

Disclosure, Concealment, and Accountable Testimony: A 20-Year Comparative Textual Analysis of Islamic Moral Reasoning in a Muslim Athlete's Autoethnographies

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Abstract

Autoethnography can connect embodied experience to the social organisation of sport, but writing the self also exposes relationships, institutions, and other people. Relational ethics addresses this problem, yet sport scholarship has given comparatively less attention to the explicit moral traditions through which authors decide both what to disclose and what to withhold. This article conducts a critical autoethnographic textual comparison of two works written twenty years apart. The first is a 2006 doctoral study of power, coercion, injury, and the coach-athlete relationship. The second is a 2026 book that locates sporting development within a broader life history and the Maldives' inaugural Olympic participation. 16 focal representational decisions were analysed through a comparison matrix and five situated Islamic concepts: *amanah* (trust), *'adl* (justice), *niyyah* (intention), *satr* (protective concealment), and *hisab* (accountability). The comparison shows a shift from an individuated pseudonym carrying diary-derived speech towards named individuals, selective paraphrase, recurrent retrospective self-correction, and wider structural framing. Both texts declare reconstruction rather than transcription, so what changes across the twenty years is the unit of representation rather than the evidential claim. From this analysis, the article develops accountable testimony: a non-mechanical approach that places a burden of justification on silence as well as disclosure. It contributes to autoethnographic ethics and athlete safeguarding by showing how faith-informed moral reasoning can be made methodologically explicit, proportionate, and open to scholarly scrutiny.

Keywords: Autoethnography; Islamic Ethics, Muslim Athletes, Relational Ethics, Safeguarding

Introduction

Autoethnography has become an important approach in qualitative sport research because it enables athlete-researchers to connect bodily experience, memory, emotion, and identity to wider social arrangements (Allen-Collinson, 2013; Sparkes, 2024). These processes are

difficult to reconstruct from policy documents or results sheets because they are often normalised before they are recognised as problems (Johns & Johns, 2000; Barker-Ruchti & Tinning, 2010). The method's intimacy is also its ethical difficulty. Writing about oneself usually involves coaches, teammates, officials, relatives, and organisations. Removing names does not necessarily prevent identification, especially where place, chronology, role, or circumstance make a person inferable. A narrative may be sincere and accurate from the author's perspective while still humiliating others, damaging relationships, or denying implicated people an opportunity to respond. Relational ethics therefore asks more than whether a story is true. It asks what obligations remain towards those drawn into it, and whether the public value of disclosure is proportionate to foreseeable harm (Ellis, 2007; Tolich, 2010; Phillips et al. 2022; Edwards, 2021).

Narrative ethics widens the issue because stories act within social worlds, shape identities, and distribute moral credibility (Frank, 2010). Recent editorial work in the field likewise frames autoethnography as testimony: bearing witness, taking a stand, and speaking to power (Herrmann & Adams, 2026). In sport, testimonial injustice matters because athletes may be assigned insufficient credibility when they describe pain, unsafe practices, or institutional failure (Luzzi, 2024). Athlete testimony in such settings is further shaped by anticipated disbelief and by cultures that reward silence (Chroni & Kavoura, 2022; Willson et al. 2022). The ethical problem therefore includes both exposure and the possibility that excessive caution reproduces silencing. Two bodies of scholarship bear on this problem without meeting. Relational and autoethnographic ethics has produced detailed accounts of consent, anonymity, and continuing obligation to relational others (Ellis, 2007; Tolich, 2010; Lapadat, 2017; Edwards, 2021). Work on Islamic research ethics and on sport in Muslim contexts has developed on a separate track, with little application to representational decisions in qualitative writing (Rattani & Hyder, 2019; Abd Rahim et al. 2023; Mohammed Insaf & Shehu, 2025). Neither treats faith-informed moral vocabularies, or silence as a decision requiring affirmative justification, as a methodological problem in its own right. The gap addressed here is therefore theoretical rather than demographic. It concerns whether relational ethics can be extended to accommodate a moral vocabulary it was not built to hold, and what that extension changes about how disclosure and restraint are justified. The small-state Muslim-majority setting is treated as a condition that makes the extension testable, not as a gap in its own right (Houlihan & Zheng, 2015).

Procedural safeguards remain indispensable, but they do not exhaust the reasoning of researchers whose obligations are also religious (Tolich, 2010; Rattani & Hyder 2019). For a Muslim author, truth-telling may be obligatory, disclosure excessive, and silence either merciful restraint or participation in injustice (Osman, 2023). The methodological question is whether such reasoning can be made explicit without romanticising religious identity or presenting one interpretation as universally Islamic. This article examines that problem through two texts written by the same Muslim athlete-author. The first is a 2006 doctoral autoethnography centred on power, coercion, injury, athletic identity, and retirement in a coach-athlete relationship (Haleem, 2006). The second is a 2026 book covering the same career within a wider life history (Haleem, 2026). The inquiry is situated in a small Muslim-majority island society where sporting, institutional, political, and personal networks are closely connected. In such settings, anonymity may be technically present but socially fragile, while athletes may depend on the same limited institutions for selection, funding,

employment, and recognition. Small-state sport therefore concentrates both opportunity and risk (Houlihan & Zheng, 2015).

Three questions follow. How does faith-informed moral reasoning shape decisions to disclose and to conceal? What distinguishes warranted testimony from grievance or spectacle? And what can such reasoning contribute to athlete-centred safeguarding? The aim of this article is to examine how two texts by the same Muslim athlete-author made those representational decisions, and to develop from that comparison an approach termed accountable testimony. Accountable testimony requires disclosure to be necessary and proportionate, and places silence under the same burden of ethical justification. The question throughout is how those experiences were ethically written, not how they were institutionally governed.

Relational Ethics, Islamic Moral Reasoning, and Athlete Voice

Autoethnography as an ethically contested practice

Autoethnography uses personal experience as a route into cultural and institutional life. From formative statements of the approach, the self has been treated as inseparable from social relations and cultural context (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Ellis et al., 2011). Later syntheses frame autoethnography as both a research practice and a representational responsibility because stories of self inevitably implicate others (Holman Jones et al., 2013; Adams et al., 2015). Sport has developed its own strand of this work, in which the researcher's own athletic body and biography become the route into the physical culture under study (Allen-Collinson, 2013). In elite sport the approach has revealed the felt insecurity of selection, the dependence created by scarce coaching opportunities, and the ways athletes learn to interpret obedience as commitment (Purdy et al., 2008; McMahon et al., 2012). The same closeness creates vulnerability. Memory is reconstructed, the author controls the frame, and relational others may appear without equivalent authority over the narrative. Autoethnography is therefore better described as ethically contested terrain than as a method made ethical by sincerity alone (Sparkes, 2024). Across this literature the difficulty is consistently located in representation rather than intention: in balancing legitimacy against exposure (Wall, 2008), in the consequences that inclusion and omission carry for entangled others (Medford, 2006), and in questions of ownership that method alone cannot resolve (Winkler, 2018). Two responses have been proposed. Relational others may be treated as vulnerable from the outset rather than after a manuscript produces concern (Tolich, 2010), and the tension between the author's right to be heard and the danger of exposing others may be held open rather than resolved (Edwards, 2021). Both accept the same premise as the present article: sincerity does not remove the need to justify representational decisions.

