



August 12, 2022

Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Postdoctoral Fellowship  
EOM Iranian Studies Institute, University of Toronto

Dear Members of the Selection Committee:

It is a true pleasure for me to write in support of Dr. Mojgan Osmani's application for the EOM Postdoctoral Fellowship.

Dr. Osmani received her BA in English Literature from Kurdistan University in Iran. Normally, students have to take part in a nation-wide MA entrance examination in order to pursue graduate studies, but Dr. Osmani was admitted directly into the MA program in Linguistics at Kurdistan University as she was rated as an exceptional talent. In her MA, she worked under the supervision of Professor Yadgar Karimi, one of the top generative syntacticians in Iran and certainly the top specialist in the syntax of Kurdish. For her MA thesis, she worked on Passive constructions in Kurdish, working with the most recent technology in Noam Chomsky's Minimalist framework. She finished her MA in 2013, and was once again identified as an exceptional talent, this time ranked first among all MA students. Consequently, she was admitted into the PhD program at Tarbiat Modarres University in Iran without an entrance examination. She finished her doctoral degree in 2019 with a thesis on the theory of phases, as applied to the Kurdish language. Her supervisors were two leading Iranian generative syntacticians Dr. Arsalan Golfam and Dr. Mohammad Dabir-Moghaddam (my MA advisor). She was also a visiting PhD student at KU Leuven University working under the supervision of Prof. Jeroen Van Craenenbroeck, an opportunity very few graduate students from Iran may qualify for.

Dr. Osmani's proposed research for the EOM postdoctoral fellowship involves an investigation of the distribution of clitics in Ardelani Kurdish (Central Kurdish), her native language, as well as several other Iranian languages. Kurdish clitics display a very intriguing pattern, one which has recently caught the attention of syntacticians working on Iranian languages, e.g. Prof. Simin Karimi at the University of Arizona. I have done some recent work (jointly with my doctoral student Sahar Taghipour) on Laki (Southern Kurdish). What is striking about the distribution of clitics in Kurdish is the subtle differences one finds when looking at different dialects. This renders the Kurdish dialects the perfect laboratory for a microvariationist study of the syntax of clitics and their placement. Dr. Osmani advances the very ambitious hypothesis that the sophisticated distribution of clitics in Ardelani Kurdish can be explained straightforwardly if we take the domain of the second position placement of these clitics to be syntactically defined phases (in line with similar proposals I have made in joint work with Karine Megerdooomian about Eastern Armenian). Meanwhile, she has noted that these clitics sometimes appear

outside of these rigidly defined domains. As such, she is planning to explore the idea that these domains may need to be defined more dynamically, in line with recent proposals based on distinct phenomena and languages. In addition, she aims to extend this hypothesis to several other Kurdish variants and other Iranian languages. I am really impressed by Dr. Osmani's profile and find her research proposal at the cutting edge of the investigations of the syntax-phonology interface. Her work on clitics in Iranian languages will constitute the first of its kind and of particular interest to a wide range of scholars, those interested in the syntax of Iranian languages as well as those invested in the formal study of clitics.

The U of T Iranian Studies Institute would be the ideal place for Dr. Osmani to pursue this research proposal. I am currently in the third year of a SSHRC Insight Grant to work on the syntax of nominal linkers in Iranian languages. I have established an excellent team working on the project. The team includes five outstanding graduate student Research Assistants and the addition of a postdoctoral fellow would be very timely and impactful. We have conducted significant research on Kurdish variants in the past two years. In addition, I have done joint research with my doctoral student Sahar Taghipour on a related Kurdish variant, addressing questions directly relevant for Dr. Osmani's research. Moreover, given her theoretical framework, I believe I am the right person to direct her research and also challenge her to sharpen her ideas. There are several other faculty members at U of T who would be very much interested in her work. I really cannot think of a better place for Dr. Osmani to conduct her research. Our team of syntacticians working on Iranian languages would also benefit immensely from her presence.

I would like to bring up another issue which I think should be taken into consideration in evaluating Dr. Osmani's application, and applications from Iran, more generally. In academia, often in assessing a candidate's file, we take into account the stage they are at in their career. That is to say, the same level of research output may be assessed as outstanding for someone just out of graduate school, but as worrisome for someone out for ten years. I believe the same exercise in fairness should be extended to the place of origin. I do not believe an application from Iran can be evaluated on a par with one from North America. Differences arise from the opportunities that a graduate student in North America enjoys compared to someone from Iran. I look at Dr. Osmani's file and I see an exceptionally gifted syntactician. She has studied in Iran and yet spent a productive year in Belgium working with Dr. Van Craenenbroeck. Domestically, she has both published and presented at the best venues available. Internationally, she has presented one paper and has recently submitted a paper to a leading journal in our field.

In short, I have my highest recommendation for Dr. Mojgan Osmani. I believe the EOM postdoctoral fellowship will provide her with an excellent and well-deserved opportunity to work with a highly engaged team of researchers working on issues of mutual interest, to expand her academic network in Canada and beyond. Her presence will be a real boost to the research on the syntax of Iranian languages at the University of Toronto.

Faithfully,



Arsalan Kahnemuyipour  
Associate Professor of Linguistics