

August 5th, 2022
Dear members of the adjudicating committee,

I am writing to put forth my application for the inaugural Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Scholar Award. I am a historian of late-Qajar Iran, with a focus on women and gender history, and a tenure-track Assistant Professor at York University’s Department of History. I completed my PhD in 2018 at University of Toronto’s History Department, under the supervision of professor Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, and was a Visiting Professor of Modern Middle East History at NYU’s Department of Middle East and Islamic Studies from 2018-2020.

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I believe this fellowship offers me the ideal opportunity to complete my first manuscript *The Cosmopolis Harem: Intimacy, Power, and Liminal Family Formation* *in Late-19th Century Qajar Iran*. The book proposal and sample chapters of the manuscript have been reviewed by the editorial board of Cambridge University Press’s *The Global Middle East* series, and I’ve been invited to submit the completed manuscript to the press for publication by September 2023. Drawing on a robust collection of Iranian textual and visual archival sources collected over the course of ten years of research primarily in Iran, the manuscript will be the first substantial scholarly study of the late-Qajar harem, and takes this institution as a key site of historical, cultural, spatial and gendered entanglements with 19th century Iranian modernization project. I approach the royal harem not only as central to the social and political life of the dynasty, but also as the site within which some of the most marginalized figures – low ranking women and concubines, various levels of servants and eunuchs, and a large and diverse constellation of Central Asian and African enslaved people –made claims to social and political power, and better life chances. Thanks to York University’s Liberal Arts and Professional Studies Minor Research Grant, I am currently in Iran completing the final phase of research for a new and final chapter of the manuscript which examines the afterlife of the harem and its residents upon its disbanding in 1896. The Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali award is thus well-timed for me to complete writing the final chapter, and revisions of the full manuscript in the upcoming year.

While this will be my first scholarly manuscript, my writing has appeared in numerous academic, art and culture focused publications over the last decade including the *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies*, *Iran Namag: Bilingual Quarterly of Iranian Studies*, *INCITE Journal of Experimental Media,* ArteEast, and Fuse Magazine. I recently submitted revisions to a forthcoming article, based on a chapter of my manuscript, to the American Historical Review journal after positive feedback from the peer review process. My research has also been presented and well-received at various academic conferences and other scholarly settings, and has been recognized by peers through awards, including most recently a SSHRC grant.

As my CV attests, my interest in Iranian history and culture has always extended beyond my academic work and I have a long track record of organizing and participating in socially engaged public programming. I see this fellowship not only as an opportunity to complete my manuscript, but also to participate more directly in the exciting scholarly activities, robust public programing, and archival initiative of The Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Institute of Iranian Studies. I would be delighted to bring my broad range of expertise in research, writing and other scholarly activities to the institute and participate in collaborative efforts with scholars at the center, some of whom I am already familiar with through my work with the *Tavakoli Archive* initiative.

Thank you for considering my application and I look foraward to hearing from you,

Leila Pourtavaf