Papal Geopolitics:

The World According to Urbi et Orbi

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Abstract
Drawing on Ó Tuathail’s critical geopolitics and Fairclough’s and Wodak’s critical discourse analysis, the paper explores the geopolitics of the Catholic Church. In particular, the paper aims at revealing the geopolitical mental maps, which are contained in the Urbi et Orbi Messages, ranging from 2000 to 2015, i.e. those uttered by the two Popes Benedict XVI and Francis. The paper shows that these messages are built around spatial tensions and (dis)continuities such as their cautious combination of transcendental and immanent spaces, the reliance on state-centrism as well as universalism and the distinctive treatment of the Christian and non-Christian world. Particular attention is also dedicated to the geopolitical definitions of the self and the other, which reveal the Popes’ stances towards a number of current geopolitical issues.
The introduction

The Catholic Church (or the Church, in this article) is, despite appearances, one of the most influential geopolitical actors in the world. Its leaders are seen as moral and political authorities by the believers as well as many others and the dominant ecclesial narratives about space and politics have a tremendous impact on the geopolitical imaginations of the mankind. While there is a multiplicity of different voices coming from the Church, its hierarchical structure makes the position of the Catholic Church more intelligible than, say, the position(s) of Protestantism which is split into a great number of individual denominations, or that of other religious traditions where a formal head comparable to Popes is missing.

This clear hierarchy also applies Church documents. From the point of view of Catholic theology, certain papal pronouncements and the documents issued by the ecumenical councils are considered the most relevant among the many texts produced by the Church (cf. the reference in First Vatican Council: Pastor Aeternus, 1870). However, from the point of view of the society at large, other pronouncements may gain an even wider media coverage and thus influence the public even more strongly. Among these, the papal messages Urbi et Orbi which are delivered every Christmas and Easter constitute the most influential series of regular media appearances which are followed by millions of people all across the globe. And the interest in these messages is strong and stable: For instance, the Christmas Message of 2004 was broadcast to 72 countries with 114 television networks (CathNews, 2004), in 2006 it was beamed to 63 countries (Deutsche Welle, 2006), and the Message of Pope Francis at Christmas 2013 was broadcast to 70 countries (Rai, 2013).

Although the intended contents of the Messages are primarily religious, they also reveal a substantial amount of information about the geopolitical views of the Popes and, by extension, the Church under their leadership – which areas are relevant, which are not, what parts of the world are worth focussing on, where is the centre and what constitutes the periphery, who is powerful and who is weak. Focussing on this geopolitical context of the Messages, we will compare the contents of the Messages delivered by Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis. We will proceed in three steps. First, we will introduce our approach to the study of geopolitics of the Catholic Church, which, following Ó Tuathail, builds on the three pillars of exploring the discursivity, perspectivalism and hegemony in the Church’s discourse. Second, we will briefly describe our research design. Third, our findings will be presented. We will assess spatial relevance, spatial agency and spatial closeness expressed in the Messages, followed by a short conclusion.

The Church, mental maps and critical geopolitics

The Church and its political activities have gradually become a popular topic for those who deal with the religious turn in IR (for instance Berger, 1999; Haynes, 2001; Philpott, 2000, 2002, 2009; Kubáčková, 2000, 2003, 2009; Fox, 2001; Hatzopoulos and Petito, 2003; Hurd, 2004; Leustean, 2005; Thomas, 2005; Fox a Sandler, 2006; Philpott and Shah 2006; Kratochvíl, 2009; Wilson, 2013; Kratochvíl and Doležal, 2015). The theoretical background from which these scholars usually approach the topic is very diverse. There are those who deal with a variety of key traditional IR theories in relation to religion (Haynes, 2011 and 2012) and those who focus on particular theoretical approaches, such as social constructivism (Hassner, 2009) or phenomenology, hermeneutics and poststructuralism (Kubáčková, 2009) or draw upon the English school (Thomas, 2001). Others take more sociological approaches, such as focussing on the micro-level of individuals (Leustean, 2005).
Our own theoretical perspective is indebted to critical geopolitics, in particular Geraóid Ó Tuathail (1992, 1994, 1996a, 1998, 1999 and 2006), but we also draw on John Agnew (2006, 2010a, 2010b) and on Simon Dalby (1991). Critical geopolitics is focussed on discourses (cf. Ó Tuathail, 1996a) which means that it is concerned with producing, transforming and even annihilating spaces for political action. Clearly, spatio-political changes can be achieved not only by moving physical objects (such as our bodies or armies, by erecting fences or by digging trenches), but also by discursive practices, i.e. by speaking and writing about space in its relation to (international) politics. This also means that discursive geopolitics is very practical: it does not have to explore the academic discourses about geopolitics (even though these may be of interest too), but the official discursive politics of space as it is practiced by the top representatives of the Church. It is this discursive production of space that Ó Tuathail calls ‘practical geopolitics’ (1999: 113–114).