The field has also debated what counts as rigorous autoethnography and whether analytic, evocative, or interpretive forms should be privileged. Anderson (2006) argues for an explicitly analytic form, whereas Denzin (2014) places interpretation, performance, and situated meaning at the centre of autoethnographic inquiry. Turning such differences into mechanical evaluative criteria has been cautioned against, because judgement remains situated and interpretive (Sparkes, 2020). This article does not attempt to settle those debates through a universal checklist. Its narrower methodological claim is that, when a text exposes or conceals relational others, the reasons for that choice should be made visible enough to be examined and contested. Collaborative autoethnography offers a different

response again, sharing narration and interpretation among participants rather than leaving representational authority with one writer (Chang et al., 2013; Lapadat, 2017). Elite sport intensifies these dilemmas because coaches and institutions may control training, medical decisions, selection, resources, and future opportunity. The coach-athlete bond has been characterised as a critical relationship in which one party depends on another for trust, security, and the fulfilment of needs (Stirling, 2009). Emotional abuse and maltreatment may be normalised as toughness, discipline, or necessary rigour, and disciplinary training practices can be experienced as ordinary long before they are recognised as harmful (Stirling & Kerr 2008, 2013; Barker-Ruchti & Tinning, 2010). Contemporary safeguarding research accordingly locates harm not only in exceptional individuals, but in cultures, dependencies, reporting failures, and performance systems that displace welfare (Gillard et al., 2024; Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2024).

Relational ethics and safeguarding overlap but are not identical. An autoethnography of harmful sport experience sits between them, since excessive disclosure may reproduce harm through public exposure while excessive restraint may suppress knowledge relevant to athlete welfare.

Islamic Concepts as Situated Analytic Lenses

Islamic ethics offers a vocabulary for examining these tensions without reducing them to complete silence or complete exposure. The five concepts used here are not exhaustive and do not represent every Muslim interpretation. They were selected because each bears directly on a representational decision the two texts required, and because each is developed within the Shafi'i tradition that shapes religious practice in the Maldives. Other frameworks, including *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, would organise the same material differently (Abd Rahim et al., 2023). Work on Islamic research ethics has established that scriptural principles require interpretive care before they can govern research conduct (Rattani & Hyder, 2019), and recent scholarship has begun applying such principles to athletes specifically (Mohammed Insaf & Shehu 2025). Qur'anic verses are cited by sura and verse to Abdel Haleem's translation, and hadith by the canonical numbering of the Darussalam editions of Sahih al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim. *Amanah* frames knowledge and authority as trusts rather than possessions. The Prophetic teaching that each person is a guardian answerable for those in their care distributes responsibility rather than concentrating it (Sahih al-Bukhari, no. 7138; Sahih Muslim, no. 1829). Applied to research, *amanah* rejects both an unlimited right to publish every remembered detail and silence where testimony could identify preventable harm. The trust is held by the writer over the memory, the relationships, and the public meaning of events that others also lived.

'*Adl* adds fairness and proportion. Context, memory limits, and structural constraints must be acknowledged without converting a complex history into the prosecution of selected individuals, and without using loyalty to erase institutional power. Where two harms conflict, the tradition requires a balancing exercise rather than a default in either direction (Osman, 2023). For a retrospective account this means separating what happened, how it was experienced at the time, and how it is interpreted now, and declining to settle any of the three by appeal to the others. *Niyyah* concerns the moral direction of an act. The foundational report that actions are judged by intentions places purpose at the centre of moral evaluation (Sahih al-Bukhari, no. 1; Sahih Muslim, no. 1907). In writing, it asks whether a passage clarifies

a structure or protects athletes, or primarily humiliates, settles a grievance, or heightens drama. *Satr*, understood here as protective restraint, limits unnecessary exposure through anonymisation, compositing, and omission of gratuitous detail (Qur'an 24:19; 49:12; Osman 2023). The term carries two senses that both bear on autoethnographic writing. It refers to covering the body, and to covering the faults of others by abstaining from seeking them out or publicising them. It also operates reflexively, since a person is encouraged not to expose his own transgressions where no right of another is at stake. For an autoethnographer both directions are live, because the writer is at once the subject exposed and the agent exposing others. *Satr* is nevertheless bounded. The obligation to command right and forbid wrong, institutionalised as *ḥisba*, constrains concealment wherever conduct inflicts harm or injustice on others (Osman, 2023). Concealment is therefore conditional on the absence of harm to others, not on the truth of what is withheld. A true account of another person's conduct is not for that reason a licensed one, and a silence that shields continuing harm is not for that reason a protected one.

Hisab, to be distinguished from the institution of *ḥisba* discussed above, extends accountability beyond ethics approval and publication. Qur'an 17:14 frames self-accounting as moral reckoning, and al-Ghazali develops this into *muḥasaba*, disciplined self-examination (al-Ghazali, 2015). Responsibility therefore continues as a text circulates, is interpreted, and may require correction. The five concepts operate together: *amanah* concerns what is entrusted; *'adl* weighs competing claims; *niyyah* interrogates purpose; *satr* governs the degree of exposure; and *hisab* extends responsibility through the future life of the text. *Satr* without *'adl* may protect authority, while *'adl* without *satr* may rationalise unnecessary exposure; good intention without *hisab* may mistake motive for consequence.

Silence, disclosure, and safeguarding

Both vocabularies converge on a single question: when is silence defensible? Safeguarding research treats athlete non-disclosure as shaped by fear, dependence, expected institutional response, and whether the athlete anticipates being believed or protected (Chroni & Kavoura 2022; Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2023). The Islamic tradition reaches a structurally similar position by a different route, since *satr* is bounded wherever conduct inflicts harm on others (Osman, 2023). In neither account is silence a neutral default. It is a decision with consequences, and consequences attach to the person who decides. Testimonial injustice explains part of the mechanism. An athlete may possess relevant embodied knowledge yet be assigned insufficient credibility within a performance hierarchy (Luzzi, 2024). Where credibility is distributed unequally, the burden of speaking falls on the person least equipped to carry it. *Amanah* redistributes that burden, locating responsibility with those who hold authority and knowledge rather than with those subject to them. Silence cannot therefore be praised as restraint without asking whose interests it serves, and both frameworks license the question.

