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Anthropological Studies

August 15, 2024

Dear Members of the Award Committee at the Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali
Institute of Iranian Studies at the University of Toronto,

I am writing to highly recommend Dr. Nima Jangouk for the Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Postdoctoral Fellowship in Iranian Studies for 2024-2025. I have had the pleasure of being a committee member for Nima's doctoral dissertation and have closely followed his academic journey, which has been marked by exceptional originality, insight, and scholarly rigour.

Nima's doctoral dissertation is a deeply personal and complex thesis that skillfully incorporates Deleuze and Guattari's notion of "lines of flight," an entirely appropriate framing for both the project and the manuscript. His work explores *Zar* practices and healing winds, engaging the reader in his learning process as he unlearns positivist approaches to social science research. His interdisciplinary approach spans philosophy, anthropology, theology, music, and poetry, all the while writing himself (his body) into being.

One of the most notable aspects of Nima's research is his book chapter publication, "Drumming with Winds: Learning from Zar Practitioners in Qeshm Island, Iran," included in the volume *Search After Method: Sensing, Moving, and Imagining in Anthropological Fieldwork* (Julie Laplante, Ari Gandsman & Willow Scobie, Eds., Berghahn Books, 2020). This chapter, based on his PhD research, was highlighted by a reviewer as the best part of the entire book. The reviewer found it to be exceptionally original, insightful, poetic, and an important contribution to the literature on Iran.

Nima's thesis is simultaneously an ethnographic study of *Zar* practices and a personal reflection on *becoming*. His project significantly advances anthropological literature on knowledge production and epistemologies. It is a sensuous project that enhances our understanding of the body in the world, in music, in philosophy, and in its becomings. Additionally, it is a political text that subtly engages with Iranian politics.

Nima's research methodology includes a comprehensive discussion of phenomenology, demonstrating an excellent engagement with the literature. Throughout the dissertation, it is evident that Nima undertook a deep ethnographic approach appropriate to the study. His fieldwork involved immersive participation in *Zar* rituals, detailed interviews with practitioners, and a thorough analysis of the cultural and historical contexts of these practices. This allowed Nima to capture the nuanced ways in which *Zar* practices facilitate healing and community formation.

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In his analysis, Nima concludes, “By tuning people’s movements as well as their emotions, perceptions, intentions, hopes, sufferings, and desires, with other beings, things, and worldly flows, *Zar* creates a phenomenological unity which transcends temporality and locality and makes healing possible at the personal level and serves as the basis of creation of a community (Ahl-e Hava [people of the wind]) at the social level. This is how the world reveals its mysteries to us, and healing and unity are acquired” (194). This quote clearly summarizes the focus and conclusions of his work.

Nima also reflects on his epistemological journey, which adds great value to this project. His ability to think across various philosophies and disciplines, combined with his deep ethnographic insights, makes him an exceptional candidate for this postdoctoral fellowship. His work not only contributes to the academic understanding of *Zar* practices but also offers a profound commentary on the nature of knowledge and the process of becoming.

I am confident that Nima Jangouk will continue to make significant contributions to the field and will be an asset to your program. Please feel free to contact me if you require any further information.



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