



Brain drain, brain gain, economic refugee or neocolonialism: An African Church's dilemma

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ABSTRACT

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, there has been an exodus of professionals from Africa to Europe or North America. These migrations did not spare the church. Most mainline churches in Africa lost senior and educated pastors who moved to join other conferences, and some joined their spouses, who were employed in care work. This paper is motivated by the need to understand the role of neo-colonialism in these phenomena. It grapples with questions such as: Is South-North migration a deliberate brain drain for Africa? Is it an intended brain gain for the host countries? Is it an economic refuge for those who involuntarily migrate? To what extent is this influx of migration a form of neocolonialism? To respond to these questions, the paper employs Lee's Push-Pull theory. The empirical study collected data through open-ended interviews conducted with six pastors who left Africa for the United Kingdom. The research challenges Western churches to consider compensating churches in Africa, as they deliberately lure their ministers to revive their "dying churches". The paper contributes to scholarship by highlighting the impact of the church's brain drain in the Global South and the church's brain gain in the Global North. The paper lays bare how brain drain and brain gain remain neocolonial tools of the ministry of the word and the sacrament to the Global South churches.

Keywords: *Brain Drain, Brain Gain, Economic Refugee, Neocolonialism, African Church*

INTRODUCTION

The emigration of the Clergy from the Global South to the Global North has become a topic of scholarly debate. However, although several scholars have researched the impact of brain drain and brain gain among other professionals,¹ little has been done on the Clergy, probably because they are not listed among the critical skills. It is this gap that this research aims to fill. Using Africa and Europe as examples, the paper argues that, while people from different facets of life view migration as double-edged, first as an opportunity for those seeking greener pastures, and second as a benefit to the host countries because of cheap labour, there is the other side of neocolonialism that continues to dominate

¹ Research on the migration of professionals from the Global South to the Global North was conducted by many scholars who include Eberchukwu Faith Obani and Boris Happy Odalonu, "Impact of Rising Migration on Socio-Economic Development of Nigeria (2015-2022)," *African Journal of Humanities and Contemporary Education Research* 10, no. 1 (2023): 39–56; Douglas Mpondi and Liberty Mupakati, "Migration Trajectories and Experiences of Zimbabwean Immigrants in the Limpopo Province of South Africa: Impediments and Possibilities," *Journal of Pan African Studies* 12, no. 1 (2018): 215–36; Hendrik C J van Rensburg, "South Africa's Protracted Struggle for Equal Distribution and Equitable Access—Still Not There," *Human Resources for Health* 12, no. 1 (2014): 26.

the pushing and pulling factors of migration.² Scholars on migration generally agree that, although imperial systems have collapsed, colonialism still dictates the relationship between the Global North and the Global South. Neocolonialism is believed to continue, dictating the pace of development of global policies. These hidden operations tend to maintain the colonial world order that favours the political power and economies of the former imperial powers. The paper challenges the notion that, whereas brain drain and brain gain are forms of neocolonialism, being economic refugees reduces the ministers of the Word and Sacraments to economic opportunists.

The paper also argues that neocolonialism remains an external force that dominates all forms of migration in Africa. The research questions that guide this research are: Is South-North migration a deliberate brain drain for Africa? Is it an intended brain gain by the host countries? Is it an economic refuge for those who involuntarily migrate? To what extent is this influx of migration a form of neocolonialism? The paper challenges the Global North churches to contribute to theological education in Africa and to financially support those same churches so that they can replace the ministers they are losing each year to the British Conference.

The researcher is a senior cleric in the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe. He employed an insider-outsider approach.³ As an insider, the researcher was aware of challenges associated with insider researchers, such as maintaining a relationship with the organisation after the research and conflict of interest.⁴ However, did not have a conflict of interest because he conducted the research from Ghana on a continental appointment by the organisation and would return home upon completing the assignment. As an insider, the researcher is trusted by the participants, who are Clergy, and is also privy to the organisation's information, which allows him to analyse it using his personal experience. The author was able to balance insider-outsider status because he has previously conducted numerous research studies on the same organisation, and the relationship has never compromised his research.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The paper employed Lee's Push-Pull Theory, developed by Everett Lee in 1966.⁵ Lee divided the factors that push and pull individuals from their places of origin to other destinations into three categories, namely political, socioeconomic, and security factors.⁶ For Lee, the push-pull theory explains how conditions in the home country, such as conflict, economic hardships, and political instability, can drive people to migrate, while prospects of better living conditions and job opportunities attract them to the same destinations.⁷ Although migration is driven by many factors, such as places of origin and personal factors, destinations remain unique. Lee argues that individuals involved in migration have a greater appreciation of their place of origin than of their country of destination, where certainty about their reception remains a matter of imagination.⁸ This imbalance in knowledge of the country of origin versus the imagination of the host country compels people to migrate, even though there is no rational justification for it. Lee cautions that "the decision to migrate does not depend solely upon the balance of positive and negative factors at the places of origin and destination, but the decision to move must be enough to overcome the natural apathy and intervening obstacles."⁹

Using Push-Pull theory, this paper argues that the patterns of migration studied reveal the machinations of neocolonialism, as explained through brain drain, brain gain, or economic refugeeing.¹⁰

² Byron Caminero-Santangelo, "Legacies of Darkness: Neocolonialism, Joseph Conrad, and Tayeb Salih's" Season of Migration to the North", *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature* 30, no. 4 (1999).

