



Dear Members of the Search Committee:

I am excited to submit my application for the Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Postdoctoral Fellowship in Iranian Studies at the University of Toronto. I am currently a Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of Cross-Cultural and Regional Studies at the University of Copenhagen. With extensive experience in research and teaching on comparative politics, modern Iran, diaspora studies, and identity politics, I believe my expertise matches the requirements of this position.

My research examines how nationalism and identity politics are represented and transformed in the digital era, specifically analyzing how social media platforms facilitate new forms of expression and contestation, reshaping narratives of national belonging and political identity. I am also interested in how diaspora communities, particularly the Iranian diaspora, not only interact with and reinterpret national narratives but also actively shape public debates about them back home through transnational networks, digital activism, and cultural production.

As part of my postdoctoral position within the *Iran Beyond Iran* project at the University of Copenhagen, I am currently working on two related research projects. The first examines the emergence of right-wing nationalist populist rhetoric within the Iranian diaspora, one that is often sharply critical of Islam, hostile to liberal values and institutions, and exclusionary toward ethnic and linguistic minorities. Combining qualitative content analysis with social network analysis, this project examines how such narratives gain traction, particularly through digital platforms, and how they reshape diaspora identity and political discourse. The second project examines how Iranian ethnic minorities in the diaspora navigate and negotiate their multiple identities, particularly in multicultural settings like Canada. It focuses specifically on how Iranian Azeris construct and express their identities in relation to both their ethnic heritage and Iranian national identity. Through ethnographic research at cultural festivals, community events, and social gatherings in Edmonton, I analyze the strategic choices they make regarding cultural representation and community participation, choices that often challenge or resist dominant Iranian nationalist narratives.

My research to date has led to several publications, including three peer-reviewed journal articles and two book chapters. In my most recent work, I examined how diasporic communities use social media to challenge and reframe established national symbols. I focused on Iranian diaspora activists who contested the national football team's role as a unifying symbol. This study shows how digital platforms enable diasporic groups to transform traditional symbols of national identity into dynamic sites of political contestation and activism. My work has also received several awards, including the Graduate Student Research Award from the Association for Iranian Studies (AIS), the State of Kuwait Graduate Scholarship in Islamic Studies, and two Alberta Graduate Excellence Scholarships.

My dissertation, which I hope to develop into a book during the postdoctoral period, is about the politics of memory and identity in post-Khomeini Iran. It examines how discursive and commemorative practices, including national and religious holidays and rituals, are "reinvented" and repurposed for political and ideological objectives, particularly to reinforce a specific religious narrative of Iranian identity. It also analyzes

how Iranian society counters state-sponsored narratives by reappropriating these same rituals and practices. The dissertation was awarded the Best Dissertation Prize by the Western Political Science Association and shortlisted for Bloomsbury's Modern Iran History series.

I have no doubts that the postdoctoral position at the Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Institute of Iranian Studies would provide me with everything I need to pursue my academic career as a scholar of Iranian studies and to revise and prepare my dissertation for publication as a monograph. Thanks to your exemplary and dynamic academic environment, I believe that my time in your research center will undoubtedly be an asset for me in acquiring the required expertise and experience. I am inspired by the work of Professor Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi and others in the field of Iranian Studies, and I would be extremely excited to have the opportunity to contribute to and be part of their ongoing projects, particularly the Iranian Diaspora Studies Initiative, which fit closely with my own research interests on nationalism, identity, and diaspora politics. Moreover, the University of Toronto's Department of Middle Eastern Studies and the Institute of Structural Islamophobia Lab would provide invaluable resources for my future research on Islamophobia in Canada, offering essential theoretical frameworks and interdisciplinary perspectives that would significantly help my work. The global reputation and academic excellence of the University of Toronto give me great confidence that this opportunity would allow me to grow as a researcher, collaborate meaningfully with leading scholars, and make impactful contributions to the field. I would be truly honored to join your academic community, where I could continue to develop my scholarship in such a vibrant, supportive, and intellectually rigorous setting.

Thank you for your time and consideration of my application.

Warmly,

Ehsan Kashfi

