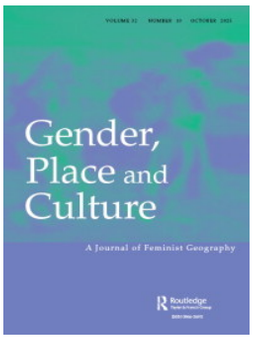

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Displaced masculinities: young men navigating manhood, education and the climate crisis in urban Uganda

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ABSTRACT

This article foregrounds the everyday experiences, expectations and emergent masculinities of young refugee men from South Sudan who live in the city of Gulu in Northern Uganda. Both age and gender norms converge in young masculinities that are (re) produced, evolve and negotiated at the intersection of contingent and precarious socio-cultural fields of forced displacement, gendered mobility, and the emerging urban climate crisis. We ask how young refugee men are negotiating their masculinities while seeking education and livelihoods in Gulu. Drawing on creative methodologies and an intersectional gender analysis, we highlight the tensions of these negotiations between family, society and host community expectations, and situate them amidst a series of interlocking urban vulnerabilities– economic, socio-political, environmental. Young refugee men and urban migrants are often invisible in discussions of climate change and urban governance, and their hopeful and emergent masculinities neglected in work on forced displacement and post-conflict contexts. In addressing these together, we centre African masculinities within gender and climate geographies; exploring the vulnerabilities and hopes of young urban migrants and refugees in the face of displacement and environmental disadvantages. Our article highlights how masculinities, temporalities and place are inextricably bound together, with the city itself – both its precarious environment and the futures it promises. A focus on everyday life allows us to better understand how gender orders and norms shape the experiences, vulnerabilities and temporalities of young men coming of age at the peripheries, highlighting the diversity of young men's experiences and vulnerabilities in an African city.

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Africa; refugees; youth; forced displacement; South Sudan; cities; intersectionality

> [Our families have] some demands, but we could not afford for them. So it's always a big challenge for us here, staying home, having nothing to do, not supporting the family… you will find that you are growing old when you are not supporting the family and not

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> doing anything. Sometimes it's stressful when you think about it. And when you go back to South Sudan, it's insecure. At the same time it's quite hard to find a job there: the economic crisis also is a problem, so you'll find that many things – like getting something to eat – is a problem in Juba… you don't even bother going to South Sudan… [T]his one is a great challenge to us and the youth here.
>
> Wek, Gulu, April 2023

This article centres the everyday experiences of young South Sudanese men who live in Gulu, a city in northern Uganda, as refugees. What emerges from their stories is a complex picture of negotiating 'manhood' amidst forced displacement and gendered mobility, environmental vulnerability and urban precarity, and family support and expectation. It is also one of pursuing hope in seeking a better life through migration to, and education in, a contemporary African city. By placing young men and masculinities at the centre of our discussions of forced displacement and the emerging African urban climate crisis, we can better understand how gender and age orders and norms converge to shape men's lives, strategies and vulnerabilities, highlighting the diversity in young urban men's experiences. An intersectional approach demands we attend to multiple, partial and contingent masculinities in order to better understand how climate and environmental burdens differentially affect young displaced men. This allows us to highlight an often-neglected aspect of work on post-conflict masculinities: how their identities and social positioning shape their vulnerabilities.

Our article therefore seeks to make two key contributions. Firstly, we highlight how young refugee men's displaced masculinities evolve and are negotiated as they come of age at the periphery of an urban population and in relation to familial norms and responsibilities transplanted from South Sudan and across different spaces of displacement. We centre their emergent and hopeful masculinities, situating these amongst complex gender politics and multiple and reinforcing systemic inequalities (and privileges) that drive disconnections between young refugee men's expectations for their futures, what they can realistically achieve, and what society and their families expect of their becoming men. Here, we highlight young refugee men's strategies to cope with displacement and enact their emergent masculinities through embracing education and (gendered) urban migration. In the process we facilitate more complex and relational representations and understandings of African masculinities beyond the preoccupation with war, violent protest and gender-based violence that dominate much contemporary work (Amman and Staudacher 2021; Ratele 2013).

Secondly, in foregrounding these young men's lived experiences we challenge the absence of meaningful engagement of refugees and displacement in emerging intersectional work on African masculinities (Ammann and Staudacher 2021), further serving to place men (and age) back into discussions about not only gender, but also climate change. This advances our understanding of young refugee men's vulnerabilities to – and differential capacities to mitigate and adapt to – the climate crisis. In Uganda, climate change is most apparent through the slow onset and accumulation of crises, rather than shocks and disasters, although these do occur. African cities are increasingly vulnerable to the climate crisis. People must contend with increasing heat, erratic weather and unpredictable seasons, food and water insecurity, increasing costs of living, and declining physical and mental health. Slow onset events evolve from small changes over extended periods of time, increasing both frequency and intensity of

regularly occurring events with dire community consequences (Head 2016). Attention to the climate is therefore critical to our discussion of everyday displaced masculinities, while better understanding displaced masculinities is of equal importance to research on climate change and justice. It directs our attention to the intersection of social, economic and environmental injustices exacerbating the climate crisis, and how they manifest as environmental burdens in the everyday lives of young refugee men, while offering opportunities to understand the everyday workings of gendered power in accumulative crises conditions (see McQuaid and Crawford 2025). Yet it is also about recognising young men as social agents navigating the city.

