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*a critical phenomenological approach*

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# Inquisitive racialization or race after secularization: a critical phenomenological approach

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## ABSTRACT

In this article, we develop the notion of ‘inquisitive racialization’, to elaborate a critical phenomenological perspective on how the expectation that religion should be privatized and/or made invisible under secularization can enable, and even stimulate, a specific form of racialization. We show that this is specifically relevant for understanding antisemitism and Islamophobia, discussing two literary and theatrical works: a fragment from the novel *In Search of Lost Time* by Marcel Proust (written between 1909–1922) and Rachida Lamrabet’s five-minute play *Projet de burkanisation*. We try to make plausible that a critical phenomenological approach enables us to bring into focus structural and everyday interpersonal, social, bodily, and affective dimensions of religion-related securitization and racialization. We discuss the influential notion of the ‘lived experience’ (*l’expérience vécue*), introduced by Frantz Fanon, trying to adapt it to contexts in which the racialization has an important religious component, discussing notions of proteophobia (Zygmunt Bauman) and opacity (Édouard Glissant) in connection to phenomenological works by, among others Alia Al-Saji, Gail Weiss and Sara Ahmed.

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## Introduction

In this article, we develop the notion of ‘inquisitive racialization’, to elaborate a critical phenomenological perspective on how the expectation that religion should be privatized and/or made invisible under secularization can enable, and even stimulate, a specific form of racialization. We show that this is specifically relevant for understanding antisemitism and Islamophobia, as it concerns the repeated interrogation, screening, and othering of people related to their (assumed, essentialised and inferiorised) cultural and/or religious background.

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Most studies on practices of screening and interrogation in Islamophobia and antisemitism, and in critical religious and secular studies in general, are oriented towards the political, governmental, or cultural dimensions of interrogative practices and securitization. A critical phenomenological approach enables us to bring into focus the everyday interpersonal, social, bodily, and affective dimensions of religion-related securitization and racialization.<sup>1</sup> Such an approach enables us to study how screening practices and strategies become part of how people inhabit the world in the everyday; shaping their daily sense of being and orientation, as well as access to the public sphere, both for those undergoing the racialization, as well as for those doing it. It thus also enables studying how screening and securitizing practices shape shared (public) spaces and cultural archives, as well as possibilities for agency and talking back.

In section one, we give a brief genealogy of how religion's privatization under secularization, particularly in the European 19<sup>th</sup> century, enabled a racialization related to suspicion, scrutiny, and screening, where race and religion became, and still are, 'co-concealing' categories (Anidjar 2008, 28). We analyse the ways in which such practices have been evoked and thematized in two literary and theatrical works: a fragment from the novel *In Search of Lost Time* by Marcel Proust (written between 1909–1922) and in Rachida Lamrabet's *Projet deburkisation* (Lamrabet 2017a).<sup>2</sup> We focus on how religion's privatization under secularization enables a racialization that makes the religious other into the continuous object of a majority's inquisitive screening for an invisible, opaque otherness behind and in the visible. We interpret this attitude in the light of Zygmunt Bauman's notion of 'proteophobia' that he introduced to understand the ambivalence towards Jews in what he called the 'allosemitism' underlying both antisemitism and philosemitism in modern Europe (Bauman 1998); and in relation to Édouard Glissant's elaboration of 'opacity' as a response to coloniality (Glissant [1990] 1997).

In section two, we further analyse proteophobia and opacity from a critical phenomenological perspective, focusing on the dynamics of visibility, invisibility and affect connected to them. We adopt what phenomenologist of race Linda Martín Alcoff calls a *subjectivist contextualist position on race*, understanding race as 'socially constructed, historically malleable, culturally contextual, and produced through learned perceptual practice' (Alcoff 1999, 17). An important notion, as already mentioned, is the 'lived experience' (*l'expérience vécue*). This notion became influential in critical race theory after its deployment by Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* (Fanon [1952] 2008). Starting from the lived experience, one 'can reveal how race is constitutive of bodily experience, subjectivity, judgment, and epistemic relationships' (17); we try to understand how this works when the racialization has an

important religious component by commenting on Fanon, and combining his analysis with interpretations by Alia Al-Saji and Sara Ahmed. The constitutive aspects of race and racialization risk dropping out of focus when the social constructedness of race is limited to its discursive construction (see as well Lentin 2021).

