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FORCED ISOLATION, SYSTEMIC DEHUMANIZATION AND THE RECLAMATION OF SOVEREIGN AUTONOMY IN THE YELLOW WALLPAPER AND WOMAN AT POINT ZERO: A RADICAL FEMINIST ANALYSIS

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Abstract
This article studies two important works of feminist literature: Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper"(1892) and Nawal El Saadawi's "Women at Point Zero"(1975). Both stories are about women who are trapped, controlled, and slowly destroyed by the systems around them. This article argues that both women, the unnamed narrator in "The Yellow Wallpaper"and Firdaus in "Women at Point Zero", experience three connected stages: first, they are forcibly isolated from the world; second, they are systematically treated as less than human; and third, they find a final, radical way to reclaim control over their own existence. To explain these three stages, this article uses three theoretical tools. The first is Erving Goffman's concept of the Total Institution, taken from his book "Asylums" (1961), which explains how certain enclosed spaces , like prisons, hospitals, and households , completely strip a person of their individual identity. The second and third tools both come from Achille Mbembe's "Necropolitics" (2003), which explains how certain powers decide who gets to live as a full human being and who is reduced to a bare, controlled existence, and also how the act of choosing one's own death can become the final act of resistance and sovereignty. By reading both texts through these frameworks together, this article shows that the oppression faced by both women is not accidental or personal , it is structural, systematic and deeply connected to patriarchal power. At the same time, the article argues that both women's final acts, Firdaus choosing execution and the narrator collapsing into madness, are not simply defeats. They are radical acts of reclaiming the self. This article contributes to radical feminist literary criticism by showing how Western and non-Western women's texts, separated by geography and time, speak to the same fundamental truth about patriarchal power and female resistance.

Introduction

"The Yellow Wallpaper" by Charlotte Perkins Gilman and "Women at Point Zero" by Nawal El Saadawi as two stories that reveal the suffering of women under patriarchal control. Although the two works were written in different countries, languages, and historical periods, they share a common concern: the way women are trapped, silenced and treated as less than fully human anfd their final act of liberation. Charlotte Perkins Gilman was an American writer, intellectual and social reformer who lived from 1860 to 1935. She wrote at a time when women in the United States had very few rights and even fewer choices. Society

expected women to stay at home, to be obedient wives, to raise children and to remain silent about their own suffering. Gilman herself lived through this kind of oppression in a very personal and painful way. After the birth of her daughter, she fell into a deep depression and the doctor who treated her, a man named S. Weir Mitchell, prescribed what was known as the rest cure. This meant complete bed rest, no writing, no reading, no intellectual activity of any kind. For a woman like Gilman, whose entire sense of self was built around thinking and writing, this treatment felt less like healing and more like a slow burial of everything she was. She did not simply suffer through this experience and move on. She turned it into literature. She wrote "The Yellow Wallpaper" in 1892 as a direct response to what had been done to her and in doing so, she created one of the most powerful feminist texts in the history of American literature. Her writing came from that understanding, and it carries the weight of personal truth in every line. "The Yellow Wallpaper" is a short story written in the form of a dairy. In "The Yellow Wallpaper", the narrator is an unnamed woman who is recovering after childbirth. Her husband, John, is a doctor who believes she suffers from a nervous condition and prescribes complete rest. He forbids her to write, work or think too much. He takes her to a country house and places her in a room with barred windows and ugly yellow wallpaper. Although he speaks to her kindly, he never truly listens to her. He makes all the decisions for her and treats her like a child instead of an equal. This creates a situation in which she is physically safe but mentally imprisoned.As the story continues, the narrator becomes obsessed with the wallpaper in her room. At first she dislikes its strange color and pattern, but later she begins to imagine that there is a woman trapped behind it. This hidden woman becomes a symbol of the narrator herself. Just as the figure in the wallpaper is caught and unable to move freely, the narrator is trapped in a life controlled by her husband and the medical system. Her growing fixation on the wallpaper reflects her increasing mental distress, but it also shows her desire to break free. At the end of the story, she tears the wallpaper from the wall in an attempt to release the woman she sees inside it. When John enters and sees her creeping around the room, he faints, while she continues moving, no longer obedient to him. Her final action suggests both a collapse of the mind and a desperate form of freedom.

