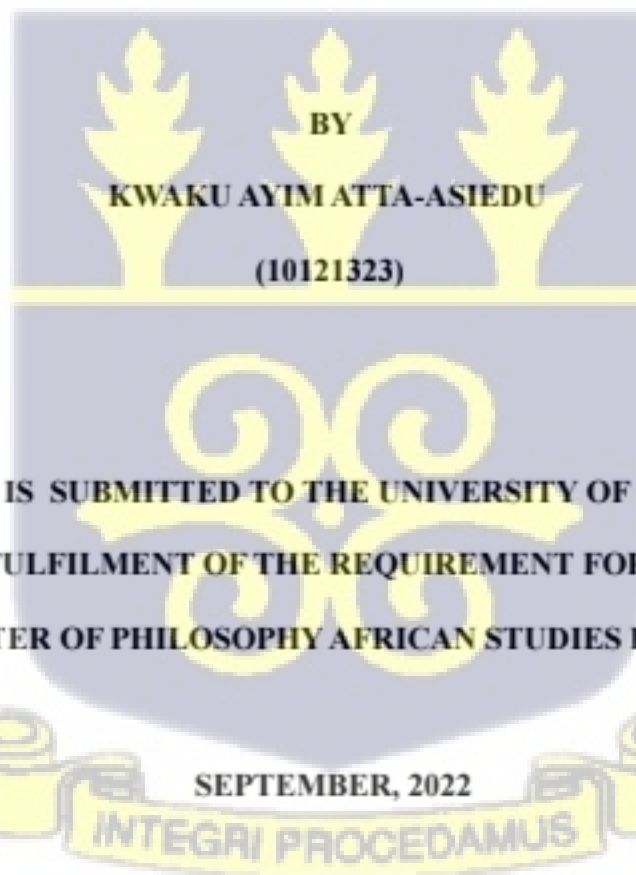


**UNIVERSITY OF GHANA**

**COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES**

**PROPHETESS LAURA ADORKOR KOFI AND THE BACK TO AFRICA MISSION:**

**A GHANAIAN PERSPECTIVE**



**THIS THESIS IS SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF GHANA, LEGON  
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE AWARD OF  
MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY AFRICAN STUDIES DEGREE.**

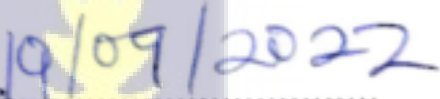
### DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this Thesis, with the exception of literature cited, which has been duly acknowledged, is the result of my own independent research work carried out at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, under the supervision of Dr. Mercy Akrofi Ansah and Dr. Moses Nii Dortey. I further declare that this Thesis has neither been submitted in whole or in part to any other Institution for any Degree.

Signed   
.....

Kwaku Ayim Atta-Asiedu

(Candidate).

Date   
.....

Signed   
.....

Dr. Moses Nii Dortey

(Supervisor).

Date   
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Signed   
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Dr. Mercy Akrofi Ansah

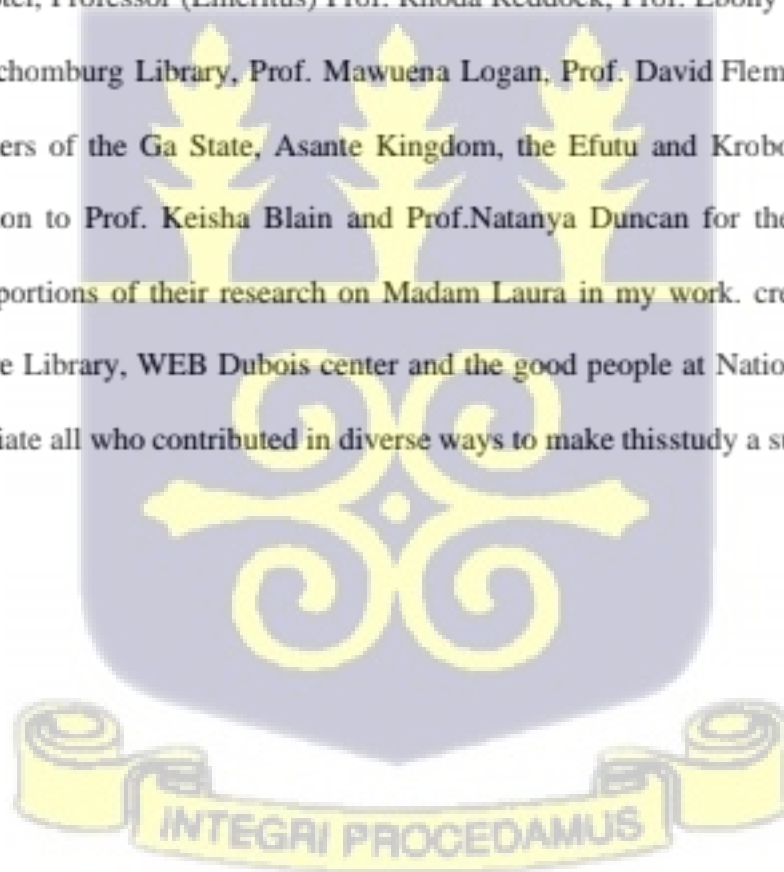
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Date   
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**DEDICATION**

I dedicate this to The Sweet Holy Spirit



## ABSTRACT

This thesis is a contribution to the discourse on Laura Adorkor Kofi and her back-to-Africa vision. The thesis engages in textual analysis of studies that have been done on Laura Kofi and explores grey areas covering her identity and Ghanaian citizenship. It engages in a comparative analysis of the various methodologies adopted by scholars who have studied Laura Kofi and makes a case for the importance of oral narratives in accessing information about Laura Adorkor Kofi's Ghanaian ancestry. The thesis is in two parts: The first part studies Laura Kofi from the United States of America perspective, while the second part studies Laura Kofi from the Ghanaian perspective. The first part analyses studies that have been done focusing on Kofi's association with the Universal Negro Improvement Association (henceforth UNIA), her expulsion from the UNIA, her formation of the African Universal Church (henceforth AUC), her Pan-African and religious engagements and events leading to her demise. This part also discusses the difficulties she encountered and the successes she achieved within the period. The second part of the study, which focuses on her Ghanaian ancestry, analyses issues relating to her origin and attempts to solve the mystery surrounding her identity. This part explains why she is referred to as a Ghanaian, a princess and a prophetess, and why she bears the name Adorkor Kofi. The study explains the seeming contradictions in some of the existing literature and documents oral accounts from a descendant and other career of handed-down oral narrations of the story of Laura Adorkor Kofi.



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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Prophetess Laura Adorkor Kofi<sup>1</sup> was a Pan-Africanist who ignored visible obstacles the times she lived in posed in her way as a woman (including one of colour), to move forward with a vision of uniting Africans in America and to inculcate in them a sense of identity and the urge to return to Africa. Studying Laura Kofi places into proper historical perspective, the contributions of Africans to the entire emancipation struggle, both on the African continent and in the diaspora. Such studies have been an ongoing academic exercise, however, the imbalance in the narratives in terms of spaces given to men who have played significant roles in the emancipation process and women who have done the same, seems to be a great challenge. Laura Adorkor Kofi (affectionately called Mother Kofi) is an embodiment of many unsung heroines who were martyred, while fighting for the emancipation of the black African across the globe.

It is important to mention that, although some scholars have researched Laura Adorkor Kofi, there still remain gaps that need to be filled. Scholars who have studied Kofi have not been unanimous on issues such as her origin, parentage and true identity. Much focus of literature has been on her political activism in the United States and very little is known about her stay in Ghana. Indeed, several questions remain unanswered and this is the reason this research needed to be done.

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<sup>1</sup> Both Newman and White spell the name 'Kofey' while other authors use 'Kofi'. I chose to use 'Kofi' in this study because the historical and cultural background of the research supports 'Kofi' rather than 'Kofey' or any other spelling.

Studying Laura Kofi further highlights the concept of religious nationalism and how she employed religion, feminism and political activism to mobilize hundreds and thousands of black Africans, in very difficult circumstances and unfavorable political atmosphere of the times. Historical studies properly place heroes like Marcus Garvey, WEB DuBois, Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, George Padmore (to mention a few), in the right academic perspective; so do women such as Laura Adorkor Kofi and many other women who have contributed to the Pan-African struggle deserve the appropriate academic attention and historical placement. It is significant to point out that the majority of the studies done on Laura Kofi pay attention to her works in the United States and focuses on her political activism for the UNIA<sup>2</sup> as well as the transition to the AUC<sup>3</sup>. Whatever mention is made of her life in Gold Coast before migrating to the United States still remains a grey area. What this research seeks to do in sum, is to tell an African story from an African perspective. Thus, Madam Kofi researched from a Ghanaian perspective.

## 1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Although some scholars have studied Laura Adorkor Kofi, these studies have largely been done from the United States of America perspective, focusing largely on her few years' Pan-African activism in the United States of America. Considering the circumstances of her background and the intensity of the cultural, political and gender obstacles that confronted her, Laura Adorkor Kofi, known as the female Marcus Garvey, deserves to be studied further from the Ghanaian perspective and positioned properly in the records of Pan-Africanism. Again, there are some challenges about her identity which need to be clarified. This research

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<sup>2</sup> UNIA stands for the United Negro Improvement Association formed by Marcus Garvey

<sup>3</sup> AUC stands for the African Universal Church formed by Laura Adorkor Kofi

therefore seeks to contribute to the debate on her true identity and to highlight her immense contributions to the black emancipation course as well as the back-to-Africa enterprise.

### **1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The research questions the study seeks to answer are as follows:

- (a) Who was Laura Adorkor Kofi?
- (b) What was her contribution to Pan-Africanism and the back-to-Africa movement?
- (c) Who was King Knesiphi?
- (d) How have other scholars studied Laura Kofi?

### **1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The objectives of this thesis are as follows:

- (a). To contribute to answering questions on the mysteries surrounding Kofi's identity and to add to the many variations of accounts that scholars have already written.
- (b). To highlight the contributions Laura Kofi made to the course of Pan-Africanism and the back-to-Africa mission, and to explore the difficulties she was confronted with at the time and how she overcame these hurdles.
- (c) To investigate the identity of King Knesiphi, mentioned by scholars as Kofi's father and one of the prominent kings of the Gold Coast.
- (d) To explore how other scholars have studied Laura Adorkor Kofi and the methodologies they employed in their respective research.

### **1.5 THE SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

It is important to mention that the amount of work needed to be done in studying Laura Kofi far outweighs the time-period given to submit this study. The scope of this study therefore

concentrated on the authentication of information already collected by other researchers, the addition of newly-gathered information and analysis. Using the information provided, I situated these within the Ghanaian cultural and historical context in harnessing the possible, the probable, the impossible and the factual.

## **1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH**

This study is significant because it places in proper historical context the identity of Laura Adorkor Kofi. The study also highlights her achievements that have not been adequately chronicled, by emphasizing the difficult circumstances within which she found herself. Finally, the research endorses Coletu's (2019) descendant epistemology as a model in contemporary biographical research because of its replicability in this research and also highlights the importance of oral narratives in reconstructing African history.



## CHAPTER TWO

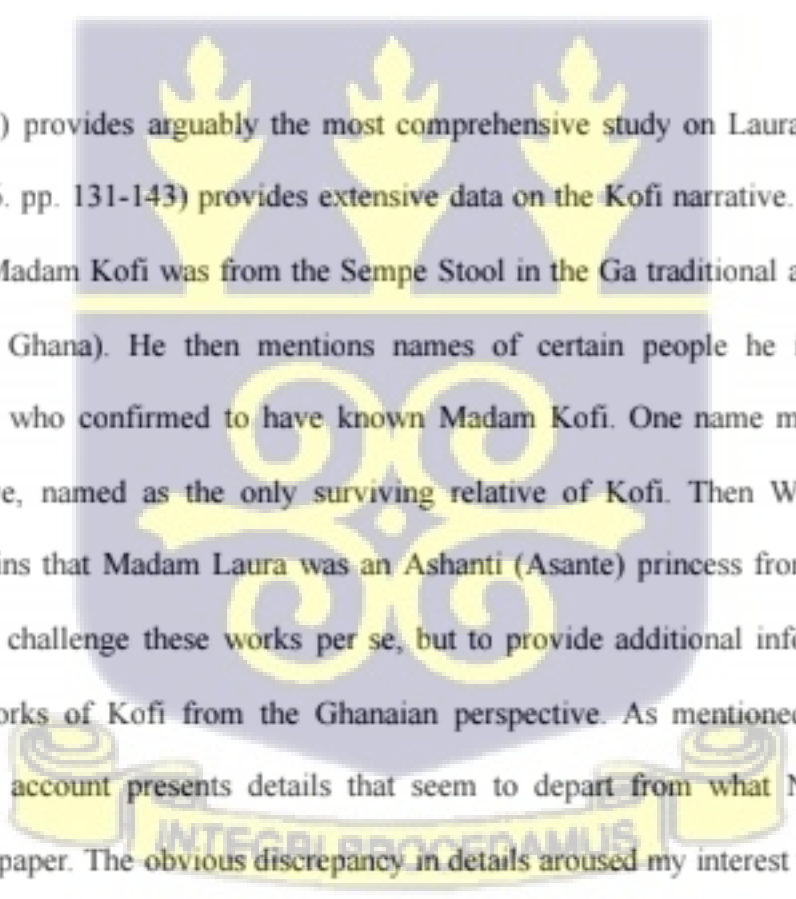
### LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### 2.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

Few scholars have studied Laura Adorkor Kofi, but for the purposes of this thesis, I focused on Newman (1996), Duncan (2009), White (2014) and Blaine (2018). Newman (1996) is regarded as one of the pioneer scholars who set out to study Laura Kofi. In his collections on Laura Adorkor Kofi, which are kept at the Schomburg Library, Newman (1996) presents a maiden research on Laura Kofi that forms a model that other scholars who have studied Laura Kofi referred to. Being a pioneer and model study on Laura Adorkor Kofi, Newman (1996) establishes three fundamental points that this thesis is built on. First of all Newman (1996) confirms that Laura Kofi was a Ga Princess from the Sempe paramountcy in the Greater Accra region of Ghana, and she was the daughter of King Knesiphi who was one of six powerful royals in the Gold Coast. Secondly, Newman (1996) further argues in his study that Laura Kofi was a prophetess and that her mandate to the United States to spearhead the repatriation of African-Americans was a divine assignment from God. Last but not least, Newman (1996) shows the methodology that he adopted in his study of Laura Kofi, which was mainly letter correspondences he sent to sources and contacts in Ghana as well as some scholars he consulted and the responses he received from them.

Another scholar who has studied Laura Kofi is White (2014). In his study, which is also highly regarded in scholarship as a model study on Laura Kofi, White (2014) explores a different dimension of the ethnic origin of Laura Adorkor Kofi. According to White (2014), Laura Kofi was an Asante Princess from Asofa in Kumasi in the Ashanti Region of Ghana.

Secondly, White (2014) corroborated Newman's (1996) findings that Laura Kofi was indeed a princess. A major point of departure between the two scholars is the specific ethnic group which Laura Kofi's royalty emanated from. Whereas Newman (1996) mentions Asofa in the Sempe paramountcy as being the birthplace and hometown of Laura Kofi, White (2014) mentions Asofa in Kumasi, the Ashanti region of Ghana as the birthplace and paramountcy of princess Kofi. Both White (2014) and Newman (1996) agree that indeed Laura Kofi's back-to-Africa mission was a divine mandate from God. Explaining the reason for the different positions held by Newman (1996) and White (2014) and clarifying issues about Laura's true origin is one of the ways I will be contributing to knowledge.



Newman (1996) provides arguably the most comprehensive study on Laura Adorkor Kofi. Newman, (1996. pp. 131-143) provides extensive data on the Kofi narrative. Among these is the claim that Madam Kofi was from the Sempe Stool in the Ga traditional area of the Gold Coast (present Ghana). He then mentions names of certain people he interviewed via correspondence who confirmed to have known Madam Kofi. One name mentioned is Mr. Beautiful Quaye, named as the only surviving relative of Kofi. Then White (2016, pp. 205-220) explains that Madam Laura was an Ashanti (Asante) princess from Kumasi. This study is not to challenge these works per se, but to provide additional information on the identity and works of Kofi from the Ghanaian perspective. As mentioned in this thesis, White's (2016) account presents details that seem to depart from what Newman (1996) provides in his paper. The obvious discrepancy in details aroused my interest to study further. Again, Newman (1996) mentions that Garvey doubted Madam Kofi's claims and decided to investigate her and recorded that she actually was from Athens, Georgia in the United States but had visited Gold Coast and England with the Red Cross. This revelation again aroused my

interest further. The mention of Laura Champion from Athens, Georgia is a claim that must be investigated. Chief Sam had earlier taken a similar initiative claiming to be a chief and a successful businessman (Coletu, 2019). He also embarked on a similar venture to motivate African-Americans and indeed Africans in the diaspora to return home and this is discussed in some detail subsequently. Admittedly, the back-to-Africa mission had a Gold Coast participation prior to Garvey's attempt to popularize it.

Two other scholars who have worked on the Laura Kofi research project are Blaine (2018) and Duncan (2009). These scholars focus their study on the gender aspect of the emancipation struggle, but also delve into what has become known as the Laura Kofi mystery. While Blaine (2018) highlights the immense contributions of Laura Kofi to women's empowerment and the back-to-Africa emancipation cause, she also delves into the Laura Kofi controversy by observing that Laura Kofi may not have been entirely honest about her claims. Duncan (2009) engaged in an extensive study of Laura Kofi and delved into other details that are not mentioned in Newman (1996) and White (2014). Duncan's study, much as it delved into issues of gender and feminism with regard to the black emancipation struggle and the United Negro Improvement Association, also discusses in some detail, the dynamics of the Laura Kofi identity. Duncan's (2009) methodology adopted in her study is worth noting. Most significant is her reference to archival materials accessed from the Balme Library, University of Ghana. Indeed, Duncan (2009) demonstrates a detailed description and analysis on Laura Kofi that is highly informative. Both Blaine (2018) and Duncan (2009) agree with Newman (1996) and White (2014) that Laura Kofi was a Ghanaian princess and prophetess. Again, the point of departure among the scholars is her ethnic identity and origin. This study therefore intends to focus on Laura Kofi's ethnic identity and origin. As mentioned in the methodology,

much as the thesis does textual analysis of existing literature, it resorts to oral accounts in answering the question of Laura Kofi's identity.

A detailed review of Duncan (2009) is presented in this section because through Duncan (2009), readers are able to appreciate Laura Kofi's philosophy and gain understanding of her messages and the themes she touched on during her campaigns. Duncan (2009, pp. 218-238) emphasizes Laura Kofi's contributions to Black Nationalist ideals and her role as a prominent figure in the Black Atlantic. Duncan (2009) further argues that Kofi's contributions to the UNIA assumes prominence when the content of her speeches, the responses of the members and the reactions of UNIA officials and observers are analyzed together with her legacy, her role in America, the Caribbean and Africa. Duncan (2009) reiterates that Laura Kofi's legacy is based in large part on the AUC and its ability to reinterpret the UNIA's objectives. She explains that it is also based on its success, although minimal, in actualizing a repatriation strategy.

Duncan (2009) further observes that according to UNIA objectives the organization sought, "to assist in civilizing the backward tribes of Africa, to strengthen the imperialism of Basutoland, Liberia" and "to promote a conscientious Christian worship among the Native Tribes of Africa" (Duncan, 2009, p. 220). Duncan (2009) again argues that Kofi proposed that the organization re-evaluates the necessity of sending preachers and missionaries to Africa and asserted that Africa was not backward in its religious or governmental beliefs. She argued that Africa was a continent with an elaborate and sophisticated array of spiritual beliefs and practices, Christian and otherwise. Duncan (2009) mentions that Laura Kofi claimed to be doing God's work by rallying the African-American community to return home. Princess Kofi

presented herself to UNIA crowds as doing the work of “her Ol’ Man God” and her father, King Kenispi and elders of her African community” (Negro World, June 14, 1919, p. 4).

Duncan (2009) further observes that Laura Kofi’s popularity in the UNIA soared, because of her ability to revive branches that were struggling, and the many that had collapsed totally, especially in the Southeastern part of the United States. Not only did she revive these divisions but she also attracted hundreds of new members. Her strategy, which worked very well, was to use the ‘camping-style’ to organize large meetings in parks and baseball fields. It is recorded that these meetings were packed and there were overflows that stretched into streets. Again, Duncan (2013, p. 223) recounts that Laura Kofi’s messages were full of the rhetoric of Black Nationalism of the 1920s, the tenets of the UNIA agenda as well as her experiences as a Prophetess from Africa. The UNIA had representation in 38 States. Not only were members from the urbanized upper class, but also included were many black peasants from across the South. Kofi focused on this group and as we have discussed, about the negative effects of elitism and male domination on the UNIA, Kofi’s mass approach and employment of more female hands contributed to her successes.

Again, Duncan (2009) records that Laura Kofi “presented a native woman’s voice in response to the UNIA’s ‘missionary’ schemes outlined in the objectives co-authored by Amy Ashwood. As a campaigner for the UNIA’s programs, she also echoed the concerns of other UNIA women for the return to stricter moral codes of conduct within the organization. She also led series of discussions on the need for African-American men to work in cooperation with African-American women to steer the course for racial progress in the United States of America (Duncan, 2013, p. 219). Duncan (2009) therefore gives us a detailed analysis of Laura Kofi’s political and religious philosophy as well as her political strategies.

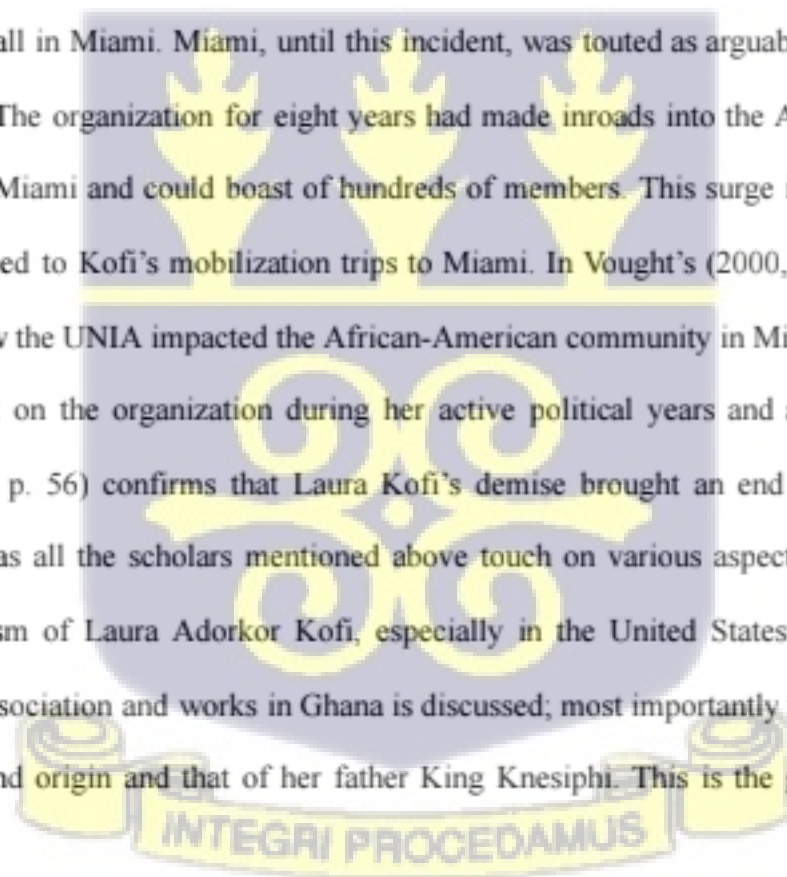
Another scholar worth mentioning, who has studied Laura Kofi in recent years is Vought (2000). Vought is a scholar who dedicated time to study the racial stirrings in the segregated black communities of Miami during the 1920s. These were also the active political years of Madam Laura Kofi in Miami. Vought's (2000) knowledge of Kofi's Miami days must be discussed in any material or study on Laura Kofi. It helps to understand the political climate of the times, the political dynamics within and without the UNIA, the social and economic state of the black communities and the readiness of hundreds of African-Americans to mobilize. It appears that Madam Kofi understood these very well and rightly exploited these conditions to achieve her goals. Vought (2000, p.56) describes Kofi as a black nationalist who claimed to be an African princess. Vought (2000, p.56) does not describe Kofi as an African princess, but makes reference to her 'claim' to be so. Just like Vought (2000), many of the early scholars who studied Kofi relied on her claims to make their analysis.

Just like Duncan (2009) analyzed in her study, Vought (2000) further mentions that Kofi's message revolved around three major themes. These are: black pride, self- help and repatriation to Africa (Vought, 2000, p. 56-57). It is noted that prior to her departure from the UNIA, Kofi's messages were not different from that of Marcus Garvey, however they adopted a religious tone when she left the UNIA and formed the AUC. Kofi's messages are described as dramatic, inspirational and passionate and the sudden rise in UNIA membership during Kofi's field mobilization is attributed to these qualities (Vought, 2000).

Another point Vought (2000, pp. 56-71) draws attention to is the fact that the rancor between Kofi and the UNIA may be attributed to several reasons but principally the fact that Madam Kofi, when leaving the UNIA, took with her most of the members of the United Negro

Improvement Association to start the African Universal Church. This gives credence to the suspicion that indeed Kofi's murder may have been planned by the UNIA. The UNIA in the 1920s had been the most dominant Pan-African organization, not only in the United States but in other parts of Europe, the Caribbean and in some parts of Africa.

Being faced with total depletion due to Kofi's charisma, fanatics of the UNIA were very upset because the continuous existence of the UNIA, especially in Florida, was at risk. Another observation Vought (2000) makes is the fact that Kofi's departure from the UNIA and subsequent death collapsed the UNIA branch in Miami. This predicament was exactly what the UNIA wanted to avoid, hence the shooting of Kofi at her maiden AUC gathering in Fox Thompson's Hall in Miami. Miami, until this incident, was touted as arguably the stronghold of the UNIA. The organization for eight years had made inroads into the African-American community in Miami and could boast of hundreds of members. This surge in numbers could also be attributed to Kofi's mobilization trips to Miami. In Vought's (2000, pp.56-71) study, he looks at how the UNIA impacted the African-American community in Miami and explores the Kofi effect on the organization during her active political years and after her demise. Vought (2000, p. 56) confirms that Laura Kofi's demise brought an end to the UNIA in Miami. Whereas all the scholars mentioned above touch on various aspects of the life and political activism of Laura Adorkor Kofi, especially in the United States of America, not much of her association and works in Ghana is discussed; most importantly the debate on her true identity and origin and that of her father King Knesiphi. This is the gap this research seeks to fill.



## 2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research is done within the theoretical framework of the Vansinan (1985) and the Subaltern (1980) theories on the importance of oral sources in contemporary historiography, especially in Africa. This thesis seeks to suggest that the study on Laura Kofi will yield results if the appropriate theoretical framework are adopted by researchers to prioritize oral sources in the collection of data. The Baylor University Institute for Oral History argues in the defense of oral history as a reliable historical material, the importance of oral sources in contemporary historiography especially in Africa. In a paper published on the Baylor University Institute for Oral History website<sup>4</sup> (Author unknown), it observed that oral history helps to collect the story of the past. As indicated in this thesis, in recording the story of the past, oral narratives form an integral part of data.

The following observations were made in the publication: first of all, oral history provides a fuller, more accurate picture of the past by augmenting the information provided by public records, statistical data, photographs, maps, letters, diaries, and other historical materials. Secondly, eyewitnesses to events contribute various viewpoints and perspectives that fill in the gaps in documented history, sometimes correcting or even contradicting the written record and thirdly, interviews are able to ask questions left out of other records. At times, an interview may serve as the only source of information available about a certain place, event, or person.

