

The West-East Interreligious Discourse: Reading from Said Nursi's *Risale-i Nur*

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Abstract

This article takes a unique approach in exploring the foundational epistemological and philosophical structure underlying interreligious relations, a crucial aspect that has been largely unexplored in previous studies. This investigation is of utmost importance, as it forms the basis for understanding the increasingly polarized nature of interreligious relations between the Western and Eastern spheres. The study seeks to elucidate the fundamental epistemological framework that underpins the paradigmatic contestation in interreligious discourse. The research methodology entails a comprehensive philosophical analysis of Said Nursi's seminal work, *Risale-i Nur*. The findings identify three pivotal factors driving this contestation: *first*, distinct thought structures rooted in specific regional contexts; *second*, a dichotomous interpretation of human relations; and *third*, a predominantly rational rather than ethical approach to understanding reality. The study concludes that ideologizing paradigms within interreligious discourse has engendered contentious relationships. This ideologization is subsequently challenged by ideological critique, leading to dialectical interactions. As a result, this paradigmatic dialectic perpetuates a cycle of superior-inferior dynamics in interreligious discourse.

Keywords: Contestation of thought, Western-Eastern relations, interreligious relations, philosophical analysis, Said Nursi

Introduction

The paradigm of interreligious relations between the East and the West has remained perpetually elusive in terms of convergence. Despite occasional compromises in specific contexts, the prevailing paradigms consistently foster contentious views. Knowledge production in the West and the East is grounded in distinct foundations, leading to cultural superiority and imbalanced relations.¹ It is of utmost urgency that we recognize the need for cultural dialog to bridge these differences.² This recognition is not just a theoretical exercise but a call to action for scholars, researchers, and academics in philosophy, religious studies, and intercultural communication. However, Chakrabarti (2023) contends that such dialog is not a means of unification, as a subordinate perspective from the North toward the South persists.³ According to Carl Oglesby, North and South refer to geographical, ideological, and cultural divisions. Ideologically, the division of North and South refers to the construction of cultural mentality by countries in the North. The concept of the North represents political, economic, and cultural progress, while the South represents the opposite.⁴ This ongoing subordination further underscores the persistent contestation.⁵ This evidence shows that the contestation of paradigms in interreligious relations between the West and the East remains a dominant discourse.

Studies on contesting paradigms in interreligious relations between the West and the East can be categorized into three primary tendencies. *First*, theological studies on the ontological paradigm of interreligious relations⁶ emphasize the perspectives of religious teachings on interreligious relations,

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¹ Francis Adyanga Akena, "Critical Analysis of the Production of Western Knowledge and Its Implications for Indigenous Knowledge and Decolonization," *Journal of Black Studies* 43, no. 6 (2012): 599-619.

² Natalia Hryhorivna Mozgova and Kateryna Serhiyivna Honcharenko, "Culture of Dialogue and Dialogue of Cultures in the West-East Paradigm in Modern and Postmodern Worldview Contexts," In *Worldview Explications of Modernism and Postmodernism* (Izdeveciba "Baltija Publishing," 2023), 142-55.

³ Debapriya Chakrabarti, "Urban Theory of/from the Global South: A Systematic Review of Issues, Challenges, and Pathways of Decolonization," *Frontiers in Sustainable Cities* 5 (2023): 1163534.

⁴ Claudius Gräbner-Radkowsch and Birte Strunk, "Degrowth and the Global South: The Twin Problem of Global Dependencies," *Ecological Economics* 213 (2023): 107946; Arindam Das and Pia A. Albinsson, "Consumption Culture and Critical Sustainability Discourses: Voices from the Global South," *Sustainability* 15, no. 9 (2023): 7719.

⁵ Edward F. Fischer, "The West in the Future: Cultural Hegemony and the Politics of Identity," *American Anthropologist* 95, no. 4 (1993): 1000-1002; Lilack Biswas, "Cultural Hegemony and the Teaching of Global English Language: Indian Perspective," *European Journal of English Language and Literature Studies* 10, no. 5 (2022): 1-9; Kasiyan, "'Becoming White': The Problem of Fine Art Neocolonization in Postcolonial Era," *Humanus* 21, no. 1 (2022): 68.

⁶ Ven Piseth Sek, "Buddhist Perspectives on Interfaith Relations," *Journal of Buddhist Education and Research* 3, no. 1 (2017): 19-23; Ahmad Najib Burhani, "Lakum Dīnukum Wa-Liya Dīnī: The Muhammadiyah's Stance towards Interfaith Relations," *Islam and Christian-Muslim*

which are continually challenged to define themselves amidst other religions. *Second*, studies related to teaching the paradigm of interreligious relations in educational institutions⁷ advocate for including interreligious relations in educational curricula due to their relevance to broader social relations. *Third*, axiological studies focus on applying interreligious relations to foster harmony and dialog⁸ worldwide, encompassing regions such as Arabia, Egypt, the United States, Indonesia, and others.⁹ While these three tendencies provide a robust foundation for studying interreligious relations from axiological and theological perspectives, they have yet to delve deeply into epistemological and philosophical perspectives, which are crucial for formulating an authentic response to the contestation of paradigms in interreligious relations between the West and the East. In this regard, the study of Said Nursi's thought becomes pivotal, as he posits that the East—particularly Islam—possesses epistemological roots in both revelation and reason, a distinctive characteristic not found in the West. Nonetheless, Said Nursi offers a unique perspective in articulating this contestation.

