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FORGIVENESS IN POLITICS AND ITS RELATION WITH JUSTICE: REVIEWING AN AXIOLOGICAL DEBATE

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Abstract:

Politics, a cognitive behaviour, with its phenomenal spectrum is believed to be elementary for social formation. Despite its capacities politics spontaneously and almost innately patronised the exercise of power in every stage of human relations from interpersonal to international and subversively contributed to the darkest part of history with narratives of human sufferings.

This article identifies the loose ends of the power narrative through the contrivance of an ethical archetype of Political Forgiveness. The didactic paradigm of forgiveness is pitted against Realism which has ever remained triumphant spoiling the innate dark sides of human nature. It might, however, seem merely an academic thought practice but this article has adequately identified slippages where humanity prevailed over crude power through predicaments with congruent contextuality of philosophical logic and arguments based on regular political theories.

Besides the ideas of Hannah Arendt, Jacques Derrida this piece of writing incorporated the thoughts of John Rawls, Thomas Nagel, Charles Beitz and others in prioritising the notion of cooperation and forgiveness while weighing the chances of Cosmopolitanism in global politics. This is an attempt to challenge the idea of global justice in identifying the paradoxes of Realpolitik while exposing the back out of ethics from politics endangering a rudimentary element of social living.

Keywords: Realism, Cosmopolitanism, Global Justice, Ethics, Humanism

1.0 Introduction:

To forgive, however, is not to forget; it is not letting by-gones be by-gones. Forgiveness is merciful when compared with the revenge that is being waived, but it is not an everything-is-hunky-dory kind of thing [...] The forgiven person is not innocent; he is on parole. Forgiveness can be faked [...] Indeed the victim is as often forced by social pressure to forgive no less than the wrongdoer is forced to apologize. A stubborn and unforgiving victim eventually will see sympathies of third parties shift in favour of the penitent wrongdoer, as long as the penitent plays his remorsefulness in such a way that it convinces others of its sincerity. Refusing to grant forgiveness in order to nurse your resentment is tricky business for your honor [...] The wronged person who "forgives" actually might prefer a faked apology, not just because it is a sign that it hurt the wrongdoer to give it but also because it allows him not to forgive completely and still cherish some hatred.

- William Ian Miller, *Faking It* (2003, pp. 91-93)

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Politics is known to be one of the oldest disciplines in the history of human academic endeavour. Empirically this fact is true according to the documented history. However, philosophically this fact could be understood as 'autotelic' owing to the antiquity of the political life of the humankind. And, therefore, it is invariably contributory to the development of the sovereign state and eventually the contemporary nation state from the primordial tribal life over a long period of time. In this context one could refer to Aristotle and that he has thought of human being as a political animal, it would not be wrong to think that political behaviour is an essence and element of our social being. But it has always been seen as a dilemma that politics and ethics do not get along very well and the ethico-political questions are only addressed in case of the 'citizens' who remains within the purview of the sovereign state. Here to elucidate the irrelevance of morality within politics one can examine the issues concerning the citizens and non-citizens through the contextualisation of the refugee crisis all over the world.

Interestingly, there are people who are stateless. Refugees, fugitives, illegal migrants, asylum seekers and may be many others without having any objective categorisation; who may not have official identification or do not fall under any particular nomenclature. There can be even more beyond one's knowledge. But irrespective of their categorical different identities, simply put, they are non-citizens whether physically existent or officially non-existent. And they do not enjoy several basic political rights and are not treated as equals. This is where politics identifies itself in choosing its priorities by making categorical division within a biological species itself called the *homo-sapiens* and that cause enormous difference in the survival of the new category.

