YouTube meme warriors: Mashup videos as political critique

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Abstract

This article focuses on mediated and playful voices of criticism by looking at two mashup videos on YouTube, both of which ridicule the people in power who claim to represent 'the people'. While mashup videos can be seen as entertainment, they can also function as a medium for political critique via parodic and satirical deconstruction. Today mashups are an increasingly popular social media practice, as they get watched, commented on, circulated, and remediated at best to a viral and memic extent. And where, for instance, state censorship is tight, mashups have become a relatively safe route for voicing political critique. Especially satirical mashups engage in meme war and aim at disarming and reshifting of established political conceptualizations, wordings, and rhetoric. They challenge the regimes of truth: types of discourses accepted and naturalized as true by a particular social constellation. In these ways, mashups can create opportunities for contributions to a stronger and healthier participatory democracy.

1. Introduction

By 2013, it has become obvious that social media is an ever more important factor in various walks of life. Political protests, citizen empowerment, and activism are no different in this respect. We know how, for instance, during the Arab Spring in 2011 social media outlets such as Facebook and Twitter were used extensively throughout Northern Africa and the Middle East to invite people to protest and to disseminate information on what was going on (see e.g. Skinner 2011). In the same way, social media proved to be in a key role in the mobilization of massive political protest for the *Occupy!* movement which spread to over 80 countries in 2011–12 (Juris 2012; see also Blumenkranz et al. 2011). In contexts such as these, social media both served as an alternative source of information to the one-sided – or even biased – accounts of the events presented in the mainstream media and as a means of mobilization and co-ordination of grassroots action.

Besides organizing protests or informing the world through news updates, an increasingly significant form of political critique and activism in social media is parodying and satirizing politicians, their politics, and their rhetoric. As such, political parody and satire are of course nothing new: they have existed as long as people have had enough freedom to ridicule those in power. In parody and satire, or in Bakhtin's (1984) words, in carnivalistic laughter, a great deal more is permitted than in serious, rational discourse. With the ubiquity of the internet and the social media, along with their emergent cultures of playful political critique, in principle anyone can now become an influential and widely heard voice of critique.

In this article, we focus on such mediated and playful voices of criticism: we will look in detail at two YouTube mashup videos, both of which ridicule politicians, the people in power who represent 'the people'. The political figures targeted in the videos are the late Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi and a Finnish populist politician, Timo Soini. Although these two politicians come from very different political and cultural contexts – and although they were in very different positions as politicians –, as political figures they share characteristics which have made them attractive for political parody and satire. Both of them have been seen as controversial and problematic figures, and both have relied on a populist rhetoric that insists on how 'their people' stand by their side.

What we will show in detail is that, while such videos could very well be seen merely as entertainment, they also exemplify how mashups have an increasingly important function in serving as a medium for political critique via the parodic and satirical deconstruction of the position, credibility, and rhetoric of politicians. In this way, we also hope to demonstrate how these videos engage in *meme war* (Lasn 1999) and aim at the debunking, disarming, and reshifting of established political conceptualizations, wordings, and rhetoric. Hence, we will also show how the videos challenge not only the politicians – the regime – that they take as their target, but also the *regime of truth* (as Foucault 1980 put it) they draw on. Through parody and satire, the videos deconstruct these memes and expose them as cheap and empty sound bites.

2. Mashups as political parody and satire

The two mashup videos under investigation in this article are examples of playful online activism. As online activism, mashups are part of a more general *culture jamming* practice, whereby well-known public mass media, consumerist discourses – advertisements, slogans, logos, texts, images, pieces of art, videos, music, speeches, and events – are mocked. Culture jammers borrow and appropriate elements of corporate imagery, mass media, and popular culture for the purposes of criticism and awareness raising (see e.g. Lievrouw 2011: 22, Tamminen 2013). Typically, their political messages tend to be quite transparent, serious and explicitly critical. Good examples of culture jamming are the "advertisements" published by *Adbusters*, which intervene in and appropriate the ways in which well-known global corporations advertise their products. Consider, for example, the following three examples:

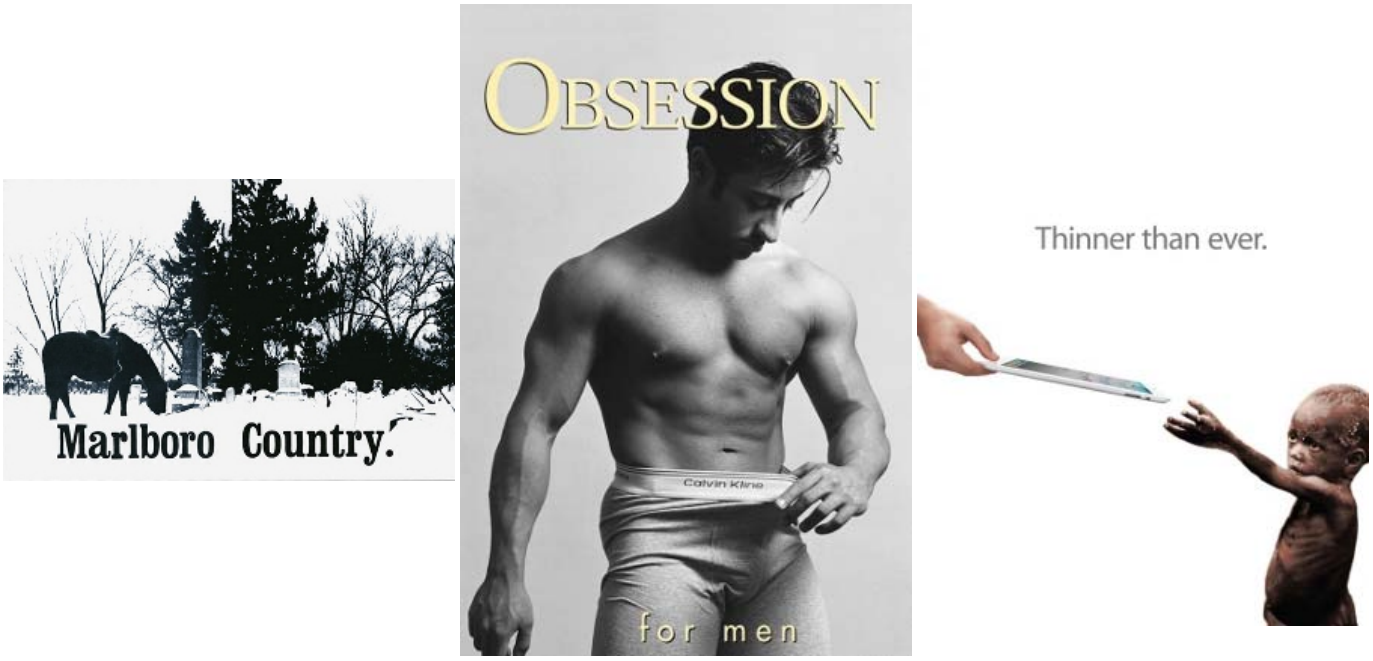

Image 1. Online spoof ads by *Adbusters*.

By quoting, modifying and recirculating recognizable semiotic choices made in corporate advertisements, for example, culture jammers comment on – besides the conventions of corporate advertising – the brands (e.g. the creation of positive imagery for lethal products), ideologies (e.g. the belief that certain types of appearances are valued more than others), and forms of production (e.g. the use of child labour and the exploitation of raw materials) exemplified by the target corporations.

While culture jamming is often explicitly political in content, mashup, or remix videos tend to be more multi-voiced: besides being critical, they often have a strong emphasis on comic entertainment. In this they resemble other types of humorous and primarily non-critical online spoofs, such as parodies of existing videos, music, speeches and current events. More specifically, mashup videos can be defined as non-commercial media products in which the video producers exploit the editing possibilities of their computers by stitching together pieces from existing media products – for instance by sampling songs on top of each other, or by making collages from videos, still images, and music – to produce a new piece of video work.

The first mashups emerged already in the 1920s. However, as the VCR technology became more widely accessible in the 1980s, the ability to produce mashups became much easier. Some of the best known political mashups from this era include videos such as *Read My Lips* and *The Reagans Speak Out on Drugs*. Both of these videos targeted former U.S. presidents: the first one uses George H. W. Bush's sound bites as its core material and the second one is a re-edited version of a speech given by Ronald and Nancy Reagan (see McIntosh 2012). These early political mashups highlighted features which were later established as characteristic of the genre.

As both parody and satire rely on ironic quotation, pastiche, appropriation, and intertextuality (Hutcheon 1987), the difference between these modes is perhaps best conceived as one of the degree of their criticality towards what is being ridiculed. Following Hutcheon's (2000: 43) original definition, what characterizes parody is discursive repetition of another text for the purpose of ironic comedy. Parody is thus "intramural", whereas satire is "extramural" in the sense that it is a form of comic criticism with an "ameliorative" and corrective aim through ridicule (Hutcheon 2000: 43). In other words, parodies attack the claims of the source material, play with it, and re-evaluate its truthfulness, but satire also encourages cynicism towards the material being parodied by making judgments of the original claims (Gray, Jones & Thompson 2009: 27–28, 32–33).

Thanks to their nature as playful critique, mashups could also be seen as a particular continuation and variation of carnival, defined by Bakhtin (1984: 9–12) as a temporary liberation from the prevailing truth in which societal hierarchies can be suspended and "turned inside-out". Like the medieval carnival, mashups constitute a special type of comic communication which is temporarily freed from the norms and etiquette normally in place. In this sense, the spaces offered by the internet open a carnivalistic arena for mashuppers.

Another historical parallel between the medieval and digital carnival is that in both of them – again in Bakhtin's (1984) terms – the folk culture and the language of the ordinary people are used to challenge, question, and destabilize the official discourse of those in power. In the case of mashups, as we shall see in more detail below, the folk culture and language of the ordinary people are represented by the semiotic and discursive memes, evolving and spreading virally on the internet as a form of critical digital intertextuality (Edwards & Tryon 2008), with which people can work through issues and events and subvert the prevailing regimes of truth.

Intertextuality and virality are of key importance in mashupping. Both of them contribute to making online spoofs, mashups, or culture jamming social in nature: although mashups are created by individual video editors, this creation takes place within the context of produsage culture (Bruns 2008; Leppänen & Häkkinen 2012), with shared and collectively monitored emergent conventions, and in interaction with appreciative audiences who are ready to take up and replicate, enregister, and remediate (Bolter & Grusin 2002) these conventions.

3. Mashups as agents in meme warfare

Today mashups are an increasingly popular social media practice, largely thanks to how they allow not only wide dissemination and sharing, but also interaction between actors, producers of content, and audiences (see e.g. Meng 2011: 35–36, 39). Mashups get watched, commented on, circulated and remediated (Bolter & Grusin 2002; Leppänen et al. 2013) at best to a viral and memic extent.

