Contradictory populism online: Nationalist and globalist discourses of the Serbian Radical Party’s websites

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Abstract

Populist or radical far right parties have been an integral part of politics in post-socialist Eastern European countries such as Serbia. This paper presents a detailed analysis of the ideologies and discourses of the Serbian Radical Party (Srpska Radikalna Stranka) (SRS) as communicated through its online presence. Close analysis of online content reveals a contradictory populist rhetoric that simultaneously rejects globalisation and the West while embracing alternative globalist ideologies. The paper analyses core political ideas of the SRS to reveal that although nativist and nationalist discourses remain key tactics in far right populist ideology, the SRS has also expanded its concepts of political collectivity and adapted to changing geopolitics. As such, the paper opens up new ways of understanding far right populist rhetoric in an era of globalised modernity.

Keywords: Serbia, far right, nationalism, anti-globalisation, Serbian Radical Party (SRS).

Introduction

The Serbian Radical Party, led by Vojislav Seselj, gained the most seats of any single party in the Serbian Parliament during the 2008 elections (Narodna skupstina Republike Srbije 2004). After winning 78 out of 250 seats, the SRS held the second largest presence in parliament behind the ruling coalition ‘For a European Serbia’ (Za Evropsku Srbiju), led by the Democratic Party (Demokratska Stranka) (DS) president Boris Tadic (Mihailovic 2008, p. 44). The party, however, has since split, with many of its members joining the newly formed Serbian Progressive Party (Srpska Napredna Stranka) (SNS), led by now former SRS acting president Tomislav Nikolic (SNS 2012). As of the May 2012 presidential elections, the SNS had received most votes, at just over a quarter of the votes (Associated Press 2012). The SNS has shifted from the SRS strict anti-EU position, towards a pro-European stance adding to the ‘pro-democratic’ and ‘pro-European Union’ discourse that has become more prominent in contemporary Serbian politics. However, although the SNS has incorporated European Union (EU) integration, it continues to promote a nativist and ‘traditional’ construction of Serbian identity. This article analyses the way that the SRS has continued its use of populist and nativist rhetoric, despite this general lean in Serbian politics towards EU integration (Stojic 2006). The SRS is chosen as a case study for
several reasons. Although there is extensive literature on radical and extreme right parties, especially in Europe, much of it underestimates the influence that such parties may have, particularly in Serbia. For example, Mudde’s (2007) seminal text on Europe’s populist radical right parties dismisses the SRS as being of little significance, yet it went on to considerable electoral success in 2008. The success of the SRS in Serbian electoral polls in recent years demonstrates that the kind of populist rhetoric it employs still holds some sway with Serbian voters. Close analysis of its rhetoric suggests not only a movement away from the ‘pro-European’ atmosphere, but also towards nationalist authoritarianism under the promise of ‘true’ democratic representations. This article does not argue that the far right in Serbia alone participates in nationalist discourse; it is present in all political parties in Serbia, with symbols, myths and a claim to a primordial connection common in calls for unity (Colovic 2002). The SRS is of particular interest, however, as it takes on an extremely nativist approach, where ‘Serbdom’ is differentiated from ‘the Other’ through claims to victimhood and being the true ‘good’. SRS rhetoric positions ‘the West’ as its main enemy and a threat to Serbia. As Serbian society is in the process of transition—in terms of democracy and capitalist reform, as well as regional integration—it is particularly interesting to take into account the way that ‘constructed primordialism’ (Appadurai 2006, p. 101) remains a key element of political discourse in parties like the SRS. In a climate in which EU membership and a transition to a democratic government and capitalist economy are high priority for Serbia, with several reforms made by the current government to meet EU integration criteria, the rhetoric presented by the SRS suggests an opposing trend that still has resonance with some voters. Although the possibility of further electoral success for the SRS is shadowed by the Party’s internal divisions such nativist rhetoric should not be ignored as any rise in popularity could reverse the progress made so far by the current government. The current economic situation in the Eurozone increases the possibility that anti-integrationist approaches could gain more popularity in the future, which could markedly affect Serbia’s multilateral relations within Europe after recently obtaining official candidate status for EU integration.

This paper therefore closely analyses the online content of SRS websites in order to gain a deeper understanding of its ideologies as a case study of far right politics in Serbia during a period of political and social transition. We define its political approach as populist in that it exploits diffuse public sentiments of anxiety and disenfranchisement, and appeals to the ‘common man’ as the superior political subject, placed in opposition to oppressive elite social or political entities (Betz 1994). This is a clear example of populist discourses considering ‘society to be ultimately separated into homogenous and antagonistic groups’, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’ (Mudde 2007, p. 23). Although this construction of society is evident in the context of SRS discourse, we argue that the way its populist appeals are framed and the way its groups are conceptualised are not static, but rather shifting in the context of globalisation. The paper identifies three core political ideas of the SRS—Greater Serbia, anti-Westernism, and pan-Orthodoxy—to reveal that although nativist and nationalist discourses remain key
tactics in far right populist ideology, the SRS has also expanded its concepts of political collectivity and adapted to changing geopolitics. We first give some background to the development of the SRS, and then turn to a discussion of the role that online communication plays in disseminating propaganda and facilitating recruitment for populist political parties. The main analysis section then looks closely at the discourses of the Serbian Radical Party online, across three core ideological themes. This begins with the idea of a ‘Greater Serbia’ that became prominent preceding the Yugoslav civil wars and remains a key objective in SRS discourse today. We then move to the Eurasianist movement, which links Serbian nationalism to other Orthodox and Eastern European nations, and then finally address the anti-globalist movement, which further expands the borders of ‘imagined community’ as a counterpoint to Western globalisation.