Neither framework licenses indiscriminate publication. Athlete-centred practice values confidentiality, survivor control, trauma-informed response, and protection against retaliation. The task is to retain what is necessary for understanding and prevention while withholding details that add little beyond identification or spectacle (Khomutova et al., 2025; Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2024). *Satr* governs the same territory from the other direction, limiting exposure that serves no protective purpose. Where the two requirements conflict, *'adl* supplies the balancing that each demands. What follows is a symmetry the relational-ethics

literature has not made explicit. Disclosure requires justification because it exposes. Silence requires justification because it withholds. Neither is innocent by default, and the reasons for each should be visible enough to be examined and contested.

Methodology

Critical Autoethnographic Textual Comparison

The study uses critical autoethnography, which treats personal experience as a site of cultural and political analysis rather than as self-report alone (Denzin, 2014). To this it adds a comparative reflexive reading of two texts by the same author, an approach developed for the present study rather than drawn from an established protocol. No reporting checklist governs textual comparison of this kind. The procedural transparency such a checklist would ordinarily supply is provided instead through the selection criteria set out in Section 3.2 and the decision matrix reported in Table 2. The two primary sources are the author's 2006 doctoral thesis and 2026 published book (Haleem, 2006, 2026). Both were read in full. They are not independent datasets; they are temporally separated representations of the same life, written for different purposes and from different social positions. The thesis was organized around one coach-athlete relationship and written closer to the competitive career. The later book widened the frame to childhood, schooling, family, poverty, abuse, athletic development, national representation, and Olympic participation.

Both texts are treated as primary textual data. The unit of analysis is the representational decision through which experience became scholarship. Such decisions include whether to identify a person, reconstruct speech, describe bodily harm, attribute responsibility, acknowledge uncertainty, combine figures, omit information, or correct a self-serving claim. The study therefore asks how the texts were ethically made rather than attempting to adjudicate every historical event or infer another person's intention. Coding was manual throughout, and no qualitative analysis software was used. Collaborative autoethnography was not adopted because the unit of analysis is two already completed texts and the focal events are several decades old; several relational others are deceased or unreachable. Retrospective collaboration would therefore be partial and could alter the very comparison under study. The design keeps the single-author structure explicit and treats the absence of collaborative reconstruction as a limitation rather than as evidence of ethical sufficiency. Quotations from the 2026 book are cited to the pagination of the first edition (ISBN 978-967-2015-67-1). The two principal embodied passages appear on pages 127–129, the Seoul flag-bearing passage on pages 228–230, and the closing biographical statement on pages 249–250. The 2006 thesis extract is cited to page 11 of the archived University of Otago copy. This distinction matters because diary-derived reconstruction, later remembered speech, paraphrase, and composite narration do not carry the same evidential force. It matters further because the 2006 text declares that its opening extract was built from diary material rather than transcribed from it.

Analytic Procedure and Audit Trail

Analysis proceeded in four stages. First, both texts were read in full and marked for decisions involving disclosure, concealment, naming, dialogue, bodily harm, responsibility, uncertainty, national representation, and relational consequence. A page-level index of the two texts was compiled across fourteen decision categories, yielding approximately 490 category-page occurrences in the 2026 book and 370 in the 2006 thesis. The index is indicative rather than

exhaustive, since each page was counted once per category regardless of how many instances it contained. Material was retained when it raised an ethical problem not already represented in the retained set, and when comparison between the two texts made the representational choice visible. Material was set aside when it repeated an issue already established, or when its inclusion would reproduce sensitive detail without adding analytical value. Second, the retained material was organised into sixteen focal representational decisions, reported in Table 2. Each cluster was entered into a comparison matrix recording the passage or decision and its source, the ethical issue and the Islamic concept or concepts it engaged, the representational choice made, the foreseeable relational risk, and the analytical rationale. Five questions guided the reading: What knowledge was held in trust? What did justice require? What intention directed inclusion? What could be concealed without protecting harm? To whom was the writer accountable?

Third, the texts were compared for continuity and difference in scope, naming, speech, attribution, tone, and structural framing. Table 1 summarises the principal shifts. The analysis does not assume simple moral progress or attribute every change to religion. Genre, temporal distance, professional experience, and the wider purpose of the 2026 book also shaped representation. Fourth, the coded decisions were interpreted in dialogue with relational ethics, narrative ethics, testimonial injustice, athlete voice, and safeguarding scholarship. Islamic concepts were applied after the initial textual identification rather than used to search for passages. All sixteen decisions were found to engage at least one concept. That result reflects the basis on which the five concepts were selected, as set out in Section 2.2, rather than a property discovered in the texts. The analytical test was therefore not whether a concept could be applied, but whether the concepts pulled against one another. A negative-case principle was applied on that basis: occasions where concealment protected dignity were examined alongside occasions where restraint would have protected the author's own standing instead, the clearest of which is the wording of the Olympic precedence claim discussed in Section 4.5.

No independent coder, critical friend, or member-reflection process was used. In a single-author reflexive study, claims of inter-coder reliability would be inconsistent with the interpretive design, but the absence of external challenge remains consequential and is addressed in Section 3.4. Quality was instead pursued through explicit selection criteria, source-grounded quotations, a declared comparison matrix, acknowledgement of counter-readings, and conservative claims about intention.

Table 1

Representational shifts between the 2006 doctoral thesis and the 2026 published book

Dimension	2006 doctoral thesis	2026 published book	Indicative frequency (pages per 100)
Scope	Coach-athlete relationship: power, injury, identity, retirement	Whole-life context: childhood, family, poverty, athletic development, national representation	—
Representation of others	One individuated pseudonym, openly declared; no individual named	Identifiable individuals named; no pseudonymous figure	Pseudonymous figure 30.6 → 0.0; naming 0.0 → 9.6
Speech	Diary-derived reconstruction rendered as direct speech, with the reconstruction declared	Selective quotation; paraphrase where wording cannot be verified	Quoted speech 45.2 → 15.5; speech attributed to one figure 3.7 → 0.0
Attribution	Credit and blame at comparable rates	Credit rises sharply; blame unchanged	Credit 5.3 → 16.3; blame 3.3 → 3.6
Acknowledgement of uncertainty	Rare	Rare	0.7 → 1.2
Retrospective self-correction	Absent	Recurrent	0.0 → 7.6
Relational exposure	Limited third-party material	Extensive family, abuse and hardship material	Family 3.3 → 19.1; abuse 5.0 → 35.5
Analytic frame	Personal and relational conflict	Institutional, cultural, national and relational structure	—
Ethical trade-off	Greater attributive specificity; reconstruction declared	Lower identification risk for critics; higher exposure of relatives and of the author himself	—

Note. Frequencies are pages per 100 pages of text (2006 n = 301; 2026 n = 251), derived from a page-level index of the two texts in which each page is counted once per category.