Memes – popular tunes, catchphrases, fashion trends, architectural styles, icons, jingles, and types of action, for example – are contagious patterns of cultural information that spread and circulate rapidly and effectively within a particular socio-cultural context. Ideas which are easily understood and imitated, and which are timely and topical, resonating with people's interests and values, have a better chance of becoming memes than those that are not (Knobel & Lankshear 2007: 202). Effective memes make intuitive sense and they can have fidelity and longevity, but memes can equally well have a short life span, and end up competing with other memes for attention (Knobel & Lankshear 2007: 201–202; Lasn 1999: 123). Memes can also serve as material for further entextualizations (Bauman & Briggs 1990) and resemiotizations (Iedema 2003; Leppänen et al. 2013): they can be lifted from their original contexts, recontextualized, and be assigned new meanings in the process. In areas such as politics, advertising, and marketing, memes are used and developed strategically in the design and promotion of new needs, values, expectations, and lifestyles.

On a more general level, memes can generate and shape particular mind-sets, forms of behaviour and actions (Lasn 1999: 123, Knobel & Lankshear 2007: 199). They can function as building blocks in our construction of the discourses with which we perceive and make sense of the world. Memes are also crucial in establishing what Foucault (1980: 131–133) calls regimes of truth: types of discourses which are accepted and naturalized as true by a particular social constellation. In this way, memes can end up having a great deal of power. Repetitive memes can index and help to impose on us a particular regime of truth, but we also contribute to the further upholding of the regime by embracing the memes. In doing so, we also become part of the regime.

Memes are not, however, omnipotent. They can be contested by stripping them of their power of 'truth' (Foucault 1980: 133). What this necessitates is a strategic turning of tables, deconstruction (see Derrida 1976), or what Debord (1967) has called *détournement*: a reinterpretation of the paradigm, its rhetoric, and discourse. In this way, the reinterpretation of memes can become meaningful and rational political critique and activism (see Lasn 1999: 107).

One strategy in meme warfare is indeed mashupping. Through parodic and satirical remodification of hegemonic memes, mashup videos can offer alternative memes whereby they strive to actively resist and subvert given notions of truth (Lasn 1999: 123, Knobel & Lankshear 2007: 199). In this sense, parodic and satirical mashups could be seen as examples of grassroots political activism in which – in van Zoonen's (2005: 63) words – there is an "equivalence of fan practices and political practices, an equality that facilitates an exchange between the domains of entertainment and politics that is commonly thought to be impossible". In other words, while mashups are playful and affective in nature (see Burgess & Green 2009: 103) and do not explicitly aim at specific changes in policy, they are, however, a meaningful form of civic engagement and commentary in the public sphere (Meng 2011: 35–37). They encourage people to play with, examine, test, and question politics, instead of simply consuming it (Gray, Jones & Thompson 2009: 11).

As a call for action, the online produsage culture of mashupping has been very successful: it has given new opportunities for those who otherwise would not have an opportunity to voice their political dissidence. Who gets to speak and who gets attention on the internet is determined by popularity, virality, linkings, and commentary, rather than by editorial policy or censorship. In this sense social media – and the internet in general – have provided new and effective ways for political commentary for ordinary people, in comparison to the restricted access provided to them by the more traditional media. For example, in China, where state control over and censorship of the internet – both content-wise and access-wise – is one of the tightest in the world, online spoofs and mashups have become an important and relatively safe route for voicing political critique (Meng 2011: 34, 38–39).

While political mashup videos came into existence long before social media and the internet (see e.g. McIntosh 2012), up to the 1990s they were an exclusive genre in the sense that, in order to create a mashup video, one had to have the know-how and facilities comparable to those of a professional media or video artist. In the early 2000s, in contrast, with the increased availability of editing devices (e.g. computers and smart phones) and the launch of YouTube as an easily available publication platform, anyone can in principle become a mashup artist, and publish their work for wide audiences.

3.1 Mashupping in focus

The two mashup videos scrutinized in this paper illustrate meme warfare in action: they show how people use video editing as a technique and YouTube as a forum to display their reactions to and protests against political events and figureheads. Our first example video takes as its target the late Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi, who was defeated and eventually killed in the Libyan civil war in 2011. From the beginning of the Libyan uprising as part of the Arab Spring until his death on 20 October 2011, Gaddafi stubbornly claimed to be the unchallenged leader of Libya. The mashup video takes snippets from Gaddafi's famous speech on 22 February 2011 (see e.g. Al Jazeera English 2011, BBC 2011) in which, among other things, he claimed that the Libyan protesters were merely a few youths who had been drugged by Al Qaeda.

Our second example is a Finnish mashup video, which takes as its target Timo Soini, the leader of the Finnish populist political party Perussuomalaiset (who refer to themselves as The Finns [sic] in English). The video features sound bites from a speech Soini gave after his party had won a landslide victory in the Finnish parliamentary elections in February 2011.

Although both of our example videos originate in very different corners of the world and respond to very different social, cultural, and political situations, their aims, style, and content are very similar. Both of them illustrate the emergent and virally spreading conventions of the translocal YouTube culture of political parody and satire that aims at deconstructing and resemiotizing (Iedema 2003) 'the truth' the political figures convey in their messages and the way in which these messages are represented in mainstream media.

Both mashuppers rely on the same techniques in their task such as video editing, entextualization – the extraction of chunks of

text, audio, or video material from their original context and their contextualization within a new discourse context (Baumann & Briggs 1990) –, repetition of textual, visual and auditory material, and bricolage – the mashupping and juxtaposition of heterogeneous semiotic resources. All of these are recurring features of political mashups (McIntosh 2012), and especially of the online produsage cultures that use existing films or music videos as material for active consumption, appreciation, or critique of the original cult products (Leppänen & Häkkinen 2012, Leppänen et al. 2013).