Methodology

The research for this paper was conducted through the collection and systematic qualitative analysis of online written and published material of the Serbian Radical Party. The official SRS website, www.srpskaradikalnastranka.org.rs, and its affiliated antiglobalizam website, www.antiglobalizam.com, were the primary sources of data. We critically analysed the political discourse of the websites’ contents. We integrated text and context, knowing that they each have political functions and implications, to see how the world is represented by these texts (Fairclough 2003; Wodak 2009). The data analysed was mainly the written statements and publication of the websites, but also included the website designs, and the links provided to other movements and organisations. In terms of the main SRS website, its official ‘Program’ was deeply analysed, providing us with the groundwork of the Party’s plans, as well as adding to the themes found elsewhere in the data. The website also provided numerous articles under the ‘News’ (Vesti) section, which were used as primary data. Although most data from the official SRS site was accessed in 2010 and 2011, the publication dates range from August 2008 to January 2011. The many releases in 2008 would have been in response to the election of that year. The antiglobalizam website did not have a clearly categorised structure, rather its content often overlapped. Therefore, parts of the articles and opinion pieces that were analysed came from the ‘New World Order’, ‘The Policy of Terror’ and ‘Responses to Global Policy’ sections. The majority of the data was collected from the antiglobalizam website during September 2010. Although we checked the site throughout 2011, the content was far more static than the official SRS site and most of the content hadn’t changed on subsequent visits. Many articles on the antiglobalizam website were not dated and thus only the access dates were recorded. Those that were dated, however, were from between 2003 and 2010. Most material published by the SRS online and the antiglobalizam website is written in Serbian in the Cyrillic alphabet, save for a small number translated into English on the antiglobalizam website. Therefore, unless otherwise stated, all English translations in this paper are the authors’ own.
Background to the SRS

The roots of the SRS lie in the ‘tiny’ Serbian Chetnik Movement (Srpski cetnicki pokret), which was in fact a private army in the province of Krajina in 1990 (Gordy 1999; Anzulovic 1999). As the army’s ‘duke’, Seselj transformed it into a political party under the name of the Serbian Radical Party, and joined the Belgrade Parliament in 1991 after a special election in the city’s Rakovica district. The party’s subsequent populist and nationalist rhetoric was not unlike that of the other political parties, such as the Serbian Renewal Party (Srpski Pokret Obnove) (SPO) and the Socialist Party of Serbia (Socijalistička Partija Šrbije) (SPS) (Cohen 2001; Popov 2000). Slobodan Milosevic’s party, the SPS, initiated a ‘collectivist, traditionalist formula of nationalism’ with the aim of appealing to the traditional Serbs, where they represented themselves as the saviours of this traditional Serbdom, fighting for the future of Serbia (Popov 2000). This future consisted of a ‘Greater Serbia’, which was one of the core tactics of Serbian political mobilisation throughout the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Seselj’s own ‘extreme national positions meshed perfectly with those of the regime and its clients in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina’ as conflict intensified in the region in 1992 (Gordy 1999, p. 46).

Since they were openly extreme and nationalist, Seselj and his party were often used opportunistically by Milosevic; in the early years, the party served as the nationalist vanguard of the SPS, where it was ‘useful for harassing the liberal opposition’ (Cohen 2001, p. 255). Zakosek (2008) argues that Milosevic needed extreme nationalism without being the extreme nationalist. The relationship between the leaders and their parties continually changed to suit Milosevic’s goals at the time, which was often reflected in the SRS’s winning of parliamentary seats—73 in 1992, 39 in 1993 and 82 once again in 1997, when the democratic parties decided to boycott the elections (IISS, 2007, p. 1).

Despite the changing focus of Serbian politics towards regional integration in the EU from the late 1990s, populist and nationalist discourse continues to dominate the SRS today. The party relies heavily on Serb nationalism and continues to rally for a ‘Greater Serbia’, an idea that the other parties have generally abandoned since the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Of all the parties that began around the time of the Yugoslav civil wars, such as the SPS and SPO, the SRS has remained the strongest in terms of electoral support as of the 2008 election. Seselj remains the party leader, despite being on trial at The Hague Tribunal since 2003, charged with numerous war crimes (Communications Service of the ICTY 2010, pp. 1–3). While its future electoral popularity is in question due to the Party’s internal split, its ideas have been a significant force in Serbian politics in recent years.

ICTs and political community in the context of the far right

The importance of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to contemporary radical politics has been firmly established in the literature. Online communities and the online presence of political parties can function in different ways depending on the context. As Back (2002) explains, online presence is another form of media that enhances the capacity for leaders to be heard and for
ideologies to be repeated. When analysing Italian right-wing extremist groups on the internet, Caiani et al. (2011) found that the medium is used mainly for disseminating propaganda and inciting violence, recruitment, reaching a global audience, exchanging resources and information, sharing objectives, and the mobilisation and organisation of events. They also found that while using the internet for recruitment, the offering of audio, video, music and document downloads emphasises the numerical significance of those behind the site, as it suggests a broad community. In general, across these functions, ICTs also enable extremists and members of far right movements to reach their target audiences even when other outlets and media are denied them (Whine 1999). This function is highly significant to the SRS that has not always had adequate access to mainstream media in Serbia partly due to past state intervention in media outlets (Cohen 2001). It therefore puts significant effort into online media, which enables it to express its ideas and opinions without censorship or control.

