**Politics of Public Space: A Study of Valiasr-Enghelab Underpass**

**in Tehran, Iran**


by

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**Abstract**

What are the driving forces in changing public squares and how do different state ideologies shape them? Do neoliberal trends of capitalism, assumed as universal according to Harvey (2013), affect the structure of a public space located in Global South as well?

I situate these questions via an examination of the redevelopment of the Valiasr-Enghelab intersection, one of the most critical and important public spaces, located in Tehran, Iran. Studying different aspects of recent changes in the Valiasr-Enghelab intersection in Tehran is a great opportunity to investigate Iran's urban and social structure. Accordingly, I apply the classic political economic framework of urban geography as a model to study how built environments in Tehran have changed over time and transformed public spaces into more commodified areas. While applying the political economic framework is operational in the Valiasr-Enghelab intersection, ignoring the role of the specific socio-cultural context is impossible. Hence, in another section of this major paper, I shift from my previous analysis of the urban development process by de-economizing the theoretical framework and taking into account the social aspects with a particular focus on the impact of security, as an extra-economic element, in shaping the Valiasr-Enghelab intersection. I investigate different controlling measures against public space, which go beyond systematic exclusion and universal approach. Finally, the examination of economic and extra-economic elements in the redevelopment of the Valiasr-Enghelab intersection provides a sufficient ground for questioning how this project relates to the right to the city.

Two central arguments direct this major paper. First, besides all the incitements of the capital market, assurance of people's devotion to the Islamic and revolutionary values shapes an inherent tendency for rulers toward controlling bodies, behaviors, and finally minds. Second, in the context of a city like Tehran and an important public space like the Valiasr-Enghelab intersection, the government seeks to cut the vital relationship between residents and the city. Disrupting citizens' right to the city, the government could shape the making of people and social relations it intended.

**Foreword**

This major paper is elaborated based on my initial thoughts within my plan of study.

My area of concentration, in my plan of study, focused on the securitization of public squares and its effects on public life. As I pointed out, my interests lie in the pursuit of public space, public life, and their relationship with the built urban environment. I aimed to investigate how built environments have changed over time and transformed public spaces to more privatized areas with security regulations. Hence, my plan focused on different structural and ideological factors that contribute to physical changes in the built urban environment that particularly affect public life and social interactions.

I perused these questions in my major paper via an examination of the redevelopment of the Valiasr-Enghelab intersection, one of the most critical and important public spaces, located in Tehran, Iran. Investigating physical changes in the built environment of the Valiasr-Enghelab underpass, I examined the state's efforts for achieving more efficient controlling measures, censuring the bodies and suppressing the right of presence in public spaces.

My plan of study contained three components: public space, privatization of public space, and securitization of public space. I selected Valiasr-Enghelab intersection as an important public space located in Tehran. The urbanization history of Tehran during the last century reveals that the city has been more or less within the same global urbanization framework, i.e., a framework which has produced a sovereign urbanization dominated by the circulation of capital. Furthermore, I concluded that recent transformations in the physical and functional aspects of the Valiasr-Enghelab intersection are not only propelled by commercialization trends but a hidden layer of securitization by controlling bodies, behaviors, and finally minds, in accordance with Islamic and revolutionary values. In addition, in the third section of this major paper, I examined how and to what extent this project enables or inhibits residents' right to the city; the right to reclaim and reassert impartial and equal social relations into the dominant political-economic ideologies.

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# Introduction

There are specific parts of cities which contain collective memories due to their particular history, socio-cultural geography, or physical attributes. The Valiasr-Enghelab intersection in Tehran is one of these places for different Iranian generations. The special location of the area along with its history and a collection of socio-cultural functions in or around the site have turned this area into a significant and memorable spot in Tehran. This area encompasses some of the most reputable universities, bookstore area, cafes, and performance centers.

As an architect student and long-time resident of Tehran, I have spent a lot of time in this area. My youth memories are tied to this area and its neighboring streets, stamping ground cafes, cinemas, theatres, or simply walking through Enghelab Street overflowing with bookstores. To me, besides the attractive cultural aspects of the site, what differentiates this area from other parts of Tehran – as a car-driven metropolis – is that I experienced all these moments as a pedestrian. A pedestrian who dare to alter the shortest route from point A to B inside the city, experience unpredictable, and explore herself while navigating within the city. I even share some resembling memories with my father who has spent his student life in this area as well. Furthermore, this area has witnessed some important collective political memories such as the 2009 Iranian Green Movement, student protests or social campaigns, and women's civil disobedience like recent anti-hijab campaign known as 'women of Enghelab Street'.

Despite the importance of the site and emphasis of all of the city plans related to this site on fostering pedestrian presence and restricting vehicle flow, in 2013 a massive physical change happened in the Valiasr-Enghelab intersection. Constructing a pedestrian underpass and implementing guardrails around the intersection, the Development Department of Tehran Municipality claimed to mitigate the heavy traffic and solve safety issues regarding interconnection of various types of transportation routes and pedestrians. This interference, which occurred without any public participation, eliminates pedestrians from this vibrant urban space by channeling them

underground. The citizens, as the proclaimed users of the city, did not have the slightest role in taking decision in this regard.

As an architect, I have been involved in Tehran's urban projects for nearly a decade. The most controversial question in different cases for me is why we have lost many public spaces and how the remaining spaces have become so highly controlled. Hence, in this major paper, I examine the formation and implementation process of Valiasr-Enghelab underpass, as a case study located in Tehran. Unfolding the process of shaping this underpass in Tehran, I intend to explore the ruling order behind the capitalist system along with the ideological intentions and socio-cultural conditions behind its architectural design. An architectural design which produces highly securitized environment with a different notion of public space and public life. This examination assists me to identify how changes in the built environment have transformed the uses of the space and its possibilities as a public space and finally, how this project relates to the right to the city discourse.

In this major paper, I seek for three specific research questions:

- What is the formation and implementation process of Valiasr-Enghelab underpass?

- What are the economic intentions and socio-cultural conditions behind its architectural design?

- How this decision regarding an important public space relates to the right to the city discourse?

In order to investigate these questions, additional research questions must be addressed as follows: What are driving forces in changing public squares? How do different state ideologies shape them? Do neoliberal trends of capitalism, assumed as universal according to Harvey (2013), affect the structure of the Valiasr-Enghelab intersection as well? How has the securitization of public spaces changed the built environment in a way that transformed the uses of these spaces and its possibilities as a "public" space? How have these urban forms transformed as a response to highly securitized public spaces? What kind of social and spatial controls are applied differently to these squares? How spatial and social control measures particularly affect

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the publicness of the squares, public life, and social interactions? Which groups of people are mostly prohibited from using the squares through security? How is public life being extracted from public spaces? How is public life transformed? Is it moving elsewhere? How do people feel about the increasing securitization of public squares?

In order to get a better understanding of the specific context I am working on, firstly, I conduct a historical analysis of the case study's background and transformation process.

Then, in the first section, I apply the classic political economic framework of urban geography as a model to examine how built environments in Tehran have changed over time and transformed public spaces into more commodified areas. This process assists me in identifying the correlations between these features and Tehran development. Studying Lefebvre's and Harvey's political economic approach towards urban geography, I investigate different aspects of their trajectory in Tehran urban context generally and the Valiasr-Enghelab intersection more specifically.

Following Lefebvre (1991), Harvey (2012) has focused on the urban development process based on the production circuit. Hence, Harvey's center of attention was mostly focused on the Global North as a paradigmatic way to explain state-market relations. Global South scholars have tried to bring in a new understanding of urban planning in the Global South. The result comes up against dominant notions, through a post-modernist frame, which defies that there is nothing as universal or social totality (Khosla, 2017). Hence, application of the classic political economic framework to study a case study in Tehran leads to a better understanding of how commercialized trends, in spite of defining in the context of the capitalist societies, still play an important role in the development of a city located in the Global South.

While this political economic framework is operational in analyzing my case study, I believe that ignoring the role of the specific socio-cultural context in which I am conducting this research is impossible. Hence, in the second section, I shift from my previous analysis of urban process by de-economizing the theoretical framework and take into account the social aspects with a particular focus on the censured body. I discuss how physical changes in the built urban environment has taken place not only

because of the economic-spatial issues but also according to the issues related to the body and the criminalization process. As opposed to seeing the body as a dematerialized, cultural, performative, discursive, or essentially non-material thing, my goal is to bring these various dimensions together into a materialist framework.

Examination of the political-economic and socio-cultural aspects of recent changes in the Valiasr-Enghelab intersection, assist me to identify how this underpass relates to the right to the city. In the third section, I intend to apply the main debates around the right to the city, based on the works of Lefebvre (1996), to Valiasr-Enghelab underpass. This process leads to examining how and to what extent this project enables or inhibits residents' right to the city; the right to reclaim and reassert impartial and equal social relations into the dominant political-economic ideologies.

To achieve the above-mentioned studies, my qualitative methodology is operationalized through a literature review of scholarly work and institutional documents, site visits, and semi-structured interviews. While observation and interviews will shape my general impression and perception of the sites, the precise literature review will mainly assist me to go beyond that and shape theoretical discussions to analyze the existing data and produce a comprehensive knowledge regarding my research questions.

Hence, to investigate my research questions I first undertake a careful and critical review of related literature and documents on political, social, material/physical, ideological representations of the phenomenon generally and in my specific case study. I will review scholarly writings in both English and Persian in order to identify key debates in the public space literature. There are documentaries and previous studies on my case study enabling me to analyze different factors, including the visual, historical, political and socioeconomic elements related to the case's publicness. I also review different grey literature (official publications) such as planning documentation. The precise literature review mainly shapes my theoretical discussions to analyze the existing data and produce a comprehensive knowledge regarding my research questions. Regarding the Persian literature I have chosen to use, all the parts are my translations. Most of these parts are not word-by-word translations. However, I

translated the exact words in two cases – which is mentioned in their citation – but there is no page number because they are part of an interview or online paper.

As a long-time resident of Tehran, I am already familiar with the Valiasr-Enghelab intersection but I visited it again in summer 2017. The goal of these informal day visits was to get a better understanding of the uses of the space. When possible, I took photographs and recorded notes in a journal on the site or after visits). Particular attention was given to the way the spaces are controlled, patrolled and rendered exclusive.

