

EARLY OKUN MIGRANTS IN JOS TOWN SINCE 1920

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ABSTRACT

Jos town, as a railway terminus for the Plateau Provincial capital as well as the state capital, attracted different ethnic and cultural groups from Nigeria and beyond. The imposition of British colonial rule led to a massive influx of immigrants, including Europeans, Lebanese, Indians, Tchadians, Cameroonians, and some Nigerians such as the Hausa, the Fulani, the Yoruba, Igbo, Tiv, Idoma, Igala, Kanuri, and a host of others. The arrival and settlement of these groups made Jos a multiethnic and multicultural society as well as a melting pot of different cultures during the colonial and post-colonial eras. The study is an attempt to present a historical trend in Okun migration and settlement in Jos town since 1920. The sources of this research were primary and secondary sources of data relevant to historical research. The objective of the research is primarily to assess the profiles of the early Okun migrants in Jos town. For a better understanding, the paper has been divided into different segments.

KEYWORDS: Early, Okun Migration, Migrants, Ethnic and Cultural Groups, Multiethnic and Multicultural Society.

INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the 20th century, scholars and students of history like Usman,⁶¹ Bako,⁶² Fwatshak⁶³ Isichie⁶⁴ Olaniyi⁶⁵ Albasu⁶⁶ Yusufu,⁶⁷ and Olu⁶⁸ have

⁶¹ See A. F. Usman and A. Bako, "Yoruba Hausa Relations in Gusau During the 20th Century", in O. Akinwumi, O. O. Okpeh and G. D. Je'adayibe (eds.), *Inter-Group Relations in Nigeria During the 19th and 20th Centuries*, Ibadan, Aboki Publishers, 2006, pp. 671-677. Also see A. F. Usman, 'Perspective on Igbo Migration to Gusau in the 20th Century', in A. I. Yandaki, I. M. Jumare and M. T. Usman (eds.), *Mahdi Adamu in the Practice of History: Hausa Land and Beyond*, Zaria, ABU Press, 2018, pp. 207-218. See A. F. Usman, Islam and the Integration of Migrant Communities: The Yoruba Experience in Metropolitan Gusau' in M. T. Usman and M. A. Rufa'I, (eds.), *Social and Economic History of Northern Nigeria Since 1500 AD*, Makurdi, Aboki Publishers, 2015, pp. 378-391.

⁶² Among A. Bako's Works are A. Bako, 'Igbo Migrants, the Indigenous Hausa Merchant Class and the Nigerian Civil War in Kano, Northern Nigeria: Challenges and Opportunities Revisited' in S. B. Ahmad and I. K. Abdussalam, *Resurgent Nigeria: Issues in Nigerian Intellectual History A Festschrift in Honor of Dahiru Yahya*, Ibadan, University Press, 2011, pp. 41-50, See A. Bako, 'The Role of Immigrant Communities in the Making of Kano Urban Complex Over the Ages, in A. I. Yandaki, I. M. Jumare and M. T. Usman (eds.), *Mahdi Adamu in the Practice of History: Hausa Land and Beyond*, Zaria, ABU Press, 2018, pp. 73-82, A. Bako, 'The Yoruba Migrants in Kano During the 20th Century: A History of

been busy studying migration and its impacts on the socio-economic history of Nigeria. These scholars and students have studied migration and inter-group relations from different theoretical and ideological pre-dispositions.⁶⁹ There is no doubt that the word migration is as old as man himself. From time immemorial people have been moving from one place to another in search of greener pastures and peaceful environments.⁷⁰

The phenomenon of migration has remained inevitable in human existence, though; their pattern and nature have been changing over time.⁷¹ This is because, no community or society lives in isolation, and no community is self-sufficient in both production and consumption of goods and services by necessity or luxury. The Nigerian societies, even before the colonial period, were considered neighbours

Economic Cooperation, *Degel: Journal of FAIS, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto*, Vol. 6, 2000, pp.19-26. Also see A. Bako, 'The Integration of the Yoruba Migrant Community in Kano Emirate in the 20th Century' *Ilorin Journal of History*, Department of History, University of Ilorin, Vol. 1, No. 2, 2006, pp. 20-35.

⁶³ S. U. Fwatshak, "Labour Migrations in Contemporary Nigeria." in M. Y. Mangvwat (ed.), *A History of Labor in Nigeria*, Jos: Jos University Press, 1998, pp. 31-43. Also see S. U. Fwatshak, "The Yoruba of Northern Nigeria," in M. Y. Mangvwat (ed.), *Peoples and Cultures of Northern Nigeria*, Texas: Genesis Graphic Design, Houston 1999, pp. 37-40.