It has also been established in the literature that ICTs have expanded the geographical communication between political actors and organisations and therefore also expanded their imagined communities. As Whine (1999) states, ICTs ‘allow the diffusion of command control; they allow boundless new opportunities for communication, and they allow the players to target the information stores, processes, and communications of their opponents’ (pp. 231–2). They have made it possible for ‘diverse and dispersed actors to communicate, consult, coordinate and operate across greater distances’ and to speakers of different languages (Whine 1999, p. 232). This therefore assists in creating a layer of imagined community that is projected into a global space. The internet has the power to form an imagined community that is stateless and disembodied, but unified by specific racial or ethnic boundaries, in which members ‘can all position themselves within a shared racial lineage’ (Back 2002, p. 635). It has in this sense kept the feeling of community alive amongst political, neo-Nazi, racial or nostalgic groups. Whine (1999) aptly writes that the use of the internet by far right groups in the USA and Europe, while essentially a modern tool of political engagement, also allows the invocation of a unified, pure and traditional community, facilitating a ‘return to some imagined past world in which an armed, racially pure, white man can live untroubled’ (p. 232). He also notes that some extreme Islamist groups’ internet spaces provide links to other movements, such as anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial, which highlights ‘the interconnectivity possibilities between totally different ideologies sharing a perceived common enemy’ (Whine, p. 239). Atton’s (2006) analysis of the discourse of the British National Party (BNP) website finds a similar sense of victimhood and oppression, in that the site ‘constructs white identity as Othered (that is, as repressed and in need of defence)’ (p. 578). This is highly similar to the discourse of the SRS, which is filled with the claim to victimhood with all who are allegedly oppressed by the West. As our subsequent analysis will show, the SRS expands its imagined community to include all those who are claimed victims of America and ‘the West’, including that of ‘the Jews’ and ‘Iraqi victims’.
In the context of the literature on ICTs and the far right, a distinction must be made however between the internet as a one-way communication medium between party ‘insiders’, and as a medium that allows and facilitates user generated content, feedback or discussion. Back (2002) notes that during the nineties, the internet was a space where many encounters took place between ‘net racists’ and their opponents, while in recent years websites have changed to a more controlled and selected information circulation. Atton (2006) discovered that this resonated with the website of the BNP. Although the party used the internet to provide information in an attempt to mobilise, it did not provide a space for discussion to take place. This is also demonstrated in the SRS and antiglobalizam websites, where much information is readily available, yet no direct inclusion of users is possible through discussion boards, chat rooms or public feedback. There is, however, indirect participation between members on websites that are affiliated to those analysed in this article. This includes blogs and discussion platforms on these websites, ones that are not only populist and ultra-nationalist, but also linked to religion-infused violence, or even war crime denial (Byford 2002). Atton (2006) explains the lack of direct participation on Party-controlled websites by stating that in contrast to ‘progressive’ alternative media, far-right media has an explicit ideological framework that ‘not only prevented counter-discourses from arising in those media, but curtailed a multi-voiced discourse from developing even among sympathizers and supporters through its hierarchical control of symbolic resources’ (p. 585). The data analysed in this paper, therefore, does not speak to the internet as a mode of community formation in terms of actual online dialogue and communication between party members, sympathisers or dissidents. Rather, it analyses the way the controlled and one-way dissemination of information and ideology from the party itself frames particular ways of understanding SRS ideology. It is thus not an analysis of the views of common supporters, but of the institution of the party itself.

Layers of nationalism, transnationalism and globalism in SRS online discourse

*Historical nationalism: heartland, religion and oppression*

The SRS, like many populist radical right parties, draws on ongoing and traditional nationalist motifs. For the SRS, this primarily involves the evoking of three interconnected themes: Greater Serbia and Kosovo as heartland, religion as an ethnic boundary marker, and the historic victimhood of the Serbian people.

Like many traditional nationalist movements, the borders of their native state are important and territory is highly symbolic to a primordial sense of ethnic belonging. In SRS discourse, this involves both an argument for the existence of a purely Serb national territory, and a focus on Kosovo as a symbolic centre. Mudde (2007) writes that populists require an existing land for ‘the people’ in order to provide weight to their nationalist arguments. The SRS’s geographical imagining of this territory falls under the umbrella of ‘Greater Serbia’, which involves Serbia acquiring as much territory as possible (Mudde 2007, p. 140; Stojic 2006; Popov
This idea continues the territorial arguments of the 1990s wars, despite a prevailing geopolitics in the Balkans that makes the reality of a Greater Serbian nation increasingly remote. The region of Kosovo is at the core of this argument and is used as a vital tool for political mobilisation. The territory is a sensitive political issue as it allows claims to both superiority and victimhood of Serbs. Nationalist Serb rhetoric lays this claim to Kosovo by labelling it as the ‘cradle’ of Serbdom and Serbia as the nation (Duijzings 2000, p. 8)—the ‘heartland’ of the Serbian people. For the SRS this concept of the ‘heartland’ returns to the idea of ‘Greater Serbia’, with Kosovo positioned as the centre of the imagined Serbian ethno-territorial state. Having become a ‘frontier region’ between the Ottoman Empire and independent Serbia before WWII, it often claimed to have suffered oppression by various regimes. The inclusive nationalist discourse that we write of claims Kosovo not only as a symbol of the oppression suffered under the Muslim empire and exploitation by the communist regime, but also as the birthplace of the Serb people and the Serbian nation (Duijzings 2000). Such concepts of heartland are often core elements of populism. Taggart (2004) identifies that populists:

> tend to identify themselves with a “heartland” that represents an idealised conception of the community they serve. It is from this territory of the imagination, that populists construct the “people” as the object of their politics. [...] The commitment to the “people” is in fact a derivative consequence of the implicit or explicit commitment to a “heartland”. The “people” are nothing more than the populace of the heartland and to understand what any populist means by the “people” we need therefore to understand what they mean by their heartland (p. 274).

The manipulation and abuse of the ‘heartland’, as argued by the SRS, takes extra weight as it is claimed to be the birth of Serb Orthodoxy.

Orthodoxy is a recurring theme in SRS discourse, with Kosovo representing the cradle of Serbian Orthodoxy. Orthodoxy is represented as the key element in membership criteria, which reflects how religion provides the basis for creating ethnic boundaries in the Balkans. Since the groups of former Yugoslavia shared many traditional customs, religion has come to symbolise group differentiation (Duijzings 2000). Over time, a religion attached to each ‘ethnic’ group was normalised. The politicisation of these religions subsequently allocated a religion to each nationality. Since Orthodoxy is assumed to be embedded in Serb national imagery, its status as the main principal criteria for national membership is stressed. Duijzings (2000) found that religious elements were emphasised across the Balkans as a whole, in the states’ attempts to create rigid, clearly defined ethnicities; ‘religious ceremonies and symbols induce feelings of belonging, and provide the means to sacralise the nation and demonise its enemies, to reduce complex social and historical realities to a clear and simple distinction between the forces of good and evil’ (p. 31). Myths and imagery are used to create ethnic identity from the religious identity, where the nation and the faith coexist and are inseparable. As Leustean (2008) notes, the political evolution of today’s nation-
states in the Balkans ‘have been intrinsically linked to the powerful force of the mythical imaginary. Myths that combine religion and politics have been milestones in the creation of national identity as political leaders have employed religion in forging an “imagined community”’ (p. 421). This consequently creates ‘us’ and ‘them’ dichotomies in nationalist discourse. It thus allows the SRS to speak to a collective group who is assumed to share this exclusive religious affiliation. It is such a strict assumption that their desired nation cannot exist without its affiliated religion. It constantly uses Kosovo to back its claims, which is seen as the birth of Serbian Orthodoxy. With Serbian Orthodoxy being intrinsically linked with the Serbian nation, the loss of Kosovo would be the loss of Serbdom. The territory of Kosovo was the site of the first Serbian Orthodox Church (Srpska Pravoslavna Crkva) (SPC) and of the ‘Battle of Kosovo Polje’ in 1389—a mythologised event in Serbian history that plays a significant role in the imagining of both Serb nationhood and Serb victimhood (Anzulovic 1999). The Battle of Kosovo—where the Serbian Prince Lazar allegedly chose martyrdom instead of rule under the Muslim empire (Duijzings 2000, pp. 182–92)—connects modern Serbs to an ethnic past and to an identity that lays territorial claim to Kosovo. As Bieber (2002) writes, it ‘establishes a historical continuity between the contemporary Serbian nation and the “Serbs” of the Middle Ages, suggesting a perennial nation’ (p. 96), a nation that has survived through constant oppression. The SRS sees the independence of Kosovo as a culmination of this historical oppression and control. An article on the anitglobalizam website writes, ‘We have lost the cradle of every Serb—Kosovo’ (Djordjevic n.d.).

