



Daredevil Rider on the "Death Highway", Beirut, Lebanon.  
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## (Auto)-Mobility in the Global Middle East: Defining the Field

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Friday 6 November 2015, 9-18h  
Muirhead Tower, Room 113  
University of Birmingham

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### Programme

Centre for Modern & Contemporary History  
University of Birmingham

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This one day workshop, held in the “motor city” of Birmingham, UK, a centre of car production and of expertise about (auto)-mobility, brings into conversation historians and social scientists who investigate the histories, politics, and social, visual and aesthetic meanings of (auto)-mobility, primarily across the Middle East but also in global and comparative perspective in the twentieth and twenty first centuries.

A transformative phenomenon of the twentieth century, (auto)-mobility in its various incarnations globalized unevenly after World War One, altering a variety of social practices and inflecting the wider dynamics of production and consumption. From new roads, production lines and showrooms, to traffic jams, garages, advertisements, car accidents, joy riders and (counter-) insurgency techniques, to name just a few salient aspects, motorized vehicles and the conditions they provoked altered conceptions of time, senses of place or authenticity, and the production of space.

Our title makes use of parenthesis advisedly, since regardless of whether people took the wheel, loitered at the curb, hitched a lift or crossed the road, (auto)-mobility transformed practices of gender, class, and domesticity, most notably, though not exclusively, in urban and suburban contexts. (Auto)-mobility also refigured international and regional dynamics in contexts such as pilgrimage, even as national road networks worked to produce national space, and urban roads re-segregated newly ‘historic’ inner cities and downtowns from suburbs that became both gated communities and laboratories for religious and political organization.

Via a case study or a historiographical intervention, participants will present their evaluations of the state of this burgeoning field as part of wider (auto)-mobility studies, and will engage in debate on its potential and future direction, whether as scholars of the Middle East or of other sites and networks of (auto)-mobility around the world.

The workshop will operate as a prologue and agenda-setting session for a larger conference, gathering original research, to be held at the University of Birmingham in June 2016. Please contact Simon Jackson with any questions: [S.Jackson.1@bham.ac.uk](mailto:S.Jackson.1@bham.ac.uk)

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9h: Coffee and Registration

**09:30-10h: Welcome and Introductory Comments**

Simon Jackson and Lucie Ryzova (University of Birmingham, History)

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**10-12:30h: Panel 1: Regional Cases & Comparisons**

Chair: Lucie Ryzova (University of Birmingham, History)

- Pascal Ménoret (Brandeis, Anthropology): “Learning from Riyadh: Joyriding, Infrastructure, and Politics”
- Frédéric Abécassis (ENS, Lyon, History): “The Creation of the Moroccan Road Network: A History”
- David Sims (Cairo, Urban Planning/Economics): “The Private Car in Greater Cairo”

Discussants: Shane Hamilton (University of Georgia, History) & Simon Jackson (Birmingham, History)

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12:30-13:30h: Lunch

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**13:30-15:30h: Panel 2: Urban (Auto)-mobility between History and Social Science.**

Chair: Samuel Dolbee (NYU, History/Middle East Studies)

- Kristin Monroe (University of Kentucky, USA, Anthropology): “Driving Then and Now: The History and Anthropology of Automobility in Beirut”
- Andrew Arsan (Cambridge, History): “On Driving - and Not Driving - in Contemporary Lebanon: Mobility, Stasis, and the Decay of the Commons”

Discussant: Sara Fregonese (Birmingham, Geography)

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15:30-16h: Coffee

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**16-17:30h: Panel 3: Comparative and Global Approaches**

Chair: Nathan Cardon (Birmingham, History)

- Simon Gunn (Leicester, History): “The Car and the City: New Approaches to Automobility in Britain and the West”

- Gijs Mom (Eindhoven, Industrial Engineering/History): “How to Approach Middle Eastern Mobility? Prolegomena for a Recipe”

Discussant: Frank Uekotter (Birmingham, History)

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**17:30-18h: Concluding Discussion and Planning for May 2016 Conference.**

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19h: Drinks and Dinner

## Paper Abstracts and Participant Bios:

**Frédéric Abécassis** is an alumnus of the Ecole Normale Supérieure (ENS) in Fontenay-Saint-Cloud. From 1989 to 1996 he taught in Egypt, then at Clermont-Ferrand and Tours universities, and has taught in Lyon's Ecole Normale Supérieure since 2000 as a modern history lecturer. He has also taught in Yemen, Algeria and Morocco. He became chief editor of *L'Année du Maghreb* – IREMAM magazine in Aix en Provence – in 2012. He has written widely on education history in the Mediterranean area and about automobile history during the colonial period in Egypt and Morocco.

