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"She's Here and I'm Not": Parenthetical Parenting, Hegemonic Masculinity, and the Hidden Geographies of Oppression in the Gauteng City-Region, South Africa

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Prevailing societal beliefs about gender constructs and fathering practices perpetuate a hidden geography of infrastructural violence and oppression in the Gauteng City-region of South Africa. Using the frames of hegemonic, failed, and respectable masculinity, we demonstrate how the notion of breadwinning, coalescing with material deficits, often pushes fathers into situations we term *parenthetical parenting*, in which their relationships with their families and children are relegated to the spatial and temporal margins. We found that the fathers believing they fall short of socially constructed expectations, combined with what are often "transactional" relationships between co-parents and their limited caring experiences, engender a sense of isolation and shame in fathers. Using evidence from sustained engagement with the Gauteng City-region, and with questions of mobility and gender, this article adds to the canon of understanding of masculinity and its relationship to both transit and geography in the Global South, providing insight into the matrices of hidden geographies and oppression that men face in urban contexts today. **Key Words: fathering, Gauteng City-region, gender stereotypes, hidden oppression, intersectionality, mobility, South Africa.**

South Africa, like many other countries, has a long history of intersectional identities and forced mobility. Black men were made to be mobile to seek work in mines or factories, (Ginsberg 2011; Howe 2022a).[1] Today, there are incredibly diverse pathways that people of all genders follow to access resources and opportunities, spread throughout large urban regions like Gauteng (Howe 2022b, 2022c). Gender dynamics and expectations are key to understanding the movements, imbued with meaning and gendered relations, performed in extended urban regions like the Gauteng City-region (GCR). Within this, our research has continually shown how gendered labor "becomes a vital component of urban infrastructure" (Doherty 2021, 759). Through the process of mobility, gender ideologies are projected onto and reflected from transit spaces. As Doherty (2021) explained, "movements are never solely individually determined strategies but are themselves mediated by both transport infrastructures and intersecting norms of gender, race, class, and other axes of social reproduction" (760).

This article builds on previous work (Parker and Rubin 2017, 2023; Lekalakala 2020; Doherty 2021; Rubin and Parker 2023) examining the intersection between gender, infrastructures of care, and the materiality of the built environment, recalling Chowdhury's (2021) claims of "how ideas of

masculinity operate as an invisible structuring principle of mobility in cities" (75). Our work demonstrates that this interstice results in a hidden geography of oppression and violence for men in post-apartheid South Africa (on this notion, see Shefer 2007). The socially conditioned expectations of men, primarily as breadwinners and providers, construct a specific form of mobility and quotidian practices of care that men perform. The requirements of this hegemonic form of masculinity, however, mean that men spend time away from their children and families, or fit their parenting into the margins of their time, which we term *parenthetical parenting*. We have introduced this term in our work to identify the times and spaces that men find around what they, and often their partners, see as their primary contribution to family life: breadwinning. Parenthetical parenting can also mean that men often live and work in precarious environments to maximize their remittances, and can live in positions of extended "waithood" (Honwana 2012), unable to fully achieve their own objectives for work and parenting due to the characteristics and constraints of their everyday lives.

As much of our previous analysis has concerned the deeply entrenched inequalities women and families experience, in this article we unpack a perspective on fathering to better understand why such a

dominant and prevalent construction of gender still pervades South African society. Largely aligning with Gorman-Murray's (2008, 368) assertion of a "range" of masculine identities corresponding to "common-sense" gender constructs, we have found there is an idealization of "masculine identity" influencing patriarchal relations between men and women in the GCR. After presenting our research context and methods in the next section, we then position this article within three specific tracts of thinking. First, we briefly discuss hegemonic masculinity, including constructions of respectable and subordinate masculinity. Second, we track these phenomena historically in South Africa to understand both the current constructions of intersectional male identity and how they coalesce around specific notions of "good fathering" and "breadwinning." Third, we reflect on the relationship between the ethics of care and infrastructure, demonstrating the reciprocal and recursive nature of these two aspects.

The consequences of the forms of hegemonic masculinity we encounter in the GCR are often catastrophic, and they are largely rendered invisible. These hidden geographies of oppression result in men living as victims of a different type of "infrastructural violence" (Coutard and Florentin 2024) than we have identified with the form female participants in our studies are subjected to (Parker and Rubin 2017); it primarily manifests as being excluded from reciprocal relationships of care and intimacy with their partners and children. We argue that, whereas the intersections of gender and mobility have been well established in previous scholarship in geography and urban studies, their implications for men, especially men in the Global South, bear deeper investigation and analysis.

