

# POGOVOR

Pred nama je knjiga fascinantnih dokumentarnih fotografija i biografija transrodnih osoba, građanki i građana Balkana, koje je autor Aleksandar Crnogorac prikupio u okviru projekta *Trans Balkan*.

One značajno dopunjuju sve dosadašnje percepcije transrodnih identiteta. Medicina ih vidi kao kvantitet i kvalitet hormonske situacije, koja uslovljava potrebu ili njeno odsustvo za genitalnom operacijom i hormonskim tretmanom. Pravo, bar kada je evropski ambijent u pitanju, sve više prepoznaje potrebu za izdavanjem ličnih dokumenata na osnovu identitetskih kriterijuma, bez uslovljavanja postojanjem dijagnoza, operacija, pa ni drugih medicinskih tretmana. Aktivizam zahteva potpunu i bezuslovnu depatologizaciju trans identiteta i dekriminalizaciju transrodnih seksualnih radnica. Sportski autoriteti Međunarodnog olimpijskog komiteta su još 2015. doneli odluku da je nivo hormona jedini dovoljan kriterijum da se trans žene takmiče u kategoriji žena na svim takmičarskim nivoima, sve do olimpijada. Sociolozi vide u marginalizaciji i diskriminaciji koju transrodne osobe doživljavaju od rane mladosti ono što ih onemogućuje da se pod jednakim uslovima školuju, zaposle, razviju svoje potencijale i poštanu korisni članovi društva. Kriminolozi se uglavnom slažu da je specifična viktimiziranost transrodnih osoba presudni kriminogeni faktor koji ih kriminalizuje, a ne neka urođena sklonost ka vršenju krivičnih dela, mada ima i onih koji „promenu pola“ vide kao potencijalno podmukli

# AFTERWORD

What we have before us is a book of fascinating documentary photographs and biographies of transgender persons, citizens of the Balkans, collected by the author Aleksandar Crnogorac during the *Trans Balkan* project.

These photographs are significant in that they serve to complement all perceptions of transgender identities to date. Medicine views them as quantity and quality of a hormonal situation dictating the need for genital surgery and hormone treatment, or absence of such need. The law, at least in the European setting, more and more often recognises the need to issue personal identity documents based on the identity criteria, with no conditions of diagnoses, surgeries, or other medical treatments. Activism demands full and unconditional depathologisation of trans identities and decriminalisation of transgender sexual workers. Sports authorities of the International Olympic Committee decided back in 2015 that hormone level is the only and sufficient criterion for trans women to compete in the women's category at all competing levels, all the way to the Olympics. Sociologists see marginalisation and discrimination faced by transgender persons from their early youth on as obstacles preventing them from getting educated and employed under the same conditions, from developing their potential and becoming useful members of the society. Criminologists mostly agree that the characteristic victimisation of transgender persons is a crucial criminogenic factor that criminalises them and not some innate propensity for committing crimes, although there are indeed those who see the “sex change” as

instrument mogućih zloupotreba. Penologija još uvek ne zna gde da smesti trans žene, u ženski, kao zatvor njihovog identiteta, ili u muški zatvor, na koji upućuju njihova lična dokumenta. Mediji ne prestaju da pojavu nazivaju „promenom pola“ i najviše vole senzacionalistički predstavljene narrative o trans ženama i trans muškarcima iz sveta estrade, ilustrovane fotografijama u krupnom planu intenzivno našminkanih likova koji navodno žive nekakve glamurozne, imaginarne živote srećnih, imućnih ljudi. Politika „mudro“ izbegava temu, jer ne želi da bude percipirana kao podrška onima koji se ne uklapaju u binarnu podelu stanovništva. A stanovništvo pak, neobavešteno, lako prihvata stereotipne predrasude da se radi o bolesnim i štetnim, po natalitet i nacionalnu dobrobit, pojavama i pojedincima. Ezoterija traži objašnjenja u prethodnim životima trans osoba, koje su one provodile kao žene, zbog čega im je teško ili nemoguće da se oslobode tih iskustava u sadašnjosti u kojoj su se rodile kao muškarci. Neke monoteističke religije pak odobravaju operativno prilagođavanje pola transrodnih osoba, smatrajući to „lekom“ protiv homoseksualnosti. Akademska zajednica kod nas, baš kao i politika, ne želi da otvara „ta“ pitanja. Organi medicinske uprave zaduženi za procese tranzicije ne objavljuju ni elementarne podatke na svojim sajtovima, valjda ne želeći da „mladima daju pogrešne ideje“.