This situation might sound hypothetical academically but in reality, we know there are millions of them who do not have a state. This might sound but is not a revolutionary revelation, neither a new discovery nor any novel academic problematic, rather, this is 'Realpolitik' which has long successfully made such things 'normal' and people are used to it. People are generally indifferent to the non-citizens. Refugees are, as an example, are never a welcoming thing. They are seen as liabilities in the GDP-oriented economies. They are allowed to live in the fringes, in shanty ghettos, if not with burb-wired incarcerations. They have compromised living with poor accommodation. Psychologically one would not feel at home in such circumstances so do the refugees and they generally reciprocate in contributing to the political turbulence of their host nation. Apart from popular democratic means for protest many choose the path of violence in venting their anger. Sardonicly, their political activities are not constitutional rather as nuisances since they are not citizens. However, in many parts of the world such spontaneous political movements ultimately left mark on the national politics and in many places, refugees have successfully established their claim for rights and equality. If one analyses India's history after the partition of 1947 and again after the Bangladesh war of 1971 many of the refugees successfully became normal citizens of course through the dynamics of regional politics where religion, language and political ideology played important roles. However, this article would like to highlight another such issue which do not consider a political phenomenon in the mainstream politics. Though is very much a common human behaviour. And that is forgiveness.

When one talks of forgiveness it technically connotes a religio-ethical paradigm. Therefore, the act of forgiving one's perpetrator as a political behaviour does not find any taker among the Political thinkers. But since antiquity human relation has respected forgiving the sinner. In every religion forgiveness is seen as a virtue. And it is praised by the sacred texts. When religion can play such determining factor in politics why not forgiveness? When people are persecuted in the name of politics, we address that as political. When religion unite people and nation states are build it gets automatic recognition as a political event. Constitutions protects individual right to religion no one raise an eye brow. Simply put when religion plays a pejorative role that becomes political, but if forgiveness is considered as a religious virtue why politics do not give it its due recognition as a

political act? Political theory has never discussed forgiveness as a contributor in social living. But there are empirical facts when the victims of some past events have forgiven their persecutors to let go off the moral burden in view of a new beginning. This article would like to examine the case of forgiveness in our socio-political living as a political behaviour and would seek to establish it as a benchmark for the establishment of justice in our conflicting socio-political relation.

Defining the science of politics is always summarised as something to deal with power among the individuals as well as among modern nation states. Since Thucydides and Kautilya to Michael Foucault power kept on maintaining its dominance over all other social behaviour as being political. On assessing the role of Law beyond the territory, Jeremy Bentham, much before the emergence of an international organisation, sincerely felt that International Law is the vanishing point of Jurisprudence. In contemporary politics H.J. Morgenthau and Kenneth Waltz have bolstered this idea of Bentham and they have seen the international system as being an anarchy.

Since the post-World War II, the legal systems of western liberal democracies are seen as the only feasible systems of equity where ethico-political issues are politically addressed, however insular and lopsided, this notion is popular among political scientists of the west. But moral values and ethical issues do not find a place in those systems as well. Therefore, the dichotomy of ethics and politics is as common as it was in the past. This article shall try to locate the place of forgiveness in politics keeping in view its recent use in domestic and international politics.

R. Scott Appleby in his *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence and Reconciliation* describes how apology and forgiveness as a new form of conflict transformation is taking shape among communities plagued by violence. Where religious faith and practices are being used to conflict termination through the conceptual prism of forgiveness.

Yehudith Auerbach in his article *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: The Religious Dimension* explains this phenomenon, giving vivid description and analysis. He has pointed out that on one hand there is spiralling of violence and hostilities among races, tribes and religions all across the world on the other there are increasing efforts at redressing past evils and enhancing justice and peace among different nations and communities in the form of apologies and requests for forgiveness. Following are some of the examples of such incidents:

- The Czech- German Declaration of Mutual Relations and Their Future Relations issued in January 1997, where they exchanged apologies for past grievances caused by each of them to the other's population;
- The Russian apologised to the Polish people for the murder of fifteen thousand Polish officers in Katyn (Mikhail Gorbachev admitted it long back in 1991 which was officially addressed by the Duma in 2010);
- The then Polish President asked for Israeli forgiveness in the Israeli Parliament in May 1991; and
- Austrian President apologised to the Jewish people for their participation in the Holocaust in 1991;
- In other instances, a nation-state apologized for its misconduct to a group that was the object of transgression. In August 1996 President of South Africa apologised to the black people for the brutalities they have been subjected to during the apartheid era;
- In some cases, the apology was accompanied by the offer of compensation as was extended by the Reagan administration to Japanese-Americans who had been incarcerated during the WWII;
- Australia, New Zealand and Canada have tried to compensate their indigenous people.

