

# Our Ivory Tower Enemies

By Bruce Bawer

In the hours before Donald Trump took the oath of office for the second time, I was busy gnashing my teeth over an article in Norway's newspaper of record, *Aftenposten*. It was about Trump, and although there was nothing new about it whatsoever, it left me incensed – because it was the quintessential example of everything stupid and dishonest that has been said and written about the president.

Trump, I read for the thousandth time, is the heir to Hitler and Mussolini. He's contributed to the dumbing-down of America, a land characterized by a "lack of political maturity" and composed largely of "ignorant, easily duped masses." He's vain and vindictive, a font of lies and conspiracy theories, a racist, a misogynist, and an autocrat who has contempt for any kind of difference. Oh, and one more thing: he comes off like a zombie.

The zombie part was new to me, but the rest, needless to say, was the usual bilge – the same preposterous string of calumnies to which all of us have become accustomed in recent years. In fact my main reaction to the article was to wonder how anyone, in January of 2025, could write such a thing – and how a newspaper editor could print it – without being deeply embarrassed by its utter unoriginality.



*Bengt Hagtvet*

Who wrote this insipid screed? A veteran political scientist by the name of Bernt Hagtvet. I checked out his Wikipedia page. He attended Norway's two leading universities, in Bergen and Oslo, went to Yale and Oxford on a Fulbright scholarship, and was a professor at Bergen before moving on to Oslo.

In other words, he has what in Norway is called an "A4" résumé. A4 is the standard paper size in Europe, just as 8 ½ by 11 paper is the standard in the U.S., and to speak of someone as having an "A4" résumé" is to say that that person has had what some employers, perhaps especially academic employers, would consider a model career, rising steadily and predictably from step to step before reaching the top of his or her field – as opposed to someone who, motivated by curiosity or commitment or boredom, has jumped from one thing to another, shifting horses in midstream and likely undergoing a major career stall or two as punishment.

A person with an "A4" résumé," then, may well be someone who's always played it safe, who's chosen not to rock the boat, who's marched in obedient lockstep. Hagtvet's *Aftenposten* article is plainly the work of such a person: a "political scientist" and purported educator who, instead of making a serious and honest attempt to understand and explain the Trump phenomenon – one of the most fascinating and consequential political developments on the planet during the last century – has chosen to parrot virtually every

ludicrous, brain-dead smear that we've heard ever since Trump came down that golden escalator.

The running theme of Hagtvet's article was that Trump is a creature of the mob – the hero of the stupid. Plainly, Hagtvet finds it outrageous that his inferiors have the power to put someone like Trump in office. Among his charges: the U.S. doesn't have a "normal" media landscape – his evidence being not that the major newspapers, the network news operations, and two of the three major cable news channels all toe the Democratic Party line, but that Fox News, which often dissents from that line, not only exists but flourishes.

Hagtvet's condescension, in short, was dishonest, disgraceful, disgusting – but also illuminating. For what Hagtvet brought into sharp focus was the fact that, like most elite Western academics, he views "populist" politicians like Trump as a threat to democracy. This is, naturally, a contradiction in terms – unless, like him, you think of democracy not as government of, by, and for the people (that mindless rabble!) but as a form of governance that, in our time, is best epitomized by the European Union, which pays lip service to democracy while denying voters the ability to replace their rulers.

I'm taking the trouble to criticize Hagtvet here not because he's anything special but for the opposite reason: he's an archetypal contemporary academic, a man who, in order to maintain his prestigious position, is content to sing from the same hymnal as all of his equally craven colleagues. I despise him no more or less than I despise other men and women of his ilk.

And here's reason #1: Hagtvet is 78 years old, and has therefore, over the course of his career, seen mass Islamic immigration transform Western Europe beyond imagining. The situation is a disaster. It's deeply sad. Countries like Britain, France, and Germany are almost certainly beyond

rescue. But has Hagtvet ever kicked up a fuss about it?

Answer: no. If he and others like him had done so, it might actually have made a difference. For in Western Europe far more than in America – and in Scandinavia far more than in most of Western Europe – academics are listened to by political leaders and by the legacy media. A person like Hagtvet is perfectly placed to bring a sense of urgency to an issue.