Zato je neophodna fotografija, kao svi-  
ma lako razumljiva vizuelna prezentacija tran-  
srodnih osoba, uz pomoć koje ljudi mogu lakše  
da prihvate ono što im je bilo nepoznato i zato  
strano. U fotografski prezentiranim likovima  
lako je prepoznati svoje sugrađanke i sugrađa-  
ne, srodnike, školske drugare, decu iz komšilu-  
ka, društvo iz kraja, jer fotografija pomaže da se

a potentially devious instrument of possible abuses. Penology still does not know where to place trans women, whether into a women's prison, a prison of their identity, or into a men's prison, where their identity documents assign them. The media never give up on calling this phenomenon the “sex change”, and what they like best is narratives about trans women and trans men from the entertainment world presented in a sensationalist manner, illustrated by close ups of heavily made up characters living glamorous, imaginary lives of happy and rich people. Politics and politicians “wisely” avoid the subject since they do not want to be perceived as supporting those who do not fit the binary division of the population. And the population themselves, ill informed, easily accept stereotype prejudices that these are sick phenomena and individuals, harming the birth rate and national wellbeing. Esotery looks for explanations in the former lives of trans persons that they had spent as women, which is why it is difficult or impossible for them to become free of those experiences now, in this time, when they were born as men. Some monotheistic religions, however, actually approve of surgical adjustment of the sex of transgender persons, considering it a “cure” against homosexuality. The academic community in our country, just like politicians, have no desire to open “those” issues. Medical authorities in charge of transition processes do not publish even the most basic data on their websites, in all probability not wishing to “give the young people wrong ideas”.

That is why the photographs are necessary, as visual presentations of transgender persons easily understood by all. With such help people can accept more easily what was unknown to them and therefore strange. In photographic presentations one can easily recognise their fellow citizens, relatives, school friends, children from the neighbourhood, since photographs help to understand and accept

shvati i prihvati poruka da su svi ti transrodni ljudi oni koji nikoga ne ugrožavaju. Tu leži i značaj ovog projekta podizanja svesti o trans osobama, koji vizuelno-narativnim kontaktom s trans identitetima i njihovom specifičnom egzistencijom doprinosi prepoznavanju i integraciji trans osoba kao ravnopravnih članova društva. Ta integracija, kako autor ističe, još uvek traje i na globalnom planu, zapravo je svuda na početku. Projekat *Trans Balkan* u tom smislu predstavlja njegov doprinos razumevanju transrodnosti kroz ove fotografsko-dokumentarne priče o trans osobama s geografskog područja Balkana, snimljene u Istanbulu, Srbiji sa njenim pokrajinama Kosovom i Vojvodinom, takođe i u zemljama regiona, u Crnoj Gori, rumunskim gradovima Temišvaru i Bukureštu, bugarskom glavnom gradu Sofiji. Obuhvaćene su i fotografije snimljene u Sloveniji, njenom glavnom gradu Ljubljani, u hrvatskom gradu Rijeci i makedonskoj Strumici.

Sećam se dobro beogradske izložbe istog autora, organizovane 2019. u Domu omladine, koju sam posetila s moje dve prijateljice lezbejke. Tišinu bez reči koja je gusto ispunila naš doživljaj izložbe, vibrantni susret s očima, telima i likovima fotografisanih transrodnih osoba, prekinula je konstatacija jedne od njih: „Sve i svi ovde fotografisani, one i oni, prešli su neku granicu, onu koju mi nismo smele, otišavši dalje nego što smo mogle i smele sebi da dozvolimo i da zamislimo“, sa čime se druga odmah i potpuno složila. Iako znam da se ne sme pitati za razloge zašto je neko takva/takav, jer znam da aktivizam kaže da se to pitanje ne sme postavljati jer je uvredljivo, diskriminišuće, jer implicira njihovu „nenormalnost“ i previše odražava distanciranost onoga ko pita od transrodnih osoba, jasno podvlačeći liniju na relaciji „mi–oni“, ipak sam, grešna mi radoznala istraživačka duša,