We therefore situate young South Sudanese men's emergent and hopeful masculinities amidst a series of interlocking urban challenges and disadvantages – economic, socio-political, environmental – to which young men must respond and adapt. Masculinities, temporalities and place are thus inextricably bound together, with the climate and the city itself – both its precarity and its promise of hope – shaping how young men construct and negotiate what it is to be a young man, their expectations as future men, and the expectations made *of* them.

Our article proceeds by first setting out what we understand by masculinities, drawing on the rich field of African masculinities. We then outline our creative methodologies and empirically examine young men's expectations – and expectations of them – in migrating to Gulu, and how intricately their emerging masculinities are tied to education and urban challenges, before addressing some of the tensions that render such hopeful masculinities contingent and partial– including their everyday experiences of navigating the compounding harms of precarity, uncertain livelihoods, and the climate crisis. As with other emerging work (Bakonyi and Chonka 2024), we demonstrate the mixed political-economic-environmental pressures that cause and perpetuate displacement into African cities, as well as the transformative impact displaced people have on urban areas.

African masculinities, forced displacement and urban climate crisis

A focus on the lived experiences of men and how they negotiate masculinities allows us to better understand differences in how they are adapting to, navigating and reflecting on complex and challenging circumstances. Masculinities are enacted both publicly and at the intimate scale of the self, family and household, where gender relations (and expectations) are constantly negotiated and reshaped by shifting configurations of power (Connell 2005, xvii). This draws our attention to clusters of 'norms, values, and behavioural patterns expressing explicit and implicit expectations of how men should act and represent themselves to others' (Miescher and Lindsay 2003, 4); and encourages us to attend to the plurality of both hegemonic masculinities and those that are marginalised and subordinated (Enarson and Pease 2016). We must therefore take a situated approach to masculinities as 'not fixed male identities but multiple, complex, and intersectional social practices and experiences that are fluid and sometimes contradictory… masculinities are embodied, negotiated, and enacted depending on different situations' (Ammann and Staudacher 2021, 760–761).

Masculinities are the product of richly situated histories. Contemporary African masculinities reflect 'Indigenous versions of manhood defined by tribal and ethnic group practices, and historically newer versions shaped by Islam, Christianity, and

Western influences' (Barker and Ricardo 2006, 160; Wignall 2016; Schulz and Janson 2016). They cannot be understood without attention to colonial legacies or those of 1980s structural adjustment, nor the ongoing impacts of neoliberal global capital (Schultz 2021); and we must heed Ratele's (2021) call to centre African theory-making and knowledge production on masculinities if we are to 'fully account for the complex life experiences of African men' (Mfecane 2018, 292).

Our task, therefore, is to move beyond essentialising and simplistic use of frameworks such as hegemonic, military/militarized, or 'hyper-'masculinities. As Myrttinen et al. (2017, 104) remind us, we must relate masculinities to their 'respective historical, political, and socio-economic contexts' and 'identify and examine various other forms of masculinities that are frequently overlooked in order to strengthen the current analytical frameworks'. In their work, this includes: 'three mostly understudied aspects of conflict-affected masculinities: 'thwarted' masculinities, male vulnerabilities, and men not conforming to heterosexual norms/gender binaries' (ibid., 106). What we are interested in here is how young men respond to situations in which it becomes 'practically impossible' to 'live up to dominant notions of masculinity in the face of realities' (Myrittinen et al. 2017, 108). including ongoing conflict, displacement, climate change and other crises

Following Ammann and Staudacher (2021, 764), while we acknowledge that 'many men in Africa face difficulties in postcolonial, neoliberal, and often precarious contexts', in this article we are interested in how 'such troubles also lead to creative disruptions in which new possibilities emerge'. Adopting such an approach allows us to examine young men's tactics and strategies as they navigate, hustle or actively 'wait' across diverse African settings (Schulz 2021; Vigh 2006; Newell 2012; Gaibazzi 2015). Ammann and Staudacher (2021, 762) remind us that 'rupture and violence are not the only coping strategies that male youth can turn to when facing challenging life conditions'. Instead, we can consider Inhorn's (2012, 30,60) concept of 'emergent masculinities' to consider how 'manly selfhood' is 'an act that is ever in progress' as 'men navigate and adapt to their changing social worlds'. A focus on emerging masculinities in the context of both urban displacement and climate change allows us 'to account for ongoing, context-specific, embodied changes within men's enactments of masculinity' in a diverse and globalized world (Inhorn and Wentzell 2011, 802).

In our discussion of displaced masculinities, we thus recognise masculinities as in flux: fluidly enacted and re/negotiated as (young) men adapt, shift and reflect on their own positionalities and masculine identities (Berggren 2014; Waling 2019). Masculinities are 'constantly established and rebuilt in flexible, multiple, diverse, and intersectional ways' (Ammann and Staudacher 2021, 764). We ask how young refugee men negotiate 'the enactments and articulations – as well as the negotiations and reinventions – of culturally defined ideals of manhood and male authority' (Kleist 2010, 187). Or to put it another way, how they assemble 'new repertoires' of masculinities within specific contexts and moments in time (Schulz 2021, 883).

