Comparative Studies in Society and History (2025), 1–26
doi:10.1017/S0010417525100248

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Cosmopolitan Spirits: Islam and the Experimental Cosmologies of Egypt's Spiritualist Movement, 1947–1960

Arthur Shiwa Zárate

San José State University, Humanities Department, USA
Email: arthur.zarate@sjsu.edu

Abstract

This article considers the history of Egypt's mid-twentieth-century Spiritualist movement through an examination of its periodical, a monthly Arabic magazine called *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (*The World of the Spirit*) (1947–1960). As it shows, Egyptian Spiritualists defended and promoted their project by crafting an experimental cosmology, one that blended claims about empirical verification with elements of Islamic and Spiritualist cosmologies. It further shows how this combination of scientism and cosmology reflects a core dynamic within the history of scientific exploration in the Islamic world. Like spiritual seekers and occult practitioners in Muslim societies elsewhere, Egyptian Spiritualists positioned their project as one of eradicating superstition from religion, modernizing the nation, and advancing science. By attending to the Egyptian Spiritualist effort to scientize religion and spiritualize science, this article foregrounds the Islamic tradition's entanglements with scientific discourses and navigates beyond claims about epistemological rupture that often characterize the study of Islam's relationship to modern science.

Keywords: spiritualism; Islam; Egypt; *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (1947–1960); spirit healing; Ahmad Fahmi Abu al-Khayr

Introduction

In November 1957, an American Spiritualist medium—or intermediary between the spirit and material worlds—named Keith Milton Rhinehart (d. 1999) visited Egypt's two largest cities, Cairo and Alexandria, where he held séances with Egyptian audiences and performed a number of seemingly paranormal feats. Rhinehart was the founder of the Aquarian Foundation, a Spiritualist church based in Seattle, Washington.[1] An Egyptian Spiritualist movement, which had emerged during the

[1]On the Aquarian Foundation and Rhinehart, see "Aquarian Foundation," in J. Gordon Melton, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology* (Detroit: Gale Group, 2001); see also "Aquarian Foundation,"

preceding decade, hosted Rhinehart and facilitated his public events in Egypt. One of that movement's leading organizers, a professor named ʿAli ʿAbd al-Jalil Radi, befriended Rhinehart and described this American medium's visit to Egypt in the Arab world's first and perhaps only Arabic periodical dedicated to Spiritualism, a monthly magazine called *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (*The World of the Spirit*) (1947–1960).[2] Years later Radi recalled that Rhinehart's visit was the "most marvelous spiritual gathering" (*arwaʿijtimāʿrūḥī*) in Egypt's history.[3] Since the coalescence of an organized Spiritualist movement in Egypt during the late 1940s, Egyptian proponents of this novel spiritual form sought to host an experienced European or North American medium in Egypt.[4] Rhinehart's trip to Egypt was the culmination of a decade of Spiritualist publicizing and organizing in that country. Indeed, according to Radi, Egypt's Spiritualist magazine entered its "golden age" during the late 1950s. Although the "Spiritualist movement" (*al-ḥaraka al-rūḥiyya*) in Egypt often "stumbled," Radi nevertheless felt that by the close of the decade there was such a movement to speak of.[5] This article explores the history of this movement through an analysis of its magazine, *ʿAlam al-Ruh*.

Although controversial and sometimes treated with derision, Spiritualism caught the attention of many Egyptians during the twentieth century. Throughout the 1950s it was common for Egypt's newspapers, such as its leading paper, *al-Ahram*, to discuss paranormal phenomena and the activities of Spiritualists. In 1959, for example, *al-Ahram* commented that "there is, these days, much news spread by the newspapers about spirits, spirit mediums, and the summoning of spirits."[6] These comments came in an interview the paper conducted with Ahmad Fahmi Abu al-Khayr (d. 1960)—Radi's colleague, and the undisputed leader of Egypt's Spiritualist movement—in which he answered questions for *al-Ahram*'s readers about the summoning of spirits.[7]

Spiritualist claims and, in some cases, practices, strongly impacted Egypt's Islamic scene. Key figures in its scholarly establishment, including Muhammad Hasanayn Makhluf (d. 1990), a leading mufti, and Muhammad Farid Wajdi (d. 1954), the editor of the journal of al-Azhar, a renowned institution of Islamic learning, articulated statements supportive of Spiritualist beliefs.[8] Tantawi Jawhari (d. 1940), a scholar of

accessed 25 July 2024, www.aquarianfoundation.com; "Keith Milton Rhinehart," accessed 25 July 2024, www.keithmiltonrhinehart.com.

[2]See Radi's autobiographical reflections, *ʿAsharat Asdiqaʾ ʿAla Raʾsihim Raʾis al-Jumhuriyya al-Asbaq Muhammad Najib* (Cairo: n.p., 1982), 42. See also "Ihtifal al-Majalla bi-Dukhuliha al-ʿAmm al-Rabiʿ," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (Dec. 1950): 2–8, at 8. For Radi's summary of Rhinehart's visit, see ʿAli ʿAbd al-Jalil Radi, "al-Wasit Rhinehart fi Misr," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (Jan. 1958): 10–13.

[3]Radi, *ʿAsharat Asdiqaʾ*, 48.

[4]Ahmad Fahmi Abu al-Khayr, Spiritualism's leading proponent in Egypt, articulated this aspiration at one of *ʿAlam al-Ruh*'s earliest yearly celebrations, "Ihtifal al-Majalla bi-Dukhuliha al-ʿAmm al-Rabiʿ," 5.

[5]See the column Radi wrote in *ʿAlam al-Ruh* on this movement and its obstacles, which began in January 1960, called "Li-Madha Tataʿaththar al-Haraka al-Ruhiyya ʿIndana?" ("Why has the spiritualist movement stumbled among us?").

[6]Salah Muntasir, "Sitta Turuq Yumkin bi-Ha Tahdir al-Arwah: Hadith Gharib Maʿ ʿAlim Arwah," *al-Ahram*, 27 June 1959, 6. See also *al-Ahram*'s report on a ghost haunting at a lawyer's home in Alexandria, "Zahira ʿAjiba fi Bayt Muhamin," *al-Ahram*, 24 Sept. 1953.

[7]For another *al-Ahram* article that featured Abu al-Khayr, see "Arwah Sharira Tuzhir fi Manzil Dabit fi Banha," *al-Ahram*, 6 Jan 1958, 5.

[8]Egyptian Spiritualists thought Makhluf supported their cause and cited his writings as legitimating Spiritualists beliefs. For Makhluf's statements on Spiritualism, see Ahmad Fahmi Abu al-Khayr, "Asʾila

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417525100248 Published online by Cambridge University Press

repute and author of a popular book on the Qur'an, was a Spiritualist practitioner.[9] The Sufi scholar and future Rector of al-Azhar, ʿAbd al-Halim Mahmud (d. 1978), opined on Spiritualism, albeit negatively.[10] In addition, luminaries in Egypt's Islamic reformist milieu debated Spiritualism. Figures no less than Muhammad Rashid Rida (d. 1935), the editor of the Islamic journal, *al-Manar*, and Hasan al-Banna (d. 1949), the charismatic founder of the Muslim Brotherhood activist movement, both responded to Spiritualist claims. Whereas Rida evinced skepticism toward Spiritualism,[11] al-Banna voiced cautious support when he called on scholars of "Islamic nations" to compete with their Western counterparts "to do many precise experiments to know the truth of these matters themselves" (*yukthiru min al-tajārib al-daqīqa li-maʿrifat ḥaqīqat hadhihī al-umūr bi-anfusihim*).[12] Other influential Brotherhood figures, including the theologian, Muhammad al-Ghazali (d. 1996), the legal scholar, al-Sayyid Sabiq (d. 2000), and the former Brotherhood leader, Ahmad Hasan al-Baquri (d. 1985), also engaged the ideas of Spiritualists and psychical researchers.[13]

Evidently, Spiritualism garnered the attention of Egypt's media and its leading Islamic intellectuals. Scholars, however, have only begun to explore *ʿAlam al-Ruh*, the mouthpiece of Egypt's Spiritualist movement.[14] By analyzing its pages, this article charts an underexamined chapter in Spiritualism's global history and explores how Egyptians have blended the Islamic tradition with novel ideas about science during

wa-l-Radd ʿAlayha," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (April 1952): 2–6, at 6. See also ʿAli ʿAbd al-Jalil Radi, *Adwaʾ ʿAla al-Ruhiyya* (Cairo: Lajnat Nashr al-Thaqafah al-Ruhiya, 1961), 39–40. For Wajdi's endorsements of Spiritualism, see Muhammad Farid Wajdi, *ʿAla Atlal al-Madhhab al-Maddi* (Cairo: Matbaʿat Daʾirat Maʿarif al-Qarn al-ʿIshrin, 1921).

[9]For a concise statement of his support for Spiritualism, see Tantawi Jawhari, *Kitab al-Ruh* (Cairo: al-Matbaʿa al-Misriyya, 1919), 4–8. For his Spiritualist activities, see Ahmad Fahmi Abu al-Khayr, "Tantawi Jawhari al-ʿAlim al-Ruhi," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (Mar. 1956): 2–10; ʿAli ʿAbd al-Jalil Radi, "al-Shaykh Tantawi Jawhari," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (Jan. 1959): 29–30, and 35; Marwa Elshakry, *Reading Darwin in Arabic, 1840–1950* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 314–15.

[10]ʿAbd al-Halim Mahmud, "Tahdir al-Arwah wa-l-Tasawwuf wa-l-Tahallul min al-Shariʿa," *Majallat al-Islam wa-l-Tasawwuf* 2, 11 (April 1960): 62–66.

[11]Muhammad Rashid Rida, "Al-Sbiritizm Aw Istihdar al-Arwah," *al-Manar* 29, 5 (Rabiʿ al-Awwal 1347/Sept. 1928), 362–71.

[12]Hasan al-Banna, "Istihdar al-Arwah", *al-Manar*, Rajab 1358/Aug. 1939, https://shamela.ws/book/6947/4519.

[13]While rejecting Spiritualist claims, al-Ghazali voiced support for psychical research. See al-Ghazali's *Rakaʾiz al-Iman* (Kuwait: Maktabat al-Aml, 1967), 317–61. Sabiq, on the other hand, expressed positive views on both Spiritualism and psychical research. See Sabiq's *al-ʿAqaʾid al-Islamiyya* (Cairo: Dar al-Kutub al-ʿArabiyya, 1964), 143, 208–209, 225–234. Al-Baquri greatly admired Spiritualists. See an article he wrote, which *ʿAlam al-Ruh* later reprinted: Ahmad Hasan al-Baquri, "Istihdar al-Arwah," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (March 1955): 11. More broadly, for the Brotherhood and its affiliates' engagement with Spiritualism and related discourses, see Arthur Shiwa Zárate, *Mediating God: Muhammad al-Ghazali and Politics of Divine Presence in Twentieth-Century Egypt* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2025).

[14]To my knowledge, the only studies on this magazine in English are Raphael Cormack, "Spiritualism Experienced Its Heyday in 20th-Century Egypt: How a Rise in the Movement and Summoning of the Dead Became Characteristic of an Era's Seismic Change," *News Lines Magazine*, 1 July 2022, https://newlinesmag.com/essays/Spiritualism-experienced-its-heyday-in-20th-century-egypt/; Raphael Cormack, "The Other Side," *Khabar Keslan*, 2 Dec 2017, https://www.khabarkeslan.com/articles/2017/11/27/the-other-side.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417525100248 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the twentieth century.[15] It focuses on the central activity Abu al-Khayr and his associates promoted, what they called "spirit healing" (*ʿilāj rūḥī*). This practice derived from the work of the British medium and healer, Harry Edwards (d. 1976).[16] As it was deployed in Egypt, it involved a medium, such as Abu al-Khayr's brother, Hamid Abu al-Khayr, summoning the spirits of the dead and requesting these disincarnate souls heal someone of their physical or psychological ailments, or expel from them, or their home, a malicious spirit. Spirit healing was thus a medical treatment and an exorcism. Importantly, to explain its mechanics, Abu al-Khayr and his associates utilized a Spiritualist cosmology, one that presumed that the dead could return to this world, perform services for the living, and thereby atone for past sins and achieve spiritual progress in the afterlife, or alternatively, attack, possess, and harm people. Such ideas were well outside of the scientific mainstream,[17] and, moreover, unorthodox within the Islamic tradition, as its central text, the Qur'an, depicts death as the end of a human's ability to perform actions in the world.[18] Egyptian Spiritualists recognized their work's unconventionality. Their goal, though, was not conventional. Rather, by promoting Spiritualism, they sought to advance Islam and science to new heights. Indeed, they argued, while the unenlightened may think that Spiritualism conflicted with the Islamic tradition and science, it, in fact, aligned with each in their truest forms.

