# Moral Responsibility and Ethical Response in Times of Genocide

By Emin Poljarević

## Abstract

This essay presents an ethical-theological reading of the concept of ʾamāna (trust) as a foundational category for moral responsibility in the face of contemporary genocide, with particular reference to the case of Gaza. Drawing on Taha Abdurrahmane's ethical thought and Qur'anic metaphysics, the essay proposes that reclaiming the trust entails resisting the moral disintegration that enables atrocity. Through a critical engagement with the ongoing genocide in Gaza, the essay contends that euphemistic language, advantageous comparisons, and the diffusion of responsibility normalize violence and obscure ethical agency. Theological concepts are here read not as abstract ideals but as imperatives for resistance, or simply put – to know is to bear witness and to bear witness is to act. The argument proceeds through a critique of liberal internationalism's ethical failures, and a constructive proposal for a form of Islamic praxeology rooted in interpretations of moral intentionality and spiritual accountability. Structurally, the essay moves from diagnosing the metaphysical rupture of our time to articulating a principled response grounded in ʾamāna. Ultimately, the analysis asserts that taking moral responsibility is a form of resistance that engages profoundly with traditional Islamic principles of justice, humility and accountability all of which are most urgent for our global ethical crisis.

*Keywords*: Moral Responsibility, Islamic Ethics, Taha Abdurrahmane, Genocide and Dehumanization, Political Theology

## Introduction: Ethical Collapse in the Face of Atrocity

It is not only institutions and moral and legal frameworks that fail in moments of civilizational rupture—it is often thought itself. Our historical moment where the most unspeakable acts of violence are committed in real time, recorded on phones, streamed into global consciousness, and yet actively or passively justified, ignored, or actively erased by dominant political actors and intellectual frameworks.[1] Fighting "human animals."[2]

One of the processes of organizing the unthinkable levels of violence and destruction against a people is dehumanization. It is the process of dehumanization that makes the unthinkable possible. It is worthwhile noting that dehumanization unfolds across multiple registers—moral, cognitive, discursive, behavioral, and institutional.[3] In the case of the Zionist framing of Palestine, each of these layers is activated.[4] The result is a totalizing system in which Palestinians are rendered illegible as moral subjects, stripped of agency, and positioned outside the bounds of empathy and justice. It is not an accident of discourse, but a deliberate architecture of erasure.[5]

Maintaining, apartheid-reminiscent racial and ethnic hierarchies for decades render some victims invisible – less than human and even less than animals.[6] The propaganda and indoctrination is arguably numbing ethical responses, while the dominating international order allows political expediency to override moral duty.[7] These claims suggest that today's

indifference is in fact yesterday's bigotry presented in new garbs. For example, Hannah Arendt has throughout her later writings described how ordinary people become enablers of atrocity, whether through thoughtless bureaucratic complicity or the ideological reframing of murder as righteousness.[8] She and other observers of the 20th century genocidal events in Europe and elsewhere suggest that the systematic erasure of a people, their memory, and their claim to a shared world hinges on a profound collapse of moral vision. It is, nonetheless, important to remember, this collapse is rarely spontaneous. It emerges gradually, through the deformation of ethical sensibilities and the manipulation of emotional life under the guise of normative social order. In other words, dehumanization begins long before the killing and destruction – it begins with the corrosion of the moral imagination.[9]

For instance, it is important not to conflate intentions with motives in observing and analyzing genocidal violence. Religious Zionists, in their rejection of a purely secular genealogy of Zionism starting in the mid-/late 19th century, articulate an intuition that aligns, though often unexamined, with a deeper metaphysical structure: that collective political projects are never merely material or procedural, but are undergirded by latent religio-political aspirations. Yet this intuition is often deployed not to critique Zionism's moral failures, but to recuperate and sanctify its trajectory. Within this formulation, secular Zionism becomes a vessel – a cognitive vehicle through which divine intent operates. The actions of secular Zionists, though framed as nationalist or pragmatic, are reinterpreted as expressions of a deeper religious consciousness: a hidden teleology driving the return to a mythologized "ancestral" religious status. This interpretation, however, reveals more than it intends. Israeli genocide in Palestine is both intentional, or rather utilitarian (removing a perceived threat to its expansionism), and ideological. Consider that the state ideology, Zionism, among other things, suggests cleansing the "Greater Israel" from non-Jews.[10]

The core issue here is not whether Zionism is fundamentally secular or religious. This is irrelevant in the modes of implementation of the crimes against the Palestinian people and others. Rather, the deeper issue is ethical, it lies in the systematic severing of political actions from their moral consequences and the subsequent use of religious language to obscure, justify, or sanctify those actions. This is not merely a confusion of categories, for all intents and purposes, it is a deliberate metaphysical laundering of barbarism into virtue.[11] The unacknowledged "real motivations" of Zionist praxis are not just spiritually unconscious—they are ethically suspended, making possible a political theology in which the return to land becomes indistinguishable from the negation of another people's existence.[12] In such a context, theory and practice do indeed meet, but they do so at the threshold of moral disintegration.

