International Journal of Conflict and Violence

"They Think We Are a Threat to Their Culture": Meta-Cultural Threat Fuels Willingness and Endorsement of Extremist Violence against the Cultural Outgroup

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"They Think We Are a Threat to Their Culture": Meta-Cultural Threat Fuels Willingness and Endorsement of Extremist Violence against the Cultural Outgroup

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Far-right political parties in Europe regularly portray Muslims and Islam as backward and a symbolic threat to secular and/or Christian European culture. Similarly, Islamist groups regularly portray Westerners and Western culture as decadent and a symbolic threat to Islam. Here, we present experimental evidence that meta-cultural threat – information that members of an outgroup perceive one's own culture as a symbolic threat to their culture – increases intention and endorsement of political violence against that outgroup. We tested this in three experimental studies among Muslims and non-Muslims in Scandinavia. In Studies 1 and 2, we experimentally manipulated whether the dominant majority group was portrayed as seeing Muslim culture and lifestyle as backward and incompatible with their own culture. These portrayals increased the endorsement of extremist violence against the West and violent behavioural intentions among Muslims living in Denmark and Sweden. Study 3 used a similar paradigm among non-Muslim Danes and demonstrated that learning about Muslims portraying the non-Muslim Danish ingroup as a threat increased endorsement of ethnic persecution of Muslims, conceptually replicating the general effect that meta-cultural threat fuels endorsement of extremist violence among both majority and minority groups.

Keywords: extremism, political violence, ethnic persecution, meta-cultural threat perception, right-wing and Islamist extremism

"The Muslim way of life is incompatible with Danish Christian thinking. It is contrary to Danish thinking to accept extreme male chauvinism, corporal punishment, gender segregation, forced marriages, female genital mutilation, beating and brainwashing of school children – not to mention: [our] educated, proper and civilized behavior towards each other."

Pia Kjærsgaard (1998), Speaker of the Danish parliament and the former leader of the Danish People's Party, translated from Danish.

"It is the case of a people who have reached the peak of growth and elevation in the world of science and productivity, while remaining abysmally primitive in the world of the senses, feelings, and behavior. A people who have not exceeded the most primordial levels of existence, and indeed, remain far below them in certain areas of feelings and behavior."

Sayed Qutb (1951), leading member of the Egyptian Muslim brotherhood and one of the key scholars behind the Islamist ideology.

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Events in the past two decades have sparked renewed interest in the so-called "clash of civilizations" (Huntington 1993). One could characterize conflict between Western and Muslim-majority countries through a narrative that appears to support Huntington's prediction that cultural identity would be the primary source of conflict after the Cold War. Evidence for this would include the Western-led wars in Muslim-majority countries, the expansion of "homegrown" Islamic terrorism in the West, the controversy surrounding the publication of caricatures of the prophet Muhammed, and most recently the war against ISIS. Far-right politicians (see Mackey 2015; Bienkov 2015) and commentators (Carr 2006; Fallaci 2002; Houellebecq 2015; Murray 2017) in Europe have fueled the perception of incompatibility and conflicting values between a Muslim and a Western world, without any acknowledgment of how their zeal may contribute to such strife, as they portray Muslims as a symbolic threat to European cultural values including Christianity, secularism, and liberalism (see also Kumar 2012; Saeed 2007).

In a similar fashion, Islamists regularly portray Western culture as a threat to Islam and Muslims (CNN 2003; Wagemakers 2008). They and some other Muslims, too, describe a clash between civilizations, and view Western principles and values as threatening and fundamentally different from their own (Gallup Poll 2002a; Gallup Poll 2002b; Pew Research Centre 2006). In this radical Islamist rhetoric, Westerners are portrayed as immoral and adhering to values inherently incompatible with and inferior to Islamic culture and traditions. Muslims and Westerners appear well aware that each group sees the other as a symbolic threat. These social perceptions are highly salient among both groups (Guardian 2005; Hervik 2004; Kunst, Sam, and Ulleberg 2013; Kunst et al. 2012; Poole 2002; Wagemakers 2008).