Table 2

Analytic matrix of the sixteen representational decisions examined across the two texts.

No.	Representational decision	Source and location	Ethical issue	Concept	Representational choice	Relational risk	Analytical rationale
1	Injury normalised as seriousness	2026, p. 127	Normalisation from within the athlete's reasoning	<i>amanah</i> , <i>hisab</i>	Retained framed as discipline	and Low; concerns self-author	Shows how performance culture is internalised without instruction
2	Medical condition reduced to a little tired	2026, pp. 127–129	Bodily modesty, then anticipated disbelief	<i>amanah</i> , <i>satr</i>	Both mechanisms retained; intention attributed	Coach may be no inferable	Removal would make the environment appear more consensual than the source supports
3	Individuated pseudonym, opening extract	2006, p. 11	Relational exposure through attributable speech	' <i>adl</i> , <i>satr</i>	Paraphrased, reproduced	not Singular remains weighable	figure Demonstrates what the earlier convention permitted a writer to do
4	Pseudonymous figure sustained across the thesis	2006, pages 154, 164, 193, 197, 200, 206	92 Cumulative exposure of one individual	<i>satr</i>	Extent reported; content reproduced	Sustained not attribution	singular One figure carries roughly a third of the text
5	Speech attributed to same figure	2006, pp. 154, 164, 193, 197, 199–200, 204, 206	Repeated attribution without right of reply	' <i>adl</i> , <i>niyyah</i>	Reported as a series; one instance analysed	Cumulative, incidental	not Ten further attributed utterances beyond the analysed extract
6	Naming identifiable individuals	2026, pp. 19, 99, 106, 249	Exposure of named parties	of <i>satr</i> , ' <i>adl</i> third	Names retained; analysed as naming decision	Named figures are a public and credited	The later text and are names individuals the earlier text never did
7	Asymmetry between naming and blame	2026, pages naming; pages blaming	24 Uneven distribution 9 credibility	' <i>adl</i> , of <i>amanah</i>	Asymmetry named, not resolved	Criticised cannot reply	figures Named figures receive credit; criticised figures are not named
8	Composite representation authority figures	2026, of declared convention	Identification versus structural analysis	<i>satr</i>	Compositing declared method	Undeclared as compositing mislead	Rests on authorial declaration rather than on textual markers
9	Childhood, family and abuse material	2026, family 48 pages; abuse pages	Exposure of relatives who did not consent	of <i>satr</i>	Included in the book; withheld from this article	Substantial exposure of parties	The largest body of third of relational exposure in the corpus
10	Self-incriminating admissions	2026, pp. 26, 52, 128, 182, 222	Self-exposure where no right of another is engaged	<i>satr</i> (<i>reflexive</i>)	Retained	Concerns author alone	the Reflexive <i>satr</i> discourages self-exposure absent a countervailing right
11	Retrospective correction	self-2026, pages; none	Continuing accountability after publication	<i>hisab</i>	Reported as the principal shift	Low	The clearest countable difference between the two texts

No.	Representational decision	Source and location	Ethical issue	Concept	Representational choice	Relational risk	Analytical rationale
12	Acknowledgement of uncertainty	2006, pages; 2026, 3 pages	Evidential honesty	<i>hisab</i>	Reported as a null result	Low	Does not support a claim of increased epistemic caution
13	Absence of institutional criticism	of 2026, narrative body	Omission structural critique	of ' <i>adl</i> , <i>niyyah</i>	Omission reported, not filled	Protects institutions and author	The narrative criticises no institution it names
14	Seoul flag-bearing account	2026, 228–230	National honour and moral pressure	' <i>adl</i> , <i>hisab</i>	National context retained; personal accusation limited	National reputational sensitivity	Shows how symbolic elevation intensifies compliance
15	Olympic precedence wording	2026, 249–250 and title page	Accuracy of self-representation	' <i>adl</i> <i>hisab</i>	Gap between conservative and broader named	Self-enhancement text could diminish teammates	Applies the standard to the author's own status claims
16	Correction publication	after Both ongoing texts, Continuing accountability		<i>hisab</i>	Commitment clarification revision	to Public and acknowledgement may uncomfortable	Responsibility does not end with peer review

Note. amanah = trust; '*adl* = justice; *niyyah* = intention; *satr* = protective concealment; *hisab* = accountability. The matrix is an audit trail of representational decisions, not a scoring instrument, and no inferential test is reported.

Positionality and relational safeguards

The author is simultaneously Muslim, former elite athlete, Olympian, coach, administrator, academic, and narrator of the experiences analysed. This position provides access to bodily and institutional knowledge that an external analyst could not easily reconstruct. It also invites motivated remembering. An author revisiting his own record has an interest in appearing consistent, forgiving of himself, or already vindicated by later events. The analysis therefore distinguishes the experience of an event, its later interpretation, and claims about other people's motives. Where intention could not be established, attention remained on actions, structures, and effects. No new participants were recruited and no new interviews or personal data were generated. That procedural status does not resolve relational ethics. People who entered earlier narratives did not thereby consent to renewed analysis. Identifiability also remains possible in a small sporting community, where roles overlap and a pseudonym may conceal a name without concealing a person (Houlihan & Zheng, 2015). Compensatory safeguards included removing identifying detail when identity was not necessary, avoiding verbatim dialogue unless preserved in a source, declaring composite representation, and directing criticism towards practices and power relations rather than character.

The 2026 book contains highly sensitive childhood and family material. Those episodes were not reproduced in this article merely to demonstrate emotional depth. This constitutes a negative case of the first kind identified in Section 3.2: concealment that protects dignity rather than authority. The material is true and narratively powerful, but it is unnecessary to establish the argument about coaching authority, athlete voice, or representational ethics. Withholding it protects dignity without making the sport system appear safer than the sources support. The absence of new recruitment removes the procedural question without

removing the relational one. Ethical weight here falls on representational decisions rather than on recruitment, which is why those decisions are reported in full in Table 2.

