

# INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE AMIDST SOCIAL CHALLENGES

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## ABSTRACT

*Our research will highlight the importance of inter-religious dialogue for human development, security, social justice, liberation, and peace. This leads us to ask the following question: do social media have a great potential for inter-religious dialogue? Can we currently speak of the existence of new methods of real interreligious and intercultural dialogue via social media in Morocco? Morocco may serve as a model for a comprehensive discussion on this subject. Morocco is committed to fighting the ideologies of extremism amplified by social media by reaffirming the true values of Islam, of the “happy medium” (dîn al wasat), of acceptance of other religions, and of constructive dialogue between civilizations.*

*This scientific research is of big interest. Effectively, the use of modern information and social media is essential to promote interreligious and intercultural dialogue. In this sense, the main aim of this project is to create an international ‘code of conduct’ concerning the use of social media. This could protect users against certain religious communities that use social media negatively, with the main objective to diffuse hate and instigate conflicts. We should highlight that social media can simultaneously present positive and negative characteristics. Incidentally, Islam recognizes the importance of human communication and interaction between different societies. Our research on interreligious dialogue is of crucial importance. Effectively, the use of social media as a sophisticated language and as a contributor to dialogue problems between individuals and groups is an essential element in the upkeep of peace and will favour human development, without excluding the impact of political action. Thus, this study constitutes a good observatory for the research that preoccupies us.*

**Keywords:** Human Development, Security, Social justice, Liberation, and Peace.

## INTRODUCTION

Interreligious and intercultural dialogue in social media is of crucial importance, on the one hand, to promote a better mutual knowledge - by the greatest number - and, on the other hand, to highlight what brings people and nations together. In fact, despite the development of modern technologies and means of communication, man often finds himself, faced with these channels, as a simple vehicle, being lulled by the illusion that the instrument changes his nature and gives meaning (Achour, 2003).

In reality, these new modes of data transmission, whatever their nature, (social media or other means of modern communication) cannot, in themselves, bring to man this fruitful exchange with his fellow-men. This form of exchange, alone, cannot nourish his inner life and give him joy and adhere to the same values in the service of a project of emancipation; do great things together (Amherdt & Delgado, 2019). If we speak of dialogue of civilizations, this brings us into the field of the affirmation of the recognition of plural identities, of nations, of

civilizations, and even the obligation to cooperate to make humanism prevail in the face of totalitarian globalization.

The dialogue that we are looking for, will therefore be the interreligious and intercultural dialogue. The genesis of this notion goes back to the 1950s and 1960s and is not easy to define, as it takes multiple forms because of its complexity and the multicultural nature of our societies. It is undoubtedly linked to that of the nation by defining it as a necessary condition for social peace (Evangeli Gaudium, 2013), "*Without this daily dialogue between all nations - in societies, between civilizations and between cultures - there can be no lasting peace or long-term prosperity.*"

The current importance of interreligious dialogue on social media is largely due to its "*globalization*". Indeed, we have reached a stage where it has become a real issue in international relations. The evolution of the practices of interreligious dialogue since the beginning of the sixties seems today to be a victim of its success by social media questions, however. What is the place of social media in interreligious dialogue, which is crucial for integral development, security, social justice, human liberation, and peace?

### **Inter-Religious Dialogue**

Jean-Claude Basset specifies that there are five elements to consider when it comes to interreligious dialogue: personal encounter, exchange of words, reciprocity, otherness, and stake (Basset, 1996). This dialogue is a personal encounter and man today needs to return to what constitutes his singularity, in dialogue with the other, his fellow man, given that "*conversion or conversation in all its forms cannot be excluded from the dialogue*".

However, the role of the media, both national and international, is decisive in this respect, since it is the media that conveys information about violations of this constructive dialogue (Charfi, 1998). Indeed, our time is propitious, facing the emergence of many perils including religious extremism, political populism, fanaticism of all kinds, ruptures that we want to put forward, denying the unity of civilizations and men; "*the cultural crisis and ideological disarray that we witness across the world in recent years,*" said Charif. The "*cultural crisis and the ideological disarray which we have been witnessing throughout the world for several years,*" underlines Mr. Charif, "have favored extremism of all kinds, including religious fanaticism: electoral successes of the extreme right in France, racist attacks in Germany, ethical cleansing in the former Yugoslavia, action by Israeli settlers in the occupied territories against peace, attacks by the Aoum sect in Japan. but it is no less true that "nowhere else than in the Muslim world, religious fanaticism has caused so many victims in recent years, in Egypt, and especially in Afghanistan and Algeria.

These strategies of differentiation, even though the foundation of our nation is based on indifference, amplified to the extreme by social media, often use the field of religion and culture, relying on the phenomenon of solitude that often embraces our contemporaries, despite the proliferation of communication networks. For we are currently living in the era of the "*clash of ignorance*" and not the "*clash of civilizations*", the latter being promoted by Samuel Huntington (Huntington, 2007).