This paper addresses the limitations identified in previous studies that have neglected the epistemological and philosophical dimensions of paradigm contestation in interreligious relations between Western and Eastern cultures. Furthermore, this manuscript elucidates the foundational elements of paradigm contestation from both epistemological and philosophical viewpoints. It highlights the significant influence of epistemological factors in shaping paradigm contestation across both regions. Specifically, this article pursues three primary objectives: first, to delineate the philosophical perspectives on secularism alongside various religious paradigms; second, to analyze the understanding of humanity from both Western and Eastern perspectives; and third, to portray the attitudes and practices related to the perception of religious diversity and differences within each region. Collectively, these three objectives represent the epistemological and philosophical frameworks essential for analyzing the contestation of paradigms within interreligious relations between the West and the East.

The philosophical views of a community undoubtedly influence the thoughts, attitudes, and actions undertaken in response to religious diversity and differences.¹⁰ This article is grounded in the assumption that in responding to the paradigmatic contestation of interreligious relations between the West and the East, there are epistemological foundations that explain why this occurs. Philosophically, epistemological foundations can provide insights into the fundamental aspects of contesting paradigms in interreligious relations between the West and the East.¹¹ This explanation differs from practitioners, who often offer procedural, technical solutions for addressing interreligious relations.

Literature Review

Contestation

Contestation refers to the practice of challenging and opposing both norms and actions in various contexts. Avelino (2021) elaborates on the significance of this concept, particularly in the context of

Relations 22, no. 3 (2011): 329–42; Simone Sinn, "Lutheran Perspectives on Interfaith Relations: Theological Trajectories of Study Processes in the Lutheran Communion," *Dialog* 58, no. 2 (2019): 140–47; Elena Mchedlova, "Interfaith Relations and Their Perspective," *World of Science. Series: Sociology, Philology, Cultural Studies* 13, no. 3 (2022).

⁷ Josef Meri, "Teaching Interfaith Relations at Universities in the Arab Middle East: Challenges and Strategies," *Religions* 12, no. 5 (2021): 330; Raiz Ahmed Saeed et al., "Role of Pakistani Universities in Interfaith Dialogue, Harmony and Relations An Index and Bibliometric of Produced Academic Dissertations," *Library Philosophy and Practice* (2021): 1-27; Nurulwahidah Fauzi, "Pemurnian Sistem Pendidikan Islam Berdasarkan Metode Risalah An-Nur: Analisis Kajian Di Negara Malaysia," *ESENSIA: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin* 15, no. 2 (2014): 261–70.

⁸ A. Singgih Basuki, "Religions, Violence, and Interdisciplinary Dialogue," *ESENSIA: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin* 19, no. 2 (2018): 171–83.

⁹ Oksana Nizamutdinova, "The Modern Interfaith Relations in Egypt," *Vestnik Volgogradskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta. Seriya 4. Istorija. Regionovedenie. Mezhdunarodnye Otnoshenija* 23, no. 6 (2018): 174-172; Peter Colwell, "Race, Power, and Privilege: Ecumenism and the Lost Narrative of Interfaith Relations in Post-Brexit Britain," *Ecumenical Review* 71, no. 5 (2019): 642-652; Ludovic Lado and Boris Olivier Glode, "Grassroots Perceptions of Islamic Extremism and Muslim-Christian Relations in Mali," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 51, no. 1-2 (2022): 184-213; Stanley H. Skreslet, "Christians and Muslims in Egypt," *Interpretation* 76, no. 2 (2022): 129-139; Jamaludin Hadi Kusuma and Sulistiyono Susilo, "Intercultural and Religious Sensitivity among Young Indonesian Interfaith Groups," *Religions* 11, no. 1 (2020): 1–22; Toby Kan, "Social Discourses in Egypt: Historical Developments of Interfaith Relations between Christians and Muslims," *Mission Studies* 40, no. 1 (2023): 120-149; Nathanael Gratias Sumaktoyo, "Faith and Friendship: Religious Bonding and Interfaith Relations in Muslim Countries," *Politics and Religion* 14, no. 4 (2021): 634-662.

¹⁰ Leonid V. Chupriy, "Religious Values as the Basis for the Development of Personality Spirituality," *Ukrainian Religious Studies* 13 (2000): 34-42; Vladimir P. Filatov, "From Explanation to Understanding," *Epistemology & Philosophy of Science* 60, no. 2 (2023): 6–22; Pierre Le Morvan, "Two Emphases of Virtue and Vice Epistemology," *Philosophy* 98, no. 3 (2023): 371–97; Richard Foley, "The Epistemology of Beliefs and the Epistemology of Degrees of Belief," in *Working Without a Net* (Oxford University Press, 1992), 140–210.

¹¹ Vibha Chaturvedi, "Philosophical Implications of Religious Pluralism," *Journal of Indian Council of Philosophical Research* 33, no. 1 (2016): 43–59.

contesting for positions that influence environmental governance and policymaking.¹² In contestation, there is an effort to defeat the opposition, strategically deploying tactics and methods to achieve desired goals¹³. As a social practice, contestation is carried out through various means, including arbitration, deliberation, debate, and validation.¹⁴ Murrup-Stewart, Atkinson, and Adams (2022) further elucidate the different methods employed in contestation.¹⁵ Sundaram (2017) explores the role of contestation in addressing legitimacy gaps within the social order, suggesting that contestation becomes a critical social practice due to its capacity to produce new orders.¹⁶

As a form of social dynamics involving competition and conflict between parties, contestation plays a pivotal role in governing intergroup relations within societal power structures¹⁷. Contestation entails the clash of conflicting goals or interests between competing parties.¹⁸ In the process of contestation, parties often strive to defeat their opponents through the strategic deployment of political power, economic resources, and social influence.¹⁹ Notably, contestation driven by political interests can lead to the alteration of values, order, and practices within a society.²⁰ Such changes in social dynamics, including power structures, cultural norms, and dominant values, become inevitable consequences of the contestation process.²¹