Context and Methods

The geography of the GCR remains deeply racialized and divided as a result of apartheid and colonial policies: Thirty years after apartheid, lower income residents and people of color remain concentrated on the periphery of the urban cores, in townships and informal settlements, requiring significant commutes to social and economic opportunities within the city region (Statistics South Africa 2022). Although the state has invested substantially in forming townships and transport infrastructure in the postapartheid era, deep spatial inequalities remain, particularly regarding access to jobs, healthcare services, educational opportunities, and other facilities (Todes et al. 2014; Rubin et al. 2023). The consequence is that, although some desegregation has occurred since 1994, the GCR is marked by persistent race and class divisions, and long commutes between the spaces of everyday life. Previously

"White" suburbs, which originally had high levels of resources and links into key economic nodes, have had a highly bifurcated trajectory. Some areas, particularly those close to the Johannesburg central business district, have become sites of migrant enclaves, overlapping with significant private and public-sector disinvestment, and forge their own paths (Zack and Landau 2022). Other areas, further away from the declining inner city, have maintained apartheid levels of access to resources, often complemented by residents' own investments and state maintenance of public arenas.

This uneven geography informed our research design. Five sites across Gauteng were chosen: Lenasia, Mamelodi, Edenvale, Denver, and Bertrams (Figure 1). Locations were chosen based on their distance from the urban core and access to amenities and transport, as well as settlement typology. The case study sites also each reflect the socioeconomic conditions and demographic profiles of the unequal city-region, in which gender, race, and class intersect with space (Table 1). All of the male subjects of the study self-identified as heterosexual men and fathers; all of them were conducting some form of caring for children.

Fieldwork was conducted from March 2019 to February 2020. At each site, we connected to respondents through existing contacts and recruited people for a focus group discussion ranging from six to thirty participants. The focus groups introduced the project, prompted general discussions on mobility and the challenges of parenting, and recruited people for the second phase of the study. We recruited two or more adult participants from the same household as frequently as possible to understand differences of gender and age in daily practices and mobility. We gave each participant (six to ten people per site) a smartphone with an application tracking their Global Positioning System (GPS) positions and modes of transportation for two weeks. At the end of the two-week period, mobility data and WhatsApp communication were used as the basis for semistructured ethnographic interviews, asking people detailed questions about their movements, identities, and choices to understand the motivations behind their mobility and spatial practices. Interviews were transcribed, coded, and triangulated (Flick 2011) with the maps, focus group data, and WhatsApp information, to identify common themes and challenges. The following section provides insight into our conceptual framing, relying on key literature on hegemonic masculinity and the ethics of care.

Hegemonic Masculinity

Sociologist Kleist (2010) understood "masculinity as the enactments and articulations—as well as the negotiations and reinventions—of culturally defined ideals of manhood and male authority, intersecting
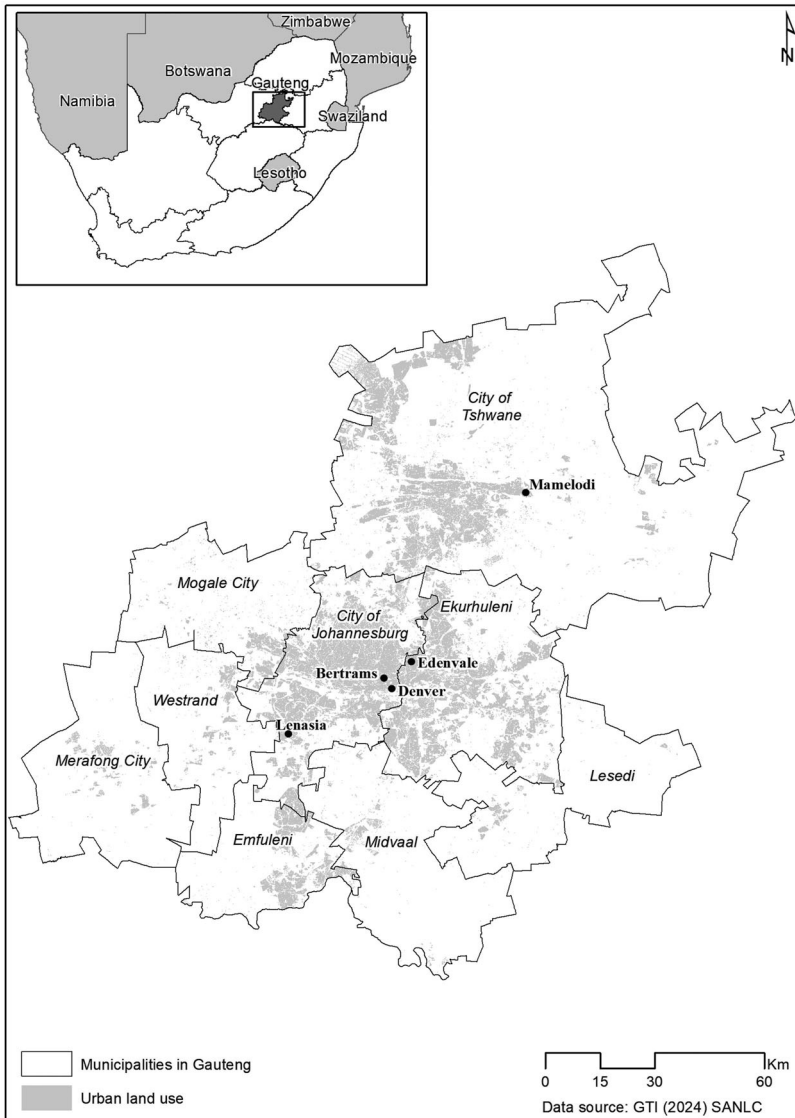
Figure 1 *Overview of the Gauteng Province, containing the five case study areas. Map by Samkelisiwe Khanyile, Gauteng City-Region Observatory.*

