Andrea Parrot & Nina Cummings
$82.50.

Reviewed by Lara Pierce

I. Introduction
Numerous books focused on violence against women have been published in the last several years.¹ The scope of their subject matter is geographically narrow and a large number of them concentrate on domestic violence.² Foresaken Females: The Global Brutalization of Women is unique because it offers a global perspective and identifies violence against women as a universal problem.

Authors Andrea Parrot and Nina Cummings are both educators of women's health in New York. At Cornell University, Parrot is a professor in the Department of Policy Analysis and Management and at


² See generally Hilary Abrahams, Supporting Women after Domestic Violence: Loss, Trauma and Recovery (2007); Eavan Boland, Domestic Violence: Poems (2007); Evan Stark, Coercive Control: The Entrapment of Women in Personal Life (2007); These are Our Stories: Women's Stories of Abuse and Survival (Jan Rosenberg, ed., 2007); Interpersonal Violence in the African American Community: Evidence-Based Prevention and Treatment Practices (Robert L. Hampton & Thomas P. Gulatta, eds., 2006).
Upstate Medical University she is a clinical professor of Psychiatry. She is best known, however, as one of the nation's leading experts on sexual assault, particularly with respect to college campuses and athletes, and date and acquaintance rape. Her books, Rape 101: Sexual Assault Preventions for College Athlete and Sexual Assault on Campus: The Problem and the Solution significantly influenced the services provided to college students and were featured on several media outlets, including The Oprah Winfrey show.\(^3\) Parrot co-founded Cornell Advocates for Rape Education (CARE) in Ithaca, New York. Forsaken Females is her first book about violence against women\(^4\) and her first with an international focus. It is one of many writing collaborations between Parrot and Cummings.

Cummings specializes in women's health. She is a Health Educator and Victim Advocate at the Gannett Health Services of Cornell University and at Ithaca College she is an adjunct women’s health professor. She is also an active member of CARE\(^5\) and has co-authored and contributed to several books, including Rape 101.

In Forsaken Females, Parrot and Cummings do not focus on one type of violence or a single locale of violence, rather they emphasize the irrelevance of geography. For example, sexual slavery and domestic violence occur in the United States, Asia, and Africa alike. The scope of the book is broad and shallow, rather than narrow and deep; it acts as a survey of violence against women on a global scale. Provided in each chapter is a description of one or more violent practices and examples of two or more countries of origin. Significantly, the authors also examine the cultural context of the violence, whether social practices, economic conditions, political pressures, or religious customs condone it.

Parrot and Cummings rely heavily on anecdotal data. They explain their decision to do so by emphasizing the need for a deeper understanding of the violence women face than statistics alone can offer. The voices of the victims play a vital role in eliciting the systemic nature of the violence and offer valuable insight into the consequences of

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4 She has written several books about sexual slavery and sexual violence, but not about other violent practices.

the violence. Forsaken Females successfully conveys the universality of violence against women by considering gender violence on a global scale, examining the social, political, economic, and religious context of the violence, and including anecdotal evidence in a straightforward format.

II. Summary Of Contents
The book is organized into three parts. Part One places violence against women in context by examining the history, methods, and theories surrounding the issue, as well as the social and political circumstances that facilitate the brutalization of women. Part Two describes several forms of violence, including femicide, genital cutting, sexual violence, sexual slavery, trafficking, domestic violence, and honor killing. Finally, Part Three describes the impacts of this widespread violence and what the role of women in the future can and may be.

III. Textual Analysis
Parts One and Three are relatively theoretical, examining the broader concepts of women’s role in societies around the world, the impacts of violence on women, and the possibilities for ending the violent practices aimed at them. Part Two is the core of the book.

The authors explain in Part One the theoretical approach they adopt.

