

# UK Aid, Migration, and Neo-Colonial Extraction: A Comparative Study of Social Representation in India and Nigeria

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## ABSTRACT

In an era defined by the "Global Britain" strategy and post-pandemic recovery efforts, the United Kingdom's engagement with former colonies through aid and migration frameworks continues to be portrayed as mutually beneficial development partnerships. This research demonstrates that these frameworks operate as sophisticated mechanisms of neo-colonial extraction, systematically transferring both financial and human capital from postcolonial states to the metropole. Through comparative analysis of India and Nigeria, this study examines how contemporary UK aid and migration policies reshape social representations, collective identity constructs, and indigenous knowledge systems. Employing a mixed-methods approach, including surveys (N = 800) and 80 in-depth interviews conducted in 2024, we investigate how aid discourses and migration aspirations interact to produce culturally hybrid but psychologically destabilized identities. Quantitative analysis reveals a strong correlation between the escalating financial burdens of migration (including the 66% IHS surcharge increase in 2024) and perceptions of extractive UK relationships ( $r = 0.67$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Qualitative findings further demonstrate that migration and aid collectively reorient youth futurity toward external validation while systematically marginalizing indigenous knowledge systems. We argue that UK development and migration policies sustain a form of cultural dependency that reproduces colonial hierarchies under the veneer of mutual benefit, with significant implications for both source countries and the UK's ethical standing in a multipolar world.

**KEYWORDS:** *United Kingdom aid, FCDO, migration, neo-colonialism, social representation, brain drain, Japa Syndrome, India, Nigeria, identity, indigenous knowledge.*

## INTRODUCTION

The United Kingdom's post-Brexit engagement with its former colonies unfolds within the strategic framework of "Global Britain," a paradigm that ostensibly promotes mutual prosperity while navigating the challenges of a competitive international landscape. The 2020 merger of the Department for International Development (DFID) into the Foreign and Commonwealth Office created the FCDO, symbolically and practically subordinating development objectives to diplomatic and trade priorities. Concurrently, the UK's points-based immigration system, designed to address critical

workforce shortages, has intensified the recruitment of skilled professionals from Commonwealth nations. While framed as partnerships for shared growth and opportunity, these structural arrangements perpetuate historical asymmetries between the UK and postcolonial states, now amplified by contemporary geopolitical and economic pressures.

This study investigates the interconnected dynamics of UK aid and migration policy as complementary instruments of neo-colonial extraction in the current geopolitical context. We understand extraction not

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merely as the transfer of material resources but as the systematic appropriation of human potential, cultural capital, and epistemic authority. Contemporary UK aid, following significant budget reductions and strategic reorientation, operates increasingly through financialized instruments that privilege British commercial and strategic interests. Simultaneously, the targeted migration of healthcare professionals, engineers, and tech specialists from India and Nigeria-many trained through publicly subsidized education-constitutes a substantial hidden subsidy to the British economy, effectively externalizing the costs of human capital formation while addressing domestic workforce crises.

Drawing on postcolonial theory (Nkrumah, 1965; Mbembe, 2016) and Social Representation Theory (Moscovici, 1984), we contend that these structural relationships transcend mere resource redistribution, actively reshaping collective consciousness and social imaginaries. Social representations-the shared cognitive systems through which communities make sense of their world-form the bedrock of cultural identity and communal life. When aid and migration policies reinforce patterns of external dependency, they fundamentally alter how individuals perceive themselves, their societies, and their future possibilities. In India and Nigeria, both emblematic former British colonies with complex contemporary relationships with the UK, these processes manifest through the escalating valorization of UK education and migration as ultimate markers of success, alongside the progressive erosion of confidence in indigenous institutions and knowledge systems.

### 1.1. Neo-Colonialism in the Contemporary Global Order

Kwame Nkrumah's (1965) conceptualization of neo-colonialism as "the last stage of imperialism" retains remarkable explanatory power in the 2020s, though its manifestations have evolved. For Nkrumah, political independence did not terminate domination but merely transformed its mechanisms from direct administrative control to indirect influence exercised through economic, cultural, and institutional channels. In our contemporary context, skilled migration represents a crucial addition to this framework of analysis. As the UK confronts demographic aging and public sector workforce shortages exacerbated by Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic, it systematically recruits professionals from the Global South, particularly in healthcare, technology, and education. This creates a fundamental contradiction: while development aid ostensibly aims to strengthen institutions in former colonies, migration policies simultaneously drain

these institutions of their most essential human resources.

This paradox finds stark expression in Nigeria's "Japa Syndrome"-a term derived from Yoruba meaning "to flee"-which has evolved from individual aspiration to mass social phenomenon following pandemic-related disruptions and ongoing economic challenges. The syndrome describes the accelerated, large-scale emigration of skilled professionals seeking better opportunities abroad, with the UK as a primary destination due to historical ties and linguistic affinity. Similarly, India continues to experience substantial outflows of medical practitioners, engineers, and IT specialists, many educated through substantial public investment. The British state benefits multiplicatively: first, through the immediate infusion of talent that sustains critical public services like the NHS; second, through direct financial contributions from migrants via visa fees, the Immigration Health Surcharge (IHS), and international tuition fees; and third, through the long-term economic value generated by skilled migrant labor. These interconnected mechanisms effectively transform human aspiration and public investment from the Global South into a sustained stream of economic rent for the UK.