I interviewed with urban planners, theorists and conversant friends in order to discern and identify the intended notions behind the conception and perceptions of the public spaces, theoretical issues such as driving forces and ideologies, and their experiences as citizens. During my most recent visit in Tehran (June 15 to August 15, 2017), I conducted semi-structured interviews with two urban planners and officials in order to get a better understanding of the intended notions behind the conception and perceptions of the public spaces. I asked questions about the redevelopment of the Valiasr-Enghelab intersection, its main principles and goals, its relationships to the rest of the city, its main usages and security features and issues. I also interviewed three urban scholars and experts to investigate more theoretical issues such as driving forces, ideologies, trends and implications of the increased control of public spaces. In speaking with this group of experts, I framed this discussion through the right to the city and the right to public space in the city. Furthermore, I interviewed three friends who had previous experiences or knowledge with the site (before or after redevelopment). These conversations provided me with their perceptions and impressions of the site in general and its security measures. With the participant's permission, these 1-hr interviews were audio recorded and later selectively transcribed and translated. Furthermore, I had brief unstructured (and anecdotal) conversations with pedestrians on the site regarding their experiences and opinions of the intersection before and after underpass execution.

# 1. Case study background

From Iran's Islamic Revolution of 1979 and the subsequent turbulent decades of the 1980s and 1990s to the Iranian women's movements in the 21st century and the resurgence of the street protests after the 2009 Iranian Green Movement, the intersection of Valiasr Street and Enghelab Street has played a critical role in Tehran as the main centre of revolutions (Tashakor, 2014, my translation). In order to get a better understanding of my case study's background, I first present a brief history of Valiasr Street which have had an important role in shaping Tehran's identity and form. Then, I present a brief portrait of Enghelab Street as an archetype of a political space. Finally, the specific intersection of these two important streets is described in terms of its history, features and current critical changes.

Tehran, located in the Alborz Mountains, has been the capital of Iran since 1785. The city has developed during the last century by the amalgamation of three historical centers, Ray (in the south), Tehran (in the center), and Shemiran (in the north). Valiasr Street played an important role in connecting these historical centers (Mokhtari et al., 2014, my translation).

Valiasr Street has undergone three historical periods through which it transformed from a simple alley to one of Tehran's main thoroughfares. During the Qajar dynasty (1785 to 1925), it was a narrow alley running between the gardens of Qajar city. After the rulership changed hands from the Qajar dynasty to the Pahlavi dynasty in 1925, the alley was redeveloped as Pahlavi Road. Pahlavi Road was built in order to shorten the distance between Tehran and Shemiran and to connect Marble Palace to Sadabaad Palace, both constructed by the Pahlavi dynasty. Residences and activities around Pahlavi Road have gradually transformed the road into a street. From the late 1960's, no one referred to the path as "road"; the name Pahlavi Street replaced Pahlavi Road. The third historical period is related to the 1979 Islamic Revolution and recent redevelopments of the street. After the revolution, the street name was initially changed to Mossadeq – after a former nationalist prime minister – and later to Valiasr, the name of the 12th Shia Imam. In this period, after an initial recession due to the changes in population and social behaviour, a new era of urban life started in the street.

Finally, in 2011, Iran's Cultural Heritage Organization registered sycamores-lined Valiasr Street on the National Heritage List (Mokhtari et al., 2014, my translation) for both its historical and commercial significance.

Valiasr Street is embedded in the memory of everyone who lives or visits Tehran. This 17-kilometer long path links the old southernmost part of the city to its northernmost part. The creative design of this street is such that after eighty years of existence, it is still the most important north-south axis of the capital (Mokhtari et al., 2014, my translation). As Asayesh (2014) states, famous Italian tourist Peter Delavale who traveled to Iran 400 years ago described Tehran as the city of sycamores in specific reference to Valiasr Street. Valiasr Street with large numbers of aged sycamores planted on both sides, widespread streams and sidewalks, and the Alborz Mountains in the background, divides Tehran into eastern and western parts (Asayesh, 2014, my translation). Passing through various historical neighborhoods, Valiasr Street transforms from an urban passage into the commercial artery of the city and an important urban destination, Tehran's very own museum of architectural history (Mokhtari et al., 2014, my translation).



Figure 1: The oldest color photo of Valiasr Street in 1960
(Source: eboniran.com/mag)

Figure 2: Valiasr Street in Tehran – current situation
(Source: FARTAK News)

The long stretch of Valiasr Street has resulted in many intersections with some main east-west axes. Many intersections have been the place of political or social movements in specific times. One of the main east-west streets constructed over the city's development was Shahreza Street. During the protests leading to the 1979 Iran Islamic Revolution, Shahreza Street served as the location for public gatherings and marches and became known as the major socio-cultural axis of the city (Mokhtari et al., 2014, my translation). After the revolution's victory, the street name Shahreza was changed to Enghelab, which translates into "revolution" in Persian language. Hence, Enghelab Street, both in its name and history, has been the most vivid example of a political space in Tehran (Rezaee Rad, 2012). During the revolution, Valiasr Street took the supporting role engaging with the Enghelab axis. Valiasr intersection, now the stamping grounds of intellectuals and students with the Student Park and City Theater, became the focus of uprisings (Mokhtari et al., 2014, my translation).

Since then, the Valiasr-Enghelab intersection retains its status as Tehran's center of gravity. If you live in Tehran and want to find the city's socio-political pulse or know what is going on in the city, what are upcoming books, festivals, or socio-cultural events, you undoubtedly go Valiasr-Enghelab intersection. In fact, over the past 39 years following the Iran's Islamic Revolution, this part of the city has always served to update people on political, social, and cultural events (Tashakor, 2014, my translation).

This intersection is a highly crowded node where culture, everyday life, and social protests mingle together. The City Theatre is located in the southern part of this intersection. The cylindrical building of the City Theater, along with its surrounding open area, is one of the few public spaces of the city and has had a great importance in shaping the intersection's identity. Right next to the City Theatre is the Student Park with its three different faces: the theatre center, students' stamping grounds, and a center for queers. Moving to the east sits the Poly-Technique University, a university with a historically important role in students' political movements. In the west part of the intersection, Tehran University has been and remains the heart of the gatherings and protests. There is a bookstore area near the intersection along Enghelab Street. These

important elements have played a great role in defining the intersection and its surrounded environment (Tashakor, 2014, my translation).
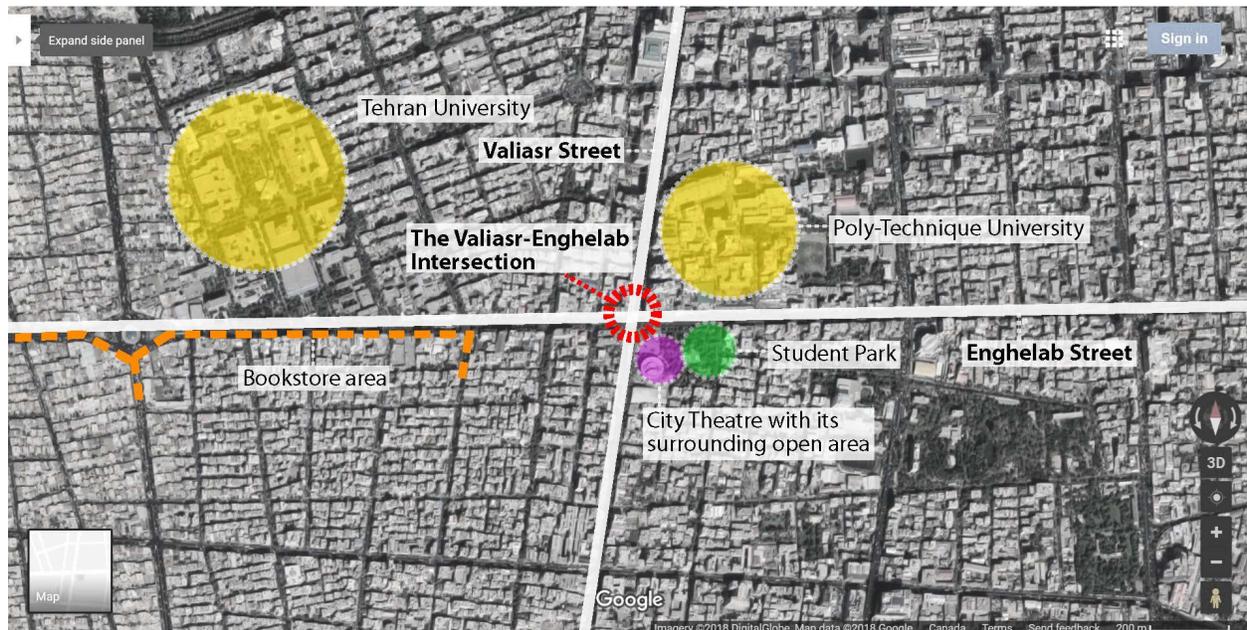


Figure 3: The Valiasr-Enghelab intersection and its surrounded environment
(Source: Google Map adapted by author)

Furthermore, at this location, a class differentiation between the middle class and working class spatially divides Tehran into upper-Tehran and lower-Tehran (Asayesh, 2014, my translation). This class differentiation is the manifestation of inequalities, which appeared with the north-south dichotomy of the city's population. While the affluent people gradually migrated to the northern part of the city, others were confined to the historical southern part (Tehrani, 2015, my translation). Hence, this intersection is also the conjoining point of class differentiation and socio-political movements (Asayesh, 2014, my translation).

Figure 4: The intersection southeast area, City Theatre's open area after presidential election
(Source: ISNA PHOTO, Peyman Yazdani)

Figure 5: The intersection northeast area, people gathering around peddlers
(Source: ISNA PHOTO, Hamid Amlashi)

The Valiasr-Enghelab intersection is known as the civil heart of Tehran, anchoring cultural and academic activities. All of the city plans related to this important site concentrate on restricting vehicle flow while encouraging pedestrian presence so as to maintain vitality in this part of the city (Tashakor, 2014, my translation). However, despite numerous specialized studies privileging pedestrians, a pedestrian underpass was inaugurated at this intersection in 2013 to facilitate vehicular flow. The hasty action of the Development Department of Tehran Municipality included the implementation of guardrails around the intersection. This measure de-facto eliminated pedestrians from this vibrant urban space by channelling them underground, cutting off pedestrian continuous access through the surface intersection. Furthermore, there are no elevators or facilities for disabled, veterans, (wo)men with strollers, or seniors, in the north-west and south-east of the project, which makes the accessibility for these groups difficult if not impossible – despite the growing rights' narratives of these groups. Furthermore, in the 5-year operational plan of Tehran Municipality (2014-2018), prepared by city council, other important squares have been identified as targets for transformation through pedestrian underpasses as well (Bahamestan Group, 2014a, my translation).