with other social positions" (187). Such notions of masculinity, however, are not without normative dimensions originally encapsulated in the idea of "hegemonic" masculinity: practices, patterns, behaviors, expectations, and personality traits "that allowed men's dominance over women to continue" put forth by scholars such as Connel and Messerschmidt (2005, 832). In their thinking, hegemonic masculinity constructs the "idealized" form of masculinity, to which "all" men aspire, and requires "other men to position themselves in relation to it" (Connel and Messerschmidt 2005, 832). In this, there is no violent coercion forcing men to adhere to these norms; instead, persuasion and institutional embeddedness render it common sense, invisible,

and internalized by other genders. Although not all "men" conform to this notion—nor is there a singular, universalizing formulation of hegemonic masculinity—there are relevant articulations thereof arising from a person's context, highly contingent on their identity and positionality (Wetherell and Edley 1999). Messerschmidt (2019) later clarified that the "model [of hegemonic masculinity] then demonstrates that the quotidian prevalence of hegemonic masculinities widely disseminates the cultural knowledge people utilize to in part guide their gendered social action" (89).

In other words, these culturally and socially contextual constructs inform men how to behave and not behave, what is acceptable and what is not in

Table 1   *Overview of study participants from each of the five areas and their demographic characteristics*

	Denver	Edenvale	Lenasia	Mamelodi	Bertrams
General information					
Population (2011 census)	7,257	49,292	89,714	334,577	3,906
Distance to economic center	6.5 km	16.0 km	30.0 km	26.0 km	3.4 km
Public transport amenities	Minibus taxi, train	Bus, minibus taxi	Bus, minibus taxi	Bus, minibus taxi	Bus, minibus taxi, BRT
Dominant housing typologies	Informal. hostel	Houses, gated communities	Houses, public housing	Houses, public housing, informal	Houses, small apartments
Participant information					
Majority population group	Black African	White	Indian/Asian	Black African	Black African
Average monthly income	> R800	R19,201–25,600	R3,201–6,400	R801–1,600	R1,601–3,200
Average education levels	High school incomplete	Tertiary education	Matric (high school) complete	High school incomplete	High school incomplete
Dominant mode of transport	Minibus taxi	Car as a driver/ private car	Private car	Mixed modes	Mixed modes
Most common birthplace	Kwa-Zulu Natal	Gauteng	Gauteng	Gauteng	Mozambique

Note: BRT = Bus rapid transit.

different situations (Messerschmidt 2019), and further constitutes what is considered respectable. Masculinity that does not broadly conform, that is either different or deficient, is "positioned outside the legitimate forms of maleness as represented in the hegemonic form and that are controlled, oppressed, and subjugated" (Swain 2006, 221). Skelton (2001), among others, argued that hegemonic masculinity only exists in direct relation to the "other" of subordinated masculinity, constructing a hierarchy of masculinities.

Marginalized masculinities, in contrast to hegemonic, subordinated, or complicit masculinities (on this notion, see also Connell 2005, 76) are formed through particular interconnections between gender relations, class, and ethnicity (Katz and Monk 1993; Meth 2009). Similarly, "failed masculinity" is a form in which "[men] are marked by their failure to live up to the normative expectations of masculinity" (Walker 2022, 1475), including deeds and acts that are culturally and contextually specific. These articulations are thus subject to a particular space and time, and can change (Morrell 1998); but, in the end, men who fall outside of these expectations simply do not "measure up." The following section offers a brief account of changing conceptions of masculinity across time, space, and identity in South Africa.

Changing Masculinities in South Africa

In Africa, broadly considered, colonial tropes of masculinity privileged the White, male, heterosexual body as the archetype of masculinity: a hegemonic benchmark for men in colonized Africa. Men are idealized as physically dominant, able to conquer and subdue the landscape and everyone it contains (Epstein 1998; Morrell et al. 2013). Men of color, women, and any other non-heteronormative male identities were subordinated, and put in an unenviable position of never being able to achieve dominance by virtue of their race and gender. Furthermore, "The notion of a male breadwinner was a colonial creation achieved through a migrant labor system and cash crop production, which targeted men" (Pasura and Christou 2018, 525). The complicity of European capital with colonial powers and traditional authorities forced men into systems of mobile, wage-based labor, imbuing this with a naturalized sense of earning as fundamental to respectable masculinity. Constructed counter to this were women's roles of reproduction and immobility, inculcating the equivalence of femininity with the domestic realm. The production–reproduction binary was also reinforced by the missionary work of Christianity, which presented such a division as divinely inspired and sanctioned (Pasura and Christou 2018). In South Africa, apartheid ideologies maintained and reinforced these ideas, as they served both the capitalist interests of the private sector and the political agenda of the state (Malton 2016).

