

THOMAS HOFFMANN

IMPACT: Thomas Hoffmann is a full professor at the University of Copenhagen. He states that he specializes in a number of fields including Qur'anic Studies, Biblical Studies, Religion and Literature, Ritual Theory, and History of Religion. He was named a professor by the dean of the theological faculty. Hoffmann publishes in the weekly right-wing Weekendavisen and is a frequent commentator on contemporary Islam and Muslims in Denmark. He is also a member of several state institutions that advise the government on policies regarding religion and integration affairs. Hoffmann has styled himself as an authority on contemporary Islam, and his comments have promoted harmful stereotypes about Muslims.

- Thomas Hoffmann is a **full professor at the University of Copenhagen in the Section for Biblical Studies**. His main topic of research is Qur'anic exegesis. He was named a professor by the dean of the theological faculty without the professorship being advertised. Throughout his tenure, Hoffmann has only had one single PhD student. The PhD student has not received their degree as a committee rejected the student's thesis twice. Hoffmann published one monograph in 2007, titled, The Poetic Qur'an: Studies on Qur'anic Poeticity.
- **In 2022, Hoffmann was appointed by the Minister of Immigration and Integration to sit on the National Integration Council, which advises the Minister of Immigration and Integration. Further, Hoffmann is one of four members on the Advisory Committee Regarding Religious Communities in the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs. The Committee advises the ministry regarding applications for recognition as a faith society under Danish law.** Hoffmann is also a member of the Commission for the Forgotten Women's Struggle, which lay dormant from October 2022 until March 2024. When the current government reinstated the commission in March 2024, it appointed four additional members, one of whom was Hoffmann. The commission is tasked with recommending to the government how to address honor abuse and assert Danish values. It is set to report in November/December 2024.
- **Hoffmann is active in the Danish political debate as a public intellectual with strong views on topics related to Islam and Muslims. He believes in making classes on Jyllands-Posten's Mohammad cartoons compulsory in Danish schools and he strongly opposed the Danish ban on Qur'an burnings.** When the latter bill passed in parliament in 2023, Hoffmann wrote that "although the law is not an Islamic law as such, it looks strikingly similar to the rules the so-called dhimmis had to observe in medieval Islamic society". He then goes on to provide an example of this overlap and ends with, "may we congratulate the government with having invented a Qur'anic time machine, which re-enacts premodern times." This plays into Hoffmann's warnings of an incremental Islamization of Danish society. He supports this claim by referencing Victor Klemperer's metaphor about arsenic, the concept of Islamogauchisme, and Lorenzo Vidino's assertion that Muslims are using secular terminology to code their religious agenda to make religious demands acceptable. **A common theme in all of these articles is that Hoffmann describes politically engaged Muslims as a power threat to social cohesion and claims they use soft power to Islamize Danish society.**
- In parallel with his political engagement, Hoffmann charges his scholarly opponents with spreading fake news and being fact-resistant when it comes to issues such as Islamism and Jihadism. He provides the example of Dr. John L. Esposito, whom Hoffmann charges with intentionally rewriting history to make the greater jihad (personal striving) primary when, according to Hoffmann, historically the lesser jihad (holy war) was primary.
- **In a review of Hoffmann's monograph, Geert Jan van Gelder, a professor at Oxford University, described it as "a book that is stimulating and readable but also seriously flawed."** Gelder notes that there "is the astonishing number of unfortunate, indeed unforgivable, errors in quoting the Qur'anic text. Some of these errors are mere typos, which is bad enough, or oversights resulting from serious dyslexia; but many others betray a lack of morphological or syntactic knowledge." **Gelder states that these errors are "no longer sloppy: it is an offense (I speak as a non-Muslim)."** Gelder noted that Hoffmann's level of Arabic was unfortunate because it made it too easy for scholars to dismiss his otherwise interesting ideas. Likewise, Professor Heine Andersen at Copenhagen University

has stated that Hoffmann's using a PhD student's religious identity as an argument against her, compromises "Hoffmann's credibility as a researcher" (see below).