Religious and cultural values may function as coordinated systems that enforce collaboration by sanctioning norm violators. Cultures may spread or become extinct through cultural conversion where people tend to selectively immigrate and assimilate into more successful cultures, and the archaeological and linguistic record suggests a long history of this occurring (for a review, see Henrich 2015). Given such dynamics, it is perhaps not surprising to find that people are attuned to threats to their own culture, as well as how others perceive it (which could also provide clues about potential

conflicts). Much prior work has documented the effect of cultural, symbolic outgroup threat – seeing certain groups as a threat to one's own culture – on outgroup negativity (Stephan and Stephan 2000). Indeed, recent correlational and meta-analytic evidence suggests that symbolic threats might rally support for outgroup violence to a greater extent than realistic threats to the concrete economic survival and safety of the ingroup (Obaidi, Kunst, et al. 2018, see also Obaidi, Bergh, et al 2018).

It is possible that the very perception that another group sees one's own group as a threat to their culture will in itself mobilize people to defend their own culture, with violence if need be. Here, we provide an initial test of whether such meta-cultural threats fuels intention and endorsement of extremist violence. In particular, we propose that the belief that the other group sees one's own culture as a symbolic threat increases endorsement of outgroup violence among Muslim and non-Muslim Westerners alike. Numerous studies show the aversive effect of meta-perceptions on intergroup interaction, documenting that holding a meta-stereotype may have a more significant and profound impact on intergroup relations than the "first hand" stereotypes that group members have about outgroups (Richeson and Shelton 2007; Vorauer et al. 2000; see also MacInnis and Hodson 2012; Vorauer and Kumhyr 2001).

1. (First-Hand) Symbolic Threats and Intergroup Hostility

Integrated threat theory (Stephan and Stephan, 1993, 1996a, 1996b) shows that symbolic threat perceptions (for example, first-hand threat: "they are threatening") have the potential to lead to outgroup hostility and aggression (Esses, Haddock, and Zanna 1993; Esses, Hodson, and Dovidio 2003; McLaren 2003). Another line of research shows that when groups perceive each other's norms, values and religion as backward and inferior they are also more likely to express hostility toward the other group (Alexander, Levin, and Henry 2005; Brandt et al. 2014; Henry and Reyna 2007; Skitka, Bauman, and Sargis 2005; Tetlock 2003).

Individuals who perceive threats to their cherished values may also come to feel less "significant," leading them to endorse and engage in violence in order to restore their psychological sense of significance (Kruglanski et al. 2009). Similarly, Moghaddam (2006) suggested that intergroup

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conflicts that are related to, and may threaten, a group's religion, and cherished values are crucial drivers of suicide terrorism. Other empirical work also supports the link between symbolic threat and endorsement of violence (Bueno de Mesquita 2007; Doosje, Loseman, and van den Bos 2013; Doosje et al. 2012; Fair and Shepherd 2006; Ginges and Atran 2009; van Bergen et al. 2015). Indeed, symbolic threat is associated with intention and support for outgroup violence across cultures, regardless of group status (for example majority/minority), over and above any "realistic" threats pertaining to economical security and physical safety (Obaidi, Kunst, et al. 2018).

2. Meta-Perceptions and Intergroup Relations

Previous research on perceived symbolic threat and endorsement of violence has generally focused on individuals' or groups' negative judgments of outgroup members ("I believe they threaten our culture …"). Here, we ask whether meta-perceptions of symbolic threat ("I believe they think that we threaten their culture …") fuel outgroup violence. Because we see ourselves through the eyes of others, people are deeply interested in how others view them (Cooley 1902; Mead 1934; Berger and Luckmann 1966). In particular, given the crucial role of cultural group living and the rules and values that have sustained it throughout human history (Henrich 2015), people should be expected to react negatively when they perceive someone to be threatening their culture, as amply demonstrated by the research reviewed in the previous section. Hence, people should intuitively infer that anyone perceiving them and their culture to be a cultural threat will be particularly hostile towards them, which should in turn fuel their own willingness to resort to outgroup violence in the face of such inferred uncompromising hostility. The current studies present our first empirical tests of this general prediction.

Vorauer, Main, and O'Connell (1998, 917) refer to the term meta-stereotype as "a person's beliefs regarding the stereotype that outgroup members hold about his or her own group." In principle, of course, meta-perception can be positive, neutral or negative, but researchers usually use the term meta-perceptions to refer to negative beliefs that one group may harbour against another (Frey and Tropp 2006; Vorauer et al 2000).

Previous research confirms that when people expect or become aware that outgroup members hold negative stereotypes about their group, it negatively influences their intergroup interaction. Vorauer et al. (1998) demonstrated that the more the majority population (for example white Americans) expected to be stereotyped by the minority population, the less they desired to interact with the minority group members, and the more prejudice they held towards the minority group members. Similarly, when ethnic minorities expected that the majority group would view them with prejudice, they (the ethnic minorities) had more negative experiences during interethnic interactions with majority group members (Shelton, Richerson and Salvatore 2005), and expressed less interest in interacting with them (Finchilescu 2010; Owuamalam and Zagefka 2011; see also Frey and Tropp 2006; Plant 2004).