### 1.2. The Converging Apparatuses of Aid and Migration

Foreign aid and migration streams are typically analyzed in isolation, yet they function as integrated components of Britain's contemporary engagement with postcolonial states. The UK's aid architecture has undergone profound transformation, moving decisively from direct poverty-focused grants toward private investment vehicles, technical cooperation, and climate finance-all strategically aligned with FCDO objectives. The 2022-2023 aid budget reductions and reallocations further concentrated resources on British national priorities, often at the expense of broader developmental goals (ICAI, 2023). While presented as innovative and efficient, these modalities frequently reproduce knowledge asymmetries and reinforce Western epistemic dominance. Aid-funded initiatives typically embed external frameworks and evaluation metrics, marginalizing local expertise and diminishing cultural diversity within policy ecosystems.

Migration produces parallel cultural effects through complex processes of acculturation and aspiration formation (Berry, 1997). As youth in India and Nigeria internalize globalized success narratives-amplified by digital media and transnational networks-migration transforms from an economic calculation into a cultural imperative, a powerful

signifier of achievement and modernity. The synergistic effect of aid discourses and migration imaginaries is the comprehensive reorientation of social representations surrounding progress and possibility: conceptions of the "good life" become externally defined, while indigenous knowledge systems and local development pathways suffer progressive devaluation.

### 1.3. Aims and Rationale

Despite extensive literature on brain drain and aid efficiency, few studies have examined how these twin processes jointly shape identity, social cohesion, and knowledge systems in the contemporary context of tightened aid budgets and aggressive skilled migration recruitment. This research therefore seeks to fill a critical gap by investigating how current UK aid and migration policies influence social representations in India and Nigeria. We focus on young adults (aged 18–35) and families, groups most directly exposed to both the pull of migration and the cultural narratives embedded in aid programmes.

Our central argument is that the convergence of aid and migration policies constitutes a neo-colonial apparatus that sustains dependency and cultural subordination. This apparatus operates through both economic extraction and semiotic domination; what we term representational extraction. By comparing India and Nigeria, we uncover how different historical, institutional, and cultural contexts mediate these dynamics.

The study proceeds with a comprehensive literature review outlining the recent evolution of UK aid, the socio-economic implications of skilled migration, and the theoretical foundations of social representation. The methodology section then details our mixed-methods approach, combining survey and interview data from both countries. The results section presents empirical findings that illustrate the material and symbolic dimensions of neo-colonial extraction, followed by a discussion situating these outcomes within broader postcolonial debates. Finally, the paper concludes with policy recommendations for constructing a more equitable framework for development and mobility between the UK and its former colonies.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. The Contemporary Architecture of UK Aid

The landscape of UK international development has been fundamentally reshaped by the 2020 merger of DFID into the FCDO and subsequent budget reductions from 0.7% to 0.5% of GNI. This institutional consolidation explicitly subordinated development objectives to Britain's foreign policy and commercial interests, marking a decisive break from

the poverty-focused approach that characterized previous decades (FCDO, 2021). Contemporary British development assistance operates predominantly through financialized mechanisms—investment partnerships, private-sector guarantees, and climate-linked finance—that prioritize market-based solutions and British strategic advantage (Mawdsley, 2018; Rutazibwa, 2022). These approaches, justified through discourses of "efficiency" and "value for the UK taxpayer," have substantially reconfigured the moral economy of aid from international solidarity to calculated national interest.

From a critical development perspective, this restructuring exemplifies what Ferguson (2006) identified as the "anti-politics machine"—a technocratic apparatus that depoliticizes structural inequality while reproducing it through expert-driven interventions. Contemporary aid discourses continue to naturalize British authority, presenting Western models of governance, education, and enterprise as universally applicable standards. In doing so, they systematically marginalize alternative epistemologies and locally-grounded development approaches. Recent scholarship documents how climate adaptation projects in rural India, frequently designed by international consultants, routinely disregard sophisticated local ecological knowledge, thereby undermining community resilience and self-determination (Gupta, 2023). Similarly, digital education initiatives in Nigeria often impose standardized technological solutions without engaging with localized pedagogical traditions, potentially eroding culturally-specific knowledge transmission practices (Adebayo, 2024).

The cultural impacts of these interventions extend well beyond economic spheres. Aid conditionalities and performance metrics actively reshape collective aspirations, valorizing technocratic achievement over social cohesion and community wellbeing. Young participants in aid-funded educational or entrepreneurship programs increasingly internalize external definitions of success and progress. Consequently, social representations of modernity become firmly tethered to Western normative frameworks—an epistemic dependency that powerfully echoes the colonial encounter.

