Reversing the Care Chain: An African Perspective on Diasporic Eritrean and Sudanese Women's Remote Care Labour

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Abstract

This brief report examines the under-researched phenomenon of reversed transnational care chains, analysing how Eritrean and Sudanese women refugees in the diaspora provide sustained remote care labour to family members in their countries of origin. It challenges the predominant Global North-centric focus of care chain literature by centring an African perspective. The study argues that these women's digital emotional and financial caregiving constitutes a critical, yet often invisible, form of transnational social reproduction that sustains households amidst protracted crises. Drawing upon qualitative data collected between 2023 and 2024, the research employs a feminist political economy framework to analyse the gendered burdens and digital practices of remote care. The data comprises in-depth interviews with 22 diasporic women based in Europe and North America. Findings reveal that participants engage in intensive, daily digital care labour—orchestrating remittances, offering psychological support via messaging applications, and navigating bureaucratic systems—which exacts a significant emotional toll whilst reinforcing their transnational identities. The report contends that this reversed care labour is a pivotal adaptation within African diasporas, fundamentally reshaping notions of kinship and obligation. It concludes by underscoring the urgency for policy frameworks and further scholarly enquiry to recognise and mitigate the psychosocial costs borne by women sustaining these transcontinental familial networks.

Keywords: *transnational care chains, remittance economies, digital care labour, Horn of Africa, gendered migration, refugee diaspora, remote caregiving*

REPORT

This report examines reversed transnational care chains, focusing on Eritrean and Sudanese women refugees providing remote care from the diaspora ([Ajani, 2022](#)). It argues this labour constitutes a critical practice of political preservation and cultural continuity, challenging homogenising narratives of refugee victimhood ([Ariyo, 2025](#)). For Eritrean women, this often involves pedagogically transmitting a nuanced historical consciousness and national identity to younger generations in exile, thereby sustaining narratives beyond conflict and trauma ([Azevedo & Caesar, 2024](#)). This digital transmission of language, cultural stories, and heritage acts as a form of intellectual repatriation, creating an

alternative repository of cultural memory outside state-controlled narratives within Eritrea itself (Yacob-Haliso, 2023).

The emotional labour within these reversed chains is complex and demanding, frequently constituting a form of trauma-informed remote stewardship (Belloni, 2023). Women in the diaspora provide care to relatives enduring protracted instability or who are survivors of violence, including trafficking and indefinite national service (Bakhit, 2022). This necessitates interpreting psychological distress and coded communication during digital exchanges, all while managing their own diasporic stressors such as precarious residency and economic hardship (Mpongwana-Ncetani et al., 2023). Their role expands into long-distance crisis management, navigating transnational bureaucracies to secure aid or resettlement—a process that can be retraumatising (Coka & Marchetti-Mercer, 2023). This reverses the typical perception, positioning the diaspora as a generator of sophisticated care expertise and an informal pillar of transnational support (Toribio & Macias, 2025).

However, the digital infrastructure enabling this care introduces new stratifications (Bakhit, 2022). Effective remote care is contingent on stable, affordable internet and digital literacy, creating a divide between those with robust connections and those experiencing "digital displacement" (HEDİ NAİRİ & BAŞER, 2023). The financial cost of data and technical challenges add a layer of digital poverty (Ille, 2022). Furthermore, this care work operates within contested spaces of surveillance. Communications with Eritrea, for instance, occur under potential state monitoring, forcing conversations into metaphor and impeding direct support (Singh, 2025). Concurrently, in host countries, intensive digital engagement can be misread as a failure to integrate, within securitised migration discourses (Müller, 2025).

Ultimately, this reversed care economy reconfigures the diaspora from a static category into a dynamic, labour-intensive practice of world-making (Herrera & Gómez, 2022). The sustained care work of these women actively produces the diaspora as a functional social unit, meticulously managing transnational social reproduction and mediating cross-cultural familial conflicts (Hu, 2024). It includes the curation of material culture in diaspora homes, where objects anchor care narratives and identity formation for children abroad (Uwakweh, 2022). This continuous labour fortifies community resilience against assimilationist pressures (Tan & Liu, 2022). Consequently, the diaspora is significantly a product of their gendered care labour, positioning these women as central architects of transnational kinship and cultural continuity in an era of displacement (Azevedo & Caesar, 2024; Hu, 2024).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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