Methodologies employed in studying Africa have been an ongoing discourse in academia for many years. The contention between approaches that are eurocentric vis a vis those that are

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<sup>4</sup> [www.baylor.edu](http://www.baylor.edu)/accessed on the 13-06-2019

afrocentric has been the topical issue. In collecting information on Laura Adorkor Kofi from the Ghanaian perspective, it became imperative to rely primarily on oral sources. It is through this methodology that information that cannot be found in the existing literature was accessed. The combination of primary and secondary data makes the biographical study rich in content. Studying the Vansina and Subaltern approaches, the thesis adopted these theoretical frameworks that proved to be accommodating to the nature of the research. Although the Subaltern approach concentrated on post-colonial historical research, the thesis adopted the theory to study a colonial historical figure who lived in a colonial Gold Coast society. The Vansinan theory on the other hand accommodates historical narratives that transcend precolonial and even into ancient African societies. In sum, the key concept that runs through both the Subaltern and Vansinan theories is the emphasis on the collection of oral narratives and their documentation in their unadulterated form in the scholarly exercise of filling gaps in history. These theories are explained below.

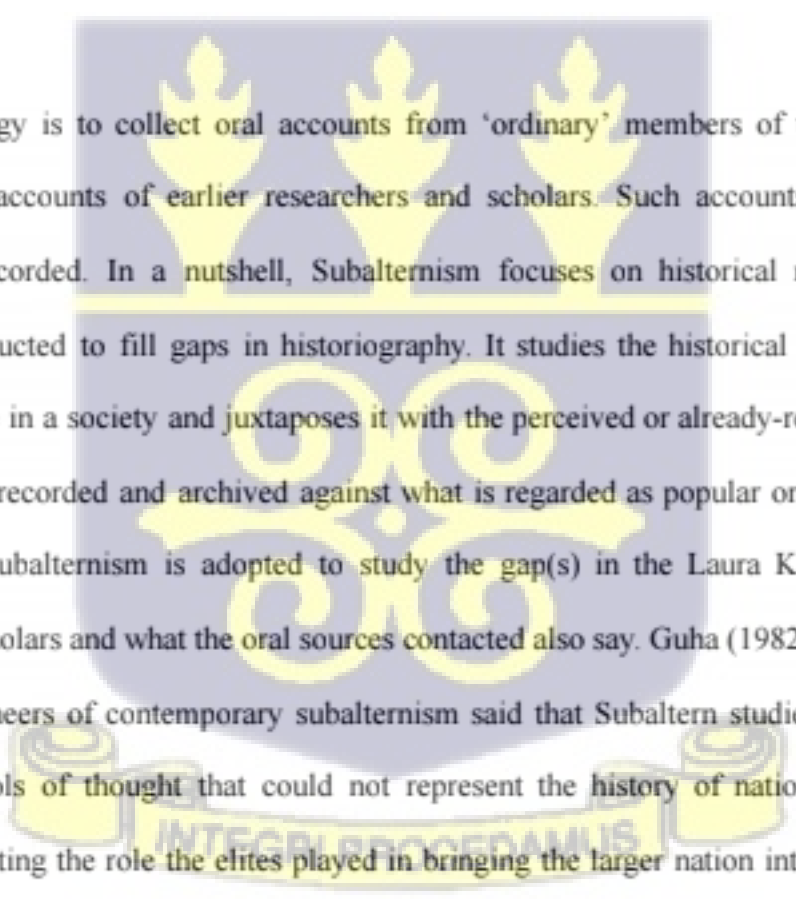
### **2. 3 THE SUBALTERN THEORY**

The term Subaltern was first used by the Italian Marxist and political activist Antonio Gramsci while in incarceration. His "Prison Notebooks" were written between 1929 and 1935 and it discussed what would later become prominent in historiography. The theory has further gone through various changes over time to its present connotation. Gramsci (1971) expounded the Subaltern concept to highlight a historical approach that focused on the low class in the society or the ordinary people who were denied a place in the making and recording of their histories. Gramsci (1971) sought to emphasize that in the recording of the history of any society, sole focus on elitism must be discarded and the ordinary members of the society must be involved in the process as carriers of oral versions of their history (Gramsci, 1971). The Subaltern concept further developed into what is called the Subaltern

group, which consisted of proponents and subscribers of the Subaltern concept. This group was led by Ranajit Guha and later Gayatri Spivak (Spivak and Guha, 1982). Other scholars such as Jean Baudrillard and Homi Bhabha have contributed to the development of this theory. What the Subaltern group sought to do was to adapt Gramsci's Subaltern concept and develop it as a theory in the study and research of Indian history. Thus, in recording the history of certain Indian societies, the voice of the 'subaltern classes' must be heard and that collection of historical data must not over-rely on the historical narratives of the State or the educated class. The Subaltern theory has continued to develop and metamorphose to imply a research methodology used mainly in historical studies that engage oral sources of various forms as a major source of historical narrative. The thesis argues that the Subaltern theory can be applied to pre-colonial as well as colonial historical and biographical study because it forms a major source of data collection in every biographical study. As indicated in this thesis, an elitist focus in the study of Laura Adorkor Kofi will not adequately provide the needed information. The research therefore recorded the accounts of several classes of people and paid very particular attention to accounts given by some of the elderly people in the various towns and villages visited.

Although Subalternism has developed over the years from its original Gramscian context into a social theory and a research methodology, recommended for studying mostly developing societies, it is yet to gain full acceptance into scholarship and research in Africa. Unlike the Vansinan theory which developed from studies conducted in and on Africa, the Subaltern theory developed with emphasis on Indian societies (Bahri, 2020). Since the 1980s, subalternism has metamorphosed into a political movement without shedding its academic and research focus. During this period the Subaltern studies group was formed, led by Guha (1982). The Subaltern studies group initiated subaltern studies which primarily focused on

studying what scholars describe as the binary relationship of the Subaltern and ruling classes (Bahri, 2020). The studies look at the relationship between the upper and lower classes in a particular society. Although this focus was initially India the studies have been extended to other societies and histories. Chakrabarty (2012), a contemporary of Guha (1982) who has studied extensively on subalternism states that “the declared aim of Subaltern Studies was to produce historical analyses in which the subaltern groups were viewed as the subjects of history rather than the objects of it” (Chakrabarty, 2012, p.15). As Guha (1982) puts it, the Subaltern studies is focused on uncovering historical data that got either destroyed in the archives during the colonial era or histories that were not studied at all. Thus, subalternism studies and documents undocumented history of societies and individuals.



The methodology is to collect oral accounts from ‘ordinary’ members of the society that disagree with accounts of earlier researchers and scholars. Such accounts are collected, studied and recorded. In a nutshell, Subalternism focuses on historical research that is purposely conducted to fill gaps in historiography. It studies the historical accounts of the ordinary people in a society and juxtaposes it with the perceived or already-recorded history: what has been recorded and archived against what is regarded as popular oral narratives. In this research Subalternism is adopted to study the gap(s) in the Laura Kofi narrative as recorded by scholars and what the oral sources contacted also say. Guha (1982, p. 403) who is one of the pioneers of contemporary subalternism said that Subaltern studies intervened in historical schools of thought that could not represent the history of nationalism in India without celebrating the role the elites played in bringing the larger nation into the discourse. According to Bahri (2020), this existing version of history discounted subaltern contributions, and so the subaltern studies group sought “to rectify the elitist bias” in a field “dominated by elitism — colonialist elitism and bourgeois-nationalist elitism. It is important to state that

subalternism is not meant to displace history earlier recorded with contemporary oral narratives. It is to fill in gaps and where necessary, complement recorded accounts. However, where there seem to be clashes in historical facts and details, the oral narratives should be considered as the correct historical account. Subalternism is therefore the history of the people, as narrated by the people themselves. What researchers who employ Subalternism in their studies do is to record these oral narratives and document them. Contributing to the discourse Chakrabarty (2012, p. 15) also a major contributor to the development of subalternism argued that the Subaltern approach was meant to concentrate on historical analysis where the ordinary subaltern class were rather seen as the historical subjects being studied and not the objects of the study. They were to be seen as active participants and observers of history and be engaged as such.

In conclusion, the Subaltern theory, subalternism and subaltern studies have become models of contemporary historiography that are being replicated in historical research globally. Subalternism must drive the future of biographical and historical research in Africa, aiding in the reconstruction of parts of the history of Africa, assisting in filling in gaps needed to be fixed and giving a voice to accounts as rendered by non-elitist, non-educated participants.

#### **2.4 CRITICISMS TO THE SUBALTERN THEORY**

A major criticism of subalternism can be found in Chibber and Workman's (2016, pp. 156-172) critique on post-colonial theories (Anderson, 2013). Chibber and Workman (2016) portray the works of subaltern proponents such as Guha (1982) and Chakrabarty (2000) as being laden with "essentialism, irrationality and Orientalism" (Chibber and Workman, 2016, p.156). Chibber and Workman (2016) in their criticism raise significant concerns about the

subaltern theory, and key among the observations is the fact that subalternism disregards the contemporary and concentrates their analysis on painting a picture of colonial suppression.

Chibber and Workman (2016) raise concerns about the subaltern binaries that appear to be pitching one against another. For example, they mention the lower class-upper class, non-elite and rural-urban binaries. Chibber and Workman (2016) offer what is described as one of the most comprehensive critiques on the subaltern theory. They describe the subaltern theory as a platform for radical critique. Other scholars such as Spivak (Morris, 2010) and O'Hanlon (1985) have criticized subalternism for the open disregard of gender considerations in the entire subaltern discourse. Spivak argues that women have been disregarded in the entire subaltern discourse (Morris, 2010).

Subalternism has also been critiqued for the oversimplification of the definition of class. David Ludden raises this concern in his assessment of the subaltern theory (Roy, 2002). The Subaltern emphasis on the collection of oral historical accounts from the subaltern as against accounts of the educated elite or upper class is Ludden's focus of criticism. To him the class differentiation which is a major theme in the subaltern theory poses questions on subalternism waning into class differentiation and divisiveness. Perusek (1931) commends subalternism for the interest it has generated in their attacks on elitist-centred historiography; he also describes the subaltern movement as being problematic, full of contradictions and being outmoded (Anderson, 2013).

## 2.5 THE VANSINAN THEORY

Vansina (1985) is touted as one of the world's foremost historians who studied Africa and developed theories and methodologies in studying African history and African historical figures. He is seen as a pioneering figure as far as studying Africa is concerned and is also

considered as one of the founders of African history as a field of study and research. Vansina (1985) emphasized a contrary position to Trevor-Roper (1960). Trevor-Roper was a British historian who went on record saying that maybe in the future, there will be some African histories that can be taught and that there was none at the time he wrote his thesis on what constitutes African history. He asserted that what was described as African history was rather the history of Europeans in Africa. He described the precolonial era as nothing but darkness (Fuglestad, 1992). Vansina (1985) pointed to the fact that Africa may not have available precolonial historical texts for analysis but that in no way denied the fact that Africa has a rich history that dates back into time. What Trevor-Roper (1960) disregarded was obviously the presence of oral narratives of African societies and focused on the absence of relevant historical texts. This is clearly what the Vansinan theory sought to disprove.

According to Vansina (1985), Africa has a history prior to the European colonial invasion and that it was very possible to study pre-colonial and colonial Africa by employing the appropriate research methodologies. He spent most of his years developing historical methods that scholars can use in studying Africa. He objected to the notion that societies and cultures without text have no history and attributed this notion to inappropriate research methodology adopted by early European Anthropologists in studying Africa (Vansina 1961). A pioneering figure in the study of Africa, Vansina is considered one of the founders of the field of African history. His insistence that it was possible to study Africa in the era prior to European contact, and his development of rigorous historical methods for doing so, played a major role in countering the idea that cultures without texts had no history. Vansina's (1971) major work titled: "The Historical Value of Oral Tradition: Application to Kuba History". sought to place emphasis on ethnographic and phenomenological approaches in studying Africa. A

methodology that emphasized the resort to oral sources in data collection rather than relying solely on textual analysis.

Vansina's (1985), sequel to the historical value of oral tradition, further explored the value of oral traditions as history. This work led to the acceptance of oral sources as reliable historical data and greatly helped in the study of Africa. Vansina also promoted the use of interdisciplinary methods in the study and recovery of African history. It is important to emphasize that the Vansinan approach does not condemn the use of textual analysis in the study of African history, what the Vansinan approach condemns is the sole reliance on textual analysis in studying Africa and in the absence of text researchers made conclusions that do not reflect the realities of the societies and individuals they studied. Thus, textual analysis must complement oral narratives collected from the field.

The Vansinan theory is based on Jan Vansina's book titled *Oral Tradition as History*. It is a material that is essential in the reconstruction of the histories of traditional societies (Mbakwe 2009). Traditional societies in this context refer to societies that predate modernity with regard to the contemporary tools used in recording and conducting historical research. Whereas in many traditional African societies, especially in precolonial times, the recording of historical events took various unconventional forms, oral narratives in the form of stories handed down from generation to generation became one of the ways of preserving and transmitting historical narratives. Vansinan in his book theorizes that Oral Traditions are historical facts that must not be discarded. According to Mbakwe (2009), African historical reconstruction in particular has adopted the Vansinan theory to the extent that for any African historical research to have validity, the contributions of Jan Vansina through this work must be acknowledged, appreciated and referenced.

Furthermore, Vansina (1985) explains that oral traditions are processes as much as they are products. He emphasizes the process through which oral narratives are collected into a finished product. He places much emphasis on the process of collecting oral data as equally important as the data collected. Again, he juxtaposes the transmission of messages by word of mouth over a period of time until the message disappears and to the stage where other oral messages emerge based or formed from previous oral messages. Hence the concept of 'hear say' or rumors according to Vansina (1985), forms a major component of oral sources. According to Vansinan, hearsay, eyewitness accounts and even myths and fables must not be discarded and must be recognized as essential components of orature. As much as eye witness accounts may be the most dependable oral sources, although they are not wholly infallible, other unconventional media such as dreams, visions, trances and hallucinations of participants of events, recipients of oral narratives of events or conduits that have the spiritual gifts to access the supernatural for such information must all be recognized.

In studying Kofi's stay in the Gold Coast which dates back to the early 1920s, the Vansinan idea of oral sources as history was adopted to collect data in the field. The information provided in this research are therefore collected from oral sources through the media Vansinan discusses in his theory such as hearsay, rumors and narratives handed down. Speaking to Nana Afia Adorkor, the descendant of Laura Kofi, she recounted experiences where the spirit of Laura Kofi appeared to her in dreams and spoke to her. Nana Afia Adorkor's account has several collections of supernatural visitations as Vansina (1985) points out in his study. In a typical scientific research this form may be discarded for lack of scientific proof but this is exactly what Vansina (1985) disagrees with. Oral accounts must not be subjected to scientific proof or any form of credibility or authenticity checks but must be

recorded as such, giving room to various accounts as witnessed, handed down or based on heat-say. All these oral narratives must be collected and recorded.

## 2.6 CRITICISMS TO THE VANSINAN THEORY

Although Vansina writes extensively on oral history as an important ingredient in historical methodology, his position on oral theory has been challenged by some scholars. Akinrinade (2021) explores some of the criticisms that have been raised against the Vansinan theory. Significant among the reasons cited are that oral sources lack complete chronology, that they are selective in content and can easily be compromised due to human errors. He points out that as Clarence-Smith (2012) argues, the proponents for oral tradition are not propagating a methodological approach for only academic purposes but there are political undertones. He points out that the Vansinan theory appears more sentimental as they offer historians the opportunity to present a history which is independent of others that have already been recorded. He refers to this phenomenon as history that has not been contaminated by colonialism. Akinrinade (2021) argues that the Vansinan theory seems to focus on lessening the impact of colonialism on Africa.

Again, oral methodology often requires a certain degree of intuition that is not needed in historical research which employs conventional sources (Stevens, 1978). This has been raised to be an opening for undue influence by the researcher who is employing oral methodology in historical or biographical studies. Stevens (1978) argues that relying on intuition moves a research from a scientific platform to a non-scientific one. The major criticism raised against the Vansinan theory has been the question of the reliability of oral sources. Akinrinade (2021) raises the question of the lack of capacity to authenticate the reliability of oral narratives. This has been the strong argument in favour of written text, but it is important to point out that

many written texts are in themselves processed oral traditions. Whereas many scholars who have studied Laura Kofi are comfortable in citing White (2014) and Newman (1996), the risk in resorting to oral sources is avoided, however Coletu (2019) disproves this assertion in her approach to Descendant Epistemology.

Furthermore, the reliance of the memory as the storehouse of oral narratives has also been critiqued. Researchers who rely on oral sources are concerned with the memory from which they access their information. Here again, issues of accuracy, authenticity and credibility have been raised by Vansina critics (Burke, 1989). Critics argue that the sole reliance on the memory as a source of evidence in collecting historical or biographical data may be problematic in the sense that there are several factors that can adversely affect and interfere with originality of oral narratives (Hutton, 1983). Indeed, Vansina (1961) seems to have pre-empted all the criticisms that have been raised against his theory. He agreed that a researcher cannot assume that oral sources are infallible, however, his position is that oral narratives must be collected together with all the minuses and processed over time. Thus, if the challenges are prioritized, oral methodology will be discarded completely and that will destroy an important methodology in historiography.

The scholar Betomo (2019) adopts the Vansina and Subaltern theories in studying the historical content and context of pre-colonial Cameroon. He also explored the strengths and weaknesses of using oral tradition to reconstruct the history of ancient Cameroonian societies. According to Betomo (2019, para. 1), he sampled primary sources and interviewed them. After the interview, he engaged in a verification of the oral narratives collected and justification of the evidence. He asserts that oral tradition was and is the storehouse of historical contents. Betomo (2019) asserts that using the Vansina (1985) and Subaltern

(1980) approaches, he was able to reconstruct a history that would demonstrate African agency and establish an autonomous sense of identity apart from the preceding period of European colonial rule. Depicting Africa's pre-colonial past consequently became a central goal, although written evidence proved to be scarce (Betomo, 2019, p.1).

In his paper, Betomo (2019) defends the rationale in adopting oral tradition as an authentic source of recounting the history of pre-colonial Cameroon. In his study he relied on verbal transmissions of historical narratives such as war poetry, praise poetry, testimonies, historical talks and narratives as well as commentaries and historian myths. In his conclusion, he argued that oral tradition has played a very important role in the reconstruction of the history of Cameroon before the inception of colonialism. He however conceded that a major challenge to the Vansinan (1985) and Subaltern (1980) theories is the question of whether oral narratives can pass the scientific test as far as contemporary historiography is concerned (Betomo, 2019).

## **2.7 THE THEORY OF DESCENDANT EPISTEMOLOGY**

Another theoretical framework this thesis adopts is the theory of Descendant Epistemology (Coletu, 2019), a methodology employed in the study of Chief Sam and the early back-to-Africa agenda. The theory of descendant epistemology refers to a historical and or biographical study that collects oral narratives from descendants of the subject being studied. In adopting tenets of this theory in this thesis, oral narratives from relatives of Adorkor Kofi were collected and documented in this thesis. Descendant Epistemology (Coletu, 2019) adopts both the Vansinan and Subaltern approaches by emphasizing oral accounts of witnesses. Coletu (2019) however, focuses on collecting oral narratives from descendants and relatives of Chief Sam whom she studied. Coletu (2019) being a distant relative of Sam

herself, adopts the family tree methodology and traces other relatives of Sam to collect their account of events. Descendant Epistemology is captured in the conviction that oral accounts of descendants of historical figures being studied must be prioritized in such studies, especially when it has to do with Africa.

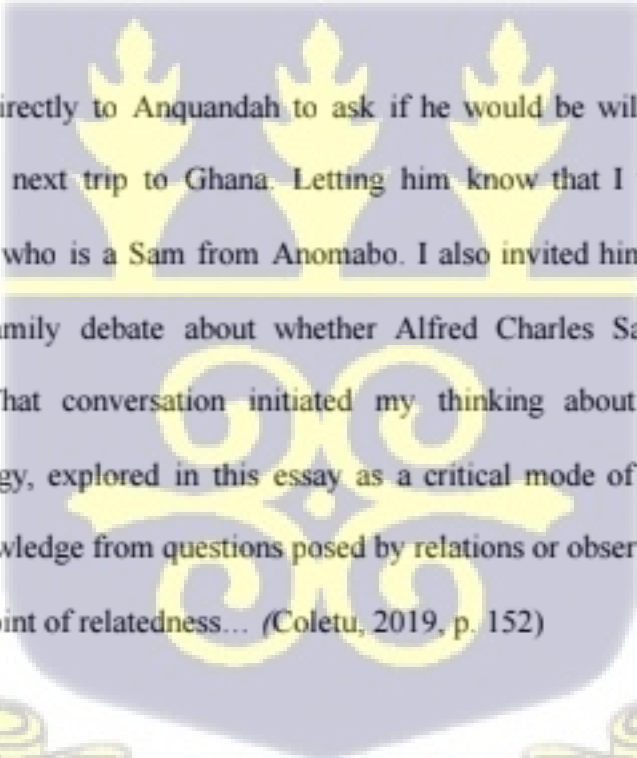
A comparative analysis can be done with the methodologies adopted by Newman (1996) (1996) and White (2014) who largely resorted to correspondences and archival materials in studying Laura Adorkor Kofi. Coletu (2019) however engages in both textual analysis of existing literature as well as extensive field research with the main objective of collecting oral accounts. She also engages in archival research in both Ghana and the United States (Coletu, 2019, p.151). This points to the fact that both oral accounts and archival materials are essential to studies that seek to reconstruct history from the perspective of relatedness. Coletu (2019) also accessed professional academic assistance from Professor Anquandah<sup>5</sup>. Prior to Coletu's (2019) study, Hill (1987, pp.57-77) had written about Chief Alfred Sam, mentioning Anquandah as a source. Coletu (2019) therefore engages the services of a scholar who had already done extensive work in that regard. Arguably, Coletu's (2019) methodology offers a template for both current and future researchers on studying not just the back-to-Africa missions, but most importantly the effort to establish relationships and origins of historical figures. The central importance of kinship in such genealogical studies is emphasized in her work.

Coletu (2019) from her position as a relative of Sam, is able to track down some relatives of Sam who give her adequate information that helps to correct the narrative on Sam which labeled him as a fraudster and a failure. For example, Coletu (2019) is able to establish facts

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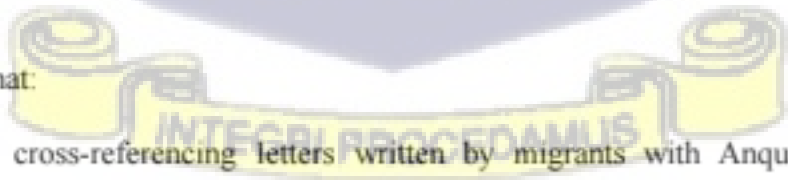
<sup>5</sup> Professor Anquandah was then the head of the department of Archaeology at the University of Ghana.

that denied the claim that Chief Sam never assisted any group of African-Americans to repatriate to Ghana. Coletu (2019) points out that contrary to criticisms of Chief Sam and the tagging of his mission as a failure, Sam had indeed purchased a ship in 1914 and named it SS Liberia which carried sixty-five to a hundred people, along with lime, timber, and salt for trade stops on the delegation's route from Galveston, Texas, to Saltpond in the Gold Coast. A critical study of Coletu's (2019) work shows extensively documented and detailed archival research in both Ghana and the United States. The findings and data collected are well-chronicled in her studies. Beyond archival research, Coletu accessed what she calls novel claims and interviews of direct descendants of Sam as well as some members of the society who had come into contact with him. Thus, people who knew Sam and could speak about him. She says:



I wrote directly to Anquandah to ask if he would be willing to meet during my next trip to Ghana. Letting him know that I was visiting my father, who is a Sam from Anomabo. I also invited him to help me settle a family debate about whether Alfred Charles Sam was our relative. That conversation initiated my thinking about descendant epistemology, explored in this essay as a critical mode of inquiry that builds knowledge from questions posed by relations or observations from the standpoint of relatedness... (Coletu, 2019, p. 152)

She continues that:



After cross-referencing letters written by migrants with Anquandah's interviews and the record of paid immigrant head taxes, I concluded that the number reported in 'The Longest Way Home', which is the

most common reference for the movement, does not capture the total aboard the ship but likely the number from Oklahoma...He interviewed Sam's first wife, Afua Kuma, who was 109 years old at the time, as well as her son and Sam's stepson, Timothy Owusu, a former diplomat to Sudan who spent much of his spare time searching for information about his stepfather. He also spoke with Esther Sam, the only child born to Afua and Alfred... (Coletu, 2019, p.153).

Because Hill (1977) had tasked Aquandah to locate witnesses and interview them about how the African- American returnees were received when they arrived in the Gold Coast in 1915, there were already secondary materials gathered from oral sources and interviews that had been well-documented on Sam and his back-to-Africa Mission. Granted that records from 1912 to 1917 were available, it begs the question why records of a royal in the late 1920s will not be available. Again, Aquandah had used information gathered about Sam to construct a family tree. This is one of the methodologies some scholars adopt in genealogical studies and it helps to clear issues of doubts. This can be adopted if basic but salient information is available. There may be spaces in the family tree that may be difficult to fill due to breaks in the information flow but enough can be done. In Kofi's case, it was difficult to draw a family tree. The information about King Knesiphi which may be the most vital information available could not be authenticated. Coletu (2019) points out that:

Anquandah used these accounts to reconstruct a partial family tree. But like many family trees, rumors leave broken branches—dangling with speculation about lives led with other people. The elliptical omissions reflected the difficulty of pinning down a string of marriages and the children of a man who died outside Ghana after living creatively within

it...More than sixty years after their arrival, Anquandah was surprised to find many people who remembered the occasion. Those interviews allowed him to map the migration path from Saltpond and Anomabo to Apaaso and Apoli, all while recording community recollections of African Americans who had settled in various places inland and along the coast (Coletu, 2019, p. 150).

As Coletu (2019) rightly points out, soliciting dialogue with residents as knowledge producers in both archaeological and historical studies is one of the most reliable methods of accessing reliable information and data. This, as Coletu (2019) puts it, alters the meanings and unsettled inaccurate assumptions put out by previous academic studies. Indeed, the essence of adopting tenets of descendant epistemology in this thesis, is not to critically examine the narratives on Laura Kofi, but also to study the methodologies adopted in the respective research. One of the objectives in studying works done on Kofi is to explore the methodologies adopted by researchers in arriving at her Ghanaian descendency. Coletu (2019) also engaged one of the descendants of Sam's migration called Kendra Field for oral accounts as passed on to her. According to Coletu (2019), one of the methodologies adopted in working on the 'Chief Sam Movement: A Century Later', was to retrace steps, ask questions and interview descendants of movement participants. Coletu (2019, p. 155) describes it as investigating from a standpoint of participation rather than armchair critique. In essence, researchers went to the field and directly interviewed relatives of persons who had participated in Sam's movement. Coletu (2013) continues by saying that:

for my part, I retraced the migration itinerary in Ghana and at least seven of Sam' residences to discover traces of community memory not captured by colonial records. Configuration of knowledge drawn from

conversations with family and research in the US and in Ghana...By calling this approach descendant epistemology, I could name a distinct and intentional research process that evolves from intimate inquiries about lineage, labor, and migration, spiraling out into new ways of looking at found documents scattered across a variety of institutions. (Coletu,2019, p.155)

Coletu (2019) further argues that she adopted a descendant perspective to imagine where traces of relatedness, resources, and motive might be found, and in the process discovered another way to study the African Movement” (Coletu, 2019, p. 155). From the above quotes, we see how Coletu (2019) conducted field research in her study of Chief Sam and the back-to-Africa movement and how she relied mostly on oral narratives.