These are the examples where the nations have tendered their apologies at an institutional level, which have been recorded as official exchanges. But at informal levels too such exchanges happened and the Truth and Reconciliation Committee experience in South Africa being the most remarkable among them. This committee has also attempted to address past injustices under the aegis of Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu¹. This was, perhaps the most prominent and popular example of seeking public apologies for forgiveness by the former tormentors to their past victims or to their families to avoid legal persecution. Similar experiences have been seen in Argentina, Chile, El Salvador, Honduras, Rwanda, Uruguay and in Peru.

Through the mass media Bill Clinton and George Bush apologised to the African people for slavery of African natives by Americans and the English Prime Minister Tony Blair apologised to the Irish people's suffering during the grand famine of 1840. Strikingly opposite examples are also there as, when asked Barack Obama refused to apologise to Japan for the notorious nuclear disaster done by the US at the end of the WWII and the British Government never apologised to India for their thorough exploitation of the colonial people, however, on more than one occasion they expressed grief for the massacre of *Jalianwalabagh*.

2.0 Political Guilt: Confessing the Atrocities of the Past:

There is a double process in the recognition of guilt. On the one hand, the evildoer has to recognize that they have committed some form of evil towards society, for instance, killing innocent people regardless of their nationality is morally evil. On the other hand, the evildoer has to change his or her heart and feel guilty, that is, he/she has to judge himself/herself as partly or totally responsible for these atrocities. Jaspers postulates: "Brainwork is not all that this requires. The intellect must put the heart to work, arouse it to an inner activity which in turn carries the brainwork" (Jaspers, 2009, p. 16). Henceforth, it can be said that this process cannot be imposed by external forces such as criminal trials; instead, it requires a process of self-reflection, a sincere dialogue with one's own consciousness.

Prima facie, the very notion of political guilt involves recognition of harms already done, it forces us to look at the past. As Herbert Morris points out, if the feeling of guilt is appropriate it summons us to "take the past seriously" (Morris, 1976, p. 108). In this sense, the process of self-reflection is a search for what really happened and our role in it. But when the issue concerns crimes committed by institutions, which are possible either with the support or the indifference of most people, such as in the cases of Germany, Argentina, Chile or Colombia, that search is not merely individual, it requires a cooperative endeavour that must involve the whole society. Karl Jaspers sets forth four types of guilt: criminal, political, moral, and metaphysical. One can find in Jaspers' reflections a dramatic picture of a series of dilemmas that form the question of German guilt and, in general and in specific the question of people's responsibility².

According to Jaspers, not all Germans were criminals and it is up to the judges of the tribunal to determine who the authors of the crimes were. According to Jaspers, this approach avoids the danger of treating a whole population as criminals. Crimes are concrete actions, committed by concrete individuals. Nations, cultures, and ethnic groups are abstractions and generalizations; they are not moral agents with intentions and motivations. This proposition on the part of Jaspers, makes the very conception of political guilt very problematic.

Asking for forgiveness for a past sin has roots in religion. However, three monotheistic religion shows significant differences in their approaches towards forgiveness; while Judaism and to some extent Islam, see repentance as analogous to forgiveness, Christianity on the other hand teaches to ask and grant forgiveness without preconditions. Can such religious value work as a political tool for conflict resolution and look beyond past suffering? Paradoxically we can see the growing cases of violence due to the growth of religiosity has brought about the clash of civilizations. If a deep

feeling of religious faith can motivate the growing movement towards the pursuit of justice through rampant violence why forgiveness cannot motivate people for the betterment of society? The realists and neorealist do admit religiosity behind the growth of terrorist activities but they fail to consider the places of forgiveness and similar values in politics except as 'track two' diplomacy when the 'track one' has failed to yield.

