Cover Letter

2025-06-12

Faculty of Iranian Studies

Dear Members of the Search Committee,

I am writing to express my interest in the Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Postdoctoral Fellowship in Iranian Studies. I am currently a Ph.D. candidate in Political Science at Carleton University, expected to graduate in 2025. My areas of specialization include liberal and democratic theory, ancient and modern political thought, Islamic medieval political philosophy, and the Scottish Enlightenment.

My dissertation investigates the phenomenon of political polarization, with a particular focus on 18th-century England, a period, much like our own, marked by intense factional division. I center my analysis on David Hume, whose political and historical writings grapple directly with these issues. While Hume offers a compelling analysis of factionalism, I argue that his solutions fall short in offering a path forward.

This limitation led me to an unexpected but intellectually fruitful connection: the political and religious philosophy of Alfarabi. In the final chapter of my dissertation, I draw upon Alfarabi’s theory of virtuous religion, remarkably similar to Hume’s theory of the mind, to suggest a more robust framework for understanding and addressing polarization. This comparative analysis demonstrates the value of turning to overlooked or unconventional sources in grappling with contemporary political challenges.

For my postdoctoral research, I intend to focus exclusively on Alfarabi’s political philosophy. My goal is to critically examine and deconstruct the widespread misinterpretations of Alfarabi that have often served ideological or authoritarian ends. I aim to reclaim Alfarabi as a thinker whose insights into reason, virtue, and political order offer a valuable resource for confronting today’s polarized climate. This endeavor aligns closely with the mission of the Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Postdoctoral Fellowship, which supports the rigorous and independent study of Iranian intellectual history.

The Iranian Studies program provides an ideal environment to undertake this work. With its commitment to preserving and exploring Iran’s rich philosophical heritage, the fellowship offers a unique platform from which to engage with Alfarabi’s legacy in a nuanced and scholarly manner, free from political and religious distortion.

Thank you for considering my application. I would be honored to contribute to the vibrant intellectual community supported by the Fellowship and look forward to the opportunity to discuss my research in further detail.

Sincerely,

Ali Elyasi