A Cultural Analysis of the Visual Signs in the Zapatistas Websites

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Master's Thesis
Digital Culture
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Fall 2012

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract

A political movement initiated in Mexico known as Zapatism is analysed through the visual objects displayed in their websites on the Internet. The objective is to make a cultural analysis and interpretation of the visual representation of Zapatistas websites, to expose their visual identity through the most salient visual signs and their corresponding cultural meanings. The analytical method introduced in this study is divided in three major aims: consolidating a pool of images retrieved from Zapatistas websites, finding patterns of visual elements within these images, and providing an interpretation for the visual signs emerging from such patterns. In the analysis, three images emerged as the core of the visual identity: the *pasamontañas* (black ski-mask), *Subcomandante* Marcos, and the red star. The main contribution of this work is the methodology and how it can be applied to support a discussion about the implications of the global-local cultural context for the visual elements of Zapatism online.

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Muita tietoja – Additional information

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Työn nimi – Title

A Cultural Analysis of the Visual Signs in the Zapatistas Websites

Oppiaine – Subject	Työn laji – Level
Digitaalinen Kulttuuri	Pro gradu -tutkielma
Aika – Month and year	**Sivumäärä – Number of pages**
Marraskuu 2012	88

Tiivistelmä – Abstract

Tutkielmassa analysoidaan Meksikossa tunnettua poliittista Zapatisti -liikettä internet-sivujen visuaalisten objektien kautta. Tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on tehdä kulttuurinen analyysi ja tulkinta Zapatistien internetsivujen visuaalisesta asusta ja sitä kautta liikkeen visuaalisesta identiteetistä. Analyysi tehdään internetsivujen tärkeimpien visuaalisten merkkien pohjalta ja merkkien kulttuuriset merkitykset analysoidaan. Tutkielmassa käytetty analyysimenetelmä on jaettu kolmeen päätavoitteeseen: 1) Zapatistien internetsivujen kuvaston kokoaminen, 2) visuaalisten elementtien mallien löytäminen tässä kuvastossa, ja 3) malleista nousevien visuaalisten merkkien tulkinta. Tutkielmassa nousi esiin kolme keskeistä kuvaa visuaalisessa identiteetissä: kommandopipo, Subcomandante Marcos (Zapatistien puhehenkilö) sekä punainen tähti.

Säilytyspaikka – Depository
Jyväskylän Yliopisto

Muita tietoja – Additional information

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Introduction

In January first of 1994, the same day that the North American Fare Trade Agreement NAFTA became effective, thousands of indigenous people under the name of *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (EZLN Zapatista Army of National Liberation) declared the war against the Mexican government. They rose against public policies that excluded the indigenous communities needs, Neoliberalism and Globalization. Although the epicentre of such a phenomenon is located in Chiapas, Mexico, Zapatistas, and their movement has been the main subject of diverse studies from different perspectives and theoretical fields, thus expanding its influence to multiple geographical locations. For instance, the relevance of Zapatism has been discussed and explained in several works of important authors, such as Paco Taibo II, Octavio Paz, Carlos Fuentes, Elena Poniatowska, Ilan Stavans, Carlos Monsiváis, José Saramago, John Berger, Marc Cooper, Andrew Kopkind, Bill Weinberg, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Alma Guillermoprieto, and Eduardo Galeano, among others.

At this moment, after almost two decades of making their first public appearance, there is a great amount of studies about the political activism of the Zapatistas movement outside and on the Internet; these are focused in the political, social, historic, and philosophic aspects of the phenomena. Some of them are particularly relevant for this research because of their emphasis on the social and cultural aspects of the online movement, for instance, "The Cyberspace, War of Ink and Internet in Chiapas, Mexico", by Froehling, O. (1997), "Civil Society, the Internet, or the Zapatistas" by Martinez-Torres, M. E. (2001), or "Digital Zapatistas", by Lane, J. (2003).

Noticeably, there is a lack of works dealing with the study of the visual culture, aesthetics and identity of the Zapatistas on the Internet. Also literature focused in Internet research on visual analysis of online activism is scarce. There are, however, works about Zapatistas that have been considered relevant for this project because they provide the background to answer some questions concerning the importance of the *pasamontañas* (a black ski-mask used by Zapatistas to hide their faces since their first public appearance), as well as the specific roles of particular members of the Zapatista movement, such as *Subcomandante Marcos*, and their relation with the popular culture (e.g., McCowan's "Imagining the Zapatistas: Rebellion, Representation and Popular Culture", 2003). Interestingly, a great majority of the works reviewing Zapatism are centralized in the figure of Subcomandante Marcos, typically overlooking the prefix "sub" that undoubtedly implies a lower degree in a hierarchical organization. Such focus on just one member of the EZLN could be regarded as an artifact distorting the definition of the entire movement. Hence, in order to sort such a methodological flaw, the scope of this research has been widened to study Zapatistas in a holistic manner, this is, avoiding the emphasis on any specific member of the group.

This work is focused in the Zapatistas[1] movement on the Internet. The purpose of this thesis is to apply a cultural analysis to the websites dedicated to Zapatism, to hypothesize about the characteristics of their visual identity. Such an endeavour requires a revision of the most important visual signs, an interpretation of their cultural meaning, and a discussion about the relationship that these visual elements maintain with the global-local cultural context. Hence, the specific aims of this study are: to make a catalogue of the imagery used by digital Zapatistas, to trace visual patterns through the visual signs used by Zapatistas in their websites, and to analyse the most frequently used visual signs to find its cultural meaning and determine their visual identity.

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[1] Some authors call them neo-Zapatistas. But I consider that as heirs of the Zapatista philosophy from the Mexican revolutionary movement they should be named simply Zapatistas.

In the first section of this thesis, the concept of activism is defined and the preconditions to consider the actions of a social group as activism are discussed. To this end, the works and ideas of Tim Jordan (2002) and Lauren Langman (2005) have been used as the theoretical basis for activism and online social movements, respectively. The views exposed in this project are illustrated with a brief revision of some of the most representative examples of social movements online throughout the history of the Internet. Moreover, the impact of Zapatistas activism online in the Latin American scenario is explored in terms of how online activism movements have changed before and after the Zapatistas. In sum, the function of this section is to define the contextual delimiter in time and space to clarify the notion of online activism.

The second section outlines the differences between Zapatistas off and on the Internet. I consider this to be a non-trivial issue because during my investigation I noticed that in the great majority of studies about Zapatism, such a distinction is typically overlooked. It is thus essential to differentiate between the indigenous that fight in their communities in the Lacandon jungle[2] and the activists on the Internet, specifically in their social, cultural and economic aspects. For this purpose, this section will describe the historical origin of the Zapatism, and will also explain who are the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico and who the Zapatistas comprising the movement on the Internet. The scope offers a view of the Zapatism as a whole but with a clear distinction of its public parts.

The third section provides the theoretical foundations for key topics presented along the text, such as cultural meaning, identity, representation and visual signs. These will guide the reader through the cultural analysis of the Zapatistas websites. The EZLN is studied as a fundamental factor of change in the Mexican popular culture to have an integral perspective about the Zapatista

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[2] Also known as "*Selva Lacandona*", which is not a jungle but a rainforest.

movement online. Furthermore, it is explained how Zapatistas represent themselves through their images, and how activists and users on the Internet interpret the Zapatista imagery to construct a cultural meaning.

The last section presents the methodology used to catalogue and process all the images found in the Zapatistas websites. The presentation of the methodological steps is followed by a first explanation of the results of the quantitative analysis. In brief, the approach led to find that the pasamontañas, the Subcomandante Marcos, and the red star, were the most recurrently used images in the websites. In addition, the data revealed that some images that were initially outside our scope were actually relevant. For this reason, the most relevant results are listed and brief explained. An underlying aim of this last section is to achieve a cultural analysis of the three most relevant images within the websites of Zapatistas using the viewpoints of Stuart Hall (1997), Johan Fornäs (2002), Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright (2001) in relation to cultural studies, media studies, and visual culture analysis, respectively. The idea is to reach a theoretical explanation for the reasons behind the extended use of those images as visual signs and propose them as candidates to portray the visual identity of the Zapatista movement online. To support this idea, this section also offers an interpretation about the meanings in a system of representation through language.

Apart from the importance of attempting a new perspective over the Zapatista movement online, the main contribution of this thesis consists in the implementation of the methodology, which was developed specially to study this case. The analysis of cultural information surrounding websites dedicated to Zapatism requires an eclectic, multidimensional and integrated methodology. It must allow the gathering of data from the Internet, clustering that data, and finally present the results in terms of culture.

Defining online activism

This section is dedicated to the concept of activism, its essential characteristics, and how to differentiate it from the activism online. Tim Jordan's (2002) work is used to outline a classification of the types of activism and highlight the most important characteristics of each type. These aspects are then illustrated with selected examples of social movements online since the invention of the Internet. Among these examples, a special place is given to the main online activism movements in Latin America before and after the Zapatistas.

1.1 What is activism

Tim Jordan defines **activism** as the transgressive action of a group of people that driven by empathy, act collectively against established policies, behaviours and ideologies, to change them in favour of the society. The main motivation of this social activity is to improve the social, political, or cultural conditions of a social group or the largest possible number of human beings (2002, 9-12). Thanks to the transgressive activism, societies started conquering their public spaces, especially since the beginning of the XX century (Gilly 2010, 32). Examples of positive consequences of these social movements are women's suffrage, the homosexual marriage and adoption, the public education, the labour rights, the warning message in the cigarettes packages and so on.

In general, the fundamental motivation is the struggle against the establishment, against the system of power that imposes rules on how to act, think and live. It is thus essential for the activism to protest against the power relations that cause oppression and subjugation (Jordan 2002, 49). In this

thesis, a phenomenon is called activism when the transgression and direct action are the primary motors of the protest. These two factors make the demands of the social movements to become more visible in the mass media and public opinion. For instance, a creative and transgressive activism is more likely to aid people in becoming adherents and join the protest. In addition it can be said that social movements at a massive scale, produce in most cases social, political and cultural changes in a short period of time (op. cit.).

A precondition of activism is collective behaviour, in other words the action of one individual is not enough to be considered as activism. The collaborative actions of a group are what generate reaction and change, particularly if the group of activists is large in numbers (Langman 2005, 47). Naturally the members of a given group can share different points of view or strategies to protest, providing different nuances to the original ideas and actions, and consequently augmenting the movement itself. For instance a subgroup of activists supporting a given social movement may believe that moderate protest is the best way to make public their claims and another subgroup of the same movement may have a radical vision about the problem and how it should be digested for the rest of the society (Jordan 2002, 25-26). In fact ideologies operating in different social movements around the world are very diverse, ranging from extremist to ultra-conservatism. An example of this is the case of the ultra-conservative wing within the Republican Party in the US; the self-styled Tea Party that promotes anti-immigrant laws and is in favour of the possession and use of firearms by citizens. The activism may have several forms of internal coherence; there is an activism in which the political ideology is not the engine of the protest, for example the environmental movements. There are also some examples of activism that may be considered more progressive and radical than others, such as the global movement to legalize the Marijuana.

Another important aspect of activism is that the success of a social movement resides and is linked intrinsically to the historical and political moment in which the protest is developed local and globally (Langman 2005, 48). That is to say that the potential victory of any activism is tied to the political events that are happening around it. For example the Arab protests in Middle East; some of them evolved in rebellions and revolutions. This phenomenon called "The Arab Spring" has spread not just in the region (Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Tunisia, Yemen) but has also inspired other social movements around the world. The success and origin of these movements is a combination of factors, not only the use of Twitter[3] and Facebook[4] by protesters. Although we cannot deny that online social networks have played an important role to communicate and gather together people on these countries, there are other elements that helped to create such a strong mass movements in Middle East. Namely, dictatorial expressions of power that exist in most of these countries, the lack of food and financial crisis—that has affected millions of people around the world since 2008, and the cracked minimal expectations of life for millions of young people; in the case of the Middle East, abundant college students but with no chances to work and develop themselves.

1.1.1 Transgressive activism

As I mentioned earlier, there are different ideologies and motivations for the activism, however this thesis is focused only on the radical social movements. This is, the sort of activism that has a high potential to change the world, like the Zapatism (which could be considered as a transgressive social movement). The transgressive activism also struggles against the establishment to find a radical democracy, but it is not simply seeking to make new laws but new forms of government and new ways of making laws (Jordan 2002, 33).

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[3] http://twitter.com/
[4] http://www.facebook.com/

The motives for some people to join a transgressive movement of activism are many and varied, for example, in many countries the political elite is made of servants of the economic power, organized crime or mass media. In those countries, the real power belongs to small groups that have the money to pay long political campaigns that very often end in highly expensive and occasionally fraudulent elections, where the power of the people to elect their rulers is decreased or is completely null. The global economy works well for big business, banking and financial institutions of great power as the International Monetary Fund IMF, who operates in favour of the great capitals while deteriorates the lives of millions of human beings that are forced to migrate to other cities or countries to survive. In these examples the colonialism is not finished, as the labelling as a "Third World" seems to stress the fact that these countries have never been able to throw off the yoke imposed by those who once were self nominated conquerors. Moreover most of these countries are economically dependent because of their immense external debts that in turn are the cause of abysmal differences in the social, economic, politic and technological relations between rich and poor countries. Also in most of these cases, a common root for all the aspects mentioned above is the high levels of corruption that has lacerated their societies.

1.2 Online activism

Advances in technology have always changed the way of living and thinking of human beings, nevertheless it seems that in the last three decades these changes have been accelerated due to a flood of new devices and technologies. People exposed to these new experiences, have changed in all aspects of their daily social and private life, and in the ways they interact with each other. We refer to new devices when it comes to computers, cell phones, personal digital assistants (e.g., game consoles, digital cameras, tablets), and new technologies like software, 3D technology, cellular and satellite telephony and Internet.

The Internet is a global system of interconnected computer networks that serve billions of users worldwide. It is comprised of millions of private, public, academic, business, and government networks, of local to global scope, that are linked by a broad array of electronic, wireless and optical networking technologies. The Internet can also be defined as a worldwide interconnection of computers and computer networks that facilitate the exchange of information among its users. The Internet carries a vast range of resources of information and services, such as the inter-linked hypertext documents of the World Wide Web (WWW) and the infrastructure to support electronic mail.