In Northern Uganda, young South Sudanese men enact emergent masculinities through seeking urban migration and education as a means to both cope with displacement, the monotony of refugee settlements, and as hopeful ways of becoming men now and in the future. In East Africa, formal education has become intricately

tied to constructions of masculinity whereby young men aspire to study to levels that help them achieve upward social mobility and financial stability (Jaji 2009, 185), in turn facilitating their fulfilment of cultural expectations as sons, brothers, and future fathers and husbands. Writing on migration in Mali, Schulz (2021, 884) reflects on the hegemony, stability and orientation of such expected roles: 'Even if one must constantly readapt and reinterpret one's potential failure, hegemonic values of becoming household head and provider… persist on a large scale'.

To better understand how this works in Northern Uganda's heteropatriarchy we must adopt an intersectional gender analysis that recognises how young refugee men's gender and sexuality intersect with their age, class, race, ethnicity, poverty and socio-legal positioning as refugees and urban migrants; and then situate such intersectional complexity amidst their everyday lived experiences of environmental (and social) disadvantages of Gulu's informal neighbourhoods. We unpack how men negotiate relations of power and interlocking systems of privilege and disadvantage. This allows us to better understand how heteronormative patriarchal 'gender orders' (Flood 2007; Connell 1987) – the patterning of gender at the level of an entire society – prioritise men's concerns and subordinate women, prioritising marriage and heterosexual union, and bestowing privileges on men that entail obligations to fulfil as husbands, fathers and sons. Importantly, it also allows us to foreground differences in men's capacities to cope with, adapt to, and make sense of forced displacement and the overlapping crises of urban precarity and intensifying climate change. In the process we can answer Alsopp's (2017, 170) call 'for a more intersectional approach to refugee masculinities.'

Despite a rich literature focused on the experiences of women refugees in the context of gender, it is striking how men have been neglected. Emerging studies, however, reveal how men migrating for survival due to political, environmental and economic shocks often end up in urban informal settlements, working hard in poor living and working conditions, developing a range of health problems that may, in fact, enhance male morbidity and mortality in the medium term (Çarpar and Göktuna Yaylaci 2021; Charsley and Wray 2015). Male bodies and masculine subjectivities are thus impacted in diverse ways, and there is need to better understand their diverse responses, interpretations and engagement (see Enarson and Pease 2016, 11). For men from South Sudan, the disruptures of forced migration can attest to significant losses in terms of family and community relations, physical displacement, cultural dislocation and restricted opportunities for self-determination (Deng et al. 2005; Marlowe 2012).

As Alsopp (2017, 170) argues, 'many of the complexities of masculinity are pulled to the surface in migration and refugee movements.' Men, often in dominant positions in the gender orders of their home countries, can experience these dis/ruptures as a masculinity crisis and loss of authority, economic opportunities or patriarchal privileges, driving much more patriarchal and sexist reflexes (Çarpar and Göktuna Yaylaci 2021; Tuzi 2020). Writing on South Sudanese men in Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya, Grabska and Fanjoy (2015, 82) reflect on 'limits to the ability of young men to access full manhood in the camp', noting changes in livelihoods, access to rights, separation from wider social networks and 'shifting social relations that put gender and

generational traditions in flux'. Amongst resettled Sudanese men in Australia, forced displacement has meant 'losses of power in both gender and institutional domains. It has required rethinking familiar perspectives on men's roles, manhood and what it means to be living by culture' (Marlowe 2012, 63).

Speaking to African contexts, Schulz (2012) cautions against taking a 'masculinities in crisis' approach and instead encourages a focus on affected aspects of patriarchy, including relations between men. Oosterom's (2017, 192) work in South Sudan notes how 'in some post-war contexts the militant masculinity became devalued and the dominant masculinity became that of men as 'model' fathers and husbands who are responsible for the education and prosperity of their families'. While in Faria's (2013, 101) work on South Sudanese masculinities in the USA, performers at a beauty pageant practiced 'new notions of masculinity that openly reject hegemonic practices of masculinity relying on aggression, domination and conflict. Instead, the performed espouse ideals of peace and an end to ethnic tensions within the South and the diaspora'; even if these were contested by 'contradictory male practices of violence and tension [that] occur amongst South Sudanese men whose violence is connected by members of the community to histories of ethnic violence back at home, as well as to the traumas of war, displacement and resettlement'.

