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**The Significance of Moral Shock –
the Armed Conflict in Palestine as a Case Study**

Abstract

This paper explores the phenomenon of moral shock in the context of the Palestinian conflict, with a view to understanding its implications for global ethical reactions. It suggests that moral shock may have moral significance and the potential for a positive impact at the global level. The paper is structured in three sections. The first explores the concept of moral shock. The second examines the armed conflict in Palestine through a moral shock perspective, highlighting specific aspects and incidents within the conflict that could potentially lead to moral distress. The third section discusses the broader implications of moral shock in this context. It suggests that moral shock may lead to positive outcomes by highlighting global responses to the ongoing events and showing how people worldwide react to these events.

Keywords

moral shock, Palestine-Israel conflict, intense surprise

Introduction

It is not uncommon to feel a sense of shock or disquiet when confronted with something that deviates from our expectations, whether it be the actions of another person or an unusual occurrence. For instance, people may be taken aback when they see a religious person engaged in actions that are perceived as immoral, such as lying or stealing. It is often the case that the more we know someone, the greater the moral shock we experience when they behave in a way that is unexpected to us. It is often observed that when we encounter unexpected moral behaviour or events, we may experience a kind of moral shock. In general, moral shock can be described as a temporary state of being immobilised or mentally frozen in reaction to witnessing or experiencing an event or behaviour that significantly contradicts one's moral expectations or beliefs. Such a response may arise from situations that are ethically challenging or emotionally distressing.¹

It might be suggested that moral shock is not necessarily caused by experiencing unexpected morally wrong actions. It may also arise from witnessing morally right ones. For instance, we may experience a certain degree of moral shock when we witness someone opposing their country's political agenda. One might consider the example of the analytic philosopher Bertrand Russell. In 1967, Bertrand Russell published a book entitled *War Crimes in Vietnam*.

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For a more philosophical discussion about shock and moral shock in general, see Stockdale (2022, pp. 498–501), Tappolet (2016), D'Arms and Jacobson (2000), Davidson (1982), and Judge (2018).

In it, Russell presents the argument that the United States bears responsibility for the war in Vietnam and offers his critique of the UK's involvement in the conflict. Two days before his passing in 1970, Russell penned a letter denouncing Israel's military action against Egyptian territory. He asserted that "the actions of Israel must be viewed with condemnation" (Russell, 1970). In light of the focus of this paper on the armed conflict in Gaza, I will discuss moral shock resulting from unexpected morally wrong actions, rather than those that may be perceived as morally right.

As previously mentioned, moral shock can be defined as a temporary state of mental paralysis or being "frozen" in response to witnessing or experiencing events or behaviours that starkly conflict with one's moral beliefs or expectations. Such a response may evoke feelings of shame or regret, perhaps due to a sense of helplessness in that moment. While these feelings may initially appear negative, they have the potential to lead to positive outcomes in the future. In this paper, I (1) explore the concept of moral shock, (2) examine the Palestinian conflict through a moral shock perspective, highlighting specific aspects and incidents within the conflict that could potentially lead to moral distress, and (3) discuss the broader implications of moral shock in this context, arguing that moral shock may lead to positive outcomes.

1. The State of Moral Shock

Moral shock is a common experience in our daily lives, yet there seems to be little reflection on its nature. This lack of inquiry is mirrored in academia, where research on moral shock remains limited. This section aims to contribute to the ongoing discussion on the concept of "moral shock," a framework that will be further applied in this paper.

Given the limited research on this phenomenon, our investigation begins with the term "shock", commonly used to denote a form of intense surprise. For instance, Jess Prinz describes shock as "an extreme form of surprise" (Prinz, 2004, 164). The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines shock as "a sudden jolt or onset of emotion which surprises, disturbs, or upsets a person or causes them to lose equilibrium (frequently with of); a feeling of" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2024). One of the examples of using "shock" in a sentence is "the extent of the violence came as a shock" (Collins Dictionary, 2024). Also, using the term "shock" as a form of surprise applies to our common speech on our daily lives. For example, we often say, "We are shocked by our national team's defeat." The usage of "shock" as a form of intense surprise illustrates the intensity of our reaction to a behaviour or an event. It could be argued that some events or behaviours may surprise us, but not shock us. To illustrate this point, one might not experience moral shock at a single instance of a white police officer arresting a black man on racially biased grounds. However, it could be suggested that widespread, systematic racially biased arrests within a police department in a democratic and liberal country, especially in a community with a majority of black residents, could elicit a significant shock.

One more important thing should be considered regarding understanding "shock" as a form of surprise. Philosophical accounts often describe shock as a reaction to unexpected behaviours or events. For instance, R. V. Feldman states that surprise is an immediate emotion to "which is *contrary* to expectation" (Feldman, 1934: 209). Also, Report M. Gordon states that "if S is surprised (amazed, astonished, disappointed) (about the fact) that *p*, then at

the time *S* came to be certain that *p*, that *p* was contrary to *S*'s expectation" (Gordon, 2003, 55).² However, this view of "shock" may be narrow, as shock can also result from anticipated actions. This means that even when we expect certain behaviours, they can still cause moral shock. For example, despite understanding ISIS's (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) extreme and violent ideology, their acts of terrorism in Iraq and Syria continue to shock us. Similarly, this paper will illustrate that, despite the historical predictability of Israel's actions, the armed conflict in Gaza still profoundly shocks people worldwide. Since the view of "shock" as a form of surprise may be narrow, I will follow Stockdale recent account that "it is also possible to be shocked when one's expectations about how things will go are confirmed" (Stockdale, 2022, 500).³ Hence, experiencing shock is not limited to situations that defy our expectations; rather, it can also occur when events unfold as we anticipate.

