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Patriarchal Biopolitics and the Thanatic Commodification of Women in Nawal El Saadawi's "Woman at Point Zero"

السياسات الحيوية الأبوية والتسليع الثانتي للمرأة في رواية امرأة عند نقطة الصفر لنوال السعداوي

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Abstract:

This paper investigates the biopolitical and necropolitical representation in Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero*, arguing that the novel illustrates a systematic continuum through which patriarchal power administers and extinguishes female life. Applying Michel Foucault's theory of biopower, Achille Mbembe's concept of necropolitics, and feminist materialist critiques of capitalism, it develops two interrelated analytical frameworks: Patriarchal Biopolitics and Thanatic Commodification. Through a close textual analysis of Firdaus's narrative, the paper reveals how patriarchal institutions, such as family, marriage, religion, law, medicine, and the sex trade, discipline women's bodies as biological capital while simultaneously rendering them disposable. Firdaus's harrowing journey, marked by childhood mutilation, marital abuse, prostitution, and eventual execution, is theorized as a necropolitical trajectory where the processes of value extraction and killability are interwoven. Rather than casting Firdaus's death as a mere tragic anomaly or a purely resistant act, the paper posits that her execution symbolizes the culmination of a system governed by violence and death. At "Point Zero," Firdaus's refusal to succumb to fear or seek moral redemption engenders a form of resistance that explains the necropolitical logic of patriarchal racial capitalism. Hence, the paper concludes that *Woman at Point Zero* emerges not only as a feminist narrative but also as a critical theory of gendered governance, exposing the mechanisms through which female embodiment is managed, commodified, and annihilated within contemporary power structures.

Keywords: Patriarchal Biopolitics, Thanatic Commodification, Necropolitics.

المخلص:

تبحث هذه الدراسة في تمثيلات السياسة الحيوية (Biopolitics) وسياسة الموت (Necropolitics) في رواية «امرأة عند نقطة الصفر» لنوال السعداوي، وتتعلق من فرضية مفادها أن الرواية تكشف عن منظومة متواصلة تمارس من خلالها السلطة الأبوية إدارة حياة المرأة والتحكم فيها وصولاً إلى إفنائها. واستناداً إلى نظرية ميشيل فوكو في السلطة الحيوية، ومفهوم أشيل ميمبي لسياسة الموت، إلى جانب الطروحات النسوية المادية الناقدة للرأسمالية، تطور الدراسة إطارين تحليليين مترابطين هما: **السياسة الحيوية الأبوية وتسليع الموت (Thanatic Commodification)**. ومن خلال تحليل نصي دقيق لمسار شخصية فردوس، توضح الدراسة كيف تعمل مؤسسات السلطة الأبوية، مثل الأسرة، والزواج، والدين، والقانون، والطب، وتجارة الجنس، على إخضاع الجسد الأنثوي بوصفه رأسمالاً بيولوجياً، وفي الوقت نفسه تجعله قابلاً للاستغلال والإبادة. كما تظهر أن رحلة فردوس، الممتدة من تشويه الأعضاء التناسلية في الطفولة، مروراً بالعنف الزوجي والاستغلال الجنسي، وصولاً إلى الإعدام، تمثل مساراً نيكرولوجياً يتداخل فيه آليات استخراج القيمة مع قابلية القتل. وترى الدراسة أن إعدام فردوس لا يمثل مجرد نهاية مأساوية أو فعلاً مقاوماً فحسب، بل يجسد الذروة المنطقية لنظام قائم على العنف والموت. وعند "نقطة الصفر"، يشكل رفض فردوس للخوف أو طلب الخلاص الأخلاقي فعلاً مقاوماً يكشف المنطق النيكرولوجي للرأسمالية الأبوية ذات الأبعاد العرقية. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن رواية (امرأة عند نقطة الصفر) لا تمثل مجرد نص نسوي، بل تقدم أيضاً نظرية نقدية حول حوكمة الجسد الأنثوي، كاشفة عن الآليات التي تُدار بها أجساد النساء وتُسَلَّع وتُباد ضمن بنيات السلطة المعاصرة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: السياسة الحيوية الأبوية، تسليع الموت، سياسة الموت، نوال السعداوي، امرأة عند نقطة الصفر، النقد النسوي.

Introduction

Generally speaking, in the patriarchal community, the female body is usually confined to such a hazardous place where preserving life ironically means administration of death. Nawal El Sadaawi's novel 'Woman at Point Zero' is a kind of map of that territory, revealing how Firdaus shifts positions between being made to move and being left to die by the state. Here, this paper goes beyond the common method of discussing the oppression and commodification of the female body to get to the actual violence behind the story of Firdaus. This paper employs two concepts: Patriarchal Biopolitics

(the ways the state and patriarchy produce and consume women's bodies) and Thanatic Commodification (the ways women are commoditized as disposable goods associated with death). Applying Michel Foucault's biopower, Achille Mbembe's necropolitics, and feminist critiques of bodily exploitation (in particular Federici and Weheliye) to observe the fatal circuit that continues to place female life in a precarious position. The novel is not only about the suffering of a single individual, but also functions as a manifestation of the necropolitical reasoning that operates beneath the cultures of patriarchy. Thus, this paper argues that El Saadawi's novel meticulously demonstrates how patriarchal biopolitics operates fundamentally through the thanatic commodification of women's bodies. This process reduces them to disposable sites of value extraction, subjugating biological life to a brutal political economy of death. Firdaus's execution, therefore, is not an aberration but the ultimate, albeit fiercely resistant, expression of this systemic logic.