Our aim in this paper is to conduct a close analysis of how these kinds of multi-semiotic techniques are employed in mashups as resources for creating political parody and satire. More specifically, we investigate what particular meanings are constructed in each video, compare them with one another, and discuss the effects mashupping can have on public discourse on politics and politicians. What motivates our analysis is that, in our opinion, the example videos effectively highlight how such seemingly superficial and trivial internet discourses as mashups are rapidly becoming an increasingly significant forum for participatory political activism. Or, to put it differently, they offer a forum that can be deployed in the meme war on prevailing representations and notions of 'truth' in which, thanks to the affordances for editing and dissemination provided by computers and the internet, in principle anyone can become an influential critical voice.

Image 2. Muammar Gaddafi: "To the front!"

Our first example is based on a speech given by Muammar Gaddafi on 22 February 2011. In his speech Gaddafi called for all Libyans and North Africans to join him in suppressing the rebellion which had spread to Libya from its neighbouring countries Tunisia and Egypt, and which had escalated into a full-scale civil war a week earlier.

Regardless of the reality in his country, in his speech Gaddafi insisted that there was no real resistance in Libya and that he was supported by all Libyans. He presented his view of the situation in Libya as not only the only right one, but also as the view of 'the people'. His speech thus was – and was widely interpreted as – a rhetorical spectacle (see Debord 1967, see also Kellner 2004), a falsified representation of the true situation. At the same time, he held up to be the regime of truth according to which Libyans and people outside Libya saw – or should see – the situation in his country.

The speech was almost immediately followed by a mashup: on the same day it was broadcast globally on the mainstream media, a mashup version, entitled *Zenga Zenga Song* ('Alley Alley Song'), was uploaded on YouTube by an Israeli journalist Noy Alooshe (see e.g. The New York Times 2011, Wikipedia 2011). The video quickly became a global and viral YouTube hit (by the time of writing this, autumn 2013, it has been viewed almost five million times). Although its producer was not a Libyan, but an outsider, an Israeli Jew, the mashup was generally welcomed by Libyans and Arabs, too (see e.g. The New York Times 2011). In a way, the mashup thus became an effective manoeuvre both in the local, regional, and even global battle against Gaddafi's rule in Libya.

Zenga Zenga Song is basically Gaddafi's speech turned into a music video (see a transliteration of the "lyrics" of the mashup in Libyan Arabic and their English translation). [1] To create this effect, Alooshe used, first, entextualization and bricolage, combining memic snippets from Gaddafi's speech with well-known nightclub rap music by a U.S. rap musician, Pitbull. [2] Second, he also manipulated the video image: he added another video layer on top of the original news footage of Gaddafi's speech depicting a half-naked woman dancing erotically. This created an effect that the woman was in fact dancing to the "music" "performed" by Gaddafi. For viewers, pro-Gaddafi and Muslim viewers, in particular, this no doubt looked like a serious imposition undermining Gaddafi. Third, Gaddafi's voice was manipulated by auto-tuning, by which an impression was created that he was not actually talking, but singing in the video. [3]

In these ways, *Zenga Zenga Song* acquired features which associated it with contemporary Western commercial rap videos. In addition, Alooshe replicated typical music video editing techniques, such as repetitive images and fast cutting. As a result, it appears as if Gaddafi is rhythmically repeating particular movements, gestures, words, and vocal lines. For example, to make Gaddafi's speech resemble an actual song, Alooshe created a chorus to the song on the basis of particular lines of the speech, thereby constructing memorable lyrics which can be easily sung along to and which are repeated several time during the song:

An extract of the Libyan Arabic "lyrics"	**The English translation**
Shebr, shebr Bait, bait Dar, dar Zenga, zenga Fard, fard Ila al-amam, ila al-amam Thawra, thawra	Inch by inch, House by house Shelter by shelter Alley by alley One by one To the front, to the front

Together with Gaddafi's repetitive body movements, these lines created the impression that Gaddafi was not only singing, but also performing a kind of a dance.

For Arabic-speaking audiences, the mashup may, taken literally, sound like a political anthem urging people to protest and take action for Gaddafi. In so doing, *Zenga Zenga Song* repeats Gaddafi's original rhetorical spectacle in which he himself used repetition as a tool in persuading Libyans to join in on a revolution:

An extract of the Libyan Arabic 'lyrics'	**The English translation**
Ila al-amam, ila al-amam Thawra, thawra Ma'ei Malayeen w romoz men al dakhel Ma'ei Malayeen men al omoor al okhra beddi awageh nedaa' ela kol malayeen al sahara men el sahara lel sahara hayzhaf al malayeen w ma had yegdar ywagefaha besor'a besor'a besor'a besor'a	To the front, to the front Revolution, revolution I have millions of people supporting me, Not from the inside but from other countries From here I send a call to all the millions of people in the desert From desert to desert the millions will march and no one can stop them Hurry up, hurry up Hurry up, hurry up

For non-Arabic-speaking audiences, in contrast, Gaddafi's "song" had no meaning as such, particularly as it does not have any subtitles. However, since the original speech was broadcast at the same time on TV all over the word, many non-Arabic speaking mashup viewers were already familiar with Gaddafi's original speech, and could at least infer what the literal content of *Zenga Zenga Song* was. In addition, an English translation of the "lyrics" of the song were soon published on the internet, making it possible for anyone to find out what Gaddafi was made to say in the video.