We have mentioned above that "shock" in general, is commonly understood as a type of intense surprise but what about specifically "moral shock"? We can experience shock from a variety causes, including events, behaviours, characters, and more. For instance, we would be shocked to learn that the Prime Minister of Israel has converted to Islam, or that Trump decided to withdraw of the US presidential election. Therefore, we need to specify what we mean by "moral shock". In this paper, I adopt Katie Stockdale's definition of moral shock as "an immediate emotional response, one that occurs without all of the data we need to make sophisticated moral judgments" (Stockdale, 2022, 499). For instance, the moral shock elicited by Russell's views on the Vietnam War and Israel's bombing of Egypt may be perceived as a response to what is considered a morally positive stance, evoking emotions like gratitude and pleasure. In contrast, moral shock caused by racially biased police arrests in a predominantly black neighbourhood in a democratic, liberal country is likely seen as morally wrong, triggering feelings of anger and displeasure. Accordingly, our experience of moral shock involves both emotional responses and evaluative judgments. Moral shock can be described as a spontaneous emotional reaction that arises before we have access to all the necessary information for making moral assessments.

We have noted that moral shock is an emotional reaction, and thus, it is affected by the individual's personality. It is possible that what causes moral shock for one person may not affect another in the same way. It is also worth noting that the intensity of this experience can vary from person to person. To illustrate, I might be quite taken aback to discover that my father has been misappropriating funds from his company, whereas someone who is not personally acquainted with my father might not be as affected. It seems fair to suggest that moral shock can be influenced by a number of factors, including an individual's beliefs, moral code and personal connections. Furthermore, it is worth noting that individuals may have varying reactions to moral shock. Some may display physical responses, such as difficulty speaking, uttering

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For other philosophers that adopt this account, see Ben-Ze'ev (2001), Dennett (2001) and Morton (2014).

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In *Moral Shock*, Stockdale mentions that moral shock may be significant in the following ways: (1) it can postpone or prevent anger, (2) it may provoke a feeling of shame, (3) it

can make us incapable of acting, and (4) it is often unforgettable (2022). In this paper, I build upon Stockdale's work and demonstrate that while the feelings caused by moral shock may be negative initially, they can ultimately lead to positive outcomes in the future within a specific, real-world context.

incoherent or illogical statements, a peculiar gaze, or an elevated heart rate (Harbin, 2016; Ekman and Cordaro, 2011; Zhao *et al.*, 2017).⁴ Hence, moral shock is as a subjective emotional reaction, varying based on individual personality, relationship to the event or person involved, and personal moral code.

Before proceeding to the next section, which details the armed conflict in Gaza, it is essential to consider three key characteristics of “moral shock” experience. Firstly, the use of “shock” to denote intense surprise illustrates the strength of our reactions to specific behaviours or events. Secondly, shock is not solely triggered by unforeseen occurrences but can also arise from expected situations or behaviours. Thirdly, moral shock is a subjective response, influenced by individual personality, connections to the involved parties or events, and personal moral beliefs.

2. The Context of the Israel-Palestine Conflict Before, on and after the 7th of October 2023

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the experience of moral shock, it is first necessary to consider the context of the Israel-Palestine conflict. Despite the historical predictability of Israel’s actions, the ongoing armed conflict in Gaza continues to have a profound impact on people worldwide. In this section, I will focus on the ongoing armed conflict in Gaza that began on 7 October 2023. I will also attempt to shed light on some general facts about the overall conflict, given the limitations of time and space. However, it is important to provide a brief introduction about the claims of both Israelis and Palestinians.

Background to the Armed Conflict

The conflict between Israel and Palestine is a long and complex one that dates back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Both Israelis and Palestinians claim the same part of the Middle East based on historical, religious, and cultural ties. Israelis consider the land their ancestral homeland, as outlined in their religious texts and historical presence in the region, which is central to the Zionist movement that aimed to establish a Jewish state (De Lange, 2010, 30–31). Palestinians, on the other hand, have lived in the region for centuries and see it as their homeland, with historical and continuous residence forming the basis of their national identity and claim. Jewish claims that they have historical and religious ties to the land dated back thousands of years. According to Jewish tradition and religious texts, the land of Israel, including the ancient kingdoms of Israel and Judah, is considered the ancestral homeland of the Jewish people (Genesis 15:1–21, New International Version). This connection is central to Jewish identity and forms the basis of their claim to the territory. From a historical perspective, the Hebrew Bible (Tanakh) recounts the history of the Jewish people and their connection to the land. Key events such as the covenant between God and the patriarch Abraham, the Exodus from Egypt, and the conquest of Canaan under Joshua are foundational to Jewish historical claims (Genesis 15:1–21, New International Version). Jerusalem, in particular, holds profound religious significance as the site of the First and Second Temples. Moreover, the land of Israel is not just a historical homeland but also a spiritual centre for Jews. The Torah, the central reference of Jewish

religious law, outlines commandments and rituals tied to the land, such as Amidah prayer and the Birkat Hamazon (Jewish Virtual Library 2024a, The 613 Mitzvot). Many Jewish prayers and religious observances express a longing for a return to Zion and the rebuilding of Jerusalem (My Jewish Learning, 2023).