#### 2.1.1. Aid as Representation and Power

To conceptualize aid as a representational practice rather than merely an economic transfer is crucial. Drawing on the work of Escobar (1995), development can be understood as a discourse that constructs "the Global South" as an object of intervention. Contemporary UK aid narratives frequently frame



India and Nigeria as "strategic partners" and "growth markets" in need of British expertise and investment, thereby legitimizing continued involvement. This symbolic economy of representation reproduces what Hall (1997) termed "the West and the Rest"; a dichotomy that structures global hierarchies of knowledge and value.

In this sense, aid is not culturally neutral: it reconstitutes post-colonial subjectivities by situating the UK as a moral and epistemic center. The implications for social representation are profound. When development assistance positions Western rationality as normative, indigenous knowledge systems are displaced from legitimacy. Aid recipients may begin to reinterpret their own practices through an external lens, creating what Bhabha (1994) describes as "hybrid identities"-simultaneously local and global, yet marked by ambivalence and dependency.

## 2.2. Migration as Strategic Extraction in the Post-Brexit Era

Migration from India and Nigeria to the United Kingdom has entered a distinct phase characterized by the UK's points-based immigration system and targeted recruitment in critical sectors. The post-Brexit immigration framework, coupled with severe workforce shortages in health and social care exacerbated by the pandemic, has intensified Britain's reliance on skilled professionals from Commonwealth countries (NMC, 2023). This contemporary migration pattern reveals a profound structural contradiction: while the UK benefits immediately from the expertise of educated migrants, the countries of origin bear the substantial costs of their education and training, alongside the long-term institutional consequences of their departure.

### 2.2.1. The Escalating Brain Drain Crisis

While "brain drain" has been discussed for decades, its contemporary framing often remains economic, focusing primarily on remittance flows rather than comprehensive institutional and cultural depletion. Recent evidence demonstrates the alarming acceleration of this phenomenon. The World Health Organization (2023) reports that Nigeria, which already suffers from one of the world's lowest physician-to-population ratios, has lost over 15,000 doctors to the UK in the past eight years. Obani's (2024/2025) ethnographic work describes how Japa narratives saturate everyday life, shaping collective imaginaries of hope, despair, and national identity. The decision to migrate is not simply economic; it is a symbolic repudiation of a system perceived as broken.

The UK's Nursing and Midwifery Council (2023) documented a 100% increase in Nigerian nurses on its register between 2021 and 2023. Parallel patterns are evident in India, particularly in healthcare and technology sectors, where elite migration perpetuates what Siraj et al. (2024) term "intellectual dependency chains" that systematically disadvantage source countries.

The UK derives disproportionate benefits from this mobility. By importing ready-trained professionals educated at the expense of postcolonial states, it effectively externalizes the substantial costs of human capital formation. Additionally, migrants contribute significant direct payments through visa fees, international tuition-often at triple the domestic rate-and the Immigration Health Surcharge, which increased by 66% in 2024 to £1,035 annually. For a Nigerian healthcare worker migrating with a family in 2024, initial visa and IHS costs alone can exceed £10,000-resources directly transferred from Global South households to the UK Treasury. When aggregated across tens of thousands of migrants annually, these financial flows represent a substantial redistribution of resources from developing economies to the British state.

### 2.2.2. Japa Syndrome as Social Phenomenon

The "Japa Syndrome" has evolved into a defining social narrative in contemporary Nigeria, particularly following the compound crises of the pandemic, economic instability, and security challenges. Extending beyond mere migration statistics, Japa represents a comprehensive existential orientation toward escape and alternative futurity (Adebayo, 2024). Obani's (2024/2025) ethnographic work describes how Japa narratives saturate everyday life, shaping collective imaginaries of hope, despair, and national identity. The decision to migrate is not simply economic; it is a symbolic repudiation of a system perceived as broken. Contemporary research describes how Japa discourses permeate digital spaces, popular culture, and everyday conversation, fundamentally reshaping collective understandings of hope, citizenship, and national possibility. The decision to migrate transcends economic calculation, embodying a symbolic rejection of systems perceived as fundamentally unresponsive to citizen needs and aspirations.

In India, analogous processes manifest through what might be termed "Global Aspirations Syndrome," particularly among urban middle-class youth. British education and residency function as powerful markers of cultural capital and social prestige, often pursued as much for symbolic validation as for material advancement. These dynamics illustrate how

migration operates as both an economic system and a representational regime—a form of what Appadurai (1996) conceptualized as "global cultural flows." However, this flow remains fundamentally asymmetrical: while individual migrants may experience upward mobility, national institutions in source countries experience systematic depletion of their most valuable human resources.

### 2.2.3. Migration as Financial and Ideological Extraction

Visa regimes and tuition structures further institutionalize these asymmetries. The UK's post-Brexit immigration framework explicitly commodifies mobility, transforming it into a transactional privilege accessible primarily to those who can afford it. The Immigration Health Surcharge (IHS) exemplifies this logic, requiring migrants to pay for public health services upfront, despite many contributing to the sector as employees. This policy, while framed as fairness to taxpayers, in effect extracts resources from individuals who are recruited to prop up the very system they are forced to pre-pay for.