However little the values of forgiveness be in politics; it has a strong appeal to humanity and its axiological aspects have intrigued Philosophers like Jacques Derrida and Hannah Ardent. Since this article problematizes the strengths and lengths of forgiveness in politics the Derrida-Arendt debate on forgiveness seem appropriate. Michael Janover in his *The Limits of Forgiveness and the Ends of Politics* writes,

Jacques Derrida suggests that forgiveness plays an essential, yet necessarily paradoxical, role in the fraught politics of reconciliation and in the legal, political and moral responses to crimes against humanity. He argues with awareness of the paradoxicality of his argument, and seemingly without irony, that forgiveness exists only for (because of and in response to) those acts that are unforgivable. Hannah Ardent, by contrast, has argued that we are simply incapable of forgiving the most serious crimes against persons qua persons, crimes against humanity, quintessentially the crimes of genocide. For her such crimes are strictly unforgivable and, in that status, they throw light on boundaries intrinsic to human action, and hence to political and moral life. Not only do such crimes not call forth forgiveness but for Ardent they point to a space (or a chaos) that seems to lie outside of human action or response, defying judgement and thought itself. Neither Derrida nor Ardent gave any exhaustive philosophical analysis of forgiveness. They were interested in its significance as an 'idea' and an experience but less concerned with its analysis in the purely conceptual terrain of analytical philosophy. (Janover, 2006, p. 228)

3.0 Justice and Collaborative Societal Living:

Moving onto the last part of this article through arguing the aspects of morality and values in the societal life one might wonder how could justice – which is again a value however, unquestionably political – be relevant in this discussion. It is where the motto of an academic argument lies. One could either be successful in establishing the argument justifiably or else may not. But still arguments should remain as the mainstream of social research. Even a failed argument can enlighten some unexplored areas of thought where such enquiries have never been made. Research methodology teaches a researcher about the discipline's search for new avenues of thought. A researcher should not ponder over searching truth, because there can be many truths depending on the focus of argument. Social science should refrain from searching truths since such an endeavour could kill the liberal atmosphere of the tradition of argument. Therefore, in this article the relationship of two values are contextualised to reach to the point where the political living of the *homo-sapiens* could find sustainable ways to peaceful living. In this context Charles Beitz is a thinker of International Politics who looks into the justification of values themselves and their interrelationship with individual behaviour at global scale. He has elaborated the principles of justice in the background of the complexities of state and individual interexchange. He has promoted an ideal of collective life in his book *Political Theory and International Relations* (1979). As Thomas Nagel says:

[a]n ideal, however attractive it may be to contemplate, is utopian if real individual cannot be motivated to live by it. But a political system that is completely tied down to individual motives may fail to embody any ideal at all. (Nagel, 1989, p. 904).

Beitz came up with his ideas when the mainstream of Political theory was dominated by the Utilitarianism which wanted to maximise social welfare and on the other hand International Relations was lacking the wisdom to grapple with the growing needs complexities of social interdependence owing to the prevalence of power-centric Realist paradigm.

Charles Beitz's ideas coincided with the emergence of John Rawls' work *A Theory of Justice* (1971), which is remembered as the renaissance of political theory in the United States. The popularity of the Rawlsian idea of justice provided the context to rediscover liberal political theory. Beitz believed that despite its intrinsic state-centrism Rawlsian idea of justice has potentials to deliver at the international level as well. At least Rawls himself elaborated his thought in that direction twice through an article in 1993 and later in a monograph named *The Law of Peoples* (1999). The book is not as popular as his *magnum opus* of 1971 due to its unorthodox stance on global politics but it definitely bolstered the arguments of the Cosmopolitans and they felt the alleged limitations of the arguments of *The Law of Peoples* could be defended in terms of universal self-interest. It was a short but very dynamic stage in world history that orthodox Realism had series of setbacks despite its daunting claim over national interest and security paradigm. Because of a sudden and spurt of economic prosperity all across the globe and emergence of global flow of free capital and Human Resource which reflected through enhanced GDP and best ever *per capita* income. Suddenly pluralism and international cooperation seemed like popular theoretical buzzwords which allowed the thinking of the likes of Cosmopolitans to sail through. However, Realist ideals recuperated within decades and inundated the minds of the academicians as well as the politicians, journalists down to the lay men with its clichéd but politically productive nationalist stance and majoritarian-populism propaganda. A milieu can fail the philosophy of Cosmopolitanism but its epistemology configures those algorithms of humanism on which the civilization has thrived and has come of age.