Nawal El Saadawi was an Egyptian doctor, psychiatrist, novelist and one of the most fearless feminist voices the Arab world has ever produced. She was born in 1931 and lived until 2021, spending most of her life fighting against the oppression of women in Egyptian society and across the Arab world. She paid a serious personal price for this fight. She lost her job at the Egyptian Ministry of Health because of her writing. She was imprisoned. She received death threats. She was placed on extremist hit lists. And still she kept writing, kept speaking and kept refusing to be silent."Women at Point Zero"is a novel based on the true story of a woman named Firdaus, whom the Egyptian psychiatrist and feminist writer Nawal El Saadawi met on death row in a Cairo prison."Women at Point Zero" tells the story of Firdaus, an Egyptian woman whose life is shaped by poverty, abuse and male domination. Her story begins in childhood, where girls are valued far less than boys. After her parents die, she goes to live with her uncle in Cairo. There she is not treated as a daughter or a loved family member, but as a servant. For a short time, education gives her hope and makes her feel that she has worth and possibility. However, that hope does not last. Her uncle eventually arranges for her marriage to Sheikh Mahmoud, an older man she does not know and does not want. The marriage is brutal. He beats her, controls her body and treats her as property rather than as a human being. Firdaus escapes the marriage and enters another world of exploitation. She meets women who teach her that she can survive by using her body on her own terms and she becomes a prostitute. For a time, this seems to give her more freedom than marriage ever did. She earns money, lives on her own and has some control over her life. But this freedom is also unstable, because men still try to dominate her. One man, Ibrahim, acts like a protector but is really another kind of owner. He takes her money and threatens her when she tries to leave. In the

end, Firdaus kills him with a knife. After the murder, she feels a clear sense of freedom for the first time. She is arrested, tried and sentenced to death but she refuses to appeal. She does not want mercy from a system that has oppressed her for her whole life. By accepting death on her own terms, she claims the last bit of power left to her. The introduction brings these two stories together to show that oppression takes different forms but follows the same logic. The narrator in "The Yellow Wallpaper" lives in a middle class American household, while Firdaus comes from a poor Egyptian background. One is controlled through medicine, marriage and domestic isolation; the other through poverty, sexual violence and social inequality. Yet both women are denied their voices. Both are kept under the power of men who claim to know what is best for them. Both are reduced to roles assigned by society: patient, wife, property, prostitute. In each case, the woman's own experience is ignored.The comparison also shows that resistance may appear in painful and extreme forms. The narrator's breakdown and Firdaus's murder are not simple victories but they are still acts of refusal. Each woman reaches a point where she will no longer quietly accept the life imposed on her. Even when the result is madness violence or death, these women assert that they are more than what society has made them.

Table 1.1 Comparison between "The Yellow Wallpaper" and "Women at Point Zero

The Yellow Wallpaper	Women at Point Zero
Patriarchal control through medicine and domestic isolation.	Patriarchal control through poverty, marriage and sexual violence.
Narrator silented by husband/ doctor.	Firdaus silented by husband, pimp and society
Act of resistance tearing wallpaper, rejecting obedience.	Act of resistance murder of Ibrahim and refusal to appeal death sentence.
Liberation framed as madness and collapse.	Liberation frames as violent defiance and acceptance of death.
Ending unsettles reader with ambiguity (madness or freedom?)	**Ending shocks reader with clarity (death as chosen freedom).**