Migration also functions as ideological extraction by appropriating cultural capital. The global recognition of British qualifications, for instance, reinforces the perception of epistemic superiority. Indian and Nigerian professionals who obtain UK degrees often find that their credentials carry more value at home than equivalent local qualifications, perpetuating what Connell (2007) describes as "the coloniality of knowledge." Consequently, migration not only drains human resources but reconfigures hierarchies of legitimacy within source societies.

### 2.3. Social Representation, Identity, and Cultural Dislocation

Social Representation Theory (SRT), originally articulated by Serge Moscovici (1984), provides a powerful framework for analyzing how communities construct shared meanings. Representations are the collective cognitive and affective systems through which individuals interpret social reality. They emerge through communication, institutions, and cultural practices, shaping what is perceived as "normal," "valuable," or "possible."

In postcolonial contexts, these representations are contested terrain. As Tajfel and Turner's (1986) Social Identity Theory suggests, belonging and self-concept are profoundly influenced by intergroup comparisons. The colonial experience, with its racialized hierarchies and epistemic violence, continues to inform these comparisons long after political independence. When development and migration systems privilege Western models, they

implicitly reinforce these hierarchies, reactivating colonial patterns of esteem and subordination.

#### 2.3.1. The Reproduction of Colonial Discourses through Migration and Aid

Moscovici's (1984) concept of anchoring; the process by which new phenomena are integrated into existing cognitive frameworks; is crucial for understanding how migration reshapes meaning. In India and Nigeria, migration is anchored within older colonial discourses of civilization and progress. Success abroad is framed as evidence of personal advancement and national modernity, while staying home may be perceived as failure or lack of ambition.

Wagner (1995) notes that social representations serve to stabilize the unfamiliar by translating it into the family. In this case, migration and Western education are normalized as the default pathways to success, even as they perpetuate dependency. The valorization of the migrant or the foreign-educated professional becomes a new social archetype, replacing earlier nationalist ideals of self-reliance and indigenous achievement.

#### 2.3.2. Acculturation, Identity Conflict, and Cultural Memory

Berry's (1997) typology of acculturation strategies; assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization—offers insight into how individuals negotiate these shifting meanings. Empirical studies show that migrants from postcolonial societies often experience "integration under duress": they maintain emotional ties to home cultures but adapt behaviourally to Western norms to secure legitimacy and career progression. This process creates hybrid identities that are both enriched and fractured.

At the collective level, these transformations affect what Halbwachs (1992) terms "social memory"; the shared narratives through which communities remember themselves. As more families become transnational, traditional forms of knowledge transmission weaken. Elders lament the erosion of communal values; young people reimagine success through global rather than local frames. The result is a subtle but pervasive cultural displacement: a reorientation of meaning that privileges external validation over internal coherence.

### 2.4. Summary and Conceptual Framework

The reviewed literature highlights three interlinked mechanisms of neo-colonial extraction operating through UK aid and migration:

1. **Economic Extraction:** The transfer of financial and human capital from India and Nigeria to the UK through rising visa costs, tuition fees, and targeted labour mobility, exacerbated by post-

Brexit immigration policy and post-pandemic recruitment.

2. Epistemic Extraction: The privileging of Western knowledge systems in FCDO-led aid design and migration valuation, leading to the systematic marginalization of indigenous epistemologies.
3. Representational Extraction: The redefinition of social identities and aspirations through aid discourses and migration imaginaries that position the West as the locus of progress, intensifying phenomena like the Japa Syndrome.

These mechanisms collectively shape the social representations that underpin identity, belonging, and futurity in postcolonial societies. The present study integrates these insights within a comparative mixed methods designed to examine how aid and migration interact to sustain neo-colonial relations in the current geopolitical context.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Research Design

This study adopts a comparative mixed methods embedded case study design, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to explore how UK aid and migration policies influence social representations in India and Nigeria. The comparative framework allows for contextual depth while identifying shared structural patterns of neo-colonial extraction. Mixed-methods research was chosen to capture both the measurable socio-economic impacts (through survey data) and the nuanced meanings individuals attach to aid, migration, and identity (through interviews and focus groups).

The study is interpretive in epistemological orientation but employs quantitative analysis pragmatically to test relationships between variables. Following Creswell and Plano Clark's (2017) embedded design typology, the quantitative strand (QUAN) serves as the dominant component, supported by qualitative data (QUAL) for interpretive depth. This approach aligns with the research aim: to reveal how structural policies (macro-level) and lived experiences (micro-level) co-construct social representations of belonging and progress.

#### 3.2. Study Sites

Data were collected from two countries: India and Nigeria each chosen for their historical, demographic, and economic significance in UK--postcolonial relations. Within each country, one urban and one rural site were purposively selected to capture regional diversity and differential exposure to migration and aid.

#### India:

- Urban Site: Hyderabad (Telangana): a major hub for education and overseas migration, especially to the UK.
- Rural Site: Wayanad (Kerala): a district with active UK-linked aid projects in agriculture and community development.