It is our contention that the more viable theories challenge existing power frameworks and call for a complete reorder of the race, class, and gendered norms that exist . . . . of particular note, is the feminist theoretical framework that establishes socially constructed male dominance and female subordination as the primary cause of violence against women.6

This is an appropriate perspective because research indicates a direct correlation between patriarchy and the severity of violence against women.7 The authors also justify their use of anecdotal evidence as

7 Id.
necessary: "without individual experiences highlighted, it would be impossible to "connect-the-dots" between cultures."\(^8\)

To a reader unfamiliar with either feminism or the subject of violence against women, Part One is effective. In fifty pages, Parrot and Cummings offer a thorough overview of the structural framework of Part Two. An explanation of violent practices against women around the world, without context would have prevented Forsaken Females from achieving its goal. Without Part One, the book would have failed to persuade readers that violence against women is connected globally through the subordination of women. To a feminist or a scholar familiar with feminism or violence against women, it will likely be redundant.

Totaling just sixteen pages, Part Three is the least insightful section. Chapter Eleven serves well, if not briefly, as a conclusion highlighting ongoing and potential international efforts to eliminate the violence against and subordination of women. Chapter Ten, which reiterates the impacts violence has on women socially, physically, mentally, and economically is less successful. It is unnecessary because the impacts discussed, such as low self-esteem, reduced mobility, heightened anxiety, and economic dependence, are fairly obvious and could have easily been incorporated into Part Two. The physical impacts described are especially superfluous: "Women whose feet were bound suffer pain and have difficulty walking. There will be painful scarring after bride burning attempts or acid attacks."\(^9\)

Ultimately, this chapter does not provide additional information, but reiterates what was discussed in Part Two or adds information that should have been included in Part Two. For example, the impacts of Female Genital Cutting (FGC) on a young girl’s mental health are explained as particularly harmful because mothers often encourage the ritual. This could have been discussed in the chapter in Part Two devoted to FGC, in which a poem by a ten-year-old Kenyan girl was featured, "... I screamed, and my Mum came running to check on me./ My loving parents, is this what I really deserved?/ I’m asking all of you, is this what I really deserved?"\(^10\) This chapter could have been more effective if the substance was worked into the previous chapters or if it was covered more elaborately in the current chapter.

\(^8\) *Id.* at 17.  
\(^9\) *Id.* at 193.  
\(^10\) *Id.* at 70.
Part Two, on the other hand, is long and serves an important purpose. It consists of six chapters that examine numerous violent practices. They are divided into categories of violence, some of which include several different forms of violence. For example, the chapter about Femicide discusses infanticide and feticide, and Sexual Violence includes marital rape, gang rape, child rape and assault, along with the conditions in which sexual assault often occurs, such as war, prison, and refugee camps. To set the tone, the authors introduce each chapter with a relevant quote about violence against women. "How to Beat Your Wife without Leaving Prints," a title in a Playboy article in Romania, introduces the chapter on Intimate Partner Violence.\(^{11}\)

Within each of these chapters, the authors first consider the "scope of the problem," by explaining context.\(^{12}\) Generally, they consider the pervasion of sociopolitical, economic, and religious factors that influence the existence of violence against women. They also explore how these factors serve to "justify" the practices. For example, intimate partner violence is often an invisible crime because the socially constructed excuse that all marriage-related matters are private overrides the potential danger of the situation. The attitude that the privacy of marriage should prevent law enforcement from interfering is further justified by the patriarchal notion that a wife is the property of her husband. Women abused by intimate partners run the economic gamut; poor women are not the only women vulnerable. One detailed example involves a Random House editor whose attorney husband beat their daughter to death.\(^{13}\) The cultural context of violent practices is also covered in this section, describing acid attacks as occurring most frequently in Southeast Asia and bride burning and Sati in India.

As in Part One, the use of a straightforward framework to introduce the issue is effective, particularly in the general-to-specific approach the authors take. The authors provide brief examples of social conditions that influence violent practices against women around the world and then delve into specific examples within cultures, which paint a more complete picture. The section on Gang Rape in the chapter about Sexual Violence provides a good example of this. The discussion begins with the various causes attributed to the act worldwide, like ethnic hatred or war, then recounts three infamous attacks in the

\(^{11}\) *Id. at 151.*

\(^{12}\) See *id.* at 53, 71, 93, 115, 135, 151, and 173.