The loss of Kosovo is only one example of the SRS’ discourse that appeals to a national communion by creating a sense of ongoing victimisation of the Serb people. Reflecting Rosland’s (2009) analysis of victimhood and identity in Ireland, the ‘construction of victimhood involved mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, creating “we”–“them” dichotomies, producing collectives of victimhood, which in many cases worked as a platform from which political agency could be voiced’ (p. 295). Therefore, the creation of these groups provides a platform for political mobilisation. In the context of the SRS, this Other is not only differentiated, but also considered evil and conspiring against ‘us’. The party presents a range of past, present or ongoing events in the region as ‘anti-Serb’. A large part of this is constructing the alleged enemy’s goal of prohibiting the formation of a unified state for Serbia, including that of Yugoslavia and ‘Greater Serbia’. As early as 1991, international actors attempted arbitration and mediation in the unstable federation. For example, the Badinter Commission was established in order to form an ‘expert opinion’ on Yugoslavia. To Serbia’s disappointment, it foresaw dissolution as the future of the federation and formulated a procedure for independence and recognition for the republics (Zakosek 2008). However, this ‘completely delegitimised both the Serbian claim to be the sole successor of the Yugoslav federation and the carving-out of Serb territories in Croatia and B-H on the basis of an alleged right of national groups to self-determination’ (Zakosek 2008, p. 603). Nationalists manipulated this to be portrayed as an attack on Serbia. It subsequently led to a push to save the territories of Yugoslavia, but under the
concept of Greater Serbia. This idea was propagated by Milosevic during the former Yugoslavian civil wars, where it became common in the discourse of political leaders who relied on Serb nationalism for political mobilisation. In reality, this idea failed on numerous occasions after 1990, beginning with the secession of Slovenia, followed by Croatia, Bosnia, Montenegro and lastly Kosovo. However, the struggle for a territory for all Serbs remained a symbolic part of nationalist discourse despite the constant change of borders. The numerous successions and repeated failure of the idea of Greater Serbia did not, for many Serb nationalists, delegitimise the project itself. Instead, its failure was read as further evidence for claims of Serb victimisation, in that anti-Serb sentiments in the international community were seen as responsible for the failure of the creation of a Greater Serbia. While this demonstrated the failure of state building, it contributed to the isolation of Serbs in both the Balkans and the international arena (Stojic 2006). For the SRS, it provided a platform of accusing the past governments of failing the Serb people, and the current government continuing to do so. Processes such as the decentralisation of Serbia and its future accession into the EU are seen as a part of the eventual world domination of the West. They call upon the Serbs’ victimisation as the connection of brotherhood and unity. As we will subsequently demonstrate, it is in this sense of victimhood that the SRS uses to connect the Serbs to geographically and ideologically broader collectives.

Expanding ethno-nationalism: discourses of Pan-Orthodoxy and Eurasianism
Alongside traditionally insular nationalist motifs, the SRS uses the sense of victimhood to expand its imagined communities beyond a narrowly defined ethno-territorial nation. Mudde (2000) argues that the ‘extreme’ Orthodox-orientated parties of Eastern Europe will ‘look for an indigenous but modern(ized) political-ideological (dis)course, thereby often rejecting the West and finding inspiration in Orthodoxy and Pan–Slavism’ (p. 26). This is certainly true of the SRS. As well as espousing an insular mode of Serbian nationalism based on territorial belonging to a Serbian nation, the Serbian Radical Party also supports the idea of cooperation and association between Orthodox countries and parties, despite the fact that this in some ways contradicts the anti–globalist and inward-looking ideologies also espoused. Leustean (2008) discovered that a similar discourse occurred in Bulgaria; politicians and clergy alike believed that common religion, a similar language and the use of the Cyrillic alphabet should foster closer relations between them and the Soviet Union. Orthodoxy is thus particularly used to offer a sense of connection and community, where countries of the Orthodox faith are considered to have the same understanding of one another’s beliefs, ideas and history of ‘oppression’. The shared Orthodox identity connects religion to politics, suggesting that one cannot exist without the other in Orthodox nations. This is especially demonstrated by the SRS’s belief that a true Serb is an Orthodox Serb, with ethnic identity inseparable from religious identity (Seselj, n.d.). It supports Dujžino’s (2000) belief that religion is the main player in the Balkan ethnic divide—as a closer connection is felt to other Orthodox countries, even though the Serbs may be culturally and linguistically more ‘similar’ to those geographically closer.
The expanded ethno-nationalism of a collective Orthodox identity also reinforces an ‘us’ and ‘them’ dichotomy, but on a broader scale, in that the SRS positions the Orthodox religion as the moral alternative to the ‘corrupt’ West. This idea encompasses an Eurasianist ideology, where religion is considered to be a force in itself, one that transcends nation-states. Mozorova (2009) especially found this idea of Orthodox collectivity in Eurasianist ideologies, where there is belief in a ‘Heartland Russia’ that has always been an ‘Orthodox Empire’, the keeper of the ‘universal faith’ and ‘worldwide holy civilisation’ (p. 81). Therefore, only she can ‘restore’ moral unity to the new corrupt world.