Scope and Limitations

This is a single-author, retrospective, interpretive comparison of two related texts. It does not claim that the author's reasoning represents all Muslim athletes, Maldivian athletes, or Islamic ethical traditions. Because both texts share one author, one sporting career, one broad case, and one moral tradition, the comparison is internal rather than an independent validation of the framework. It cannot separate what the five concepts contribute from the author's own dispositions, later professional experience, changing relationships, or the different purposes of the two texts. Three features of the design limit what the readings can be checked against. The absence of external checks noted in Section 3.2 has a direction. Every reading in Section 4 rests on one reader's judgement of texts that reader also wrote. This most plausibly biases the analysis towards readings consistent with the author's present self-understanding. Second, the page-level index counts categories rather than discrete decisions, so the proportion of candidate decisions retained cannot be stated exactly. Third, another analyst applying the same concepts to the same passages could reach different representational decisions, and nothing in this study tests that disagreement.

Coaches, officials, teammates, and relatives are not represented directly, and their absence requires restraint. That absence biases the account towards the author's interpretation of shared events, most plausibly in the direction of a more coherent and more self-consistent narrative than the participants collectively would produce.

Memory remains reconstructive, and exact wording, chronology, and intention were therefore claimed only when supported by the source texts. Two features of the later text compound this. It was written with the benefit of professional and scholarly training, so retrospective reinterpretation is likely to bias the comparison towards apparent ethical improvement over time, independently of any change in moral reasoning. It was also published without external editorial or examiner review, unlike the 2006 thesis, so part of the representational difference between the two texts may reflect the absence of a gatekeeper rather than a change in the author's reasoning. Portability is also untested. Accountable testimony is offered as a framework for further use rather than as a demonstrated general ethical grammar. Such work could establish which elements are transferable, which depend on the Islamic moral vocabulary that generated them, and where alternative ethical traditions produce different decisions. The aim is not to universalise a situated framework, but to make it sufficiently explicit that its usefulness and limits can be tested.

Analysis: Writing the Self Under Moral Obligation

Amanah: when silence becomes an ethical failure

The first tension concerned whether experiences of coercion, injury, and silence should be made public at all. During the athletic period, pain and obedience were embedded in the language of commitment. Training through warning signs could be understood as discipline, national duty, or the price of becoming competitive. The later book records how this norm became self-discipline: "Still, I said nothing. I was more afraid of embarrassment than injury. I also believed, in my teenage ignorance, that this must be normal for 'serious' athletes. Perhaps suffering in silence was part of the job" (Haleem, 2026, p. 127). The passage matters

because it shows normalisation from within the athlete's own reasoning. The coach does not have to command silence for performance culture to produce it, since disciplinary power in high-performance sport operates through self-monitoring rather than instruction (Johns & Johns 2000; Barker-Ruchti & Tinning 2010). A comparable retrospective re-evaluation has been documented among elite athletes who once treated harmful coaching as necessary severity (Stirling & Kerr, 2013). The autoethnographic contribution is the mechanism: seriousness was equated with private endurance, and shame became more threatening than injury.

A second passage makes the relational structure clearer, and it is more complicated than a straightforward account of coaching harm. The athlete, then sixteen, developed severe groin pain and subsequently passed blood in his urine. He records that he first told no one at all, and that the earliest barrier to speech was not his coach but bodily modesty. In his account the symptoms concerned a region he had been raised to regard as unmentionable, and naming them felt transgressive before it felt risky (Haleem 2026, p. 127). The coach then noticed that he had become slower and paler, and criticised the apparent reduction in effort. The athlete concealed the condition and reported only that he felt a little tired, anticipating that the truth would be heard as an excuse (Haleem, 2026, p. 128). The text does not establish malicious intention, and it does not describe an unresponsive system. The athlete eventually disclosed to his sister, a nurse, who arranged medical assessment. A first physician underestimated the condition. State funding for specialist treatment abroad followed within two weeks, and the cause was identified there as severe dehydration and resolved (Haleem, 2026, pp. 128–129). What the passage documents is therefore narrower and more precise than institutional failure. It shows two distinct silencing mechanisms operating in sequence. The first is an anticipated judgement of credibility within an unequal training relationship. The second, and the earlier of the two, is *satr* turned upon the athlete's own body.

That second mechanism is where the Islamic vocabulary does work that relational ethics alone cannot. *Satr* governs both the covering of the body and the covering of another person's faults (Osman, 2023). The reticence that kept the athlete from naming his symptoms and the restraint that later governed how he wrote about his coach are therefore not two dispositions but one principle operating in two directions. A framework built only around obligations to relational others would register the second and miss the first, and would consequently attribute to coaching authority a silence the source locates first in the athlete himself. The delay the two mechanisms jointly produced nevertheless preceded a response that, once triggered, was neither slow nor indifferent. *Amanah* required retention of both mechanisms, and of the recovery that followed. Removing the anticipated-disbelief mechanism would make the training environment appear more consensual than the narrative supports. Removing the modesty mechanism would misattribute to coaching authority a reticence the source locates elsewhere. Removing the eventual medical response would make the wider system appear more indifferent than the source supports. *Amanah* equally required acknowledgement of the athlete's agency: he wanted selection, accepted demanding preparation, admired authority, and reproduced the culture inside himself. Accountable testimony therefore names dependence and preventable harm without writing the athlete as wholly powerless or the coach as wholly malicious.

Satr: protection, compositing, and evidential cost

The second tension concerned how much identifying and private detail should appear. In a small society, replacing a name with a role may provide little protection because informed readers know who occupied the role. The 2006 thesis used an individuated pseudonym together with diary-derived speech. Its opening extract is dated to February 1992, before the Barcelona Games. The extract reconstructs a training episode in which the coach, given the pseudonym "Sato," responds to an incomplete session by saying that in the athlete's position he would himself have resorted to suicide. The author then declares that he has lost trust in his mentor (Haleem, 2006, p. 11). Two features of that passage matter for the comparison. The reported utterance is framed in the first person, as the coach's statement about himself rather than as an instruction directed at the athlete. The thesis also introduces the extract by stating that its ideas were taken from a training diary rather than transcribed verbatim from it. The 2006 convention therefore did not claim documentary speech. What the individuated pseudonym preserved was a singular figure to whom reconstructed speech could be attached and against whom it could be weighed. The thesis also pseudonymises the country in which the episode occurred, so the disguise operated at two levels rather than one. The convention was not confined to that extract. The pseudonymous figure appears across ninety-two pages of the thesis, roughly a third of its length, and speech is attributed to him on eleven of them. What the opening passage illustrates is therefore a sustained convention rather than an isolated decision, and the cumulative exposure of one individual is correspondingly greater than any single extract suggests.