Additionally, Jews have maintained a continuous presence in the land of Palestine for millennia, despite periods of exile and dispersion. Major Jewish communities existed in cities like Jerusalem, Safed, Hebron, and Tiberias throughout history, even during times of foreign rule. In the late 19th century, Theodor Herzl established the Zionist movement, which advocated for the re-establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. This movement gained momentum, leading to increased Jewish immigration to the region and the eventual establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. It is important to note the difference between the Zionist movement and Jews. While many Jews are Zionists, not all Jews support Zionism. Several Jewish movements and sectors oppose Zionism and the establishment of the state of Israel, such as Neturei Karta, Satmar Hasidim, Jews for Justice for Palestinians, and the International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network. Zionism is primarily a political movement, whereas Judaism is a religion and cultural identity. Understanding this distinction helps in clarifying the different dimensions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the varied viewpoints within the Jewish community.

On the other hand, Palestinians also have deep historical, cultural, and national claims to the land, which are grounded in their continuous residence and historical connections to the region. Historically, Palestinians trace their ancestry to various people who have lived in the region over millennia. This includes ancient civilizations such as the Canaanites, Philistines, and other indigenous groups (Bugh *et al.*, 2024). Over the centuries, the region now known as Palestine has witnessed the arrival of various conquerors and settlers, including Arabs who brought Islam to the area in the 7th century. This diverse historical lineage forms a significant part of Palestinian identity. Culturally, Palestinians have developed a unique dialect of Arabic that evolved over centuries. The majority of Palestinians are Muslim, with notable Christian minority (Ferrara, 2023). They also maintain a variety of traditional customs, including folk music, dance (such as the Dabke), cuisine, and crafts. These traditions have been passed down through generations and formed a vital part of Palestinian identity today. In the early 20th century, the modern Palestinian national identity began to take shape, particularly in response to the growing Zionist movement and British colonial rule. After World War I, the League of Nations granted Britain the mandate to govern Palestine (Ginat, 2018). During this period, Palestinian nationalism grew in response to both British policies and increasing Jewish immigration. The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 led to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, an event known as the Nakba (catastrophe).⁵ Many Palestinians became refugees, and this collective trauma is central to their national consciousness. Despite the upheavals of the 20th century, Palestinians have maintained a

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For more information on physical responses to shock, see Harbin (2016), and Ekman and Cordaro (2011). For details about facial expressions related to surprise, refer to Zhao *et al.* (2017).

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In 1948, Israeli paramilitary groups, Irgun and Lehi, carried out a massacre in the village of Deir Yassin, resulting in the deaths of approximately 107 Palestinian villagers (Morris, 2005).

continuous presence in the region. Villages, towns, and cities such as Gaza, Hebron, Nablus, and Ramallah have long-standing Palestinian communities. Even in areas that have experienced significant conflict, Palestinians have endeavoured to preserve their cultural heritage and way of life.

Conflicts arise from differing interpretations and understandings of territorial claims between Israelis and Palestinians.⁶ Since then, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been marked by competing claims to territory, including the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem. And Israel has been accused of committing numerous disturbing actions during the conflict with Palestine (Center for Preventive Action, 2023). Before considering the conflict in Gaza on and after 7 October 2023, it is important to explain why Gaza is significant globally, socially, and economically. The Gaza Strip is a small, narrow territory located along the Mediterranean coast in the Middle East, bordered by Israel to the north and east, and Egypt to the south. Despite its small size, approximately 365 square kilometres, Gaza is densely populated, with over 2 million residents. Politically, Gaza is a focal point of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Historically, several countries and authorities have governed Gaza. After the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, Gaza was administered by Egypt. Following the Six-Day War in 1967, Israel occupied Gaza. The Oslo Accords in the 1990s led to the establishment of the Palestinian Authority (PA), which was supposed to administer Gaza and parts of the West Bank. However, full implementation faced numerous obstacles. In 2005, Israel unilaterally withdrew its settlements and military from Gaza. In 2007, Hamas, an Islamist political and militant group, took control of Gaza after winning parliamentary elections and a subsequent violent conflict with the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority. This led to a political and administrative split between Gaza (controlled by Hamas) and the West Bank (controlled by the PA) (Britannica, 2024).

Hamas is considered a terrorist organization by Israel and other countries, and it is a significant player within the “Axis of Resistance”.⁷ This anti-Western, anti-Israeli alliance in the Middle East includes Iran, Syria, Hezbollah, and various Iraqi and Yemeni groups, and opposes Western influence and seeks to counter Israeli military strength. The support for Hamas by Iran and its allies adds to the geopolitical tension between pro-Western and anti-Western blocs, affecting global diplomatic efforts to address the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and regional security.

Gaza’s situation is central to any comprehensive solution to the conflict and remains a major point of contention in regional and international diplomacy. The blockade and frequent conflicts have created severe humanitarian conditions in Gaza, with high unemployment, poverty, and limited access to essential services such as healthcare, clean water, and electricity, leading to a protracted humanitarian crisis that attracts international concerns and aid efforts.⁸ Socially, Gaza’s population is young and densely populated or rather packed, with over half of its residents under the age of 18 (Mohammad, 2023). Ongoing conflict, economic hardship and political repression are straining the social fabric, leading to significant challenges in education, mental health and community resilience. Economically, Gaza is severely constrained by the blockade, which restricts exports, imports and the movement of labour. Industries such as agriculture, fishing and manufacturing struggle under these conditions, resulting in high levels of unemployment and dependence on international aid (Milton, Elkahlout & Attallah, 2024). The situation in Gaza has wider implications for regional stability in the Middle East, affecting Israel’s security policies, Egypt’s

border and security strategies, and international diplomatic efforts, particularly those led by the United Nations and various peace mediators. The ongoing conflict and humanitarian crisis in Gaza also affects global public opinion, shaping the narratives and policies of countries around the world regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In sum, Gaza's location, its separation from other Palestinian territories, and its political, social and economic significance make it a crucial focus for understanding the broader dynamics of the Middle East and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is also important to remember that Israel is often seen as a progressive and democratic country that takes human rights seriously. This can be seen in Israel's Declaration of Independence of 14 May 1948, which clearly recognises a commitment to equality and human rights as fundamental to its democratic nation:

"The State of Israel [...] will foster the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants; it will be based on freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel; it will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex; it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture [...]" (Jewish Virtual Library 2024b, The Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel)

Furthermore, Israel's commitment to equality and human rights is also enshrined in its Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty, which underscores the foundation of its democratic principles.