⁶⁴ For More Analyzes on migration in Nigeria, see E. Isichei, *History of Nigeria Migration in Various Nigerian Societies Before Colonial Rule*, London, Longman, 1986. Also see E. Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, London, Macmillan Press, 1977, p. 212

⁶⁵ See R. Olaniyi, *Diaspora is not Like Home: A Social and Economic History of Yoruba in Kano, 1912-1999*, Muenchen, LINCOM Publishers, 2008, pp. 1-249.

⁶⁶ For a detailed account of Colonial and Post-Colonial Migration in Northern Nigeria, consult the work of S. A. Albasu, *The Lebanese in Kano: An Immigrant Community in a Hausa Society in the Colonial and Post-Colonial Periods*, Kaduna, KABS Print Services, 1995, pp. 6-193. Also see S. A. Albasu, 'The Hausa Factor and the Lebanese in the Economy of Kano' in A. I. Yandaki, I. M. Jumare and M. T. Usman (eds.), *Mahdi Adamu in the Practice of History: Hausa Land and Beyond*, Zaria, ABU Press, 2018, pp. 85-92.

⁶⁷ A. M. Yusufu, "Migration as a Factor of Contact and Interactions in the Lokoja Area in the 19th Century", in O. Akinwumi, O. O. Okpeh and G. D. Je'adayibe (eds.), *Inter-Group Relations in Nigeria During the 19th and 20th Centuries*, Ibadan, Aboki Publishers, 2006, pp. 671-677.

⁶⁸ See D. J. Olu, 'Migration and Settlement of Yagba Community in Sokoto City During the 20th Century' *Being a Paper Presented at the International Conference of the Department of History, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria*, Held on 6-9 July 2017, PP.1-15.

⁶⁹ See U. M. Bello, "An Immigrant Community: The Nupe in Sokoto", M. A (History) Dissertation, UDUS, 1999, p.1.

⁷⁰ See N. C. Ijanya, "A Socio-Economic History of the Idoma Migrant Community in Sokoto Metropolis: 1967-2000, 2010, p. 1.

⁷¹ See C. C. Ojukwu, 'Globalization, Migration and Philosophy of In-word Looking: The Contemporary Igbo Nation in Perspective', *Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, Vol. 3, No. 3, March 2009, p. 86. Also see I. Salisu, 'Igbo Migration and Inter-Group Relations in Gusau Town C. 1927-1996' M. A. (History) Dissertation, UDUS, 2012, p. 1.

because of migration.⁷² Various scholars who studied migration have provided different explanations of the concept. These scholars have made references and relate them to the movement of people of different categories and tribes, like workers, labourers, merchants, etc., from one village, town, area, geographical zone, state, country, and continent to another.⁷³

GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION, CLIMATE, AND EARLY HISTORY OF JOS

Jos is located on a mountainous Plateau that rises more than 1,000 metres above the surrounding plain. To the South and South-east, the plateau falls off into savannah lowlands. The region is of scenic beauty, with gigantic rock formations arising from the plains. Given its high altitude, Jos offers a temperate climate and has long attracted both foreign visitors and retired elites. Its surroundings are known for their hillsides, spectacular waterfalls, and wildlife parks. Until the situation changed in 2001, it was also known for its relatively harmonious relations. Jos lies in the centre of the country, at the juncture of the predominantly Muslim north and Christian south.⁷⁴

Jos is in the middle belt of Nigeria. Geographically, the Jos Plateau lies between latitude 9 and 10 N and longitude 9 and 10 E and is in the central part of Nigeria. Geographers Buchanan and Pugh were some of the earliest to identify it with the topographical description 'the Jos-Plateau'. Because of its excess cold in the past, the people were said to keep themselves warm at night.⁷⁵ The Jos Plateau has different

⁷² This statement is accredited to Prominent Nigerian Historians T. Falola, M. Adamu, e'tal, *History of Nigeria 1: Nigeria Before 1800 A.D*, Nigeria, Longman Publishers, 1989, p. 122-123.

⁷³ See I. Salisu, 'Igbo Migration and Inter-Group Relations in Gusau Town C. 1927-1996' M. A. (History) Dissertation, UDUS, 2012, pp. 1-2.

⁷⁴ For a detailed description of the Geography and Location of Jos, see J. Krause, *A Deadly Cycle: Ethno-Religious Conflict in Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria*, Geneva, Geneva Declaration Secretariat, 2011, pp. 16-19. Also see A. D. Bingel, *Jos: Origins and Growth of the Town, 1900-1972*, Jos, University Press, 1978, p. 1. See also B. Dogo, 'The Migration Patterns of the Nomadic Cattle Fulani on the Jos-Plateau, Nigeria', MSc (Geography and Planning) Dissertation, University of Jos, 1990, p. 6. See C. G. Ames, *Gazetteer of the Plateau Province*, London, Frank Case, 1934, pp.7-14. See S. U. Fwatshak, *African Entrepreneurship in Jos, Central Nigeria, 1902-1985*, Durham, North Carolina, Carolina Academic Press, 2010, pp. 9-10. See L. S. Gomwalk, 'Jos Tin Mines and the Rise of a City, 1902-1960', M. A. (History) Dissertation, University of Jos, 2015, pp. 32-42; see also W. M. Poten, 'Jos Crises and History of Contestation Between the Berom, Anaguta, Afizere and Other Plateau Groups', M. A. (History) Dissertation, University of Jos, 2023, pp. 1-135. See D. N. Ishaku, 'Origin and Development of Residential Segregation in Jos Metropolis, 1917-2011', M. A. (History), Dissertation, University of Jos, 2020, pp. 1-117.