³ Mark Sherry, "Insider/Outsider Status," in *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*, ed. Lisa M. Given, vol. 1 and 2 (London: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2008), 43.

⁴ Hanin Bukamal, "Deconstructing Insider-Outsider Researcher Positionality," *British Journal of Special Education* 49, no. 3 (2022): 327–49.

⁵ Nicholas van Hear, Oliver Bakewell, and Katy Long, "Push-Pull plus: Reconsidering the Drivers of Migration," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 44, no. 6 (2018): 927–44.

⁶ Rashid Faridi, "Migration Theories: Lee's Push Pull Theory," *Rashid's Blog: An Educational Portal* 5 (2018).

⁷ Seong-Seop Kim and Choong-Ki Lee, "Push and Pull Relationships," *Annals of Tourism Research* 29, no. 1 (January 2002): 257–60, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-7383\(01\)00043-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-7383(01)00043-3).

⁸ Everett S. A. Lee, "Theory of Migration. Demography," *Population Association of America* 3, no. 1 (1966): 47–57.

⁹ Lee, "Theory of Migration. Demography."

¹⁰ Ariana Virani and Andrew Ward, "Neo-Colonialism and Patterns of Migration: The Indian Diaspora in Uganda," *Tulane Undergraduate Research Journal* 6, no. 1 (2025).

For example, the Zimbabweans who left for the UK in the 2020s did so as economic refugees, fleeing the sociopolitical and economic conditions in the country, and the Clergy are no exception. Although MCZ recommended these ministers for service in the British Methodist Church, the approval came after the two Conferences received applications and conducted interviews, suggesting that the applicants had made economic rather than pastoral decisions to migrate.¹¹ This is worse for those ministers who followed their spouses on a Certificate of Sponsorship visa. These ministers made economic decisions as a response to Zimbabwe's sociopolitical and economic situation, which led many to suffer economic hardship. The scenario presents a contest between economic stability and the call and vocation, with which the push-pull theory will be grappling.

METHODOLOGY

This is an empirical study that uses the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe (MCZ) and the Methodist Church in Britain (MCB) as case studies to argue that brain drain, brain gain, and economic refugeeism are forms of neocolonialism affecting the church in Africa. In research, a "case study is used as a methodology to generate an in-depth understanding of a contemporary issue or phenomenon in a bounded system."¹² This case study is appropriate for this research because the challenges of brain drain, brain gain, and economic refugeeism are not limited to Zimbabwe alone. MCZ will serve as a microcosm of the macrocosm challenges affecting almost all churches in the former British colonies, as their ministers transfer to serve in the British Conference, leaving a vocational void in their own conferences. For example, in 2012, the MCB accepted fifty ministers from other conferences. Among these ministers were those from South Africa, Brazil, Ghana, The Gambia, Malaysia, Kenya, Nigeria, India, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, South Korea, Canada, Australia, Sierra Leone, Zimbabwe, the Caribbean, and the United Methodist Church. The above scenario justifies the use of the case study methodology to discuss the effects of brain drain, brain gain, and economic refugeeism in Africa, in general, and the world, in particular. The case study design is preferred as a research strategy when the researcher is interested in how, why, and what questions.¹³

Case study is also used as a response to the findings of the research on the impact of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Zimbabwe Fellowship in the United Kingdom, as both a reverse and distant mission.¹⁴ The research finds that "the MCZ has more than fifty ministers serving in the MCB. Twenty-five of them left Zimbabwe as laypeople and were ordained as ministers of the Word and Sacrament in the British Conference. The other half represents the various categories of ministers who migrated from Zimbabwe. These include those who joined their spouses and those who applied to serve as recognised and regarded ministers of the British Conference."

According to the British Conference, recognised and regarded means that "presbyters and deacons seconded by other autonomous Methodist conferences and other churches (denominations) may be recognised and regarded by the British Conference as admitted into Full Connexion only if stationed by the British Conference. These ministers share the same privileges and responsibilities and are subject to the same discipline as the MCB's Clergy."¹⁵ The number of MCZ clergy serving in the MCB also includes those whom the MCZ seconded to serve as chaplains to the Zimbabwean Fellowship but later joined the MCB, as well as those who had disciplinary cases but later applied to join the MCB.¹⁶

Six clerics who applied to serve with the British Conference as recognised and regarded ministers, and those who applied to be ministers without station from 2021 to 2026, were purposively

¹¹ Everson Ndlovu and Richard Tigere, "Economic Migration and the Socio-Economic Impacts on the Emigrant's Family: A Case of Ward 8, Gweru Rural District, Zimbabwe," *Jamba: Journal of Disaster Risk Studies* 10, no. 1 (2018): 1–10.

¹² Hayden Coombs, "Case Study Research: Single or Multiple," *Southern Utah University*, 2022, 1–4.