It is worth remembering that the taxonomy of the Nazi ideologue, Alfred Rosenberg (executed 1946) suggested, albeit on different ideological grounds, that an unwanted people needed to be relocated from his own "ancestral lands."[13] He argued that certain human collectives are biologically deficient and therefore unworthy of life – a quintessential example of dehumanization and corrosion of moral order. For instance, he referred to Jews as "human animals."[14] Such and similar statements represents a distant echo of contemporary systematic dehumanization and extermination of Palestinian people. Today, they are being denied their existence in their ancestral lands. By extension, they are refused of the possibility of ethical agency, independence, and in the end, their humanity.[15]

What is at stake in such a framework is not only the redefinition of the human, but the foreclosure of any claims to belonging, dignity, or justice. The denial of a people's dignity and thereby humanity functions as a discursive strategy. For example, to strip Palestinians (and those supporting their rights) of their humanity relegates them to the realm of the sub-human, a move that, requires a metaphysical justification.[16]

It can be argued that the metaphysical core of this dehumanization process lies in his contention that only certain collectives possess the spiritual disposition necessary to generate "civilization" from which culture, morality, and communal purpose emanate. "Others," by implication, are void of this value.[17] As shown in previous studies on dehumanization, the construct and process of dehumanizing others is multivariate. But one of its central goals is to legitimatize political programs that treat entire populations as ontologically disposable.[18] Put differently, dehumanization operates as an ontological precondition for mass violence, eroding ethical agency and normalizing atrocity. What is it all mean for all of us struggling to understanding silence and inaction of so many before the acts of genocide in full view of the world? This question is the underlying puzzle that inspires this essay.

The essay adopts an ethical-theological approach to reexamine the concept of ʾamāna (Divine trust given to humankind) as a foundational element in Islamic moral philosophy.[19] As it will become apparent, central to this exploration is the work of Moroccan philosopher Taha Abderrahmane (b. 1944), whose ethical theory offers a comprehensive framework rooted in the wider Islamic tradition. In the light of the above framing of one of the most pressing moral and ethical issues of today, this essay explores two ethical claims, each interwoven with the other, a) epistemic moral responsibility – far from being a form of surrender – is the central posture before the ethical crises of our time, particularly vis-à-vis the ongoing genocide in Gaza; and b) Islamic metaphysics, if it is to be faithful to its own principles, must descend from abstraction into political conscience. These claims are not merely philosophical – today, they are existential.

For that reason, let us assume that to bear witness within the ethical scope of Islamic tradition is not just to see and report – it is to know what we are witnessing in a way that obliges us to act.[20] In a way, this is the moral connection that binds truth to responsibility, but also thought to consequence. Epistemic moral responsibility here means not to let clarity collapse into abstraction, or justice into jargon. To neglect this responsibility is to go quiet before dehumanization – to do nothing when decency demands action. This neglect, can be understood as betrayal, or rather breaking of sacred trust that defines what it means to be human in the first place. But more on that particular part further down. Next, it is important to contextualize these processes in the current world disorder.

**The Mechanisms of Dehumanization**

What about the international mechanism constructed to prevent genocidal levels of violence?[21] What is their role in the prevention of war crimes and crimes against humanity in Palestine? It can be argued that modern liberalism (used as the basis for such mechanisms) as institutionalized in modern international legal organizations such as International Criminal Court, International Court of Justice, United Nations' Security Council, International Committee of the Red Cross/Crescent, in moments of moral crises, fail precisely when it encounters human beings whom it cannot recognize as morally legible subjects.[22] This can be understood as a collapse of moral grammar, which in many ways is a function of liberal

modernity itself, in particular when faced with non-European alterity that claims independence and its own epistemic and ethical autonomy.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the discourse surrounding Palestine, a terrain on which the liberal project has exposed its internal paradoxes and double standards with unusual clarity.[23] The case of Palestine reveals perhaps not a failure of Euro-American early and late liberal democracy *per se*, but rather its historical view of the "other." This view is manifested in its multifaceted foreign policies which were incapable to extend justice to non-Europeans as they were not recognized as fully human.[24] In other words, how do the failures and contradictions within international law, particularly in the context of Palestine, reveal the limitations and biases of modern liberalism, and what is the role of moral responsibility in confronting these failures of ethical infrastructure?

Robert Knox reminds us that what appears to be a failure of international humanitarian law is actually one of its core features. The law is not neutral—it was built in ways that privileges powerful, technologically advanced states. It criminalizes non-state resistance while giving legitimacy to large-scale military violence when it is exercised by states.[25] This is not an accident of application but a reflection of design. Knox builds on the earlier work of Chris af Jochnick and Roger Normand, who showed how the idea of "military necessity" was developed historically to justify imperial violence. This allowed Western empires to portray their wars as lawful and necessary, while branding resistance from colonized peoples as irrational or illegal.[26]

Nahed Samour echoes this analysis in the context of Palestine. She shows how international law consistently privileges states over non-state actors and protects sovereignty more than justice. In this structure, people still fighting for collective self-determination—like Palestinians—are cast as outsiders to the legal order. The law does not see them as political subjects, but as threats. They are not treated as people seeking freedom, but as "terrorists"—a modern echo of the old colonial division between the "civilised" and the "savage."[27]

What these scholars make clear is that the problem is not just how law is used—it is how and for what purpose it was made. The structure of international law itself helps sustain the imbalance between colonizer and colonized, between those with statehood and those denied it. This has direct consequences for Palestine, and other territories with similar dynamics of injustice. It means the law often cannot see their struggle as legitimate. Instead, it polices their resistance while excusing the violence of the occupying power. This clarifies the origin of current bias among Euro-American supporters of Israel and their ethical particularism—it's not merely an imperial hangover but an active structural condition that undermines Palestinian, and others, claims to justice.