⁷⁵ For More Consult K. M. Buchanan and J. C. Pugh, *Land and People in Nigeria, the Human Geography of Nigeria and its Environmental Background*, London, London University Press, 1955, p. 15.

geographical and climatic features, which give it a different outlook from the immediate regions to the east, west, south, and north of it.⁷⁶

The topography of Jos metropolis is typically a plateau surrounded by hills, including the Dogon Dutse hills, the Shere hills, the Naraguta hills, and the Jenta hills. There also exist many large and small inselbergs, as well as rocky outcrops. These physical features served useful purposes both in the past and present. For example, in the past, the mountains and rocks served as hunting grounds and as natural defenses against external aggression. Today, some of these mountains and rocks form part of the tourist attraction, which gives Plateau State the identity of 'Home of Peace and Tourism'. Jos is well drained by a network of rivers and streams, including the Dilimi River, which is a tributary of the Shari River system. The Shari itself empties into Lake Chad in the northeast.⁷⁷

Jos metropolis, which is the area of study, is the capital of Plateau State, in Nigeria's central region. Since 1915, Jos has been an administrative centre, and this has brought economic advantages. In 1915, it became the headquarters of the colonial government station, which had previously been in Naraguta, which is also a part of Jos metropolis. In 1926, it also became the headquarters of the newly created Plateau Province. Following the creation of states in 1967, Jos became the capital of Benue-Plateau State. Since 1976, Jos has remained the capital of the new Plateau State following the creation of Benue and Nasarawa States in 1976 and 1996 respectively.⁷⁸ The metropolitan city of Jos was founded as an urban enclave at the beginning of the 20th Century, but it was preceded by earlier indigenous settlements such as Naraguta and Guash. What the British called the Hausa settlement of Naraguta was founded by the Anaguta. But as Stobart observed, the settlement was attacked during the 19th Century as part of the unsuccessful Jihad on the Jos Plateau.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ For an elaborate Account, see H. J. Morrison, 'Early Tin Production and Nigerian Labor on the Jos-Plateau 1906-1921' *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 1977, pp. 205-216. Also see A. M. Borok and P. K. Tubi, 'Toponyms in the Jos-Plateau and the Impact on Inter-group Relations: An Ethno-Historical Perspective' *RJHIS*, Vol. 4, No. 2, 2017, p. 183. See also A. M. Borok, A. Suleiman, C. Azgaku, 'The Politics of Labor Control and Inter-Group Relations in the Jos-Plateau Mining Camps 1945-1960', *IJHSSS*, Vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 322-333.

⁷⁷ See S. U. Fwatshak, *African Entrepreneurship in Jos, Central Nigeria, 1902-1985*, Durham, North Carolina, p. 1.

⁷⁸ Cited by S. U. Fwatshak, *African Entrepreneurship in Jos, Central Nigeria, 1902-1985*, Durham, North Carolina, pp. 9-10. See I. K. Abdussalam, 'History and Co-existence in the Nigerian State: The Case of Jos' in S. B. Ahmad and I. K. Abdussalam (eds.), *Resurgent Nigeria: Issues in Nigerian Intellectual History a Festschrift in Honor of Dahiru Yahya*, Ibadan, University Press, 2011, pp. 308-315. Also see L. Bonkat and D. Akume, 'The Impact of Herders/Farmers Conflict on the Socio-Economic Lives of Women in Plateau State' in S. Ibrahim, O. E. Tangban, A. O. Ahmed and C. C. Osakwe (eds.), *Defense, Security, Economy and Development in Nigeria*, Vol. 2, London, Bahiti and Dalila Publishers, 2017, pp. 458-474.

⁷⁹ D. N. Ajiji and D. M. Kangdim, 'Political Stakes and the Nature of Political Alliances in Jos Metropolis of Plateau State' in S. U. Fwatshak (ed.), pp. 75-76.