Since its commercial inception in the 1990's the Internet has attracted the interest of the people to enter to the network and interact with other people in the same city or around the world. Internet users (i.e., connected people) can also find, publish and share extraordinary amounts of information and services. And the diversity of uses that the network has to offer is increasing exponentially; in its few years of existence the Internet has evolved from a simple communication system to a network of networks where each day new applications are developed for different purposes and audiences. Now people can listen to the radio, chat with other people with an unnoticeable delay in the flow of the messages, publish videos, watch television, read the newspaper, publish their thoughts in a journal or blog about any subject, play games online, search by satellite the geographical location of a given individual, and so on. Furthermore the main form of social organization on the Internet is the community; depending of its size and hierarchical organization online communities can be divided for its analysis in small groups or tribes.

Internet is an ecosystem where all the ways of thinking have the opportunity of being represented in terms of the social, cultural and political factors that make each social group unique. Accordingly

the Internet has become a useful technological and social platform, where as Tim Jordan (2002) states, social movements can make three kinds of activism. One, the activism that is centred on the nature of the Internet and its government, this category includes the *hacktivism* (i.e., the legal or illegal action that employs a computer or network to transgress any entity on the Internet) and all the movements that seek to improve security, privacy and free flow of information online. Another kind of activism is the one that takes place in the network but is also linked to a social movement outside the Internet. These sorts of movements use the Internet to publicize their activities, proposals, demands, marches and meeting points. Finally, there is an activism that combines both, described by the anthropologist Arturo Escobar as "The double type of activism" on the Internet. This is, combining an activism in which all actions are about the nature and government of the Internet, and another that is linked to an offline social movement (Taylor & Pitman 2007, 102).

Online activism refers to the massive organization, action and demonstration on the Internet for the purposes of a social movement inside or outside the Internet. The next section presents a review of the origins of online activism and gives some examples of the most representative movements in the last two decades.

1.2.1 Origins of online activism

Since it was first marketed in 1987, the Internet has become a powerful communication tool especially for those who have access to this technology. There are about 2,095,006,005[5] users in the world, thus it is not venturous think of it as an alternative source of information standing aside of traditional mass media—that has been controlled by governments or capital. For this reason the activism has found on the Internet a suitable ecosystem to develop and grow, a place where activists

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[5] Internet World Stats. 2011. World Internet Users and Population Stats. Available online:
    http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm. (Read 12 Sept 2011.)

have discovered reliable information and a space to distribute and discuss their ideals, with an acceptable degree of freedom (McCaughey et al. 2003, 25-26). This has been important particularly to youth population with Internet access, as it has allowed them to participate actively in the movements, for example, as it can be observed in the movement for the free public education in Chile or the riots in the UK in 2011.

Normally mass media has catalysed the public opinion towards supporting (or not) a certain activism, at a local or global level (Langman 2005, 54); it is precisely the lack of objectivity in the print media and especially on television the phenomenon that has forced many people to gather information on the Internet. In the case of Mexico, mass media are powerful economically and politically; consequently the way they present the news is biased and corresponds only to their interests and those of the Estate. For this reason, anti-systemic demonstrations have not appeared in the main Mexican mass media for decades. The protest and the right to express social disagreement have been stigmatized by television associating them with negative connotations, as a consequence a portion of Mexican society detest public demonstrations and scorn the social and civic participation.

Interestingly the Internet has its hierarchies. The governments can control the flow of information and some Internet services cancel or ban users accounts if the information is against the ideology of the service or company. For example this year YouTube[6] cancelled the channel "Cubadebate" because they published information about a CIA worker that destroyed a Cuban aeroplane with 73 people in 1976[7]. Although Internet users have privacy in some aspects, like publishing or not their pictures, videos, or notes, confidentiality is no longer warranted because governments and

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[6] http://www.youtube.com
[7] Cuba Debate. 2011 Available online: http://www.cubadebate.cu/noticias/2011/01/12/google-censura-canal-de-videos-de-cubadebate-en-youtube/. (Read 17 Jan 2011)

companies are monitoring all activity (e.g., e-mails, surfing behaviour, shopping information, and forums). This information is used to persecute people politically or terminate accounts in services such as Facebook. On the other hand security agencies also do this in order to prevent possible extremist attacks, child pornography, fraud, and so on.

The first signs of online activism appeared during the decade of the 80's but more formally one decade later, when some companies that owned Internet services made unilateral decisions about cancelling or modifying those services without the opinion or consent of the users, crushing and ignoring their rights. Then the first communal movements were just to make adjustments in those services. Users began to organize themselves via e-mail to promote changes in the hierarchical structure of their online communities (McCaughey et al. 2003, 28). For example the case of eBay[8] (Jarret et al. 2006) where the online community took control of the website, or the case of GeoCities (McCaughey et al. 2003, 25-26) when was bought by Yahoo the users started to protest in their website about this and the new "Terms of service".

Subsequently to the use of e-mail as the main tool for activism, there were applied different strategies to fight for democratization and freedom of information on the Internet, as well as to extend the scope of many social movements outside the network. Thus in 1988 emerged the term hacktivism, when the network of the National Aeronautical and Space Administration (NASA) was attacked (Jordan 2002, 120). As Tim Jordan asserts, the term hacktivism was created by the mass media to refer mainly to the illegal actions on the Internet and not to the radical political activism online (op. cit.). In order to satisfy the targeted aims, the hacktivism apply technological tools, such as web site defacements, redirects, denial-of-service attacks, information theft, web site parodies, virtual sit-ins, and virtual sabotage[9].

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[8] http://www.ebay.com/
[9] Wikipedia, The free encyclopedia. Available online http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hacktivism (Read 9 July 2011)

Almost at the same time, other terms related to the online activism emerged, for instance the terms *cyberwar* and *netwar*. Cyberwar emerged in 1993, "is a concept that refers to information oriented to military warfare" (Taylor & Pitman 2007, 87). For militia the first cyberwar occurred during the war of Yugoslavia when the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) forces bombed Kosovo in 1999; a Kosovan group called "The black hand" attacked NATO military and security computers (Geers 2011, 26-28, 96; Elison 2000, 129-130). The term netwar refers to "an emerging mode of conflict (and crime) at societal levels involving measures short of traditional war in which the protagonist use network forms of organization and related doctrines, strategies and technologies attuned to the information age." (Taylor & Pitman 2007, 87). The US Pentagon has used the term netwar when referring to the activism produced by the Zapatistas online. In this work neither of these terms are used because they were created by the US military advisor, as such, they are biased concepts loaded with negative propaganda for all the movements that are fighting and protesting against the establishment.

A group of artists named the *Critical Art Ensemble* (CAE)—linked to the *Electronic Disturbance Theatre* (EDT, discussed later in this thesis because of its relevance for the Zapatism online), published in 1995 a series of essays titled "The Electronic Civil Disobedience". In those essays they declared that the protests had died in the streets, and proposed hacktivism as a tool to attack the presence of institutions on the Internet (Meikle 2002, 147). In other words the CAE provided the groundwork for the activism online.

Subsequently it emerged a group of British activists called *Ehippies* (Electrohippies collective), whose purpose was to express their discontent for the government censorship policies in the mass media and Internet control (Jordan 2002). The most relevant moment of Ehippies was in 1999

during the conference of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Seattle, US, because they were able to block and deny the service to the WTO website thanks to the participation of 450,000 online activists, while hundreds of activists on the streets blocked the access to the forum to delegates of the conference. Nevertheless Ehippies were forced to inaction because of certain laws enacted in 2000 in the UK, these laws would limit the right of citizens to use the Internet as a political tool and for activism[10].

In the same way in October 21th of 1999, a group of online activists proposed that date as the "*Jam Echelon Day*". Echelon was a surveillance network operated mainly by the US government and aided by some other governments that searched for subversive words inside emails. Online activists proposed to send as many emails as possible containing words such as *revolution*, *manifesto*, *revolt*, *revolution*, *bomb* and so on, in order to saturate the server of Echelon[11].

Apart from the movements mentioned above, different forms of online activism have occurred since the 90's decade (see Table 1).

Table 1. Examples of online activism.

Name	Address
Netstrike	http://www.autonoomcentrum.nl/global/netstrike.htm
The Cult of the Dead Cow	http://www.cultdeadcow.com/
Black Orifice 2000	http://www.bo2k.com/whatis.html
The Legions of the Underground	http://www.legions.org/
Cybernetic Revolution	http://www.net4dem.org/cyrev/
Computer Professional for social Democracy	http://cpsr.org/
Committee for Democracy in Information Technology	http://cdiglobal.org
Labortech	http://labortech.net/
The Electronic Frontier Foundation	https://www.eff.org/
Anonymous	http://www.whyweprotest.net/
The Pirate Bay	http://thepiratebay.se/about

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[10] Electrohippies collective. Available online http://www.iwar.org.uk/hackers/resources/electrohippies-collective/comm-2000-12.pdf. (Read 10 May 2009)

[11] Wired Magazine. Available online: http://www.wired.com/politics/law/news/1999/10/32039. (Read 5 Feb 2009)

Another recent example of online activism and noticeably visibility in the mass media is the case of *Wikileaks[12]*, a group of activists that since 2006 is fighting to obtain and publish information that somehow has been censored or classified as secret by governments, companies, global organizations and mass media companies. Their effort has exposed the poor diplomacy about war crimes in Iraq by the US, censorship of newspapers as "The Independent", government corruption, and other critical information.

1.2.2 Characteristics of online activism

Online activism has found on the Internet a free flow of information and the necessary privacy and security to develop, spread and support a large number of cases of offline activism (Langman 2005, 55). For instance, demonstrations online allow people to participate even if they do not have the possibility to take physical actions.

Langman (op. cit., 60) enumerates three kinds of Internet-worked Social Movements (ISM) i.e., online activism that depends on and conforms part of the Internet: the *activism of alternative media* that provides information different to the one made available through mainstream mass media, the *activism that proposes global alternative politics* to reach social justice and peace, and finally the *activism that in a whole is on the Internet*. For Sandor Vegh (In McCaughey et. al. 2003, 72-76) online activism can be classified in two big groups: *awareness / advocacy* and *organization / mobilization*. The first group refers to an online activism that provides information and news about the offline protests, demonstrations and movements through activists' websites and networks. The second kind of online activism does the same as the first, but in addition it calls activists to do online protests; not only to write emails to a given politician or governmental institutions with the

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[12] http://wikileaks.org

aid of web services such as petitionsite.com (op. cit., 33). This last form of online activism encourages hacking services like *PayPal*, *Amazon*, *MasterCard* and *Visa*, just as the hacker group Anonymous did when they manifested themselves against the imprisonment of Julian Assange from Wikileaks[13].

Additionally Tim Jordan (2002, 125-127) claims that the main feature in online activism protests is that they are Virtual Mass Direct Action (VMDA), in other words those demonstrations involve a large number of people who act from their computers at the same time to cause a real impact on the Internet and mass media. In this context, **virtual** means that the protests online are symbolic demonstrations because they happen in the non-physical space of Internet; **mass** means that it is imperative the participation of a great number of people in the discussion, opinion and action in the online protests; **direct action** means that the participants of the online protest take direct action attacking certain websites and spreading big amounts of information about their actions to other activists and Internet users in general.

Although Jordan asserts that "A problem with the analogy to mass street protest is that when protesters block a street, it is impossible to miss the message and impossible for protesters to miss each other and the feeling of solidarity in the street, while in cyberspace, packets of information flowing across the Net are simply packets of information" (2002, 125). The participants online may experience a similar feeling as protesters on the street, and they may also build information and social networks with other activists through protests on the Internet. For instance in past Mexican presidential elections (in 2006 and 2012) the active participation of political opposition on the Internet had a fundamental role in the political life and perception of the Mexican governmental

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[13] AlterPolitics. 2010. Available online: http://www.alterpolitics.com/politics/tech-wars-anonymous-hacker-group-declares-war-on-wikileaks-censorers. (Read 11 March 2012)

system and its failures. In the Mexican case online activism aimed to assure the free social determination and democracy.

1.2.3 Internet factors that allow online activism

The Internet has inevitably affected the way to do activism, the determinant factors for this are the speed of connection, the flow of alternative information, the low cost of connection, the sense of anonymity and the online network between movements that is possible because of the large number of devices with Internet access (Langman 2005, 55, 70-72).

With **speed** of connection we refer to the velocity with which users can share, collect and publish information trough Internet around the world, for instance the velocity to download data from Mexico City to Tampere is of 5.28 Mbps[14]. Hence the speed allowed certain social movements to reach a global echo on the Internet. Online activism has helped to publish general statements simultaneously online, in the street and in various places such as those spread the day of the earth.

The second factor is the **flow** of a great amount of **alternative information**; the exchange of that information between users has made them aware of the proposals and expressions of the social movements. Thus, the Internet promptly became a relevant tool to exchange information, for this reason a large number of people have joined social movements that are related to their causes and thoughts. It is in this form, how new progressive social projects, global justice movements, and demonstrations have emerged.

The third factor is the **low cost** of an Internet connection that has allowed people to be connected even in rural communities. In 2009 Japan was the country with the cheapest Internet connection in the world $0.27 for 1Mbps per month[15], the same year Finland made 1Mb broadband access a legal

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[14] The Global Broadband Speed Test. Available online: http://speedtest.net. (Read 8 Sep 2011)
[15] Internet Speeds and Costs Around the World. Available online: http://gizmodo.com/5390014/internet-speeds-and-costs-around-the-world-shown-visually. (Read 30 September 2011)

right[16]. This initiative followed by other countries such as France, increased the active participation of citizens in online forums, chat rooms and discussions. This is true even in countries like Mexico, where in spite of the elevated cost of Internet, there are public places where people is allowed to use the Internet connection for a small amount of money. Thus facilitating the access for activists, who do not have a computer of their own.

The fourth factor that makes the Internet an effective medium to associate individuals in diverse social movements and struggles is the sense of **anonymity**. The Network gives people the opportunity to hide their real names and physical characteristics, however this aspect is questionable because there are different methods to know the identity of a user. This sense of anonymity is strong in all users and for activists it is a key to belong and participate within a movement.

Finally the fifth factor is that small and local movements have built **networks** with another movements with the help of the Internet. Causing that more activists and movements to extend their perspective about the agenda of international activism. Within these networks all web sites are interconnected, as there is not possibly to be isolated. As Legman (2005, 55) asserts a social network is easily created, constructed, and is *rhizomatic* (i.e., millions of heterogeneous proliferations without hierarchy, Klei 2002, 48), in the sense that it spreads in *deterritorialized* (i.e., take the control and the order from an specific land or space, op.cit., 49) online public spaces, for example: chat rooms, forums, and meeting places.