Anticipating negative evaluation from outgroup members can also lead to hostile and negative acts directed towards the outgroup by reciprocation of the negative evaluation (Bourhis et al. 1979; Devine, Evett, and Vasquez-Suson 1996; Kamans et al 2009; Kteily, Hodson, and Bruneau 2016; O'Brien Leidner and Tropp 2017). For instance, Dutch Moroccan teenagers who felt negative about the Dutch and believed that the autochthonous Dutch held negative stereotypes about them as criminal and aggressive were more inclined to act in line with this negative image by endorsing aggressive behavior toward the Dutch society (Kamans et al. 2009; see also Owuamalam et al. 2013). Kteily et al. (2016) showed that meta-dehumanization ("I believe that they think that we are less than human") leads both Westerners and Arabs to (first-hand) dehumanize the other group, in turn leading to support for violence against the outgroup (see also Doosje and Haslam 2005).

In sum, there is a robust evidence for negative consequences of meta-perceptions (Barlow, Sibley, and Hornsey 2012; Bourhis et al. 1979; Finchilescu 2010; O'Brien et al. 2017; Richeson and Shelton 2007; see also MacInnis and Hodson, 2012; Owuamalam et al. 2013; Vorauer et al. 1998; Vorauer and Kumhyr 2001), although few studies have investigated the effects of negative meta-cultural perceptions on actual endorsement of extremist intergroup violence (but see Kamans et al. 2009; Kteily et al. 2016). Prior research has (to the best of our knowledge) focused largely on meta-perceptions of personal and/or "essentialist" attributes (for

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example that the outgroup sees one as stupid, savage, or less than human) and intergroup violence. But given the importance of culture for human group-living, people can be expected to be attuned to perceptions of their culture and its values. Here we present a series of initial experiments that test whether people respond with greater endorsement of outgroup violence when they learn that an outgroup sees their ingroup's culture and values as threatening, incompatible, and inferior to its own culture. This paper attempts specifically to advance that knowledge in relation to the increasingly hostile relations between Westerners and Muslims.

In these initial studies, we chose to focus on perceptions of both cultural threat, incompatibility and inferiority or "backwardness", because the negative effects of a perceived symbolic threat likely presuppose that the outgroup culture is also seen as incompatible and worse than the ingroup's culture: If not, groups might simply develop their culture by integrating new cultural aspects from the outgroup, as happens when cultural practices spread without this being experienced as a cultural threat (for example the widespread adaption of American traditions of Valentine's Day and Halloween in Scandinavia in recent years). Indeed, cultural threat, beliefs about incompatibility and inferiority or "backwardness" constitute the attitudinal bases of contemporary anti-Western (see Pew Research Centre 2006) and anti-Muslim resentment among Muslims and secular or Christian Westerners respectively (Dunn, Klocker, and Salabay 2007). Previous studies have also shown that portraying outgroup members as inferior, incompatible and threatening can lead to rejection and hostility in the form of opposition to civil liberties for the targeted group (Dunn 2001).

As illustrated in the quotes presented at the beginning of this paper, Islamists and right-wing autochthonous politicians, including right-wing extremists and commentators, share a common strategy: both groups claim that the respective outgroup is a cultural threat and inferior to the ingroup (Murray 2017; see also Mackey 2015; Bienkov 2015).

Here, we test whether symbolic threat from knowledge that an outgroup perceives a subject's cultural ingroup as "backward" and incompatible can increase willingness to participate in violence against the outgroup. We assess this by exposing Danish and Swedish Muslims (Studies 1 and 2) and secular/Christian Danes (Study 3) to information suggesting that the outgroup views their (the participants') cultural in-

group as inferior and as a cultural threat; we test whether exposure to this information increases behavioral intentions to participate in outgroup extremist violence and increases support for ethnic persecution against the outgroup.