the message that all those transgender people do not threaten anybody. Therein lies the importance of this awareness raising project for trans persons, contributing via visually-narrative contact with trans identities and their specific existence to recognising and integrating trans persons as equal members of the society. This integration, as pointed out by the author, is still ongoing globally as well, actually it is still early days everywhere. The *Trans Balkan* project in this sense represents the author's contribution to understanding transgenderism through these photographic-documentary stories about trans persons from the geographic area of the Balkans, through photographs taken from Istanbul via Serbia with its provinces Vojvodina and Kosovo, via Montenegro and Bosnia to Romanian cities of Timisoara and Bucharest, to Sophia and then returning via Slovenia to Rijeka, Ljubljana and back to Strumica.

I well remember the exhibition by the same author held in 2019 in Belgrade Youth Center that I visited with my two lesbian friends. The wordless silence that thickly filled our experience of the exhibition, a vibrant meeting with the eyes, bodies and faces of photographed transgender persons, was interrupted by a comment made by one of lesbians: "Everyone photographed here, every one of them, they crossed a border that we didn't dare to cross, they have gone further than we could dare to allow ourselves even to imagine", and the other one immediately and fully agreed. Although knowing full well that we are not to ask for reasons why somebody is like that, since I am aware that activism insists that the question is not to be asked since it is offensive, discriminating, implying that they are "abnormal", and emphasising too much the distance between the asker and transgender persons, clearly stressing the line between "us" and "them", still, I, may Lord forgive me my inquisitive researcher's spirit, unexpectedly and out of the blue got an interesting an-

ne očekivano i nenadano dobila interesantan odgovor na prećutano pitanje kako i zašto se neka/neko rodi kao trans osoba. Možda i tako što su se neke lezbejke zadržale u ambijentu lezbejstva, ne usuđujući se da iskorače iz te relativno bezbedne i već uveliko priznate zone nekakvog sociopsihološkog komfora u opasni predeo odbacivanja onoga što nam je pripisano kao polna pripadnost prilikom rođenja. Požurila sam posle izložbe da pitam i moje gej poznanike, da li i oni vide transrodnost kao divljinu u koju nisu hteli ni smeli da zakorače, i na moje iznenađenje, mnogi od njih su se složili, čak dobacujući kontrapitanje – pa zar nismo svi mi transrodni, neki samo više, a neki možda samo manje spremni da to manifestujemo.

Kad košarkaškom loptom udarite o zemlju, ona odskoče drugačije nego kad to isto uradite s teniskom ili pingpong lopticom. I naši životi odskoču, tj. reaguju drugačije kada su udareni od ljudi, bačeni na tlo, u voljnoj ili nevoljnoj interakciji između ljudi i tla po kome hodaju i od koga se odbijaju kada su na njega bačeni. Za transrodne ljude je to udaranje o tlo češće i bolnije iskustvo nego za cisrodne, one čiji je rodni identitet neupitno usaglašen s telom. Takođe, nismo svi lopte koje odskoču kada su udarene o tlo, neki su, naime, čaše, koje se razbiju u susretu s tlom. Neki znaju da je njihovo preživljavanje vrlo mnogo zavisno od izbegavanja rizika bacanja na tlo. I fotografisane osobe znaju to isto, samo što su intenzitet i frekvencija izbegnutih i/ili preživljenih rizika kod njih bili neuporedivo jači, neke/neki su ih preživele/i, a za neke je, kako saznajemo, to bilo pogubno iskustvo. Saznala sam, uz pomoć fotografija transrodnih osoba, i da su granice u velikoj meri veštačke, stvorene spolja, da omogućće spoljašnje analize, kategorizacije, tretmane, primene zakona, kreiranje javnih politika i sl., a

swer to an unspoken question – how and why somebody is born as a trans person. Perhaps also in this way – some lesbians feeling comfortable in the lesbianism setting, not daring to step out of that relatively safe and already well recognised socio-psychological comfort zone into a perilous terrain of rejecting the sex assigned to us at the time of birth. After the exhibition I hastened to ask my gay acquaintances as well whether they see transgenderism as wilderness where they would not or dared not tread, and to my surprise many of them assented, even adding a counter-question – wondering whether we are not all of us transgender, some only more and some perhaps only less ready and willing to manifest it.