In studying Sam and Kofi we establish striking similarities in approach. Both were involved in fundraising. While Kofi raised funds to build UNIA and has been criticized for misappropriation (although that was not proven), Sam’s fundraising was focused on the journey back to West Africa. Both were very eloquent and used that to their advantage. Coletu (2019) records moving speeches delivered by Sam prior the repatriation and upon arrival in Anomabo in Ghana. Any study of Kofi may be inadequate if this very important aspect of her identity is not properly investigated. This extract from Coletu (2019) summarizes the objectives and importance in adopting descendant epistemology as a theoretical framework in studying the biography of historical figures. Coletu (2019) says that:

the construction of those notes, kept in a family garage rather than a formal archive, inspired me to look at the evidence anew from the perspective of those closest to Sam, stitching together

trace materials from the families who participated or observed the movement's progression at close range. (Coletu, 2019, p.155)

The final argument Coletu (2019) advances in support of descendant epistemology is captured in the statement below:

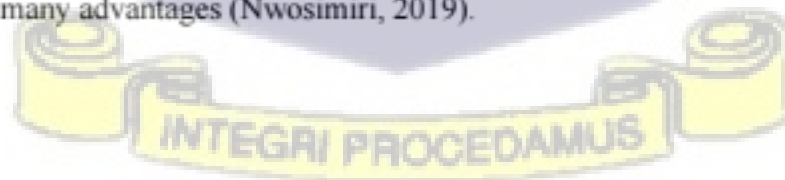
What we learned was motivated in part by familial interest in the movement, but also by a manner of inquiry forged from existing knowledge of places, kin networks, and migration histories. Records of contact, mediated by institutions such as churches, Freemason lodges, governments, and corporations, constitute the frontline for genealogical research (Coletu, 2019, p.155)

In conclusion, it is important to note that Descendant Epistemology as a theory is recommendable in the effort to reconstruct history that has been subjected to varied debates especially in the quest to establish certain facts. Coletu (2019) argues that Descendant epistemology serves as a methodological preface to her essay, not only to underscore the critical stance within families about institutionalized knowledge produced on paper, but also to demonstrate how an argument emerges from a method. Investigating her family's relationship to Alfred Charles Sam foregrounded the technical question of kinship (Coletu, 2019, pg.157). This approach informs the reason to adopt tenets of descendant epistemology in studying Laura Adorkor Kofi.

## 2.8 CRITICISMS TO DESCENDANT EPISTEMOLOGY

There has not been any scholarly critique to the theory of Descendant Epistemology (Coletu, 2019) at the time of writing this thesis but the concept of relying on family narratives has been critiqued. Borland, Sawin and Tye (2017) argue that it may lack the flow of chronology in terms of collecting oral accounts from sources. They further argue that an essential part of history is the element of chronology and that without specific chronology there cannot be history. They also discuss the question of impartiality and fairness in the oral accounts as well as the recording, analysis and documentation because family oral sources as well as the researcher may have biases based on family affiliation and relationship. To address the possibility of the researcher's biases influencing research, it is suggested that the researcher involves other researchers in various stages of the study, from gathering of data to review of data, analysis and the final outcome.

The point of selectivity in interpretation has also been raised. Descendant Epistemology may be subjected to most of the criticisms raised against both the Vansinan and Subaltern and indeed many of the theories that propagate the dependence on oral sources in reconstructing African history. It is however worth mentioning that a critical analysis of Coletu's (2019) work tends to agree that studying the biography of a historical figure from the perspective of relatedness has many advantages (Nwosimiri, 2019).



## 2.9 RELEVANCE OF THE THEORIES TO THIS RESEARCH

The need to examine or re-examine historical research in Africa has become topical in contemporary historiography discourses. Challenges posed in historical academia by debates raised about methodologies adopted in gathering or collecting historical data in Africa, where emphasis on the relevance of oral tradition and oral sources as an important source of historical information has been the subject of debate for many years. When historical narratives handed down through oral sources are deemed to contain elements of myth, fables, and heroic make belief, or when oral information collected seem to suffer the challenges in corroboration, or when a narration from sources contains conflicting details, we do not necessarily disregard such information as unreliable data for historical analysis (Vansina, 1961).

It is important to note that oral sources and oral materials can be contaminated or influenced with some amount of distortion on the journey of transmission from generation to generation. There is the high possibility of intermittent inaccuracies, but these will not be enough to quell oral sources and oral data collected from the research field as unreliable primary sources in any research on Africa. An example is the historical narrative of the Asante warrior Yaa Asantewa which can be placed in a similar historical context as these two theories discussed. Beside oral sources do we have any empirical evidence that proves that indeed a woman led the Asante army to fight the British in 1900? A lot of our historical narratives are captured in oral sources as the means of collecting the data as we currently have it (Wilks, 2000). If the Yaa Asantewa narrative (and indeed other historical narratives handed down) which has been recorded mainly from oral accounts is to be challenged for lack of empirical evidence then researchers must study the history, situating the narrative as has been handed down, within the

social, cultural, religious, and political systems of the times. Such a study will confirm whether, indeed, a woman led a battle to defeat the British or not, giving not just the facts but also the prevailing circumstances within which the facts may have occurred. If so then many of our historical accounts will be challenged because, as earlier mentioned, traditional African societies were not equipped enough to record and store many of the historical events that took place. There may therefore not be enough archival evidence to establish such collections as scientific proof of African history due to challenges in preservation and documentation, but African oral tradition has proven to be a very reliable and efficient means of collecting historical narratives on pre-colonial and colonial events (Vansina, 1985).

The same applies to the narrative of 'Komfo Anokye', the great traditional priest who is believed to have conjured a stool from the heavens. Vansina (1985) and the Subalterns support the argument that oral tradition must be admitted and factored into the collection of the history of a society, especially in Africa. The presence of variations and inconsistencies in facts, or the absence of means to verify or corroborate stories in itself present a minute and insignificant challenge to the entire process.

Recorded departures in facts, infusion of exaggerations and elements of myths and fables will in themselves create avenues for further interrogations. For example, the *Fante* (an Akan ethnic group in southern Ghana) has the story of the legendary *Asebu Amemfi* the giant from *Asebu* in the Central Region of Ghana. Growing up as a Fante child, we heard the story of Asebu who often carried his wife in a huge traditional harvester. His wife fried maize and poured huge bowls full of hot fried maize into the giant's mouth as they walked along. In July 2009, I visited Asebu and while there, made enquiries about this giant called Amemfi. The interest was to know where he was buried and where his wife was buried. Enquiries were

made about members of his family and if giants have been produced in the family centuries after his death. I engaged the people, asked several questions and recorded graphic details of the history of Amenfi. It was gathered that the Amenfi family still has the traits of their ancestor but intermarriages through migration have halted the process in recent observations.

The element of distortions in Afro-American history has been topical in historiography discourses and Hill (1975) points to this fact. Hill in his introduction to his studies on Garvey says that distortions to African-American history is common but Garvey has suffered more in terms of such distortions and this needed to be corrected. This he does in his study and documentation of the life of Marcus Garvey. Of major interest is Martin's concession in his introduction that distortions in African-American history is a fact and not an illusion (Hill 1975). The prevalence of taints of distortions in itself does not deny the content of a particular historical narrative. This is what both Vansina and the Subalterns emphasize in their respective theories. It is against this backdrop that I study Laura Adorkor Kofi from the Ghanaian perspective, relying more on primary data collected principally through oral sources, this time not from people who have collected information based on her stay in the United States but those who may have accessed information about her in Ghana.

Focusing on Laura Kofi's ancestry and roots in Ghana, her royal roots to the Ga State or the Asante Kingdom, her parentage, family, marriage as well as her missionary work as mentioned by scholars who have studied her, the theories discussed above guided the collection of oral narratives from the research field. It is important to mention that, although relying on oral narratives has been subjected to criticisms, this research adopted the theories discussed above due to the many advantages outlined in adopting primary data when reconstructing history in Africa. Thus, collecting eye witness accounts, accounts passed on

from generations to generations and hear-say accounts form an important basis in primary data collection of historical events and personalities. This largely informed the decision to adopt these theories in the research and the results were successful.



## CHAPTER THREE

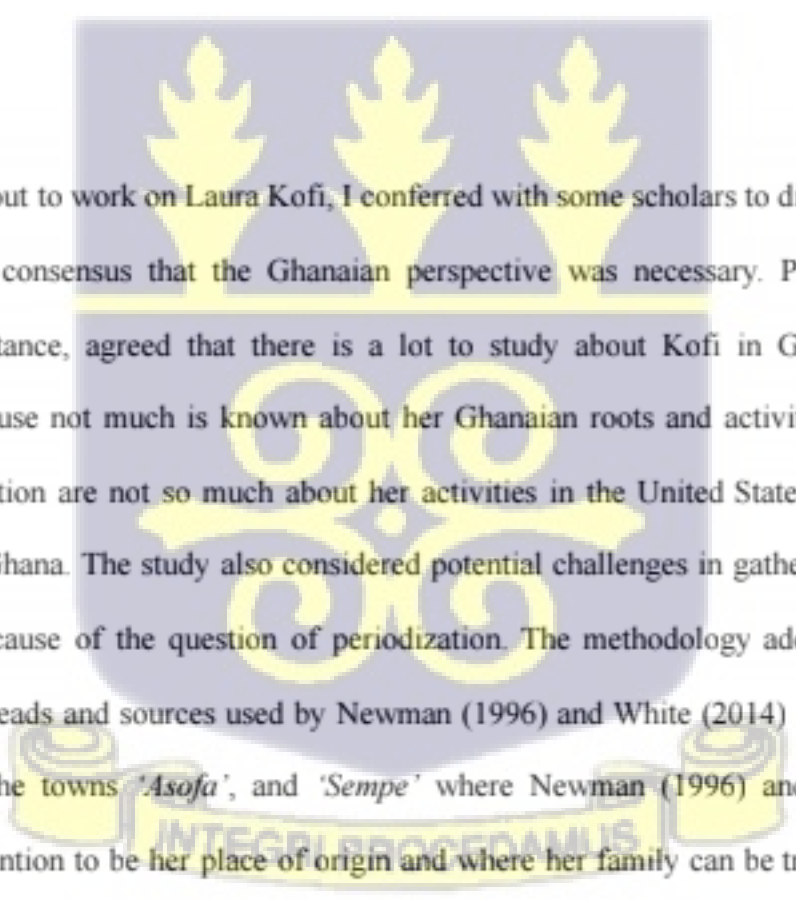
### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 METHODOLOGY EMPLOYED IN THE STUDY

Using biographical study as a research methodology, I employed intensive archival research, textual analysis and oral accounts to trace the identity of Madam Laura Adorkor Kofi and to document her immense contributions to Pan-Africanism and the back-to-Africa mission. The methods adopted include audio-visual analysis, interviews, genealogy analysis, and descendant epistemology. The areas of study are the United States of America and Ghana. In the United States, the research covered mainly New York and Florida. I accessed much information electronically from the Schomburg Library. I also accessed information from Miami, Louisville, and Daphne as well as Alabama. These cities and states comprise the areas where Mother Kofi had some contacts and engagements, either during her days with the UNIA or during the AUC days. Indeed, her place of interment called Adorkorville is located in Miami even till this day.

Furthermore, vital archival materials and information were accessed from the Kofi collections stored at the Schomburg Library. I also had a gatekeeper in Miami where Kofi spent most of her final days. The gatekeeper facilitated access to some scholars who have either studied or written about Laura Kofi and through email interactions and phone conversations, I collected enough information to help write this thesis. It was through this contact (who wishes to remain unnamed) that I had access to interview Nana Afia Adorkor, Laura Kofi's great grand-daughter generations removed, who gave me some vital information that helped me to make my analysis in this study. As mentioned earlier, the thesis was written from two

perspectives: studying the life and works of Laura Kofi in the United States and secondly by studying her roots in Ghana. The first part relied more on secondary materials which included archival collections and other literature on the subject. The second part relied mostly on primary sources in gathering information through interviews, to corroborate and verify some of the records in the secondary materials accessed. Some secondary data were consulted, but largely, the major source of information was from primary sources. Prior to the emergence of Covid-19, the plan was to travel to the United States as part of my fieldwork, but this could not materialize. I was fortunate however to have officials from the Schomburg Library agree to a Google Meet encounter. Following these meetings, officials from the Schomburg Library emailed me scanned copies of original collections of archival materials on Kofi, the UNIA and the AUC.



Before setting out to work on Laura Kofi, I conferred with some scholars to discuss this study and there was consensus that the Ghanaian perspective was necessary. Professor Ebony Coletu, for instance, agreed that there is a lot to study about Kofi in Ghana and by a Ghanaian, because not much is known about her Ghanaian roots and activities. Indeed, the areas of contention are not so much about her activities in the United States, but about her connection to Ghana. The study also considered potential challenges in gathering the needed information because of the question of periodization. The methodology adopted therefore, was to list the leads and sources used by Newman (1996) and White (2014) in their study of Kofi. Laura. The towns 'Asofa', and 'Sempe' where Newman (1996) and White (2014) respectively mention to be her place of origin and where her family can be traced, as well as other sources mentioned are key sources to this research.

First of all, it was important to follow-up on the sources and the information recorded in the archives, without appearing to be challenging their veracity and authenticity. These were not done independently and in isolation from other research works done in other fields that have some bearing on this study. I employed Mrs. Sabina Quaye<sup>6</sup> who assisted in gathering the information needed for this study. Efforts were made on the field to trace Madam Kofi's background in Ghana and interviewed some of her mentioned descendant-relatives' generations removed. Again, the research resorted to archival materials and other literature and criticisms on Pan-Africanism and the contribution of women to the course. Also, archival newspaper articles accessed from the Schomburg library were immensely helpful. Oral narratives were collected from some prominent persons<sup>7</sup> who are well-versed in colonial history and that of the United States of America, as well as others who understand chieftaincy issues from pre-colonial times till date<sup>8</sup>.

The research also took me to the *Krobo* area where the surname Kofi can be found among the Krobo ethnic group of Ghana, precisely '*Odumase Krobo*' in the eastern part of Ghana. I followed a lead to Kroboland when I was investigating the etymology of the name Kofi and the ethnic groups that use Kofi as a surname in Ghana. At the Krobo palace, *Nene Odonkor Adu, Konor of Manya Krobo* traditional area (Overlord of the paramountcy) admitted to this and explained that Kofi became a *Krobo* surname through marriage to an *Asante*. Indeed, several other ethnic groups such as the *Ewe* and the *Nzema* also use the surname Kofi. What was a matter of concern was for a *Ga* royal to bear the name Kofi or for an *Asante* royal to bear the name Adorkor. This is where the challenge was. Then there was the need to make a

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<sup>6</sup> Sabina Quaye is a Ga scholar who speaks Ga fluently and understands the culture. She assisted in data collection and was also an interpreter.

<sup>7</sup> Professors Fleming and Mawuena Logan of University of Louisville and Professor Ebony Coletu of University of Pennsylvania.

<sup>8</sup> All sources have been duly acknowledged.

case for the name 'Adorkor' which can neither be of Asante origin in general nor of Asante royal origin.

Furthermore, researching the identity of King Knesiphi took me to other places such as Winneba in the Central Region of Ghana, the *Sempe Mantse's* palace in Accra, the *Ga Mantse's* palace, the *Manhyia* Palace and Manhyia archives. I also spent days in both Asofa in the Greater Accra region of Ghana and Asafo in Kumasi. In researching Kofi's identity three methodologies were employed: the first was to study details of records of Newman (1996) and White (2014) and to follow-up on the leads. The objective was to find information that will confirm Laura Kofi's identity. The first method adopted was to test some theories used in Newman's (1996) research and records. Newman's (1996) work and collections provides adequate archival records for any scholarly study on Laura Kofi. From the Ghanaian perspective, names of persons Newman (1996) had contacted during his research were followed-up. Other secondary materials that addressed questions that came up in the research, such as the meaning of the name Kofi and its ethnic origin, and so on, in Ghana were also studied.

This study adopted the genealogical approach in exploring the Ghanaian name Kofi and its ethnic origin. The name theory approach included confirming the actual or correct spelling of her name as from the archives. In this part of the study Agyekum (2006, pp.206-235), Odotei (1991) and some oral sources provided the needed information for the research. My research in this regard focused on exploring reasons a Ga princess will bear the name 'Kofi'<sup>9</sup>. The research studied families in 'Ga Mashie' (The Ga State) bearing the surname 'Kofi'. Another

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<sup>9</sup> Kofi is often given to males born on Friday. It is common among the Akan ethnic group. Others use it as their surname

spelling also found was 'Coffie'. Every '*We*'<sup>10</sup> in *Ga Mashe* (Ga State) has a peculiar name they can be identified by. For a royal, because the Gas are patrilineal, you inherit your father's name. Hence we assume that the name 'Kofi' was the stool name or regular name of King Knesiphi. It should therefore be easy to get to Ga Mashie, mention a name and be directed to the family house (*We*) or royals associated with that name.

According to *Nii Dzaase* (the King maker of Ga State), who could not confirm that the Ga State ever had a King called Knesiphi, he punned around Knesiphi with the view that 'Nii' which is the official stool title for all Chiefs in the Ga State could have been adulterated by the whites to '*Kn*'. Granted the actual name was '*Nii Sipi*' or '*Nii Sephi*' or any other close to it, even if there are no records in the archival collection on Ga history, the oral history should have some records of one such King and her daughter Laura Kofi. No matter how one tries to juggle theories to accommodate the records as written by scholars who have studied Laura Kofi, you still have tons of questions to ask that do not agree with the culture and traditions of the Ga State at the time in history. It is important to note that it is not possible for such a figure to be unpopular in Ga folklore or Ga history. Speaking to Professor Irene Odotei, a scholar in Ga history, she clearly did not seem to have heard about Laura Kofi, so it was with many of the Ghanaian scholars spoken to, as well as some of the chiefs and elders in the various paramountcies interviewed during my field research.

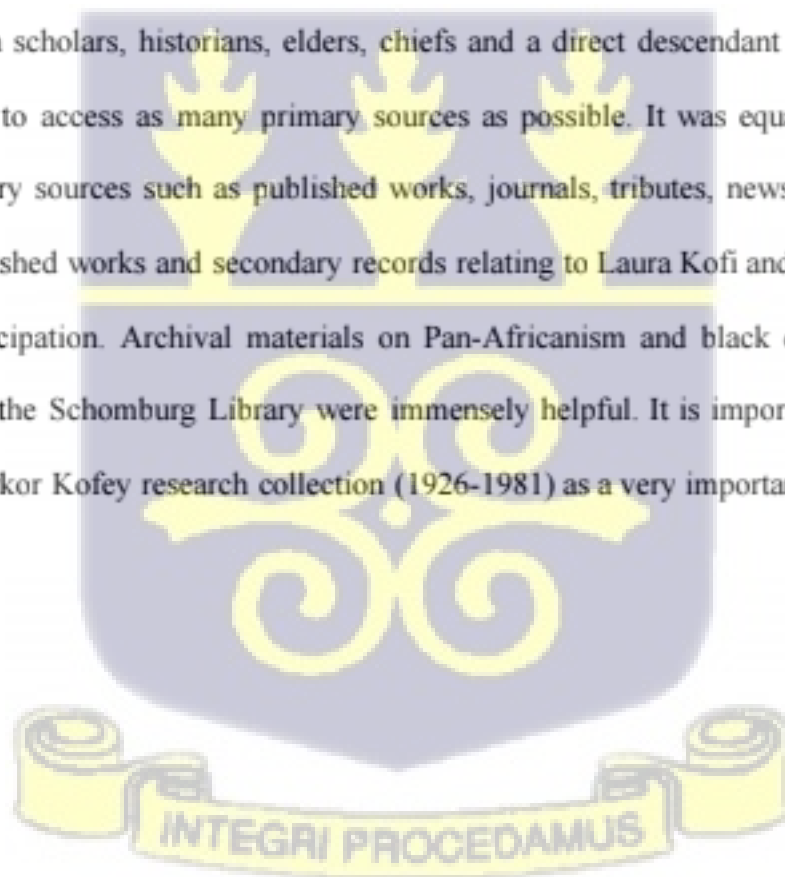
Secondly, the research studied the records and archives of both the Ga and Ashanti kingship history for salient clues to confirm her claim to royalty, her royal parentage and the identity of King Knesiphi. Provided in this thesis are the records of Kings and Chiefs that have ruled the Efutu of Winneba, the Ga state and the Asante Kingdom. Thirdly, the research studied traces

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<sup>10</sup> 'We' is used for specific royal and traditional homes within the Ga state.

or links to Christian organizations in the Gold Coast or present Ghana to establish Laura Kofi's claim to priesthood in Ghana and her service as a missionary in a village called Asofa. The archival materials used in this study were gathered from sources in the United States (all sources are fully acknowledged). This part of the research covered *Manhyia*<sup>10</sup> Palace in Kumasi, Sempe in Accra, Winneba, Dubois Centre, the National Archives and Padmore Library in Accra. Studies were also done at the Balme Library, the archival section of the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana and the History Department of the University of Ghana.

To sum up, this study has relied on primary information obtained mainly through extensive interviews with scholars, historians, elders, chiefs and a direct descendant of Laura Kofi. It was important to access as many primary sources as possible. It was equally important to access secondary sources such as published works, journals, tributes, newspaper reports, as well as unpublished works and secondary records relating to Laura Kofi and her contribution to black emancipation. Archival materials on Pan-Africanism and black diaspora religion accessed from the Schomburg Library were immensely helpful. It is important to single out the Laura Adorkor Kofey research collection (1926-1981) as a very important data source for this research.



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<sup>10</sup>Manhyia Palace is where the Asante King lives. The Manhyia archives can be found there.

### 3.2 LIMITATIONS TO THE STUDY

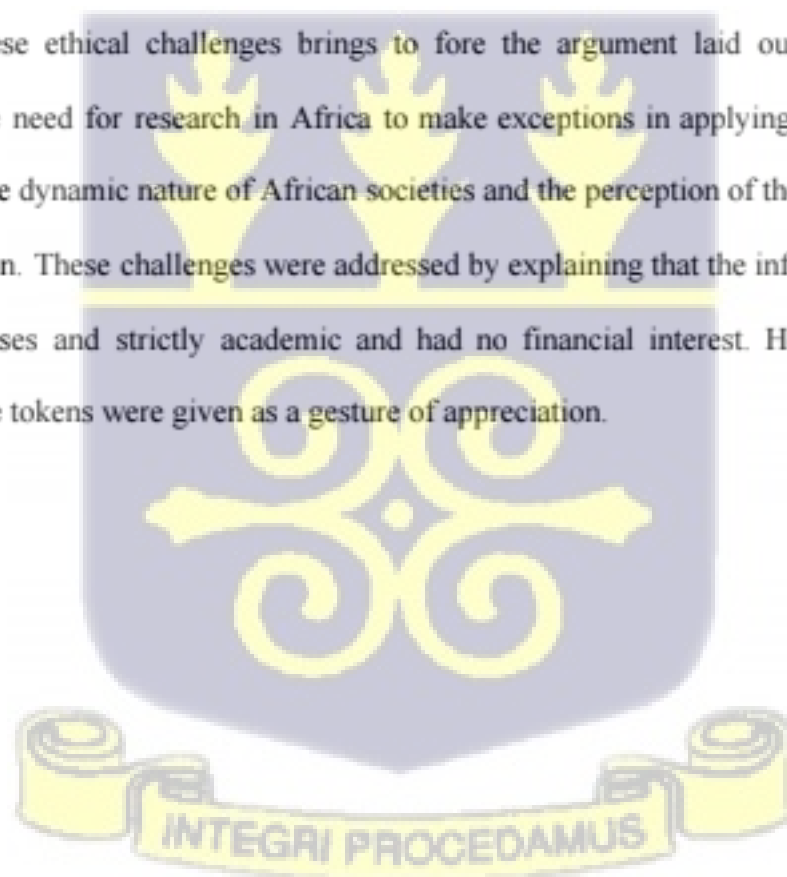
Conducting research in the era of a global pandemic and its associated restrictions came with some challenges. Data had to be sourced from scanned copies of documents rather than hard copies, which made reading a bit difficult because many of the original Laura Kofi collections are written in ink. Many interviews had to be done on the phone or via Zoom or Google Meet rather than face-to-face interviews. This came with internet stability challenges and had cost implications. Also, some of the informants could not be accessed due to their self-imposed covid restrictions. Admittedly, investigating the historical background of a personality such as Laura Kofi, a great Pan-Africanist by all standards, whom the literature of Pan-Africanism has not given much attention, was not going to be an easy exercise, especially from the Ghanaian perspective, because not much about Kofi's life in Ghana was recorded. Another challenge was the collection of oral materials and the task of authenticating oral information collected. However, going by the Vansianian (1961) and Subaltern (1980) theories that propagate the importance of oral sources in the reconstruction of history and the need not to challenge or disregard oral narratives in the analysis and documentation processes, the study regarded oral sources as data that can be verified, authenticated and used.

### 3.3 ETHICAL CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED

Some ethical challenges were faced during the stage of data collection but these were managed quite well. Firstly, as mentioned in the discussion of the methodology used, the emergence of Covid made accessing sources and contacts a bit difficult. In the quest to interview some chiefs, some of the gatekeepers demanded money before granting me access. Other gatekeepers were willing to help even without receiving anything, but few of them

refused to pick my calls when they realized no money would be paid. Indeed, some of the informants interviewed expected monetary rewards after granting me interviews.

Secondly, the question of persistence being a nuisance or not also came up. In many cases it became necessary to persist with telephone calls in order to gain access. It became an ethical concern but also it was often necessary to exert a little pressure in order to be granted access. These challenges were encountered in the effort to gain access to some of the chiefs and elders. One was caught between cultural practices and research ethics. There had to be a line between what was a gift, a duty (as in the case of giving money for transportation) and what was inducement. These were the major ethical challenges faced during the research. Addressing these ethical challenges brings to fore the argument laid out in Atta-Asiedu (2022)<sup>11</sup> on the need for research in Africa to make exceptions in applying stringent ethical codes due to the dynamic nature of African societies and the perception of the concept of gifts and appreciation. These challenges were addressed by explaining that the information was for research purposes and strictly academic and had no financial interest. However, in some instances, some tokens were given as a gesture of appreciation.



<sup>11</sup> Atta-Asiedu K. A (2022). Ethical Codes in Research in Africa: The Call for Flexibility and Context Specificity. *Afr.J. Humanities & Soc. Sci.* 2 (2) pp. 7-11. <https://doi.org/10.51483/AFJHSS.2.2.2022.7-11>

## CHAPTER FOUR

### PAN-AFRICANISM

#### 4.1 DEFINING PAN-AFRICANISM

This chapter discusses Pan-Africanism as a movement in its formative stages and focuses mainly on the structure of the organization with respect to female representation. It further focuses on the challenges female members were confronted with unlike their male counterparts, during the early stages of the formation of the Pan-African movement. This discussion is a preamble to the discussion on the political activism of Madam Kofi. It helps to highlight the challenges she had to endure in her role as a Field Organizer for the United Negro Improvement Association. This discussion will also help to appreciate Madam Kofi's efforts as a female Pan-African activist in the 1920s.

