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An Investigation into the Struggle to Center Gender-Based Violence Policy in Refugee Settings

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ABSTRACT

Despite decades of research and policymaking on how to address gender-based violence in times of emergency, humanitarian responses continue to neglect the implementation of international standards set forth by international Non-Government Organizations (NGOs), creating a large gap between recommended policy and policy implementation. This article draws on fieldwork undertaken at a refugee camp in Greece to interrogate and problematize the persistence of gender inequality in NGO operations. Its empirical findings demonstrate that NGOs are themselves embedded within, and complicit in perpetuating, the patriarchal social systems and structures that support gender-based violence in the first place. At the core of the gap between policy research and implementation is the persistence of patriarchy as a systematic structure of gender inequality, which obstructs gender awareness among workers and creates resistance to attempts to center and embed GBV standards in organizational programming and coordination efforts.

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In 2015, the European Union experienced the largest refugee crisis since World War II, with a total of 1,255,640 registered asylum seekers (Eurostat, 2016). Forced migration and displacement inherently creates an environment of vulnerability, resulting in the breakdown of "law and order and in protective societal norms" (United Nations Population Fund [UNFPA], 2012). This vulnerability disproportionally affects women and children, where in humanitarian emergencies, gender-based violence (GBV) in particular "sharply increases" and should be treated by humanitarian personnel "as a serious and life-threatening problem" (UNFPA, 2016).

In general, women are at a disadvantage with less social power, less access to resources and less control and participation in public life, and it is within this imbalance that GBV occurs (United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2015). According to the UNHCR, the leading global body specializing in displacement, "No one is spared the violence, but women and girls are particularly affected because of their status in society and their sex" (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2008, p.7). Scholars Jeanne Ward and Beth Vann found that migrating women and girls are "those most at risk" where a "disproportionate vulnerability is directly related to their subordinate status in nearly all cultures and societies" (Ward & Vann, 2000, p. 13). Due to this gendered power imbalance, it stands to reason that humanitarian responses should be developed in way that accounts for the power relations that play out in an emergency situation. Going one step further, if we heed what the UN implores, then "all humanitarian personnel should assume it is occurring, treat it as a serious and life-threatening problem and take actions to prevent it and provide comprehensive services to survivors" (UNFPA, 2016).

The warning, given by the United Nations (UN) and international NGOs, that GBV is a risk factor that demands attention, is based on the discovery of the weaponized use of rape and other forms of gendered violence in the Rwandan and Yugoslavian/Bosnian conflicts. This inspired targeted research which resulted in a set of standards and recommendations that shaped policy, mandating all actors to prevent, protect, and mitigate GBV in emergencies. These policies have been used, researched, reshaped, and promoted for decades, yet in

practice, they fail full implementation. GBV "remains endemic in situations of conflict, disaster and displacement" in which "women and girls, and to lesser extent men and boys, continue to be raped, abused and violated" (Humanitarian Practice Network [HPN], 2014, p. 13). Despite the last decade's increased focus and a broad knowledge of GBV in emergencies, "humanitarian responses do not prioritize responding to this violence as a lifesaving intervention" (HPN, 2014, p. 10). Dale Buscher, director of protection at the Women's Refugee Commission (WRC), argues that the "humanitarian community needs to assess why implementation is so haphazard and why basic guidance is not being put into practice" (HPN, 2014, p. 13).

The European refugee crisis provided a fitting opportunity to investigate why well-constructed policies fail in implementation. This article draws on the findings and analysis of a research investigation conducted in a refugee camp in Greece to argue that a central problem underpinning the failure of the translation of policy to practice is that NGOs are themselves embedded within, and complicit in perpetuating, the patriarchal social systems and structures that support gender-based violence in the first place. Although impartiality is a core principle of the humanitarian purpose of NGOs, it is a mistake to view such bodies as "culture-free" and immune to organizational gender bias. In this article, evidence supplied by fieldwork is assessed with a view to interrogating and problematizing the persistence of gender inequality in NGO operations.

The Fieldwork Site

This article is the result of fieldwork conducted at a refugee camp in Greece in 2016, amid a massive influx of refugees due largely to conflicts in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Greece was chosen as the fieldwork location for a couple of reasons. First, women and children made up over half of the refugees in Greece, clearly indicating the need for GBV policy implementation (Robinson, 2016). Second, at the time, Greece had approximately fifty-eight refugee camps throughout the country (UNHCR, 2016). These factors provided an ideal research site, a large refugee population and a collective multi-actor humanitarian response to analyze. The Greek

government assumed control over the response, but it soon became apparent that its institutions and civil society organizations lacked "depth of experience" to oversee proper coordination (Bezirium, 2018, p. 30). While the government did allow numerous small NGOs, charities, religious groups and independent volunteers to operate in the refugee camps, these organizations struggled to provide assistance amid unorganized and chaotic coordination. Due to Greece's economic instability, the EU stepped in to provide assistance. Since 2015, approximately $803 million — from the EU and other national governments — was funneled into the humanitarian response in Greece, with $188 million going directly to the Greek government, $161 million to UNCHR and the remainder to a long list of other NGOs (Howden & Fotiadis, 2017). This economic infusion into Greece made this the most expensive humanitarian response in history at that time (Howden & Fotiadis, 2017) and supplied the nation with access to vast wealth and resources to address the refugees' needs.