Hence, the effect of the mashup also comes from the incongruity between the elements of the original speech and the mashup. In the original speech Gaddafi uses repetition as a persuasive rhetorical strategy (see e.g. Rank 1976) to drive home his message, but the mashup took these memic features of Gaddafi's speech to the next level. With the help of imitation and exaggeration, Gaddafi's speech was effectively ridiculed by the mashupper.

The overall effect of all of these semiotic re-interpretative operations is that the mashupped speech resembles a Western music video in which Gaddafi is made to sound and gesticulate like a rapper performing a song, repeating the key lines of the song to the accompaniment of rap music and the sexy, scantily dressed female dancer. Through entextualization, bricolage, audio-visual manipulation, and repetition the mashup thus becomes a satire. It becomes a critical and comic mockery of Gaddafi's politics, his rhetorical spectacle, and his persona. It is satire, rather than parody, because of its explicit criticality and ameliorative goal: Gaddafi's political speech is disarmed and Gaddafi as the leader is carnivalistically and spectacularly dethroned through ridicule and laughter.

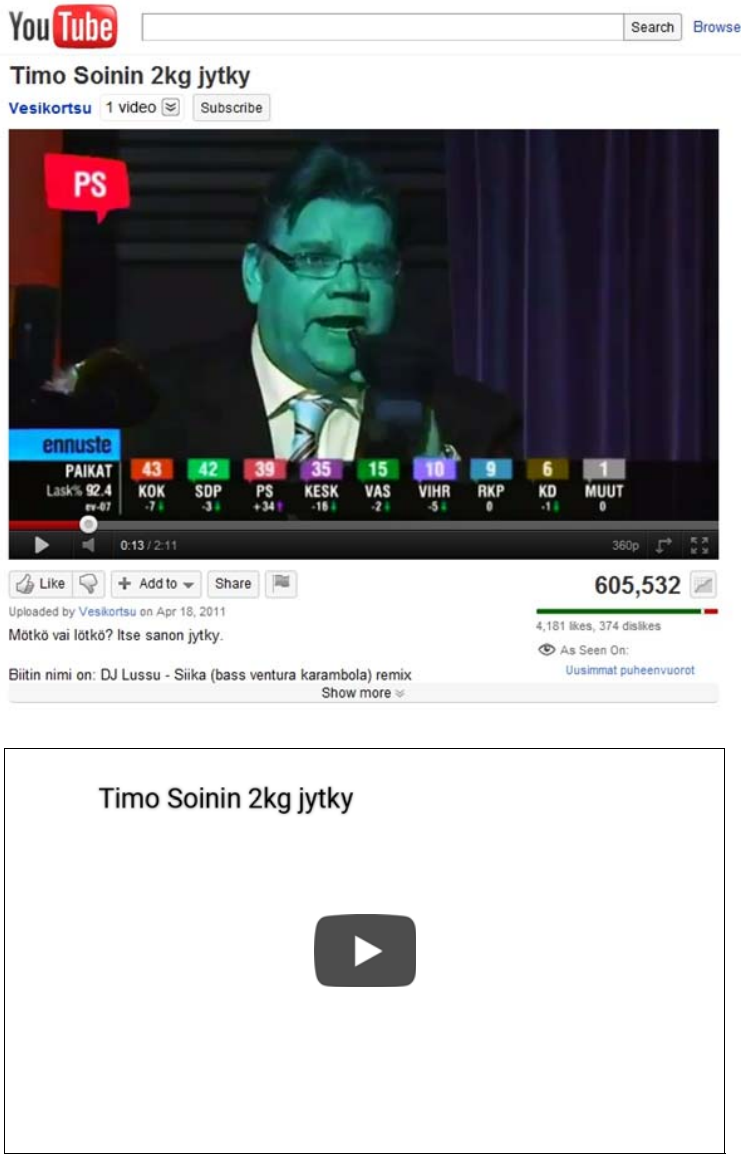

Image 3. Timo Soini: “It’s payday!”

Our second example video, *Timo Soinin 2kg jytky* (‘Timo Soini’s 2 kilogram bang’), was created by an anonymous Finnish mashupper (with the alias Vesikortsu, ‘Water Condom’). [4] This video was uploaded on YouTube on 18 April 2011, a day after the 2011 Finnish parliamentary elections.

In the elections, the populist political party Perussuomalaiset (‘The Finns’) got a considerable victory: a 15 per cent rise in votes. While all other parties lost seats in parliament, Perussuomalaiset gained – ending up with 39 seats out of 200. Their success was largely explained as a protest by low income rural and working class voters against what they saw as the previous government’s incompetence in dealing with the troubled national economy, as well as the government’s policy on the EU and immigration (see e.g. Borg 2012, Puhakka 2012, Korhonen 2013).

While the media and the polls also played a role in making victory possible for Perussuomalaiset, a not insignificant factor contributing to the party’s victory was the party’s leader, Timo Soini, who, thanks to his populist rhetoric, managed to give a voice to many frustrated and disappointed Finnish voters (Borg 2012, Puhakka 2012, Korhonen 2013). Perussuomalaiset also managed to re-ignite and use nationalism as a factor unifying their fairly heterogeneous group of supporters. According to Soini’s and his party’s rhetoric, Perussuomalaiset stand united behind the little people, that is, for traditional Finnish culture and against the “old political parties”, the threat from outside the borders of Finland (such as immigration and the EU), and late modern, “incomprehensible” high culture.

