

September 10th, 2023

To: The Selection Committee - the Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Scholar Award

Dr. Sivan Balslev - Application to the Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Scholar Award

Dear Esteemed Members of the Selection Committee,

I am writing to present my candidacy for the Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Scholar Award for the 2024-25 academic year at the Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Institute of Iranian Studies at the University of Toronto.

As a dedicated historian specializing in modern Iran, with a primary focus on the cultural and social history of the Qajar and Pahlavi periods, I bring a wealth of expertise and a profound commitment to advancing our understanding of this pivotal era. Since July 2018, I have held the position of lecturer (assistant professor) in the Department of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, a role that stands as a testament to my dedication to scholarship and my potential in the field.

Currently, I am on a promising tenure track, with my tenure file scheduled for review in the coming years. The opportunity offered by a residency at the Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Institute of Iranian Studies is a unique and unparalleled chance for professional growth. This esteemed award not only offers access to invaluable archival resources but also provides the essential uninterrupted time necessary to embark on the ambitious endeavor of crafting my second monograph. This forthcoming work will delve into the yet underexplored history of children and childhood in modern Iran, as outlined in the attached synopsis.

My first book, *Iranian Masculinities: Gender and Sexuality in Late Qajar and Early Pahlavi Iran*, was published by Cambridge University Press in 2019. This monograph represents a pioneering effort to comprehensively examine the history of masculinity in Iran, tracing its evolution and its intricate connections to transformative processes such as modernization, the emergence of a new Western-oriented elite, and the development of Iranian nationalism. In recognition of its significance, the book was unofficially translated into Persian in 2022, making it accessible to readers in Iran and beyond.

My current research project, generously funded by a 4-year grant from the Israel Science Foundation, is a comprehensive exploration of the history of children and childhood in Iran, spanning from 1870 to 1970. I am pleased to report significant progress in this endeavor, which has culminated in the completion of three scholarly articles, all submitted to prestigious peer-reviewed journals. Currently, I am writing a fourth article.

The first of these articles, titled "International Organizations and the Question of Child Labor in the Iranian Carpet Industry," (submitted to *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East*), examines the intricate involvement of various international organizations, ranging from the International Labour Organization to missionary networks and international carpet firms, in the regulation and exploitation of child labor in Iran from the late 19th century to the interwar years. My research underscores the pivotal role children's bodies played in both their employment and the endeavors to limit child labor. I emphasize how children, with their delicate fingers, were perceived as ideal weavers. Yet, simultaneously, the sight of crippled, dwarfed, and ailing children laboring at the weaving looms evoked great consternation among Europeans and Iranians alike, compelling them to seek protective measures for these young workers. The efficacy of enforcing improved working conditions and minimum age requirements in the carpet industry was contingent upon a multitude of factors, many of which were intricately tied to international relations between Iran, Great Britain, and the international community.

The second article, "Scouting in Iran Amid Changing Practices of Masculinity and Childhood" (Submitted to *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*), illuminates the complex interplay of cultural shifts in the conceptions of childhood and masculinity during the reign of Reza Shah. It dissects the tensions arising from shifts such as the transition from child labor to formal schooling, the balance between

classroom education and exposure to nature, and the fine line between adult surveillance and the desire to establish a "separate sphere" for children. Scouting emerged as a possible solution, providing primarily elite children with outdoor activities, newfound independence, and a homosocial, age-segregated space overseen by professional adults.

The third article, titled "Between Actors and Victims - Children in the Iranian Constitutional Revolution" (presently submitted to *the International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*), delves into the agency and political subjectivity of children during the Constitutional Revolution. It highlights their symbolic roles in constitutionalist press coverage and their frequent and widely accepted participation in mass events of the Revolution and local initiatives organized by modern schools. The article underscores that children were not merely witnesses but also essential, albeit often overlooked, actors in the Revolution, serving as poignant symbols in revolutionary discourse, and taking an active role in demonstrations, sit-ins, and the press.

Currently, I am completing a fourth article that analyzes Jalal Al-e Ahmad's *The School Principal* through the lens of childhood studies. This article uncovers the clash between modern childhood ideals and traditional perceptions of childhood, as well as the challenges posed by modern childhood to deeply entrenched patriarchal ideas and practices. I assert that Al-e Ahmad's work is not solely a critique of the Iranian education system but also a testament to the uneven and sometimes arduous adoption of the concept of childhood as a period of innocence, dependence, and nurturing by adults.

Furthermore, I have had the privilege of presenting some of my research findings at several academic forums, including the Association of Iranian Studies Biennial Conference in Salamanca (August 2022), The Institute for Iranian Studies in Vienna (April 2023), and the Society for the History of Children and Youth Annual Conference at the University of Guelph (June 2023). Additionally, I had the honor of contributing to a seminar luncheon at the Institute of Iranian Studies at the University of Toronto in June 2023 and had the pleasure of meeting and considering future collaborations with Prof. Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi.

As previously mentioned, I am embarking on my sixth year at the Hebrew University, and it is important to acknowledge the unforeseen challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and my time spent on maternity leave. These circumstances resulted in the unfortunate loss of two years' worth of research time and necessitated an extension of my tenure track, which significantly impacted my career trajectory. Nonetheless, I am highly motivated and eager to regain lost ground. A residency at your esteemed institute, with its unparalleled access to the Tavakoli archive, the opportunity to engage with the vibrant Iranian studies community at the University of Toronto, and the precious gift of dedicated research and writing time, would be instrumental in my journey toward achieving tenure at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

I believe that my dedication to scholarship, my demonstrated ability to produce innovative research, and my commitment to the field of Iranian studies make me an ideal candidate for the Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Scholar Award. With your support, I am confident that I can contribute significantly to the ongoing academic discourse in this field.

Sincerely,



Dr. Sivan Balslev

The Department of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies
The Hebrew University of Jerusalem