The combined forces of the Anaguta, Afizere, Berom, and other indigenous groups defeated the Jihadists in 1873 at the battle of *Rafin Jaki* and drove them towards Bauchi from where they came. However, Hausa traders came later from Bauchi and other northern cities and established regular trade with the indigenous communities at Naraguta, where they camped. Slave raiders, among them, also operated from there.⁸⁰ Demographically, Jos witnessed rapid population growth between 1915 and 1933, as the population rose from 8,000 in 1920 to 11,000 in 1931. The figure dropped to 10,000 in 1933 because of the depression, which led to the laying-off of labourers. Post-depression boom saw a steady rise in the population, which reached 19,250 in 1946 for the township and native town combined.⁸¹

GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION AND PEOPLE OF OKUNLAND

Okun refers to the people and their dialect, and also applies to the geographical area that they occupy. The area, which has been variously referred to as Kabba Division, Kabba Yoruba, Northeastern Yoruba, presently constitutes a major portion of Kogi State of Nigeria.⁸² According to Tubi, the Okun people are said to have six cultural groups, namely Bunu, Ijumu, Kiri, Owe, Oworo, and Yagba. These groups resulted primarily from linguistic correlates.⁸³ Geographically, Okunland is

⁸⁰ D. N. Ajiji and D. M. Kangdim, 'Political Stakes and the Nature of Political Alliances in Jos Metropolis of Plateau State' in S. U. Fwatshak (ed.), pp. 75-76. See S. E. M. Storbart, (A. D. O.) Assessment Report on Anaguta and Jarawa Tribes, Naraguta Division, P. 8, Bauchi Province, File 555P of 30th June 1914, N. A. K. Kaduna.

⁸¹ S. U. Fwatshak, *African Entrepreneurship in Jos, Central Nigeria, 1902-1985*, Durham, North Carolina, pp. 106-107.

⁸² . For further details on the people of Okun, see, for example, A. Obayemi, "The Sokoto Jihad and the Okun Yoruba: A Review", *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, Vol. 9. No.2, 1978, pp. 61-87. See also A. Obayemi, "History, Culture and Group Identity: The Case of the Okun NorthEast Yoruba" *Journal of Historical Research*, A. B. U. Zaria, Vol.1, 1976, p. 1. A. Obayemi, "State and Peoples of the Niger-Benue Confluence Area" in O. Ikime (ed.), *Groundwork of Nigerian History*, Ibadan, Heinemann Educational Books, 1980, pp. 144-164. See E. Krapf-Askari, "The Social Organization of the Owe", *African Notes*, Vol.2, No.3, 1965, pp. 9-12. See S. O. Biobaku (ed.), *Sources of Yoruba History*, Ibadan, University Press Limited, 1987, p. 208. Z. O. Apata, "Administrative Changes and Reorganizations in the Old Kabba Province of Northern Nigeria, 1897-1939" PhD (History) Thesis, University of Ife, 1985, p. 8. I. Akanmidu, "Owe Bunu and Ijumu Inter-Group Relations: A Re-Assessment", in C.B.N. Ogbogbo, R. O. Olaniyi and O. G. Muojama (eds.), *The Dynamics of Inter-Group Relations in Nigeria Since 1960: Essays in Honour of Obaro Ikime at 70*, Ibadan, BW Right Integrated Publishers Limited, 2012, pp. 430-449. See Jide Ige, "The Ideals of the Sokoto Caliphate in the Outlying Districts: The Okun Factor in the British Conquest of Northern Nigeria, 1897-1906" in H. Bobboyi and A. M. Yakubu (eds.), *The Sokoto Caliphate: History and Legacies, 1804-2004*, Vol 1, Kaduna, Baraka Press, 2006, p. 271.

⁸³ P. K. Tubi, "Globalization and Its Effect on Okun-Yoruba: An Ethno-Historical Perspective", in *The Nigerian Journal of Economic History*, No.13 and 14, A Publication of the Nigerian Economic History Association, 2015, p. 4.

circumscribed within latitude 7.30N and 8.35N and longitude 5.20E and 5.30E. The area is bordered to the north by Nupeland, Ebiraland to the east, Edo State to the southeast, and other southern Yoruba groups to the west and southwest.⁸⁴ It is an inland area that has many links with the River Niger. It covers an area of 4,608 sq miles (about 7,376 sq km). The 1952 and 1963 population censuses of the area put the population at 10,325 and 80,037, respectively.⁸⁵ While the 2006 population census puts the population at 598,585.⁸⁶

Okunland is endowed with many streams, but the main rivers are Ohe and Oyi. River Ohe, which rises some kilometres north of Okunland, flows into the Atlantic Ocean and Oyi, with its tributaries flowing into the River Niger. It must be stated here that none of these streams served as a trade route or means of transport to Okunland, like the role played by the Atlantic Ocean, the Rivers Niger, and Benue. The landscape is undulating but with numerous inselbergs. The highest hill in the area is Okoro Hill at Ogidi, which is 720m above sea level.⁸⁷

The area is characterized by two seasons: the dry and wet seasons. Both seasons last for six months. There is a short period of harmattan in the dry season in the months of November, December, and early January. These months, especially from the middle of November, are dry and hazy.⁸⁸ The heaviest rainfall is recorded in the month of September. The annual temperature of 24C⁰-29.67C⁰ and the rainfall of 12m-18m are suitable for growing crops like yams of varying species, guinea corn, maize, millets, beans, groundnut, Banana, cassava, coffee, cocoa, and Kolanut.⁸⁹

EARLY OKUN MIGRANTS IN JOS TOWN

According to Omojarabi, a prominent Okun migrant in Jos metropolis, there is indeed no document to confirm with precision the exact date when Okun migrants first

⁸⁴ P. I. Akanmidu, "A History of Western Education Among the Okun –Yoruba People of Kogi State 1902 – 1980," M.A. Dissertation, Unilorin, 2009, p.25.

