

Moi African Cluster Centre of the Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence (Moi-ACC)

Africa Colloquium Seminar

Topic: Nation, Culture and Race: Kenya and the FESTAC '77

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Zoom Link: Join Zoom Meeting

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Abstract

Nation, Culture, and Race: Kenya and the FESTAC'77

The Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC) was an Olympics-size international cultural festival held in Lagos, Nigeria, from 15 January to 12 February 1977, reuniting artists and intellectuals from all African independent countries and the African Diaspora. For many African regimes, that was an opportunity to showcase the vitality and strength of their cultural riches both in “traditional” and “modern” forms to audiences throughout Africa and the outer world through live satellite television transmissions, radio broadcasts or the printed press. Inevitably, the festival invited comparisons of the demonstrable results of contrasting national cultural policies in place in different African countries and also fostered, in each participating country, discussions about these same cultural policies, as well as the nature and development of the national culture, which related to broader debates on the way the post-independent State was being run. This paper presents the preliminary research findings on the Kenyan press coverage of the FESTAC'77. Based on articles published in *The Nation*, *The Standard* and *The Weekly Review* between 1976 and 1978, I will try to sketch the conflicting positions that traversed the participation of Kenya in the festival, including the “expatriate” crisis and the struggle to “Africanise” cultural and higher education institutions, the general direction of cultural policy, the settling of national narrative about independence, and the efforts to bring forward the undelivered promises of liberation in the national conversation.