Egyptian Salsa Revolution: Culture Resist and Salsa Persist
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LEAD-IN:

Despite the modernization phase that Egypt is passing through, many Egyptians still have negative attitudes towards dancing in general. Salsa dancing is believed to make men sissy and women shameless. Sara Reda has the story.

MUSIC: “Un Dos Tres Maria” by Ricky Martin (:11) - Fade in and out.

RASHA: “I felt in love with salsa because of the music, how much fun it is, the social aspect, the dance, the fact that it’s for all age groups and they are all there for the same reason... to dance.” (:12)

MUSIC: “Un Dos Tres Maria” by Ricky Martin (:22) - Fade in and under.

MOHAMED: “It is great exercise. Also it’s fun. It builds self-confidence. It’s a lifestyle in general.” (:07)

NOUR: “I was in dire need for social connection and interaction. And, I found out that salsa events provide a safe, but at the same time, very refreshing way to meet people with the same mind.” (:12)

RASHA: “The fact that it’s for all age groups, from all walks of life, from different parts of the world and they are all there for the same reason, to dance.” (:09)

MUSIC: “Un Dos Tres Maria” by Ricky Martin (:09) - Fade in and under.

These are some examples from salsa lovers that I have gotten to know. But there is a very passionate dancer called Wessam that I would like you to meet.

WESAM: “I have been dancing salsa for over ten years. It’s a wonderful passion dance. It’s something new. It’s sometimes where you can express your feeling. The way the rhythm moves my body and the musicality is awesome, it’s amazing, it’s burp. Over 10 years, I have been hooked since the first dance, and I am still going. And, in the salsa community, you get to meet a lot of wonderful people. They become like your second family. It’s like amazing life.” (:31)

MUSIC: Cuban music (:32) - Fade in and under.
Despite the great expansion of Latin dancing in Egypt in the past 20 years, it’s still hard to access the history of salsa dancing. That’s because dance, in general, does not often leave behind clearly identifiable tangible traces to track, especially in places where cultural and religious restrictions prohibit it. But, what about salsa in Egypt and who exactly dances salsa?

MOHAMED: “Salsa nights in Egypt are totally different than anywhere else. They are mainly for young people. For young men of course. That’s because in religion, dancing is a taboo and in the Egyptian culture dancing is inappropriate and unrespectable. For example, old people are expected not to dance because they have to respect their age. And, for men, dancing is considered girly and for women, dancing is unrespectable. This makes dancing problematic for all social strata.” (:36)

MUSIC: Cuban music (:4) - Fade in and out.

That was Mohamed Sharkawy, a salsa dancer who never missed an international salsa festival! And talking about who dances salsa in Egypt, Dahab, a professional salsa dancer, has highlighted an important point.

NAT SOUND of people chanting Cuban songs (:28) - Fade in and under.

DAHAB “Poor people mainly are not that much interested in dancing. And they don’t have time even to think about it. If we are talking globally. Dancing globally will be the interest of the whole society. Because even the poor people there are considering dances a way to earn money.” (:18)

NATSOUND of people laughing (:05) - Fade under and out.

In case you develop a chronic salsa addiction the way most Egyptian salsa dancers do in a very short span of time, you should join the salsa dancers at Bien café in Mohandessin, an up-scale neighborhood in Giza.

NATSOUND of people dancing salsa on Latin music (:25) – Fade in and under

The café is cozy with a nice stage, small tables and an amazing Latin DJ. They offer a salsa workshop at 9:00pm led by a professional dancer, then you can practice the whole evening. You can also choose to enjoy your favorite cocktails and mocktails with pulsating Latin songs in the background.

Beside Bien café, salsa nights are held in a form of house Latin parties. I personally went to a very special salsa night but I would let Wessam tell you all about it.
WESSAM: “It’s a wonderful villa in Maadi and we have a great host, Renilde, and it’s a luxurious place. The people here are like seriously cool, it’s crowded, they fit in. They are stylish, they are open minded. Lots of fancy clothes. Everyone is enjoying the open buffet. The tiramisu, There is a Champaign over there, you just enjoy. Everything is cool. Here is much more private, you know, have your own privacy and it’s all about the host. She is a great host.”

Being in this special night, I couldn’t stop myself from interviewing Samia, a veiled mother salsa dancer who is very committed to dancing.” (:31)

SAMIA: “Dancing is the only thing that makes you feel so happy. You have nothing to think about. You always feel pretty, and you know, like a woman, heheh, and forget all your stress and everything.” (:14)

SARA (Narrator): “What makes you come here every Tuesday, every Thursday to dance again and gain. What keeps you motivated?” (:07)

SAMIA: “Well, it’s a kind of fitness, enjoy. And you feel like that you have to look nice and feel really like a woman and start to meet people and make friends maybe some times. But it’s all about dancing, because I love dancing and that’s the only reason I am keeping coming here.” (:24)

And in the middle of the night, the music suddenly stopped and the event host stood on a chair to make an announcement.

