Understanding Religious Radicalization Processes in the Muslim Youth Societies from Social Identity Theory Perspectives
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Religious radicalization is very complex, multidimensional phenomenon and growing rapidly among Muslim youths all over the world. This phenomenon is very concerning, since it may transform and develop to extreme forms of violence such as suicide attacks, hijackings and skyjackings, bombing and killing of civilians etc. However, this phenomenon is not new in the Islamic world, and it is deeply rooted in Islamic political history and society. Forms of religious radicalization with the emergence of extremist Islamic movements in the early beginning of Islam include *Ridda* wars (Apostasy wars) and *Al-Khawarij, Qarmatians, Hanbali and Qutbism* (currently represented by Salafi jihadism and ISIS). It is worthwhile to mention that the commonalities between these movements were the salience of the religious social identity.

Religious social identity was harnessed by these movements to stimulate and polarize people to join them and achieve their agendas. Thus, religious social identity was the center of cohesion and strength of these movements. Moreover, some of these movements have resurfaced again today, but under different names and in different places of the world, including *Al-Qaeda* in Arab Peninsula, *Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen* (militant group) in Somalia, the *Sunni-Deobandi* movement in Pakistan, and *Al-Jamaat-ul-Muslimin* in Bangladesh.
Therefore, it is necessary to understand the deep strength of the construction of the old religious social identities and their roles in inspiring the new Islamic terrorist organizations and movements. Noteworthy, the linking chain between these old and new movements were their adoption of religious social identity that is characterized by two main features. First, categorizing people into in-group (us) and out-group (them) dichotomies. For instance, people were divided to Al-Momonon (believers) vs. Al-Kuffar (infidels), Taki (pious) vs. Gair Taki (impious), Godly vs. hypocritical and so forth. Based on conversations with many people from Mosul in Iraq, ISIS has adopted the same religious social identity that was used in the Ridda wars between 632 and 633 AD. In Ridda wars people were categorized into Al-Momonon (in group) and Al-Kuffar (out-group). Subsequently and as result of this process anyone categorized as Al-Kuffar were demonized and brutally killed. Second, using extreme forms of violence to win the battle or to achieve the movement’s agenda. Particularly, through spreading terrorism and employing unusual methods of humiliation and torture methods against out-group(s). For example, in the beginning of Islam Al-Khawarij terrorized the society by slit and belly cut of pregnant women. Similarly, ISIS burned people alive like the case of the Jordanian pilot Muath Al-Kasasbeh.

Furthermore, if we trace current terrorist organizations we can find the dominance of religious social identity in comparison with other social identities such as (ethnicity, nationality, and gender). Therefore, the focus of this paper will be on the role of religious social identity in the radicalization process. By drawing on social identity and self-categorization theories this paper will attempt to explain how the Muslim youths identify,
categorize themselves extremist group(s) (in-group) based on the religious social identity, and how they identify their relations with others (out-group).