Figure 6: Guardrails around the intersection
(Source: Iranpejvak.com)

Figure 7: The underpass
(Source: meidaan.com)

The executive planning consultant in charge of Valiasr-Enghelab intersection underpass justifies the project with numbers. According to statistics, he defended, approximately 14,500 pedestrians, 5,900 cars and 250 buses passed through the intersection in the peak traffic hours, causing a major traffic jam in the area. Some experts have identified the location of Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) stations right in the middle of the main intersection of the city as the primary reason of creating the traffic jam. The BRT stations built in 2010 exacerbated the traffic (Bahamestan Group, 2014b, my translation). As explained by an urban policy scholar and social activist interviewed in Tehran:

> 4-5 months before opening the project, the intersection became a disaster due to the heavy traffic. The underlying reason of this heavy traffic was the wrong location of BRT stations right in the middle of the street. Furthermore, the manipulation of the traffic lights, 4-5 months before the project's opening, created a false traffic and public discontent. By these acts, the municipality wanted to make the project a public demand. A politician does not act against public desire. The mayor wanted to be popular and sought for higher positions (Participant 05, my translation).

To address traffic congestion, various solutions were studied such as implementing a car overpass, a pedestrian bridge, or a car underpass. A pedestrian or car overpass was impossible due to the existing skyline and City Theatre building which is globally recognized and nationally registered as an important masterpiece. A vehicle underpass was impracticable as well due to the massive volume of underground urban utilities such as the existing metro station structure and Tehran's underground water services network.  Accordingly, the underpass's executive consultant concluded that the pedestrian underpass was the best solution to address traffic congestion (Bahamestan Group, 2014b, my translation).

Hence, the interconnection of various types of transportation routes such as subway, BRT and taxis became the excuse for Tehran Municipality to split the intersection and build the underpass in order to facilitate traffic and to concern pedestrian's safety issues (Bahamestan 02, 2014, my translation).



Figure 8: Interconnection of various types of transportation routes
(Source: Mehr Agency, edited by author)
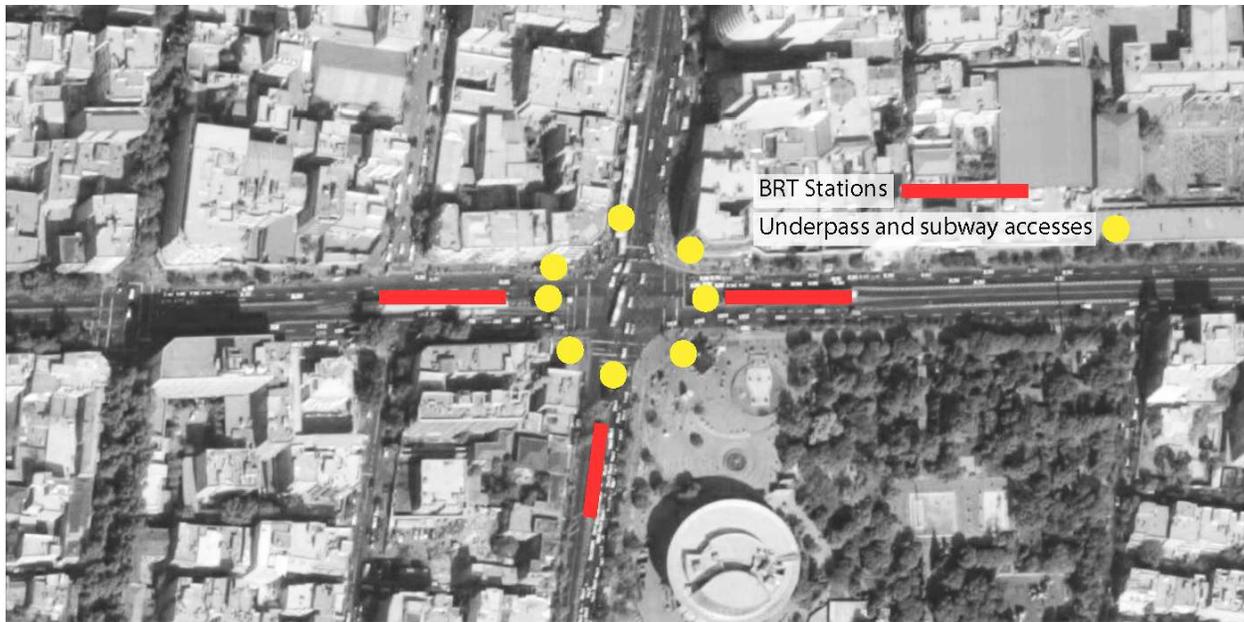
Figure 9: Interconnection of various types of transportation routes right inside the intersection
(Source: produced by author)

Another interview's participant, who is an everyday user of the intersection (and holds a Master of urban management) defines this project as the result of the municipality's engineering point of view.

> The Municipality's approach to the city is confined to the commercial and engineering attitudes without any aesthetic and social trends. The only point is low cost and high income (Participant 06, my translation).

The approval process of the project and its assignment to the consultant company occurred extremely fast and without any public participation.

> This project has been approved by the city council in less than a month, and the previous proposal on the site, which aimed at making the area a public square with pedestrian priorities, was canceled immediately. Without offering any bid, the project was given to a consultant, which is related to Islamic revolutionary guard and claimed to be the only one to have enough knowledge of existing underground mechanical utilities (Participant 06, my translation).

The intersection's underpass, with its 7m wide, 3m high, and 3700 m2 area, has 14 entrance and exit escalators, located at the four corners of the intersection and existing BRT stations. This underpass is connected to the existing subway as well (Hamshahrionline, 2013). At the ground level, the intersection is now surrounded by continuous metal guardrails directing people to the underground underpass.

Since the construction of the underpass four years ago, the Valiasr-Enghelab intersection has been emptied of pedestrians. Although city officials claim that this project facilitated the movement of vehicles and protected pedestrians, some urban and social experts believe that the goal of this project was not limited to traffic mitigation but rather can be better framed as a sort of militarization of public space obliterating past social and political mobilizing history and divesting the intersection of any future protest (Tashakor, 2014, my translation).



Figure 10: The Valiasr-Enghelab intersection empty of pedestrians
(Source: photo by author)

## 2. The Political Economy of Public Space as applied to Tehran

Public spaces are seen as hallmarks of democracy but they are increasingly commercialized, privatized and policed to be aligned with neoliberal and profit-based trends. In the early 1970s, Henri Lefebvre (1991) initially theorized the commodification of urban space, which was later extended by David Harvey (2012), Edward Soja (1996)

and Andy Merrifield (2006), among others. Lefebvre (1991) called our attention to the dimension of space as an important driving force and brought a political economic frame into urban development theory. This political economic frame was influenced by a Marxist understanding of capital and the function of capital at the urban scale. The important notion which emerged in this period of time involved the expansion of urban studies' understanding of profit. In his book *Rebel Cities*, Harvey (2012) explains how capitalist surplus is produced through the production of space.

Harvey's (2012) political economic framework cannot be applied to different contexts without regard to their specific socio-cultural aspects. In this section, I propose an analysis which demonstrates that commercialized trends still have a drastic role in the development of Tehran. Accordingly, I apply the classic political economic framework of urban geography as a model to study how built environments in Tehran have changed over time and transformed public spaces into more commodified areas. The impact of socio-cultural agents on the development of a particular public space in Tehran is investigated in another section of this paper.

To develop a better understanding of neoliberal capitalist impulses in cities, I start by presenting a brief history of Tehran urbanization. Then, I examine some important features of the classical economic framework as they account for the shaping of public spaces in Tehran. I frame my analysis using some of Lefebvre (2003) and Harvey's (2012) theories of urban revolution, accumulation by dispossession, and lived space versus conceived space. I identify the correlations between these features and Tehran development. Studying recent changes at the Valiasr-Enghelab intersection, one of the most important public spaces in Tehran, provides a perfect ground for investigating the political economic structure of Tehran.

## A brief urbanization history of Tehran

The urbanization history of Tehran during the last century reveals that the city has been more or less within the same global urbanization framework, i.e., a framework which has produced a sovereign urbanization dominated by the circulation of capital. In the early twentieth century, Tehran's urban form was influenced by modernization.

Traditionally, Tehran was a neighborhood-based city formed according to religious and ethnic orientations, and regardless of class. Following Naser al-Din Shah Qajar's order (King of Persia from 1848 to 1896) to expand the city, this traditional form gradually transformed into the modern forms of urbanization. Accordingly, the first manifestation of inequality appeared with the north-south segmentation of the city's population (Tehrani, 2015, my translation).

This process was deepened during the era of nationalist and secular Reza Shah Pahlavi's (King of Iran from 1925 to 1941) modernization program. With the emergence of the oil industry, the working class (in the Marxist sense of the word) formed and the result was the worsening of the north-south polarization of the city. During this period, Tehran's urban form was changed and European-style boulevards were built – a process that can be read as Tehran's Haussmannization. Implementing the city's regionalization plan, Tehran's neighborhoods declined and class distinction became more apparent. Thus, Tehran encountered a top-down urbanization whose main objectives were facilitating the transfer of commodities and services alongside support for the market and centralization of power (Tehrani, 2015, my translation).

Madanipour (1999: 60-61) describes this new city's regionalization plan as follows:

> The land use pattern in the old city was a functionally-defined system organized in separate quarters, with the citadel and residential areas, bazaars and mosques. Now it has changed to a mixture of uses in the city centre and predominance of single use areas on the periphery… Upon this pattern, an orthogonal network of roads was imposed, an open matrix which would ease the flow of people and resources into and around urban space, changing the movement pattern from pedestrian to vehicular.

This process continued to the mid-1960s. At this time, oil revenues suddenly increased and capital circulation, more than ever, overflowed to Tehran. Tehran transformed into a center of consumption and Western lifestyle (Tehrani, 2015, my translation).

The 1979 Islamic revolution arose from inequality and the north-south dichotomy in highly polarized Tehran (Tehrani, 2015, my translation). However, despite the main goal of the Islamic revolution seeking to redistribute wealth and power in favor of rural areas, the centralization process continued in Tehran (Madanipour, 1999).

In the years after the revolution, a law named *Municipal Fiscal Self-Rule Act* was passed on the self-regulation of municipalities. According to this law, municipalities had to absorb the costs of urban management by relying on their own resources. From this point on, the management of cities, starting in Tehran and then spreading to all cities, turned into the management of a business enterprise. Therefore, city managers have sought the maximum profit from the resources available in the cities. Approximately 70% of urban resources come from selling density (i.e., constructing beyond the regulations) and rezoning residential spaces into administrative or commercial ones (Sedaghat, 2017a, my translation). This is an economic structure based on selling the city.