The East-West Divide

The East-West divide refers to the opposition and tensions between the Eastern and Western spheres across various sectors.²² This divide manifests notably in social and religious relations.²³ Numerous studies have emphasized the complex and often contentious relationship between the East and West in the context of interreligious dialog.²⁴ The notion of the East-West divide often highlights the dichotomy between differing paradigms and the challenges associated with integrating norms and cultures.²⁵ Scholars such as Gabriel (2018) and Huttunen (2017) have challenged the traditional understandings of the East-West concept. Gabriel focuses on the importance of non-metropolitan knowledge production,²⁶ and Huttunen traces the evolution of the concept within the context of UNESCO's cultural projects. The literature on the East-West divide collectively addresses the ambiguities and complexities inherent in this conceptual dichotomy.²⁷

The debate surrounding the East-West divide pertains to the differences in cultural patterns that are geographically dichotomized. Studies have mapped various characteristics, indicating that regions along the East-West latitude are significant cultural differentiators.²⁸ The dichotomy between the East

¹² Flor Avelino, "Theories of Power and Social Change. Power Contestations and Their Implications for Research on Social Change and Innovation," *Journal of Political Power* 14, no. 3 (2021): 425-448.

¹³ Tanja A. Börzel and Michael Zürn, "Contestations of the Liberal International Order: From Liberal Multilateralism to Postnational Liberalism," *International Organization* 75, no. 2 (2021): 282-305.

¹⁴ Antje Wiener, "Introduction: Contestation as a Norm-Generative Social Practice," in *A Theory of Contestation* (Springer Berlin Heidelberg, 2014), 1-15.

¹⁵ Cammi Murrup-Stewart, Petah Atkinson, and Karen Adams, "Storying Ways to Reflect on Power, Contestation, and Yarning Research Method Application," *The Qualitative Report* 27, no. 3 (2022): 777-791.

¹⁶ Sasikumar S. Sundaram, "Norm Contestation and Global Governance: Taking Actor Configurations and Practical Reasoning Seriously," *Polity* 49, no. 1 (2017): 139-148.

¹⁷ Gregorio Bettiza and David Lewis, "Authoritarian Powers and Norm Contestation in the Liberal International Order: Theorizing the Power Politics of Ideas and Identity," *Journal of Global Security Studies* 5, no. 4 (2020): 559-577.

¹⁸ Troy Sternberg, "Conflict and Contestation in Kyrgyz Mining Infrastructure," *Extractive Industries and Society* 7, no. 4 (2020): 1392-1400.

¹⁹ M. Iqbal Fardian, "Buying Voters: Money and Political Transaction in Legislative Elections," *Journal of Contemporary Sociological Issues* 1, no. 1 (2021): 56.

²⁰ Try Riduwan Santoso, Rizqi Rahayu, and Adi Robith Setiana Setiana, "Political Interest of Religious Ritual: The Sundanese Nyangku Ritual in Indonesia," *IAS Journal of Localities* 1, no. 2 (2023): 123-37.

²¹ Avelino, "Theories of Power and Social Change. Power Contestations and Their Implications for Research on Social Change and Innovation."

²² Dingyu Chung, "The Parallel and Interdependent Political Evolutions in the West and the East: Eusocial Politics," *Open Journal of Social Sciences* 9, no. 5 (2021): 279-338.

²³ Adam B. Cohen, Michael Shengtao Wu, and Jacob Miller, "Religion and Culture: Individualism and Collectivism in the East and West," *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 47, no. 9 (2016): 1236-1249.

²⁴ Safvet Halilović, "Islamic Tradition of Bosniaks as an Example of Interreligious Tolerance and Coexistence," *Zbornik Radova* 18 (2019): 187-204; Mohammad Jafar Amir Mahallati, *Friendship in Islamic Ethics and World Politics* 125-144; Ruairi Meyler, "The Crusade of the Pen: Developed during the Colonial Period and Dismantling the Discourse of the War on Terror," *International Journal of Asian Christianity* 5, no. 1 (2022): 5-22.

²⁵ Polina Gerchanivska, "East-West Dichotomy: Historical and Cultural Aspect," *National Academy of Managerial Staff of Culture and Arts Herald*, no. 1 (January 22, 2019).

²⁶ Sharmani Patricia Gabriel, "Introduction: East/West-What's at Stake?," *Literature, Memory, Hegemony: East/West Crossings*, 2018, 1-19.

²⁷ Miia Huttunen, "Three Halves of a Whole – Redefining East and West in UNESCO's East-West Major Project 1957-1966," *Kulttuuripolitiikan Tutkimuksen Vuosikirja*, 2017, 140-154.

²⁸ Ray Friedman et al., "The Impact of Culture on Reactions to Promise Breaches: Differences Between East and West in Behavioral Integrity Perceptions," *Group and Organization Management*, 2018, 273-315.

and West is also associated with differences in social and political structures, reflected in governance systems, social policy ideologies, and local power dynamics.²⁹ These differences also extend to the economic dimension,³⁰ where distinct patterns of industrial structures, trade, and economic access manifest in each region,³¹ These characteristics illustrate how the geographical and cultural differences between the East and West can significantly influence and impact one another.

Interreligious Relations

Interreligious relations encompass the interactions, contacts, and dynamics between various religions or belief systems within a societal context.³² Mchedlova (2022) and Williams (2015) emphasize the importance of dialog and interfaith cooperation in maintaining and nurturing interreligious relations.³³ Conflicts often arise in interreligious relations due to misunderstandings between parties regarding specific values and beliefs.³⁴ The establishment of interreligious dialog and cooperation on global issues can play a crucial role in fostering peace and understanding.³⁵ Domnic (2023) underscores the significance of interfaith dialog in promoting shared welfare in an increasingly globalized world.³⁶ Such dialog is often pursued to mitigate various risks, such as the influence of radical forces and political movements on national and global security, in response to the rise of radical religious movements.³⁷ Thus, interreligious relations involve diverse aspects emphasizing the importance of collaboration and mutual understanding to maintain peace and well-being.