The refugee camp where the fieldwork was undertaken (hereafter, the subject refugee camp) had opened in early 2015 on an abandoned Greek military base, with a few old buildings used as a supply warehouse, some makeshift housing, and a cafe. Upon arrival, the researcher observed that all residential tents were in the center of the camp, in a big open field. Directly circling the tents were the service facilities, including Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) facilities, supply distribution, protection areas, and education tents. Halfway through the researcher's fieldwork, residents were moved into more permanent and winterized housing — small trailers equipped with a heater, a bathroom, and beds. This created a shift in the WASH facilities and also left the large field open.

While the Greek government — the Greek Air Force for this camp — controlled the camp, with one or two government workers appearing three times a day to deliver food, there were numerous non-government actors who sustained and managed the camp's day-to-day operations, including the International Organization of Migration (IMO); the Red Cross (Spanish Red Cross and Hellenic Red Cross for medical services, and French Red Cross for WASH); Echo (for food and non-food distribution); I AM YOU (for education); Lighthouse Relief (for protection spaces and construction); Flourish (for art therapy); and Rits Cafe (for nutritional and culturally

appropriate food). In addition, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), Save the Children, and UNHCR all have a small presence in the camp. UNHCR has a trailer on the ground but no dedicated staff; Save the Children has a mobile unit that is present for certain program initiatives; and MSF provides mental health and other services but is not always present.

Due to the hands-off approach of the Greek Air Force and lack of security, the camp was also home to many independent volunteers who preferred to offer help in their own way instead of adhering to the structure and rules of the NGOs. All of these workers would arrive early to late morning and leave around sundown. Due to the lack of camp security, anyone could come into the camp, so on occasion, journalists and other interested parties would arrive to take photographs and conduct research. Gender-specific programming was undertaken by the IMO (for GBV incident responses), Lighthouse Relief (in providing protection spaces for children and women, and reproductive healthcare for women), and the Red Cross (in providing a female-only protection space).

The fieldwork provided a close view of how the Greek government and NGOs operated and how they addressed, or *if* they addressed, GBV. While this one camp cannot be generalized to the country's entire humanitarian response, it does provide a glimpse into the obstacles and reality of getting gender incorporated in the refugee setting.

Methodology

Field observation was conducted for a period of six weeks. As a participant observer[2], the researcher was able to observe the organization and structure of the refugee camp, as well as the interactions of the NGOs and Greek government. A GBV standard checklist was created[3]

[2] As a participant observer, the author did not have authority or influence to affect how GBV standards were handled within the organization. This NGO is a volunteer-led organization with four employees on-site. These employees made all decisions and used volunteers to carry out duties.

[3] The GBV standard checklist was created by combining all recommended standards as put forth in these four guidebooks: GBVAoR Working Group's Handbook for Coordinating Gender-based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Settings, IASC's Guidelines for Integrating Gender-based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Actions, UNFPA's Minimum standards for prevention and response to gender-based violence in emergencies, and UNHCR's Handbook for the Protection of Women and Girls.

and used to assess the challenges that prohibited the implementation of GBV standards, to understand why some GBV standards were able to be implemented with ease while others were not, to observe how the refugees interacted with the camp structure and the NGOs, to observe how the government and the NGOs interacted with the refugees, to identify what services were provided, and to cross-compare the data collected from the interviews. This allowed for an in-depth look at the struggle and challenge for the NGOs to fully implement their intended GBV programming.

Interviews were conducted with three NGO humanitarian workers. The three interviewees represent a hierarchy of positions within the NGO: regional director (the highest position), protection coordinator (overseeing all protection workers), and the gender-based violence officer (GBVO). To capture a variety of answers, the researcher used improvised questions that arose in response to the events of the camp and accounted for the different positions that the interviewees held within the NGO. This flexible approach created an environment that allowed participants to discuss their feelings, perceptions, and opinions that they found significant to their work in the field, and also indirectly identified solid reasons for the deprioritization of gender in practice.

A database was created that included all document research, field observation, and transcribed interviews. This database was used as a coding database to identify the most common themes to extract. The themes extracted provided a collection of the most common reasons as to why a gap existed between GBV standards and their implementation.

The theoretical framework for the fieldwork combined a human rights-based approach with a feminist research ethic (Ackerly & True, 2010). A human rights-based approach is defined as:

> a conceptual framework for the process of human development that is normatively based on international human rights standards and operationally directed to promoting and protecting human rights. It seeks to analyze inequalities which lie at the heart of development problems and redress discriminatory practices and unjust distributions of power that impede development progress. (UNICEF, 2016)

This approach provides the perspective that an individual is entitled to a particular baseline of treatment, free from discrimination. This baseline comprises the norms, principles, and standards set forth by the international human rights system, which can be used to support the position that GBV standards in humanitarian responses are indispensable to the provision of human rights protections, rather than secondary, superfluous, or optional. A human rights-based approach is the backdrop that both justifies and demands that gender be taken into consideration and is the benchmark for all humanitarian practices.