Describing that utterance here requires its own justification, because this article argues that exposure must be necessary and proportionate. Three considerations support retention. First, the extract stands in the public record of an examined thesis that remains openly archived and is cited in full in the Data Availability statement, so the present article discloses nothing that restraint could now recover. Second, the figure is a declared pseudonym, and no institution, squad position, or date is supplied here that would narrow identification beyond what the 2006 text already established. Third, and most importantly, the analytical object is evidential form rather than character. The contrast between diary-derived speech attributable to a single figure and later composite narration cannot be demonstrated without indicating what the earlier convention permitted a writer to do. On that reasoning the present article paraphrases rather than reproduces the sentence, since the analytical point turns on the utterance's grammatical form and evidential status rather than on its exact wording. The passage is retained as the object of analysis, not as a judgement on any individual, and no inference about intention is drawn from it. The direction of the reported speech is itself part of that analysis. A first-person expression of frustration and an instruction to a subordinate are different acts, and a later writer who renders the first as the second has increased exposure without increasing evidence.

The 2026 book adopts a different representational policy, and it moves in two directions at once. Identifiable individuals are named on twenty-four pages, where the 2006 thesis names none. At the same time the author reports that coaches and authority figures are sometimes combined into composite or hybrid figures, dialogue is paraphrased when exact wording cannot be verified, and individual incidents are placed within recurring patterns. Compositing is a declared convention rather than a textually marked one, so the analysis takes it on the author's account; naming, by contrast, is directly observable. This shift protects

internal confidentiality and moves the analytical object from one person's character to the organisation of authority. Compositing may protect dignity, as *satr* requires, but applied only to those the narrative holds responsible it also protects the writer from contest. That asymmetry is an 'adl problem within the framework's own terms, since it distributes credibility unevenly between those who can reply and those who cannot.

A composite cannot sustain the same claim about who said or did a particular thing. The later text therefore cannot retain the authority of a diary quotation while dissolving the person to whom it belonged. Transparent compositing is essential: without disclosure of the convention, the reader could mistake a structural representation for an individually verifiable event. *Satr* also constrained what was not included. Sensitive family and childhood episodes appear in the 2026 book but are not reproduced in this article, because they would expose relational others without altering the analysis of athlete voice and coaching power. By contrast, the concealed-medical-condition passage was retained because removing it would obscure a safeguarding mechanism. The operative distinction is not whether a detail is true, but whether it is necessary to establish the sociological claim and whether that purpose can be achieved with less exposure.

'Adl: constrained voice and structural responsibility

Justice complicated concealment because some silence was produced by dependency rather than mercy. The opportunity to represent the nation carried exceptional symbolic value and reduced the practical freedom to challenge the only available pathway. In a small system there is rarely a second coach, a rival federation, or an alternative route to selection, so the cost of dissent is not distributed across options (Houlihan & Zheng, 2015). Questioning training could be read as weakness, disloyalty, or ingratitude, and athlete silence in such conditions is shaped less by the absence of grievance than by the anticipated response to voicing it (Chroni & Kavoura, 2022; Gurgis et al., 2022). Formal participation therefore did not necessarily indicate unconstrained choice. The 2026 book registers both sides of this at once. Describing the Seoul opening ceremony, the author records the flag as history and struggle rather than ceremonial cloth, and writes of promises made to himself about what he would carry for his country (Haleem, 2026, pp. 228–230). The same passage that expresses unambiguous pride also establishes why disagreement had become unavailable. Honour of that magnitude does not sit alongside constraint; it produces it.

'Adl required the analysis to identify unequal authority, limited alternatives, and the expected costs of disagreement while preserving the author's agency and gratitude. A narrative that described sacrifice without its constraints would reproduce an institutional interpretation in which the athlete freely chose every risk and therefore owned every consequence. A narrative that denied the athlete's ambition would be equally unjust. The text supports neither reading, and the analysis reports both. Historical context was relevant but not exculpatory. Practices once celebrated as toughness may now be recognised as maltreatment, yet contemporary vocabulary should not be used to assign motives that the evidence cannot establish. Justice requires separation of what happened, how it was experienced, what was understood at the time, and how the event is interpreted now. Where those four could not be separated cleanly, the analysis reported the ambiguity rather than resolving it in either direction.

Niyyah: critique without grievance or spectacle

Niyyah addressed the danger that unresolved suffering could become a socially authorised form of revenge. Anger may identify injustice, but it can also simplify motives and reward the most damaging version of a story. The concept sits differently from the others in this analysis. Where the preceding sections declined to infer intention in others, *niyyah* is applied here only reflexively, to the author's own purposes in writing, which are the one set of intentions the analysis can report rather than reconstruct. The comparison between the texts shows a movement away from organising the narrative around one antagonist and towards distributed responsibility across the athlete, coaches, family, institutions, national expectations, and later interpretation. The representational evidence for that movement is set out in Section 4.2: an individuated pseudonym carrying attributable speech in 2006, composite figures and paraphrase in 2026. What changed was not the severity of the events recounted but the unit to which responsibility was attached.

This movement does not retract the earlier account. It disciplines its purpose. Details were retained when they clarified bodily risk, dependence, or silencing. The operative test for removal was not intensity but function: a passage was cut or compressed where its dominant effect was to establish the author as wronged rather than to establish how the wrong was produced. The same discipline applied to praise. Olympic participation and national representation were genuine sources of honour and could not be rewritten as only harm because harm had become the analytical focus. A text that converted every remembered good into evidence of a system's failure would misrepresent the record as surely as one that denied the failure. *Niyyah* is not proof of moral purity. Autoethnographic writing may pursue justice, explanation, recognition, and personal repair at the same time, and the author makes no claim to have separated them. Its methodological value lies in making those mixed motives objects of scrutiny rather than resolving them, and in revising passages whose primary effect is humiliation or spectacle.

Hisab: uncertainty, correction, and self-representation

Hisab extended responsibility beyond publication. Reviewers can test scholarship, but they cannot know every omitted context, relational consequence, or memory distortion. The author remains answerable as the text circulates among people who lived the history. This responsibility changed the treatment of uncertainty. Emotionally clear memories were not converted into exact quotations when wording was uncertain; later interpretations were presented as later interpretations; and distributed responsibility was not reduced to a single cause. If a factual error or unfair inference becomes apparent, accountability requires clarification rather than reliance on the defence that the text passed review. *Hisab* also applied to self-description, and here the 2026 book supplies a negative case against its own author. Its closing biographical note states that he captained the first Maldivian Olympic team and carried the national flag at Seoul in 1988. The same note records two specific and checkable firsts, namely the first Maldivian to break three hours for the marathon and the first Maldivian to complete a doctorate in sport (Haleem, 2026, pp. 249–250). Those formulations are conservative and verifiable.