When you strike a basketball and it hits the ground, it bounces off differently than a tennis ball or a ping pong ball. And our lives also bounce or rather react differently when struck by people, thrown to the ground, in a willing or unwilling interaction between people and the ground they walk on and against which they bounce when they are struck. For transgender people this bouncing and hitting the ground is a more frequent and more painful experience than for cisgender persons, those whose gender identity is unquestionably in accordance with their body. In addition, we are not all of us balls that bounce when they are struck, some of us are glasses that shatter when they hit the ground. Some know that their survival very much depends on avoiding the risk of hitting the ground. And the persons photographed also know all that; however, the intensity and frequency of the avoided and/or survived risks for them were incomparably higher. Some of them survived, and for some, we realise, it was a fatal experience. I learned also, helped by photographs of transgender persons, that boundaries are for the most part artificial, created from outside, aiming to enable external analyses, categorisations, treatments, enforcing the law, creating public policies, etc., and that the ones who live

da se oni koji žive svoje autentične živote ne kreću unutar strogo omeđenih kategorija, da znaju da je iskorak preko njih i te kako moguć i da se dešava mnogima.

Verujući tada da sam jedina u Srbiji koja teoretiše transrodnost, smatrala sam se tim odgovornija da uključim vizuelni doživljaj s fotografija transrodnih osoba kao neophodni istraživački deo naučnog iskustvenog putovanja, koje sam slobodna da preporučim i drugima koji su zainteresovani za tu temu. Moje putovanje je započelo analizom položaja transrodnih osoba lišenih slobode u zatvorskim ustanovama, koje rigidnije nego bilo koje druge institucije priznaju samo striktnu rodnu binarnu podelu na žene i muškarce, na zatvore za žene i zatvore za muškarce, što su dodatni muka i teret za one koji se ne uklapaju svojim rodnim identitetom. Iz tog diskursa dolazi jasna potvrda da svi ljudi, što obuhvata i osuđena lica na izdržavanju kazne lišenja slobode u zatvorskim institucijama, imaju pravo na život bez nasilja. To uključuje i mogućnost da žive svoje autentične živote, jer su svi zapravo jednako vredni kao ljudi, mada istovremeno različiti u svojoj prirodnoj posebnosti kao individue. Na tu jednostavnu činjenicu obaveznosti zaštite od nasilja i diskriminacije svih opominju nas i fotografije Aleksandra Crnogorca. One pozivaju pre svega na poštovanje njihove hrabrosti i svega što čini njihovu egzistenciju specifičnom i autentičnom, na koju je, bez preterivanja, nužna reakcija poštovanje koje na momente prerasta u divljenje.

*Dr Zorica Mršević<sup>1</sup>*

their authentic lives do not move only within strictly demarcated categories and that they know that stepping out of them is by all means very much possible and happens to many.

Believing then that I was the only one in Serbia to theorize transgenderism, I considered myself even more responsible and indeed called to include visual experience from the photographs of transgender persons as a necessary research part of the scientific experience journey, and I take the liberty to recommend this journey to others who are interested in the topic. My own journey started by analysing the position of transgender persons deprived of liberty in penitentiaries, institutions that are more rigid than any others in recognising only the strict gender binary division into females and males, into prisons for women and prisons for men, which is an additional suffering and burden for the ones whose gender identity fails to fit. From this discourse comes a clear confirmation that all persons, which means also persons convicted to serve the deprivation of liberty sentence in penitentiaries, have the right to life without violence. This includes also the possibility for them to live their authentic lives, since they are all equally worthy as human beings, although at the same time different in their natural distinctiveness as individuals. It is this simple fact of necessity of protection for all against violence and discrimination that Aleksandar Crnogorac's photographs remind us of. They above all call for respect for their courage and everything that makes their existence distinctive and authentic. The inevitable reaction to that, with no exaggeration, is respect that at times grows into admiration.

*Zorica Mršević PhD*

<sup>1</sup> Institut društvenih nauka, Beograd.

<sup>1</sup> Institute of Social Sciences, Belgrade.