This article examines Abu al-Khayr and his associates' efforts to carve out space for spirit healing within Islam and science to shed light on a central dynamic within the history of scientific exploration in the Islamic world. On the one hand, Egyptian Spiritualists saw this novel spirituality as promising a more scientific approach toward religion, one that would eradicate the superstitions of conventional religion and contribute to Egypt's modernization. On the other hand, they saw in this novel spiritual form a salve for the souls of Egyptians who succumbed to an ill-informed scientific materialism that denied the agencies of spiritual powers. Abu al-Khayr and his associates thus framed their project as a two-fold enterprise: Spiritualism would render Islamic ideas and practices amenable to scientific inquiry and, at the same time, render modern scientific and medical practices open to the influence of

[15]There is a small, but growing body of scholarship considering the histories of Spiritualism and Spiritism in the Islamic world. See, for example, Alireza Doostdar, *The Iranian Metaphysicals: Explorations in Science, Islam, and the Uncanny* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 112–122; Özgür Türesay, "Between Science and Religion: Spiritism in the Ottoman Empire (1850s–1910s)," *Studia Islamica* 113, 2 (2018): 166–200; Kutluğhan Soyubol, "In Search of Perfection: Neo-spiritualism, Islamic Mysticism, and Secularism in Turkey," *Modern Intellectual History* 18, 1 (2021): 70–94; Valerie J. Hoffman, "A Sufism for Our Time: The Egyptian Society for Spiritual and Cultural Research," in Lloyd Ridgeon, ed., *Routledge Handbook on Sufism* (New York: Routledge, 2021); Jane I. Smith and Yvonne Yasbeck Haddad, *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 99–126; Elshakry, *Reading Darwin in Arabic*, 314–15.

[16]On Edwards, see "Edwards, Harry (1893–1976)" in Melton, *The Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology*; see also Harry Edwards, *A Guide to Spirit Healing* (London: Psychic Book Club, 1952); Paul Miller, *Born to Heal: A Biography of Harry Edwards, the Spirit Healer* (London: Psychic Book Club, 1948).

[17]For a study that considers Spiritualism and psychical research's place within the scientific community, see Seymour H. Mauskopf and Michael R. McVaugh, *The Elusive Science: Origins of Experimental Psychical Research* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980).

[18]Smith and Haddad, *Islamic Understanding*, 7–8.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417525100248 Published online by Cambridge University Press

otherworldly, metaphysical presences.[19] This double movement—between scientizing religion and spiritualizing science—is central, in many respects, to the history of scientific exploration within the Islamic world. Indeed, from Morocco to Egypt to Iran, spiritual seekers and reformers have not only drawn upon scientific discourses to make claims about "true" Islam, but have also utilized concepts drawn from the Islamic tradition to make claims about "true" science.[20]

By situating the Egyptian Spiritualist project within this dynamic, this article moves away from understandings of the Islamic encounter with modern science that emphasize epistemological rupture,[21] and instead builds on scholarship foregrounding the Islamic tradition's entanglements with modern scientific discourses.[22] This latter approach is useful for highlighting a distinct feature of Egyptian Spiritualism, what might be thought of as a type of cosmological experimentalism. To defend and explain spirit healing, Egyptian Spiritualists experimented with Spiritualist and Islamic cosmologies, combining elements of each together with a scientistic ideology. By cosmologies I mean accounts of the different classes of beings—spiritual and material—that inhabit this world, as well as understandings of the afterlife and its relationship to this world. For instance, when it came to spirit healing, Egyptian Spiritualists sometimes framed it as treatment for disturbances caused by *jinn* (sing. *jinni*), spirit-like beings found in the Islamic tradition who can be good or evil and can possess people.[23] More often, however, Egyptian Spiritualists, while accepting the reality of *jinn*, cast skepticism on claims about *jinn* disturbances. Instead, they framed their spirit healing in terms of a Spiritualist belief that it was the spirits of the human dead that caused the possessions and hauntings they investigated. This was especially the perspective of the leader of Egyptian Spiritualism, Abu al-Khayr, who favored Spiritualist accounts because he believed they were empirically verifiable and more advanced scientifically

[19]Spiritualists often make claims about the scientific grounding of their beliefs. On this point, see John Warne Monroe, *Laboratories of Faith: Mesmerism, Spiritism, and Occultism in Modern France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008). Claims such as these, however, are not unique to Spiritualists, but are similar to the claims adherents of other novel, New Age spiritual traditions make. See, for example, scholarship on what has been termed "metaphysical religion": Catherine Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); Courtney Bender, *The New Metaphysicals: Spirituality and the American Religious Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010). On metaphysical religion in Muslim societies, see Doostdar, *Iranian Metaphysicals*; Arthur Shiwa Zárate, "The American Sufis: Self-Help, Sufism, and Metaphysical Religion in Postcolonial Egypt," *Comparative Studies of Society and History* 61, 4 (2019): 864–93.

[20]See, for example, Doostdar, *Iranian Metaphysicals*; Ana Vinea, "Possessed or Insane? Diagnostic Puzzles in Contemporary Egypt," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 55, 2 (2023): 260–74; Elshakry, *Reading Darwin in Arabic*, 99–218; Zárate, "American Sufis," 874–82; Zárate, *Mediating God*; Ellen J. Amster, *Medicine and the Saints: Science, Islam and the Colonial Encounter in Morocco, 1877–1956* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013).

[21]For this approach, see Ahmad Dallal, *Islam, Science, and the Challenge of History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 149–77.

[22]Doostdar, *Iranian Metaphysicals*, 5, 171–72; Elshakry, *Reading Darwin in Arabic*, 12–18; Omnia El Shakry, *The Arabic Freud: Psychoanalysis and Islam in Modern Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 2; Vinea, "Possessed or Insane?" 262.

[23]On the *jinn*, see Amira el-Zein, *Islam, Arabs, and the Intelligent World of the Jinn* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2009); Barbara Drieskens, *Living with Djinns: Understanding and Dealing with the Invisible in Cairo* (San Francisco: Saqi, 2008). On *jinn* exorcism, see Emilio Spadola, *The Calls of Islam: Sufis, Islamists, and Mass Mediation in Urban Morocco* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014).

than traditional Islamic accounts. Nevertheless, *ʿAlam al-Ruh* hosted a diversity of views and its writers drew upon the Islamic tradition in their explanations of the paranormal phenomena they observed. Indeed, a mixing and blending of cosmologies and scientistic imaginaries was a central feature of *ʿAlam al-Ruh*'s discourse. Such an eclectic approach, believed Egyptian Spiritualists, offered the most enlightened method for understanding the world's spiritual troubles.

This article has five sections. This first situates the Egyptian Spiritualist movement vis-à-vis global Spiritualism and considers reasons why it emerged in Egypt when it did. The second provides an overview of key actors and organizations within Egyptian Spiritualism. The third examines Abu al-Khayr and his colleagues' spirit healing, exploring its relationship to local healing traditions and the ways Egyptian Spiritualists legitimated their practices by blending Islamic and Spiritualist cosmologies. The fourth explores how Abu al-Khayr and his associates positioned Spiritualism as a scientific tool with which they could study the Islamic tradition and advance new understandings of it, as well as their criticisms of scientific materialism. Finally, the fifth section examines the campaign of Egyptian Spiritualists against superstition in the name of science and social order, concentrating on their activities pertaining to possession (*mass*), *jinn*, and sorcery (*siḥr*).

Situating Spiritualism in Mid-Twentieth-Century Egypt

Spiritualism is a diverse phenomenon, but in its most basic sense, it is the attempt to communicate with the dead through a living medium during a séance.[24] Beginning in the United States in 1848 with the Fox sisters, it spread to Great Britain and France and across Europe. Beyond séances, Spiritualist practice included the usage of turning tables and planchettes, and phenomena such as table rapping, clairvoyance, clairaudience, and automatic writing. In France, Spiritualism developed into Spiritism.[25] From the United States and Europe, Spiritualism and Spiritism spread to Latin America, the Caribbean, and various Muslim societies.[26] Its presence in Egypt is part of a history of the global diffusion of Spiritualism that has only recently begun to be traced by scholars.[27]

Several factors made possible the global diffusion of Spiritualism including novel forms of print media and new technologies.[28] Egyptian Spiritualists, as we will see

[24]For introductions to Spiritualism, see Christopher M. Moreman, ed., *The Spiritualist Movement: Speaking with the Dead in America and Around the World*, 3 vols. (Praeger: Santa Barbara, 2013); Cathy Gutierrez, ed., *Handbook of Spiritualism and Channeling* (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

[25]A key point of distinction between Spiritism and Spiritualism is the former's belief in reincarnation. See Lynn L. Sharp, "Reincarnation: A Path to Progress," in Cathy Gutierrez, ed., *Handbook of Spiritualism and Channeling* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 221; see also, John Warne Monroe, "Crossing Over: Allan Kardec and the Transnationalization of Modern Spiritualism" in Cathy Gutierrez, ed., *Handbook of Spiritualism and Channeling* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 263.

[26]For Spiritualism and Spiritism in Latin America and the Caribbean, see Bettina E. Schmidt, "Meeting the Spirits: Puerto Rican Espiritismo as Source for Identity, Healing and Creativity," *Fieldwork in Religion* 3, 2 (2010): 178–94; Waleska de Araújo Aureliano and Vânia Zikán Cardoso, "Spiritism in Brazil From Religious to Therapeutic Practice," in Cathy Gutierrez, ed., *Handbook of Spiritualism and Channeling* (Leiden: Brill, 2015). For these movements in the Islamic world, see the literature cited in footnote 15.

[27]On this point, see Monroe, "Crossing Over," 249–50. For aspects of its global diffusion, see Moreman, *The Spiritualist Movement*, vol. 1.

[28]Simone Natale, *Supernatural Entertainments: Victorian Spiritualism and the Rise of Modern Media Culture* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2016), 109–34.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417525100248 Published online by Cambridge University Press

below, were well versed in the literature of Euro-American Spiritualists and translated this literature into Arabic. With regard to technology, a common claim among *ʿAlam al-Ruh*'s writers was that photography—or more specifically "spirit photography" as it was practiced by Euro-American Spiritualists—offered proof of the human spirit's existence after death.[29] Additionally, discoveries related to electricity and radio provided Spiritualists in Egypt and elsewhere with analogies for how the spirit world functioned.[30]

More importantly for the Egyptian case, Spiritualism offered its practitioners a means of reworking religious cosmologies in line with scientific imaginaries and of advancing critiques of materialistic science.[31] As we will see in the following sections, Spiritualism appealed to Egyptians who were concerned with contesting the perceived conflict between religion and science. It is no coincidence that Spiritualism gained a foothold in the Islamic world at a time when Muslim societies were under the control of European colonial powers. Intellectuals across these societies sought to demonstrate that their native traditions were not obstacles to science.[32] By improving the scientific standings of their societies, they believed they could surmount the challenge of imperialism. Ottoman, Turkish, and Iranian thinkers experimented with Spiritualism and Spiritism for this basic reason.