As we intend to produce a depiction of the spatial representation of the Church’s place in the world as it is perceived by the Popes, we will also build on the notions of ‘geographical mental maps’ (Da Vinha 2012: 12) which can be understood as ‘a conceptual instrument for foreign policy analysis’ (ibid.). For our research, the idea of mental map is crucial as ‘[t]he aim is, through a careful analysis of the language [...] used in public speeches, diplomatic notes, treaty texts, cartographic annexes and the like, to determine the key geographical concepts and related images that [...] officials more or less consciously entertain in making, conducting, and justifying foreign policy’ (Henrikson, 1980: 509).

A caveat is in place here: For post-structuralist students of geopolitics, mental maps can have a broader meaning. They are usually interpreted in the Lacanian sense of ‘the orders of the imaginary and the symbolic not the real. In other words, we are dealing with the systematic refusal of the [too complex] real’ (Ó Tuathail, 1994: 270). Imaginary maps of meaning thus consist only of those elements of reality which are understood as meaningful, whereas the seemingly unimportant elements of reality are discarded. While we are, broadly speaking, interested in mental maps as such, we focus here on geographic mental maps, i.e. those parts of the mental maps that give a spatial imagery to the relations of power and meaning mental maps describe (cf. Ó Tuathail 1994: 270 and Da Vinha’s 2012: 13).

As we are focussing on a small number of highly influential individuals, we also employ the concept of the ‘geographic mind’ and the ‘geographic field’ of an individual. The geographic mind describes the spatial imagination of a particular person, the ideas about which parts of the world are relevant/irrelevant, close/distant, central/peripheral etc. While the geographic mind does not have to necessarily work on such binary oppositions, dichotomies of this kind are frequently present as they may reflect the person’s ideas about spatio-political hierarchies and the relations of dominance and submission.

Geopolitics of the Catholic Church: discursivity, perspectivalism and hegemony

In its more than two decades of existence, critical geopolitics has been through a lively debate about which topics should be thematised (Dodds, 2001; Sturm, 2008; Agnew, 2010b; Jones and Sage, 2010; Kuus, 2010). Among the topics that emerged as worth exploring is also religion (Ó Tuathail, 2000; Agnew, 2006; Dijkink, 2006; Proctor, 2006; Wallance, 2006; Sturm, 2013). One may trace two perspectives in the religion-related geopolitical research (Sturm,

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1 To mark the difference between the former (physical actions) and the latter (discursive practices), Ó Tuathail uses the term ‘geo-politics’, i.e. a hyphenated form, for geopolitics being done discursively.
2013): religious geopolitics, which studies how religion is employed in the politics of state, and geopolitics of religion, which asks what sort of geopolitics is conducted by religious communities and leaders themselves. The former point of view is much more popular among students of critical geopolitics. Interestingly, Catholicism is thematised very rarely from both the perspective of religious geopolitics (De Busser, 2006) and that of geopolitics of religion (Ó Tuathail, 2000; Agnew, 2010a; Olson, 2013).

Every kind of geopolitical practice is characterized by three basic elements: discursivity (that is the rhetorical constitution of the political space), truth-claims derived from a particular source of authority (perspectivalism), and hegemony (the overarching simplifying narrative that binds the geopolitical construction into a coherent whole).