1.3 Online activism in Latin America

Since 1992 Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Latin America have had access to electronic networks through regional nodes of the Association for Progressive Communications (APC). This has helped to empower and support NGOs social movements and people to reach

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[16] CNET News. 2009. Available online: http://news.cnet.com/8301-17939_109-10374831-2.html. (Read 30 September 2011)

access to information and communication technologies[17], nevertheless, social movements not only use APC networks but also the Internet to express and spread their ideas. As Thea Pitman (Taylor & Pitman 2007, 86) argues, the Latin American social movements represent the main contribution of digital culture to the region. Clearly the Zapatistas have been the movement with more presence in the mass media and for that reason it is also the most popular, however there are other relevant movements listed next.

AlterNex, from Brazil is the largest APC node in the Latin America and provides general electronic communication services, among NGOs and individuals. In 1989, AlterNex started as an experimental network but in 1992 achieved international recognition because of its electronic support for the UN Earth Summit (http://www.ax.apc.org).

Mayan hackers was a Guatemalan social movement originated in the 90's as a consequence of the atrocities committed by the Estate against the Mayan communities during the civil war. This movement arose to revalidate the Mayan culture especially in regards to the language. Mayan hackers were Mayan professionals educated abroad Guatemala that around 1994 started to use the computers against the discrimination and oppression of their culture (O'Donnell and Delgado 1995, Media Development (3) 36-38).

ALAI Latin American Agency of Information is an Ecuadorian communication agency that was born in 1977 to distribute alternative information and since the 80's has been doing it electronically. Its objective is the democratization of the information to reach social justice (http://alainet.org/).

FUNREDES *Fundación Redes y Desarrollo* is a NGO originated in Dominican Republic in 1993. Its objective is to disseminate the use of information and communication technologies in the developing countries (http://funredes.org/).

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[17] Ricardo Gómez, 1997. Available online: http://base.d-p-h.info/pt/fiches/premierdph/fiche-premierdph-5493.html. (Read 20 June 2007)

Cacerolazos.com is an Argentinian website launched in the beginning of 2002 after the street protests in December of 2001 that provoked the resignation of the Argentinian president Fernando de la Rúa. This website provides information about street demonstrations and also provides different sound tracks to make *cacerolazo* (make noise with a saucepan) with de aid of a computer (http://www.cacerolazo.com/).

The Gas War occurred in Bolivia in 2003, this conflict was an intense and cruel fight among civil population and the government because the Estate tried to privatize the natural gas of Bolivia. The massive indigenous movement achieved the resign of the president Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada. In this movement the alternative mass media as the Internet played a central role, because it exposed the reality of the activists and the governmental repression to the international opinion. Some of those websites that showed different stories to the official were: http://www.bolpress.com/, http://bolivia.indymedia.org/, and http://www.padem.org.bo.

APPO: The Popular Assembly of Peoples of Oaxaca created in 2006, is a group of 300 Mexican NGOs of students, workers and teachers that struggled for the resign of the governor of Oaxaca Ulises Ruiz Ortiz in the south of Mexico. During five months the APPO occupied the principal streets in Oaxaca, this was possible because its social network was informed about mobilization and police stations from the official APPO website, cell phones and especially their radio station—that was also available on the Internet and suffered sabotage from the Mexican government all the time (Esteva 2010, 978-982).

Zapatistas from the past to Internet

This section revises the history of Zapatism, and explains the differences between the Zapatista movement located in Chiapas, Mexico, and the Zapatista movement on the Internet. In the existing literature both forms of Zapatism are commonly mixed, i.e., there is a lack of analysis in the social, cultural and economic differences between the indigenous that fight from the rainforest and the activists on the Internet. Considering them as separated entities has a double aim: to present the Zapatism as a whole but also as the sum of its parts.

The Zapatism as a political movement and as a social phenomenon is a constant reference in studies about activism in and out the Internet, but very often studies focused on online Zapatism mythologise the struggle and forget about what represents the movement for the indigenous communities of Chiapas in Mexico (Taylor & Pitman 2007, 89-90). Those studies present the indigenous people in the Lacandon jungle as if they were the same people building the Zapatista movement on the Internet, but they are not. Admittedly, online Zapatistas are not only followers of a movement but also activists that fight, share and support the same ideals than those in the rainforest, they are committed to the cause and have served as a promoters of dialogue between Zapatism and society. They link movements, alternative mass media, and people, to grow in numbers and ideas and developing a support network that has avoided some of the Mexican government abuse.

2.1 The origins of Zapatism

In Mexico during the last decades of the nineteenth and early on the twentieth century, the regime of the dictator Porfirio Díaz took the land the indigenous of the centre and south of the country, and from the peasants of the north. Such a dispossession policy happened particularly in the *haciendas* (i.e., estate) producers of sugar located in the centre, ranches in the north and coffee haciendas in the south. At the same time that the railway networks, monetary circulation, exploitation of mineral deposits and foreign trade were developed (Gilly 2010, 32).

Under those circumstances the people from Morelos and the south of Mexico City in the centre of the country organized themselves into a peasant struggle, fighting against the government. The director of that struggle was Emiliano Zapata, a man sensitive to the injustice and a deep respect to agriculture and an almost pure indigenous descent that spoke Nahuatl and Spanish. That group henceforth called Zapatistas fought to defend their land from the *hacendados* (i.e., owners of the states) and to recover resources that had already been lost. Their aim was to achieve local liberties for the right of autonomy and auto determination, on the whole they struggled to preserve their rural culture (Brunk 1998, 457-458).

This south peasant movement joined to the revolts in the north conducted by Francisco Villa and together created the two largest armies formed by peasants in the history of the American continent. In December of 1914, during the climax of the Mexican revolution these two peasant armies occupied Mexico City while the liberal wing of the revolution retreated to the port of Veracruz. The storming of Mexico City was one of the greatest feasts that peasants and indigenous movements had reached in the continent. The participation of these two autonomous peasant armies during the Mexican Revolution (1910-1921) was decisive to determine the democratic and radical agrarian

character of the Mexican constitution adopted in February of 1917, moreover, it uphold the nationalist reforms of the 1930 (Gilly 2010, 32).

In the so called "Plan de Ayala" (i.e., document comprising new agrarian policies) created by the Zapatistas in 1911 as well as in subsequent documents, they proposed the most advanced programs to distribute the land and to establish a communal organization of the government in the entire Republic, in brief, a program of dynamic and anti-capitalist content. Thus, between 1912 and 1918 Zapatistas put in place and maintained their own government in their region in what has been called the Morelos Commune (op. cit.).

The Zapatism has been the program, model and the inspiring myth of each peasant and indigenous struggle in Mexico. Thus each time new protests and demands arise, they pave the way to new experiences, and thus the organization is lived and created by previous generations and movements, not just copied from what was done in other countries. Therefore the armed indigenous uprising in January of 1994 led by the EZLN invoked the legacy and tradition of the Zapatista revolution of the 1910-1920 through their actions, forms of organization and planning documents (Gilly 2010, 32).

2.2 The Zapatistas in the Lacandon jungle

In January first of 1994 in Chiapas, Mexico, the same date that the North American Fare Trade Agreement (NAFTA) became effective, thousands of indigenous under the name of *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (EZLN, Zapatista Army of National Liberation) declared the war against the Mexican government. Their main motive was to fight against the policies that excluded the interests of the indigenous communities (Martinez-Torres 2001, 349; Froehling 1997, 291).

As mentioned before, the name "Zapatistas" is an appropriation of the peasant and indigenous movement during the Mexican Revolution. The cultural appropriation (Sturken & Cartwright 2001, 59) of the name was an empowered move of the rebel army, because the former Zapatistas and their struggle in the Mexican Revolution poses a very respected matter to most Mexicans.

2.2.1 Brief chronicle of the Zapatista upraising

The Zapatistas in Chiapas constitute a social movement that has 27 years of history, their struggle has focused on improving the quality of life of indigenous communities in Chiapas but also in other regions of Mexico. In the first 10 years of the struggle, the Zapatistas organized themselves to make the war to the Mexican government and people in the power. As a result, they started a fight against the same system that during 500 years has maintained them subjugated and has tried to erase their culture and identity[18].

Since the Zapatistas first appearance in 1994 a non-indigenous member of the EZLN called "**Subcomandante Marcos**" became one of the most notable leaders in the movement because he has been the spokesperson of the Zapatista army. Subcomandante Marcos was the first person that spoke to the press after the beginning of the conflict, and he also made public the declaration of war to the Mexican government. Furthermore Subcomandante Marcos writes quite often about the resistance, Mexican and international politics, life in the rainforest, and Zapatistas in general. So, he counts with a substantial number of readers following his stories, narrations and press releases published on newspapers but especially on the Internet.

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[18] The Sixth Declaration of the Selva Lacandona. 2005 Available online:
https://webspace.utexas.edu/hcleaver/www/SixthDeclaration.html. (Read 5 August 2006).

The first ten days of the Zapatista uprising were of an intense armed battle, the government voice-man declared that there were near to 17000 soldiers against 200 rebels. In 1994, Mexico was living many political and social changes, thus the government tried to discredit the movement, arguing that foreigners were trying to destabilize Mexico and were using the indigenous to their purposes. However, local and foreign press recognizes the EZLN as an indigenous movement and judged harshly the government of Salinas de Gortari and his false social peace and modernity discourse, the Zapatista movement in Mexico provoked many political changes, even the office of the president was surpassed and had to change its stance against the Zapatistas[19].

Furthermore the Zapatistas exposed the backwardness of the indigenous way of life in the south east of Mexico. For instance, Chiapas is one of the richest provinces in natural resources but in 1994 half of the people in that region had no drinking water, two thirds of the total population did not possess drainage, 90 % of the rural population had tiny or no income at all, the educational level was the lowest in Mexico, in rural areas 72 % of the children did not finish the first grade of elementary school, and hundreds of children died of curable diseases such as flu[20].

The Zapatista insurrection brought the **indigenous topic** to the foreground instead of NAFTA in the mass media and Mexican policies. Nevertheless in December of 1994 the government changed and the new president Ernesto Zedillo changed the strategy, calling the EZLN terrorists to allow a new military incursion that provoked thousands of displaced indigenous. Because of this, the civil society achieved a cease-fire, but the militarization of Chiapas was imminent (op. cit.). In five years 70,000 troops occupied this province—that has an area of 74.211 square kilometres and had a

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[19] Zapatistas, Crónica de una rebelión. 2003. Canal 6 de Julio. Available online: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d94KzsYOp0c. (Watched 14 March 2007)
[20] Peace Process, War Process. Brief history of the conflict in Chiapas. Available online: http://www.sipaz.org/en/chiapas/peace-process-war-process.html. (Read 30 January 2010)

population (in 1994) of 3,607,128 inhabitants of which over a million were indigenous. Together with the soldiers, there were the municipal, estate and federal police, and also paramilitary groups (i.e., groups sponsored by the government with counterinsurgency training)[21]. Because of those circumstances the Zapatistas called for a dialogue with the government to end the low intensity war, thus, the Mexican government was forced to sit and listen to the demands of the EZLN. As a result, after a tiring process that ended in 1996, the government and Zapatistas signed an agreement called "*Los Acuerdos de San Andrés*" to resolve the indigenous demands. The document contains concessions and proposals between the Mexican government and the EZLN to warranty a new relation among indigenous people, Mexican society and state. The central purpose of these agreements is to end the subordination, inequality, discrimination, poverty, exploitation and political exclusion of indigenous people, and recognize their right to self-determination[22].

The Zapatistas are extremely poor people, being indigenous makes them completely invisible to public policies, and that condition is worsened by the fact that to the great majority Spanish language is not their mother tongue. Hence the war did not make Zapatistas rich, they have instead suffered persecution, hunger and death, and however they claim that they have returned dignity to their communities and descendants. Remarkably, they chose courageously to build their **autonomy** fenced by military forces.

2.2.2 The Zapatistas communities

When the Mexican government refused to recognize and apply "Los Acuerdos de San Andrés" in 1996 the Zapatistas started to build their autonomy in the rebel territories. Consequently after seven

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[21] Militarización y guerra sucia en Chiapas. 1999. Observatorio de conflictos y Derechos Humanos. Available online: http://www.observatori.org/mostrar.php?id=58&files_id=104&tipus=articulos&lng=cas. (Read 07 May 2011)
[22] San Andres Accords. 1996. EZLN and Mexican Government. Available online: http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/mexico/ezln/san_andres.html. (Read 21 October 2007)

years, in 2003, with a fortified social network and a mesh of solidarity among different ethnic towns and unities, the movement initiated a new organization within the communities to be self-fitting and autonomous (Inclán 2008, 31). Thus they created "***Las Juntas de Buen Gobierno***" (Good Government Councils) called "***Los Caracoles***" (The Snails) that are based in the statement that people choose their authorities and these have the duty to govern obeying the community[23]. Moreover "Los Caracoles" attempt to fix the social inequality among the **autonomous municipalities and communities**, to intercede in the conflicts between all the communities—being these autonomous or non-autonomous—to attend the violations of human rights against Zapatistas communities, protests and demonstrations, and to investigate these cases and order the Autonomous Councils to fix the faults and supervise the fulfilment of them[24].

Furthermore the duty of Zapatistas communities is to **command obeying** and this is applied without distinction, thus the meaning of collective has a crucial importance in the Zapatistas thought, just as oral communication among Zapatistas communities because it is the foremost security system within revel territory. Also in Zapatistas communities the concept and relations of power and self-government are evolving constantly into an empowered civil society with a participative democracy, a society that knows how to be represented and how to control their leaders to respect their communal accords. For example, if someone steals money or other goods from "La Junta de Buen Gobierno" he or she is punished and obliged to reinstate the damage to the community[25]. In addition, within the Zapatistas communities exists a novel exercise to command the resistance, there the authorities follow the communal sense to construct and outline the strategies of their struggle and organization; in practice, the word of each person is equal in importance and all the opinions about autonomy and communal policies are relevant.

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[23] Palabras por el nacimiento de las Juntas de Buen Gobierno. 2003. Subcomandante Marcos. Available online: http://palabra.ezln.org.mx/comunicados/2003/2003_08_09_d.htm. (Read 19 December2006)
[24] La Treceava Estela. 2003. Subcomandante Marcos. Available online: http://palabra.ezln.org.mx/comunicados/2003/2003_07_f.htm. (Read 22 December 2006)
[25] The Zapatista Caracoles and Good Governments: The Long Walk to Autonomy. 2003 Paul Chatterton. Available online:http://www.stateofnature.org/theZapatistaCaracoles.html. (Read 26 December 2006)

Clearly the Zapatistas have done a laborious campaign to improve the service in **education and health** within the communities. This includes, the foundations of the autonomous education to teach about their live, culture, roots, history, and to be aware about their reality. Zapatistas have developed an efficient system to build schools, develop study plans, provide training as teachers, build clinics, provide medicines to the people and so on. All of these have been made possible without any support from the Mexican Government[26].