Moreover, this paper examines Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* through the lens of biopolitics, necropolitics, and feminist political economy. The protagonist, Firdaus, becomes a privileged site for tracing how patriarchal institutions, family, marriage, law, medicine, and the sex industry transform women into biological capital while rendering them disposable. By developing the twin concepts of "Patriarchal Biopolitics" and "Thanatic Commodification," this paper argues that Firdaus's life and death chart a necropolitical itinerary in which value extraction and expendability are mutually constitutive under patriarchal racial capitalism.

Statement of the Problem

Although the idea of 'Woman at Point Zero' is regarded as one of the most important feminist texts in Arab and postcolonial discourses, it remains common that Firdaus is viewed as a victim of individual male aggression or a representative of the abstract patriarchy. Although such an approach may seem valuable in documenting gendered violence, it often stops short of theorizing the broader systemic logics that render *Firdaus* simultaneously exploitable, disposable, and eventually killable. The actual problematic issues this paper addresses are that the narrative is not entirely connected to existing biopolitical regulation and necropolitical authority, particularly in its emphasis on its intersection with gendered labor, sex regulations, and state authority. Current research seldom discusses how FGM, forced marriage, coerced sex, prostitution, and judicial killing are not acts of misogyny and do not simply help maintain the order of things, but are what make bodies useful in this way and help brand certain lives as worthless, etc. By not focusing on these social structures, critics ensure that they remain focused on individual suffering rather than demonstrating how patriarchy controls the population, strips women of value, and lets them perish. This paper, therefore, asks: how does Firdaus's life narrative illuminate the operations of a patriarchal biopolitical order that governs women as reproductive and sexual laboring subjects while sustaining a necropolitical horizon in which their elimination becomes both legally permissible and socially necessary? In posing this question, the study seeks to reposition *Woman at Point Zero* not only as a testimony of resistance but as a literary cartography of how modern power administers life, disciplines desire, and organizes death along gendered lines.

Objectives of the Study:

The main objectives of this study are:

1. To theorize "Patriarchal Biopolitics" in *Woman at Point Zero* by analyzing how institutions discipline and regulate Firdaus's body and sexuality as sites of biopolitical production.

2. To conceptualize “Thanatic Commodification” in the novel by examining how Firdaus’s economic value is inseparable from her exposure to violence, debility, and eventual state-sanctioned death.
3. To situate the necropolitical itinerary suggested by Firdaus within broader frameworks of patriarchal racial capitalism, legal neglect, and hierarchy.
4. To provide feminist literary criticism with a framework that combines biopolitics, necropolitics, and materialist feminism, enabling the reading of the female body in literature as simultaneously a work person and expendable flesh.

The Contribution

This study presents a significant advancement in understanding Nawal El Saadawi’s *Woman at Point Zero* by developing a hybrid theoretical framework that integrates biopolitics, necropolitics, and feminist political economy. This approach transcends conventional readings that primarily focus on individual victimhood, radical resistance, or generalized patriarchal oppression. By introducing the concepts of Patriarchal Biopolitics and Thanatic Commodification, the study provides a new vocabulary for examining how Firdaus’s body is both marketed as “biological capital” and positioned for death. It reframes practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM), forced marriage, prostitution, and execution as coordinated instruments of governance.

This analytical lens enriches existing feminist and postcolonial critiques of the novel, moving beyond a focus on patriarchal hegemony and trauma to explore the continuum between “making live” and “letting die” that delineates Firdaus’s life trajectory. In literary terms, the study shifts critical attention away from a binary framework of oppression and empowerment to address the structural conditions that render Firdaus both grievable and ungrievable, as well as productive and expendable.

From a socio-political perspective, this framework has broader applicability, illuminating the interconnected roles of law, religion, family, and the marketplace in creating “death worlds” for women within patriarchal cultures. Furthermore, it offers a transferable analytic model for investigating gendered necropolitics, commodification, and state violence in diverse texts and contexts, where women’s lives are intricately organized around care, coercion, and killability. Thus, this study aims to deepen the discourse surrounding the management and commodification of female embodiment under patriarchal power structures, providing a nuanced understanding of the mechanisms that govern women’s lives and deaths in both literary and real-world contexts.