In the Islamic world, the earliest experimentation with these novel religious forms occurred during the second half of the nineteenth century in the Ottoman heartland, where scholars translated the work of Euro-American Spiritualists, and, in some cases, held séances.[33] In 1920s Iran, a Spiritist society conducted research on the spirit world through communication with the souls of the dead.[34] Similarly, in 1940s Turkey, intellectuals researched the paranormal through séances and published original studies on Spiritualism.[35]

Thus, by the time *ʿAlam al-Ruh* appeared in 1947, the Islamic world's intellectual discourse was familiar with Spiritualism. A comprehensive history of Spiritualism's diffusion to Egypt has yet to be written, but those interested in this history, including Egyptian Spiritualists and Western-trained academics, begin with two scholarly figures, Jawhari and Wajdi,[36] who both left supportive writings on the topic during

[29]See, for instance, Ahmad Fahmi Abu al-Khayr, "Barahin Qatiʿa ʿAla al-Haya Baʿda al-Mawt: Arwah al-Mawta Tatajassad fi Dawʾ al-Nahar wa-Taswir bi-l-Fotughrafiyya," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (Jan. 1951): 5–10. On the broader phenomenon of "spirit photography," see Natale, 135–69.

[30]See, for example, Anthony Enns, "Psychic Radio: Sound Technologies, Ether Bodies and Spiritual Vibrations," *Senses and Society* 3, 2 (2008): 137–52; Richard Noakes, "Thoughts and Spirits by Wireless: Imagining and Building Psychic Telegraphs in America and Britain, circa 1900–1930," *History and Technology* 32, 2 (2016): 137–58.

[31]See, especially, Monroe, *Laboratories of Faith*; see also Doostdar, *Iranian Metaphysicals*, 112–22.

[32]On Egypt during this period, see Elshakry, *Reading Darwin in Arabic*. For Iran, see Cyrus Schayegh, *Who is Knowledgeable is Strong: Science, Class, and the Formation of Modern Iranian Society, 1900–1950* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

[33]Türesay, "Between Science and Religion," 175–79, 183–87.

[34]Doostdar, *Iranian Metaphysicals*, 115.

[35]Soyubol, "In Search of Perfection."

[36]See, for example, the Arabic history of Spiritualism by the lawyer Raʾuf ʿUbayd, who was a Spiritualist himself, *al-Insan Ruh La Jasad: Bath fi al-ʿIlm al-Ruhi al-Hadith* (Cairo: Dar al-Fikr al-ʿArabi, 1964), 204–06. Smith and Haddad follow ʿUbayd in beginning with Jawhari and Wajdi, *Islamic Understanding*, 113–14. On ʿUbayd's significance in Egypt's Spiritualist scene, see Radi, *ʿAsharat Asdiqaʾ*, 57–62.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417525100248 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the early twentieth century.[37] *ʿAlam al-Ruh*'s writers referenced Wajdi's writings to legitimatize their enterprise, but did not describe him as a Spiritualist. Rather, Wajdi's significance was as an Arabic source for information about Spiritualism and as a translator of Spiritualist texts. Jawhari, on the other hand, was Spiritualist himself. In fact, according to Abu al-Khayr, together they established Egypt's first Spiritualist circle, most likely during the 1930s.[38] Although this claim's veracity is difficult to establish, *ʿAlam al-Ruh*'s writers and other Egyptian Spiritualists do not mention other circles in existence in Egypt or elsewhere in the Arab world prior to Abu al-Khayr and Jawhari's circle. The scope of its activities was presumably not extensive, as they are neither reported on in *ʿAlam al-Ruh* nor described in secondary scholarship.

Although research on Spiritualism and Spiritism in Muslim societies is a burgeoning field, with the exception of Iran, scholars have yet to provide a detailed picture of the activities Spiritualists and Spiritists in these societies pursued. *ʿAlam al-Ruh* is thus a vital resource for filling this gap. The magazine also allows scholars to trace the emergence of a Spiritualist movement in Egypt. By "movement" I mean something more than the largely solitary activities and scholarship of Wajdi and Jawhari. Rather, I mean collective organizing activities involving a central mouthpiece (i.e., *ʿAlam al-Ruh*), and multiple propagandists, mediums, and séance circles, with a message that appealed to Egypt's professional classes.[39] At first glance, its 1940s emergence seems late when compared to Spiritualism's influence in the United States, where its appeal reached its height from the 1850s through the 1870s and thereafter witnessed periodic revivals into the early twentieth century.[40] However, this mid-twentieth-century emergence in Egypt is in line with trends in Turkey and Iran where Spiritists and Spiritualists became active during the twentieth century's first half.

In Egypt, two factors explain why a Spiritualist movement emerged when it did. First, it was an outgrowth of the *efendiyya* movements of the early twentieth century. The *efendiyya* were a social grouping made up of urban, literate, and upwardly mobile Egyptian men, who formed politically prominent movements committed to anticolonial nation building and ideals of cultural authenticity during the 1930s and 1940s—a time of tremendous domestic and international upheaval.[41] They were products of an early twentieth-century rise in education and urbanization.[42] These movements included Islamic societies, such as the Brotherhood and the Young Men's Muslim Association, who, alongside other *efendiyya* societies, like Young Egypt,

[37]Jawhari, *Kitab al-Ruh*; Wajdi, *ʿAla Atlal.*

[38]Ahmad Fahmi Abu al-Khayr, "Tantawi Jawhari al-ʿAlim al-Ruhi," 5. Unfortunately, Abu al-Khayr does not provide a date for the founding of this circle or its name, but according to Radi, Abu al-Khayr founded a circle during the 1930s. It seems likely that this was the circle Abu al-Khayr founded with Jawhari. See Radi, *ʿAsharat Asdiqaʾ*, 39.

[39]These details of Egypt's Spiritualist movement are discussed on page 12 of the present article.

[40]R. Laurence Moore, *In Search of White Crows: Spiritualism, Parapsychology, and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 40.

[41]Although he does not reference the *efendiyya*, Cormack argues, "Spiritualism…becomes popular when a new world and a new order looks possible. Arab Spiritualists emerged when new ways of existing in the world were being imagined." ("Spiritualism Experienced its Heyday.") On the *efendiyya*, see Lucie Ryzova, *The Age of the Efendiyya: Passages to Modernity in National-Colonial Egypt* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[42]Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski, *Redefining the Egyptian Nation, 1930–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 1–31.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417525100248 Published online by Cambridge University Press

popularized a turn toward the Islamic tradition for a model of modernity. These societies developed vibrant presses and outreach activities to spread their messages. The *efendiyya* movements, I argue, paved the path for Egyptian Spiritualists, providing models they could follow for organizing.

Second, Egyptian Spiritualists became most active during the mid-to-late 1950s, at the moment when Gamal Abdel Nasser's government (r. 1954–1970) outlawed and repressed Egypt's most influential Islamic society, the Brotherhood, and curtailed the activities of Egypt's Salafi societies.[43] The Nasser government came to power through a 1952 anticolonial revolution and ushered in a politics of authoritarian secular Arab nationalism.[44] *ʿAlam al-Ruh*'s writers shared the Nasserist state's vision of modernization, social uplift, and science-based reform,[45] but did not explicitly address domestic politics. No doubt owing to their apolitical orientation and fealty to progressivism, the Nasser regime allowed them to function freely during the 1950s. It is known that Nasser allowed Egypt's Sufis, who supported the regime's ideology, to develop a press and pursue activism as a way of counteracting the Brotherhood's influence.[46] Egyptian Spiritualists likely benefited from this strategy.

The ideological message of *ʿAlam al-Ruh*'s Spiritualists emerged in dialogue and competition with Egypt's other 1950s Islamic trends, including Salafis, Muslim Brothers, and Sufis. Egypt's Spiritualists shared with these groups the presupposition that the best way to reform society was to reform Islam. Unlike Egyptian Salafis, however, who sought to remove extraneous, foreign elements from the Islamic tradition,[47] *ʿAlam al-Ruh*'s writers advocated an expansive and eclectic take on that tradition. Additionally, these writers shared with the Brotherhood a cosmopolitan perspective on Islam. Both Spiritualists and Brotherhood affiliates, for example, found common cause with Euro-American spiritual seekers.[48] Yet unlike Brotherhood activists, *ʿAlam al-Ruh* avoided engagement with politics. Finally, in their blending of science and spirituality, *ʿAlam al-Ruh*'s writers shared much with a key organization within Egypt's

[43]On the government's campaign against the Brotherhood, see Mathias Ghyoot, *Brothers Behind Bars: A History of the Muslim Brotherhood from the Palestine War to Egypt's Prisons* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2025). For discussion of Salafism in relationship to the Nasser regime, see Aaron Rock-Singer, *In the Shade of the Sunna: Salafi Piety in the Twentieth-Century Middle East* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2022), 59–64.

[44]Roel Meijer, *The Quest for Modernity: Secular, Liberal and Left-wing Political Thought in Egypt, 1945–1958* (London: Routledge, 2002).

[45]For the politics of this period, see Omnia El Shakry, *The Great Social Laboratory: Subjects of Knowledge in Colonial and Postcolonial Egypt* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 197–218; Laura Bier, *Revolutionary Womanhood: Feminisms, Modernity, and the State in Nasser's Egypt* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).

[46]On the Nasser regime's relative tolerance for Sufis, see Frederick De Jong, "Aspects of the Political Involvement of Sufi Orders in Twentieth Century Egypt (1907–1970): An Exploratory Stock Taking," in Gabriel R. Warburg and Uri M. Kupferschmidt, eds., *Islam, Nationalism, and Radicalism in Egypt and the Sudan* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1983), 183–212; see also Arthur Shiwa Zárate, "Sufi Reformism and the Politics of Enchantment in Nasser's Egypt, 1954–1970," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 98, 1 (2021): 154–55.

[47]Rock-Singer, *In the Shade*, 6, 13–14.

[48]On the cosmopolitan and eclectic intellectual milieu of the Brotherhood, see Zárate, *Mediating God*; Zárate, "American Sufis."

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417525100248 Published online by Cambridge University Press

reformist Sufi establishment, the ʿAshira Muhammadiyya.[49] Although Abu al-Khayr criticized alleged irrational excesses of Sufis, *ʿAlam al-Ruh*'s other writers posited connections between their practices and Sufi practices, especially those related to channeling the healing blessings of deceased Sufi saints, or Friends of God (*awliyāʾ Allāh*). In one article, *ʿAlam al-Ruh*'s writers favorably quoted a piece published by the ʿAshira's magazine, *al-Muslim*, which described the postmortem healing works of a certain Friend of God.[50] For its part, *al-Muslim* articulated a supportive position on Spiritualism.[51]

In sum, *ʿAlam al-Ruh*'s project did not simply derive from the diffusion of Spiritualist discourses to Egypt. Rather it was produced out of the intersection of global and local forces, which came together under the pressures of twentieth-century Egyptian political life. With this context in mind, we can consider the main Egyptian Spiritualist actors and their activities.

Egypt's Spiritualists and Their Activities

Abu al-Khayr began his career as a Spiritualist publicist by translating a work by the British Spiritualist, J. Arthur Findlay (d. 1964) in 1936.[52] Translation was a crucial component of the Egyptian Spiritualist movement, as it was elsewhere in the Islamic world.[53] *ʿAlam al-Ruh*'s writers reported extensively on Spiritualism in Western societies and related news from Western Spiritualist periodicals, such as *Psychic News*. Reports about ghost hauntings, exorcisms, and spirit sightings from Western societies filled *ʿAlam al-Ruh*'s pages. Edwards's spirit healing loomed especially large in *ʿAlam al-Ruh*.[54]

Through years of promotional activities, Abu al-Khayr became known as Egyptian Spiritualism's leader.[55] According to Sabir Jabra, a Christian doctor, pharmacist, and member of Abu al-Khayr's Spiritualist group, Abu al-Khayr "was the only man in the East who opened the door to the field of Spiritualist research."[56] Radi asserted that no other person in history, with the exception of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (d. 1930), did

[49]On the ʿAshira's blend of Sufism, science, and socialism, see Zárate, "Sufi Reformism," 143–73.

[50]"Min Halat al-ʿIlaj al-Ruhi fi Misr," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (Nov. 1955): 23–24.

[51]Muhammad Zaki Ibrahim, "Ifadat wa-Intibaʿat fi Allah," *al-Muslim* (Jan. 1969): 5–13, at 10; Muhammad al-Manfaluti, "Tajassud al-Ruh: Haqiqat Islamiyya ʿArafaha al-Sufiyyun min al-Qadim," *al-Muslim* (Sept. 1954): 26–28, at 27.