Also, the **Zapatistas women** are organized to fight against the paternalist system widespread in Mexico and especially in indigenous communities. This issue has not been comprehended by all Zapatistas men, because the paternalist practices have a deep cultural root in many indigenous towns, nevertheless many Zapatistas women have took the duty to spread information about their human rights and sexual education to the communities[27]. Apart from this, their plan is concerned with another issues, such as nourishing, housing, ecology, people and narcotics traffic, drugs consume, democracy, and land.

Speaking generally the social dimension achieved in the communities, responds to the Zapatistas capacity as a movement to redefine their rebel resistance and struggle, keeping as mainly concepts the autonomy, democracy, freedom, and justice to all people; from the communities, for the communities, and to the communities.

Overall, the organization of Zapatistas communities may be not a perfect system, but in the practice "command obeying" is a tendency in their territory, moreover the project is not exempt of mistakes, contradictions, and irregularities. However, the positive result is the benefits brought upon the

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[26] SERAZLN-ZACH. 2005. Available online: http://serazln-altos.org/welcome.html. (Read 04 January 2007)
[27] EZLN: 20 Y 10, el fuego y la palabra. 2003. Comandanta Esther. Available online: palabra.ezln.org.mx/comunicados/2003/2003_11_25.htm. (Read 28 December 2006)

communities, in spite of the persecution, harassment, and poverty that indigenous people in Mexico have endured. So the autonomous councils have achieved the improvement of the way of life in the region and established the conditions to continue the resistance and struggle. Paraphrasing the Zapatistas thought, "they advance slowly however with the patience of the snail"

2.3 Online Zapatistas

The morning of January first of 1994 the Zapatista movement captured the spotlight of mass media, and the Internet was no the exception (Martinez-Torres 2001, 347). When these revel indigenous appeared on television around the world, a large number of people empathize with them, other people were amazed about what they were seeing, a group of vulnerable, fragile, malnourished and weak indigenous that stirred up against the system. Zapatistas appeared to say that they existed and would not allow the globalization destroy them once and for all, moreover the Zapatistas were not willing to suffer more humiliations, abuse and harassment by a system that had maintained a policy of neglect and extermination against them during 500 years[28]. In addition the Zapatistas promulgated that their fight was to reach "a world where many worlds fit"[29]. As one might expect, the mass media coverage about the Zapatistas was so extensive that the image of Subcomandante Marcos showed on the Internet two days after the armed uprising (McCaughey et al. 2003, 166), however the EZLN did not have an official website until 2001 when they marched from the Zapatistas communities in the Lacandon jungle to Mexico City (Clifford 2005, 137-138). In the words of Subcomandante Marcos: "people put us on the Internet and thus Zapatism came to occupy a space that no-one suspected it would" (Taylor & Pitman 2007, 91).

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[28] 1st Declaration of the Selva Lacandona. 1994. Available online: http://palabra.ezln.org.mx/comunicados/1994/1993.htm. (Read 12 April 2007)
[29] 4th Declaration of the Selva Lacandona. 1996 Available online: http://www.struggle.ws/mexico/ezln/jung4.html. (Read 06 November 2006)

2.3.1 Appearance of Zapatista movement on the Internet

The Zapatistas movement was not born on the Internet, but the Zapatistas in the Lacandon jungle cleverly capitalized this fact (Taylor & Pitman 2007, 90). Although during the 90's in Latin America existed an important political activity online, when the fight of Zapatistas was made available to the public eye, it became one of the most relevant and popular movements on the Internet. For example, Wired Magazine named the EZLN one of the twenty-five most important people online in 1998 (op. cit., 97). In fact the unexpected appearance of the EZLN in the Lacandon jungle was the cornerstone factor to make that news agencies around the world showed the Zapatistas message and demands. As Harry Cleaver (1998) asserts, it was an advantage that the EZLN commanders were almost all the time available to give interviews in the beginning of the uprising to national and international mass media. Promptly these interviews and press conferences were spread on the Internet by online Zapatistas (i.e., activists that name themselves as Zapatistas and support their ideology and discourse), through mailing lists and networks, such as **Peacenet** (e.g., carnet, mexnews), the **Internet** (e.g., Mexico-L, Native-L, Centam-L) and **Usenet** (e.g., soc.culture.Mexican, soc.culture.Latin-American). Also the information about the Zapatistas was collected, compiled, synthesized and released on websites, for example in the US, Clever (1998) listed "the Latin American Data Base" at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque, which is a compendium of news from Chiapas; The Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy began to issue the Chiapas Digest; The Mexican Rural Development discussion group of the Applied Anthropology Computer Network began to compile news and analysis and make them available through an easily accessible gopher site: Chiapas-Zapatista News (op.cit.); The Institute of Latin American Studies at the University of Texas has duplicated those files at its own Lanic gopher site. Thus, the information about the existence and paths of access to these resources were passed from those in the know (specialists) to those who wanted to know (anyone interested in the uprising).

Furthermore information about the Zapatistas and Chiapas was shared within online discussion forums, in addition to the Internet scholars and researchers publishing their work about the armed struggle of the EZLN. This flow of information was very intense especially when the Zapatistas announced new strategies of struggle or resistance (Morello 2007, 56-73), but even now Internet users can find abundant information and documents related to Zapatistas, moreover since the advent of the Web 2.0[30] in 2004 a large number of videos and audio files about the Zapatistas became available.

Accordingly this large amount of information published and disseminated on the Internet is the background of the online Zapatistas activism. Their ideals, demands, and characteristics of the struggle were adopted by a great amount of people around the world, and there were created solidarity and support groups to help the Zapatistas struggle in Chiapas, Mexico. Also through the websites there have been summoned activists to join, donate, distribute or translate the Zapatistas word. All this is what we call online Zapatistas, people completely empathic to the ideas of the EZLN that have spent their access to the network to become self enacted Zapatistas.

2.3.2 Transgressive online Zapatism

Before the Zapatista uprising, another online activists already had a project of struggle, and after the appearance of the EZLN executed a number of MVDA (Mass Virtual Direct Actions) in their name. That is the case of the Electronic Disturbance Theatre (EDT) led by Ricardo Dominguez, as they bombarded websites of the Mexican government in March of 1998, after the massacre in a town named Acteal, Chiapas. There, the government and paramilitary groups murdered 45 indigenous children, men and women. The transgressive attacks were achieved through **floodnet**, a script that

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[30] Web 2.0 does not refer to a specific version of the Web, but rather a series of technological improvements. TechTerms. 2008.
     Available online: http://www.wordwebonline.com/search.pl?w=Web+2.0. (Read 04 August 2011)

sent a large number of access requests to a web page provoking it unattainable. EDT attacks were targeted especially to the website of the presidential office, making it slow or inaccessible. The group also hacked these websites with messages in the error page such as "No human rights found on this server" or "No democracy found on this server"; these actions met 18,000 people in 4 hours (Lane 2003, 139-141), which even currently is an important amount of people for that short period of time.

In computing, a mirror is an exact copy of a data set, on the Internet a mirror website is an exact copy of another. Mirror websites are used mainly to provide multiple sources of the same information and have an important value as an alternative way to offer reliable access to large downloads, i.e., mirroring is a type of file synchronization[31]. In Mexico the main website that served as a mirror for the EZLN communiqués and all information about Chiapas and the Zapatistas was **laneta.org** "the real truth" (Martinez-Torres 2001, 251-252). However in the year of 2000, in Mexico only, five million people had access to a computer and less than two million households had an Internet connection[32]. Thus most of the population in Mexico ignored about the online Zapatistas movement and its importance on the Internet.

In general all these Zapatistas websites around the world became a single social network serving as a system of communication between themselves but also with another activists and movements (McCaughey et. al. 2003, 181). Then in 2001, the EZLN launched their official websites, thus implementing another platform to share, distribute and call more activists to join their causes, for

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[31] Wikipedia. 2012 Available online: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mirror_%28computing%29. (Read 01 June 2011)
[32] Usuarios de Internet en México. 2010. INEGI. Available online:
http://www.inegi.gob.mx/est/contenidos/espanol/temas/Sociodem/notatinf212.asp. (Read 18 May 2011)

example the initiative called "the intergalactic gathering against the Neoliberalism"[33] was created with these purposes.

Currently the EZLN has several official websites to inform about their actions, also they have an online radio station that broadcast from the rainforest, moreover the Zapatistas in Mexican printed media and TV have almost disappeared. Their activism online has become one of the principal strengths for their central cause (i.e., to construct a different world) because by being online Zapatistas are able to contact a large number of people, organizations and other social movements, to fight and win online and offline battles.

Finally Zapatistas have survived all this time notably due their ability to use their social network on the Internet, therefore, they have the support of a huge amount of people and have earned the sympathy of another social movements around the world.

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[33] Enter the Intergalactic: The Zapatistas' Sixth Declaration in the US and the World. Upping the Anti. Available online: http://uppingtheanti.org/journal/article/03-enter-the-intergalactic/. (Read 12 September 2010)

Theoretical framework

Stuart Hall asserts that studying the culture underlines the crucial role of the symbolic knowledge in the centre of the social life (1997, 03); accordingly the EZLN might be studied as a fundamental factor of change in the Mexican popular culture (Bruhn 1999, 50). Hence to have an integral perspective about the online Zapatista movement, it is essential to understand how they represent themselves through their images, but it is also necessary to learn how activists and users on the Internet interpret the Zapatista imagery to construct a cultural meaning.

3.1 Culture and the Zapatistas

To achieve a cultural analysis of the images of Zapatistas, it is necessary to define a theoretical framework for culture. For this purpose, the anthropological definition of Stuart Hall where "culture is used to refer whatever is distinctive about the "way of life" of a people, community, nation or social group", will be the departing point for the analysis. In other words, culture is a set of practices that belong to a particular social group under a given scope, and those who interpret the world and communicate their thoughts and feelings among them, exist within the same culture (1997, 02). Hence, the "Zapatistas online" is a cultural group that share the same practices that determine what is Zapatism.

The culture is constructed by social practices that construct meaning by symbolic communication (Fornäs 2002, 27). Sturken & Cartwright (2001, 50) argue that it is not possible to understand a culture without the analysis of the production and consumption of cultural products (e.g., music, films, painting, poetry, sculpture, television programs, radio broadcasting) between its members.

The context where these cultural products are consumed massively is called *popular culture*. In there, mass media transmits and expands the way individuals understand the world, and their contents are spread outside the original context (i.e., local cultural group) into a global context (Hall 1997, 03).

3.1.1 Macromedia and mesomedia

Mass media is divided in "*macromedia*" and "*mesomedia*". In the macromedia industrial institutions produce the contents, in the mesomedia the contents are produced by a person or through public and alternative spheres of information. Within the former, it is evidently more difficult to determine who produces and who consumes the contents (Fornäs 2002, 33). Naturally, the Internet also has these two kinds of media.

The macromedia has traditionally disseminated the popular culture, for example a narrow selection of works from the film industry has a key influence in people. Another example is the transnational news agencies, which spread their contents globally through television, radio or newspapers. However, with the Internet it has been easier for people to access diverse tools to create contents and cultural products and also spread them massively. Thus Internet caused the production - consumption loop of culture to evolve into a multi-directional phenomenon, this is, culture is feeding itself with its own contents and its meanings, producers are consumers and consumers are producers of cultural products. Furthermore, the Internet and the current possibility of being connected to it from diverse devices—even mobile, are used by millions of people to share cultural products. For that reason, popular culture and its aesthetics have experienced changes in their forms, how information is presented and when. This cultural sharing around the world is now easier thanks to the globalization phenomena, for instance, at least in Western culture people know about

the Occupy or *Indignados* movements in the US, Spain and many other countries, and this adoption of the cultural products take part of the imagery identifying distinct social groups.

3.1.2 Cultural context of the online Zapatism

The description of these phenomena and their related technologies are but a reflection of the complexity of their cultures and their study (Fornäs 2002, 27). In this thesis the scope is narrowed down to the convergence of three domains: Western, Mexican, and Zapatista cultures. The Western culture refers to the social practices that share Europe and the territories that were influenced by the European culture. For instance Mexico, which has been influenced by the Western culture as a consequence of the colonization of its territory—by the Spanish from 1521 to 1821. The Mexican culture encompasses the social practices (e.g., language, argot, visual symbols, music, food, art) that are understood and assimilated by Mexicans and people within and outside the country. The Zapatista culture encompasses the social practices shared by the members of the Zapatista movement in the Lacandon jungle and also the activists online.

Mexican and Zapatista cultures have the same geographic and historical context and that allows them to keep similar concepts, social conventions, and interpretations of the visual signs. Such a close interaction allows for a better communication between cultures, resulting in a shared set of meanings attributed to the images of Zapatistas. Noticeable, big differences also exist, specially those related with the representation and interpretation of indigenous people, for instance in the history of Mexican television, the concept of indigenous people is very often associated with ignorance, poverty, and foolishness, in contrast, in the Mexican film industry the concept is frequently related with honesty, humility, and humanity.

In online and offline expressions of Zapatism, there is evidence of appropriation of cultural products from other social groups. This is reflected in websites that were developed in cultures different from the three main cultures mentioned (Western, Mexican and Zapatista). In these websites they incorporate Zapatista images to the imagery of their own cultures (Hall 1997, 03). Yet, it is necessary to note that there is no popular culture that can satisfy all viewers in terms of the adoption and assimilation of the cultural experience, memories, and desires (Sturken & Cartwright 2001, 57).

3.2 The visual language of Zapatism

The meanings attributed to objects and symbols are shared within a given culture through the language. It is, therefore, the medium in which people and social groups reason and understand the things, it is also a medium where meaning is produced and exchanged. Evidently, meanings can only be shared through our common access to language (Hall 1997, 04). Thus, language is a system of representation that people and social groups use to communicate ideas, concepts or feelings. It can be spoken, visual and musical, using the body, sounds, words, images, and any object. Each culture has a common language and conceptual map (i.e., the way that people organize mental and symbolically an idea, concept or object), a linguistic code that allows its members to communicate properly and share cultural meanings (op. cit.). A good example of this is the image of a raised left fist, which for people in the Western culture, it clearly means protest or social fight. Nevertheless, such an idea or concept could be interpreted in different ways in different cultures, for instance in the case of the imagery used by Zapatistas, there may be people or social groups outside the Zapatism, who believe that the members of the rebel movement are dangerous or violent only because they wear the pasamontañas (black ski-mask) like another radical and social movements.