More than forty years ago, Bozzoli (1983) complexified gender relations in South Africa arguing for a "patchwork" of patriarchies. Bozzoli argued that there was a coexistence of many patriarchies in the country, including "an 'English speaking variety', 'Afrikaner patriarchy' and 'Black culture' characterised by 'sexist assumptions and ideologies'" (Morrell 1998, 613). Drawing from her experiences, she argued against two key concepts: the totalizing effect of colonial hegemonic masculinity and the agency and power of preexisting cultures and the power of context. Other scholars built on these assertions; for example, work on Colored male

identities in the Western Cape and colonial Natal White men between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Morrell 2001), early twentieth-century mine workers (Breckenridge 1998), White gangs including the "ducktails" of the 1960s (Mooney 1998), the tsotsi gangs of Soweto from the mid-1930s (Glaser 1998), and the contemporary gangs of the Western Cape (Luyt and Foster 2001), among many others (Morrell et al. 2013).

Two commonalities within these hegemonic constructions of masculinities consistently emerge: "the allure of violence" (Breckenridge 1998) and the "breadwinner" ideal, or men who earn their male authority by providing economically for their female partners and families. Furthermore, research has consistently shown men perceive themselves as "good" fathers through this practice (Silberschmidt 2001; Parker and Rubin 2017). Meth (2009) summed up this notion by stating: "In South Africa, the provider role is dominant, particularly in resource poor environments where not providing is regarded as shameful" (858). Such ideas of masculinity link directly into notions of what constitutes appropriate "care" for and by men, and how they are related to the materialities of their environments.

Infrastructures, Gender, and Ethics of Care

The work on the ethics of care has "become an important focus of feminist theorising, acknowledging the distinctive and often unshifting role that care plays in women's lives" (Raghuram 2016, 2). Understanding care as a form of labor was a key historical and political moment, showing how the reproductive roles of women contributed to the maintenance of capitalism and to embedding naturalized notions of gender roles. Geographers have looked at the ethics of care at a multiplicity of scales and contexts, from the intimate spaces of the home to the institutional and postausterity state and on into the nonhuman and far distant worlds. In summary, "care ethics that recognize the generative and redistributive potential of care … feminist theories of care-relations seek to understand hidden, ordinary, nurturing and just forms of reparative work that weave together the material, ecological and social fabric of cities" (Ashraful and Houston 2020).

It is here that care intersects with the world of infrastructure, in two important and interwoven ways. Understanding of infrastructure has gone beyond the technocentric and functionalist lens to thinking about infrastructures "also as having distinct social, spatial, political and aesthetic effects" (Graham and Marvin 2001; Larkin 2013). Infrastructures are seen as constituted of material and intangible features: social networks, policies, legislation, social norms, and historical legacies that locate people within lattices of repression. As we have argued elsewhere (Howe et al. 2024), both tangible and intangible infrastructures make care possible in the first place. To a large degree, "caring for" conduct can be seen as the labor of child care and caring practices, which generally falls to women, whereas men as fathers might motivate their actions based on "caring about" their children. This might mean less involvement in the day-to-day activities of child care and hands-on actions, but drive other activities such as providing financially for children (LaRossa 1992; Aitken 2000). Fathers also often take on less vulnerable roles that link masculinity and technology, or other masculinized material engagements.

Infrastructure is a vector that organizes lives and enables—or constrains—particular forms of sociality and life from flourishing (Berlant 2016, 393). Due to this relational nature, an individual's experience of infrastructure is unique and different to others based on the benefits or harms received and enmeshed in it (Amin 2014, 138). As such, the materiality of how bodies move through space should be considered, including the nature of the bodies, their social and political positioning, and the constitution of their assemblages and encumbrances. Boyer and Spinney (2016) described how the materiality of travel ''pushes back'' on people, shaping their experiences of mobility as well as their construction of their identity. Rodgers and O'Neill (2012) took the notion of the impact and influence of infrastructure and materiality to pose the idea that "marginalised individuals and communities, who are excluded from infrastructural provisioning, experience uneven urban conditions of deprivation and … infrastructural violence" (402).

Hegemonic masculinity in South Africa across race, socioeconomic position, and geographic location, although demonstrating significant differences, seems to hold the notion of breadwinning in common. The materiality of the environments in which they live, the materiality of their infrastructure, affects and influences how men are able to perform that role, however. As our studies have shown, this has a diversity of impacts on their social lives, relationships, and senses of self. The following sections provide selected empirical insights from our study, expounding on these interlaced ideas and how they manifest in the daily realities of care in the GCR.