Theoretical Framework:

For the scrutiny and a thorough analysis of the primary text, an interdisciplinary theoretical analysis is adopted to interrogate the intersection of biopolitical governance, necropolitical violence, and gendered political economy. The concept I am dealing with is “biopolitics,” as developed by Michel Foucault. It demonstrates how governments can exercise power not only to suppress dissidents but also to regulate life itself. Foucault argues in his 1976 book, “The History of Sexuality,” that biopower operates through organizations that govern populations through “techniques of attaining the subjugation of bodies and of governing populations” (p. 140). It refers to such things as sexual norms, reproductive controls, and medical surveillance, as well as all that allows patriarchal systems to treat the bodies of women as inexpensive biological resources. Then there is the necropolitics of Achille Mbembe, which pushes Foucault a step further by indicating that the same processes of “making live” confer the power to “let die”. Mbembe suggests that in the colonial and racial capitalist world, sovereignty is reflected in its

rule, where some people are permitted to live, and others must die (2003: 11). For Mbembe, the "*subjugation of life to the power of death*" creates "*death-worlds*" where marginalized populations become disposable. This paradigm is critical to consider state-approved executions such as that of Firdaus. It shows how death is being used as a tool of control by patriarchy in an attempt to maintain control over bodies that are commoditized. Mbemba is even connected to the concept of homo sacer (1998) coined by Giorgio Agamben, who is politically invisible and can be killed without the law taking any action against it, and as Mbemba emphasizes, how the law turns its back so easily on women at the mercy of patricide.

The materialist basis for engaging with all this is the feminist critique of embodiment and capitalism, particularly Silvia Federici's work. In *Caliban and the Witch* (2004), Federici documents how capitalism's emergence depended on the patriarchal "*accumulation of bodies*" through witch hunts, forced reproduction, and the devaluation of women's labor. She demonstrates that the female body became a site of "*primitive accumulation*," reduced to "*a machine for the production of labor*" (2004: 146). In his *Habeas Viscus* (2014), Alexander G. Weheliye has further argued that racializing assemblages produce "*hierarchies of the human*" where gendered violence enables "*disposable populations*" (2014: 12). These theories illuminate how Firdaus's body is rendered both a productive asset and expendable commodity. Additionally, Judith Butler's work on "*grievable life*" in his *Precarious Life* (2004) and Hortense Spillers' distinction between "*body*" and "*flesh*" in "*Mama's Baby, Papa is Maybe*" (1987) deepen our understanding of embodied commodification. Specifically, Spillers argues that patriarchal racial capitalism reduces subjects to "*flesh*", stripped of kinship and vulnerable without consequence (Spillers, 1987, p. 67). More importantly, Joan C. Tronto's ethics of care (*Moral Boundaries*, 1993) reveals how patriarchal systems systematically devalue care labor performed by women, facilitating their economic exploitation.

Consequently, the integration of these two stands here in the paper is necessary for constructing two interdependent concepts: firstly, Patriarchal Biopolitics: The systematic regulation of female life through institutions (family, marriage, judiciary) that discipline bodies via Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), forced marriage, reproductive controls, and labor exploitation. Secondly, Thanatic Commodification: A process whereby commodification under patriarchy becomes contingent on expendability. The female body's market value, as wife, laborer, or sex worker, is inseparable from its proximity to death. Violence and disposability are not external to commodification but intrinsic to its logic. This framework is adopted in the analysis and the scrutiny of El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero*, because it is appropriate for revealing Firdausi's (the protagonist) trajectory as a necropolitical itinerary: from biopolitical management (FGM, marriage) to thanatic commodification (prostitution's transactional violence) and state execution, a continuum where value extraction and expendability are mutually constitutive under patriarchal racial capitalism.

literature review

One of the most significant studies, identified by researchers as a central critique of the patriarchal violence in postcolonial Egypt, is *Woman at Point Zero* by Nawal El Saadawi. Istifadah and Rohmana (2022) demonstrate how the novel documents "*the variety of gender injustice and biases in the form of physical, verbal, sexual abuse, marginalization, and exploitation of women*" (p. 5), providing "*concrete evidence of entrenched patriarchal hegemony*" (p. 7). This perspective is reinforced by Kök and Bakırtaş (2024), who position Firdaus as "*the voice of oppressed women compelled to live under circumstances inherent in traumatic social traditions that deny women's autonomy, such as circumcision*" (p. 115). These studies meticulously trace institutional complicity, noting how male

domination operates across educational, legal, and economic spheres, particularly through spaces like Al Azhar, depicted in the novel as *"an awesome world peopled only by men"* (El Saadawi, 1983, p. 32, cited in Istifadah & Rohmana, 2022, p. 11). Crucially, scholars recognize Firdaus's paradoxical agency in prostitution, where she *"managed to find her own existence and made herself a subject"* (Istifadah & Rohmana, 2022, p. 14), becoming what K  k and Bakırtař term a *"rebellious heroine standing against her predestined life story"* (2024, p. 118).