The challenge in settling on a single encompassing definition of Pan-Africanism makes such an exercise very tedious academically. This study will not get into the definition controversy but for the purposes of the discussion, the thesis settles on a definition given by Makalani (2018). According to Makalani (2011), Pan-Africanism represents the complexities of black political and intellectual thought over two hundred years. What constitutes Pan-Africanism or what one might include in a Pan-African movement often changes according to whether the focus is on politics, ideology, organizations, or culture. Pan-Africanism actually reflects a range of political views. Makalani (2011, par. 1) argues further that fundamentally,

Pan-Africanism constitutes the belief that:

African peoples all over the world; those on the African continent and those in the diaspora are one people and Africans all over the world share not just a common history, but also, they share a common destiny. This sense of interconnected pasts and futures has taken many forms, especially in the creation of political institutions. (Makalani, 2011, p.1).

This will be the working definition for this paper because it strategically ropes in as many of the branches of Pan-Africanism as possible, and brings all under one umbrella. So although this definition may not exhaust the narrative on a suitable definition, it is, for the purposes of this discussion, quite exhaustive and encompassing.

Another controversial topic is the question of how, when, and where Pan-Africanism began and with whom. The challenges that periodization poses to the history of Pan-Africanism can derail any discourse on Pan-Africanism and throw it overboard (Esedebe, 1994). Geiss (1967) points to American Negroes in the nineteenth century who developed cultural, intellectual and political traditions which led towards Pan-Africanism. Padmore takes it back to around 1787 with the formation of Sierra Leone (Geiss, 1967). Care must be taken, not to rope in every anticolonial agitation on the African continent as Pan-African. As much as it is accepted that there is the need to periodize and also determine what features and phenomenon appropriately constitute Pan-Africanism, there is also the potential error of tagging Pan-Africanism to one person or group of persons (Clarke, 1988). Hence the option to limit the historical survey from 1900 to 1958 when active and conscious Pan-African sentiments were concretized into formal fora (Campbell, 2006). Also, the role of the congresses in sustaining Pan-Africanism cannot be underestimated. It is important to note that, but for the congresses, Pan-Africanism

would have vanished into oblivion or would not have at best, achieved some of the successes it did (AttaAsiedu, 2020). It is also not part of the objectives to delve into the capital 'P' and small 'p' debate in categorizing Pan-Africanism. Pan-Africanism is looked at holistically without measuring the degree of contribution and impact or otherwise.

#### 4.2 THE QUESTION OF MALE DOMINANCE AND ELITISM

The two major criticisms that have been leveled against the Pan-African Movement is its elitist nature and overly-leaning-towards-men feature, giving little or no room for active women and popular or mass involvement (Anne 2009; Farmer, 2016). A critical study into Madam Laura Kofi and her contributions to early Pan-Africanism demonstrates that women could do as much, if not more than their male counterparts in the emancipation struggle (Atta-Asiedu, 2020). Secondly, Kofi's ability to draw mass following, driving the majority of her supporters from the mass non-elite group and women, and the impact of this mobilization strategy exposes the elite and male-dominated culture that was in existence then and the adverse effect it had on the Pan-African course (Ashley, 2016).

Although it has been pointed out that the elitist and male-dominance culture was a key factor that derailed the progress of not just Pan-Africanism but the entire emancipation movement, the latter appears to have been a major hindrance to the success of Pan-Africanism. Many years down the line, it cannot be said that there is parity and gender balance in this context but drastic improvements have been made over the years. This gender disparity has been a huge setback for the Pan-African course. It was (and still is) an internal and self-imposed roadblock that has ignored the many contributions of women in various capacities, from politics to academia, to the Pan-African movement. Indeed, in the early stages of Pan-Africanism, this gender disparity was very intense but literature has paid little attention to

it. Daring women such as Madam Laura Kofi defied the status quo and led mass mobilization drives to increase UNIA membership and to raise funds for the organization. Her strategy to move away from an elitist and a male-focused organization yielded rapid results. Undoubtedly, Kofi must be given some credit for employing a mobilization strategy that would later become quite a popular strategy to be employed by future nationalist leaders on the African continent. It is not clear where her motivation derived from but we can point to her familiarity with the masses that were not elite, the masses that were common and ordinary citizens like herself and in whom she saw a constituency of hungry people desiring the right leadership and motivation to escape from their predicament (Bair, 1996 b).

Reference can also be made to the emergence of the Black Power Movement<sup>12</sup> and their preference for a more populist approach to fight for emancipation; a strategy which Kofi employed and achieved overwhelming results within a short space of time. It is important to mention that the culture of elitism and male-dominance in the emancipation struggle, although demystified by women such as Madam Truman and Rosa Parks, and indeed many years later by Madam Kofi and several other women, the magnitude of its impact to women political activism has been underestimated (Bair, 1996 b). In fact, the many obstacles Madam Kofi was confronted with in the emancipation struggle can be attributed to the culture of elitism and male-dominance which was concealed but real in the UNIA at the time. It was a major and significant challenge to Kofi. Although being a woman, and not being part of the elite, intelligentsia crop was not a novelty in the Pan-African struggle of the era, Laura Kofi is hailed because she came in as a total stranger, not recommended by any political stalwart and yet she achieved so much in so little time. It is, therefore, understandable why she had to ride on Garvey's back and play the religious card in order to be heard. Madam Laura Kofi

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<sup>12</sup> A radical pro-black movement formed in the United States of America.

understood the hurdles and impediments the system placed in her way. She also knew her strengths and employed a political strategy that worked to her advantage.

Kofi operated in the midst of intense segregation and discrimination of black people in America, the low status accorded black women and sexist limitations in the UNIA, arguably the largest black mass movement in Afro-American history were enough barriers to have stopped her, but they did not (Atta-Asiedu, 2020). Although the documentation of women's roles and contributions towards Pan-Africanism is inadequate, the literature available gives a clear picture of the immense impact women have made to this cause. An example is Rhoda Reddock's paper on the two Mrs. Garveys (Reddock, 2014, pp. 58-77). It is important to note that beyond the two Mrs. Garveys and the wives of other prominent members of the leadership of Pan-Africanism were other women whom the literature discusses. Reddock (2014), a paper that focuses on Pan-Africanism and feminism, outlines the contribution of the two Mrs. Garveys towards Garveyism and to a larger extent, Pan-Africanism. Reddock (2014) outlines some significant efforts these and other women made towards feminism in the Caribbean, on the African continent and among Africans and also Blacks in the diaspora.

It is important that research focused on these 'other women' who played various roles to enhance the course of Black emancipation as much as Laura Kofi did, especially those who were not in the limelight but stayed underground to support the movement. It can therefore be placed in comparative contexts, not just Kofi's contributions, but the similarities and differences in approaches and the results achieved. This comparative analysis may be done by taking into cognizance the similarities and differences in the cultural demands of the times, as far as women playing such leadership roles are concerned.

Furthermore, research has to explore in some detail, Kofi's role and contribution towards the course of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in general and to the 'back-to-Africa' mission in particular in order to analyze the impact of her contributions to the larger course of Pan-Africanism, observing particularly, the role played by women in this movement. It is also important to analyze the contributions of the UNIA towards her demise and to determine if being a daring woman contributed to this. In this study, an attempt is made to paint a vivid picture of the environment in which Laura Kofi (and indeed many other women) engaged in her Pan-African activism and the reasons for the challenges she endured.

Pan-Africanism as a concept, ideology or political movement emerged in an era where civil liberties, not just of women, but also of men and indeed, the entire Black race in Europe, and especially in North America, and the Caribbean were extremely limited (Biney, 2016). Within this environment, history can point out some black women who stood out to be counted in their visible acts of defiance against the system. Black women such as Anna Julia Cooper, Amy Euphemia Jacques Garvey, Amy Ashwood Garvey and Claudia Jones, just to mention a few (Abbas, 2015) can be mentioned. These women stood out and are duly acknowledged in history and it will not be fair to credit the successes of Pan-Africanism to its male stakeholders only. A study of nationalist agitations in the Gold Coast, prior to the attainment of independence in 1957, points to an array of women who played various significant roles to achieve the end results. Many may be victims of the 'male-dominance and elitist tag' yet their immense contributions cannot be swept under the carpet. Many of such women may not have been in the frontline for obvious reasons, yet their contributions, no matter how minute, must be fully documented.

#### 4.3 THE PROGRESSION OF WOMEN AND NON-ELITIST REPRESENTATION

The perceived male domination of Africa's liberation movements commonly foiled women's liberation by treating 'the women question' as divisive (House, 2015). This perception cuts across many of the liberation movements that operated across the continent and in the diaspora. Thus, Mama and Abbas (2014) observe that with all its walls adorned with portraits of male leaders, one could be forgiven for seeing Pan-Africanism as an elite and men-only affair.

As mentioned earlier, the successes gained in anti-colonial struggles on the African continent could largely be attributed to the 'women' factor (Ilesanmi, 2018). South African women, for instance, emerged as primary catalysts for protests against the apartheid regime. These women first participated in resistance movements through women's branches of the larger male dominated liberation organizations, such as the African National Congress. This phenomenon cut across other anti-apartheid groups like student groups and so on (Benson, 2020). Indeed, the role of women in such political movements and the struggles cannot be underestimated and we see the impact Kofi leaving the UNIA had on the organization. It is believed that after the demise of Laura Kofi, many of the state branches of the UNIA collapsed. Again, Mama and Abbas (2014) further intimate that the very formal foundation of Pan-Africanism, which points to the 1900 congress in London, was organized as a reaction to Western imperialism and colonialism by a crop of African-American, West Indian and African Intelligentsia. They advance this argument to support the elitist and male-dominated tag. The African Association formed by Henry Sylvester Williams, who was a West Indian elite living in London at the time, was composed of a crop of elite class of people. Hence, the

transposition from Pan-African Association to the Pan-African Congress meant a continuation of the status quo (Geiss, 1969).

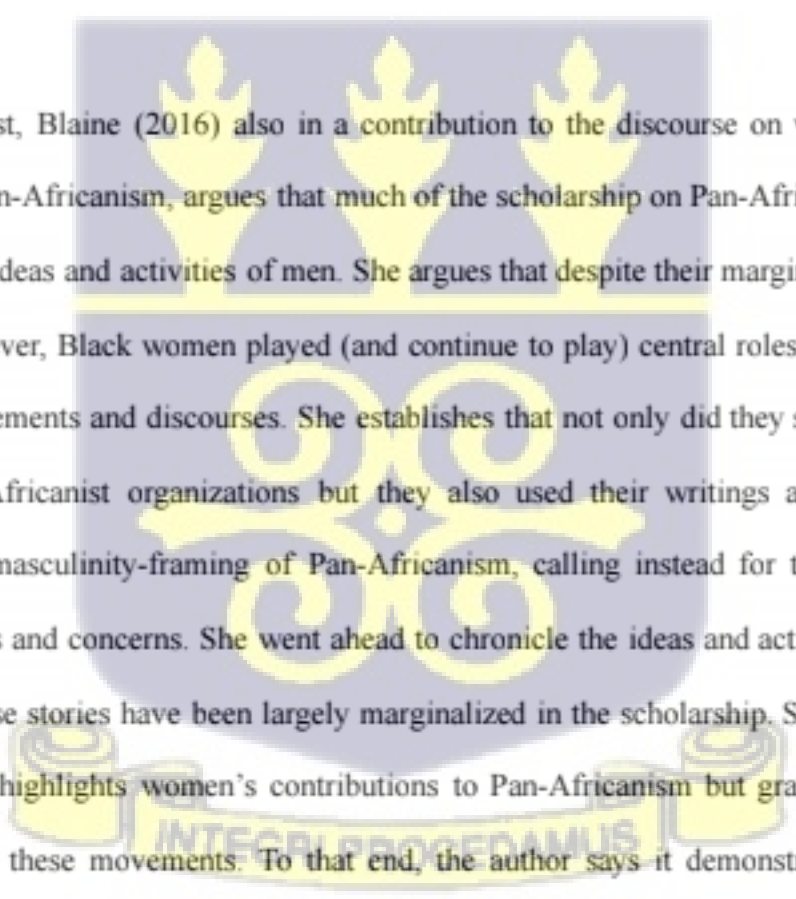
Furthermore, some writers have also argued that the elitist nature of early Pan-Africanism within the period under review, stems from W.E.B. Du Bois' intellectual influence on the Movement as an 'Intellectual Movement' extended to the conferences. This culture of intellectualism was transferred to other stalwarts who would join later such as Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, Nnamdi Azikiwe, George Padmore, Julius Nyerere, and Jomo Kenyatta, just to mention a few. Walden describes them as 'Intellectual heirs' of Du Bois (Walden, 1974). Walden asserts that Du Bois' influence on Pan-Africanism was largely intellectual and many women could not break through this fortress. If early Pan-Africanism would therefore carry the label as an 'Intellectual Movement' (Geiss, 1967, p. 720), then there is a just reason. One would understand why it had such an elitist appeal and not a mass appeal at the early stages.

It is also important to mention that the crop of Africans from the continent of Africa who would later carry the mantle of Pan-Africanism and take charge of its leadership were also of the elitist, intelligentsia group, many of whom were students studying abroad. As far back as the 1930s, Du Bois himself described the Pan-African Movement as one that aims at an 'intellectual understanding' and cooperation of all groups of African descent (Esedebe, 1994). Such comments tend to give credence to the school-of-thought that argues that the elitist composition and posture of Pan-Africanism might have been a deliberate and calculated strategy adopted by its founding fathers and pioneers. Also, the argument that women were not major contributors to Pan-Africanism may be a bit overstretched. There may not have been enough women representation but the few made significant impact. In Adi and Sherwood (2003), it is established that since 1787, forty Pan-Africanists were surveyed and

only three of them were women. Do we interpret this to mean that the women recorded were the only ones who played significant roles in the movement or the records captured only these three? I believe there were more women whom the records and literature are silent on.

Other authors have presented alternative opinions and it pays to establish some balance in the argument. Prominent among the authors who have written to reject the notion that PanAfricanism was not elitist and or, male dominated is Nangwaya (2016). Nangwaya (2016) makes a case for women activism in early Pan-Africanism. According to Nangawaya, several women who contributed actively to Pan-Africanism are only suffering from political obscurity instigated by the available literature. She argues that due to the seeming revolutionary element in subsequent Pan-African activism, it can easily appear to be the exclusive domain of men. Nangawaya further mentions that Pan-Africanist women in the diaspora contributed immensely to the Movement right from its inception and at the 1900 Conference in London. Referring to the Haitian Pan-Africanist, Benito Sylvain's report on the conference which is captured in Martin's (1984) book which studies Pan-Africanism from the era of slavery and beyond. Nangawaya mentions that there were at least six African women at the maiden conference: Anna H. Jones, Anna Julia Cooper, Fannie Barrier Williams and Ella D. Barrier from the United States, and Mrs. Loudin and Ms. Adams from Ireland, among the fifty-one African delegates. She claimed that these women were not simply observers at this international gathering but they also played prominent roles. She points out that Anna Julia Cooper delivered a paper titled, 'The Negro Problem in America' while Anna H. Jones spoke on the subject, 'The Preservation of Racial Individuality'. The contributions of these two women to PanAfricanism is well-documented (Duncan,2009). This, however, does not deny the argument of the lack of adequate mention in literature.

The argument goes beyond the concept of imbalanced female representation to adequate mention in the relevant literature. It is admitted that the fact that early Pan-Africanism is tagged as masculine and elitist does not mean there were no significant women contributions (House, 2015). The contrary argument has also been advanced that the fact that some women played some roles does not also negate the belief that the Movement within the period under scrutiny was male-dominated and elitist. Male dominance is not used only in reference to a total rejection of active female participation, but also the balances or the ratio and proportion of representation, as well as the gendered posture. Even in the face of inadequate reportage, it is still believed that these active female representations and contributions were rather the exceptions than the norm.



Another Activist, Blaine (2016) also in a contribution to the discourse on women, gender, politics, and Pan-Africanism, argues that much of the scholarship on Pan-Africanism tends to emphasize the ideas and activities of men. She argues that despite their marginalization in the literature, however, Black women played (and continue to play) central roles in shaping Pan Africanist movements and discourses. She establishes that not only did they start and lead an array of Pan-Africanist organizations but they also used their writings and speeches to challenge the masculinity-framing of Pan-Africanism, calling instead for the inclusion of women's voices and concerns. She went ahead to chronicle the ideas and activism of a cadre of women whose stories have been largely marginalized in the scholarship. Significantly, the issue not only highlights women's contributions to Pan-Africanism but grapples with how gender informs these movements. To that end, the author says it demonstrates how ideas about Pan-Africanism and the dynamics of these movements were very much shaped by social relations between men and women and particular ideas about gendered divisions of labor (Blaine, 2018). Suffice to mention that women such as Madam Laura Kofi made

significant contributions to Garveyism and to the Pan-African cause in the 1920s but very little is recorded on her.

In agreement with the school-of-thought that women have largely been marginalized in the records of Pan-African history and that the few women (compared to the male representation) who made prominent and significant contributions must be adequately represented in literature, it is also important to point to the emerging trend of some women scholars working in this field to ensure adequate women active involvement and representation in contemporary Pan Africanism. There is still so much to do to totally eradicate the gender imbalance. It has gone through diverse challenges and stages of metamorphosis and gradually the necessary changes will be made. Indeed, the male dominance label is not just a product of the literature per se but a fair description of the movement which can be attributed to the level of gender consciousness of the period and also the availability of substantial numbers of women willing to partake in the activities of the movement.

Elitism, on the other hand, could have been a conscious strategy and it could also have been incidental; a product of the times. Either way, it is urgent, going forward, for Pan-Africanism to weane itself of these tags. Whether the situation has improved in contemporary times is still very much debatable. Blaine (2018) argues that if we are to create a decolonial world and consciousness, in which all forms of oppression are eliminated, we need to deal with the fact that among the many “pitfalls” of the struggle for Pan-Africanism since 1945 has been sexism or patriarchy or what Nyabola (2016) refers to as “Man-Africanism” (Biney, 2017)<sup>12</sup>. This is a very vivid and picturesque satire on Pan-Africanism and its perceived patriarchal outlook. The above discussions paint a picture of the circumstances within which Laura Kofi had to ‘break the ice’ and surge forward to establish her name in the annals of Pan-African history.

Also, Farmer (2016) shares similar sentiments in the article that focuses on African men and women and the issues of patriarchy and Pan-Africanism. Farmer (2016) also points to the patriarchal nature of the Pan-African Movement as a legacy inherited from the early Pan African stalwarts. We can refer to several pieces of literature that clearly show that Pan Africanism (even in contemporary times) is not just male dominated but also patriarchal in posture. This statement from Shepperson and Drake (1986) is most significant to this discussion. They expressed that if Pan-Africanism in the English-speaking world was started by intellectuals from the Caribbean, Afro-American intellectuals were not far behind them (Shepperson and Drake, 1986). Being founded by intellectuals, it was almost certain that Pan Africanism was going to function in an environment of elitism, a niche it should have weaned itself off over the period but which it has failed to do comprehensively. The involvement largely of a class of elitist and educated urban men would significantly drive the Pan-African Movements over the period.



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<sup>12</sup> Biney (2017) referred to Nanjala Nyabola's article published on May 23, 2016 in *The New Inquiry* titled, 'Eulogy for Pan-Africanism: Long Live Man-Africanism'.

In sum, whether the Pan-African Movement between 1900 and 1958 was elitist or male dominated may still be subjected to debate. This is a question that may best be answered based on one's position and the facts available. It will also vary largely based on the period in question and the prevailing factors within each period. It is admissible that early Pan-Africanism was (even if just a tag or label) elitist and indeed male-dominated. However, it may be observed that these labels came about, not necessarily out of a conscious, deliberate act or decision to form an elitist and male-dominated movement, but the demands of the times, and the political and socio-cultural atmosphere at the time resulted in Pan-Africanism taking on the elitist and male-dominated form (Atta-Asiedu, 2020).

There are two schools-of-thought that have debated this topic; one writes strongly against the elitist and male-dominance outlook and another does the opposite, especially in the area of women's contributions towards the Pan-African course during the period. Much concentration was placed on the congresses and conferences from 1900 to 1958. Within a struggle for emancipation was inherent oversight for active women participation, a strategy which if it had been earlier adopted, would have enhanced and sped the course of Pan-Africanism. It is therefore vital to study the Pan-African conferences. The discussion of the conferences will focus on the organization, representation, and major highlights that can best explore the question of male dominance and elitism or otherwise. It is important to point out that the discourse on Pan-Africanism is very broad and failure to properly demarcate clear lines and observe proper periodization and themes can throw any relevant discussion out of context and beyond the parameters set. Fluidity and elasticity are major attributes (whether negative or positive will depend on the outcome) of the Pan-African course.

Secondly, the conferences and congresses are significant to this discussion because they gave breath and life to the existence of Pan-Africanism. It can therefore be said that contemporary Pan-Africanism traces its roots to the conferences. Take the conferences out of the discussion and what we will be left with is a picture of a skeletal entity caught up in a perceived quagmire of confusion, strife, lack of proper organization, and all the negative attributes and connotations one can think of. A discussion of Pan-Africanism that takes out the congresses will be denying the very structures that gave hope to its many proponents and posed a threat to Western imperialism, challenging discrimination and segregation. Hence, the decision to discuss the perception of Pan-Africanism as elitist and male-dominated, from the perspective of the conferences or congresses is appropriate.

#### 4.4 THE CONFERENCES

Early Pan-Africanism was expressed through conferences and congresses. A discussion of the emerging stages and growth of the Pan-African concept cannot be discussed outside the parameters of these conferences. They constitute the very foundation and soul of Pan-Africanism globally (Adejumobi 2008). Significant in the conferences is the organization and constitution of members and participants. In discussing the question of male dominance, a better picture can be drawn when the conferences are dissected and discussed in a progressive and comparative sense. This discussion will give a clear picture of where Pan-Africanism started in terms of female representation and where it ended, stretching the discussion to contemporary times. In this section I discuss the composition of membership in each of the conferences, paying close attention to gender disparity and the elitist arguments and demonstrating that these were the major flaws of early Pan-Africanism.

#### 4.4.1 THE MAIDEN CONFERENCE

The 1900 Conference was the maiden gathering for this cause. Held in London from the 23rd to the 25th of July, it was strategically positioned so that tourists of African origin could be present for both the conference and the Paris Exhibition. The records credit the Trinidadian Lawyer Henry Sylvester Williams as the original brain behind the organization of the maiden conference (Adejumobi, 2008). About 50 delegates were at the conference, coming from the West Indies, the USA, and the U.K. Names mentioned include Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, John Alcindor, Dadabhai Naoroji, John Archer, Henry Francis Downing, and W. E. B. Du Bois, with Bishop Alexander Walters of the AME Zion Church chairing proceedings (David, 2009). It is mentioned that Bishop Walters observed that it was the first time in history that Black people from many parts of the world had gathered to discuss pertinent matters to the Black race (Salamone, 2009).

It is important to observe that although the gender representation was grossly imbalanced, there were few prominent women at the conference. One Anna Jones, a Canadian-American, delivered a speech on 'The Preservation of Racial Equality' and another female, Anna Cooper, also presented a paper on the 'Negro Problem in America'. Admittedly, the composition of delegates at the maiden conference was visibly elitist and saying it was male dominated will also not be wrong (Hooker, 1974; Khaminwa, 2009). In actual fact, the 1919 Conference is often referred to as the first conference but one does not see the need not to recognize 1900 as the first conference, which had about 57 delegates from 15 countries attending the meeting. The low attendance is attributed to the British and American governments' refusal to grant passports and visas to citizens expected to attend. The attendees are listed as follows: Eliezer

Cadet (Universal Negro Improvement Association); Gratien Candace (Guadeloupe); Blaise Diagne (Senegal); French Commissioner General of the Ministry of Colonies, William Jernagin, Washington (United States); Charles D. B. King (Liberia); Richard R. Wright; and Robert Russa Moton (Worley and Contee, 1970).

The point of interest is in the fact that a female representation in the person of Ida Gibbs Hunt, wife of William Henry Hunt played a very significant role in the organization of this conference, together with Du Bois. She also played the role of a primary translator at the conference. The total number of women present is not clear but it is certain that female representation was woefully inadequate compared to the male representation. The composition was largely elitist and male-dominated. Suffice to say that the very foundation of the conferences, which may be described as the bedrock of Pan-Africanism, was elitist and male dominated. That is how Pan-Africanism was birthed, that is how it was nurtured and that is how it has grown up.

#### **4.4.2 THE SECOND CONFERENCE**

Another Congress was held in 1921 with sessions held in Paris, Brussels, and London from the latter part of August to the first week of September. The records mention that representatives came from the Caribbean as well as from Britain and the United States. It is significant to note the presence of an Indian activist called Shapurji Saklatvala (David, 2009). This conference was significant based on the focus on change and the fact that Du Bois forwarded the resolutions to the League of Nations. It was also significant due to the position of delegates who represented Africans of French origin. Their rejection of the resolutions and later rejection of the Pan-African ideals is most significant. Again, the records are not certain

of the representation of women at this conference and the roles they played. It is however believed that once again, it was elitist in nature and male-dominated (Amy, 2004).

#### **4.4.3 THE THIRD CONFERENCE**

The 1923 Conference is said to be the most disorganized one. It was held in London and Lisbon. The French group had indicated that they would not be represented at the meeting; although some delegates of French origin attended the meeting, they were there in their individual capacities. It is believed that Ida Gibbs Hunt was present at the meeting (Roberts, 2013). She may have been the only female present at the conference. Again, this conference followed the status quo of elitism and male dominance. After 1923, there were a series of other meetings held. The 1927 Pan-African Congress was held in New York City and adopted resolutions that were similar to the 1923 Congress (Roberts, 2013). Once again the 1927 representation was largely imbalanced in favor of men and was very elitist in representation and composition.

#### **4.4.4 THE 1945 CONGRESS**

The 1945 Conference was very significant for two major reasons. First of all, for the first time in as many congresses, key on the agenda were issues on women in the West Indies. The second reason was the active involvement of Mrs. Amy Ashwood Garvey- the first wife of Marcus Garvey- in the organization of the conference. It is mentioned that in early 1944, two persons from the British West Indies approached Du Bois about the necessity of a post-War Pan-African meeting. One of them was Mrs. Amy Jacques Garvey, second wife of Marcus Garvey (Shepperson and Drake, 1986). Key organizers of the 1945 Conference in Manchester include George Padmore and Dr. Kwame Nkrumah and about 200 delegates from all over the world were present (Adi, 2009).

This conference is touted as the one that highlighted women issues the more and had more women present, although the male-to-female imbalance was still prevalent. The active African representation makes this conference more unique from previous ones. Shepperson (1986) mentions that female representation at the 1945 Conference was the highest since the conference began. Historian Saheed Adejumo writes in *The Pan African Congresses, 1900-1945* that the fifth congress was dominated in majority by delegates from Africa and Africans working or studying in Britain (Adejumo, 2008). Present at the conference were middle-class Black-British and African-American Intellectuals (Adejumo, 2009). Adejumo's description of the 1945 conference shows that it was quite representative and to an extent, compromised the elitist tag. Much as representation cut across, it was still largely elitist and again the males dominated regardless of the improvements achieved in female representation. It saw a transition to an elite African class of politicians and a crop of the African intelligentsia although the magnitude had comparatively dwindled.

#### **4.4.5 THE ALL-AFRICA PEOPLES' CONFERENCE**

Fast-forwarding to 1958, the elitist and male-dominant nature of the All-Africa Peoples' Congress, which was held in Accra in December 1958, was a reflection of the composition and nature of previous Pan-African conferences. As already mentioned in this chapter, these were products of the times rather than a calculated effort to marginalize women and the masses. Much to say that this crop of intellectuals saw the urgent need to champion a course of freedom for all. It is mentioned that Mrs. Du Bois was at this Congress to represent his aged and ailing husband and read a paper on his behalf. Also, Sekou Toure of Guinea was represented by his wife (Shepperson and Drake, 2008). The composition of delegates at the congress was diverse, from all over the world, representing nations and organizations. At the

dawn of independence for some African states such as Ghana, the political atmosphere across the continent was still largely male dominated and elite influenced.

