Flora Shaw gives the name Nigeria
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Flora Shaw gives the Name

By Our Special Correspondent

The name Nigeria was first suggested in a special article published in The Times on January 8, 1897. The article, in accordance with the traditions of the newspaper, was published anonymously, but it was in fact written by Flora Shaw, who spent eight years in Printing House Square as an expert on colonial affairs. Later, in 1902, she married Sir Frederick Lugard, then High Commissioner of the Northern Nigerian Protectorate.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Before the name Nigeria was put forward, this area of the Western Sudan had been known under a variety of titles, including the Niger Empire, the Niger Sudan, the Central Sudan, and the Hausa Territories. The following argument was put forward by Flora Shaw in the course of her article, which was headed “Nigeria”:

In the first place, the title “Royal Niger Company’s Territories” is not only inconvenient to use but to some extent is also misleading, it may be permissible to coin a shorter title for the agglomeration of pagan and Mohammedan states which have been brought, by the exertions of the Royal Niger Company, within the confines of the British Protectorates, and thus need for the first time in their history to be described as an entity by some general name. To speak of them as the Central Sudan, which is the title accorded by some geographers and travellers, has the disadvantage of ignoring political frontier-lines, while the word “Sudan” is too apt to connect itself in the public mind as the French hinterland of Algeria, or the vexed questions of the Niger basin. The name “Nigeria”, applying to no other portion of Africa, may, without offence to any neighbours, be accepted as co-extensive with the territories over which the Royal Niger Company has extended British influence, and may serve to differentiate them equally from the British colonies of Lagos and the Niger Protectorate on the coast and from the French territory of the Upper Niger.

Flora Shaw’s first article for The Times was on Egyptian finance, sent in under the signature “F. Shaw”, so that her sex should not stand against her. It was held to be a lucid exposition of a complicated subject, and was published. Miss Moberly Bell, in her biography of Flora Shaw, describes a meeting with the then editor of The Times, in which she suggested that the “Foreign and Colonial” column should be headed “Colonial and Foreign”. It was changed immediately, later becoming “Imperial and Foreign” until this year, when it was changed to “Overseas News”. In May, 1890, Flora Shaw began writing a regular fortnightly article for The Times, and became the newspaper’s first woman correspondent when she travelled to South Africa and Australia. She resigned from the permanent staff in September, 1900, though she travelled to South Africa for the paper again in the following year.
“... Nearly two months have elapsed since the dispatch of additional British officers and war-like stores to the territories of the Royal Niger Company prepared the public mind for probable military operations in those districts.

Sir George Goldie, the governor of the company, left England on December 4, and reached Lokoja, the military capital of the Company, on New Year's Day. It is to be expected that his arrival will be shortly followed by a decision as to any active policy which it may be thought desirable to pursue, and in countries where the fighting season is short action follows swift upon decision. Therefore, if fighting is to take place, it is probably that news of it will be not long delayed.

A force of from 800 to 1,000 trained Hausas well provided with military equipment and well Red by British officers constitutes an instrument for war which, though small in comparison with the vast crowds in arms commanded by local chiefs of the native Niger States, is still sufficiently important to arouse considerable interest in its proceedings.

Various rumours have been current as to the object against which the force is to be directed. The fact that its military base will be at Lokoja combines with, what is known from other sources to give assurance that the operations will be confined wholly to the internal affairs of the territories over which the charter of the Company extends. Border difficulties may be dismissed from consideration. While we wait for definite information it may, therefore, be worthwhile to consider briefly what is known about the general situation in the Royal Niger Company's territories.

In the first place, as the title "Royal Niger Company's Territories" is not only inconvenient to use but to some extent also misleading, it may, be permissible to coin a shorter title for the operation of pagan and Mahomedan States which have been brought by the exertions of the Royal Niger Company within the confines of a British Protectorate and thus need for, the first time in their history to be described as an entity by some general name.

To speak of them as the Central Sudan, which is the title accorded by some geographers and travelers, has the disadvantage of ignoring political frontiers, while the word ‘Sudan’ is too apt to connect itself in the public mind with the French Hinterland of Algeria, or the vexed questions of the Nile basin.