⁸⁵ S.B. I. Bamisaiye, "A Study of the Historical Development of Baptist L.E.A School Ekinrin – Ade Kabba Division 1929 – 1979," M.A Dissertation, A.B.U Zaria, 1992, p. 4. See Population Census of the Northern Region of Nigeria 1952 and 1963, Gaskiya Corporation, Zaria.

⁸⁶ Official Gazette (FGP 71/52007/2,500(0L24): Legal Notice on Publication of the Details of the Breakdown of the National and State Provisional Totals, 2006 Census.

⁸⁷ S.B. I. Bamisaiye, p. 5. See R.K. Udo, *Geographical Region of Nigeria*, London, Longman, 1981, p.109.

⁸⁸ S.B. I. Bamisaiye, p. 5. See K.M. Buchanan and J.C. Pugh, *Land and People in Nigeria: The Human Geography of Nigeria and US Environmental Background*, London, University Press, 1967, pp. 21 – 36, pp. 209 – 211. Also see W. A. Perkin and H. Jasper, *Nigeria: A Descriptive Geography*, Ibadan, University Press, p.46. C.K. Meek, *The Northern Tribes of Nigeria: An Ethnographical Account of the Northern Province of Nigeria*, Vol. 1, London, Frank Cass and Co Limited, 1971, p. 14.

⁸⁹ R. Pullan, "Settlement of the Middle Belt in Nigeria: An Attempt at Climatic Definition," in *Journal of Geographical Association of Nigeria*, Vol. 5, No. 1, p. 39. See also R.K. Udo, OP. Cit, p. 111.

arrived in Jos metropolis. One thing that is, however, certain is that the earliest known Okun appearance in Jos metropolis was during the era of colonialism, but how early in history it would be nearly impossible to say because their migration and settlement in Jos metropolis has not been documented. The available evidence now is based on oral interviews obtained from Okun migrants in Jos metropolis. It is important to note that Okun migrants started moving to Jos metropolis during the colonial period when they came as traders, teachers, and to work in the European firms as accountants, secretaries, clerks, and others worked in the mining fields.⁹⁰

Prominent earliest Okun migrants who settled in Jos metropolis include, amongst others, Oba Benjamin Aiyedege, an Odo-ape man in what is today Kabba Bunu Local Government area of Kogi State, who is believed to have come to Jos in 1920 purposely to work as an apprentice engineer with African Tin Mining Company. He was among the first Okun migrants to arrive in Jos in 1920. He was a middle-aged man at the time of his arrival. According to Chief M. A. Joel, Aiyedege left his aboriginal home after his primary education at the Holy Trinity School, worked in Kaduna, where he served the then District Officer (D.O) as a steward for several years before coming to Jos in 1920. In 1939, when the Second World War began, Aiyedege was mobilized into the British Army from his company. His troop proceeded to East Africa, particularly in Nairobi and Ethiopia. In 1943, he was transferred to Free Town, Sierra Leone; in 1944, he was moved to Burma, India. He returned to Jos in 1945 after his demobilization from the army, where he headed the fitting mechanical section of African Tin Mining Coy on a salary of Three Shillings per day. He had all his children in Jos and relocated home in 1987, where he was enthroned as the traditional ruler of Odo-ape.⁹¹

Pa Ayo Oroniya was another early and prominent Okun migrant in Jos. He came in 1930 as a middle-aged man and later got a job with Madara Limited in 1942. Madara Limited was a company located at Bukuru, which was into the production of dairy products like milk, yoghurt, meat, etc. He later became a staff member with the Amalgamated Tin Mine of Nigeria (ATMN) in 1952, where he worked up to 1976, when he retired after 24 years of continuous service. He was from Kabba Bunu Local Government of Kogi State and built his permanent residence in the Bukuru area of Jos, Plateau State. He had all his children in Jos, prominent among them is Venerable Kehinde Oroniya, an Anglican priest presently in charge of the Anglican Cathedral, Bukuru, and Mrs. B. Tyoden, the wife of the late Prof. Sunny Tyoden, the former Deputy Governor of Plateau State. Pa Ayo Oroniya died in Jos in 2004. He was a committed Christian and an ardent follower of the Anglican Church.⁹²

Another Okun migrant who settled in Jos was the late Chief Christopher Ayodele Jimoh. He arrived in Jos in 1940 as a professional tailor located at Sarkin

⁹⁰ For More see Alh. H. Omojarabi, Accountant, 81 years, Jos, 03. 08. 2025. As of the time the interview was conducted, Omojarabi was the outgoing president of the Okun Development Association, Jos Chapter.