Several studies have explored the characteristics of interreligious relations. These relations often include open dialog and cooperation between adherents of different faiths, intending to understand differences and find solutions.³⁸ The most important characteristics of these relations include tolerance, respect, and accommodation of the beliefs and religious practices of others.³⁹ Despite efforts to establish interreligious relations, conflict and tension often remain inevitable due to differences in values, beliefs, and even political interests.⁴⁰ Each religion plays a critical role in promoting peace, reconciliation, and conflict resolution among conflicting religious groups.⁴¹ Furthermore, interfaith cooperation is essential for achieving inclusive development and social cohesion.⁴²

Materials and Methods

This study examines the paradigmatic dialectics that dominate society and the contesting non-dominant thoughts from the works of Said Nursi, who lived from 1877 to 1960. The selection of this study's subject is based on three key arguments. Firstly, Nursi was a thinker who lived through dynamic historical periods, including World War I, World War II, the Ottoman Empire, the Modern Period, and the rise of global nationalist movements, which provided a rich social context for his life and thought. Secondly, he was a prominent scholar well-versed in Islamic and modern sciences, offering a unique

²⁹ Ziming Liu, Zhiqiang Qian, and Nan Li, "An East-West-Traffic Governance System Based on EBPf and Centralized Gateway," in *2023 IEEE International Conference on Sensors, Electronics and Computer Engineering, ICSECE 2023*, 2023, 1366-1370; Xuechen Chen and Yifan Yang, "Contesting Western and Non-Western Approaches to Global Cyber Governance beyond Westlessness," *International Spectator*, 2022, 1-14.

³⁰ Amitav Acharya, "After Liberal Hegemony: The Advent of a Multiplex World Order," *Ethics and International Affairs*, 2017, 271-285.

³¹ Hana Nielsen, Paul Warde, and Astrid Kander, "East versus West: Energy Intensity in Coal-Rich Europe, 1800-2000," *Energy Policy*, 2018, 75-83. Natasa Stanojevic and Marko Paic, "The Resistance Economy and the Emergence of the New World Economic Order," *Zbornik Matice Srpske Za Društvene Nauke*, 2023, 17-30.

³² Halim Rane, "Interfaith Actor Reception of Islamic Covenants: How 'New' Religious Knowledge Influences Views on Interreligious Relations in Islam," *Religions* 13, no. 9 (2022): 873.

³³ Mchedlova, "Interfaith Relations and Their Perspective"; Ryan J. Williams, "Understanding Interreligious Relations," *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 2015, 1-7.

³⁴ Ahmad Rahmatullah Airlangga PH, Widya Ajeng Saputri, and Putri Rahmah Nurhakim, "Socio-Religious Behavior on Consumption Pattern during Israel and Palestine Conflict in Muslim Society," *IAS Journal of Localities* 1, no. 2 (2024): 138-52.

³⁵ Julia Köbrich and Lisa Hoffmann, "What Do We Know about Religion and Interreligious Peace? A Review of the Quantitative Literature," *Politics and Religion* 16, no. 4 (2023): 708-732.

³⁶ Negussie Andre Domnic, "Relevance of Interreligious Dialogue Amidst Multiplicity in the Society," *European Journal of Philosophy, Culture and Religion* 7, no. 2 (2023): 1-12.

³⁷ Arash Beidollahkhani, "From a Radical-Religious Movement to a Democratic Social Sub-Movement," *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights* 29, no. 5 (2022): 1-24.

³⁸ Jeff Clyde G. Corpuz, "Religions in Action: The Role of Interreligious Dialogue in the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Journal of Public Health* 43, no. 2 (2021): 236-237.

³⁹ Najib George Awad, "Dispensable and Inconsequential? Reflections on the Value of Tolerance in Interreligious Relations and Dialogue," *Context: Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 10, no. 2 (2023): 61-85.

⁴⁰ Rogers Brubaker, "Religious Dimensions of Political Conflict and Violence," *Sociological Theory* 33, no. 1 (2015): 1-19.

⁴¹ Köbrich and Hoffmann, "What Do We Know about Religion and Interreligious Peace? A Review of the Quantitative Literature." *Politics and Religion* 16, no. 3 (2023): 708-732.

⁴² Dina Sijamhodžić-Nadarević, "Contribution of Islamic Religious Education to Intercultural Values in Pluralistic European Cultures: Insights from Bosnia and Herzegovina," *Religions* 14, no. 4 (2023): 453.

perspective on the interplay between knowledge systems. Thirdly, Nursi engaged extensively with the complex patterns of global thought and interacted with followers and leaders of various world religions, making him a relevant figure for understanding the dynamics of interreligious relations.

This research is qualitative. The primary data sources are Said Nursi's principal works, particularly the *Risale-i Nur* collection. *Risale-i Nur* is a seminal work by Said Nursi written in Turkish, including the *Munazarat* (Debates) and *Sözler* (The Words), *Mektubat* (The Letters), *Lem'alar* (The Flashes), *Sualar* (The Rays). This study also utilizes English translations of those works. Additionally, parts of *Risale-i Nur* have been separately translated into English under titles like *The Damascus Sermon*. Besides *Risale-i Nur*, primary data is also drawn from the book *Panel I Bediuzzaman Said Nursi* and other relevant writings in journals and books. The research began with a desk review of primary data from Nursi's work and secondary data from previous studies. The subsequent analysis focused on Nursi's works, which discuss the contested paradigms of interreligious relations between the West and the East, combined with other relevant studies from journals and books related to the core inquiry. The next step involved mapping and categorizing data from selected primary sources by formulating research questions.

