Elaheh Hatami

*Glocal Bodies*
Dancers in Exile and Politics of Place: A Critical Study of Contemporary Iranian Dance
From:

Elaheh Hatami
Glocal Bodies
Dancers in Exile and Politics of Place:
A Critical Study of Contemporary Iranian Dance

October 2022, 202 p., pb., 12 col. ill.

42,00 € (DE), 978-3-8376-6080-7
E-Book:

PDF: 41,99 € (DE), ISBN 978-3-8394-6080-1

This book is a critical study of Iranian dance and the works of Iranian-American female dancers in exile. Focusing on the study of contemporary Iranian dance through analysis of the choreographies of three female dancers in diaspora (namely Aisan Hoss, Shahrzad Khorsandi, and Banafsheh Sayyad), this research is among the first of its kind. Elaheh Hatami investigates the transformation of professional Iranian dance and discusses the role of relocation and displacement in its performance. She argues that Iranian dance and Iranian female dancers have always been in exile – not only in a physical sense, but also in the metaphorical sense of ‘exile’ implying foreignness, exclusion, and marginalization.

Elaheh Hatami (Dr. phil.), born in 1979, studied dance studies at Freie Universität Berlin, where she also received her doctorate. For her Ph.D she was awarded with a scholarship from the Friedrich-Ebert Foundation. Her research focuses on the contemporaneity and transformation of dance forms at the time of digitalization.

For further information:
www.transcript-verlag.de/en/978-3-8376-6080-7
Contents

Acknowledgements .................................................................................. 7

Introduction: Background, Objective, and Methodology ............................ 11

Chapter 1. Dance: A Dilemma in Iranian Art ........................................... 23

Chapter 2. Exile at Home:
The Imposition of Outsider Status
on Dancers and Dance within Iran ......................................................... 45

Chapter 3. Moving toward External Exile:
Iranian Dance and Dancers Cast
out of their Homeland ........................................................................ 87

Chapter 4. Change of Perspective:
Becoming Contemporary
through Tradition and Experiment ....................................................... 113

Chapter 5. Transformation and Reconnection
to Home ................................................................................................. 133

Conclusion ............................................................................................ 183

List of Figures .......................................................................................... 191

Works Cited ............................................................................................ 193

Online Resources .................................................................................... 201
Acknowledgements

The development of a doctoral thesis is a not a solitary process. I sincerely appreciate the generous support that helped me in the formation, development, and completion of the thesis.

Foremost, my sincere thanks go to Professor Gabriele Brandstetter, who has supported my work with much understanding since I was a master’s student. I am grateful for her support and her many inspiring ideas, which aided my critical understanding of this topic. Our numerous discussions on an intellectual and personal level will always be remembered as enriching and constructive exchanges. I have always found our dialogue to be encouraging and motivating. Thanks for her comments, her constructive suggestions, and her support after the completion of each section, and thanks for giving me the confidence to continue on this journey.

I would also like to thank Professor Matthias Warstat, my second supervisor, who cordially and optimistically provided me with valuable ideas and feedback.

The development and composition of this book would not have been possible without generous funding, including financial and in-kind support of the Friedrich Ebert Organization. Furthermore, I would not have been able to afford expenses for research field trips, participation in conferences, proof-reading and publication without the support of the Friedrich Ebert Organization.

My gratitude extends as well to the interviewees and researchers in California, especially Aisan Hoss, Shahrzad Khorsandi and Banafsheh Sayyad, whom I was honored to meet personally. Thanks for sharing the stories of their lives, their experiences, and their materials, including videos and photos, and for providing me with the opportunity to participate in workshops and rehearsals.
I thank Professor Jacqueline Shea Murphy from the University of California Riverside, with whom I had a chance to talk and exchange ideas while she stayed as a fellow at the International Research Center Interweaving Performance Cultures of Free University of Berlin. Her feedback and questions concerning the subject of the research were inspirational for Chapter 4.

I am furthermore thankful to Professor Anurima Banerji from UCLA and Dr. Heather Rastovac Akbarzadeh, for their warm welcome and scientific exchange during my stay in California.

