



Editor: Bruce Maddy-Weitzman Assistant Editor: Brandon Friedman

Volume 11, Number 5 March 14, 2017

Nostalgia for the Monarchy in Egypt*

Joyce van de Bildt – de Jong

“May God have mercy on your days... If only another [like you] would come!”¹ In recent years, this melancholic homage to King Faruq has appeared repeatedly on Facebook pages that romanticize the Egyptian monarchical period (1805-1953). The sentimental yearning for the monarchy is a reaction to present popular grievances, in particular the lack of stability, security, freedom, and economic opportunities in Egyptian society today. This nostalgia is clearly detached from historical reality, and selectively highlights positive aspects from the past. The Egyptian monarchy is increasingly viewed through such “rose-tinted glasses” because of the lack of visible prospects for the future.

Nostalgia for the monarchy was first expressed during the final years of the Mubarak era. Until then, the monarchy had been presented in a negative light by the Egyptian state ever since King Faruq, the last monarch, was overthrown by the Free Officers in July 1952. School textbooks and state-sanctioned history books largely presented the monarchy in a negative light, highlighting the corruption of the Palace and its failure to resolve issues of inequality and poverty. The humiliating events of February 4, 1942² and the defective arms scandal of 1948³ were remembered as important turning

* This article is a revised and edited edition of an article that was originally published in the MDC's *Tzomet HaMizrach HaTichon* *The Middle East Crossroads* (on February 5, 2017. The editorial team at *Tel Aviv Notes* would like to thank *Tzomet's* Editor, Dr. Esther Webman, for making the original article available for publication here.

¹ “[Al-Tashahun al-siyasi yadfa' al-Misriyin ila al-hanin al-'ahd al-malaki](#),” *Masr al-Arabiya*, 1 February 2014.

² The date marked an incident in which the British Ambassador in Egypt, Sir Miles Lampson issued an ultimatum to King Faruq threatening to force his abdication unless he would appoint

points that eroded the legitimacy and popularity of the monarchy. King Faruq himself was presented as a gambler and a womanizer, living a lavish lifestyle.

However, the monarchical period began drawing interest during the later years of the Mubarak regime. Media attention to members of the former royal family increased and included interviews with Faruq's daughter Princess Fariat⁴ and King's Fu'ad II's ex-wife Queen Fadila.⁵ Moreover, Princess Nevine 'Abbas Halim of the royal family published her memoirs in Arabic in 2010.⁶ In 2005, two *Al-Ahram Weekly* specials⁷ marked the occasion of the bicentenary of dynasty founder Muhammad 'Ali Pasha's coming to power by celebrating him as the one "launching Egypt into the modern age."⁸ *Al-Ahram* sought to provide a new perspective on the monarchical period, noting, "It is our hope that this series will help to bring the considerable achievements of this period into focus, as well as seeking answers to the question of what went wrong."⁹ Discussions focused on Muhammad 'Ali's achievements in developing education, industry, and modernizing the Egyptian army, among other things. Over the years, various articles and books addressed King Faruq's life,¹⁰ as well as his mysterious death in Italy in 1965.¹¹ These revisions of the monarchical period provided Egyptians

the Wafd to form a new government favorable to the British. King Faruq's submission to this request exemplified the corruption of the monarchy, the collusion of the Wafd, and the continuing control of the British over domestic affairs in Egypt.

³ The King was accused of knowingly providing Egyptian troops with faulty arms in the 1948 war against the nascent Jewish state.

⁴ Interview with Princess Fariat, daughter of King Faruq, with host Amr Adeeb on the Egyptian TV Show *Cairo Today*. See: [Ibrahim al-Khudari, al-Masry al-Youm, December 7, 2007](#). Princess Fariat lived in Switzerland, but her daughter lived in Egypt with her husband and son. She died in 2009 and was buried alongside her father in the Khedival mausoleum of Cairo's Rifa'i Mosque.

⁵ Preview of [Queen Fadila's interview to Ahmad Mislmany](#) on Dream TV2, August 30, 2008.

⁶ Al-Amira Nevine 'Abbas Halim, *Mudhakkarat Amira Misriya* (Alexandria: Markaz Dirasaat al-Iskandariya, 2010).

⁷ See *Al-Ahram Weekly* Special "[Two Centuries of Modernity](#)," March 17, 2005; and, *Al-Ahram Weekly* special series "[Muhammad Ali \(1805-2005\)](#)," May-November 2005. The latter series was published ahead of an international symposium commemorating the bicentennial in November 2005 in Egypt.

⁸ "Two Centuries of Modernity," *ibid*.

⁹ *Ibid*.

¹⁰ See, for example: Husayn Husni, *Sanawat ma' al-malik Faruq* (Cairo: Dar al-Shorouq, 2002); Suhair Helmi Faruq: *Dhaliman wa madhluman* (Cairo: Markaz al-Ahram lil-Tarjamah wa-al-Nashr, 2008); Samia Nkrumah, "[Thrice-married man?](#)" *Al-Ahram Weekly* Special, March 17, 2005; and, [a four-part series](#) about King Faruq's life in exile broadcasted by *Al-Arabiya* in 2008.

¹¹ Hala Sakr, "[The king is dead](#)," *Al-Ahram Weekly* Special, March 17, 2005; [Mahmud Fawzi interviewed Ibrahim Baghdadi](#), the former intelligence officer and ex-Cairo governor who was suspected to be the man who poisoned King Faruq in 1965 in Rome. The interview was published as a book in 1992.

with a more balanced image of the monarchy than that previously disseminated by school curricula and state propaganda.