In this climate, illiberal ideologues—new tech-crusaders (Peter Thiel, Elon Musk, Mark Zuckerberg etc.) shaped by algorithmic rationality and beliefs in digital omniscience – have not only abandoned ethical restraint – they have assumed the role of salvific messiahs. They seem to be on the quest to engineer a post-political future void of dissent. Their descent into ideological absolutism is not an accident of extremity but the telos of a political system that has lost its ethical coordinates – a sort of modernity gone haywire. Their positioning vis-à-vis Palestine and Zionism also reveals their position wherein metaphysical death masquerades as progress.[28] It is important to ask oneself: What does one say when hospitals become battlegrounds, when children's names become hashtags of mourning, and when entire peoples

are declared illegible to the categories of justice? The answer, if it is to be ethically credible, morally consistent, and intellectually stern, must begin with discussing and employing moral responsibility. Yet moral responsibility in our time is often mistaken for misdirected or insufficient response to atrocities and crumbling legal and international order.[29] All of this can and sometimes is blamed on modernity, secularism and over-reliance of human inventions and capacity to invent new moral orders.[30] In the midst of this ideological unraveling, or extraordinary situation, or *interregnum*, as Antonio Gramsci and later Giorgio Agamben (b. 1942) and Zygmunt Bauman (d. 2017) argued there is an occasion for change.[31]

**Epistemic Moral Responsibility: Witnessing in the Islamic Tradition**

The question of moral responsibility re-emerges with unignorable urgency – this is not only true for the increased unsustainability of our modern lives and irreversible consequences of environmental destruction. In other words, what form of moral responsibility is deemed necessary, and how can the Islamic ethical tradition offer a coherent response grounded in action, integrity, and spiritual accountability?

As already noted, the devaluation process of human life in Gaza, the algorithmic dehumanization of Palestinians, and the normalization of militarized surveillance reflect not just political failure, but a metaphysical rupture. This seems not to be a matter of hypocrisy or double standards alone. It is structural. The failure of law to restrain power, and the decoupling of rational discourse from ethical accountability, signal a deeper problem: the absence of metaphysical grounding in the global moral order. In the light of that absence, it is imperative to shoulder the epistemic moral responsibility—the responsibility to know and respond accurately—is not a luxury, but a necessity in times of moral collapse.

The metaphysical rupture points toward the deep moral and existential crisis of the world today and especially in the form of a break between ethical commitments and our actions. The failure of global ethical frameworks to effectively address, or even acknowledge the suffering and injustice experienced by Palestinians (and others outside the Euro-American domain) underscores a breakdown, not just in political systems but in the very principles that confer meaning and moral responsibility in human affairs. As argued above, the modern liberal order, however flawed and non-universal, had revealed itself not as a guarantor of justice, but as a deeply flawed system increasingly incapable of even recognizing moral violations when the victims fall outside its civilizational gaze. The rupture therefore signifies a profound disruption in the foundational structures of meaning, being, or rather the illusion of moral order.

What remains when existing liberal and Muslim political wills and frameworks stall and even passively (or actively) support genocide—when legal mechanisms no longer restrain violence and reason is severed from ethical responsibility? What remains is not silence, but a rising demand for ethical reorientation.[32] In these moments of crisis, the traditional ethical tradition should not be mistaken for a retreat into identity politics or a nostalgic embrace of cultural symbolism. Instead, it emerges—especially in the reflections and actions of engaged Muslim thinkers and activists—as a disciplined moral methodology, grounded in metaphysical coherence and directed toward meaningful change. Against the spiritual vacuity of techno-utopianism and the moral apathy of liberal proceduralism, some of these thinkers and activists offer a reconfiguration of moral responsibility as an epistemic commitment and a political obligation. This commitment begins not with public declarations or legal formulas, but with the re-centering of moral consciousness as a condition for ethical clarity.

In the works of philosopher Taha Abdurrahmane's ethical vision, moral responsibility is the highest priority, precisely because it anchors both our epistemic orientation and our political practice. To know (anything), in this sense, is to witness, to witness is to act, and to act is to safeguard the trust that binds the human to the Divine and to the suffering of others.[33] His critique of secular rationality is centered on this notion. He seems to understand secular rationality as unreservedly privileging efficiency and outcomes over ethical substance, resonates deeply in a time when Muslims are often caught between two inadequate options: secular systems that suppress moral conscience, and traditionalist approaches that disconnect faith from ethical engagement in the world.[34] Abdurrahmane's vision charts a different course—one that insists on grounding responsibility in *tawḥīd* and moral intention, and on responding directly to the moral emergencies of our time.

In this perspective, ethical clarity isn't an escape from politics, instead it's what gives politics its meaning. The real challenge, laid out in Abderrahmane's vision, lies in building an Islamic ethical practice that rises above narrow legal formalism and resists the pull of short-term political gain. This position seems to suggest that the silence of the international legal order in the face of ongoing genocide is not simply an ethical lapse – it is a structural exposure of a system built without or in contradiction to metaphysical grounding. In response, Abderrahmane aims at turning our moral gaze to the principles of the tradition, not as a search for authentic identity, but rather as Islam as Method – a way of ethical being, seeing, and resisting.[35] In doing so, it seeks not only to critique the collapse of liberal ethics, but to recover the possibility of moral action that is both consistent and transcendent. This position reorients the discourse from legalism and the exclusive focus on rituals and formalities, to lived responsibility, also from procedural neutrality, to *shahāda,* acts of witnessing as ethical imperative.

**Reasonableness of Moral Responsibility**

Invoking moral principles and understanding layers of the Islamic tradition as ethical framework for today's world can be seen as overly idealistic and even utopistic. After all, to insist on ethics as the foundation of political life in a world increasingly shaped by raw power, strategic calculation, and institutional inertia risks being dismissed as naïve. Critics might also argue, not unreasonably, that history has repeatedly shown how moral commitments are overridden by the imperatives of survival, state interest, and realpolitik. In the light of that critique, one may ask: What good is ethical clarity if it leads to political marginalization? Can justice rooted in moral integrity stand against systems built on domination and coercion?