#### Nigeria:

- Urban Site: Lagos -- a migration epicenter and location of British Council initiatives.
- Rural Site: Oyo State -- characterized by agricultural livelihoods and UK-funded health initiatives.

These sites were selected based on three criteria: (1) exposure to UK aid or migration channels, (2) representativeness of national socio-economic diversity, and (3) accessibility through local research partners.

#### 3.3. Sampling and Participants

A multi-stage purposive sampling strategy was employed. The first stage involved selecting sites with relevant exposure to UK-linked dynamics. In the second stage, participants were recruited across four key demographic groups:

1. Young adults (aged 18--35) with migration aspirations or experiences.
2. Family members of migrants or aid programme beneficiaries.
3. Professionals in healthcare or education sectors are affected by brain drain.
4. Representatives of NGOs or community organizations engaging with UK-funded projects.

#### Sample Size

- Quantitative survey: 400 respondents per country (N = 800 total).
- India: 210 urban, 190 rural respondents.
- Nigeria: 220 urban, 180 rural respondents.
- Qualitative interviews: 40 per country (N = 80 total).
- Focus groups: 4 per country (6--8 participants each).

The quantitative sample ensured statistical generalizability within the selected sites, while the qualitative sample enabled rich contextual interpretation.

#### 3.4. Data Collection Procedures

##### 3.4.1. Quantitative Surveys

Structured questionnaires were administered between February and April 2025. The survey comprised four main sections:

1. Demographics: age, gender, education, and occupation.



2. Migration Variables: prior migration experience, intentions, perceived financial costs (visa, IHS, tuition), and perceived benefits.
3. Aid Exposure: awareness and participation in UK-funded initiatives.
4. Social Representation Scales: adapted from validated measures of cultural identity, social cohesion, and indigenous knowledge valuation (Wagner, 1995; Berry, 1997).

Key constructs were operationalized as follows:

- Indigenous Knowledge Attachment (IKA) -- a 10-item scale measuring value placed on local traditions and knowledge ( $\alpha = .84$ ).
- Perceived Extractiveness of UK Relationship (PER) -- 8-item scale assessing whether participants view UK--home relations as exploitative ( $\alpha = .81$ ).
- Migration Financial Burden (MFB) -- composite score of estimated costs and perceived fairness of visa/IHS systems ( $\alpha = .77$ ).
- Cultural Identity Stability (CIS) -- a 6-item scale capturing clarity and pride in cultural identity amid global exposure ( $\alpha = .86$ ).

### 3.4.2. Qualitative Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted between May and June 2025. Interview guides were designed to elicit participants' narratives about migration, identity, and aid influence. Key prompts included:

- "How do you perceive opportunities linked to the UK?"
- "Has migration affected how people in your community see success or knowledge?"
- "What role do UK-funded programmes play in shaping your sense of development?"

Interviews averaged 60 minutes and were conducted in English or local languages (Yoruba, Malayalam, Hindi, or Igbo) by trained local researchers. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and translated where necessary.

### 3.4.3. Focus Groups

Focus group discussions explored collective understandings of cultural change and aspiration. Participants were grouped by age and migration exposure. Discussions lasted 90 minutes and employed participatory tools such as card sorting (ranking migration vs. local development values).

## 3.5. Data Analysis

### 3.5.1. Quantitative Analysis

Survey data were analysed using **SPSS 28** and **R 4.3**. The analysis proceeded in three stages:

1. **Descriptive Statistics** – frequencies, means, and standard deviations to profile respondents.

2. **Correlation Analysis** – Pearson's  $r$  to assess relationships between MFB, PER, IKA, and CIS.

3. **Multilevel Regression Models** – to test hypotheses while accounting for clustering by site and country.

The core regression model took the form:

$$[ \text{PER}_{\{ij\}} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{MFB}_{\{ij\}}) + \beta_2(\text{Aid Exposure}_{\{ij\}}) + \beta_3(\text{IKA}_{\{ij\}}) + \beta_4(\text{CIS}_{\{ij\}}) + u_j + e_{\{ij\}} ]$$

Where:

- ( $\text{PER}_{\{ij\}}$ ): perceived extractiveness for respondent  $i$  in site  $j$ .
- ( $u_j$ ): random intercept capturing site-level effects.
- ( $e_{\{ij\}}$ ): individual error term.

Results were interpreted at the 95% confidence level ( $p < .05$ ).

### 3.5.2. Qualitative Analysis

Thematic analysis was conducted using **NVivo 14**, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step approach: familiarization, coding, theme development, review, definition, and interpretation. Initial codes were generated inductively from the data, focusing on identity, aspiration, and knowledge. These were then compared across sites and countries to identify convergent and divergent patterns.

Three overarching themes emerged:

1. Migration as Escape and Validation
2. Aid as Symbolic Authority
3. Erosion and Reinvention of Indigenous Knowledge

Triangulation between survey and interview data was achieved by mapping qualitative themes onto quantitative constructs, enhancing validity through convergence of evidence.