The data analysis followed three stages: reduction, display, and verification. Data reduction involved selecting and filtering relevant data. Data display entailed presenting the analyzed data in a narrative-analytical format, and data verification involved testing the validity of the data according to the research theme and approach. As is common in qualitative research, analysis begins early in the research process, shortly after determining the research topic.⁴³ This approach differs from quantitative research, where analysis is typically the final step after data collection. The researchers analyzed the data by selecting and categorizing information related to the contestation of paradigms in interreligious relations between the West and the East, as found in Nursi's works and other relevant studies. The data in this study complemented each other, so no single data unit dictated the interpretation of another. Therefore, the analysis aimed to explain the epistemological foundations of said contestation.

Results

After the data collection process, this study reveals several key points that substantiate the existence of a paradigmatic contestation. These findings form the methodological basis for explaining the presence of two paradigms that consistently influence the attitudes and actions of religious groups in establishing interreligious relations. Below are three explanations derived from the evidence.

Epistemological Evidence: The Contestation between Secular and Religious Paradigms

The paradigm of interreligious relations is heavily influenced by the production of knowledge originating in the West. Western knowledge emerges from an epistemological perspective that strongly emphasizes rationality. Anything that does not align with rational thought is not accepted as truth. Among these is religion, which is a matter of belief that can only be deeply understood through feeling, even though certain aspects can be subjects of rational thought. As a result, interreligious relations are built upon a rational viewpoint. This Western paradigm sharply contrasts with the paradigm found in the East. The Eastern paradigm is born from a profound appreciation of religion and emphasizes the equal relationships between humans and between humans and nature. Said Nursi identifies the epistemological perspectives of the West and the East as a form of paradigmatic contestation in interreligious relations. According to Said Nursi, the West tends toward a secular epistemology, while the East is more religious.⁴⁴ This contrast is illustrated in the following table.

Table 1: Narrative of Epistemological Contestation

Western Paradigm	Eastern Paradigm	Category
Source: <i>deha</i> (genius), intellect	Source: <i>hüda</i> , guidance	Epistemological sources
Function in the mind	Works in the heart	
Confuses the heart	Illuminates the spirit	
Looks to the soul and body	Develops the potentialities	
Cultivates the soul	Illuminates nature	

⁴³ Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldana, *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*, 3rd ed. (Sage Publications, Inc., 2014).

⁴⁴ Sükran Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey: An Intellectual Biography of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi* (SUNY Press, 2005), 158.

Develops the potentialities of the soul	Expands the spiritual capacities	
Makes the spirit a servant	It makes the soul and the body servants	Role and function
Turns man into satan	It makes the zealous angel	
Recognizes only the life of this world	Produces happiness in this world and the next	
Is materialist and worldly-minded	Sees conscious Divine art and wise power	
Worships deaf nature	It worships Allah, the processor of art and power	Epistemological implication
It sees the bounties in it as ownerless booty	It scatters the light of thanks; for this reason, guidance is seeing and hearing	
The feeling it gives is thankless usurpation and theft	Its benefit from Divine bounties with thankfulness and measure	

Source: *Panel I Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, İstanbul: Sözlür Neşriyat ve Sanayi A.Ş., 1993.

The table above demonstrates that the Western paradigm is based solely on intellect (*deha*), which gives rise to a satanic worldview that fosters a subordinate and dichotomous relationship between human beings. This stands in stark contrast to the Eastern paradigm, which is closely associated with Islam and is based on guidance (*hüda*), prioritizing a deep understanding rooted in the heart. Ultimately, this leads to an appreciative attitude toward others.

The data presented in the table highlights several key points. First, Said Nursi emphasizes that secular epistemology forms the foundational paradigm for Western intellectual traditions, whereas religiously rooted epistemology is the foundation for Eastern thought. Second, Nursi underscores the positive role of religion in Eastern societies, a role that is not entirely applicable in the West. Third, the sources of this paradigmatic contestation are distinctly different; the West prioritizes rationality, while the East emphasizes religious understanding through the heart. Consequently, the differing roles of reason and religion in shaping Western and East societal understanding manifest in a paradigmatic contestation within interreligious relations between the two regions.

Perspectives on Humanity in the West and the East

Evidence of paradigmatic contestation in interreligious relations between the West and the East is evident in their contrasting perspectives on human relationships, particularly regarding the subordinative Subject-Object dichotomy. The secular paradigm perceives individuals who do not conform to its ideology as objects to be evaluated as inferior or less developed. Said Nursi refers to this group as “The Club,” representing the Western faction that prioritizes the satisfaction of carnal desires. He argues that the Subject-Object paradigm has fostered a worldview centered on survival and self-perpetuation, negative nationalism, and perpetual enmity within the framework of constant struggle and competition. In contrast, Said Nursi explains that the Eastern paradigm views human relations as a humanitarian subject-subject relationship. The religious epistemological foundation in the East considers each person as part of oneself, leading to a life concept emphasizing love, sincerity, and brotherhood. To illustrate this contrast, Nursi provides an example of the consequences of the subordinative paradigm within the context of life in Europe:

Yanlış anlaşılmasın, Avrupa ikidir. Birisi, İsevîlik din-i hakikîsinden aldığı feyizle hayat-ı içtimaiye-i beşeriyeye nâfi san’atları ve adalet ve hakkaniyete hizmet eden fünunları takip eden bu birinci Avrupa’ya hitap etmiyorum. Belki, felsefe-i tabiiyenin zulmetiyle, medeniyetin seyyiâtını mehâsin zannederek beşeri sefâhete ve dalâlete sevk eden bozulmuş ikinci Avrupa’ya hitap ediyorum.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *Lem’alar* (Ufuk Yayınları, 2013), 115.