NAT SOUND: The event host, Renilde, announces Mohamed Toraqy’s birthday. (:35)- Fade in and out.

YASMIN “Yes we have a birthday of one of our friends called Mohamed Toraqy. Mohamed Toraqy is the best of all. He is so gentle man. He love to help people and we would like to make our birthdays in salsa nights.” (:18)

And this is what Yasmin Salim, a young salsa dancer, thought about how intimate and solid the salsa communities are in Cairo. Rasha Sadek, a salsa dancing instructor who has been teaching salsa for almost 8 years, also sees the growth of the salsa communities.

MUSIC: “Adios Amor (Salsa Remix)” by George Lamond- (:29) Fade in and under.

RASHA: “Yeah, I think salsa is spreading in a fast pace everywhere in Egypt now. It started in Cairo, moved to Alex and Hurghada and everywhere else. Umm, although it still faces challenges and limitations and some misconceptions due to the restraints and the cultural aspect of things, uhh but otherwise it’s still spreading.” (:20)
The girls were laughing as they were shocked that a man could shake his hips better than they could ever do. **I myself couldn’t follow** any of the basic steps and I had no idea why everyone was counting 1-2-3, 5-6-7. (The basic salsa feet steps) and I remember asking myself where in the world did numbers 4 and 8 go? I felt inferior watching everyone showing off their dancing style and taking over the dance floor, especially because I was veiled at that time—something that doubled the challenges for me.

**MUSIC:** "Adios Amor (Salsa Remix)" by George Lamond (:15) Fade in and under.

Nour, a 24 year old salsa dancer, is going to sum it up for us.

**NOUR:** “In Egypt many men would claim to be open minded and not conservative. I don’t think this way, but you know how men are. They judge you. It’s not just about men. It’s about everyone. Some women actually would judge you for dancing and being veiled. And, I think the problem is with the entire culture. Some men would dance with you and respect you for doing what you do and following your passion in life, no matter what your conditions are, being veiled or not, but others would disrespect you.” (:28)

**MUSIC:** “Campina” (Afro Cuban Jazz Project) (:38) - Fade under and under and out

This actually makes women’s situation very complicated. Not to mention that men also face challenges, but for different reasons.

**MOHAMED:** “Poor Egyptian men are in a big problem. They were taught that dancing is sissy. Thus, they grow up having no connection with their bodies, no sense of freedom at all. What is even worse, is that not only are men socially prohibited from dancing, women also are but definitely for different reasons and not to mention that dancing is attached with a low public image.” (:24)

The challenges of dancing in Egypt double when it comes to veiled girls and women. Nour has more to add.

**MUSIC:** “Charanga Latina” by Mi Violin Charanguero (:17) - Fade in and out.

**NOUR:** “People automatically assume that veiled girls are religious and culturally reserved. So, they expect them to act very conservatively. They label them. Thus, when a
veiled woman does anything that they believe to be indecent quote and quote, she is
directly labeled as loose and, you know, forsaking religion.” (:24)

MUSIC: “La Vida Es Un Carnaval” by Celia Cruz (:15) - Fade under and out.
NOUR: “They have no idea that not all veiled women are religious. Veil women became
more of traditional trend. It’s not related to religion anymore. At least not as it used to be
before.” (:37)

MUSIC: “La Vida Es Un Carnaval” by Celia Cruz (:08) - Fade under and out.
NOUR: “Egyptians have a problem of not accepting diversity in personalities and
beliefs. They tend more to label people. They need to have a price tag on you.” (:12)

MUSIC: “La Vida Es Un Carnaval” by Celia Cruz (:27) - Fade in and under.
Despite all the limitations that salsa dancers in Egypt face, they are still going loco over salsa
because it is fun, enticing, and stimulating. For all these reasons, salsa deserves to get more
exposure and recognition in the mainstream Egyptian culture.

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Thank you for listening to “Egyptian Salsa Revolution: Culture Resist and Salsa Persist”
This documentary was produced and narrated by Sara Reda.

Special thanks to: Salsa instructor Rasha Sadek and Salsa dancers Noor Mohamed, Mohamed
Sharkawy, Ahmed Dahab, Samia Eleish, Wessam Mohamed, and Yasmin Salim.

Sources from: Intensive interviews with Egypt’s most famous salsa instructors and dancers.

Music used in the documentary:

“Un Dos Tres Maria” by Ricky Martin
“Adios Amor (Salsa Remix)” by George Lamond
“Campina” (Afro - Cuban Jazz Project)
“Charanga Latina” by Mi Violin Charanguero
“La Vida Es Un Carnaval” by Celia Cruz
“Salsa de Noche” by Gipsy Kings
The natsound was gathered by me. Thanks for listening.