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### **Historians, Nationalism, and Pan-Africanism: Myths and Realities**

My paper is about the role African historians have played in interpreting nationalism and pan-Africanism and how these ideals could be used in the African renaissance. I am cognizant of the fact that the 1960s marked the high noon in discourse on nationalism and Pan-Africanism – this was a time when African historians across the continent celebrated the event of independence and produced what came to be known as “usable pasts.” In short, historians aimed at enhancing nationalist and pan-Africanist ideals on the continent. Their goal was to rally citizens of individual countries of Africa into nurturing nationalism and solidarity of the entire continent. In short, they re-interpreted that past as “a service to the nation and pan-Africanism.” Thus, their efforts were both functional and celebratory of independence (*uhuru*). However, critics of the *uhuru* project chose to direct their criticisms on that past that celebrated a “merrie Africa” or the idea of a golden African past – they concerned themselves with the uncritical glorification of Africa’s past. While the first generation of African historians may have overlooked many factors that constrained social and political relations in the African past such the dictatorial and authoritarian nature of some African leaders, the knowledge they produced helped to nurture African pride and vibrant nationalities across the continent. The same concepts that characterized nationalism and pan-Africanism were used in researches on African personhood effectively helping to reclaim the African past that some western scholars regarded to be retrogressive. Indeed, the Organization of African Unity (OAU), and several other sub-regional groupings and intellectual consortiums aiming to liberate the entire continent from colonial yoke and white settle minority rule are positive elements of the nationalist and pan-Africanist intellectual endeavors. This conceptual paper argues that at this critical juncture in global history when Africa is suffering both cultural and economic marginalization, historians and other social scientists need to revisit the role of nationalism and pan-African ideals in problematizing the African condition. African historians should look for the past that could bring about an African renaissance. Instead of merely glorifying the African past we should re-conceptualize democratic institutions by promoting, concepts of human rights as seen by Africans themselves, and ideals that would enhance African citizenship. The main question here is to rethink the place of civil society in creating an African citizenship – how was regional citizenship promoted in the past? What did African people living in proximity borrow from each other? I will attempt to deal with these and many more questions I consider illuminate myths and realities of nationalism and pan-African in the intellectual renaissance of Africa. I will examine

canonical texts and books written by historians belonging to the nationalist school of thought and their critics.