

Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Institute of Iranian Studies

University of Toronto

Dear Members of the Selection Committee,

I am writing to apply for the Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Postdoctoral Fellowship in Iranian Studies for the 2025–2026 academic year. I recently completed my PhD in English and Diaspora and Transnational Studies at the University of Toronto. My dissertation, *Diasporic Pilgrimage: Iranian Women's Return Narratives, 1999–2020*, examines post-revolution Iranian diasporic return narratives through theories of identity, space, memory, and authorship to develop the framework of diasporic pilgrimage. I am currently revising this project into a monograph.

Since completing my doctorate, I have remained closely engaged with the Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Institute as an editor and researcher for *Cinema Iranica* and *Women Poets Iranica* as major initiatives housed at the Institute that are reshaping the field of Iranian studies. These roles have placed me at the centre of important scholarly and community-based conversations on Iranian film, literature, and cultural production. In addition to my editorial and research contributions, I have had the opportunity to present my work, moderate panels, and host community events at the Institute. I am also thrilled to be part of the organizing committee for the Conference on Global Iranian Studies, which will be held in Toronto in May 2026. This important event will bring together scholars, artists, and students from around the world and further enrich the Institute's programming. I consider this collaborative and community-focused work foundational to my intellectual commitments, and I hope to continue it through the postdoctoral fellowship.

With over 15 years of teaching experience, I have designed and delivered workshop-based writing courses in both the arts and sciences, as well as large undergraduate survey courses within the Department of English. My pedagogical approach is informed by diasporic storytelling, comparative diaspora studies, and transnational feminist theories to emphasize the interconnectedness of cultural narratives and critical thinking. I am enthusiastic to contribute to the Institute's teaching, mentorship, and programming during my tenure as a Postdoctoral Fellow. I also hope to have an opportunity to run a course at the Institute to share my work with emerging scholars while drawing from my teaching experience.

I have enclosed my CV and a synopsis of my monograph and related research. Letters of recommendation will be sent separately, as instructed.

Thank you for taking the time to review my application.

Sincerely,

Niyosha Keyzad

## CURRICULUM VITAE

**Niyosha Keyzad**

### POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

#### *Degrees*

PhD, English Literature and Diaspora & Transnational Studies, University of Toronto, 2024

Dissertation: "Diasporic Pilgrimage: Iranian Women's Return Narratives, 1999-2020"  
Committee: Neil ten Kortenaar (co-supervisor), Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi (co-supervisor), Karina Vernon

MA, English Literature, McGill University, 2012

H. BSc. (with distinction), Anthropology and English, University of Toronto, 2010

### HONOURS AND AWARDS

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| 2023, 2024 | Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Institute of Iranian Studies Fellowship                                |
| 2019-2020  | Graduate Fellowship, University of Toronto School of Cities                                      |
| 2015-2020  | Junior Fellow, Massey College, University of Toronto   |
| 2017       | Morris Wayman Prize, Massey College, University of Toronto                                       |
| 2016-2017  | Graduate Associate, Centre for Ethics, University of Toronto                                     |
| 2016       | Postsecondary Scholarship, Iranian Women's Organization of Ontario                               |
| 2014       | Best Article in a Trade and/or Association Magazine Finalist, Canadian Online Publishing Awards  |
| 2014-2015  | CCCJ Fiftieth Anniversary First Families Award, University of Toronto SGS University-Wide Awards |
| 2011       | Alumnus of the Month (March), University of Toronto Scarborough                                  |
| 2010       | Entrance Scholarship, McGill University Department of English                                    |

### PUBLICATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS

#### *Non-Refereed Publications*

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|------|---|
| 2020 | "Reclaiming Scarborough's Stories in Zines." <i>Spacing Magazine</i> .<br><a href="http://spacing.ca/toronto/2020/03/12/reclaiming-scarboroughs-stories-in-zines/">http://spacing.ca/toronto/2020/03/12/reclaiming-scarboroughs-stories-in-zines/</a>     |
| 2013 | "A Legal Case for Anger." <i>McGill News Alumni Magazine</i> .<br><a href="https://publications.mcgill.ca/mcgillnews/2013/07/26/a-legal-case-for-anger/">https://publications.mcgill.ca/mcgillnews/2013/07/26/a-legal-case-for-anger/</a>                 |
| 2011 | "Beating the Off-Campus Blues." <i>McGill News Alumni Magazine</i> .<br><a href="http://publications.mcgill.ca/mcgillnews/2011/12/07/beating-the-off-campus-blues/">http://publications.mcgill.ca/mcgillnews/2011/12/07/beating-the-off-campus-blues/</a> |

- 2010 (2010). Poems: "At the Border," "Foreign Accent Syndrome," *Scarborough Fair Arts Magazine*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

### ***Media Appearances***

- "UTSC Alumni Create Scarborough Studies Symposium," *CBC*.  
<https://www.cbc.ca/listen/shows/here-and-now-toronto/segment/15610605>

### ***Conference Presentations***

- 2022 "Sites of Diasporic Return in Gelareh Asayesh's *Saffron Sky*," paper presented at the Biennial Iranian Studies Conference, University of Salamanca, Salamanca. (August)
- 2019 "Minor Interlopers: Spatiality in Childhood Memoirs of the Iranian Diaspora," paper presented at the Association of Canadian College and University Teachers of English Congress (Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences), University of British Columbia. (May)
- 2018 "Shot in the Dark: Censorship and Femininity in Rakhshan Bani-Etemad's *The May Lady*," paper presented at the Biennial Iranian Studies Conference, UCLA, Irvine. (August)
- 2018 "Teaching *Scarborough*: The Pedagogy of Local Literature," paper presented at the Association of Canadian College and University Teachers of English Congress (Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences), University of Regina. (May)
- 2017 "Identification Crisis: The Politics of Diasporic Identity in North American Iranian Memoirs," paper presented at the Association of Canadian College and University Teachers of English Congress (Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences), Ryerson University, Toronto. (May)
- 2017 "Imagined Neighbourhoods: News Media Consumption within the Iranian-Canadian Diaspora," paper presented at the Centre for Ethics Associates Roundtable, Centre for Ethics, University of Toronto. (January)
- 2016 "In-Between Spaces: Reading Memory, Space, and Identity in the Memoirs of North American Iranian Writers," invited presenter at the annual University of Toronto Graduate Student Conference. (April)
- 2016 "University of Toronto Women in House Program," selected participant at the Massey College and Munk School of Global Affairs International Women's Day program, Senate of Canada, Ottawa. (March)
- 2015 "Collectives in TransMigration: Animating Bodies Across Borders," invited contributor at the 'Border Trauma Workgroup at the 4<sup>th</sup> Hemispheric Institute Convergence. The University of Texas at Austin, Austin. (November)
- 2014 "Playing Cat and Mouse: Postmemory and the Metaleptic Re-Presentation of the Holocaust in Art Spiegelman's *Maus*," paper presented at the annual University of Ottawa Graduate Student Conference, Ottawa. (March)

### ***Campus/Departmental Talks***

- 2025 “Diasporic Pilgrimage: Iranian Women’s Return Narratives, 1999–2020,” presented at the Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Institute of Iranian Studies, University of Toronto, Salamanca. (April)
- 2020 “In Conversation with Omid Tofighian,” invited interviewer at Massey College, University of Toronto. (January)
- 2016 “Exile and Diaspora in Marjane Satrapi’s *Persepolis*,” invited lecturer for ENGB25: Graphic Novel, University of Toronto. (November)
- 2012 “Stamped Upon Her Race: The Presence of Quadroons in George Washington Cable’s *Old Creole Days*,” paper presented at the annual McGill University English Graduate Colloquium, Montreal. (March)
- 2012 “An Other History: Subalternity in Radwa Ashour’s *Specters*,” Master’s research paper presented at the annual McGill University English Graduate Students Association (EGSA) Conference: Panel on Translation, Montreal. (January)
- 2010 “In-Betweenness in Diana Abu-Jaber’s *Arabian Jazz*,” paper presented at the annual University of Toronto Scarborough Campus Research Conference on the Humanities: Panel on Identity and ‘the Other.’ (March)