[52]Radi, *ʿAsharat Asdiqaʾ*, 39. On Findlay, see "Findlay, J. Arthur (1883–1964)," in Melton, *The Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology*; see also J. Arthur Findlay, *On the Edge of the Etheric* (London: Rider and Co., 1932).

[53]Doostdar, *Iranian Metaphysicals*, 115; Türesay, "Between Science and Religion," 166; Soyubol, "In Search," 78–79.

[54]A main component of *ʿAlam al-Ruh*'s annual celebrations was a viewing of a film of Edwards conducting spirit healing. See, for example, "Ihtifal al-Majalla bi-Dukhuliha al-ʿAmm al-Rabiʿ," 3. *ʿAlam al-Ruh* also published Arabic translations of Edwards's *A Guide to Spirit Healing*. See, for example, the series called "al-Murshid Li-al-ʿIlaj al-Ruhi," which began November 1958 and continued sporadically until March 1960.

[55]Najib al-Wisa, "Al-Mahrajan al-Ruhi fi Suhag," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (Feb. 1949): 24–26, at 24; ʿAli ʿAbd al-Jalil Radi, "ʿAlam al-Ruh," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (Nov. 1958): 2–3, at 2–3. See also the account of a one-time practitioner-turned-critic of Spiritualism, Muhammad Muhammad Husayn, *al-Ruhiyya al-Haditha: Haqiqatuha wa-l-Ahdafuha* (Alexandria: Tawziʿa Mansha'a al-Maʿarif, 1960), 10–11.

[56]"Ihtifal al-Majalla bi-Dukhuliha al-ʿAmm al-Rabiʿ," 7.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417525100248 Published online by Cambridge University Press

as much as Abu al-Khayr to promote Spiritualism.[57] When Abu al-Khayr established *ʿAlam al-Ruh*, he edited it and maintained it at his own expense.[58] The magazine held annual celebrations to commemorate its publishing activities, the work of Egyptian Spiritualists, and articulate their aspirations. At the first of these celebrations in January 1949, Abu al-Khayr called for the establishment of a society for Spiritualist research in Egypt, like those in Europe and the United States.[59] Two years later, *ʿAlam al-Ruh* celebrated the establishment of the Egyptian Society of Spiritualist Research (ESSR), which obtained government approval in September 1950. Abu al-Khayr served as its Secretary General.[60]

Radi was also a leading member of Egypt's Spiritualist movement.[61] He recalls that he first became interested in Spiritualism after the death of his brother. Although he would eventually become close colleagues with Abu al-Khayr, Radi's relationship with the latter was not always smooth. Abu al-Khayr sharply criticized one of Radi's earliest books on Spiritualism, a work published in 1951.[62] Thereafter Radi spent several years in London where he claimed to immerse himself in that city's Spiritualist scene. Upon returning to Egypt in 1957, he became friends with Abu al-Khayr. By this time *ʿAlam al-Ruh* was experiencing financial difficulties and Abu al-Khayr asked Radi to take over the funding of its publication, which Radi did at his own expense.[63]

Throughout the 1950s, the ESSR investigated paranormal phenomena across Egypt. During this decade, Egyptian newspapers called upon Abu al-Khayr and the ESSR to opine on events involving possessions, spirits, and hauntings, or what *ʿAlam al-Ruh*'s writers called collectively "spirit disturbance" (*shaghab rūḥī*), more generally. To buttress the legitimacy of its endeavor, *ʿAlam al-Ruh* frequently reprinted excerpts from or entire articles by other media outlets that showcased Abu al-Khayr's investigations.[64] An article from August 1954 that was printed in the newspaper *al-Jumhuriyya*, for instance, reported how Abu al-Khayr and colleagues put an end to the occupation by "demons" (*ʿafārīt*) of an apartment in the Shubra district of Cairo.[65] Another article first printed in the newspaper *al-Akhbar*

[57]Radi, *ʿAsharat Asdiqaʾ*, 42.

[58]On this point, see Radi, "ʿAlam al-Ruh," 3. According to an earlier article, however, Abu al-Khayr and the members of his Spiritualist circle, the Cairo Spiritualism Circle (*dāʾirat al-qāhira al-rūḥiyya*), funded the magazine. See "Ihtifal al-Majalla bi-Dukhuliha al-ʿAmm al-Sadis," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (Dec. 1952): 2–7, at 3. Note that the magazine did not publish advertisements.

[59]"Ihtifal al-Majalla bi-Dukhuliha al-ʿAmm al-Thani," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (Jan. 1949): 30–31, at 30.

[60]"Ihtifal al-Majalla bi-Dukhuliha al-ʿAmm al-Rabiʿ," 4.

[61]ʿUbayd singles out Radi, in addition to Abu al-Khayr, as the most important Arab authorities on Spiritualism, *al-Insan Ruh La Jasad*, 206–09.

[62]Ahmad Fahmi Abu al-Khayr, "Muharrij Jadid La Yurid An Yataqqi Allah fi al-ʿIlm," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (Dec. 1951): 7–17. The book was Radi's *al-ʿAlam Ghayr al-Manzur* (Cairo: Dar al-Fikr al-ʿArabi, 1951).

[63]Radi, *ʿAsharat Asdiqaʾ*, 41–42.

[64]See, for instance, the *al-Ahram* article about reports of spirit disturbances occurring in an army officer's apartment. In it, *al-Ahram* interviews Abu al-Khayr and describes him as "a specialist in the summoning of spirits" (*akhiṣṣā ʾī fī taḥdīr al-arwāḥ*). See "Al-Arwah al-Mushaghiba," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (Feb. 1958): 2–4, at 4. See also the interview *al-Ahram* did with Abu al-Khayr in 1959, previously cited in footnote 6. Note further that even critics, such as Husayn, recognized that Spiritualism received a great deal of attention in the Egyptian media during the late 1950s. Husayn laments the "preoccupation of newspapers with the news of spirits," adding that such papers, which had never previously seemed interested in spiritual matters, now seem to be propagating Spiritualism, *al-Ruhiyya al-Haditha*, 4–5.

[65]"Shaghab Ruhi Jadid fi Manzil bi-Shubra," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (Sept. 1954): 11–17.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417525100248 Published online by Cambridge University Press

interviewed Abu al-Khayr, describing him as a "spirit expert" or "scholar" (*ʿālim rūḥī*), and asked him to give his opinion on a story about disturbances caused by *jinn* in the Egyptian city of Kafr al-Shaykh.[66]

Supporters and practitioners of Spiritualism in Egypt included lawyers, doctors, professors, actors, musicians, artists, engineers, and government employees. The participation of educated professionals in Egypt's Spiritualist movement was a source of pride for *ʿAlam al-Ruh* and the magazine highlighted this, especially when such individuals partook in its yearly celebrations.[67] Additionally, the magazine's articles often included the writers' profession. The magazine had readers across the Arab world, including Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, and Kuwait. By 1960, the number of Spiritualist circles that *ʿAlam al-Ruh* reported on and advertised for increased from one during the early 1950s to four by the end of the decade, including one established by Radi, which was called the Pyramid Spiritualist Society.[68] However, there was a dearth of good mediums in Egypt, as Radi noted on multiple occasions.[69] When a British medium named Dorothy Adams visited Egypt —the second visit of a foreign medium to Egypt after Rhinehart's—she too commented that Egyptian mediums needed more training.[70] Still, by the close of the decade, Radi penned an article in *ʿAlam al-Ruh* introducing no fewer than six Egyptian mediums.[71] Additionally, by the late 1950s, *ʿAlam al-Ruh* could report on a growing number of publications on or closely related to Spiritualism written by Egyptian authors, including a set of articles written by Muhammad Shahin Hamza, a writer whose work *ʿAlam al-Ruh* celebrated.[72] Hamza's articles were later published as a book, the preface of which Radi wrote.[73] At least from the perspective of the writers in *ʿAlam al-Ruh*, the 1950s was a decade of growth for Egyptian Spiritualism. Indeed, there was enough growth in popular interest in Spiritualist practices that Abu al-Khayr and his brother, Hamid, both deemed it necessary to write articles warning Egyptians against what they believed were improper and dangerous methods of summoning the dead.[74]

[66]"Al-Arwah al-Mushaghiba," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (Oct. 1954): 8–18, at 9.

[67]For instance, *ʿAlam al-Ruh* claimed that its celebrations were attended by the "elite of men of science, literature, art, and journalism." See "Ihtifal al-Majalla bi-Dukhuliha al-ʿAmm al-Thalith," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (Dec. 1949): 2–8, at 2. For similar claims, see "Ihtifal al-Majalla bi-Dukhuliha al-ʿAmm al-Thani," 30; "Ihtifal al-Majalla bi-Dukhuliha al-ʿAmm al-Rabiʿ," 2.

[68]Each of these groups advertised their spirit healing in *ʿAlam al-Ruh*. In addition to the Pyramid Spiritualist Society, the others were the Cairo Spiritualism Circle, the Society of Islamic Spiritualism (*al-jamʿiyya al-islāmiyya al-rūḥiyya*), and Dar al-ʿIlaj al-Ruhi. For an advertisement for all four groups, see, "Ila al-Marda Tullab al-ʿIlaj al-Ruhi," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (March 1960): 24. For Radi's comments on the founding of the Pyramid Spiritualist Society, see *ʿAsharat Asdiqaʾ*, 64.

[69]ʿAli ʿAbd al-Jalil Radi, "Li-Madha Tataʿaththar al-Haraka al-Ruhiyya ʿIndana?" *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (April 1960): 4–7, at 5; Radi, *ʿAsharat Asdiqaʾ*, 64.

[70]"Akhbar Ruhiyya," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (Aug.–Sept. 1959): 49–51, at 50.

[71]ʿAli ʿAbd al-Jalil Radi, "Uqaddim La-Ka Haʾulaʾi al-Wusataʾ," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (Nov. 1959): 36–38.

[72]For mention and praise of Hamza's articles, see "al-Akhbar al-Ruhiyya," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (June 1960): 21. The other publications celebrated by *ʿAlam al-Ruh* are Sabir Jabra's *Majd al-Kitab al-Muqaddas*; Ahmad Qadri Sulayman's *al-Risala al-Ruhiyya fi al-Qurʾan al-Karim*; Jamal al-Din Hasan Husayn's *al-Ruhiyya fi al-Turath al-Islami*; and ʿAbd al-Razzaq Nawfal's *Allah wa-ʿIlm al-Hadith.*

[73]Muhammad Shahin Hamza, *al-Ruhiyya al-Haditha: Daʿwa Ila al-Iman* (Cairo: n.p., 1968).

[74]Ahmad Fahmi Abu al-Khayr, "Tahdir al-Arwah bi-Salla wa-Ghayruha," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (April 1960): 2–3; Hamid Abu al-Khayr, "Khatir Tahdir al-Arwah bi-Salla," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (May 1960): 25.

Despite the Egyptian Spiritualist movement's growth during this decade, when Abu al-Khayr suddenly died in 1960, ʿ*Alam al-Ruh* ceased publishing temporarily. Thereafter it continued to be published sporadically and under a different title.[75] Although it is difficult to trace the long-term legacy of the Spiritualist groups affiliated with Abu al-Khayr and ʿ*Alam al-Ruh*, people like Radi, Hamza, and others continued to publish on Spiritualism throughout the 1960s.[76] Additionally, there is at least one group active in Egypt today, the Egyptian Society for Spiritual and Cultural Research, which was founded in 1980, that attributes to Abu al-Khayr an important role in its early historical formation and maintains fealty to Spiritualist ideas, if not practices.[77] Regardless of the legacy of Egypt's Spiritualist movement, the latter's importance, I argue, has less to do with its influence than with what its blending of cosmologies and scientific imaginaries says about the relationship between science and the Islamic tradition in modernity.