\(^{13}\) See *id.* at 155-56.
U.S.,¹⁴ and includes a specific incident in India, which is strengthened by a vivid description of the rape by the victim’s husband.¹⁵

The voices of victims and witnesses have a constant presence throughout each chapter. Recognizing that victims and witnesses of violence provide a unique perspective more insightful than statistics alone, the authors use many excerpts from interviews conducted by Human Rights Watch and other non-governmental organizations. They serve to clarify or elaborate on practices and incidents after a general description and act as transitions and comparisons, both highlighting differences and emphasizing similarities. Set apart in italicized text, each chapter contains between five and twenty accounts of victims or witnesses. The anecdotal evidence adds substantial value to the book, evidenced by one of the four stories used to explain the obscure West African system of Trokosi Slavery.

Once you are sent to the shrine, you usually stay there until you die. And even after you die, your family may have to replace you with another virgin. . . . Once, when I was three months pregnant, I decided to go to the farm and get a cob of corn and roast it. The priest caught me and got very angry. He asked three other men to hold me down and tie me to a table. . . . I was beaten mercilessly.”¹⁶

Parrot and Cummings compare this woman’s account to the Devadasi System of slavery in India. “[T]he Devadasi practice, like that of the Trokosi, is a religious-based system that makes it difficult to change.”¹⁷ By making this comparison, strengthened by the details provided by personal accounts, the authors are able to elicit the shared experiences of women in starkly contrasting cultures. This furthers their goal of emphasizing the universality of violence against women.

Finally, each chapter in Part Two ends with “Success Stories and Promising Practices” and the authors’ conclusions about further action that needs to be taken. It includes specific instances of programs

¹⁴ One incident in Glenridge, NJ in 1989 involved a victim who was mentally handicapped, another in 1991 at St. John’s University resulted in the rape of a female student by several male student athletes, and in 1993 the “Spur Posse” gang tracked points for each sexual assault. Id. at 98-99.
¹⁵ Id. at 99.
¹⁶ Id. at 120
¹⁷ Id. at 121.
achieving the elimination of violence against women. This section serves two important purposes: it equips the readers with practical tools to address violence by implementing solutions and it offers hope. Both are equally vital components for eradicating violence against women.

Despite these successful aspects of the Forsaken Females, it is not entirely faultless. The simplicity of the format, although helpful to underscore the commonality of the themes surrounding violence against women, becomes repetitive and mundane at times. Repetition weakens the longest chapter, which discusses FGC.\textsuperscript{18} Approximately three pages are devoted to “Reasons for Genital Cutting,” such as conformity to tradition and culture, which often treats the cutting as a rite of passage deeply rooted in women’s sexuality. In the next section, “Religious and Political Justifications for FGC,” traditional perceptions of a woman’s sexuality are the common rationale. Additionally, the former section focuses on African cultures, the latter on Islamic cultures initially but then shifts back to Africa. By sticking to a uniform format, echoed in each chapter, the authors are unable to deal with the subject matter flexibly.

The book would benefit from an organization by country. Once the authors give specific examples and specific rationales, the common themes could be explored, pulling from the country-specific examples to create a less confusing flow. The chapter could instead consider the African practices and rationales, then the Islamic, and finally a discussion on how these practices and justifications are similar or different. This organization would likely prevent the reader from feeling confused by the ebb and flow of the conversation.

If the reader is able to overlook the organizational flaws, the reader will find that the strengths of Forsaken Females outweigh its weaknesses. The broad scope of violence examined and the proffered causes of it outshine the organizational problems. The feminist theoretical framework employed by the authors, the inclusion of anecdotal evidence along with statistical data, and the pragmatic tools they provide in the success stories are what ultimately make this book successful.