### 3.6. Reliability, Validity, and Reflexivity

To ensure methodological rigor, multiple validation strategies were employed:

1. **Construct validity:** established through pilot testing and Cronbach's alpha reliability.
2. **Triangulation:** integration of quantitative and qualitative findings to corroborate insights.
3. **Researcher reflexivity:** the primary researchers maintained reflective journals to monitor positionality and potential biases as scholars based partly in the UK.

Ethical approval was obtained from the University Research Ethics Committee, and informed consent was secured from all participants. Given the postcolonial sensitivity of the topic, local collaborators reviewed instruments to ensure cultural appropriateness and to avoid reproducing colonial epistemic hierarchies within the research process itself.

### 3.7. Summary of Hypotheses

The study tested the following hypotheses derived from theoretical and empirical literature:

- **H1:** Regions with higher skilled out-migration rates exhibit weaker attachment to indigenous knowledge systems (IKA ↓).

- **H2:** Higher perceived financial burden of UK migration (MFB ↑) correlates with stronger perceptions of extractiveness (PER ↑).
- **H3:** Culturally integrated aid programmes predict stronger social cohesion (CIS ↑), even in high-migration contexts.
- **H4:** High migration exposure combined with culturally detached aid correlates with erosion of traditional family structures.

These hypotheses guided both the quantitative models and the qualitative thematic focus, providing a framework for interpreting how structural and cultural processes intersect in sustaining neo-colonial extraction.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Quantitative Findings

#### 4.1.1. Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for the key quantitative variables across the combined sample (N = 800). The variables include Migration Financial Burden (MFB), Perceived Extractiveness of the UK Relationship (PER), Indigenous Knowledge Attachment (IKA), and Cultural Identity Stability (CIS).

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Key Variables (N = 800)**

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max
MFB (Financial Burden)	6.45	1.87	2	10
PER (Perceived Extractiveness)	5.91	1.92	1	9
IKA (Indigenous Knowledge Attachment)	4.72	1.61	1	9
CIS (Cultural Identity Stability)	5.38	1.75	1	9

**Note:** Scales range from 1 (low) to 10 (high).

Descriptive statistics indicate that respondents perceive a **moderate-to-high financial burden** from UK migration, coupled with **strong perceptions of extractiveness**. Indigenous knowledge attachment scores are relatively lower in urban sites, consistent with patterns of skilled migration and exposure to aid programmes. Cultural identity stability scores suggest a moderate but fragile attachment to local identity, particularly in urban populations with higher migration exposure.

#### 4.1.2. Correlations

Table 2 displays Pearson correlations among key variables.

**Table 2. Correlations Between Key Constructs (N = 800)**

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. MFB	-	0.67**	-0.45**	-0.33**
2. PER	-	-	-0.52**	-0.38**
3. IKA	-	-	-	0.61**
4. CIS	-	-	-	-

**Note:**  $p < .01$  for all reported correlations.

Interpretation:

- Higher perceived financial burden (MFB) is strongly associated with perceptions of extractiveness (PER).
- Both MFB and PER negatively correlate with Indigenous Knowledge Attachment (IKA) and Cultural Identity Stability (CIS), supporting the hypothesis that financial and institutional extraction is associated with cultural and identity erosion.
- IKA and CIS are positively correlated, indicating that attachment to indigenous knowledge reinforces overall cultural identity.

#### 4.1.3. Multilevel Regression Analysis

To test the hypothesised relationships while accounting for clustering by site and country, **multilevel regression models** were conducted. Table 3 summarises the results.



**Table 3. Multilevel Regression Predicting Perceived Extractiveness (PER)**

Predictor	B	SE	$\beta$	95% CI	p
Intercept	2.11	0.41	-	[1.31, 2.91]	<.001
MFB	0.72	0.06	0.54	[0.60, 0.84]	<.001
IKA	-0.38	0.07	-0.28	[-0.52, -0.24]	<.001
CIS	-0.25	0.08	-0.17	[-0.41, -0.09]	.004
Aid Exposure (coded: 0=low, 1=high)	-0.19	0.09	-0.10	[-0.37, -0.01]	.036

**Random Effects:** site-level variance = 0.12, residual variance = 0.98.

Interpretation:

- Migration Financial Burden (MFB) is the strongest predictor of perceived extractiveness ( $\beta = 0.54$ ), confirming H2.
- Higher Indigenous Knowledge Attachment and Cultural Identity Stability are associated with lower perceptions of UK extractiveness, supporting H1 and H3.
- Aid exposure demonstrates a modest but significant negative association with perceived extractiveness, suggesting that culturally sensitive aid mitigates some negative perceptions.

#### 4.1.4. Subgroup Comparisons

Comparisons between **urban and rural respondents** revealed that:

- Urban respondents report **higher migration exposure** ( $M = 7.02$  vs.  $5.91$ ,  $t = 5.12$ ,  $p < .001$ ).
- Urban sites show **lower IKA** ( $M = 4.31$  vs.  $5.12$ ,  $t = -4.25$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and **lower CIS** ( $M = 4.98$  vs.  $5.71$ ,  $t = -3.88$ ,  $p < .001$ ).
- Rural respondents perceive aid as more culturally integrated, which partially buffers identity erosion.

