



## *Tehran's Borderlines*

Tehran has changed in recent decades. Rapid urban development through the expansion of subway lines, highways, bridges, and tunnels, and the emergence of new public spaces have drastically reshaped the physical spaces of Tehran. As the city changes, so do its citizens, their social relations, and their individual and collective perceptions of urban life, class, and culture. *Tehran's Borderlines* is about the social relations that are interrupted, facilitated, forged, and transformed through processes of urban development. Focusing on the use of public spaces, this book provides an analysis of urban social relations in the context of broader economic, cultural, and political forces. The book offers a narrative of how public spaces function as manifestations of complex relations among citizens of different backgrounds, between citizens and the state, and between forces that shape the physical realities of spaces and the conceptual meanings that citizens create and assign to them.

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# Tehran's Borderlines

Urban Development and Public Life  
in Contemporary Iran

JALEH JALILI  
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## *A Note to the Reader*

Cities change – some slowly, others more quickly and in drastic ways. This book captures a brief moment in the life of a rapidly changing city. And by a changing city, I am not merely referring to Tehran's physical spaces, which indeed have changed quite rapidly in recent decades. I am also referring to the volatile economic and political context of Iran.

Many things changed between the time that I conducted most of the research for this book in 2014–2015 and the time I wrote the final draft in 2021 and early 2022. These changes involve typical urban development and transformations in economy and politics, but they also include two shocking moments that shook the Iranian society: the massacre of protesters (mostly poor and working class) in 2019, and the killing of innocent children and adults, who lost their lives when two missiles, shot by IRGC (Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, a branch of the state's armed forces), hit a passenger plane in early 2020. Furthermore, the catastrophic toll of the Covid-19 pandemic in Iran and the deterioration of the economy in recent years due to a failing government have contributed to a hopeless moment, with one-third of Iranian households moving into poverty in the span of just a few years in an extremely suppressive political environment.

This is not to suggest that I did my research in brighter times, as I do not have an objective measure to make such a claim, but just to acknowledge that things have changed rapidly and drastically. Despite the profound impacts of these events, I have tried my best to keep the book in the time it belongs to – the time I collected most of the data – and to share the stories as I was told them. Although I wrote the narrative in this book, I believe that it is a reflection of the collective stories that the participants shared with me in Tehran. Thus, this book should be considered as a window into Tehran and the daily lives of Tehranis in 2014–2015.

*A Note to the Reader*

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I have tried to capture and reflect how life was lived in a vibrant developing metropolis and to let the participants build the narrative of the book. What helped me were the voices of women and men who shared their life stories and their views with me. Their visions of their lives in Tehran at the moment we met and what emerged from our conversations were powerful enough to make the book what it is now. I hope that their voices, their generosity in sharing their thoughts and experiences, and their hopes and dreams are as present in the book as they are in my mind and heart.