While acknowledging Israel's democratic foundations and commitment to human rights, it is also important to consider the context of the prison statistics. According to reports, there are approximately 7,200 Palestinian prisoners in Israeli custody, including 88 women and 250 children aged 17 and under (McKernan, 2023). According to human rights groups, nearly a third of these prisoners are held without Trials or official charges (Zilber, 2023). These practices are often justified by the Israeli authorities on security grounds, citing the need to prevent terrorism and protect national security. However, they have also been the subject of considerable international criticism and

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Other examples of massacres resulting from this conflict include the 1953 incident in Qibya, where approximately 69 Palestinians, including women and children, were killed (Ganin, 2005, 109). This massacre received international condemnation, including from the United States. In 1982, the Lebanese Forces militia, with the involvement of the IDF, perpetrated a massacre in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps. Most victims were Palestinians, with estimates of civilian deaths ranging from 450 to 3,500 (Fisk, 2001, 282–283).

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Since Hamas is considered a permanent threat to the existence of Israel, on December 27, 2008, Israel launched Operation Cast Lead, a 22-day military offensive that began with aerial and naval bombardments, followed by a ground invasion. This operation caused significant Palestinian casualties and extensive damage to Gaza's infrastructure. According to the UNHRC, about 1,400 Palestinians were killed, including 926 civilians,

255 police officers, and 236 fighters (2009). In response, the UNHRC established the Goldstone Report, led by South African judge Richard Goldstone, to investigate violations of international law during the conflict. The report concluded that Israeli forces potentially committed war crimes, including deliberate targeting of civilians and destruction of civilian infrastructure (UNHRC, 2009).

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An example of the result of continuous conflict is Operation Protective Edge, launched by Israel on 8 July 2014. During the seven-week offensive, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported that 2,251 Palestinians were injured, with 10 percent suffering permanent disabilities. The war caused extensive damage, leaving many homeless. Damage to medical facilities and schools disrupted essential services, worsening living conditions. For detailed information about the damage caused by IDF during the 2014 Gaza war, see OCHA (2015).

debate. These statistics can be shocking to people around the world, given that Israel is seen as an advanced and democratic country that takes human rights seriously.

To comprehensively understand the dynamics of the armed conflict in Gaza, an examination of the events on 7 October 2023 is pivotal. In the early hours of that day, Hamas initiated a multifaceted attack, called “Al-Aqsa Flood”, employing land, air, and sea operations. Israeli sources report that this assault resulted in the death of 1,151 individuals, including 274 military personnel (TOI Staff, 2023). Additionally, it is estimated that approximately 240 individuals were taken hostage (Shao & Gamio, 2023). Hamas’ operation elicited global astonishment due to the significant civilian casualties involved.

On 22 January 2024, Hamas issued a 16-page document aimed at justifying and defending their actions (Palestine Chronicle, 2024). Within this report, they acknowledged missteps, attributing them to the unexpected disintegration of Israeli defence mechanisms and ensuing turmoil at the border regions adjacent to Gaza. Despite these admissions, they claimed that the operation as a “necessary step” to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories (Hamas Media Office, 2024). The global response to the Hamas operation of 7 October 2023 has evoked different perspectives, with observers falling into three distinct groups.

The first group condemns Hamas, attributing sole responsibility for the Gaza conflict to Hamas. This faction upholds Israel’s right to self-defence by any means deemed necessary. For example, eminent German philosopher Jürgen Habermas has publicly stated that Israel’s military response to the events of 7 October is “justifiable in principle” (Oltermann, 2023). *The second group* holds that the actions of both Hamas and Israel are morally unjustifiable. Jack Russell Weinstein, for instance, unequivocally condemns the targeting of Israeli civilians, asserting that “nothing in the world justifies that” (Philosophical Currents, 2023). Furthermore, Weinstein criticized the forced displacement of one million Gazans to areas lacking in basic necessities such as food and water, areas that are also targets of bombardment, including the alleged use of internationally prohibited weapons like white phosphorus. Such measures, he argued, violate international law and raise profound humanitarian and ethical questions (Philosophical Currents, 2023). Conversely, *the third group* refrains from condemning Hamas’ actions, instead lauding the operation as “heroic” and an “achievement”. Osman Umarji, for example, refers to the operation as a “gift from Allah” (Anti-Defamation League, 2023). Similarly, Bikrum Gill, during a webinar, has expressed opposition to demands for the condemnation of Palestinian violence, implicitly supporting the actions taken by Hamas (Anti-Defamation League, 2023).

In this paper, I do not attempt to justify the actions or operations of any party involved in the armed conflict, as such an endeavour would require a comprehensive analysis of the multitude of factors leading to this complex situation. Instead, the paper focuses on documenting the various responses to the events of 7 October, with the aim of providing a comprehensive overview of the situation. Given the constraints of time and space, I will focus in particular on statements made by Israeli officials that potentially suggest incidents of genocide in Gaza. In addition, I will highlight some facts about the humanitarian situation that has caused moral shock around the world.

Response to 7 October 2023

Many Israelis officials gave statements that may indicate their intent to commit genocide in Gaza. I will now mention some of the statements that have caused moral shock around the world.