The name "Nigeria" applying to no other portion of Africa may, without offence to any neighbours, be accepted as co-extensive with the territories over which the Royal Niger Company has extended British influence, and may serve to differentiate them equally from the British colonies of Lagos and the Niger Protectorate on the coast and from the French territories of the Upper Niger.

Nigeria, thus understood, covers, as is well known, a thickly peopled area of about half-a million square miles, extending inland from the sea to Lake Chad.
and the northern limits of the empire of Soot, bounded on the east by the German frontier and on the west by a line drawn; southwards from Say (?) to the French frontier of Dlahomey.

The frontier lines have for 10 years been the subject of discussion with our European neighbours on either side. The northern limit was definitely settled by the Anglo-French treaty of 1891; the eastern boundary was determined by the Anglo-German treaty of 1893; and certain vexed questions on the western frontier were for practical purposes brought to a close last year, when the Royal Niger Company completed in the neighbourhood of Bajibo the erection of forts which it judged necessary for the legitimate maintenance of its authority.

Within these limits Nigeria contains many widely differing characteristics of climate, country, and inhabitants. Its history is ancient and is not wanting in dramatic elements of interest and romance. The country has been vaguely thought of as a country of swamps and forests, inhabited by pagan natives of low type who, as was lately demonstrated after the outbreak at Brass, had not finally risen above the cannibal stage. This is true of the immediate neighbourhood of the coast, where the Niger runs to the sea through mangrove swamps and a population demoralized by the use of bad European spirits display their barbarous vices to European observation.

Nothing could be more misleading than such an impression of the general character of the district ill question. As the country slopes inland it rises in successive waves. The first drops to a valley three or four hundred miles inland through which run in opposite directions the two great rivers of the district. The Binue, lowing west by south from the German frontier, and the Middle Niger, flowing east by south from the French Sudan, meet at Lokoja, and the double flood, turning at that point at a right angle, forms the waterway of the Lower Niger to the coast. This is the entrance passage of the Company's territories.

Everything desiring to enter Nigeria from the sea must pass this way, and it is therefore not surprising that this is the most generally known portion of the territory. The most important territories of Nigeria lie beyond the boundary of the two rivers. North of the valley, traced in an irregular semi-circle from east to north-west by the basins through which they run, the ground rises again in another and more considerable wave, reaching a height of 2,000 feet and maintaining a plateau level of from 1,700 feet to 2,000 feet which does not appear seriously to decline until the northern boundaries of Sokoto are reached.

On the further side of two great rivers the ground rises so rapidly as to overhang the flood in some places with hills of which the summits are forest-crowned, while in other parts beautiful views are offered of open and diversified landscape. At this time of the year portions of the riverbanks are covered with masses of flowering creepers, which hang to the water's edge. Scarlet, yellow, pink, and mauve tints prevail. Rare lilies and orchids also abound, and the European
travellers who have seen it to rank with the picturesque beauties of the world have held the scenery on some points of the river.

The country of the northern plateau appears to be generally open, and in its natural condition to consist in many parts, like a large portion of the bush country of Australia, of roughgrass lightly timbered. It is well watered, abounds in natural products, and offers evident facilities for cultivation. In the northern parts of the territory connecting the towns of Kuku, Kano, Wurnu(?), Sokoto, Landu (?), & co, where, by proximity to the principal seats of native authority, the maximum amount of order and security may perhaps be looked for, the country has been described by a recent traveller as resembling, wherever it is. Not subject to devastation by marauders, a continuous garden. The methods of agriculture are simple, but the fertility of the soil appears to supply the place of more scientific treatment.

Hedges of castor oil plant, which grows luxuriantly, divide, the cultivated, land. The principal crops raised are Guinea corn, Indian corn, wheat, and other cereals, cassava, rice, onions, cotton, indigo, peas, beans, sweet potatoes, ground nuts, and kitchen vegetables, and the Hausa native of the interior attributes the great superiority in strength which he possesses over the native of the coast to the superior food on which he lives. The pagan coast native lives chiefly on cassava and bananas, to which gin may perhaps now unfortunately be added. The Hausa of the interior lives chiefly on Guinea corn, and uses neither tea, coffee, nor habitually any stimulant, except the kola nut, which he chews, and which, notwithstanding its disagreeable taste to Europeans, is immensely valued as a native luxury.

