



Prof. Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi
Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalili
Institute
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Dear Prof. Tavakoli-Targhi

Letter of Reference: Dr Simon Theobald

It gives me great pleasure to supply a reference supporting the application of Dr Simon Theobald for the Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalili Postdoctoral Fellowship in Iranian Studies at the University of Toronto.

I am a Research Fellow at the Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation at Deakin University, in Melbourne, Australia. I have been employed in this position since 2014. I am an anthropologist specialising in ethnic and religious identity in Iran, I have performed fieldwork in Iran on three occasions, and I speak Persian. In addition to my monograph, *Armenian Christians in Iran* (CUP 2019), my research has been published in several prestigious peer-reviewed journals, such as *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, and *Third World Quarterly*. My current research is focused on Sunni Muslim activism in Iran.

I have known Dr Theobald for approximately seven years, and I acted as an assistant supervisor on his PhD panel. I know Dr Theobald to be an exceptional scholar of considerable skill and intellect, and well above his peers. In the course of his doctoral candidature, he exceeded expectations, spending more than the desired twelve months in the field, and achieving proficiency in Persian. His dissertation, "Complete Lives: Utopian Inheritances in Contemporary Mashhad", is an outstanding work which makes both scholarly and applied contributions to the literature. In particular, I found Dr Theobald's skills went beyond merely data collection; his capacity to learn and understand Iranian philosophical concepts and then link them to Western knowledge is a rare skill, and one which is incredibly valuable in an era where cross cultural communication is crucial.

Dr Theobald is an ideal candidate for the Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalili Postdoctoral Fellowship as he has an original dissertation that will have an impact on the field of Iranian Studies. Furthermore, Dr Theobald would bring an invaluable and diverse skillset to the Institute. Having read through his proposal and cover letter, I can vouch that Dr Theobald is an incredibly skilled ethnographer, well-versed in both the theory and practice of ethnography, and has been able to produce outstanding publications so far in his short career. His doctoral research, which forms the basis of his book proposal, was no easy task, as the groups with which Dr Theobald worked during fieldwork are notoriously insular and suspicious of outsiders, particularly non-Muslims. It is testament to Dr Theobald's talent and skill that he was able to successfully perform his research with this group openly and transparently.

I have always found Dr Theobald to be a diligent scholar as well as an amiable and friendly person. He has been a valuable member of the Australian academic community - both at his home institution, the Australian National University, and in larger circles of anthropology and Iranian studies. He has always worked well both independently and with others. His dedication to his work has led to an excellent dissertation, along with a growing track record of publications which exceeds the achievement of his peers. As his supervisor, I am very pleased with his development as a junior scholar. He has proven himself to adapt easily to new environments and has a terrific demeanour.

I am entirely confident that Dr Theobald has the skills, application and ability to carry out and complete his proposal. Dr Theobald possesses a perfect balance of passion and focus to be able to complete in a timely manner. Furthermore, his energy coupled with his analytical skill means he stands well above his peers.

Please accept my unreserved support for Dr Theobald's application.

Please do not hesitate to contact me to discuss this reference further.

Yours sincerely,



James Barry, PhD

Research Fellow, ADI, Deakin University