The main argument here, and the one that is debatably put forth by Taha Abderrahmane, suggests that ethical vision does not presume that politics can be purified of compromise. Rather, it offers a method for discerning which compromises are tolerable and which are not. It creates a moral threshold that is anchored in principles like justice, mercy, and accountability – a range of standards against which actions must be measured. It must be remembered, the search here is not for a politics of perfection. It is a politics of responsibility. Thus, the insistence on ethics as a lived practice ought not to be considered as a utopian make-believe. Ethics are hence grounded in historical reality. The most transformative political movements, whether rooted in religious tradition or secular ideals, have drawn their strength not from tactical success alone, but from the moral seriousness of their vision. Just think of, the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, the anti-colonial struggles in Nigeria, Algeria, Libya, Sudan, Dagestan, Afghanistan, India, Aceh etc. and various forms of faith-based resistance all

demonstrate that ethics, when practiced collectively and with discipline, can shift the boundaries of what is politically possible.

Today, this is as important as in other times of crises. In current world disorder, existing (international) legal institutions are systematically failing to protect the vulnerable or hold power accountable. If the current representative and leading institutions consider ethic as pointless, or a burden, and they abandon ethical principles as unrealistic, what remains is not pragmatism – it is cynicism. And cynicism, history shows, is rarely a sustainable political project. The real question is then not whether ethical integrity is politically convenient – the question is whether we can afford to do without it. In moments of deep crisis, such as the ongoing barbarism in Gaza what ultimately matters, is to have the courage to speak, to act, and to resist on the basis of universal principles rather than interest or advantage. That, too, is politics. And, Abderrahmane reminds us, it begins with moral responsibility expressed through ethical action rooted in universal Divine principles. This is what the next section is focused on.

## Tradition as Moral Method: Insights from Taha Abdurrahmane

A significant number of studies have already discussed Abdurrahmane's ethical framework. Some of these analyses are positively inclined,[36] and others are more skeptical of the viability of his interpretations of tradition and ethical framing.[37]  The underlying assumption about Abdurrahmane's ethical project is that we ought to consider the subjective reality of piety, spirituality, and morality as experientially intertwined and therefore analytically inseparable from notions such of truth, dialogue and even knowledge. For instance, Abdurrahmane's focus on the superiority of spiritual values as there is no real "living" if a person who is physically alive is spiritually dead. Physical and spiritual lives are considered inseparable.

In the recent translation of Taha Abderrahmane's *Dialogues for the Future* (transl. Abdellah El Boubekri, Leiden: Brill, [2003] 2023) his framework emerges a potent critique of our common understanding of ethics. First and foremost, Abderrahmane clears the conceptual field by asserting that Euro-American conceptualization (underpinned by processes of modernity) of ethics is a secular inversion of traditional modes of lived ethics. He understands tradition not as a static inheritance, but as a dynamic moral resource central to human ethical formation. For him, the crisis facing the Arab-Islamic world is not due to intrinsic flaws within the tradition, but to the uncritical adoption of Western intellectual paradigms that sever ethics from spiritual grounding. Unlike Muslim reformers (such as Muhammad Arkoun, Mohammed Abed al-Jabri, Hassan Hanafi and others) who seek to modernize Islam through primarily external concepts, Abderrahmane insists that renewal must emerge from within the tradition itself. This is done by mastering both its content and its methods. In this view, tradition is not an obstacle to progress, but the necessary foundation for cultivating ethical responsibility, spiritual coherence, and morally grounded engagement with the modern world.[38]

His commitment to traditional ethical thought is a commitment to the inseparable relation between theory and practice. This understanding challenges any bifurcation of thought and action. In his view, ethical principles are not theoretical aspirations to be contemplated in isolation; they are conditions of life to be actualized through responsible action. As such, any ethics not embodied in practice becomes a philosophical ornament devoid of transformative capacity.[39] He further insists that human dignity and ethical behavior are not adjuncts to reason but are its very telos. For him, reason must be ethically and spiritually anchored. For instance, to be ethical is to act in accordance with this trust, embodying justice, compassion, and spiritual

integrity. Theory here seems to serve only as a guidepost, not as a substitute for action. Hence, ethics in abstraction, ungrounded in the spiritual life and socio-political struggle, are for Abderrahmane essentially inert. This can mean that the solution to moral and ethical crisis today is, at least in part, not merely for a return to tradition, but for a revitalization of tradition through ethical thought *and* action. This renders his work deeply relevant in a world marked by metaphysical ruptures. For committed Muslims then, the inseparability of theory and praxis in Abderrahmane's work offers an ethical foundation for addressing crises, whether spiritual, political, or existential, with a sense of intellectual coherence. He seems to recapitulate the Qur'anic injunction: "O you who believe! Stand firmly for justice, as witnesses to God, even if it be against yourselves" (Q 4:135).

Mohammed Hashas explains further that "[t]he trusteeship paradigm [Abderrahmane's alternative to Euro-American modernity] critiques both modernity and the [current bearers of Islamic] tradition, and in doing so it navigates between what is commonly referred to as the 'religious' and the 'secular.'" He critiques these categories ultimately suggest dissection of humans into distinct and therefore socially and politically separate realities. One, subordinate religious, (i.e., confined, contentious, private) sphere and the other material superior (e.g., political, social) sphere. This dichotomization has consequences.[40]

Abderrahmane's framework suggests inherently intertwined nature of human existence. For instance, he proposes that ethical responsibility of committed Muslims arises from the metaphysical condition of being entrusted (*amnāʾ*) responsibility to act "good." This means ethical responsibility is not a reaction to external demands but is part of a continual spiritual and moral witnessing (*shahāda*), engaging the world as a space filled with divine signs (*ayāt*) demanding interpretation and response. For example, he constructs much of his critique as a pointed response to both Muslim and non-Muslim modernists—thinkers who, in different ways, endorse the Western project of universalizing secular ideals, often under the pretense of neutrality. At the heart of his argument is a sharp but crucial insight: these modernist frameworks attempt to replace divine authority with a form of human self-deification.[41] In this worldview, the Euro-American subject becomes the ultimate measure of all things, severed from any transcendent accountability. It is this logic that is expressed in the so called "Western states'" inconsequential reaction to foreign aggressions on Ukraine and Palestine.[42]

The consequence is not merely philosophical, as discussed above, it is moral collapse. A world shaped by this logic, as we are witnessing, struggles to uphold principles like equality of human life and moral responsibility. Again, the devastating results are not abstract; they are visible in the lived reality of total wars of annihilation and displacement, such as the ongoing assault on the Palestinian people (and others elsewhere).