Performing "Breadwinning"

For almost all of our respondents, breadwinning was seen as a key feature of fathering and care work. This phenomenon was so entrenched that it was almost invisible. One White, middle-income respondent illustrated it succinctly with an offhand remark:

that being a good father was "to be a provider, obviously" (E2). Such sentiments reinforce the traditional and essentialized notion that good fathers finance their families. One Black, lower-income father, who is currently unemployed and does not live with his son, also naturalized the situation by stating: "When it comes to the finances, I take it that automatically those things are facing me and are my responsibility" (D1).

How earning was accomplished among participants varied across education level and access to opportunities. Most fathers in our study, though, fit their caring activities around their work responsibilities, again reinforcing the notion that their primary role is to provide. Several fathers across income and racial categorizations spoke of how the demands of their jobs, such as traveling a great deal or working long hours, prevented them from engaging more in the daily practices of child care. Instead, mothers were expected to work in jobs that had more flexibility. For example, many of the women in our studies had part-time jobs that left them free in the afternoons, and they assumed responsibility for almost everything else that happened during the course of the day with their children and household. Male participants justified and naturalized this using traditional masculine framings by simply stating, "She's here and I'm not" (E2).

Despite some pervasive similarities along gender lines, it is important to note differences in the ways that men were able to be present in the lives of their children related to their income levels: Middle-income fathers were overarchingly physically present in their children's lives on a daily basis. This presence influenced their spatial footprints, moving between the intimate domestic spaces of home into the city, for example, bringing children to school and helping with homework. Lower-income fathers generally did not live with their children, constructing a different scale and temporality. Their spatial footprints were often conducted away from the daily rituals of care and extended through traveling to visit their children, or their children traveling to them during holidays. This has had a profound effect on household and family dynamics (Seekings 2008). D2, for example, is a migrant worker, originally from the province of KwaZulu-Natal. His typical spatial footprint in the city-region was quite small: He lives in Denver and works informally in an illegal mine as a *zama zama*, after losing his job in the formal sector. The proximity of Denver to the mine means that he can work the long, demanding hours necessary for the job, not have to bear any expenses for transport, and he can live frugally in an informal settlement. He maximizes the amount of money he sends "home" to his wife and children; he travels to see his family as often as he can but spends most of the year without them. His overall spatial footprint as a father spans provincial boundaries, yet is constrained to the activities of financial provision and the hegemonic masculinity that surrounds it.

D1, another father living away from his child in Denver, was only permitted by the family of his child to see his son in neutral locations, because he had not paid "damages" to the family of the mother of his child—asserting the cultural narrative of the "breadwinner" over other forms of support a parent can provide.[2] He noted, however, that an additional reason his son does not stay with him is because he lives in an informal settlement, which he argues is not an appropriate place for a small child: "This type of space, because of how things are here … When you live in a place where you are expecting problems then that's the problem" (D1). He was both worried and embarrassed about living there: worried that his child could be hurt in a space with such poor infrastructure and amenities, and ashamed that he could not offer his child something better.

His location and the fragmentation of D1's household also affecting his spatial footprint substantially, as the mother of the child had moved to an urban node further east of Denver, meaning that D1 had to pay money for transport to see his son. Continuing the complex familial structures of support and bilateral remittances that began during apartheid, D1's own mother sends him money to live on, while he travels every day to the east of Johannesburg's central business district to look for work. He travels east because he relies on the trains, which are the cheapest form of transport; they run from east to west across the points of the GCR he can access on foot, his only other affordable form of transit (Figure 2).

Hidden Geographies of Oppression

The hegemonic expectation of men having to fulfill the role of breadwinner has a number of implications for men involved in caring. Although there is no presumption that nuclear families are the best and only model of household configurations in the South African context, lower-income men in our studies tended to live away from their partners and children for extended periods of time. Men who lived in the informal settlements refused to let their children come and visit them, saying, for example: "When a child is playing outside [in Denver] you have to expect they will get hurt" (D1). D2 does not allow his children to even come because he lives in a single room that he shares with his cousin—and also because he argues that Denver, despite it being an informal settlement, is still a more expensive place to live than "home" and he simply cannot afford to have his children there. He stated,