On 28 October 2023, as Israeli forces were preparing for a land operation in Gaza, the Prime Minister of Israel referred to a biblical story about the total destruction of Amalek by the Israelites (Sandler-Phillips, 2024). The Bible passage quoted is a directive for total destruction, advocating the killing of men, women, children and livestock without exception:

“Now go, attack Amalek, and proscribe all that belongs to him. Spare no one, but kill alike men and women, infants and sucklings, oxen and sheep, camels and asses.” (Sefaria, 1985, 15:3)

Furthermore, on 12 October 2023, President Isaac Herzog made a stark declaration implying collective responsibility in Gaza, stating:

“It’s an entire nation out there that is responsible. It’s not true this rhetoric about civilians not being aware or involved. It’s absolutely not true. [...] and we will fight until we break their backbone.” (Omaar, 2023)

Similarly, Israel’s Minister of Heritage reportedly said:

“... one of Israel’s options in the war in Gaza is to drop a nuclear bomb on the Strip.” (Cohen *et al.*, 2023)⁹

These statements have caused moral shock, particularly because they come from officials in a country that has experienced one of the most horrific genocides at the hands of the Nazis. In fact, Israel’s Declaration of Independence mentions, “The Nazi holocaust, which engulfed millions of Jews in Europe, proved anew the urgency of the re-establishment of the Jewish state”. The establishment of Israel in 1948 was profoundly influenced by the horrors of the Holocaust. Given the facts of the Holocaust and the founding principles of the State of Israel, the current situation in Gaza is a moral shock and raises critical questions about the ethical responsibilities of a state founded on the principles of preventing genocide and protecting human rights (more on this later). It is particularly jarring for a state born out of the ashes of the Holocaust to be accused of actions that some perceive as similar to those perpetrated by the Nazis against the Jews. As a result, the global community often views Israel through the lens of its historical experience with genocide and expects it to act as a moral exemplar in conflict situations. We should, thus, consider how these statements have been reflected in actions on the ground by the IDF, leading to a severe humanitarian crisis in Gaza,¹⁰ and examine how these developments have provoked moral shock around the world.

Dropping “dumb” bombs weighing up to 900 kilos on one of the densely populated areas in the world caused what the United Nations chiefs called a “crisis of humanity” (Guterres 2023). According to (OCHA), on the 88th day of the war, there were over 22,313 fatalities, 57,296 injured, and 1.9 million internally displaced (2024). At least 70% are women and children. Accordingly, over 115 Palestinian children are killed every day, which is described by the United Nations chief’s as “a graveyard for children” (UNICEF,

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For more statements that may indicate Israel intent to commit genocide in Gaza, see ICJ (2023).

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IDF Stands for Israel Defense Forces, the military forces of the State of Israel, responsible for defense and security operations.

2023). This fatality and injury rate led to a new acronym “WCNSF”, meaning “wounded child, no surviving family” (Save the Children, 2023). As of day 88 of the conflict, reports indicate that over 311 doctors and health workers, as well as 103 journalists, were killed while on duty in Gaza. Additionally, there have been 144 casualties among UN employees. The situation in Gaza has led to substantial physical and psychological harm to Palestinians, with significant displacement and destruction of infrastructure.¹¹ There are critical shortages of water, food, fuel, and electricity, and approximately 1.9 million Palestinians lack access to adequate shelter, clothing, and sanitation. Furthermore, the healthcare system is severely impacted, with shortages of medical supplies and equipment. Reports state that many injured, including children, have undergone surgery, such as amputations, under challenging conditions, sometimes without anaesthesia. The UN Secretary-General noted that even

“... humanitarian veterans who have served in war zones and disasters around the world – people who have seen everything – [say] they have seen nothing like what they see today in Gaza.” (Guterres, 2023)

The UNRWA Commissioner-General expressed being at a loss for words to describe the situation:

“... [we] are out of words to describe what is going on.” (Lazzarini, 2023)

And the World Health Organization labelled it as “unconscionable” and “beyond belief” (UN News, 2023).

Based on the incidents and facts mentioned above, it appears that the deliberate targeting of civilians and the destruction of civilian infrastructure are patterns followed by the IDF. Historical events such as Operation Cast Lead in 2008 – 2009 and Operation Protective Edge in 2014 exemplify this pattern, where significant civilian casualties and extensive damage to homes, medical facilities, and essential services were reported. Therefore, it seems logical to anticipate that Israeli forces might repeat these actions in future conflicts. But these statements indicate that, despite the historical predictability of Israel’s actions, the recent armed conflict in Gaza since October 7 continued to shock people worldwide, and the shock is further amplified by the recurring nature of these events, highlighting a persistent cycle of violence and suffering. This suggests that moral shock is not solely triggered by unforeseen occurrences but can also arise from expected situations or behaviour, especially when the behaviour consistently results in severe humanitarian crises.

The predictability of such actions by the IDF adds a layer of moral complexity and outrage. People react not only to the immediate horrors of civilian casualties and destruction of infrastructure, but also to the perceived failure of international mechanisms to prevent these predictable patterns of violence. This recurrence of violence, while predictable, creates a moral shock because it challenges the very principles of human rights and international law that many believe should govern state behaviour in conflict. Moreover, the global response to these events underscores a widespread expectation that Israel, as an advanced and democratic nation, should adhere to higher standards of conduct in warfare, particularly with regard to the protection of civilians. Disappointment and outrage stem from the perceived inconsistency between Israel’s stated commitment to democratic values and human rights, as enshrined in its Declaration of Independence and Basic Laws, and its actions during these conflicts.