Discursivity is an essential part of performing ‘geo-politics’ since in this way, the author of the utterance constructs the world, including its spatial arrangement, through language. While mental maps do not always have to be expressed discursively, to explore them we need their external expressions, i.e. discursive depictions of these maps. We started from our own preliminary assessment of what kind of mental maps we could expect from the top leaders of the Church. These characteristics are both general, i.e. pertaining to the Church as such, and particular, i.e. related to the person of the speaker. The general focus ranges from the regions with large Catholic populations (such as Latin America, Philippines etc.) to regions of particular religious relevance (such as the Holy Land and Rome/Vatican as the seat of the Pope). The personal focus can be shaped by the region of the Pope’s birth, by his education, life experience and even theological preferences.

The second feature lies in presenting the authority’s truth whereas the authority itself is not necessarily revealed (which Ó Tuathail calls Cartesian perspectivalism; Ó Tuathail, 1996b: 3). Perspectivalism differentiates between the outside world and the ‘I/eye’ of the subject (ibid.). In modern geopolitics, this distinction between the mind and the world leads to the subjective view’s transformation, thus universalizing a certain perspective ‘into a supposedly scientific method of establishing objectivity and certainty’ (ibid.). Since the scientific truth-claim is thus not presented as the speaker’s, but the authority’s, further arguments are not necessary and the truth of the statement is not questioned: It is automatically taken for true and its validity for granted. Thus ‘objectivity’ is introduced: One is ‘authorised’ by the authority to present its truth. In other words, one’s view of reality becomes objective because of the supreme authority whose truth is presented. In this context, it is not important that critical geopolitics is sceptical of objectivity in human affairs; the problem lies in the alleged objectivity’s goal to suppress and discredit alternative views which might pose a challenge to the established geopolitical order and erode the established hierarchies which are often oppressive. In Ó Tuathail’s words, ‘knowledge is always situated knowledge, articulating the perspective of certain cultures and subjects while marginalising that of others’ (Ó Tuathail, 1999: 108).

The task of critical geopolitics thus lies, in the first step, in revealing the supreme authority. It means suspending the claim from its unquestionable validity, truth and objectivity which the supreme authority seems to have endowed it with. Are religious actors somehow different as far as the supreme authority is concerned? Thomas argues that for secular actors the ‘ultimate authority is located in humanity’ (Thomas, 2001: 517), i.e. it is this-worldly and rational-moral, whereas religious actors refer to God or another transcendentally grounded religious-moral authority as their supreme source of knowledge/revelation. We are, however, convinced that this view is only partially applicable as we can easily discover rational-moral reasoning in religious texts as well and the construction of papal mental maps can also combine immanent

and transcendental sources of authority. Also, as the below-discussed differences between the two Popes shows, the reference to the same ultimate authority may result in divergent assessments of reality as well as entirely different mental maps.

As for the third aspect, i.e. hegemony, Ó Tuathail and Agnew (1992: 195) claim that ‘geopolitical reasoning works by the active suppression of the complex geographical reality of places in favor of controllable geopolitical abstractions’. In other words, geopolitical practitioners make the world smaller and simpler so that it is easier to manage and control. This ‘simplification of the world’ is heavily dependent on Cartesian perspectivalism as it constitutes the core of discursive hegemony. Vice versa, perspectivalism’s robustness depends on the strength of the hegemonic narratives. The mutual reinforcement means that actors who refer to certain authorities and base their arguments on these authorities will only rarely doubt these authorities as this would undermine both their claim and their position.

Although all the three elements are typical for all kinds of modern geopolitical enterprises, we believe that they are even more pronounced in the geopolitical practices of religious/faith-based actors. Since religious actors often lack material power and large, state-like territories, it is only logical that ideational/discursive constructions gain greater prominence. In a similar vein, arguments based on allusions to authority are more frequent and the hegemonic narratives even more forcefully put forward. The two features of modern geopolitical practices (discursivity and perspectivalism) are thus very explicit in the Urbi et Orbi messages, and for this reason we dedicate our attention mainly to uncovering the third principle of Ó Tuathail’s, i.e. hegemony.