In Northern Uganda, such traumas unfold against the emerging climate crisis. Gender and climate studies (Rao et al. 2019; Few 2007; Moosa and Tuana 2014) and intersectional approaches to climate justice (Crawford et al. 2025; Mikulewicz et al. 2023) highlight how, while crises such as climate change are having an impact on all communities, these impacts are diverse. This diversity is shaped by differential access to resources (e.g. land, water, housing, capital) and opportunities, which in turn are linked to socio-cultural roles, norms, values and practices that position men and women in unequal relations of power in very particular political, geographical and historical contexts. These in turn emerge from multiple and reinforcing systems including poverty, structural exclusion and social disadvantage, and disproportionately render some groups more vulnerable to socio-environmental injustices. Men, however, are virtually invisible from much of this discourse. If at all mentioned, men's absence or migration is seen only through the lens of impacts on women, and how this enhances their vulnerability to risks and stressors (Rao et al. 2019). Of the limited studies of the links between climate change and gender in South Sudan, the focus has tended to be on women's disproportionately high vulnerability and lower ability to adapt (Mai et al. 2018). As Hearn (2019) notes, the relations between men, masculinities and environmental crises including climate change, famine, energy and ecology have been neglected. This article therefore seeks to advance the discussion on masculinities and climate change. We argue that we cannot conceptualise relational and complex masculinities without situating them within the socio-environmental burdens generated by the emerging climate crisis.

As global neoliberal capital and the legacies of colonialism and decades of conflict and displacement in Northern Uganda and South Sudan intertwine with an urban climate crisis and the accumulation of environmental burdens, we therefore need a more nuanced picture of gender dynamics in forced displacement, post-conflict and urban contexts. Young men, especially refugees and migrants, tend to be invisible in

discussions of climate justice, urban governance, and their hopeful and emergent masculinities largely neglected in work on forced displacement and post-conflict contexts. In addressing these together, we can centre African masculinities within gender and climate geographies; highlighting the vulnerabilities of young urban migrants and refugees to environmental disadvantages, a key concern if we are to take urban climate resilience, adaptation and mitigation seriously.

Researching gender and the city: creative methodologies

Our article draws on extensive qualitative fieldwork conducted in Uganda between December 2021 and April 2023. We collected data as part of our broader applied research on the gender-age-urban interface of climate change for marginalised communities in three cities: Gulu, Kampala and Masaka. We draw here from the lived experiences of nineteen South Sudanese refugee participants living in Gulu - ten women, nine men – all of whom were Dinka, cisgender, heterosexual and aged between eighteen and thirty years. Eighteen had been born in South Sudan and registered as refugees in Uganda, while one was born and registered as a refugee in Kenya, though resided in Gulu. We recognise the partiality of our contributions towards masculinities and gender dynamics here in not including the perspectives of young gender and sexual diverse refugees and urban residents, which we do examine elsewhere (McQuaid and Crawford 2025; Crawford, McQuaid and Niyitegeka 2025; McQuaid 2014; McQuaid 2020).

In Gulu our empirical data was gathered using a creative toolbox including: four sharing workshops, two stakeholder workshops with youth activists and decision-makers, drawing diaries accompanied by weekly reflective discussions conducted over six weeks, one-to-one ethnographic interviews, and a series of music workshops to collaboratively write and record a song entitled *Piir* (Life), from which we have borrowed the lyrics as subtitles for our empirical analysis. For the latter, seven of our young participants came together to synthesise key learnings and analyses from across the data collection into a song which has since been playing across local radio stations in Northern Uganda. The song appeals for unity, nationalism and environmental and climate justice for all.

Applied creative methodologies, including the use of drawing, images and music, offer, we argue, new feminist, intersectional and decolonial routes to laying bare the messy gender politics of everyday urban lives, especially for those who have been historically excluded from research (McQuaid and Pirmasari 2023). They allow us to foreground embodied local knowledge and responses and open up spaces for exploring – and articulating – plural masculinities, responsibilities and futures that speak directly to local contexts and the challenges of urban inequalities and climate change. In Gulu, our workshops and interviews sought to create safe spaces in which young refugees could holistically explore their lived experiences and understandings of the urban climate crisis, and the song co-creation process sought to bring our participants into a process of collaborative data analysis. While we acknowledge the importance of including the lived experiences of women in analyses of masculinities, in the interests of space here, we focus only on the narratives of the young men in our research. For this article we therefore analysed interview and workshop transcripts,

visual and narrative data from the drawing diaries, reflective conversations in and around research activities, and the song lyrics. All research was conducted with full ethical approval from the University of Leeds and all names used here are pseudonyms.

'Think of the people who are forced to move from their homes': gendered mobilities and education as emergent masculinities in Gulu

For the young men in our research, the most common reason for coming to Uganda was to escape conflict, particularly between the outbreak of the South Sudanese Civil War in December 2013 and the establishment of the Transitional Government of National Unity in February 2020. Uganda is the largest refugee hosting country in Africa, with 1.5 million refugees in the country as of 31st July 2023, most of whom came from South Sudan (UNHCR 2023a). The vast majority of which – 1.4 million – are registered to one of the country's thirteen rural refugee settlements, often informally referred to as camps (UNHCR 2023b).

Adjumani is currently the largest settlement in Uganda with 212,648 refugees as of 31st July 2023. It is located within the Northern district of Adjumani, bordering South Sudan to its northeast, where refugees account for 47% of the total population (UNHCR 2023a). The majority of the refugees we engaged with had at least some experience in Adjumani, and many continue to have close ties there, including strategically returning to access services, provisions, or to maintain a record that they reside there. Uganda has been lauded for its approach to refugees – 'the best place in the world to be a refugee' (Hatten 2017) – in part because it theoretically allows for free movement and rights to work, but the 'Ugandan model' is heavily reliant on refugees in urban areas being 'self-reliant', or to put this another way, '[b]y moving to the city, refugees forego the material aid available within the settlements' (Omata 2022, 660). While there are services and organisations (however limited) aiding refugees in Uganda's capital, Kampala, these are often non-existent in other Ugandan cities. While our article centres experiences in Gulu, the settlements continued to be places where the young people we spoke to regularly visited and provided an undesirable alternative to city life.