I’d like to thank the all other dancers, choreographers, and dance instructors in Los Angeles, Berkeley, and San Francisco, whom I was honored to meet either in their homes, in cafés, and in dance studios. Listening to them and their experiences was influential in affording me a more objective understanding of the performance spaces of Iranian dance and its status in the diaspora.

I am sincerely grateful to Kathrein Hölscher and Beate Eckstein, my referees and consultants for PhD students in the international scholarship holders team. Their commitment, cordiality, and readiness for consultation via telephone or email or in person deserve a separate and emphatic expression of gratitude.

In Tehran, my thanks go to Gholi Amani, the ex-head of the Harekat-e-Mowzoon (rhythmic movements) society, who welcomed me and generously provided me with his valuable archive.

To Mr. Hossein Taghavi, who from thousands of books and magazines patiently and enthusiastically found and provided me with the resources I needed.

I will always be grateful to Professor Oliver Charles Mechcatie, who helped me in the first step in the formation of the idea of the thesis.

I thank my fellow students at colloquium for helping my thesis to become more mature with their critiques and suggestions.

I also have benefitted from the support of friends and contacts who have not been directly involved in this research: I thank Parvin Hadinia, Mohammad Abbasi, and Ashkan Afsharian in Tehran for their conversation and for introducing me to the contemporary dance scene inside Iran.

Thank you to transcript publishing house for including the book in the TanzScripte series. I would like to thank the staff of transcript publishing for their friendly help during the process of publication.

I am grateful to the proofreader Shane Bryson for his accurate work and critical comments.
My extended family deserves special acknowledgment. Their enthusiasm for dance and music and for sharing it at our parties and gatherings has inspired me since I was a child.

I am very much grateful to my late father, Ghasem, and to my late mother, Sedigheh, who always encouraged me to learn and experience new things. Without their devotion and tolerance of the suffering of being away from me, it would definitely be impossible for me to continue this path.

To my son, Hamun, who joined us in the middle of my writing the thesis, I am thankful to him for lightening our lives and changing my view of the life.

These acknowledgments would not be complete without mentioning Mehdi, my husband and friend, who encouraged me to pursue a master's degree in dance studies and continued to support me along the way. His attention, encouragement, humor, flexibility, innovative ideas, and constructive criticism were very helpful to complete my doctoral thesis.

With sincerity and love, I dedicate this book to him.
Introduction: Background, Objective, and Methodology

This book is a revised version of my doctoral dissertation that I submitted in March 2020 at the Free University of Berlin. The research is a deepened continuation of a part of my master dissertation entitled *Covered Bodies: Embodiment and Expression of Female Body and Emotion in Iranian Dance*. In my master thesis, I have addressed the reaction of the Iranian women dancers to 1979 Revolution and the prohibition of dance, due to that. Migration and self-exile have been the reactions imposed upon Iranian women dancers who have wanted to pursue dance professionally, since they need a free environment without censorship to pursue these activities. Movement in dance and movement for dance are their strategy and approach to this pursuit. Surpassing physical and mental barriers and struggling with new challenges that arose during relocation, as well as efforts to become established in their new settings, are some of the factors that have affected the practices of these women dancers. Analyzing the current situation of these dancers is impossible without pausing to consider the history of dance in Iran and raising critical questions: What is *Iranian Dance*, and how has it transformed to its current form? What kinds of complexities in Iranian dance and its ambiguous and tumultuous history have led to current situation of it? By whom and with what intentions has this dance been defined? By answering these questions, which are mostly related to the history of dance in Iran, this study will provide an understanding of the current situation of Iranian dance and its performers.

The objective of research is not to iterate a narrative history of Iranian dance, but to address the key moments in that history which prompted the current situation, with reference to Walter Benjamin's theses on the concept of history. My hypothesis is that the Iranian dance and women dancers have been in exile from the beginning of their time performing on stage, and this exile has appeared in the different forms, both material and metaphorical.
The subjects of study in this book are Iranian-American women dancers, having immigrated to America in their adolescence or leaving for the US after being established professional dancers in Iran. They are trained in Western dance techniques and have integrated the Iranian dance aesthetic into their choreography.

This qualitative research design is based on grounded theory. The lack of academic literature on and documentation of Iranian dance was the reason for the decision to conduct research based on interviews to collect the first-hand lived experiences from dancers.

