Professor Emeritus Arlene Voski Avakian is a founder and former Chair of the department of Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Her books include: Lion Woman's Legacy: An Armenian American Memoir (1992), Turkish translation Aras press, Istanbul, Spring 2020; Through the Kitchen Window: Women Explore the Intimate Meaning of Food and Cooking (1997, 2005); From Betty Crocker to Feminist Food Studies: Critical Perspectives on Women and Food (co-editor), African American Women and the Vote 1837-1965 (1997) (co-editor). An activist for most of her adult life with particular focus on bringing white supremacy into the center of praxis, Avakian is currently working with Movement Voter Project, an organization that funds progressive grassroots groups in marginalized communities in the U.S., building community infrastructure and getting out the vote.

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Shaharzad Akbar is a human rights activist from Afghanistan, currently in exile, with a diverse professional background in human rights, media and culture and youth mobilization. Shaharzad’s work experience spans from establishing and running a consultancy firm in Kabul, supporting Afghan civil society and media in her role as Country Director of Open Society Afghanistan, to working with the government on development issues and most recently leading Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission. Fighting for human rights and women’s rights has been a theme throughout her professional career. Shaharzad has advocated for the human rights of Afghans, a dignified and just peace and accountability for gross violations internationally including through engaging with the UN Security Council and UN Human Rights Council. Born in Jawzjan, Afghanistan, Shaharzad lived for a few years as refugee in Pakistan when Taliban were in power. Shaharzad completed an MPhil at Oxford University in 2011; previously she obtained her BA (cum laude) from Smith College in the U.S. Shaharzad’s writing has appeared in international media including Washington Post, CNN, Newsweek, Just Security, Al Jazeera, and academic journals.