Igor and James explained how they had chosen to move to Gulu, the administrative capital of Uganda's Northern Region, which became a city in July 2020, to pursue their education, a strategy linked to its perceived route to manhood. The city is located approximately two hours by road from both Adjumani and Nimule, the first main town within South Sudan, as well as being roughly equidistant from Kampala and Juba, with traffic between the two capitals passing through Gulu. During the conflict in Northern Uganda, Gulu served as a site of refuge for displaced people from rural parts of the north, and has been characterised as a 'place of deep and abiding trauma', as well as precarity, especially for women (Harris et al. 2023). Yet for the young men in our research, despite significant challenges that we discuss below, Gulu was constructed as a space of opportunity and hope, especially when directly compared to the bounded and perceived containment and 'waithood' of the settlements.

23 year-old Wek moved to Gulu in January 2015 in time for the start of the school year: 'I was first in the settlement but since the situation got worse and worse, we

decided to move here… I've been here in Gulu for four years… I studied here and I'm done with my Senior 4.' While schools exist in the settlement, the education afforded in Gulu's schools is regarded as much stronger. James, who works as a photographer and videographer, says that he 'came here [Gulu] for studies because the other side of Adjumani kids play a lot. They don't go and concentrate at school… resources are not enough'.

For young refugees, the city represents a place-based and temporal pathway to becoming men: a means to fulfilling masculine norms and expectations as future husbands, fathers and adult sons and brothers. In short, a means to both pursue their expectations of a 'better' future and meet the expectations of their communities and families. These enactments of hopeful and emergent masculinities through migrating for education are deeply embedded in familial relations and support networks, that are themselves contingent on the radical and protracted uncertainties of forced displacement. Wek was able to gain the support of an uncle: 'The uncle told me… find a small house that he could afford, maybe take children to some better schools. So, we shifted here and we found ourselves a home. Children were at school, when kids are sick, there are some good government hospitals that we could always go to.' While James told us that 'my mum is illiterate… when you are educated, you are free to do more other things in life and your brain enlarges… So, that is the reason as to why she sent us this side and she… is trying to do hustling the other side [in the settlement] so that she can pay the school fees and all the other things for us.'

Initially both of Igor's parents wanted him to study in the town of Adjumani and his mother was happy with his work as a translator in Adjumani's hospital: 'I get some money there. We used to buy things like [a] mattress. I am the one who bought them using my own money so my mother was really happy with me'. However, with the support of an uncle – who regarded schools in Gulu as superior – he moved. In Gulu he was able to complete secondary school up to Senior 4, but following 'some misunderstandings' with his uncle, who had been paying his fees, he was not able to continue his education as he had wanted. As many young men reported, family support was frequently partial and uncertain. Kwai came to Gulu in 2011, 'because I have my auntie in Australia. She promised like to put me back to school so I had to wait here. She kept promising me, but nothing is happening'. While Casey completed his primary education in the settlement, he moved to Gulu to start secondary school. He was being supported by his aunt, 'but things were tight, so I am still at home up to now.' He has been unable to complete his secondary education, unlike his firstborn older brother who gained his Uganda Certificate of Education.

However precarious, support for young men's education, and their movement to Gulu, is enabled by masculine privileges reinforced at household, community, and even refugee administrative scales. This is particularly the case the more advanced your education becomes – especially after primary school, when gender- and age-based dynamics become increasingly marked. When resources are limited, not all children will receive equal support in pursuing formal education. Preference is often given to boys and young men, to the detriment of girls and young women. As Igor reports: 'in our culture boys are a bit lucky because they educate boys, because boys are the ones who are going to take care of the family. The lady will get married, so they

don't consider ladies a lot there, unless the family are having a lot of money – then they can take both to school, but when they have little money, they will take boys alone.'

Gender thus intersects with age hierarchies to structure opportunities and the allocation of limited family resources. Preference is commonly given to the 'firstborn' due to their standing in the family and translates into expectations to shoulder larger family responsibilities in the future. As Igor explains: '…being the firstborn is not really easy because in our culture everything is on [the] firstborn. Like my father is now too old. He cannot work again so the defence of the family is supposed to be on me but now I have nothing, I don't have my support… since I am the firstborn so everything look[s] to me.'