The findings are based on the analysis of one-on-one interviews, review of videos of their choreographies, and observations during the dancers’ training courses. The interviews were completed in a standardized and open-ended format in Persian and English. These interviews were conducted with ten Iranian–American dancers and choreographers in Los Angeles and San Francisco Bay area in the homes of the dancers, or at studios or cafés in February/March 2015 and November 2016.

The purpose of the interviews was to gain insight into the approach and work of the Iranian–American women dancers and to examine the influence of being in the exile on their dances.

The interviews were semi-structured. The criteria by which the questions were included the experience of immigration or exile, obstacles, and opportunities as an immigrant artist, the meaning of being a female dancer in the Iranian–American market, the performance space, the reaction of the audience, and the role of non-Iranian choreographers and institutions.

The interviewees belonged to the first and second generation of immigrants. A point of emphasis for all interviewees was the experience of being away from “home.” In addition, all of the interviewed dancers were active in the realm of Iranian dance.

I transcribed recorded interviews to over 80 pages in Berlin. After reading the text of the interviews several times, I derived several themes from them. In order to draw accurate conclusions and ensure enough space to examine and analyze the videos, the number of dancers considered in the interview analysis was limited to three. The primary characteristic shared by these three dancers is their training and background in Western and modern dance and the integration of Iranian dance vocabulary in their choreographies.

Written references and interviews also form an important part of the book. In addition, visual resources including videos, photographs, program notes, private archives, pre-Revolution art and cultural magazines, were used
to develop the structure of this study, as well as conversations with ex-dancers who were active before the 1979 Revolution and with dancers who are currently active in a limited capacity in Iran.

California, as the first destination for Iranian immigrants, hosts the largest population of Iranian diaspora. The four decades of tense relations between Iran and America after the 1979 Revolution and dancers’ exile to a country with a hostile attitude towards their homeland have made the case of Iranian-Americans peculiar in comparison to that of Iranian immigrants in other Western countries. Due to this uniqueness, Iranian dancers in America have taken a different approach than have their counterparts in Europe. The differences in art, culture and cultural policies between America and Europe have undoubtedly influenced these differences in the diaspora. Beyond the national context, this research’s focus on the work of diasporic dancers centers on Iranian-American women dancers in the more localized context of California. The quality and concepts of their choreography are influenced largely by the tastes and expectations of the audience, who are mostly Iranians living in California. As a result, being in California has itself created a unique situation for the performance of Iranian dance and for their dancers. California and its cultural hybridity are reflected in the choreography of women dancers and create a style whose main characteristic is that it is interwoven and personal.

Aisan Hoss, Shahrzad Khorsandi, and Banafsheh Sayyad, the three dancers discussed in book, were chosen among ten women dancers interviewed; these three were selected not for their fame but for their attitudes towards Iranian dance and their integration of it in their choreography. Their continuousness, consistency, and efforts in presenting a contemporary version of Iranian dance are factors based on which one can consider them drivers of the transformation of Iranian dance. I regard the dancers taken into account in this research as contemporary women dancers who apply and integrate Iranian dance aesthetics in their choreographies. By interweaving different dance techniques, which seem to be confusing at first glance, these dancers have established themselves as glocal dancers, I suggest.

**Research Questions**

Dance cannot be separated from migration; many dances were born or evolved in the process of migration, during a journey, and in the contexts of other
 Migration, per se, is related to political, economic, social, and cultural elements that must necessarily be considered in a review of their impact on the formation, transformation, and evolution of dance. For instance, one cannot ignore the role of European immigrants—who brought their cultural achievements with them—in the creation of Tango in Argentina, which subsequently spread around the globe with the massive migration of Tango dancers from Latin America. Flamenco would likely not be practiced in today's form without borrowing from and being influenced by different cultures, including those of slaves, North African Muslims, and Moors. The influence of the music, dance and costumes of expelled Persian immigrants on Indian Kathak, furthermore, cannot be ignored. These examples suggest both the role of migration in the development of dance in different historical periods and how dance is affected by religious, cultural, economic, and colonial policies of power relations. *Iranian Dance* and *Dance in Iran* are no exception. Silk Road cultural exchanges, historical attacks on Iran in different periods, the widespread migration of Iranians, Iranians' travels and encounters in the West in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and colonial policies have undeniably shaped dance in the country.