4.0 Conclusion:

Political forgiveness is necessarily a conditioned forgiveness because "the political" is by definition a conditioned realm, a discipline relying on various variables. The theme of forgiveness in politics, hence, takes an additional significance in international conditions of state breakdown, resurgent nationalism, intra-state and international wars, increasing displacement and exploitation of persons. A politics of forgiveness, if we can use that term to describe the cluster of concerns with remembrance and recognition, apology and overcoming of past violations, is likely to demand further attention into the future, given the sheer pace and quantum of present conflicts. It is likely far-fetched to hope that reflection on forgiveness could forestall, or educate against, collective outrages.

I would like to conclude this article with a precious quote from Avishai Margalit's seminal book *The Ethics of Memory* (2002), who like Derrida, also sees forgiveness as a gift that cannot be ordered but something that might be an obligation in certain socio-political contexts:

In the Bible, gifts to others and offerings to God are both denoted by the same word *minha*. And there is indeed a clear element of gift exchange in the offerings to God in the Hebrew bible. The idea I want to propose here is that the duties involved in forgiveness, both those of the one who asks for it and those of the one who bestows it, are similar to the duties involved in exchanging gifts. [...] Forgiveness, unlike ordinary gifts, is not intended to form or strengthen a relationship but rather to restore it to its previous state. Rejecting a sincere plea for forgiveness is like rejecting a gift. A weighty justification is needed in both cases. Consider this famous case: "The day came when Cain brought some of the produce of the soil as a gift to the Lord; and Abel brought some of the first-born of his flock, the fat portions of them. The Lord received Abel and his gift with favor; but Cain and his gift he did not receive. Cain was very angry and his face fell" (Genesis 4:3-5). The traditional Jewish Bible commentators felt that gifts should not be rejected arbitrarily. The rejection of a gift needs to be justified. Gifts impose obligations: the obligation to accept the gift unless there is a good reason to reject it, and also the obligation to return a gift in a gift-exchange society. I am claiming that the obligation to forgive, to the extent that such an obligation exists, is like the obligation not to reject a gift – an obligation not to reject the expression of remorse and the plea for forgiveness. (Margalit, 2002, p. 195-196).

Endnote:

1. J. Paul Lederach, suggests that the “peacemaking paradigm of reconciliation involves the creation of social space where truth, justice, mercy and forgiveness are validated where justice and peace have kissed”. According to him Mandela and Tutu are two seminal figures in the paradigm of ethico-political reconciliation. Please See Tutu, Desmond, M (1999), *No Future Without Forgiveness*. NY: Daubleday Publishers and Lederach, J. Paul, (1997), *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*, Washington DC: US Institute of Peace Press.
2. In this respect Tzvetan Todorov’s critical analysis of the uses of comparisons in the cases of the Holocaust and the gulags is noteworthy. In his book, *Hope and Memory*, Todorov points out how comparisons may be unduly used either for justifying an atrocity – for instance the affirmation made by some historians such as Ernst Nolte and Andreas Hilgruber that Hitler and the Nazis were imitating Stalinist policies- or for accusing one’s enemies –for instance the comparison made by the critics of Stalinism between the gulags and the lagers (pp.74-76). Please see Todorov, T. (2016), *Hope and memory: Lessons from the twentieth century*, Princeton University Press.

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