Khatam and Keshavarzian (2016: n.p.) define the context of *Municipal Fiscal Self-Rule Act* as follow:

> The budget deficits caused by the eight-year war with Iraq and the dramatic decline of oil revenue after 1985 was followed by the approval of the "Municipal Fiscal Self-Rule Act" that targeted expenditures of all large cities in the name of austerity. This policy cut the national budget allocation for large municipalities in a span of four years (1988-1991). The objective was to save the central government outlays for social welfare, however, it became a challenge for municipalities that had few tools to raise their own revenue.

The decline in tourism along with the decline in other industrial sectors propelled the construction sector and the construction fees to act as the "economic engine for Tehran's economic growth" (Khatam and Keshavarzian, 2016: n.p.).

## The urban revolution: switching capital into the secondary circuit

The story of Tehran's recent urban development can be traced back to Henri Lefebvre's book *The Urban Revolution,* published in 1970. As Merrifield (2006) states Lefebvre's idea of the urban revolution grew out of the 1968 turbulence (in Paris and elsewhere), when capitalism lost its stable situation. Lefebvre (2003) identifies the second circuit of capital as a remedy for absorbing the shocks of the capitalist structure. This secondary circuit of capital is the real estate in which capital could reinstate, reproduce and reinvent itself. Lefebvre calls the process of shifting the capital from industry to real estate the urban revolution (replacing the industrial revolution). For Lefebvre (cited in Merrifield, 2006: 87) "urbanization annihilates time and space" in the post-industrial era, and entrepreneurial urbanization became the substitute for industrialization. Accordingly, the organization of the city and society is determined by entrepreneurs and developers, and not urban planners. Lefebvre (2003) studies the impacts of this new order in different scales -- from the global scale which contains the most abstract relations like capital markets to the private scale which includes people's everyday lives (Merrifield, 2006).

In the *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre (1991) elaborates his previous ideas through the use of a spatialized and Marxist frame. Lefebvre (1991) examines the process of turning cities into commodities and people into proletarized objects during the post-industrial era. Accordingly, space acts as the ultimate "object of exchange" (Lefebvre cited in Merrifield, 2006: 97). This process confines the city to being "a mere habitat, signifies the loss of the city as oeuvre, a loss of integration and participation in urban life" (Merrifield, 2006: 69).

Harvey (1978) defines three different capital circuits. The primary circuit of capital is based on the Marxist theory of capital accumulation and production of values and surplus values. Due to the tendency of capital towards overaccumulation, the second circuit of capital comes into the equation as a solution. This secondary circuit of capital is the built environment. According to the large-scale and long-term process of production and consumption in the built environment, capital can fixate itself and delay the crashes. Through the secondary circuit of capital, entrepreneurs and developers

basically turn space into a commodity through the rentier process and the accumulation of land (Harvey, 2012). When the built environment is involved in both processes of production and consumption, the difference between commodity as use value versus commodity as an exchange value, as Marx argued, now is to some extent overlapping (Harvey, 1978). Harvey (1978) explains the essential role of the state in switching capital flows from the primary circuit to the secondary circuit of capital. Because of the large-scale and long-term investments in the built environment, individuals are not usually able to switch the capital flows by themselves. The state, as a mediator between different fractions of capital, facilitates the process of capital flow by supplying "fictional capital" such as credit system (Harvey, 1978: 107).

In spite of defining the urban revolution in the context of the capitalist societies, the recent history of Tehran urbanization is a witness of restructuring the city and consigning it to the financial capital. Tehran has never been an industrialized city to go through the same process in capital switching from the first circuit into the second circuit of capital. Instead, the oil industry boom and the money overflowing from it have appropriated the ground for commodifying the city. Put another way, Tehran took a shortcut into "the urban revolution" without experiencing full-fledged industrialization. According to Sedaghat (2017b, my translation), continuous destruction and rebuilding has been the ongoing mechanism for creating surplus value in Tehran and other large cities of Iran. Tehrani (2015, my translation, n.p.) describes Tehran as the country's main center of speculation, capital circulation, and accumulation though urban development:

> The sky, which is a public property, has become the main revenue source for the municipality and is being sold to the citizens under the name of density; private banks and malls are growing everywhere; towers hit the sky in the northern part of the city; the real estate drives the city; and Porsche, Alfa Romeo, Maserati, and all kinds of sport utility vehicles flaunt in the streets.

## Accumulation by dispossession

David Harvey (2003) expanded the concept of "primitive accumulation", initially proposed by Marx, under the heading of "accumulation by dispossession." Marx (1867) defined the primitive accumulation as a violent and predatory process that, in the early modern period, dispossessed people from their means of production such as land. When people were dispossessed of the self-subsistence economy, they had to come to the market. Therefore, primitive accumulation proletarianized people and changed social relations in accordance to the capitalist structure, long bourgeois, and proletariat classes. Harvey (2003) extends the notion of accumulation developed by Marx and argues that primitive accumulation is an ongoing process that has grown increasingly more prominent under neoliberal economy. As Glassman (2006: 620) remarks, privatization of public assets becomes the "cutting edge of accumulation by dispossession."

The economy of the Islamic Republic has specific features in the years after the revolution and especially during the years after the war. One of these features is 'dispossession', which has been a decisive factor in Iran's economy. During the first decade of the revolution, this dispossession mainly occurred in form of confiscation. As Iranmehr (2013) states, six months after the revolution, the Revolutionary Council passed the "protection and development of Iran's industries" law. The law legitimized the government for confiscating the property of a number of powerful capitalists and family-owned companies.  Except for a few industry owners who were related or connected to the previous regime, others were victims of the extreme communist tendencies of the revolution at its early stages (Iranmehr, 2013, my translation). After the first decade of the Islamic revolution, expropriation reshaped in the form of conquest of public properties and their conversion into private ones at a large scale of urban management (Sedaghat, 2017a, my translation). Khatam (2016) explains this process as a result of the fiscal deficit caused by the eight-year Iran-Iraq war and decline of the oil revenue. Compensating this deficit, the municipality allowed the supported construction (in the name of intensification) as well as the transformation of green and public lands into private or commercial properties without consulting residents (Khatam,

2016). For instance, public spaces such as gardens and green spaces all over the city were converted into private properties for further investment and construction. Accordingly, great wealth was obtained and accumulated through the process of dispossessing people of their public spaces (Sedaghat, 2017a, my translation). Khatam (2016) describes this process as the "commodification of urban space, and environmental degradation in Tehran".

Back to the Valiasr-Enghelab intersection as an example of expropriated public space, different groups were dispossessed from using this once culturally vibrant space. The Valiasr-Enghelab intersection, once one of the most populous public spaces of Tehran, has now been captured by technocrats and urban engineers. This intersection, which previously allowed social and public encounters, is today expunged of people. Here, spontaneous consumption of street space has been transferred to a planned and controlled underground (Tehrani, 2015, my translation). This is the very notion of Glassman's (2006: 620) "cutting edge of accumulation by dispossession" as previously articulated by Harvey (2003).

## Lived space versus conceived space

Lefebvre's (1991) theory of production of space is based on a "spatial triad." Lefebvre (1991) categorizes space into three ways: representations of space, spaces of representation, and spatial practices. The representations of space (or conceived space), in their homogenizing manner driven by profits, embody the power relations and top-down strategies of entrepreneurial management. These are the dominant spaces of a capitalist society like buildings and infrastructures conceived by entrepreneurs and developers. Opposing the representations of space stand the spaces of representation. Spaces of representation (or lived space) are the field of actual everyday lives of people, such as houses and public squares, where social practices take place shape/and outside of dominant conceptions. According to Lefebvre (1991), the spatial practices (or perceived space) perform as a medium between the conceived and lived space – though the concept of spatial practices is less clear. Lefebvre (1991) continues by elaborating the ongoing challenges between conceived and lived spaces. In contrast to the homogenizing power of the conceived space, the lived space insists on a

heterogeneity of practices and "the right to difference" (Lefebvre, 1991: 115). Lefebvre's (1991) theory of lived space and right to difference is originated from Nietzsche's preferences of difference and lived space over the abstract-conceived space (Merrifield, 2006).

The dominating notion of representations of space is an obvious feature of Iran's urban development. Sedaghat (2017a, my translation) declares that the main spheres of Iran's large cities are now assigned to the processes of financial growth and capital investment, as well as the constant propagation of the lifestyle and ideology, desired by the rulers. Therefore, instead of responding to the residents' needs, urban projects are basically assumed as profitable investment opportunities for capital growth or political-ideological propaganda. Tehrani (2017, my translation) identifies the order that ruled in Tehran as only emerging from and governed by sovereignty and authority. The sole purpose of such order is the reproduction of capital through the control of public spaces and the maintenance of unequal power relations.

The Valiasr-Enghelab intersection, one of the most important public spaces in Tehran, is a good example for elaborating how lived spaces can be transformed or reclaimed into conceived spaces. The intersection is known as the civil heart of Tehran, anchoring cultural and academic activities (Tashakor, 2014, my translation). Referring to Lefebvre's (1991) definitions of spaces of representation, the Valiasr-Enghelab intersection was probably Tehran's best example of a collective urban lived space.

However, despite many specialized studies privileging pedestrians, the Valiasr-Enghelab intersection pedestrian underpass was inaugurated in 2013 to facilitate vehicular flow at the cost of controlling and eliminating pedestrians from this vibrant urban space (Bahamestan, 2014, my translation). In contrast to the previously lived space, the Valiasr-Enghelab intersection has, as intended, become emptied of pedestrians. Escalators all around the intersection are now channelling people to the underground maze overflowing with low-quality retails. Closed-circuit television cameras are scattered all around the underground path to make the space further controlled and recorded (Tehrani, 2017, my translation). These changes in the structure of a public

space clearly portray a particular representation of space; one space that is highly controlled and controllable.

# 3. The Cultural Politics of Public Space

The technical perception of planning practice results in a universal point of view, which tends to define every different situation within the limited perspective of its political economic framework. While applying the political economic framework is operational in different cases, as I pointed out previously, I believe that ignoring the role of the specific socio-cultural context is impossible.