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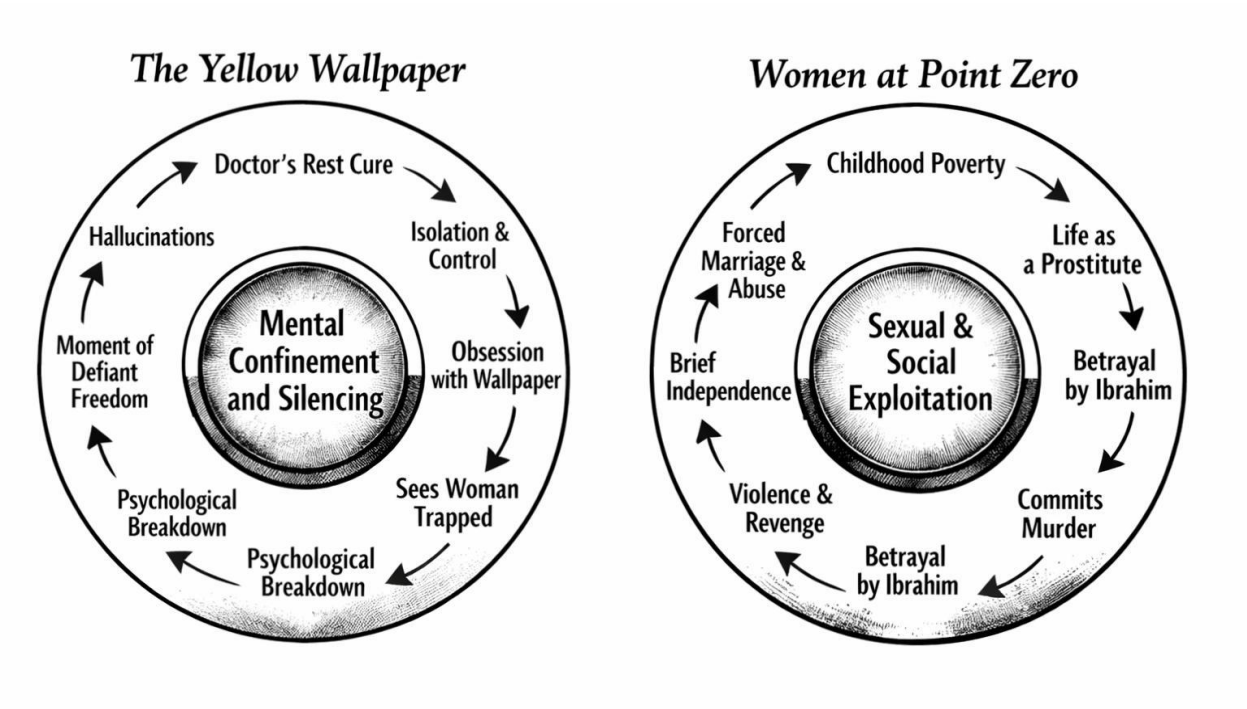

Fig 1.1 The Loop structure followed in "The Yellow Wallpaper" and "Women at Point Zero".

Literature Review

The two texts at the heart of this article "The Yellow Wallpaper" by Charlotte Perkins Gilman and "Women at Point Zero" by Nawal El Saadawi have each attracted a great deal of serious scholarly attention over the years. Researchers, critics and theorists from many different academic traditions have studied these texts, written about them, argued over them and built entire bodies of interpretation around them. The theoretical frameworks this article uses Erving Goffman's concept of the Total Institution and Achille Mbembe's concept of Necropolitics, have also been widely discussed and applied in literary and cultural studies. All of this existing work is valuable and this article builds on it. But what has never been done before, not by any scholar, in any publication, at any point, is bringing all of these pieces together in the specific combination this article uses. No one has read "The Yellow Wallpaper" and "Women at Point Zero" as a pair, using both Goffman and Mbembe together as a combined theoretical framework, to trace the specific three-stage journey of forced isolation, systematic dehumanization, and reclamation of sovereign autonomy that both women share. This section maps out the existing scholarship clearly and carefully, so that the gap this article fills becomes completely visible.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (1979) produced the first major and influential interpretation of "The Yellow Wallpaper" in their book "The Madwoman in the Attic". Their contribution was to reframe the narrator's behavior: they argued that the narrator is not simply going mad but is experiencing an awakening. What earlier readers interpreted as "madness" is reinterpreted by Gilbert and Gubar as a form of insight or resistance. Their central claim is that nineteenth-century patriarchal culture silenced women by labeling their resistance as mental illness; by doing so, it dismissed and contained dissent. The impact of their argument was profound. Before Gilbert and Gubar, many readers and critics treated Gilman's story as a clinical case study about a sick woman. After their work, the story became widely read as a critique of patriarchal power and a depiction of female resistance. Their work became the foundation for feminist readings of the story that followed. However, in relation to the present