> They plead to come here during school holidays. I ask them what they will eat here. … They will starve here. A day they require 2 Rand [less than 10 cents] to buy at the shop. How much will the daily 2 Rand cost a week? (D2)
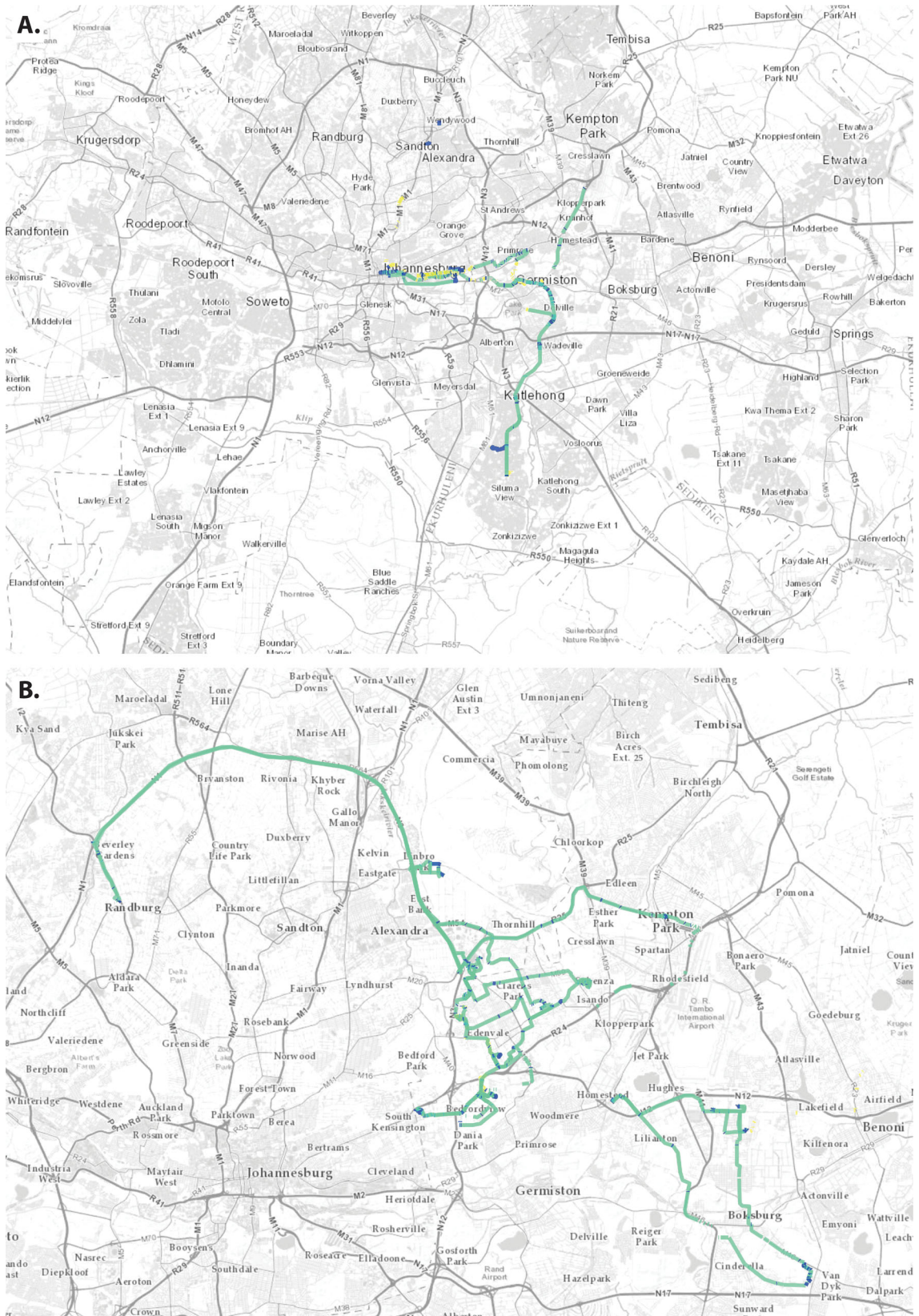
Figure 2 *The pathways around Gauteng for participants identifying as male. (A) Participant in Denver from 5 July to 14 July; (B) Participant in Edenvale from 14 September to 16 September (right). Green indicates vehicular travel; blue indicates walking; yellow represents "tilting," or where someone is looking at the screen of their phone. Map by author Lindsay Blair Howe.*

As a result, he travels to KwaZulu-Natal to see his family as often as he can but spends most of the year without them. In explaining this, participants expressed sadness and a painful acknowledgment of loss. As D1 noted:

> Living far from your child is not good at all. I know it happens to a lot of people, though it happens from my perspective it is not good. As a parent you must always know what is happening in your child's life even the smallest events like playing … you would want to watch and see that they are okay.

Even men who live with their children care for their children in the margins of their days: primarily before and after work, and in ways that are congruent with ideas of masculinity. In the evenings, fathers often helped with homework, although that was dependent on their schedules and if they were home in time (L3). E1 explained that he works until 5 p.m., and when he comes home, he helps with homework, eats dinner with the family, and a "little bit of playing with the kids or entertaining them or doing stuff with them" before bedtime. The power of these moments of connection for fathers should not be underestimated, however. One father noted, "I love to walk the kids to school … it was a chore getting up but it was a pleasure to take them. And I loved those minutes in the car on the way there" (E2). Holdsworth (2013) argued that there is more going on in these moments than just the routine transportation of children to school, asserting that "mobility is inherent to disclosing intimacy and emotion within families and relationships" (18). So for many of these fathers, taking their children to school can feel like a profound act of care through emotional connection, performed as a bookend to their work day.

