

Joyriding in Riyadh

Why do young Saudis, night after night, joyride and skid cars on Riyadh's avenues? Who are these "drifters" who defy public order and private property? What drives their revolt? Based on four years of fieldwork in Riyadh, Pascal Menoret's *Joyriding in Riyadh* explores the social fabric of the city and connects it to Saudi Arabia's recent history. Car drifting emerged after Riyadh was planned and oil became the main driver of the economy. For young rural migrants, it was a way to reclaim alienating and threatening urban spaces. For the Saudi state, it jeopardized its most basic operations: managing public spaces and enforcing law and order. A police crackdown soon targeted car drifting, feeding a nationwide moral panic led by religious activists who framed youth culture as a public issue. The book retraces the politicization of Riyadh youth and shows that, far from being a marginal event, car drifting is embedded in the country's social violence and economic inequality.

Pascal Menoret is Assistant Professor of Middle Eastern Studies at New York University Abu Dhabi. His research combines urban history and social anthropology. His publications include *The Saudi Enigma: A History* (2005) and *L'Arabie, des routes de l'encens à l'ère du pétrole* (2010).

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Joyriding in Riyadh

Oil, Urbanism, and Road Revolt

PASCAL MENORET

New York University Abu Dhabi



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To Basil, and to A., M., and T.

I climb into my GMC truck when my heart feels heavy
And relax when I hold its steering wheel in my hands.
Then I do as I like, driving to Kuwait or the Iraqi border,
And if I'm done there I travel throughout Saudi Arabia,
Plunging into the waves of adventure, God being my protector,
For no longer do I feel any desire for a life of ease and comfort.
Bkhetan¹

¹ Quoted by Marcel Kurpershoek, *Oral Poetry and Narratives from Central Arabia*, vol. III: *Bedouin Poets of the Dawasir Tribe: Between Nomadism and Settlement in Southern Najd* (Brill 1999), p. 110.

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