**Abstract:** This overview of the creation of the road network in Morocco in the 20<sup>th</sup> century makes the study of mobility and circulation a point of entry into a wider social and labour history, with an emphasis on syndicalism, housing and health. Structured as a history of decisions on road development, it seeks to identify the logics subtending those decisions, and to show connections between the production of space and modes of government, understood as forms and practices of legitimation and domination.

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**Andrew Arsan** is University Lecturer in Modern Middle Eastern History at the University of Cambridge and author of *Interlopers of Empire: The Lebanese Diaspora in Colonial French West Africa* (London and New York: Hurst and Oxford University Press, 2014). "I am currently at work on two book-length projects. The first is a work on contemporary Lebanon, focusing on the politics of everyday life and the issues that preoccupy ordinary Lebanese on a day-to-day basis, from electricity, water, rubbish and roads to public space and nightlife. The second is a synoptic history of the lands we now call Lebanon from the early sixteenth century to the early twenty-first century."

**Abstract:** In this paper, drawn from my on-going research on the politics of everyday life in contemporary Lebanon, I wish to consider the norms that frame driving, and not driving, in a country in which the car and the forms of mobility it underpins and symbolises are as ubiquitous as they are seemingly ineluctable. The car, the road, the traffic jam – these, I will suggest, are commonplace metaphors for the Lebanese condition. But to understand the value attached to driving, we must – I suggest – also consider what it means not to drive, and the particular symbolic freight attached to other forms of moving through and inhabiting the city. Driving and walking, when considered together, can tell us a great deal about contemporary Lebanon and the platitudinous imaginaries that frame its inhabitants' lives.

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**Nathan Cardon** is a Lecturer (Assistant Professor) in US History in the Department of History and the American and Canadian Studies Centre at the University of Birmingham. "My first book, "A Dream of the Future: Race, Empire, and Modernity at the Atlanta and Nashville World's Fairs," is under contract with Oxford University Press. I am currently beginning work on two new projects. The first examines how African American men and women challenged the United States' social and gender hierarchy at the turn-of-the-century. Using cycling as a lens it examines the intersections of race, empire, sport, and leisure in the formulation of American modernity. The second and much broader project examines the cultural history of doping in sport beginning in the 1890s and ending with Lance Armstrong."

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**Samuel Dolbee** is a fifth year Ph.D. student in the joint program in Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies and History at NYU. His dissertation explores the environmental history of the end of empire by following locusts, cholera, and tribes as they moved from the Ottoman Empire into the post-Ottoman nation-states of Iraq, Syria, and Turkey.

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**Sara Fregonese** is Birmingham Fellow in the School of Geography, Earth and Environmental Studies and associate of the Institute for Conflict, Cooperation and Security at the University of Birmingham. Her research concerns the mutual constitution between conflict, geopolitics and the urban built environment with a special focus on Lebanon and Beirut, where she has fifteen years of research and publication experience. Her research interests include urban conflict and division, radicalisation and cohesion, the role of hotels in geographies of war and peace, and geographies of protest. She recently co-authored the book: *The radicals' city: urban environment, polarization, cohesion* (Ashgate 2013).

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**Simon Gunn** is Professor of Urban History at the University of Leicester and co-editor of *Urban History* journal (Cambridge University Press). He has written widely on British and European cities in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and edited with James Vernon, *The Peculiarities of Liberal Modernity in Imperial Britain* (University of California Press, 2011). He is currently co-authoring a book based on the Leverhulme-funded project, *Motor Cities: Automobility and the Urban Environment in Britain and Japan, 1955-1973*.