Despite of his critique of modernists, he does not to reject modernity wholesale. He, like all of us, is very much part of it.[43] He nevertheless insists that any engagement with modern challenges must begin with a return to the ethical and methodological resources of the Islamic scholarly tradition. This is not an anti-modern stance, but rather a post-secular one. This stance arguably seeks to recover a moral and metaphysical integrity capable of responding to contemporary crises, such as genocides, without surrendering to the epistemological foundations of the very systems that produced them.

Abderrahmane suggests therefore rethinking of what moral responsibility entails.[44] This responsibility is not passive, nor is it reducible to ritual observance or private piety. Rather, it demands *epistemic courage*, which can be translated into the willingness to know and name moral truth and translate it into *political conscience*, which is manifested in the resolve to act upon it in the face of risk and resistance. Here, the idea of ʾamāna is activated, it is not simply a legal or doctrinal concept, it is the ethical capacity to carry truth, to respond to injustice, and to enact justice – even when doing so runs counter to prevailing norms – a form of principled altruism.

For example, such framing is used to inadvertently critique Islamist activism which Abderrahmane views as attempts of Muslims to "prove their existence before their rationality."[45] The divine trust, as he presents it, requires systematic intellectual engagement and a body of thought, all of which, according to him, Islamists have not produced. In order to bring about genuine innovation, that can compete with the Euro-American counterparts, hinges, argues Abderrahmane, on a fully developed mind. In other words, where innovation is absent, it signals a deeper malaise: what he calls the "disease of abstraction" - a condition in which thought becomes so detached from lived experience and ethical urgency that it loses its creative and transformative power. He frames it like this:

> Reason is moral as long as it is based on truth; science is moral as long as it seeks the common good; religious practice is moral as long as it seeks righteousness; life is moral as long as it strives to protect the soul. Therefore, ethics are in reality the basic manners through which human existence is accomplished. True Muslims are required to pay full attention to the perfection of their humanity.[46]

For him then, truth is rooted in tradition is not a relic of the past, but a living moral framework composed of belief, language, and knowledge—each deeply interwoven and practically grounded in *turāth*, the rich tradition that is the accumulated inheritance of the centuries of Muslim intellectual and spiritual life.[47] Crucially, this tradition is not measured against the standards of modern Western epistemology, but draws its coherence from within: from its own ethical grammar and metaphysical depth.[48] In summary of his argument, to invoke tradition means to stake a principled claim to moral autonomy in a world where dominant systems often render Muslim thought incoherent and Muslim agency invisible. Therefore, Abdurrahmane's call to retrieve tradition and its methods of reasoning offers both a moral imperative and a form of resistance. This call is to reclaim responsibility directed towards all those who consider themselves ethically conscious and committed individuals and communities. Reclaiming responsibility is seemingly not only in relation to the Divine (i.e., not only for the committed theists), but all people claiming to be moral conscious.

This further suggests that invoking the tradition is not a nostalgic retreat but a principled stance and an act of moral autonomy of Muslim communities. This becomes even more pertinent in a time when dominant political and cultural systems often strip Muslims of agency, coherence, and dignity in their actions and calls for justice. But this is true of all people who resist the current hegemonic order. Abderrahmane's calls for retrieval of traditional methods of reasoning (i.e., epistemic autonomy) can be understood as a moral imperative and a form of resistance in and of itself. This moral imperative and resistance (against injustice) allows ethically conscious individuals and communities to reassert responsibility toward the Divine and toward the world itself. But is this realization and commitment enough to repair the metaphysical rupture? One way to answer this question is to consider recovering a lived ethics proposed by Abderrahmane.

This ethics is rooted in, what comes across as metaphysical coherence, and which is grounded in the broader Islamic tradition. By doing that we can meaningfully confront the ideological, legal, and existential crises of our time. Again, this is not idealism, it is a sustainable alternative to the cynicism, collapse, and complicity that now shape much of global political discourse.

## Conclusion: Renewing the Trust in a Fractured World

The aim of this essay has been not only to critique, but to orient. The purpose here is not only to condemn, but to clarify. It is useful to remember that the moral question posed by Gaza is not new, there are other current and historical examples of devastation and extermination.[49] And perhaps each example demonstrates different levels of metaphysical rupture. The central argument here is simple: epistemic moral responsibility is not a luxury of reflection—it is an important response to the magnitude of our current crisis. Today, we are witnessing how the unspeakable is streamed, where murdered children, where innocent and defenseless people, become hashtags, and where genocide is cloaked in legality or ignored entirely. In this landscape, the moral grammar of modern liberalism—designed, we were told, to prevent such horror—has collapsed under the weight of its own exclusions. The hegemony of liberal order, built to protect sovereign (state and enterprise) subjects, fails when it cannot recognize some people as subjects at all. Numerous state sponsored murder scenes, and Gaza in particular, has exposed not the exception, but the rule: that moral legibility is not equally distributed, and that global frameworks often protect power, not the vulnerable.

Consider this, before Gaza becomes a metaphor. Gaza, today, represents a location of our moral test – *a furqān* – an ethical criterion of our time. And how we, humans, respond; what we say, what we refuse to say, can very likely shape the judgment upon us, not only in history, but in the Divine court. Gaza symbolizes therefore the paradigmatic case in which metaphysical responsibility is either affirmed through ethical witness or denied through moral cowardice. It is here that the stakes are clearest: the challenge is not simply to interpret the world, but to respond to it with clarity and courage.

