

University of Toronto
Faculty of Arts and Science
The Elahe Omidyar Mir-Djalali Institute of Iranian Studies
Application for Postdoctoral Fellowship in Iranian Studies
Ashkan Bahrani
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Dear committee members,

I am writing to apply for the postdoctoral fellowship position at the Elahe Omidyar Mir-Djalali Institute of Iranian Studies at the University of Toronto. I am an assistant professor of Religion and History in the School of Social Sciences, Arts, and Humanities at Al-Akhawayan University in Ifrane, Morocco. I received my PhD in religious studies (Critical Studies in Asian, Islamic, and Jewish Traditions) from the Graduate Department of Religion at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, TN, USA. I successfully defended my dissertation in December 2022, submitted the final draft, and graduated on May 12, 2023. My primary research fields are Iranian Studies, Islamic studies, Premodern Islamic Mysticism (focusing on Sufism in Persianate Societies), Islam in the 20th and 21st centuries, and critical theories of religion. The title of my dissertation is *Sufi Debates in Premodern Iran (9th-15th cent): A Genealogical Approach*, in which I investigate the emergence, configuration, and reframing of the concept of 'Sufism' in contemporary Iranian studies, with a concentration on the case of Sufi debates in premodern Greater Iran.

Before joining AUI, I served as Metempsychosis: An Interreligious History project coordinator at Monash, where I run Afterlife, Rebirth, and Immortality monthly seminars in 2023 and 2024. Also, I served as the bibliographer of Islamic Studies and 'World Religions' at the Vanderbilt Divinity Library from 2015 until 2022. Furthermore, in the Spring of 2018, I served as an adjunct lecturer in the Department of Religious Studies at Sewanee, the University of the South. I taught two courses, namely Studying Islam in the West: Muslim Civilizations and Cultures, as well as Islamic Mysticism. From Fall 2018 until December 2019, I served the College of Arts and Science at Vanderbilt University as a Persian tutor. I ran two Persian courses for reading knowledge, the first at the elementary level and the second at the advanced level.

In a collaborative project with Dr. Aydogan Kars (Monash University), we have worked on a critical edition, English translation, and studies of thirteen treatises (Arabic and Persian) by the prominent premodern Sufi, theologian, ethicist, and jurist, Shihab al-Din Umar al-Suhrawardi (d. 1234 CE). Brill Publishers published this book as *Umar al-Suhrawardi: Studies, Editions, Translations* in December 2021. My collaboration with Dr. Kars also has some by-products that were articles. Our article "A Sufi Master without a Hospice: Abdolkarim Soroush between Sufism and Mysticism" has now been published in a special issue in the *Journal of Academic Study of Religion* in Australia. Also, our article titled "Knowledge and Causality in Ibn Arabi's Book of Giving and the Buddhist Notion of Dependent Origination" was published in the *Journal of Religions* in August 2022. As part of my postdoc project at Monash, we also worked on an article titled "Four Epistles of Sahlagi: Newly Recovered Sources on Early Sufism, Theology,

and Traditionism,” which will be published in the latest issue of *Studia Islamica* in November 2025,

In the academic year 2019-2020, I served the Department of Religious Studies at Middlebury College in Vermont as a research assistant for Dr. Ata Anzali. I am primarily preparing the Persian translation of Dr. Anzali's monograph, *'Mysticism' in Iran: The Safavid Roots of a Modern Concept* (2017: The University of South Carolina Press), which was published in 2024. I come from an Iranian working-class family. Born and raised in Iran, I earned my B.L. in Law and M.A. in Islamic Philosophy and Theology from Shiraz University. I have published both original works of research, including *The Mirrors of Nothingness: Negative Theology, according to Rumi and Meister Eckhart* (published in Persian in 2011), and works of translation, including the Persian translation of Ahmet Karamustafa's *Sufism: The Formative Period* (2016). As a person of color who comes from a Middle Eastern background and as my research and teaching background indicates, I have been involved in the study of Muslim society as an underrepresented religious and cultural minority in the U.S. for the last eight years.

I am highly intrigued by the University of Toronto position in Iranian Studies for three main reasons. First, it provides me with an exceptional opportunity to contribute to the network of Iranian studies scholars at the EOM Institute. Also, it will help me work as extensively as possible on methods and theories in the study of religion, focusing on critical race theory and post-colonial theory. In this way, I will contribute to the enrichment of the study of modern Middle East politics and Iranian Studies by adding the study of Sufism in the emergence of modern nationalisms in the Middle East. Secondly, I am fascinated by teaching and researching Islamic studies, Middle East politics, and methods and theory in the study of premodern and modern Islam, and this position provides me with an exceptional opportunity to make my dream come true through an intense engagement with full-time research and the network of scholars, most specifically Professor Mohammad Tavakkoli-Targhi. Thirdly, the full-time research position will allow me to dedicate my undivided attention to work on my monograph tentatively titled: “Sufism and Iranian Orientalism” based on the first part of my dissertation.

My wife and I have had a deeply productive experience at AUI in Morocco. During the past year, I taught courses such as Comparative Religion, History of the Arab World, Religion in International Affairs, Islamic Societies, and Global Islam in the Contemporary World. Due to political and administrative problems, however, AUI has failed to secure my residency status in Morocco, which requires me to start a new job. I am confident that my research on the history of Islamic mystical ideas in premodern and modern eras in Iran as well as my teaching and research experience in the US, Australia, and Morocco will provide the community at the University of Toronto with new insights. The EOM Institute at the University of Toronto will be the best fit for my career. Thank you very much for your consideration.

Yours Sincerely,
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