Put another way, I opine that it is not possible to consider any reality as 'universal' fact in this variegated world. Hence, in this section, I shift from my previous analysis of the urban development process by de-economizing the theoretical framework and taking into account the social aspects with a particular focus on the censured body.  To do so, I start by presenting a brief background theory, which compares universal and local approaches. Then, I seek to delve more deeply into the contextual analysis of the Valiasr-Enghelab intersection in terms of its history and social relations as to reveal the ideological intentions behind its architectural design, which produces highly securitized environment with a different notion of public space and public life. Then, I investigate different controlling measures against public space, which go beyond systematic exclusion and universal approach. Furthermore, I consider how propaganda and advertisement have impacts on people's minds and everyday lives. Subsequently, I discuss how the physical changes in Iran's built environment – and the Valiasr-Enghelab intersection specifically – have taken place not only because of the economic-spatial issues, but also according to the issues related to the body and its criminalization process. Finally, I conclude that the control of public space occurs to ensure that the body and behaviours of individuals do abide by the authoritarian rules of the Islamic Republic government.

## Background theory

Regarding the production process in which urban spaces are shaped, three important driving forces are recognizable: economy as the first circuit, space as the second circuit,

and social relations as the third circuit. While thinkers of the first group considered economy as the main driving force in shaping the cities or society, geographers and critical urban thinkers of the second group – such as Harvey (1978) – brought the dimension of space and territory into the equation. In fact, they considered spatial production as a driving force as important as economic production.  The main debates of the third group of thinkers are centered in social relations. They argue that urban development forces are not necessarily class- or territory-based, but they can be shaped by gender, race, and sexual issues (Khosla, personal communication, January 10, 2017). Hence, while the theoretical base of the first and second group scholars fall into a universal and more pervasive approach, the third group of thinkers believe in the deterministic role of specific characteristics shaping every single place in the world.

Roy (2015) is extremely critical of the universalization of theories that are developed in the Global North. In an Urban Theory Lab's interview, Ananya Roy (2015) does not argue against generalization per se, but rather criticizes the way that urban scholars generalize theories. Put another way, she is critical of the hegemonic approach toward globalization. Although capital accumulation happens around the world pervasively, Roy (2015) believes this process happens in the Global South or "places off the map" in a particular and different way. Roy believes that by limiting themselves to a specific place, western urban scholars impoverish the theory while losing an inherently valuable information resource. Hence, Roy (2015) takes a deconstructive position to argue against the Euro-American central position, which weighs every different context within its limited scope. To her, the way in which accumulation by dispossession occurs in the Global South is not simply through population displacements, which occur due to value and surplus value. She states that a post-structural and post-colonial point of view is needed for investigating the specific socio-political context of the Global South. In fact, Roy (2015) does not confine the city to agglomeration economy but she takes into consideration all the social relations and histories involved (Brenner and Roy, 2015). Hence, her recognition of planning is profoundly different from geographers and critical urban thinkers, such as Harvey, that brought the dimension of space and territory into the urban development equation without regard to social relations. I opine that Roy's post-structural point of view can be

applied to my case study in Tehran by considering the impact of security, body control, and ideological engineering of public behaviors and mind, as extra-economic elements, in shaping the Valiasr-Enghelab intersection.

## "Streets of discontent": Contextual analysis of Valiasr- Enghelab Intersection

Iran's Islamic revolution in 1979 was a vivid example of mass movements of people through public spaces such as streets, universities, mosques, workplaces, and so forth. After the revolution's victory, Iran's new "Islamic" republic regime remained apprehensive regarding the power of collective rebellions inside public spaces. Therefore, controlling the boundaries of public space and public life has been one of the major missions of the state during the past 40 years (Ehsani, 2015). Contentions around the physical changes of the Valiasr-Enghelab intersection, as one of the most crucial and political public spaces, provide an appropriate example for examining the socio-cultural politics of public space in Iran.

As Khatam (2016) argues, Enghelab Street in Iran is the best example of a street and social space overflowing with universities, bookstores, and performance centres. This street has played an important role in significant political shifts, whether before or after the Islamic revolution. Enghelab Street has always been used as a socio-cultural platform for struggles between people and the government. A historical review reveals that Enghelab Street acted as Tehran's backbone in the mobilization of collective actions for student movements between the 1950s to 1970s. This critical role extended to the 1979 Islamic revolution. Thirty years later, during the 2009 election protests known as the Green Movement, Enghelab Street (again translating into "Revolution Street") played a significant as a historical symbol of resistance and mobilization. According to Bayat (2013: 170), Enghelab Street or

> Revolution Street represented a unique juncture of the rich and the poor, the elite and the ordinary, the intellectual and the layperson, the urban and the rural. It was a remarkable political grid, intersecting the social, the spatial, and the intellectual, bringing together not only diverse social groups, but also

institutions of mobilization (the university) and the dissemination of knowledge and news (the chain of bookstores).

At the same time, and by extension, Valiasr Street turned into the alternative space of protest. Valiasr Street is embedded in the memory of every one who lives or visits Tehran. This 17-kilometer long path links the old southernmost part of the city to its northernmost part. After eighty years of existence, it is still the most important north-south axis of the capital (Mokhtari et al., 2014, my translation).

During the revolution, Valiasr Street took the supporting role engaging with the Enghelab axis. As the stamping grounds of intellectuals and students with the Student Park and City Theater, the Valiasr-Enghelab intersection became the focus of social, cultural and political uprisings (Mokhtari et al., 2014, my translation).

For Bayat (2013: 161), "streets of discontent" contain specific physicality and sociality, which make them appropriate for political and collective actions. Bayat (2013: 162) calls this specific character the "spatiality of discontents" i.e., "particular spatial forms shape, galvanize, and accommodate insurgent sentiments and solidarities." The first particular attribute is the potential of a space for assembling people in a short time before they can be dispersed. For instance, the Valiasr-Enghelab intersection, with its adjoining university campuses, bookstores, and theatres, provides a great potential for absorbing people and intellectuals in the street. The second feature, according to Bayat (2013), is the historical importance of the streets. The historical importance of the Valiasr-Enghelab intersection has already been mentioned. The third significant trait of "streets of discontent" is accessibility and being part of the mass transportation system. Otherwise, the discontent remains localized and cannot spread over different urban spaces. Enghelab and Valiasr Streets are Tehran's North-South and East-West respective centrelines. Hence, the Valiasr-Enghelab intersection is located at the heart of Tehran with a great accessibility, which provides a platform for incorporating Tehran's different classes that consequently creates a convergent diversity in the site. The fourth feature is the flexibility of streets for enabling protesters to flee in case of police intervention. The intersection is surrounded by side streets, which makes this thoroughfare a maneuverable space to disperse (Bayat, 2013). Hence, the Valiasr-

Enghelab intersection encompasses the socio-spatial qualities, which befitted it as a street of discontent. The Islamic Republic has a low toleration regarding any kind of disagreement. Hence, for the state, discontent contains a variegated spectrum from silent protests or even peaceful individual oppositions against Islamic rules to collective or violent demonstrations.

## Controlling measures against public space

While urbanization acts as an arena for the survival of capitalism, it could be, at the same time, the potential field of any resistance and revolutionary resurgences against capitalism (Kipfer, 2002). The tertiary circuit of capital comes into the equation, first, through investment in science and technology. By technologic investments, the government aims to harness science to the reproduction process. Secondly, the tertiary circuit of capital comprises the social reproduction of labor power. The social reproduction of labor power contains investments in health and education (to assure the ability of labor power in contributing to the production process) and extends to repression of the labor force by ideological or militaristic tools (Harvey, 1978). Via Harvey's definition of the tertiary circuit of capital, I deem that by cultivating the consumerism ideology among the people, the state aims to make the public space profitable on the one side, and militarized and controllable on the other. Investigation of different controlling measures against public space provides an appropriate ground to go beyond systematic exclusion and universal approach. Public spaces, fundamentally, exist based on their publicness and openness to all groups of people. However, states increasingly seem to prefer to confine public spaces to predetermined realms for controlled activities, in which no subversive action can be conducted against the states' authority. Hence, as Ehsani (2015) contends, publicness is not a given but a manipulated collective asset, which is indisputably integrated into the inherent social relations of a society. For instance, some governments and city managers convert public spaces to more privatized and highly controlled environments by ongoing commodification strategies, which characterize capitalist states. Yet, a different story occurs in some developing countries with totalitarian governments, where there are serious struggles over controlling public spaces and defining their boundaries (Ehsani,

2015). In some cases, only covered and censored versions of behaviors and lifestyles are permitted in public. For example, public spaces in Iran are securitized by the government through a series of control measures (of can be done or said) that no longer render such spaces as public.

Under the increasing use of regulations, policing, and securitization strategies, public space as a realm in which public life happens is threatened and both its physical and social characteristics are transformed. Through ever-increasing securitizing of urban public spaces by totalitarian governments, democracy, and social interactions are threatened likewise, causing their decline and in some cases their devaluation and demise. Nemeth (2012: 812) calls this increased securitization the "death of the public realm", as public spaces can no longer act as a public forum with open access, individual liberties and shared participation. As a result, people often have to transfer most of their regular public life and activities to private spaces such as enclosed or virtual environments. Regulating public space is applied not only through law enforcement and controlling public behaviors, but also by physical changes in the built environment such as architectural design and use of surveillance technologies, all for reducing the risk of undesirable public behaviors (Lippert and Walby, 2013).

## Controlling the minds through controlling people's everyday lives

According to Kipfer (2002), Lefebvre's most important debate is the problematic of everyday life and his critique of the hegemony of advertised everyday life. As Kipfer (2002: 130) states, Lefebvre argues in his three volumes on everyday life (published between 1947 and 1981) that television, radio, literature, and all other forms of media are at the service of a single goal: penetrating into the smallest aspects of everyday lives in order to transform people from "creative subjects into objects of their own alienated products." Controlling people's everyday lives not only has the function of doing social control, but also generating consent among people.

As Tehrani (2015, my translation) remarks, in developing countries using the titles such as development is actually an ideological cover for implementing projects like the Valiasr-Enghelab intersection. Despite the importance of the intersection as a lived

public space, there was no announcement or public consultation before initiating the project and residents were surprised by the changes (Karimi, 2016: 92, my translation). A few days after the installation of guardrails around the underpass, Tehran Municipality started negative propaganda against people who dare crossing the guardrails. The national media started naming transgressing individuals and deeming them anti-social citizens who risked their lives and caused trouble for vehicles. They are characterized as disrupting the law, the state, the space and traffic. To convince the audience to use the underpass, advertisements have also highlighted and (over)emphasized the popular satisfaction of the project. The Valiasr-Enghelab intersection underpass has been presented as a successful project and an important strategy of traffic management. These advertisements by city officials had a significant impact on citizens' approach towards the underpass (Karimi, 2016: 114, my translation). When people's understanding of a phenomenon depends on the way that such a phenomenon is represented by officials, policies can get in the way of transferring realities.