The book's title, however, uses the broader phrase "the first Maldivian Olympian," which the body of the text nowhere defends. A reader could take that phrase to assert a precedence in competition. The 1988 programme does not support such a reading. The Maldivian

delegation contested athletics events across the Games, and the marathon in which the author competed was held on the closing day, so several teammates had entered competition before him. The gap between a cautious text and a less cautious title is exactly the kind of representational decision this article is about, and *hisab* requires naming it rather than resolving it in the author's favour. This is the clearest case in the corpus where restraint would have protected the author's own standing rather than anyone's dignity. Nothing in the title's claim exposes a third party, so silence about the gap between title and text would have cost no one but the reader. The same *satr* that limits unnecessary exposure of a coach would, applied here, have shielded the writer from scrutiny. That asymmetry is the point. A framework that governs only what an author discloses about others, and never what an author claims about himself, leaves the writer's interests systematically unexamined. Accountable testimony does not require an author to abandon a defensible claim about himself. It requires the grounds of any such claim to be visible enough that a reader can weigh them and, if unpersuaded, set them aside. Where the grounds are not stated, the claim should be narrowed to what the record supports. Applying that standard to the author's own status claims, rather than only to criticism of others, is what distinguishes accountability from self-justification.

National representation and small-state proximity

The Seoul opening ceremony brought the competing demands of this analysis into a single moment. The flag was not experienced as neutral ceremonial cloth but as a national history placed into the athlete's hands. The book describes the moment as follows: "It was not just cloth. It was history. It was a struggle. It was a declaration that we existed" (Haleem, 2026, p. 228). The honour was genuine, and it intensified a moral burden that made personal fear, injury, and disagreement appear secondary to collective representation. *Amanah* and *'adl* pull in different directions here. What the athlete held in trust was a country's first appearance, and weighing that against his own condition was not a calculation the situation invited him to make. Small sport systems amplify that pressure because roles overlap (Houlihan & Zheng, 2015). A coach may also be an administrator; an official may influence future selection; and colleagues may be connected through family or community. Such proximity can support care and commitment, but it can also weaken independent challenge. It creates a further difficulty for the writer. Disguising the setting removes the very context that makes the analysis meaningful, since the concentration of roles is not incidental to what happened but constitutive of it.

Accountable testimony responds by retaining national and institutional conditions while limiting personal identification. It shows how symbolic elevation and limited alternatives shaped compliance without treating national pride as false or every official as culpable. The ethical failure lies in assigning extraordinary responsibility to a young athlete without developing equally strong mechanisms of welfare, voice, and accountability. Small-state proximity also clarifies why silence requires justification. When one narrow network controls selection, resources, employment, and reputation, non-disclosure cannot be read as evidence that no problem existed. Athlete-centred safeguarding therefore requires confidential pathways, protection against retaliation, and decision-makers sufficiently independent of those who control sporting opportunity (Gurgis et al., 2022; Willson et al., 2022).

Discussion

Accountable testimony as a methodological contribution

Relational ethics has understandably placed substantial emphasis on the risks of disclosure and on the reasons required for exposing relational others. Accountable testimony adds a corresponding presumption: where structural harm is at stake, silence is also an ethically consequential act that requires reasons. Speech and silence are not equivalent in every case, but neither is automatically innocent. An omission that removes knowledge necessary to understand how harm was produced must therefore be defended in terms of necessity, proportionality, vulnerability, and public value. That silence carries ethical weight is not itself a new claim. Safeguarding research already treats athlete non-disclosure as produced by dependency and anticipated disbelief rather than by the absence of grievance (Chroni & Kavoura 2022; Gurgis et al., 2022). What accountable testimony adds is a structure for giving those reasons, drawn from a moral vocabulary in which concealment and disclosure are both already governed. The contribution is therefore methodological rather than conceptual: not the discovery that silence requires justification, but a way of making the justification explicit, contestable, and applicable to the author as well as to others. The framework describes autoethnographic writing that accepts an obligation to speak when lived knowledge reveals structural harm while rejecting the assumption that authenticity requires maximal exposure. It asks five connected questions: What knowledge has been entrusted to the author? What must justice make visible? What intention directs the writing? What can be concealed without protecting harm? To whom is the author accountable for representation and consequence? Figure 1 sets out the relationship between the five concepts, the two directions in which *satr* operates, and the symmetrical burden that both disclosure and silence carry.

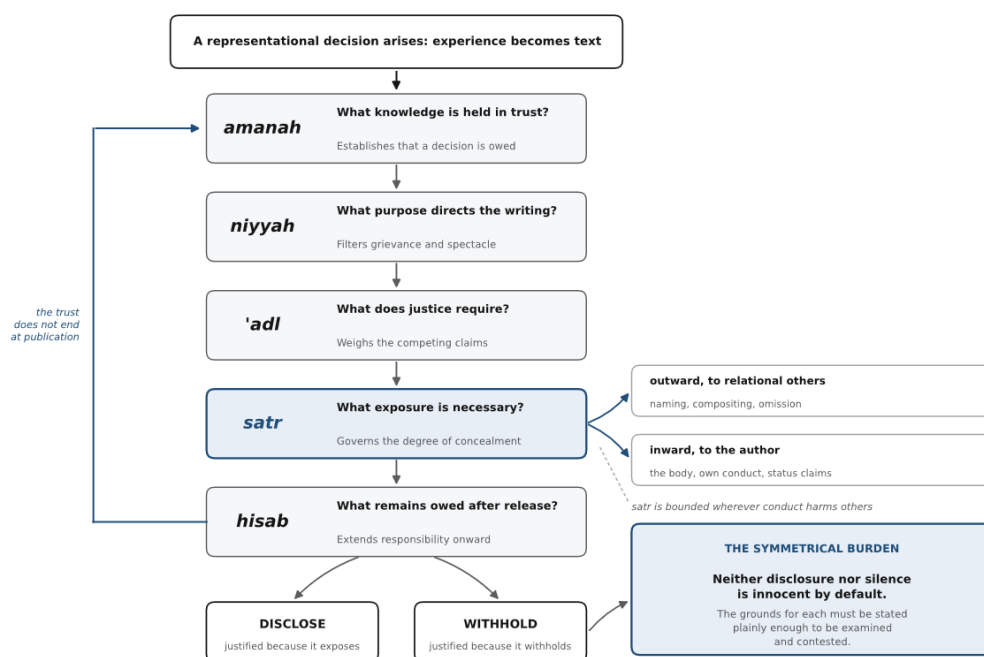


Figure 1. Accountable testimony as a decision structure. Five Islamic concepts are applied in sequence to a representational decision, with *satr* operating in two directions and *hisab* returning responsibility to *amanah* after publication.