Research design
Critical geopolitics does not use its own methods and instead makes use mainly of discourse analysis and ethnographic methods (Sturm, 2008). In line with this claim we draw upon Jennifer Milliken’s (1999) approach to the study of discourse in international relations, Norman Fairclough’s (2001) analytical framework and Ruth Wodak’s concept of basic discursive strategies used by political actors (Wodak and Meyer, 2009). However, as these approaches are rather complex and sometimes need some modification to fit in our research design, we choose mainly those elements of the aforementioned approaches that are instrumental in revealing the hegemonic aspects of the Church’s geopolitical practice.

First of all, we are interested in Milliken’s productivity and ‘objects’, i.e. places and groups which are ‘produced’ as such (Milliken, 1999: 229). Hence, we are looking for places charted in Pope Benedict’s and Francis’ mental maps in terms of spatial relevance and groups in terms of spatial agency. Here, we follow the binary oppositions of relevant/irrelevant for places and self/others for groups (op. cit.). For spatial relevance we employ slightly modified principles of content analysis, for spatial agency we refer to certain aspects of Fairclough’s agency (2001, 2003) and use Milliken’s concept of the publics (audiences) (1999). Moreover, we investigate spatial closeness both in spatial relevance and agency, i.e. we point out the binary opposition of close/distant. In doing so, we draw upon certain aspects of Wodak’s strategies of predication (Wodak and Meyer, 2009) and seek to further specify Fairclough’s agency (2001, 2003). To make hegemonic features of spatiality evident, we investigate the nature of the space constructed (earthy/heavenly, religiously/non-religiously defined, Christian/Catholic/other) and its dimensions.
As far as our corpus is concerned, we investigate the Urbi et Orbi Messages which were pronounced from 2005 to 2015; our research includes fifteen Messages by Pope Benedict XVI (Christmas 2005 – Christmas 2012) and five by Francis (Easter 2013 – Easter 2015).

I Spatial relevance

De-territorialisation: reduction of the world to spaces of problems

The starting question revolves around the distinction between references to concrete territories and to de-territorialized issues. In the analysed speeches, de-territorialized references are virtually always reduced to problems, global matters that need to be addressed: wars and violence, terrorism, natural disasters, poverty, migration, misuse of children and women, epidemics, moral crises, religious persecution, economic crises, social marginalisation etc. As the problem-orientation is so prevalent in the Messages, it seems that the earthly world is produced mainly through de-territorialised issues - the earthly dimension is shrunk to an earthly world of problems.

Interestingly, while further reductions occur both in Benedict’s speeches and in those uttered by Francis, these reductions are substantially different in each case. For Pope Benedict, religious freedom plays a dominant role, while Pope Francis’ Urbi et Orbi are of a less religious nature. As a result, due to the religiously conceived Messages, Benedict’s earthly world of problems is further reduced to a religious or even a Christian space. Hence, for Benedict, the world is defined by a series of problematic spaces where religious freedom is violated. The world is a space of moral crisis and where Catholic Christianity and its moral values are present, they are under constant attack. In the Messages by Pope Francis, these reductions are also present, but to a much lesser degree. In particular, the distinction between the agency of the self in the religious space and the agency of the others in the morally corrupt space is not as pronounced; instead the earthly de-territorialized problems are tackled without this translation into the religious/irreligious binary. Hence, while discursive hegemonies are imposed by both Popes, Benedict tends to reduce the complexity much more forcefully, first to the world of problems, and second to a world of moral crisis assailing the believers.

Territorial issues

The focus on problems is also replicated in the Popes’ mental maps of relevant territories as problems are often the starting point to which territorial predicates are added (the conflict in Ukraine, in Syria, etc.). As war is the key issue, the relatively peaceful parts of the world are absent from the mental map: Europe and North America are often entirely omitted in contrast to Asia and Latin America and especially to the Middle East and Africa. Again, however, substantial differences between the Popes are visible:

1) Benedict’s larger vs. Francis’ smaller territorial units

In contrast to his successor, Pope Benedict XVI refers more to continents or greater territorial units than states. This feature is more palpable in the Urbi et Orbi Messages pronounced especially in the initial years of his pontificate. In the course of time single countries are charted in the map more frequently, but the phrases ‘besides other states’, ‘and other states’ put them into the context of larger units with more or less common characteristics. This is not the case with Pope Francis: cornerstones of his mental map are states, rarely paying attention to continents or regions.³