Since 2011, the success of Perussuomalaiset as a major political player has generated a great deal of controversy, discussion, and debate: its causes, impact, and repercussions on politics and the society have been recurrent topics in political discussions in the mainstream and social media. [5] The mashup video on Soini is, in fact, one particular type of response to the debate following the party’s electoral success.

Timo Soinin 2kg jytky is based on snippets from a speech given by Soini when the preliminary vote counting was almost over. [6] In this speech, Soini coined a new meme by referring to his party’s victory as “Iso Jytky” (‘a Big Bang’). The mashup video adopts this meme as its core lyrical building block in creating its interpretation of Soini and his rhetoric (see the lyrics of the mashup). In addition, Soini’s speech is remixed with another mashup based on a well-known Finnish YouTube meme video *Ice fisching Siika suomi finland part 1*, or *Kahen kilon siika* (‘A 2 Kilogram Whitefish’) as it is more commonly known.

The Finnish word 'jytky' is a dialect word, which – according to the dictionary of Finnish dialects (*Suomen murteiden sanakirja*) – can refer to two things, either to 1) something big, solid, or sturdy, or to 2) a bang or a boom. In his speech, Soini uses this dialect word in an innovative way to describe his party's election victory. As an attention-seeking strategy, it was a highly successful one: it was recognized as a non-standard word, a word drawn from ordinary, everyday, dialectal language. In addition, 'jytky' also effectively associated the election victory of the party as something of large-scale, distinctive, and even explosive proportions and impact – a big bang. It also became the crux of countless entextualizations and resemiotizations in different discourse events and in the media.

In the mashup, however, 'jytky' took on a meaning that was quite different from those it had acquired in the context of Soini's original election speech. This is because the mashup used the word as a resource for the purpose of creating a comic version of Soini's speech. In this task, like *Zenga Zenga Song*, it drew on entextualisation and bricolage as its principal methods.

In the mashup 'jytky' is repeated extensively, it is played with, cut in half and even its syllables are repeated extensively as "lyrics" of the new "song". Hence, in a similar way as in *Zenga Zenga Song*, in *Timo Soinin 2kg jytky* a speech by a controversial political figure is converted into a music video. Most prominently, this is done by presenting snippets of Soini's talk in synchrony and on beat with rave music from the mashup of *Kahen kilon siika* playing in the background. [7]

As with the video of Gaddafi's speech, the video of Soini's speech is furthermore heavily edited: the mashupper uses fast cuts, colour changes, inversions of the image, and switches of pitch and tempo so that the new video starts to resemble a psychedelic techno music video. With the help of these editing techniques, again much like Gaddafi, Soini is made to appear as if his gestures and movements are those of a singer, rather than of a political speaker. The only difference between these representations is the music genre used: while Gaddafi was turned into a rapper, Soini is made to sound and look like a techno song singer.

In a way typical of the viral internet culture, the Finnish mashupper shows how, in order to distinguish his/her creation from others and to attract audiences, s/he must laminate the basic format with further layers of entertaining complexity. This is most clearly evident in the way the mashupper combined snippets from Soini's speech with an equally edited and remixed version of the *Kahen kilon siika* meme which had become a YouTube hit in Finland in 2008.

The *Kahen kilon siika* video became famous and popular in Finland, because for Finnish YouTube audiences it portrayed a particularly comic example of what could be referred to as "over-reaction" videos. Typically these videos depict a scene in which someone becomes ridiculously excited and emotional over some, usually mundane or trivial, event or phenomenon. [8] In the *Kahen kilon siika* video two Finnish men are ice fishing, when one of them catches a big whitefish. The man holding the video camera then becomes extremely agitated, exclaiming in an Eastern Finnish provincial dialect over and over again how they caught a two kilogram whitefish ("Kahen kilon siika! Kahen kilon siika! Ooh! Ooh! Ei jumalauta tulukaa kahtomaan!" 'A two kilogram whitefish! A two kilogram whitefish! Oh! Oh! Oh my god, come look at this!').

Timo Soinin 2kg jytky begins, nevertheless, with an extract of Soini's speech:

Extract of Soini's speech	English translation
Minua on myös tuettu vaikeina aikoina, vaalitappion hetkellä; uskoen parempaan, uskoen omaan asiaan, ideologiaan ja unelmaan, suomalaiseen työhön ja yrittämiseen	I have also been supported during difficult times, amidst election defeat; believing in (something) better, believing in (my) own cause, ideology and dream, in Finnish labour and entrepreneurship

Although the techno music beat is already pounding in the background, Soini's speech is thus far more or less undistorted. As the "song" kicks in, however, the mashup builds to a crescendo consisting of the memic 'jytky' – or 'tuli iso jytky' ('this was a big bang') –, accompanied by the memic 'siika' – or 'kahen kilon siika' ('a two kilogram whitefish').

In this way, Soini's original proclamation is likened to the ridiculous over-excitement expressed in the *Kahen kilon siika* video. Both Soini, the party leader, and his election speech are made to look non-serious, comic, and absurd. The electoral victory is thus presented as comparable to catching a whitefish, and the excitement over it as equally laughable as the excitement of the fishermen who caught the whitefish in the viral YouTube video. Soini's meme and rhetoric are thus disarmed, stripped of their credibility, and exposed as cheap sound bites in exactly the same way as Gaddafi's in *Zenga Zenga Song*.

