

## INTERVIEW WITH NITA SALIHU HOXHA

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Duration: 16 minutes

Present:

1. Nita Salihu Hoxha (Speaker)
2. Aurela Kadriu (Interviewer)
3. Donjetë Berisha (Camera)

*Transcription notation symbols of non-verbal communication:*

() – emotional communication

{ } – the speaker explains something using gestures.

*Other transcription conventions:*

[ ] – addition to the text to facilitate comprehension

Footnotes are editorial additions to provide information on localities, names or expressions.

**Nita Salihu Hoxha:** Nita Salihu, born in 1984, graphic designer.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Do you remember when did you hear for the first time, or when did you realize for the first time that Kosovo will declare independence?

**Nita Salihu Hoxha:** More or less every year, from 2005, 2005, actually from 2004 until 2009, I was part of Karrota [Marketing Agency] and more or less every year we thought what should we come out with, “Like, what is something interesting that we would do for ourselves, with what, what promotion should we do to ourselves?” Because when you are a creative agency, not necessarily you have to have a megalight or a billboard placed *on your face* [in English] in a commercial way, but you have to do it in other ways, print [your brand] on a pencil, give it away to the clients. To show it, “I have done this work,” to do good work for a Gallery, you know, something creative to show off. And that is the best part when you have to do creative work for a client, but the idea was that, “OK, let’s do something promotional for ourselves.”

And what did we do that year? We got out, it was January, or maybe end of January, because somehow January was always, we were hardly awake, and for that reason to activate our brains we would *brainstorm* [in English], “Let’s gather and come out with a concept.” At that time our office was close to Sami Frashëri [High School] that cobbled street downhill, and our office was on the right side, if you continue further down you have Stacion Gallery and the Ethnological Museum, and on the other side is the marketplace.

We usually held our meetings in the kitchen. You know, the kitchen was on the second floor, the office was all open and we all gathered in that small kitchen, we laid down a bit and made ourselves comfortable, so we could come up with something interesting. Even Shkenca, who was our lead, the leader of the creative team, she started writing “March, March 8.” And she said, “Hey *more*,” she said, “I think independence will be declared in February.” No one knew the exact date, we only knew it was in February, she said, “My dad told me so,” or someone told her so. And she wrote it down: “February.” We didn’t know the date, “Wow, let’s...” we did away with other ideas, “let’s think about February, about the independence and how.” All of us got emotional, “Ohhh, independence.” You know, as if we had turned 18 and our parents told us, “Move to your own apartment, because you’re all grown-ups, we had enough!”

And we began and we were very excited and stuff, what should we think of and stuff? And we started thinking, “What should we call it, let’s give it a name so it has more potency.” And Jeton, Jeton Morina was a boy, he was the art director at the time, he had just come from New Zealand or a year before he had come from New Zealand and interestingly enough he came up with the name *Newborn* [in English], a new born, *New Life* [in English], you know a new life, let’s call it *Newborn*. Perhaps after some names, I don’t remember exactly how long did that process take to think of a name in that tiny kitchen, on those sofas, armchairs that we had. As we were there, “Wow *Newborn, Newborn.*”

And it was there that we started thinking about the name. Then someone suggested, “Maybe go out...” I remember all sort of ideas, at times a bit banal, you know, “Pacifiers, let’s give away pacifiers.” But on the other hand it was, “How pacifiers?” You know, it seemed condescending, a man with a *plis* and a pacifier in his mouth. “No, let’s do T-shirts. No, let’s print posters.” You know there were, while *brainstorming* [in English], you should not shut down other people’s ideas. On the other hand, I had a background, because some years earlier I was part of the Missing Identity, some other project. And I was always interested in doing big sculptures, you know, working with concrete, you know, I like that time, doing something brutalist in style. You know, do something big.

At that time we always felt offended by the way media represented us, the way they described us at the time, they always had the view of the market, you know, it was on the left side of our office, the marketplace, some men with *plis*, some women with scarfs, somewhat poor, unfortunate, all old. Being a country whose majority is the youth, you know, has the biggest number of young people, but what everyone saw was old people, “You know, Kosova, the marketplace, some apples, pears. That’s us.” I was thinking to myself, “It would be nice to think of something that can be shown on television,” you know, *on your face* [in English], something modern and stuff.

