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Dr. Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi
Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Institute of Iranian Studies
University of Toronto
4 Bancroft Avenue,
Toronto, ON M5S 1C1

Dear Dr. Tavakoli-Targhi,

I am writing to express my strong interest in the Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Postdoctoral Fellowship in Iranian Studies for 2025–2026 at the University of Toronto. With advanced training in anthropology (Ph.D., Boston University, 2025), religious studies (M.T.S., Harvard University, 2017), and linguistics (M.A., Allameh Tabatabai University), I bring an interdisciplinary approach to the study of Iranian migration and cultural life. The opportunity to join the Institute's dynamic scholarly community offers an ideal setting to complete my book manuscript and contribute meaningfully to its mission.

My proposed project, *Hope Across Borders: Migration, Faith, and the Journey to Belong*, builds on my doctoral research and multi-sited fieldwork with Iranian Muslim migrants in Boston and Vancouver (2018–2023). In response to rising global migration—particularly among educated Iranians—it explores the internal diversity of this population, including shifting religious and political orientations. While focused on the experiences of pious Muslims unaffiliated with the Islamic Republic, the study also examines their interactions with other Iranians and non-Iranians in pluralistic host societies. It traces how their cultural and religious practices, though often sources of marginalization, also open pathways toward more fulfilling lives.

Where previous scholarship has emphasized structural constraints and policy regimes, my work foregrounds the existential dimensions of migrant life—how individuals persist, form relationships, and sustain hope amid instability. I approach migrant religiosity not as a fixed identity, a form of adaptation, or a reaction against Western norms, but as a creative source of meaning, connection, and renewal. Drawing on ethnography and personal narratives, I examine naming practices, food rituals, and communal gatherings in public spaces as everyday acts that cultivate care, belonging, and vitality. In conversation with Iranian diaspora studies, the anthropology of religion, and critical theories of hope, the project brings understudied voices into both academic and public discourse.

The Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Institute's commitment to interdisciplinary and culturally grounded research resonates deeply with my scholarly goals. Alongside completing my manuscript, I would be excited to contribute to the Institute's initiatives—through collaborative research, public events, and engagement with wider communities. Drawing on my experience teaching Persian language, literature, and anthropology at Boston University and the University of British Columbia—as well as my continued engagement with Persian-speaking diasporic communities—I would be eager to develop a course aligned with the Institute's educational and cultural mission.

Thank you for considering my application. It would be an honor to join the Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Institute and contribute to its vital work on Iranian history, literature, and culture.

Sincerely,
Mahtab Sirdani