article's aims, Gilbert and Gubar did not apply Erving Goffman's institutional framework, and they did not put "The Yellow Wallpaper" into dialogue with Nawal El Saadawi's "Women at Point Zero"; those comparative and institutional theoretical moves remain absent from their account. Ann J. Lane (1990), in her biography "To Herland and Beyond", shifted critical attention from abstract readings to the personal and historical origins of "The Yellow Wallpaper." Lane's contribution was to show how deeply the story was rooted in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's own life experience, especially her treatment by the prominent physician S. Weir Mitchell. Lane described the "rest cure" that Mitchell prescribed, complete bed rest, prohibition of reading and writing and enforced passivity and documented how damaging Gilman found this treatment. Lane argued that Gilman wrote the story as a direct protest against the rest cure and its wider assumptions about women's fragility and need for control. This biographical and historical contextualization helped readers understand the real life basis of the narrative's critique of medical and domestic authority. Nevertheless, Lane's focus on biography and history means that her study does not engage the theoretical frameworks of Goffman's Total Institution or Mbembe's necropolitics, nor does it undertake the comparative reading across cultures that the present article proposes. Julie Bates Dock (1996) contributed a detailed study of the story's publication history and early reception. Dock documented how "The Yellow Wallpaper" was initially received by readers and critics, showing that for much of its early life the story was read as a horror story or a medical curiosity rather than as a feminist critique. This reception history is important because it demonstrates how interpretations of literature change over time and how early readings can obscure the political significance later critics emphasize. Dock's work thus enriches our historical understanding of the text's critical life, but like Lane's study it does not develop the theoretical or comparative analysis that the present article undertakes.In 2003 Catherine Golden edited The Captive Imagination, a wide-ranging collection that gathered many different approaches to Gilman's story. Golden's collection provided feminist, psychoanalytic, historical, formal, and stylistic readings and thereby mapped the multiplicity of directions scholarship had taken. This collection demonstrated the richness of existing scholarship and highlighted how many interpretive possibilities the story supports. Still, even in this large and comprehensive volume there is no essay that applies Achille Mbembe's concept of necropolitics, no essay that pairs "The Yellow Wallpaper" with "Women at Point Zero" and no essay that traces the specific three stage journey, forced isolation, systematic dehumanization and reclamation of sovereign autonomy that the present article identifies. In that way, Golden's collection both showcases existing strengths in the field and also makes visible the gap the present article seeks to fill.

The most important early scholarly work on "Women at Point Zero" came from Fedwa Malti Douglas in her 1995 book Men, Women, and God(s): Nawal El Saadawi and Arab Feminist Poetics. Malti Douglas was one of the first scholars to give El Saadawi's work serious academic attention in the Western academy. She argued that Firdaus's story is not just an individual tragedy. It represents what patriarchal Arab society does to poor women who have no family protection, no legal rights and no recognized place in the social order. She also paid close attention to the frame structure of the novel, the way El Saadawi herself appears as a character trying to reach Firdaus and argued that this raises important questions about whose voice gets to tell a woman's story. Malti Douglas's work is essential background but it focused on El Saadawi's broader body of work and on Arab feminist literary tradition as a whole. It did not use Goffman or Mbembe and it did not read the novel alongside any Western feminist text. In 2000, the scholar Amal Amireh published an important essay in the journal Signs called "Framing Nawal El Saadawi: Arab Feminism in a Transnational World." Amireh raised a serious critical warning. She said that Western academic readers were often reading "Women at Point Zero" in a way that reproduced orientalist assumptions , treating Firdaus's story as the story of an oppressed