This book follows the evolution and transformation of *Iranian Dance* in the process of modernization and later, during the main wave of Iranian migration after the 1979 Revolution, at which point dancers were exiled. I will argue that dance in Iran has been colonized. It suffers from the condition of exile not only outside Iran but also inside the country. This study could not have been completed without tracing the role of women dancers and performers. Their devotion, resistance, and continuity in preserving dance and keeping it alive are crucial to consider.

To fulfill this goal and in order to understand the process of the transformations of Iranian dance, this work centers on Iranian women dancers settled in California. California is the largest and most populous Iranian diaspora in the world and is home to most Iranian political dissidents and opponents of the 1979 Revolution. As such, it is not possible for most of them to return to Iran. As the years passed and the number of immigrants increased, these immigrants believed that they could not easily return to Iran. They started to become rooted in American society; therefore, they began to establish various television stations and produce cultural goods inside California.¹ In this way,

¹ The number of satellite channels broadcasting programs from California have been more than the number of state television channels in Iran.
they were fighting with the governing cultural policies of the new political regime in Iran by expressing their dissatisfaction and by preserving their connections with their country and the Iranians inside Iran. Pop music and dance have become the center of attention for migrants’ cultural activities. This attention can be justified with reference to the immediate ban on these two art forms by the new political regime inside Iran, mostly under the pressure of religious institutions. Hence, Iranians in Iran had almost no access to cultural products in dance and music, other than those being produced in California; however, getting access to them was also extremely difficult, due to the strict punishments. Therefore, the image of dance for the post-Revolutionary generation of Iranians inside the country is that of Californian-based dancers. This kind of dance, which of course has numerous fans, can be classified as entertainment is often known as social dance or Iranian dance. This study studies that type of stage dance, which tries to differentiate itself from Iranian dance as “vulgar art” in aesthetics and style and to represent itself as a form of “sublime art.” This effort has faced various challenges and complexities, such that a clear distinction between these two concepts for the Iranian audience inside and outside Iran remains absent; accordingly, it is hard to draw a line between dance as entertainment and dance as a performing art in Iranian culture.

Like arts in all traditions, the vitality of the dance depends upon continuous reinterpretation and re-embodiment by contemporary artists. Dance is also continuously updated to reflect its immediate context, which changes over time. My research does not aim to study the aesthetics changes as progress, but more based on the hypothesis that the new changes and dance styles are resulted from being in an exiled situation: a condition, which despite all challenges has created a space for self-awareness, resistance and transformation by relying on capabilities and potentials. Iranian dance raises provocative questions. Do contemporary choreographies differ from the past ones? Why, in choreographing Iranian dance, should one look to the past for inspiration? What does modernizing ancient Iranian myths mean to contemporary Iranian dance or dancers? As the issue of Westernization remains relevant, what kind of choreographies are we observing? In addition, the emphasis of American dance institutions on “authenticity” in dance and being “sublime” poses more questions: What does the “authenticity” mean, and what elements comprise such authenticity in the Iranian dance? Finally, why has dance always been troubled among the arts in Iranian society and culture? And why is it important to revise and rethink the
history of Iranian stage dance and to view it through a critical lens? Central to this discussion is the study of women's bodily presence and performativity, along with how these parameters have changed and evolved in the process of migration and relocation in the contemporary era. Concepts such as exile, tradition, modernity, exoticism, Orientalism, body politics, and performativity, as well as their dependence on colonial and postcolonial discourses, are crucial to answer above-mentioned questions. On this account, studying and understanding critical discourses related to colonial, post-colonial, and hegemonic practices of American cultural actors and institutions and their influence on contemporary Iranian dance appears to be inevitable in answering this study's research questions. Reflecting on the above-mentioned questions and researching the current situation of Iranian dance and dancers depends undoubtedly on understanding the past. Iranian dance has an ambiguous past, and this lack of clarity is aggravated by a further lack of written sources; furthermore, the limited sources that are available have mostly failed to deal with this issue in a critical way.