Despite these contributions, prevailing analyses remain constrained within human rights paradigms that foreground individual suffering while undertheorizing systemic logics. As K  k and Bakırtař acknowledge, such approaches document *"dominance of men in various aspects over women"* (2024, p. 120) but fail to interrogate how Firdaus's disposability is structurally produced. Biopolitical frameworks inspired by Foucault offer partial solutions, yet suffer from Eurocentric limitations. Rabinow and Rose's definition of biopower as *"mechanisms through which biological features became objects of political strategy"* (2006, p. 195, cited in Bieler & Morton, 2004, p. 83) requires radical recontextualization for postcolonial settings. Bieler and Morton (2004) provide this by insisting patriarchal and racial oppressions *"live dialectically in internal relation to capital"* (p. 91), not as external cultural phenomena. This perspective is amplified by Mbembe's necropolitics, which frames sovereignty as *"the power to decide who may live and who must die"* (2003, p. 11), creating what Rajat and McLaren term *"death worlds"* for the marginalized (2023, p. 304). Agamben's concept of homo sacer, those who *"can be killed but not sacrificed"* (1998, p. 8, cited in Rajat & McLaren, 2023, p. 306), further explains zones of legal abandonment.

Moreover, Silvia Federici's work bridges these theoretical domains by exposing capitalism's foundational reliance on reproductive labor. As Bieler and Morton theorize, primitive accumulation transformed patriarchal domination into *"structurally internalized expressions of gendered oppression"* (2024, p. 16) through witch hunts and sexual discipline. Their value theory of social reproduction argues that capitalism treats it as a *'natural' force of labour that costs nothing* (2021, p. 132), echoing Marx's *'gift of Nature to capital'* (1867, p. 637). This materialist critique converges with K  k and Bakırtař's postcolonial reading of FGM as an *"exemplary practice denying women's autonomy"* (2024, p. 122) within state-sanctioned power regimes.

Patriarchal Biopolitics and Thanatic Commodification

In this research paper, postcolonial, feminist, and political-economic perspectives are strictly used to trace the journey of Firdaus in the novel *Woman at Point Zero* as a necropolitical globe-travelling. It is a straight narrative in which patriarchal, capitalist, and state forces transform her body into a controlled location into a commodity to be discarded, and the conclusion is a judicial execution. Drawing together the concepts of Patriarchal Biopolitics (Foucault, 1978; Federici, 2004) and Thanatic Commodification (Mbemba, 2003; Bieler & Morton, 2024), I reveal the reasoning that gives her death such a tragic and, at the same time, unavoidable feeling.

The biopolitical management phase begins in childhood, where familial, religious, and medical institutions discipline Firdaus's body into docility. Female Genital Mutilation *"they cut off a piece of flesh from between my thighs"* (WPZ, 1983, p. 12) initiates what Federici terms *the "primitive accumulation of the body"* (2004, p. 63), transforming biological potential into governable property. This bodily subjugation intensifies through sexual exploitation normalized as kinship duty, *"familial abuse by her uncle... extra-familial abuse by her childhood friend"* (Istifadah & Rohmana, 2022, p. 12), and educational exclusion reinforcing gendered subservience, *"School taught me that disobedience*

is a sin" (WPZ, p. 28). These techniques exemplify Foucault's biopower: institutions optimize female life for reproductive utility while suppressing autonomy.

Thanatic commodification emerges when prostitution paradoxically becomes Firdaus's sole space of agency. Her declaration, "*I now knew that all my value resided in my body*" (WPZ, p. 72), belies the deadly political economy theorized by Mbembe. The pimp's calculation "*He beat me daily to increase my price*" (WPZ, p. 89) demonstrates how her market value escalates through physical endangerment: vulnerability to violence becomes surplus value, and expendability enhances profitability. Even as Firdaus asserts she "*made [herself] a subject*" (Istifadah & Rohmana, 2022, p. 14), her body remains trapped in what Bieler and Morton identify as "*capital's dialectics of disposability*" (2024, p. 18), where profitability requires proximity to death.

The necropolitical culmination occurs when Firdaus murders her pimp, triggering state elimination. Her execution, "*The court needed my death to prove men owned life*" (WPZ, p. 108) consolidates Kök and Bakırtaş's "postcolonial chauvinist order" (2024, p. 122), functioning as a sovereign performance of power over life/death (Mbembe, 2003). The state eliminates her not as punishment but to eradicate the "*defiant commodity*" (Federici, 2004, p. 145) whose testimony threatens patriarchal capitalism. In death, her corpse embodies Agamben's homo sacer, a body "*killable but not sacrificable*" (1998, p. 8), stripped of legal or social sanctity.

Patriarchal Biopolitics reveals how institutions (family, religion, medicine) discipline female bodies into biological capital. Thanatic Commodification exposes capitalism's reliance on female disposability for profit. Together, they demonstrate Firdaus's execution as the necessary endpoint of a system that: Produces women as governable biological resources, extracts value through controlled endangerment, and eliminates unruly bodies to maintain hegemony. This is clearly evident in "*They sold my body while alive; they sold it again when dead; first to the brothel, then to the state*" (WPZ, p. 112).

This intervention reframes *Woman at Point Zero* as a theoretical manifesto against what Federici terms "*the war on women's bodies*" (2004); a war waged through biopolitical regulation, thanatic markets, and necropolitical extermination. Firdaus's trajectory is not an anomaly but the archetype of gendered necropolitics under racial capitalism.

