



June 19, 2025

Re. Ehsan Kashfi's Postdoc Application

Dear Professor Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi,

I write in my capacity as Dr. Ehsan Kashfi's doctoral supervisor to most *enthusiastically* support his application for a postdoc position at the Institute for Iranian Studies at the University of Toronto. Dr. Kashfi successfully defended his outstanding doctoral dissertation on May 24, 2024 and received the *Best Dissertation Award* from Western Political Science Association in 2025. The dissertation, titled "*The Discursive and Commemorative Construction of Iranian Identity in Postrevolutionary Iran*", showcases a remarkable blend of theoretical depth and empirical research and stands as a testament to his research excellence. This postdoc position provides a valuable opportunity for Dr. Kashfi to revise his dissertation and submit it to a university press for publication.

Dr. Kashfi's dissertation deconstructs the discourse, commemoration and rituals co-opted by the Islamic Republic of Iran to craft a hegemonic and state-sponsored narrative of Iranian identity. It carefully problematizes the strategic maneuvers employed by the state to mold the collective memory of Iranians through its cultural machinery and ideological apparatus, especially under the leadership of Ayatollah Khamenei. It asks "how has Ayatollah Khamenei defined Iranian identity in his writings and public speeches, and what major cultural and religious mechanisms has the Islamic Republic of Iran employed to embed its narrative of identity?" To answer these questions, it examines the content of Khamenei's public discourse over four decades, and three strategies of the Iranian state: manipulating national calendar and holidays, renaming streets and public spaces, and appropriating religious rituals and traditions. The dissertation employs a threefold methodology of discourse analysis, archival research, and fieldwork in Najaf and Karbala (Iraq), and Tehran (Iran) in the summers of 2019 and 2021 during the Arbāeen Walk.

Informed by critical and intersectional theories of identity politics, the dissertation challenges essentialist-primordial interpretations and certain readings of modernist approaches to identity politics. It illustrates how the construction, historicity, hybridity, and intersectionality of national identity offer a more nuanced understanding of the complexity involved in the formation of national identity in Iran.

The findings of this dissertation provide an in-depth understanding of how the state can utilize traditions and ritual symbolism to reinforce a specific narrative of national Identity. Moreover, it shows how Iran's civil society constantly and tirelessly countered the state's top-down policies of identity formation by reclaiming national-religious traditions and public sphere, providing alternative national celebrations, and employing novel and nuance methods of socio-cultural resistance among religious and secular social forces.

Dr. Kashfi is currently a Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Copenhagen's Department of Cross-Cultural and Regional Studies, Denmark. He has an active research agenda on nationalism, discursive and commemorative constructions of national identity, and the rise of new populist nationalist movements, with a particular focus on social media, Middle East politics and Islamic studies. He has published in peer reviewed venues such as journal of *Ethnicity and Nationalism* (2023), *Religions* (2021), and several book chapters including a book chapter with the prestigious Duke University Press one with a Minneapolis University Press. He has a few more works under review and/or in progress. Moreover, he has an excellent



record of presenting his research papers at academic international conferences such as International Studies Associations (ISA), American Political Science Association (APSA), the Midwest Political Science Association, the Southern Political Science Association, the Canadian Political Science Association (CPSA), and Association for Iranian Studies (AIS), among others.

Dr. Kashfi received a *Graduate Teaching Award for 2024* from the University of Alberta in recognition of his teaching excellence. He has taught several courses at the University of Alberta and during his studies at University of South Florida. They include Introduction to Politics, Introduction to Comparative Politics, Introduction to International Relations, Politics of Nationalism, and Nationalism, among others. As shown in his CV and course evaluations, he is an excellent, engaging and skilled teacher committed to excellence. Passionate for teaching, Ehsan participated in a variety of workshops and extensive training in Teaching Training Programs at both the University of Alberta and the University of South Florida. He has co-chaired "Teaching and Pedagogy in Political Science Group" (TaPPS) for the past few years. TaPPS is a working group of graduate students and faculty members that spearhead various projects to support the development of teaching skills for new and established teachers. Ehsan, in sum, is an excellent teacher with outstanding teaching review with a critical and engaging teaching pedagogy. Moreover, he has received a number of awards, grants and scholarships in recognition of his excellent accomplishments. They include, multiple teaching awards, the Makhzoumi Graduate Scholarships, the State of Kuwait Graduate Scholarship in Islamic Studies, Frank Peers Graduate Research Scholarship in Political Science, and the Government of Alberta Graduate Excellence Scholarship, among others.

Additionally, he is an exemplary and brilliant research assistant working with me on a number of research projects as well as organizing and coordination several public events. More specifically, Dr. Kashfi has been working with me as a symposium/workshop coordinator since the Fall 2018, including the international symposium/workshop I organized at the University of Alberta, April 27-28, 2019. As a conference coordinator, he was in charge of contacting the contributors, the symposium website, and all the logistics of the event. Additionally, he has been my assistant for organizing a number of public events for the *Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (MEIS)* as well as maintaining the MEIS website. In May 2022, he co-organized an international Graduate Conference entitled *Rethinking MENA and the Muslim World*, at the University of Alberta. I am very impressed with his commitment, dedication, outstanding performance and contribution to the university/academic community. He is an excellent and energetic young scholar.

All in all, Dr. Kashfi's outstanding academic accomplishments, his exceptional scholarly promise, seriousness and self-motivation, his dedication and commitment to research, teaching, and academic community equip him ideally to be an outstanding candidate. For all these reasons, I recommend Dr. Ehsan Kashfi to you *unreservedly and most enthusiastically*. He is an excellent smart scholar and has my full support. I respectfully urge you for a careful consideration of his application.

Sincerely,

Mojtaba Mahdavi

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