As we will try to show, 'inquisitive racialization' analysed from a phenomenological perspective, helps to understand the bodily and intersubjective aspects of a specific experiential field for Jews and Muslims. This experiential field, we argue, is shaped by combined conversionist, colonial and assimilationist pressures on Jews and Muslims as European minorities under conditions of what we call religio-secularism.<sup>3</sup> It is from a limited perspective that we bring together certain shared structures of experiences by Jews and Muslims, both historically and today. We do not mean to use antisemitism as a historical 'foil' for understanding Islamophobia today, to compare both groups in a more general (or essentialising) sense, or to suggest that other groups do not have similar experiences, but we try to provide an understanding of a specific, historically persistent pattern of racialization towards Jews and Muslims in European societies on an experience-oriented, affective and everyday level.<sup>4</sup> After introducing what we mean by 'inquisitive racialization' via a reading of a passage from Marcel Proust's *Recherche*, we flesh out the concept's relevance today in conversation with two Muslim women living in Belgium and the Netherlands. We report on our conversations with the Belgian writer and lawyer Rachida Lamrabet whose literary work *Projet Deburkanisation* we also analyse in section one, and Hajar Fallah, a Dutch lawyer and committee member of S.P.E.A.K., a collective for and by Muslim Womxn.<sup>5</sup>

We are aware that as white Dutch scholars, we can write about racialization without easily becoming the objects of racializing discourses and experiences ourselves. This gives a responsibility not to speak for, but with people who do undergo such experiences, often daily. We have tried to do this by having extensive conversations with Hajar Fallah and Rachida Lamrabet as co-thinkers about the inquisitive dimensions of the racialization that we wanted to address. We went through several editorial rounds together and have tried to attune as well as possible to the contents of our conversations. We would like to emphasize that our conversations with Lamrabet and Fallah have been constitutive for this article beyond our discussion of their specific comments and we would like to express our gratitude to them here.

## Section 1. A 'few little eccentricities'; introducing the notion of inquisitive racialization

### *Oh, I don't like the sound of that*

In the novel *In Search of Lost Time*, Marcel Proust describes a scene of domestic unease, taking place in France just before the Dreyfus Affair (1894). We are in the home of the adolescent narrator in his native village *Combray*. The narrator's family forms part of the conservative Catholic *bourgeoisie*, and his grandparents live with the family. His grandfather has a few 'little eccentricities' (Proust 1996, I, 108). Each time the narrator wants to bring home a friend, the grandfather will ask: 'And what's the name of this friend of yours who is coming this evening?' 'Dumont, grand-papa'. 'Dumont! Oh, I don't like the sound of that'.<sup>6</sup> The grandfather would 'divine' (Proust 1996, I, 107) immediately when the protagonist was talking about a Jewish friend, no matter whether this could be easily discerned from the name. He would judge that these friends, although he 'held nothing against Jews in principle', were usually 'not of the best type' (Proust 1996, I, 107). And he would sing 'Archers, be on your guard. Watch without rest, without sound' (Proust 1996, I, 107). Then when the friend would enter the house, the grandfather would nearly always strike up, for example 'Oh God of our fathers' from the opera *La Juive* (The Jewess), or else 'Israel break thy chains'.<sup>7</sup> He would hum the tune alone, to an 'um-ti-tum-ti tum, tra-la', but was trying out the visitor's reactions. The narrator used to be terrified that his friend would recognize the tune and be able to reconstruct the words (Proust 1996, I, 107). During the friend's visit, the grandfather would submit him to a subtle integration test *avant la lettre*, asking him a few questions that would 'unmask' the friend, and then, to demonstrate that there were no doubts left, he would hum another air, for example 'Yes, I am of the chosen race' (Proust 1996, I, 107).

By humming these tunes upon the visiting friend's entrance, the grandfather would instantly create an atmosphere of *invisible* difference around Jewishness that was shared by the narrator *and* the friend, creating an unspeakable gap between them. The narrator witnesses how his friend gets screened for his reactions, not being sure whether the friend was aware of the meaning of the grandfather's 'eccentricities' or not.<sup>8</sup> Bloch, one of the friends 'identified' by the grandfather, would talk about the weather and about poetry as a response to the welcome, although it never becomes certain that it is a response at all, for the whole experience is never talked about. The grandfather succeeds in creating an atmosphere of enduring *méfiance*, and the possibility of uncovering something hidden is affectively connected to the entering friend, whose behaviour is made into an unstable 'sign' of an identity that might, but also might not, be a cause for *méfiance*.

### *Race after secularisation*

The attitude of the grandfather narrated in the passage from the *Recherche* is characteristic for what we call 'inquisitive racialization'. The notion denotes a seemingly innocent inquisitiveness, while also deliberately recalling the medieval Spanish Inquisition that was invented to uncover, and prove, presumed hidden beliefs of heretics, Marranos and Moriscos. The latter two names were used for respectively Jews and Muslims after their (forced) conversion to Christianity. Conversion, and forced conversion particularly, can easily lead to distrust about the veracity of one's appearance, about a hidden Otherness. In Iberia, the Marranos, often called *conversos*, 'new Christians', sometimes secretly did remain religiously different, sometimes developed mixed religious beliefs and practices, and sometimes they adapted as much as possible. Whatever their actual practices, however, they remained 'Otherable' and were often met with distrust and inquisitiveness. In this context, the concept of 'race' (*raza*) came up, covering both 'blood' and 'religion', to indicate a continuity of belonging, in relation to what was 'under' or 'behind' the convert's 'cover'. Actual hidden continuity could be the result of resistance by the 'converted' against their conversion, but an assumed hidden continuity could also function as a justification for an enduring mistrust of new Christians (see further Heng 2018; Moyaert 2024; Westerduin 2020; Yovel 2009). As Geraldine Heng writes in her reconstruction of the invention of race in the Middle Ages, 'decades after a conversion, and even when the convert was a prominent personage – showered with protective privileges by the king and decorated with the belt of knighthood – a residue of Jewishness would cling tenaciously, to trouble a convert's Christian identity and stir up doubts about him' (Heng 2018, 76).