#### 4.5 CHALLENGES TO PAN-AFRICANISM

The failure of Pan-Africanism to achieve set objectives over the period between 1900 and 1958 (and beyond) can be attributed to a plethora of reasons. These objectives can be summed as the attempt to establish a culture of oneness and brotherhood among all persons of African descent, whether those living on the continent of Africa or the diaspora, to mobilize a return to the motherland and to fight for emancipation from colonial rule.

If the theory of political mobilization will be referred to, the two organizational and structural defects or flaws of the period were firstly, denying Pan-Africanism a mass or popular culture involvement; and secondly, denying the leadership and structural beams a more active, visible, and operational women involvement. These are two lessons the apartheid struggle learnt from. The success of the Ukrainian revolution from the 18th of February to the 23rd of February, 2014 is credited largely to the political struggles' leadership taking their protest from the corridors of the elite and driving it through the machinery of the masses and onto the streets, with women playing very active roles. We can draw on further examples, both on the continent and across the globe, from the role popular culture space and women have played in political movements all over the world.

The elitist and male-dominated tag ascribed to early Pan-Africanism is a sentiment that has been shared by some prominent persons in academia and the world of scholarship. I will continue this discussion by referring to some positional comments and observations made by certain authors on the perception that Pan-Africanism was elitist and male-dominated.

Political and ideological movements the world over have triumphed in the pursuit of their goals largely due to the role 'popular culture', on whose wings the movement practicalized or implemented its ideals on the ground, played. A significant pointer is the role of the masses in the apartheid struggle in South Africa.

Taking a political struggle off the boardrooms and into the streets was a key strategy missing in early Pan-Africanism; lessons many nationalist agitations on the continent of Africa picked from. Geiss (1969) in the introduction of his paper on Pan-Africanism, mentions that although Pan-Africanism is talked about and discussed a great deal, it is ironically the least known political movement or concept of our time. This may sound unacceptable at a glance but further and critical studies prove Geiss (1969) right. Once again, the absence of popular and mass participation as well as active women involvement can be pointed out as the reasons for Geiss' (1969) position. Pan-Africanism has remained within the corridors of elitism and in academia and those are the places it prides its popularity from.

Suffice to say that when Madam Laura defied the status quo and moved the mobilization of the UNIA from the boardrooms and the elite into a more popular space, within a matter of two years she had achieved so much. One could conduct a random survey in the streets and the ghettos of any country, or even on the campuses of a university, and ask randomly, people's knowledge about Pan-Africanism and the interpretations may vary. Indeed, in academic circles and at the apex of politics, the term Pan-Africanism may be bandied about but as Geiss (1969) points out, that it is also the least known political movement of contemporary times and he attributes this to its elitist and chauvinistic nature.

Furthermore, it has also been mentioned that early Pan-Africanism, being elitist and male dominated, was a reflection of the times and circumstances surrounding its active emergence as a movement and a political ideology. The argument is that it was not a deliberate strategy but an unfortunate, yet unpredictable, outcome of the social and political environment of the times. Therefore, its elitist and male-dominated nature was not necessarily a policy of the movement. This sentiment was expressed by Sherwood (2012), who argues that the concerns of Pan-Africanists, their philosophies, and politics naturally depended on the times they were living in. This argument, however, poses some fundamental problems. If a group of people see the need to organize and fight for their rights and freedom, within the same victimized group there cannot be a section that suffer extra deprivation for reasons of their sex and status in the society. Thus, the oppressed cannot subject the same treatment to another group within its fold. If it was an unconscious development which emerged as a result of the culture of the day, then drastic improvements should have accompanied radical cultural changes over the years (Dustan, 2016).

Again, as part of her contributions to the discourse on whether Pan-Africanism is an elitist and male-dominated ideal, Khaminwa (2009) in a strongly-worded article, asserted that Pan-Africanism is an elitist ideal that does not come out of any real relationships between the people of different countries that are populated by African people (Khaminwa, 2009). This is a position she strongly defends in a letter. Adding to the discourse is the continuation of Ilesanmi (2018) who advances the argument further by looking at the demographics as far as women's visibility in decision-making processes in Africa is concerned<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> Further reference to 'Women's Political Participation'; Afro Barometer 2021 published by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (2021)

Furthermore, Adi (2018) makes similar observations about the organization and structure of Pan-Africanism. Adi (2018) emphasizes the point that Pan-Africanism has elitist origins. Adi (2018) argues that Pan-Africanism also 'accepts colonially-imposed identities and tends to fuse complex and intersectional identities'. Given this, Adi (2018) provides us with convincing examples of how we should guard against the top-down, elitist form of mobilization. This has been the argument; that for any political mobilization to achieve substantial results, the bottomup, mass or popular approach must be adopted. This is the strategy Laura Kofi adopted and achieved highly-commendable results. Another point to note is that the anger of the organizers of the Black Power Movement was towards the failure of the elitist approach to adequately address their concerns. They resorted to popular culture themes (the impact of the element of violence may be discussed separately) to press home their demands.

Adi's (2018) provides guidance on how to organize and further Pan-Africanism goals and objectives (as mentioned above) if the Movement is to succeed. Just as Geiss (2012) intimated, Adi (2018) also observed that a top-down elitist mobilization as a political mobilization strategy has not worked for the Pan-African cause. So we clearly see why Madam Laura Kofi succeeded and others did not succeed. It is important to mention that although contemporary Pan-Africanism has over the years improved in shifting the movement from the elite space into a more popular space, and enhanced female representation and female voices, there is still more to be done. Whereas Pan-Africanism has not fully weaned itself of the elitist and male-dominance tag, other forms of cultural and religious contributions to the Pan-African course have achieved immense successes in this area. Women groups and feminist advocates keep lamenting have been on this path for many years. Adi (2018)

mentions some of the women who have played significant roles in the development of Pan-Africanism. The only contention has to do with the degree of contribution in comparative terms and the circumstances in which these contributions were made. The name of one Alice Kinloch, a South African, is mentioned and she is credited with the initiation of modern Pan-Africanism at the beginning of the 20th Century. The term 'Black Internationalism' is also credited to a woman named Jeanne Nardal, who first coined it. Reddock (2014) also deals effectively with this subject.

In conclusion, it is noteworthy that throughout the history of the Pan-African movement, women representation has been woefully inadequate and the involvement of the masses has also been a huge challenge. It is significant therefore to point to Kofi's approach that departed drastically from the status quo and more importantly, the fact that it yielded immense results is worth mentioning. The Pan-African scholar, Campbell (1994), said that, "(Pan-Africanism) ideological history has tended to focus on the contribution of great heroes, mostly males, an approach which denies the link to a broader social movement and the role of women" (Campbell, 1994, p. 286).

In this section I have attempted to paint a picture of the Pan-African movement and the entire course of Pan-Africanism. I have shown that not only was it couched in elitism but it was largely very pro-male. This is to help us understand and appreciate the weight of Kofi's short but very impactful contribution to the course of Pan-Africanism and place her in the right historical context.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### WHO WAS LAURA ADORKOR KOFI?

#### 5.1 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In the history of Africans in the diaspora, a woman called Princess Laura Adorkor Kofi, believed to be a princess and a prophetess, was said to have travelled from the Gold Coast (presently called Ghana) to the United States in the 1920s, motivated by a vision from God, to encourage African-Americans to return to Africa. Madam Kofi is quoted to have said:

I am a representative from the Gold Coast of West Africa, seeking the welfare of Africa's children everywhere. God called me out of Africa to come over here and tell you His people what He would have you to do. (Newman 1996, p. 136)

Another scholar, Feinberg (1989) makes reference to this proclamation by Laura Kofi.

Kofi is believed to have been born between the years 1890 and 1892 and died in 1928, making her a woman of about 36 to 38 years at the time she died. Her place of birth is not known but she is recorded to have been born in 'Asofa' in Ghana. Other records mention Sempe in the Greater Accra region of Ghana (Newman (1996). Another record mentions that she was born Laura Champion in Alabama in the United States (White, 2016). Another record mentions the Ashanti region of Ghana (White, 2016). The uncertainty in her place of birth signals the magnitude of the challenge in ascertaining the facts about her identity. Not much is known about her family background apart from what scholars have recorded as her probable

family relations and place of origin. Regardless, the magnitude of her contributions to the struggle for black emancipation and the crusade to get Africans in the diaspora to return home cannot be contested. Although her activism in these areas lasted for a comparatively short time, the records of the immense impact she made cannot be denied. The fact that Newman (1996) and White (2014) disagree on her ethnic origin is proof of the controversy surrounding who she really was. However, as earlier indicated, the debates surrounding the controversies on her identity must not be the focus when Kofi is being researched or being written about. Research on Kofi, just like her male contemporaries, must focus on her immense contribution to the African liberation movement.

If the limited years of her entry into the United States and immediate active involvement in the UNIA theory is critically assessed, it will be noticed that her political activism and subsequent rise to fame was very rapid. Without any prior political experience recorded, Kofi's immediate rise in the UNIA signals her political clout. Kofi's rise at the helm of an organization that is recorded to have been pro-male at the time (the UNIA) can be attributed to her personal drive and self-motivation. She had to force her way up the ladder, ignoring all the social and cultural obstacles of the times. One can safely say that Kofi literally came out of obscurity, she had no recorded previous political experience, she had no contacts within the UNIA but she singlehandedly and within a very short period rose to become a colossus within the organization and in black American politics of the times.

Studying the archival records on Kofi, it is noticeable that she had so much impact on the UNIA and in the black community in the United States within that period of time and the results were seen many years after her death. Blaine (2018) suggests that although believed to be a foreigner in the United States, Laura Kofi's quick adjustment to the political terrain is

most commendable. Her road trips which she embarked on, often alone, and her ability to fit into the system so quickly are most commendable. Worthy of mention is her knowledge of the challenges facing the black communities across the United States and the degree of quick immersion into American society. Indeed, some scholars have pointed to the fact that she may have been familiar with the culture and the politics because she may very well have been American or might have lived in America much longer than she is believed to have been (Lawton, 2020). It has also been suggested that although she was a foreigner who had just arrived, Kofi learned on the job and did so within a short time. In fact, she showed no sign of being a stranger in a foreign land if indeed she was.

Another issue worth analysing is how Kofi arrived in the United States and her emergence on the political scene. Some authors have conceded that Kofi's migration from the Gold Coast to the United States is in itself shrouded in mystery (Blaine, 2018). Commenting on this, Duncan (2013) points out Laura Kofi's strengths, her impact and legacy as being the positives that can be attributed to her but she also adds that her claim to be Ghanaian may not be right as Blaine (2018) had stated in her study of Kofi. According to Duncan (2013, pp. 218-238), Kofi's trip to the United States occurred in phases and introduced her to audiences throughout the Diaspora from Africa to Canada. Along the way, she went to the Panama Canal Zone in 1925 as the featured guest speaker at a UNIA meeting in Colon, Panama. Her experience in Colon brought her notoriety that followed her to Detroit UNIA circles in 1926. This information by Duncan (2013) gives a fair idea of Kofi's political journey prior to her attainment of fame in 1926.

There are obviously challenges in trying to periodize Kofi's migration to the United States and her political journeys within the United States. Studying various accounts rendered by

different scholars, the analysis is that, prior to 1924 when she announced herself on the political scene, she had engaged in a series of travels to other parts of Africa, the Caribbean and some European and North American countries (Newman, 1996). It was through these journeys that Kofi schooled herself in the politics of the times. Although not very well educated, and this is seen in the difficulties she had in expressing herself fluently in the English language. Also, archived records of her messages to the AUC stored in the AUC archives clearly show that Laura Kofi had some challenges expressing herself fluently in the English language. This shortcoming however did not deter her from becoming arguably one of the best orators of the times.

Another observation worth pointing out is an article published in the March 21, 1928 column of The New York Times. This article is a vivid demonstration and a classic representation of the events of the times. Mention is made of King Knesiphi, who is boldly referred to as Laura Kofi's father. This is of utmost interest. Another article published by The New York Times on the 20th of March, 1928 reported a notification purported to have emanated from 'King Knesiphi', giving credence to the assertion that indeed there was one King Knesiphi of the Gold Coast who admitted to being the father of Madam Kofi. It is important to clarify that apart from the mentioning of her father, not much is known about Kofi's birth, her family, upbringing and growth. This explains the gaps in her biography. What scholars have been able to unearth are her active political years in the United States.

## 5.2 POLITICAL ACTIVISM

Politically, Laura Adorkor Kofi was a leader in the Black Nationalist Movement and founder of the African Universal Church (a religious-political organization), before her unfortunate assassination in 1928. She was a religious leader and a Pan-Africanist, an orator and a woman

full of charisma and zeal. The history of Pan-Africanism and black religious nationalists will be incomplete without mentioning or chronicling the impact Kofi made on the Black Nationalist Movements, especially the Universal Negro Improvement Association. Focusing on Kofi's political activism, White (2014) renders a very detailed account highlighting Madam Kofi's Pan-African activism across the United States and beyond. This is done in so much detail that many of the authors who have written on Madam Kofi's engagements with the UNIA quote and reference White (Atta-Asiedu, 2020).

According to White's (2016) account, Madam Laura Kofi joined the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) founded in 1914 by Marcus Garvey, almost immediately upon her arrival in the United States. The exact date of her formally joining the association is not known, but it is believed it was in the early 1920s. She was immediately appointed as a field director and spokesperson, traveling to various parts of the United States to 'preach' the message of the association (White, 2016). Prophetess Laura Adorkor Kofi is believed to have joined the UNIA, because it was the most organized pro-emancipation group at the time, and she believed her objectives could be achieved with the support of the group. However, this decision, whether right or wrong, would prove to be a critical turning point in her life for both positive and negative reasons. Positive in the sense that Kofi made her political impact by using the UNIA as a pedestal, however, the same UNIA played a significant role in her assassination. Some researchers limit her active role in the UNIA to only about a year and half, but these were very effective years (Newman (1996). Other scholars believe that Kofi arrived in the United States in the year 1924 and formally became active in the UNIA in the same year, until her departure in the early part of 1928 and demise in March 1928 (White, 2016).

According to Lawton (2020), Kofi espoused a brand of Pan-Africanism that encouraged black people to embrace African culture, become economically self-sufficient, and seek out religious redemption. Initially, Laura Kofi had immense support from Garvey, because he also saw that he could draw on Laura's talents, speaking prowess, and public appeal to his advantage. Madam Laura Kofi instantly became the 'new big thing' when it came to Black emancipation activities. The attention she attracted drew increasing members to join the UNIA (Carlson 2014, Atta-Asiedu, 2020). White (2014) also observes that, for many African Americans, it was their first time listening to someone from Africa. She spoke about the greatness of Africa. She spoke about the movement from Africa to liberate the people in America, and that there was a divine relationship between Africans on the continent of Africa, Africans in the east and Africans in the west. She also spoke of pride and strength of the black race (Carracco, 2018). While Garvey was in detention over a mail scandal, Madam Laura Kofi continued to grow in popularity and this made Garvey very uncomfortable.

Unfortunately, after Garvey's release, the two had fallen-out and Garvey began to describe her as fake and constantly appealed for her arrest (Carracco, 2018). As a result, Madam Kofi felt threatened, especially when Garvey was released. She, therefore, relocated from Miami to Jacksonville and resigned from the UNIA. Other records say she was sacked (Newman 1996). Some authors have argued, though, that Garvey expelled her from the UNIA and Kofi did not resign willingly (Lawton, 2020). Also, Newman (1996) and White (2014) both agree that she resigned. White (2014) mentions that her gradual introduction of religion into her messages greatly unsettled the UNIA and formed part of her problems with Garvey, but Lawton (2020) believes that the reason for her expulsion was the belief that she was raising funds in the name of the UNIA to purchase ships to advance her personal 'back-to-Africa' agenda (Lawton, 2020). Between 1926 and August 1927, after she had visited Marcus Garvey in the

Atlanta Penitentiary, Princess Kofi established branches of the Universal African Orthodox Church in New Orleans, Alabama, and Florida, while soliciting members for the UNIA and helping to revitalize branches and divisions that were dormant. Duncan (2009) compares her work in the UNIA to those of Jacques Garvey, Davis and De Mena. Kofi was heralded as a prophetess of Garveyism while the Miami Division 286 viewed her as the female John-the-Baptist. Per Duncan's (2013) analysis, historiographical considerations of Kofi by Bair (1996) and biographical sketches of her work in the black church by historian Newman (1996) focus primarily on her as a religious charismatic speaker (Duncan, 2013, pg.8).

### 5.3 EXPULSION FROM THE UNIA AND THE BACK-TO-AFRICA VISION

Kofi's departure from the UNIA was unexpected and sudden. Several accusations were leveled against her by Garvey and his close associates. One of such charges leveled against Kofi which contributed to her expulsion from the UNIA was that she had breached Article 1, Section 40 of the General Laws of the UNIA which talked about misappropriation of funds. It says:

No officer or member of the Universal Negro Improvement Association and the African Communities' League shall retain in his possession for more than twenty-four hours, funds or moneys intended for the Universal Negro Improvement Association and the African Communities' League<sup>13</sup>.

Kofi in her campaign, had indeed solicited funds for the UNIA and had been accused by Garvey of not having his consent to do so: one of the reasons Garvey became furious with her. Kofi was accused of embezzlement, but no records show that she was given a hearing.

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<sup>13</sup> Section 40 of the General Laws of the UNIA

The fact that Kofi's rising fame and popularity threatened Garvey is open-secret that cannot be ignored. Facing involuntary repatriation and uncertainty in his future leadership of the organization, and the probable choice of Kofi by the majority of the members as his replacement, a conspiracy may have to be hatched and effected to get rid of Laura Kofi (Lawton, 2020).

Studying Duncan (2009), she emphasizes that in her opinion, Kofi's idea of going back to Africa was both literal and figurative. Duncan (2009) further argues that Kofi had a vision to connect Africans all over the world to their ancestral home. Duncan (2009) also mentions that the economic successes of African Americans and the journey to financial independence could be linked to the impoverished state of many African nations. This may be figurative but in a nutshell, Kofi believed that the souls of Africans in the diaspora were linked to those of their brothers and sisters in Africa. Duncan (2009) explains that Kofi dreamt of creating an Africa for African-Americans in the United States as much as she dreamt of encouraging mass repatriation.

Kofi also preached reverse repatriation where Africans could also come to the United States and feel at home much as they would in Africa (Duncan, 2013). From this, we realize that Kofi's brand of repatriation did not preach the cutting of ties completely with the United States, which had become their new home but a connection with Africa even when some did not want to physically leave. This is what sets Kofi's brand of repatriation different from others such as Chief Sam and Marcus Garvey (Duncan, 2013).

Although Madam Laura Kofi did not live to see her vision of getting Africans in the Atlantic Diaspora to return to Africa, records show that her short crusade along the length and breadth

of the United States, carrying a 'prophetic message' of voluntary reparation sank very well with hundreds if not thousands of African-Americans. Credit is attributed to her oratory skill and the employment of religious connotations to gain prominence. This brings to fore the power of religion in emancipation movements. She may not have chalked some of the successes Chief Sam may have chalked amidst the obvious challenges (Coletu, 2019) but she set the atmosphere for many African-Americans to consider making the 'prophetic exodus' back to Africa. It will be most unfair to measure the success or failure of her mission due to the obvious fact of her untimely tragic demise and the short period she had to propagate her message, but we can measure the success she attained in getting her message across to thousands of African-Americans.

Many years down the line, the seeds planted by both Madam Laura and Chief Sam and indeed Garvey himself, who has been tagged as 'father' of the 'back-to-Africa' agenda, saw fruition in the famous 'Year of Return' led by Ghana in the year 2019. Although many authors and researchers doubt the possibility of a holistic return to Africa, there is the increased conviction of a gradual reconnection with Africa over many years to come.

The argument has further been advanced that Kofi's knowledge and passion for Africa was born out of her missionary visits to West Africa with the Red Cross. Indeed, there are records of missionaries who worked in many parts of West Africa. We can point to Emily Christmas Kinch, who travelled to West Africa from 1908 to 1910. She also worked as a missionary in Sierra Leone and Liberia where she established the Eliza Turner Primary School. She also authored a pamphlet based on her time in Africa entitled *West Africa: An Open Door* (Burkett, 1978). Duncan (2009) also conceded that much of the information attributed to Laura Kofi cannot be authenticated with verifiable evidence and records. For example, the

belief that the leaders and people of the Gold Coast sent Kofi with a message to ask when and if African Americans intended to return to their homeland (Duncan, 2013). She encouraged them to come “home” to build and proposed to start an import/export business in Accra to get them started. In this way, Kofi becomes a pioneering entrepreneur and a unique advocate of African American women’s political, social, and economic activism (Duncan, 2013).

Again in Duncan’s (2013) analysis, unlike Chief Sam and other pioneers of the repatriation agenda, Laura Kofey presented a very different strategy for repatriation. Her plans included avoiding any reliance on already established African countries and presented greater opportunities for individuals as well as collective wealth (Duncan, 2013). Duncan points out that Mother Kofi, as she became known, advised that those who will leave for Africa did not settle in the cities that have already been developed. She admonished that they go to the villages and settle there. She said:

That they should prepare to build up the old waste places, that Children go way out among your people and put up their own stores, because the other fellow is going to have and isn't going to give it away to you. (Duncan, 2013, p.228).

According to Duncan (2009), Laura’s Kofi’s strategy for repatriation was reminiscent of the American pioneer experience, where families moved to the west in search of land ownership and business opportunities. A study of the above transcription of portions of Laura Kofi’s speech shows clearly her scanty perception about the then Gold Coast. Her inability to give specific details of the proposed repatriation towns is vividly shown in the above speech. A study of Descendant Epistemology shows Chief Sam’s knowledge of the towns demarcated for the returnees and plans advanced to receive and settle them.

In Duncan's (2009) opinion, Kofi's warnings about seeking 'one's own ground' may have resulted from the example set by the founding of Maryland State in Africa by the Maryland State Colonization Society in 1854. Duncan (2009) asserts that Kofi's awareness of the Maryland example may have come through one of the churches she worked with in Kumasi, Ghana. On the contrary, it is believed that Kofi knew details of the Maryland situation because she was born and bred in the United States and had grown to learn of this history either through formal or informal means. Kofi opted for a different repatriation approach due to the limited success of previous similar efforts. This offers an example of the kind of repatriation scheme Kofey advocated which differed from the one Garvey had in place when she first entered UNIA circles. Both approaches were built on a longstanding effort by African-Americans to establish a home in Africa as early as the 1780s (Duncan, 2013).

Studying the recollections of Emily Kinch and Henrietta Peters (Nicholas & Smith, 2020), it is obvious that the women's position of Africa and issues of repatriation sharply differ from that of their male counterparts who appear to take the credit for initiating the agenda. Laura's viewpoint tallied so much with Kinch and Peters (Nicholas & Smith, 2020). Kofi championed the very best of the positive sides of Africa and never in any of her public speeches made specific reference to Ghana or the Gold Coast. She referred to Africa as a whole. In her references to African culture and political systems she did not pay particular attention to the unique diversities from one African society to another. A mistake very common to many non-Africans who see Africa as a 'country'. Again this causes questions to be raised about her Ghanaian origin. Her speeches identified her more with the system in the United States than in Ghana. She seemed more familiar with the political, social, cultural and religious system in America than she did with Ghana in particular and Africa as a whole. As Duncan (2009) puts

it, not only was Laura Kofey<sup>14</sup> reformulating African colonization efforts, but she was one of the few recorded African women inviting African-Americans to return to their homeland” (Duncan, 2013, p. 225).

It must be noted that while African-Americans and various anti-colonization groups in America and England raised funds and devised plans for the return of slaves and their descendants to Africa, there were few recorded formal invitations to former slaves and free people of color to return to Africa. Laura’s message was that she was sent from Africa to ask African-Americans if they wanted to “*come home, to let us know: and if you don’t want to come, let us know*”<sup>15</sup>In this assumed capacity as an envoy sent from Africa on this special mission, Laura passionately preached this message (Kofi, *Mother’s Sacred Teachings*, p. 17. 27 *Negro World*, August 12, 1922). Kofi’s assumption of a liaison status between Africa and the UNIA at a time when other formal channels had failed may have brought her under scrutiny” (Duncan, 2013).

Duncan (2013) further argues that, it is clear that Kofi presented her message and invitation in terms readily understood by people of the diaspora. In part, it is her presentation and central focus on the redemption of Africa as a means for the Diaspora to reclaim itself that struck a chord with UNIA members and non-members alike. As Duncan (2009) observes, the efficient womanhood of the UNIA was further highlighted by Kofi’s ability to create both fictive and literal links with Africa and the diaspora Africans despite her disagreements with the UNIA leadership. Her message resonated with the membership to such a degree that she was perceived as a threat and attempts were made to discredit her in both the *Negro World* and

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<sup>14</sup> Duncan also used ‘Kofey’ and not ‘Kofi’ in her paper.

<sup>15</sup> Recorded in *Mother’s Sacred Teachings*, page 17, paragraph 27. These are records of Kofi’s messages to the AUC

mainstream press. Duncan (2009) argues that Laura Kofi is another example of the uniqueness of UNIA women and their approach to racial uplift. Her life illustrated the ideologies and practice of racial uplift that blended nationalist trends of the 1920s and the ideals expressed in the women's movement of the same period. Black Nationalism during this period has been defined as a belief that black powerlessness could be overcome by "setting up mechanisms of self-determination" (Duncan, 2013, pg. 222). Laura Kofi introduced what Duncan (2009) describes as a strong female voice into the UNIA and arguably one of the strongest voices on repatriation.

The difference between Kofi's advocacy and that of Marcus Garvey is that while Garvey was specifically advocating for repatriation to Liberia, Kofi focused and emphasized the need to emigrate to other parts of Africa she described as 'less developed'. Her message was simple and unequivocal, that African-Americans should leave to the interior parts of Africa. She did not mention specific African countries she felt were less developed at the time. This has been one of the many criticisms leveled at her approach to repatriation. Unlike Chief Sam who had made considerable preparations in Ghana (Coletu, 2019), Kofi resorted to focusing on repatriation without offering specific details on where to go, how to get there and so on. The major flaw in her organization was the clear unpreparedness in terms of where African-Americans ready to repatriate were to move to. Thus, even if she had succeeded in gathering people ready to leave America, issues of repatriation, destination, lands and so on were going to be a problem. She preached repatriation so passionately but she had no clue where they would be going. Liberia seems to offer the only alternative because it had been established by freed slaves and they would have gladly received brothers and sisters coming to join them. This may be the reason Garvey chose Liberia as the receiving destination.

Again, this narrative conflicts with other narratives recorded by some authors such as White (2014) who claimed that Laura was sent by her father King Knesiphi and also the narrative that the people of the Gold Coast had sent her with a message to their brothers and sisters to go back home. If this narrative is correct then the destination for repatriation should have been Ghana and nowhere else. Kofi should have been clear with her mission. One also questions the position of the colonial government at the time on the repatriation issue. It is recorded how the British Government made Chief Sam's repatriation efforts very difficult and a failure (Coletu, 2019). It is conceivable why Kofi could not have repatriated African-Americans to a British-controlled Gold Coast without resistance.

Furthermore, it is clear that Kofi was not abreast with the political situation in the Gold Coast. She preached repatriation with such simplicity and ignored the cultural, social, political and financial implications. One thing Madam Kofi may have failed to think through was how Africans in the diaspora who returned to Africa would be resettled. Unlike Chief Sam who had made some arrangements with the chiefs of the Eastern Region of Ghana to provide lands for resettlement (Coletu, 2019), there are no records of Madam Laura taking such steps. In any case, was Gold Coast the only country that had been mandated to resettle those who chose to return 'home'? Again, what will incite Madam Laura to make such false misrepresentations and why have historians and researchers not discovered these inconsistencies in her story? The question of fraud, even if it were so, was for strategic and good reasons.