The Royal Niger Company, unable to prevent the consumption and importation of alcoholic liquor in the territories of the coast, took the precaution in the early days of their administration of absolutely prohibiting the introduction of European alcohol in any form into the territory of the interior. Throughout the central region economic trees abound. Conspicuous amongst thorn are India-rubber, shea-butter, tamarinds, date and other palms, besides bread fruit, kuka, and many of which the nameless are less familiar to English ears. The banana and the papaw are among the native fruits, and wherever the pomegranate flourishes the climate is said to be suitable for white habitation. Tobacco grows wild through-the whole region.

Towards its eastern boundaries the plateau of Nigeria rises into mountainous. Regions, where amid rocky fastnesses and fertile valleys the aboriginal pagan inhabitants of the country defend their liberties as they can from the advancing slave-raider. The mountainous districts alternate with forestland still the home of the elephant, and with regions of extraordinary fertility where cultivated crops flourish. Wild fruits and flowers are plentiful, and extensive tracts are described as being covered with rich sweet herbage full of violets in (?) various parts of Nigeria; iron is found and has been worked for centuries. Silver is known to exist
in considerable quantities, and the waters of the Binue are reputed by the natives to wash down gold.

The whole plateau is diversified by occasional mountain ridges. Towards the west, where it fattens into a region of extensive cotton fields, it stretches across the valley of the Niger to the comparatively little known but interesting kingdom of which the name is variously given as Barbar, Boussa, and Borgu. Near Blajibo, on the boundary of this State, the flood of the Niger is broken by rapids which impede the course of navigation from the sea and have been the scene of the death of more than one distinguished traveller. Borgu has successfully withstood the advance of Mahomedan power, and is one of the few large States which is wholly independent of Sokoto.

It is usually counted among the pagan States, but the inhabitants repudiate the description of themselves as pagans and claim to be of the religion of "I isra (?), the Jew who died for men." A sort of spurious Christianity, largely mixed with pagan superstitions and rites, is held by some travellers to be the religion of the people of Borgu, who are also believed to have some racial affinity with the Berbers of Northern Africa. The populations of Nigeria are, like the country which they inhabit, widely diversified. Tribes distinguished by most interesting and remarkable peculiarities occur.

The body of the population may, however, fairly be classed in three main divisions. These are pagans, Hausas, and Foulahs.

The Pagans are the indigenous inhabitants now driven by successive tides of foreign conquest to take refuge in the mountains or in the countries of the Lower Niger and the coast, where they have sought the protection of European Powers. They are still very numerous, and they represent the lowest civilization of the country.

The Hausas, who are generally regarded as forming the most interesting of the races which inhabit the country, are believed to number as many as 15 millions. At the beginning of this century they were conquered by the Mahomedan Foulahs, who for about two hundred years had been gradually establishing their domination in the Sudan. The Hausas at that time were pagans, but their civilization claims to be quite as old as that of the Foulahs themselves, and they also came originally into Nigeria from the north, travelling, according to their own traditions, across Africa from Asia. In Nigeria they either drove out or enslaved the original pagan inhabitants and founded several States known geographically as ausaland.

Their principal town of Kano, which is now the commercial capital of Sokoto, has flourished as a centre of government, commerce, and art for nearly 1,000 years. It was founded at about the period when William the Conqueror was engaged in building the Tower of London. Its marketplace is said to be the largest in the
world. Kano-made cloth is sought by the Arab populations throughout the north of Africa, and Kano workers in. leather and iron have maintained the fame of their district for centuries.