3. Aims and Overview

For the three studies, we hypothesize that learning that a cultural outgroup perceives a subject's cultural ingroup as a symbolic threat increases the subject's endorsement of violence against the outgroup, and that this happens in similar ways among non-Muslim and Muslim Westerners in relation to each other. Study 1 experimentally manipulated whether Danish Muslims were told that autochthonous Danes see their group's culture and religion as "backward," "incompatible," and a threat to their way of life, testing the hypothesis that such information would increase endorsement of extremist violence against Europe in defense of Muslims and/or Islam. Study 2 conceptually replicated this paradigm in Sweden, testing whether such meta-perceptions of cultural threat would also cause actual behavioral intentions to engage in political violence in defense of Islam and/or Muslims (as opposed to "solely" supporting the violence of others). Study 3 matched the paradigm as closely as possible with a sample from the Danish majority population to test the prediction that Muslim citizens in Denmark perceiving Danish culture as "incompatible," "inferior," and a cultural threat to Islam would also increase their (non-Muslim Danes') intentions to participate in ethnic persecution of Muslims.

4. Study 1: Danish Muslims

Study 1 manipulated the perception among Danish Muslims that the majority of non-Muslim Danes see Islamic culture and lifestyle as incompatible and inferior, and assessed effects of this meta-perception on endorsement of extremist violence against the West.

The Danish context is of particular interest for several reasons, all of which suggest that Muslims might experience high levels of meta-cultural threat perception. Specifically, Denmark was the origin of the controversy surrounding publication of cartoons depicting the prophet Muhammad, as they were first published in the Danish Jyllands Posten. Second, the rise and success of the anti-immigration Danish People's Party has resulted in Denmark adopting restrictive

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immigration and asylum policies. Most importantly, after Belgium, Denmark has been the European country producing the most "homegrown" Muslim foreign fighters per capita since 2012 (Neumann 2015).

4.1. Method

4.1.1. Participants and Procedures

We first identified eighty Facebook groups in Denmark related to Islam and Muslims. From this initial pool we randomly selected twenty groups to recruit participants from. We sampled 154 respondents (63.8 percent female). Since our study involved Muslims' endorsement of extremist violence, two respondents who did not identify themselves as Muslims were excluded from further analysis. This resulted in a religiously homogenous sample of 152 participants.

The majority of the participants were in the 18–34 age range (84.3 percent). In terms of education, 11.2 percent were enrolled in high school, 9.5 percent had completed high school, 27.2 percent were enrolled in university, 22.5 percent had a bachelor's degree and 23.2 percent had a post-graduate degree. In terms of social class 2.6 percent identified as upper class, 15.2 percent as upper middle class, 63.6 percent as middle class, 15.9 percent as lower middle class and 2.6 percent as working class. Participants received no personal compensation for participation, but we paid 20 DKK (approximately $4) to a charitable cause chosen by each participant.

4.2. Measures and Materials.

An overview of the measures and their items used in the three studies can be found in the supplementary online materials (SOM).

4.2.1. Experimental Manipulation.

A half of the participants, selected randomly, were presented with the following information about meta-cultural threat and incompatibility and inferiority/backwardness, based on actual statements by Danish politicians and members of the public:

> "The following section is a summary of the most recent poll concerning ethnic Danes' attitudes towards Muslim immigrants in Denmark. Please read the summary and answer the following questions.
> The majority of native Danes see the presence of Muslim immigrants in Denmark as a problem, and they see Islamic cul-

ture and religion as backward. They see Islamic values, norms and traditions as incompatible with Danish values, norms, and traditions. Because of this, native Danes believe that Muslim immigrants pose a threat to Denmark. Furthermore, the study shows that Danes do not think that Muslims belong to Danish society."

The other half of participants in the control condition were presented with a fictional summary of "television watching habits" among Danes that was matched in length to the meta-cultural threat condition. Both manipulations were followed by a filler task in which participants rated their preference for a series of graphical icons. Upon completion of the questionnaire, participants were debriefed as to the actual goal of the study and thanked for their participation.

4.2.2. Dependent Variable

After the experimental manipulation and filler task, participants completed the measure of endorsement of violent extremism, measured with six items (for example, "Those who harm Muslims should be exposed to same treatment," α = .73) rated from 1 strongly disagree to 7 strongly agree, except for the last two items which were rated from 1 do not support to 7 strongly support.[1]

4.3. Results and Preliminary Discussion

A one-way ANOVA showed that, as predicted, the perceived meta-cultural threat condition had a significant effect on endorsement of violent extremism (F(1, 150) = 12.52, $\eta2$,= .08, p < .001, see Figure 1), such that participants in the meta-threat condition expressed greater support for anti-Western violence (M = 2.72, SD = 1.37, 95% CI [2.46, 2.99]) than participants in the control condition (M = 2.04, SD = 0.98, 95% CI [1.77, 2.31]). We also performed a Bayesian independent-samples t-test in JASP to test the prediction that endorsement of extremist violence would be