The analysis develops this proposition in three ways. The situated question of what a writer should do now is given a structured but non-mechanical form, since the five questions organise judgement without replacing it (Ellis, 2007). An anticipatory caution towards relational others is balanced by a duty to justify restraint where silence would protect power rather than dignity, as Section 4.5 illustrates when the standard is turned on the author's own status claims (Tolich, 2010). And a principled resistance to formalised evaluation criteria is supplemented rather than overturned, because what is made visible is the author's moral reasoning rather than a score (Sparkes 2020, 2024). Accountable testimony shares a concern with bearing witness and speaking to power with recent framings of autoethnography as testimony (Herrmann & Adams, 2026). It adds a constraint that witnessing alone does not supply. Narrative ethics asks what stories do once they are released into social worlds (Frank, 2010). Accountable testimony asks instead what the author owed before release and what remains owed afterwards. The approach therefore differs from a general appeal to balance, because it requires reasons for the representational consequences of both speaking and withholding.

The concealed-medical-condition passage demonstrates the difference most clearly. A purely precautionary reading might remove it because a relational other did not consent and could be identifiable. Accountable testimony retains the mechanism while reducing exposure: no intention is attributed, the focus remains on anticipated disbelief, and the analysis explains why omission would make the environment appear safer than the source supports. Here *satr* governs form while *amanah* resists silence. The same passage also shows the framework doing work a secular account could not, since it was *satr* that identified the athlete's bodily reticence and his later representational restraint as one principle rather than two dispositions. The model also rejects two weak equations: emotional intensity with analytical depth, and procedural compliance with ethical completion. A manuscript may be moving yet unjust, anonymised yet internally identifiable, or restrained while concealing serious risk. Ethical strength lies in transparent reasoning that connects disclosure to analytical purpose and proportionate public value.

Implications for sport sociology and safeguarding

The ethical problem of autoethnography mirrors athlete disclosure, and Section 2.3 set out why. Both involve unequal power, fear of disbelief, uncertainty about consequence, and a tension between privacy and protection. Testimonial injustice helps explain why athlete knowledge may be discounted even when it concerns the athlete's own body (Luzzi, 2024). Faith-informed analysis adds that authority is not merely power but *amanah*: greater expertise and control create greater responsibility, and the burden of speaking should not fall on the person least able to carry it. For sport sociology, the analysis suggests that silence in athlete accounts should be read as data rather than as absence. Where a narrative omits an episode, the omission carries information about what the athlete judged unsayable and to whom. Studies of athlete voice that treat non-disclosure only as a methodological problem to be overcome may therefore discard the evidence most indicative of how a performance culture regulates speech.

For sport organisations, the analysis produces a narrower and more specific implication than existing safeguarding guidance supplies. Reporting mechanisms are commonly designed around the fear of a coach or an institution. The account examined here shows an earlier

barrier operating before any of that: the athlete could not name a bodily symptom at all, because the region concerned was one he had been raised to treat as unmentionable, a form of bodily concealment the tradition treats as continuous with the covering of others' faults (Osman, 2023). Existing reporting pathways are typically designed around independence from the coach or the institution rather than around what an athlete is able to say (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2023). A confidential pathway built solely around independence from the coach would not have reached him. Practitioners working with athletes from communities where bodily modesty carries religious weight should therefore ensure that at least one disclosure route does not require the athlete to name the affected body part to a person of the opposite sex, to a non-clinician, or aloud. Athlete voice should not otherwise depend on public self-exposure. Confidential reporting, independent investigation, survivor control over personal detail, and protection against retaliation function as institutional equivalents of *satr*, while credible action and transparent responsibility express *amanah* and *'adl*. Organisations should not celebrate disclosure while leaving the reporting athlete to absorb selection, employment, or reputational consequences. Islamic concepts should not become a generic safeguarding checklist. Religious language may support dignity and welfare, but it may also be used to demand loyalty or discourage criticism. Their value lies in dialogue with athletes and communities, and in making the moral assumptions of institutional practice visible. Ethical plurality does not weaken common safeguarding standards; it may make those standards more intelligible and usable in particular settings.

Limitations and future research

The limitations set out in Section 3.4 point to three studies that would test what this article can only propose. The first would test portability directly. Applying the decision matrix reported in Table 2 to a set of published sport autoethnographies by other authors, including writers from different Muslim traditions and non-Muslim writers, would establish which elements of accountable testimony travel and which depend on the Islamic vocabulary that generated them. The framework predicts that the five questions can be answered by any author, but that the reasons given will differ systematically by moral tradition. If non-Muslim authors produce the same justifications in the same proportions, the Islamic vocabulary is doing no distinctive work and the claim in Section 5.1 fails. The second would test the analysis against the people it concerns. Where represented others are living, contactable and willing, presenting them with passages at varying levels of disguise and recording how they judge necessity, proportionality and identification would show whether authorial and relational judgements converge. This bears directly on the compositing question: composites are assumed to protect dignity, but they may instead create a credibility problem, since a reader who cannot locate a figure may discount the account. Nothing in the present study establishes which effect dominates.

The third concerns small states specifically. Fragile anonymity and limited institutional independence may alter both reporting behaviour and willingness to participate in research, which would make safeguarding evidence generated in large systems a poor guide to small ones. A comparative study of disclosure pathways across several small island federations would test whether that is so, and the question is consistent with current safeguarding research priorities (Parent et al., 2024). Each of these designs shares a feature the present study lacks: an external check on the author's judgement. That is the condition under which

accountable testimony would cease to be a framework offered for use and become one that has been tested.

Conclusion

This article examined autoethnographic writing as a morally consequential practice through a 2006 doctoral thesis and a 2026 book. Across 16 representational decisions, *amanah*, *'adl*, *niyyah*, *satr*, and *hisab* produced accountable testimony: disclosure proportionate to analytical purpose, restraint where private detail adds little beyond exposure, and justification of silence wherever silence would conceal a safeguarding-relevant mechanism. Two findings show the framework doing work a secular account would not. *Satr* identified an athlete's reticence about his own body and his later restraint towards a coach as one principle rather than two. *Hisab* turned the same standard on the author, requiring him to name an overclaim in his own book's title. Sport organisations should ensure that at least one disclosure pathway does not require an athlete to name an affected body part aloud. Autoethnographers working from an explicit moral tradition should state the grounds of both what they disclose and what they withhold. Treating representational power as an *amanah* permits firm critique without abandoning moral restraint.

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