¹³ Jean Hartley, "26 Case Study Research," *Essential Guide to Qualitative Methods in Organizational Research*, 2004, 323; Robert. E. White and Kenneth Cooper, *Case Study Research. In Qualitative Research in the Post-Modern Era: Critical Approaches and Selected Methodologies* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2022).

¹⁴ Martin Mujinga, "Reverse and Distant Mission: The Missiological Impact of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Zimbabwe Fellowship in the United Kingdom," *Religions* 17, no. 1 (January 13, 2026): 90, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel17010090>.

¹⁵ Methodist Church in Britain, "Recognised and Regarded as a Presbyter or Deacon, Admitted into Full Connexion with the British Conference. [S.O. 732] ," 2025, <https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/ministries/ministers-of-otherchurches/recognised-and-regarded/>.

¹⁶ Mujinga, *Reverse and Distant Mission*, 13.

selected as participants of this study. Purposive sampling allows researchers to deliberately target individuals with specific characteristics, expertise, or experience relevant to the study.¹⁷ Moreover, purposive sampling also allows researchers to ensure that the data directly address the core objective of the study. Although the sample considers affirmative action based on sex, age, education, and geography, this study benefited from including men pastors because they were the only category that had migrated to join the MCB at the time of the study.

Participants were given pseudonyms during data analysis because many were sharing individual experiences. Liamputtong cautions that "researchers are ethically required to make every attempt to ensure anonymity and confidentiality of the participants. This anonymity is not just a promise, but even online anonymity must remain as such."¹⁸ Pseudonyms help preserve participants' identities and integrity in publications and reports. This protection is key in any research.

Data for this research were collected through open-ended interviews. Participants were asked questions about their understanding of brain drain, brain gain, economic refugeeism, and neocolonialism. Interviews were conducted via Zoom and WhatsApp Conference calls. Ethical considerations, including no reward for participation, anonymity, the time and length of the interviews, voluntary involvement, and the platform to be used, were communicated to the participants before the interviews began. Data were also collected from sources in the fields of migration and Methodist Church in Zimbabwe literature.

The participants' findings were analysed using thematic analysis, which seeks to identify dominant themes in the phenomenon under study.¹⁹ The themes were divided into brain drain, brain gain, economic refugeeing and neocolonialism. Thematic data analysis is flexible and can be easily applied to the phenomenon under study.²⁰

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

MCZ traces its roots to the British Conference in 1891.²¹ The church existed as an extension of the British Conference, rendering it a missionary church with a missionary leadership and a missionary ecclesiology.²² The church appointed its first indigenous leaders in 1965, and in 1977, the MCZ was granted autonomy (independence) by the British Conference.²³ Autonomy meant that MCZ could plant and implement its mission work in its country.²⁴ Second, "autonomy meant that MCZ would be self-ruling, self-governing, self-supporting, and self-directing."²⁵ Third, "autonomy meant having the power to select local leadership, determine the form of worship, decide financial matters, and direct other church-related affairs without interference from outside, including the government."²⁶ Autonomy also meant that it recognised the church's change in status from a district of the British Conference to a full-fledged conference. Autonomy occurred in the context of a deep political crisis and racism among the Methodist members.²⁷

After 1965, the missionaries began to return to the United Kingdom, and by the time of the autonomy, few had remained in Zimbabwe. The Methodist Church in Britain maintained its partnership with the MCZ, supporting it through grants that included scholarships for higher education. Between

¹⁷ Johann Mouton, *Understanding Social Research* (Van Schaik Publishers, 1996).

¹⁸ Pranee Liamputtong, "Focus Group Methodology: Principle and Practice," 2011.

¹⁹ Abbas Tashakkori and Charles Teddlie, *Mixed Methodology: Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, vol. 46 (Sage, 1998).

²⁰ Victoria Clarke and Virginia Braun, *Successful Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide for Beginners* (London: Sage publications Ltd, 2013).

²¹ Liberty Mawire, "Comrades or at Variance? A Historical and Theological Analysis of the African Apostolic Church Vis the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe" (Harare: Connexional Bookshop, 2015).

²² Kennedy Gondongwe, "African Ministers and the Emergence of Resistance to Colonial Domination: The Development of Indigenous Clergy in the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Zimbabwe" (University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2011).

²³ Martin Mujinga, "Ministry in the Tempest: A Reconstruction of the Life, Work, and Legacy of Rev. Andrew. Ndhlela of the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe," *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, April 16, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.25159/2412-4265/14231>.

²⁴ Martin Mujinga, *The Historical Development of Methodism* (Harare: Connexional Bookshop, 2017).

²⁵ Simon Madhiba, "Struggles and Strides: A History of the Localisation Process of Methodism in Zimbabwe 1891–1996," *Harare. Methodist Literature Department*, 2000.

²⁶ Mujinga, *Ministry in the Tempest*. 9.

²⁷ Mujinga, *Ministry in the Tempest*. 9.

