

Fana Yohannes

Young Eritrean Nationals in Diaspora Connecting with their Motherland



Interview conducted by: *Sabrina Solomon*

Today, our guest is Fana Yohannes, a 33 years old Eritrean, born and raised in California, America. She recently finished her voluntary work in her motherland. She has accumulated massive experience with giant social media companies.

Tell us a little more about your background please.

Sure. I graduated from Santa Claire University with a communications degree. While I was an undergraduate, I started interning at apple which turned into a full time job. So I was working on the public relations team at Apple launching everything from iPhone, apple watch, ear pods and putting products to market. And my specialty at Apple was social media. Through my influence, I was able to broaden my horizons for working with social media influencers and social media publishers. So that curiosity then led me to work at Instagram where I lead next generation communications specializing and focusing on Gen Z communications, launching products like reels, helping build executive profiles and whatnot. I guess my passion is social media in a sense that provides a sense of connectivity as I was really gravitating towards it at a young age. So through

leveraging social media, I've been able to build a very successful career in technology where I currently own a consulting business in the States helping clients navigate social media algorithm. So I now work with companies to help identify their social media plans and strategic communication skills and also work with content creators and help coach them as well.

You have given a social media training here recently. Tell us more about it.



I initially came here for vacation with my family for a month. But then I was approached by a woman named Nadia who's from Germany who told me about her voluntary experience here in Eritrea. So through these connections that I found with Nadia, I was actually able to be connected with the youth center and was able to share my learnings and that has provided me with more opportunities to volunteer. I first did a keynote speech through the National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students. That keynote actually created a lot of curiosity since it was about the introduction of social media and AI and how you can best leverage it as a country. And so that caught the interest of the attendees. I think the Ministry of Information is really interested in cutting-edge journalism and they welcomed me as a teacher for a two weeks course. So it was a two-week seminar that I lead about social media and AI on how to leverage its platform but also strategies on how to engage diaspora youth with Eritrean history.

In the fast pacing world of technology and AI, how are the youth supposed to leverage social media in a positive way?

I'd say that with social media, it's really important to learn about social media literacy before using it. So firstly, it's really important not to take everything as the truth and you have to think critically about social media. One of the primary ways misinformation is spread on social media is through emotions, so it's crucial to check your bias and your emotion when you're consuming social media contents. Also, it's very important to have a sense of self and individuality because social media brings a lot of confusion with a lot of trends that you see where you start to think that is real or that it's something that you should emulate. So social media is a great tool especially when it comes to sharing new ideas, learning new things, building new businesses, building a community and so many great ways where you can reach people through social media but also have to consume responsibly and efficiently. So having that strong sense of self helps resist the social comparisons and negative impacts in terms of mental health.

The new warfare is the digital warfare, so we have to be very alert and very protective about the information that we're consuming and we have to also have means of being able to fact check.

***How do you rate the relations diaspora nationals have with their homeland?
And what piece of advice do you have based on your experience?***

This trip has been so inspiring for me because despite the length of my career; how many times I have been here, it's the first time that I have seen and met so many diaspora as few as they are who are so engaged in volunteering service work. So I have been lucky to be able to meet so many people that are so passionate about helping their country from the diaspora. I have met a lot of them in different ministries learning and sharing their experiences and knowledge.

Those who are able to get access to the ministries are really able to make interesting impact in Eritrea. But not only that, they can also learn about how they can continue to help when they are abroad. It isn't until you provide service that you understand the future is in your hands collective with the next generation's hands. So there needs to be a collaboration between the diaspora and the locals to make sure that we continue to advance. And I think our parents' generation has

done a good job showing an example of what a diaspora nationals means; like supporting during times of need. But now, as diaspora youth, we need to figure out how to show up as a generation of peace and show up in order to continue the prosperity and longevity in Eritrea. But you can't get a solid understanding of that unless you know your history and understand the present of how Eritrea operates and what it needs in order to succeed and strive. You have to understand the past to make sense of the present and to understand what the plan is for the future and so you have to understand your history.

What do you think about the biased narratives about Eritrea that can be creating confusion and disconnect between diaspora and Eritrea?



As I mentioned earlier, one way that misinformation is spread is through emotions and bias. So when you hear something that affirms even the slightest uncertainty, that narrative starts to take over. And then you start seeing that narrative over and over again because of the algorithms on social media showing you what you interact with the most. So despite the truth, it affirms the negativity about Eritrea. So it's really important you do a fact check. We Eritreans have a responsibility to share our history and many have no idea about that history and they haven't learned about that sacrifice and so they don't share the same experience as the people in Eritrea that are protecting the sovereignty. So we have to continuously be able to inform and educate and control our narrative on social media and not just turn a blind eye to what's happening on social media. So yes, we need to

inform the people wherever they are. Otherwise the misinformation will win and that confidence and believe might get erased.

Any final remarks you want to make?

One message that I want to share with the diaspora is that they have a very strong sense of cultural history but I don't think we have a sense of our liberation history. And I think given how much time has passed, I really think that we as the young diaspora community need to learn more about the liberation history. Because without that, we don't really understand how this country runs or operates. And also, while we have our living ancestors, our living founding fathers and mothers, we need to be able to document and learn from them as much as possible. Thank you.

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