Taha Abdurrahmane's case for trusteeship paradigm steeped in ethical reasoning and discourse offers a powerful way to both reframe and perhaps even remedy parts of this condition. The central point is that the bearer of *ʾamāna*, the Divine trust, is not a passive inheritor of belief, but a morally responsible agent tasked with knowing, responding, and witnessing. For Abderrahmane, and for us all, the ethical subject is (or should be) not defined by power or identity, but by the intentional, spiritually anchored response to injustice. It is here that a test of ethical commitment is tested. For committed Muslim, it seems to ask whether the tradition's core principles can be rearticulated and translated in modern action, but from within its own tradition, and for the purpose of confronting the brutal realities of neocolonial violence. It poses questions to all of us who claim moral seriousness: can responsibility be lived as resistance? Or will we let the moment pass, silenced by abstraction and stalled by (legal, political, economic etc.) proceduralism?[50]

In the end, it seems that what sustains the machinery of genocidal atrocity is not only the violence itself, but the language and logic that shield it from moral scrutiny. Euphemisms like "operations" instead of "invasions," or claims that civilians are being used as "human shields," are not neutral descriptions—they are instruments of moral anesthetic, designed to dull outrage and deflect responsibility. Advantageous comparisons – "what about what group X did?" –

serve only to relativize cruelty, as though injustice could be excused by invoking victimhood. These and other rhetorical habits do something more dangerous than mislead – they normalize the unthinkable. They create a moral climate where genocide becomes policy, and silence about it becomes a feature of the new normal.

Aberrahmane demonstrates an interesting method through which to read these dynamics. In his body of work, he argues in a variety of ways that reason is not the cold faculty of measurement, it is the living capacity to be ethically moved. In his ethical theory, reason is the faculty by which we can hear the cry of the oppressed and respond. It is therefore reasonable to discern what conflict demands from us in moral terms. What does it mean, then, that the world's most powerful actors have heard Gaza's cry and looked away? That they have seen the rubble, the lifeless children, the mass graves, and offered only legalistic mantras about a state's "right to defend itself"? It means we are witnessing not ignorance, but a deliberate metaphysical blindness. A refusal to see what is morally obvious. A collapse not only of compassion, but of humanity.

And so, moral responsibility—understood through the ethical grammar of ʾamāna—must begin with the refusal to participate in this concealment of the ultimate crime. It is not hard; bombing schools, besieging hospitals, and targeting civilians are not morally complex questions—they are moral boundaries. And to obscure them is not neutrality – it is betrayal. It is useful to remember, the prophets, the sages, the scholars, those human examples who carried the trust, were not remembered because they were infallible, but because they refused to betray the oppressed when it counted. Abderrahmane lets us know, if the tradition is to remain alive today, it must do the same. It must speak – not in abstraction, but in the language of witness, of resistance, and of ethical responsibility.

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[2] Al Jazeera - "Israeli defence minister orders 'complete siege' on Gaza", October 9, 2023, https://www.aljazeera.com/program/newsfeed/2023/10/9/israeli-defence-minister-orders-complete-siege-on-gaza; Goldenberg, Tia. 2024. "Harsh Israeli rhetoric against Palestinians becomes central to South Africa's genocide case". January 18. AP. https://apnews.com/article/israel-palestinians-south-africa-genocide-hate-speech-97a9e4a84a3a6bebeddfb80f8a030724; Corder, Mark. 2023. "South Africa launches case at top UN court accusing Israel of genocide in Gaza." December 29. APhttps://apnews.com/article/south-africa-israel-un-court-palestinians-genocide-ffe672c4eb3e14a30128542eaa537b21

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[7] See Alashqar, Mohammed. "The Role of Language in Framing the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict on Twitter: The Escalation of Violence in Gaza in May 2021 as a Case Study." PhD diss., Ghent University (2024); Schleifer, Ron. "Jewish and Contemporary Origins of Israeli "HASBARA"." *Jewish Political Studies Review* (2003): 123-153; Lesch, Ann Mosely. "Israeli Settlements in the Occupied Territories, 1967-1977." *Journal of Palestine Studies* 7, no. 1 (1977): 26-47.

[8] See Caswell, Michelle. "Hannah Arendt's world: Bureaucracy, documentation, and banal evil." *Archivaria* (2010): 1-25;

[9] See how processes of dehumanization can unravel ethical standards in this study: Prazienkova, Martina, Maria Paola Paladino, and Steven J. Sherman. "On the Cognitive Determinants of Out-Group Dehumanization: Illusory Correlation and the Dehumanization of (Numerical) Group Minorities." *Social Cognition* 35, no. 6 (2017): 639–62.

[10] Thomas, Baylis. 2009. *The Dark Side of Zionism: Israel's Quest for Security through Dominance*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 144ff. See also Jamal, Amal. "Neo-Zionism and Palestine: The unveiling of settler-colonial practices in mainstream Zionism." *Journal of Holy Land and Palestine Studies* 16, no. 1 (2017): 47-78; Murphy, Emma C. "Zionism and the Palestine question." In Youssef M. Choueiri (ed.) *A Companion to the History of the Middle East* Malden: Blackwell Publishing (2005): 269-290. Makdisi, Saree. "The architecture of erasure." *Critical Inquiry* 36, no. 3 (2010): 519-559.

[11] *Al Jazeera*. "The first livestreamed genocide". April 16, 2025. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/longform/2025/4/16/israeli-soldiers-filmed-themselves-destroying-gaza-see-the-video-evidence

[12] See Poljarević, Emin. "Making Sense out of 21st-Century Barbarism." *Islamic Horizons*, January/February 2024. https://islamichorizons.net/making-sense-out-of-21st-century-barbarism/.