Looking into Hagtvet's *oeuvre*, to be sure, I discovered that in 2016 he co-edited a collection of essays entitled *Islamism: Ideology and Threat*. On the face of it, it sounds promising, doesn't it? I was so curious that I hunted the book down at the University of Oslo library. It turns out that, far from being a polemic on the subject – a wake-up cry, like my own *While Europe Slept* or Mark Steyn's *America Alone* (both published in 2006), among other titles – Hagtvet's book is a deadeningly academic product, the kind of book that exists so that its contributors can add another publication to their CVs. Those contributors approach the topic of Islamism from a variety of perspectives and with scholarly dispassion – with predictably soporific results.

Its running theme is that Islam and Islamism are two very different things: one is a religion, the other a dangerous political ideology that claims to be rooted in that religion. In one essay, Lars Akerhaug slams Norway's two best and most honest websites on Islam, [document.no](http://document.no) and [rights.no](http://rights.no), for maintaining that "everything that is wrong in Norwegian Muslim milieux can be traced back to Islam as a religion." He says they're wrong. No, *he's* wrong. Islam is and has always been much more than just a religion. It's always been violent. It's always been about subduing, converting, or killing the infidel. From the very beginning, it spread not by voluntary conversion but by military conquest.

To read this 472-page anthology, in which those inconvenient

truths are dodged again and again, is thus a frustrating experience. One pictures a group of pipe-smoking professors sitting comfortably in a faculty lounge, politely debating recondite details about Islamic history and theology while outside the window pro-jihad lunatics run riot. The term “fiddling while Rome burns” comes to mind. (I might add that *Islamism* is the seventh book in a series about various forms of contemporary extremism – which suggests that as far as Hagtvet and his co-editors are concerned, there are at least six forms of contemporary extremism that are more important than Islamism.)

But to come back to Trump. Hagtvet’s own essay in *Islamism* makes clear why he hates the president. His focus is largely on ISIS, and for him the main problem with that organization is not that it puts the Koran’s directives into practice but that it believes in nationhood – in, specifically, the Islamic State. This is at odds with Hagtvet’s own emphatically expressed view that the only proper stance for a civilized individual in these post-Enlightenment times is to consider oneself a “global citizen” for whom the UN, the EU, the World Health Organization, and pretty much every other international body is by definition a good thing. Naturally the man is repulsed by a president whose slogan is “America first” – and who stands with the ordinary Americans who lost their jobs because of globalization.

So it is that while Hagtvet speaks of Islam in guarded, nuanced terms, he likens Trump to the bloodiest dictators in history. If you’re a respected academic, you see, you can call Trump a tyrant and his supporters morons – but you can’t ever speak about Islam, or any Muslims not guilty of mass slaughter, with anything but slavering deference. Criticize Muslims and your fellow members of the cultural establishment will freeze you out; sling mud at the MAGA mob and your fashionable friends will congratulate you at the next cocktail party.

It's sheer cowardice. It's a cowardice that Hagtvet shares with most other academics, politicians, and journalists from Lisbon to Leipzig. For decades, they've watched Western Europe go down the tubes because of Islam, but with a few honorable exceptions they've all tiptoed delicately around this horrific reality. Meanwhile writers who've dared to sound the alarm have been routinely maligned as bigots, racists, and conspiracy theorists. Some of us have been put on trial. And of course our writings have made us thoroughly ineligible for such lofty academic posts as Hagtvet has held.

Take Peder Jensen. No one in Norway is a more knowledgeable student of Islam. Like Hagtvet, he studied at the University of Bergen. He also attended the American University in Cairo. At both institutions, he studied Arabic. For many years he's written ardent, deeply informed articles about Islam under the pen name Fjordman. But while Hagtvet and other ivory-tower wimps have prudently policed their own speech on the topic and thereby maintained their professional and social viability, Jensen had to leave the country a while back because, having been branded as a pariah by the cultural establishment, he couldn't even get a job doing the lowliest sort of manual labor.

Jensen's fate makes me furious. The faintheartedness of influential men and women with cultural power in the face of Islam makes me furious. They've sown the wind and they'll reap the whirlwind. But millions of others will suffer, too, for these influential people's silence. And it didn't have to be this way. It's all down to the utter gutlessness of the likes of Bernt Hagtvet, who knows it's safer to heave words like "dictator" at the man who may yet save the free West – or part of it, anyway – than to speak the full and ugly truth about the totalitarian ideology that may yet destroy it.

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