- In their article, "[The Case for Studying Non-Muslim Islam](#)," two historians of religion, Jesper Petersen and Anders Ackfeldt, demonstrated that, despite being a declared non-Muslim, Hoffmann positions himself as an Islamic authority, who lectures to Muslims about "true" Islam, categorizing popular Muslim interpretations as erroneous and thus undermining Muslim voices. Petersen and Ackfeldt conclude that Hoffmann's poor understanding of research epistemology renders him more an object of study than a producer of research. Petersen has also stated his [critique](#) of Hoffmann in Danish Media. In addition to scholarly critique, the Danish Press Board has [demanded](#) that *Weekendavisen* correct undocumented claims, which Hoffmann leveled against a Muslim NGO in his column in the newspaper (see below).
- Despite never having done any empirical research on contemporary Islam let alone fieldwork, Hoffmann presents himself to the Danish public as an expert on various aspects of Muslim life (see below). He also makes bold religious claims about the Islamic tradition. Hoffmann has, for example, [argued](#) that Muslim women consent to being raped when they enter into Islamic marriage (nikah): "As when, for example, a woman repeatedly consents to being raped by her husband because, all else being equal, she also wants to be a devout Muslim woman who lives up to what is defined as Islamic marriage norms... To put it bluntly, rape within marriage is a contradiction in terms, because the woman has once and for all consented to it via the nikah contract." In another article, Hoffmann [explains](#) that Muslim women may experience difficulty divorcing Islamically with the assistance of an Islamic authority, because the Quran "prescribes physical punishment of disobedient wives", the assumption being that Islamic authorities generally condone spousal violence.
- Similarly, Hoffmann has opposed Muslims' readings of the Qur'an 5:32 as a declaration that killing a single human being equals killing all of humankind, [calling](#) a specific Muslim debater's interpretation of this verse "tending towards misinformation" adding that his Islam is based on "careless references to the Quran". In correction of this Muslim debater, Hoffmann states that, "first of all, this is not a commandment to Muslims, but a commandment to Jews, the children of Israel - a religious group, which the Qur'an often polemicize against." He then directs the readers attention to the following verse (5:33) on taking revenge on people who wage war against Islam by killing, crucifying, or cutting off their hands and feet on opposite sides of the body. This verse is according to Hoffmann a commandment to Muslims as opposed to 5:32 (for other examples of Hoffmann undermining Muslim readings of 5:32 see [here](#) and [here](#)).
- Another example of Hoffmann's delegitimizing Muslim interpretation of Islam may be found in [his repeated correction of Muslim women who do not believe that the hijab is compulsory, adding that it is a requirement for men to enforce this rule upon women](#): "As regards the veil then this is clearly and unequivocally an injunction from God in the Quran. It is not a direct injunction to the woman, but on the contrary, it is an injunction to the men that they make this injunction on 'their' women". Hoffmann's main argument in the article is that the hijab is not a choice for Muslim women, it is a compulsory demand from God, who has made men responsible for enforcing this.
- As these three examples demonstrate Hoffmann presents himself as an authority on Islam and how it is practiced by Muslims, explaining to both Muslims and non-Muslims what Islam is. If Muslims do not agree, he undermines their views and states that they are misinformed about Islam.
- Hoffmann has written laudingly about far-right Danish-Swedish political activist, [Rasmus Paludan](#), who is known for engaging in public acts of burning the Qur'an with slices of bacon inserted in between the pages. [Paludan](#) is also the founder of the far-right party, New Right. On April 20, 2022, Hoffmann [published](#) an opinion piece in Berlingske along with a colleague in which they argue that: "... by constantly repeating his circus here at home, Paludan has managed (almost) to civilize the anti-democratic among Danish Muslims, so that they do not lose self-control every time people make statements that violate their holy book."