These ideas lead to calls for collective action and resistance. The SRS believes in and advocates a collective resistance formed by all ‘true’ Orthodox nations in order to save what is pure and traditional. This is not just conceived of in the abstract—they pledge ‘multiparty and multiparliamentary’ cooperation (SRS Antiglobalizam 2006, p. 2), which is clearly conceived of as transnational in practice. Under the ‘New World Order’ section on the antiglobalizam website, there are documents that take pride in the meeting between members of the ‘International meeting of political parties: Orthodox peoples in the World Order System’ (SRS Antiglobalizam 2006). This includes parties from Serbia, Bulgaria, Moldova, Russia, Romania and Ukraine—who are to ‘rely on the tradition of brotherhood, mutual trust and understanding of the rich historic and cultural ties’ of the Orthodox peoples. The statement released from the meeting speaks of the spreading of Orthodoxy across the world, in particular to the youth, in order to save them from the ‘unknown global challenges and threats’ directed towards them by the West (SRS Antiglobalizam 2006, p. 1). The site claims that if ‘traditionally Orthodox’ peoples do not fight the demonic anti-Christ ways and norms, it will mean the disappearance of clean, pure, traditional Orthodox ways of life. The statement of the meeting goes as far as to speak of the ‘Orthodox Civilisation’, one that is exclusive and true, yet also collectively overpowered. This allows the collective connection of victimhood between Orthodox communities across transnational boundaries and creates a sense of an expanded imagined community that manages to simultaneously transcend and be embedded within Serbian ethno-nationalism.

As with the discourses of Greater Serbia discussed above, these ideas have long been evident in Serbian and SRS nationalist discourse. Like many parties in post-socialist countries, the SRS sees a connection of shared victimhood between Orthodox peoples due to the suppression of Orthodoxy throughout Ottoman and subsequently communist rule, now repeated by the Christian West. This return to the ‘us’ and ‘them’ dichotomy of differentiating groups, where ‘them’ is a group of changing ‘oppressors’ with a continuing vendetta against ‘us’, the Serbian and other Orthodox countries. To give an example from the SRS, the last point of its National Program echoes similar sentiments in relation to the Serbian Orthodox Church. It begins by declaring that the SPC was almost ‘destroyed’ during the Second World War and mostly during communist rule, ‘more clerics were killed by communists than under the whole Ottoman occupation’ (Srpska Radikalna Stranka 2009, pp. 3–4). They accuse the communist regime—with whom they
have had political ties in the past—of suppressing the SPC in order to take Orthodoxy out of the lives of the Serb people, with the nationalisation of land formerly owned by the Church in Kosovo ‘given’ to Albanian immigrants (Srpska Radikalna Stranka 2009, pp. 3). These accusations repeatedly form an imagined community based on the sense of a historic and ongoing victimhood. This connection is further propagated through the belief in Orthodoxy’s strength and endurance. Its survival of historic oppression proves the possibility of survival of this new form of oppression, which is characterised as ‘internationalisation’ (Srpska Radikalna Stranka 2009, p. 3).

**Alternative globalisms: discourses of West and anti-West**

The rhetoric of the SRS involves the creation of a Serb identity against ‘globalisation’ and ‘the West’. As Volcic (2005) discovered in her research on young Serb intellectuals, Serbian ‘imagined community’ is partly designed by differentiating self from ‘the Other’. In the context of a globalised world identity, construction involves knowing where they stand against all Others (Appadurai 2006; Anderson 2006). That is, ‘us’ is simply just ‘not them’. In terms of the SRS, the Other is the corrupt, imperialistic and demonic West. This creation of the Other, and consequently of oneself, has very much to do with the way that the Other is portrayed. The process of differentiating oneself from the Other, by creating an image of Them, is very much a product of the different cultural flows that are occurring as part of globalisation (Appadurai 2006). Mass media use modern technology to shape the Other by portraying particular image/s of Them. After all, the image that is projected is the image that is seen. With this in mind, the picture presented of the West by the SRS includes negative connotations that suggest a threat to the future of Serbs. Therefore, the Serbs are the ‘us’ who are the alternative ‘good’. The SRS is presented as the inevitable leader of this movement, as they are the true believers of the purity and natural importance of Serbs. Therefore, in order to define who ‘we’ are, the Party first creates a certain description of this Other. This Other, as mentioned above, goes beyond the Serbian political arena of opposition parties, expanding to encompass all who are allegedly against Serbia. The SRS creates an ‘evil’ face of this Other by de-legitimising and rejecting images that portray the West:

we do not accept the “sincerity” of the Westerners’ relation to God, because in fact it always turns out to be out of hate, concentrated hate. They wish to destroy those most valuable abilities in other people, to enslave other people, to exploit them, to instate that domination of Freemasons of which many secret groups have been dreaming for centuries (SRS Antiglobalizam, n.d. (b)).

The SRS’s opinion is an exaggerated response to the relationship in recent history between Serbia and the West, which is defined by the SRS as consisting primarily of America and Western Europe. The media and political campaigns associated with this relationship have caused confusion, mistrust and fear (Volcic 2005).
Some of the most significant demonising of ‘the West’ includes that of the nationalist and populist rhetoric deployed by the Milosevic regime. The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) bombings against Serbia in the late 1990s, as well as the unstable government and poor economy in contemporary Serbia, are often blamed on the West’s imperialism. These concepts are now intensified by the ambiguity of Serbia’s position within Europe and the globalised world (Erjavec 2007; Volcic 2005). The search for a Serb identity in the context of globalisation continues to be complicated by the confusion of where Serbia stands with Europe—whether it is a part of Europe, a margin border-space, or a completely separate entity. Whilst there was a wave of pro-European sentiments after the fall of the communist regime in 2000, the lack of improvement in social conditions has reignited cynicism about integration (Volcic 2005; Stojic 2006). The unstable nature and uncertain future of the EU itself at the moment only adds to this cynicism despite Serbia gaining official EU candidate status (BBC News 2012).

The SRS has chosen to take advantage of this disappointment through discourses of victimisation. Its rhetoric paints a picture of the West as malevolent, accusing them of continuing to overpower Serbia in all forms. Volcic (2005, p. 158) writes, ‘the West and its ideology is reworked through the memories, images, fantasies, experiences and state ideologies that permeate Serbia’. This leads the SRS to suggest an anti-globalist or resistance movement, campaigning for an alternative form of globalism.