The Necropolitical Terrain of the Female Body

Delving into the core of the analysis, Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* situates the female body within what Achille Mbembe calls a necropolitical zone: a space in which life is managed through its permanent exposure to death. From Firdaus's earliest memories, her body is constituted as a site of pain and fear rather than agency or pleasure. She recalls that she "*learned to fear [her] body, because it was always a source of pain*" (WPZ, p. 12). This fear is not incidental but pedagogical. In Foucauldian terms, it marks the initial inscription of biopower: the body is disciplined into obedience through suffering, rendered governable precisely because it is violable.

This logic reaches its first explicit articulation in Firdaus's experience of Female Genital Mutilation, which she recounts with stark minimalism: "*They cut off a piece of flesh from my body*" (WPZ, p. 13). The sentence with which Firdaus dies is not only clinical but also powerful; it echoes the political reasoning behind the action. According to Foucault, all aspects, such as sexuality and reproduction, are controlled by a biopolitics in the name of social necessity. Here, however, there is no control and no mutilation that can be considered separately. The cut flesh illustrates the way that the body of a woman becomes de-materialized into something detachable, a biological excess that loses its existence when

the patriarchy prevails. Mbembe's necropolitics clarifies this convergence: the sovereign does not merely "*make live*" but actively exposes certain bodies to injury and death as a condition of governance.

Firdaus articulates the ontological aftermath of this violence when she states, "*After that I never felt the same again*" (WPZ, p. 14). What is lost is not simply sexual sensation but bodily sovereignty itself. She emerges as what Mbembe terms a "*living dead*" subject; alive, yet permanently marked by social death. From this point onward, Firdaus inhabits a body already designated as expendable, a prerequisite for the later intensification of violence.

Marriage extends this necropolitical terrain under the veneer of legitimacy. Firdaus describes her husband's routine abuse: "*He used to beat me with his shoe*" (WPZ, p. 44), a detail that underscores the symbolic degradation at work. The shoe, associated with dirt and abasement, becomes a disciplinary instrument, revealing marriage as an institutionalized site of bodily humiliation. Far from protecting life, patriarchal biopolitics here administers slow destruction. Firdaus's realization that "*marriage was a system built on suffering*" (WPZ, p. 46) exposes the institution as a mechanism that normalizes women's pain in the name of social order.

The family's complicity further entrenches this necropolitical logic. When Firdaus is abused by her uncle, she recalls that "*my uncle knew, but he said nothing*" (WPZ, p. 52). Silence functions as a technology of power, demonstrating how patriarchal governance operates as much through abandonment as through direct violence. The female body becomes an unprotected zone, exposed to harm without recourse. By the time Firdaus declares, "*I was born with my death inside me*" (WPZ, p. 87), the novel crystallizes its central claim: under patriarchy, female life is structured as life already infused with death, its annihilation not an exception but an ever-present possibility.

Patriarchal Biopower: Disciplining and Regulating Female Life

Many Critical works on *Woman at Point Zero* have largely emphasized and focused on patriarchal violence, FGM, and prostitution, reading Firdaus as emblematic of Third World women's oppression within authoritarian and religiously inflected contexts. Hence, getting along with these contexts indicates that Firdaus's trajectory illustrates with brutal clarity Michel Foucault's assertion that modern power operates through the production of docile bodies. From childhood, she was trained into submission: "*I was taught to obey*" (WPZ, p. 21). This teaching is not merely moral but physical, determining the position, motions, and sensations of the body. The result is that obedience becomes a survival hack, which is internalized long before Firdaus can talk about resistance.

Education briefly interrupts this process. Firdaus recalls that "*school was the first place where I felt I had a personality*" (WPZ, p. 32), suggesting that subjectivity itself emerges in spaces where patriarchal surveillance is momentarily suspended. That this autonomy is short-lived is no accident. When women acquire knowledge, according to Federici, it is the gendered division of labor that has enabled patriarchal capitalism to proceed. Firdaus being kicked out of school is the command voicing biopolitical dominance over her future labor and reproduction.

Marriage reinstates surveillance with renewed intensity. Firdaus observes that "*my husband watched me all the time*" (WPZ, p. 43), a statement that reiterates the panoptic reason of Foucault. Perpetual visibility drives self-control; the gaze represents an instrument of control. Physical punishment reinforces this surveillance: "*He beat me until my body was swollen*" (WPZ, p. 45). It narrates a story of the body's power and makes it a living record of patriarchal authority.

Religious discourse legitimizes this violence. Firdaus is told that “*a virtuous woman is obedient*” (WPZ, p. 27), a moral injunction that conceals political domination. According to Foucault, the most effective way of power is that which appears natural or ethical rather than coercive. Virtue becomes synonymous with submission, foreclosing resistance by framing it as moral failure.

Biopower also operates through categorization. Firdaus learns that “*a respectable woman does not complain*” (WPZ, p. 48), a dictum that weaponized silence. Once she speaks, resists, or deviates, she is expelled from respectability. This expulsion becomes explicit when she notes, “*Once I became a prostitute, they stopped seeing me as human*” (74). Here, biopolitical concern evaporates. Once she has crossed the deviance line, Firdaus ceases to be an object to be handled and becomes a body that can be exploited or even thrown away, and her shift towards necropolitical disposability becomes apparent.