\textsuperscript{18} The authors suggest adopting this term or Female Genital Circumcision instead of the “pejorative” Female Genital Mutilation because the latter can be received as insensitive and offensive by the practicing cultures, thereby lessening the chance of cooperation in ending the practice. \textit{Id.} at 88, 89.
IV. DISCUSSION
Overall, Forsaken Females is successful. Parrot and Cummings achieve their objective of educating the reader about the violence women face around the world. The book highlights individual violent practices that transcend cultural differences and geographical separation, which underscores the interconnectedness of gender violence and poses the problem of violence against women as pandemic, the "global brutalization." It persuasively argues that the subordination of women is the root cause.

While it may seem logical for Parrot and Cummings to include information about international laws governing women and violence, they posit that laws are not yet workable. Making and enforcing laws addressing violence and discrimination against women, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), \(^{19}\) is premature. The nature of the violence itself must first be examined. "Once the phenomenon of violence against women is understood within the cultural justification that supports it, it can be challenged."\(^{20}\) They seek to do just this.

Despite their position, Parrot and Cummings could have afforded to include a section about CEDAW. Instead they mention it only twice. While it is perhaps obvious to the authors why laws are ineffective, that information is not obvious to their readers. How current laws fail to understand the "phenomenon of violence" and how that understanding could be incorporated in the laws, would be insightful. That information would likely strengthen their argument and it also might have overshadowed the failings of Part Three, where such a discussion would fit well.

Another way in which the book could be improved involves the chapter about Femicide. The term "femicide" is not necessarily familiar to the intended audience and the authors do not define it. It is used as a way to characterize "feticide" and "infanticide," yet that does not seem to complete the definition. The statement, "[i]n other countries, where infanticide is the primary method of femicide,"\(^{21}\) implies that additional practices of femicide exist. In at least one other publication, femicide is an alternative term for domestic violence.\(^{22}\) Thus, without

\(^{19}\) For detailed information about signatories, committees, and developments see http://www.un.org/womenviolence/daw/ccdaw/.

\(^{20}\) Supra note 6, at 20.

\(^{21}\) Id. at 55.

\(^{22}\) See California Women's Law Center, Murder at Home: An Examination of Legal and
an explanation of the term, the reader may be confused by the authors' treatment of it.

Another definitional flaw in the femicide chapter weakens the discussion about “feticide.” The chapter essentially focuses on the cultural consequences of laws and policies limiting childbirth combined with the availability of sex determination ultrasound technology. In countries like China and India, where female children are either outlawed or rejected, women have long practiced infanticide, the intentional killing of an infant child. Today, however, when more women are able to determine whether their fetus is male or female, they more commonly destroy their fetuses instead, to avoid criminal liability and the additional emotional trauma of killing a born child.\footnote{See \textit{supra} note 6, at 57.}

Given that feticide, the intentional destruction of a fetus, closely resembles abortion, the intentional termination of a pregnancy, the authors should have addressed their choice of terms. They complicate the matter by mentioning abortion in passing and apparently using it interchangeably with feticide.\footnote{See \textit{id.} at 58 and 59.} This is confusing to the reader. Is feticide not abortion? How do the practices differ? Additionally, the reader is not educated about the cultural connotations of the terms. Is feticide more acceptable than abortion? Are they equally disdained? In light of their detailed explanation for referring to female genital circumcision as “cutting” (FGC) versus “mutilation” (FGM) because of cultural sensitivity, the authors likely made a conscious decision to use the feticide instead of abortion. Not only does this omission leave the curiosity of readers unquenched, it ignores the opportunity to engage the reader more completely in the discussion. Abortion is a familiar term to, at the very least, their U.S. audience. Had the authors addressed the relationship between feticide and abortion, they would have greatly enriched the reader’s frame of reference. They should have offered the same enlightened explanation to the reader about feticide as for FGC.