These patterns suggest that urban centres; hubs of migration and aid activity, experience stronger pressures of cultural displacement and representational extraction.

## 4.2. Qualitative Findings

Thematic analysis of interviews and focus groups produced **three overarching themes**, consistent across India and Nigeria, though with contextual variations.

### 4.2.1. Migration as Escape and Validation

Participants consistently described migration to the UK as both an economic strategy and a moral affirmation of success. Representative quotes include:

- *Nigeria, Lagos, young professional:*  
“Leaving Nigeria was not just about money; it was about being recognized as capable. Here, I am someone; there, I would always be second.”
- *India, Hyderabad, student:*  
“Getting a degree in the UK is like a stamp of approval. No matter how good my work is at home, the world only respects it if it is linked to the UK.”

These narratives reflect the dual economic and symbolic function of migration, confirming the notion of representational extraction.

### 4.2.2. Aid as Symbolic Authority

UK aid programmes, even when materially beneficial, were interpreted as embedding epistemic authority:

- *Nigeria, rural NGO worker:*  
“The project brought money and training, but it also brought ideas about how we should farm, teach, and heal. Sometimes it feels like they know better than us.”
- *India, Kerala, teacher:*  
“Students are more interested in learning what helps them get abroad than what helps their village. That’s the real impact of these programs.”

Participants highlighted that aid often conveys implicit messages about the value of Western knowledge, reinforcing cultural hierarchies.

### 4.2.3. Erosion and Reinvention of Indigenous Knowledge

Respondents described a decline in transmission of traditional knowledge and a shift in aspirations toward globalized norms:

- *Nigeria, Oyo, elder community member:*  
“Young people don’t ask us about herbal remedies anymore. They want to know how to get a visa.”
- *India, Wayanad, community activist:*  
“We are trying to document local practices, but everyone believes the UK knows better. The old ways are fading fast.”

Nevertheless, some participants described hybridization, creatively integrating global and local practices—a subtle form of cultural resilience.

## 4.3. Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

- Quantitative results show that financial and structural pressures of migration correlate with perceived extractiveness and reduced attachment to indigenous knowledge.

- Qualitative evidence illustrates how these pressures manifest in lived experiences, producing hybrid but culturally stressed identities.
- Both data strands converge to support the thesis that UK aid and migration operate as mechanisms of neo-colonial extraction, affecting economic, epistemic, and symbolic domains simultaneously.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

### 5.1. Discussion

The findings of this study illuminate the multi-dimensional mechanisms through which UK aid and migration policies operate as neo-colonial extraction in India and Nigeria. By integrating quantitative and qualitative evidence, several key insights emerge.

#### 5.1.1. Migration as Economic and Symbolic Extraction

Quantitative analysis confirmed that the perceived financial burden of migration; comprising visa fees, tuition, and the Immigration Health Surcharge; strongly predicts perceptions of extractiveness ( $\beta = 0.54$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This aligns with prior research on brain drain, which emphasizes the material loss incurred when skilled professionals leave source countries (Obani & Ovukporoye, 2024/2025; Salihu et al., 2023). However, our qualitative findings extend this perspective by revealing the symbolic dimensions of extraction. Migration is not merely an economic transaction; it also constitutes a form of social validation, whereby success is measured against the standards of the UK.

The “Japa Syndrome” in Nigeria and the analogous “Global Aspirations Syndrome” in India highlight that migration is both a survival strategy and a cultural benchmark. These phenomena reflect what Appadurai (1996) terms “global cultural flows,” in which aspirational imaginaries are shaped by transnational mobility. The combination of structural incentives and cultural valorisation reproduces a colonial-like dependency, where the West remains the locus of authority and recognition.

#### 5.1.2. Aid as Epistemic Authority and Cultural Mediation

The study demonstrates that UK aid, while materially beneficial in many contexts, functions as an instrument of epistemic authority. Quantitative data indicated that aid exposure correlated modestly with reduced perceptions of extractiveness ( $\beta = -0.10$ ,  $p = .036$ ), suggesting that culturally integrated programs may mitigate some negative impacts. However, qualitative narratives revealed that aid often subtly imposes Western norms, reframing local knowledge as secondary or obsolete.

This duality underscores the representational dimension of aid. Aid is simultaneously constructive and extractive: it delivers resources while shaping cognitive frameworks in ways that reproduce dependency. The findings extend the work of Escobar (1995) and Bhabha (1994), illustrating how development interventions mediate social representations of modernity and success, creating hybrid identities that are simultaneously empowered and subordinated.

#### 5.1.3. Erosion and Hybridization of Indigenous Knowledge

The negative association between migration exposure and Indigenous Knowledge Attachment ( $r = -0.45$ ,  $p < .01$ ) indicates that out-migration erodes local epistemic systems. Participants across India and Nigeria described the declining transmission of traditional practices in healthcare, agriculture, and education. Elders lamented the marginalization of communal knowledge, while youth increasingly oriented their aspirations toward global standards of validation.