In the early modern period, during the European 'wars of religion' that were rather wars of intertwined nation, state, minority and imperial formation, notions of toleration, privacy, and religious freedom were invented. This did not prevent the dynamic between religion as 'belief' and a suspected (political) Otherness behind the 'belief', between visibility and invisibility from coming up, especially in colonial and minority contexts. Religion kept touching on race, understood as 'a structural relationship for the articulation and management of human differences, rather than a substantive content' (Heng 2018, 19).

'Race' is 'one of the primary names we have – a name we retain for the strategic, epistemological, and political commitments it recognizes – attached to a repeating tendency, of the gravest import, to demarcate human beings through differences among humans that are selectively essentialized as absolute and fundamental, in order to distribute positions and powers differentially to human groups' (Heng 2018, 27).

A paradigmatic example of how the dynamic between visibility and invisibility in the nexus between race and religion further developed in the modern European context, was the position of the French Jews in post-Revolutionary France. It forms the context of the Proustian fragment. In 1792, the Jews had been given French citizenship, while being increasingly supposed to transform their traditional, objective, collective and visible characteristics into an invisible and individual allegiance to a *culte Israélite*, turning Judaism as a collective tradition into a private 'belief', a 'religion' on the model of Protestantism (Batnitzky 2013; Jansen 2014). The grandfather, during his little inquisition about the Jewishness of the protagonist's friend, is doing nothing but trying to uncover the hidden collectivity 'behind', readable by specific 'signs' only, of the protagonist's 'assimilated, secularised' friend. Secularization thus did not lead to the projected, quiet invisibilization and privatization of Judaism into a 'denominational belief', or a *culte* – the notion used for 'religion' in the French institutional context. Instead, it led to the racialization of Judaism into what Hannah Arendt called 'Jewishness' (Arendt [1948] 1979). Arendt drew on Proust as a witness of this process. She argued that particularly during and after the Dreyfus affair (1894–1906), 'being Jewish' came to be seen as 'private' in the literal sense of 'hidden', and the object of speculation for the French majority; as a fascinating and racial individual vice, rather than a theological-sociological belonging.<sup>9</sup> In Gil Anidjar's apt terms, race and religion become 'co-concealing categories' (Anidjar 2008, 28), resulting in an 'Orientalist imaginative feast' (32), exuberant, intellectually exciting, and causing tensions and anxieties at the same time.

One specific anxiety was the one that Zygmunt Bauman called 'proteophobia'. He thematized how this worked in relation to the Jews in pre-World War II Europe:

The apprehension and vexation related not to something or someone disquieting through otherness and unfamiliarity, but to something or someone that does not fit the structure of the orderly world, does not fall easily into any of the established categories, emits therefore contradictory signals as to the proper conduct – and in the result blurs the borderlines which ought to be kept watertight and undermines the reassuring monotonous, repetitive and predictable nature of the life-world. (Bauman 1998, 144)

Bauman argued that such anxiety concerning boundaries and otherness is why antisemitism is only a reactive variant of an underlying 'allosemitism'. While the 'anti' of antisemitism denotes an explicit *hostility*, *allosemitism* does not unambiguously mean either the hatred or love of Jews, but rather denotes a 'radically ambivalent attitude' (Bauman 1998, 143). It is an anxiety all the same, however, a 'proteophobia'. As we can scrutinize in the passage in the Proustian novel, this radically ambivalent attitude manifested itself in the

continuous fascination for the truth and clarity 'behind' the blurred appearance, the 'real' identity behind the assimilated gesture, the 'other' inside the proteic, secular appearance. It enables speculation about hidden membership of a possibly inimical group.

Proteophobic racialization can thus be read as an ambivalent othering, at work in relation to religious minority difference under conditions of (expected) secularization. It is based on 'not fitting', causing a diffuse and vague anxiety, where 'the 'unfitting' becomes a fissure in the world order (an order of domination over the 'other') through which the ultimately invincible chaos is reluctantly and depressingly sighted' (Bauman 1998, 144). As a response to the anxiety, the visible becomes the speculative 'sign' of what is behind or 'in' it. The notion of proteophobia thus captures an affective layer in how the Jews in Dreyfus Affair France were seen, not, or not only, as representants of an older culture that was contemptible for not being civilized, or 'humanized', enough, as was the case with racialized peoples in the colonial context. Rather, proteophobia implied a profound ambivalence towards persons who were not seen as representants of a specific 'nation' or 'religion', but rather as 'uncategorisable'. Such ambivalence is also present today, involving both Jews and Muslims (see Bell 2018; Jansen 2020).