As became quickly apparent in our discussions, the privileges bestowed on the 'firstborn' referred almost exclusively to the firstborn *male* child, and came with distinct expectations of responsibilities to navigate. 20-year-old Jackson describes that if a girl is the firstborn she 'has no responsibilities over her father's things' because she will marry, join the family of her husband, and bear children in that family, unlike a boy who will remain and be the beneficiary of key inheritances, such as land. The oldest of six siblings, and whose parents are in South Sudan, Jackson remarks that the 'responsibility of my entire family is supposed to be on me, because if I'm having money then I handle the responsibility of the entire family… at times I just sit down and see what should I do, but I'm left with no option'. Casey, who has an older brother, argues that 'the responsibilities of the firstborn they are not all that different from mine,' though admits that his brother 'will be the first person to provide the needs in the family because he is the firstborn'. The entwining of gender and age hierarchies' manifests for young refugee men in mobilities out of the settlement, but also produce a weighing of responsibility that becomes framed through expectations of their own (urban) futures and expectations that are made *of* them.

Reflecting related work on sibling support practices in Uganda (McQuaid et al. 2019), the role of the firstborn is often perceived with ambivalence. On the one hand, Jackson feels it is 'a good thing which has happened' to him, providing a 'target to achieve, so I want to make a better thing for my life.' He 'really love[s] to have the responsibility of my entire family' as 'it's a great thing to help people'. However, 'what comes now, I don't have those things to make everyone feel I'm responsible… but if it's there, I will make it and be proud of it. Right now, the way I am, I don't have anything to do'. Igor agrees, being in 'education' gives him a sense of purpose, as it sustains the possibilities and state of becoming, of moving towards the potential to fulfil his patriarchal expectations: 'I'm here [Gulu] for a reason: that is studies. So, I came for this and all those parents, they know that I'm here for studies… It feels good because I'm doing something good also for them, because they want the best of me, they want me to benefit from what I'm doing from here'.

26-year-old Manute highlights the continuation of heteropatriarchal masculine norms from South Sudan to Uganda: '[I]f you are 20 years and above you're supposed to have a job, have kids… The hardest thing according to our culture, society, like if you reach 18 years, you are supposed to work for your family, get a job'. For many of the young men, pursuing education is therefore viewed – by their families and broader community – as an 'acceptable' reason for them to be in Gulu and for not

pursuing or delaying other expectations, such as marriage and having children. In part, this helps explain the continuous pursuit of qualifications and fees to undertake more formal education – it prolongs youth and delays the impending burdens of 'manhood'.

However, this 'purpose', the hope of bright futures as men fulfilling responsibilities, can be difficult to reconcile with the precarity of many young men's current situations. As we explore in the next section, young men's urban and educational desired-for futures encounter the intersectional injustices of the urban climate crisis, as well as legacies and effects of colonialism, structural adjustment, and neoliberal global capital. Their emergent masculinities reveal themselves as relational, but also partial and contingent, deeply compromising their perceived possibilities for positive change and achieving the social status of manhood. As Manute explains, 'I'm supposed to have a job, pay my school fees, but for now I don't have. Even some of my relatives are blaming me: 'why can't you get yourself a job?', 'Why can't you go to South Sudan?', 'Get yourself a job, take care of your mum'. I used to tell them, 'I will get a job', that's the false hope I've been giving to them'. Kwai puts it simply: 'It is hard. It is hard to be a man. It is hard because everything is on men. Men are suffering.'

'I was finding the root of life when I was young but it didn't pay me': urban precarities and masculinities in flux

As hinted at above, the expectations of the opportunity of education in Gulu quickly give way to a more complex lived reality navigating precarious livelihoods, insecurity, discrimination, family responsibilities, environmental vulnerability, and the excitement of urban life. Much of this weighed on the minds of the young men we spoke with. Jackson explains that 'at times I just sit down and say 'what should I do?', but I'm left with no option. At the end of the day, after all these thoughts I will not have answers of what I should do to make a better life'. Kwai reflects: 'when you are 18, people call you man, not a boy. You are no boy no more. So, you should be having your own things… people like expect a man to be a man. Like, you are expected to have your own family, like to have your own land… to be rich'.

This socio-material benchmarking of manhood by independence and taking care of yourself (and preferably others) was a challenge that preoccupied all of the young men, especially as manhood and material wealth entwined in the weight of social expectation. Here too, symbolic and material markers intersect with the broader socio-legal refugee regime, in which turning 18 triggers certain administrative changes for registered refugees, with ramifications for mobility, resettlement and reunification cases, and so on.

While education is accessible provided fees can be paid, formal opportunities for young men to earn money in Gulu was limited. Neoliberal dynamics, legacies of structural adjustment, aid-dependent and limited economic growth, and prevalence of informality in urban centres have reproduced persistently high levels of youth un- and under-employment and a volatile labour market across Uganda (Asiimwe 2023). Igor notes that 'getting a job here in Gulu here is not easy. That is one of the hardest things I have ever faced. Even these people from Gulu also they are even complaining about jobs.' Wek agrees: '[T]he Ugandans themselves could not find job[s], so us

foreigners, unless you have a business to run… but like having a job, maybe hoping to be employed, that's one of the hardest things.' Stubborn youth unemployment intersects with discrimination against refugees for young men like Wek. When applying for a job, if you write that your nationality is South Sudanese, he reports, 'other people will get, but for you… your results will not come out.' Discriminatory assumptions of wealth, elite status, or at least self-sufficiency, linked to age and gender, have long informed the response to refugees in urban areas, particularly in Africa. The UN's Refugee Agency (UNHCR), for example, long characterised urban refugees as being young, single men seeking better opportunities, a representation which has served to justify minimal or no support or protection in urban areas (Crawford 2021). The young men explain that many Ugandans erroneously believe that all South Sudanese 'have money.' As this is not true, they engage in struggles for daily survival. They are left to 'hustle', 'capitalizing on every opportunity to procure a good or a service to supplement income and symbolic capital… it is both a survival strategy and a means of crafting an identity' (Munive 2010, 331); something that of course is true of their participation in our research itself.