2005 and 2024, over ten ministers obtained PhDs, and several others pursued master's degrees through the British Methodist programme called SALT Scholarship. Unfortunately, the grant began to decrease as the MCB had decided to redefine its relationship with its partner churches as a wholesome, non-monetary partnership. MCZ received its last capacity-building grant in 2023.²⁸ This grant marked the end of a financial relationship between the MCB and MCZ. The financial relationship ended after COVID-19. By 2018, ten MCZ ministers applied to be recognised and regarded as ministers by the MCB. It is not clear why ten ministers suddenly applied at the same time, or why this was the first time such an application link was discovered, as the financial relationship was winding up. COVID-19 halted the process for the ten applicants. The process continued in 2021.

In 2021, MCZ lost three of the ten ministers to the British Conference, which had applied to serve as recognised and regarded ministers. Two of the ministers had PhDs, and one had a master's degree. In 2022, the MCZ also lost three experienced and educated ministers to MCB, one of whom had a PhD and two had master's degrees and were pursuing their PhDs. In 2023, another minister with a master's degree was recognised and regarded by the MCB. In the same year, four ministers applied to be ministers without stations to join their spouses in the UK who were doing care work.²⁹ This decision means that they were to leave active ministry to assume a new status of spouses staying and working in the diaspora under the Certificate of Sponsorship visa.³⁰ In 2024, MCZ approved six ministers to serve as recognised and regarded ministers. Two had PhDs, and the other four had master's degrees but were pursuing their PhDs. For the first time, one was a woman. All six ministers were accepted and stationed at the British Conference.

The above statistics demonstrate that, in 5 years, MCZ lost thirteen senior and educated ministers to the MCB, and four who followed their spouses, making a total of seventeen. These statistics above represent the puzzle of brain drain for MCZ and brain gain for MCB. In contrast, the four ministers represent economic refugees to a greater extent. Those serving as recognised and regarded do so first as an economic enterprise and second as a form of reverse mission.

DISCUSSION

Brain Drain

The concept of brain drain originally emerged in the 1950s to describe the migration of British scientists to the United States. It later evolved to encompass movements from developing to developed states.³¹ According to Young et.al., brain drain is a slang term referring to the substantial emigration of professionals from a country, or to individuals moving from one organisation to another in search of better job opportunities.³² The term is often used to describe professionals, including doctors, healthcare workers, scientists, engineers, and financial professionals. Writing from a Zambian experience, Noyoo argues that "brain drain is discussed in the context of former locales, because these areas have very few skilled people to head key sectors of their country's economy. When a significant number of these people leave these places, it almost results in the hemorrhaging of natural economies, resulting in brain drain."³³ By nature, brain drain is a product of globalisation and international migration, and it has social and economic implications for both the country of origin and the country of arrival.³⁴ Unfortunately, researchers have never considered the Clergy among the professionals who cause brain drain. This point was buttressed by Boateng *et al.*, who argue that "Clergy play a crucial role in supporting the mental

²⁸ Methodist Church in Zimbabwe, *Minutes of the Annual Conference* (Kadoma, Zimbabwe: Methodist Church in Zimbabwe, 2023).

²⁹ Methodist Church in Zimbabwe, *Agenda of the 45th Annual Conference Ministerial & Representative Sessions, Gweru, Zimbabwe, August 21–23* (Harare: Methodist Church in Zimbabwe, 2022); Methodist Church in Zimbabwe, *Minutes of the Annual Conference*.

³⁰ Mujinga, *Reverse and Distant Mission*, 13.

³¹ Chiemi Kurokawa and Tatsuya Kusakabe, "Reversing Brain Drain to Brain Gain: Examining the Drive of Educated Sudanese Migrants to Return and Contribute to Their Home Country," *International Journal of Educational Development* 117 (September 2025): 103342, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2025.103342>.

³² Julie Young, Michael J. Boyle, and Katrina Munichiello, "Brain Drain: Definition, Causes, Effects, and Examples," 2024, https://www.investopedia.com/terms/b/brain_drain.asp.

³³ Ndangwa Noyoo, "Brain Drain or Brain Gain? Leveraging Zambia's Diaspora Dividend," in *Africa and Its Global Diaspora: The Policy and Politics of Emigration* (Springer, 2017), 313–29.

³⁴ Noyoo, "Brain Drain or Brain Gain? Leveraging Zambia's Diaspora Dividend."

health of their congregants, but the impact on their own well-being is understudied.³⁵ This oversight also helps explain why the mass exodus of the Clergy is not counted as significant, because ministry of the Word and Sacrament is viewed as a call and a vocation, not specifically a profession.³⁶

A discussion on the exodus of ministers from Zimbabwe, as a microcosm of Africa's macrocosm, shows how ministry, as a call and vocation, has transitioned into a profession. This point aligns with Glasse's assertions, which dispute the unprofessional status of the Clergy, citing job knowledge, education in the field, and the clergy's institutionalisation as instruments that moralise societies. The Clergy are responsible for their work, competent in their work, and ethical in their conduct, and this is evidence that they are professionals.³⁷ This paper agrees with Glasse that the purposeful selection of professional, experienced, and educated ministers by the Global North churches cannot be reduced to call and vocation, which appear to be forms of volunteerism, but to a profession that demands specific skills. This purposive selection of the best African ministers is what this paper refers to as neocolonialism, given that the colonisation of Africa was made possible by the influence of missionaries, who were not just people with a call and a vocation but professional people with the necessary skills to contribute to the pacification of Africans, much as missionaries were paid professionals.³⁸ Missionaries were not ordinary people but educated professionals.³⁹ This answers why the British Conference is taking the best of ministers from Africa, because they understand the value of educated ministers.