### **TEACHING**

#### ***Course Instructorships***

ENGB34: The Short Story (2025)  
ENGB02: Effective Writing in the Sciences (2024)  
ENGA02 (previously ENGB05): Critical Writing about Literature (2014-Present)  
ENGA02: Critical Writing about Literature (2018-2019, 2022)

#### ***Teaching Assistantships (Seminar Leader)***

ENG110Y: Introduction to Narrative (2016-2017)  
ENGB04: Critical Thinking About Poetry (2015)  
ACMA02: Inquiry and Reasoning in the Humanities (2015)  
HLTB02: Issues in Child <sup>[1]</sup><sub>SEP</sub>Health and Development (2008-2010)

#### ***Teaching Assistantships (Marker / Grader)***

ENG365: Contemporary American Literature (2016)  
ENG360: Early American Literature (2015)  
ENG235: The Graphic Novel (2014-2015, two terms)  
ENGB35: Children’s Literature (2014)  
ENGB25: Canadian Short Story (2013)

ENGL359: Poetics of the Image (Spring 2012; McGill University)

**RELATED EXPERIENCE**

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|-----------|---|
| 2015-2017 | Editorial Assistant, <i>Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry</i> , edited by Ato Quayson  |
| 2015      | Indexer, <i>The Cambridge Companion to the Postcolonial Novel</i> , edited by Ato Quayson   |
| 2012      | Electronic Communications Coordinator, McGill University (Development & Alumni Relations) (June-Sep)  |
| 2011      | Editorial Assistant, <i>McGill News Alumni Magazine</i> , edited by Daniel McCabe, McGill University (Development & Alumni Relations) (June 2011-August 2012) |
| 2011      | Catalogue Librarian, McGill University Libraries (Rare Books and Special Collections) (Jan 2011-Sept 2011)  |

My dissertation, *Diasporic Pilgrimage: Iranian Women's Return Narratives, 1999–2020*, examines post-Revolution Iranian diasporic women's return narratives through the paradigm of pilgrimage, which I argue is a defining feature of life writing that portrays homecoming as a transformative experience for the returnee. By investigating Iranian women's return narratives written in both the West and Iran, this project offers a nuanced reading of return that transcends traditional representations of the journey as one of nostalgic longing or traumatic reckoning. I argue that these narratives reimagine the journey to Iran as a pilgrimage, not simply to a physical place but also to a homeland fraught with contradictions, political upheaval, and complex personal histories.

In my analysis, pilgrimage refers not only to the traditional notion of journeying to sacred sites but also to an experience that transforms the self. Pilgrimages are sacred, particularly in the view of Iran's theocratic regime, which has created a cultural hegemony that attempts to control identity formation and the conception of sacred spaces. While most scholarly discussions have focused on the dichotomy between the "oppressed" East and the "liberated" West, my approach departs from this reductive framework and explores how Iranian women's return narratives destabilize notions of belonging, identity, and homecoming. The women's narratives I read often secularize and reinterpret the notion of sacredness, turning the pilgrimage into a space for personal reflection, self-reconstruction, and, in some cases, rebellion against both the Iranian state and Western ideologies.