A feminist research ethic provides for "critical inquiry and reflection on social injustice by way of gender analysis, to transform, and not simply explain, the social order" (Ackerly & True, 2010, p. 2). In this pursuit, the researcher bears responsibility for producing a "critical perspective on social and political life that draws our attention to the ways in which social, political, and economic norms, practices, and structures create injustices that are experienced differently or uniquely by certain groups of women" (Ackerly & True, 2010, p. 1). For the present research project, simply identifying and explaining failed GBV standards could not be the end result; the fieldwork research aimed to use a feminist research ethic to provide an analysis that would be attentive to the power dynamics that influenced GBV programming and shaped the relationships between humanitarian workers, organizations, and refugees. As Ackerly and True so aptly put it: to refrain from doing "feminist-informed research would be to perpetuate the invisibility of gendered absences, silences, differences, and oppressions and the violations of human rights they conceal" (Ackerly & True, 2010, p.24). This approach informed the research questions and direction, allowing the researcher to situate the data collected from humanitarian workers and field observations within a broader feminist analysis of human rights.

Gender-Based Violence, Patriarchy, and Humanitarian Responses

According to Jeanne Ward, a leading author of the Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC) GBV Guidelines and longstanding expert on GBV, "the problem of violence against women and girls is widespread in humanitarian emergencies" (Ward, 2016, p. 296). The European

refugee crisis has been no exception. As the WRC reported in 2016, "Protection risks for women, girls and other vulnerable groups are present at every stage of the European refugee migration" (Women's Refugee Commission [WRC], 2016a, p. 3). These risks include human trafficking, exploitation and abuse by smugglers, criminal groups, and individuals along the transit routes and campsites (Muiznieks, 2016), with reported cases of rape, sexual harassment, domestic violence, transactional sex, early and forced marriage, and physical assault (WRC, 2016c). Those particularly vulnerable were single women, female-headed families, pregnant and nursing women, adolescent girls, and elderly women (Muiznieks, 2016). Feminist intervention and leadership in NGO programming is essential if such organizations are to fulfill their obligations to protect women and girls. That is, feminist strategies are needed in NGOs for the simple reason that there are specific forms of violence perpetrated by men against women and girls, which take place within a gender hierarchy, which feminists have theorized as the product of *patriarchy*. As Ward explains, the very concept of "gender-based violence" comes from the feminist movement and "is used to articulate women's exposure to violence in the context of patriarchy" (Muiznieks, 2016, p. 289).

NGOs are constituted by groups of people who are working within and through patriarchal social and cultural systems. A social system is "an arrangement of shared understandings and relationships that connect people to one another and something larger than themselves" and "it's something people participate in" (Johnson, 2005, p. 26). Social systems around the world are almost universally patriarchal (Ortner, 2014). What does patriarchy look like? Sociologist Allan Johnson states that patriarchy's "defining elements are its male-dominated, male-identified, male-centered character. At its core, patriarchy is a set of symbols and ideas that make up a culture" (Ortner, 2005, p. 29). In order to understand how NGOs negotiate this system, we need to consider patriarchy's "cultural ideas about men and women, the web of relationships that structure social life, and the unequal distribution of rewards and resources that underlies oppression" (Johnson, 2005, p. 29). Such a consideration demands acknowledgement that the unequal distribution of resources inevitably affects the implementation of GBV standards on the ground. This is borne out in

the many evaluations of the European refugee crisis response which show that there is a persistent resistance to centering GBV policy in the implementation of NGO emergency response efforts.

Throughout 2015 and 2016, reports on the European refugee crisis confirmed that a focus on gender-specific risks was wholly lacking, with reports indicating that German, Greek, Macedonian, Serbian, and Slovenian state and non-state actors neglected the use of GBV standards in their humanitarian responses (Bonewit, 2016; UNHCR, 2015a; WRC, 2016a; WRC, 2016b; WRC, 2016c). The 2015 IASC GBV Guidelines state:

> All humanitarian personnel ought to assume GBV is occurring and threatening affected populations; treat it as a serious and life-threatening problem; and take action based on sector recommendations in these Guidelines, regardless of the presence or absence of concrete evidence. (UNHCR, 2015a, p. 8)

Despite this ostensible commitment to address sexually specific forms of violence, the "record of international NGOs prioritizing GBV in emergencies is dismal" (HPN, 2014, p. 27). In a 2016 report, the WRC condemned the ad-hoc planning by international NGOs, leading to a hastily designed response that has resulted in dangerous conditions along the route, especially for the most vulnerable among the refugees, including single women traveling alone, female-headed households, pregnant and lactating women, adolescent girls, unaccompanied minors and persons with disabilities (WRC, 2016a, p. 3).