The Healing Spirit

The central practice ʿ*Alam al-Ruh*'s Spiritualists pursued was spirit healing. It was rooted in Edwards's ideas, which were ecumenical, though most explicitly tied to Christianity. The name "spirit healing" derived from Edwards's work. As we will see below, Abu al-Khayr and his colleagues' spirit healing also had parallels with local Islamic healing traditions. Nevertheless, it was neither a mere reflection of Edwards's practice nor a traditional practice. It was rather an amalgam of different ideas, one that reflects a crucial dynamic within the history of scientific exploration in the Islamic world. This dynamic relates to the fact that metaphysical inquiries have not existed on modernity's margins, but have been central to projects of modernization in societies as diverse as those of the North Atlantic, and contemporary Iran and Morocco.[78] With regard to the Islamic world, two features stand out in this history. One is the attempt of researchers to grasp metaphysical phenomena through scientific practice and concepts, and banish superstition from such phenomena;[79] and the other is a commitment on the part of Muslim reformers to "ontological multiplicity," or a willingness to accept mainstream scientific and medical suppositions, while at the same depicting materialist science and medicine

[75]Cormack, "The Other Side."

[76]See Radi, *Adwaʾ ʿAla al-Ruhiyya*; Hamza, *al-Ruhiyya al-Haditha*. See also ʿUbayd's Arabic history of Spiritualism, *al-Insan Ruh La Jasad*.

[77]Hoffman, "A Sufism for Our Time," 476. Like the Egyptian Spiritualist movement, the Egyptian Society for Spiritual and Cultural Research maintains an eclectic spirituality. It is primarily a Sufi organization, but it developed out of a Spiritualist circle that was formed in the 1950s by al-Sayyid Rafiʿ Muhammad Rafiʿ called the Islamic Spiritualist Society. The latter was one of the groups affiliated with ʿ*Alam al-Ruh*. ʿ*Alam al-Ruh*, for instance, commented positively on a book Rafiʿ wrote. See "Akhbar Ruhiyya," ʿ*Alam al-Ruh* (Oct. 1959): 36–38, at 38. The ESSCR's website reports how Abu al-Khayr introduced Rafiʿ to Spiritualist practice and relates the founding of the Islamic Spiritualist Society, "Khalfiyyat Taʾsis wa-Ahdaf wa-Ruʾyat al-Jamʿiyya al-Misriyya li-Buhuth al-Ruhiyya wa-l-Thaqafa," 2 June 2013. https://ar.aroadhome.org/2013/06/blog-post.html.

[78]Jason Ānanda Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment: Magic, Modernity, and the Birth of the Human Sciences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 1–8; Doostdar, *Iranian Metaphysicals*, 3–8, 38–44; Spadola, *Calls of Islam*, 119–36.

[79]On this point, see Doostdar, *Iranian Metaphysicals*, 4–5.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417525100248 Published online by Cambridge University Press

as insufficient mechanisms for evaluating spiritual realities.[80] Thus, as I will show in this and the following sections, Egyptian Spiritualists framed their spirit healing as a corrective to the superstitions (*khurāfāt*) of local exorcism practices and as a challenge to materialism (*māddiyya*) in science.

I begin this section, however, describing what Abu al-Khayr and his associates' spirit healing entailed. It involved the invocation of the aid of spirit worldly agents—benevolent souls of the dead (who had been doctors in their embodied lives)—who helped heal the living of their physical and psychological ailments.[81] Hamid Abu al-Khayr was the medium for Abu al-Khayr's circle. Other Egyptians involved in this circle included clairvoyants who could "see" the healing spirits summoned by Hamid.[82] Spirit healing did not have to be performed in person; it could also be deployed remotely through a practice called "absent healing" (*ʿilāj ghayābī*) wherein the patient received treatment while at home.[83] Additionally, Abu al-Khayr and his circle's spirit healing could be an exorcism, which also involved the assistance of the benevolent spirits of the dead, who, in this case, banished or pushed out malevolent spirits from a person's body or residence.[84]

Compared to local traditions of healing and exorcism, Egyptian Spiritualist healing practices were distinct. These local traditions include the paraliturgical usage of the Qur'an in the form of *ruqya* (incantation), amulets (*tamāʾim*), and supplicatory prayer (*duʿāʾ*).[85] Such usages are common across the Islamic world and they are believed to procure God's aid to deal with moral, psychological, and physical ailments. *Ruqya* entails reciting certain Qur'anic verses or prayers attributed to the Prophet Muhammad combined with acts such as dry spitting or blowing over the outstretched palms and then rubbing the afflicted area of the body. In other contexts, however, *ruqya* refers to exorcism involving the reading of the Qur'an in the presence of someone possessed by *jinn*.[86] Another tradition practiced in parts of Egypt and Sudan is called *zar*. It is a type of *jinn* exorcism and appeasement, which involves music, dance, singing, and sacrificial offerings.[87] In addition, Muslims also employ healing practices attributed to the Prophet Muhammad. These practices, often called "prophetic medicine," include the usage of foods, herbal remedies, simple drugs, and supplicatory prayers.[88] People in Muslim societies also attribute healing powers to Sufi shaykhs and Friends of God, whose tombs serve as centers of popular devotion.[89]

[80]I borrow this term from Vinea's study of Salafi Qur'anic healers in contemporary Egypt, "Possessed or Insane?" 269.

[81]Edwards, *Guide to Spirit Healing*, 14.

[82]See, for example, "Min Halat al-ʿIlaj al-Ruhi fi Misr," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (Oct. 1951): 11–14, at 14.

[83]On absent healing, see ʿAli ʿAbd al-Jalil Radi, "30 Suʾalan La Tasʾaluha," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (Nov. 1959): 44–46, at 44.

[84]See, for instance, "Al-Arwah al-Mushaghiba," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (Oct. 1954): 10.

[85]Kathleen Malone O'Connor, "Popular and Talismanic Uses of the Qur'an," in Jane Dammen McAuliffe, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Qur'an* (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

[86]For *ruqya* as it relates to *jinn* possession, see Spadola, *Calls of Islam*, 121–36.

[87]On *zar*, see Hager El Hadidi, *Zar: Spirit Possession, Music, and Healing Rituals in Egypt* (New York: American University in Cairo Press, 2016).

[88]See Irmeli Perho, *The Prophet's Medicine: A Creation of the Traditionalists Scholars* (Helsinki: Finnish Oriental Society, 1995); Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Medicine of the Prophet*, Penelope Johnstone trans. (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1998).

[89]On Sufi traditions of saint veneration and tomb visitation, see Christopher S. Taylor, *In the Vicinity of the Righteous: Ziyāra and the Veneration of Muslim Saints in Late Medieval Egypt* (Leiden: Brill, 1999). On the

Despite their diversity, a common feature within these traditions is the invocation of God, who is regarded as the ultimate source of healing.[90] In line with this orientation, Egyptian Spiritualists framed their spirit healing in God-centered terms. Nevertheless, as we will see, their conception of the mechanics of spirit healing derived crucial elements from a Spiritualist cosmology, one wherein the spirits of the dead are believed to play an active role in the lives of the living. By combining claims about the this-worldly agency of the souls of the dead and the healing presence of the Islamic tradition's deity, Abu al-Khayr and his associates were experimenting with different cosmologies, attempting to craft out of them a plausible whole. This can be seen further, as this section will also show, in the way Egyptian Spiritualists posited analogies between Spiritualist accounts on good works performed by the spirits of the human dead and Islamic discourses about the activities of angels and deceased Sufi saints.

On the first front, consider how *ʿAlam al-Ruh* advertised Abu al-Khayr and his circle's spirit healing: each issue included a one-page advertisement for their spirit healing entitled "To the Sick Ones Seeking Spirit Healing." A typical advertisement tells readers dealing with intractable sicknesses to send their names and addresses to the magazine. After doing so, it instructs them to sit every Monday and Friday from 7:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. in a darkened room. Prospective patients can do this alone or with others, provided they do so in a quiet, calm manner. Most importantly, the patient must do it in a way that allows him to be "directing of his heart to God." The patient should continue this practice weekly "until God bestows upon him healing." The advertisement adds that the Cairo Spiritualism Circle (Abu al-Khayr's circle) will provide treatment for free and will perform it at a distance. Prospective patients should not visit the circle for in-person healing. Concluding, it warns patients against seeking spirit healing from anyone who asks for payment in return, for in that case "God will not decree for him healing."[91]

Abu al-Khayr and his circle thus believed that God effected the healing they procured. As such, spirit healers, like Abu al-Khayr and Jabra, consistently emphasized that their work had its source in God's agency.[92] In one article, after giving his readers their absent healing instructions, Abu al-Khayr tells prospective patients to follow instructions and they will "achieve healing when God wants for them healing."[93] In this way, Egyptian Spiritualists positioned themselves as mediators of God's power. One valuable feature of *ʿAlam al-Ruh* is that it printed hundreds of letters from Abu al-Khayr's patients thanking him and God for healing. Although these letters were selected by the magazine for publication and are, therefore, only positive, they nevertheless provide a glimpse at how patients interpreted spirit healing. Patients too understood it in God-centered terms. Many of these letters, for instance, invoked God as the agent behind healing. One letter

wondrous powers of Sufi saints and shaykhs, including their healing abilities, see John Renard, *Friends of God: Islamic Images of Piety, Commitment and Servanthood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); see also Taylor, *In the Vicinity*, 133–35; Smith and Haddad, *Islamic Understanding*, 190–91.

[90]This is especially the case with Prophetic healing and other types of religious healing found in the Islamic tradition. On this point, see Michael W. Dols, *Majnūn: The Madman in Medieval Islamic Society*, Diana E. Immisch, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 243.

[91]"Ila al-Marda Tullab al-ʿIlaj al-Ruhi," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (June 1954): 24.

[92]Sabir Jabra, "al-ʿIlaj al-Ruhi," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (June 1948): 26–30, at 27–28.

[93]Ahmad Fahmi Abu al-Khayr, "al-ʿIlaj al-Ruhi fi Misr," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (Nov. 1949): 2–5, at 5.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417525100248 Published online by Cambridge University Press

writer thanked Abu al-Khayr for helping him achieve health, noting, "I am one of those upon whom God has covered them with aid by way of spirit healing…. I had hardly participated in six sessions before my healing was completed by [the] grace of God."[94] Although patients construed God as the primary agent, they acknowledged that Abu al-Khayr and his brother, Hamid, were mediators of God's aid. As one letter writer put it, here addressing Abu al-Khayr directly, "God alone, o virtuous and honorable teacher, is able to bestow upon you…what is facilitated to people by your pure hands in terms of the grace of God and God's blessing."[95] A letter from a father whose daughter was healed by Abu al-Khayr's circle thanked Hamid, "the spirit medium," through whom "God bestowed upon her healing."[96]

Although local Islamic healing traditions and spirit healing share the invocation of God, the key difference between them is that spirit healing attributes a central role to the souls of the dead in effectuating healing. Except for popular beliefs about the spirits of deceased saints (an exception to which I will return),[97] the dead do not usually play a role within Islamic healing practices. The central role of the dead in spirit healing derives from a Spiritualist cosmology. Whereas the Qur'an depicts death as the end of a person's ability to perform good deeds in this world for which he or she will be rewarded by God, Spiritualists believe that death marks the beginning of a journey of spiritual progress.[98]

To justify ideas such as this one in Islamic terms, Egyptian Spiritualists deployed multiple strategies. One was to draw analogies between the nature and deeds of angels as reported by the Islamic tradition and the spirits of the dead according to Spiritualism. For instance, in a column called "The Spiritual Side [*nāḥiyya rūḥiyya*] of the Noble Qur'an," a writer named Rabih Lutfi Jumʿa argues that the activities of angels are analogous to the good works of the dead. He describes the spiritual entities found in the Qur'an, including the human spirit (*rūḥ*), *jinn*, satans or demons (*shayāṭīn*), and angels (*malāʾika*) collectively as "spirits" (*arwāḥ*).[99] For him, "angels are no other than good, pure spirits who have reached a level of ascent that is great."[100] By *ascent* here, note that Egyptian Spiritualists believed that existence in the *barzakh*—the intermediary realm where the spirit resides between death and resurrection—allows the dead to continue to perform good deeds and achieve spiritual ascension (*irtiqāʾ rūḥī*). In an article on "the deeds of the spirit in the other life," Jumʿa asserts, "life in the *barzakh* is a rising high [*sumūw*] and an ascent [*irtiqāʾ*] and deed [*ʿamal*], not a life of restriction, stopping, idleness, and stagnation."[101] On the good deeds of "spirits" (*arwāḥ*) with whom Spiritualists interact, Jumʿa further argues that they are done to expiate sins. He writes that

[94]"Min Halat al-ʿIlaj al-Ruhi fi Misr," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (Apr. 1954): 23–24, at 23.

