Women Without Men (2010)
Film and Literary Festival
Participant Bios

Shoja Azari is an Iranian-born artist and filmmaker whose films and video installations have been internationally screened and exhibited. Since 1997, he has collaborated with Shirin Neshat on many video installations, including Turbulent, which won the Golden Lion Prize at the Venice Art Biennale. Since 2006, he has also worked with visual artist Shahram Karimi on “video painting,” a new form examining the juncture between film and the plastic arts. He has lived in New York since 1983.

Shiva Balaghi is a historian of the modern Middle East, with special interests in the interrelated histories of colonialism, nationalism, gender, and visual culture. Currently a Cogut International Humanities Fellow, she is completing a book on the cultural history of Iran from the mid-nineteenth century through the present. She is the Vice-President of the American Institute of Iranian Studies and an editor of MERIP. Her publications include Reconstructing Gender in the Middle East (co-edited, 1994), Picturing Iran: Art, Society, and Revolution (co-edited, 2002), and Saddam Hussein: A Biography (2005). She has published numerous articles on Iranian intellectual history and visual culture, as well as on Shirin Neshat and Shoja Azari. Her writing has been translated into Chinese, Arabic, Persian, and Turkish. She has taught History and Women’s Studies at the University of Michigan, the University of Vermont, and New York University.

Reza Baraheni is a distinguished Iranian poet, novelist, literary theorist and translator who is also a noted human rights activist. Author of more than sixty books, including The Crowned Cannibals, a collection of prose and poetry, and God’s Shadow: Prison Poems, he was a co-founder of the Writers Association of Iran and was instrumental in turning the Association into Iran’s most important human rights organization. Active for more than 35 years in trying to promote democratic liberties in Iran, Baraheni was imprisoned and kept in solitary confinement for 102 days by
the government of the Shah, then imprisoned again in 1981 and 1982 by the Islamic Republic of Iran. In 1994 he was signatory to and translator of an “open letter to the world” calling for artistic freedom and an end to censorship in Iran; this document, with the help of International PEN, succeeded in bringing worldwide attention to the plight of Iranian writers. Baraheni received asylum in Canada in 1997, where he later became President of PEN Canada (2000 -2002) and a visiting professor at the Centre for Comparative Literature at Massey College, University of Toronto.

Mishana Hosseinioun is a Drafter with the '2048 Project: Humanity's Agreement to Live Together' at the UC Berkeley Law School. She earned her Bachelor's degree in Near Eastern Studies with an emphasis in Arabic literature, and Rhetoric with a focus in narrative and image and public discourse at the University of California, Berkeley. She received her MPhil in International Relations as a Clarendon Scholar at the University of Oxford, England, where she is currently a Doctoral Candidate.

Shahriar Mandanipour is regarded as one of the most accomplished writers of contemporary Iranian literature. His novel Censoring an Iranian Love Story was published in English translation in 2009; he is also the author nine volumes of fiction in Persian, including the short story collections The Eighth Day of the Earth, Violet Orient, Midday Moon, Mummy and Honey, Shadows of the Cave, and Ultramarine Blue, and a novel, The Courage of Love. Formerly a Brown University International Writers Project Fellow (2006), he is currently a visiting scholar at Harvard University and Boston College.

Iranian-born filmmaker/artist Shirin Neshat's work has been exhibited at galleries and museums worldwide, including The National Museum of Contemporary Art in Athens; the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam; the Serpentine Gallery, London; the Museo de Arte Contemporaneo in Leon, Spain; and many others. She is the recipient of numerous prizes, including the Golden Lion Award at the 48th Venice Biennale in 1999, and a Lillian Gish Prize in 2006. Women Without Men, her first feature-length film, received the Silver Lion Award at the 66th Venice International Film Festival in 2009. More information about the film can be found at www.womenwithoutmenfilm.com.

Photo by Ala Ebtekar

Photo by Lina Bertucci
Iranian novelist Shahrnush Parsipur, born in Tehran, Iran, in 1946, is no stranger to political opposition. A woman who writes about hot-button issues like lousy marriages and female virginity, Parsipur has seen all of her books – eight works of fiction and a memoir – banned in her native land. She’s been imprisoned for her writings four times, once for nearly five years, from 1981 to 1986. Parsipur’s writing career began in 1974 with the publication of her first novel, The Dog and The Long Winter, in which a tradition-bound young woman encounters the revolutionary activism of her brother and his friends. Parsipur’s later works, like Touba and the Meaning of Night and Women Without Men (a title alluding to Ernest Hemingway’s Men Without Women), openly explore the condition of women in Iran. Parsipur’s characters speak unabashedly of women’s sexual oppression, ridicule chastity, and express their resistance to Iran’s male-dominated culture. Indeed, Women Without Men was considered provocative enough in Iran that it landed Parsipur in prison twice, in 1990 and 1991. Now a political refugee, Parsipur has lived in the U.S. since 1994 when she received a Lillian Hellman/Dashiell Hammett Award from the Fund for Free Expression. She is a former Brown International Writers Project Fellow (2004).

Moniro Ravanipour is an internationally acclaimed innovative writer who is the author of eight titles published in Iran, including two collections of short fiction, Kanizu and Satan’s Stones, and the novels The Drowned, Heart of Steel, and Gypsy by Fire. Her tales, described as “reminiscent in their fantastic blend of realism, myth, and superstition of writers like Rulfo, Garcia Marquez, even Tutuola,” frequently take as their setting the small, remote village in southern Iran where she was born. Nahid Mozaffari, editor of Strange Times, My Dear: The PEN Anthology of Contemporary Iranian Literature, writes that Ravanipour “has been successful in the treatment of the complex subjects of tradition and modernity, juxtaposing elements of both, and exposing them in all their contradictions without idealizing either.” Ms. Ravanipour was among seventeen activists to face trial in Iran for their participation in the 2000 Berlin Conference, accused of taking part in anti-Iran propaganda. Copies of her current work were recently stripped from bookstore shelves in Iran in a countrywide police action. She is a former Brown University International Writers Project Fellow (2007).