Before moving to the next section, it is important to explain why I focus on Israel's behavior rather than Hamas'. While Hamas' operations, which resulted in civilian deaths and the taking of hostages, have shocked people globally, my focus remains on Israel for two primary reasons. First, Israel's blockade, the IDF's deliberate targeting of civilians, and the destruction of civilian infrastructure, as discussed above, are central to this analysis. Second, the behavior of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, particularly his role in undermining negotiations aimed at achieving a ceasefire and securing the release of hostages held by Hamas, demands closer attention. In the following lines, I will not discuss the first reason, as I have already examined the actions and intentions of Israeli officials and the IDF. Instead, I will focus on Netanyahu's role in the second reason.

Since 7 October 2023, numerous international efforts have sought to establish a ceasefire, mitigate the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, and secure the release of hostages. However, these negotiations have been repeatedly sabotaged. On 30 May 2024, U.S. President Joe Biden announced a new proposal aimed at securing the release of all hostages (Berman, 2024b). The plan, presented in three phases, sought to end hostilities and facilitate the release of the captives. On 1 June 2024, large-scale anti-government protests erupted across Israel, with demonstrators expressing frustration over the Israeli government's handling of the hostage situation and its hesitation to agree to a ceasefire (TOI Staff, 2024).

Although much of the international community is advocating for a hostage-ceasefire deal, Prime Minister Netanyahu's actions, particularly his introduction of new conditions to the negotiations, have led to a deadlock. His insistence on maintaining control over the Gaza–Egypt border, specifically the Philadelphi Corridor, is a key aspect of Israel's broader strategy to weaken Hamas and prevent future attacks. Netanyahu argues that controlling this border is crucial for preventing the smuggling of weapons into Gaza, which he believes would enable Hamas to rearm and prepare for further conflicts. This position has become a major obstacle in ceasefire negotiations. Netanyahu's stance has drawn criticism both domestically and internationally. Hostage families, frustrated by the stalled negotiations, have accused the prime minister of prioritizing military objectives over the safety of the remaining hostages. Some members of Israel's negotiating team have even accused Netanyahu of intentionally sabotaging the hostage deal (Bob & Lazaroff, 2024).

Moreover, on 31 August 2024, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) recovered the bodies of six hostages held by Hamas in a tunnel near Rafah in southern Gaza. The discovery of the bodies caused a surge of public anger and grief in Israel, leading to mass protests against the government's handling of the hostage situation. The families of the hostages, along with advocacy groups, criticized Prime Minister Netanyahu for failing to secure a deal that could have saved the hostages' lives, and they called for nationwide protests and strikes to demand a comprehensive hostage-release deal. On 7 September 2024, massive demonstrations rose against Prime Minister Netanyahu's government, with around 500,000 people rallying in Tel Aviv alone (Kirsh, 2024). These protests are driven by frustration over the government's handling of

hostage negotiations with Hamas, as well as a broader call for a ceasefire. Demonstrators are demanding that Netanyahu prioritize a deal to bring the hostages home, criticizing his government for allegedly prioritizing political interests over their release.

In conclusion, while the international community continues to push for a ceasefire and a resolution to the hostage crisis, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's actions have significantly complicated these efforts. Going forward, the focus will likely remain on whether Netanyahu can navigate these pressures to secure a deal that prioritizes the release of the remaining hostages while addressing the broader security concerns of Israel.

In the following section, I will show that this experience of moral shock has transformed into a positive response around the world.

3. The Moral Significance of Moral Shock

In the previous section, we demonstrated how the deliberate targeting of civilians and destruction of civilian infrastructure are patterns followed by the IDF, a fact that continues to shock people worldwide. We also discussed statements by Israeli officials suggesting an intent to commit genocide in the ongoing Gaza conflict and highlighted the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza, emphasizing its shocking impact. In the following lines, I will argue that the moral shock from these events can lead to positive outcomes, illustrating how people around the world are responding.

It is common for people in many countries to protest in support of Palestinians, especially in Islamic and Arab countries. However, the situation this time is different. Many pro-Palestinian protests have been held in countries that are well-known for their strong support of Israel. For instance, from 7 October 2023 until 1 January 2024, there have been seven national protests in London. On one such march, held on 11 November, over 300,000 people marched in London alone, in addition to other protests in major UK cities (Ducourtieux, 2023). Moving to Israel's strongest ally, approximately 300,000 supporters marched in Washington, D.C., making it the largest rally in solidarity with Palestine in US history (Hicks IV, 2023). Moreover, many Jewish movements participated in these protests, demanding a ceasefire in Gaza. For instance, on 18 October 2023, Jewish peace activists staged a sit-in on Capitol Hill, demanding an immediate ceasefire. While these protests are organized nationally, there was a global day of protests on 14 January 2024, involving more than 30 countries worldwide. In some of these worldwide protests, presidents and officials have participated.

Many governments around the world have condemned Israel's actions. For instance, Spain's Social Rights Minister Ione Belarra sent a message via social platform X:

"Dignity has filled the streets of Madrid today to urge the end of the genocide that Israel is planning against the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip. Freedom for Palestine." (Jones, 2023)

Another example is the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs, Josep Borrell, who condemns the "inflammatory and irresponsible statements" made by Israeli officials, which suggest forced displacements of the people of Gaza (Jones, 2024). Moreover, as of 16 November 2023, at least eight countries, including South Africa, Jordan, Turkey, Chile, Colombia, Chad, Honduras, Bahrain, and Bolivia, have withdrawn their ambassadors from Israel.