And at that time one of the ideas I had, I said, “We should make something big, perhaps make the *Newborn* out of concrete.” But now, you know, “Oh, yes, we could be on television, on BBC.” And then we started, “Wow, super!” We started giving structure to that concept, you know. Fis [Fisnik Ismaili] said, “Yes, the font!” Shkenca who was our lead, it had become our [company’s] identity, we used the body type Din, Din font. She said, “Wow, yes, we should use that one,” and stuff. Because Karrota had become Ogilvy franchise, David Ogilvy Advertising, the biggest in the world at the time, and though we used that name, the color red was present in everything. Even our office was all red. You know, *branding* everything, red, red, with quotes of David Ogilvy and stuff. More or less only the Karrota’s logo was left, the carrot, the rabbit, that kept us local, before becoming a foreign [advertising company]. And it is there that the concept began to materialize. Fis said, “Perhaps we will make it out of metal.” So, we began with the ideas of how to realize it, the concrete was a problem, how to do it? It will remain static somewhere, how to carry it? How to make it? Where to place it? You know, many things. So, let’s develop it.

And I forgot to tell you this earlier, when we gathered to *brainstorm*, you could not say, “You are an *accountant*, you will not come along. We are the creative ones, or only the designers.” There was the office assistant, who cleaned the office, the *accountant*, the finance officer, the entire office. You could not say, “Not you. Close the door!” You know, whoever was there, the more the merrier, because they had other viewpoints. On the plus side, we were doing something for independence so we were really *hyped* [in English]. In fact, we didn’t even know the date, and we didn’t really know what it meant, you know. More or less it was a secret, you know, “Why are they keeping the date secret?” So the people would not go crazy? So it doesn’t become a big thing? Somehow, as if, “Let’s have it there, let’s declare independence, but no one should know about it.” You know, it was a sort of, and we wanted to shout out that fact. And then, Fis said, “I know these people, let’s make it out of metal. We will make it out of metal. We have to find the company, who will do it for how much?”

Then we arrived to the point when we said, “We will make it red and we’ll start working on the project.” You know, start writing and stuff. Fis started writing, he writes very well. He started writing the project and stuff and he handed over to the Prime Minister’s office to see and you know, for funds. However, we found the company, how to say it, a metal business. Their name was, if I am not mistaken, it is the last name, the last name of the person who led the metal business. So, the entire family led the business, something like Asllani, the name was Asllani, if I am not mistaken. And more

or less they took care of that part, you know, because they had the machines which were very precise down to the millimeters, you know, to produce it. More or less it was a laser machine, you know, it maintained the shape of the letters, he did not say to you, “Ah, you know some letters [are impossible],” but he did them to perfection. So, they began taking care of the budget, some budget lines, to write the project and hand it in. And so we got the confirmation that they will help us do the monument, but not in red, but in yellow or blue, you know to fit in.

At the time we did not know the background, you know, how, why? So we came-up with the *Newborn* in yellow. More or less we expected to start the process any time, and we did so right after they told us so. Although at the time Fis showed off, like, “We are doing it, we are doing it!” More or less, he started being more engaged and dedicated. The rest of us had to take care of the office business, because the team was very big. Sometimes I feel offended, when I see that Fis is devaluing [our work], “Yes, we came up with the idea very quickly. We wrote down *Newborn*, decided on the font Din, and sent it to production.” Well, no, it was not that easy, because you do need a background explanation of how we came up with it. It’s not that... but you are devaluing the process of how we came up with it, what were we thinking, how we were all up for doing something, you know, it was not that simple. But the best thing was that he said, “We will produce it, even if they don’t give us the money, even if no one helps us, I will sell my car.” He had bought a Passat that year, it was such a big car and at that time, had he sold it, we really could have produced it with that money.

But then the good thing was that the production was supported, but again we did not have a date, we did not have the time or anything. But you know, we had eleven intensive days to produce it altogether. What are we talking about? We are talking about a production within eleven days, on top of that other materials were needed, because *Newborn* is 24 meters long, one letter weighs a ton, although it was said that the letter W was three tons. The thing was that the company that produced it was under a lot of stress, “What if people climb on it?” They had to test it, they tested it with seventy people climbing on a letter, they dragged it to see if it falls down. In fact, we didn’t know that it would be that busy, we didn’t know whether we are placing the monument and people would pass by and say, “Wow! What are these letters for?” Until recently, people referred to the monument, The Letters, no one read it as, *Newborn*, but The Letters. “Where are we meeting?” “Near the letters.” And so, we were done with this part. Now more or less we thought, “How to inspire everything, how to give life to *Newborn*? You know, how to organize, how will the event go that day?” More or less, at night, it was 2 AM, the company went and placed the *Newborn* in front of Boro e Ramizi.