**Content and Structure of Research**

In order to understand the history of Iranian dance and trace the process of its transformation, time and place must be considered. By applying the theses of Walter Benjamin regarding the importance of reviewing a historical topic's past to understand its present significance, it is argued that the present time represents a turning point in the history of Iranian dance and is essential to consider and examine in order to understand the past. Moreover, in reviewing the role of migration and displacement as crucial factors in contemporary Iranian dance, it is inevitable to rethink, revision and rework Iranian dance and to approach it from a new perspective. In this book, I raise the issue that dance and Iranian women dancers are in a condition *exile*. Exile does not manifest only in physical separation; it metaphorically and literally means “marginalized” and “strange” where class, gender, religion, and politics have been playing an influential role in the emergence of exile and subsequent developments. This study aims not to investigate the history of Iranian dance in a linear way, but instead to determine the timescales and foci around which shifts and changes in exile type have emerged. The study outlines what exile means and how this meaning changes in each historical period under study. The relevant historical periods are as follows:
Introduction: Background, Objective, and Methodology

- the end of nineteenth and beginning of twentieth centuries, the time of encounter the West and acquaintance with ballet outside Iran;
- middle of the twentieth century and the beginning of modernization and Westernization of dance by US actors through the introduction of ballet to Iran;
- the mass migration of Iranians to the US after 1979 Revolution and ban on dance in the country; and
- the contemporary era, accompanied with experimental approach of Iranian-American dancers to Iranian dance.

Since twentieth century is a critical period in this history, due to confrontations of Iran with the West and the introduction of modernity, with Westernization and the establishment of dance as an identifiable phenomenon, this study first engages with the process of such development in this period and addresses the challenges posed to dance in this historical era. Following that, the state of body as a corporeal medium, which does not hold a high position in the Islamic-Iranian culture, is discussed. Consequently, and according to the literature, the body’s existence and value are defined in relation to the soul: A body is valuable that is celestial and mystic.

Based on that conception of the body, the production of a disciplined and female chaste body in the twentieth century is outlined independently, through the ratification of the unveiling law and the imitation of Western dress. The sudden physical exposure of female bodies to the public places, where women were rarely present and where gender segregation has played a significant role, triggered both praise and critique. These topics are discussed in Chapter 1 Dance: A Dilemma in Iranian Art. Chapter 2 Exile at Home: The Imposition of Outsider Status on Dancers and Dance within Iran addresses the important theme of exile in its metaphorical meaning. It will be argued that since its inception in Iran, stage dance, and the women dancers have been in exile. Various aspects of this exile are investigated. Motrebs and the disparaging attitude to them are here outlined. Drawing on Bakhtin’s theory of the grotesque and, later, on Mary Russo, Judith Butler, and Julia Kristeva, it is argued that the grotesque and abject bodies of women Motrebs, through performing exaggerated movements not in harmony with social norms, subvert patriarchal norms that suppress femininity and idealize women’s bodies. Marginalization is therefore the punishment of these grotesque bodies. Reviewing and juxtaposing the historical literature of Sasan Fatemi, Jafar Shahri, and Ruhollah Khaleghi on Women Motreb dancers offers a detailed insight into their sta-
Through the Westernization of Iran and the institutionalization of ballet as a symbol of modernization, Motreb dancers were marginalized, and some even lost their original functions in order to comply with cultural and political changes. The professionals became café and cabaret dancers, and the amateurs vanished from public view.

Ballet, as Western phenomena, has formed the dance stage in Iran, which remains relevant in contemporary times. Due to the inevitable influence of ballet, I track the very first encounters of Qajar princes and noblemen with ballet in Europe in the nineteenth century. Studying the travel books and reports of men travelers and focusing on their confrontations with the stage and ballet illustrates that dance has strongly feminine connotations related to grace and sin, and the stage is seen as a place of lust, pleasure, and entertainment for patriarchal Iranian society. The conclusion of such reports and observations reflects the misinterpretations of the men travelers concerning the cultural motivations for the performance of dance in Western countries. This chapter further discusses how the confrontation of the structurally traditional Iranian society with ballet, a Western import to Iran, influenced Iranian stage dance and the representation of women dancers. Colonial modernity generated institutionalized but ambiguous authenticity in Iranian dance, which I call ‘pseudo-authentic dance’. Focusing on the transnational practices of American colonialism and Orientalism discourse will also pave the way to discuss how such hegemonic practices drew a line between “sublime” and “vulgar” dance and between dancer as “artist” and as “prostitute” in the twentieth century. Moreover, to demonstrate how dance was used both as a form of embodied royals propaganda and indoctrination. These issues are detailed in Chapter 2 Exile at Home: The Imposition of Outsider Status on Dancers and Dance within Iran.

