



MASHAYEKHI, MEHRDAD

MASHAYEKHI, MEHRDAD (مهرداد مشایخی, Mehrdād Mašāyeki, b. Tehran, 16 Mordād 1332 Š./ 7 August 1953; d. Fairfax, Virginia, 13 Mehr 1390 Š./ 5 October 2011), scholar, public intellectual, political activist ([Figure 1](#)).

Mehrdad Mashayekhi was the eldest child of Morteżā Mašāyeki and Āriandoḡt Āriānpur. His father is a pediatric doctor who also composes poetry, and his grandfather, Shaikh Moḡammad-Bāqer Mašāyeki, was a member of the first parliament. His mother came from the Kashani family of Nāyeb Khan Kāši and was related to the late poet [Sohrab Sepehri](#).

Mashayekhi spent part of his childhood in France, where his father was completing his medical training. He earned his diploma from the Andiša high school in Tehran in 1971. He then entered Tehran University to study dentistry but decided this was not his passion, and in 1972 he moved to the United States to study economics at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio. As an undergraduate, he played soccer for Case Western and was inducted into the university's Athletic Hall of Fame. After earning his BA degree in 1976, he enrolled at the American University in Washington, D.C., where he went on to earn a master's degree in economics (1979), and then his Ph.D. in sociology (1986). Mashayekhi wrote a dissertation entitled "Dependency as a Problematic: A Study in the Political Implications of the Dependency Perspective." In this unpublished work, which is perhaps his most important contribution to the field of Iranian studies, he argued that Iran's post-1953 intellectual climate was dominated by a form of ideological populism that he labeled as "Third Worldism." Central to Third Worldism was the problematic



(or discourse) of dependency, which blamed Iran's unequal and uneven form of socioeconomic development on its "dependent" attributes. He considered this overemphasis on dependency to be an improper focus and maintained that it led its proponents to downplay the significance of democratic politics.

Mashayekhi's gravitation toward sociology and Marxist politics was in part due to the influence of his maternal uncle, the acclaimed sociologist and educator [Amir-Hosayn Aryanpur](#), whose work on literature, philosophy, and sociology swayed the youth of Mashayekhi's generation, and on whom he contributed an entry to the *Encyclopaedia Iranica*. In the 1970s, Mashayekhi became politically active in the [Confederation of Iranian Students](#) in the United States. After the Islamic Revolution of 1978-79, he joined a student organization in America supporting *Sāzmān-e čerikhā-ye fedā'i-e kalq-e Irān* (see COMMUNISM iii. In Persia after 1953). A number of internal splits occurred during 1980-82, prompting Mashayekhi and a group of like-minded intellectual activists to dedicate their energies to independent, theoretical political work. In 1980, he helped found the Center for Iranian Research and Analysis (CIRA) with a group of graduate students in the Department of Sociology at the American University in Washington, D.C., and later he joined the editorial boards of a number of journals, including *Andiša o enqelāb* (1983-1986; [Figure 2](#)), *Nazm-e novin* (1984-1985; [Figure 3](#)), and *Kankāš* (1987-1997; [Figure 4](#)). His contributions (under the penname M. Armān) covered a wide range of topics, including Marxism, the 1979 revolution, the Iranian socialist movement, the role of intellectuals in politics, and satirical pieces. One particular essay entitled "Diruz, emruz, fardā: arzyābi az se tajroba dar jonbeš-e siyāsi-e kārej az kešvar" provides a self-critical reflection on the political activities of diasporic intellectuals, including his own and those of his colleagues.

Mashayekhi's research was focused primarily on post-revolutionary Iran, in particular, the theoretical shortcomings of the traditional Iranian left and what seemed to him as their inadequate regard for democratic politics. In fact, the question of democratic politics permeated his entire corpus, beginning with his doctoral dissertation and continuing to his last two books. His writings on youth, social movements, civil society, and Islamic reformism all stemmed from this same preoccupation, and sociology provided him with the requisite analytical tools. He also had a lifelong interest in the related topic of political culture, as evidenced in his 1992 co-edited book, with Samih K. Farsoun, entitled *Iran: Political Culture in the Islamic Republic* ([Figure 5](#)), as



well as a number articles, including “Ešārati bar jāygāh-e ejtemā’ī va siyāsi-e ṭanz dar Iran,” *Kankāš*, no. 4, 1989, pp. 151-83), and “Culture of Mistrust” (*Blackwell Companion to Contemporary Islamic Thought*, ed. by Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi’, 2007, pp. 544-61). In these he argues that political culture should not be treated as a static essence or a deterministic cause, but rather as amenable to change arising from the impact of non-cultural factors (state power, class interest, etc.). In his writing, he emerges as a secular cosmopolitan intellectual who is not willing to embrace the rhetorical tropes of nativism or uncritical nationalism.

From 1987 to 2010, Mashayekhi taught a wide range of courses at Georgetown University, George Mason University, George Washington University, St. Mary’s College of Maryland, and the University of Maryland, either as an adjunct or visiting assistant professor of sociology. As an activist scholar, Mashayekhi believed that intellectuals and academics should have an instrumental role in the public sphere. He was a generous and frequent contributor to many blogs, journals, and newspapers, both inside Iran and elsewhere, including *Advār News*, *Āftāb*, *Āraš*, *‘Elm o jāme’ā*, *Goft-o-gu*, *Ham-mihan*, *Irān-e emruz*, *Iran Nameh*, *Irāniān*, *Journal of Iranian Research and Analysis*, *Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, *Kelk*, *Sekulārism-e now*, and *Tehran Bureau*. In addition, he appeared regularly on Persian-language television and radio programs of media outlets such as BBC, Deutsche Welle, Radio Australia, Radio Fardā, and Voice of America, to share his analysis of political and social developments in Iran.

In 2003 he co-founded Etteḥād-e Jomhuri-ķāhān-e Iran (United Republicans of Iran). In 2011 he and two dozen of his colleagues split from this organization to form Sāzmān-e Jomhuri-ķāhān-e Iran. This new organization, formed in the aftermath of the suppression of the 2009 Green Movement (Jonbeš-e sabz) in Iran, maintained as part of its platform a firm commitment to secular-democratic and republican values (including chiefly the separation of religion from government). Mashayekhi believed that the reform initiatives of dissident Islamists had demonstrated their shortcomings and it was now time to articulate a new, post-reformist, secular-democratic discourse and practice. He borrowed the concept of “refolution”—half reform and half revolution—from the British historian, Timothy Garton Ash, to advocate combining radical structural changes (in the cultural, economic, legal, and political domains) with relatively peaceful methods of social change, as had taken place in Central and Eastern Europe in 1989.



In 2010 Mashayekhi was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. He faced his illness with unflinching courage and retained the sense of humor he was known for until the very end. He is buried in the National Memorial Park Floral Gardens in Falls Church, Virginia (Figure 6).

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