⁹¹ See Chief M. A. Joel, Contractor, 80 years, Jos, 09. 08. 2025.

⁹² See for Example K. Oroniya, Pastor, 62 Years, Bukuru in Jos, 23.08.2025.

Arab Street along Massalacin Jumma'at area, and later became a businessman and the proprietor of the famous Hope Hotel, established in the 70s located at Sarkin Arab Street. Between 1987 and 1988, Ayodele served as a counsellor of Sarkin Arab Ward. He was the pioneer president of the Okun Development Association, Jos Chapter, formed in 1966. He was from Ogidi village of Ijumu Local Government Area. He died in Jos in the 90s. He had all his children in Jos, who include Barrister Mike Ayodele, who is the owner of M. F. Ayodele and Co., Olive Chambers at No. 7 Tafawa Balewa Street, Jos, Barrister Mrs. A. Adeoye, wife to retired Brigadier General Adeoye, Mr. Idowu Ayodele, the former Assistant Director, the National Intelligence Agency (N.I.A.) and Bamitale Ayodele, a matron who served and retired in the Jos University Teaching Hospital (JUTH), presently working in Faith Alive Hospital as a part-time matron.⁹³

Other Okun migrants who settled in Jos before Nigeria's independence in 1960 included Pa. Akobe, an indigene of Kabba Bunu Local Government Area whose full name was J. S. Akobe. He was believed to have arrived in Jos in 1950. He obtained his tailoring training from Christopher Jimoh and later became the proprietor of Akobe Tailoring located at Church Street, Jos.⁹⁴ There was also another Okun, Mrs. Kemi Oroniye, who arrived in 1954 as a newlywed bride to Pa. A. Oroniye, who later ventured into foodstuffs business. Essentially, she procured onions, pepper, beans, maize, dried corn, groundnut, locust beans, and millet in tons from rural markets and transported them to Jos. She was also into provision business. She died in Jos in 2017.⁹⁵ There was Mama Ibijoke, who was said to have arrived in Jos during the colonial administration. She was into beer parlour business at No. 10 Church Street and died in Jos in 1986. Pa Jonathan Olu arrived in the 1930s, worked in the carpentry division of Jos Local Government, and died in Jos in 1999. He lived at Dankafala Street, behind Jos North Local Government Area, and had all his children in Jos. Prominent among his children are Major General Folusho Jonathan Olu and Late K. J. Olu, an intelligence corps officer of the Nigerian Army. Baba Yusufu arrived in 1940, lived at Cole Street along Nassarawa area of Jos, from Kabba Bunu Local Government Area.⁹⁶

PULL FACTORS

The influx of the Okun people into Jos, like the case of other groups, was largely in connection with tin mining, colonial administration, and expanding opportunities for trade and commerce that followed. The British colonial rule aided this migratory tradition, especially to Jos, which became a centre of colonial

⁹³ Barrister M. Ayodele, Lawyer, 65 Years, Jos, 27.08.2025.

⁹⁴ Pa. J. Bamidele, Watch Repairer, 72 years, Jos, 17.08.2025.

⁹⁵ See K. Oroniye, Pastor, 62 years, Bukuru, 23.08.2025.

⁹⁶ Barrister M. Ayodele, Lawyer, 65 Years, Jos, 04.09.2025.

administration, commerce, investment, and infrastructure.⁹⁷ The movement of Okun migrants into Jos metropolis seemed to conform with Rasheed Olaniyi's view that:

Migration occurred within the changing context of economic circumstances created by British rule. Migration was provoked not only by the quest to earn cash but also by the ruthless colonial exploitation of the rural communities and, profoundly, the colonial regime's laissez-faire attitude to the well-being of the masses. The British colonial policies in Nigeria disrupted the traditional socio-economic structures and rendered peasant farming an unrewarding enterprise. The features of British economy include, imposition of systematic and universal taxation, compulsory use of a standard coin and currency, encouragement of the production of export crops, and the exploitation of Nigerian mineral resources, control of external trade by the colonial government and British monopoly capital, and the establishment of new centres of trade and administration pushed the peasants to seek their means of livelihood away from the farm and to adjust the patterns of economic activities to enable them earn enough currency to pay taxes. In this way, the capitalist penetration fostered uneven development, which influenced migration from spheres of agriculture and craft production towards wage labour for the payment of taxes and the pursuit of entrepreneurship.⁹⁸

