**The Indepedence House**

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When asking people around Lagos Island about the Independence House near Tafawa Balewa Square, nobody seems to know. Referring to it as the Defense House, the name it currently bears, does not make a significant difference — only when starting to describe the tall abandoned skyscraper in its monumental dark appearance, people begin to recall the structure. In fact, the Independence House cannot be overlooked easily, but it seems to have lost its place in the perception and identity of the city of Lagos today.

Donated by the British crown to the people of Nigeria in honor of its independence in 1960, ‘The Independence House’ was meant to be a legacy for a new era of self-governance and modernization of the country: the construction of the twenty-five-story building with an estimated height of 103 meters was completed in 1961. At the time, it was not only the first high-rise of Nigeria, but also the tallest building on the African continent. In the years following independence, when Lagos Island served both as the State and Federal capital, it became the first Federal Secretariat housing several ministries.

At this time, a new architectural image for downtown Lagos was sought to demonstrate an independent culture and a functional modern state. ‘Tropical Modernism’, an adaptation of the ‘International Style’ for warmer climates, became the preferred language for newly erected prestige government buildings like ‘The Independence House’.

Under the regime of General Ibrahim Babangida, the building was taken over by the military and renamed as the ‘Ministry of Defense Building’ in the late 1980s. The relocation of Nigeria’s capital to Abuja in 1991 and a fire in 1993, that occurred under suspicious circumstances, marked the beginning of the decline, deterioration and subsequent abandonment of the monumental structure.

A decade later, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry announced its redevelopment into a ‘World Trade and International Business Centre’, that, when completed, would be the proposed rival of the Dubai World Trade Centre. The center was supposed to house all types of investors, entrepreneurs, associations, and businesses. This proposal never made it into reality: ‘The Indepedence House’ stands vacant and neglected to this day.

Walking up to the building today, one finds that access is highly restricted and people in the neighborhood tell stories of rodents, reptiles, and all manner of people dwelling in its empty halls. Looking at the building’s prevailing appearance, we recognize its significance, but we see a ruin.