³ The only exception is Africa constructed in his Urbi et Orbi pronounced at Easter 2013 as ‘scene of violent conflicts’ (Francis, 2013a).
2) Benedict’s problem orientation vs. Francis’ specificity
In general, both Benedict XVI and Francis inscribe states in their mental map, even though Benedict tends to lump them together into greater units. For Benedict, however, states serve as examples of specific expressions of de-territorialized problems, such as war and famine. This is also why he often alludes to ‘others states’ to which the particular problem might be applied. Francis, on the other hand, speaks about concrete, much more explicitly territorialized problems. Often, he presents a definitive list of states without the ambition to include other parts of the world than those he speaks about explicitly.

3) Fixation of specific problematic territories
The basic rule of mentioning problematic countries or regions applies virtually universally in the Messages. However, some countries are mentioned only exceptionally, in the connection with a recent outburst of violence or a disaster: For instance, for Francis, this would be Mali (Francis, 2013a), the Philippines (Francis, 2013b), Venezuela (Francis, 2014a), Pakistan (Francis 2014a), Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia (all Francis 2014a and b), Kenya (Francis 2015a), Iran (Francis, 2015a), or Yemen (Francis, 2015a). Other territories become more fixed as points of almost a ritual invocation, permanent fixtures on the Popes’ mental maps. Examples of such territories include Syria (beginning with Benedict’s Urbi et Orbi for Christmas 2011; Benedict, 2011b) and Ukraine (beginning with Francis’ Urbi et Orbi for Easter 2014; Francis, 2014a).

4) Dominance of Africa and the Middle East
All in all, both Popes clearly focus primarily on Africa and the Middle East. Hence, our expectation that Francis would tend to talk more about Latin America and Benedict about Europe was wrong: In Pope Benedict’s XVI mental map, Africa and the Middle East represent 74 % of all territorial allusions (Africa: 41 %, Middle East: 33 %). The percentage is even higher in the map of his successor - 87 % (Africa: 54 %, Middle East: 33 %). The rest of the world is more present in Benedict’s XVI map and its variety is definitely higher than in Francis’ map: Asia represents 16 %, Latin America 8 %, Europe 1 % and even Oceania 1 %. Francis’ rest of the world consists of Asia (only 4 %), Latin America (solely 2 %) and Europe (7 %).

In territorial terms, both Benedict XVI and Francis construct a space where Africa and the Middle East are dominant problematic regions, with Francis being even more focussed on the two and excluding the other regions from his Messages even more frequently. While the dominance of Africa and the Middle East result in part from thematising problems related to conflicts, tensions and violence, the Popes’ concern for Africa might refer to the assumption that Africa (together with Asia) is the future of the Church (Mastrofini, 2006). The salience of the Middle East for the Church is obvious as well: it is a region with a tradition of religious variety implying presence of diverse religious communities, Christian and Catholic ones included, and a region with sacred places which are of high importance for the Church.

It is, however, worth noting that this territorial focus is at odds with the de-territorialized binary construction of the world or religion vs. the world of moral crisis. For both Benedict and Francis, moral crisis is usually spatially tied to the West (Europe and North America). And

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4 It is worth mentioning that Benedict XVI charts several Central American countries into his map: Haiti, Honduras, Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Guatemala.
5 Europe is present thanks to the Balkan Peninsula which is mentioned only once (Benedict XVI, 2007b).
6 The presence of Europe results from tensions in Ukraine (mentioned in three Messages: Francis 2014a and b and Francis 2015) and from refugees coming to the Italian island of Lampedusa (mentioned in one Message: Francis, 2013b).
yet, in the territorial parts of the Messages, it is the more religious and often more Catholic parts of the world that are seen as suffering greatest problems.

**Mental Map of Pope Benedict XVI based on his Messages Urbi et Orbi (Christmas 2005 – Christmas 2012)**

Note: Data based on the analysed Messages available from http://www.vatican.va.