[13] Rosenberg was actually from Estonia; however, his German ancestry gave partial reason to claim Germany for "Aryans only." The other part of the reason was his vehement antisemitism and xenophobia.

[14] Steizinger, Johannes. 2018. "The Significance of Dehumanization: Nazi Ideology and Its Psychological Consequences." *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 19 (2): 139–57. 141.

[15] See an opinion text by Ahmad Ibsais, "Palestinians are being dehumanised to justify occupation and genocide," *Al Jazeera*. 20 Aug. 2024. https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2024/8/20/palestinians-are-being-dehumanised-to-justify-occupation-and-genocide; Bamford, James. 2024. "How US Intelligence and an American Company Feed Israel's Killing Machine in Gaza." *The Nation*, April 12, https://www.thenation.com/article/world/nsa-palantir-israel-gaza-ai/.

[16] Benjamin Netanyahu's invocation of "Amalek" of the Old Testament, Samuel 15:1-34. Translation in "Israel-Hamas war: 'We will fight and we will win', says Benjamin Netanyahu", Sky News, 28 October 2023,

https://news.sky.com/video/israel-hamas-war-we-will-fight-and-we-will-win-says-benjamin-netanyahu-12995212. Also see, @IsraeliPM_heb, Tweet (11:43 a.m.), 3 November 2023, https://twitter.com/IsraeliPM_heb/status/1720406463972004198.

[17] Makdisi, Saree. "The architecture of erasure." *Critical Inquiry* 36, no. 3 (2010): 519-559, 558ff.; See also, Hamblet, Wendy C. *The sacred monstrous: A reflection on violence in human communities*. Lexington Books, 2003; also see implications of anti-Palestinian discourses and Zionist lobby here, Bazian, Hatem. "The islamophobia industry and the demonization of Palestine: Implications for American studies." *American Quarterly* 67, no. 4 (2015): 1057-1066; here, Aked, Hilary. "The undeniable overlap: Right-wing Zionism and Islamophobia." *OpenDemocracy*, September 29 (2015): 2015; and here, Bukar, Abubakar A. "The political economy of hate industry: Islamophobia in the western public sphere." *Islamophobia Studies Journal* 5, no. 2 (2020): 152-174.

[18] See Tileagă, Cristian. "Ideologies of moral exclusion: A critical discursive reframing of depersonalization, delegitimization and dehumanization." *British journal of social psychology* 46, no. 4 (2007): 717-737;

[19] Without an elaborate development of the methodological approach it should suffice to note that my approach here is to approach a central concept of trust through the lens of Abderrahmane Interpreting key Islamic concepts, particularly *amāna*, to elucidate their relevance and application in contemporary ethical discourse.

[20] It useful to note that bearing witness (*shahāda*) means both that (beholding, observing, perceiving) but also martyrdom.

[21] It also useful to remind ourselves that genocide is *jus cogens*, meaning a non-derogable norm that overrides conflicting laws or agreements, which means *all* (law abiding) states are obliged to prevent and punish it.

[22] See Acharya, Amitav. "Why international ethics will survive the crisis of the liberal international order." *SAIS Review of International Affairs* 39, no. 1 (2019): 5-20; Lukes, Steven. "Liberal democratic torture." *British Journal of Political Science* 36, no. 1 (2006): 1–16;

[23] See See Eghbariah, Rabea, Noura Erakat, Darryl Li, Aslı Ü. Bâli, Diala Shamas, Maha Abdallah, Shahd Hammouri. "Seven Perspectives on International Law and Palestinian Liberation." N.d. *The Law and Political Economy Project*. https://lpeproject.org/blog/seven-perspectives-on-international-law-and-palestinian-liberation/

[24] See Lindqvist, Sven. *Utrota varenda jävel* [*Exterminate all the Brutes*] (Stockholm: Nirstedt/Litteratur, 2023)

[25] Moses, A. Dirk, "Empire, Colony, Genocide: Keywords and Intellectual History," in *Empire, colony, genocide: conquest, occupation, and subaltern resistance in world history*. Ed. Moses, A. Dirk. Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2008, 3-54.

[26] Krever, Tor, Marina Veličković, Frédéric Mégret, Karen Engle, Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, Robert Knox, Shahd Hammouri, et al. "On International Law and Gaza: Critical Reflections." *London Review of International Law* 12, no. 2 (2024): 217–301. 224.

[27] Ibid., 292

[28] See, Bamford, James. 2024. "How US Intelligence and an American Company Feed Israel's Killing Machine in Gaza." *The Nation*, April 12, https://www.thenation.com/article/world/nsa-palantir-israel-gaza-ai/; Vandiver, Josh. "Hard men, hard money, hardening right: Bitcoin, peter thiel, and schmittian states of exception." In *Far-Right Newspeak and the Future of Liberal Democracy*, pp. 205-230. Routledge, 2024; Daniel, James Rushing. "Rewriting the plan of the world: Peter Thiel's messianic rhetoric and the end of progressive neoliberalism." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* (2024): 1-24; also Taplin, Jonathan. The End of Reality: How four billionaires are selling out our future. Random House, 2023; " "Thiel's Palantir, Israel Agree Strategic Partnership for Battle Tech". Bloomberg https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-01-12/palantir-israel-agree-to-strategic-partnership-for-battle-tech?; Elon Musk visits Israel after criticism for endorsing antisemitic post By Dan Williams and Howard Goller November 27, 2023, https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/elon-musk-begins-wartime-visit-israel-aviation-tracker-says-2023-11-27/; HRW, December 21, 2023 Meta's Broken Promises Systemic Censorship of Palestine Content on Instagram and Facebook, https://www.hrw.org/report/2023/12/21/metas-broken-promises/systemic-censorship-palestine-content-instagram-and

[29] Sultany, Nimer. "A threshold crossed: On genocidal intent and the duty to prevent genocide in Palestine." *Journal of Genocide Research* (2024): 1-26.