Indeed, during the colonial era, many Okun migrants were frequenting Jos to benefit from the new forms of commercial activities that developed during the period. More Okun citizens with certain skills also came with the prospects of working and conducting business in Jos.⁹⁹ Okun migration and settlement in Jos took a new turn after Nigeria's independence in 1960, as a result of the increase in Okun migrants who came not only from their aboriginal home but also from different parts of Nigeria, like Kano, Kaduna, Niger, Kwara, and a host of others. Some of the Okun migrants found their way to Jos metropolis either on the invitation of close relations or just on their own.¹⁰⁰

The movement of the Okun migrants into Jos increased especially after the Nigerian Civil war of 6th June 1967 to 12th January 1970. This was a result of the disruption caused by the Nigerian Civil War, which led to an unprecedented dispersal of people all over the country (population shift from one part of the country to another). The Okun people of Kogi State were also not spared in that serious population shift, as many of them moved into Jos for greener pastures, that is, to search for a peaceful environment where they could seek jobs and get involved in other economic activities, as well as acquire Western education. For instance, one of the Okun migrants in Jos who was interviewed claimed that the peaceful nature of Jos, the good weather conditions, and the availability of jobs in Jos city were some of the

⁹⁷ Chief S. A. Arukoyo, Businessman, 80 years, Jos, 16.08.2025.

⁹⁸ See, for example, R. Olaniyi, *Diaspora is not like Home: A Social and Economic History of Yoruba in Kano, 1912-1999*, p. 56.

⁹⁹ Prof. E. T. Alemika, Lecturer, 63 Years, Jos, 28.08. 2025.

¹⁰⁰ Prof. E. Olumodeji, Retired Professor of Sociology, 77 years, Jos, 07. 09.2025.

major attractions that kindled his interest in Jos. In fact, Jos was not much affected by the civil war crisis. The movement of the Okun migrants to Jos, therefore, became uninterrupted in the post-civil war years until 2001, when the major Jos crisis broke out.¹⁰¹

According to Prof. Alemika, a professor of Pharmaceutical Chemistry Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences at the University of Jos, an Okun migrant in Jos, in addition to Okun craftsmen, some of the Okun people in Jos metropolis were, and some are still, civil servants. They came either by transfer or came on their own to look for jobs. Some even came to the metropolitan Jos to work through several job advertisements they saw in national dailies like 'New Nigeria News Paper' examples of such Okun civil servants in Jos who have worked include late Mr. Gbemiro who worked with the Plateau State Polytechnic, late Mr. J. O. Mayomi who served as head of metal department at the Technical School Bukuru from Odo-ape village of Kabba Bunu Local Government Area, Prof. E. Olumodeji, a retired professor of Sociology University of Jos, Prof. Etannibi Alemika professor of Criminology and the Sociology of Law, Prof. Mrs. Emily Etannibi Alemika served in the Department of Public Law, Faculty of Law at the University of Jos, Prof. Mrs. Eseyin Head Department of Chemistry at the University of Jos from Owe village of Kabba Bunu Local Government Area, Dr. J. B. Eseyin a computer scientist and one time Deputy Director of Information Communication Technology (I.C.T) at the University of Jos, and Prof. Joash Ojo Amupitan (SAN), who became Deputy Vice Chancellor (Administration) of the University of Jos.¹⁰²

The literate Okun migrants in Jos mostly occupy a salaried class, while those without a Western education are involved in crafts. However, the greater majority of the Okun migrants in Jos came for employment purposes, that is, to get jobs; their movement to Jos was induced by the peaceful environment of Jos before the crisis erupted.¹⁰³ The majority of the Okun people presently in Jos metropolis believed that their ultimate desire is to acquire land within the city of Jos and build more houses for themselves in the city before or after retirement from their occupational pursuits. In analysing their stay in metropolitan Jos and their experiences in Jos, a few of the Okun migrants commented on their conditions before coming and after arriving. They indeed acknowledged satisfaction. For instance, Chief Arukoyo, a prominent and respected Okun migrant and a traditional title holder in Kabong community of Jos, reveals that he has spent more than forty years in Jos and has no regret.¹⁰⁴

Since the most important reason they gave for coming to Jos is economic improvement based on employment opportunities, they tried to compare the living standard in Jos metropolis with their initial standard of living in their previous domain, about working conditions, income, opportunities, education of their children, health facilities, and quality of life in a material sense. Some of them reported satisfaction

¹⁰¹ Chief T. Owa, Businessman, 82 Years, Jos, 29.08.2025.

¹⁰² See Prof E. T. Alemika, Lecturer, 63 Years, Jos, 28.08.2025.

¹⁰³ Pa. J. Odofin, Retired Civil Servant, 81 Years, Jos, 20.08.2025.