Clearly, this attitude could be due these people not sharing the same cultural background as Mexican and Zapatistas.

3.2.1 The visual signs of Zapatistas

Signs, embodied as sounds, words, notes, gestures, expressions or images of a given language, have the power to represent concepts, ideas and feelings of people and social groups in such way that it is possible to read, decode or interpret their meaning broadly in the same way within a given culture (Hall 1997, 05). The images selected for analysis for this thesis, were considered because of their not simplistic semblance; these images work as visual signs because they effectively characterize the concepts of Zapatism. The conceptual relationship between the signs contained in the images is already in the mind of each person exposed to them, and together—these signs and their inherent relations—contribute to construct the system of meanings defining the culture of online Zapatistas (Hall 1997, 18). The idea is in concordance with Lundsten's (2007, 286) views, who claims that an *index* represents its signified by virtue of causal relationship, e.g., the relationship between indigenous people and poverty. Also, an *icon* represents its signified by virtue of morphological sameness. For instance, a picture of a man wearing a black ski-mask and smoking pipe would represent Subcomandante Marcos if the viewers recognize him. Subsequently, *symbols* are signs that represent by virtue of convention. For example, the acronym EZLN (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional) is a symbol that does not have a morphological, neither a causal relation with the Zapatista Army, however it represents it. For all the above, visual signs serve simultaneously as index, icon and symbol (Hall 1997, 19; Lundsten 2007, 286), because they have a causal, morphological, and conventional relationship between the image itself and the knowledge within it.

3.2.2 Communication in the Zapatista culture

Culture and communication are intrinsically connected, communication is the medium to share and transmit cultural meanings between people and social groups; in fact the Latin origin of the word means to share. Consequently, communication acts as a mean to build common thoughts (Fornäs 2002), this is, communication is a precondition to build social conventions and cultural concepts by helping people to understand each other, to reach consensus, and to share ideas. Likewise, verbal and visual communication need an *emitter* who produces and transmits a message to a *receptor* who receives and makes an interpretation about that message. Accordingly, if the images in a website are ignored, then there is no communication between the web-master and the users. In that sense, the visual signs used by Zapatistas in their websites are of interest only to the people and social groups that are willing to communicate with the Zapatistas. Furthermore, these visual signs are the link between the message (emitted by the Zapatistas) and the interpretation that the users make of that message within a medium such as Internet (Fornäs 2002, 29). Therefore, appropriation of visual signs of Zapatistas is in itself an act of communication. These signs are cultural products created with the purpose of being shared on the Internet, they also are a direct link to produce sociocultural interactions between users and the visual language of Zapatism online (Fornäs 2002, 31).

A **narrative** is a communication process where a narrator (the message producer) shares her ideas to a reader. In such a process, both, narrator and receptor share cultural codes and context, which is the same in every domain (e.g., visual and verbal). In this thesis I propose that the visual signs used by Zapatistas function as visual narratives because they tell the status of the movement, the poverty of the Zapatistas in the Lacandon jungle, the protest on the streets, and so on. These narratives are shared in the specific context of activism online, thus enabling an interaction between Zapatistas, activists, and the accuracy of cultural interpretations regarding their messages.

Cultural communities are produced, maintained, and reproduced, by means of narrative communication. Thus, **Visual narratives** are multi-layered (i.e., visual, conceptual, cultural layers) and multi-dimensional (i.e., objectivist, textual and contextual interpretations) (Lundsten 2007, 281-302). For example, the image of *Comandanta Ramona* who is an indigenous, woman, carrying a rose in her hands and wearing a black ski-mask. This image comprising several visual signs has as many layers of content as meanings. At the same time, the visual narrative created by the images is generated through a loop of interactions between producers and viewers of the websites. Hence, these signs feed the imagery of their political movement through visual narratives. Accordingly, "Understanding visual narratives equals to making sense of visual expressions of narrative communication. In this case, there is a social community that ascribes a certain purpose to this imagery as a vehicle of certain social act." (Lundsten 2007, 283).

3.2.3 Interpretation of the visual signs of Zapatistas

In communication, the interpretation of a message requires a mental process to accept or reject the meanings and cultural associations adhered to that message. Such a process takes place at an individual level despite the pressure of dominant ideologies. In other words, observers struggle with the dominant meaning of the message while using their own cultural and personal meanings, resulting in changes over themselves, and sometimes, in the shifting of the meanings that had been imposed by macromedia and other broader social forces.

Apart from the referred clashing between observers and dominant ideologies, there is also a negotiation between producers and consumers of cultural products. During this negotiation the meanings are created, thus transforming consumers into active meaning creators, and not merely shallow recipients of decoding images (Sturken & Cartwright 2001, 57). Stuart Hall (1997)

describes three processes involved in the decoding and encoding of a message. The first is a *dominant-hegemonic reading* of an image, i.e., when observers identify themselves with the dominant meanings of the image in an unquestioned manner. For instance, the news broadcast by television, where the image speaks for itself about the events that are then narrated. The second is the *negotiated reading*, where producer and consumers of cultural products may negotiate an interpretation from the image and its dominant meanings. In this kind of process the observer is more participative about the production of meanings, as it happens for instance in a political cartoon. The third process described by Hall (op. cit.), refers to the *oppositional reading*, where in the process of interpretation observers demonstrate an adverse position, rejecting the dominant views about the meaning of a visual sign. For example, when the Mexican government—in February of 1995—revelled to the public opinion the identity of Subcomandante Marcos and published his image without pasamontañas. Remarkably, despite authorities showed an image of a man named Rafael Sebastián Guillén Vicente, the image of a man wearing a black ski-mask and smoking pipe portraying the identity of Subcomandante Marcos strongly remained within the Mexican society in general.

In addition, there are also binary oppositions (e.g., man/woman, conservative/liberal, moderate/radical) however these are reductionist interpretations of the signs and as such, they cannot reflect the complexity of the differences within their labels, but on the other hand, such oppositions effectively reflect how people and social groups make sense of the world (Sturken & Cartwright 2001, 104).

In addition to Hall's views, one has to consider the present circumstance, where people have an easy access to digital devices and services. To this respect, Sturken & Cartwright assert that nowadays a large number of images are viewed in a variety of contexts, each of which may further affect the

meaning of those images. Moreover, observers possess their own set of cultural associations that may affect their individual interpretation of a given image. This does not mean that images could have been misinterpreted as a rule, for the reason that meanings are created when, where and by whom images are produced and consumed (2001, 46).

The content and meaning of the visual signs of Zapatism can be interpreted in a multidimensional cultural context according to Hall's model. The first process of interpretation is produced by the macromedia (i.e., professional photographers). For instance, the images created by Angeles Torrejón[34] and Pedro Valtierra[35], which seem very well planed, featuring either, a commercial, journalistic, or artistic purpose, and were published mainly on television. The second process happens when observers assign new purposes and meanings to those images. The third process of interpretation occurs when supporters of Zapatism and activists make an appropriation of those familiar images. Finally, mesomedia (see 3.1.1) creates new images that are online on the websites, these images have the purpose of showing their ideology, and they have influenced activists and users since 1994.

3.2.4 Encoding and decoding of Zapatistas visual signs

The meaning of the signs of Zapatism is constructed by a system of representation, to decode that meaning it is necessary to access a specific cultural code. For example, people who ignore what is the Zapatista movement—offline and online—could interpret as observers the visual narrative within of the websites formulating a conceptual relationship in their minds. But such a formulation will not have a direct correspondence to the message and ideology of Zapatism, and people who

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[34] Angeles Torrejón 1995, ZoneZero. Available online: http://www.zonezero.com/exposiciones/fotografos/angeles/2.html
[35] Pedro Valtierra 1998, Aristegui Noticias. Available online: http://aristeguinoticias.com/2606/multimedia/fotogaleria-la-obra-de-pedro-valtierra/#&panel1-14.

know about their history, context and ideology. It is thus the cultural codes the entity adjusting the relationship between concepts and signs, and stabilizing the diversity in language and culture. The cultural codes related to other social movements, signs and attitudes, and ideologies, allow people and social groups to interpret more accurately the signs of Zapatistas. These generalities existing in the language allow the communication and comprehension of concepts between diverse cultural groups (Hall 1997, 21).

Visual signs are mental representations of social conventions that exist in the culture where they are presented. The Zapatistas websites—the majority in Spanish Language—share the social conventions and cultural context for a considerable number of users that visit these websites[36]. Consequently, it is commendable to remember that the representation of Zapatistas on the Internet is intrinsically connected to the Zapatism offline and its whole cultural context (Hall 1997, 18).

3.2.5 Cultural appropriation of images of Zapatism

Sturken & Cartwright define the term *appropriation* as the process of borrowing and changing the meaning of cultural products, such as images. Artists, mesomedia, activists and people seeking to make a statement that opposes to the dominant ideology have applied effectively a cultural appropriation (2001, 59). Zapatistas also have made an appropriation of a set of images and visual elements of the popular culture to show their way of thinking. For instance, in their websites, they often use red and black colours; this combination of colours is used to indicate a working strike and is known as a flag for civil disobedience in Mexico and other countries. Zapatistas chose these colours because they are in resistance, protest, struggling and want to demonstrate their disobedience towards the social and political system.

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[36] Until 2011 at least 164,968,742 Internet users in the world were Spanish speakers. Internet World Stats. 2001-2012. Internet world users by language. Available online: http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats7.htm. (Read 25 Jun 2012.)

Borrowing and changing or reconfiguring images has proliferated in the actual process of publishing (Sturken & Cartwright 2001, 60). The Internet remarkably accelerates this phenomenon of appropriation of images by people, who publish them in a different cultural context after performing few transformations on them. For example, numerous websites of Zapatism have appropriated a famous picture of Comandanta Ramona taken in 1996 when she spoke to a huge audience in Mexico City in a historical meeting with various indigenous groups and civil organizations. This journalistic image, and each derivation of it highlights different aesthetic values and characteristics, because during the appropriation of images their meaning is altered strategically to suit the particular purpose intended by those who take such images as if they were of their property.

The Zapatistas—just as any other social movement—needed an image to be recognized and distinguished from other rebel movements in Mexico, Latin America and the world. Accordingly, they built their uniforms, the elements and symbols became the characterization of their image, and these were complemented with adopted elements from other revolutionary movements around the world and Mexico. For the Mexican natives, many of the references that Zapatistas used in their image characterization, were obvious references to social fighters in the Mexican revolution, such as Francisco Villa (1978-1923) and Emiliano Zapata (1879-1919). Therefore their images acquired an enhanced or neutral meaning depending on the cultural context of the observer. Nevertheless, I speculate about the existence of a global culture where various meanings are shared, allowing the communication through diverse cultures. The existence of such a culture could be noticed easily on the Internet, where *memes*[37] (e.g., the memes created during the green Iranian movement after presidential elections in 2009-2010 specially after the assassination of a young Iranian woman,

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[37] Internet Meme is a concept, idea or cultural product that spreads massively via the Internet. 2012 Wikipedia. Available online: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internet_meme. (Read 30 June 2012)

identified as Neda Agha-Soltan) are successful in diverse cultural groups. The Zapatistas appeared in the macromedia in the mid of the 90's, just when the project of globalization was established; paradoxically, the same macromedia that aided governments to promote the cultural, social, and mainly economical globalization. It was in that point in history where movements as the Zapatistas and another anti-globalization movements started their struggle.

3.3 Representation of Zapatistas on the Internet

Stuart Hall defines *representation* as "...the production of meaning of the concept in our minds through language" (1997, 17). He asserts that representation "is the link between conceptual language which enables us to refer to either the real world of objects, peoples or events or indeed to imaginary worlds of fictional objects, people and events" (op. cit.). To Hall, the relation between *objects*, *concepts* and *signs* lies at the centre of the production of meaning in language. The process linking these three elements is what we call "representation". Moreover, Hall argues that representation is a fundamental element in the process of production and exchange of meanings between members of a culture. In other words, representation connects meaning and language to culture (1997, 15). Accordingly, to understand the cultural meaning of the images of Zapatism within their websites, we must analyse their representation through their visual language. In addition, Hall describes two systems of representation. The first allows people and social groups to know the world by building a set of correspondences—or chain of equivalences—between things (e.g., people, objects, events, abstract ideas) and the conceptual system of those people or social group. The second "depends on constructing a set of correspondences between our conceptual map and a set of signs, arranged or organized into various languages which stand for or represent those concepts." (1997, 19). Visually, the online Zapatistas use a system of representation to experience, interpret, and make sense of the conditions of their lives both, as image-makers and as observers. In

essence the online Zapatistas have been constructing their ideological selves through their representations (Sturken & Cartwright 2001, 56).

As Fisher & Abedi (1989, 29) assert, all political movements that are revolutionaries need an image to represent them and to promote changes in the social consciousness. Thus, the websites provide a representation of Zapatistas themselves, and the images contained on them portray a visual narrative that defines what is Zapatism. These visual signs serve to identify Zapatistas and to distinguish them from other cultural groups, just as most websites are decorated to introduce their main topic to their users. Consistently, the image of pasamontañas is present in the websites of Zapatistas since 1994[38]. For this reason I suggest that the pasamontañas used by Zapatistas is the most relevant visual sign and it is populated with meanings.

3.3.1 Ideology of Zapatism

Sturken & Cartwright define *ideology* as "…the ideas about how life should be", a set of ideas and beliefs, shaped though the unconscious, in relationship to other social forces, such as the economy and institutions (2001, 51-56). Thus, Zapatista ideology is represented through the visual signs contained in their websites. These images show aspects that a person or a social group must observe in order to be a Zapatista, moreover they show the reasons for their struggle, the identity of their enemies, and issues that need to be dealt with. Because our lives are immersed in ideologies, which are often in tension with each other, it is easy not to recognize them as such; Sturken & Cartwright (2001, 51) argue that societies in general intend to cover their ideologies, and for that reason it is easier to notice the ideologies of another times.

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[38] This image is still predominant in the present. However, the websites analysed in this work comprehend from 1994 to 2008.

In the case of Zapatistas online as a rebel group, it is easier to interpret the ideology represented in the visual language of their websites, because they want to distinguish themselves from the mainstream, from the western ideology and from the ideology of the Mexican government. Thus their images have a strong connection with their ideology, and for this reason they typically show images of indigenous people. They try to make it clear that it is an indigenous movement, images of old people, women, men and children in assemblies are meant to represent that in democracy everybody has an opinion. Assembles, the image of people talking, and speech bubbles represent the importance of the word and the use of language as a weapon. There are also images of people together with Zapatistas, which I argue, are used to represent the support of civil society to help the movement to stop the military attacks against their communities.