Internationally, on 22 December 2023, the United Nations Security Council approved Resolution 2720, addressing the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. The resolution calls for increased aid, including fuel, food, and medical supplies. It demands the opening of all Gaza border crossings for humanitarian aid and the appointment of a Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza. Moreover, on 29 December 2023, South Africa has filed a case against Israel at the International Court of Justice (ICJ), accusing Israel of genocide in its war on Gaza. This legal action alleged that Israel's military campaign in Gaza constituted a breach of the 1948 Genocide Convention, to which both Israel and South Africa are signatories. This treaty obligates states to prevent and punish acts of genocide, defined as acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group. The lawsuit specifically requests the ICJ to impose provisional measures to halt alleged violations by Israel. These measures are intended to protect the rights of the Palestinian people against further violation. The hearings for South Africa's case against Israel at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) were scheduled for 11 and 12 January 2024. Both South Africa and Israel were given two hours each on separate days to present their arguments. South Africa argued that Israel's military actions and the blockade in Gaza, particularly in Rafah, had caused significant civilian harm, alleging violations of the Genocide Convention. Israel, on the other hand, contested the claims, defending its actions as necessary self-defense against Hamas (ICJ, 2024).

The case has garnered international attention, with several countries and organizations expressing support for South Africa's legal action. This includes the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Malaysia, Turkey, Jordan, Bolivia, the Maldives, Namibia, Pakistan, the Arab League, Colombia, and Brazil, among others. On 24 May 2024, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled that Israel must immediately halt its military operations in Rafah, a city in the southern Gaza Strip, and open the Rafah border crossing for urgent humanitarian aid (United Nations, 2024). This decision came in response to South Africa's request, accusing Israel of violating its obligations under the Genocide Convention. It is important to note that while ICJ judgments are legally binding, the court does not have enforcement power. If a judgment is not complied with, the issue can be taken to the United Nations Security Council, where permanent members like the United States have veto power. Moreover, in response to Israel's operation in Rafah, several European countries have recently recognized the Palestinian state. These countries include Norway, Ireland, and Spain (Berman, 2024a). This recognition, which has entered into force on 28 May 2024, is seen as a significant political move, especially in the context of the ongoing conflict in Gaza. The leaders of these countries have emphasized that recognizing Palestine is crucial for supporting moderate forces and maintaining the possibility of a two-state solution, which they believe is essential for lasting peace and security in the Middle East.

I will end this section with one more global response, established by students from countries that are among the strongest supporters of Israel. In April 2024, students at Columbia University organized a "Gaza Solidarity Encampment" to express solidarity with Palestinians and protest against the ongoing conflict in Gaza (Banerjee, 2024). The protest involved setting up tents and banners, creating what the students called a "Liberated Zone". The encampment was a response to the ongoing conflict in Gaza and aimed to draw attention to Palestinian struggles and demand the university divest from companies

associated with Israeli activities in the region. The encampment quickly drew significant attention and participation, with hundreds of students and faculty members joining. However, it also faced backlash. Counter-protests occurred, and the university administration took measures to disperse the encampment. This included authorizing the NYPD to clear the area, resulting in the arrests of over 100 students who were cited for trespassing. Despite these actions, the movement continued, with new encampments forming and ongoing protests and demonstrations taking place on campus. On 15 August 2024, Columbia University President Minouche Shafik resigned from her position due to the turmoil surrounding the encampment (Allen & Singh, 2024).

The “Gaza Solidarity Encampment” movement has sparked a significant wave of student activism both in the United States and globally. In the U.S., the movement has seen the establishment of encampments on more than 140 campuses, including prestigious universities such as Harvard University, the University of California at Berkeley, and the University of Michigan (Looker, 2024). These encampments are part of a broader effort to advocate for Palestinian rights and to demand that universities divest from companies linked to Israeli activities in Gaza. The student protests have extended beyond encampments to graduation ceremonies, where top students have mentioned Palestine in their speeches and waved Palestinian flags. This public display of solidarity underscores the importance of these movements, particularly given that many U.S. presidents and high-ranking officials are alumni of these institutions. The activism of these students reflects a growing awareness and advocacy for Palestinian rights within influential academic circles. These movements are not limited to the United States. Globally, similar protests have taken place at universities, indicating widespread support for the cause. These protests and encampments around the world have led to positive outcomes. It influenced the ongoing conflict in Gaza by raising international awareness. Protests around the world have brought international attention to the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, encouraging media coverage and discussions. This awareness has shifted the narrative from solely focusing on military actions to emphasizing the need for humanitarian relief and a ceasefire. For example, large protests in cities like London, New York, and Paris have pushed global media outlets to cover the protests, placing Gaza’s plight on the front pages of major news outlets.

In several instances, these protest movements have catalyzed governmental discussions and actions, particularly in the UK and the US, where debates in Parliament and Congress have focused on providing humanitarian aid and reconsidering arms sales to Israel. For example, in the UK, widespread protests and public outcry have spurred parliamentary debates, with over 130 MPs advocating for a suspension of arms exports to Israel, citing concerns over potential violations of international humanitarian law in Gaza (Sultana, 2024). This public pressure has resulted in the suspension of 30 out of 350 arms export licenses, a decision announced by Foreign Secretary David Lammy on 2 September 2024, following a review of Israel’s compliance with humanitarian law (Maddox, 2024). However, many MPs and advocacy groups continue to push for a broader and more comprehensive arms embargo.

Student movements worldwide have prompted several universities across Europe to suspend cooperation with Israeli institutions due to the ongoing conflict in Gaza and concerns over human rights violations. Institutions such as Trinity College Dublin, the University of Ljubljana, Leiden University,

Ghent University, OsloMet University, and others have taken action in response to these concerns (Matthews, 2024). Furthermore, in Spain, the Conference of University Rectors in Spain (CRUE), representing 76 universities, announced that they would suspend collaboration with Israeli universities that fail to demonstrate a clear commitment to peace and adherence to international humanitarian law (Jack, 2024).