Despite the turbulent political relations between the US and Iran since 1979, resulting traveling restrictions, and the absence of direct cultural exchange, Iranian dance and dancers in the US have deeply influenced the people in Iran to connect them to dance again. For instance, one can refer to the period of the Iran–Iraq war from 1980 to 1988. During these years—in which Iranian society was deeply depressed, as a result of the political suppression and under shock of devastation resulting from war and economic

---

2 My usage of “embodied propaganda and indoctrination” is inspired from Jens Richard Giersdorf, The Body of the People: East German Dance since 1945, The University of Wisconsin Press, Wisconsin, 2013.
sanctions, when socio-cultural restrictions in the form of strict censorship were at their peak—collections of videocassettes from dance courses and performances were smuggled into Iran and copied and distributed widely among families. These videocassettes were the only references available for learning Iranian dance in the absence of any other resources or archives. This wave also encouraged those dancers who were forcefully marginalized after the 1979 Revolution and were under the shock of a dance ban in the country. Therefore, they felt confident that they could also return and hold underground courses with minimal facilities and a limited number of trainees. In contrast, Iranian women dancers and choreographers in California preserved their contact with their home country despite their physical absence. They utilized the cultural products and motifs of Iran, including its music, textiles, poetry, and literature; they engaged in the socio-political development of the country and its religion to enrich their art, to present a non-clichéd picture of Iranian dance, and to attract a broader audience in the Iranian community. These efforts were all in order to gain ground to establish their art in exile as “sublime.”

My focus is thus to determine the parameters, which push dancers to adopt such approaches in exile, and to figure out the reasons behind the struggle between tradition and modernity, despite that most of the dancers have been trained in the West and currently perform there. Furthermore, to investigate the methods that selected dancers apply to move from the ‘past’ toward ‘contemporary’ choreography, while preserving their past heritage; and to extract the features of Iranian dance that makes it attractive to American dancers and choreographers, and to study if the interest of American institutions play any role in forcing Iranian dance to remain in exile. The shift in the geographical space of the performance of the dance, due to its prohibition after the 1979 Revolution and the mass migration of Iranians to the US, are outlined in Chapter 3 Moving toward External Exile: Iranians to the US, are Cast out of their Homeland. In order to understand the situation of exile, a theory of exile from Edward Said and the state that it creates for the Oriental artist are first discussed. Similarly, Hamid Naficy’s analysis of the emergence of exile culture and its impact on Iranian televisions in Los Angeles is reviewed. It is also argued that the exile space of dance and Iranian dancers is located within diverse dichotomies and In-betweenness: tradition versus modernity, East versus West, old versus new homeland, self versus others, inclusion versus exclusion, and localization versus globalization.

The controversial US-Iranian relations in the last four decades and its impact on transformation of Iranian dance into a medium to represent a posi-
tive image of Iran in the US in order to mitigate the negative attitude toward US-Iranians are picked out as a central theme in this part. Accordingly, the activities of US dance institutes Ballet Afsaneh in Berkeley (Northern California) as one of decisive institutions to rediscover the Iranian dance and bring it on the stage outside Iran are discussed. I demonstrate the characteristics of its productions and its policy to attract Iranian audience and how such institutions established an image of Iranian dance, which complicate the individual Iranian dancers to present other image and form of dance. In this chapter, the crucial concept of world dance is also reviewed and the status of Iranian dance in America is examined. The role of American Institutions and the meaning of post-colonial notions such as Orientalism to Iranian dance are also investigated.