Interestingly, although the movement of Zapatistas is ideologically linked to Emiliano Zapata, his image is not used very frequently in the websites, neither are images of other historical characters of the Mexican revolution (e.g., Pancho Villa). This lack of visual references, may be due activists online ignore incidentally the political subtleties of the Mexican Revolution, or perhaps because they think that it is better to remove any historical reference to represent better the current image of Zapatism. Nevertheless, these are only speculations that deserve a more detailed analysis; a follow up could abound on these reasons.

An ideology is crucial to the system of representation in which is experienced and made sense of reality. Althusser stated, "we are 'hailed' or summoned by ideologies, which recruit us as their 'authors' and the essential subject." (Sturken & Cartwright 2001, 52). In other words, activists, scholars, and media, have spread the ideology of Zapatism more than Zapatistas themselves, perhaps because they are the source of a purist version of the Zapatistas ideology. Nevertheless,

who adopt and share such an ideology are those who assume themselves as Zapatistas and develop websites to show to the world what is Zapatism. Accordingly, images of Zapatistas are both, representations and producers of the ideology of Zapatism (op. cit. 72). Noticeably, the effort that requires the design, programming, and administration of a website is the most valuable evidence that people behind the Zapatistas websites, feels, believe, and share the Zapatistas cause because it belongs to them and that is why they are Zapatistas.

For Althusser, ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence. Ideology does not simply reflect the conditions of the world, whether falsely or not. Rather, it is the case that without ideology we would have not means of thinking about or experiencing what we call reality (Sturken & Cartwright 2001, 52).

3.3.2 Discourse of Zapatistas online

Discourse has been defined as "...the rules and practices that produce meaningful statements and regulate what can be spoken in different historical periods." (Sturken & Cartwright, 2007, 94); it is an element of knowledge that defines and limits what can be said about something (op. cit.). Thus the discourse of Zapatism observable through their visual language highlights that they are an indigenous movement, that they are going to use pasamontañas until their demands are accomplished, that women are fundamental to the movement, and that civil organization and disobedience are two important political assets. Naturally, the representation of Zapatistas has evolved from 1994 to 2008, particularly in the statement of the movement, which has changed from Zapatistas offline to Zapatistas online.

Discourses are meant to construct or refer to knowledge about a specific topic, cluster of ideas, images and practices. Through visual language discourses, the otherness, equality, and the distinction between normal and abnormal in a given culture are defined. For instance, the word, image and concept of *indio* emerged in the politic and public arena of the local and global cultural context thanks to the discourse of the Zapatistas. Indigenous presence in Mexican media was almost non-existent, and the views about them, their cosmogony, ways of life, and their concept of community have always been misunderstood. Indigenous are often shown as fools, lazy, dirty, ignorant, and weak. They are portrayed as second-class people, with lack off common sense, bad speakers of Spanish language, and they are also frequently criticized for wearing old fashioned clothes or mocked because they use their traditional clothes. To *mestizo* people (i.e., a term that Spaniards conquerors used to refer to the descendants of European-born and indigenous parents during the colonization of America), indigenous groups are not only synonym of curiosities and folklore but also of regression. Independently of the efforts of the Mexican government to disqualify the movement, the Zapatistas reassure with their actions that the movement is indigenous and their fight is for the autonomy and rights of all indigenous people.

On the other hand as Sturken & Cartwright notice, the photography has been a principal factor in the functioning of discourses since the nineteenth century, because its development coincided with the rise of the modern political state (2001, 95). For instance, Mexican governments through its political institutions such as the *Secretariat of Social Development* have used images to share and reinforce their discourses. An example of this is the official advertising of the government about the concept of family, which is always represented visually by a heterosexual couple and two children, because until now, that is the only family model recognized by the Mexican laws. Within Zapatistas websites half of the images are pictures (see Table 4 in the next section).

Method and Analysis of the visual identity of online Zapatism

This section will explain the methodology used in this research to compile and analyse images from selected websites of Zapatistas. The compilation would facilitate an objective analysis in terms of cultural studies, its processing resulted in a database of images that allowed us to understand each website as a particular entity and find quantitatively the discourse and ideology of Zapatism through the visual signs found on them.

Following the presentation of the methodology I expose a cultural analysis of three of the most relevant images found in the Zapatistas websites—according to the quantitative analysis. In addition, I introduce a hypothesis about the reasons that make such images functioning as visual signs, possible candidates to portray the visual identity of the online Zapatista movement. To support this idea, the section also offers an interpretation about the meanings in a system of representation throughout language.

4.1 The Process

The cultural decoding of websites should involve an eclectic, multidimensional and integrated search for explicit and implicit statements on cultural issues, such as values, norms and opinions regarding gender, class, race, religion, the state, as they are intentionally or unintentionally expressed and materialized in the many features of this highly **hybrid medium**. In the absence of a better word, I would propose the term "hybrid media analysis" for this complex research activity. Hybrid in this context should be understood in two ways, thereby stressing either the medium or the

analysis (Pauwels 2005, 7), because it is a quantitative research of the visual data in the Zapatistas websites and it is also a qualitative research about the cultural meanings of this data.

4.1.1 Criteria of selection of the websites

The first step to select the websites to be analysed, was to search for the terms "Zapatistas", "EZLN", "Zapatism" and "La otra campaña" (the other campaign) into the most popular *web search engine* at that moment: Google[39]. Accordingly, the five official websites of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation were included. Then, the oldest websites related with Zapatism were also selected, such as the website of Harry Cleaver in Austin University[40] that was launched in 1995. That website provides *hyperlinks[41]* (i.e., a link from a hypertext file to another location or file on the Internet, typically activated by clicking on a highlighted word or icon at a particular location on the screen) to the first net-lists and websites around the world about the Zapatistas struggle. From these pointers, there were appointed the websites that until 2008 were active, that are six in total. After that, the websites that are related to "La Otra Campaña" (The other campaign) that was the last relevant political and social stage in the Zapatistas movement that macromedia widespread were also selected. Each website of the last selection represents a different city, therefore they are diverse in content and format, and are a total of twenty-four websites. Finally, another twenty-five websites were selected randomly using the web search engine and hyperlinks of Zapatistas; twelve of them from Mexico and eighteen from another countries. Overall, the database was built from fifty-nine Zapatistas websites within the period from 1995 to 2008, twenty-one of these websites are from abroad of Mexico and thirty-eight from it. Thus the database comprises a sample of diverse websites that contributed to find the visual identity of the online Zapatism.

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[39] https://www.google.com/
[40] https://webspace.utexas.edu/hcleaver/www/Chiapas95/zapsincyber.html.
[41] WordWebOnline. Available online: http://www.wordwebonline.com/en/HYPERLINK. (Read 04 September 2012)

4.1.2 Homepages archive

The next decision was whether to base the cultural analysis on the images within the homepages of those fifty-nine websites. As the homepage is the main page in any website, it is the equivalent of a printed publication cover. There it is shown the most relevant information and it normally exhibits the intentions, personality and character of the company, organization, social group or person who owns the website. Accordingly, the images within the homepage provide enough cultural information to analyse and determine the visual identity of the Zapatistas websites.

Thus the creation of the homepages archive was made saving the general image of each one of the fifty-nine homepages. This process aimed to acquire reliable data because of the ephemeral nature of the websites and Internet itself, given that their appearance could change at any time or simply disappear (Pauwels 2005, 17). Thus the archive of homepages was composed of fifty-nine pictures, which allowed a full control of the. In addition, there where archived the name of each website, the date of the last visit, the visual information and their *Universal Resource Locator* (URL, i.e., the address of a website on the Internet)[42] address as part of the database.

4.1.3 Processing of images from the homepages

The pictures contained in each homepage were extracted and arranged in a single repository. Then, each picture was dissected in images portraying a unique graphic characteristic. The resulting images were organized according to their topic and then linked back with its source. This resulted in a table where the columns were named as the topics, and the rows as the webpage Internet address, each cell of the table was filled with the number of times a given topic appeared in a particular

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[42] WordWebOnline. Available online: http://www.wordwebonline.com/search.pl?w=url. (Read 30 August 2012)

webpage. The process from selection to dissection of the Zapatistas websites is explained in Figure 1. The details of this procedure will be explained in the following sections.
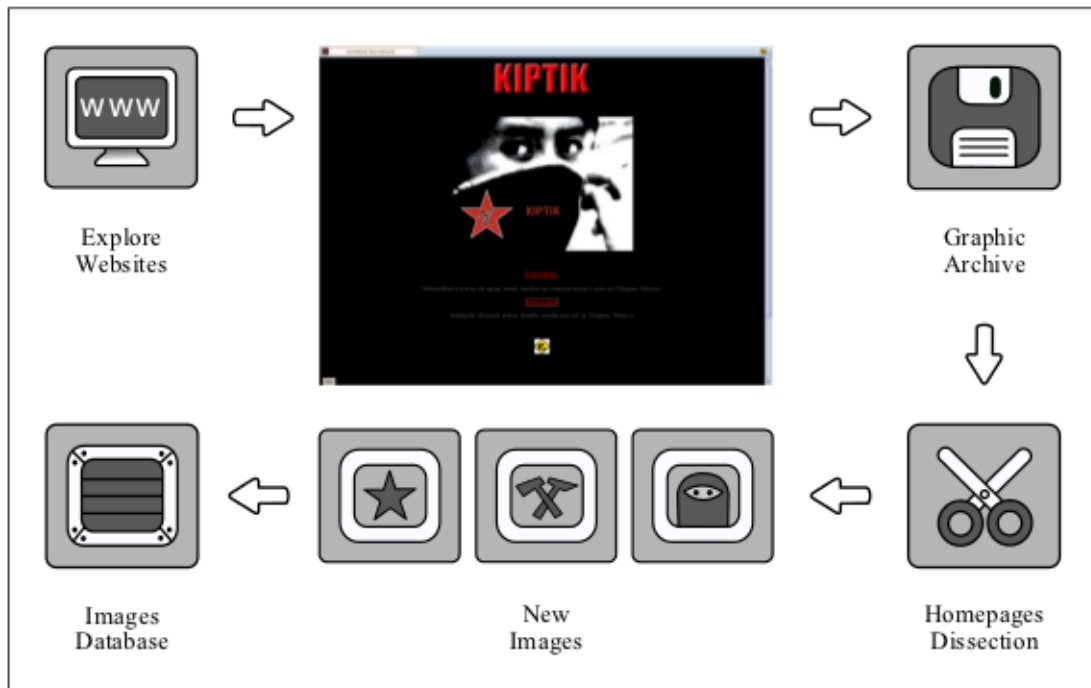
Figure 1. Overview of the selection and dissection of the websites.

Complex online Zapatistas images

When analysing the new images obtained from the homepages, it became evident that a number of these visual elements or illustrations were composed by different images, each carrying its own cultural meaning, for example: the image of Comandanta Ramona has three basic meanings: Ramona herself as a leading member of the Zapatista army, the indigenous woman, and the pasamontañas (black ski-mask). For that reason those visual signs were divided again to separate the images within them to be added in the database as is shown in Figure 2. Because the purpose of the database was to know the exact number of each graphic element within the websites in order to

learn which images are more repeated in the websites and to be able to determine which of them represent hierarchically the visual identity of the Zapatistas on the Internet.

Figure 2. Complex images: Images within image.

4.1.4 Grouping of websites and images

The database of images allowed accommodating the data in a table to organize the graphic information, look for patterns and analysing the complete map of data within the websites. These were arranged in four groups, as follows: "EZLN" (the official websites), "La Otra" (The Other Campaign), "World" (websites of Zapatistas around the world), "Mexico" (websites of Zapatistas located in Mexico). The images were named one by one, however, after the primary analysis it became evident that a number of them represented a similar cultural meaning, for that reason they

were grouped together. For instance the image of pasamontañas and *paliacate* (Red scarf used by peasants to clean their sweat) as is shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Paliacate as Pasamontañas.

4.1.5 Summaries of the main table of data

The data comprised of websites and images organized in a main table, was summarized, and the results presented in three tables explained next. The first table (Table 2) presents the sum of all the images; the columns are the websites grouped according to their main focus, and the rows the images or groups of them. Note that the lesser number of appearances in the totals is two. This is due the removal of images appearing only once for convenience in the presentation of results. With these results it can be determined numerically, which are the most important visual signs in the

Zapatista discourse. This approach brought out the three most important images that would be analysed later.

Table 2. Quantitative importance of online Zapatistas images.

	Official EZLN	La Otra Campaña	World Zapatistas	Mexican Zapatistas	Totals
Red Star	15	108	37	19	179
Ski-mask	25	67	59	26	177
Activism	11	44	16	3	74
People	3	51	13	1	68
Indigenous	10	10	30	9	59
Sub Marcos	8	24	18	9	59
Animals		15	7	8	30
Media	3	19	5	3	30
Nature	2	4	17	6	29
Weapons	1	16	10	2	29
EZLN	4	12	8	2	26
Commandants	4	6	9	6	25
Repression	3	15	7		25
Murals		11	11	2	24
Pre-Hispanic		9	13	1	23
Fist	2	12	3	3	20
Maps	3	2	9	2	16
Children	6	1	6	1	14
Emiliano Zapata		12	2		14
Mexican flag	1	6	5	1	13
Dead		5	5		10
Home		5	4		9
Political parties		6			6
Education		1	4		5
Transport		2	2	1	5
Coffee			1	2	3
USA		3			3
Mexican president		2			2
URSS		1	1		2

In Table 2 the image of Subcomandante Marcos is used the same number of times as the indigenous, after another four images (red star, ski-mask, activism and people). However, I conclude that it is the second in importance because it appears typically as a big sized image on the top of the homepage. The red star is numerically the second in rank, but it most be noticed that it is

a secondary visual element used as an ornament of the text or as background of another graphical elements.

The following table (Table 3) offers specific data about the aesthetic qualities of the images or groups of images. For instance, a large number of websites used similar colours, therefore the images are divided in four groups as follows: red/black, black/white, and green/white/red (as in the Mexican flag). This table determines the character of the websites and its cultural codes through the colours that have been used in movements of revolutionary, protest or social character.

Table 3. The colour of images of online Zapatistas.

	Official EZLN	La Otra Campaña	World Zapatistas	Mexican Zapatistas
Red / Black	6	44	25	14
Black /white	2	45	21	8
Green / White / Red	2	4	5	4

Finally, the images were separated in two big categories according to the graphic style of the images: photography and illustration (see Table 4). This shows accurate information about the visual character of the websites and how online Zapatistas represent the reality.