**Mental Map of Pope Francis based on his Messages Urbi et Orbi (Easter 2013 – Easter 2015)**

Note: Data based on the analysed Messages available from http://www.vatican.va.
5) Spiritualization of the Holy Land
Unsurprisingly, the Holy Land is a perennial part of both Benedict’s and Francis’ mental maps. However, both Popes eschew official terms such as the State of Israel and the State of Palestine and prefer talking about the Israelis and Palestinians, employing the religious term Holy Land and various Christian circumlocutions. Given the more forthright nature of Francis’ Messages, one might also expect that he would be more explicit about this particular conflict too. Yet this is not so – indeed, the opposite is true: the detachment of the references to the Holy Land and its spiritualization is more pronounced in Francis’ Messages who always puts the reference first, before the others, while this was not the norm for Pope Benedict. The diplomatic approach which leads to the religiously careful rhetoric thus spiritualizes the country, removes the Holy Land from the world of secular problems and suppresses the violent dimension of the conflict. The symbolic and spiritual relevance of the Holy Land is further reinforced by the ritual invocation of the Land - irrespective of whether the conflict was in its more violent phase or not, both Popes always mentioned the Holy Land in their speeches.

6) Catholic strongholds vs. problematic and ambitious territories
Another assumption of ours that Catholic strongholds, i.e. territories with the highest share of the Catholics, to be included in the Popes’ mental maps. But, at least as far as these maps are articulated in the Messages, this assumption is not confirmed. Instead, here also, the problem-orientation prevails: territories facing problems are the key units of reference in both papal mental maps. While countries with a high number of Catholics are mentioned, they are certainly not disproportionately stressed: Democratic Republic of Congo (which represents 5.1 % in Benedict’s map and 7.4 % in Francis’ map), Nigeria (2.5 %; 9.3 %), Venezuela (1.7 %; 1.9 %), Philippines (1.7 %; 1.9 %) and Columbia (0.8 %; 0 %).

To sum up, Benedict’s geographic mind tends to a certain state-centric universalism, the tendency to include as many countries as possible, but also to perceiving the world as a world of conceptual issues, of problems. His map becomes larger, more enumerative, ordered by problem categories, but also more difficult to manage and control. As for Pope Francis, his geographic mind is not concerned with exhaustive lists or types of problems, instead, he tends to a certain particularism. His map is simpler, more targeted but easier to manage and control. In terms of perspectivalism and hegemony, it is clearly Pope Benedict who aims at a more ordered, classified and universalist spatial representation, with the world ordered according to well-established, problem-based principles. Paradoxically, the efforts at exhaustiveness

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7 The Holy Land is mentioned in all analysed Messages, i.e. in all fifteen Benedict’s XVI and all five Francis’ Urbi et Orbi.
8 Fifteen countries with the highest number of the baptised are the following: Brazil, Mexico, Philippines, USA, Italy, France, Columbia, Spain, Democratic Republic of Congo, Argentina, Poland, Peru, Nigeria, Venezuela, Germany (Secretaria Status, 2016).
9 In the map consisting of states and geographical regions, i.e. in the same map as described in paragraph 4.
10 In his Christmas Urbi et Orbi in 2009, Benedict XVI presents cases from all the continents even (Benedict XVI, 2009b).
often lead to a more complex and less easily controllable map than is the case with the pragmatically minded Francis.

II Spatial agency

For the analysis of spatial agency, we refer to Fairclough’s agency (2001, 2003) and use certain aspects of Milliken’s publics (audiences) (1999). The basic spatial agency is to be expressed in the distinction of the ‘self’ and ‘others’ and the corresponding division of the space of the ‘self’ and that of ‘others’.

One level of the spatial ‘self’, agency may be represented by the audience (Milliken, 1999), i.e. addressees of the Pope’s words. While the obvious spatial distinction is the space (and people) of Rome and the space (and people) of the world, this plays a rather ceremonial role, without having any much impact on how the Messages are conceived and what problems are addressed. In other words, the Popes focus on the world, while Rome rarely appears beyond the introduction. Even though both Popes start with the address of ‘dear brothers and sisters’, they have clearly different audiences in mind. For Pope Benedict’s XVI the audience is religiously determined: he talks to Christians, in some cases even exclusively to Catholics. Again, a reduction is taking place here: the earthly space is reduced to the religious one, the religious to the Christian, and the Christian to the Catholic. In contrast to his predecessor, Pope Francis predominantly defines the audience in broader terms, i.e. people without further specifications and the religious reduction, with its corresponding claim of religious leadership is not carried out.