Some of the mothers in our studies described in detail how their husbands were involved in the bedtime routine. One woman, a White mother of two, described how her husband finds a space of connection and intimacy:

> [My husband] always does the bedtime stories and he's like, "It's my time with my kids, it's the only time I get with them in the week." So he's always done that. (E5)

Other men also seemed to use the evenings as times to connect with their children, doing things with and for them. An Indian mother of one illustrated this by explaining:

> He helps to put her [our daughter] to bed and that. He does see to her quite a lot. His love for her is endless because he's always wanted a daughter. So, say for instance if I wanted to feed her … he tells me that no, she's my daughter, I am going to feed her. (L4)

Being the breadwinner thus naturalized gender roles in both directions: The blurring of fatherhood and financial provision influenced how mothers and fathers described themselves and their roles; men were generally seen as being "good with money"—earning it and managing it—whereas women described themselves as "shocking with money" (E5) or not earning the "real money" (E7). These ideas correspondingly influenced the daily activities of parents. In most households—spanning across both lower and higher income segments—men took care of monthly expenses, or sent home money monthly, whereas women covered daily or immediate costs. In doing so, however, men remained removed from the granular level of parenting activities, as their responsibilities allowed them distance from observing or enacting what happens in the day-to-day lives of their families. This means that even if they are physically present, they might be distanced from the intimacy that proximity and routine bring to families.

Our cases show how many men's involvement with their children was what we refer to as parenthetical. For middle-class men, this meant bracketing the working day or week: Their parenting occurred before the work day began and after the work day ended, generally taking the form of ferrying children to evening events and activities or assisting with homework. As one upper-middle-income White mother described it, her husband is "very hands-on at the weekends and after dinner" (E5). For many of the lower income respondents, however, this meant on weekends or holidays, demonstrating a different temporal bracketing. Although many men were increasingly traversing the caring about–caring for divide, and expressing a strong desire to do so, they still conduct caring activities very much on their own terms, taking on roles that align with hegemonic notions of masculinity and do not interfere with their primary role as provider for the family.

Precarity, Informality, and Infrastructural Violence

Chowdhury (2021) discussed how urban residents "'do gender' in their everyday interactions with infrastructural arrangements in the city" (75). An important arena for this is the lived experience of informality and precarity, the material space of informal settlements, and the kind of work available to men. If work and life allow them to perform their gender, this simultaneously and paradoxically distances them from their potential role as a caregiver. Men spoke of how they assumed precarious and dangerous work to support their families—which

was necessary in the context of mass unemployment and poor educational attainment in South Africa. Father M5 from Mamelodi spent many years traveling around Southern Africa, for example, working on a lodge as a tiler—despite the fact that not only did it take him away from his child, it affected his lungs, eventually resulting in a form of tuberculosis. As the single father of a son with special needs, though, he felt compelled to work to raise enough money for his son's expensive and necessary medical care. Other men lived in informal settlements to save on costs, despite the fact that they were dangerous and lacked amenities. On one hand, this meant that fathers could save as much money as possible, but on the other, as discussed earlier, these precarious material conditions meant they could not have their children in their lives regularly. Living in informal settlements or conducting activities in "gray" worlds such as artisanal mining, for example, did not constitute a respectable form of masculinity. The cognitive dissonance between expectations of good fathering and their inability to achieve them, in some cases due to circumstances far beyond their control such as structural racism and urban segregation, resulted in an immense sense of pressure and psychological burden for fathers in our studies, akin to the "slow violence" described in infrastructure studies (Nixon 2011; Coutard and Florentin 2024).

The prevailing construction of men as breadwinners in South Africa means that failing to provide depicts men as failed partners or fathers. D2 mentioned that when he lost his job, his wife told him not to come home to visit unless he was also bringing money, equating his value as a father with financial support. The following excerpt from his interview transcript is enlightening:

> *Interviewer:* When there is no money are you still a father?
>
> *D2:* Yes, I am a father but a weak father.
>
> *Interviewer:* You see yourself as a weak father when you do not have money?
>
> *D2:* You are weak because you cannot survive with your woman without money. She survives on the children's grant money which she gets for them. They [the mothers] are the good parents. When you don't work you are just a father.
>
> *Interviewer:* What makes a good father good?
>
> *D2:* Being employed and having an income. Having my wife obey me. If I follow their rules, I am no longer a father. I am a broke, weak father, there is nothing I can do.

The inability to perform masculinity in the proscribed way meant that these men felt ashamed and emasculated, and in the kind of transactional relationship just described—enforced by the mother—men who did not perform this contextually-specific form of masculinity were excluded, told not to come home, and ultimately made to feel unvalued and unloved. For Morrell et al. (2013), "This brings us to the question of how hegemony is constructed and by whom. … The role that women play in legitimating and maintaining oppressive versions of masculinity is increasingly being acknowledged" (28).