In terms of SRS discourses, there are three key and interconnected stages here. Firstly, much like many factions in the so-called ‘anti-globalisation movement’, the SRS discourses reject Western models of global economic and political integration as illegitimate, oppressive and imperialistic. Secondly, they position themselves, as Serbs, as aligned with the other purported victims of this oppressive global regime. Finally, the SRS constructs an ideology of an alternative globalism, in which these victimised non-Western powers (including Russia and Asian and Middle Eastern states) unite with Serbia to gain freedom and control on the global stage. Simultaneously, however, there are contradictory discourses that seem to encourage the integration of Serbs in the global capitalist status quo.

**Rejection of Western globalisation**

The SRS rhetoric involves a strict rejection of globalisation and ‘the West’. As many populist radical right parties in Europe, they link political globalisation to extreme conspiracy theories of US and/or Jewish domination in the world. These often revolve around the idea of the ‘New World Order’ (NWO), where far right parties ‘fear the ever-growing international political cooperation between states, in particular the involvement of the United Nations’ (Mudde 2007, p. 193) and the authority of international institutions. The SRS’s stance regarding the legitimacy of international law is one example of how their conceptualisations of West and anti-West seem to be determined by context and influenced by populism. Their main argument is that the concept of international law is a US-led narrative that has been designed to achieve global American domination (SRS Antiglobalizam
A section written by Seselj, named the ‘Ideological Concept and Theoretical Paradigm of Globalism as a New World Order’, states that the:

organization of the United Nations was transferred into instrument of only one state which in totality sacrifice moral and humanism in order to be triumphant before the history, to destroy justice and humanity. The existence of mankind is jepararaze (sic) by selfish interest of the main creator of industrial, technological process, which results are converted in substantial vehicles/tools for domination and destruction of collective mind of nations (SRS Antiglobalizam 2010).

Therefore the party refuses to recognise international organisations and institutions as legitimate forms of authority. Numerous publications, press releases and articles on the SRS and antiglobalizam websites accuse the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), the International Court of Justice (ICJ), NATO and even the EU of being mere tools of US domination. An article named ‘When Two Worlds Collide’ on the antiglobalizam website is dedicated to the quotations of Leonid Ivashov, a ‘former Russian prime military diplomat’ for the newspaper Novosti, which supports the idea that NATO is a tool of American imperialism. It speaks of an imperialism that specifically denies Serbs their territorial rights to their heartland, ‘all NATO had to do next is to enslave and humiliate the Serbs by taking their Holy land [Kosovo] away from them. The ultimate goal of the USA and NATO is to make slaves out of Serbs’ (Stijovic, n.d.). International organisations are read to exist solely as the enemy of Serb nationalism. The SRS accuses the United States and the West of achieving this militarily through organisations such as NATO, while politically they do so through forcing policies onto the Serbian government. They believe that the decentralisation of Serbia and the hope of joining the EU are part of this conspiracy from ‘abroad’ as part of an inherently destructive worldwide movement towards the decrease of sovereignty amongst nations (SRS Antiglobalizam 2010). One particular article goes so far as to say that the EU Maastricht Treaty was crafted in order to create a regional identity, with the aim of Germany one day being in control of the European population (SRS 2010).

The party is particularly vocal in respect to the ICTY and uses it to accuse the current government of ‘giving in’ to the demands of the West. After the arrest of Radovan Karadzic, the SRS accused the ‘traitorous and dictating Boris Tadic regime’ of ‘kidnapping’ a ‘national hero’ (SRS 2008). This is an example of populist rhetoric in terms of what Taggart (2004) describes as a ‘reaction to a sense of extreme crisis’ (p. 275), as ‘it is surely more common for populist leaders to be opportunistic and exploitative of grievances and prejudices’ (Crick 2005, p. 631). Many Serbians in general, including some political figures, have felt that fulfilling the requirements of the ICTY constitutes the admission of a kind of collective guilt. This adds to the self-victimisation of Serb nationalism and fuels anti-EU sentiments. As Stojic (2006) writes, the ICTY is an important precondition for EU membership for the states, yet:
the strong anti-Hague sentiments in both countries [Croatia and Serbia] are transformed into negative orientations towards the EU. The ICTY is a symbol of difficulties these countries are faced with on their road towards the European Union…[Euro-sceptics] interpret indictments, which are individual, as a collective guilt that have to be rejected as a threat to national identity and pride (Stojic 2006).

The SRS takes these sentiments to an extreme level and sees the ICTY as a US-dominated international organisation that is used for Western imperialist aims. One article argues that it was set up only in order to punish the Serbs who fought against America’s wishes (SRS Antiglobalizam, n.d. (a)). According to the SRS, the US/West have always had a goal of committing genocide against the Serb people because they stood in the way of their expansionist policies (SRS Antiglobalizam, n.d. (a)). By labelling the Serbs as the victims of genocide, the party again attempts to use the sense of victimhood in order to gain momentum for their nationalist rhetoric. The SRS firmly states that Seselj’s imprisonment is unjust and inhumane. Their current campaign for his release is filled with accusation of where ‘all process [sic] and human rights of Dr Seselj have been violated: the right to life, the right to the fair trial, the right to the expeditious trial’ (Vseselj 1999). The contradictions of populism are visible here also, in that the SRS calls on the norms of human rights and global justice as an implicit part of their critique of the very institutional processes intended to uphold these norms.

Shared victimhood & collective resistance
The second discursive move frequently made in SRS materials in its construction of West and anti-West is the positioning of Serbs and other non-Western peoples as united in a shared victimhood and a shared resistance under Western oppression. As previously discussed, they claim that Orthodox people have all experienced continuous suppression, but have been able to fight and allow the Orthodox spirit to live on. Yet despite at times entrenching Orthodoxy as central to the populist collective of the ‘pure people’, the party also draws upon groups outside of the religion into a globalised frame of shared victimhood. In particular, they turn towards the purported victims of Western/American imperialism and are supportive of diverse anti-West movements. For example, the SRS constantly claims that America’s presence in the Middle East is an imperialist attempt to suppress all that is not Western and to make non-Westerners into obedient slaves. In the English version of the Anti-Global Policy, Seselj states that ‘The Americans want to destroy the Iraqi state in order to make an example out of it and suppress any kind of future Arab resistance and disobedience towards America and their domination’ (SRS Antiglobalizam, n.d. (b)). It claims that the ‘Iraqi struggle’ is to defend all that is not corrupt or dominating; and ‘If, God forbid, Iraq fails, mankind will be destined to an era of apathy, era of hopelessness, era of pessimism’ (SRS Antiglobalizam, n.d. (b)).