As the Messages are pronounced in the ‘we’-form, one may speak about an inclusive audience (as there are clear examples of this not being a simple majestic plural); despite being addressed as ‘you’, the audience becomes part of ‘us’. The very point of departure for understanding the ‘self’ is the role of the Pope as he is the representative of the ‘self’, the speaker who enunciates the objectified truths. Pope Benedict XVI often assumes the role of a Christian leader, speaking on behalf of Christian communities, which is again consistent with his general focus on religious matters. Pope Francis’ Urbi et Orbi show less religious accents and Pope Francis clearly sees himself as a ‘defensor hominis’ (Casanova, 1996: 362). The reduction to earthly problems is thus expressed differently – for Benedict, the relevant spaces are those inhabited by agents who either suffer or cause religious persecution and discrimination; for Francis, the relevant spaces are much broader, and the agents are involved in a number of socio-economic problems and wars.

Surprisingly, Benedict’s agents are more active, they are often called upon to take action by themselves. In spite of the religious orientation of his Messages, their actions are not always explicitly dependent on the initiation by transcendental agents. Francis, on the other hand, while more broadly critical of the world’s problems, expects less action from the afflicted and instead typically relies on divine intervention. Both Popes also include the international community and representatives of nations in their mental maps; in addition, Pope Benedict XVI introduces religious leaders. In other words, authorities extend the earthly space of ‘others’, regarded as ordinary people, adding the dimension of international and domestic politics. Both Popes await their role in (re)solving problems in the world either as primary agents or as secondary ones, i.e. following the agency of transcendental ‘others’.

With the exception of Pope Benedict’s XVI Message pronounced at Christmas 2009 in which the separation of ‘self’ and ‘others’ is explicitly expressed in addressing the audience, i.e. at the very beginning of the Message.
III Spatial closeness

Pointing out the binary opposition of close/distant in spatial relevance, we draw upon certain aspects of Wodak’s strategies of predication (Wodak and Meyer, 2009). For discerning closeness and distance of the spatial agency, we again use a modified notion of Fairclough’s agency (2001, 2003).

Benedict’s XVI distance vs. Francis’ closeness

While spatial relevance and spatial agency can be uncovered relatively easily, spatial closeness or distance is more difficult to ascertain. To do so, we applied predicate analysis (Wodak and Meyer, 2009), but even then the task is not simple for a number of reasons. Most importantly, predicates are employed rarely and not used in de-territorialised issues, solely in territorialised ones. In both the mental maps there are no objects labelled as distant pointing out to an obvious periphery: if predicates are employed, they are of a positive nature. Hence, we may only assume that distance is expressed by the absence of allusions to a territory. But as territories are primarily defined as ‘problematic spaces’, this absence may also indicate that a particular part of the world is peaceful and prosperous.

Both Benedict and Francis use the positive predicate ‘beloved’ in their Messages, expressing their personal or emotional relations to the place or country. Pope Benedict XVI mentions it only twice in his total fifteen Messages, whereas Pope Francis eight times in the five analysed Messages. Both Popes use the word ‘beloved’ in connection with a territorialised aspect, i.e. either with a state or region or with a people living in a concrete territory. It is the people of Haiti (Benedict, 2010a) and the Land of Egypt (Benedict, 2012b) which are beloved to Pope Benedict XVI. Pope Francis labels Syria, Iraq and Ukraine as beloved more times.12 One may conclude there are only few objects in Benedict’s XVI mental map which are close and the intensity of the closeness is very low,13 whereas the relative closeness is higher and more intensive14 and also more stable in Francis’ mental map. The predicate ‘noble’ is worth mentioning. It is used to express the notion that the object is distant, but it is connected with positive esteem, i.e. with an aspiration to get closer despite the present distance, with a desired closeness. For instance, Pope Benedict XVI used the word ‘noble’ for the people of China in his Message pronounced at Christmas in 2012.