Table 4. Illustrative or photographic representation of reality of online Zapatistas.

	Official EZLN	La Otra Campaña	World Zapatistas	Mexican Zapatistas
Photography	23	93	63	19
Illustration	7	89	54	18

4.2 Construction of meaning in the visual signs

Cultural messages and meanings are very often lacking of logic or are not even well rationalized by the people or social groups that typically share and spread such meanings by almost unintentional means (Hall 1997, 02). It is possible that activists and users construct the meanings of the visual signs contained in the websites as an emotional response to the message in those images. Furthermore, cultural meanings do not refer exclusively to the mental process of an individual, instead, cultural meanings adjust and organize the social practices and affect conducts of a group. Consequently, cultural meanings have real, practical effects in people and social groups, and meanings are constantly produced and exchanged within each interaction between individuals or social groups (op. cit.).

When analysing a cultural product, such as the referred visual signs, it becomes clear that the meanings contained there are based in the specific forms of communication used in the different groups, the social conventions among the Zapatistas online, and their specific cultural context. In other words, to construct a cultural meaning it is necessary to consider a context to place it through the language; this is, the way people and social groups think and feel about the representation of things, concepts, ideas, another people and events (Hall 1997, 03). In this thesis I propose that the cultural context is multidimensional because the visual signs of Zapatistas exist in four contexts, namely: *the historical context*, where the images have been seeing and interpreted—from 1994 until now; *the environmental context*, which is the particular context of the observers; *the online context*, that refers to the context on the Internet and the surroundings of Zapatistas websites; and *the textual context*, this last is included because images have an intrinsic relation with the verbal language given that images scarcely appear without a text accompanying them. Hence, the meanings of the visual signs of Zapatism are created in a set of complex relationships between producers, viewers,

websites, and their contexts. Noticeably, the interpretation of those meanings is not exactly the same by all the members of a given culture, however, the richness of the cultural encoding cues contained in the Zapatistas visual signs, allow such meanings to be decoded broadly in a similar fashion (Sturken & Cartwright 2001, 56).

An image creates meaning in the moment that is received and interpreted by an observer (Sturken & Cartwright 2001, 47). The first images of Zapatistas may have produced a meaning of confusion, fear and uncertainty, and then over time these meanings changed because of the discourse and acts of the Zapatistas in the Lacandon jungle. And ultimately, the meanings throughout the visual representation in the Zapatistas websites became very different and also increased its complexity.

Just as observers construct meaning from images, images create audiences (Sturken & Cartwright 2001, 45). Therefore, the visual signs of Zapatism are bound to create spectators, and for that reason these are repeated through Zapatistas websites. After all, one of the most important characteristics in the Zapatistas movement is the ability to maintain an online struggle—not only using the alternative media but also with ideas and words. Besides, in terms of activism, a protest or movement must find the most extraordinary ways to reach the attention of society, to get the support of more and more people. Thus, Zapatistas found one way to attract followers and appear in the mass media despite any negative connotation related with their ski-mask. However, in the images contained in the analysed websites, there is always a stress in the positive aspects of the Zapatista ideology. Although they do not describe any explicit auto-criticism, interpretation from the users could be in both ways, i.e., in the positive and negative meanings related to the images.

4.2.1 Cultural meaning of the visual signs of online Zapatistas

To learn about the origin and to find the actual cultural meaning of the sings used by Zapatistas (the pasamontañas, Subcomandante Marcos, and the red star), this thesis relies in the work of Stuart Hall (1997, 24). In his work, Hall introduced three approaches to explain how meaning is represented through language: the reflective, intentional, and constructionist. These will be explained next.

The reflective approach

In the *reflective approach* meaning is strongly tied to the object, person, idea, or event in the real world, and language functions like a mirror to reflect the meaning, as it already exists in the world. Thus the meaning of the image of **pasamontañas** is an object, its function is to cover the face and head of a person to protect her from the cold or wind. The meaning of the image of **Subcomandante Marcos** is a man wearing black ski-mask, military clothes, two watches, headphones, cartridge belt, red bandanna and smoke pipe. The meaning of the image of the **red star** is a red polygon that is the result of uniting the vertices of a pentagon and simulating the geometrical portrait of a starfish. So in this approach, the attempt of visual language is to reflect the truth that is already there fixed in the world (Hall 1997, 24).

The intentional approach

In the *intentional approach* it described how the producer of the cultural products imposes her unique meanings (i.e., views about the world) through language. The sings used by Zapatistas mean what activists online determine these signs should mean (Hall 1997, 25). I suggest that Zapatistas online are the producers of the images because they put those images in their websites even if they just appropriated them from diverse sources. The meaning of the **pasamontañas** is the belonging to a social movement, in concordance with Manuel Castells (2003, 85), who wrote that everybody

could become Zapatista by wearing a mask. I would add that it is also necessary be an *indio* from the Lacandon jungle, even in the websites outside of Mexico the principal images are those of the Zapatistas offline. Thus, including such an image has the purpose to show that the websites are Zapatistas. To Zapatistas online and offline the use of the pasamontañas as a visual sign is quite important; for them it means to make visible those who are invisible, to put a name to the unnamed. Also, they wear their own mask to avoid someone else putting it on them[43]. The meaning of the image of **Subcomandante Marcos** in the Zapatistas websites is to show the most notable member of their movement because he has been the spokesperson of the EZLN since 1994, an image that represents the mestizo converted to guerrilla. The meaning of the image of the five-pointed **red star** that form part of the EZLN flag is that Zapatista movement is a sign globally related to the socialist and communist ideology, however Zapatistas as an indigenous movement have designated different meanings to the red star, for them it represents a human; being the head, the two arms and the two legs, the red heart that join these five parts and make them one. The red star also symbolizes the humanity and dignity of their struggle, this is, to remember that the Zapatistas fight is for all human beings (Leetoy 2008, 78). Also in the speeches of the different commandants, the five points of the star represent the continents, or as they call them, the five corners of the world.

The constructionist approach

The *constructionist approach* recognizes the active participation between producers and consumers of cultural products to construct meaning by using a system of representation comprising concepts and signs. The symbolic world is where the meaning is made, not on the material quality but on the symbolic function of the sign (Hall 1997, 25). This approach explains how the meaning of the signs

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[43] Subcomandante Marcos, 1998. Above and below: masks and silences. Available online:
http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/mexico/ezln/marcos_masks_july98.html. (Read 22 March 2007)

used by Zapatistas has been constructed through the representation and interpretation made by producers and observers of those signs within the websites.

4.2.2 The pasamontañas (black ski-mask)

The pasamontañas is represented in different aesthetic ways as photography and illustration. A constant feature is the use of circular forms, not peaks, even the holes for the eyes through the ski-mask are always rounded. This rounded trait gives the images a not violent appearance. For instance, see the examples in Figure 4. The Figure shows different examples of pasamontañas taken from the analysed websites; the image in the bottom is an example of the use of the bandanna as pasamontañas, in all of them, it can be appreciated the rounded forms, except for the icon on the left upper part, which shows the red star as the background of the comic interpretation of a Zapatista man. Furthermore the examples show the ethnic characteristic of Zapatistas offline.

Apart from being a garment functioning as a military uniform, the pasamontañas as mask has a long tradition in the Mexican culture. Such a tradition provides people with cues and shared meanings about the particular uses of the mask within the culture. In other words, Mexicans attribute different meanings to the pasamontañas and most of them does not have negative connotations (e.g., the majority of wrestlers that are very popular in Mexican culture use a mask and this visual element give them power and identity), in contrast with other cultures where for instance, the mask is associated with terrorism (e.g., the US film industry represent terrorists typically with a black ski-mask). It is possible that for the majority of Mexicans the Zapatistas ski-mask does not have negative connotations, based in the social support of Mexican society to the Zapatistas causes, necessities and demonstrations thought the country. Paradoxically, the pasamontañas has been necessary to become visible in Mexico, given that a group of indigenous people could not be noted

because of the strong discrimination coming from the mestizos towards the poor, but especially towards the *indios*—since the Spanish Colony. Sadly those negative attitudes are still perpetuated by the mass media. This argument of visibility is supported by contrast, when comparing another indigenous movements in the same political context and sharing roughly the same political causes, such as the Triqui people in Oaxaca, whom have not reach the same cultural impact as Zapatistas.

Figure 4. Images of pasamontañas (ski-mask) and paliacate (red scarf).

Since the Zapatista upraising they were identified because of the pasamontañas, it became the main visual element to identify the movement, in Mexico the pasamontañas itself became a symbol of rebellion. For the fragile aspect of Zapatistas women, children, men barefoot, and wearing humble cloths, the pasamontañas was the most visible and uniform visual feature. And because of the combination of all the characteristic elements, the pasamontañas was not particularly intimidating. This is evident when compared with another rebel or radical movements where their members were hooded, such as ETA (Euskadi ta Askatasuna, "Basque Homeland and Freedom") in Spain, *Sendero Luminoso* in Peru, or even police special forces in Mexico and other parts of the world. Thus, the reaction towards a group of rebels wearing ski-masks and declaring the war against the government has to be different in each country depending on the experiences related with the representation of the ski-mask and the relationship with the authorities. Experiences and therefore, meaning might be different in Spain or Peru. In Mexico when the Zapatistas movement started, people was worried about the Zapatistas life, and throughout their civil organisations, the society stopped in many cases the actions of the government against the indigenous. At that moment the ski-mask was not a relevant point to discuss. Indeed, the EZLN never showed intentions to participate in terrorist acts, moreover, most part of the Mexican society was aware about the inequality and pondered that the Zapatistas' demands were just and justified. The pasamontañas also made apparent that the EZLN was a horizontal organization, but as any militarized organization, there are hierarchies. Hence, each commandant has her or his visual characteristics to be recognized in the media. Zapatistas give meaning to their symbols and for this reason some people feel attached to their movement and its ideology; perhaps because of that they started using Zapatistas symbols in t-shirts, dolls, posters and even condoms.

Another feasible explanation for the use of pasamontañas could be that they started using it simply to protect their identities to avoid being recognized by their authorities, towns and communities. The purpose I speculate, to avoid suffering political persecution or disappearance (i.e., being kidnapped or killed by paramilitary groups and police as it happened in Acteal in 1997). Or maybe to give unity to the movement that reunites seven ethnic groups from diverse regions and communities. But above all these, the pasamontañas made them equal and that may be the same for Zapatistas online, which inherited the same meaning and democratic organization.

4.2.3 The image of Subcomandante Marcos

The image of Subcomandante Marcos is also represented in different aesthetic ways as photography and illustration, as the pasamontañas. Its constant feature is the headphones and the pipe as visual elements to recognise his silhouette. The Figure 5 shows different images of Subcomandante Marcos extracted from the websites. The image in the left upper corner is one of the most popular images of him, the image on the right corner represent Subcomandante Marcos and his liking for the football soccer as he expressed it in a letter that he wrote to the football soccer team Inter the Milan (EZLN, March 30th 2005).

Marcos has created his own image as rebel (i.e., a process where the meaning is encoded), he has used and played with the symbols and meanings of technology, rebel, Ché Guevara, and soldier. Consequently, he is the producer of his image (Sturken & Cartwright 2001, 46), and he has designed this outfit to transmit meanings about his and Zapatistas ideology. The *Chicano* performance artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña defines Subcomandante Marcos as "The Subcomandante of the performance", "the last popular hero in a noble tradition of activism […] who have utilized

performance and media strategies to enter in the political 'wrestling arena' of contemporary Mexico". Subcomandante Marcos has done so to fulfil his objectives and those of the Zapatistas by "wearing a collage of 20th century revolutionary symbols, costumes and props borrowed from Zapata, Sandino, Ché and Arafat" (Lane 2003, 135). Although his followers have accepted this meaning from him in general, the Mexican society has a particular point of view about the image of Marcos (i.e., a process where the meaning is decoded), ranging from the rebel hero to the puppet of the system. This is, his image is the representation of the hero, rebel, member of the guerrilla, writer, idealist, scholar and at the same time for other people his image represent the manipulative of indigenous people and an opportunist.

During the weeks and months following the rebellion in early 1994, the international press formed its own ideas about the aims and ideological underpinnings of the Zapatista movement. "The way millions of Americans got the story", wrote journalist Andres Oppenheimer, was that "...the Zapatistas were a new phenomenon—a pro-democracy Indian uprising with no ideological overtones." (McCowan 2003, 29). 60 Minutes—the news show aired on CBS—was avidly consumed by the largely uninformed audience, when on August 21st of 1994, the show opened with the following comment: "What Robin Hood was to the people of Sherwood Forest, Subcomandante Marcos has become to the people of Mexico—a fighter for the rights of peasants who are trapped in poverty by large landowners" (op. cit.). Because of the intense character of Subcomandante Marcos and his ability to enchant the media and its journalists, scholars and journalists started talking as if he were the Zapatista movement.

The market adopted his image as it happened for instance with the image of Ché Guevara or Frida Kahlo. Subcomandante Marcos image was used to attract young people with commercial purposes, to restaurants and cafeterias, and it was printed in clothes, and music album covers (McCowan

2001, 65). The paraphernalia strengthen his image, and became one of the most important symbols of the Zapatista rebellion and struggle. In Mexico, the image has been used as a banner of fight against government and its policies; in a country where the social differences are abysmal, where people has hunger for heroes, and dreams with a better life and an honest system, such a phenomena is easy to happen.

Figure 5. Images of Subcomandante Marcos.

The image of the Subcomandante Marcos is indispensable to the Zapatista movement because his person is the interlocutor between indigenous and Mexican societies, and local and global media. This is because he is a mestizo who speaks Spanish, English and French. For these reasons, mestizos empathize with him, and recognize all the Zapatista movement with his image. Accordingly, he is the cultural mirror that helps to understand the Zapatistas, their struggle and their reasons. For example, since 2006 the presence of Subcomandante Marcos in macromedia has been completely null, and it was demoted from his position as a spokesman. This circumstance has affected the diffusion and popularity of the Zapatistas movement on the macromedia and the perception of Mexican society. Nevertheless, they have preserved an active presence on the Internet.

The idealization of the image of Subcomandante Marcos is something that could be expected in a regional context where social justice does not exist, where spaces in the macromedia to expose anti-system ideologies are denied for hundreds of political movements in Latin America. Apart from this, the relationship between the Mexican society and their flesh and blood heroes existing in the wrestling business, provide another positive connotations to the Zapatistas ski-mask. These visual narratives add values based in the popular imagery, given that in the Mexican wrestling being masked allows the wrestler to fight against the evil or good, to be a hero or anti-hero and possess power, identity and personality.