The way in which Soini, as a serious politician, is undermined in the mashup may not, however, be the only message conveyed. Why this is possible has to do with the way in which, despite his controversial politics, Soini is often represented in the media as a charismatic, easily approachable and pleasant man of the streets. No doubt this image is also something that he himself as a populist politician also wishes to promote. In the mashup, the interpretation of Soini as a man of the people becomes possible when one remembers that ice fishing is quite popular in Finland, and that, for some Finns, there may actually be a parallel between *Kahen kilon siika* and Soini's electoral success. In this way, this metaphorical connection may actually become, if not entirely positive, at least understandable to Finnish audiences. It might, furthermore, bring the political event closer to the everyday experiences of Finns, who recognize the unexpected joy and surprise in catching something as valuable as a big whitefish.

Whereas Noy Alooshe stated that he wanted to make a comment on Gaddafi with his mashup, we do not know for sure what motivated Vesikortsu to produce *Timo Soinin 2kg jytky*. It could be that in this case the mashupper merely wanted to produce a new take on two well-known memes with his innovative mixing of political rhetoric and a YouTube hit. Thus, looked at from this perspective, *Timo Soinin 2kg jytky* may not be a critical and corrective satire at all, but "harmless" comic parody which builds on the ironic parallel between the videos used as its source material.

The ambivalence of *Timo Soinin 2kg jytky*, is, however, the only major difference between the representation of the two videos under investigation here. In all other respects, they resemble each other closely. Entextualization, bricolage, video editing, and repetition proved to be crucial means for ridicule. As examples of mashupping, they are also concurrent. Thanks to the global reach of YouTube, the mashupping meme war makes simultaneous blitzkrieg advances on otherwise geographically and culturally separated fronts.

4. Discussion

In this paper we analyzed two political mashup videos, a video by an Israeli journalist on Muammar Gaddafi, and a video by an anonymous Finnish mashupper on Timo Soini, a populist Finnish politician. Although the videos were made by individuals in very different contexts, and originate in and address quite different socio-historical and political situations, they are produced within the same YouTube produsage culture. The videos have similar goals and they rely on similar techniques to parody and satirize political figureheads, their politics, and rhetoric. The similarities between them is, in fact, a good illustration of the rhizomatic interconnectedness of mashupping, so typical of interest-driven translocal social media cultures on the whole. It manifests in eruptions and reformulations of similar practices in different local nodes of the global internet.

Through a close analysis of the semiotic techniques used by the video producers we showed ways in which mashups participate in the meme war against the representations made by politicians. More specifically, we demonstrated how, by using snippets and memes from political speeches, and drawing on such semiotic techniques as bricolage, entextualization, repetition, and innovative juxtapositions – involving the superimposing of layers of cultural references on top the other –, the mashuppers deconstructed the regimes of truth that the politicians featured in the videos under investigation were relying on and mediating to others. The analysis of our example mashups showed how the original newscasts of the politicans' speeches were re-keyed as music videos in which they were comically represented as wanna-be rock stars. They were made to do a song-and-dance number in which the repetition of memic lines of their speeches was a recurring feature.

The result of these resemiotizations was, in both cases, the questioning of the politicians' credibility. In this, the degree of their criticality was, however, somewhat different. Of the case of *Zenga Zenga Song* we concluded that the gist of the mashup video was satire – it aimed at, and was received as, an act of protest against and resistance to Gaddafi's rule. For example, not long after Noy Alooshe uploaded his video onto YouTube, members of the Libyan opposition stated that they would dance to *Zenga Zenga Song* as a victory song when Gaddafi is defeated (see e.g. The New York Times 2011). Whether this actually happened or not does not matter: the mashup was already proven as a significant part of Libyan resistance and opposition to Gaddafi. In contrast, in our analysis of *Timo Soinin 2 kg Jytky* we concluded that the video was much more ambivalent in its representation of Soini, and that it could be interpreted as parodic entertainment, rather than satirical commentary aimed at completely undermining his political persona and message.

However, what seems clear to us on the basis of our analyses is that mashupping, which at first glance may seem merely humorous, can in fact be a powerful tool for political critique and activism. What makes this kind of resistance particularly interesting is that it expresses itself in parody and satire, which carnivalistically resemiotize the politicians' memes as laughable and ridiculous. When watching them, audiences laugh because there is something wrong with the picture (see Morreall 2009): they perceive the comic incongruity between political figures and their messages. In this sense, the mashups could thus be seen as a form of resistance against the politicians' notions of truth, and they can make their audiences reconsider and re-evaluate their assessment of politicians and the issues they are advocating.

Secondly, social media such as YouTube are particularly enabling for producers of online spoofs and mashups. This is because they allow meme warriors a channel, sometimes the only channel, through which they can voice their political critique when, for instance, the established media is run by the government, and people's possibilities to use social media are also heavily regulated – as was the case in Gaddafi's Libya. For example, what happened during the Arab Spring – and more recently with the Russian opposition protests, or with the 2013 protests in Turkey – when governments realized that social media were used by civil rights movements, freedom fighters, and other protesters to call people out to protests, they quickly reacted by trying to shut down cell phone networks and internet connections. In this way, they created a real, physical participation gap (cf. Jenkins 2008: 23) which prevented people from taking part in protests, because they had no means of gaining access to information mediated by social media on where and when protests would take place. Consequently, emergent participation gap of this kind also meant a gap in freedom of speech and expression.

However, while such social media as Facebook and Twitter as grassroots channels for spreading information can be, and were, restricted in these ways, parody and satire are much more difficult to regulate. This is because, as our two examples again illustrate, it is possible to see mashupping as largely harmless, which by its nature is allowed to escape regulation and censorship. Like the medieval carnival, it can function as a means by which those in power can be critiqued in ways that do not ostensibly look like criticism at all.