Honwana (2012) wrote extensively about the bind that many young people find themselves in today: a state of limbo between childhood and adulthood that she termed "waithood." They are unable to advance due to their inability to meet the traditional markers of adulthood, or societal expectations thereof, under contemporary conditions of work and life. For many men in the GCR—not just young men—the city-region's geography and the state of its transport and other infrastructures result in many men reporting feelings of waithood. Economic decline, neoliberal policy failure, and high levels of unemployment mean South Africans, especially those with little income or other resources, are effectively "stuck."

In D1's case, after getting his ex-girlfriend pregnant, he could not pay damages to the family, which meant that he could not see his son without their consent. His ongoing lack of employment continued a dependency on his mother, such that he could neither pay damages to his ex-partner, nor could he marry his new partner. One Indian single father in Lenasia still lives in his mother's home, relying on her help to raise his daughter, and according to him, unable to finance his own dwelling due to the structure of the housing market. The situation of returning to dependency and waithood is possible regardless of age: M7, from Mamelodi, recently moved back in with his mother, explaining: "I'm in the process of getting a divorce. I also lost my job. So, that's why I came back." He and his mother also share the house with his sister and nieces. In these cases, the materiality of returning home or staying in the parental home returns men to situations of dependency, showing the importance of familial networks in navigating the complex spaces and social relations of South African urban space.

Conclusions

The intention of this article was to expose the multiple ways in which the material world, infrastructures, and ethics of care intersect and result in hidden geographies of oppression for men and fathers. We have added two important and innovative ideas to the existing canon of masculinity. First, we locate the hidden geographies of oppression that affect men's daily practices and emotional lives;

second, we propose the concept of parenthetical parenting, in which men's relationships with their families and children are often pushed to the spatial and temporal margins of their lives. Thus, through tracing the invisible but interlaced threads that cause a sense of shame and inadequacy for men, they become trapped in constructions of masculinity that are hegemonic and difficult to escape. Although hegemonic masculinity is a contested term, our empirical work reveals a shared sense that being a man or father is deeply connected into the colonialized notion of being a provider and the head of a family. Within different demographic groups, how men are able to meet this expectation differs wildly, and is dependent on social factors, like access to education, as well as the spatial geographies that they inhabit.

Our cases reflect the difficulties that men face when trying to perform their gender "requirements" in South Africa: In many cases, this means a lack of presence, with the relationships they hold dear pushed to the perimeters of their breadwinning-driven lives. They themselves state fittingly that in many dimensions—financially, emotionally, pragmatically—their female partners and co-parents are there, but they are not. This means, for one, that men in the sites we studied miss out on shared intimacy with their children and partners. It also reduces relationships to a more transactional level, leaving substantial room for failure and raising feelings of shame and lack of care when men do not achieve what is required. Women in these cases are complicit, embedding gendered expectations and removing care when men do not measure up. The materiality of the environments in which men live and work as well as the expectations mean that men are also "stuck" and remain in limbo across many spheres of their lives. This means that "even the most powerful men may subtly experience a vulnerability which they cannot acknowledge" (Morrell et al. 2013, 15), and constitutes a possible sphere for change.

The specific material assemblages of the GCR reflect intersectional identities, socioeconomic constraints, and the dialectics that propel people throughout the city region in pursuit of masculinized constructions of caring and providing. It reveals the privilege of certain social groups and marginalization of others. Our narratives demonstrate the entangled and contingent relationship between how fathers think of themselves and their roles, the culture of fatherhood, as well as their daily actions and practices. Both the content of the common-sense understandings about masculinity in the GCR and the deployment of these ideas in space demonstrate the damaging legacy that apartheid left behind, which continues to replicate through human movements and interactions today. Class, race, and gender intersect with the apartheid legacy to have profound impacts on the spatial footprints of fathers and paternalistic geographies of care.

The article thus links to the contingent and ever-evolving relationships between identity, inequality, and spatial praxis, grounded in an understanding of the intersectional factors that shape the routine activities of everyday life in extended urban regions in the Global South. The enduring spatial legacy of apartheid and colonial policy, along with naturalized, hegemonic cultural practices, is obdurate, and related to a shame and sense of failure. As such, these geographies remain largely hidden, and men are left to endure this violence and oppression mostly in silence. Our work sheds light on these intersectional moments and provides a new way of understanding the challenges that men face in city regions of the Global South.

Disclosure Statement

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Notes

[1] We use the term *Black*, laden with history and meaning, in this context to refer to all people of color in South Africa. We use the categories of male and female in this article, as the participants in our studies all self-identified as such.
[2] Known as *inhlawulo* in isiZulu, this term describes the practice of a father paying a "fine" to the family of a woman he has impregnated out of wedlock.

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