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[1] Given the difficulty in reaching our samples, Studies 1 and 2 collected a broad spectrum of data designed to address a range of research questions. Variables not included in the studies reported here concerned, for example ethnic/Danish/Muslim identification, altruism, group and personal relative deprivation, social dominance orientation, religious fundamentalism, right-wing authoritarianism, perceived Islamophobia, and injustice, dehumanization, and perceived personal uncertainty. For Studies 1 and 2 we ran a series of moderation analyses for a set of variables relevant to Islamist extremism and did not find any significant moderations (perceived personal deprivation; β = .39, p = .700, perceived Islamophobia; β = .40, p = .693; perceived injustice; β = -.59 p = .556, and SDO; β = .07 p = .496).

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Figure 1: Mean ratings and standard errors of meta-cultural threat and control conditions for Studies 1, 2, and 3.
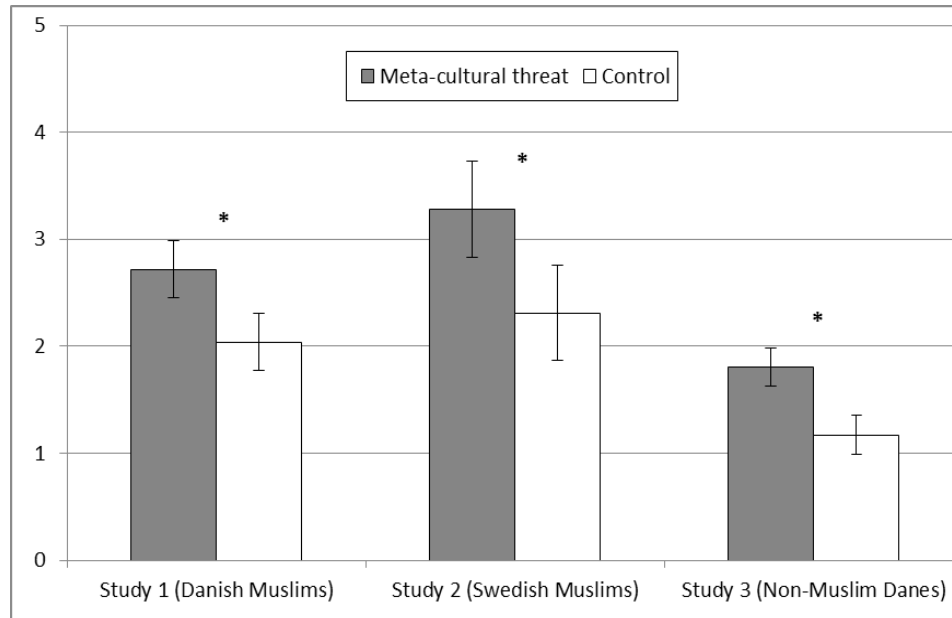
greater in the meta-cultural threat condition than in the control condition, with a default prior of a 50 percent likelihood that the effect size would fall between -.707 and .707 (see Bartlett 2017). This analysis showed a BF10 Bayes factor of 47.61, indicating strong evidence in favor of the experimental hypothesis, relative to the null hypothesis.

The results of Study 1 confirmed our hypothesis that learning about negative meta-cultural threat perceptions about one's group fuels greater endorsement of extremist violence against the outgroup. In other words Study 1 showed that telling Muslim participants that their values were seen as a "backward" and incompatible threat to Danish culture by autochthonous Danes (manipulated meta-symbolic threat perception) increased their endorsement of extremist violence.

5. Study 2: Swedish Muslims

In Study 2, we replicated Study 1 in a different context, among Muslim residents of Sweden, and used a more stringent measure of violence. Whereas Study 1 assessed attitudes towards endorsement of violent extremism, this study focused on actual behavioral intentions to commit violence in defense of Muslims or/and Islam. Behavioral intentions tend to be better predictors of actual behavior than attitudinal support (see de Weerd and Klandermans 1999). The measure of violent behavioral intentions used here has

proven able to differentiate actual jihadists from the general population in Afghanistan (Obaidi et al, forthcoming; see also Obaidi, Kunst, et al. 2018). In other words, the dependent measure here should be more proximate to actual violence by Muslims against Westerners.