The pure-bred Hausa is perfectly black, but is, of course, of a far higher type than the ordinary negro, and differs from him especially in the fact that he is naturally active, persistent, and industrious. He is essentially a man of peace as the Foulah is a man of war. The Hausa of today is Mahomedan, having in the matter of religion yielded to the superior enthusiasm of his conquerors. The Hausa language has, however, conquered the language of the Foulah, and is the Court language of Sokoto. The Foulah is a Mahomedan Arab, relatively light coloured, of the well-known type. The Foulah domination over various Hausa States in Nigeria was established in the first instance rather by military than by religious superiority, and gradually rulers of the Foulah race began to take the Place of the Hausa Kings.

But in the year 1802, a religious war was proclaimed against the Hausa populations, and resulted in the establishment of a certain Sheikh Othman as Sultan of Sokoto, then, as now, the dominant State. Within a few years all the petty Kings of the Hausa States were replaced by Foulah Emirs, and the Foulah race was definitely established in the position which it holds today as the dominating race of the entire district. On the death of Othman one of his sons inherited the sovereignty of Sokoto, and one the sovereignty of Gandu.

Gandu has, however, always recognized in some degree the supremacy of Sokoto, and Sokoto has remained the supreme native power of Nigeria. All other Hausa States within the borders of this district pay tribute to it, the so-called pagan State of Borga forming a notable exception. The principal fact in regard to the payment of this tribute with which the administration of the Royal Niger Company is likely to be concerned is that it is largely paid in slaves.

The Emir of Adamawa, whose territory lies towards the eastern boundary of the Company, is said to contribute no less a number than 10,000 annually. Nupe, Muri, Bautshi, Zaria, and other States contribute in their degree. Slaves are raided for not only among the pagan populations of the mountains, but by every Foulah King amongst his own Hausa subjects.

Slaves are the currency of the country for all large sums as well as for Imperial tribute, and whenever a petty ruler is pressed for money he raids on whom he dares. So numerous is the Hausa population, and so general is the practice of slave-raiding amongst the Mahomedan Foulahs, that it has been calculated that of the whole population of the world one in every 10 (?) is a Hausa-speaking slave. To proclaim a general war against the practice of slave-raiding over an immense-district through- out which slaves constitute so important a source of wealth would inevitably rouse all the Foulah States to arms, and would be a task far beyond the strength of the government of the Royal Niger Company. The
Company has endeavoured to pursue its work in the territories under its influence with the friendly co-operation of the constituted authorities. No Foulah administration has more constantly oppressed its subject populations in this respect than that of Nupe, whose territory stretches along the northern bank of the Middle Niger from the neighbourhood of Lokoja to the frontier of the western province of Borgu, and whose Emir claims to extend his rights southward over the pagan States upon the other bank.

Nupe was one of the latest of the Mausa States to fall under the Roulah yoke. It was conquered about 1818, and the Hausa populations within its borders, who were among the most civilized of the country, have more than once since then risen against their oppressors. On the latest occasion of such a revolt, when the Hausa populations of the king- dom of Nupe rose in 1882 against the then reigning emir, the help of the Company was given to the Mahomedan domination. But help has always been given with conditions.

It has been the practice of the Company to endeavour to protect certain peaceful pagan populations. To the south of the two rivers who have appealed to them for assistance. In a personal interview between the Governor of the Company and the late Emir of Nupe, held at Bida so lately as January of 1892, it was clearly laid down that Nupe should not raid for slaves across either the Niger or the Benue in countries which are under British protection.

The Emir of Nupe was definitely warned that slave-raiding south of the river would constitute a casus beli (?) with the Company. The warning has been disregarded, not only by the Emir Maloke, who died last year, but by his successor, the present Emir Abu Bokhari. A force of Nupe soldiers numbering about 1,000 cavalry and 10,000 infantry have been for some months concentrated to the south of the river in the neighbourhood of Kabba waiting only for the season to permit of the beginning of slave-raiding operations.

The latest news which has been received from the territories is to the effect that this force has been further strengthened by the presence of the Emir himself with the remainder of the Nape army, bringing the whole to an approximate strength of 2,000 cavalry and 18,000 to 20,000 infantry. If the Company should judge it necessary in vindication of their authority to enter into armed conflict with this body of troops, the operation will be more considerable than any which has yet been attempted by them, and, whether success or failure attend their arms, the consequences cannot fail to be proportionately far-reaching.”

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