Ward similarly notes that GBV is often considered as a secondary concern, rather than integrated into NGOs' emergency response protocols (Ward, 2016, pp. 285). The empirical field research that forms the basis of this article found that the NGO practices at the refugee site in Greece conformed to this general picture of neglect in the centralization of GBV policy to humanitarian responses. The fieldwork results confirm that there are gaps in policy and practice which are preventing humanitarian organizations from fulfilling their obligations to girls and women. The following section identifies these gaps to argue that they are a manifestation of patriarchal power structures regulating the practices of the NGO itself.

Identifying the Gap

The research results, based on document sources, interviews, and fieldwork observation, produced these three interdependent explanations as to why humanitarian responses lack GBV standards: lack of coordination, prioritization and leadership. Although these findings will now be addressed separately, it will be become obvious how interdependent they are, thus highlighting the complexity of a humanitarian response. It is a response so complex that without the proper leadership and prioritization, a focus on any one specific protection issue is at risk of neglect. One example scenario, although basic in its nature, can demonstrate the importance of having all three aspects present. Consider the basic task of providing toilets in a refugee camp: if no one is responsible for it (leadership) with a sense of urgency (priority) then who will implement the policy (coordination)? Imagine a refugee camp without toilets. What risks would that bring to the camp? Now, consider this and apply it to GBV standards. If no one is responsible for it (leadership) with a sense of urgency (priority), then who will implement it (coordination)? These three factors are required for any element of a refugee camp to be realized. Hence, the remainder of this section will discuss how the lack of coordination, prioritization, and leadership affects the implementation of GBV standards.

Working in Silos

The "quality of coordination" was the answer given by the GBVO when asked about the neglect of gender consideration in the overall European response (Bezirium, 2018, p. 36). While this may be a plausible explanation for the overall response, the field research clearly identified a larger problem—a complete and total *lack* of coordination to address gender or GBV. Coordination meetings led by UNHCR, called "protection meetings" in the camp, were conducted weekly and attended by all the NGOs. During the six-week observation period, each weekly protection meeting failed to include a GBV discussion or anything related to gender-specific risks. An NGO worker shared her experience:

> I continued to push to include GBV as an urgent topic in the protection meetings… but somehow it was avoided and never given the proper priority. UNHCR led these meetings and they were focused for months on the situation of UAMs [unaccompanied minors]. (Bezirium, 2018, p.36)

Gender appeared as an invisible priority. As the interviewee went on to explain, "It was avoided probably because nobody had an answer as to why it was not present. It was nobody's mandate and everyone has their own agenda" (Bezirium, 2018, p. 36). Not only did this particular camp lack GBV standards, it also lacked the leadership or the will to oversee the implementation of GBV standards or the creation of GBV programming. However, the camp did have two female-friendly spaces, and although neither was programmatically linked to GBV, it was clear that an attempt to make this link had begun during the observation period. This is not unique to this one refugee camp. One UN Women assessment report found that in the weekly refugee coordination meetings conducted in Serbia and Macedonia, "there is no focused attention on GBV or gender mainstreaming" even though it does get mentioned and some workers do consider it in their work (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women [UN Women], 2016, p. 19). In addition, this assessment found that the overall coordination lacked a "mechanism to address gender and GBV issues on a systemic basis" (UN Women, 2016, p. 18). These findings confirm that not one organization in the camp was taking the lead on GBV and this was not an isolated situation.

In another interview, when an NGO director was asked about the gap between GBV policy and practice, his answer was simple: "coordination amongst actors." When probed deeper, he added:

> Coordination is a problem because either the appropriate duty bearers are not there, not upholding their responsibilities to their citizenry or you know to their responsibilities from like an international legal standpoint but it's also … [about] ego. So much of the time it's ego. It could be lack of experience also, knowing how to navigate what's appropriate, what's not, people being

> overwhelmed, and like not being able to take care of one thing while other things are going on. So it's a lot of things. (Bezirium, 2018, p. 37)

With this statement, we see the complexity of why coordination is lacking. But one phrase here highlights an important finding: "The appropriate duty bearers are not there, not upholding their responsibilities" (Bezirium, 2018, p. 37). Hence, coordination is linked to leadership; or those responsible for protection: in this case it would fall to the Greek government, the EU, and any NGOs that have made it their mandate to operate within the camp. The research did uncover that an NGO was technically responsible for GBV but, at the that time of the observation period, they were not coordinating an effort to address it. When asked how they fulfill this mandate, they stated to the GBVO that they are required to act only when an emergency is brought to their attention. If an emergency happens during non-working hours, they call UNHCR or local law enforcement. The NGO with the GBV mandate did not conduct GBV casework and there was no referral pathway, nor was there coordination or engagement with the refugees — all vital aspects of GBV standards. The GBVO stated that this NGO looked to her NGO for the GBV focus, even though her NGO was not empowered to take the lead on the programming.