One of the main challenges that Iranian dance and Iranian women dancers in the US face is the imposition of stereotypes associated with Orientalism and exoticism, a factor related to these dancers' geographical location. Two issues are discussed in this regard: Firstly, the interest of US dancers and choreographers in the exotic and fusion, placed in line with the approach followed by twentieth-century American dancers like Ruth St. Denis and La Meri. Secondly, by referring to the Orientalist literature of authors such as Flaubert and Curtis in eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the stereotypes related to the images of Oriental female dancers' bodies are outlined, which remain relevant to contemporary Iranian female dancers. In Chapter 4 Change of Perspective: Becoming Contemporary through Tradition and Experiment, I change the perspective and examine the Iranian dance and the work of Iranian women dancers in the US from a new angle. Considering Iranian dance as a dynamic phenomenon, I argue that this type of dance has the potential to be updated and presented in a contemporary format.

Among other reasons that Iranian dance has remained unknown is the lack of literature and documentation of it. The sparse literature on the subject has been mostly written by US writers, who are interested in regarding Iranian dance as traditional, static, unprofessional, ethnic, or folk dance. Hence, its transformation and contemporaneity are mostly ignored. A separate section is dedicated to the review of such literature and the way in which it engages with Iranian dance both in theory and in practice. Moreover, examples make clear that the role and presence of women dancers has been overlooked not only on the stage, but also in the text. Summarizing such reasons and evidence, a clear picture can be given according to which the meaning of exiled dance and its appearance in different formats is defined. Despite all
challenges, being in the US has provided Iranian women dancers with a free environment in which to work, away from the restrictive regulations one has to deal with inside Iran. Therefore, it gives an introduction what approach they are following in the free capitalist and customer-oriented atmosphere of the US that is always seeking innovation and newness.

Drawing on liminality theory of Victor Turner and referring to cultural theorists like Homi Bhabha and Hamid Naficy, who argue that the diaspora produces and reproduces new identities through transformation and difference, the section Dancing in Liminality: The Experimentation of Women Dancers in Exile outlines that dancers are presenting a new image of Iranian dance in a threshold space. In supporting this hypothesis, a range of theories on experimental dance from perspective of Mark Franko and Cynthia Novack, are reviewed and referred to. These theories enable one to examine the term “tradition” from a different angle: tradition as an experiment and an innovation, capable of expanding into the US by passing through the experimental phase. If the women dancers succeed in such a tradition of experimentation, a new genre of Iranian dance may be distinguished. These matters are discussed in Chapter 4.

In order to present a holistic overview of the current status of Iranian dance and generate novel insight into the work of women dancers in exile, I completed two research stays in California, one in 2015 and one in 2016. During my stay in California (specifically, in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Berkeley), I met with and interviewed Iranian-American scholars and dancers. To determine the role of Iranian dance techniques and to understand these dancers’ training targets and methods, their trainees’ skill levels, and the motivations and audiences (target group) of the selected dancers, I met and interviewed ten women Iranian-American dancers and choreographers in Northern (Bay Area) and Southern California (Los Angeles). After hours of talking, transliterating and summarizing interviews, I selected the works of Aisan Hoss, Shahrzad Khorsandi, and Banafsheh Sayyad, among others. I participated in their workshops and observed their methods of training and choreography. These three dancers and choreographers are those who have been persisting in their work as individuals, and they succeeded in establishing their style. Although each of them has their own method and approach, however, innovation, experimentation, and a state of exile are common among them. Moreover, all of them have been trained in Western dance techniques and applying Iranian dance aesthetics in their choreographies. In Chapter 5 Transformation and Reconnection to Home I deal with the life and work of Aisan
Hoss, Shahrzad Khorsandi, and Banafsheh Sayyad. Based on the interviews, I elucidate the challenges and opportunities, discussed in previous chapters and the result of being in the exile. Furthermore, parts of their selected dances and choreographies are discussed and analyzed, based on factors such as movement, stage, costume, and music. I also define the meaning of the experimentation in the work of these three dancers. Moreover, the in-between situation, between modernity and tradition, the local and the global, is studied. And the movement methods are explained, thorough which the Iranian-American women dancers bridge old and new homelands and establish themselves as glocal dancers.³

³ The word “glocalization” is a combination of two terms; globalization and localization. According to sociologist Roland Robertson, who significantly influenced the concept of globalization, the word glocalization comes from the Japanese word “dochaku,” which means, “living on one’s own land.” The term indicated “originally the agricultural principle of adapting one’s farming techniques to local conditions.” The word “localization,” according to Robertson, has also been adopted “in Japanese business for global localization” and means the adaptation of “a global outlook to local conditions.”