Africa has the second-highest number of displaced persons in the world, with about 6.6 million in Sub-Saharan Africa.⁴⁰ These numbers include voluntary and involuntary migrants, among whom are the Clergy, nonprofessionals, and professionals of different fields. Given that brain drain causes countries, industries, and organisations to lose a core portion of individuals, the exodus of the Clergy from Zimbabwe to the UK cannot be sidelined to the periphery of call, vocation, and stipend. Still, it must also be understood in the context of employment, professionalism and better job living conditions.

There are several causes of brain drain, which create a vacuum that takes longer to fill. On the one hand, pull factors include economic opportunities, access to better jobs, a quest for a higher standard of living, access to good health care, and good accommodation.⁴¹ On the other hand, driving factors for brain drain include political instability, persecution on religious grounds, and gender-based violence, among other reasons.⁴² Since 2000, Zimbabwe has been experiencing a sociopolitical and economic crisis that has led most citizens to leave the country for South Africa, Europe, the United States, and other parts of the world.⁴³ These migration trends changed after the COVID-19 pandemic, as most developed countries relaxed immigration procedures for health workers seeking new work opportunities elsewhere.⁴⁴ The 2020s were the same period in the MCZ when many ministers began applying to relocate to the UK, resulting in an increase in MCB human capital and a decrease in MCZ ministers.

Whereas advanced economies benefit from an influx of skilled workers, developing countries are left to deal with the loss of their productive skilled workers. Writing on the example of South Africa, Gibson and McKenzie argue that during the four years between 1995 and 1998, South Africa experienced a net loss of professional people, with the result that one third of companies could not find the management and other skills that they require from the pool of local employees. This is a case in point that people with specialised skills are leaving the country. It is alarming to know that the fields of distance education and higher education in South Africa are also losing many skilled professionals.⁴⁵

³⁵ Augustine Cassis Obeng Boateng et al., "An Examination of the Impact of Clergy-Involved Mental Health Activities for Their Congregants on Clergy Life Satisfaction, Happiness, and Perceptions of Having a Life Close to Ideal in the USA," *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 78, no. 3 (2024): 107–19.

³⁶ Clyde J Steckel, "The Ministry as Profession and Calling," *Word & World* 1, no. 4 (1981): 373–81.

³⁷ James D Glasse, "Profession: Minister" (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1968).

³⁸ Christoph Nebgen, "Missionaries: Who Were They," *A Companion to the Early Modern Catholic Global Missions*, 2018, 401–22.

³⁹ Dana L. Robert, "Rethinking Missionaries' from 1910 to Today," *Methodist Review*, 2012.

⁴⁰ Ibrahim J Gassama, "Africa and the Politics of Destruction: A Critical Re-Examination of Neocolonialism and Its Consequences," *Or. Rev. Int'l L.* 10 (2008): 327.

⁴¹ Lee. *Theory of Migration. Demography*.

⁴² Lee. *Theory of Migration. Demography*.

⁴³ Mpondi, and Mupakati, *Migration Trajectories and Experiences of Zimbabwean Immigrants in the Limpopo Province of South Africa*

⁴⁴ Tafadzwa Dzinamarira and Godfrey Musuka, "Brain Drain: An Ever-Present; Significant Challenge to the Zimbabwean Public Health Sector," *Public Health in Practice* 2 (November 2021): 100086, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.puhip.2021.100086>.

⁴⁵ John Gibson and David McKenzie, "Eight Questions about Brain Drain," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 25, no. 3 (2011): 107–28.

During the interviews, a participant mentioned that "brain drain is a reality for African churches. However, unlike the missionaries who came to Africa as an extension of the state, power and authority, the ministers relocating to the United Kingdom did so out of the frustrations of their countries that have brutal socioeconomic and political challenges." This scenario presents these ministers as second-class professionals because they are willing to endure any working conditions outside of Africa. This point was buttressed by Collier, who argues that, "although nearly five billion of the world's people are beginning to climb from desperate poverty and to benefit from globalisation's reach to developing countries, there is a "bottom billion" of the world's poor whose countries, largely immune to the forces of global economy, are falling farther behind and are in danger of falling apart, separating permanently and tragically from the rest of the world."⁴⁶

Collier refers to the Global South countries' bottom billion, and it remains a foundational text in developing countries because it is associated with the conflict trap, which includes civil wars resulting in political instability; the natural resources trap, which relates to dependence on resource exports and the promotion of corruption; bad governance; and military interventions. Another interviewee reiterated that the influence of the ministers who migrate to the UK is insignificant because they do not have power or authority, but they are a product of their failed states that have created environments where the educated are frustrated and end up taking migration as the only option. African governments, with many black political elites, inadvertently favour colonial powers by perpetuating narratives of helplessness and brain drain.