### ***Proteophobia and Islamophobia today; project *deburkanisation****

The coupling of racial and religious categories goes hand in hand with their intermingling and mixing. These processes play a role in both antisemitism and in Islamophobia, as well as in their interrelations, both historically and today. Trying to understand how proteophobia, as an effect of secularization and the invisibilization of religious belonging, specifically affects Muslims today, we can turn to a contemporary work of art that has been the object of deep controversy. In early 2017, the *projet deburkanisation* by the Belgian writer and lawyer Rachida Lamrabet, who had published her prizewinning debut novel *Vrouwland* [femaleland] in 2007, came out. The work was one of a number of art works commissioned for a larger project called 'The Plurality of Privacy in Five-Minute Plays' and was performed at the Royal Flemish Theatre in Brussels. Following its appearance on YouTube, and an interview from 21 March 2017 in the Belgian magazine *Knack*, during which Lamrabet talked about the play and the 'burqa law' that was discussed at the time in the Belgian context, Lamrabet was fired from her job at the human rights agency UNIA.<sup>10</sup>

*Projet Deburkanisation* opens with the voice of a woman speaking Flemish-Dutch. At the start of the film/play, we see a migrant neighbourhood. The camera focuses on a television satellite dish as the voice begins to praise the 'Almighty, who sees everyone', including those

who – the woman says—‘want to see everything of her’. When the camera turns inside the home, we see a woman in a rather dark room wearing a niqab and typing on a computer about her anger at the law prohibiting the *niqab*. She addresses a ‘you’ that remains unnamed, but obviously refers to those who have written and/or supported the law. She gives various reasons for wanting to wear a *niqab*. She starts by a theological one: the Almighty is praised and invoked as the all-sovereign whose laws she follows. This Almighty is also the one who will take revenge for her: ‘You will not go unpunished’. Another reason she wants to wear her *niqab* is her deep mistrust of the majority supporting the law, and from which she wants to separate herself by wearing her *niqab*, her claim to privacy, to ‘not being screened’. She writes: ‘You want to see everything, scrutinise everything, my body must be transparent’. And adds a bit later:

Oh, how you hate it that my body is a dark continent . . . I know how you dream about drawing borders on my body with a black marker . . . and about marking the places that can be exploited in red. In your dreams you have shaded my most vulnerable zones in green. [. . .] Liberté, égalité, sécurité. Liberty, equality, security (Lamrabet 2017a, n.p.)

By wearing her *niqab* the woman hyper-visibility her will to remain invisible. Her religious practice then, ironically also embodies her worldly right to privacy, or her ‘right to opacity’, the right to resist the colonial ‘requirement of transparency’, as Édouard Glissant formulated it in his *Poetics of Relation* (Glissant [1990] 1997, 190–194). This is precisely the right that proteophobia cannot tolerate: ‘Opacities can coexist and converge, weaving fabrics. To understand these truly one must focus on the texture of the weave and not on the nature of its components. For the time being, perhaps, give up this old obsession with discovering what lies at the bottom of natures’ (190). This old obsession is also the inquisitive obsession of the grandfather, and of contemporary Islamophobic (and antisemitic) affect, too.

Lamrabet, after her interview in *Knack* where she argued for the right to privacy without endorsing the *niqab*, received a letter from UNIA, the human rights organization she worked for. The letter from UNIA stated that ‘both the film and the interview are contradicting the values that UNIA stands for (including the idea that God’s law should prevail over civil law)’. Lamrabet was seen as defending extremists instead of foregrounding women being subjected to racialization. In the weeks after, there were intensive talks with UNIA, followed by her dismissal. Lamrabet writes that after the email and her dismissal, a ‘moment of despair followed. One moment I thought I had lost my way in a surreal world where everyone spoke a language that was my own, but that sounded

incomprehensible in the ears of those listening when I said something' (Lamrabet 2017b, 55). This feeling could have sounded familiar to Proust's narrator's friend, whose identity became the object of speculation, and of an aggressive 'unveiling' through the inquisitive behaviour of the grandfather. 'Religion', she writes, 'and more specifically Islam, is a topic that fillets "our" identities, that defines who "we" are and who the "others" are' (Lamrabet 2017b; Lamrabet 2017, 55). How 'Religion' works is therefore related to the ways in which the notion of *taqiyya* is used in Islamophobic discourse, to denote a hidden project by Muslims to institute theocracy (55). Colonial, conversionist and assimilationist legacies and experiences take on a specific shape here, where racial categorizations, privacy and uncertainty about identities intermingle. We can further deepen our understanding of this process by turning to the critical phenomenology of race.