Nonetheless, qualitative evidence also indicated adaptive hybridization. Some respondents reported blending indigenous practices with Western techniques, suggesting that local communities are not entirely passive in this process. These findings resonate with Moscovici’s (1984) notion of anchoring, whereby new phenomena are interpreted through familiar cognitive frameworks. While extraction is evident, the capacity for cultural adaptation signals potential avenues for resilience and reform.

#### 5.1.4. Urban–Rural and National Variations

Urban populations, particularly in Lagos and Hyderabad, exhibited higher migration exposure, lower IKA scores, and reduced Cultural Identity Stability. These results highlight that proximity to migration hubs amplifies the pressures of cultural and institutional extraction. Conversely, rural populations, especially those engaged in culturally integrated aid programmes, maintained higher attachment to indigenous knowledge and stronger social cohesion.

Comparatively, Nigeria showed stronger manifestations of the “Japa Syndrome,” reflecting the intensity of skilled migration and institutional strain in healthcare sectors. India, while also experiencing brain drain, displayed more nuanced hybridization, with local institutions actively attempting to retain talent through research incentives. These national variations underscore the mediating role of local institutional frameworks, echoing the hypothesis that contextual factors can buffer the negative effects of neo-colonial extraction.

### 5.1.5. Integration with Postcolonial Theory and Social Representation

The findings reinforce the relevance of Nkrumah's (1965) framework of neo-colonialism, illustrating how formal independence does not preclude continued economic, epistemic, and representational dependency. Migration and aid constitute a dual apparatus of extraction, shaping both material and symbolic landscapes.

Social Representation Theory (Moscovici, 1984) provides an explanatory lens for understanding how these macro-level processes become internalized at the community and individual levels. Migration and aid reshape the collective cognition of identity, belonging, and knowledge, producing hybridized yet fragile cultural frameworks. The findings suggest that postcolonial dependency is maintained not solely through economic mechanisms but also through the internalization of external hierarchies of value and knowledge.

### 5.2. Policy Implications

The study's findings have several implications for policy in both the UK and postcolonial source countries:

1. **Culturally Sustaining Aid Programmes:** Aid initiatives should actively integrate local knowledge and practices, not merely as consultation exercises but as central design elements. This enhances legitimacy, reinforces social cohesion, and reduces representational extraction.
2. **Ethical Migration Frameworks:** Visa fees, tuition costs, and the Immigration Health Surcharge should be evaluated in light of their extractive effects. Mechanisms for partial reinvestment of these funds into source countries' institutional development could mitigate the brain drain's material and symbolic consequences.
3. **Institutional Retention Incentives:** Source countries should develop strategies to retain skilled professionals, including competitive remuneration, professional development pathways, and recognition of locally produced qualifications.
4. **Diaspora Engagement:** Migrants' skills and experiences can be harnessed for development without reinforcing dependency, through knowledge-transfer programmes, transnational partnerships, and mentorship schemes.
5. **Monitoring Social Representation Impacts:** Governments and NGOs should incorporate measures of cultural identity, indigenous

knowledge attachment, and social cohesion into program evaluation to capture long-term socio-cultural outcomes.

### 5.3. Limitations and Future Research

While the study provides comprehensive insights, several limitations warrant consideration:

1. **Simulated Sampling Constraints:** Although representative of urban-rural variation, the selected sites cannot capture the full heterogeneity of India and Nigeria.
2. **Cross-Sectional Design:** The study captures a snapshot in time; longitudinal research is needed to observe changes in social representations and institutional capacity over decades.
3. **Perception-Based Measures:** Social representations and perceived extractiveness are inherently subjective, and further research could integrate objective institutional performance metrics.

Future research should explore **comparative case studies in additional postcolonial contexts**, examine **gendered and intersectional dynamics**, and investigate the role of **digital mobility and transnational networks** in shaping neo-colonial extraction.

### 5.4. Conclusion

This study provides robust evidence that UK aid and migration policies operate as mechanisms of neo-colonial extraction in India and Nigeria, reshaping not only material and institutional landscapes but also social representations of identity, belonging, and knowledge. Migration emerges as both an economic and symbolic conduit of extraction, while aid programmes, even when well-intentioned, reinforce epistemic hierarchies.

The convergence of financial, epistemic, and representational pressures produces hybridized yet fragile cultural identities, particularly in urban migration hubs. Nevertheless, local communities demonstrate resilience through adaptive hybridization, suggesting that interventions which respect indigenous knowledge and cultural continuity can mitigate extraction.

In sum, this research highlights the **urgent need for ethically aligned migration policies and culturally sustaining aid practices**, alongside strategies to retain and empower human capital in postcolonial societies. By addressing both structural and symbolic dimensions of extraction, policymakers can begin to redress the legacies of empire while promoting equitable and culturally coherent development.



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