**Abstract:** Between the 1950s and the 1970s many Western countries experienced the advent of a 'motor age', characterised by the spread of mass car ownership and following the example of a process begun in North America more than two decades earlier. This paper examines this phenomenon and surveys aspects of the recent literature which has sought to describe and account for it. In particular, the paper examines the concept of an international 'car system' in the post-war decades, which sociologists claim became embedded in Western society and in some parts of the East, such as Japan. In the paper I attempt a comparative overview of the post-war 'motor age', looking in particular at urban form and the politics of automobility in Britain, France, the United States and West Germany.

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**Shane Hamilton** was recently appointed a Distinguished Lecturer by the Organization of American Historians. His first book, *Trucking Country: The Road to America's Wal-Mart Economy* (Princeton, 2008) won the 2009 Theodore Saloutos Award for Best Book in Agricultural History. He serves as Associate Editor for the journal *Enterprise & Society*, and has published articles and reviews in *Agricultural History*, *Business History Review*, *Enterprise & Society*, *Reviews in American History*, and *Technology and Culture*. He is currently working on a book project entitled "Supermarket USA: Food and Power in the Cold War Farms Race," which has been supported by a National Science Foundation Scholar's Award and the Virginia Macagnoni Prize for Innovative Research.

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**Simon Jackson** is Lecturer in Modern Middle Eastern History at the University of Birmingham, where in 2014-17 he also holds a Leverhulme Early Career Fellowship. He works on the discourse and politics of economic development in the French League of Nations Mandate in Syria and Lebanon, is finishing a book on the history of Fordism in the post-Ottoman Middle East, and is starting a new project on the global history of colonial commodities and natural resources, specifically North African phosphates in the intersecting contexts of decolonization and the Green Revolution.

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**Pascal Menoret** is Renee and Lester Crown Chair in Modern Middle East Studies at Brandeis. He completed his Ph.D. in 2008 from the Department of History at the Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne. His research combines urban history and social anthropology. His latest book, *Joyriding in Riyadh: Oil, Urbanism, and Road Revolt*, (Cambridge University Press, 2014) explores the relationship between urban planning and youth unrest in the Saudi capital. His new book project, entitled *Graveyard of the Clerics: Religious Activism in Saudi Suburbia*, is

a cultural history of the Saudi Islamic movements since the mid-1960s. He has also published *The Saudi Enigma: A History* (Zed Books, 2005) and *L'Arabie, des routes de l'encens à l'ère du pétrole* (Gallimard, 2010).

**Abstract:** Saudi Arabia became a main contributor to global suburbanization after 1945. First, the United States enrolled the massive Saudi oil reserves in the task of keeping global energy prices low. Low prices in turn fostered economic growth in Western Europe, Japan, and North America, supported the automobile industry, and stimulated car transportation worldwide. Second, the country was an early non-western testing ground for urban growth techniques that, perfected in the United States before WWII, were widely exported during the Cold War: state guaranteed mortgages, standardized building and subdivision, and extensive freeway systems. Cheap gas, safe loans, and real estate speculation metamorphosed the Saudi landscape from the 1970s onward. Middle class Saudis started fleeing the inner cities, choked with car traffic and invaded by rural and foreign migrants, to the peace and isolation of the suburbs. This paper examines the consequences of this transformation, in particular through the experience of joyriders and car drifters. I will compare joyriding in Riyadh with joyriding in other locales, in particular Belfast, in order to interrogate the relationship between youth crime, infrastructure, and politics in conflict-ridden societies.

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**Gijs Mom** is an Associate Professor emeritus at Eindhoven University of Technology, and Programme Director for Mobility History at that university. He is the founder of the European Center for Mobility Documentation. In November 2003, he co-founded the International Association for the History of Transport, Traffic and Mobility (T<sup>2</sup>M). In 2004, Johns Hopkins University Press published his book on *The Electric Vehicle: Technology and Expectations in the Automobile Age*. He is editor of the new journal *Transfers; Interdisciplinary Journal of Mobility Studies*, which he founded in 2011. In 2014 his second monograph, entitled *Atlantic Automobility: Emergence and persistence of the car in Europe and the USA, 1895 – 1940*, was published by Berghahn Books. For this publisher he also set up a book series, “Explorations in Mobility”, co-edited with Georgine Clarsen and Mimi Sheller.