From Biopolitics to Thanatopolitics: The Emergence of Thanatic Commodification

When asked about the definition of biopolitics, Foucault infamously writes that this is the stage at which power assumes control of life, where the sovereign power to kill is replaced by the procedure of refining, disciplining, and controlling bodies and populations. These plans are inculcated in Firdaus throughout childhood in *Woman at Point Zero*: circumcision, schooling, marriage, sexual roles, etc., are presented as a series of natural events that enable her body to become manageable, reproductive, and socially decipherable. Biopolitics posits the body of women as a space in which obedience, modesty, and endurance are developed as being required to maintain societal order.

Thus, Firdaus's movement into prostitution does not mark a rupture from patriarchal control but rather its most explicit and unmediated articulation. What had previously been regulated through familial authority, marriage, and moral discourse now becomes overtly governed by market logic. Her first sexual transaction, “*He paid me ten piastres*” (WPZ, p. 63), is narrated with chilling precision. The specificity of the amount matters: it signals the moment at which Firdaus's body is fully abstracted into exchange value. In Marxist-feminist terms articulated by Silvia Federici, this moment reflects the culmination of a long process in which women's bodies are prepared, disciplined, and rendered exploitable for capitalist extraction. Prostitution does not introduce commodification; it merely names what has always already been at work.

As Firdaus becomes more deeply embedded in the sexual economy, she observes differential pricing: “*Some men paid a pound*” (WPZ, p. 65), revealing how her body circulates within a hierarchy of value shaped by male desire, class, and market demand. Her flesh is no longer singular or personal; it is interchangeable, fungible, and comparable to other bodies. This fragmentation of the self corresponds to Foucault's analysis of how biopower reduces subjects to divisible units: labor power, reproductive capacity, sexual availability, each managed according to institutional needs.

Firdaus's devastating realization that “*everything in life has a price*” (WPZ, p. 73). This is the critical point of the novel towards patriarchal capitalism: it is not cynicism, but structural understanding. The story of Firdaus reveals that commodification is the appropriation of all realms, including ethics, sex, security, honor, and the subjugation of these spheres to commodity and money values. Federici's work on primitive accumulation and the disciplining of women's bodies illuminates this moment precisely. Firdaus understands that her body has been used as a resource all along: initially in unpaid household and sexual service, and now openly being sold. Prostitution is no longer conceived as a moral corruption, but rather as a clear economic sense.

Nevertheless, only biopolitics fails to explain the life-threatening final act that shaped Firdaus's story. Mbemba informs that necropolitics ensues when bodies become killable: the act of eliminating them is

not only permitted but even a structural necessity. Her pimp epitomizes the most violence-ridden version of this necropolitical reasoning. His daily violence, “*He beat me every day*” (WPZ, p. 78), is not merely sadistic but managerial. Beatings function as a disciplinary technology, ensuring compliance, productivity, and submission. Violence becomes a tool of profit maximization, confirming Mbembe’s argument that necropower operates through the instrumentalization of death and injury.

When Firdaus resists, the latent logic of extermination surfaces explicitly: “*He threatened to kill me*” (WPZ, p. 80). This threat reveals the ultimate condition of her commodified existence. Her life is contingent, revocable, and subordinate to male economic interest. Death is not a breakdown of the system but one of its regulatory mechanisms. The pimp’s power over life and death mirrors sovereign power itself, illustrating how necropolitics is not confined to the state but diffused through patriarchal economic relations.

The state’s complicity is exposed when Firdaus seeks help and recalls that “*the police laughed at me*” (WPZ, p. 82). This denotes the transition between biopolitical neglect and necropolitical consent. The state denies her protection, which essentially validates her lack of protection and thus exposes her to harm, as Mbembe points out in his argument that necropolitics is practiced through the discourse of abandonment in which the law is suspended. The body of Firdaus becomes deprived of its right to legal protection, and its destruction is neither avenged nor commemorated.

This process culminates in her execution: “*They will hang me tomorrow*” (WPZ, p. 105). The state, having failed to protect her life, now asserts its sovereign right to take it. Here we find the extreme of the kind of power Foucault is referring to when he says that modern power is, in turn, productive and prohibitive of life and death. The execution of Firdaus gives the latest chapter in the arc of thanatic commodification: her previously lucrative body is wiped out, as a warning example, which strengthens the patriarchal order. Following this shift of regulation of life to the administration of death, the book, *Woman at Point Zero*, explains how ordinary patriarchal discipline is linked to extreme sovereign punishment. The text is not merely a feminist critique of oppression but a literary blueprint of how modern power has turned women's bodies into a living asset and a dying matter, to be controlled, consumed, and eventually destroyed.