Translation: Let there be no misunderstanding; there are two Europes. I am not addressing the first Europe, which, drawing inspiration from the true Christian religion, pursues arts beneficial to the social life of humanity and sciences that serve justice and fairness. Instead, I am addressing the corrupted second Europe, which, under the darkness of naturalistic philosophy, mistakes the vices of civilization for virtues, leading humanity toward debauchery and misguidance.

Nursi's statement highlights the stark juxtaposition between Western and Eastern paradigms concerning subordinate attitudes toward Western society. The table below elucidates and observes Nursi's insights into subordinate perspectives among humans and their modes of expression.

Table 2: Differences in Perspectives and Approaches to Life

Category	Perspectives and Approaches to Life	
	Western Paradigm	Eastern Paradigm
Relational Pattern	S-O (Subject-Object)	S-S (subject-subject)
Purpose	Satisfaction of the lust of the soul (without spiritual depth)	Ensuring justice, human rights, and technological advancements beneficial to life
Form	The Club, Negative Nationalism	Positive Nationalism
Behavioral Orientation	Survival and self-perpetuation (individual survival)	Love, sincerity, brotherhood

Source: Said Nursi, *Risale-i Nur*, Istanbul: Sözlür Neşriyat, 1996.⁴⁶

The data presented delineates a fundamental distinction between Western and Eastern paradigms of human relations. The Western paradigm is characterized by a Subject-Object structure, while the Eastern paradigm operates within a subject-subject relational model. These differing relational patterns manifest various purposes and forms within their respective frameworks, consequently shaping behavioral orientations associated with each model. Additionally, the analysis underscores a notable distinction within Christianity, categorizing it into two distinct forms: "True Christianity" and "Deceived Christianity." True Christianity, as described in this framework, refers to the practice that stems from a profound contemplation of Jesus's teachings. In contrast, Deceived Christianity is portrayed as being rooted in secular Western philosophy.

Said Nursi articulates the concept of Deceived Christianity with the following phrase, "*felsefe-i tabiiyenin zulmetiyle, medeniyetin seyyiâtını mehâsin zannederek beşeri sefâhete ve dalâlete sevk*" (the darkness of naturalistic philosophy, mistaking the vices of civilization for virtues, leads humanity toward depravity and misguidance).⁴⁷

The data illuminates three key patterns in human relations within the Western and Eastern paradigms. Firstly, the Western paradigm conceptualizes human relations as a Subject-Object relationship, whereas the Eastern paradigm views them as subject-subject interactions. Secondly, the goals of these paradigms diverge significantly; the Western paradigm is characterized as seeking to satisfy desires without prioritizing spiritual depth, while the Eastern paradigm is described as striving to ensure justice, human rights, and collective well-being. Thirdly, these differing perspectives on human nature led to contrasting orientations in social life; the Western paradigm emphasizes individual survival, while the Eastern paradigm focuses on fostering love, sincerity, compassion, and brotherhood.

This analysis provides evidence suggesting that divergent views on human nature and interpersonal relationships fundamentally shape the paradigmatic contestation in interreligious relations between the West and the East. The Western approach is more subordinative, maintaining a distinction between subject and object. In contrast, the Eastern approach is presented as more humanistic, viewing human relations as subject-subject interactions.

⁴⁶ Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *Sözlür* (Ufuk Yayınları, 2013); Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *The Words* (Sözlür Nesriyat A.S., 1992).

⁴⁷ Said Nursi, *The Words*; Said Nursi, *Sözlür*; Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *Sualar* (Istanbul Nesriyat A.S., 2010), Said Nursi, *Lemalar*, 115.

Rational versus Ethical Perspectives

Evidence of the paradigmatic contestation in interreligious relations between the West and the East is manifest in their divergent practices. As described by Said Nursi, the Western paradigm emphasizes a rational approach to fostering interreligious relations. Nursi posits that this rational approach can lead to challenges in accepting and addressing non-material aspects of religious experience and understanding. He states: “At this time, however, due to the domination of European civilization and the supremacy of natural philosophy and the preponderance of the conditions of worldly life, minds and hearts have become scattered, and endeavor and favor divided. Minds have become strangers to non-material matters.”⁴⁸

Nursi’s statement suggests that the Western paradigm’s approach to understanding diverse cultural and religious perspectives may limit the ability to appreciate the non-material dimensions of religious experience. Furthermore, it emphasizes the Western paradigm’s focus on rationality in navigating interreligious relations. In contrast, Nursi advocates for the Eastern paradigm, which highlights the importance of spiritual connections in interpersonal relationships. According to Nursi, this spiritual connection plays a crucial role in fostering ethical conduct within the context of interreligious interactions. He articulates this perspective by stating,

Müsavat ise fazilet ve şerefte değildir, hukuktadır. Hukukta ise şah ve geda birdir. Acaba bir şeriat, karıncaya bilerek ayak basmayınız dese tazibinden men’etse; nasıl benî-Âdem’in hukukunu ihmal eder? Kellâ... Biz imtisal etmedik. Evet, İmam-ı Ali’nin (ra) âdi bir Yahudi ile muhakemesi ve medar-ı fahriniz olan Salahaddin-i Eyyübî’nin miskin bir Hristiyan ile mürafaası, sizin şu yanlısınızı tashih eder zannederim.

Translation: Is it possible for a religion like Islam, which prohibits its adherents from tormenting an ant to allow its followers to torment humans and neglect the rights of human kind? The fourth caliph of Islam, ‘Ali, the cousin of the prophet, was equal to a simple Jew in the court. Similarly, the founder of the Ayyubi dynasty, Salah al-Din Ayyubi, of whom you are proud, was also equal to a poor Christian in the court. These examples serve to show that Muslims and non-Muslims are equal before the Qur’anic law.⁴⁹

Nursi’s statement reinforces that the Eastern paradigm strongly emphasizes ethical conduct in interreligious relations. This perspective enriches the available data, demonstrating the existence of a paradigmatic contestation in interreligious relations between the East and the West.