The third participant argued that "there is no anomaly in ministers migrating to the UK because, as Methodist ministers, they are motivated by John Wesley's dictum, 'The world is my parish'. This participant responded to John Wesley's 1739 statement after he was excluded from the Anglican pulpits in London because his doctrine of justification by faith offended many people.⁴⁷ Although Wesley wished to preach in consecrated buildings under Anglican oversight, the biblical necessity of preaching the gospel led him to take unorthodox steps, including open-air preaching.⁴⁸ The contexts of John Wesley and the ministers migrating to the UK are very different, and using Wesley's axiom is misleading. This point was emphasised by the first participant, who argued that the concept of "the world is my parish" can be critiqued as a privileged perspective, noting the limitations individuals from non-Western countries face in travelling to the UK. These migrants migrate from a less privileged position, and some of them are deported; as such, they cannot declare the world to be their parish, as there are some areas where they are restricted, including easy access to the UK in comparison to people from the UK who can visit Africa as tourists and not migrants.

Brain Gain

Brain gain is understood on two levels. The first level is where skilled workers migrate to developed countries in search of better opportunities, without the intention of returning home after gaining the necessary skills and qualifications.⁴⁹ Their contribution to these economies is called brain gain, while the loss of skilled workers from their countries of origin is called brain drain. The second level of brain drain occurs when employees leave their countries for developed countries to acquire skills and return to their countries of origin after earning qualifications. These positive aspects of brain drain are commonly referred to as brain gain and brain circulation, though they lack rigid definitions. Hunger adds that brain gain is the return of highly qualified professionals to their home country, bringing new skills, networks, and capital that can boost local productivity, unlike brain gain from students and skilled workers who return to their countries to contribute to the economy. The Methodist Clergy who relocate

⁴⁶ Paul Collier, *The Billion Bottom: Why the Poorest Countries Are Failing and What Can Be Done About It* (Oxford: Oxford University Press Collier, 2007).

⁴⁷ John Marsh, "Was Wesley an Anglican? Implications for Mission," *Great Commission Research Journal* 6, no. 2 (2015): 203–15; Martin Mujinga, "Africa Methodist Council," *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 50, no. 1 (July 23, 2025), <https://doi.org/10.25159/2412-4265/17294>.

⁴⁸ Albert Brown-Lawson, *John Wesley and the Anglican Evangelicals of the Eighteenth Century: A Study in Cooperation and Separation with Special Reference to the Calvinistic Controversies* (Durham: Pentland Press, 1994).

⁴⁹ Kurokawa and Kusakabe, "Reversing Brain Drain to Brain Gain: Examining the Drive of Educated Sudanese Migrants to Return and Contribute to Their Home Country."

to the UK have no plans to benefit their country of origin by returning because, for them, migration is an economic and social opportunity where they earn while raising their families in stable economies.

Whereas migration represents brain drain for the country of origin, it is a brain gain for the British Conference, as ministers from Zimbabwe and other countries of the Global South are often sought for their expertise, experience, and education. Studies conducted by Etzo, Paci, Raffaele & Usala, among tertiary students in the United States, find that "students who come to the US boost economic growth in the Centre–North regions (brain gain), while southern provinces suffer reduced growth due to the brain drain."⁵⁰ The fact that many highly educated citizens of low-income countries are emigrating in search of greater opportunities constitutes brain drain for their countries, which are already struggling to retain such professionals, and a brain gain for countries prepared to receive these desperate employees.⁵¹ This point speaks to the issue at hand because Clergy in Africa are transferring in large numbers to the Global North churches, thereby presenting these ministers as economic benefactors.⁵² The Clergy going to the UK have become new missionaries ministering from the underside, given the nature of their migration, which is associated with desperation and compromise. These ministers find ministry in the UK fulfilling their economic needs as they experience the cross-cultural nature of mission, which historically followed imperial routes but is now declining in local membership.⁵³

The sixth participant defended brain gain as myopic. He argued that "ministry is a vocational call from God, not limited to any region, as such ministers can exercise their vocation in any part of the world." In contrast, the participant acknowledged the relocation of qualified and experienced theological leaders as a brain gain for Global North churches and a brain drain for Global South churches. He added that, "the MCB do not recruit any minister from Africa because they have a call; they take the experienced, the educated, the best and the professional who have the skill to deal with the challenges of the declining state of churches in the UK and the role of multicultural members in maintaining the church's presence."⁵⁴ This migration becomes beneficial to the MCB and the individual ministers.

Economic Refugeeing

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees defines an economic refugee as any person who leaves their country of origin purely for economic reasons that are not related to the refugee definition to seek material improvements in their livelihood.⁵⁵ While the MCB recruits some ministers, other ministers do menial jobs in the country because their spouses work as care workers. These push-and-pull factors affect the MCZ, which is suffering from brain drain, while the MCB is experiencing brain gain. As economic refugees, ministers may feel compelled to leave their calling for economic opportunities abroad, thereby impacting their families and vocations. The most challenging aspects for ministers who apply to be without a station are varied. First, they ignore their call and vocation as they involuntarily join their spouses, who have no intention of returning to Zimbabwe. Second, they live double lives: the first is attached to the church because they have been given only five years as ministers without stations; the second is their commitment to their family in the UK. According to participant three, "this double life creates a challenging situation for ministers without a station, as vocation and family haunt them from two different sides.