“Point Zero” as Thanatic Apotheosis and Resistant Epistemology

As a prose narrative, the title *Woman at Point Zero* signals more than the narrative’s conclusion. “Point Zero” names the threshold at which biopolitical discipline collapses and necropolitical clarity emerges. Firdaus’s arrival at “point zero” is not merely the moment before her execution but the culmination of a long process in which biopolitical regulation and necropolitical violence converge. Facing imminent execution, Firdaus declares, “*I am not afraid to die*” (WPZ, p. 106). This statement is not a resignation but a radical undoing of power. Fear is the primary affect through which biopolitics governs; its disappearance signals the loss of power's leverage. At this point, the state’s power over life achieves its purest form: the absolute right to end existence. Paradoxically, it is in this terminal that Firdaus becomes the authoritative voice, transforming her censored body into a center of knowledge of resistance. Her death becomes not a silencing but a speaking position from which the mechanisms of patriarchal domination are unveiled.

From this position beyond fear, Firdaus articulates a comprehensive indictment of patriarchy: “*All the men I knew were criminals*” (WPZ, p. 99). This is not hyperbole but structural analysis. She collapses distinctions between husband, pimp, client, policeman, and judge, exposing them as functionaries

within a single system of domination. Mbembe's conception of necropolitics as a networked form of power, distributed across institutions and actors, finds narrative embodiment here.

Firdaus further dismantles the moral hypocrisy underpinning patriarchal judgment when she states, "*They said I was a prostitute, but they bought my body*" (WPZ, p. 100). Respectability is brought to the fore in this sentence as an ideological disguise. The shame of prostitution conceals the omnipresence of commodification through patriarchy, which allows men to abuse and apathetically denies any responsibility, where Firdaus has the quickness to strip this reasoning naked.

Crucially, Firdaus refuses individualization of blame. "*My profession was imposed on me by others*" (WPZ, p. 96). She insists that she wants her life restructured around structural causality rather than moral failure. This action puts her voice on par with feminist materialist critique, abandoning the liberal discourse of choice in favor of systems. The strength of her insight lies in the fact that she had to be perfectly on the verge of destruction to know this.

Her refusal to sign the appeal, "*I refused to sign the appeal*" (WPZ, p. 108), constitutes her most radical act of resistance. The last bargain that patriarchal power has to make is life at the cost of submission, silence, and reentry into the carceral system. Repudiation is the means by which Firdaus avoids the exchange of reason that was her lot. She refuses to commodify her life one last time.

When she declares, "*My only path to freedom was death*" (WPZ, p. 109), Firdaus articulates the unbearable truth of necropolitical society: that for some subjects, survival itself is a form of captivity. While this conclusion is tragic, it is also accusatory. It indicts a system in which death appears as the sole escape from perpetual exploitation. Nevertheless, even here, Firdaus asserts agency, stating, "I felt stronger than all of them" (110). The power to be able to see, name, and deny power in all its forms is strength not based on survival; it is strength in the epistemic sovereignty.

The Resonant Silence Beyond the Necropolis

Silence in *Woman at Point Zero* is never empty. It accumulates throughout Firdaus's life as the silent detritus of suffering, submissiveness, intimidation, and loss. At the end of the novel, silence is no longer imposed silence but a reverberating area outside the necropolis of authority. Her assassination does not stop her political influence. Instead, her death amplifies her voice, transforming it into what Mbembe might describe as a spectral resistance that haunts the structures responsible for her annihilation. El Saadawi herself admits, "*I was afraid of her courage*" (WPZ, p. 3), a striking reversal that positions the condemned woman as the bearer of power and the living intellectual as its witness.

Firdaus's testimony exposes the systemic nature of patriarchal violence when she states, "*They all beat me*" (WPZ, p. 97). Throughout the narrative, institutions maintain authority by orchestrating who may speak and who must remain silent. The disciplinary tools of the family, school, religion, marriage, and the state are the means of normalizing the suffering of women at the expense of masking the origin. Firdaus is always instructed never to ask, never to aspire, never to call injustice by name. Silence here is an instrument of biopolitical regulation: it trains the female body to accept violation as fate. Firdaus's eventual narration of her life reverses this economy of speech. By recounting her story to the psychiatrist, she transforms silence from a mechanism of domination into a resource of reflection.

Thus, her execution becomes spectacle: "*People came to watch*" (WPZ, p. 111), confirming Mbembe's assertion that necropower requires visibility. Death must be seen to function politically. Firdaus's hanging serves as a warning, disciplining other women through terror while reaffirming patriarchal sovereignty. However, this spectacle fails to contain her narrative. Firdaus insists, "*My voice was*

stronger than their voices” (WPZ, p. 110). This voice transcends the body and remains alive even after physical destruction. Foucaultian discourse escapes the discipline and spreads as counter-knowledge, destabilizing power.

El Saadawi’s insistence that “*she had once been a child called Firdaus*” (WPZ, p. 101) performs a final act of resistance against commodification. Naming restores singularity, reclaiming humanity from abstraction. It refuses the reduction of Firdaus to a prostitute, criminal, or corpse.