Social and economic forces thus conspire to structure young refugee masculinities, forging disconnections between their future expectations of independence and financial stability and present precarities. All the young men we spoke to showed distress at their inability to conform to age-related masculine norms both in the present and their perceived future. Wek articulates the emotional toll of not feeling you are doing or being 'enough': 'it's always big challenge for us here, staying home, having nothing to do, not supporting the family. So, you will find that you are growing old when you are not supporting the family and not doing anything. Sometimes it's stressful when you think about it'. As Kwai also reflected in his drawing journal: 'by this time as a man, I should be having my own work, but now I am not working… because I am in another country… I am jobless.' They faced a double bind of trying to complete or further their 'education', while also feeling as if they were 'failing' their families, by not providing for them. Wek describes how 'family is demanding' and as a young man, you could 'see that you are failing the family. You have that guilt in you always, that maybe you are not supporting the family.' The present and future intersect in his decision-making: returning to South Sudan weighs on his mind – caught between insecurity in his country of origin, but the lack of employment prospects and poor economic situation in his host country.

Such emotional stress is compounded by environmental vulnerabilities. All the young men lived in under-serviced neighbourhoods because they are the parts of the city that are cheapest to rent. Here a lack of formal waste management, sanitation and drainage intersect with poor quality and informal housing, to render residents vulnerable to climate change impacts including heat and erratic weather. Jackson describes such neighbourhoods: 'These grass-thatched houses… have poor sanitation. People who are living in it, they are not living a good life… raining is too much here and it's been affected by flood because the place is sloppy and erosion is occurring there… the rain affects the area, the water will be running down going to the swampy area… dust is also there, pollution is there'. Wek – who has stayed in a few different homes in Gulu and is in the process of moving home again when we speak with him – elaborates on the nested challenges: 'that area is always slippery, the road is not

always safe. There are always like electric poles but there is no power in the area. So, the security there is not okay because the place is always overcrowded and a lot of people there. This is the worst place in Gulu.' Wek describes his place as a 'swampy area… where people dump, throw water, garbage there, everything… This is the worst place in Gulu.' James contrasts the area between the dry season when 'people keep on dumping rubbish' which damages the soil, and the rainy season, when the land floods, and the water smells bad due to the rubbish, and flood water rises into people's compounds and homes. Environmental issues and poor infrastructure are compounded by insecurity, as the parts of the city where the young men live are also 'very dangerous' and 'well known for robbery', as Casey explains.

Young men's capacities to move around the city were deeply entwined with these socio-environmental burdens. Most walked around the city as they frequently could not afford to pay for transport; a product of both environmental and social disadvantage. Jackson explains how limited finances meant limited mobility options: 'when I don't have money and I'm to foot [walk], I will get mud along the way. At times I can easily slide and fall… I will go home when I'm totally dirty with muddy clothes … But when I have money, I can easily take a boda boda [motor/cycle taxi]… But when it's rainy season … they charge us a lot.' As Manute observes: 'if it is raining, they increase the price. At night they increase the price. If they see you are not from this place, they increase the price'. Increasing temperatures also had an impact, as Casey notes: 'As you can see, even right now [in April] it is very hot and even it's a problem, because most of us don't have any other means of transport other than walking, so sun heat always affect[s] us'. Manute also finds heat a challenge: 'when it is sunshine, there will be dust and sunshine. At least when there is rain you can stand under shade and when the rain stops you can continue with your walk. But the sun cannot stop from morning to evening… when the sunshine is too hot it can cause headache, it can ever cause sickness to me.'

Structural disadvantages conspire with the complex temporalities of a challenging present oriented towards an increasingly precarious future to manifest for these young men a sense of thwarted masculinities. As Wek reflects, '[I]n our culture men are almost the one doing everything for the family. So, if you are a man, married, and maybe you cannot afford anything for the family, you are considered a failure.'

The expectations the young men felt intersected with their struggles with emplacement. Manute explains: 'I'm not okay as I'm not a citizen here… Staying in a foreign country is not like staying home. We are growing old and we should at least do something for the country, somehow, we are not okay being here'. Their challenges were exacerbated by stigma against refugees, circumscribing their access to housing, school, healthcare, even trying to gain access to nightclubs and parties. As Jackson explains, being South Sudanese translated into 'overcharging of house[es] for rent and denying to rent a certain house. When some of us get a house and you want to rent it … they will be like 'we don't need you people' and if that person is accepting you to stay there, he will overcharge you a lot of money'. Wek recounts how: 'You'll find that in every school, they are charging unnecessary fees that are not supposed to be charged on us. So, they'll be like 'you are foreigners… you pay this extra fee''.