#### **5.4 LAURA KOFI AND THE AFRICAN UNIVERSAL CHURCH**

The formation of the African Universal Church may not have been a well-planned, calculated measure by Laura Kofi; it was an after-thought, to form a religious-political organization that will kill two birds with a stone: sustaining the back-to-Africa agenda, and also imbibing her

followers with her religious beliefs (Blaine, 2018). The AUC was, therefore, niched in a mold, similar to Kimbanguism<sup>17</sup>. It is believed that Laura's choice of the religious posture in accessing the following and getting her message across was very successful. She was seen as a messenger from God and idolized by many. Lawton (2020) in a comment on Laura Kofi argued that the establishment of the African Universal Church (henceforth AUC) by Laura Adorkor Kofi was both accidental and incidental, a decision which although may have been in the long term plan of the founder, had to be prematurely established as a result of her fallout and consequent expulsion from the UNIA. Indeed, a study of some of the archival materials accessed from the Schomburg Library collections on Laura Kofi contain hints of Kofi's concealed desire to usurp the authority of Garvey, stage a subtle coup and exert her authority and leadership over the UNIA.

It is important to observe that Laura Kofi was very ambitious and leading the UNIA may have been her ultimate goal. The fact that Garvey became unsettled at the increasing popularity of this 'stranger' called Kofi was visible in his interactions with the Garveyites during his stay in prison. It is recorded that in many of his letters to the leadership of the UNIA Garvey expressed his unhappiness at the increasing popularity of Laura Kofi (White, 2016). It is important to mention that Madam Laura had already laid the foundation for this coup, harnessing massive support and following, majority of whom were former UNIA members. The coup theory gives credence to the formation of the AUC along the lines of the structure and themes of the UNIA. In the words of Aime Jacque Garvey, in a letter written to Newman (1996), she conceded that Laura was "such an organizer" (Newman (1996), 1996).

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<sup>17</sup> *Kimbanguism was a religious-political movement named after the Priest Simon Kimbangu who resorted to religion to mount a political resistance to Belgian colonial policies in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 1921.*

The formation of the AUC was therefore supposed to be the vehicle through which Kofi was to espouse her religious and political ideologies and to intensify her back-to-Africa agenda.

Again, the records also show that at the initial stages of her involvement in fieldwork and organizing the UNIA in various States across the United States, she had not intensely espoused her divine assignment. She indeed had given hints of her affiliation to royalty and divinity but these were intensified when she left the UNIA and started the AUC. This indeed raises some questions. As mentioned earlier, Laura Kofi was a very intelligent and smart woman who knew exactly what to do, how to do it, and when to do it. She knew that the prevailing conditions of the Black person in the United States were repressive and the need for a 'savior-figure' to give a glimmer of hope was much heightened. So she exploited this very well to her advantage. The AUC was couched in the mold of a religious and nationalist organization in one body. Her messages to the members and sympathizers of the AUC, which had a fair combination of political messages delivered with religious content and context, was key to her mobilization successes. This strategy appealed to many of her followers. Historical records put the formation of the AUC around late 1927 to early 1928. Not much can be written about the AUC prior to Laura's demise because from the records, although it was very vibrant and had the potential of growing into a global force, it had just begun and did not have branches anywhere else in the United States.

It was certain that this was an organization that had been formed around the qualities and charisma of its leader and when the leader was no more and did not have the time to groom a protégé, it ran into crises. It must be put on record that the narrative of Laura Kofi being a Priestess could not be corroborated in the oral narratives collected and sources contacted in

academia but her affiliation to the Red Cross and having served as a missionary was corroborated by the oral narratives accessed. It is important to put it on record that, as part of this study, steps were taken to investigate traces of Kofi's ministry work in the Gold Coast. Archival materials, historical edifices and religious remnants associated with Laura Kofi were looked for but nothing was found. The only oral narratives accessed were her politico-religious activities as the leader and founder of the AUC. The AUC may not have been in existence in any form while Kofi was in Ghana. The first time the organization attempted to establish branches in Ghana and send Missionaries out was the post Kofi era. Although such attempts were made, they were not successful.

Through religion, however, Kofi effectively mobilized a following that heeded to her messages and were very loyal to her. Many of the then and present Laura followers see her as a cult figure and is idolized as such. Some have claimed to have had premonitions of 'Saint Laura' giving them messages, while some have also testified to various divine interventions purported to have been instigated by 'Saint Laura'. In her ability to resort to religion as an effective tool for political mobilization, we do not necessarily see a fake or fraudulent person but a political strategist who knew what to do, how to do it, when to do it, and the people to address. While pointing out the inaccuracies in the historical records, it is important to highlight Kofi's prowess in political mobilization and unique speaking abilities which were her strengths.

### **5.5 A CULT FIGURE AND FEMALE MARCUS GARVEY?**

That Laura Kofi was (is) a cult figure is something that needs attention in the Kofi discourses. The reference to 'cult figure' is not being done in a negative or derogatory sense but rather in a positive light. Much as the sense of religious mysticism and the aura of divinity were

prevalent during Laura's days with the AUC, it intensified when she passed. Adorkor Kofi was not seen as just a political figure, but also, she was seen as a divine messenger of God tasked with a unique assignment to deliver God's people physically and spiritually. A critical study of two materials stored in the AUC archives gives a clear indication of how Kofi was greatly revered by her followers. Although members of present day AUC do not do same with the intensity her followers did when she was alive and during the early stages of her demise, it is noticeable that she still enjoys the status of a 'goddess'. In Nyombolo (1964:58) a collection of Kofi's messages purported to have been delivered through her by God, titled 'Mother's Sacred Teachings' contain these original messages of divine nature.

Data accessed from the AUC archives in Jacksonville titled 'Mother's Sayings from the Book of Her Sacred Teachings and Public Ministry (1928:4-10) contains prophecies believed to have been anonymously recorded when Kofi spoke under the unction of a 'spirit' believed to have been sent from God to possess her. In these messages Kofi is heard referring to her followers as "my children" and "my people". There are more records of this aspect of Kofi's mission recorded in unpublished documents stored by the Jacksonville Historical Society. A major resource person in this regard is Carl S. Smisher of Jacksonville University, Florida, who has in his custody original collections of Kofi's messages. White (2014) emphasizes that the murder of Kofi rather resulted in the formation of a cult-like following. To her followers then and those following her now, Laura Kofi was a messenger of God (Nyombolo, *The African Messenger* pg 9). This has led to Kofi being immortalized not just by the AUC, but by a large section of the black community in the United States who visit her place of interment regularly to seek for prayers or to offer prayers for one thing or the other. Unfortunately, not the same can be said from the Ghanaian perspective. It is important to honour her memory with a statue in Accra. The comparison to Moses and Jesus Christ attests

to the fact that Kofi's followers saw her as a very special being. Some of her followers believed that Kofi completed her assignment although within a short time just as Jesus Christ did. Referring to her as Saint Kofi confirms this position. Members of the AUC believe that Kofi's spirit is still with them and guides them to this day. They believe that although Kofi is dead, she is not really dead, but is still alive (Jacksonville, AUC 1928: 4-10).

Whereas some scholars have written in support of Kofi being referred to as the female Marcus Garvey (Duncan, 2013), and indeed almost all the authors who have researched Kofi made reference to her as the 'female Marcus Garvey', it is also important to appreciate Laura Kofi's uniqueness, strengths and achievements as an individual. To suggest therefore that Laura Kofi was a female Marcus Garvey is debatable. Laura Adorkor Kofi was who she was and must not be silhouetted in the shadows of any other. The effort to cast her in a feminine mold of Marcus Garvey is to deny her of her personhood and the successes which she chalked as a PanAfricanist. Furthermore, it places Marcus Garvey above her which will be an argument subject to debate.

Indeed, Laura Kofi may not be enjoying the required fame within scholarship or in Pan-African history but that does not deny the fact that she was a giant in her own right. Many successes can be attributed to Kofi where Garvey failed. As indicated in this paper, but for Kofi, many of the UNIA branches would have collapsed due to the charges leveled against Garvey, his arrest and subsequent deportation. Morale among the black community and members of the UNIA had waned down; people had lost interest in the activities of the UNIA until Kofi arrived on the scene. Laura Adorkor Kofi was therefore unique in her own right and must not be cast in the shadows of Marcus Garvey. This opens the discussion of female achievers being cast in the mold of their male contemporaries or even male historical figures.

Such comparison may be done, but in so doing, female historical personalities must not have their personhood identified within that of a male; thus, until a female achiever is compared to a male one, their achievements and identity will not be illuminated. White (2016, p.207) agrees that love her or loathe her, Laura Adorkor Kofi was unique. It can be said that Laura Adorkor Kofi and Marcus Garvey were contemporaries with different strengths and weaknesses. They shared a common vision, and regardless of the disagreements between them, they both contributed immensely to the black emancipation struggle. Using Garvey as a model to measure Kofi may sound laudable but it is most unfair to her achievements and her memory.

#### **5.6 DEMISE AND ASSESSMENT OF IMPACT**

Mother Laura Kofi unfortunately died prematurely while engaged in the course of achieving her vision. During her active days with the UNIA, Madam Laura had thousands flocking to her meetings to hear her speak on the need to 'return to Africa'. It is believed that when she left the UNIA she took most of their members to the AUC. This made Garvey and some UNIA stalwarts extremely angry (White, 2014). If Laura was growing popular during her UNIA days, her popularity was yet to increase even more after her departure. On the 28 of March, 1928, Mother Kofi returned to Miami to hold a meeting; the maiden meeting of the AUC. The meeting that was held at Liberty Hall in Florida was to be a memorable one – one that would have birthed a new movement that was to rub shoulders with Garveyism and which by all indications would have made great inroads into territories already captured by Garvey. Records mention that thousands of her sympathizers had gathered to hear her speak. Strangely, she asked her bodyguards to take their seats. Standing on the podium unprotected, a Black man rushed towards her on the stage and shot her in the head, killing her instantly.

The name of the assailant who was also killed by the mob on that day is Maxwell Cook, a 33-year-old Jamaican and ardent follower of Garvey.

Following her demise, funerals were held in several counties and she was finally buried in Jacksonville. It is believed that the UNIA bore the cost of her funeral (Newman (1996), 1996). She described herself as the 'Warrior Mother of Africa's Warriors of the Most High God'. Madam Laura may not have succeeded in her vision to get Blacks of African descent to repatriate back to Africa, but her impact in building, organizing, and making the UNIA effective cannot be downplayed. Her charisma and oratory prowess won the UNIA several memberships and indeed, many had bought into her 'back to Africa' crusade, believing that she was truly a prophethess sent by God, in the mold of Moses to the Jews in Egypt. Until the very second of her death she carried along thousands of sympathizers and followers, which included thousands of former UNIA members.

A critical study of Madam Laura's history signals huge gaps in her claims. Her critics maintained that she was a fraud. She was also heavily criticized for being autocratic. This is debatable, because being a woman, she drew such attacks on her boldness and forthrightness. Her religious approach was also heavily criticized. It is worth noting that the resort to religion was one of her major strengths. The religious appeal attracted the majority of the people who felt hopeless and had some glimpses of hope in her message. The resort to religion as a conduit for political mobilization is a key strategy that worked very well. Seeing herself in the caste of biblical Moses, she understood that religion in the mouth of a good orator is an effective weapon. The UNIA had consciously rejected resorting to any form of religion for mobilization and indeed had explicitly forbidden it. It is believed that Kofi's blatant disregard for this order is a contributory factor to the tension that rose between Garvey and her. One

thing is clear though and significant to note, that at the very early stages of her association with the UNIA, Laura Kofi did not play the religious card. She adopted that strategy much later into her mobilization drive and more intensely when she left the UNIA and formed the AUC. In fact, it is important to mention that among the various methods and strategies she employed, playing the religious card was the most effective. The entire vision of the AUC is founded on her claim to be the female 'Moses of the time'. The people believed her and many still do even till today.

So much as her approach was criticized by especially mainstream Garveyites, the masses of the African-American community bought into her approach and message. Prophetess Laura Adorkor Kofi may not have been genuine in her claims and in her messages, but one thing is certain, she was very intelligent, a strategist par excellence, and a great orator. For instance, her choice of Miami as the starting point of her crusade is believed to have been very tactical. Miami had, arguably, been the breeding grounds for many of the UNIA cells. It is mentioned that Miami alone had hundreds and thousands of Blacks registering as members of the UNIA. Miami also happens to be one of the places where Laura chalked so much of her successes while working as a field operative for the UNIA. It is understandable, therefore, why she would opt for Miami as the headquarters of the AUC and also hold her very first meeting (service) there. Again, the UNIA branch in Miami was nearly in shambles. At the imprisonment of Marcus Garvey, the people had no leader to champion their cause, and Mother Laura saw that and exploited the vacuum. Records detail how she claimed association to Garvey, touting his endorsement of her campaigns, the people wholeheartedly accepted her.

Further records also show that Garvey denied giving her the permission to represent him and labeled her a 'fraudster'. Whether she would have succeeded in her repatriation campaign or

not is another question altogether. It is difficult to measure the success or otherwise of her works based on the limited evidence and literature available. Her greatest achievement was to win hundreds to the UNIA and to position herself strongly to be, arguably, the first woman from Continental Africa (that is if her claims were true) to have marshaled such a movement for African-Americans in the United States of America. Choosing to ride on the back of Garvey and the UNIA cannot be described as a flaw; it was strategic and a win-win situation for the UNIA and herself.

As it has been pointed out in this study, Kofi may have ridden on the back of the UNIA in establishing herself as a voice for the African-American community but she also positioned the UNIA in a stronger state than Garvey had left it prior and during his incarceration. Love her or loathe her, whether Laura Kofi or Laura Champion, much as the question and mystery surrounding her identity will continue to play a key role in this aspect of history, the emphasis must be laid on the fact that a woman rose during an era of intense segregation and discrimination, and single-handedly marshaled a movement of that magnitude. Her successes are well chalked in the many strides she made while temporarily being a major focal point for the UNIA. Truly, while, as chronicled in this study, some other women played significant roles in their respective ways in supporting the emancipation drive, Madam Kofi's achievements, within a relatively short period, stand very tall. Her charisma, personal drive, and appeal to the masses were her great assets. While history studies the mysteries surrounding her identity, particular attention must be paid to her boldness and achievements for the African-American community and for black emancipation globally.

## CHAPTER SIX

### ANALYSIS OF ISSUES, CONTROVERSIES, AND DEBATES

#### 6.1 THE IDENTITY CRISIS

This chapter engages in the discourses on the issues, debates, and controversies that have been raised by some scholars who have studied Kofi. Most important is the debate on the mystery that seems to have shrouded Kofi's identity and her journey to the United States. The purpose of this chapter is not to challenge the contents of existing literature nor to refute claims made by scholars who have researched Kofi, but to objectively present pertinent issues that have been raised by some other group of scholars who have also studied Kofi namely, Blaine (2018) and Duncan (2009).

The chapter also seeks to make personal analysis, looking at the issues raised by the two schools-of-thought; thus, those who subscribe to Kofi's Ghanaian origin, claim to royalty and the priesthood, and those who believe Kofi may not have been honest about these claims. Both Blaine and Duncan raise questions on Kofi's true identity and Blaine (2018), for instance, argues that Kofi may not have been honest about her true identity.

This section also presents a transcribed version of my interview with Nana Afia Adorkor, great granddaughter (many years removed) of Laura Kofi. This interview offers an important oral version of the Kofi narrative that is worth studying further. For me, this new discovery offers a new theory to the Kofi identity discourse that scholars interested in studying Kofi must look into. As part of this research I decided to investigate Kofi's ancestry in Ghana,

using various methods that could give me a clue about her family relations and place of origin.

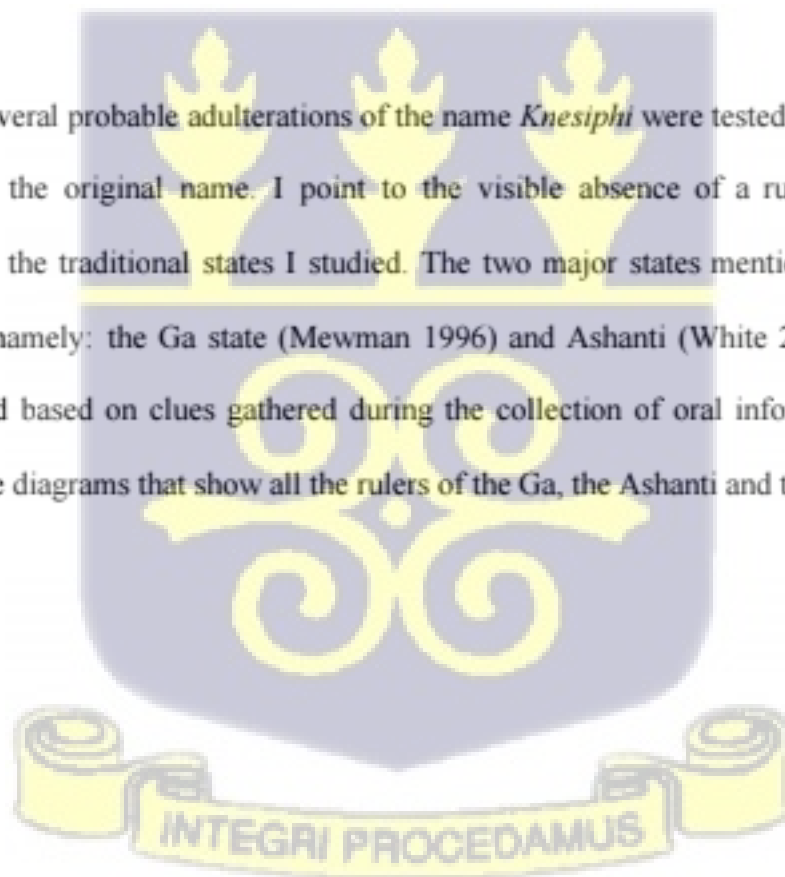
Also in this study, several pertinent questions on some of the literature that mentions Sempe and Asofa are raised. If Kofi was Ghanaian, and importantly if she was a Ga or Asante princess, that should be easy to establish. Whether Asante royalty has ever used the name 'Adorkor' or has had a princess by that name needed to be researched into. I also looked into Newman (1996)'s assertion that Kofi was a GaDangme. Indeed, the name 'Adorkor' is from the GaDangme ethnic group but the name 'Kofi' is not (Antwi, 1985). Therefore, she would not have been given such a name especially if she were a Ga princess. Rather we can find the name 'Coffie' and 'Kofey' among the GaDangme people (Adjah, 2009).

Also, further details using her names as the basis for analysis are analyzed. In Ghana, names can tell where a person comes from, especially if the person is a royal (Agyekum, 2006). Although in contemporary times factors such as religion and marriage and so on make it difficult to tell the exact origin of certain names, it should be easy to trace a name that is associated with royalty in Ghana. Furthermore, both authors confirm that Madam Kofi, as she was affectionately called, was a prophetess prior to her migration to the United States. My study confirms that Kofi assumed that status rather in the United States. My research confirms that Kofi was neither connected to any religious body in Ghana, nor are records of her ministry in Ghana accessible. It was observed during the research that what we have available to rely on might not be her own words, or are words alluded to by her followers (Mother's Sayings, 1964).

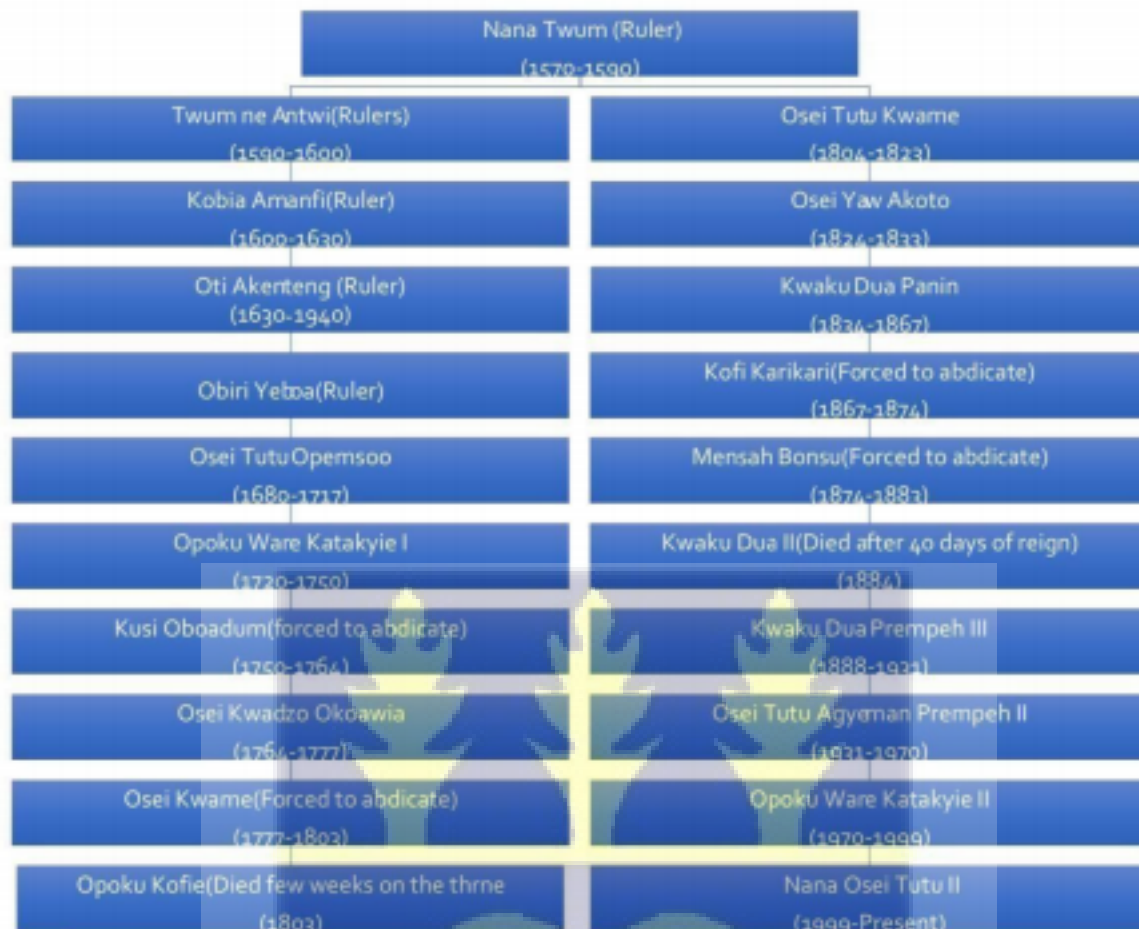
## 6.2 WHO WAS KING KNESIPHI?

As mentioned earlier, unraveling the identity of King Knesiphi is key to unraveling the identity of Laura Adorkor Kofi. All the literature on Kofi mentions King Knesiphi as her father. King Knesiphi is said to be one of the seven Kings of the Gold Coast (Newman 1996). Not much details are given on King Knesiphi. The Newyork Times published an article after Kofi's assassination that contained a message from King Knesiphi. This study embarked on a search by studying the literature, digging into archives and collecting oral information about the identity of King Knesiphi. I studied kings, chiefs and rulers who ruled three specific states during pre-colonial through the colonial era to present day Ghana.

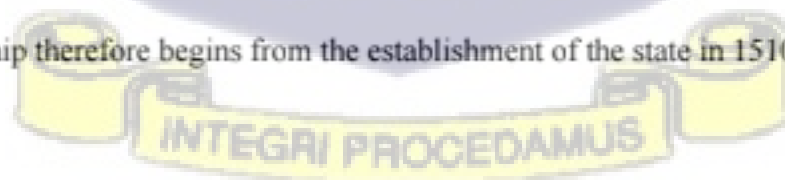
In the study, several probable adulterations of the name *Knesiphi* were tested to find clues and connections to the original name. I point to the visible absence of a ruler by the name Knesiphi in all the traditional states I studied. The two major states mentioned in literature were studied, namely: the Ga state (Mewman 1996) and Ashanti (White 2016). The Efutu state was added based on clues gathered during the collection of oral information from the field. Below are diagrams that show all the rulers of the Ga, the Ashanti and the Efutu states.



### 6.3 RULERS OF THE ASANTE AND GA KINGDOMS



Below is a list of Gã Dangme Kings (rulers of the Gã State in southern Ghana). The year 1510 is recorded as the year of the Foundation of Gã State (Tunnmaa dynasty/We dynasty). Ga State kingship therefore begins from the establishment of the state in 1510.



<sup>19</sup> Table showing list of Ashanti rulers and Kings down the line. Credit to Manhyia Archives



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Between 1500 and 1600 the rulers who ruled the GaDangbe people before they became one state are four, namely: King Ayi Kushie, the revered spiritual and political leader, King Mampong Okai, the wealthy king, Queen Dode Akabi known as the tyrannical queen and then King Okaikoi who was called the warrior King.

Again, visibly missing is King Knesiphi or any name close to it. From the year 1510 to 2004, many kings (26 in all) have occupied the Ga paramount stool from the four ruling houses namely: Teiko Tsuru We, Tackie Commey We, Amugi We, and Abola Piam We (Atta-Asiedu, 2020). The Ga paramount stool rotates among these four ruling houses. After the gap

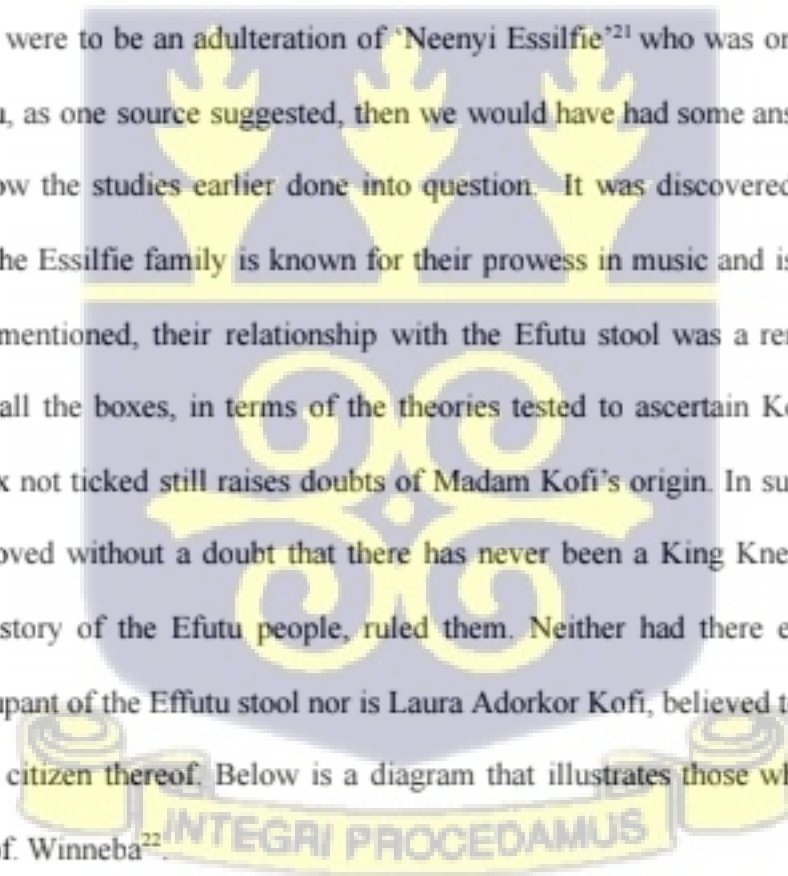
<sup>20</sup> A table showing GaDangme Kings down the line. Credited to the GaDangme Traditional Council.

had chieftaincy dispute that in 2015 with the enstoolment of Tackie Teiko Tsuru II, the current *Ga Mantse*. King Tackie Teiko Tsuru 2, is from the Teiko Tsuru We ruling house. Nii Benne (secretary of the Ga paramount stool; *Dzaase*) explained and confirmed that never in the history of the Ga State has there been a King Knesiphi or any name aside from the four major clans during the period under review. He mentioned that if we were to use the period Kofi is believed to have entered the United States to the time she passed away, the records, as indicated in this paper, do not point to King Knesiphi or Knesipi as the ruler either of the Ga State or the people of Sempe during that period. Therefore, how the name King Knesiphi became associated with Madam Kofi and how it was connected to the Ga stool is still unclear. Responding to whether the said King Knesiphi could have been king of the Sempe division, the chief linguist mentioned that first of all, only the Ga Mantse can hold the title of king and the divisional rulers use a chieftaincy title. Going by this fact, the said King Knesiphi could not have held the title 'king'.