Whereas the migration of MCZ ministers to the UK can be defined as both brain drain and brain gain, those who migrate as ministers without a station are presented as economic refugees. The term economic refugee in this paper refers to ministers who left their call and vocation in Zimbabwe because their spouses had relocated to the UK. The decision of these ministers was forced by a situation beyond

⁵⁰ Ivan Etzo, Raffaele Paci, and Cristian Usala, "Brain Gain versus Brain Drain: The Effects of Universities' Mobile Students on Territorial Inequalities," *Regional Studies* 59, no. 1 (December 31, 2025), <https://doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2025.2481085>.

⁵¹ Catia Batista et al., "Brain Drain or Brain Gain? Effects of High-Skilled International Emigration on Origin Countries," *Science* 388, no. 6749 (2025): eadr8861.

⁵² Andreas Damelang and Anette Haas, "The Benefits of Migration: Cultural Diversity and Labour Market Success," *European Societies* 14, no. 3 (2012): 362–92.

⁵³ Mujinga, *Reverse and Distant Mission*.

⁵⁴ William Alonso, "'Birds of Passage.' Migrant Labor and Industrial Societies," *Population and Development Review* 7, no. 3 (1981): 527–29.

⁵⁵ The United Nations High Commission for Refugees, "Economic Migrant," n.d. <https://ec.europa.eu/assets/home/emnglossary/glossary.html?letters=w&detail=economic+migrant>,

their control. On one hand, relocating a spouse to the UK is a social issue because it is a family decision. On the other hand, the decision has administrative, ecclesiological, and pastoral challenges for the church.

Administratively, the MCZ lost two ministers who left circuits (parishes) during the year and the other two who left at the end of the year after completing their terms in their respective appointments.⁵⁶ In the first case, MCZ struggled with administrative issues related to managing the circuit left by the minister during the year. The major challenge was "how to replace a minister who had kept his relocation a secret", said participant three. According to the fifth interviewee, the situation created a vacuum that prompted the administration to replace an experienced and educated minister with a local preacher who had just received his call to ministry but had not been prepared to serve as a minister. These individuals lacked the skill, training, and administrative skills to run a circuit/parish.

On the ecclesiological side, the ministers who were transferred as ministers without station remained in the records of the MCZ but without station (jurisdiction). Being ministers without stations meant they lost their pastoral rights in Zimbabwe and in the UK. The term minister without portfolio traces its origins to Catholic theology, where it is known as the Clergy without jurisdiction. According to Scott, "a clergy without jurisdiction are ministers lacking authorization from a diocesan bishop or superior to exercise ministry within a specific territory, making their actions illicit or invalid in canon law."⁵⁷ Unlike those ministers who were seconded to serve in the British Conference and retained pastoral rights, and who are recorded in the records of the MCZ and the MCB, the ministers without station were lost in the UK's industries, where they did menial jobs unrelated to their call. What remained important to these ministers was their families and the need to earn a better living, said the fourth participant. Pastorally, the MCZ's pastoral ministry was limited, as there were few ministers to provide pastoral oversight to congregants.

Neocolonialism

The social, political, and economic challenges that haunt Africa cannot be discussed without acknowledging the contributions of the former colonial powers. The colonisers demeaned Africa by condemning its culture as barbaric, treating Africans as people without a history, and describing Africa as a dark continent.⁵⁸ The colonisers and the missionaries were accomplices in the dehumanisation process of Africans. They tyrannised them, terrorised them, persecuted them, and instilled a lack of confidence in everything that is African.⁵⁹ When the colonisers left Africa, the practice of imperialism did not end. They left legacies that saw Africans behaving, leading, oppressing and abusing their own people as their colonial masters. True to the assertions of Virani and Ward, "neocolonialism is evident as it influences patterns of diasporic migration, creating push factors that structurally disenfranchise marginalised communities that were often colonised under the imperial system."⁶⁰ This underhanded imperialism turned Africans into a museum of acute poverty, hunger and corruption, thereby creating pushing and pulling factors that saw most Africans leaving the continent.⁶¹ The Clergy were part of this wave of migration. Without going deeper into the subject of neocolonialism, it is a fact that the migration of the MCZ clergy to the UK follows a pattern like those affecting other employees.

Several factors fit the brain drain of the MCZ and the brain gain of MCB as a form of neocolonialism. First, the acceptance of African ministers in large numbers is a form of neocolonialism because African seminaries and churches have been turned into training grounds for the Global North churches. One interviewee confirmed that "Africa invests in training clergy, who then leave to serve in wealthier countries, often leaving local churches and communities without leadership." The call and

⁵⁶ Methodist Church in Zimbabwe. *Minutes of the Annual Conference*, (2023).

