

“Silent Soldiers” by Samantha Pimentelli

I decided to focus my Annotated Bibliography on Asian-American Nonfiction, particularly autobiographies, creative nonfiction, and poetry because I think it provides an important resource for young adults, especially women, who are socially restricted or limited by traditional gender roles in male dominant cultures, and shows how literature and writing can give women a sense of freedom and control. I think it's important that young women have a sense of identity and justice in a world where they are innately oppressed by patriarchal structures, and I believe that non-fictional literature provides a form of refuge in which they can express their side of the story freely, and informatively without social limitations. I also think poetry can also be represented as a form of non-fiction because it provides young women with an outlet to speak and share their experiences in an honest and subjective way. In literature and society, women are often marginalized and misinterpreted by traditional gender roles which identify women collectively as submissive, weak, emotional, and nurturing, and fails to recognize their qualities as altruistic and heroic traits.

These novels and resources that I have chosen provide readers with a different cultural and social perspective on the treatment and rights of women, and portray strong female protagonists that endure emotional/and physical abuse and struggle to survive even in the most dire of circumstances. In addition, they also highlight female authors that assert the importance of strong female protagonists in literature, as well as the social enactment of sisterhood in communities that objectify women. Significantly, this genre consists of strong problem novels that can teach young adults about the social and political inequalities that presently affect

women, specifically in Asian cultures, and how their experiences contrast or compare to their own personal beliefs or expectations of women's roles.

The centerpiece I have chosen for my topic is *Sold* by Patricia McCormick because it gives factual insight into the social inequalities and mistreatment of women in Indian cultures. It also deals with contemporary cultural issues related to gender, specifically illegal trafficking of young girls in India, while also giving a realistic outlook on a young female's perspective and experience. The book shows how the protagonist and narrator, Lakshmi, is culturally oppressed, due to the self-recrimination and objectification she suffers as a result of male sexual abuse. After presenting this novel for my book talk, I thought the themes and central issues would blend well with my chosen literary genre because it informs the reader about real issues that are considered socially taboo, such as sexual slavery; Even though we are fully aware of its existence.

The issues conveyed in the novel represent some of the ways in which patriarchal society objectifies women, for example, by using them to satisfy their sexual desires and domestic needs, without consideration for their emotions or ideas. In addition, the main character, Lakshmi, subjects herself to physical abuse in the hope to gain freedom from, "Happy House," her prison, (*Sold*), which exhibits the ways young woman are psychologically oppressed by prostitution. Thematically, the novel portrays a strong female protagonist who survives through perilous and trying times by believing in her mother's words: "Simply to endure is to triumph," (McCormick, Patricia, 16). I think the novel gives young readers invaluable information about the way women are undervalued, and taught to be submissive to men in Muslim cultures, and shows the harsh

realities that young women like poor Lakshmi have to face daily in their struggle to survive, and endure.

In the article, the author Colleen A. Ruggieri, is an English teacher who reflects upon women's gender roles and the social effects that stereotypes have on young adult's perception of themselves. Significantly, it discusses the struggles and, "suffering that women have had to endure," in their fight to gain independence and personal rights, such as choosing who they will marry, "having control over their bodies," and deciding what they want to do with their lives, (Ruggieri, A. Colleen, 48). Most importantly, the author emphasizes that metaphorically women are like silent soldiers because they are constantly fighting a, "silent war...that is often unnoticed- the confusing battle to define gender roles, the fight for identity," in a culture ruled by patriarchal ideology, (Ruggieri, A. Colleen, 48).

I chose this article because it highlights the cultural oppression of women globally as a result of traditional gender roles that deem them as the weaker sex and encourages them to sacrifice their true selves. In order to combat the battle of the sexes, the author chooses to teach students about young adult literature that features strong protagonist women, and forces students to question and challenge the way they view gender roles. One novel in particular that the author uses in her effort to, "make a difference in student lives," is, *Shabanu*, written by Suzanne Fisher Staples. She states that the book has given students strong insights into addressing the social issues related to gender, and provides teachers with a valuable resource for, "discussing and cultivating," positive views toward women, not only in Muslim cultures, but in any society around the world, (Ruggieri, A. Colleen, 48).

The book *Shabanu* would also be a valuable resource for young readers because it focuses on the domestic violence that women have to endure as a result of the strict customs of Muslim culture. The novel also presents strong female protagonists such as, Sharma, Shabanu's aunt, who is a woman of great strength and determination, and sets a positive example for her niece by leaving her husband after he beats her. The main character Shabanu also suffers objectification from her father when she learns that he has sold her hand in marriage to another man. At the end of the novel, Shabanu tries to escape, but her father beats her, and forces her marry the old man, *Rahim-sahib*.