woman in a backward Arab society, rather than recognizing that the same patriarchal logic that destroys Firdaus also operates in Western societies. This warning is directly relevant to this article. By reading "Women at Point Zero" alongside "The Yellow Wallpaper", this article makes exactly the point Amireh was calling for: the logic that destroys both women is the same logic, operating in different cultural settings. Amireh's essay was a critical and theoretical intervention. It was not a close literary analysis using Goffman and Mbembe and it did not develop the comparative reading that it was pointing toward. The most recent major scholarly work on "Women at Point Zero" is Hoda Elsadda's 2012 book Gender, Nation, and the Arabic Novel: Egypt, 1892–2008 offers a reading of Firdaus's final choice that is particularly relevant. Elsadda argued that Firdaus's refusal to appeal her death sentence should be read not as a failure or defeat but as the most radical and autonomous act available to her. In Elsadda's view, Firdaus's denial of appeal is the first time she acts entirely on her own terms, free from others' control. This insight closely approaches the argument the present article advances about sovereign autonomy. Yet Elsadda did not use Mbembe's framework to develop that insight, nor did she connect Firdaus's act to the narrator's climactic gesture in "The Yellow Wallpaper." Her reading therefore gestures toward, but does not complete, the necropolitical and comparative theoretical move that the present article takes up.

How Goffman has been used in Literary Studies

Erving Goffman wrote a book called "Asylums" in 1961. In this book he gave the idea of the "Total Institution." A Total Institution is a place where almost everything is controlled: when people sleep, when they eat, what they wear, how they behave, even how they think. The person inside is surrounded by rules and power. Literary scholars liked this idea and soon started using it to read novels. In Victorian literature, they used Goffman's idea to study madhouses and asylums in the works of Charlotte Brontë and Wilkie Collins. In twentieth century literature, they used the same idea to read prison stories and other texts about people locked up in institutions. Feminist scholars went further. They said that the home or family can also work like an informal Total Institution for women. Even though there are no bars or guards, women can still be controlled by money, rules, social roles, and expectations, so their lives are shaped and limited. All of this work is useful and important. But, as your article says, no scholar has used Goffman's framework to read The Yellow Wallpaper and Women at Point Zero together. No one has shown how both texts describe women being slowly eaten up by the same kind of institutional power, even though one woman is in a private house in America and the other is in a prison in Egypt.

How Mbembe has been used in Literary and Cultural Studies

Mbembe's Necropolitics essay was published in 2003 and generated immediate and wide discussion. Jasbir Puar, in her 2007 book Terrorist Assemblages, extended Mbembe's ideas in relation to sexuality and race in the context of the war on terror. Alexander Weheliye, in his 2014 book Habeas Viscus, developed Mbembe's framework in connection with Black feminist theory and the question of what counts as a human life. These are important works, but they are not focused on the kind of feminist literary analysis this article undertakes. Within feminist literary criticism, some scholars have drawn on Mbembe's ideas to analyze texts in which women are reduced to bare life. But this work has stayed mostly within postcolonial literature focused on Africa and the Middle East. No scholar has used Mbembe's framework to read "The Yellow Wallpaper" alongside "Women at Point Zero". And no scholar has used Mbembe's concept of necropolitical resistance, the reclaiming of sovereignty through claiming one's own death as the central key for reading both the narrator's final breakdown and Firdaus's refusal of pardon as parallel acts of radical self-assertion. This argument is completely new.

What this article does that no one has done before

The existing scholarship has done valuable work on each text separately and on each theoretical

framework separately. But no one has brought all of these pieces together in the specific way this article does. No scholar has read "The Yellow Wallpaper" and "Women at Point Zero" as a pair, using both Goffman's Total Institutions and Mbembe's Necropolitics as a combined framework, to trace the three-stage journey of forced isolation, systematic dehumanization and reclamation of sovereign autonomy that both women share. This is the gap. This article fills it.

