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Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Institute of Iranian Studies

University of Toronto

Dear Members of the Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Fellowship Committee,

I am writing to express my keen interest in the Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Postdoctoral Fellowship in Iranian Studies for the 2025–2026 academic year. I recently completed my Ph.D. in Urban Studies at the University of British Columbia (May 06, 2025) and am a scholar deeply engaged with issues of spatial justice and housing for marginalized communities in Iran. Given my plan to revise my dissertation into a book manuscript, I believe my research aligns closely with the intellectual goals of the Institute.

My proposed monograph, grounded in my doctoral dissertation, investigates the state's role in the expropriation of land and dispossession in Iran through a critical study of Roshankouh, a Baha'i village in northern Iran.

The postdoctoral fellowship would provide an ideal context for developing this work into a full-length monograph. I intend to deepen two key areas of inquiry: (1) the Islamic property regime and its role in enabling the systematic spatial persecution of Baha'is, and (2) the historical foundations of land governance during the Pahlavi era (1940s–1979). Through a combination of archival research, legal analysis, and ethnographic methods, my research asks how both the Pahlavi and Islamic regimes redefined concepts of property, common resources, and spatial authority—and with what consequences for collective landholding traditions and marginalized community life.

My scholarly approach is informed by my lived experience as a Baha'i in Iran. Denied access to higher education due to my religious identity, I completed my undergraduate studies at the Baha'i Institute for Higher Education (BIHE), an underground university for Baha'i students. My personal history of dispossession—alongside the confiscation of my family's property—has shaped a lifelong commitment to spatial justice, the urban commons, and the defense of community land rights. I have pursued this commitment through academic research, public writing, and community organizing, including co-founding *Diyar Common Matters Society*, a nonprofit in British Columbia focused on equitable urban development.

Throughout my academic career, I have remained committed to collaborative, interdisciplinary research and public scholarship. My work has been published in peer-reviewed and public-facing venues such as *City: Analysis of Urban Trends*, *Fennia*, and *Aasoo*. I have also been an active academic instructor and presenter, delivering lectures on housing, marginalization, and Iranian urbanism at conferences and academic institutions in Canada, the United States., Europe, and Iran.

The Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Institute offers a uniquely supportive environment for pursuing this research. I am especially eager to engage with its distinguished faculty, contribute to its intellectual community, and draw on its resources to complete and refine my book manuscript. I am confident that my project will not only enrich academic discourse in Iranian studies and critical urban theory but also offer a timely insight into how authoritarian states use spatial governance as a tool of persecution and inequality.

Please find my CV and a synopsis of my monograph and research interests attached. Two letters of recommendation will be submitted separately by scholars familiar with my work.

Thank you very much for considering my application. I would be honored to contribute to the Institute's scholarly community and further the study of spatial justice and marginalized communities in Iran.

Warm regards,

Pegah Behrooz-Nobar