At first sight, a problem seems to be posed to the conscience of the actors of the media. In reality, it requires from us the greatest vigilance, in order to say what is true, as well as to face the challenges of the century that continues, without another being able to replace it.

The religious factor is used by some to attract their populations and individuals in need of humanity. For this, they proceed to the implementation of a presentation via social media aiming at opposing the different religions and, in the same logic, the different peoples who can identify with them (Saint-Prot, 2008).

The crucial aspect of interreligious and cultural dialogue having been affirmed, the essential questions are posed. Aware of this peculiarity, the objective of the present text is to clearly elucidate the need for interreligious dialogue and its importance in social media, as a requirement that cannot be dispensed within daily life, not to mention intellectual and cultural life. There is no dialogue possible if there is no understanding. And understanding naturally presupposes knowledge.

That is why today the dialogue of civilizations must imperatively integrate the religious fact, by the interreligious dialogue which will recede the extremisms and will allow moving away from the spectrum of totalitarian globalization. Moreover, the national civil society is more and more resolutely involved in an action of promotion of the interreligious and intercultural dialogue itself.

In short. The question of interreligious and intercultural dialogue has become an issue and an essential dimension of contemporary social and political life. Its impact is felt as much on the internal level as in the sphere of international relations. Numerous summits and conferences, at the international level, evoke the theme of interreligious and intercultural dialogue and make resolutions about them, either with the specific purpose of discussing them or in the margin of the main subject.

From the beginning of the 1960s to the present day, several commissions have been created throughout the world, all of them having as their object dialogue, justice, truth, and reconciliation. The great meeting in Assisi, Italy, on October 27, 1986, initiated by Pope John Paul II, was the starting point for several similar meetings. In this sense, the use of modern information and social media is essential to promote inter-religious and cultural dialogue.

As we can see, the fight against all extremists will not end anytime soon. Moreover, will it ever end? If we are to create a permanent body, a sustainable institution, a global code of conduct regarding the use of social networking sites against certain religious communities in order to warn users against negative uses of social networks whose objectives are to spread hatred and encourage conflict, let's emphasize that social media have both positive and negative aspects. Moreover, Islam recognizes the importance of human communication and interaction between different societies. Misunderstood, misinterpreted, and distorted for political purposes, especially after September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, in religious matters, the number of sites advocating hatred has increased.

### **This Objective is Truly of General Interest**

Even more and as an example, in France itself, the former Minister of National Education, Najat Vallaud-Belkacem, questioned on the subject on France Inter on April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2021, declares "*Secularism is only called upon to exclude Islam*". This shows that secularism has turned into anti-religious dogmatism. France is struggling to understand nowadays what the "*laïcité*" it stands for really means (Mustapha, 2006). Authentic secularism is not a problem for religions in general and for Islam in particular, an Islam that the orientalist Louis Massignon described as a "*secular theocracy*" (absence of sacraments, of the clergy, each being his own "*imam*", etc.).

Thus, the process of globalization, which would have us believe that borders no longer exist, that there is only one world. If we are not careful, it will lead us to destruction and produce destabilization, dependence, and subjection. More than that, in reality, it aims at denying man everywhere, in what he has of the singular because coming from no tradition, from no culture and consequently of new forms of conflicts (the theory of the "*clash of civilizations*").

Ernest Renan has well underlined that a nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Since human society has other laws than those of biology, a nation is not a race, it goes beyond elementary ethnic or tribal affiliations; it is a will to be together to do great things in order to take one's place in history, and it is a territory, what Maurice Barrès calls the "*earth*". The practice of dialogue has gradually become the guarantee of social peace. This is also the case in Morocco (Renan, 1882).

### **Morocco, an Actor in the Dialogue of Civilizations**

It is not by chance that Morocco, for example, an old civilization and a nation for more than ten centuries, which we will take as a case study, a country fundamentally attached to Islam, is also one of the most dynamic actors of the dialogue of religions and of the construction of the alliance of the peoples in front of the devastating ideologies of the clash of civilizations, amplified by social media. and to preserve the values in the face of international imperatives. Thus, it is important to note that Morocco is itself affected by tensions and the issue of religion is therefore seized by the extremists in an attempt to challenge the national social contract, which respects diversities, and the conscience of each religious choice. The involvement of his Majesty the King in fostering the cause of a good understanding between religions and promoting the dialogue of civilizations is of course essential.

Morocco, through the will of its king, who wants to be "in tune with the times", intends to play an essential role in this world that is being built through the bold initiatives taken by both sides concerning the need to establish a dialogue between religions and cultures. This reminds us of the expression of the famous theologian Hans Kung: "*No peace between nations without peace between religions, no peace between religions without dialogue between religions*"(Kung, 1999).