## Section 2. Inquisitive racialization; a play of visibility and invisibility, and proteophobic affect

A groundbreaking text for the critical phenomenology of race is Frantz Fanon's *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs*, especially chapter five, which addresses 'The lived experience of the black man' (Fanon [1952] 2008). The chapter brings philosophical and narrative lines together and puts into words the narrator's experience of being racialized as being reduced to 'an object among other objects', fixated by 'the white gaze' (89). This experience, where 'the Other, the white man, [who] had woven me out of a thousand details, anecdotes, and stories' (91), is contrasted with the possibility of a lived experience where one's 'body scheme' is built up from 'remnants of feelings and notions of the tactile, vestibular, kinaesthetic, or visual nature (90).<sup>11</sup> The latter conception of the body schema is the basis of the 'I can' of classical phenomenology, which is, in Sara Ahmed's words, also a 'white phenomenology' (Ahmed 2007). For in experiencing racialization, the body scheme is traversed by another, 'historico-racial' scheme consisting of 'a thousand details, anecdotes, and stories' (Fanon [1952] 2008, 91). These histories and stereotypes result in objectification; a fundamental experience of 'I cannot'. Fanon later also calls this an 'epidermal' racial scheme (92), emphasizing visibility and the role played by the white gaze causing immediate identification and fixation.

Gail Weiss points out that not only the historico-racial schema can disrupt the body schema related to 'I can'. For example, she argues, there is also a 'historico-gender schema of male superiority', schemes of class, ability, religion, and sexuality (Weiss 2015, 88–89). The notion of inquisitive racialization, then, could highlight the working of a racializing scheme arising at the intersection of race and religion under conditions of assimilationist (and/or

colonial) secularization. It targets both the immediately visible as well as assumed hidden ideas and collectivities, causing a paradoxical play of visibility and invisibility.

### **Visibility, invisibility and proteophobic affect**

The specificity of inquisitive racialization can be further fleshed out by commenting on Alia Al-Saji's phenomenological reading of the struggles about *hijab* in French schools in the early twenty-first century (Al-Saji 2014). Al-Saji refers to Fanon's epidermal racial scheme to interpret the racialization of Muslim women in the French context. One of her examples concerns what happened to a girl in secondary school, who used a bandana and high-necked sweater to achieve a certain level of coverage after the ban of wearing religious signs at her school. This was just prior to the 2004 law banning the wearing of religious signs in public schools (Al-Saji 2014, 133–134). Al-Saji renders and comments on the event in the following way:

As the girl entered her classroom (in high-neck and bandana), the teacher responsible for the class reacted with immediate and visceral repulsion; she could not (physically and emotionally) tolerate the presence of the girl in her classroom, expressing violently and vocally her desire for the girl to leave. What was clear was that the teacher *saw* the girl as willfully incarnating religious dogmatism and gender oppression; her reaction was not that of worked-through argument or judgement, but of prereflective perception and affect. (134)

Al-Saji interprets the reported reaction of the teacher as the result of the white gaze and its immediate, 'epidermalizing', identificatory affective habits. She refers to Fanon's historico-racial scheme to unravel what happens and analyses perception and affect as 'two sides of the same phenomenon':

Since the racist reaction of intolerance takes the form of a quasi-automatic, bodily, and affective reaction to the appearance of the girl's body, this reaction can be read as itself a 'natural' reaction to the way things are (rather than as a culturally, socially, and historically constituted comportment). The nonreflective level at which perception and affect operate function to hide the ways in which these operations are mediated and constituted by a history and culture of racism, effectively naturalizing what is seen and felt. (140)

The girl, Al-Saji puts forward, is racialized through perception and affect, but the racialization itself remains invisible: the process gets rationalized and naturalized as if belonging to the racialized body, instead of being understood as a historical, cultural and social construct (137). In this way, the racializing affect and perception naturalize and rationalize a hierarchy, making it appear as if it is the natural order of things, which 'cannot be seen otherwise', causing an overdetermination not only of the present, but also of the future (138–139).

We want to suggest that the situation might not only be read in terms of a racialization based on the girl's looks, but also in terms of proteophobia. There seems to be not only the Fanonian historico-racial schema at work, but a conjuncture of historico-racial, religious and gender schemes, causing a complicated dynamics of racializing perception and affect. An interpretation along these lines could ask whether the teacher's repulsion could also have been an effect of the tension caused by the *possibility, but not the certainty*, that the girl's attire implied specific ideas. Could the panic and aggression also be the affective products of how race and religion are 'co-concealing categories'? Such a proteophobic dimension does not make the experience of being racialized any less direct and harmful. However, what goes on between racializer and racialized gets more complicated when it is not, or not only, about immediate identification as Other, but when there is also a moment of disorientation and inquisitiveness, related to not knowing, to 'unfitting': 'what does the bandana mean, what are the intentions of the student', and, in the aggressive mode, 'why do I not know, why isn't she transparent', and perhaps, unconsciously, 'I hate opacity'?<sup>12</sup> This would mean that the affect could have been not only about the bandana as a visible and immediately identifiable sign of religious deviance, as Al-Saji suggests, but as a 'difficult sign', and the affect could be the proteophobic anxiety such signs create. We cannot be sure about our reading – and neither can Al-Saji or others. The teacher may not even have been transparent to herself in this regard. The racializing perception then exists of a multi-layered dynamic of visibility and invisibility. The affective uncertainty connected to it is due to the speculative dimension of signification in general, which is exacerbated in inquisitive racialization and proteophobia. The aggression can then be understood as a way of acting on these anxieties and preparing the ground for a conspiratorial suspicion that Islam secretly strives for domination of the white secular western world (Zia-Ebrahimi 2018).

