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The evolution in Libya comes as a reminder of the importance of media in today’s world and more specifically the connections between media and war. Hoskins and O’ Loughlin book “identifies and illuminates the conditions of what they term diffused war and the new challenges it raises for the actors who wage and counter warfare, for their agents and mechanisms of the new media for the mass publics” (back cover of the book). Their work aim to “identify and illuminate the conditions of diffused war and the new challenges it raises...for the agents and mechanisms” of Governments, Military, new media, and mass public. It is a valuable contribution to the ongoing debate and questions raised regarding War and the Media.

The idea of Diffused war, central in their book, refers “to a new paradigm of war in which i) the mediatization of war ii) makes possible more diffuse causal relations between action and effect iii) creating greater uncertainty for policymakers in the conduct of war” (p.3). Diffused war can be interpreted through a set of axes that the authors propose, such as “Justifiable-Unjustifiable death, Routine-Exception, Patience-Urgency, Certainty-Risk, Us-Them” (p.168).

The new paradigm that Hoskins and O’ Loughlin introduce, diffusion of war, it is more than an interesting idea, since it accurately approaches and captures the evolutions in technology, the changes in communication and “the management of such flux amid complex systems that make the cause and effect of any conduct as diffuse” (p.13) As a result Government, Military and Publics are “forced to find new

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ways to manage information about war” (p.18) Certainties of the past are scattered and obscured by the dynamic of mediatization, that results from changes in “communication technologies...to the point that the conduct of war cannot be understood unless one carefully accounts for the role of media in it” (p.4) “Mass media provides meaning and mediates the meaning of the action in foreign policy. Their influence is greater in foreign policy issues because of the lack of personal experience, and consequently, the public’s reliance upon the information that receives from the mass media in general” (Panagiotou 2006:12). As a result a battle of symbols and representations is taking place on the same time with the real war, it is the battle of perceptions, that all sides has to fight and win. “The unintentional and intentional recording of events by the ubiquitous electronic/digital media....contribute to an archive of unpredictability that unsettles past, present and future” (p.9) that does not though as someone might think “results in the immediate end of the Big Media institutions such as BBC, CNN” (p.9). Rather it constitutes a new landscape where “renewed” media have to operate and compete several other sources of diffused information. «The conduct of war and conflict today....involves the difficulty of the management of such flux amid complex systems that make the ‘cause’ and ‘effect’ of any conduct as diffuse. (p.13) In that frame war is seen more as a battle «of symbols and representations» and as a result «mediatization of war matters because perceptions are vital to war» (p.5). War consists as Virilio(1989:7) suggests “not so much in scoring territorial, economic or other material victories as in appropriating the ‘immateriality’ of perceptual fields” (p.147). In order to approach the emergence of immediate and unpredicted «relationships between the trinity of government, military and public», Hoskins and O’ Loughlin examine in details, central issues and dimensions regarding the coverage of war, such as whether images of war
In the era of “third order” of information (Weinberger, 2007), where mediatization of war transforms brakes down previous distinct roles (producer, consumer, etc) Hoskins and O’ Loughlin book “provides the concepts and tools for the reader to acquire greater literacy of war and media” (p.2) as they find intelligibility through diffusion.

In the ongoing debate regarding War and Media, this book is a very interesting contribution and valuable approach in the dynamic relationships between war and media, through the addressment of key issues that compose this relationship. Certainly the book meets the aims and fulfills the needs of its target readership since and in the own words of the authors we are “…to think about who takes responsibility for recording and interpreting war and conflict as it happens, both to form an accurate memory and to guide present and future policy and action.” (p.60).
References