Through the will of its sovereign, Morocco is committed to fighting deviant extremist ideologies by reaffirming the true values of Islam, those of the middle way (dîn al wasat), of respect for other religions, as well as those of constructive dialogue between civilizations. In this sense, Morocco has initiated very close relations with the Holy See (Vatican). Let us recall, in this regard, the visit of His Majesty King Hassan II to the Vatican in 1980 and that of Pope Francis in March 2019 in Morocco, a first since John Paul II in 1985. A historic date in interfaith dialogue.

On many occasions, King Mohammed VI, expressly relying on his position as "*Commander of the Believers*", has argued that the values advocated by Islam are "*based on justice, respect for life, human solidarity and listening to others*". Therefore, Morocco is in the vanguard of the fight of reason against all attempts to fan the flames of extremism, often spread by advocates of the ideology of the "*clash of civilizations*" and "*social media*". The Kingdom "*does not cease to take initiatives of all kinds and to fully and resolutely join all praiseworthy efforts deployed in this direction.*"

Today, the Kingdom of Morocco can only be a leading actor to carry out these steps of meetings and implementation of new challenges. The common action must aim at establishing a world in which man will be able to "*live a truly human life*", according to the words of Pope John Paul II, during a speech at the University of Coimbra, in the spring of 1984.

Morocco has all the assets that allow it to play a role in this dialogue, not only because of its awareness of the reality of what is at stake in this field but also because of its history and tradition, as attested by the peaceful cohabitation of Moroccans of both Muslim and Jewish faiths for 14 centuries. Sociologist Jean-Paul Willaime notes: "*Religions are identity and ethical resources which, precisely because they represent conventional forces, can play a positive role in democratic and secular societies*" (Willaime, 2009).

Indeed, its geostrategic position, at the confluence of the African and European continents, the cradle of three monotheistic religions, has made the Kingdom a catalyst for the dialogue of civilizations. Its continuous commitment to the rapprochement between the various cultures and religions has manifested itself through a dynamic involvement in international bodies (United Nations, Organization of the Islamic Conference, League of Arab States).

Over the years, the efforts invested by Morocco in interreligious and intercultural dialogue have been immense. Another indicator of the progress made is the adoption of various internal legal texts and the ratification of several international agreements in the field of this dialogue between civilizations (Saha Tchinda, 2017).

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In this regard, one can only underline the King's approach of tolerance and wisdom when he declared in his message to the participants at the interfaith meeting in Brussels on December 18, 2001, on "*God's peace in the world*": "*Those who want to set us against each other, culture against culture, religion against religion, are the prophets of obscurantism and regression. They are those who would like to make us forget that the religions of the Book, in the faith in a Unique God and in the message of Abraham, have all brought to Man, the message of deliverance and progress, against barbarism, violence, and extremism. Any people having a civilization and claiming a religion can and must be proud of all that it brought radiant to humanity. But it must also measure its dark side, by asking itself collectively: what about the crimes of which many civilizations have been guilty and of which few have been spared? Many, at one time or another in their history, have let contempt and hatred speak for themselves*".

In establishing and strengthening dialogue to combat all forms of misunderstanding, mistrust, and disagreement that generate tensions via "*social media*", a very important international conference on "*the promotion of dialogue among cultures and civilizations through concrete and sustained initiatives*" was held in Rabat, from June 14 to 16, 2005, under the high patronage of His Majesty King Mohammed VI (El Ghissassi, 2006).

Given that interfaith dialogue must rely on the contribution of multiple stakeholders from all walks of life, Morocco has charted its course, reappropriating the concepts highlighted by Unesco, which in 2008 signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Alliance of Civilizations: "*tolerance*" (1995), "*culture of peace*" (2000), "*dialogue among civilizations*" (2001), "*intercultural and interreligious dialogue*" (2007) and, a "*rapprochement*

nt of cultures" (2010) so many concepts transformed into active policy, with the sole objective of "living together in peace" (Machelon, 2009).

Indeed, the process of interreligious dialogue finds a relevant field of implementation in the space of social media which constitutes the place of all encounters, in freedom and acceptance of differences, around what makes the unity of man.

## CONCLUSION

This research concludes, the use of social networks as a sophisticated language and their contribution to the problems of dialogue between individuals and groups will be an essential element in the maintenance of peace and will promote development for all mankind, without denying the impact of political action. This contribution, therefore, constitutes a good observatory for the research that concerns us.

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| <p><b>Received:</b> 23-May-2023, Manuscript No. JLERI-23-13625; <b>Editor assigned:</b> 24-May-2023, Pre QC No. JLERI-23-13625(PQ); <b>Reviewed:</b> 12-June-2023, QC No. JLERI-23-13625; <b>Revised:</b> 16-June-2023, Manuscript No. JLERI-23-13625(R); <b>Published:</b> 26-June-2023</p> |
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