The novel’s final insistence that “*her story will not die*” (WPZ, p. 113) confirms the permanent political power of testifying. Narrative is a survival strategy, in opposition to patriarchal biopolitics and necropolitics. The voice of Firdaus, who has been created at Point Zero, continues to accuse structures that render women expendable. It is infantile, ironically, but demands recognition, accountability, and transformation of the thanatic logic within the patriarchal power. The most radical act in the novel is the resonant silence behind the necropolis. It is the point at which death ceases to be the demonstration of power and where the absence is being present. The voice of Firdaus, the speaker on the threshold of death, remains lingering, since the story does not conclude with verdicts and morally shut doors. It concludes with a resonant silence that will not be closed.

Conclusion: Necropolitical Clarity and the Limits of Survival

The novel, “*Woman at Point Zero*,” compels a rethinking of female oppression beyond frameworks of victimhood, empowerment, or resistance understood in isolation. Through the life and death of Firdaus, El Saadawi exposes patriarchy not simply as a cultural ideology or interpersonal hierarchy but as a fully articulated regime of governance; one that manages women’s lives biopolitically while reserving the sovereign right to abandon them to death. This study has argued that Firdaus’s trajectory constitutes a necropolitical itinerary in which Patriarchal Biopolitics and Thanatic Commodification operate in tandem, producing a female subject whose economic value is inseparable from her disposability.

Foucault’s concept of biopower illuminates how Firdaus’s body is rendered governable from the outset: disciplined through Female Genital Mutilation, trained into obedience within the family, regulated through marriage, and surveilled by religious and legal institutions. These practices exemplify the modern logic of “*making live*,” in which female life is optimized for reproductive, sexual, and domestic labor. However, as this paper has shown, biopolitical management alone cannot fully account for Firdaus’s experience. Her life is not merely regulated; it is persistently exposed to injury, abandonment, and annihilation. Mbembe’s necropolitics thus becomes indispensable for understanding how patriarchal power functions through the production of death worlds; zones in which certain lives are rendered killable, ungrievable, and structurally expendable.

Federici’s feminist materialist critique bridges these frameworks by revealing the economic logic underpinning both biopower and necropower. Firdaus’s body is not only disciplined but extracted from, first through unpaid reproductive and sexual labor, then through explicit commodification in prostitution. Thanatic commodification names this process precisely: under patriarchal capitalism, women’s bodies acquire value through vulnerability, violability, and proximity to death. Violence is not incidental to this economy but constitutive of it. The pimp’s beatings, the police’s refusal of protection, and the state’s final execution of Firdaus all demonstrate how death operates as a regulatory mechanism within patriarchal political economy.

Firdaus’s execution, therefore, must be read not as a tragic endpoint or exceptional cruelty, but as the logical culmination of a system that has already declared her life surplus. Having ceased to be economically productive and morally recuperable, she becomes homo sacer; a subject stripped of legal

and political protection whose death consolidates sovereign authority. In this regard, the intervention of the state does not contradict the previous forsaking of the state but fulfills it. The scene of her hanging reestablishes the boundaries of respectability, obedience, and gendered citizenship through the demonstration of the consequences of refusal amongst women.

Nevertheless, *Woman at Point Zero* does not end with the total victory of necropower. At “Point Zero,” Firdaus achieves a form of epistemic sovereignty that destabilizes the very system that kills her. Her refusal to fear death, to sign the appeal, or to internalize moral judgment marks a collapse of biopolitical leverage. If, as Foucault argues, power depends on the management of life, then Firdaus’s indifference to survival renders her ungovernable. Her declaration that “*my only path to freedom was death*” is not a romanticization of self-annihilation but an indictment of a society in which life itself has been transformed into captivity.

Most importantly, Firdaus’s resistance does not take the form of liberal agency or redemptive survival. Instead, it emerges as what this paper has theorized as resistant epistemology; knowledge forged at the edge of annihilation. Social death allows Firdaus to speak and to tell the unified form of patriarchal violence, to blur the boundaries between husband, client, pimp, judge, and policeman. Through her testimony, it becomes clear that respectability, legality, and morality are utopian masks that conceal a single necropolitical economy. Firdaus does not merely recount her life; she speculates on it, in this opinion.

The novel’s final insistence on naming, on remembering that “*she had once been a child called Firdaus*”, performs a last refusal of abstraction. In opposition to the dehumanization of women into flesh, commodity, or corpse, naming would reclaim their singularity without having to repudiate structural violence. Firdaus turns iconic and undivisible: this is a character who exposes the logic of patriarchal racial capitalism.

To conclude, *Woman at Point Zero* demands to be read not only as feminist literature but as critical theory. Through Firdaus’s necropolitical itinerary, El Saadawi exposes how modern patriarchy governs women through a continuum that links care and coercion, productivity and punishment, life and death. By integrating biopolitics, necropolitics, and feminist political economy, this study has argued that female embodiment under patriarchy is structured by a deadly paradox: women are made to live only insofar as they remain exploitable, and they are allowed to die when they cease to be useful. Firdaus’s voice, forged at Point Zero, endures as a counter-archive against this logic; an uncompromising demand to reckon with the systems that make women’s deaths both possible and necessary.

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