The location, at first, we didn’t know where is the location, we were looking for a flat surface, flat only. That was the only flat surface that was also wider, you know so people could see left and right, more like a square, because our square is quite narrow. Everything that happens, happens there. So the *Newborn* was placed there, hardly, they went through such pains, one letter at a time at night. I did not go that night, you know, but the next morning, maybe our meeting was at 5 or 6 AM. We decided to cover it up with a blue sheet and have balloons inside, so that we invite people to come. And more or less what Fis says, the cherry on top of this concept is when I said, “Hey, since the independence declaration will be signed, why don’t we sign [on the monument] with the marker?” And everyone was like, “Wow! Yes!” And maybe that invited people. More or less we bought many markers, so we were well equipped and everyone has a marker, although we didn’t know, it was an open question whether anyone would pass by the monument.

On that day, you know, since it was very cold in the morning, very, very cold and we had to stick together. We went to that café, there was one in the corner next to the fountain, I don’t recall the name. There in the corridor we had all our stuff. There was also the balloon guy, he blew them with

helium. The whole day we put [balloons] in until around noon or 1PM, I remember that by that time we were frozen. Then we had to place the balloons under the sheet with our hands, but they lifted the sheet, more or less the work of five-six hours went to nothing. Then, let's quickly tie-up the sheet, bring the barricades, place them on the side, the security... now everyone was involved, we were a group of thirty and if someone knew someone, for example, I invited Vigan, everyone invited their boyfriends, friends, girlfriends to come and help finish it. Because you did not have volunteers, you could not make a call, "We are looking for volunteers!" We still did not know what was about to happen. So, we placed the balloons once again under the sheet and again warmed up and watched television. The Assembly meeting began, they placed [the declaration] to sign, all with goosebumps, wondering, "God, are people going to come or not?" And they said, "The signing will continue..."

You know we left a path open, so that people slowly could come in and sign there, you know, quite beautiful. The Prime Minister, the President at that time came, you know, Hashim Thaçi and Isa Mustafa. As they got out of [the Assembly], they were followed by the security. I, you know, at that point we divided the work, Shkenca, Jeton, Fis and I had our teams and we had buckets with markers and at one point I realized I was in the middle of the crowd and that people ran toward [*Newborn*], they crossed the barricades. And the security had to remove the barricades, there was no space left to say, "Now it is your turn to sign." The mass of people was all over, excited, as if, yes, everything depend on the fact if you signed on the letter and it was done! You know, as if the whole process depended on that. People, as it seems, were so excited that I really thought, I said it, "They will crush me!" And no one came to pick up one marker, because I thought about it, "Look, maybe each will take one, one." I thought, "Maybe two." But, no, no, [they took] plenty.

It became, I don't know, this euphoria, tensed, people pierced through, they passed me, what was missing was them getting on my back and asking me, "Can you get me higher because I seem to be unable to reach the letter?" You know, I was squeezed a bit there. But again it was, everyone started hugging, and loving one another. It was like, I don't know, a breaking point, you know, like before and after war, that how it was before *Newborn* and after *Newborn* for me. Independence, until recently, I asked, "What was the date, 17, 16, 19?" Because I could not remember the date at that time. And after that, you know, we were full of energy and at the same time sad. You know, it was like when you reach your goal and you pass through it running fast, and now you are freed. At the same time, you feel like crying out of joy and laughing, you are in between the two.

It was very emotional for the entire team that worked on it, and very nice that Fis pushed it, because you always need a leader, but you cannot forget the team. Starting from the smallest to the biggest, the youngest was Etrit Zeneli, then Shkenca Koçi, Jeton Morina, Fisnik Ismaili, then there was the accountant Jetona Ceradi, Arton Zeneli, Bes Bujupi, more or less the team that we had, you know, so to say Valon Xhaferi, I don't remember if he was there at the time, Valon also, the finance officer. So, you know, there were so many people involved, that you should not devalue the work by saying, "Yes, we came-up with a letter, we decided on a font, it's done!" It should not be such a short history.

**Aurela Kadriu:** OK. Nita, I thank you very much, because you addressed all the question I had and I did not have to intervene. Thank you very much!