- Like other opinion pieces by Hoffmann, the analysis is based on pure speculation and the erection of a narrative, disconnected from the actual events. Hoffmann for example [draws a line](#) back to public executions of Christians in Andalusia in the 850s adding that Paludan is planning to found a church called “Saint Jacob, the Moor-Killers Church.” That is, Hoffmann inserts the Qur’an burnings and unrest in Sweden into a narrative frame which is foreign to the situation. When Swedish researchers later published their empirically grounded reports on the events, there was of course no Andalusian narrative because it was irrelevant. The contrast between Hoffmann’s speculation and proper research (in the form of the two reports) is stark. The reports can be downloaded [here](#) and [here](#), and Hoffmann’s later comments on these reports can be read [here](#).
- **Hoffmann has also [written laudingly](#) about Kåre Bluitgen’s Mohammad biography for children, giving it five out of six stars in his book review. This is the book that indirectly sparked the Mohammad Cartoon Crisis in 2005-6.** When Bluitgen could not find illustrators for this book, it led Jyllands-Posten to commission the Mohammad Cartoons. Hoffmann warns that families who buy the book “must be ready for equally harsh and disturbing scenes, like the ones that can be found in the Bible: details saturated descriptions of slave trade, decapitations, stonings, rapes, ethnic cleansing, and massacres... if one compares Bluitgen’s retelling with the original sources one will notice that they agree well.” However, at no point does Hoffmann note that this is not the Prophet Mohammad that most Muslims venerate. Rather, he writes that, “there is a large minority of people for whom Mohmmad is not just a religious figure but ‘a good role model’, as it is stated in the Qur’an. Therefore, it is of course important that the public gets an easily readable insight into the texts, which are the foundation of Muslims’ large veneration of Mohammad.” In other words, Hoffmann presents this view of Mohammad as the one Muslims venerate, and he legitimizes Bluitgen by stating that he “does not seem to have smuggled in a hidden agenda.”
- Hoffmann describes media consumption as a source of fieldwork when it comes to analysis. For example, he [describes](#) his listening to a Muslim radio program in the following words: “As non-Muslim listener one gets a quite unique insight into a universe that would normally require fieldwork or Muslim friends to gain access to. Sometimes it even feels as if one listens in on a somewhat exclusive and private conversation... As a listener one is transformed into an anthropologist whose foreign gaze can identify structures and ‘truths’ that the natives do not notice in their everyday”.
- **Hoffmann often ventures into pure speculation based on what he observes in Danish media. For example, on September 1, 2022, he [claimed](#) in *Weekendavisen* that there were links between the Center for Muslims’ Rights in Denmark (CEDA), a Muslim civil rights organization in Denmark that aims to voice Muslim concerns about Islamophobia and discrimination in Denmark, and Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s AKP.** Thus, Hoffmann subverted CEDA’s positions to speak by saying they are influenced by foreigners. **CEDA complained to the Danish Press Board, which on August 22, 2023 sided with CEDA and [demanded](#) that *Weekendavisen*, which published Hoffmann’s claims, correct Hoffmann’s unsubstantiated claims.** Weekendavisen complied with this demand, and the article is now preceded with a statement and link to the verdict of the Danish Press Board.
- Hoffmann’s speculative approach often has consequences for Muslim citizens and institutions. **On October 20, 2023, Niels Mikkelsen, who is also a high school teacher, gave a Friday sermon in one of Denmark’s most popular mosques, The Islamic Faith Society. In late December 2023, this Friday sermon got the attention of the former Minister of Integration, Inger Støjberg, who posted it on Facebook. On January 4, 2024, *BT* published a story on the Friday sermon, in which Hoffmann [concluded](#) that the sermon is worrying,** and that “Niels Mikkelsen walks like the legal cat around the hot porridge. And the hot porridge is, of course, terrorist approval.” Hoffmann later [published](#) an opinion piece in which he elaborates on why he believes that Mikkelsen condones or approves of terrorism, although Hoffmann also clarifies that he cannot determine whether Mikkelsen’s sermon is illegal. Hoffmann’s claims are not substantiated in the sermon, which the mosque has nevertheless pulled from its social media channels. However, **Hoffmann’s piece had significant consequences for Mikkelsen and the mosque.** Mikkelsen was called for a disciplinary talk at his workplace because the principal was worried that he may radicalize the students. The mosque was asked to explain the event to the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs. The Danish People’s Party put a [bill](#) to the vote in parliament to rescind the acknowledgement of the Islamic Faith Society, meaning the mosque could have lost their tax exemptions, marriage license, visas for imams, etc. This bill explicitly