4.2.4 The red star

As it occurs with the pasamontañas or Subcomandante Marcos images, the red star is represented in different forms. Its function in the Zapatistas websites in several cases is to reinforce the text or information. However as it could be seen in the Figure 6, there are diverse examples of red stars that

could construct complex meanings, for instance, the three images in the right side suggest the presence of the red star together with an image of Mexican popular culture; the image on the top portrays a "Catrina", which is a famous etching of the Mexican artist Guadalupe Posadas related with one of the most important festivities in Mexico "the day of the deaths"; in the middle, there is an illustration of a pre-Hispanic sculpture embedded over the red star; the one on the bottom, has the same visual elements but the red star is the background.

Figure 6. Red star used by Zapatistas.

The image on the bottom left corner represents the red star but also inside of it there are images about Zapatistas from the Mexican Revolution and the Lacandon jungle, also some Mayan symbols and a world map. The image on the centre is a green silhouette of Chiapas, with five red stars that pinpoint each of the autonomous towns affiliated to Zapatism. In the top left corner there is an example of the red star depicted in the EZLN flag.

A particular characteristic of the Zapatistas is their appreciation for some visual elements, such as the five-pointed red star, which has been used by socialist and communist movements (e.g., Russian and Chinese revolutionaries movements). Noticeably, Ché Guevara used the same sign in his beret, thus the red start implies part of the Zapatista ideology as a social movement, close to Marxism and to the Latin America liberation ideologies.

For example, the rock band "Rage Against the Machine" from the US use the red star to support the Zapatista movement, consequently this visual sign is recognized by the followers of this kind of music that contains in their lyrics political messages (e.g., against the system, government and war). Then mainly youth people through mass media as MTV music channel or mesomedia music websites spread the Zapatista red star. It is thus possible to speculate that as a visual sign it may inspire people emotions of rebelliousness and fight.

In sum, the red star is a visual element that presents the Zapatistas movement in a simple but effective way in terms of visibility, usability and web development.

4.3 Visual identity of Zapatism online

Identity is the convergence point between discourses, cultural practices and systems of representation (see "Identity is a structured representation", Grossberg in Hall and du Gay, 1996, 89). To Stuart Hall (1997, 01), the cultural process of sharing meanings converts an image into the identity of a social group, despite it not being integral, original and unique. To define the identity of a culture, people and social groups are required to establish cultural borders to determine the boundaries between those who are equal and those who are different from them. The Zapatistas websites have cultural borders through their visual signs as the pasamontañas, Subcomandante Marcos and the red star, but interestingly these websites also feature representations of the otherness (i.e., visual signs of what is not the Zapatistas, such as the police and the Mexican soldiers). These two sides are what define the Zapatistas as a cultural group through their visual identity. Noticeably, each website as a unique element contains other images that present some acts in the community where the website is from.

The meaning of the Zapatistas visual signs is linked to their identity, their functions are to determine what is and what it is not Zapatism online, and to help people or social groups to adopt or reject their identity. The visual identity of Zapatistas online is a consequence and construct of their representation and discourse (Hall 1997, 05). The ideology and identity of Zapatistas have been constructed over the time (Leetoy 2008. 79). Hence, the meanings of the visual signs of Zapatism provide the sense of identity to Zapatistas online, this is, who they are and where they belong is also linked to culture (Hall 1997, 03)

The transmission of the popular culture on the Internet plays an important role in the politic, social and psychological aspects of the social groups. It provides them with tools to form and renew their

collective and individual identities, thus generating democratic opinions (Fornäs 2002, 30).

Furthermore through the visual language that Zapatistas use in their websites, it is possible to

determine that the main visual identity of this cultural group on the Internet comprises the

pasamontañas, Subcomandante Marcos and the red star. Nevertheless, it is necessary to remark that

this is not permanent, because meanings and people are in constant change. The Zapatistas online

assume all the ideology from the Zapatistas located in the Lacandon jungle, and through their visual

language they show their identity to the users. The users, then, interpret these signs to construct a

meaning about the Zapatistas movement. Thus, their identity is not concentrated in a specific

geographical place, the phenomena of deterritorialization (i.e., severance of political movements

from their original contexts) brought by the globalization, has allowed to many social groups to find

identification with other groups around the world mainly on the Internet. Fornäs (2002) argues that

the processes of globalization and communication through technologies as Internet, make the

cultural border more permeable and blurred. Even in those spaces as Facebook[44], where a person

just fill the boxes on a non-flexible format, it is possible to notice and determine her identity

through the subtleties of the language and her profile images—among other pieces of information.

Accordingly, in the case of the Zapatistas websites, these are open to interact with other

organizations and websites, but the territory of such websites are Zapatistas territory, marked with

their visual and discursive cues.

The Zapatista identity is the sum of many identities. This hybrid identity, for example, is the

identity of mestizo in post-colonized countries. In Mexico there is an identity composed mainly by

indigenous and Spanish identities; the intersection between these is what is called Mexican identity

(Hall and Du Gay 1996, 91). The online diaspora or the ability of people to leave their original

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[44] http://www.facebook.com

homeland on the Internet, has allowed the contact, communication and interaction of a person or social groups with other people and social groups and their identities. This could influence the development of those identities and the construction of new ones. For this reason, Stuart Hall (op. cit.) proposed that it is more accurate to talk about identification instead of identity. Identification is constructed on the recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group. It may also be constructed with an idea and with the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on its foundation. This is precisely what happens with online Zapatistas that have a strong solidarity and compromise with the struggle of offline Zapatistas and other social movements. The visual signs of Zapatistas and their meanings are in the websites, to promote an identification process between the Zapatista and another cultures (Hall and Du Gay 1996, 02). This identification is the process in which people or social groups share, adopt or reject cultural practices, ideologies and discourses from other people or social groups. Some times the identification between people and social groups is strong and sometimes is weak, but noticeably, the process of identification does not void individuality.

Conclusion

This thesis offers a cultural analysis of the visual signs contained in the websites of online Zapatism. First the notion of online activism was defined and delimited. Then, the differences and convergences between the characteristics of Zapatistas off and online were explained on detail. Subsequently, the theoretical framework to do the cultural analysis of the visual signs of Zapatism online was provided. Next, the methodology to recollect and analyse the visual data was described. Finally, the results were explained in terms of cultural studies, this is, the meanings of the most important images of the Zapatism online and how the visual signs featured in them outline a visual identity.

The visual analysis is based on diverse resources that allowed a transition from a subjective point of view to an objective exercise. Naturally, incorporating sources written in Spanish and English has extended the scope and expanded the understanding about the Zapatism. This bilingual context enabled a contrast by language. For instance, in Spanish there is a huge documentation about the Zapatista movement in the Lacandon jungle and in English there is more information about the Zapatism online.

When this work started to be planed and defined I was expecting to see other images that I considered to be important to the Zapatista rebellion. For example I was expecting to see more images of Mexican revolutionary Emiliano Zapata because his name and the philosophy of his peasant movement in 1910 was borrowed for the Zapatistas in Chiapas. In the same manner I was expecting more images about Argentinian rebel Ernesto Ché Guevara because he is one of the most important political and social leaders of the last half of the XX century specially in Latin America,

moreover his image is one of the most popular images around the world. However it was interesting to find images portraying murals, which are visual narratives representing the Zapatistas in the Lacandon jungle, their ideology and way of life.

Remarkably, within the analysed websites there is the same number of images of "el Ché" than the anthropologist Andrés Aubry, that worked closely to the indigenous communities in Chiapas since 1973 and was an advisor of the EZLN. Another peculiar result is that there are few images of the Mexican flag, probably because this visual sign does not say much about the Zapatista ideology except for their geographical location. The image of Subcomandante Marcos undoubtedly is a fundamental visual sign within the Zapatista movement, however the number of his images is balanced with respect to the images of indigenous Zapatistas. Thus is important to say that within the official EZLN websites there are no more than ten images of "El Sub". All the images are focused in the struggle and protests of the Zapatista movement, but there are not images about the daily life of the indigenous communities, that in my opinion could communicate better to the observers, the conditions of those communities and their struggle.

In my opinion the online activism needs a new wave of radical global demonstrations to be effective because at the present moment a great number of people think that doing online activism or being activist is to click buttons and sign petitions, adding or sharing a social cause through their social networks. The technology and the Internet might be used as tools to support activism in the street but not to replace it. After all if the offline activism disappears, the progress, evolution and development in our societies will stop. Particularly the massive access to Internet and the misinformation of users about their rights on the Internet have allowed that the governments and companies restrict their liberties and impose their rules to citizens that believe that they have control

over their privacy and information. Initiatives like ACTA (Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement) are clear examples of how the establishment would like to control more the flow of information, especially the alternative, on the Internet.

Currently, the websites of Zapatistas are limited to be sources of information about the seventeen years of Zapatista struggle and many of these websites have not been updated since many years ago. There is not a group or website doing a direct action (attacking Mexican or global institutions websites) in favour of Zapatistas on the Lacandon jungle. The Zapatistas websites with accurate information are the officials ones; these update their information often and the information comes from the epicentre of the movement in the "Juntas de Buen Gobierno". Zapatistas know that having presence on the Internet—in a context where the current coverage in the macromedia is null—is what ensures them to remain in the social memory.

This research represents a different link in the study of one of the most relevant social movements of the last three decades. A valuable angle of this work is the way the methodology was constructed, showing the feasibility of interleaving quantitative and qualitative methods to answer each specific problem or question. Nevertheless, a number of issues about the visual language of Zapatism remain open, these clearly deserve an in depth exploration and offer an opportunity for future endeavours. For example, a more detailed analysis about the patterns and clusters of the data collected in this thesis from different perspectives, such as gender, aesthetics, geographical and cross-cultural differences. Also it may be interesting to make an analysis about the correlation between the text and the images to look for congruency between the visual and textual discourses.

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Appendix A: Zapatistas' Websites

Official Zapatistas websites (Last visited 26 July 2008)

Enlace Zapatista http://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/.

Palabra EZLN http://palabra.ezln.org.mx/.

Radio Insurgente http://www.radioinsurgente.org/.

SERAZLN-ZACH http://www.serazln-altos.org/.

Zesta Internazional http://zeztainternazional.ezln.org.mx/.

"La Otra" Zapatistas websites (Last visited 26 July 2008)

Colectivo por La Otra Campaña "Heroes de Ocosingo" http://laktyan.blogspot.com/.

El otro Morelos http://www.metroflog.com/ELMITODELCRANEO.

La Otra Campaña - Vancouver http://otravancouver.resist.ca/.

la Otra Campeche http://campeche.laotramx.org.

La Otra Chicago http://chicagotra.org/.

La Otra Chilanga http://laotrachilanga.blogspot.com.

La Otra Colima-Jalisco http://sonrisas-furiosas.blogspot.com/.

La Otra DF http://www.megafono.lunasexta.org/.

La Otra Ensenada http://laotraensenada.org.mx/.

La Otra Estado de Mexico http://espora.org/~sartaguda/laotra/inicio.html.

La Otra Guerrero http://guerrero.laotramx.org/.

La Otra Huasteca y Totonacapan http://laotrahuasteca.blogspot.com/.

La Otra Jalisco http://zapateando.wordpress.com/category/la-otra-en-jalisco/.

La Otra Los Angeles http://laotra.delotrolado.net/.

La Otra Morelos http://www.laotraenelsurdemorelos.blogspot.com/.

La Otra Oaxaca http://www.casacollective.org/index.php.

La Otra Papantla http://laotrapapantla.blogcindario.com/.

La Otra San Diego http://laotrasandiego.blogspot.com/.

La Otra Tamaulipas http://laotratam.blogspot.com/.

La Otra Tampico http://sexta-declaracion.blogspot.fi/.

La Otra Tijuana http://laotratijuana.blogspot.com/.

La Otra Xilitla http://laotraxilitla.blogspot.com/.

La Otra Yucatán http://yucatan.laotramx.org/.

Red LaOtraMX http://laotramx.org/.

World's Zapatistas websites (Last visited 26 July 2008)

Chiapas 95 https://webspace.utexas.edu/hcleaver/www/Chiapas95/chiapas95.html.

Chiapas and the Zapatista rebellion http://struggle.ws/mexico.html.

Colectivo de Solidaridad con la Rebelión Zapatista de Barcelona http://chiapas.pangea.org/home/mexp.htm.

Collectif Ya Basta! http://zapata.com/.

Comitato Chiapas Torino http://www.ipsnet.it/Chiapas/home.htm.

Committee of Indigenous Solidarity / DC Zapatistas .http://cis.mahost.org/.

Consolato ribelle del Messico http://www.ecn.org/brescia/consolato/.

Encuentro/Gathering http://encuentro.mayfirst.org/.

Groundwork Books Collective http://groundwork.ucsd.edu/.

Kiptik http://www.kiptik.org/.

Mexicanos Unidos en Defensa del Pueblo http://mudp.org/.

Plataforma de Solidaridad con Chiapas, Oaxaca y Guatemala de Madrid http://www.nodo50.org/pchiapas/.

Possible Worlds http://www.possibleworlds.org/.

Red de Apoyo Zapatista de Madrid http://www.nodo50.org/raz/.

Schools for Chiapas http://www.schoolsforchiapas.org. /.

Zapatista Net of Autonomy & Liberation
http://www.actlab.utexas.edu/~zapatistas/guide.html.

Zapatista Page http://www.tmcrew.org/chiapas/chiapas.htm.

Zapatistas Dolls http://www.zapatistadolls.com/.

Zapatistas in Cyberspace
https://webspace.utexas.edu/hcleaver/www/Chiapas95/zapsincyber.html.

Zapatistas Women http://www.actlab.utexas.edu/~geneve/zapwomen/enter.html.

zZoomzap http://zoomzap.com/index-eng.php.

Mexican Zapatistas websites (Last visited 26 July 2008)

Café para la Vida Digna http://www.zapatistacoffee.com/.

Centro Medios Independientes (Indimedia-Chiapas)
http://chiapas.mediosindependientes.org/.

Con el E.Z.L.N. al D.F. http://www.ezlnaldf.org/.

Confederación General del Trabajo Chiapas http://www.cgtchiapas.org/.

Enlace Civil http://www.enlacecivil.org.mx/.

Estacion Libre http://www.estacionlibre.org/.

La pagina del Subcomandante Marcos
http://www.patriagrande.net/mexico/ezln/index.html.

Revista Chiapas http://www.revistachiapas.org/chiapas-pres.html.

Subcomandante Marcos http://www.submarcos.org/menu.htm.