Like Denmark, Sweden has seen a recent rise in right-wing rhetoric and political representation, and has witnessed increases in anti-Muslim and anti-immigration rhetoric and hate crimes against Muslims across several Swedish cities (Reuter 2015). In terms of per capita figures for foreign fighters traveling to Syria and Iraq, Sweden is third on the list of European countries (Neumann 2015). These developments make Sweden an ideal context to test our predictions.

5.1. Method
5.1.1. Participants and Procedures

We used data collection procedures similar to those used in Study 1. From a pool of ten Islam-related Facebook groups in Sweden, we sampled 151 Muslim respondents (57.4 percent women). The majority of the participants were in the 18–34 age range (86.0 percent). In terms of education, 26.1 percent had completed high school, 46.3 percent were enrolled in university, 15.7 percent had earned a university degree and 4.5 percent had a post-graduate degree. In terms of social class, 0.7 percent identified as upper class, 9.7

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percent as upper middle class, 58.2 percent as middle class, 14.2 percent as lower middle class and 17.2 percent as working class. Participants received no personal compensation, but we paid 20 SEK (approximately $4) to a charitable cause chosen by each participant.

5.2. Measures and Materials

Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two experimental conditions from Study 1 (with minor adjustments for the Swedish context). [2]

5.2.1. Dependent Variable

After the experimental manipulation, participants completed a six-item scale (α = .86: Obaidi et al., forthcoming; see also Obaidi, Bergh, et al, forthcoming), which measured participants' behavioral intentions to commit violence in defense of Islam and/or Muslims (for example, "I would personally use violence against people harming other Muslims that I care about" rated from 1 strongly disagree to 7 strongly agree).

5.3. Results and Preliminary Discussion

We again used a one-way ANOVA to test the effect of the meta-cultural threat manipulation on behavioral intentions to commit violence. The analysis showed that the overall effect of the meta-cultural threat manipulation was significant ($F_{(1, 83)}$ = 8.370, $\eta2$ = .09, p < .01). Participants in the meta-cultural threat condition expressed stronger behavioral intentions to commit violence in defense of Islam and/or Muslims (M = 3.28, SD = 1.59, 95% CI [2.82, 3.73]) compared to those in the control condition (M = 2.31, SD = 1.49, 95% CI [1.86, .2.76]), see Figure 1. We also performed a Bayesian independent-samples t-test, as in Study 1. The BF10 Bayes factor was 7.97, again indicating strong evidence for the experimental hypothesis. Thus, in line with the results of Study 1, the perception that autochthonous, non-Muslim Swedes view Muslim culture as a backward and incompatible threat to Swedish culture caused a significant

increase in Swedish Muslims' behavioral intention to employ violence in defense of Islam and/or Muslims.

6. Study 3: Non-Muslim Danes

Studies 1 and 2 among Danish and Swedish Muslims demonstrated that meta-cultural threat increased endorsement of extremist violence (Study 1) and violent behavioral intentions to defend Islam and/or Muslims (Study 2). In Study 3, we tested whether these effects would replicate among the majority group in Denmark. Here, we experimentally manipulated meta-cultural threat among non-Muslim Danes telling them that the majority of Muslim citizens view Danish culture as incompatible, inferior and a threat to Islamic culture. We predicted that exposure to this meta-threat would increase willingness to participate in ethno-religious persecution of Muslims. In other words, our overall prediction is that non-Muslim and Muslim Danes react the same way in relation to each other, namely with an endorsement of violence, when meta-perceptions of symbolic cultural threat are made salient.

6.1. Method
6.1.1. Participants and Procedures

Study 3 was also an online study with the same data collection procedure as Studies 1 and 2. We collected data from 191 non-Muslim Danes (M age = 28.57, SD = 8.82; 55.8% women) from different Facebook groups in Denmark. In terms of education, 25.1 percent had completed high school, 40.8 percent had earned a bachelor's degree, 8.5 percent had attended master's studies and 18.3 percent had a post-graduate degree. In terms of social class, 4.7 percent identified as upper class, 17.4 percent as upper middle class, 65.1 percent as middle class, 11.6 percent as lower middle class and 1.2 percent as working class. Participants received a gift card worth 60 DKK (approximately $10) for an online take-away service.

6.2. Measures and Materials
6.2.1. Experimental Manipulation

Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two experimental conditions from the previous studies: half were primed with the information about meta-cultural threat and incompatibility adapted from Studies 1 and 2; the other half

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[2] The current study included another experimental manipulation (perceived realistic threat), which was not related to our dependent variables. Post hoc analyses using the Scheffé test indicated that the only significant difference was between the meta-cultural threat perception and the control conditions (p =.01).