The specificity of proteophobia leads us to a somewhat different view of the ways the racial schema relates to antisemitism and Islamophobia than in Fanon's analysis. Fanon used Sartre's (1960) concept of 'overdetermination' in *Antisemite and Jew*, to denote the dehumanization of epidermal racialization. He wrote:

The Jewishness of the Jew, however, can go unnoticed. He is not integrally what he is. We can but hope and wait. His acts and behavior are the determining factor. He is a white man, and apart from some debatable features, he can pass undetected. (...) The Jew is not liked as soon as he has been detected. But with me things take on a new face. I'm not given a second chance. I am

overdetermined from the outside. I am a slave not to the 'idea' others have of me, but to my appearance. (Fanon [1952] 2008, 95)

Weiss notes that the assumption of a 'Jewish body' is problematic, since it leaves out Jews of colour and does not acknowledge 'the very visible bodily markings (e.g. religious garments, hairstyles, etc.) that have historically signified Jewish identity as readily as skin color has signified Black identity' (2014, 220). We think there is another important reason for not making such a strict distinction between epidermal racialization, antisemitism and islamophobia. This is that invisibility can be a separate and strong reason for racialization in itself – this is the inquisitive dimension of racialization that is not only a deeply damaging experience, but that enhances a dangerous, conspiratorial (and potentially genocidal) political imaginary as well, crucial to understand racialization in particular in the European context (Zia-Ebrahimi 2018).

### ***Mood work and affective strangers***

The dynamic of visibility and invisibility relates to the dynamic of perception and affect in what Sara Ahmed describes as *mood work* (Ahmed 2014, 14). Mood work is the 'affective labour done by who is perceived as stranger, in order to be in tune again' (Ahmed 2014, 14). It needs to be done by those perceived as *affective strangers*, when they 'become moody figures, those who are not attuned, or who get in the way of attunement' (Ahmed 2014, 14). As Ahmed explains, we tend to lean towards bodies with a similar body rhythm or similar bodily history. This creates an intercorporeal experience of attunement. While 'attuning' to some bodies, we may not attune to others, creating 'affective strangers', bodies in the background. Strangers 'appear at the edges of the room. Dimly perceived, or not quite perceived, lurking in the shadows. No wonder a stranger is a rather vague impression' (Ahmed 2014, 18). Attunement can also become prescriptive, which, again, goes together with processes of naturalization and rationalization:

When attunement becomes an aim, those who are not in tune or who are out of tune become the obstacles; they become what gets in the way not only of attunement, but of all that it promises: life, connection, empathy, and so on. (20)

Bodily history plays an important role in (mis)attunement, when one is not fitting the (prescriptive) attunement or bodily rhythm, entering a room can cause a moment of disorientation: 'A body can enter the room and cause a shift in the atmosphere because of what that body brings with it; histories that linger as mood' (22).

In the case of inquisitive racialization, it is the ‘ambiguity of the stranger’ that counts. When one is made into a ‘stranger’ in reaction to (affective) histories connected to inquisitive racialization, one does not just remain ‘dimly perceived’, one also becomes hypervisible as invisible, with layers of non-trustworthiness that need to be scratched off.<sup>13</sup> A constant screening of what ‘might lay behind the immediately visible’ is thus connected to the proteophobic affectivity. Proteophobia thus tries to make visible and fixate what is ‘out of tune’ and invisible. To return to *Projet Deburkanisation*: ‘Oh, how you hate it that my body is a dark continent’. The body needs to be visible, transparent, secular, and controlled.

Proteophobic screening has a gendered aspect, taking a specific form towards women. For proteophobic screening ‘the Muslim woman is not so much a wolf than a *witch*. The potential ‘threat’ that might arise from her is not physical. Rather, the threat resides in her ability to *pass*, her relative innocence, and in the potential pact she might conclude with the devil (i.e. the Islamist)’ (Fadil 2018). Witchiness can help understand why it is specifically the *hijab* that forms the recurrent locus of religio-secular struggle, as focused as it is on the invisible layers underneath the ‘innocent’ visible – ‘derrière le voile’.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, in order to be not seen as a threat, one has to attune, to do *affective labor*, or *mood work*: to attune to ‘who are already, as it were, in the room’ (2014, 22). According to Rachida Lamrabet and Hajar Fallah, one needs to deal with the proteophobic stereotypes and react to/resolve the anxiety for chaos and domination. Rachida says, for example, highlighting the dynamic of visibility and invisibility:

You can feel how your presence in a room is uneasy, and you try to accommodate, to free people from their uneasy feeling. By acting as normal as possible, not drawing attention to your being different, not saying that you might think differently about something, even when you don’t agree with what is being said. You do not want to brutalise people, you sense the tension, and then you try to unmine it by conforming.