[95]"Min Halat al-ʿIlaj al-Ruhi fi Misr," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (Mar. 1956): 22–23, at 22.

[96]"Min Halat al-ʿIlaj al-Ruhi fi Misr," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (Sept. 1958): 19–21, at 20.

[97]Smith and Haddad, *Islamic Understanding*, 183–84, 190–91.

[98]Ibid., 7–8. See also "Spiritualism," in Melton, *The Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology*. Al-Ghazali criticizes Egyptian Spiritualists on this point because it conflicts with the Qur'an and Sunna, *Rakaʾiz*, 350.

[99]Rabih Lutfi Jumʿa, "al-Nahiyya al-Ruhiyya fi al-Qur'an al-Karim," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (Jan. 1948): 15–18, at 17.

[100]Ibid., 17–18.

[101]Rabih Lutfi Jumʿa, "al-Nahiyya al-Ruhiyya fi al-Qur'an al-Karim," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (June 1948): 22–26, at 26. On the *barzakh*, see Smith and Haddad, *Islamic Understanding*, 32–33; Mittermaier, *Dreams that Matter*, 3.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417525100248 Published online by Cambridge University Press

"the deeds undertaken by these spirits are good deeds [*aʿmāl ṣāliḥāt*] with which the spirit expiates [*tukaffir*] its sins. Spirits, therefore, are always striving to help and do good. They help…those who live on earth and extend aid to them. There is no doubt that good spirits encircle their loved ones among the living and try to protect them from evil." Importantly, for Jumʿa, the aid spirits of the dead provide the living is analogous to the help angels provide humans according to the Qur'an. He concludes quoting Qur'anic verses including 3:124, which reports how angels helped the Muslim community in battle against its enemies.[102] If spiritual entities like angels can help humans, he suggests, then highly evolved spirits of the dead may also do so.

Jumʿa's claims were not unprecedented, as Jawhari also suggested analogies between the spirits of the dead and angels. Jawhari, however, based his assertions on a reading of the philosophy of the Brethren of Purity (*Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ*) of tenth-century Iraq.[103] Although *ʿAlam al-Ruh*'s writers did not often claim that the spirits they engaged were angels, the parallels between the nature of angels as reported by the Islamic tradition and the activities of the noble dead as conveyed by Spiritualists suggests that Egyptian Spiritualists took the former as a model for thinking about the latter. For one thing, within the Islamic tradition, angels are spiritual entities that take human form, interact and speak with humans.[104] Abu al-Khayr notes this and describes the archangel Gabriel's deeds according to the Qur'an and hadith. For him, this shows that Islamic religion accepts the reality of "spirit materialization" (*tajassud al-rūḥ*) and legitimates the notion that the spirits of the dead can materialize and interact with the living.[105] Second, in the Islamic tradition, angels are inherently good and perform only God's wishes.[106] Similarly, according to Egyptian Spiritualists, any healing spirit with whom they interact is unquestionably good and "does not communicate with…the living other than by [God] giving it permission."[107] Lastly, angels in the Islamic tradition have abilities that surpass those of the *jinn*, with whom they were once at war.[108] Egyptian Spiritualists likewise describe the abilities of the spirits of the dead as surpassing those of *jinn*. As Abu al-Khayr put it, "one spirit is stronger than the entire kingdom of the *jinn*."[109]

Another Islamic analogue for the good works of the spirits of the dead came from the belief that deceased Sufi saints can aid the living. The Spiritualist idea that the dead continue to perform good deeds in the afterlife such that "God raises their rank," as one writer put it,[110] parallels Sufi claims about Friends being able to help the living after their deaths because of their favored rank with God.[111] Indeed, around the same time Egyptian Spiritualists made such arguments, *al-Muslim* defended the idea that some of the *barzakh*'s inhabitants, namely God's Friends, continue to enact good

[102]Ibid., 24.

[103]Jawhari, *Kitab al-Ruh*, 31–35. On the Brethren's beliefs about humans becoming angelic through spiritual progress, see el-Zein, *Intelligent World of the Jinn*, 43.

[104]El-Zein, *Intelligent World of the Jinn*, 48.

[105]Ahmad Fahmi Abu al-Khayr, "al-Jinn wa-l-Arwah," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (June 1950): 32–36, at 34.

[106]El-Zein, *Intelligent World of the Jinn*, 42–44.

[107]ʿAbd al-ʿAziz al-Zahiri, "al-Ruhiyya wa-l-Din," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (Aug. 1953): 20–22, at 22.

[108]El-Zein, *Intelligent World of the Jinn*, 48–49.

[109]Ahmad Fahmi Abu al-Khayr, "Fi al-Sihr" *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (Oct. 1950): 28–32, at 32.

[110]Al-Zahiri, "al-Ruhiyya wa-l-Din," 22.

[111]Smith and Haddad, *Islamic Understanding*, 184.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417525100248 Published online by Cambridge University Press

deeds on earth.[112] For their part, *ʿAlam al-Ruh*'s writers claimed that al-Sayyida Nafisa (d. 824), a well-known Friend with a tomb in Cairo, was actually a "healing spirit" (*rūḥ muʿālija*), who "participated in healing the sick in séance rooms and in the homes of the ill ones."[113]

ʿAlam al-Ruh's writers drew attention to Sufi claims about Friends in the afterlife continuing to interact with the living to suggest parallels with Spiritualist claims about the good deeds of the dead. On the most basic level, there is a belief among Muslims that the dead and the living can intercourse with one another in dreams.[114] This belief is particularly common among Egypt's Sufi communities, who regard dreams as avenues of communication between deceased Friends and their devotees.[115] In their discussions of Sufism and Friends, *ʿAlam al-Ruh*'s writers highlight this to legitimate a basic Spiritualist postulate—that the dead and living communicate with one another.[116] More specifically, however, the magazine highlighted the postmortem deeds of Friends to make claims about the works of the dead. Thus, it published an article by the Sufi scholar Muhammad al-Bakhit al-Mutiʿa (d. 1935), affirming that deceased Friends wield marvels (*karāmāt*) for their devotees. There is no doubt, he writes, "that the spirits of Friends…after their bodily death are a cause through their prayer and attention to God…of the fulfilling of the needs of some visitors to [their tombs] seeking their intercession."[117] Echoing Sufi arguments about the favored status of Friends with God, an *ʿAlam al-Ruh* writer asserted, "God honors their spirits, so they materialize after their death in the world of the *barzakh* and perform wonders [*al-aʿājīb*] with their devotees and disciples."[118] Sufi narratives about deceased Friends' marvels provided *ʿAlam al-Ruh*'s writers with material within which to find parallels with Spiritualist claims. One author, after lamenting that Egyptians look askance at "modern Spiritualism," noted that it confirms the plausibility of Friends enacting wonders like al-Sayyida Nafisa's healings. Spiritualism, he writes, "reveals for people these secrets and presents to them evidence and proof for the continuance of life [after death], interpreting those doings of extraordinary phenomena [*al-khawāriq*] that this group [i.e., Sufis] used to call the marvels of Friends [*karāmāt al-awliyāʾ*]."[119]

Despite the analogies Abu al-Khayr and his colleagues made between Spiritualism and Islamic traditions, the mechanics of spirit healing closely align with Spiritualism. Describing what happened during a spirit healing session, Hamid Abu al-Khayr, who was also clairvoyant, writes that he saw the spirits "encircling the patient. There were six doctors and two assistants…. Each was individually examining the patient and writing its report, delivering [the report] to the [spirit] leader." During this

[112]Muhammad Zaki Ibrahim, "Ijabat Sufiyya Sharʿiyya Qatiʿa ʿala Khamsat ʿAshara Suʾalan Asasiyyan Jamiʿan," *al-Muslim* (Mar. 6 1954): 5–13, at 9.

[113]"Min Halat al-ʿIlaj al-Ruhi fi Misr," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (Nov. 1955): 24.

[114]Smith and Haddad, *Islamic Understanding*, 50.

[115]Mittermaier, *Dreams that Matter*, 148–64.

[116]See, for instance, "Min Halat al-ʿIlaj al-Ruhi fi Misr," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (Nov. 1955): 23–24; ʿAbd al-Salam al-Hijazi, "al-Zawahir al-Ruhiyya fi Bayt al-Rasul: al-Sayyid Nafisa," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (Aug.–Sept. 1959): 22–26, at 25.

[117]Muhammad al-Bakhit al-Mutiʿa, "Fi Karamat al-Awilyaʾ," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (Sept. 1948): 20–27, at 26.

[118]Muhammad Ibn Ahmad al-Wizani, "Min Aʿmaq al-Tasawwuf: al-Ruh wa Atharha," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (April 1959): 28–30, at 30.

[119]Al-Hijazi, "al-Zawahir al-Ruhiyya," 23.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417525100248 Published online by Cambridge University Press

examination, "the body of the patient healed…by means of the emission of rays [ashiʿʿa] brought to bear upon him from the ethereal apparatus [*al-jihāz al-athīrī*] that one of the assistants of the spirits placed on [the patient's] head."[120] That spirits utilized an "ethereal apparatus" to emit healing rays is a consistent claim in *ʿAlam al-Ruh*. "The spirits heal the patients," writes another author, by "sending x-rays from ethereal apparatuses, which are reflected to the clairvoyant who concentrates the [x-rays],…directing them to the patient."[121] The language of ether-based healing rays and apparatuses, and disembodied spirit doctors does not have precedents in the Islamic tradition, though similar claims can be found in Edwards's writings,[122] which suggests their Spiritualist provenance.

As we have seen, the Egyptian Spiritualist effort to legitimize their practices took multiple forms—from exploring common ground with Islamic ideas about God's curative powers to analogizing the good works of the dead to the deeds performed by angels and deceased Sufi saints. They thus combined elements from both Islamic and Spiritualist cosmologies in their claims. In sum, what they produced was novel and unconventional, drawing from multiple traditions. This is important because although they saw their project as a friend to religion, Egyptian Spiritualists posited distinctions between Spiritualism and local understandings of the Islamic tradition, especially because Spiritualism, they claimed, was grounded in science. As I will show in the next section, they did not think of Spiritualism as a religion, but rather as a scientific tool with which to investigate religious discourses and advance new understandings of them.

Of Science and Spirits

For *ʿAlam al-Ruh*'s writers, Spiritualism would undo the conflict between science and religion and produce a more advanced understanding of the world's religions, including Islam. Just as importantly, it would also yield a more advanced understanding of science, one that would affirm the existence of spiritual agencies and refute scientific and medical materialisms. In this section, I consider how *ʿAlam al-Ruh*'s writers framed Spiritualism as a scientific tool with which they could investigate spiritual phenomena and affirm their reality, on the one hand, and critique scientific materialism, on the other. In their commitments to scientizing religion and society, Egypt's Spiritualists shared much with the Nasserist state's progressive social vision.[123] Their emphasis on science was a reflection of the era's scientistic ethos. Yet their critiques of scientific materialism and commitments to Spiritualist cosmology were at odds with this ethos, and Egyptian Spiritualists, as we will see, encountered criticisms.

For the magazine's writers, Spiritualism was religion's ally. According to Jumʿa, its emergence demonstrated that "the progress of the natural sciences has not ceased bringing together distance between the deniers of the spirit and its believers."[124]

[120]Hamid Abu al-Khayr, "al-ʿIlaj al-Ruhi ʿIlmiyyan wa-ʿAmaliyyan," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (Nov. 1959): 25–26.

[121]ʿAbd al-Munʿim al-Manjuri, "ʿAjaʾib al-ʿIlaj al-Ruhi al-Hadith," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (Sept. 1952): 12–17, at 13–14.

[122]Edwards, *A Guide to Spirit Healing*, 26, 57.

[123]On this vision, see Meijer, *Quest for Modernity*; El Shakry, *Great Social Laboratory*, 197–218; Bier, *Revolutionary Womanhood*.