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formed the control group. The following text was presented to the meta-threat group:

> "The following section is a summary of the most recent poll concerning Muslim immigrants' attitudes towards native Danes in Denmark. Please read the summary and answer the following questions.
>
> The majority of Muslim immigrants see native Danes as a problem, and they see Danish culture and religion as morally corrupt. They see Danish values, norms and traditions as incompatible with the Islamic values, norms and traditions. Because of this, Muslim immigrants believe that native Danes pose a threat to their culture in Denmark. Furthermore, the study shows that many Muslim immigrants prefer not to assimilate into Danish society."

In the control condition, participants were again presented with the text describing preferences for various TV programs.

6.2.2. Dependent Variable

Next, we measured Muslim outgroup persecution, which was adapted from Altemeyer's (1996) posse measure, following Thomsen et al. (2008). Participants were asked to "imagine that someday in the future the Danish government decides to outlaw immigrant organizations and requests all citizens to do their best to make sure that the law has a successful effect." Participants then indicated on a scale from 1 strongly disagree to 7 strongly agree how much they agreed with items about Muslim persecution: (for example "I would participate in attacks on Muslim headquarters if supervised by the proper authorities", α = .95).

6.3. Results

As in Studies 1 and 2, we used a one-way ANOVA to test the effect of the meta-cultural threat manipulation on intentionality towards violent persecution of Muslims. The analysis showed that the overall effect of the meta-cultural threat manipulation was significant (F (1,191) = 24, $\eta2$ = .11, p < .001, see Figure 1). Participants in the meta-threat condition expressed stronger willingness to violently persecute Muslims (M = 1.80, SD = 1.19, 95% CI [1.6, 2.04]) compared to those in the control condition (M = 1.17, SD = .41, 95% CI [1.08, .1.25]). As in the previous studies, we performed a Bayesian independent-samples t-test, which provided strong evidence for the experimental hypothesis (BF10 Bayes factor = 7437.18). Thus, in this dataset of non-Muslim Danes we conceptually replicated the results of Studies 1 and 2, demonstrating that similar processes underlie nega-

tive outgroup attitudes and intentions in response to meta-cultural threat perceptions, irrespective of whether a person belongs to the dominant or the subordinate group.

7. General Discussion

Identifying how Muslim and non-Muslim Westerners respond to meta-cultural threat perceptions is important for practical application and theory development. The relationship between Muslim culture and the West is often described as one of the most pressing socio-political challenges of our time (Barrett 2017; Huntington 1993). More knowledge about the psychological mechanisms that underlie tension between the groups is urgently needed to address violence by both right-wing and Islamist extremists.

In the present work, we provide initial evidence that Muslims' and non-Muslims' meta-cultural threat perceptions have direct consequences on their attitudes and behavioral intentions towards each other. Three experimental studies demonstrated detrimental effects of meta-cultural threat on intergroup relations, with increased levels of endorsement of and willingness to engage in political violence. Effects replicated across contexts and group status (majority/minority), suggesting similar underlying mechanisms. Our findings lend support to the theoretical account of extremism that argues that one group's hostility triggers an extreme response in a second group that further radicalizes the first group (Eatwell 2006; Moghaddam 2018, see also Reicher and Haslam 2016).

Previous research demonstrated that first-hand symbolic threat among Muslim and non-Muslim populations across seven WEIRD (Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic) and non-WEIRD cultures is a more potent and stronger predictor of outgroup aggression than realistic threats to ingroup's safety and economic survival (Obaidi, Kunst, et al. 2018). Just as first-hand symbolic threat operates similarly among Muslim and non-Muslim Europeans, these findings show that meta-perceptions of cultural incompatibility can also fuel willingness and endorsement of extremist violence for both groups.

