Abstract

Political actors—whether governments, parties, electoral candidates or local officials—rely on cultivating a particular political image in the mass media to position themselves on the ideological spectrum and appeal to their constituents. However, as a political image emerges into public discourse, it is subjected to multiple reiterations of reappropriation, reformulation, recontextualizations and ultimately the myriad remix opportunities of popular culture. Situated within the context of the Arab Spring, and more particularly the Al-Qusayr battle of the Syrian Revolution, this paper examines parodies of the logo of the Lebanese party Hezbollah following the party’s intervention in the Syrian conflict at the battle of al-Qusayr, a town in the Homs province of Syria. The paper builds on the literature on political image, parody, political humor, and Bakhtin’s conceptualization of carnival applied to the context of the Syrian Revolution. This paper conducts a semiotic analysis of the Hezbollah parodies, arguing that the spoofs achieve a carnivalesque uncrowning of political authority; employing dialogical re-appropriations of the party’s logo to oppositional narratives and thereby uncovering “unofficial truths” of public opinion on the party (Bahktin 1984). The parodies appeal to scatological humor, effecting an uncrowning of the credibility and authority of the political party. Finally the paper presents a contribution to existing literature on parody, as well as to existing theorizations of the Arab Spring, while presenting the creative capacity of revolution as carnival to promote a fracturing of political narratives and a challenge to the existence of dominant narratives surrounding the party in the public sphere. Further, the paper introduces the complicating factor of popular culture to the existing literature on political image, problematizing the relinquishing of hermeneutic monopoly over constitutive symbols of a
political image in the public sphere.