[124]Rabih Lutfi Jumʿa, "al-Nahiyya al-Ruhiyya fi al-Qur'an al-Karim," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (Jan. 1948): 15.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417525100248 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Although an ally to religion, it was not a religion. Abu al-Khayr emphasized this and castigated those whom he believed conflated Spiritualism with religiosity (*tadayyun*) and Sufism.[125] He asserted that Spiritualism "is not a form of mysticism nor is it a plunging excessively into religiosity [*imʿānan fī al-tadayyun*] as ignorant ones of the religious folks do…. It is [rather] a practical and theoretical explanation of the truth of life after death and the possibility of communication between the living and the spirits of the dead."[126] It was, in other words, a science. "The study of the spirit," wrote Jabra, "has become science of firm establishment with its own principles, theories, laboratories, and scientists."[127]

Along these lines, Spiritualism, for these authors, provided the means for pushing understandings of religion out of the realm of legend and into the realm of empirical verification. Jumʿa, for example, describes the work of psychical researchers, such as J. B. Rhine (d. 1980), on manifestations of "extrasensory perception" (*al-idrāk bi-ghayr al-ḥawāss*), like telepathy (*tilībāthī*), and describes instances from the Islamic tradition when pious individuals exhibited telepathic powers including the Caliph Umar (d. 644) and some unnamed Sufis. Such ideas, he writes, were once "considered…under the authority of superstition [*fī ḥukm al-khurāfa*]," but adds that "when modern Spiritualist science came, it proved the validity [of telepathy] and the possibility of it occurring, and made it one of the phenomena testifying to the facets of the spirit [*al-ẓawāhir al-dālla ʿalā wujūh al-rūḥ*]."[128] Similarly, another author reflected on the Qur'an's instructions that believers take refuge in God "from the evil of an envier when he envies" (113:5). Although people once considered such claims about envy mere "superstition," he writes, "modern science has furnished scientific evidence of it." "Modern Spiritualism," he adds, has become "the first scientific authority to believe in the soundness of this theory."[129] In this sense, *ʿAlam al-Ruh*'s writers believed that to understand the Islamic tradition through Spiritualism was to understand it through science. Thus, Abu al-Khayr described his Spiritualist project in this way: "I will don the clothing of the scientific preacher [*al-waʿiẓ al-ʿilmī*], or the preacher who uses in sermons chemistry, physics, and biology. In this way I will be a preacher of the newest type [*aḥdath ṭirāz*]."[130]

Evidently, Egyptian Spiritualists believed their approach toward religion was innovative; they conceived of their work as producing a more advanced understanding of the Islamic tradition. For this reason, *ʿAlam al-Ruh*'s writers argued that the extraordinary occurrences (*khawāriq*) and marvels recorded in hadith, Islamic healing traditions, and Sufi hagiographies had scientific explanations. As one writer put it, "modern Spiritualist science has removed the veil from some surprising truths [*ḥaqāʾiq mudhisha*], with which we can analyze many of the extraordinary occurrences that have appeared in Islamic history [*al-tārīkh al-islāmī*]."[131] This writer then describes instances of Prophetic healing

[125]Abu al-Khayr, "Muharrij Jadid," 8.

[126]"Ihtifal al-Majalla bi-Dukhuliha al-ʿAmm al-Sabiʿ," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (Dec. 1953): 2–7, at 2.

[127]Jabra, "al-ʿIlaj al-Ruhi," 26.

[128]Rabih Lutfi Jumʿa, "al-Nahiyya al-Ruhiyya fi al-Qur'an al-Karim," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (Jan. 1949): 13–19, at 16.

[129]Hasan ʿAbd al-Wahhab, "al-ʿAin wa-l-Hasad," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (Mar. 1960): 13–16, at 13.

[130]Ahmad Fahmi Abu al-Khayr, "Khalq al-Insan min al-Turab," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (Mar. 1954): 2–5, at 2.

[131]ʿAdil al-Qalqili, "Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyya Yunaji al-Arwah," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (Sept. 1954): 8–11, at 8.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417525100248 Published online by Cambridge University Press

as recorded by Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 1350), which, he claims, have explanations in Spiritualism. In another article, an author describes forms of "spirit healing in the Islamic heritage" including "the placing of the hands on the sick person…dry spitting [*nafth*] and blowing [*nafkh*]…prayer [*ṣalāt*], supplicatory prayer, supplication [*ibtihāl*], and *ruqya*." These techniques, he argues, have their "scientific interpretation" (*tafsīr ʿilmī*) in that "the spirit healing medium encounters from the spirit world spiritual rays [*ashiʿʿa rūḥiyya*] which filter through his body and emit from the tips of his fingers so that they are directed to ethereal appendages [*al-aʿḍāʾ al-athīriyya*] that correspond to their ill counterparts in the [patient's] material body."[132]

In making such claims, these writers were in effect asserting that Spiritualism could adjudicate the truth of Islamic traditions and advance understandings of Islam. Another example comes from Radi's account of Rhinehart's activities in Egypt. Rhinehart was known for materializing objects, such as gems from his body. Egyptian Spiritualists, Radi says, were impressed by his ability to materialize objects. Rhinehart's deeds, he adds, proved that certain people can wield marvelous powers. What this "American medium undertook," he writes, "proves without debate the truthfulness of the 'extraordinary' deeds [*al-aʿmāl al-khāriqa*] undertaken by…God's Friends and the righteous worshippers over the course of the years."[133]

While such arguments depicted the Islamic tradition as amenable to science and highlighted Spiritualism's scientific credentials, they also echoed critiques Euro-American spiritual seekers leveled against scientific materialism. Indeed, Abu al-Khayr was as sharp of a critic of the materialist presumptions of Egypt's medical establishment as he was of the superstitions of religious folks. Egyptian Spiritualists, for example, highlighted the work of Western scientists-turned-spiritual seekers, including Rhine—a former botanist and pioneer of psychical research, who wrote *The Reach of the Mind* (1947)—and Alexis Carrel (d. 1944), a cardiovascular surgeon and author of the international bestseller *Man the Unknown* (1936).[134] Both were critics of materialist conceptions of science who believed that future research would affirm the existence of spiritual powers. Their works frequently featured in Egypt's Islamic intellectual scene and were channeled by Brotherhood affiliates in their criticisms of materialism.[135]

ʿAlam al-Ruh's writers acknowledged that their healing techniques were not accepted by most Egyptian medical professionals. The magazine reported on their efforts to gain recognition for the legitimacy of their healing practices and their debates with critics, whom they derided as "materialists" (*māddiyyūn*) who espouse "the philosophy of empty, idle speech."[136] In one article, Abu al-Khayr lamented the "opposition" they faced from "men of religion and psychologists" (*rijāl al-dīn wa-l-sīkūlugiyyūn*). While discussing the "errors" these critics purvey about religion and science, Abu al-Khayr describes Rhine's work on extrasensory perception and asserts that "psychology and psychologists will crumble in the face

[132]Hasan ʿAbd al-Wahhab, "al-ʿIlaj al-Ruhi fi al-Turath al-Islami," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (Nov. 1959): 7–10, at 7.
[133]Radi, "Al-Wasit Rhinehart," 13.
[134]On Rhine, see Mauskopf and McVaugh, *The Elusive Science.* On Carrel, see Joseph T. Durkin, *Hope for Our Time: Alexis Carrel on Man and Society* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965).
[135]See, for instance, al-Ghazali, *Rakaʾiz*, 83–95, 317–42; Sabiq, *al-ʿAqaʾid*, 232–34.
[136]"Ihtifal al-Majalla bi-Dukhuliha al-ʿAmm al-Thamin," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (Dec. 1954): 2–4, at 2.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417525100248 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of modern spirit science."[137] In another article, he mocked the comments of an Egyptian doctor, who rejected spirit healing, even though "modern spirit science," claimed Abu al-Khayr, was an established discipline in Euro-American universities. He then called on this doctor to acquaint himself with "the renowned medical doctor, scientist, Dr. Alexis Carrel, a Nobel Prize winner, who wrote avowing spiritual phenomena [*muʿtarifan bi al-ẓawāhir al-rūḥiyya*] and spirit healing."[138] Abu al-Khayr was particularly fond of referencing Carrel's experience studying miraculous healings at Lourdes shrine in France and his views on prayer's healing powers while responding to critics of spirit healing.[139]

If Carrel and Rhine's work provided Egyptian Spiritualists with resources with which they could criticize scientific materialism, the words of their patients provided another source of material. In their letters to *ʿAlam al-Ruh*, Abu al-Khayr's patients related their experiences with failed medical treatments and complained of the inability of doctors to heal them.[140] Such letters provided Egyptian Spiritualists the opportunity to publicize the alleged wrongdoings of their rivals. For instance, in their introduction to one letter, *ʿAlam al-Ruh*'s editors noted that despite "spirit healing's tremendous success in Egypt," it still had many critics among psychologists. For his part, the letter writer describes seeking treatment from psychologists who, although they were unable to help him, took much of his money. They "deceived me for a long time and obtained from me a large sum without benefit," he writes. The letter closes thanking Abu al-Khayr for quickly healing him at no expense.[141]

As this section has shown, *ʿAlam al-Ruh*'s writers utilized Spiritualism to probe the Islamic tradition and recast it in scientific terms, while at the same time defend their beliefs and criticize scientific materialism. They thus worked to scientize religion and spiritualize science. In this sense, they were not unlike spiritual seekers and advocates of ontological fluidity elsewhere in the Islamic world.[142] In the next section, I consider another feature of the Egyptian Spiritualist project, one that resonates with modern occult exploration and metaphysical inquiries as they have existed across the globe. Like their fellow travelers in different contexts, Egyptian Spiritualists framed their enterprise as one of reforming and uplifting society by casting out superstition. However, one of the more unique features of their campaign against superstition, as we will see, relates to how Spiritualist spirit healing in Egypt was refracted through the prism of local exorcism practices and beliefs about the *jinn*.

Exorcising Superstition from Egyptian Society

Abu al-Khayr and his associates distinguished Spiritualist healing practices from what they saw as the superstitions of unenlightened local healing traditions. One of the most important of these distinctions relates to possession or "mass," as it is called in Arabic. In Egypt, as elsewhere in the Islamic world, *jinn* are thought to be the cause

[137]Ahmad Fahmi Abu al-Khayr, "al-ʿIlm al-Ruhi al-Hadith wa-Munahiduhu," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (Mar. 1955): 2–10, at 2 and 10.

[138]Ahmad Fahmi Abu al-Khayr, "Muʿaridu al-Ruhiyya," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (Mar. 1958): 15.

[139]Ahmad Fahmi Abu al-Khayr, "Rijal al-Tibb wa-Muʿjizat al-ʿIlajiyya," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (Apr. 1958): 2–7, at 5–7.

[140]"Min Halat al-ʿIlaj al-Ruhi fi Misr," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (Nov. 1948): 22–24, at 22.

[141]"Min Halat al-ʿIlaj al-Ruhi fi Misr," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (May 1955): 11–14, at 11–12.

[142]See Vinea, "Possessed or Insane?" 269.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417525100248 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of possession and local practices for dealing with *jinn* possession developed.[143] Although *ʿAlam al-Ruh*'s Spiritualists accepted the reality of *jinn* possession, they maintained that the possessions and hauntings they dealt with were caused by the spirits of the human dead. Indeed, they believed that if some spirits of the dead enacted good in the world, others inflicted harm upon individuals, or disrupted their physical environment by causing fires, overturning furniture, and breaking glass. As we will see, the subtext of the Egyptian Spiritualism effort to maintain a distinction between their project and local ideas about *jinn* related to their desire to distinguish the spirit healing of Spiritualists, with its alleged scientific grounding, from local exorcism traditions that they believed were based in superstition rather than fact.