The novel essentially highlights the issues of domestic abuse, the limitations of gender roles, and the objectification of young woman in male dominated cultures. It teaches young readers that no one deserves to be a victim of physical violence, or emotional abuse. It also provides young readers with a set of strong female characters who set examples through their actions, not through clichéd messages that would divert or alienate male readers.

The importance of sisterhood, which is an element of my overall theme, is depicted in the novel by the bond between Sharma and Shabanu because they rely on each other for moral support and guidance. They both suffer from physical abuse from male family members, and try to escape, however only one succeeds. Thematically, the novel portrays the effects of traditional gender roles and social oppression in Muslim cultures, while also encouraging students, especially teenage girls, to relate their experiences to their own lives.

The last novel I would like to present features is titled *Nectar in A Sieve* by Kamala Markandaya, and features a female protagonist named, Rukmani, who is a Muslim women

struggling to endure the tragedies and hardships of social and cultural oppression. At the age of twelve, her family marries her to a tenant farmer, and is forced to leave her home. Working in the fields alongside her husband, Rukmani, deals with environmental strife and affliction that cause her to question her life and identity. In the face of poverty and disaster, she employs courage and strength in her struggle to find happiness in a changing India. Due to the imperial influence of the British-Indian alliance during the Asian Diaspora, Rukmani and her family suffer from famine, scarcity, and cultural oppression as a result of patriarchal influences, such as industrialization.

This novel expands on the topic of traditional gender roles and how women are affected by patriarchal societies. It also shows the ways in which women are undervalued and taught to sacrifice their own needs and desires for their family. *Nectar In a Sieve*, can also be viewed as a non-fictional resource that students can use to learn about the plight of women in Indian cultures, and how they learn to endure. The novel also displays a strong female protagonist who represents the heroic qualities of women, such as courage and compassion, in contrast to stereotypical gender roles that deem women as weak and submissive.

The novels and the resources that I have covered focuses on real issues that women from Asian communities and cultures are forced to endure as a result of being socially and physically oppressed by the establishment of traditional gender roles. Essentially, I think that Asian-American non-fiction and literature provides young readers with cultural insights and knowledge into the mistreatment of woman in not only in America, but in Asian/and Indian cultures. Poetry and literature are also presented as tools that women can use as a form of rebellion and resistance

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to male dominance, and a vital source of education when they have no other option. Significantly, the sources also feature female authors that depict strong female protagonists in literature, as well as highlight the social advocacy of sisterhood in communities that objectify women. Significantly, this genre consists of strong problem novels that can teach young adults about the social and political inequalities that presently affect women, specifically in Asian cultures, and how their experiences contrast or compare to their own personal beliefs or expectations of women's roles.

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Annotated Bibliography

Ali, Nujood, and Delphine Minoui. *I Am Nujood, Age 10 and Divorced*. New York: Three Rivers, 2010. Print. The book is an autobiography about a Middle Eastern girl, Nujood Ali, who is forced into an arranged marriage with a, “man who is three times her age.” She tells the story of her abuse at the hands of her husband after she attempts to escape. She is able to obtain her freedom, “with the help of local advocates and the press,” accomplishing an extraordinary achievement in her culture where half of all girls are married under the legal age. The novel relates to my genre because it is an autobiographical account of a child wife in Yemen, who struggles with the oppressive restrictions of gender roles and restrictions in a Middle eastern community. It also is considered a work of creative nonfiction because it deals with and communicates credible information told by a first person narrator that is undeniably the writer. The book can be considered a problem novel because it shapes the writers private experience in a fictional way that transports readers into another person’s experiences, thoughts, and feelings.

Griswold, Eliza. "Why Afghan Women Risk Death to Write Poetry?" *New York Times* [New York] 27 Apr. 2012: 1-4. Print. The article presents young female poets who are members of Mirman Baheer, a literary society based in Kabul, where girls can meet and read their poetry. The poems are transcribed word for word by an appointed female writer during the readings, so that the poems can be preserved and kept secret from their families. One of the poets, who goes by her pen name Meena Muska, is a widow who is required by Pashtun tradition to marry one of his brothers. She does not dare to protest

directly instead she recites poetry to Amail, a member of the literary society in order to voice her plight. It also describes the challenges and injustices that Afghan women like Meena have to endure in their struggle for freedom. Another member, Zarmina raises questions through her poetry, such as: “Why am I not in a world where people can feel what I’m feeling and hear my voice?” (2). The article also emphasizes that, “poems [represent] one of the only forms of education,” and identity for young women in male dominant cultures. The article also presents Pashtun folk poetry called *landai* that has long been a, “form of rebellion for Afghan women,” belying the notion that they are weak and submissive. The poems written by the Afghan women, cover issues that deal with topics such as the Russian occupation, the hypocrisy of the Taliban and the American military presence.

