



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO  
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Dear Fellowship Decision Committee Members:

I write to recommend Mr. Hadi Milanloo's for the 2022-23 Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Dissertation Completion Fellowship. I am Hadi's doctoral supervisor and have worked with him closely since his arrival at U of T in September 2016. He is the recipient of a prestigious Connaught International Student Award granted to only the most talented and accomplished of the University's many international students. Hadi has further distinguished himself by winning an award for best student paper at the Canadian Society for Traditional Music. He is a bright, talented musician and researcher and has crafted a promising dissertation project that will attract attention from many quarters.

Hadi's dissertation project is about female instrumentalists negotiating their careers in Tehran. This topic is of great significance to ethnomusicology, Iranian studies, and anthropology of the Middle East. Since the revolution and the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, both women's public solo singing and the recording of women's individual singing voices have been prohibited because of the arousal they potentially cause in male listeners. Virtually all of the literature on Iranian women and music has focused on the absence or hidden continuation of female singing but overlooks a critical fact: female instrumental performance is (comparatively) unrestricted and has flourished. Today women can be seen in greater numbers than ever in Iranian history playing instruments on stage, teaching in universities, and touring internationally. Hadi offers us a chance to understand how women instrumentalists have navigated their new opportunities and challenges in the context of contemporary Iran, where ethnographic research is rare.

The ethnographic research Hadi undertook in Tehran between 2019-20 produced many insights related to labor of the artistic and gendered sorts and new perspectives on the lives of working and creatively active women. While women do participate in art music in greater numbers than prior to the revolution, Hadi's research reveals their struggles to be taken seriously, to be considered for performance opportunities, and the challenges of combining demanding performance and touring schedules with caregiving duties that disproportionately fall on women. Women undertake extra work to "compensate" for being women and in order to be considered acceptable by male gatekeepers. This labor includes acquiring exceptional levels of musical mastery when compared to their male competitors as well as careful attention to their physical appearance. Hadi shows us how women work to dress and comport themselves modestly in order to appear sufficiently "serious," or – alternatively – highlight their physical

attractiveness in order to gain Instagram followers, a new locus for art music activity. Hadi's research shows us that for some women, visual self-presentation, entrepreneurship, and social media savvy are avenues of "virtuosity" alongside traditionally "musical" skills such as technique and depth of musical interpretation. The women whose musical lives he analyzes are brave, talented, and complicated; representing their complexity is a challenge Hadi has admirably embraced. Hadi has assembled a feminist scholarship-inspired theoretical framework combining concepts of conditional inclusion, intersectionality, erotic capital, and more, which allows him to put his case study into conversation with comparative international studies of women in music. He is also working to understand his elite interlocutors' professional lives in relation to the particular conditions of economic precarity of early twenty-first century Tehran.

Hadi is very well placed to undertake this study. He holds a B.A. and M.A. in Iranian classical music at University of Tehran's Department of Music, the country's premier institution of music education, where he focused on setar (a long-necked lute). He then went on to do a second M.A. in ethnomusicology at Memorial University, where he worked closely with Dr. Beverley Diamond, a Canada Research Chair in Traditional Music and past President of the Society for Ethnomusicology. While training with Dr. Diamond, Hadi studied research methodologies predicated on mutual respect and attentiveness to Indigenous modes of narration and knowing. In other ways, Hadi's decision to write about Iranian women is not an obvious choice. During his fieldwork as in his years of coming of age in Iran, he has also been subject to official gender segregation as well as to a historical legacy (and continuing tendency) towards homosocial friendships. There are barriers to what he can know, what he will be told, and – in the case of women-only concerts where some of his interlocutors perform – barriers to where he can go. These challenges have given Hadi the opportunity to reflect on the limits of his authority and access that also apply – in very different ways – to the women whose lives and works he chronicles. Knowing that one does not know is a valuable asset.

A fellowship within your esteemed interdisciplinary Iranian Studies community would perfect for Hadi at this point in his dissertation writing process. He has made great progress in the past year and has a clear, feasible plan for completion. Hadi will delight in being part of your community and will bring much to the table. I hope you will give him your serious consideration.

Sincerely yours,

Farzaneh Hemmasi  
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