

Cover Letter

Dear Graduate Scholarship Committee,

I am writing to apply for the Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Graduate Scholarship for 2024-2025. I am currently a PhD student of Iranian Studies at the University of Toronto, studying under Professor Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi's supervision and focusing on cultural history of modern Iran through a cinematic lens. I have had the honor of contributing to the Cinema Iranica Project since 2021 as a Graduate student. This scholarship represents a significant opportunity for me to advance my research, participate in academic conferences, and pursue language training abroad.

My research project, titled *The Politics and Poetics of Cinematic Intimacy in Iran*, aims to study how cinematic portrayals of intimacy in early 20th-century Iran reflect and shape national identity formation when analysed through a global context. I have included a detailed description of my project in what follows.

Furthermore, I have requested a letter of recommendation from Dr. Sophia Farokhi, the research coordinator for The Cinema Iranica Project at the Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Institute (EOMI) of Iranian Studies. I have worked under Dr. Farokhi's supervision for the Cinema Iranica Project since 2021 and she is familiar with my research and can attest to my academic abilities and dedication to my field of study.

I am grateful for the opportunity to apply for the EOMI's Graduate Scholarship. Thank you for considering my application. Please feel free to contact me at negar.banisafar@mail.utoronto.ca or 647-804-4132 if you require any additional information.

Sincerely,
Negar Banisafar

Project Description

How could film production and education, which are very much geared toward a clear-cut national phantasy, lead to the formation and rise of citizens who aim to govern others toward an imagined national identity? Through an in-depth analysis of intimacy on and off the cinematic screen in the first half of the 20th century in Iran, my research sheds light on how modernization catalyzed the formation of an intimate public sphere that turned private matters into topics of public discourse, both within cinema halls and in the print media of the time, gradually elevating them to the status of national concerns requiring governance.

The rich corpus of Iranian literature and illustrations in the manuscript tradition is filled with descriptions of lovers kissing one another and exhibiting corporeal closeness. However, when kisses and physical intimacy are portrayed on the cinematic screen, they become controversial topics that raise various debates in the public sphere. Policymakers and governors in every era react differently to such depictions.

By perusing the archives, my research aims to situate this central question in the global sociohistorical context of modern Middle Eastern cinematic culture and beyond, including Bollywood and Hollywood, to historicize intimacy through a cinematic lens. Rethinking the theories of intimacy when analyzing post-colonial and colonial settings, and studying affects, emotions, and feelings on and off the screen, can help in better understanding publicity, modernization, and how cinematic modernity affects identity formation and creates new spatial imaginaries that transform people's lives and the face of societies.

I have been dedicated to this topic since beginning my MA studies in 2021 at the University of Toronto (U of T) under Professor Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi's magnificent supervision. As of September 2024, I will be entering the second year of my PhD studies at the U of T. During my studies, I have taken numerous relevant courses, such as The Intimate Public Sphere, Cinematic Modernity, History and Historiography of Cinematic Media, and Emotions & Feelings in Cinema, to name a few. These courses have greatly assisted me in writing research papers that I plan to incorporate into my thesis chapters. As my research demands, it would play a transformative role in my research if I could make use of cinema archives of countries such as Turkey and Egypt.

As an international student, the substantial tuition fees for my MA have limited my ability to explore Middle Eastern cinematic archives and engage in pivotal academic conferences. I estimate that a budget of CAD \$10,000 would significantly support my academic pursuits, covering travel to key archives, conference participation, accommodation, and essential research materials. Any amount from the EOMI that could assist me in meeting these goals would be greatly appreciated. The generous support of the Elahe Omidyar Mir-Djalali Institute (EOMI) of

The Elahe Omidyar Mir-Djalali Graduate Scholarship Application
Negar Banisafar

Iranian Studies would alleviate financial constraints, enabling me to excel in research and contribute to the fields of media studies, cultural histories, and affective technologies on a global scale.

I am deeply grateful for your consideration of my application. The scholarship from The EOMI is crucial to expand my research impact and will provide invaluable opportunities for me to engage with fellow researchers and share my findings with a wider academic audience. Thank you for your time and support.

Sincerely,
Negar Banisafar