In *Ga* the title '*Nii*' (Nana is the Akan rendition) is very often used at both levels but in terms of hierarchy, the divisional chiefs are ranked lower than the Ga Mantse. The irony however is that, as much as the Ga State is willing to be associated with Laura Kofi, my sources were quick to avoid distorting history by roping in someone who never occupied the Ga stool. In doing so, they also failed to mention the king or chief whose daughter Kofi was. Given these findings, It is not clear how Mother Kofi can be linked to either the Ga or Asante stools. It will be difficult to establish the connection but I intend to pursue this research further beyond this study. Anyone connected to either the Ga or Asante stool would not be an ordinary person and so the archives would have enough records on her, or oral records will not miss mentioning them (Atta-Asiedu, 2020).

#### 6. 4 KOFI LINKED TO WINNEBA

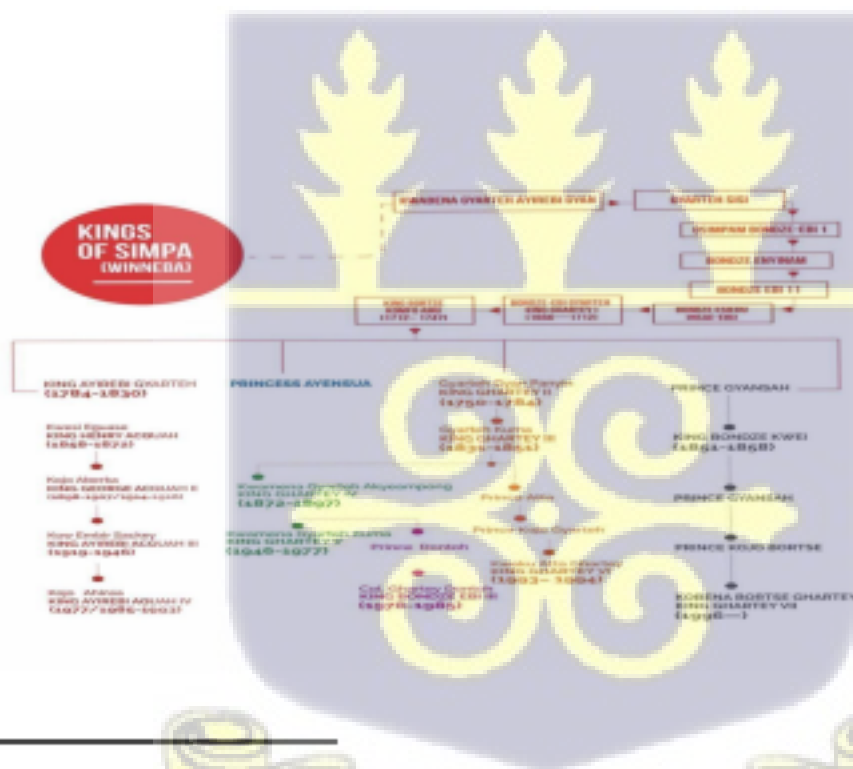
The research proceeded and this time, sources advised me to go to the Efutu traditional area where the name Knesiphi sounded familiar to the name Essilfie which is connected to the Effutu stool. Based on the information received from Nana Bondzi, a citizen of Winneba, the focus was then directed at tracing the Effutu stool occupants and establishing any direct or indirect link to either King Knesiphi or Laura Adorkor Kofi. Primary sources contacted in Winneba to corroborate Nana Bondzi's account could not confirm or deny the knowledge of one Laura Kofi, nor could she be linked to the Essilfie family of Winneba. A list of all kings who have occupied the Effutu stool was studied and King Knesiphi could not be located. If King Knesiphi were to be an adulteration of 'Neenyi Essilfie'<sup>21</sup> who was once a King of the people of Efutu, as one source suggested, then we would have had some answers, but then, it would still throw the studies earlier done into question. It was discovered from sources in Winneba that the Essilfie family is known for their prowess in music and is a very religious family but as mentioned, their relationship with the Efutu stool was a remote one. It was important that all the boxes, in terms of the theories tested to ascertain Kofi's origin, were ticked. One box not ticked still raises doubts of Madam Kofi's origin. In sum, the field work in Winneba proved without a doubt that there has never been a King Knesiphi who at any point in the history of the Efutu people, ruled them. Neither had there ever been Neenyi Essilfie as occupant of the Effutu stool nor is Laura Adorkor Kofi, believed to be her daughter known to be a citizen thereof. Below is a diagram that illustrates those who have ruled the Effutu people of Winneba<sup>22</sup>.



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<sup>21</sup> 'Neenyi Essilfie' means King Essilfie. Neenyi is the title that all rulers of the Effutu state bear

Historically, the people of Winneba, especially those belonging to the fishing communities in Winneba, are believed to have a relationship with the fishing communities in *Sempe* in the Ga state. This is as a result of years of fishing migration from the coastline of the central region of Ghana to the coastline of the Greater Accra region and a reverse fishing migration from the *Sempe* area to the coastline of the central and western regions of Ghana. Therefore, if the facts gathered from the field visit to Winneba had corroborated the *Neenyi Essilfie* theory, there could be a historical justification to support that argument. Speaking to Neenyi Bonney<sup>23</sup>, an elder who is closely related to the Ghartey faction that claim ownership of the Winneba



<sup>22</sup> A diagram showing kings who have ruled the Effutu state. Credit to Simpa Traditional Council

<sup>23</sup> Neenyi Bonney was my resource person in Winneba. He is a member of one of the royal families in Winneba.

<sup>24</sup> A table showing all the Kings who have ruled the Efutu State. Credited to Efutu Traditional Council

kingship, he recalled the story of Madam Laura Kofi and suggested that the correct name of the one who he assumes may be king and father of Laura Kofi is Neenyi Essilfie rather (who was indirectly linked to the kingship in Winneba in the Central Region of Ghana, yet not far from Accra). Neenyi Bonney mentioned that although Neenyi Essilfie was not a king, he was indirectly linked to the Winneba stool by virtue of being a half-brother to the Ghartey faction (indeed, there is the need for further interrogation into whether or not Madam Kofi was truly the daughter of Neenyi Essilfie or King Knesiphi, or linked to the Ga or Asante royalty). This gives support to the conspiracy theorists who emerged from Garvey's UNIA and labeled Madam Kofi as fake and a fraudster. It however, does not take anything away the genuineness of her intentions in any way. Chief Sam, also of the Gold Coast, has been subjected to similar interrogations and debates. Although Winneba is not mentioned in any literature on Madam Kofi, it became imperative to stretch the fieldwork to cover other areas that possibly will give some clues.

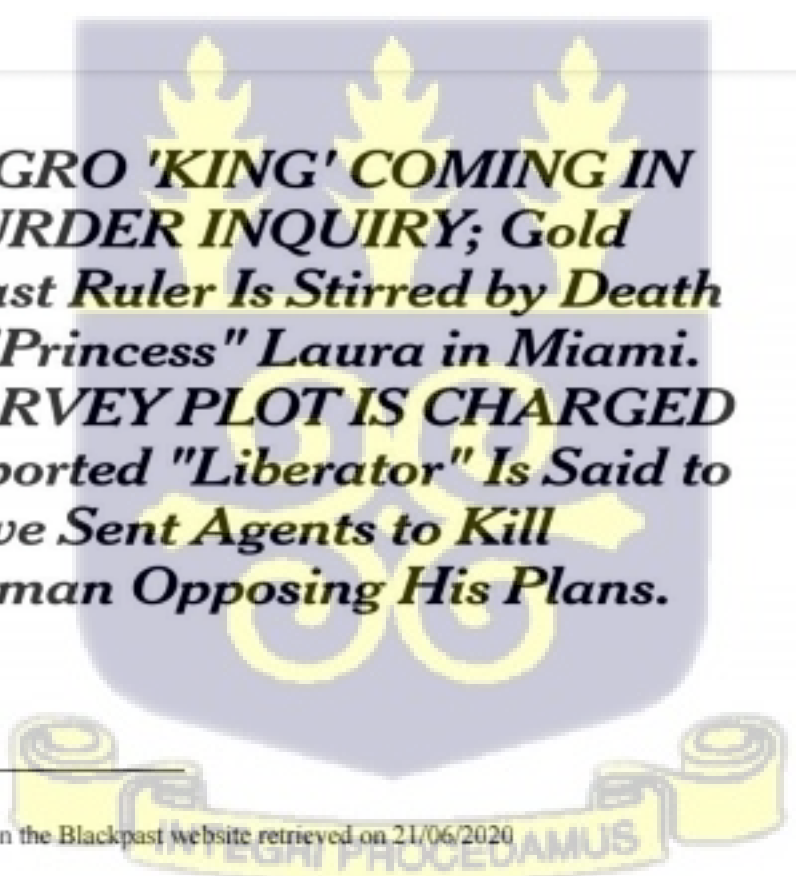
If indeed King Knesiphi was King Essilfie but wrongly pronounced, then stretching the exercise to cover other areas would have fully paid off. In essence, the Winneba option may appear closer to the evidence provided than both Ga and Asante. To wit, *Neenyi (Nana/Chief) Essilfie*, which interprets as King Essilfie appears to have been adulterated to sound as King Knesiphi (Atta-Asiedu, 2020). It is also important to point out that in Twi, Ga, and Effutu orthography, the sounds 'k' and 'n' do not occur together in succession in a word as it is in English. This shows that we could not have a king from any of the mentioned ethnic groups with a stool name that is spelt with 'kn'. Prof. Kofi Agyekum, a Professor of Linguistics at the University of Ghana, tackles this subject in one of his papers (Agyekum, 2006). How all the literature mentions King Knesiphi as once a famous king in the Gold Coast is most intriguing.

Another theory uncovered during the research is the possibility of Knesiphi being an adulterated form of *Nii Shipi*. *Nii Shipi* is the title given to the leader of the *Asafo*. The *Asafo* is the traditional military wing of the Ga state and anyone who leads this group is given the title *Nii Shipi*. They were warriors drawn from various lineages. However, *Nii Shipi* is not a king and does not occupy any royal position. His only role is military. During the colonial period the *Asafo* group or *Asafo* companies were responsible for various military actions to defend the state. They functioned as the King's army or the army of the particular state they represented. In contemporary times, the role has become more ceremonial than functional. The *Asafo* companies can be found in most of the coastal towns in southern Ghana and the *shipi* or *supi* role is always the same. If King Knesiphi was therefore 'Nii *Supi*' then this also raises more questions.

The findings of this research may not be conclusive but the analysis and questions asked are valid and substantial to the attempt of tracing Madam Kofi's ancestry and verifying her claim or attribution to royalty. As mentioned in Atta-Asiedu (2020), it is important to establish which part of the Gold Coast King Knesiphi ruled and within which period. Failure to do so will give credence to those who have labeled Madam Kofi as fake and a fraudster. In the effort to unravel her identity, her exact birthplace in Ghana, the school(s) she may have attended and other Ghanaians linked to her were researched into. It was important to this research to have access to oral narratives or archived records on family members, such as husband, children, brothers and sisters. Bishop Lawton (2020, par.) mentions that "Kofi boldly claimed to be the daughter of King Knesipi of the Gold Coast"<sup>25</sup>. The scholars Newman (1996) and White (2014) make similar references to one King Knesiphi of the Gold Coast (some spell it Knesipi) who is believed to have been one of the seven kings of the Gold Coast. It is important to establish that none of the authors were specific in tracing the

traditional area or the kingdom where King Knesiphi ruled, nor were the names of the other six kings of the Gold Coast mentioned. It also appears that the records available stop at the words of Madam Kofi; what she said about herself is what has been recorded and none of the researchers or authors have challenged her claims. Below are two extracts of news reports published in *The New York Times* on the 20<sup>th</sup> of March, 1928, two days after the death of Kofi that made reference to King Knesiphi, Kofi's father.

ARTICLE PUBLISHED IN THE NEW YORK TIMES IN 1928 AFTER THE DEATH OF LAURA KOFI



***NEGRO 'KING' COMING IN  
MURDER INQUIRY; Gold  
Coast Ruler Is Stirred by Death  
of "Princess" Laura in Miami.  
GARVEY PLOT IS CHARGED  
Deported "Liberator" Is Said to  
Have Sent Agents to Kill  
Woman Opposing His Plans.***

<sup>23</sup> Article published on the Blackpast website retrieved on 21/06/2020

MIAMI, Fla., March 20.--King Knesipi of the Gold Coast of Africa, notified Dade County authorities today, through his attorneys, that he intended to visit Miami as soon as possible to investigate the death of his daughter, "Princess" Laura Kofey, who was killed here  
TWO ... [VIEW FULL ARTICLE IN TIMESMACHINE »](#)

These newspaper publications tend to give credence to the 'King Knesipi' theory. In the first extract, we read that King Knesipi had made contact with authorities in the United States, expressing his desire to travel to the United States to investigate the death of 'his daughter'. The extracts epitomize the degree of press accommodation of the Knesipi story unlike in the press where they led a smear campaign to label him a criminal. There are questions to ask. Did King Knesipi ever make any such contact with the *Times* newspaper? Was the Knesipi story orchestrated with media support to an extent? All these are valid questions that need to be interrogated in our quest to find answers to what very well may pass as a distortion of historical facts.



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<sup>26</sup> News Article extracted from the 21st March 1928 column of the New York Times. Credit to New York Times digital archives.

## 6.5 PORTRAIT IDENTIFICATION

Another option adopted in the quest to trace Laura Kofi's Ghanaian ancestry was to refer Kofi's pictures to a portrait identification expert to identify any clues to Africa, Ghana, the Ashanti or the Ga ethnic group. This observation came out inconclusive. Portrait identification is a methodology used by both archeological researchers and sculpturists. Some intelligence agencies also use this methodology in ascertaining origin or identity. Portrait identification may or may not be a conventional methodology due to the long-standing debate in African studies regarding what constitutes the African identity and in defining who an African is. This has been the major critique of the portrait identification technique. However, experts maintain that in many societies in Africa certain facial traits and tribal marks are common to members of specific societies. The decision to contact a portrait anthropologist was to explore other unconventional methodologies in authenticating the identity of Kofi. In recent times, portrait anthropologists rely on fourth dimensional technology in studying portraits and clarifying the origin by observing features that are similar to others.

As unconventional as it may sound, studying facial features by an expert could give some clues as to whether one is Ghanaian or not. Certain peculiar features are associated with specific ethnic groups and persons from a particular society or family. Indeed, Kofi looks more like an American of African descent than an indigenous African Asante or Ga princess. Peter von Morez, a portrait identification specialist studied Kofi's features for about two weeks and reported that they constitute a blend of African and American features but he could not say for certain which one she belonged to as these features are common across the board. He singled out Kofi's nose and mouth as strikingly non-African, below is the portrait of Kofi submitted for 'portrait identification'. It is important to note that pictures of Laura Adorkor Kofi date back from 1926 to 1928. Records do not have many pictures of her, and the few

available in the archives are not of the quality that can be reproduced without compromising the quality.





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27Portrait of Laura Adorkor Kofi, Jacksonville's Lost Princess, Metro Jacksonville Newspaper published on the 28/04/2014. Source: Jacksonville Historical Society Archives

## 6.6 ASOFA, SEMPE AND ASAFO ANALYSED

Another point of contention in the Laura Kofi narrative is the lack of clarity in her exact birthplace. Three different towns have been mentioned in literature and they are: *Asofa*, *Sempe* and *Asafo*. Scholars have mentioned these towns to be either Kofi's birthplace or a missionary field. Newman (1996) in his narrative seems to mix the two. In one breath he refers to *Asofa* as her birthplace; in another, *Asofa* is mentioned as a place where Laura had a first missionary encounter. This led to the study of '*Asofa*' and how it is related to Laura Kofie. Suffice to mention that White (2014) also mentions *Asofa* to be in the Ashanti Region. The research focused on finding any village or town in the Ga district, preferably in *Sempe* called *Asofa*. It was discovered that there is no part of *Sempe* called *Asofa*. Further checks proved that *Asofa* is in the *Amasaman*<sup>28</sup> area of the Greater Accra Region. The town *Asofa* was created in the late 1970s and the early 1980s by a farmer known as *Asofa*, and his wife. According to oral sources accessed in the chief's palace, their great grandfather *Asofa* moved to the area to farm and eventually settled there. *Asofa* is, therefore, a relatively new settlement and cannot be found in the Gold Coast era.

Furthermore, *Asofa* also happens to be the only one in the Greater Accra Region. It is quite cosmopolitan and cannot be said to be a typical Ga settlement. Based on these discoveries, the *Asofa* theory cannot be accurate. In fact, *Asofa* can well be said to be closer to the outskirts of the Eastern Region of Ghana than it is to the Greater Accra Region. Another thing I noticed in *Asofa* is the language spoken by the majority of the people. Nine out of ten of the people I spoke to could not understand or communicate in Ga, which is the language spoken by the Ga

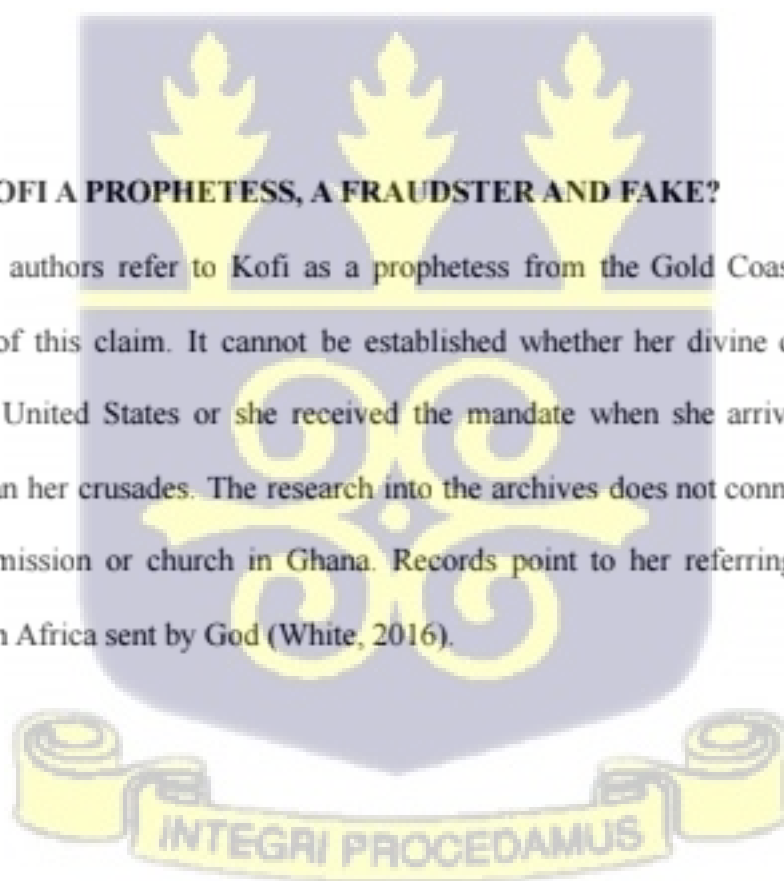
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<sup>28</sup> *Amasaman* is a district town in the Greater Accra Region but shares a border with the Eastern Region.

ethnic group. Many of them spoke Twi, some Ewe, and very few could communicate in basic Ga<sup>29</sup>. Both Sempe<sup>30</sup> and Asofa (or Asafo) have been mentioned by White (2014) and Newman (1996) (1996) as the birth place and mission fields of Laura Kofi interchangeably. Although these scholars provide what may appear as conflicting information with regards to these towns, it was still prudent to study a bit more about them. The field trips to these places, as well as interactions with the chiefs, elders, and people of Sempe, Asofa (both in Accra) and Asafo in Kumasi raised more questions. It is interesting to note that the chiefs and people of Sempe actually claim ‘ownership’ of Laura Kofi but ironically cannot show how she is an indigene of Sempe and also how she is connected to the stool. The Sempe theory and the evidence as provided by some scholars does not adequately address the question of Mother Kofi’s origin.

#### **6.7 LAURA KOFI A PROPHETESS, A FRAUDSTER AND FAKE?**

Although most authors refer to Kofi as a prophetess from the Gold Coast, studies do not provide proof of this claim. It cannot be established whether her divine call preceded her journey to the United States or she received the mandate when she arrived in the United States and began her crusades. The research into the archives does not connect Laura Kofi to any Christian mission or church in Ghana. Records point to her referring to herself as a missionary from Africa sent by God (White, 2016).



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<sup>29</sup> Interview with the overlord of Asofa

<sup>30</sup> Sempe is one of the oldest settlements in Ga-Mashie (the central part of the Ga state believe to be the original settlement of the Ga people) and is closely linked to the Ga Mantse (Ga kinship).

Other researchers who have studied Laura Kofi argue that she may well have been an itinerant preacher because these were common during the colonial era (Atta-Asiedu, 2020). Suffice to state that if Madam Laura Kofi was indeed a prophetess in the Gold Coast, there would have been some records of her ministry in the archives or the oral accounts would have provided that information. As it stands there is none and no religious organization in Ghana has claimed links to Prophetess Laura Kofi (Atta-Asiedu, 2020). Unraveling her claim to royalty is challenging enough but more challenging is the unraveling of the mystery of an African princess who also doubled as a prophetess. Laura Kofi's claim to have heard voices or been mandated by God borders on the supernatural and that cannot be corroborated or challenged in this thesis. Indeed, the resort to religion as a means of escape for a group of people believed to be undergoing some sort of oppression has a biblical allusion to Moses and his mission to the children of Israel while in captivity in Egypt<sup>31</sup>.

Using God and religion as a conduit for emancipation struggle has a long history. It is clear that the Africa United Church (AUC) was Kofi's first attempt at leading a religious organization. It is important to mention that the formation of the AUC was more strategic than religious. Coming out of the UNIA, Kofi needed an organization she could use to propel her agenda. Her assumption of the 'Moses' character and mission and the nature of her campaign strategy which was mainly religious, although criticized by Garvey and the UNIA, had succeeded with the masses of the people. Hence, the formation of the AUC was a timely strategic ploy to give credence to her claim of being a prophetess and being on a divine mission. Madam Laura was super intelligent and a born politician. She exploited to her

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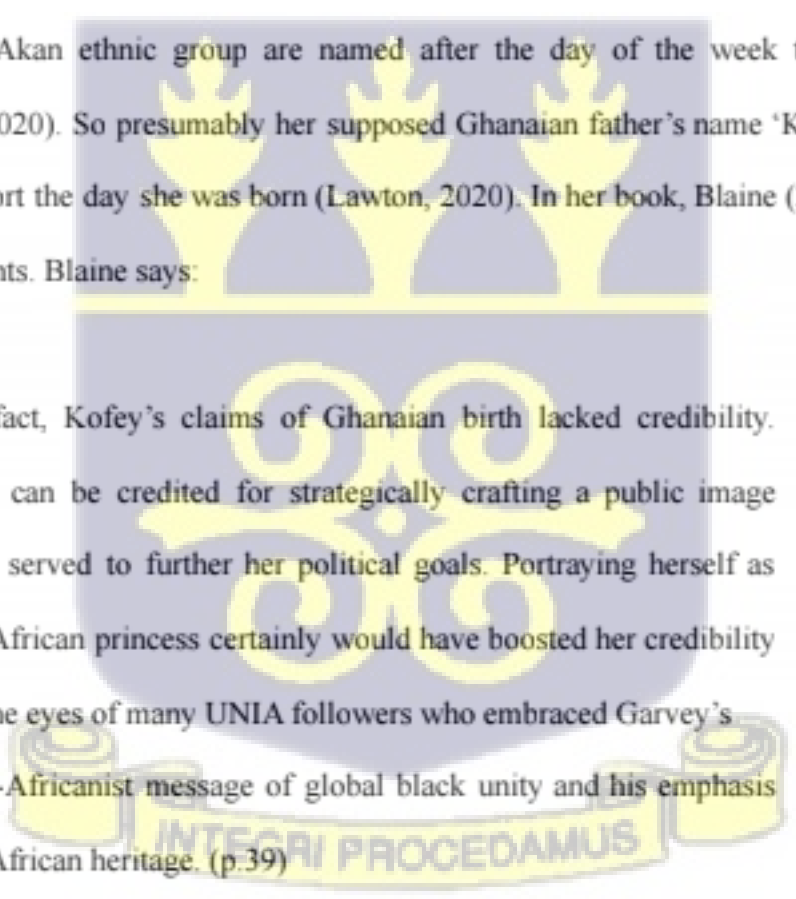
<sup>31</sup> Exodus Chapter 5 to Chapter 9

advantage what resonated with the masses of the people and achieved immense success in so doing.

It is important to note, until there is enough evidence to the contrary, that her first affiliation to any religious body was when she formed the AUC. She had no prior affiliation to any religious body either in the United States, the Gold Coast, or any other country. There were cultural and religious conventions in the Gold Coast that could not have made her claim to royalty as well as a prophetess and missionary possible. The research did not discover any evidence to prove or disprove her encounter with God, her visions, and the mosaic and messianic mission to Africans in America, but the records are clear that from 1924 when Kofi began active PanAfrican activism in the UNIA, the religious aspect of her mission had not been highlighted. Moses in the Bible had to demonstrate that indeed he had been sent by God. This led to his numerous demonstrations of miracles and supernatural signs and wonders as shown in the Bible (Exodus 7-11).

Jesus in the Gospels also had to demonstrate through miracles, signs and wonders that He was sent from God; so did many of the Prophets who carried missions similar to that of Prophetess Kofi. In the case of Prophetess Laura Kofi, although her followers saw her as a messenger sent from God, there is not a recorded case of any supernatural sign performed by her. It was her word against all others. The observation is made as to why she did not complete her mission if she was indeed sent by God but her followers disagree with this. They believe Mother Kofi completed her assignment and was murdered just like Jesus Christ was. (Mother's Sacred Teachings, 1964).

On the question of Laura Kofi being labeled as fraudulent and fake, this view has been discussed by some scholars, including Duncan (2009) and Blaine (2018). These concerns were raised by Garvey himself during Kofi's active political engagements for the UNIA. A section of the UNIA leadership cast doubts on Madam Laura Kofi's claims on her identity and origin. Investigations conducted by some followers of Marcus Garvey state that Laura Kofi's real name was Laura Champion. The investigations also pointed to Alabama in the State of Georgia as her place of birth (Newman (1996), 1996). Furthermore, the records state that Laura Kofi had links to West Africa and might have visited and lived briefly in the Gold Coast (Newman (1996), 1996). Other studies argue that Laura Kofi was born on a Friday and so she may have picked a surname that reflects the day she was born, knowing that in Ghana, people of the Akan ethnic group are named after the day of the week they were born (Atta-Asiedu, 2020). So presumably her supposed Ghanaian father's name 'Kofi' was indeed chosen to support the day she was born (Lawton, 2020). In her book, Blaine (2018) expresses similar sentiments. Blaine says:

The image contains a large, semi-transparent watermark of the University of Ghana crest. The crest features three golden torches at the top, a central shield with a golden emblem, and a banner at the bottom with the Latin motto 'INTEGRI PROCEDAMUS'.

