

Application for the Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Postdoctoral Fellowship in Iranian Studies

Dear Selection Panel,

I am delighted to apply for this position. My research has an interdisciplinary emphasis which I feel fits well with the ethos of the Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Institute of Iranian Studies. Situated at the intersection of political communication, digital media and feminist media studies, my research inquires about the mediation of Iranian women's movements and debates around gender issues on social media platforms as this is shaped by local and global power relations.

I am currently a PhD candidate at the University of Tehran working on *Iranian Women's Digital Activism: Gendered Discourses on Social Media Platforms*, which investigates feminist discourses generated and circulated on Iranian social media, engaging with the ways in which social media platforms are being used by women's rights activists to construct and represent their demands, challenges and issues. I am going to defend my doctorate in late September.

I recently obtained a fellowship at the Center for Advanced Internet Studies (CAIS), Bochum, Germany. In addition, from February to May 2020, I acted as a visiting fellow at the Institute for Feminist Legal Studies at Osgoode, University of York. I also collaborated with the Erasmus Graduate School of Social Sciences and the Humanities at Erasmus University Rotterdam (EUR) as a visiting researcher from December 2019 to May 2020. As part of the research collaboration, I have written an article that explored how Iranian women's rights activists from different backgrounds and standpoints have appropriated even the smallest structural opportunities with different tactics and strategies, including appropriating a diverse range of media, in order to set their agenda in the face of official efforts to neutralise, depoliticize and marginalise women's issues in post-revolutionary Iran. At EUR, I also had the chance to audit two essential courses which would be of great assistance for my current research proposal: in 'discourse analysis and interpretive research' we explored how discourse analysis can enhance our understanding of policy, politics, and social movements, and in 'digital research method' we examined theoretical and methodological aspects of researching digital data.

I completed my BSc and MSc in Media and Communication Studies at the University of Tehran. After graduation, I worked as a journalist for the Iranian Students News Agency (ISNA), the largest independent national news organization in Iran. I have mainly worked on politics and social affairs. Alongside this, I've also written articles as a freelancer for local and national outlets on social and women's issues. In addition, I worked as a researcher at the Digital Humanities Centre at the Iranian Research Institute for Information Science and Technology (IranDoc). IranDoc is a national institute affiliated with the Iranian Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology (MSRT) with a nationwide mission for research in the field of information science and technology. Working with IranDoc equipped me to integrate a humanities perspective with digital methods.

My work and my education have always intersected with each other, straddling the fields of gender and media. During my academic and professional experience, I have engaged in a range of activities including cooperation in research and development projects, and the organisation of workshops and conferences, which have assisted me in broadening my academic skills and competencies.

My most recent article manuscript, which is recently accepted by the Quarterly Journal of Society, Culture and Media (Jamea, Resaneh Va Farhang, Publisher: Iranian Association of Cultural Studies and

Communication) is titled *Popular Feminism on Iranian Instagram: A Critical Investigation into the Mediation of Iranian Women's Activism on Social Media Platforms*. This article investigates the manifestation of Popular Feminism, as the most visible feminist discourses are generated by Iranian Women's digital activists on social media platforms. It interrogates how women's issues and demands are articulated in the discourse. It is argued that this form of digital activism, proposing simplified individualist solutions for gender inequalities and adopting a global feminist framework, could be considered as part of a process in which popular feminist discourse is regenerated and reinforced in the Iranian digital space.

I co-authored an article entitled *Lives and Times of Iranian women: An Ideological Approach to Women's Representation on Instagram* which was published quite recently in the Quarterly Journal of New Media Studies (Motaleate Resanehayeh Novin, Publisher: Allameh Tabataba'i University). It looks at the affordances of social media platforms, particularly photo and video-sharing platforms, for diverse and alternative forms of gender representation. Applying John Berger's ideological approach, it analyses a collection of photos shared on Instagram and explores the producers' politics of self-representation. The article shows the potential of Instagram for both resisting and reinforcing traditional gender norms.

My last research project, *Iranian Women's Digital Activism and Politics of Polarization* was presented at the Women and Digital Political Communication in Non-Western Societies (IAMCR online Pre-conference, July 2022). In this project, I investigated how online debates around gender issues on Farsi social media are radically polarized along two contradictory yet related lines, popular feminism and popular misogyny. I also presented my research, *Iranian Women's Movements on Social Media: An Ethnographic Investigation into the Mediation of Collective Desires* at the (Re)Imagining SWANA Futurities conference held in November 2021 by York University. This essay focused on how long-standing suppressed collective desires and utopian imaginaries of Iranian women concerning their issues, demands and futures manifest in digital mediated spaces.

I was also a teaching assistant on the modules Media, Gender and Family, and Feminist Media Studies which were offered respectively to MA students at the University of Tehran (2021-2022) and Tarbiat Modares University (2018-2019). These modules foregrounded the roles of the media in the construction of gender and outlined the major themes in feminist media studies which could contribute to understanding the media.

My project aligns with the research orientation of the Institute in two key respects; Firstly, in relation to Iranian culture, my research engages with social media users as agentively involved in the production of popular cultural and political material. Iranian feminist digital activism is framed as a form of popular feminism, as a way of understanding their connection with transnational feminisms and western feminism in combination with their characteristics as nationally-focused causes. Secondly, concerning the history of contemporary Iran, my research sees political activism in global digital media as being shaped by the historical, socio-political and cultural contexts of the society in general, and the trajectories of the Iranian women's movements in particular.

This postdoc position would be a great opportunity for me to pursue my research interests as an early career and would allow me to contribute actively in a field where I think I can make a difference.

I look forward very much to hearing from you,

Best regards,

Mitra Shamsi