Theoretical Framework

Erving Goffman was an American sociologist. In the late 1950s, he spent over a year inside a large mental hospital in the United States, quietly observing the way the institution worked , not from the perspective of the doctors and staff but from the perspective of the patients. What he found there formed the basis of his 1961 book, "Asylums". In this book, Goffman introduced the concept of the "Total Institution". To understand what he meant by this, it helps to think about how normal life is organized. In a normal life, a person does different things in different places. They sleep at home, work somewhere else, and spend their leisure time in yet another place. They move between these different spaces and different social roles throughout the day. No single person or organization controls everything about their life. A "Total Institution" is the opposite of this. It is a place where all of these different activities happen in the same place, under the same authority, according to the same rules. The person cannot leave. They cannot choose what they eat or when they sleep or how they dress. The institution, the prison, the mental hospital, the boarding school, controls every single aspect of their existence. And this total control has a very specific effect on the person inside: it destroys their individual identity. Goffman called this process the "mortification of the self." When a person enters a "Total Institution", they are systematically stripped of everything that made them an individual. They give up their personal clothing and are given an institutional uniform. They are assigned a number or a role. Their personal history, their relationships, their habits, their preferences, all of these are either ignored or actively suppressed. The institution creates a new identity for them, the patient, the inmate, the prisoner and this new identity is defined entirely by the institution's needs, not by the person's own sense of who they are. "Total Institutions" also have very specific ways of maintaining their control. They watch people constantly. They punish small acts of disobedience very harshly. They reward compliance and punish any assertion of individual will. They create a clear and rigid line between the staff, who have all the power and the inmates, who have none. And they do all of this in a way that makes it very difficult for the people inside to even imagine what a life outside would look like. Goffman's most important insight for the purposes of this article is that a Total Institution does not have to be a prison or a mental hospital. Any space that operates according to this same logic that completely controls a person's life, strips them of individual identity, and replaces it with an institutional role is a "Total Institution". This means the concept can apply to a household where one person has complete power over another. It means it can apply to a marriage where a woman has no rights, no choices and no identity outside of her role as a wife. It means it can apply to any enclosed, controlled space in which a person is managed rather than free.

Achille Mbembe is a Cameroonian thinker who works in politics and philosophy. In 2003 he wrote an essay called "Necropolitics," and this essay has become one of the most important and widely read texts in postcolonial and critical theory. To understand Mbembe, it helps to start with an earlier French philosopher, Michel Foucault. In the 1970s, Foucault introduced the idea of biopower. Biopower is the way modern states and their institutions like hospitals, schools, prisons, and governments, do not only control people by punishment, but also by managing life itself. They decide who is "normal," who is "sick," who is "healthy," who counts as a real citizen and who needs to be watched, treated or locked away. In this view, power is not only about killing or punishing; it is about shaping and organizing life. Mbembe takes this idea of biopower and pushes it much further. He argues that in colonial and postcolonial situations, power is not only about

managing life; it is also about managing death. He says that the sovereign power, the highest power in a society, is the one that decides not only who will live, but who will be allowed to live as a fully human being and who will be pushed into what he calls a "death-world." A death-world is not just dying. It means a person is still physically alive, but has been stripped of almost everything that makes life meaningful. They have no rights, no recognition, no real freedom, and no future they can shape for themselves. They are kept alive because they are useful as workers, as bodies, as things to be used but they are not really allowed to live. They are only existing, not living.Mbembe first used this idea to describe the lives of colonized people, especially people living under apartheid in South Africa or people in the occupied Palestinian territories. For these people, they are physically present in their own land, but they have been taken out of power, out of law, and out of full humanity. They are allowed to exist, but not to live freely. They are treated as if they do not matter as full human beings. For your article, what is important is that this same idea can be used to think about women in patriarchal societies. In very patriarchal systems, women are often not killed, but they are still placed in a kind of death-world. They are allowed to live, but they are systematically denied the things that would make their lives truly human and free. They are denied political rights, economic independence, control over their own bodies, and the right to decide about their own future. They are kept alive because they are useful as wives, as mothers, as workers, as sexual objects but they are not treated as full human beings with their own desires and their own power over their own lives. In this sense, they are also living in a death-world.The second key part of Mbembe's idea for your article is his idea of resistance. Mbembe argues that for people who have been pushed into a death-world, who have had almost everything taken from them, the final and strongest act of resistance can be to claim their own death. By choosing when, how, and why to die, the person takes back the one thing that the system was trying to control: the power over life and death. For Mbembe, this is not ordinary suicide, done only out of personal pain. It is a political act. It is the person saying: I am the one who decides here, not you. My death belongs to me, not to your system.