Despite the geographic and cultural distance between Serb nationalists and Iraqi insurgents, the dichotomy of West and anti-West places them into the same community of the oppressed. As Jeffrey (2006) writes, victims and perpetrators are
identified as representatives of a larger ethno-national collectivity, rather than as individuals (p. 293). In SRS discourses, however, it seems that common ethnic or national identities are not necessarily required for a sense of shared victimhood to be claimed: Serbs and Iraqis constitute shared victimhood under the American-dominated West. The very character of Western civilisation is considered to be the root of the problem as there is allegedly an historical legacy of division of society between citizens and slaves (Clover 1999). The SRS often frames a global West versus anti-West struggle as a ‘battle’ between good and evil. The NWO, Seselj claims, is a ‘battle’ against a monster headed by Washington, a battle that is to be fought till the last breath (SRS Antiglobalizam, n.d. (b)). Their ‘anti-global policy’ on antiglobalizam continues in this tone, stating that:

We are against globalization, because it is trying to melt all nations and their collective minds, to turn people into slaves, and that is what we do not want...There is no democracy in international relations. American democracy, forced to others by cannons, cruising missiles and depleted uranium, rules all international relations. There is no democracy under the American boot (SRS Antiglobalizam, n.d. (b)).

Therefore, according to SRS materials, American influence is always combined with imperialistic aims. The party further appeals to this global communion of victimhood by connecting itself to other perceived victims in history. It expresses distaste with the ‘Western culture’ that it sees as corrupt and perpetuated globally with a hidden imperialistic agenda. Seselj goes as far as to insist on a relationship between contemporary American Hollywood culture and Nazi culture of World War II: both ‘artificial’ and ‘attempting to destroy all inherited culture, and to make new one’ (SRS Antiglobalizam 2010). These sentiments are also expressed in the SRS Program, where it is stated that genocide was committed against the Serbs in the hope of a ‘final solution’, another nod to the Holocaust (Srpska Radikalna Stranka 2009, p. 6). Such statements imply genocide—both physical and cultural—of Serbians and other peoples aligned with the anti-West. This, after a history of anti-Semitic statements or violence associated with Seselj and his Party (mainly by and from SRS supporters) (Bakic 2009; Byford 2002; Cohen 2001, p. 220), is a clear indication of how populist nationalism transforms itself and reframes its enemies and allies in response to changing political conditions.

The party’s rhetoric, therefore, although drawing on traditional tropes of protectionist nationalism, is not anti-globalist in the sense of being isolationist. It in fact campaigns for a collective and transnational movement by ‘the people’ to resist ‘the global elite’. The notion of ‘the pure people’ within these populist appeals is dynamic: while it sometimes refers to a nativist sense of the people it also calls upon a wider global community of ‘victims’ to stand up to these elitists and establish a ‘New World Order’. Seselj assures that emancipation is possible if the fighting spirit lives on during this battle against corruption and suppression. He writes about the NWO:
Those whose dreams are to install the Masonic New World Order, already proclaimed upon the one dollar bill 200 years ago, are in deep delusions. Proud freedom loving people do not tolerate their secret societies, do not tolerate their conspiracies. Proud and free people are striving for an open society, a society of friendship, where all nations and countries will live in sincere respect of each other (SRS Antiglobalizam, n.d. (b)).

This fight against slavery and tyranny is also repeated in the article’s dedication to the ‘Iraqi struggle’ against America’s ‘suppression’ suggesting that Iraq is ‘not just defending itself...[but] defending all of us’. He writes that ‘if Iraq wins, then we all have a chance, and a wind of optimism will blow across the entire world’ (SRS Antiglobalizam, n.d. (b)). Such statements clearly reflect elements of globalism in terms of both the recognition of a global problem (McGrew 2005, p. 21), as well as to the encouragement of a global flow of an idea (Steger 2005, p. 13). Another article written by Seselj continues to preach the ability of a collective Eurasian movement against America, whose power they claim has decreased:

after the top of the power achieved by winning in the cold war, we are witness to the fall of the domination of western civilization. The main challenge are eastern people, specially Chinese, with the most dynamic and they keep their independence...But, challenge to American egoism presents also Russia, Japan, India and Arab states (SRS Antiglobalizam 2010).

Therefore, the SRS is supporting a transnational and regional fight against a global concept of terrorism, in which the enemy has no defined national borders, which is very similar to the ‘enemy’ that the US itself claims to be fighting in the ‘War on Terror’. This relates to a study by Erjavec et al. (2007), who looked at a group of Serbian intellectuals and their appropriation of the ‘War on Terror’ discourse to suit their own situation. Their informants altered the discourse in the sense that they accused the US of being the terrorists and the Serbs part of the victims of the terrorism. This meant creating an ‘us’ and ‘them’ dichotomy where the ‘good’ are the Serbs and other ‘victims’ and the ‘evil’ the US and the West. This appropriation is also seen in SRS rhetoric, accusing the West of terrorism. It is a clear example of populism in the SRS, exploiting current issues or events.