¹⁰⁴ Chief S. A. Arukoyo, Businessman, Jos.

with life in Jos town concerning income and children's upbringing. For example, Chief M. A. Joel and Chief T. Owa made this comparison and appreciated Jos and Plateau State in general as the host community.¹⁰⁵ According to Mr. Sunday Ijagbemi, who is the current president of Okun Development Association (O.D.A). Jos chapter, a good number of Okun migrants came to Jos to earn a living, which is very crucial to them. All they craved for were better economic opportunities. Ijagbemi further reaffirmed that the Okun migrants in Jos metropolis, whether educated or not, do not depend on anybody for survival. They are always productive, hardworking, while pursuing peace with their host communities. He said Okun migrants are economically aggressive and always engaged in one economic activity or another.¹⁰⁶

Several Okun migrants in Jos worked in various organisations and government ministries. Many of them were craftsmen and women. They collectively formed the Okun community in Jos. It is important to note that the decision of Okun migrants to go out of their aboriginal home and their system of settlement was no doubt their own affairs. However, the date of entry of some of the Okun migrants in Jos could not be fixed with precision and accuracy. The Okun people in Jos metropolis did not move into Jos in groups but came in individually.¹⁰⁷ The migration of Okun into Jos metropolis could be explained by both push and pull factors. Isa believes that 'people of a particular tribal group would settle where their fellow tribesmen were living'. This statement could be attributed to the Okun group in Jos metropolis.¹⁰⁸ Other early Okun settlers in Jos metropolis include Pa. Ola Oshibikan, Edward Alesagba, Engr. K. A. Tobi, Pa. J. Odofin, Elder Lawal.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ See Chief M. A. Joel. Also, see Chief T. Owa.

¹⁰⁶ See Chief S. Ijagbemi, Technician, 65 Years, Jos, 30.08.2025.

¹⁰⁷ Mallam I. O. Idris Imam, 60 Years, Businessman, 30.08.2025, Mallam Idris Imam is the current Secretary General of Okun Development Association, Jos Chapter.

¹⁰⁸ See, for example, I. U. Isa, *The Metropolitan City of Sokoto*, p. 86.

¹⁰⁹ Mrs. O. Oshibikan, 85 Years, Trader, Bukuru, 1.09.2025. Pa. Oshibikan arrived in Jos in 1961. He was an educated Okun migrant in Jos; he was an architect by training, he worked with the Amalgamated Tin Mine of Nigeria and retired in Jos, had all his children in Jos, and built his personal house in the Bukuru area of Jos. He was from Ikin-Ade village of Okunland and died in Jos in 2016. Alhaji H. Omojarabi is 81 years old as of 2025, another typical example of an Okun resident in Jos who came to Jos in 1961 and was admitted as a student into the City College of Commerce, Bukuru, graduated in 1966, and later got a job with Levantis Company as an account officer, worked for 22 years, and retired in Jos. He hails from Aiyegunle Gbedde of Ijumum Local Government Area of Kogi State. Among the Okun migrants who helped in the development of the Okun union in Jos is Chief M. A. Joel, who came to Jos in 1969 and stood as an exceptional case. As a professional engineer, he worked with the National Cash Register Company, N.C.R., an American company predominantly in business machines and office equipment located at No. 10 Ahmadu Bello Way, formerly known as Naraguta Street. He was transferred to Jos from Lagos in 1969, where he worked with his company as a maintenance officer. When he first arrived, he lived at No. 32 Rwang Pam street, and thereafter moved to No. 4 Langtang street in 1973 and then to his personal house in 1974 at Apata area in Jos. Prof. Joash Ojo Amupitan (DVC Administration, University of Jos) is a Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN) and a professor of law who was

CONCLUSION

The central focus of this article has been on Early Okun Migrants in Jos since 1920. Jos, like any colonial administrative centre and railway terminus, attracted different sets of migrant groups from divergent ethnic and cultural backgrounds in the 20th and 21st centuries. Jos town grew from a small administrative capital to a large heterogeneous urban centre. There is no doubt that the contributions of Okun migrants in the history of Jos, especially during the colonial and post-colonial eras, will always be remembered. The Okun Population in Jos, therefore, is a quality population. Economic interdependence, religion, languages, and inter-ethnic marriages had cemented the relationship between the Okun migrants and their hosts. There is no doubt that more detailed research on the activities of the Okun migrants in Jos town is needed to complement this preliminary research.

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appointed to the position by the university senate in October 2022. After his first law degree, Prof. Amupitan joined the service of the University of Jos in 1989 as an assistant lecturer and rose through the academic ranks to attain the position of reader in 2003 and professor in 2008. He was conferred with the revered position of SAN in 2014 in recognition of his achievements in the law profession, among many other professional accolades. He was called to the Bar in 1988 and completed a Master of Law in 1993 at the University of Jos. He acquired a PhD in Law also from the University of Jos in 2007. He is from Aiyetoro Gbedde town of Ijumu Local Government Area of Kogi State.

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