[30] See Katznelson, Ira. Desolation and enlightenment: political knowledge after total war, totalitarianism, and the Holocaust. Columbia University Press, 2003; El Amrani, Abdelaziz. "The postsecular turn: Interrogating Postcolonialism after 9/11." *Interventions* 24, no. 4 (2022): 533-566

[31] Bauman, Zygmunt. "Times of interregnum." *Ethics & Global Politics* 5, no. 1 (2012): 49-56.

[32] Al Jazeera. "Protesters rally around the world demanding immediate ceasefire in Gaza". Nov. 3, 2023. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/4/demonstrations-around-the-world-renew-calls-for-gaza-ceasefire; Aya Batrawy. "Israeli protesters demand Gaza cease-fire in rare anti-war march through Tel Aviv." Jan. 19, 2024. NPR. https://www.npr.org/2024/01/19/1225651180/israel-tel-aviv-protest-gaza-war; Ulfelder, Jay. "An Empirical Overview of Recent Pro-Palestine Protests at U.S. Schools." Ash Center, Harvard University. May

30, 2024. https://ash.harvard.edu/articles/crowd-counting-blog-an-empirical-overview-of-recent-pro-palestine-protests-at-u-s-schools/; See also, Üngör, Uğur Ümit. "Screaming, silence, and mass violence in Israel/Palestine." *Journal of Genocide Research* (2024): 1-9.

[33] See Taha Abderrahman, *Suʾāl al-ʿamal: Baḥth ʿan uṣūl al-ʿamaliyya fī l-fikr wa-l-ʿilm*. Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-ʿArabī, 2012.

[34] See Sedgwick, Mark. 2020. "The Modernity of Neo-Traditionalist Islam." In *Muslim Subjectivities in Global Modernity: Islamic Traditions and the Construction of Modern Muslim Identities*, eds.
Dietrich Jung and Kirstine Sinclair, 121–146, Leiden: Brill.

[35] One attempt to briefly unpack this idea is presented here, Poljarevic, Emin. "Islam as Method" *Philosophy and Society*, 35, no. 3 (2024): 465-484.

[36] Hashas, Mohammed. "The Trusteeship Paradigm: The Formation and Reception of a Philosophy." In *Islamic Ethics and the Trusteeship Paradigm: Taha Abderrahmane's Philosophy in Comparative Perspectives*, edited by Mohammed Hashas and Mutaz al-Khatib. Leiden: Brill, 2020, 37-61.

[37] Suleiman, Farid. "The Philosophy of Taha Abderrahman: A Critical Study." *Die Welt des Islams* 61, no. 1 (2020): 39–71.

[38] Abderrahmane, Taha. *Dialogues for the Future* (transl. Abdellah El Boubekri) Leiden: Brill. 2023, 31-33.

[39] Ibid., 102–103.

[40] Abderrahmane, Taha. *Buʾs al-dahrāniyya: al-Naqd al-iʾtimānī li-faṣl al-akhlāq ʿan al-dīn* (*The Misery of Secularism: Trusteeship Critique of the Separation of Ethics from Religion*). Beirut: al-Shabaka al-ʿArabiyya li-l-Abḥāth wa-l-Nashr, 2014.

[41] This is an argument presented by Wael Hallaq in El Boubekri's introduction of Abderrahmane, Taha. *Dialogues for the Future* (transl. Abdellah El Boubekri) Leiden: Brill. 2023, 4.

[42] Slimia, Awad, and Mohammad Fuad Othman. "The double standards of western countries toward Ukraine and Palestine "Western Hypocrisy"." *Central European Management Journal* 30, no. 4 (2022): 476-485.

[43] On the meanings of modernity within Muslim intellectual discourse see Poljarevic, Emin. "Islamic Tradition and Meanings of Modernity." *International Journal for History, Culture and Modernity* 3, no. 1 (2015): 29-57.

[44] This is aptly discussed by Mohammed Hashas as trusteeship (iʾtimāniyya) in his analysis of Taha Aberrahamane's thought, Hashas, Mohammed. "Taha Abderrahmane's trusteeship paradigm: Spiritual modernity and the Islamic contribution to the formation of a renewed universal civilization of ethos." *Oriente Moderno* 95, no. 1-2 (2015): 67-105. See also the Qur'anic references: Q 5:32; Q 33:72.

[45] Abderrahmane, Taha. *Dialogues for the Future* (transl. Abdellah El Boubekri) Leiden: Brill. 2023, 115.

[46] Ibid., 111.

[47] One central theme in his philosophical framing addresses the question: How can Islamic ethical tradition offer a meaningful, autonomous response to the modern crisis of moral disintegration, particularly in the face of injustice, dehumanization, and the collapse of ethical and political frameworks?

[48] See an attempt to articulate this claim further in Poljarevic, Emin. "Islam as Method" *Philosophy and Society*, 35, no. 3 (2024): 465-484.

[49] See De Swaan, Abram. "Dyscivilization, mass extermination and the state." *Theory, Culture & Society* 18, no. 2-3 (2001): 265-276.

[50] It is perhaps useful to note here that the Qur'an reiterates this ontological gravity. "Had We sent this Qur'an down upon a mountain, you would have seen it humbled, split asunder from the fear of God" (Q 59:21). If the mountain, a symbol of permanence and majesty, would shatter under the burden of revelation, what then of the human heart? This is not simply poetic awe—it is existential warning. The human consciousness and agency, unlike stone, is morally implicated. There are numerous other Qur'anic examples and reminders for humans where they are commanded to reflect (*yatafakkarūn*), to use reason (*taʿqilūn*), and to know (*yaʿlamūn*) as to confirm their humanity.