One of my interview participants provided his lived experience of the negative propaganda against people who cross the guardrails:

> Some people like me show their disagreement by crossing the guardrails, but waiting for the green light after that. We want to show that we abide by the rules, but we do not agree with this project. This group of people is labeled as lowbrow in the state's propaganda. This is the government's method for making people uncomfortable in expressing their protest (Participant 06, my translation).

Based on my brief (and anecdotal) conversations with pedestrians on the site, many appear satisfied with the redevelopment of the intersection because there is no more interference between pedestrians and vehicles, and there are shopping options underground. This is well aligned with the propaganda that prioritizes the presence of vehicles over people on the streets and the commercialization of urban space and life. However, as reminded by Participant 5 (my translation):

> You cannot rely on the questionnaires on the site because it counts just the present people and not the groups of people eliminated from the site like the

disabled. On the other hand, usually the positivist point of view relies on the percentages. The critical point of view pays more attention to marginalized groups. In our country, disabled are deleted systematically and this is weird in a war-torn country.

Indeed, the redesigned intersection has provided a particular mobility challenge for disabled people, strollers and the elderly who cannot negotiate the escalators. Hence, this group is systematically eliminated from the public polls which aim to represent the underpass as a successful and desirable public space among the users.

## Censuring bodies and public behaviours

Streets of discontent provide justified excuses for governments to take actions that contribute to controlling and harnessing the inherent potentials of spaces. As Bayat (2013: 162) explains:

> Foucault, Lefebvre, and others, focus on how power (politics) configures space— how, for instance, the modern prison or the spatial division of streets and alleyways was deployed to discipline the bodies (the way we move or walk in public, and the like) of modern subjects; how functional specialization in homes (such as separating kitchen, bedrooms, and sitting rooms) was aimed at the moral repair of the working class; and how modern open boulevards (as transparent spaces) targeted restricting riots by exposing insurgents to police surveillance.

In doing so, it is more comprehensible how a politicized urban space such as the Valiasr-Enghelab intersection has suddenly gone through this amount of change without regard to public opinion. The transformation was a big surprise for citizens and led to opposite reactions in forms of contentious meetings, writings, or civil disobedience such as crossing the guardrails.

My interviews with planning officials and urban scholars reveal how this area is controlled by conducting and censuring the existence of bodies.

Valiasr intersection underpass is a vivid example of a militaristic point of view. How a structure can be against people. How architecture can be for citizens while acting against citizens. The mayor, as a previous officer had a strict framework and even added the guardrails to force people to go to the underground. According to Foucault, the best way of controlling the minds is controlling the bodies. Especially after the 2009 Green Movement, they [the local state] wanted to manipulate the intersection to better control it. Mitigation of traffic to enhance public transportation is an excuse for applying more control on this critical public space (Participant 6).

This interviewee clearly expresses as a space of gathering and protest was divested of its possibilities and reduced to a space of transition from one point to another. This is also echoed by another interviewee:

Modernization moves at a great pace in Iran and there is no democracy within the urban space decisions. I deem that the government, with all its governmentality, and private sections, as rentiers, are shaping the city through specific mechanisms. A city's form is important. By changing the urban form, public spaces can be securitized. In Tehran, this securitization is happening by making public spaces inaccessible to the citizens. People may feel it is more safe and organized, but they are being deprived of direct presence in the urban space and their presence is confined to being in the vehicles. This is a complex aspect of securitization, which is harder to be recognized. The result is less chaotic, but more aligned with insatiable commercial trends. There are fewer mechanisms like CCTV or police; however, the possibility of presence is taken from the citizens (Participant 7).

This interviewee clearly emphasizes that the space is rendered inaccessible and highly controlled to avoid any gathering. However, the rationale for such agenda was to promote the safety of the new infrastructure of transportation and commercialism.

The modern human being is not freer than before. She/he is under intense control. It is more obvious in Iran because of the new infrastructures and

ideological regime. Public transportation utilities are multi-functional. On the one hand, expanding public transportation means facilitating transportation and movement in the city, and expanding and democratizing public spaces. On the other hand, modern transportation utilities are controllers per se. Modern spaces are more securitized everywhere in the world (Participant 7).

After the 2009 Green Movement, Tehran became coded. You are not going to consume the street. You should be on highways or in malls. Nothing like pedestrian avenues has been built since then in Tehran (Participant 8).

These interviews clearly convey how the state tries to apply controlling measures by censuring the bodies and suppressing the right of presence in public spaces.

## Colonization of public space

Since the Pahlavi era, the social engineering of public life has been an indisputable part of Iran's governing system. Reza Shah Pahlavi, with the dream of a modern Iran and individuals, decreed orders regarding public behaviour and appearance to avoid any religious or traditional symbols. After the Islamic revolution, compulsory hijab and dress codes and control of public behaviour to align them with Islamic rules acted as a tool for controlling bodies and public behaviours yet again (Ehsani, 2015).

As Ehsani (2015: 218) states, this "colonization of public space" occurs to ensure that the body and behaviours of every individual do abide by the authoritarian rules of the Islamic Republic government. Socializing with the opposite sex, loose veiling, and any dissent against the existing rules is considered a crime and suppressed cruelly. As a result, during the past forty years, many public spaces have been subverted in regard to their initial function and have adopted the government's preferred roles. For instance, since the revolution, the University of Tehran, once a symbol of political resistance and academic atmosphere, has instead hosted public Friday prayers, while the Grand Mosalla, originally built for public religious rituals, has been used as a place for conducting cultural and commercial events such as book fairs and Islamic fashion shows. Hence, while Friday prayers are being held at the center of the most politicized academic center, the public and publishers have seen the moving of the book fairs from

the University's main place to Grand Mosalla – the symbol of the Islamic Republic (Ehsani, 2015). This paradoxical relocation, in my view, happens for the sake of more efficient body control and as a prime example of the penetration of ideological engineering of public behaviours into any activity happening in public spaces.

By the same formulation and due to ideological oppression, the Valiasr-Enghelab intersection, previously known as one of the rare and most popular public spaces in Tehran, has been transformed to a commercial, soulless space dedicated to cars and traffic. According to Ehsani (2015), the notion of public and public space has been contentious issues in post-revolution politics in Iran. Specifically, after the 2009 Green Movement and public pressure to change repressive politics in Iran, controlling public spaces, events, and forms of public life became the locus of the government's political practices. As Ehsani (2015: 226) writes, "[w]ith more than half of Iran's population aged below 35, the 'youth' are seen as a potential threat, as well as the subject of social engineering by the state." Therefore, the cultural politics of public space in the Islamic state aims at diminishing the cultural and political interactions and events that happen in public spaces like the Valiasr-Enghelab intersection. As of its 2012 redevelopment, the previously well-known vibrant public space no longer acts as an active platform for young people and students to linger a little bit longer for communicating or enjoying street performances. This place is now overflowing with vendors and metal structures, which conduct pedestrians to the maze-like underground that full of low-quality small shops.  As one of my interviewees note:

> As students, we used to spending time near Valiasr intersection, adjacent to Tehran University. We walked through the whole area and went to cinemas and bars. We hung out with friends almost every day and enjoyed our loitering in the site. It was a live avenue. Now everything is settled in a way to transform this area into a crowded and noisy street. I never go there now because it makes me sick (Participant 3).

As another interviewee concludes:

Pedestrians are eliminated from the site and by this elimination social interactions and urban culture are affected. This space is intensely defined and separated. People cannot linger in the space; they just find their ways and pass. This area is turned into a place of transition. It seems that people and social interactions are eliminated from the space intentionally (Participant 4).

Furthermore, some of the participants explain where public life is transferred.

Public life is transferring to the family and kinship network. The social capital is in danger. People are afraid of each other because there is no possibility for dialogue and engagement between them. People also build their ideal society in the virtual environment and social network. When people are deprived of public space, it seems that they are reduced to separate atoms which are not attached to each other at all (Participant 4).

The intersection does not have the previous function. I, as a previous everyday passerby on the site, try to choose alternative paths. Shaping the public spaces is a slow process because memories are an important part of it. Semi-public alternative spaces are shaping in Tehran, but they cannot function as the intersection's substitute (Participant 5).

Having these conversations and studying the transforming nature of public spaces in Tehran, I contend that recent transformations in the physical and functional aspects of the Valiasr-Enghelab intersection are not only propelled by commercialization trends like many other places in the world. Under the impulses of the capital market in the Islamic republic, there is a hidden layer of tendency toward controlling bodies, behaviours, and finally minds, in accordance with Islamic and revolutionary values. To do so, public spaces, as I discussed in the case of the Valiasr-Enghelab intersection or Tehran University, are vacuumed of their initial collective function and refilled with commercial or ritual activities with their inherent securitizing nature. The right of presence in public spaces is the key factor, which has been denied in the redevelopment of the intersection. Manipulating public spaces in this way, the

Islamic Republic is transforming public spaces into nothing but codified spaces, hollowing out spontaneous features of a lived public space.

## 3. Lessons and Reactions: Pedestrians' *Right to the City*

Harvey (2012: 4) understands the concept of the right to the city as a way to not only shape and reshape our cities but also ourselves.

> The question of what kind of city we want cannot be divorced from the question of what kind of people we want to be, what kinds of social relations we seek, what relations to nature we cherish, what style of life we desire, what aesthetic values we hold. The right to the city is, therefore, far more than a right of individual or group access to the resources that the city embodies: it is a right to change and reinvent the city more after our hearts' desire. It is, moreover, a collective rather than an individual right, since reinventing the city inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power over the processes of urbanization. The freedom to make and remake ourselves and our cities is, I want to argue, one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights.

Harvey's long quote sets the stage for conceptualizing the right to the city as an attempt for manipulation and enhancement of this reciprocal relationship between city and people. Hence, in this section, I argue that in the context of a city like Tehran and an important public space like the Valiasr-Enghelab intersection, the government sought to cut this vital relationship between residents and the city. Reshaping the city according to desired ideologies, the government could shape the making of people and social relations it intended. To apply a more vivid image of the right to the city, I investigate the main debates around the right to the city in the works of Lefebvre (1996). Then, I apply, compare and evaluate Lefebvre's key elements of the right to the city to the Valiasr-Enghelab underpass in order to examine how and to what extent this project enables or inhibits residents' right to the city. Finally, I discuss public demand regarding the right to the city in Iran.