What the example videos also highlight is that, while mashupping is a global form of discourse practice, it is also very much a local phenomenon that can be domesticated to serve local aims. For example, while *Zenga Zenga Song* could be seen as a usefully ambivalent discourse practice which can escape censorship, our Finnish example, *Timo Soinin 2kg Jytky*, demonstrates that not all mashups originate as a response to oppression. This video was produced in a country where social media and the internet are free and government interference is non-existent, but, like *Zenga Zenga Song*, it nevertheless relied on parody and satire for the purpose of provoking questions and discussion (see Thompson 2009: 217). In the context of liberal and democratic Finland, however, mashupping probably has less to do with resistance and protest than with the tradition of political parody and satire which has been visible in the Finnish culture and media for a relatively long time. In any case, in this context, too, mashupping serves as a form of political critique.

The actors in meme warfare – politicians and mashuppers – are what Chantal Mouffe (2000) would call adversaries in democratic politics. Following Max Weber, Mouffe considers politics as practice characterized by "agonistic plurality" within which political viewpoints compete with each other for hegemony (Mouffe 2000, see also Laclau & Mouffe 1985). In this view, politics

thus is a constant struggle for political power shares, and political adversaries can only cease to disagree if an advocate of a particular political position undergoes a radical change of political identity (Mouffe 2000). Mouffe's view is thus in opposition to what Habermas has argued about political agreement that can arise as a result of critical and rational public communication. In a way, it could be argued that mashups in fact operate somewhere in between the Habermasian public sphere and Mouffean agonistic democracy. Mashups are a form of participating in the critical Habermasian public sphere (see Meng 2011: 37), but they are not primarily rational in their persuasion. When mashups engage in meme warfare, they are fighting for the hegemony of memes, and while their adversaries – the politicians they target – might not themselves undergo radical political change, mashups can have a great deal of influence on the views and, hence, political position of the general public.

Notes

[1] The "lyrics" of Zenga Zenga Song in Libyan Arabic were published on http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20110325202142AAIaXP3, accessed in June 2012 (no longer available), and their English translation on http://youtube.com/watch?v=97uYryhQMA4, accessed in June 2012.

[2] Pitbull, or Armando Christian Pérez, is a rapper, songwriter, and record producer from Miami, Florida. The song used in the mashup is his hit song Hey Baby (Drop It To The Floor) featuring another rapper, T-Pain.

[3] Auto-tuning refers to the measurement and alteration of pitch in vocal and instrumental music recording and performances. Its original purpose was to disguise or correct off-key performances, but in can also be used to create effects such as those used, in particular, in modern rap and nightclub music.

[4] The "lyrics" of the *Timo Soinin 2 kg Jytky* song have been transcribed and translated by the authors.

[5] In fact, the party only got 19.1% of the votes in total, which means that the majority of Finns voted for the other parties.

[6] The mashup itself has been remixed multiple times: these include, for example, a dubstep version, a Chipmunk version, and extended versions, the longest of which lasts for 10 hours.

[7] The video, entitled *DJ Lussu – Siika (bass ventura karambola) remix* is one of the many remixes produced by mashupping the spoken audio bits of the original *Ice fisching Siika suomi finland part 1* video and new musical components to create a song.

[8] Perhaps the most well-known example of such over-reaction videos is the "double rainbow video", which records the emotional upheaval of a Yosemite hiker who unexpectedly sees a double rainbow on the sky. Available online at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OQSNhk5ICTI, date accessed 15 May 2012.

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Mashup of *Kahen kilon siika*: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mHMTz4rtw1Q

Muammar Gaddafi – Zenga Zenga Song – Noy Alooshe Remix video: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cBY-0n4esNY

Read My Lips mashup video: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gvmrLuw4l0g

The Reagans Speak Out on Drugs mashup video: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=La5jrfobfTM

Timo Soinin 2kg jytky ('Timo Soini's 2 kilogram bang') mashup video: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IT06siITu0Q

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Appendix

Lyrics to *Timo Soinin 2kg jytky* (translated by the authors):

[--] as the leader of this party.
I have also been
supported during difficult times,
amidst election defeat;
believing in (something) better,
believing in (my) own cause,
ideology and dream,
in Finnish labour and
entrepreneurship.

It’s payday!

Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!
Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!
Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!
Bang! Bang! Bang! Ban-banbabang!

Banbanbanbanbang-ng -ng!
Ban- ban- ban- ban-g -ng -ng -ng!
Banbanbanbanbang-ng -ng!
Ban- ban- ban- ban-g -ng -ng -ng!

This was a big bang!
This was a big bang!
Ba-baba-nanannnanannananna -na

This was a big bang!
This was a big bang!
Ba-baba-nanannnanannananna -na

This was a big bang!
This was a big bang!
Ba-baba-nanannnanannananna -na

This was a big bang!
This was a big bang!
Ba-baba-nanannnanannananna -na

This was a big bang!
This was a big bang!
Ba-baba-nanannnanannananna -na

This was a big bang!
This was a big bang!
Ba-baba-nanannnanannananna -na

Bang!

Banbabanbanbanba-ba
Nannanababbaba-ba
Ba-baba-nanannanannanannanana
Bang!

(Repeated three times altogether)

Banbabanbanbanba-ba
Nannanababbaba-ba
Ba-baba-nanannanannanannanana

This was a big bang!

“So, what you going to say?”

Baaaang!

That’s how it is.

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Last updated 2014-12-15 by Joe McVeigh
Links updated 2017-01-12 by Linda Ravindrarajan