The data indicates distinct differences between rational and ethical approaches to interreligious relations. The rational paradigm, associated with the Western approach, grants greater importance to intellect and empirical evidence while considering non-material experiences. In contrast, the ethical paradigm, aligned with the Eastern approach, provides significant space for the appreciation of religious matters and the spiritual status of humans, particularly those of other faiths. Furthermore, this ethical paradigm emphasizes respect for the diverse spiritual beliefs of others, including belief in non-material entities such as God, angels, and the afterlife.

This analysis provides evidence for a paradigmatic contestation between Western and Eastern approaches to interreligious relations. This contestation manifests in contrasting worldviews that shape human thought, attitudes, and actions in fostering interreligious relationships.

Discussion

This research, which aims to narrate the differences between the paradigms of interreligious relations in the West and the East according to Said Nursi’s thought, has found a sophisticated structure of ideas underlying the paradigmatic differences in real societal contexts. These findings include contrasting perspectives and positions between subject and object. There is a distinct difference in the viewpoint of certain subjects toward external entities, which can be differentiated into the relational patterns of

⁴⁸ Said Nursi, *The Words*, 496.

⁴⁹ Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *Munazarat* (Yeni Asya Yayınlar, 1996), 16.

subject-subject and subject-object. The subject-object perspective is rational, whereas the subject-subject perspective is ethical/spiritual.

The structural distinctions that underpin societal concepts have influenced the patterns of human behavior within those societies, as particular contextual elements shape these patterns. From Greimas' structuralist viewpoint, context emerges from the interplay between actants and their actantial roles within a designated sphere of action.⁵⁰ The dynamics of this interaction generate contextualization, which is an individual's interpretation of the cultural spaces surrounding them. According to Giddens, this interpretation emerges from human existence's individual and social dimensions.⁵¹ Human actions, as part of an event or occurrence, manifest the interaction between individual consciousness and the social situation of the community. Conversely, the social situation of the community shapes an individual's interpretation of events they experience.⁵² Knowledge production from different contexts leads to the development of various systems of thought (epistemes) and corresponding attitudes⁵³. Thus, differences in context and epistemes influence relationships and perceptions of other subjects. Therefore, the analysis indicates that social structures determine and subsequently influence different patterns of relations between various entities. A complex system of ideas supports these differences.

Regarding the epistemological differences between the West and the East, there are divergent concepts of humanity, its function, and its role in society. Western societies conceptualize humans as subjects over everything, including other humans, whereas Eastern societies view humans as part of the universe of life.⁵⁴ Studies in Occidentalism, Orientalism, and Post-Colonialism also elaborate on these differences in the concept of humanity, its roles, and functions⁵⁵. The impact of these differing perspectives on humanity results in varying concepts of how humans perceive other humans. In the West, the construct of white (Nordic) racial superiority has emerged, which influences views on non-Western cultural roots.⁵⁶

The paradigm underlying the Western perspective on specific issues emphasizes a rational viewpoint strongly influenced by the development of Auguste Comte's positivist philosophy.⁵⁷ The evolution of positivist philosophy in the West was massive, eventually leading to secularism. The core view of secularism is the rejection of anything irrational and non-empirical. Rational thinking and behavior are considered the proper way to progress, while irrational thinking is seen as regressive, as it is regarded as a societal phenomenon that belongs to the metaphysical or theological stage.⁵⁸ This phenomenon contrasts with the Eastern paradigm, which emphasizes spiritualization/ethics. Eastern philosophy is more theosophical, although, in specific contexts, it can also be rational. Theosophical philosophy seeks to unify the relationship between God, humanity, and nature in a cosmo theandric relationship.⁵⁹ This philosophical view impacts one's perception of other subjects. Thus, the roots of cosmo theandric

⁵⁰ Algirdas Julien Greimas, *On Meaning: Selected Writings in Semiotic Theory* (University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 106-120; Algirdas Julien Greimas, *Structural Semantics: An Attempt at a Method* (University of Nebraska Press, 1983), xi-li.

⁵¹ Anthony Giddens, "Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age," in *The New Social Theory Reader*, 2020, 354-361; Anthony Giddens, *Social Theory and Modern Sociology* (Polity Press, 1991), 1-21.

⁵² Kyung Man Kim, "Critical Theory Criticized: Giddens's Double Hermeneutic and the Problem of Language Game Change," *Cultural Studies - Critical Methodologies* 4, no. 1 (2004): 28-44.

⁵³ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language* (Pantheon Books, 1972), 191-195.

⁵⁴ Ana P. Mužar, "The Cofferdams and the Making of Civilised Culture Revisited," *Филолог – Часопис За Језик Књижевност и Културу* 13, no. 26 (2022): 342-56; Michael Bulfin, "Baudrillard and Rethinking the Modern Western-Civ Course: The Epistemology of War in an Era of New Media, Neoliberalism, and Virtual Warfare," *Philosophical Studies in Education* 48 (2017): 45-54.

⁵⁵ Denis Sivkov, "The Ontological Turn in Anthropology and Technological Change in the Indigenous Collective," *Philosophical Literary Journal Logos* 32, no. 2 (2022): 193-225; Aswathi A. Nair, "Delineating the Western Orders of Rights and Reason in Post-Colonial Africa," *African Journal of Political Science* 10, no. 1 (2022): 97-106; Fadi Butrus K. Habash, "'The Other' and 'Othering' in Thomas De Quincey's Confessions of an English Opium Eater: A Psychological Study," *Journal of University of Human Development* 5, no. 3, (2019): 97-102.