Throughout these initial studies on meta-cultural threats, we manipulated cultural threat, incompatibility, "backwardness," and inferiority together. We believe this follows the basic logic of cultural threat, as the main attitudinal compo-

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nents of anti-Western and anti-Muslim resentment (Research Centre 2006; Dunn et al. 2007) and contemporary discourse about how Muslims and non-Muslims perceive each other. These dimensions are also central components of the contemporary prejudice expressed by both groups towards each other. For example, some non-Muslim Westerners perceive Muslim men as a threat to white women, perceiving Muslim men as unable to control their "aggressive" sexual tendencies or sexist attitudes (Murray 2017). The current U.S. president justified his "Muslim ban" partly on the grounds that Muslim immigrants posed a threat to women in the United States (Taub 2016). This perception of threat from Muslim men implies that their behaviour is incompatible with Western, liberal values of respecting women: Muslim men are portrayed as backward and less civilized on the basis of being unable to control their "aggressive" sexual tendencies (Hubbard 2005). Although meta-perceptions of a culture as "backward" and symbolically threatening are often likely to go hand-in-hand, future research should test whether they have distinct consequences that differ in severity. For these initial experiments of cultural meta-perceptions, we favored ecologically valid manipulations over precise examination of specific factors.

Across the three studies we used different dependent variables, which can be seen both as a strength and a weakness. The fact that we found similar effects, although we varied our measures of violence across studies, is a clear strength of this paper. However, we have less knowledge of whether we would have found the exact same results if we had used the exact same dependent variables across all studies. Nevertheless, a recent study using the same dependent variable we used in Study 2 found similar results across three studies among three different populations and contexts (Obaidi, Kunst, et al. 2018). Although this suggests that we might have reached the exact results had we used the exact same dependent variable across all studies, future work should test this empirically.

More generally, these studies contribute experimental evidence to the literature on intergroup threats, the literature on Muslim extremism, as well as the ways in which research in psychology can inform the study of security (see O'Brien and Tropp 2015). In a meta-analysis Riek, Mania, and Gaertner (2006) commented that one of the major limitations in the domain of intergroup threat theory is the shortage of experi-

mental studies. The existing empirical studies that have manipulated threats have also shown weaker effects on outgroup attitudes than those found in correlational studies. This strongly suggests a need for more experimental studies on this topic. A similar concern can be raised in the domain of terrorism research. Although, experiments are widely recognized as important in research on terrorism, they are in fact rarely implemented (Arce, Croson, and Eckel 2001). This problem is compounded by the fact that this area of research relies heavily on secondary data and is seldom empirical (Silke 2004). To address these limitations, in the current study, we used experimental data to examine the effect of meta-cultural threat perceptions on willingness for and endorsement of extremist violence against the outgroup.

The results from our controlled experimental manipulations are important because they can provide insight into how hostile intergroup perceptions and actions serve to confirm and reinforce each group's views of its counterpart. Hence, the results of this initial set of studies provide a new perspective on how to interpret incidents of political violence in real life. Developing a theoretical framework to explain these events is a necessary step toward ultimately finding ways to prevent them. The current work thus has important implications for policy-making and de-radicalization processes. For example, efforts could be implemented to reduce the perception of meta-cultural threat by promoting belonging and connectedness, which has been suggested to be important in preventing violent extremism (Ellis and Abdi 2017).

In future work it would be relevant to investigate the underlying psychological mechanisms through which meta-cultural threats increase endorsement of outgroup violence, and to directly compare any unique effects to other negative perceptions and meta-perceptions of outgroups. For instance, is the effect of such meta-perceived symbolic threats as strong as or even stronger than perceived symbolic threats from an outgroup? Does any frame that implies cultural conflict increase proclivity for outgroup violence and do such perceptions mediate the effects of both first-hand and meta-cultural threat? And, importantly, will positive, conciliatory meta-information that the outgroup thinks that one's culture is compatible with, as worthy as, and not a threat to their own culture cause parallel reductions in willingness to engage in outgroup violence (see O'Brien et al. 2017)? Future work should also explore which individual psychological differ-

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ences moderate the effect of meta-cultural threat on out-group violence.

8. Concluding Remarks

We demonstrate that meta-cultural threat perceptions have detrimental consequences for intergroup relations between Muslim and non-Muslim populations, potentially leading to acts of violence. We demonstrate that the same conditions can feed willingness to engage in violent conflict between Muslims and non-Muslims on both sides: meta-cultural threat fuels the intention for and endorsement of outgroup violence irrespective of whether the person belongs to the dominant or minority group. Our results indicate that such psychological processes are generally applicable to both Muslims and non-Muslims in predicting intergroup violence among both low and high power groups. The plausible psychological mechanism for Muslim extremism demonstrated here also appears to apply to the endorsement of extremist violence among the Danish majority group. Those who perceive Muslim or Western culture as an inferior, incompatible cultural threat, and endorse violence against it, may have much in common (in terms of psychological processes) with the extremists they hate on the other side.

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