In the post-revolution period, the diasporic pilgrimage of Iranian women has evolved significantly. Earlier works, such as Gelareh Asayesh's *Saffron Sky* (1999) and Marjane Satrapi's

*Persepolis II* (2004), associate return with complex memories of childhood marked by trauma, nostalgia, and loss. These texts challenge the conventional notion of “misery memoirs,” in which return is typically depicted as fraught with emotional conflict and cultural dissonance. They complicate the idea of Iran as merely a place of departure by portraying the return as an ongoing process in which the narrators seek to remain in Iran for extended periods, engaging with the country beyond the initial tension of re-entry. In more recent return narratives, including Parnaz Foroutan’s *Home is a Stranger* (2020), there is a shift toward a more Romantic vision of return, wherein the returnee seeks not only to confront the past but also to engage with the present through more dynamic and adventurous means. This change offers a broader understanding of how return can be portrayed, especially for second-generation Iranian women who are not returning to sites marked by trauma, but rather exploring new opportunities for belonging, identity, and sexuality in Iran.

Chapter One of my dissertation focuses on the fragmentation of the narrative “I” in *Saffron Sky*, where the protagonist oscillates between being Iranian and American, between past and present, and between different versions of herself. This narrative fragmentation is a crucial site for examining the way diasporic identities are constructed and reconstructed in the process of return. I analyze how Asayesh uses pilgrimage to depict not just the physical journey but the psychic journey of a self in flux, caught between multiple affiliations. Gelareh’s pilgrimage thus becomes an opportunity to explore representations of rootedness and transience within the borders of multiple, often conflicting, worlds.

In Chapter Two, I turn to Satrapi’s *Persepolis II*, to analyze the metaleptic address to readers that Satrapi uses to blur the boundaries between private and collective memory. This chapter explores how the pilgrimage is represented as a journey to the sacred, juxtaposed with secular spaces of



personal significance. In particular, the personal and private aspects of memory are foregrounded through the juxtaposition of sacred spaces in Iran and private diaspora spaces. Satrapi's treatment of identity in *Persepolis II* demonstrates how the process of return functions not as a return to an idealized homeland, but rather as a confrontation with a divided self, torn between past and present circumstances.

Chapter Three shifts to the more recent *Home is a Stranger* by Parnaz Foroutan, where return is less burdened by the weight of nostalgia and trauma, and more infused with a sense of possibility. This chapter examines Foroutan's representation of a "haram pilgrimage," one that breaks with traditional narratives of return and reimagines the journey as an opportunity to claim one's sexuality, engage with nature, and explore the boundaries of Iranian society. Parnaz's return highlights how a more eventful, adventurous return is possible, not in spite of the limitations posed by the Iranian state and society, but because of them. The tension between the sacred and the secular, and the public and the private, are depicted in ways that transform the notion of diasporic pilgrimage into a spiritual and emotional reawakening through political and social reckoning.

My dissertation contributes to the growing body of scholarship on diasporic Iranian women's life writing and return narratives by challenging the notion that these narratives are expressions of trauma or longing. I demonstrate that these return narratives encompass acts of resistance, self-assertion, and identity reconstruction that occur within spaces of tension—between the West and Iran, between exile and return, between sacred and secular. These narratives thus occupy an ambiguous position, caught between remembering and forgetting, between longing and disillusionment, and between the familiar and the foreign.

My research interests extend beyond the scope of my dissertation to include the intersections of gender, memory, and space in Iranian diasporic literatures. I am particularly interested in the ways in which memory, individual and collective, is performed in diasporic literature and cinema to negotiate the boundaries between personal identity and national history. My future research will continue to explore these themes, focusing on how diasporic Iranian women use their writing to challenge dominant narratives of national identity, belonging, and cultural preservation.

Additionally, I am committed to examining the role of translation in diasporic literature, especially in the context of Iranian women writers. How do translated works reshape our understanding of diaspora and exile? How do translation practices negotiate between languages, cultures, and audiences? These questions will also guide my postdoctoral work as I continue to explore the global circulation of Iranian literature and the ways in which diasporic narratives transcend geographic, linguistic, and political boundaries.