⁵⁶ Dave Egan and William H. Tishler, "Jens Jensen, Native Plants, and the Concept of Nordic Superiority," *Landscape Journal* 18, no. 1 (1999): 11-29; Gustav Jahoda, "Intra-European Racism in Nineteenth-Century Anthropology," *History and Anthropology* 20, no. 1 (2009): 37-56; Benjamin R. Teitelbaum, "Scandinavians in Chicago: The Origins of White Privilege in Modern America," *Scandinavian Studies* 92, no. 4 (2020): 546-550.

⁵⁷ Mahreen Ali, Ayaz Ali Shah, and Syed Aizaz Ali Shah, "Positivism and Interpretivism," *Qlantic Journal of Social Sciences* 2, no. 1 (2021): 20-26; Premalatha Karupiah, "Positivism," in *Principles of Social Research Methodology*, 2022, 73-82.

⁵⁸ Erika Bourguignon, "Western Rationality and the Angel of Dreams: Self, Psyche, Dreaming.," *American Anthropologist* (2000): 962-963; Lewis Pyenson, "The Ideology of Western Rationality: History of Science and the European Civilizing Mission," *Science and Education* 2, no. 4 (1993): 329-343; Robert Doran, "The History and Fulfilment of Western Rationality: Martin Jay's the Eclipse of Reason," *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 14, no. 1 (2020): 93-103.

⁵⁹ Johan Buitendag and Corneliu C. Simuț, "Emerging Religious Consciousness—A Cosmotheandric Understanding of Reality in the Light of Sophology of Some Russian Theologians towards an Eco-Theology," *Religions* 13, no. 4 (2022): 296; Jose Nandhikkara, "Human Beings-in-Solidarity-with-Nature-and-Grace: Cosmotheandric Perspectives on Ecology," *Journal of Dharma* 37, no. 2 (2012): 123-28; Sanjit Chakraborty and Anway Mukhopadhyay, "Correction to: Atheisms: Plural Contexts of Being Godless (Sophia)," *Sophia Studies in Cross-Cultural Philosophy of Traditions and Cultures* 60, no. 3 (2022): 19-20.

philosophy shape spiritual and ethical thinking and actions toward other subjects, even those who are different, including adherents of other religions.

In the context of a comparative study of Said Nursi's thought, critical research exists that emphasizes the significance of acknowledging the identity of a society and its religion while concurrently avoiding stereotypical attitudes. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, a prominent Hindu philosopher, articulates that Eastern societies possess their unique contextual richness and distinct paradigms for interpreting other societies. Consequently, the perspective of domination over these societies is fundamentally subjective.⁶⁰ In line with Radhakrishnan, Gavin D'Costa, a Catholic philosopher and theologian, emphasizes that the Western perspective tends to diminish the richness of the internal diversity of Eastern societies, which the West perceives as an objective action. This attitude has led to resistance from the East, as it has become an ideological viewpoint.⁶¹ Consequently, according to Khaled Abou El Fadl, a Muslim theologian, this ideological perspective loses wisdom regarding the diversity found in Eastern societies, particularly Muslims.⁶²

According to Said Nursi, this research analyzes the epistemological roots of the contestation between Western and Eastern paradigms of interreligious relations. Previous studies have focused on ontological and axiological aspects. Thus, the findings of this research provide theoretical references for future studies focusing on the analysis of non-dichotomous dialogical paradigms, which serve as a meeting point between Western and Eastern paradigms.

Conclusion

Upon analyzing the epistemological construction and perspectives on humanity within the paradigmatic contestation in Said Nursi's thought, this study reveals a pattern of ideological paradigms in interreligious relations that generates contentious relational patterns. Furthermore, it identifies a critique of this ideology. The interaction between ideology and its critique produces a dialectical relational pattern. This paradigmatic dialectic continuously creates superior-inferior relationships, indicating that the study of paradigm contestation in interreligious relations is not solely based on empirical experience but also involves religious consciousness and more holistic expressions.

These findings enrich previous research by expanding theoretical perspectives. While earlier studies focused on analyzing interreligious relationship paradigms independently (examining awareness of religious subjects as manifested in various socio-cultural actions), this study broadens existing perspectives by investigating the roots of differing paradigms between Western and Eastern contexts from the standpoint of philosophical consciousness.

This research has examined the aspects of paradigmatic contestation in interreligious relations from an integrative perspective, combining approaches from philosophy, sociology, anthropology, and religious studies. However, it is important to note that this study is based solely on the thought of a particular figure, Said Nursi. As a result, certain elements have not been thoroughly examined, including the viewpoints of alternative thinkers and comparative analyses across various philosophical traditions. Additionally, the study does not incorporate mixed-method perspectives involving disciplines such as Particle Physics (e.g., interreligious relations from the perspective of supersymmetry theory) or Biology (e.g., perspectives of Biocentrism or Semi-permeability theory –which suggests that the two entities may not be completely separate, there is room for complementarity). Therefore, further research is needed to address these limitations and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics in interreligious relations.

⁶⁰ S Radhakrishnan, *East and West in Religion* (George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1933). See also Muliadi, Muliadi, Syamsidar Syamsidar, and Nurul Islam. "Religious Moderation by Design: A Comparative Sociological Da'wah Study in Indonesian Higher Education". *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 13, no. 2 (2025): 1549-80.

⁶¹ Gavin D'costa, "Whose Objectivity? Which Neutrality? The Doomed Quest for a Neutral Vantage Point from Which to Judge Religions," *Religious Studies* 29, no. 1 (1993): 79–95; Gavin D'Costa, *Christianity and World Religions* (Wiley, 2009).

⁶² Khaled Abou El Fadl, *Islam and the Challenge of Democracy*, ed. Joshua Cohen and Deborah Chasman (Princeton University Press, 2004).

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