**Abstract:** Mobility studies (including and especially historical ones) on the Middle East are few and far between. This presentation tries to identify several avenues of approach to start writing on the *tabula rasa*, based on a study on World Mobility History the author is currently writing, on the basis of mainly secondary sources, as well as his experience of five years of editorship of *Transfers; Interdisciplinary Journal of Mobility Studies*.

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**Kristin Monroe** is assistant professor of anthropology at the University of Kentucky. Her research concerns urban space and mobility, social inequality, and state making in the Middle East. Her forthcoming book, *The Insecure City: Space, Power, and Mobility in Beirut* will be published by Rutgers University Press in spring 2016 and her other work has appeared in *City & Society* (2011), *Anthropology of Work Review* (2014), *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* (2014) and *Everyday Life in the Muslim Middle East*, Third Edition (2014).

**Abstract:** In 2004, during an interview early on in my fieldwork in Beirut, a respondent implored me to “think more broadly about the issue of traffic.” When she explained in frustration, how traffic problems were linked with, as she put it, “what was happening in society,” it was one of the many moments during my research when talk about mobility experiences told of more than merely getting somewhere; they expressed larger issues related to social, political, and economic life. In this paper, I take up my respondent’s entreaty and think broadly about traffic by exploring how automobility practices in Lebanon in both contemporary and historical times not only reflect, but also shape social relations of power. Driving, in short, is a critical site for examining the politics of public and cultural space. Through this exploration of automobility, past and present, I consider how my engagement of an historical anthropological approach to the study of automobility in Lebanon has informed my analysis of civic and national culture as a way of thinking through the possibilities for future methodological practice.

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**David Sims** is an economist and urban planner who has worked mainly as a consultant in many countries in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. Half of his work experience has been in Egypt, where he is based. He is the author of *Understanding Cairo: The Logic of a City Out of Control* (2010 and 2012) and *Egypt's Desert Dreams: Development or Disaster?* (2015).

**Abstract:** The private car is already the main culprit behind Cairo's increasingly clogged arteries and its horrendous traffic paralysis. Although only 15% of the city's households own private cars, and although Egyptian planners and officials are well aware of European concepts of the human-scale city -- where public transport, pedestrianized space, clean air, and bicycles take center stage -- it seems inevitable that the private car will continue to dominate thinking. A reading of government actions shows that the private car -- and its companion the sprawling suburb -- is essential to the concept of modernity and prosperity, as it is the basis of the lifestyle of the tiny middle class, and it is precisely this middle class that is most coddled by the State.

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**Lucie Ryzova** is a social and cultural historian of modern Egypt at the University of Birmingham, with particular interests in Egyptian popular culture and vernacular modernity. “My first book, *The Age of the Efendiyya: Passages to Modernity in National-Colonial Egypt* (Oxford University Press, 2014) is both a social history of a specific generation of young, self-consciously modern men (the *efendis*), and a cultural history of Egyptian modernity writ large. I am currently working on two book projects. The first is a social history of photography in 20<sup>th</sup> century Egypt. The second is a historical ethnography of reading and writing in late Colonial era Egypt. I am also working on contemporary topics in three main areas: the production of cultural (and especially photographic) heritage in contemporary Egypt and the region; the nexus of class, gender and urban space in the context of revolutionary urban battles during the past few years; and an alternative social history of Downtown Cairo with particular attention to the social meanings of spatial practices such as hanging out, strolling, and loitering.”

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**Frank Uekotter** is Reader in Environmental Humanities at the University of Birmingham. He studied history, political science and the social sciences at the universities of Freiburg and Bielefeld in Germany, the Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore and Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, USA. His books include *The Age of Smoke. Environmental Policy in Germany and the United States, 1880-1970* (University of Pittsburgh Press: Pittsburgh, 2009). He is now writing a book that is essentially an archaeology of environmentalism: an investigation into places and events that resonated globally; he is also building a research group on the global world of monoculture that seeks to understand why production systems all over the world, from coniferous forests in central Europe to soybeans in Brazil, are tilting towards a reliance on a single crop during the modern era.

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