Mood work can be done by ‘privatising’ political ideas, making parts of oneself invisible, to not be trapped and overdetermined as ‘suspicious other’. Mood work, however, also tends to come back as the suspicion that one is having a hidden agenda. To escape from the inquisitiveness about what is behind the visible, one is forced to make parts of oneself invisible, but this adds fuel to the suspicion again. Hajar told about ‘the sacrifices’ she and others ‘make as Muslims’, just not to be suspicious. This goes from the choice of subjects for papers and theses during their studies (excluding anything about terrorism, Islamism, colonial contexts, Palestine, but also literature written in Arabic) to the fear of being viewed as a potential terrorist, to the fear of not being seen as trustworthy, and, as a response, reading the books

others liked, writing papers about things less important to you, all kinds of 'hiding': it results in, as Hajar said, 'simply having to make parts of yourself invisible' in public. *Projet Deburkanisation* highlights how trying to remain invisible in public (in this case symbolized *and* practiced by the wearing of a *nikaab*) is a trap: it causes suspicion. Thus, the mood work required in reaction to inquisitive racialization is to find a delicate balance between not being too visible as 'invisible', while at the same time making invisible one's areas of interest, in order not to be framed as suspicious other. The uncertainty about the politics/collective 'behind' the belief complicates matters further, for one is always at risk of being accused of 'hiding' one's political identity and loyalty under a religious 'cover'.

As the row in reaction to Lamrabet's artwork demonstrates, the feeling of being suspected is not unrealistic: suspicion is deeply ingrained in society, and even removes the public's sensitivity to the artistic dimension of the artwork, while art is the place for 'good ambiguity', for play with meaning – but apparently not for Muslim artists. When one does not do the mood work but plays with inquisitiveness and the imbrication of religious and secular identities instead, as did Lamrabet, one becomes highly visible as a suspicious other and erased as an author: she and her protagonist were identified as one and as dangerous. Lamrabet writes, in accord with Al-Saji: 'The Muslim woman is always linked to all Muslim women around the world and above all, she is linked to the Muslim woman who lives in the imagination of white people' (2017, 67). Making an artwork about the alienation of the 'affective stranger' produced by the visible/invisible paradox, Lamrabet became explicitly framed as such a stranger, and from being the object of an inquisitive proteophobia that could still have left some ambivalence intact, she became reduced to the utterly negative stereotype of the enemy within, or its 'helper' (as a witch).

As we discussed with Hajar how well she recognized Fanon's interpretation of the experience of the white gaze, she mentioned:

I think that, unconsciously, I didn't address that yet because when you talk about such experiences, they are very often thrown back into your face with remarks like 'you only *assume* these things', 'you only *think* this is the case', 'this is *your* experience of it', etc. These reactions play a role, unconsciously. I find that really problematic. I keep having the idea that I need to come up with very clear arguments, you know, to prove my inner world, that it is not just subjective – no one's inner world is, by the way, but that's a sidenote'.

Hajar addresses here what Al-Saji describes as the naturalization and rationalization of race. The racialization itself remains invisible and uncommunicable, as if it is not there. This further complicates the play of visibility and invisibility. When one tries to address the racialization, it is being denied, unaddressable and invisible. This makes one's own experiences suspicious, in

need of proof, even towards oneself. A cycle of not knowing what the other thinks, wants and is, is set and kept in motion. How to respond to such a cycle is a question that phenomenologists of race have addressed in various ways. We do not have the space to further reflect on these responses here, but we do so in the longer chapter we wrote on the basis of this article, where we address Alia Al-Saji's notion of hesitation as well as Gail Weiss' notion of overdetermination (Jansen and van der Steen 2024).

## Conclusion

In this article we introduced the term of inquisitive racialization to flesh out a specific form of racialization related to religion and secularism from a (critical) phenomenological perspective. This is a form of racialization different from but also overlapping with Fanonian, epidermal racialization. Like that, inquisitive racialization has specific 'details, anecdotes and stories' as its source: narratives of suspicion where race and religion are co-concealing categories. Characteristic for these narratives is that invisibility and uncertainty are at their core. The idea of an 'essential (religious) truth' behind (converted or secular) appearances, which needs to be 'unmasked', creates a loop of invisibility and visibility, which is hard to escape from for those targeted by this form of racialization.

The nexus of race and religion was and still is a source of proteophobia and race-thinking in the European context 'after secularization', but actually it has been since the emergence of religion as a matter of conversion with a 'racial' leftover in the formative Iberian context, when repression of difference, early state formation and the colonial project went hand in hand. In contemporary Europe, epidermal schemes and proteophobia go together and reinforce each other leading to an experiential field where racialization targets both the immediately visible as well as assumed hidden (invisible) ideas. We suggested the concept of inquisitive racialization to give the latter dimension of racialization a more specific understanding from a critical phenomenological perspective, paying attention to patterns of racialization daily felt and lived by racialized religious minorities, and Jews and Muslims in particular, but which are not always acknowledged due to their normalization and naturalization.