The human rights scholarship has also provided evidence that coordination is a reason for the gap between policy and practice. In 2014, Rebecca Holmes and Dharini Bhuvanendra's literature review on gender policy and humanitarian aid identified "problems of coordination across all the different actors and sectors" (HPN, 2014, p. 6). They specifically noted that these coordination problems were a "key obstacle to effective GBV programming… especially in ensuring that GBV survivors had access to numerous services." Problems with coordination were largely due to "issues of trust between national and international actors, and well as competition between agencies to secure funding." In addition, an assessment carried out in Greece and Macedonia, by UNCHR, WRC and UNFPA noted that "most of the refugee and migrant response work is functioning in silos" and that "formal information sharing protocols are lacking" (UNHCR, 2015a, p. 12). The collective research confirms that a lack of coordination and collaboration between humanitarian organizations is preventing the implementation of

GBV standards and programs. Another strong reason that was identified in the fieldwork is that GBV policy was simply not a priority.

Where is the Will?

A disheartening finding discovered across all interviews, field observation, and policy research was the lack of will or desire to make GBV a priority. The European Women's Lobby repeatedly requested that the EU Commission provide a "clear EU response to the rights of female refugees" with no success, leading the lobby to conclude that "it simply isn't a priority for them" and that "the major problem is the lack of political will, with some member states using a lack of financial resources as an excuse for inaction" (Pelaez, 2016). While there are, of course, instances of attempts by humanitarian workers in the field and scholars in the policy literature to raise the importance of GBV, their efforts have not yet resulted in the transformation of approaches to gender in NGO programming.

In the subject refugee camp, a gender focus was not a priority for any stakeholder. When the GBVO was asked, "Do you think GBV programming… has been given the proper priority?" the answer was simply "no" (Bezirium, 2018, p. 40). The protection coordinator stated: "we have failed to give the proper priority to analyze gender dynamics that are crucial to implement GBV standards." While the director felt that the overall European response to GBV was not a priority, he thought that in this camp it was "more so", indicated by the two female-friendly spaces which "increased ability…in theory." The director elaborated: "GBV [programming] doesn't exist without [the protection officer] wanting it to exist" and that at least one essential aspect of the female-friendly spaces — "the identification of gender-based violence cases" — was never programmatically linked. This statement highlights the impact individuals make on humanitarian work, which became increasingly apparent when all three interviews were analyzed together. It was found that the three humanitarian workers interviewed, all working within the same NGO, impacted the NGO's struggle to build a GBV program within the camp. This impact, as will be shown next, demonstrates how individual humanitarian actors can have a direct impact on what programming actually moves toward

implementation.

Although GBV programming was part of its overall mission, the NGO under observation did not have it, which provided the impetus to find out why there was a gap between its stated policy and practice. All interviewees mentioned that resources and funding were an issue, which is also a common refrain in the industry. However, in this particular case the problem was not that resources and funding were unavailable; rather, it emerged from disagreement between the actors over how the resources and funding were to be used and implemented. For instance, the protection coordinator, who oversaw the protection issues of children and women, talked about and advocated for a greater GBV focus in the program, yet her time and monetary spending went primary to the child-friendly space, which continued even after multiple meetings with the GBVO, resulting in a power struggle between the two (Bezirium, 2018, p. 41). The director, with eight years of refugee protection experience, was, in theory, amenable to GBV programming, yet called into question the assumptions embedded in GBV policy. In the interview, when asked about the goal of building relationships through the female friendly space activities and its link to GBV policy, he stated:

> So that's important. But still, what is the outcome there and what is the assumption there? We need to get them comfortable so they can talk about all the domestic violence and horrible things that are obviously being perpetrated against them because they're, I mean, they are Muslims, right? And Muslim men are really bad. Now, I'm being facetious here but… I really struggle because of the lack of depth and the youth in my team to believe that they aren't making some huge biases. (Bezirium, 2018, p. 41)

As mentioned previously, the director called out the disconnect between the female-friendly space and "the identification of gender-based violence cases" but then expressed his concern about the assumptions that this link might make with Muslim men. Although he conceded that the NGO needed to create GBV programming links, this next part of the interview indicates his uncertainty:

> Because no one has said that one of our overall goals is to provide culturally appropriate and gender-segregated space that allows for the disclosure and identification of challenges that otherwise wouldn't be, you know, appropriate or possible in a camp setting. Fine, but then what is the outcome there? By doing that what did we accomplish? Did we have an increase of disclosers of domestic violence? (Bezirium, 2018, p. 41)

For this particular NGO worker, his words suggest an uncertainty about the purpose of GBV policy, but also a concern about its intentions and an overall resistance to implement the NGO's stated mission, which did include GBV policy.

This did not deter the GBVO, as she immediately sought to implement a full GBV program. Upon her arrival, GBV program-building began and activity funding started to flow towards the female-friendly space, along with a concerted effort to reach out to the girls and women in the camp. The participant observer saw firsthand the GBVO's advocacy with the director and her persistence in fighting for GBV standards, in spite of the resistance of her peers.