## The right to the city

Lefebvre's (cited in Gilbert and Phillips, 2003) definition of the right to the city is anchored in the right to difference. The right to difference encompasses the right to claim and reassert equitable social relations into the dominant political-economic ideologies. It also comprises the right to reaffirm the use value of urban life into the preponderant notions of the exchange value of capitalist cities. This is 'the right to claim rights' which differentiates the right to difference from 'granted' rights of normative citizenship. In other words, the right to difference is a 'practised' right, which goes beyond the formal rights by active participation of different members of society in claiming equality, inclusion, and self-management within the urban society (Gilbert and Phillips, 2003). Accordingly, Lefebvre's conception of the right to the city is thinking outside of the predominant and exclusive system to reclaim difference and alternative. Peter Marcuse (cited in Mayer, 2009: 367) calls this revolutionary appropriation of urban space "a right to redistribution not for all humans, but for those deprived of it and in need of it".

As Purcell (2014) states, over the past decades, there has been a burgeoning tendency toward the right to the city. Accordingly, UNESCO (2006) and UN-HABITAT (2010) have strived to integrate the concept as part of human rights to create more inclusive and sustainable cities. Furthermore, related charters such as the World Charter for the Right to the City, the European Charter for the Human Rights in the City, Montreal Charter of Rights and Responsibilities, have been developed to articulate some expressions of the right to the city. Although these constant efforts are of a great importance, the vast spectrum of issues and meanings remains related to the concept of the right to the city (Purcell, 2014). Hence, it is important to recognize and focus on applied to the specific case of the Valiasr-Enghelab intersection.

## Use vs. exchange value

The first attribute of the right to the city to be discussed is one that I broadly considered by various interpretations of the concept: the importance of the 'users' of urban space over the exchange value of urban development. While use value encompasses the

practices different people and groups who live in the city, exchange value represents the profits realized by various stakeholders (e.g., owners, developers, state through tax revenue) in the development and redevelopment of the city. As Harvey (2012: 3) discusses "we live in a world, after all, where the rights of private property and the profit rate trump all other notions of rights one can think of." As a result, the right to the city discourse has a great emphasis on the importance of use value over exchange value. For Lefebvre (1970), these dimensions of use and exchange values are captured when he respectively refers to as the urban society and the capitalist city. Purcell (2014: 148,149) explains Lefebvre's and what he saw as the domination of capitalism over the urban as follows:

> The contemporary "city" is the capitalist city, which for him [Lefebvre] is not "the urban" at all, but merely an impoverished manifestation of it, an urban world reduced to its economic elements… capitalist industrialization imposes itself on the city by asserting the primacy of exchange value.

This is the key element of Lefebvre's right to the city because residents should be able to enjoy and/or have a say in the way the city evolves rather than be subjected to the vagaries of development, gentrification or marginalization.  For Lefebvre, the right to the city is best expressed by the right to difference, to a different city –one where its making is not confined to the hands of technocrats, developers and investors but rather spread to include and respect people and their practices.

**'The urban' as the mediator between neoliberalism and everyday life**

Secondly, Lefebvre (cited in Merrifield, 2006) distinguishes three different scales within the human life: the 'global level' associated with power apparatus, abstract relations, and capital market; the 'private level' – such as homes – where the everyday private lives of people take place; and the urban level as the 'mixed level' mediating between the global and private levels. To me, the urban level is Lefebvre's paradigmatic level in which the notions of users' everyday lives still stream within urban space despite the neoliberal trends of a capitalist society. However, as Lefebvre (cited in Merrifield, 2006) imparts, the neoliberal trends of the global level pervade all other aspects of life and

urban level. Hence, Lefebvre (cited in Merrifield, 2006) expresses his critiques of the capitalist modernity, which produces functional spaces and atomized people. For Lefebvre (1970), this is the Cartesian partitioning of the city, which controls citizens' minds and practices and restricts their creativity and passion. While, Lefebvre (cited in Merrifield, 2006: 71) does not seek a solution in dissolving the urbanity itself or returning to the rural life, he strives to imagine a new humanism within the urban society. He saw the need for a new right, *the right to the city,* which emerges as both a cry and demand.

**Expropriation of urban space**

Lefebvre (cited in Purcell, 2014: 149,150), uses specific terminology to elaborate the right to the city. Lefebvre refers to '**expropriation**' in order to explain urban space as a collective asset and normative right, which belongs to every inhabitant of society, regardless of their social or ownership status. Based on Lefebvre's definition, there is no privileged right in favor of property ownership since "the city belongs to those who inhabit it". Out of this belonging, arise the terms '**appropriation**' and '**participation**' as the cry and demand to be part of the city. Having the right to '**access**' to and '**use**' of space, the inhabitants of the city reorganize urban space in such a way that appropriate it for social interactions, creative encounters, learning, playing, and difference. Through the claiming and appropriation of urban space, citizens participate actively in the urban development process.

Citizens' active participation in shaping cities to their practices and aspirations rails against the nominal and indirect power bestowed to citizens by the bureaucratic socialism. Instead, Lefebvre (cited in Purcell, 2014: 145) believes in a more bottom-up social system where the inhabitants retrieve "the collective self-governing of society" to "shake off the control of capital and the state in order to manage their affairs for themselves". As Purcell (2014) elucidates via Marx's (1844) writings, citizens have always yielded these rights partially to the state in exchange for security. Lefebvre (1970) contends with this dichotomy between state and citizens and wants a more balanced and equitable mixing in this regard.

## The right to the city as applied to Valiasr-Enghelab underpass

Study of the right to the city in the context of Tehran is meaningless without taking into account the passive role of people in highly securitized public spaces. The right of presence in public space, as the key factor of the right to the city, has been eradicated in the redevelopment of the Valiasr-Enghelab intersection. **Without appropriate possibility for access, presence, and usage of public space**, the first requisite of the right to the city is strongly compromised if not completely erased.

Aforementioned in the previous section, the Valiasr-Enghelab underpass is not accessible to all groups of people. Installation of fences on four sides of the intersection has deprived users from accessing the intersection in the name of safety. This is particularly problematic for particular users with limited mobility. The lack of appropriate mobility facilities like elevators and visual/acoustic signs exclude low-mobility groups like elders and disabled from this previously important public space. The spatial complexity of underpass and the confusing access makes it difficult for more mobile people to actually navigate and identify exits. Low-income people are another group that was de facto eliminated from the site due to their inability to buy personal vehicles. By the process of channelling pedestrian circulation underground, neighboring retail shops have been stagnated due to the pre-empted pedestrian traffic (Karimi, 2016, my translation). Hence, the municipality's dysfunctional policy and management system prioritizing vehicles over people by the installation of fences on four sides of the once popular intersection has rendered the intersection virtually inaccessible for people to go by or congregate.

By developing an underground space and exiling pedestrians and their diverse activities to a refurbished underground, the government eliminated the social life and therefore has '**nipped in the bud' any potential for creating an "urban society."** In such a way, not only the intersection can no longer act as a stage for integration of people's everyday lives into commodified spaces (as Lefebvre elaborates), but such intervention confine people to transfer most of their regular public life and activities to private spaces such as commercial/private spaces or virtual environments. Nemeth (2012) refers to this increased privatization and securitization as the 'death of the public

realm' where public spaces can no longer act as a public forum with open access for individual liberties and shared participation. Regulating public spaces through physical changes and equipping the Valiasr-Enghelab underpass with surveillance technologies, the state severed the relationship between citizens and this particular part of the city, reducing the risk of undesirable public behaviors, and reshaping its realities and potentialities per its agenda.

The agenda was never to be publicly debated; **no public participation was conducted before or during the project implementation.** Generally, city council, as the only public representative, does not generally have a say in the particular details or aesthetics of a project. In fact, city council's role does not exceed projects' budget approval. However, other institutions such as the City Theatre was offered a minor role in decision-making. The City Theatre was involved simply to prevent the construction of a pedestrian bridge that would have destroyed the iconic theatre's facade. In addition, social and public organizations were unaware of the implementation of the project and did not have any say in the decision-making process (Karimi, 2016: 144, my translation).

One interviewee, who has been the previous Mayor's consultant in urban development studies, confirms that no actual public participation has taken place in the process of decision making of Valiasr-Enghelab underpass. This interviewee goes even farther to explain that:

> In my opinion, public participation does not exist in our country, but if you ask the municipality, they will deny it and believe that their limited questionnaires are sufficient and acceptable as social and public participation.

Hence, it is comprehensible how a politicized urban space such as the Valiasr-Enghelab intersection has suddenly gone through this drastic change without regard to public opinion. In a more democratic system, a similar project would have gone through very different procedures of consultation and analysis. For instance, in a more participatory approach to planning, public meetings would have technically created opportunities for diverse groups of stakeholders to come together, hear each other, and

become aware and informed of the changes that are happening in their local built environment. Increasing awareness of the problems, solutions/proposals and changes can be a start point for creating a sense of community in which everyone is afforded to engage in making decisions about the own built environment. Creating a safe atmosphere, public meetings should provide a venue for every segment of the society, no matter how small in number, to share their ideas. Yet, in the case of the Valiasr-Enghelab intersection, no information about the project was prepared nor shared before its opening. As previously discussed, Participant 6 states that the city council approved this project in less than a month. Then, without offering any bid, the municipality assigned the project to a consultant related to Islamic Revolutionary Guard. Before starting the project, only one information panel, with very limited details, was installed at the site. People and mostly media understood the project as the extension of the subway lines. Only several months after starting the project construction, when in its final stages, did more detailed information was published. Hence, the transformation was a big surprise for citizens and against all odds of right to the city, right to difference and right to participation.

The story of the Valiasr-Enghelab intersection narrates how people are officially stripped of their right to the city by the state. By doing so, the city and its potential dynamics chose and imposed controlled, surveilled, artificial, and alienated spaces in the name of safety that was not a problem in the first place.

## Public 'demand' on the right to the city

> Urban affairs have not become public affairs yet in Iran. People do not think of the city as something related to them and consequently do not recognize the right to the city for themselves (Participant 7, my translation).

According to Tehran's city council announcement in 2007, Tehran Municipality should conduct socio-cultural assessment reports for all urban projects before, during and after projects' implementation (Tehran squares' management, n.d.). Nonetheless, as it is clearly specified in the socio-cultural assessment report of Valiasr-Enghelab underpass (Municipality of Tehran's 6th district, 2012, my translation), one of the main deficits of

this project is neglect of public opinion before and during the project. Justifying this ignorance, the municipality claims that it conducted some polls in order to evaluate public support for the project, after the inauguration of Valiasr-Enghelab underpass. Although the municipality concluded that about seventy percent of the people surveyed by satisfied by the project, no detailed information was published regarding statistical community and method of measurement (Karimi, 2016, my translation). Based on my personal and brief conversation with pedestrians on the site, many appeared satisfied with the redevelopment of the intersection and rarely objected or showed their dissatisfaction. Hence, in spite of constructing and confining citizens to the underground, people appear satisfied with this project. This is not necessarily a surprising conclusion as the sate leave very little or more accurately no room for people to be perform **their civil rights and to claim their right to the city.**

As participant 4 remarks, despite rare contentions around destroying historical buildings, debates on public spaces are not part of public concerns and more generally remain concentrated in academic and social activism milieux. This participant elaborates the reasons of citizens' unawareness of their civil rights as follows:

> After the revolution, the quality of urban space has declined in Iran's cities. This fact is not recognizable for people with no other model to compare. For them, faster is better. Moreover, economic pressures on people have weakened the ability for them to think about a better quality of life in public spaces. Economic pressures affect the quality of urban space and public demands (Participant 4, my translation).

