

## **The Bosnia Syndrome and the Conflict in Kosovo**

*Chiara De Franco*

Avoiding another Bosnia was a priority for the international community, in the US and the UK in particular, which became obvious as soon as the violence of the conflict in Kosovo developed. During the long conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the international media, and CNN in particular, aired daily images of what they defined as “ethnic cleaning,” advocating a prompt intervention by the US or by NATO- which actually came very late and revealed the inadequacy of the “western” policy toward Bosnia. Concern for a possible repetition of the tragedy in Bosnia was evident in all the European governments and all the different phases of the conflict in Kosovo. It was diffused among American and British politicians from the early 1990s and was part of the discourse produced by the international community in all the conferences where security matters were discussed.

Obviously, it is not possible to establish if this concern was sincere or instrumental, nor it is possible to say “how much” it was determined by the media or by other factors. However, what is possible to argue, on the basis of the analysed data, is that the role of the media in creating the Bosnia Syndrome is dual in nature: 1) the media was the main force supporting an intervention in Bosnia, the main provider of images which were taken as proof of the “ethnic cleaning,” and therefore the main critic of “western” inactive policy; 2) the media created a narrative link between Bosnia and Kosovo, by focusing on the same actors and by putting them in a story which repeats the narrative of the conflict in Bosnia. The result was that politicians felt they should avoid another Bosnia and they did not want to be questioned again by the media, as happened with the war in Bosnia.

Each of these steps is analysed and explained by using discourse analysis. Firstly, I will explain how, from the discourse of politicians from 1995 to 1999, the Bosnia syndrome clearly emerges as a lesson learnt and how then it applies to the conflict in Kosovo. Then I will explain how discursive and visual links that the media constructed between the conflict in Bosnia and the one in Kosovo, contributed to strengthening this syndrome and made it work powerfully in the crisis of Kosovo.