We would like to stress the importance of Glissant's notion of a 'right to opacity' here. The Marranos and Moriscos needed opacity to resist the co-emergence of racism, forced conversion and inquisitiveness in Iberia, not coincidentally at the time of the early colonialism whose Caribbean legacies Glissant addresses. The tension caused by the societal pressures to be Christian and at the same time the suspicion of invisible 'leftovers' from Judaism and Islam, led to the invention of layered selves. Such 'opaque' selves are not illegitimate but instead a fundamental right, as Glissant argues. Harming this right does not just do psychological or interpersonal harm: it

damages the foundation of the freedoms of conscience, opinion, religion, association, and political formation. A way to counter proteophobia could be to turn the inquisitive dynamics around; to not question and investigate 'affective strangers', but the racializing habits themselves, making them visible and taking them out of the realm of 'naturalization'. We hope to have made a step in making the specific dynamics of inquisitive racialization more visible, creating room for further investigation and criticism.

## Notes

1. A critical phenomenological approach focused on the lived experience of religious securitization and racialization has remained relatively at the background in, for example, Talal Asad on French secularism in terms of inquisitory practice (2006), Hussein Agrama's analysis of religious freedom as a 'binding practice of suspicion' (2012), Yolande Jansen on screening and scratching in paradoxical assimilation (2009; 2014, 2020), Anya Topolski's analysis of how 'governing Europe's Others' tends to turn out to divide them between 'good' Others and 'bad' Others (2018); Reza Zia-Ebrahimi on conspiratorial racialization (2018); Schirin Amir-Moazzami on Interrogating Muslims (2022). We build on these works in this article, focusing on what a phenomenological approach can add to these critical analyses.
2. There is a long tradition of reading Proust in relation to antisemitism, racism and assimilationism in the context of the Dreyfus Affair (Arendt [1948] 1979; Hughes 2003; Jansen 2014; Rose 2011). It is beyond the scope of this article to go into the specific historical interweavings and sequences of antisemitism and Islamophobia in the Western-European context. We concentrate on analysing a few shared phenomenological dimensions, while acknowledging important historical and structural differences between them. For a list of studies in this field and a special issue dedicated to the interweavings, overlaps and differences between Islamophobia and antisemitism, both socio-historically and in relation to European colonial imaginaries, see Jansen and Meer 2020. In a longer book chapter based on the present article, to be published in Schirin Amir-Moazzami and Frank Peter (eds) (2024) *Beyond Islamophobia* (working title), we further expand on recent literatures on the historical emergence of suspicion of religious groups from the Middle Ages onwards, and its racializing legacies in secular European societies today.
3. For the notion of religio-secularism, see Dressler 2014; Jansen 2017; 2020.
4. Lentin & Titley 2011; Jansen 2014; Amir-Moazzami 2022.
5. For S.P.E.A.K, please see <https://www.we-speak.nl/>.
6. The English translation is not fully adequate. The French original says 'Oh, je me méfie', which also means 'Oh, I distrust that' (Proust 1987–1989 [1913–1927]: I, 90).
7. *La Juive* (1835) was a popular opera at the time, composed by Jacques Fromental Halévy to a libretto of Eugène Scribe, while the line 'break thy chains' [romps ta chaîne] is from the opera *Samson et Dalila* (1877) by Camille Saint-Saëns (see further Jansen 2014, Chapter 3).
8. See for a further discussion of Proust's evocation of the situation of Jews in the context of Dreyfus Affair France and its actuality, see Hughes 2003, Rose 2011, Jansen 2014.

9. The novel meticulously studies and renders modern 'uncovering' practices, via the specific use of metaphors to create a 'palimpsest' style, where layers of signs and meanings are covering each other, a style that has been analysed in relation to attitudes towards Jews and antisemitism, as well as in the context of queer studies, and these in connection to each other (See further Hughes 2003; Jansen 2014; Rose 2011; Sedgwick 1990).
10. This decision had been influenced by the right-wing populist party N.V.A. (New Flemish Alliance).
11. The concept of the 'body scheme' was introduced by the medical doctor and phenomenologist Jean Lhermitte in 1939 and was quoted by Fanon 2008; 91.
12. This in relation to the French Jacobin tradition that, according to historian Mona Ozouf, is built on the 'ideal of perfect social and psychological visibility', and where 'one's innermost thoughts are themselves criminal' (Ozouf 1984: 83, our translation).
13. Scratching the surface for finding 'true' identity (but never finding it of course) is one of the central metaphors connected to distrust of 'true' assimilation in Marcel Proust, see Jansen 2014, 2020. It runs parallel to the obsession with closeted homosexuality (Hughes 2003; Sedgwick 1990).
14. Muslim men are often more directly framed as 'threat'. Witchiness and ambivalence are also played out in the movie 'The Battle of Algiers', which portrays women's contribution to anti-colonial struggle as characterized by their hiding weapons under their *haik* while seeming pious and innocent, as well as bombs under the 'cover' of a modern appearance (see further Jansen 2014).

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