Participant 5 describes this unawareness as a chronic priority in Iranians' mentality, especially Tehranians, which recognize the street as vehicles' property. This priority is combined with the government's assumption of a citizen as a mobile young man while neglecting other users such as women, children, elders, and disabled. Based on this priority, the government shapes the agenda setting with their particular interest and translates it in the city. This point of view is not confined to the state or sovereign but exists, spreads and is internalized by residents as well. When it comes to the

facilitation of the traffic, it becomes an uncontested part of citizens' culture to leave the street for cars and resort to pedestrian bridges or underground paths. Since there is no dissent in general or specific claims for the right to the city, the redevelopment of the intersection is justified with a simple post-project questionnaire (Participant 5, my translation).

As pointed out previously, out of dissatisfied people or social activists only a few protested under what we could associated as their right to the city. Participant 6 links the indifference or frustration of citizens to express their discontent to their **lack of a sense of belonging to the city**. Put another way, people have always seen everything within the city against themselves and in favour of vehicles. This is the alienation that Lefebvre's cautions us about. Hence, **the non-involvement and alienation of citizens in the city** is another reason for them not formulating any demand regarding their built environment. The policies that reduce pedestrian rights in favor of cars have transformed the city to a mere passage for vehicles free of disturbances. This fact intensifies citizens' irrelevance to the city since they just see it as a place to earn money. This gap between citizens and the city goes so far as to make people indifferent to the biggest events or changes in the city. Hence, instead of active citizens, people's identity transforms to a mere observer who does not take any reaction against the loss of public space.

Participant 6 further explains the lack of public demand on the right to the city. As stated in the previous section, **social control and the engineering of public opinion** have been the indisputable part of Iran's governing system. The prevailing discourse of the society leads the public opinion toward the approval of car-oriented policies. The executive apparatus of the city applies its power to align the opposite opinions with the favorite mode and development policies. As pointed out in previous section, even if a citizen attempts to cross the fences as a protest, the state quickly advertises him/her as an antisocial and uncivilized element. These negative advertisings occur through national media broadcasting names of individuals who cross the guardrails and depicting them as anti-social citizens who risk their own lives and others.

**The government dominance over civil society** has led to limited mobilization by social or urban activists as well. The overcoming of capital flows to the city and implementation of policies establishing their financial dependence on the municipality, have also led most of activists to retreat from their objections against Valiasr-Enghelab underpass. Among non-profit organizations, only Bahamestan Group (an NGO that works to protect rights to the city, to empower all the inhabitants of the city especially vulnerable groups, and to pursue marginalized rights in urban development processes) started formal meetings against the underpass and continued its demands for removing the guardrails until now. Other institutions such as Meydan (a non-profit entity not affiliated with any political party or organization, which publishes online articles on socio-cultural issues) published some articles criticizing the Valiasr-Enghelab underpass project and intentions (Karimi, 2016, my translation). The government or municipality sponsor most non-profit organizations. Therefore, non-profit organizations' existence directly depends on their financial relationship with the power apparatus. Hence, the process of formal protests against a project can become very complicated. As an example, after Valiasr-Enghelab underpass inauguration, Bahamestan Group held a critical meeting in the Iranian Academy of Arts (presidential institution/academy with the main objective of proposing policies for the preservation and promotion of Islamic, national and local arts). It was the last meeting of this type because the Iranian Academy of Arts had some projects from the municipality and did not want to lose them.

This is the way that municipality continues to work without any public participation while justifying the legitimacy of their (re)development projects. Referring to Lefebvre, a citizen who is supposed to have the right to appropriate the city, has been relegated and limited to a simple passerby in the commercialized underground of the Valiasr-Enghelab underpass. Such experience is contrived by the municipality with the authority to apply any decision aligns with its benefits. Despite all, citizens, as the proclaimed users of the city, still have no demand. The conditions in which citizens can claim their right to the city in a political-economic regime like Tehran are most restraining.

# Conclusion

In 2013, an underground path was built at the Valiasr-Enghelab intersection, one of the most critical and important public spaces in Tehran, Iran. Of course, the issue is not confined to the construction of a pedestrian underpass – read destruction of a public space – but the set of relations that this project has been produced under its securitization logic. Addressing this issue also matters when it comes to implementing similar projects in other major city squares and public spaces. In fact, the redevelopment of the Valiasr-Enghelab intersection is part of a larger project, approved by the Tehran City Council, for expanding underground public spaces of many important street-level squares of Tehran. Valiasr Square underpass has been inaugurated recently and Haft-e-Tir Square underpass will be the next project. Studying different aspects of recent changes in the Valiasr-Enghelab intersection is an opportunity to investigate Iran's urban and social structure. Hence, in this major paper I investigated capitalist approaches as well as ideological intentions behind Valiasr-Enghelab underpass architectural design.

Lefebvre (1991) and Harvey's (2012) political economic approach towards urban geography is the framework I have applied to the Tehran context in the first section of this major paper. I examined different aspects of this trajectory within Tehran urban context generally and the Valiasr-Enghelab intersection more specifically. Financial growth and capital investment, along with the constant propagation of the rulers' desirable lifestyle and ideology, are the main driving forces of Iran's large cities. This process can be defined through Lefebvre's (1970) articulation of urban revolution where ongoing destruction and rebuilding the city is the mechanism for producing value and surplus value in Tehran and other large cities. This is a model wherein people are dispossessed of their public space for the sake of wealth accumulation. The only purpose of this order is the reproduction of capital through the control of public spaces. The Valiasr-Enghelab intersection, known as the civil heart of Tehran, was probably Tehran's best example of an urban lived space. However, this important intersection is one of the victims of the dominant process of financial growth and capital investment. The process through which an urban lived space is transformed into conceived space --

a space, which portrays a particular representation of space which is highly controlled and controllable. As Banerjee (2001) states, public space and public life cannot be divorced and the notion of public space has altered from a civic pride to a commodified space.

Public spaces have always been conflictual. The assembly of certain individuals in public spaces produces relations and interactions that are not always entrenched in the conceived functions or aspirations of urban designers and leaders. This constellation of organized and spontaneous activities can express itself in the form of public festivals and ceremonies as well as 'undesirable' behaviors or violent protests. Hence, controlling the public realm has been always one of the central focuses of the state and urban leaders. There is a diversified spectrum of control measures carrying from place to place due to different cultures, regulations and political systems. While some governments and city managers are converting public spaces to more privatized and highly controlled environments by ongoing commodification strategies which characterize capitalist states, some totalitarian governments (ab)use their power as a tool for suppressing any opposition and prevent the creation of public space and public life (e.g., public squares in Tehran such as the Valieasr-Enghelab intersection).

The contextual analysis of the Valiasr-Enghelab intersection reveals that the commercialization trend is not the only factor, which propels transformations in the physical and functional aspects of the Valiasr-Enghelab intersection. In fact, according to my research, urban development forces are shaped based on social relations as well. This is where the main debates of some critical geographers and thinkers enter as they argue that urban development process is not necessarily class- or territory-based, but it can be shaped by extra-economic elements such as gender, race, and sexual issues. Forasmuch as elaborating the specific elements related to gender, race, or sexual issues are beyond the scope of this major paper, it is worth further investigations through another research for future. Hence, my investigation in the second section is confined to the impact of security, as an extra-economic element, in shaping the Valiasr-Enghelab intersection. During the years after Iran's Islamic revolution, the state has always strived for controlling the boundaries of public space and public life. In other

words, besides all the incitements of the capital market, assurance of people's devotion to the Islamic and revolutionary values shapes an inherent tendency for rulers toward controlling bodies, practices, and finally minds. Physical changes in the built environment such as architectural design and use of surveillance technologies are among state's measures for reducing the risk of undesirable public behaviors. To do so, public spaces, are substituted by commercial or ritual activities with their inherent securitizing nature while being vacuumed of their initial collective function. Valiasr-Enghelab underpass is a prime example of the penetration of ideological engineering of public behaviors and mind to be aligned with the state's ideologies. The development of this previously important public space illustrates the state's efforts for achieving more efficient controlling measures by censuring the bodies and suppressing the right of presence in public spaces.

Examination of economic and extra-economic elements in the redevelopment of the Valiasr-Enghelab intersection provides a sufficient ground for questioning the right to the city, as a way to not only shape and reshape our cities but also ourselves (Harvey, 2012). The development of 'underground spaces' in the main squares of Tehran will lead to the elimination of social life in them. In fact, pedestrians and their diverse activities and practices are intended to be exiled to the refurbished undergrounds. The publicness of public space is created through the social interaction and dialogue between different groups. By elimination of pedestrians from the streets, people are officially stripped of the right to use the city and dynamic streetscape and are redirected into more controlled, artificial, and alienated spaces. Obviously, the right of presence in public spaces is the key factor, which has been denied in the redevelopment of the Valiasr-Enghelab intersection. Manipulating public spaces in this way, the Islamic Republic is transforming public spaces into codified spaces, hollowing out spontaneous features of a lived public space. By doing so, the government is actually cutting this vital relationship between residents and the city. Excavation of Lefebvre's terminology regarding the right to the city enables me to investigate the overlaps and contradictions between the Valiasr-Enghelab intersection redevelopment and the concepts of expropriation, appropriation, and participation within the urban space. As discussed in detail, without appropriate possibility for access, presence, and

usage of public space, there is no way for citizens to reorganize urban space in such a way that appropriate it for social interactions, creative encounters, learning, playing, and difference. Furthermore, as 'the right to claim rights' is an essential part of the right to the city, public demand on the right to city was another factor to be investigated in this major paper. Lack of a sense of belonging to the city, the non-involvement and alienation of citizens in the city, social control and the engineering of public opinion, and the government dominance over civil society are among reasons which restrain citizens' right of claim for their right to the city. Hence, citizens, as the proclaimed users of the city, are relegated and limited to a simple passerby in the commercialized underground of the Valiasr-Enghelab underpass.

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