A look at how these three NGO personnel reacted to a call for the implementation of some GBV standards indicates that individual workers have an important impact on policy implementation. Therefore, an understanding of what is happening at the humanitarian worker level is imperative, especially if the overall leadership is failing to take responsibility or accountability. As scholar Cathrine Brun states: "It is the individual experiences and insights of staff that are used to make decisions on what to do, and what is possible to do in this particular context" (Bezirium, 2016, p. 403). Hence, in a refugee camp, the priorities pursued by the various NGOs and their workers will either include, hope to include, or simply not include, GBV policy. And regardless of what an NGO's mission may be, the workers' actions either produce, or do not produce, the intended results. One way to mediate this issue, in any organization, is to have leadership to guide and insure its mission.

Lack of Leadership

The first thing it would take to implement GBV policy in a refugee camp is for a humanitarian worker or workers, an organization or a group of organizations, to initiate, support and oversee the initiative. From that starting point other issues could be addressed under this leadership, such as proper prioritization, allocation of resources and funding, putting expertise in place, and so on. On the other hand, if there is no organization or group of organizations to take charge, or not even one humanitarian worker attempting to create a gender focus, then it simply doesn't materialize. And this was the case, not just in this camp, but in the overall response in Europe.

Overall leadership within the EU, and other European countries, at the time of this research, "largely focused on how to secure borders, not how to offer meaningful access to protection" (WRC, 2016b, p. 4). UN Women observed of Macedonia and Serbia that neither of their emergency plans "specifically incorporates a gender analysis nor demonstrates a particularly gender-sensitive response. Both are relatively weak on protection and neither looks specifically at addressing GBV issues" (WRC, 2016b, p. 17). Government contingency planning in the two nations was found to have "focused on hardware (for example, number of winterized shelters and beds needed) rather than on the need for services (including on protection and GBV prevention and response)" (UN Women, 2016, p. 17). An UNHCR gender assessment cited Greece as having a "lack of clearly established leadership and clear definition of roles and responsibilities of all actors at the local level" (2015a, p. 12). In Germany and Sweden, the needs of women and GBV standards went unaddressed in the reception and accommodation centers (WRC, 2016b). A number of human rights and humanitarian organizations conducted research and released reports highlighting this neglect, yet not one agency was taking up the initiative to remedy the situation. Granted, some of these organizations would be acting outside their mission if they were to do so, while others were not given the capacity to do so by the Greek government.

This lack of leadership to consider gender risks in the refugee flow into Europe was the impetus for conducting this research. It is important to point out that in the humanitarian

responses observed in the fieldwork and encountered in the policy literature, there were certainly traces of gender consideration. It was not that there was no one who wanted to, or attempted to, create GBV program elements. What was striking, rather, was that in Greece, there was no evidence — either in the policy literature or in the fieldwork research conducted with NGO personnel — to suggest that any organization was taking the lead to make sure that GBV standards were in place in all the camps.

The responsibility for this neglect can, in the first instance, rest with the Greek government, since, technically, it is primarily responsible for refugee protection within its borders. Through the government's actions, it was clear that gender risks were not a priority and subsequently its desire to retain control over the response resulted in the large international NGOs (including the UN bodies) being sidelined, both in mandate and funding. As one interviewee stated, GBV standards are "a huge responsibility…and UN agencies who are experts on this topic have not been allowed to be operational in the country" (Bezirium, 2018, p. 51). She went on to say:

> Greece is still a functioning and legitimate state; therefore, they are mandated to respond to the emergency. This means that national law is to be followed, and international organizations that are mandated to lead the response in such emergencies are left in a second place and are only allowed to provide advice on how to deal with the emergency. Greece is clearly not ready or experienced in humanitarian aid (plus their economic crisis). This has made it all much more difficult to handle, and has certainly made it very hard to implement humanitarian standards (Bezirium, 2018, p. 51).

Consider the following incident that occurred in the subject camp. After the death of a young baby who had not been taken to the hospital for urgent treatment, all the NGOs in the camp, along with the UN, initiated a meeting with the Greek Air Force, where they claimed there was no need for emergency protocols because they wanted the camps "to act as a Greek village" (Bezirium, 2018, p. 51). A Greek government agency, mandated for the camp

management and security, refused to provide a link from the camp to local law and emergency services, making it clear that the refugees and camp NGOs need to handle incidents as a village — effectively on their own.

Clearly, the Greek government was not going to address risks in the refugee camps, leaving the room for camp actors to take up the effort. This could have been done by active coordination between the NGOs through protection meetings or through the diversion of funds to the smaller NGOs in Greece that enjoyed greater freedom to operate. Yet, during the period of time under observation, no leadership of GBV or coordination of other prevention protocols were initiated. The NGO mandated with GBV case management was also the designated actor for overall camp protection and responded to incident calls, but since they had no dedicated GBV personnel, they relied on other NGOs for follow-up (Bezirium, 2018).

Disappointingly, this NGO did not, in the service of its protection mandate, make any formal links with any other NGO, resulting in no GBV case management, no designated GBV personnel, and no initiative to coordinate GBV processes. The research found that leadership on GBV standards and policy action did not exist and there was no clear answer as to why it was not a priority. And this finding — lack of leadership on GBV — can be traced back to the European region as a whole. The EU, and Europe as a whole, has the resources and the human rights and gender policy to tackle this issue head-on, yet the will to lead this initiative is absent.