The SRS’s populist rhetoric is also evident in its support of transnational economic cooperation, whilst expressing dissent against global capitalism itself as the structural conditions of economic imperialism. In this sense, they are similar to many populist radical right parties who reject the idea of a capitalist global market and link it to anti-Semitic and anti-American conspiracy theories (Mudde 2007, p. 188). Seselj and the SRS accuse capitalism of being corrupt and a guise for US domination. They even suggest that US multinationals have gained so much control over Europe that the continent has become a ‘colony’ (SRS Antiglobalizam 2010). This is an example of populism that is central to the ideologies of the SRS as it associates these multinational companies with ‘the elite’, who are negatively affecting the lives of ‘the people’. However, on the other hand, they favour alternative kinds of transnational economic integration, and paradoxically position
the Serbian people as effective capitalist agents. While the SRS is vehemently against economic integration with the West through the EU, it supports economic cooperation with non-Western countries calling for collaborative action between non-Western countries in resistance to US-led economic hegemony. These sentiments were expressed by Seselj even during the 1990s, where he would comment on the possible economic links with countries such as Russia and China (Cohen 2001, p. 223). The antiglobalizam website promotes multilateral organisations that it considers to serve as oppositional forces to US imperialism. An article under the heading ‘Responses to Global Policy’ speaks of a ‘new Eurasian giant’ that is the Shanghai Organisation for Cooperation (SRS Antiglobalizam 2007). They believe that the organisation was formed in the interest of ‘strengthening regional cooperation in order to make more successful confrontation to the USA influence’ and is ‘the struggle against movements for secession or for religious or cultural autonomy’. They claim that their main motive is a fight against the ‘three forces of evil—terrorism, separatism and extremism’. The article’s author, Jadranka Joksimovic, claims that the SOC was created in response to the US’ Global War on Terror; it is a ‘crystal clear association on global concept of struggle against terrorism’. Another author on antiglobalizam took care to note that Vladimir Putin has insisted that the organisation was formed in the desire for greater economic and political cooperation, which contributes to the ‘strengthening of international peace and stability’ (SRS Antiglobalizam 2007). The SRS supports this notion by expressing interest in an economic relationship between Serbia and Russia. For example, it took pride in the ‘first Serbian-Russian Business forum’ (SRS Antilgobalizam 2008), where they expressed support for capitalist policies and transnational arrangements. The antiglobalizam website backs this cooperation as one that ‘is not intended to be against any other countries, other markets or other integrations; it is unconditional and based on equality and mutual interest’ (SRS Antilgobalizam 2008).

There is another paradox in the party’s anti-capitalist claims in that in other sections of the website they display admiration towards capitalist values and position the Serb diaspora as effective capitalist agents. The last sentence in the Serbs Abroad section on the SRS Program states that ‘their [the Serbs abroad] life in the Western countries until today, their connections and acquaintance with top businessmen and political establishments, are a guarantee for Serbia’s entry into the world’ (Srpska Radikalna Stranka 2009, p. 17). The SRS thus seems to both desire entry into the Western capitalist system and promote wholesale resistance to it.

Conclusions

In light of the continuing influence of populist far right politics in Serbia and other post-socialist countries, and of the significance of ICTs to propaganda dissemination by populist parties, this article has closely analysed the online content of the Serbian Radical Party’s website and its affiliate website antiglobalizam. Our findings support the existing literature on the role of ICTs in radical politics, providing another ‘case study’ for this emergent field. We
illustrated that the internet provides an uncensored platform for populist rhetoric to be disseminated and to reach those who sympathise with that view in Serbia, a country that has so far not been given great attention in the literature on populist politics and ICTs. Observations made throughout this study have noticed a move towards social media by Serbian far right parties, including the SRS. The far right could thus engage in concentrated use of social media for political purposes in the future. Being a medium of interest in a growing field, Serbia would no doubt provide invaluable case studies. Further research could demonstrate an additional element in disseminating populist rhetoric for nationalist mobilisation. Its potential to reach new audiences and attract support would add rich data to politics and ICTs.

We have attempted to frame SRS ideologies in terms of nationalist and globalist discourses, to understand how far right ideologies are adapting to modern global dynamics. The paper identified three core political narratives of the SRS: Greater Serbia, pan-Orthodoxy and anti-Westernism. Analysis of these ideas demonstrated that although their populist discourse suggests ultra-nationalism and nativist policy ideas, it also encourages pan-Orthodox and anti-Western ideologies. This is a clear expansion of the SRS's imagined community to include collectives that would otherwise not fit in with an entirely insular Serb national identity. We demonstrated the ways in which both alternative globalisms of anti-West and Serb nationalism are propagated through the use of populist myths. Serb ultra-nationalism relies heavily on the sense of victimhood as a link within and across diverse and expanding forms of ‘imagined community’, which goes beyond the ‘traditional’ territorialisation of a national identity. The reoccurring myths express both continuities with traditional or historic forms of Serbian ethno-nationalism, such as Serbian Orthodoxy—an integral part of Serbian nationality; Kosovo as the heartland of the Orthodox Serbs; and the movement for Greater Serbia; but also new discourses of anti-West that account for modern globalised geopolitics. Conspiracy theories pit transnational institutions such as the ICTY and EU as the direct enemies of the Serbian cause. However, while still largely nativist and protectionist, SRS online discourses do not wholesale reject globalist values. They instead put forward alternative globalisms of resistance in which they link Serbs to Holocaust victims, to Iraqi insurgency in the Middle East, and to the new emerging economic powers in Asia. Tropes of shared victimhood and shared resistance to US-led Western globalisation allow the Serbian nationalist identity to transcend national borders and include these larger group collectives as part of the in-group.

This rhetoric seems to have served in the party’s favour in terms of its electoral popularity in Serbia. Further research into the appeal of populism and nationalist ideas to the electorate remains, especially with the emergence of a successful new party that is being led by a former SRS member. Serbia, along with other post-socialist countries, faces significant challenges in making the transition to a stable, efficient and effective democratic government. The current economic troubles in the EU may exacerbate the nativist sentiments that the SRS represents. With political, social and economic reform in Serbia occurring alongside an uncertain
economic future of the EU, there may be disorientation amongst the electorate. The recent election has demonstrated shifts towards different political ideals. This includes success of the far right. Therefore, nativist appeals that rely on constructed primordial arguments have resonated with a significant proportion of the Serbian population. Understanding the populist appeal of the far right seems increasingly important in this political climate. What this paper has attempted to show, therefore, is that far right ideologies represent both continuities with historical ethno-nationalist movements and regional pan-Orthodoxy, as well as emerging discourses that link this nationalism to a globalised anti-Western resistance.

Notes
1. The SRS is not to be confused with the original Serbian Radical Party formed in 1881 by Stojan Protic, whose political ideologies are far removed from the SRS of today (Mackenzie 2008). The use of this name is an attempt to connect the past to the present, as will be seen in much of the SRS rhetoric and nationalist discourse of today.
2. The success of the SNS in the May 2012 elections is further evidence of the continued appeal of far right politics.
3. This is not to be confused with the original Chetnik movement that began in 1903 through small guerrilla groups and reached its peak ‘political and organisational strength’, with most followers coming from the peasantry and Serbian ‘petit-bourgeoisie’ (Zanic 2007, p. 448).

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