

Script: “The Challenges of protecting animals in Egypt”

8 minutes – 3 seconds

Nadine Ismail

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Nadine Guiddawy (NG): “It’s just a dog” (00:00:02)

Mohamed El Katatney (MK): It’s just a dog (00:00:01)

Nadine Awadallah (NA): It’s just a dog (00:00:01)

Karim AbdelKodos (KA): It’s just a dog (00:00:02)

Nada Selim (NS): It’s just a dog (00:00:01)

MUSIC: FADE IN: John Lennon – Imagine (1 minute – 56 seconds from the beginning of the song).

If you are an Egyptian pet owner, I bet that’s the sentence you’ve heard the most since you became one. As a dog owner myself, I cannot even remember how many times I’ve heard it. And it’s usually followed by sentences like: you must be kidding; do you do all that for a dog? Do you really spend all this money on his food? Are you that free to keep on walking your dog?

SFX: (Group of people laughing – FADE In when ANNC says “you must be kidding”)

But if these are the comments you get for caring about a single dog that you love dearly, how difficult do you think it is then to be an animal protector and to care for large numbers of strays?

Amina Abaza , founder of SPARE (Society for the Protection of Animal Rights in Egypt) , a non-profit organisation aiming at helping animals in need , explains that the biggest challenge of opening up a shelter in Egypt was the reaction of people towards her idea.

AMINA ABAZA (AA): "I wanted to that – to do that but I didn't know how, because people was mocking ... me a lot thinking that I was stupid or something to care about animals. So, I was a little bit shy to express my will and my dream to open a shelter and to work for animals. (00:00:19)

But were the people at least respectful enough of it when she decided to challenge society and pursue her dream?

(AA): In the beginning, television was inviting me to make me the fun uhmm, ya3ni the few minutes of fun in the program. (00:00:08)

Laila Fayek, Egyptian Animal Protector, has also explained that she always gets mocked at by people. She recounts that she was once told that what she's doing is an obscenity and that she will be judged by God for putting in time, effort and money for helping animals over humans.

Seems like a lot of Egyptians have the same feeling towards the idea of helping animals. Here are a few responses of students at the American University in Cairo AUC , a supposedly well-educated and open-minded group of our society, that were asked what they think of people who spend their time and money to help animals in need.

Yehia El Kholy (YK): What I think about those people, I think that they are crazy. (00:00:02)

Ok, to each their opinion. Go on people, Go on.

Shehab El Tohfa (ST): I think that humans have the priority to – to get founded by whatever organization that is used. (00:00:07)

Alaa Abd el Alim (AA): I think that it's very useful; however we should – ya3ni- consider humans first. (00:00:06)

Nadine Gammal (NG): My opinion is that there are more important problems in Egypt that we have to face, like homeless children. (00:00:09)

Youssef Magdy (YM): You'd rather spend this money on people who really need it in different ways, whether medically or in any other way, rather than dogs, rather than animals 3amatan. (00:00:09)

Aly El Boghdady (AB): I am against because the human needs is more important than animals need, especially in Egypt. (00:00:08)

MUSIC: FADE IN: One Direction – Story of my life (1 minute – 37 seconds from the beginning of the song).

Such a conception, that we, humans, are superior and that our needs are always to come first might be due to the lack of importance or awareness given to the idea of animal welfare in Egypt. In fact, SPARE, the first Egyptian non-profit organization was only founded in 2001. You may think that was a long time ago, but compared to other countries, we took the step extremely late.

The world's first animal welfare charitable organization, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals was founded in 1824 in London. Years later, The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals was founded in 1866 in the United-States. The Canadian Federation of Humane Societies the largest national animal welfare organization in Canada was later founded in 1957.

But as they always say, it's better late than never and at least, a step was taken and many organizations have been founded to minimize the torture of animals and promote their welfare in Egypt. The problem remains that, in a poor country like Egypt, with a high illiteracy rate and in which most people do not get their basic human rights, the majority never thinks of animals, they do not acknowledge the idea of animals having rights in general. This is why explaining to Egyptians methods of saving animals, especially when they're scientific and advanced, is an extremely tough task to do.

SFX: (Group of dogs barking – FADE In when ANNC says “methods of saving”)

MUSIC: FADE IN: Roy Todd – Piano Music (25 seconds from the beginning of the song).

(AA): It was here in Sakkara our first pilot project .It was very strange because we started in a place where people really don't know what we are doing. First of all, they don't know what animal welfare is and TNR was, for them a big mystery. They started saying that we are removing the ovaries of the females to im-uhm export them and earn money. Of-course everything here is linked to money. And that we were making a big business, very fishy. (00:00:30)

And this mind-set stems from the Egyptian government and how it deals with stray animals.

MUSIC: FADE IN: John Legend – All of Me (1 minute – 48 seconds from the beginning of the song).

Let me tell you a little story that would make the image clearer in your minds. Farah Hamza, - a 21 year old Egyptian - has adopted a baladi – meaning native dog in Arabic- when she found him thrown alone as a puppy in one of Cairo's vast deserts.

This is a rare case for many reasons. Firstly, Egyptians do not really adopt, they prefer buying dogs and it's almost impossible to find homes for baladis. Secondly, Egyptians prefer having foreign breeds and perceive the local Egyptian Baladis as filthy, ugly and not fancy enough.

Let's just back to the story of Farah.... Since she adopted him, Carlos became her baby. Each day, he grew a little and she witnessed him becoming unique in his own ways. He then became her priority; she played with him, fed him, took him for walks and definitely spoiled him as much as she can. In short, she did everything to make him live peacefully and happily. But unfortunately, her dream was short lived.

(FH): I didn't see this but my cousin he explained to me the scene and the blood. Basically, the baladeya came and killed him because a neighbor she reported that he was making a lot of noise. Uhhh yeah, so this is what happened basically. I didn't see it, but I can imagine it.

So, the neighbor is actually my mum's friend. She saw her I think a week after. And she told her yeah, do you know who called the Baladeya? It's me, cuz the dog was making lots of noise and she took it as something that's funny, well it's not at all. She killed a member of our family.. (00:00:39).

After listening to the story of Carlos, most people claim that that's only a unique case, and that they see hundreds of dogs living normally in the streets of Cairo.

Aya AbdelSallam (AA): Have you heard of the mass killing of street animals by poison or by shooting? (00:00:06)

I am sure that most of the listeners haven't, because as you know, no one really cares to report the killing of stray animals. First of all, that was Aya AbdelSallam, Egyptian animal rescuer. I talked to Aya on the phone because she had just rescued a puppy and was very busy taking care of him.

(AA): The government is involved in that, because when they get a lot of complaints from residents in certain areas dogs are barking or attacking children, the easiest way is to just kill them by this poison that is banned internationally. (00:00:21).

MUSIC: FADE IN: Roy Todd – Piano Music (1 minute - 31 seconds from the beginning of the song).

SFX: (A dog yowling in pain – FADE in when Aya says “they kill them”)

Seems like helping Animals is the hardest thing one could do while staying in Egypt. And the situation would remain as is as long as we believe that certain lives matter more than others.

I personally believe that the most important misconception to clear is to make people understand that caring for animals doesn't mean caring less for humans, and that you will never find an animal rescuer who wouldn't go out of their way to help another human.

(AA): La Martine, the French poet said it. And I love what he said: You do not have a heart for animals and a heart for humans. You have a heart or not at all. (00:00:11)

This Audio Documentary was produced by Nadine Ismail for the Audio Production class at the American University in Cairo taught by Professor Kim Fox in fall 2015.

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