[refers](#) to the article in BT, where Hoffmann provided his evaluation. However, the bill did [not pass](#) as the government concluded that the bill contradicted the European Convention of Human Rights. Furthermore, the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs vindicated The Islamic Faith Society in the sense that they accepted the mosque's explanation and chose not to pursue the case any further.

- The case with CEDA and The Islamic Faith Society are but two examples of Hoffmann's habit of wild speculation without any concern for the consequences and implications his speculations have for the individuals and organizations that he directs his suspicion towards.
- On February 18, 2021, [Weekendavisen published an article](#) on a migration conference in which the Norwegian PhD fellow, Rahma Søvik had presented her research on transnational relocation. This soon sparked a heated debate, which **Hoffmann got involved in when he, on March 17 and April 1, published updates on Facebook in which he questioned whether Søvik was qualified to do research, lecturing her on positionality and on how her empirical data must be interpreted. Hoffmann identified/categorized Søvik as Salafi to disqualify her research.** Hoffmann did not attend the conference in question and reached his conclusions based on a mere reading of Søvik's abstract and following the debate. When a concerned Professor Emeritus, Heine Andersen, [complained](#) to the chief editor at Weekendavisen about the original story published on February 18, the complaint was [rejected](#) with reference to Hoffmann's two Facebook posts. [On March 31, Andersen stated on Facebook](#) that, "I have not previously experienced that a researcher's religious identity has been used directly as an argument. In this case behind the researcher's back. This is in my opinion compromising Hoffmann's credibility as a researcher." The PhD student later published an opinion piece in which she [publicly](#) complained about Hoffmann. Furthermore, she sent a [formal complaint](#) to Copenhagen University, but this was also [rejected](#). On July 10, Hoffmann [complained in Berlingske](#) that the complaint was inconvenient for him because he was being considered for a full professorship at the time. He was promoted to full professor shortly after this incident.
- **Hoffmann is also connected to several individuals who have spread conspiracy theories targeting Muslims in Europe. In a February 2023 post for *Weekendavisen*, Hoffmann referenced [Sameh Egyptson](#), a Swedish academic and highly visible public commentator who has spread conspiracy theories about an alleged Islamization of Sweden.** Similarly, Hoffmann introduced [Florence Bergeaud-Blackler](#), a French academic who has [alleged](#) that the Muslim Brotherhood has infiltrated the European Union and French academia, to the Danish public. **Despite having done no research on the Muslim Brotherhood, Hoffmann wrote a preface to the Danish translation of Bergeaud-Blackler's book [Le frérisme et ses réseaux: l'enquête](#) ("The Brotherhood and its Networks: The Investigation").** Likewise, Hoffmann introduced Ruud Koopmans, a Dutch sociologist who has dismissed Islamophobia, [calling](#) it an "inflated problem," to the Danish public. [Hoffmann's remarks](#) regarding Koopman's study were: "I am not an expert in quantitative sociology, but the study seems well-designed and sober to me", which leads Hoffmann to conclude that the majority of European Muslims are fundamentalists, which is close to [Koopmans'](#) [conclusion that 44 percent of European Muslims are fundamentalists.](#)