June 15, 2025

Dear Members of the Fellowship Committee,

I am writing in support of Leila Moslemi’s application to the Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Dissertation Completion Fellowships. My name is Leila Pourtavaf and I am an Assistant Professor in the History Department at York University. I have known Leila for nearly four years, both as a member of her PhD committee, and as a Research Assistant, and can attest that she is a dedicated and hard-working student with an excellent and innovative dissertation project that deserves support.

I first met Leila when she participated in my *Gender in the Iranian the Archives* workshop. The week-long workshop brought together established and emerging Iranian Studies scholars and archivists for a series of guided sessions on archival research focused on how to trace histories of gender and sexuality in the archives of modern Iran. In one of the workshop sessions, graduate students were invited to present their research projects, focussing on their research methods, as it related to the theme of the workshop. I was impressed by Leila’s presentation and research practice which showed a deep level of archival engagement, and excited by the work she had started doing as a PhD student in the University of Toronto’s Near and Middle Eastern Studies program.

This led me to hire her as a Research Assistant in the fall of 2023. During the course of her one-year RAship with me, Leila was instrumental in helping me research an execute an archival curatorial project at the Aga Khan Museum. The display, titled *Outings: Women’s Social Worlds in Qajar Iran*, focused on representations of women’s social worlds as they collectively navigated shifts between tradition and modernity in late-19th and early 20th century Iran, at the height of Iran’s entanglement with its modernization project. It was a perfect meeting place of mine and Leila’s research interests and Leila was a dedicated researcher who made a significant contribution to the project. In particular, we collaborated on research in the Tavakoli archives to find images which appeared in newspapers and periodicals that highlighted modern gender roles in late-19th and early-20th century Iran, and how women increasingly played key roles in public life, navigating new social worlds that became open to them. It was during this collaboration process that Leila invited me to serve on her dissertation committee, under the supervision of Professor Tavakoli-Targhi and I was happy to accept.

### Over the two year, along with her supervisor and other committee members, I have guided Leila as she drafts her dissertation. Leila’s dissertation focusses on the Iranian Visual Public Sphere in the late-Qajar and early Pahlavi period. Relying on a robust archive of visual materials from early Iranian newspapers and magazines, her dissertation argues for the significance of the visual, rather than textual elements of early print culture, in the development of a modernizing Iran. Relying on her background in art history, Leila has amassed an impressive array of examples, and a visual analysis of them to illuminate her arguments. Leila’s ideas and archival efforts have been exciting and innovative, and I have found her to be a thoughtful student who openly engages with the feedback from her committee and pushes her disciplinary boundaries to engage with more historical methodologies. I am excited for her to spend the next year completing this work with the support of her eager committee.

Leila is a great colleague who has actively contributed to various conferences and symposiums at the University of Toronto and The Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali. She has excellent organizational and management skills and is a pleasure to collaborate with. It is my belief that she is deserving of this award and that it will help her in the successful completion of her dissertation.

Sincerely,

A close up of a signature

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Leila Pourtavaf

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