In fact, Kofey's claims of Ghanaian birth lacked credibility. She can be credited for strategically crafting a public image that served to further her political goals. Portraying herself as an African princess certainly would have boosted her credibility in the eyes of many UNIA followers who embraced Garvey's Pan-Africanist message of global black unity and his emphasis on African heritage. (p.39)

Blaine's (2018) statement undoubtedly captures the position held by other scholars of Black and African history. Blaine (2018) makes reference to another female UNIA leader called

Madam Maymie L.T. de Mena who hailed from the southern part of the United States yet concealed that identity and rather assumed the identity of an Afro-Nicaraguan for similar reasons (Blaine, 2018). The parallels are quite clear. In more recent times we can point to a reverse identity change in the case of Jessica Krug, a former George Washington University professor using a Black identity even though she is white. It was reported in *the New York Times* (September 9, 2020 edition) that she had eventually resigned.

The issue of identity assumption or identity switch (others call it identity theft) appears to be a complex debate that must be engaged in even beyond academic circles. Whether a person, based on relevant reasons, can switch identity or nationality and assume a different one of her choice must be accepted or challenged is the question worth discussing. This engages the African identity debate extensively. Who indeed is an African? Who is and who is not a Ghanaian? These questions need to be answered. While we interrogate the multi-layered complexities in ascertaining African or Ghanaian identity, we can also point at C.V. VitoloHaddad, the University of Wisconsin-Madison graduate student, who claimed to be a person of color while being white<sup>32</sup>. So these trends are quite common and they have been for many years. Some refer to this phenomenon as 'racial fraud'. I think we still have to look at the intention behind the switch and place each case in the proper context. Some switches may be for fraudulent purposes; others may well not be, but for identification and historical purposes.

Laura Kofi is believed to have claimed to be of royal descent and records name one King Knesiphi of the Gold Coast as her father (White, 2016). Do we tag her as fake and fraudulent

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<sup>32</sup> The story of alleged racial fraud was carried by many media outlets including [www.cnn.com](http://www.cnn.com)

because of the difficulty in tracing her identity? Writing about Laura Adorkor Kofi, Allen and Ibarra (2019) referred to her as being an “African Princess, the daughter of Knesiphi, one of the “seven kings” of Africa’s Gold Coast (later Ghana), and was said to have been born near Accra” (Allen and Ibarra, 2019, p. 20).

The scholar, White (2014), argues that skeptical reporters would typically put quotation marks around her title, while outright detractors would claim she was not African at all. This allegation was refuted by Newman (1996) (2008), who compiled some evidence to prove that Kofi was born in Ghana (Atta-Asiedu 2020). Some documents discovered from the Schomburg archives that traced Kofi’s journey to the United States raised several questions about the route she took from the Gold Coast until she arrived in the United States (Newman (1996; 2014).

Again, records of ocean passengers who disembarked in New Orleans from the ship Madam Kofi travelled on refers to a Black woman named Laura Kofi, born 1892, who gave her profession as missionary and whose last residence had been in Africa. Also, the records stored at Coral Gables Museum indicate that she sailed from Cristobal in the Canal Zone aboard a vessel called ‘Cartago’, which arrived in New Orleans on the 18 of October, 1926. The records further state that she was born in Montreal in Canada. The explanation has been offered that perhaps the official who handled the records, for one reason or the other, may have heard Canada instead of Ghana (Newman (1996), 2008). It must however be mentioned that although Laura Kofi has been accused of making false claims about who she was, she must rather be applauded for her bravery and ability to exploit an opportunity in her favor and harness it to achieve a goal. Indeed, if her life had not been abruptly truncated, and if the

records of her birth and death were correct, considering she was 36 years at the time she died, she would have succeeded where Chief Sam and many others after her, including Garvey could not succeed.

Another argument that has been raised is the fact that for a princess and a prophetess to die and be buried in a foreign land without the full royal recognition at her funeral or the presence of royal representation at her funeral or a monument raised in her honor in Ghana is inconsistent with the culture of the people of Ghana (Atta-Asiedu 2020). Another argument that has been advanced on Kofi's identity suggests that Kofi, seeing that Garvey, a Caribbean and not a through-and-through African, could champion the cause of Blacks and Africans and chalk such successes, she felt she could do the same with an African connection attached to her identity (Lawton, 2020). Having considered all these issues raised on Laura Kofi's true identity, it is important not to lose sight of the positives. Laura Kofi must be seen as a zealous and ambitious woman who needed to be heard, who had a passion, and resorted to subtle means to achieve her goals. We may critique this aspect of her drive but we ought to celebrate her for the immense impact she made in such a short period.

Discussions in this thesis engage in the various debates surrounding Kofi and the effort to unravel the truth about who she really was and where she came from. The research has provided analysis to demonstrate why Laura Kofi's claim to royalty, divinity, and origin are all shrouded in mystery and why certain claims cannot be factual. In this section, some explanation as to why certain portions of her claims may technically endorse who she claimed to be is discussed. The section offers a paraphrased and transcribed version of interviews accessed from descendants who had spent time researching her background and the information they had gathered about their ancestor Laura Adorkor Kofi. In the quest to access

as much information as possible on Kofi, Professor Mawuena Kossi Logan who is a Ghanaian-American took interest in assisting to unravel Kofi's mysterious identity. Professor Logan offered to help with some contacts in Miami where Kofi had spent her last days and emailed what can be described as another theory on Kofi's identity. Professor Logan wrote the following:

Hi, I spoke with my friend in Miami today and he is familiar with Madam Kofey and her involvement with/in the UNIA chapter in Miami. He also said Madam Kofey was an African American (Black American), apparently married to a Ghanaian prince, hence her name, and that the Black Archives and/or County Police Department in Miami should have documents on her. He also shared an article, which I am attaching to this email, just in case you are not familiar with it<sup>3316</sup>.

This aspect of the Laura Kofi story appears to be closer to the truth based on oral accounts collected from the source in Miami who insisted to remain anonymous and also from a descendant of Laura Kofi. According to this anonymous source, Laura Kofi was in fact an African-American who married a Ghanaian Prince, hence the name Kofi. He referred to CIA and FBI declassified records on the UNIA, Garvey, Laura Kofi and other leaders of the UNIA at the time. The source mentioned that the true identity of Laura Kofi was known to both the CIA and the FBI and added that these are declassified records that researchers studying Kofi can go through the appropriate channels and procedures to access.

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<sup>16</sup> Email interaction with Professor Mawuena Logan, a lecturer of Pan-African studies, University of Louisville, USA. Email received on 13/09/2020 at 06:48am

## 6.8 PRINCESS AFIA ADORKOR'S NARRATIVE

This section presents paraphrased transcriptions of interviews with Princess Afia Adorkor, the great granddaughter of Laura Adorkor Kofi, generations removed. Nana Afia Adorkor, just like her great grandmother (many years removed) is a Pan-Africanist who is equally devoted to the repatriation of African-Americans. She believes that repatriation is not only in the physical sense, but can be done spiritually as well (Lawton, 2020). She has embarked on various activities for African-Americans who wish to connect to Africa.

A few weeks after receiving new information from the scholar who wanted to remain anonymous, concerning what he described as the truth about who Kofi was, an email that contained information about a lady called Nana Afia Adorkor, a direct descendant of Kofi was received. The mail contained information about this source and how she could be contacted. After several unsuccessful attempts to get the princess to be interviewed, she finally consented to a Zoom meeting. At the meeting, specific questions were asked about her great grandmother (far removed), Laura Adorkor Kofi.

The princess showed me documents in her possession that told the actual truth about her ancestor. She refused to give copies of the documents out because to her, these were sacred documents directly handed down to her by Laura Adorkor Kofi. Princess Afia however, agreed to make scanned copies available whenever she came to Ghana or if I visited the United States. Putting together pieces of information received from Nana Afia Adorkor, (some of which were orally handed down to her, she also had accessed information from parchments that had been given to her by family members purported to have been from her great grandmother (severally removed) told another side of the Laura Kofi story that scholars

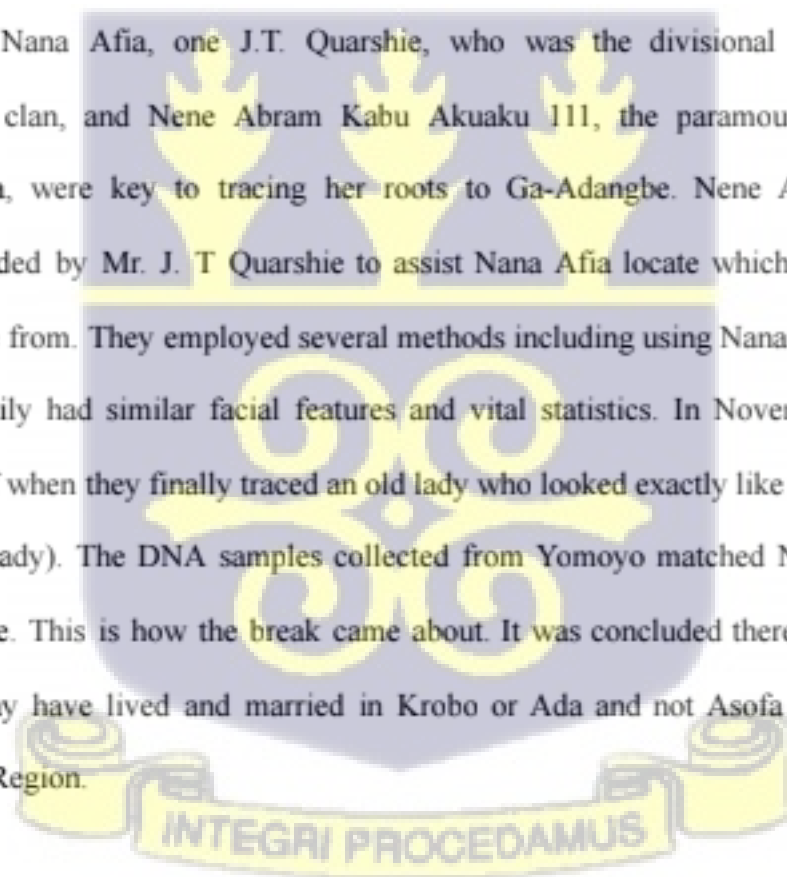
may not have accessed in their study of Laura Kofi. The Princess Afia narrative corroborated information received from Prof. Logan's source in Miami, and could be the key to unraveling this Kofi mystery. Another scholarly source studied was the works of Lawton (2020) on Laura Adorkor Kofi. Lawton has done extensive research on Kofi and has one of the most comprehensive works on Nana Afia Adorkor (Lawton, 2020). Lawton (2020) researches Postcolonial African history, pre-colonial African history, and pre-colonial African civilizations, as well as 20th century black ideology. What makes Lawton (2020) an important source, among other reasons, is that he lives in Jacksonville, Florida and has had a nostalgic affiliation to the study of Kofi. I wrote to Lawton to make enquiries about Nana Afia Adorkor and to verify her story about Laura Kofi. Lawton (2020) made available video recordings of interviews he had with Nana Afia Adorkor which explored further the new narrative on the Laura Kofi biography.

According to Nana Afia, she has spent about twenty years tracing her family history, uncovering Laura Adorkor Kofi, and the AUC. Since discovering her family history, Nana Afia has dedicated herself to preserving Kofi's legacy through various charity works in Ghana and the United States (Lawton, 2020). The interview with Nana Afia Adorkor was a very lengthy one. It discussed matters relating to the African identity concept. As far as Laura Kofi was concerned there were only three questions which needed to be answered. The first was to ascertain which part of Ghana her ancestor Kofi came from. The second was to know a bit about Kofi's father, King Knesiphi. Last but not least, I wanted to know about Kofi's migration to the United States.

According to Nana Afia, when she began tracing her roots, she had access to archival materials that pointed to Accra as Kofi's place of birth. She began to research further and

traveled extensively in the course, making countless visits to Ghana. She made a series of contacts with relevant Ga chiefs and other traditional authorities. Her research in Accra did not give her the answers she was looking for but she kept on digging until she found herself in Ada (in the Dangbe East District of Greater Accra Region) which is linguistically and culturally similar to the Gas in many ways. Ada is part of the Ga Dangme ethnic group. Nana Afia recounts that she spent months in Ada asking questions, moving from one historical site to another until she hit a clue that led her to unravel where she came from. Strangely enough it was through the unconventional research method already discussed in this paper—portrait observation and portrait analysis—that she got a clue about her background.

According to Nana Afia, one J.T. Quarshie, who was the divisional secretary to the Dangmebiawe clan, and Nene Abram Kabu Akuaku III, the paramount chief of Ada traditional area, were key to tracing her roots to Ga-Adangbe. Nene Akuako set up a committee headed by Mr. J. T Quarshie to assist Nana Afia locate which part of Ada her ancestors came from. They employed several methods including using Nana Afia's portrait to see which family had similar facial features and vital statistics. In November 2012, their efforts paid off when they finally traced an old lady who looked exactly like Nana Afia called Yomoyo (old lady). The DNA samples collected from Yomoyo matched Nana Afia with a high percentage. This is how the break came about. It was concluded therefore that indeed, Laura Kofi may have lived and married in Krobo or Ada and not Asofa or Sempe in the Greater Accra Region.



In one of the field trips to *Krobo*, which is a sort of sister ethnic group to the *Ada*, it was gathered that Kofi is a surname which became part of Krobo name through marriage between a Krobo and an Asante. Nana Afia's discovery gave a clue that there could indeed be some

connection there. Yomoyo, when told the story of Kofi, recounted a story her grandmother had told her about one Ga-Adangbe princess. According to Nana Afia, Yomoyo explained that Laura AdorkorKofi was actually not Ghanaian, but she came to Ghana with the Red Cross and settled in the Sempe area in Accra. She explained that the Prince called Kofi (whom Laura would later marry) was a very educated Ada royal who had completed his middle school level four<sup>34</sup> and was working with the colonial office in Accra. She recounted that the Prince was indeed transferred to Kumasi, where Laura Kofi began what one could describe as a mini clinic, taking care of sick people for free. On Sundays she preached to the local people as well. The oral account mentioned that Laura Kofi finally returned to the United States in the mid 1920s. While in the United States she made frantic efforts to convince Prince Kofi to join her there permanently, which meant quitting his very lucrative job in the Gold Coast and his royal duties to his people. He felt he could not abandon his people.

The oral account mentioned that it took months of trying to convince her husband that she felt a burden to liberate her people and compel them to return to Africa. Her husband reluctantly agreed and she went back to her people in Georgia in the United States with their daughter who was 3 years old at the time. According to Yomoyo, it is believed that Kofi's husband remarried after hearing of Kofi's demise. After the interview with Nana Afia, I contacted Professor Logan and our source in Miami, as well as Bishop Lawton and they corroborated



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<sup>34</sup> This level is similar to graduating from high school. Although a pre- tertiary level, it was a very high standard during the colonial era.

the story is based on declassified documents the CIA had released which gave some background information on Laura Kofi. This is another descendant theory that is in the prime stages of further study. Thus, adopting tenets of descendant epistemology and genealogical studies to unearth additional details on the descendants of Prince Kofi with the Ghanaian wife is an option that must be explored in further Laura Kofi studies.

Princess Afia Adorkor's account appears to answer the mystery surrounding Kofi's Ghanaian origin and repatriation mission. One can safely conclude that per the facts given, Kofi did not lie about her Ghanaian origin per se, neither did she lie about her royal affiliation, although she was not born a royal, but she claimed these through her marriage to a Ga Dangme royal. If Nene Kofi (Kofi's husband) was a royal, then Laura Kofi may not have committed an offense in calling herself a princess, for so she was. What is not clear is the identity of King Knesiphi. Nana Afia agrees that Knesiphi could have been an adulterated form of a Ghanaian name. She mentioned that the error could have come from the American press and not Laura Kofi. The challenge to the infamous Trevor-Roper (Fuglestad, 1992) and the Hegel (Gjesdal, 2020) critique of what constitutes African history is what Vansinia (1961) and the Subalterns (1980) seek to correct.

In collecting African history, oral narrations from elders of families and societies cannot be ignored. The western dynamics may be different from the African due to challenges in recordkeeping, but this is where oral narratives of events in the past need to be collected and studied (Andindilile, 2016). We cannot ignore oral sources and narratives from witnesses and receivers of handed-down narratives in our effort to chronicle events of the past. African historiography has faced a huge challenge of European periodization that concentrates on colonial and postcolonial times, in some rare instances dating back to the emergence of the

first Europeans on African soil. African history predates limitations of European periodization and had for many years relied on oral transmission (Chimee, 2018). This is evident in this research, by resorting to oral narratives to collect what may very well be the solution to the mystery surrounding Kofi's identity, an understanding of the circumstances that may have informed Kofi's assumption of Ghanaian citizenship and Ghanaian royalty is gained.

In conclusion it is important to mention that as much as it was important to focus much of the research of Laura Kofi on her early years in Ghana, the research showed that not much of her stay in Ghana was recorded. Laura Adorkor Kofi attained prominence in the United States between 1926 and 1928. Before then, she was very much unknown.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The thesis studied Laura Adorkor Kofi, whom literature describes as a Ghanaian princess and prophetess, who migrated to the United States in the mid-1920s. Laura Kofi is believed to have received a mandate from God in a vision, and with backing from her father King Knesiphi, described in literature as one of the seven Kings of the Gold Coast, she traveled to the United States with the sole aim of gathering African-Americans to return home to Africa. The thesis analysed Laura Kofi's political engagements as a member and later as field organiser for the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) until her expulsion and her subsequent formation of the African Universal Church (AUC), until her untimely demise in 1928. The thesis also discussed the conditions within which she worked, her successes, failures and criticisms. The study also explored her Ghanaian origin and attempts to trace her family line in Ghana.

The research adopted tenets of the Vansina (1985), the Subaltern (1980) and Decendant Epistemology (2019) theories. While the Vansina (1985) and Subaltern (1980) theories emphasize the importance of oral sources and oral narratives in biographical and historical studies, Decendant Epistemology (2019) moves a step further to employ oral sources from a descendant and genealogical perspective. The thesis adopted these theories on the basis that for the Kofi narrative to be told from the Ghanaian perspective, there was the need to rely more on oral sources and also to focus more on relatives of Laura Kofi here in Ghana. Based on the theories adopted in the study, the methodologies employed in the research consists of textual analysis of existing literature in studying and analyzing Laura Kofi's stay in the

United States, while oral sources and oral accounts were collected in Ghana to contribute to the narrative from the Ghanaian perspective. The main objective of the study was to investigate the true identity of Laura Kofi which appears to be the missing piece in the Kofi narrative, with scholars who have studied Kofi holding different positions on her origin.

The thesis further discussed works of scholars who have studied Laura Kofi and focused mainly on Newman (1996), White (2014), Blaine (2018) and Duncan (2009). It further studied Kings who have ruled the Ga, the Asante and the Effutu States in the attempt to identify King Knesiphi, known to be Kofi's father. Investigating the identity of King Knesiphi is important in any attempt to investigate who Laura Kofi was. Several oral accounts are recorded in the study, including that of Nana Afia Adorkor who is a descendant of Laura Kofi. The thesis concludes with a paraphrased version of the oral account of Nana Afia Adorkor, a descendant of Madam Laura Kofi. This oral account offers another dimension of the Kofi narrative and explains who Laura Kofi could have been.

In conclusion, taking into consideration all the textual analysis and the analysis of all oral accounts collected, one can argue that indeed Laura Adokor Kofi may not necessarily have been a Ghanaian by birth, nor was she a Ga or Asante Princess. The facts analysed show that Madam Laura Adorkor Kofi assumed Ghanaian citizenship through a brief relationship with a Ghanaian prince. Also, studies could not ascertain the identity of King Knesiphi who is mentioned in literature to be one of the seven kings of the Gold Coast. This study dug deeply into royal archives of states mentioned in literature as well as others not mentioned in literature and nothing was found. This does not bring finality to the Knesiphi theory. As earlier mentioned, one can also argue that Kofi's claims of Ghanaian citizenship and royalty may not necessarily be completely false if the background facts and circumstances of her

claims are critically analyzed. Having spent some years living and engaging in charity work in Ghana, she may have been immersed into Ghanaian cultural, social and religious life and felt part of the people.

It is also clear from this research that the media at the time, such as the Newyork Times and the Miami Times which reported Kofi's death and events proceeding, may not have been accurate with some of the facts published in relation to Laura Adorkor Kofi and King Knesiphi. Information garthered during this research suggests that Laura Adorkor Kofi may have assumed the statutes she assumed in order to gain the attention and acceptance of the African American community in the United States and to overcome the gender stereotyping of the day. Under the circumstances discussed in this thesis, Kofi could make these claims and justify them. Thus, to say Laura Adorkor Kofi was not a Ghanaian and a royal is technically not wrong and to say she was a Ghanaian royal is also technically right, but she was not Ghanaian by birth neither was she through naturalization. From the Ghanaian perspective these claims can well be challenged. Unlike Chief Sam whose family house and hometown as well as relatives can be identified, none of these can be identified with Laura Adorkor Kofi.

On the question of her contributions to Pan-Africanism and the back-to-Africa concept, Laura Kofi's impact may be measured by looking at the two years of active Pan-African activities across the United States and her influence beyond the United States. The journey back to Africa may not have started but her ability to mobilize hundreds of African-Americans who were willing and ready to make the journey back to Africa. The success she achieved in mobilizing the people could be used to assume that she would have been successful if she had lived longer to carry it through.

Finally, as already mentioned, whereas scholarship has concentrated on Kofi's political and religious activities in the United States, which spans over a period of two to four years, very little focus has been placed on the Ghanaian perspective and this may explain the scanty information about her stay in Ghana. This research does not bring closure to Kofi's years in Ghana. More needs to be uncovered and some recommendations are made in this context, below.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

This research on Laura Adorkor Kofi is by no means a closure to studies on her identity and contribution to Pan-Africanism and women's empowerment. This research provides additional information for further studies on Laura Adorkor Kofi. Based on findings from the research, the following recommendations are proposed:

Firstly, the question of Pan-Africanism and feminism must be prioritized and research in this context must take center-stage. Although some women have been studied, there is more to do to chronicle the development of women's roles and contributions to the emancipation struggle of the black race, especially the Pan-African movement. The increase in knowledge with regards to the contributions of women to the Pan-African cause will help deal with the patriarchy label hanging on Pan-Africanism. It will also contribute in bridging the gap in the gender imbalance in literature. The focus should be on the contributions of African and African-American women towards the struggles both on the African continent and in the diaspora.

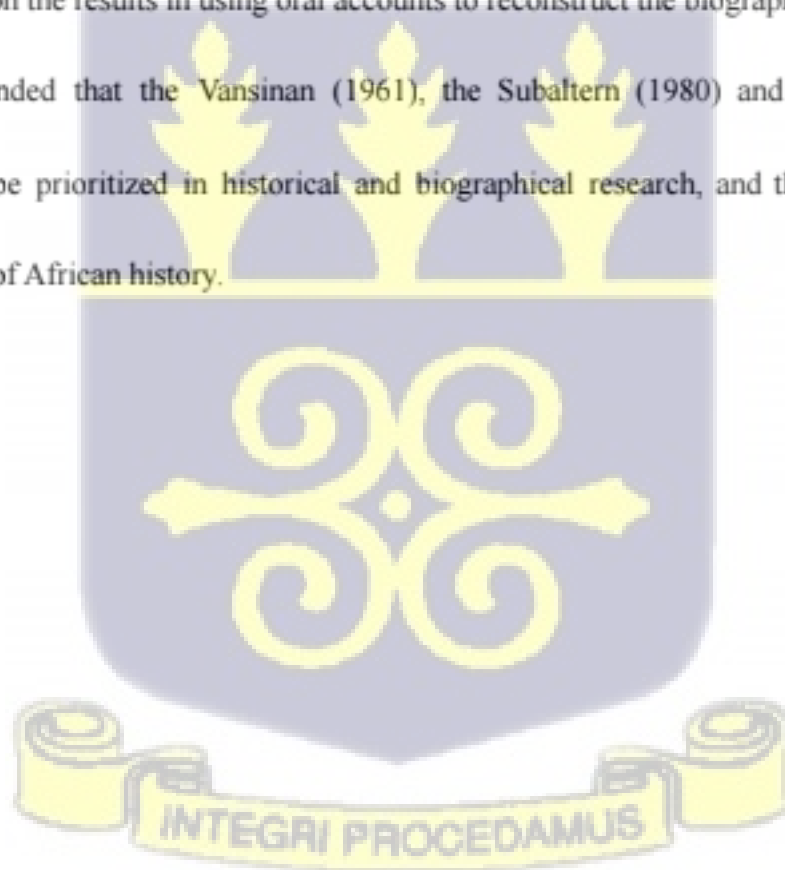
Secondly, recommended for further studies, is the back-to-Africa concept and its contemporary relevance. This must go in tandem with studies on the diaspora as an active member of the African Union as well as the contemporary relevance of the concept of Pan Africanism. The question to answer is whether Pan-Africanism should change in terms of its vision, mission and modus operandi, in order to be contemporarily relevant and meaningful to this generation. In the period of post-colonial Africa, the mission for African countries has

shifted from fighting colonialism and imperialism to fighting for economic independence. Should Pan-Africanism in Africa refocus with the changing times? This should be the focus for further studies. Also, the discourse seems to be shifting from repatriation to reparation because a holistic repatriation seems impossible. This theme must also direct the focus for further studies.

Furthermore, the history of Laura Adorkor Kofi is still shrouded in an identity crisis and the urgency to unravel who she might have been (or otherwise) cannot be ignored. Much as her contributions to Garvey's UNIA and Pan-Africanism in general has not been contested, hanging on her memory is the tag of 'fake' and 'fraud', labels first used on her by Marcus Garvey when he came out of detention. Other scholars have suggested this may be true. This thesis has contributed to explaining why this may be true and has also given reasons to justify why Kofi might have made those choices. This however does not bring closure to the debate. While establishing who she was not, research must now focus on disclosing who she was. It is important to clarify that not much is known about Kofi's birth, her family, upbringing and growth. This explains the seeming- gap in her biography. This is an area that must be studied further. Also, research on Laura Kofi from the Ghanaian perspective must continue in Ghana. This is to explore her stay in Ghana, voluntary services, marriage, family and so on. The question to answer in detail is who was Laura Kofi before she emerged on the political scene? While doing so, research will discover more on King Knesiphi and also about her husband Prince Kofi. It is also recommended that further studies should be conducted on Laura Champion, from a genealogical perspective, to trace her family in the State of Alabama in the United States. This will help trace connections between Laura Kofi and Laura Champion, if there are any.

Also, it is recommended that a monument is built in Ghana to immortalize Laura Kofi and preserve her memory. This monument may be located in the Krobo area to serve as motivation for young girls. History books used in either basic or secondary schools must study Laura Adorkor Kofi. Also, it is recommended that the Government of Ghana officially recognizes Laura Kofi and her descendants who are currently in the United States must be given a home in Ghana and Ga-Dangme must make full claim to Laura Kofi as one of them and teach children about her.

Finally, based on the results in using oral accounts to reconstruct the biography of Laura Kofi, it is recommended that the Vansinan (1961), the Subaltern (1980) and Coletu's (2019) theories must be prioritized in historical and biographical research, and the attempt at the reconstruction of African history.



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