Analysis

Forced Isolation

Charlotte Perkins Gilman's The Yellow Wallpaper begins with a quiet but devastating problem: the narrator is not believed. Early in the text she says, "**John is a physician, and perhaps… that is one reason I do not get well faster.**"(Line 1). To understand why this line is so powerful, it is important to think about what happens when a person's suffering is not believed. Suffering is not only a physical experience. It is also a social experience. When someone is in pain, they need others to recognize that pain, to name it alongside them, to validate that what they are feeling is real. Without that recognition, suffering becomes invisible, and an invisible suffering is one of the most destructive things a human being can endure. The narrator is suffering. She knows she is suffering. But John's disbelief means her suffering has no social reality. It exists only inside her own body and mind, with no one willing to confirm it. This line is crucial because it shows how her suffering is dismissed by the very person who should help her. John is both her husband and her doctor, which means she cannot appeal to one role against the other. If she disagrees with him as a wife, he is also her physician. If she disagrees with him as a patient, he is also her husband. Both roles belong to the same man, and that man has decided she is not truly ill. This leaves her completely isolated, unable to name her own pain in a way that will be taken seriously.She reflects: "**If a physician of high standing, and one's own husband, assures friends and relatives that there is really nothing the matter with one but temporary nervous depression, a slight hysterical tendency, what is one to do?"** (Line 110). The historical context deepens this further. In the late nineteenth century, women's illnesses were frequently labeled as hysteria, a term that was used to cover almost any emotional or psychological distress that a woman expressed. Hysteria was not taken seriously as a real medical condition. It was seen as a kind of female

weakness, an inability to manage the nerves, something that could be cured by rest, fresh air, and compliance. The narrator's condition is diagnosed in exactly these terms. John calls it a "**temporary nervous depression**" and a "**hysterical tendency**." These words are not neutral. They are clinical labels designed to minimize her experience and return her to docility. By calling her condition hysterical, John removes it from the category of serious illness and places it in the category of female unreliability. Her suffering becomes, in his framework, a sign not of genuine illness but of her own weakness. This makes her isolation complete because even the language available to describe her suffering has been taken over by the system that denies her. This shows that her own account of herself has been erased. John's authority as doctor and husband combine to make her words meaningless. She says she is suffering; he says she is not. His version wins.There is a prime example that how the lady is forcibly isolating from herself. This erasure continues in the choice of her living space. She wanted a pleasant room downstairs with a garden view, but John ignored her preference and placed her in a large upstairs room. She describes it with dread: "**Windows barred for little children, and rings and things in the walls… The bed is nailed down.**" (Line 15). Each detail here matters. Bars on the windows suggest imprisonment. Rings in the walls suggest restraint, as if someone had once been chained there. A nailed-down bed means she cannot rearrange the furniture or make the room her own. The space is fixed, immovable and hostile. Although John presents this room as a place of rest and healing, it is in fact a prison. The cruelty lies in the gap between what she is told, that this is care and what she experiences, confinement. She is forced to be grateful for her own imprisonment. This self-silencing is itself a symptom of isolation, because isolation does not always mean physical solitude. The narrator lives in a house with her husband, her sister-in-law Jennie, and occasionally other people. She is not alone in a room by herself. But she is alone in the most important sense, which is that no one around her accepts the reality of her experience. She cannot talk to John about how she truly feels because he dismisses it. She cannot confide in Jennie because Jennie reports back to John. She cannot write in her journal openly because she must hide it whenever someone comes. Every potential avenue of connection is blocked. Her isolation is not geographic. It is relational and communicative. She exists in a house full of people, but she is completely alone. Her intellectual life is also restricted. John forbids her from writing, claiming that too much thinking will worsen her condition. Yet she writes in secret, hiding her diary and snatching moments when no one is watching. She explains: "**I must say what I feel and think in some way, it is such a relief.**" (Line 30). The word "relief" is important. Writing is not entertainment for her; it is survival. It is the only way she can hold onto her sense of self. By forbidding her to write, John does not merely restrict an activity. He cuts off her connection to her inner world. When she tries to speak up, John laughs at her: "**John laughs at me, of course, but one expects that in marriage**." (Line 45). This line is heartbreaking because she has internalized her own dismissal. She does not say it is wrong or unfair. She says it is expected. She has accepted that wives are not taken seriously. This is exactly what sociologist Erving Goffman describes in his theory of Total Institutions: systems that strip away individuality until the person accepts the institution's version of reality. The narrator has been processed by the institution of marriage so thoroughly that she defines herself through its rules. The image of the woman behind the wallpaper grows stronger as the story progresses. The narrator writes: "**She just takes hold of the bars and shakes them hard. And she could not get through, because every time she tried the bars would strangle her.**" (Line 70). This woman is not merely a hallucination. She represents the narrator's hidden self, the part of her that knows she is trapped and is desperately trying to escape. But every attempt is strangled by the system. The strangulation here is symbolic: it is not physical death but the suffocation of identity. Her isolation operates on multiple levels at once: she is physically locked in a room she did not choose; socially cut off from friends and the outside world; intellectually forbidden from reading and writing; and institutionally trapped, because the very

