

## **Transkription des Interviews mit Farah H. Kamel: „Managing Partner von Dayma – eco education through experiential activities in Egypt“ (gekürzt und geglättet)**

Farah Kamel ist Managing Partnerin der Organisation Dayma.

Dayma ist eine ägyptische Organisation für Umweltbildung, die Exkursionen und Workshops anbietet, um junge Menschen für Kultur, Natur und Nachhaltigkeit zu sensibilisieren. Das Team organisiert Exkursionen an verschiedenen Orten in Ägypten und arbeitet mit lokalen Gemeinschaften zusammen, um Vermittlungsangebote in der Natur zu entwickeln.

Farah Kamel verantwortet die Programmgestaltung und die Vermittlungsstrategie. Außerdem fördert sie Partnerschaften sowie Citizen-Science-Initiativen, die die Teilnehmenden ermutigen, sich aktiv für Umwelt- und Naturschutz zu engagieren.

### **TMW: Can you please introduce yourself?**

#### **Farah H. Kamel:**

My name is Farah. I am the managing partner of a social enterprise that does eco education through experiential activities in Egypt, called Dayma. We work to help people connect to nature, community and self, and understand our local environments and how they're connected to our local communities with the objective of encouraging people to become more involved in environmental stewardship and conservation work.

### **TMW: How does the history of European colonialism continue to affect Egypt's environment today, and how are these impacts visible in the Canal Zone?**

#### **Farah H. Kamel:**

So for us at Dayma, we believe that environmental colonialism is basically the environmental effects of actions that are taken by either an occupying state or more affluent or powerful nations imposing their development or extraction policies on less affluent communities.

This usually happens without consideration for the importance and the balance of the local ecosystems, or the available resources or data, or the needs of the sustainability of the local communities.

We see that all the time, just in our context, by seeing how very little, especially urban communities, know about their local environment and their local biodiversity and how little it's valorized. So a lot of people don't really see the values of our deserts, for example, or our local marine ecosystems. And in its place, other things have taken root and have become more available. For example, a lot of the things that we plant or a lot of the things that we see value in planting are not of Egypt's biodiversity, not of our, like the crops, for example, are very water intensive. A lot of the plants are water intensive and don't belong where we do.

And that lack of our relationship eventually builds to a lack of relationship with not just the land, but the things that live on it, for example, like the birds or insects or even how we understand how our ecosystems are connected. So understanding soil biodiversity, all of these things.

So starting to look at that and understanding that things that we now just take for granted because of how much we've been exposed to a European sensibility, like we need to reeducate ourselves. So even things that have to do with how the land rebuilds itself.

And you can see this specifically also in the Canal Zone on a more structural level. So once the Suez Canal was built, you can see that these two ecosystems that did not interact, were not connected, became extremely connected. So Red Sea species have now become, a lot of Red Sea species have now become an invasive species in the Mediterranean called the Lessepsian Migration. And it's named after de Lesseps and one of the things that people do not understand, and we've seen this during the summer, is that this happens because they did not see the effects of colonialism as environmental. But things like seeing Red Sea lionfish on the north coast of Egypt have become very common. Seeing puffer fish on the north coast of Egypt has become very common. And the people that are exposed to both, are often very confused as to why these animals are here. But that's one of the problems, one of the things that we structurally change the way that the landscape looks, connected these two ecosystems, and did not consider for a moment that any of these animals would become a problem. Actually, now in Europe as well, because we are connected to Europe through the Mediterranean. So a lot of the Lessepsian migrants that we have, have flown up to Europe and have become extremely, problematic species in the Mediterranean basin.

### **TMW: How can we better understand the challenges of climate change by studying history?**

#### **Farah H. Kamel:**

Looking at climate change through the lens of history is something that needs to be done, in order to understand how we got here.

Essentially climate change, and it's in the name “change”, is looking at how things have changed, but you need multiple data points. If we're looking at our own context as a data point, understanding how we got here, we have to understand the data points from before. And then also what kind of systems have brought us here.

We usually, in Dayma, work with climate change on multiple levels. So one of the things that people have been using to pretend that climate change is not a problem, or pretend that it's not a human made problem, is that they have talked about the fact that the climate has been changing the world over since eternity.

And we use that actually, we go, we visit *Wadi al Hitan*, which is a Unesco World Heritage Site that looks at the change in not only, evolution, how certain bodies of certain animals have changed, but also how the ecosystems have changed. And there's actually a climate change museum there.