With multiple expectations of upward mobility, independence and material success reinforced at family, society and administrative scales, young men continue to re/

negotiate masculine norms in spite of discrimination, joblessness, limited mobility, environmental burdens and inability to provision for the wider family. Igor reflects: 'I am supposed to support my family right now, but the family is the one who is supporting me… I have nothing. I am not even working… Even when I think about it sometimes, I can get a lot of stress.'

Young men were all navigating familial pressure to marry, yet marriage is a social expectation of masculinity that does not map onto the precarious socio-economic conditions they face in Gulu. As Igor recounts: 'Like right now my family always say that I should get married but I am the one refusing. I don't want [a wife] just to come and get to suffer when I have nothing still yet… Marriage is one of the expensive things here. In our tribe, you can spend like one hundred cows… But right now, maybe I am having only three cows. Imagine!'. Yet not getting married or delaying marriage came with its own issues, for as Jackson explains: 'If you don't get married, people will talk bad things against you… and your family will not be respected, even you yourself will not be respected by people'. There are ramifications in choosing not to fulfil the expectation to marry. This risks the privileges that a heteropatriarchal gender order bestows upon them as sons, husbands and fathers, but also as (older) brothers. The city and challenging economic and environmental conditions, as well as the structural exclusion of refugees, serve to maintain the young men as vulnerable, as transient and mobile – as precarious.

The young men thus continue to focus on one thing: 'to have a better life'. They sought to fulfil their expectations: to care and work to provide for their families; to enjoy football; live in concrete houses with tiles in the bathroom, multiple bedrooms and strong rooves; start businesses or graduate with degrees or attain school leavers certificates; build hotels and train as mechanics; sell cars or work with the internet; write scripts and shoot movies; have friends; put their future children through school; South Sudan would find peace and 'development'; trees would be planted; the weather improved; and Gulu would be full of tall buildings, hospitals and paved roads. On balance, therefore, for the young men, Gulu was a hopeful and future-oriented space, one of becoming, just like them. As Wek articulates:

> The time we came, Gulu was quite down, but I could see Gulu growing. It's growing so fast. When we first came the roads were not all tarmacked, but I could see now the town is growing, the roads are tarmacked… As a refugee seeing this place, like when I was in a camp, you could not have any kind of beautiful views with places to visit, but here in Gulu, there are a lot of leisure places where you can go. You get your money, you go and have fun… Gulu is a better place for anyone to live as a refugee.

Gulu therefore represents a space of transition and growth, as Casey reflects: 'in my life I expect myself to be somebody. I will be educated and my children also are going to be educated. They are going to be someone in future, someone who is responsible… our family is going to be also at a standard level, not like right now. Like my family in [the] future, my family is not going to be in the camp. It is going to be in those places like Gulu'. Such imagined futures, like their emergent masculinities, are deeply relational, This is reflected in the lyrics of their song 'Piir': 'I'm always moving looking for a better life/Because I wanna make Mama proud'.

Conclusion

Our focus on young men's everyday negotiations of displaced masculinities amidst urban challenges has sought to advance existing analytical frameworks that tend to focus on hegemonic and/or violent masculinities. A critical, intersectional and plural approach to masculinities that addresses forced displacement, the urban climate crisis, the navigation of gender norms, roles and expectations, and situates men within the contested and environmentally inequitable urban contexts to which they have migrated, has sought to complicate existing analyses of post-conflict and displaced masculinities, and join a growing field of work that centres African masculinities. Further work is needed to progress these insights and understand the vulnerabilities and responses of young men to the entwined socio-environmental burdens of the climate crisis.

Young refugee men's experiences are thus inextricably gendered. Their stories highlight a continuity of evolving gendered patterns from South Sudan through displacement into refugee settlements and migration into the city. Gender and age serve as mechanisms for privilege as well as disadvantage, yet even the privileges they negotiate within heteropatriarchal gender orders are contingent and relational. Access to education is precarious and deeply reliant on unpredictable family support, while young men's lived experiences of the city are often more precarious than anticipated. They seek to find their place and grasp at urban futures while negotiating different expectations of what it means to be/come men against a complex landscape of poor housing, limited mobility, unemployment and informal livelihoods, environmental injustice, discrimination, crime and poverty, but also freedom and the joy and purpose in (potentially) fulfilling family responsibility.

Their stories highlight an uneven access to the city, wherein they benefit from young male privilege to migrate out of refugee settlements into the city, but struggle to find ways out of its poorer neighbourhoods with their difficult living and working conditions, and struggle to keep afloat the educational advancements they so desperately seek. For many, these displaced masculinities – as well as temporalities themselves – converge to manifest in a sense of failure: to meet socio-cultural expectations of men commensurate with their stage in the life course, or indeed the future men they will one day become. The city – constructed as a space of social mobility and transformations into responsible men with material wealth – is simultaneously a space that maintains them in a state of precarity, poverty and exclusion. Yet, on balance, for nearly all of these young men – as it is for so many youths migrating from rural subsistence lives into Uganda's cities – Gulu represents the best option 'for a better life' available out of living in the settlement or returning home to the multiple crises that continue to enmesh South Sudan.

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