⁵⁷ Peter Scott, "Supplied Jurisdiction & Traditional Priests", accessed February 26, 2026, <https://yrc.fsspx.uk/en/supplied-jurisdiction-traditional-priests-30452>.

⁵⁸ Obikwelu Ifeanyi John, Gérard-Marie Messina, and Andy Chukwuemeka Odumegwu, "The Effects of Neocolonialism on Africa's Development," *PanAfrican Journal of Governance and Development (PJGD)* 4, no. 2 (2023): 3–35.

⁵⁹ Shafiqur Rahaman, Rawshan Yeazdani, and Rashed Mahmud, "The Untold History of Neocolonialism in Africa (1960-2011)," *History Research* 5, no. 1 (2017): 9–16.

⁶⁰ Virani and Ward, "Neo-Colonialism and Patterns of Migration: The Indian Diaspora in Uganda."

⁶¹ Rahaman, Yeazdani, and Mahmud, "The Untold History of Neocolonialism in Africa (1960-2011)."

vocation of ministers are monetised. The Global South loses while the Global North gains. This form of neocolonialism has devastated the socio-political and economic life of Africa.⁶²

Second, neocolonialism creates power imbalances. Ministers who transfer to the MCZ do so without any intention of being appointed to an influential position, regardless of their level of education, other than being a parish pastor, because they are relocating without power or influence. Unlike missionaries who were part of the empire in Africa, wealthier countries and churches often recruit African Clergy, perpetuating a power imbalance in which Africa exports its skilled workers to meet the needs of the Global North. Africa's Clergy are often desperate, running from the realities of their own countries, including deteriorating economies.

Third, the migration of Clergy from Africa can exert cultural and economic influence over African churches, potentially undermining local autonomy and cultural identity. Although Global North churches are expected to compensate African churches for losing their skilled, educated, and seasoned ministers, one minister cautioned about the dangers of financial benefits that could treat Clergy from Africa as commodities to be sold to benefit the African church.

Lastly, the loss of skilled Clergy can create dependence, with Global North churches relying on borrowed workers because they are failing to attract local people. While this is good for them, the Global South church struggles to build strong legacies, as the future of the church benefits the Global North, which seems not to care about the Global South's struggle to train and develop ministers.

RECOMMENDATION

The research on brain drain, brain gain, economic refugeeing, and neocolonialism undertaken in this study presents a microcosm of the macrocosm challenges with which the MCZ, in general, and the church in Africa. The challenges discussed portray the church in Africa as a hunting ground for the best ministers to stabilise the dying churches in Europe. These findings were presented in one of my research projects, in which I argued that the MCB will be a church with a multicultural body and a white head, as it will have leadership only while people of different pigmentation will be the majority in most of their churches.⁶³

Although the paper argued for administrative, ecclesial, and theological issues affecting the Church in Africa and yet benefiting the Church in Europe, there is another reality: the challenges the Clergy in Africa face. These challenges range from the poor economies the continent is grappling with, low or no stipends that cannot provide reasonable pensions, and a dim future for the Clergy's families, as ministers cannot build any investment for their future. The second painful reality is the social challenges with which the church is also faced. The minister's family's decision to allow the spouse to relocate to the UK is a challenge the church cannot control. While the minister is under the church's jurisdiction, his family should not be compromised by his career. This scenario presents a minister with difficult choices: either respond to a social issue or to the ecclesial structures. In the context of this difficult decision, some ministers have compromised their call and vocation to be ministers without station; however, they should not be condemned for doing so, as the family has a more prominent place in their lives. The third reality is that the MCB has no choice but to take the most viable and energetic ministers from Africa to bolster its dying churches. Lastly, to create a balanced environment, the MCB, with money, should take a deliberate step to sponsor theological education in Africa, given how it has disadvantaged the region. Having discussed the above scenarios, it is therefore recommended that the MCB take deliberate action to finance theological education in Africa. It is also recommended that churches in Africa should develop relocation policies that allow them to benefit from the investments they have made in those migrating ministers, as there is no recognition of the work done by African churches.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the movement of the Clergy from the Global South to the Global North remains an ongoing debate that warrants attention. Using a case study, the research finds that, while people from

⁶² Gassama, "Africa and the Politics of Destruction: A Critical Re-Examination of Neocolonialism and Its Consequences."

⁶³ Mujinga, *Reverse and Distant Mission*.

different facets of life view migration as double-edged, first as an opportunity for those seeking greener pastures, and second as a benefit to the host countries because of cheap labour, there is another side of neocolonialism that continues to dominate the pushing and pulling factors of migration, perpetuated by neocolonialism. The hideous influence of neocolonialism continues to operate in Africa, affecting the development of global policies. The paper found that brain drain and brain gain are forms of neocolonialism, economic refugeeism affecting the church in Africa and turning ministers into economic refugees in the UK. The paper also concludes that neocolonialism remains an external force that dominates all forms of migration in Africa. The paper challenges the Global North churches to contribute to theological education in Africa and to financially support these churches, as they are reaping the best of their Clergy. This proposal is made in the context of how the Global North churches have contributed to the struggle of African churches by luring their senior and educated clerics, whom the church in Africa invests significant resources in training and development, to revive dying churches.

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