To conclude, the expressed closeness or aspiration to a less distant relation seems to reflect a hegemonic dimension: 72 % of the Haitian are baptised Catholics, Egypt is ‘blessed by the childhood of Jesus’ (Benedict, 2012b), in Syria, Iraq and Ukraine there are Christian communities, and finally China is considered the future of the Catholic Church, together with the whole Asian continent (Mastrofini, 2006). One may sum up the background of the closeness in the mental map as the assurance of the Christian presence in the world or the spatial expansion of the Catholic faith, or both.

Closer ‘you’ vs. distant ‘them’

When dealing with closeness or distance in spatial agency, we further elaborate the concept of Fairclough’s agency (2001, 2003) in terms of a finer distinction between ‘them’ and ‘you’: the former expresses a greater distance, the latter marks objects which are closer. When investigating the category of ‘others’ constituted in opposition to the ‘self’, ‘others’ facing

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12 Syria is called beloved in four analysed Messages, Iraq in two and Ukraine also in two Messages.
13 Only two objects in fifteen Messages, the expression ‘beloved’ is used only twice.
14 Three objects in five Messages, the predicate ‘beloved’ is employed eight times.
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problems are usually considered ‘them’ in general, but rather ‘you’ as members of Christian communities. More distance, i.e. as ‘them’, is evident in the treatment of others, when conversion to Christianity is foreseen, as it will be this conversion that would bring the people closer to the speakers (interestingly, this position is put forward much more forcefully by Benedict than Francis). Transcendental ‘others’ are not unreachable, they are definitely understood as ‘you’. Distancing is strongly present when authorities are addressed or mentioned. Paradoxically, while the Popes are also undoubtedly authorities of sorts, they never see themselves as part of the group of authorities which can contribute to solving world’s problems.

Conclusion

The Urbi et Orbi Messages create a very distinctive spatial order. The dominant hegemonic move is the simplification of the world to the series of ‘spaces of problems’, which need to be tackled. In the case of Pope Benedict, this tendency is so strong that the problem orientation overshadows references to concrete territories; these territories are mentioned as examples of broader problematic issues (such as war). As far as references to particular territories are concerned, these are mostly not related to the specific relevance of such territories to the Church (in terms of the Catholic population), but reflect the perceived global distribution of ‘problems’. As a result, the Middle East and Africa are mentioned most frequently. An interesting case is the Holy Land, which is almost ritually mentioned, but as a sort of a place between the earthly and the spiritual space. But this also means that unlike in other cases, the conflict there is addressed, but all the references are meticulously de-politicized.

The simple division of the spiritual, heavenly sphere with its transcendental actors and the earthly sphere of problems is further complicated in two ways. First, even the earthly sphere often undergoes, particularly in Pope Benedict’s Messages, a double reduction – from the space of problems to the space of religiously defined problems (such as persecution because of faith) and to Christian/Catholic problems. Hence, the spiritual becomes present in the secular domain, but it is usually seen as persecuted, oppressed or otherwise threatened. Second, while transcendental agents may intervene in the secular matters, often, secular authorities are invoked and asked to take measure to tackle the injustice. Religious communities are present in the earthly sphere as well, but they are typically victims, often described in passive terms, as secondary agents at best (i.e. following the lead of God or relying on divine providence).

The differences among the Popes also pertain to the definition of the ‘self’ and the ‘others’, which also translates into different representations of the ‘we’ and different ways of approaching these problems. Pope Benedict clearly sees himself as a religious leader and his ‘we’ is most frequently the Church; Pope Francis, on the other hand, presents himself as a ‘defensor hominis’, speaking on behalf of the ‘people’. An interesting disassociation is taking place here – while Popes are certainly authorities/leaders as well, they do not present themselves as such. The identification with the oppressed goes so far that Pope Francis even adopts their passive stance – it is the ‘others’ who can change things, mainly the transcendental agents are called upon, sometimes secular powers are addressed. But while the Messages call for the solution of the pressing problems, they almost never indicate which specific earthly actors should do this and, even more importantly, how this should be done.

15 See for example Christian communities in Iraq (Benedict XVI, 2010a) and in Africa (Benedict XVI, 2012a).
Literature


**Appendix**


Benedict XVI (2006a) *Urbi et Orbi Message of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI. Easter 2006*, [Online], Available: http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-


