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Admissions Committee
The Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Institute of Iranian Studies
University of Toronto

Dear Members of the Admissions Committee,

I am writing to enthusiastically support Niloofar Hooman's application for the Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Postdoctoral Fellowship in Iranian Studies for the 2024-2025 academic year. Ms. Hooman is nearing the completion of her doctoral degree in the Department of Communication Studies and Media Arts at McMaster University. Her impressive qualifications and research expertise make her an outstanding candidate for this fellowship.

Ms. Hooman's research employs a critical interpretive methodology to examine digital and emerging media cultures and activism, with a focus on feminism, gender, and social media platforms. Her doctoral dissertation, "Social Media, Street Activism, and Networked Feminism: Negotiating the Political Female Body in the Iranian Context," investigates how Iranian women utilize social media for activism and engage in novel forms of public protest. This work provides invaluable insights into the intersection of technology, activism, and gender dynamics within Iranian youth cultures and public spheres, highlighting often-overlooked aspects of Iranian feminist and youth cultures. Specifically, Ms. Hooman's dissertation explores visual feminist narratives—nudity, profanity, radical feminism, and queerness—on Instagram as forms of resistance among Iranian youth and women. A particularly compelling aspect of her research is that it refrains from translating radical protests in Iran into Western frameworks of resistance to patriarchy or situating them solely within the geopolitics of the modern Middle East. Instead, Ms. Hooman paints a nuanced picture of resistance and negotiation, where the radical nature of each feminist gesture is deeply rooted in the histories and dialogues of the Iranian feminist movement. Since the nineteenth century, this movement has developed through the volatile twentieth century and into the present, shaped by an Iranian regime that maintains power through

Islamist anti-imperialist rhetoric, turning Islamism into a form of violent populism. At the same time, the regime seeks legitimacy among Iranian youth by introducing superficial reforms and nominal feminist legislation, influencing feminist allegiances and interpretations. This is the backdrop against which the clash between secular and religious feminisms vividly unfolds in Iran. Ms. Hooman's project, therefore, is particularly promising as it delves into the complex history of Iranian feminism through the visual language of Instagram, offering a technological feminist history of contemporary Iran.

As a fifth-year doctoral student, Ms. Hooman has gained significant recognition as an emerging scholar. Her achievements are especially commendable considering she arrived from Iran six years ago as a visiting student and chose to pursue a second doctoral degree in Canada. Her research in feminist media, queer studies, and digital culture has led to the publication of eight peer-reviewed journal articles, four book chapters, and a short-form public scholarship commentary. She was also honored with a 2020 international research excellence award from the Image Research Network, alongside myself. Her dedication to extending academic knowledge beyond traditional boundaries is evident in her engagement with wider audiences. She is a strong advocate for the democratization of education and has shared her expertise in feminist and gender studies through platforms like CP24, 630 CHED, New Canadian Media, and the Pink Talk podcast. Niloofar's aim is to make complex concepts more accessible to a broader audience, while broadening and nuancing the representations of Iran in Canadian scholarship. I must note that Niloofar, along with several other Iranian doctoral students at McMaster, has made significant efforts to differentiate Iran from other Middle Eastern contexts. Through seminars, public engagements, and academic work, Ms. Hooman is part of an active Iranian diasporic community at McMaster. This community challenges the simplistic binary thinking—either philic or phobic—that divides the world into rigid categories such as oppressed, enlightened, religious, or secular. Specifically, Ms. Hooman's research compellingly argues that systemic oppressions must be understood within their specific historical contexts. Her work illustrates that both religious and other forms of identity frameworks can be as oppressive in certain contexts as they are perceived or portrayed as liberating in others.

I would like to highlight the details of my academic collaborations with Niloofar. Together, we have co-authored two significant works: a peer-reviewed article on the cinematic oeuvre of Asghar Farhadi (Mincheva & Hooman, 2020) and a book chapter in Claudia Yaghoobi's edited collection on the Iranian #MeToo movement (Mincheva & Hooman, 2023). Moreover, alongside Niloofar and other scholars, we participated in a round table discussion on the Iranian aspects of the #MeToo movement, recently published in *Feminist Formations* (Yaghoobi, Mincheva, Hooman et al., 2024). Currently, we are collaborating on an article exploring narratives of vulnerability and solidarity associated with the hashtag #MahsaAmini on Instagram. Throughout my work with Niloofar, I have found her to be a scholar of remarkable discipline, curiosity, and intellectual acumen, adept at engaging with both theoretical and practical dimensions of the

world. Her nuanced critique of Farhadi's films revealed how his success is not solely due to Hollywood acclaim but also how he skillfully navigates Iran's censorship regime. This insight led us to develop the concept of cinematic Islamic feminism, a distinctive feminism within Farhadi's films that is ahead of social discourse, allowing secular and religious perspectives to coexist with equal credibility and dignity. In all our subsequent projects, Niloofar has consistently played the role of the primary skeptic, whether we are interpreting data from feminist organizations in Iran, debating women's rights legislation, or analyzing interviews with prominent Iranian figures. I am grateful for Niloofar's dedication to research and her ability to articulate complex ideas with clarity and humility.

Based on everything written so far, you might conclude that I think of Niloofar Hooman in superlatives. Indeed, Niloofar is a remarkable and rare graduate student. Her talent, judgment, motivation and originality, her communicative and people skills, the ethical gravitas in her concerns, and her accessible, appealing, enjoyable personality, all exceed expectation. Let me repeat again, in conclusion, my full support of Ms. Niloofar Hooman. I am confident that Niloofar will not only excel in the Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Postdoctoral Fellowship but also contribute significantly to the intellectual environment at the Institute. Her passion for Iranian Studies and commitment to advancing the discourse around gender and resistance in Iran align perfectly with the mission of your esteemed fellowship.

Thank you for considering this exceptional candidate. I am certain that Niloofar Hooman will bring her enthusiasm, dedication, and scholarly rigor to your program.

Cordially yours,



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