Patriarchy and the Presumption of Gender Equality

The gap between policy and practice outlined here can be understood as an effect of the pervasive gender inequality — and lack of understanding of it — that is part of the very fabric of the institutions within which humanitarian workers operate. Analysis of the fieldwork strongly indicates that NGOs themselves are *complicit* in sustaining patriarchal values through justifying the exclusion of the particular, gender-specific needs of women and girls from their programming. Over the period of the fieldwork, the subject NGO took an approach to "gender mainstreaming" that de-emphasized the "politically differentiated needs of men, women, boys and girls" and misunderstood "the inequality underpinning these differentials" (Ward,

2016, p. 286). This section explores weaknesses in the application of the *theory* of gender mainstreaming that revealed a problematic presumption of gender equality, which effectively worked to undermine, rather than the support, the female-specific vulnerabilities that feminist GBV policy is designed to address.

To begin with, the refugee camp did have some gender-specific programs, but as it lacked GBV policy connections, the subject NGO hired a new GBVO to establish the recommended GBV policy within the camp. During an early meeting between the GBVO and the NGO director, the former discussed funding strategies needed to connect the female-friendly space to GBV policy. The director argued against the suggestion on the grounds that the camp already had two female-friendly spaces and had no male programming, which he regarded as representative of lopsided gender funding. Yet these grounds for objection are flawed. First, simply having female-friendly spaces is not enough, which as discussed previously, the director confirmed. In order to protect those vulnerable to GBV, such spaces must be connected to GBV policy. Female-friendly spaces may provide women and girls with the opportunity to commune together (through activities such as crafts and yoga), but without GBV policy in place, their needs and rights remain unprotected. Second, there is no reason to assert that a focus on GBV programming which benefits and empowers women must therefore, as a foregone consequence, exclude men. The concept of "inclusive" gender programming problematically ignores the fact of gender hierarchy by implying that all genders have an equal stake. The director's response suggested that if gender inclusivity wasn't the aim, then GBV programming wasn't going to be the focus. For the researcher this raised a red flag: the interests of women and girls appeared to be de-emphasized, deprioritized, and depoliticized on the basis of an argument for "inclusion," which, in fact, had the opposite effect of reproducing female exclusion from the programming. At the heart of this exchange lay the question of gender mainstreaming and its capacity for organizational transformation when organizations themselves are resistant to gender analysis (Benschop & Verloo, 2006).

One particular debate in the scholarly literature on the humanitarian sphere illuminates the specific problem, illustrated here, of the erasure of patriarchal violence — and

its sexually specific character and consequences — through treating men and women as though they are socially equal, which works to erase the *structural* problem of male violence against women and girls. Chris Dolan (2014), an academic, practitioner and activist with refugees, has argued for a shift of focus away from gender-specific responses towards gender inclusivity, which, he says, can accommodate the diversity of victims of violence, regardless of gender, especially among LGBTI populations. Dolan's work has focused on sexual violence against men and boys within crises in Africa and his work has highlighted the issue that GBV policy lacks the equal inclusion of all people. Dolan warns that if the focus of GBV remains on women, "the situation of victims will not improve and social justice and change agendas will continue to falter" (p. 486). In his view, too much of a focus on women excludes as objects of gender-based violence anyone who fails to conform to gender norms, such as cis-men, trans, intersex, and queer folk. Dolan believes that IASC guidelines for GBV humanitarian interventions fall short because the focus is on women as the majority group that is affected by GBV. As he claims, "in practice women's rights have been promoted and protected when it comes to GBV, with little attention given to the different needs of men and others" and that this centering of women, or what he calls "gender equality by way of GBV interventions," has sacrificed "humanitarian principles" (p. 499). Dolan suggests that in order to address the needs of all potential victims of gender-based violence, we must critically question the principle of "male-female gender equality" and reject the "concentration of expertise in the hands of 'gender experts'" to instead pursue "attitudinal change in humanitarian personnel as a whole" (p. 486). In other words, if we don't include all people, Dolan argues, then humanitarian responses will continue to fall short. But Dolan does not stop there. He also makes the somewhat sensational claim that the prioritization of women is "inverting a patriarchal prioritization of male over female" (p. 500). In a bemused response, feminist scholar Jeanne Ward wrote:

> This line of reasoning suggests that a focus on gender equality for women and girls actually leads to gender inequality for men and boys. How could that be? The very definition of gender inequality understands women as a

disadvantaged group in comparison to males. (Ward, 2016, p. 294)

Ward, a leading author of the IASC GBV Guidelines, replied to Dolan's opinion note with a lengthy article that rejected Dolan's claim that the rights of women are already promoted and protected in practice. Ward maintained instead that any "shift away from a focus on gender equality in GBV programming represents a regression rather than an advancement for the GBV field" because "a dedicated spotlight on the rights and needs of women and girls continues to be hard-won in humanitarian contexts" (Ward, 2016, p. 276). Certainly, the findings in this research article support Ward's contention that women's rights, in refugee meetings, are given little, if any, consideration. If GBV programming in humanitarian responses *were* successful in meeting the needs of women, then there would be a reasonable argument for a shift in focus to gender-inclusive GBV programming — but this is simply not yet the case.