In Abu al-Khayr's articles on possession and what he called "spirit disturbance," by which he meant hauntings, he described the activities of the dead who behave maliciously. "Spirit possession" (*al-mass al-rūḥī*) he writes, is "caused by unseen personalities [*shakhṣiyyāt ghayr manẓūra*] who attack…some of the living." They are "the spirits of the dead who are not aware of their passing into the world of the spirit, so they cling to the world of matter and cause pains and illness among its inhabitants."[144] He adds in another article, "an evil spirit" (*rūḥ sharīr*) may not only cause someone physical and psychological harm, but also might push a person toward the "crime of murder."[145]

ʿAlam al-Ruh is packed with reports about Abu al-Khayr's efforts to treat possessions and stop hauntings. A consistent feature in these reports is Abu al-Khayr's insistence that only "Spiritualist methods" (*wasāʾil rūḥiyya*), specifically spirit healing, can ameliorate disturbances caused by the dead. Thus, in one article about how he exorcised "disturbing spirits" bothering a Sudanese family, Abu al-Khayr tells his readers that, in these instances, "amulets [*taʿāwīdh*] and *ruqya* do not benefit…. No treatment is there in these cases other than Spiritualist methods, whether from proximity or distance. And I mean by Spiritualist methods the reliance upon pure, refined spirits in halting these troublemakers in their tracks."[146] Abu al-Khayr told an Egyptian newspaper that there are some cases of disturbances, including some caused by *jinn*, wherein only "Spiritualist methods" will prevail. What is necessary in such cases, he says, is "our resorting to the refined spirits [*arwāḥ rāqiyya*]."[147] In one of his articles, Hamid Abu al-Khayr gives an idea of what, exactly, the good spirits do to aid the possessed. Describing a spirit healing session, he claims that the "healing spirit" used his "apparatus" to expel the "invading spirit" (*al-rūḥ al-ghāzī*) from the body of the patient and "compel it to the ground of the room in front of me." Thereafter, the patient returned to normal. After healing the patient, the good spirits, says Hamid Abu al-Khayr, went on to pursue the "sorcerer" (*sāḥir*) who sent this being from the spirit world—in this case a *jinni*—to harm the patient. "Strong, good spirits were dispatched to [the sorcerer] to detain [*taqbiḍ ʿalā*] the evil spirits [*al-arwāḥ al-sharīra*] that this sorcerer used in his evils, and with that, this sorcerer became a sorcerer failing in each deed he undertook…. As such, they constrained his livelihood."[148]

[143]Spadola, *Calls of Islam*, 121–36; see also Vinea, "Possessed or Insane?" 260.

[144]Ahmad Fahmi Abu al-Khayr, "al-Mass al-Ruhi wa-l-Hurub," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (Dec. 1956): 2–7, at 2-3.

[145]Ahmad Fahmi Abu al-Khayr, "Al-Mass al-Ruhi wa-l-Jarima," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (Jan. 1956): 2–10, at 2.

[146]Ahmad Fahmi Abu al-Khayr, "Al-Arwah al-Mushaghiba," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (Dec. 1947): 2–8, at 2.

[147]"Al-Arwah al-Mushaghiba," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (Oct. 1954): 10.

[148]Hamid Abu al-Khayr, "al-ʿIlaj al-Ruhi ʿIlmiyyan wa-ʿAmaliyyan," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (Jan. 1960): 29–31, at 30–31.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417525100248 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Clearly Egyptian Spiritualists saw their exorcisms as in competition with an occult economy in Egypt for dealing with spirits. Abu al-Khayr and his associates framed their work as an effort to police this economy. Egyptians, they believed, were held back in their societal development by unscientific perspectives on the unseen and had therefore fallen prey to the manipulation of sorcerers, charlatans, and fraudsters, who claimed, but rarely possessed, knowledge of and influence over the spirit world.[149] By investigating spirit disturbances, Egyptian Spiritualists positioned themselves as servants of science and society. Along these lines, the writers of *ʿAlam al-Ruh* criticized *zar* as ill-informed. One article laments Egyptians' ignorance of "Spiritualist sciences," and their resort to *zar* to treat possession. "In truth," the author writes, *zar* is "unscientific" and "ineffective."[150] Abu al-Khayr likewise criticized *zar*, describing as superstitious (*khurāfī*) the practices associated with it, such as "the burning of incense, the playing of drums, and that annoying shout, and what follows it of *ruqya*, amulets [*taʿāwīdh*], and reprehensible songs…which, it is supposed, will expel [from the patient] the invading 'devil' [*al-ʿafrīt al-ghāzī*]."[151] More ominously, he noted in another article, *zar* practices actually "increase in terms of pain the states of possession for patients." Unfortunately, he adds, "We are today passing a period in which cases of spirit possession have become frequent, and charlatans [*dajājila*] find in this fertile ground," opportunities to promote such activities as *zar*.[152]

Zar, however, was not the only practice Egyptian Spiritualists worried about. There was the general perception that Egyptians suffering from malevolent spirits were being duped—as one father put it in a thank you letter to Abu al-Khayr—by all sorts of "shaykhs…charlatan swindlers [*al-dajājila al-mushaʿwidhūn*]," and even "doctors," who promised healing but only take "a lot of money without result."[153] A problem closely related to that of charlatanry was sorcery (*siḥr*). The writers of *ʿAlam al-Ruh* accepted sorcery's reality, though they sought to minimize the perception that it was reliable for dealing with the spirit world or related, in any way, to Spiritualism. There are different perspectives on sorcery in the Islamic tradition, but given that it is mentioned in the Qur'an, its existence was accepted by Muslim scholars, even if they also cast skepticism on reports of it occurring.[154]

In their articles on the topic, *ʿAlam al-Ruh*'s writers argued that the work of Spiritualists, like themselves, should not be conflated with that of sorcerers. According to one writer, "some erroneously imagine that Spiritualism is a type of sorcery or sleight of hand [*al-shaʿwadha*], although the difference between them is vast because sorcery employs [*taskhīr*] the *jinn* to achieve extraordinary deeds [*al-aʿmāl al-khāriqa li al-ʿadāt*]."[155] As these comments intimate, part of the cause

[149]On rationalist criticisms of superstition and charlatanry in contemporary Egypt, see *Mittermaier*, *Dreams that Matter*, 38–40.

[150]Yusuf Salah al-Din, "ʿIlaj al-Mass al-Ruhi," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (Nov. 1956): 13–19, at 13.

[151]Ahmad Fahmi Abu al-Khayr, "al-Zar bi-Shaqqayhi al-Haqiqi wa-l-Khurafi," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (June 1953): 2–4, at 3.

[152]Abu al-Khayr, "al-Mass al-Ruhi wa-l-Hurub," 7.

[153]"Min Halat al-ʿIlaj al-Ruhi fi Misr," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (Sept. 1958): 19.

[154]On sorcery in the Islamic tradition, see Doostdar, *Iranian Metaphysicals*, 52–57; see also el-Zein, *Intelligent World of the Jinn*, 76–78.

[155]Al-Sayyid Kamal al-Shura, "Bayna al-Ruhiyya wa-l-Sihr wa-l-Shaʿwadha," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (Dec. 1952): 15–16, at 15.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417525100248 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of this conflation is that sorcerers, like Spiritualists, claim to communicate with unseen intelligences, in this case the *jinn*. Importantly, the *jinn* are believed to be shapeshifters, capable of taking human form. Thus, it was common for Egyptian Spiritualists to be accused of summoning—wittingly or unwittingly—the *jinn* rather than the spirits of the dead, a charge which they rejected.[156] Responding to one writer who made this claim, Abu al-Khayr asserted, "I challenge him to bring to us a sorcerer or mention to us a sorcerer that the dead, in his presence, can speak with direct voice and materialize."[157] For Abu al-Khayr the proof that the beings he and his colleagues communicated with were the dead is that Spiritualists in the West have, apparently, taken the fingerprints of their spirit world interlocutors to confirm their identities. The *jinn*, according Abu al-Khayr, do not have such abilities. Abu al-Khayr thus challenged anyone claiming Spiritualism was akin to sorcery to summon a *jinni* who could replicate his fingerprints.[158]

Rather than be confused for sorcerers, who manipulated the ignorant and self-servingly trafficked in *jinn*, Egyptian Spiritualists sought recognition as scientific investigators of the paranormal and as social servants. The distinction between science and superstition was therefore of utmost importance for *ʿAlam al-Ruh*'s writers. "Spiritualism," as one writer asserted, "necessitates, for understanding some its facts, familiarity with the science of nature and chemistry which decisively shows that it is not a superstition [*khurāfa*]." If Spiritualism depends on "real facts based upon proven scientific principles," "sorcery," he claimed, "depends on *jinn*." In line with how Egyptian Spiritualists positioned themselves as servants of society, he warns that sorcery "is among the most severe of crimes in terms of danger for society." He adds, "Why does the government not fight these liars [*affākīn*]? Why do we not punish sorcerers [*al-saḥara*] and fraudsters who drain the money of people futilely and cause to them the worst of harms?"[159]

As these comments indicate, Egyptian Spiritualists positioned themselves as both servants to society and as wardens of the boundaries between science and superstition. Spiritualist ideas and practices, they believed, provided more reasonable and more effective means for dealing with Egypt's spiritual disturbances. By waging a scientific campaign against irrational and unenlightened beliefs about *jinn*, sorcery, and exorcism, Abu al-Khayr and his associates saw themselves as contributing to the much-needed uplift and modernization of Egyptian society.

Conclusion

The Egyptian Spiritualist project of *ʿAlam al-Ruh* offers a valuable window into the Islamic tradition's twentieth-century entanglements with science. This is because, in Egypt and elsewhere across the globe, metaphysical and occult exploration has often been central to campaigns to advance human knowledge and modernize and uplift society. In Egypt, this manifested in Abu al-Khayr and his colleagues' efforts to eradicate superstitions related to *jinn*, exorcism, and possession, as well as their desire to police sorcery and sorcerers. It further manifested in their attempts to utilize

[156]Ahmad Fahmi Abu al-Khayr, "al-Jinn wa-l-Arwah," *ʿAlam al-Ruh* (Sept. 1950): 2–10. See also al-Ghazali's criticisms of Egyptian Spiritualists, *Rakaʾiz*, 358.

[157]Abu al-Khayr, "Muharrij Jadid," 10.

[158]Ibid., 9.

[159]Al-Shura, "Bayna al-Ruhiyya wa-l-Sihr," 16.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417525100248 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Spiritualism as a means of recasting the Islamic tradition in line with a scientistic imaginary, one that emphasized empirical verification over the narratives of tradition. By drawing upon Spiritualist science to explain and interpret paranormal occurrences from the Islamic past and present—including wondrous healings, the marvels of Sufism and God's Friends, and human intercourse with different types of spirits—Egyptian Spiritualists sought to render the Islamic tradition scientific. Just as importantly, a key element of Egyptian Spiritualism was the claim that "true" science, or science in its most advanced form, recognized the agencies of spiritual powers in the natural world. In this respect, their endeavor was one of spiritualizing science as much as it was one of scientizing the Islamic tradition.

The blending of a scientistic ideology with Islamic and Spiritualist cosmologies was one of the most distinctive features of Abu al-Khayr and his colleagues' Spiritualist project. Indeed, at the heart of this project was a cosmological experimentalism, or a commitment to mix and match claims about empirical verification with diverse elements drawn from Islamic and Spiritualist cosmologies. The experimental cosmologies of Egypt's Spiritualist movement included, as we have seen, the combination of Islamic beliefs about the presence and activities of God, angels, deceased Sufi saints, and *jinn* together with Spiritualist beliefs about the deeds and activities of the human dead, both the good and the evil, as well as the Spiritualist view on the porous nature of the boundary between the world of the living and that of the departed. Ultimately, this cosmology served as a mechanism for Egyptian Spiritualists to craft a plausible whole out of their rather eclectic beliefs, all the while voicing fealty to science, Islam, and Spiritualism.

Acknowledgements. I would like to express my gratitude to the two anonymous reviewers of this article for their feedback and suggestions for revising and improving it. I would also like to thank Heather Hughes at the University of Pennsylvania Library for her assistance locating some of the difficult to find materials I used in it.

Cite this article: Zárate, Arthur Shiwa. 2025. "Cosmopolitan Spirits: Islam and the Experimental Cosmologies of Egypt's Spiritualist Movement, 1947–1960." *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 1–26, doi:10.1017/S0010417525100248