

Ndumiso Gama: Yeah, definitely there's thousand. I've tried some and I've learned a lot from them and like you say you try something and then you realize, okay, it's not for you.

Sadru Nazarali: And get married. There might be a girl with a good brain.

Ndumiso Gama: Exactly. I know that's true. My mother, believe it or not, every time ... my mother is here. My adopted mother. Yeah, my biological parents both passed away. So before I came to Canada. My father, 2001, my mother, 2007.

Sadru Nazarali: What about your siblings, where are they?

Ndumiso Gama: Only one is in South Africa. I am close to my sister. There is one between she and I. However, I also want to have a home over there. I would say she's the most responsible one among my siblings, and she's kind of like taking care of everybody. So if I were to bring somebody, it'll probably be her. My other siblings, well, they're not really interested in coming here anyway. They love Swaziland. Most Swazi's love Swaziland. It's only now that we've started traveling, you know, but even those that travel they still want to go back including myself. One day I would love to go back.

Sadru Nazarali: is there any tourism there or wildlife game parks or nothing like Kruger National Park or something?

Ndumiso Gama: Yeah we have a national park. Not only one, like quite a few. So I'm assuming you're retired now?

Sadru Nazarali: Nope. I love working, I go to the office from 10-3 every day. I go to office, I go to stuff and 50 per cent of my time is community work. I can't stay at home, see the different kinds of people as there is something I've seen a lot of retirement. And at my age, you ask yourself, what takes you on at the retirement. Some people want to travel somewhere and start gardening, some people like music but that doesn't create the next generation. The brain ... these people there is amazing the experience. I'm seeing the other way around, get engaged, get engaged with the young people. This was in Kenya engaging my group to help the university I was in. I was in university in Karachi, Pakistan in the partnership book, I still got some VIP guests, so I'm always engaged. So that's your circle gets on, but also good and that doesn't require which community, where you come from or nothing. If you're good at that, they want you.

Ndumiso Gama: Somebody once said, when you get to, probably your age, your main job is to share the knowledge and experience to the future generations.

Sadru Nazarali: My father told me, what is in his last days when he was telling me a little says 'My son, all your life you want this. My son, my children, my money, my house.' So remember, whether it's a Ismaili community or society you live in or a country you live in: take less, give more, and you'll be always happy.

Salima Suleman: That conversation was personally quite relevant for me, because my grandfather, my grandmother and my dad were among the first people in the Ismaili community to come to Edmonton and they were very close with Sadru at that time. When my grandfather was alive, both my grandfathers have passed now, so when they were both alive, they would tell me these stories and bits and pieces. But they never, we never sat down and had a full conversation about that narrative and that family immigration experience. And I reflect on everything that I have and everything my family has built, and all the privilege I have and the space I get to occupy in Canada. And I am so grateful and humbled that the people that came before me, had the courage and they built all of this off of 4000 shillings, which is nothing and it really resonated with me that way.

Eric Storey: The subject of privilege, I was born in Canada, have grown up in Canada. The idea of needing to work, wanting to work but because of the immigration process not being allowed to work, how frustrating that must be because your needs could not ... you have the ability to meet your needs, but you're not allowed to. The other part is that mostly when we talk to people who have immigrated to Canada, we tend to talk about what happened once they arrived and their experiences once they arrived. And what we forget about is the really rich history and the life that they had before they came here.

Salima Suleman: Yeah, and that they existed in a world that was so vastly different. And they were so adaptable. And that in today's world, I think we all are so averse to change and look at <http://thesharedmic.blubrri.net>



how much change that generation and people who immigrate weathered and they came out stronger and better. And they built these lives for us: I'm a first generation Canadian and my kids will be, you know, Canadians and that it comes from this, this place of courage and a desire for something more. And that's it for this episode. Thanks for joining us for our first three episodes of The Shared Mic. We look forward to sharing more conversations with you.

Eric Storey: The Shared Mic is produced by Age Friendly Edmonton, a partnership between the City of Edmonton and the Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council. You can find us on Apple, Spotify, Google Podcasts, or wherever you subscribe to your favorite podcast. Please subscribe, leave a review and let us know what you think about this episode. Thanks!