Herein lies an important impediment to NGO efforts to protect women and girls, who are disproportionately vulnerable to gender-based violence. The struggle to bring female-focused GBV programming to the center of humanitarian responses may be due, in part, to a resistance to view gender-specific interventions as the solution. When you have individuals — such as the NGO director or Dolan — pushing to have everyone equally addressed in GBV programming, then we ignore the specific qualities and effects of patriarchal oppression and endorse, through critical neglect, the gender inequality that produces violence against women in the first place.

In the subject camp, while the GBVO did eventually proceed with writing some GBV processes, there continued to be a push to deflect it toward the male population. These types of delays only "serve to maintain the status quo" (Ward, 2016, p. 285) and prevent any type of focus on GBV. As Ward says of the tactic of delay, prioritized actions to reduce GBV (along with women's rights and gender equality) are "often postponed in humanitarian action as low-priority," reflecting Cynthia Enloe's wry observation that "'later' is a patriarchal time zone." The current research confirms Ward's contention that we still have a long way to go in addressing GBV for vulnerable female populations. As Ward warns, it would be "entirely

premature to dismantle women- and girl-centered GBV programming when the humanitarian system is not yet fully acting on its commitments and so many women and girls worldwide have yet to benefit."

If a persistent pattern of neglect is found in humanitarian responses then we need to look at the patriarchal culture that is male-centered and male-dominated, and within which resources are unevenly distributed. This is a culture that provides us with the ideas and norms in which we operate. We are all participants in this culture and we uphold it unless we challenge it. As humanitarian professional Ricardo Fal-Dutra Santos (2019) states, "The promotion of gender equality inevitably challenges patriarchy insofar as it fights against gender inequalities. The latter are enabled by the patriarchal system while also contributing to perpetuating it." A male-centered system breeds gender inequality, and since humanitarian organizations operate within this system, their responses cannot be administered without gender equality measures. This perspective does not stand alone. In 2019, Fal-Dutra Santos appealed to the humanitarian community that "challenging patriarchy is not only in line with, but also an essential component of, principled humanitarian action."

How should this shape an organization's work within a refugee camp? It looks like this. When the workers sit down in their first meeting to organize their programs for the camp, they fully acknowledge that gender equality measures guide their every step. There is an acknowledgment that we operate within a patriarchal culture and that the default response and norms will need to be questioned. There is acknowledgment that decades of work and experience has already produced a comprehensive guide for the best protection of refugees. This guide has GBV standards that are required to be brought to the center of the humanitarian program, it is not a selective wish list. A humanitarian response cannot do the hefty task of upending the patriarchal system; rather, this task falls to humanitarian workers to ensure gender equality is not compromised. The research findings discussed here provide an example of what actually happens in humanitarian responses when gender inequality is ignored and unrecognized: GBV policy is not fully recognized nor implemented.

Conclusion

This article examined the gap between GBV policy and practice by situating the investigation in a refugee camp, where the reality of the humanitarian response could be dissected and analyzed from all angles. What was discovered is a lack of importance attached to GBV programming, confusion around when GBV standards should be implemented, and humanitarian workers lacking the will and/or leadership to coordinate the implementation. A lack of understanding about the importance of GBV standards leads to the neglect of them — a pervasive problem seen throughout the European response to the refugee flow. Until the day the patriarchal system is dismantled and/or gender equality is realized, it is left to the individuals in the field to direct attention to, and bring to the center, those affected by GBV. Without this centering, those in the field will continually be faced with the confusion, uncertainty and a general lack of knowledge about GBV standards**.**

The author hopes that readers who aim to create solutions to the neglect found in humanitarian responses will find in this article credible ways to close the gap between policy and practice. This article, and its related research conducted in the field, offers a window into the very complicated reality of humanitarian responses refugee camps. Due to the inescapable limitations of this research, findings cannot be generalizable to all humanitarian responses, but neither should their importance be minimized on the basis of these limitations.

As we have seen in the operations of NGOs on the ground and in the debate between Dolan and Ward, a major obstacle to the implementation of GBV policy is a deep resistance to a feminist analysis of vulnerability and a reluctance to acknowledge current humanitarian responses as a product of the patriarchal structure. There is much uncertainty as to how to tackle such pervasive global and local gender inequality, but it is encouraging is that female-centered policy and practices can be found in geographic pockets around the world, and the author is optimistic that these instances will continue to grow and proliferate.

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Acronyms & Abbreviations

EU	European Union
GBV	Gender-based violence
GBVAoR	Gender-based Violence Area of Responsibility
GBVO	Gender-based Violence Officer
IASC	Inter-agency Standing Committee
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
NGO	Non-governmental organization
UN	United Nations
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene for All
WRC	Women's Refugee Commission