

## Global Architectural Fascism (GAF): The Extreme Case of MVRDV Projects in Tirana

LLAZAR KUMARAKU

*POLIS University*

When I was asked to write an opinion on the Downtown One building in Tirana designed by MVRDV I hesitated to give it. I hesitated because I remembered a piece of advice from my mom when I was young that always told me "if you can not talk about something well, it is better not to talk". I do not know how much I have followed this advice in my life but but, at least, I try to remember it often. My mom's advice was valuable at the time and I believe it is probably still valid today.

Immediately after that, I started thinking about the reasons that lead a person to come out and give such advice. I found the answer to the fact that my mother was born immediately after the Second World War where in Albania the fascist and Nazi regimes had passed and then with a life spent in the communist dictatorship she could not build and could not have a critical spirit towards what surrounded her. This is because the critical spirit was suppressed and always denounced as agitation and propaganda. Immediately after this reasoning I set out to analyze the aspects of Fascism and Nazism that in a certain way formed the main ideologies of the first half of the 20th century and which, together with communism, must have influenced my mother's mentality and a major part of the society that was born in the second half of the last century. For all three of these ideologies, including communism manifested in Albania, the main aspect was that of nationalism translated into all possible forms. As Sotir Dhamo says, the slogan of that period in Albania about architecture was

"National in form and Socialist in content" What is currently happening with the way MVRDV reads the Albanian context is precisely a sick nationalism that goes as far as architectural parody. Here I want to mention three main projects of this studio.

The first one is the decoration of a building in Tirana with the red and black flag of Albania. It consider Albanians like the indigenous tribes studied by Warburg in the "Serpent Ritual" who managed to understand only their archaic totems and had no kind of abstract culture. While in the beautiful Holland where Mr. Maas was born, I believe and I do not have any information that any international architect has proposed a building painted with the flag of the Netherlands. I also believe that even at Delft University of Technology, where Mr. Maas studied, they do not educate students to take archaic totems and carve them into architectural forms. Others do like this: Vasily Klyukin does in Russia but not Mr. Maas in the heart of Europe. Anyway, maybe Mr. Maas does not do it in Europe, or maybe someone, clever, do not allow him to do it in Europe, but he proposes it in the heart of Albania: in Tirana.

The second case of a misinterpretation is the Tirana Rocks case where organically developed "copa Tirane" are banally interpreted as a formless urban informality. A project that have nothing to do with the organic parts of Tirana and that through rhetorical metaphors sought to conquer that small part of the curated public greenery that is still one of the most beautiful

that Tirana has. While the first two proposals for Tirana had the good fortune to not be builded, the third case, Downtown One, is unfortunately on its way to completion. I write "unfortunately" because, contrary to my personal belief that a building should exist only for the fact that it comes to life (just like humans whose existence should not be questioned after birth), this building did not deserve to be built for the simple fact because it seems like a kind of nationalist mockery where the state map is taken and overlapped to the building. This action has all the colors of ridicule and parody, like we were an indigenous people who are not cultured with an abstract knowledge, as stated above, and who understands only material forms. From the formal point of view expressed by the rendered images but now also from what has been realized, the MVRDV building is reminiscent of the mysterious stone slab of Kubrick's 2001 Odyssey film. Without the map of Albania it would have looked like something mysterious that contains inside a magical secret, the bearer of an impenetrable mystery. The repetition of a rectangular module, typical of the serial architecture of Modern Movements, made this building have a kind of dignity of its own which is then desecrated by the presence of the pixelated map of Albania. Perhaps Mr. Maas' action is an attempt to give a sense of orientation to the inhabitants of this building: "I live in Kukes". At least that is the goal stated by the design studio. The problem of orientation was the main one from the architectures of modern movements but that can not be solved simply with a banal and naive action since people in the tower of Mr. Maas will not enter from the balconies of Tirana or Fier but from the corridors, stairs and elevators from the interior of the building. Also from the point of view of the urban scale, at least in the façade that appears on the side of the Lana River - the one where the map is pixelated - expresses a kind of Global Architectural Fascism (GAF) where the great dimension "Bigness" hegemonizes over everything that is contextual.

This hegemony of GAF is covered and sold as context-respecting architecture by proposing an architectural parody like the pixelated map that is similar to the other architectural mockery that crowns the towers with Skanderbeg's helmet. This project is from another design studio but it seems like something mysterious put them together in a certain way. Something that makes these works a "duck architecture": a banal and misunderstood postmodernism; an architecture made for people considered stupid who understands only the forms manifested in images and not abstract concepts. A Fascist mockery.