These few weaknesses, however, do not detract from the authors’ successful argument that the subordination of women is an integral part of the violence practiced against them. In each chapter of Part Two the authors present several cultural and societal beliefs about women that tie directly to a form of violence. The chapter about

trafficking provides a vivid example of the direct links they are able to make between observations about the status of women and the resulting, or connected, violence. Greece is examined in the section on “forced prostitution.” In that country, “prostitution is thought of as a threat to societal order”25 and the women are thus perceived as “dirty and diseased.”26 Regardless, prostitution is legal because it serves the needs of men. Not only does prostitution legitimize the sexual urges and “needs” of men, but it solidifies the role of women as servants to the needs of men while simultaneously punishing women for taking on this role. Additionally, the contemptuousness of Greek society towards these women relegates prostitutes to a lower status among women, placing them in direct opposition to the virtuous women whose partners need the promiscuity of a prostitute.

The continued legalization of prostitution in Greece, and in turn the affirmation of men’s “needs,” naturally raises the demand of customers. When this demand surpasses the supply of prostitutes, women are trafficked within and into Greece. Prostitution is a lucrative business. To achieve freedom, women who are trafficked as prostitutes must overcome social stigma of prostitution. This is “enormously difficult,”27 and their chances of succeeding are even further jeopardized if they contract diseases.

The authors paint the complete picture. Men have “needs” that must be met by women who are punished for meeting them. Not only are men not punished for their sexually promiscuous “needs,” but the accommodation of men by women is reinforced and strengthened by the notion that these are in fact needs and not desires. This hierarchy is enforced by the legalization of a practice otherwise viewed as reprehensible and societally destructive.

Women, on the other hand, who are permitted and even forced to serve men both by fulfilling their needs and by providing financial wealth to pimps and traffickers, are treated as the societally destructive force.

While Greece is certainly not a country featured prominently in the book, the authors do provide a second example of violence against women that occurs in parts of Greece. This second example, coupled

25 Id. at 138 (quoting G. Lazaridis, Trafficking and Prostitution: The Growing Exploitation of Migrant Women in Greece, 8 Eur. J. of Women’s Stud. 1, 76 (2001)).
26 Id. at 138.
27 Id.
with the above example, reinforces their argument. While men, even married, are permitted to address their needs by patronizing prostitutes, women who seek to fulfill their needs with men to whom they are not married, are severely punished. To protect the family's honor, they may be killed. In the context of women who stray, "adultery betrays the entire family because the family expects to have control over the sexual behavior of all females in the family." Men are not punished for straying to prostitutes and are even authorized to exercise control over the sexuality of women. This power justifies "honor killings."

Examining numerous aspects of a single country's society, like Greece, allows Parrot and Cummings to persuade the reader that violence against women is caused by the subordination of women. Additionally, they powerfully illustrate the extent to which this violence-subordination link exists on a global scale by providing examples from several countries and regions. Their comprehensive approach to considering socially constructed contributing factors along with geographical irrelevance, they provide the reader with a well-researched and well-formulated argument.

V. CONCLUSION
Parrot and Cummings produce an excellent conduit for catalyzing and framing the necessary discussion about women and the violence perpetuated against them on a global scale. As a survey of shared experience of the violence women face, despite the geographical boundaries that separate them, it is a powerful resource. By analyzing the sociopolitical, economic, and religious factors that enable and condone violence against women from a feminist theoretical approach, and by providing numerous personal accounts, Parrot and Cummings successfully convey the global nature of violence against women.

Those interested in combating the subordination of women, and in turn the violence practiced against them, will benefit from reading Forsaken Females. Parrot and Cummings offer pragmatic suggestions for implementing policy and practices that may, and in some cases already have, curtail the violence women face. Though it may seem redundant to a feminist scholar, or a scholar who specializes in the study of violence against women, it is worth reading nevertheless. It fills a

28 Id. at 174.
unique gap in the related research by taking a global perspective, shedding light on numerous obscure violent practices and linking violent practices that may not otherwise be discussed in one volume. Forsaken Females is an excellent resource for readers who want to understand the nature of violence against women on a global scale.