Ingold, Jeanette. *Paper Daughter*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2010. Print. The novel is about a young Chinese girl named, Maggie Chen, who is inspired by her father to become a writer. Her father is killed and she sets out to uncover the truth about his death. In finding research for her first story, Maggie discovers that her father’s death may have been linked with illegal activity, and tries to clear his name. She travels to Seattle’s Chinatown, where she learns of secrets, lies, and connection to the Chinese Exclusion Era. Using her instincts, she is forced to confront the truth about her own identity, her father- “and each new discovery reveals more about her ethnicity, her father’s hidden life, and a family she never knew existed. The novel relates to my topic because it incorporates historical information into the narrative, and also uses first person narrative

to relate individual experience in a creative way. The issues of women's gender roles is also a theme represented in the book, and shows how literature can be used as a tool for women to gain independence and freedom from cultural oppression.

Latifah. *My Forbidden Face*. Hachette: Miramax, 2008. Print. The book is an autobiographical account of an educated middle class Afghan girl who was born in Kabul in 1980. She dreamed to become a journalist someday, thinking about her aspirations for the future. However, in September 1996, Taliban soldiers seized power over Kabul, and from that moment on Latifah became a prisoner in her own home. She was now forced to wear a chadri. *My Forbidden Face* provides a poignant and highly personal account of a women's life under the Taliban regime. With painful honesty and clarity Latifah describes the way she watched her world falling apart, in the name of a fanatical interpretation of a faith that she could not comprehend. Her voice captures a lost innocence, but also reflects her determination to live in freedom and hope. Earlier this year, Latifah and her parents escaped Afghanistan with the help of a French-based Afghan resistance group. The book expands on the topic of gender, power, and war, which is a central issue in patriarchal societies around the world. Most importantly, the novel allows reader's to develop their own ideas and opinions about the narrator's life, and compare it to their own experiences.

Markandaya, Kamala. *Nectar in a Sieve*. New York: J. Day, 1955. Print. The novel features a female protagonist named, Rakshimi, who is a Muslim women struggling to endure the tragedies and hardships of social and cultural oppression. At the age of twelve, her family

marries her to a tenant farmer, and is forced to leave her home. Working in the fields alongside her husband, Rukmani, deals with environmental strife and affliction that cause her to question her life and identity. In the face of poverty and disaster, she employs courage and strength in her struggle to find happiness in a changing India. Due to the imperial influence of the British-Indian alliance during the Asian Diaspora, Rukmani's and her family suffer from famine, scarcity, and cultural oppression as a result of patriarchal influences, such as industrialization. This novel expands on the topic of traditional gender roles and how women are affected by patriarchal societies. It also shows the ways in which women are undervalued and taught to sacrifice their own needs and desires for their family. *Nectar In a Sieve*, can also be viewed as a non-fictional resource that students can use to learn about the plight of women in Indian cultures, and how they learn to endure.

McCormick, Patricia. *Sold*. London: Walker, 2008. Print. The novel is about a young Nepali girl named, Lakshmi, who is unknowingly sold into prostitution by her stepfather and is forced to endure physical and emotional abuse at the hands of, Mumtaz, the owner of, "Happy House," a brothel located somewhere in India. While imprisoned there, Laskhmi is forced to have sex with strange men in exchange for money, and suffers physical abuse from Mumtaz. In her struggle to survive, Lakshmi befriends the other women in the brothel who provide her with emotional support, and help her endure. At the end, she is confronted by an American agent from an outreach program who helps her escape. The novel connects to my genre because it displays factual information that the author

obtained from interviewing young Nepali and Indian women who have been sold into prostitution and were able to escape. It also emphasizes the importance of female advocacy, and gives insight into the cultural value of women in Muslim cultures. Significantly, it reveals the way women are culturally conditioned to undervalue their own worth, and beauty. The book deals with various complex issues, such as prostitution, sexuality, cultural displacement, and the mistreatment/abuse of women.