Conclusion

We often experience moral shock in our daily lives, but we do not investigate this experience. This paper attempts to explore this phenomenon briefly. We have seen that *moral shock* is a strong reaction, not only to surprising events, but also to anticipated situations. It is a subjective experience, shaped by individual personality, relationships to the events or people involved, and personal moral values.

Having explored the concept of moral shock, we have found that it can be triggered by both unexpected and expected events. For example, despite the predictability of Israel's actions, the ongoing armed conflict in Gaza continues to shock people around the world. I also highlighted statements by Israeli officials and the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza, both of which contribute to global moral shock. Finally, we observed how moral shock can lead to positive outcomes. This was demonstrated by global responses to the ongoing events, showing how people worldwide have reacted by raising international awareness, catalyzing governmental discussions and actions, suspending arms sales to Israel, and halting cooperation with Israeli institutions. While these responses are positive, they are still not enough to stop the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

Learning about the theory of moral shock provides a deeper understanding of the emotional and ethical dimensions of the Palestine-Israel conflict. In the context of this conflict, the bombing of civilian areas and other human rights violations have triggered widespread moral shock, prompting global reactions that range from protests and calls for ceasefires to increased humanitarian aid efforts. This theory helps explain why predictable events, such as repeated violence in this region, continue to evoke strong emotional responses. Even when the conflict's trajectory is foreseeable, the moral weight of witnessing ongoing suffering and destruction can still shock the global conscience. This collective moral shock not only highlights the ethical gravity of the situation but also serves as a catalyst for action, pushing individuals and societies to take a stand against perceived injustices. By understanding moral shock, we can better appreciate how it drives global empathy, solidarity, and demands for ethical intervention, ultimately showing how emotional reactions to conflict can lead to positive, proactive responses on the world stage.

This work could be extended to examine how the international stance of certain countries can create a global moral shock. For example, exploring the use of the US veto in the UN Security Council to block immediate ceasefires in Gaza, or analysing the potential double standards in Western media coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, would be illuminating. Time constraints limit this investigation, but further research could build on these points. Hopefully, the world will unite in seeking an immediate ceasefire as a step towards peace in the Middle East, so that we can overcome this moral shock.

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Ali Sharaf

Značaj moralnoga šoka – vojni sukob u Palestini kao studija slučaja

Sažetak

Ovaj rad istražuje fenomen moralnoga šoka u kontekstu palestinskoga sukoba, s ciljem razumijevanja njegovih implikacija na globalne etičke reakcije. Sugerira da moralni šok može imati moralno značenje i potencijal za pozitivan učinak na globalnoj razini. Rad je strukturiran u tri dijela. Prvi istražuje koncept moralnog šoka. Drugi ispituje oružani sukob u Palestini kroz perspektivu moralnog šoka, ističući specifične aspekte i incidente unutar sukoba koji bi potencijalno mogli dovesti do moralne uznemirenosti. Treći dio raspravlja o širim implikacijama moralnoga šoka u ovom kontekstu, argumentirajući da moralni šok može dovesti do pozitivnih ishoda putem naglašavanja globalne reakcije na tekuće događaje, pokazujući kako ljudi diljem svijeta reagiraju na te događaje.

Ključne riječi

moralni šok, palestinsko-izraelski sukob, intenzivno iznenađenje

Ali Sharaf

Die Tragweite des moralischen Schocks – der bewaffnete Konflikt in Palästina als Fallstudie

Zusammenfassung

Dieses Paper exploriert das Phänomen des moralischen Schocks im Kontext des Palästinakonflikts, in der Absicht, dessen Implikationen auf globale ethische Reaktionen zu erfassen. Es lässt darauf schließen, dass ein moralischer Schock moralische Gewichtigkeit wie auch das Potenzial für positive Ausflüsse auf globaler Ebene haben könnte. Die Arbeit ist in drei Abschnitte gegliedert. Der erste erkundet das Konzept des moralischen Schocks. Der zweite Abschnitt durchforscht den bewaffneten Konflikt in Palästina aus der Perspektive des moralischen Schocks, indem er spezifische Aspekte und Vorfälle innerhalb des Konflikts, die gegebenenfalls zu moralischem Kummer führen könnten, hervorhebt. Der dritte Abschnitt greift die umfangreicheren Implikationen des moralischen Schocks in diesem Zusammenhang auf. Er legt nahe, dass ein moralischer Schock zu positiven Ergebnissen hinführen kann, indem er globale Reaktionen auf die laufenden Ereignisse unterstreicht und aufzeigt, wie die Menschen weltweit diesen Ereignissen begegnen.

Schlüsselwörter

moralischer Schock, Israelisch-palästinensischer Konflikt, intensive Überraschung

Ali Sharaf

**L'importance du choc moral –
le conflit armé en Palestine comme étude de cas**

Résumé

Cet article explore le phénomène du choc moral dans le contexte du conflit palestinien afin de comprendre ses implications pour les réactions éthiques globales. Il est suggéré que le choc moral peut avoir une importance morale et un impact positif à l'échelle mondiale. L'article est structuré en trois sections. La première aborde le concept de choc moral. La deuxième examine le conflit armé en Palestine sous l'angle du choc moral, en mettant en lumière des aspects et des incidents spécifiques au sein du conflit qui pourraient potentiellement conduire à une détresse morale. La troisième section discute des implications plus larges du choc moral dans ce contexte. Elle suggère que le choc moral pourrait entraîner des résultats positifs en soulignant les réactions mondiales aux événements en cours et en montrant comment les gens dans le monde réagissent à ces événements.

Mots-clés

choc moral, conflit israélo-palestinien, surprise intense