And we talk about: “Yes. Okay. There is evidence that there has been climate changes all over the world, but this time it's us on the line. This time we are the animal that will become extinct.” And it's very important to talk about that because understanding that history does repeat itself, but this time it's repeating itself much faster. Because we are the animal or the species that is fueling that change is very important for people.

And then there are things that are more related to why we have come here in terms of how fossil fuels became so important for the industrial revolution, how that became so important for the development of more affluent nations and extraction from those affluent nations. But that line of thought is easier to show when you look at what kind of crops we plant, how heat stress has become a thing or how it's become worse in our local communities, especially in the south of Egypt, we've got flash flooding that's become a little bit less reliable. We don't quite understand when the patterns come. And it's having a lot of stress on both our local communities' livelihoods, but also on their everyday lives.

**TMW: Dayma believes culture is central to environmental conservation work. Why is that, and how do you incorporate cultural activities into your work?**

**Farah H. Kamel:**

So even though Dayma is not an environmental conservation enterprise or organization, you cannot have interaction with environmental conservation without understanding the value of what you're trying to conserve. So Dayma has always worked on the idea that connection and education are what build towards stewardship, and stewardship can mean conservation, or it can mean more sustainable ways of doing what you already do or more sustainable businesses and activities.

So one of the things that we work on is first, educating people and then giving them avenues to connect with conservation activities that already exist in Egypt, or encouraging them to become part of the change themselves. We work with NGOs such as Nature Conservation Egypt, which is one of the leading entities working on conservation work on both conservation of birds and other species. But one of the more, involved activities that we do is we work with them and Hemaya on an introduction onto what the Egyptian tortoise is, and that is a species that is critically endangered and almost extinct in the wild in Egypt, mostly due to poaching and environmental degradation or habitat loss. And it's become a huge commodity. A lot of wildlife trade is specifically focused on reptiles, creates that problem and makes species critically endangered.

And then also because of the priorities of development in Egypt, a lot of the ecosystems that these animals need, have been sold off to big companies to do tourism development. And this is something that we've seen all over Egypt, that tourism, because we are constantly marketing ourselves to more affluent communities and for ourselves, like even inside Egypt or abroad, huge swaths of land are changed irreparably.

So you have entire desert ecosystems that are being turned into resorts and golf courses, something that obviously is quite foreign for Egypt. Rolling lawns are not part of the local ecosystems, and they're having a huge effect either in the North on these animals that really rely on the desert, and in the east, where they're causing eutrophication and causing a huge problem for our reef ecosystems. And then in order to conserve them, people need to understand that they need to deprioritize these things that are quite foreign to our own native, both like ecosystems and culture, but in order for them to mobilize, they need to learn. And that's one of the first steps.

Other things that we do are related more to working with people and understanding the concept of migration, for example. So Egypt is on one of the biggest flyways that connects Africa to Europe and Asia. And we have massive amounts of birds that migrate through here. And unfortunately, hunting and different kind of practices that are not all local, but some people that come from abroad to hunt have created a massive problem for us in terms of maintaining these populations. So in order to encourage people to either work on conservation or become more involved or even just encourage local authorities to make things like that, to make violations like that less likely, and police them better.

We need people to be educated and engaged, and we do that through our cultural activities, because not everyone can effectively connect with nature in the same way. So a lot of the time, art or food or activities that have to do with understanding how nature is connected to the local communities that we visit, and how you can see the reflections in that, are really good ways of getting people more interested in being part of the conversation on conservation.

## **TMW: How do you use citizen science to mobilize people?**

### **Farah H. Kamel:**

So one of the things that is very effective in helping people understand that so much of the nature or the things that they think of as nature, greenery, gardens, that they see in Cairo especially, and in other places in Egypt, that are very green, are not native. And one of the ways to do that is through activities such as BioBlitzes, which are citizen science activities where we use an app, there are different apps that you can use, that help you identify the different species that you see either of plants or animals or insects or whatever.

And the beauty of that is, once it identifies the subject of your picture, it can tell you where it came from, and you start becoming much more aware of how much of what you think of as nature is constructed, and how much we're losing of our local species communities, and that's very powerful for us. And it has the added value of actually collecting data and helping create this understanding, and these massive data sets of how different species are spread over our country and how native species are spread or, the pattern of spread in our country.

We think doing that is one of the first steps for conservation. How do you learn how to conserve or what to conserve if you don't understand what exists? So I think it's, in its own way, creating a new set of data, a new history of understanding these things, and it's very exciting.