Ruggieri, Colleen A. "What About Our Girls? Considering Gender Roles with Shabanu." *English Journal* 90.3 (2001): 48-52. Print. The journal article provides teachers with a rich resource for discussing and cultivating positive views toward women, not only in Muslim culture, but in any society around the world," (49). Significantly, it discusses the struggles and, "suffering that women have had to endure," in their fight to gain independence and personal rights, such as choosing who they will marry, "having control over their bodies," and deciding what they want to do with their lives, (48). The author also presents a novel called, *Shabanu*, by Suzanne Fisher Price, which gives her students cultural insights into the social oppression of women. Essentially, it provides readers with enticing literature that focuses on female protagonists and teaches them about the social oppressions that both sexes face as a result of gender roles. In addition, it allows women and men to cultivate and develop positive perceptions of female characters, and roles.

Staples, Suzanne Fisher. *Haveli*. New York: Knopf, 1993. Print. The novel is the third book in the, *Border Trilogy*, written by Suzanne Fisher Staples, and is told from the perspective of Shabanu, a young female protagonist who struggles against the tyranny and of custom

and ancient law. Shabanu is now eighteen, and a mother who faces daily challenges in her position in her husband's household, even as she plans for the younger daughter's education and uncertain future. During a visit to Nemali, their home in the city of Lahore, Shabanu falls in love with another man named, Omar, in spite of traditions that forbid their union. The novel shows how Shabanu is affected by gender roles, and cultural limitations that prohibit her from deciding who she will marry. It also emphasizes the theme of gender, identity and oppression are central elements to my topic. I also chose this novel because it integrates historic information into a fictional narrative, giving readers insights into cultural realities other than their own. The novel also contains lyrical prose from the voice of Shabanu, which gives the narration a poetic quality, and presents how literature and writing can be an important creative tool for women to actively speak out against the injustices they experience from cultural oppression.

Staples, Suzanne Fisher. *The House of Djinn*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008. Print.

The novel is the second book in the Suzanne Staples, *Border Trilogy*, and features the young female protagonists, Mumtaz, daughter of Shabanu, who has lived with her father's Muslim family for ten years, enduring emotional abuse from her aunt Leyla on a daily basis. Her only advocates are her uncle Omar and Baba, patriarch of the Amirzai Tribe, but they deny her from personal rights, such as the choice to whom she will marry. Mumtaz falls in love with a Hindu boy, afraid that her uncle will find out, she confides in her cousin Jameel. Soon they find themselves in the middle of a power struggle, after Baba dies unexpectedly, leaving the village to their vices. The novel emphasizes the issues of the power struggle between the sexes, and shows how women are oppressed by patriarchal rules. It also explores the delicate balance

between freedom and tradition in modern day Pakistan. Mumtaz's strength and courage also present young readers with strong female protagonists that exhibit heroic and altruistic qualities, and challenge their perception of gender roles.

Staples, Suzanne Fisher. *Shabanu: Daughter of the Wind*. New York: Knopf, 1989. Print. The novel is narrated by a young girl who lives in the Cholistan Desert in Pakistan and centers on the story of her becoming of age. On the brink of womanhood, the main character Shabanu, and her older sister Phulan are at a marriageable age and are faced with the issues of arranged marriage. At the age of twelve, Shabanu is not interested in marriage, but her father coerces her using force and aggression. Before Phulan's wedding, a terrible disaster strikes: Shabanu and Phulan encounter Nazir Mohammed, who is known to have murdered Shabanu's cousin, Lal Khan, in the past. When Shabanu returns home, she tells her father, who becomes enraged and goes to Nazir to warn him that his daughter is engaged to be married to another man, and that Nazir doesn't have legal ownership of her. This book shows how Middle Eastern women are objectified by men in their culture, and the limited by gender roles.

"WOMEN MAKE MOVIES | Between the Lines: Asian American Women's Poetry." *WOMEN MAKE MOVIES | Between the Lines: Asian American Women's Poetry*. N.p., n.d. Web. 1 May 2014. The film, "offers rare interviews with over fifteen major Asian-American-Pacific poets. The topics are organized into, "interwoven section," such as immigration, language, family, memory, and spirituality. It is a sophisticated and artful merging of Asian-American history and identity with the use of performance, voice, and image. The

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engaging documentary serves as a poetry reading, virtual anthology, and raises issues about gender, ethnicity, aesthetics, and creative choice. The filmmaker desires to show both individual voice and diversity within the Asian-American women's community. The interviews also feature female poets who discuss the usefulness of poetic and aesthetic features in giving insights into Asian-American cultures. The film also uses archival images, and historic footage, and photography to provide important lively viewing for literature, history, ethnic and women's study classes. The film also represents poetry as a form of female advocacy or sisterhood, in the attempt cultivate personal identity and empowerment. Poetry can provide women with an outlet to speak their minds, and inspire young women to reflect on their own personal experiences.