One media production that had a major influence on the monarchy's image was a television series titled "*Al-Malik Faruq*" based on King Faruq's life, broadcast during Ramadan 2007.¹² The drama series highlighted the existence of democracy and freedom in pre-revolutionary Egypt, and contradicted what generations of students had learned at school. Faruq was portrayed not as a puppet of Britain, but as its opponent, hence challenging the main stereotype of the king that had existed over the years. According to this portrayal, the king committed serious errors not because he was corrupt, but because he lacked experience and people in his entourage favored their own interests over that of the country. Various historians, e.g. 'Isam al-Dassuki and Yunan Labib Rizq, as well as Nasserites such as Osama Anwar Okasha and 'Adel Abbas viewed the series as an unwelcome call for the return of the monarchy.¹³ Since the television series was produced by a Saudi broadcasting channel, they claimed that it was a Saudi conspiracy promoting the monarchal system and seeking to defame the July Revolution and Nasser.¹⁴

Skeptics of the nostalgia for monarchy warned that the monarchal era in reality had been one of poverty, illiteracy, ignorance, class divisions, corruption and lack of rights.¹⁵ Still, the events of January 2011 and June 2013 led some to conclude that the republican experiment in Egypt had failed and that the return of the monarchy could solve Egypt's present predicament.¹⁶ This conclusion may be related to the observation that throughout the region Arab monarchies had proved to be the most resilient in the face of Arab Spring upheavals. In a 2013 interview, a member of the former Egyptian royal family, Prince Osman Rif'at Ibrahim, called for the return of

¹² [The series was broadcast by the Saudi channel MBC.](#)

¹³ Yaman Zaytouny, "[Husayn Fahmy yutalib bi-'awdat al-anzima al-malakiyya.. wa-Ukasha yuhajimuha](#)," *al-Arabiya*, September 29, 2007 ; Sami Sharaf, "Criticism of history professors on King Faruq series," [al-Fikr al-'arabi al-qawmi](#), October 23, 2007.

¹⁴ "[Al-Malik Faruq: Al-Afdhal bayna al-musalsalat raghm al-tashkik fi-sidqiyyatihi](#)," *al-Ghad*, October 4, 2007; "[The Conspiracy Theories of King Farouk's series.](#)"

¹⁵ For various views of proponents and opponents of a return of the monarchy, see: Sarah El Shalakany, "[Why Some Egyptians Yearn for Return to Monarchy](#)," *al-Monitor*, August 8, 2016.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

the monarchy in Egypt.¹⁷ He cited the example of Spain, which successfully reinstated its monarchy following a devastating civil war and an era of fascist dictatorial rule, and now enjoys a viable democratic system. Prince Osman expressed his conviction that the monarchy could return much-needed stability to Egypt and unite the nation. In addition, royalist politician Husam Shaltut ran in the 2014 presidential elections on a program based on bringing back the monarchy. He proposed Faruq's son, Ahmad Fu'ad, as the new king.

However, for the majority of Egyptians, the return to the monarchy does not seem to be a realistic goal. Paradoxically, the recent yearning for the monarchical period has coincided with a growing trend of nostalgia for Gamal 'Abd al-Nasser. Indeed, both the admiration for the royal past and Nasser's popularity are reactions to present-day popular grievances and a way of expressing current needs and desires. This relevance of the past was made clear by the timing of *al-Arabiya*'s publication in 2014 of excerpts from King Faruq's "forgotten memoirs."¹⁸ The symbolic date of January 25, the beginning of the uprisings in 2011, was chosen for publication of the first installment of the seven-part series about the king, signifying the desperate search for alternatives to the existing state of affairs.

In a dramatic scene contained in the *al-Arabiya* series, former president Muhammad Naguib's memoirs described his final exchange of words with King Faruq on July 26, 1952. As he was about to sail into exile, the king impressed Naguib with the following words: "Your mission is a difficult one. As you know, governing Egypt is not an easy task."¹⁹ Indeed, it is a task that has proved challenging until today, and increasingly so. The nostalgia trend is a reaction to everything the 1952 Revolution and the 2011 Revolution were unable to achieve. At the same time, the nostalgia for the monarchy represents discontent with the return of the military to politics after 2013. The nostalgia for the pre-revolutionary period is an expression of this

¹⁷ Tanya Goudsouzian, "[Egypt: The return of the King?](#)" *Al Jazeera*, July 9, 2013, accessed January 21, 2016.

¹⁸ The King's memoirs were originally published in the British weekly *Empire News*, in October 1952. See: Paul Crompton, "[King Farouk: The Forgotten Memoirs](#)," *al-Arabiya* [English], January 25-31, 2014.

¹⁹ Muhammad Naguib, *Kuntu Ra'is li-Misr* (Cairo: Al-Maktab al-Misri al-Hadith, 1984, 2nd edition), 129.

resentment towards the military regime, and highlights the severity of Egypt's extant social, political, and economic problems.

[Joyce van de Bildt - de Jong](#) is a doctoral candidate at the Zvi Yavetz School of Historical Studies and a Junior Researcher at the [Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies \(MDC\)](#), [Tel Aviv University](#).

To republish an article in its entirety or as a derivative work, you must attribute it to the author and the Moshe Dayan Center at Tel Aviv University, and include a reference and hyperlink to the original article on the Moshe Dayan Center's website, <http://www.dayan.org>.

Previous editions of TEL AVIV NOTES can be accessed at
<http://www.dayan.org/tel-aviv-notes>.

You are subscribed to the Moshe Dayan Center Electronic Mailing List. Should you wish to unsubscribe, please send an email to listserv@listserv.tau.ac.il, with the message "unsubscribe dayan-center."