systems meant to help her ,medicine and marriage are the same systems imprisoning and forcibly isolating her.This entire sequence is the clearest application of sociologist Erving Goffman's concept of the Total Institution. In Asylums (1961), Goffman explained that a "Total Institution" strips away individuality and replaces it with an institutional identity. The narrator's words themselves prove this: her pain is dismissed (Line 1), her environment is structured to restrain her (Line 15), her writing is forbidden (Line 30), her dismissal is normalized (Line 45), and her hidden self is strangled by institutional logic (Line 70). The text does not merely illustrate isolation; it demonstrates Goffman's theory directly. The household, under John's authority, functions as a Total Institution where her identity is erased and replaced with the role of "hysterical patient."

Nawal El Saadawi's Women at Point Zero presents a parallel but harsher version of forced isolation. Firdaus recalls: **"I was not a human being. I was just a female body to be used."** (Line 5). This proves that her isolation begins in childhood. She is denied recognition as a person and reduced to a body. Later, her uncle arranges her marriage: "**He was an old man and I was a young girl, but that did not matter to anyone.**" (Line 20). This proves that her opinion is erased. Her isolation is imposed by patriarchal authority, not by chance. Violence enforces this isolation. Firdaus says: "**He hit me and I did not cry. I had learned not to cry.**" (Line 35). A similarly crushing form of forced isolation appears in Women at Point Zero, where Firdaus describes her childhood and early life with a kind of flat, factual horror that is even more disturbing because it carries no self-pity. She recalls "**I was a child and did not know that the world had become a vast prison from which there was no escape.**"This line comes from Nawal El Saadawi's Women at Point Zero, and it is spoken by Firdaus as she looks back at her earliest years of life. On the surface it reads as a simple childhood memory, but when you examine it carefully, word by word, it reveals something much deeper and much more painful than a straightforward recollection. The word "I"is here describing the personal observation and personal experience of the protagonist.She is describing her own life, her own body, her own childhood. The word "child" is the first thing that demands attention. Childhood is the period of life during which a human being forms their most fundamental understanding of themselves and the world. It is the time when a person learns whether they are valued or not, whether their feelings matter or not, whether they have a right to exist on their own terms or whether their existence is conditional upon serving others. For most children, this period offers at least some experience of safety, of being loved simply for existing, of being treated as a person whose inner life is real and worth considering. Firdaus received none of this. From the very beginning of her life, her family communicated to her through their daily behavior that she was worth less than her male siblings. Her mother's preference for her brothers, expressed not in one dramatic moment but in the continuous texture of everyday life, told her repeatedly and consistently that female existence occupied a lower category of human worth. When Firdaus says she "did not know", she is not saying she felt trapped and could not find a way out. She is saying something much deeper than that. She is saying that the entire system that was imprisoning her felt completely and absolutely normal to her, so normal that it did not even register as a system at all. This is the most important thing to understand about this phrase. A child does not analyze the world they are born into. A child simply observes it, absorbs it, and accepts it as the way things are. Firdaus grew up watching her mother favor her brothers over her, watching her uncle make decisions about her life without asking her, watching women around her being treated as secondary and powerless. She did not look at any of this and think, this is wrong, this is a system designed to confine me. She looked at it and thought nothing at all, because there was nothing to think. It was simply life. It was simply how things were. The way her family treated her, the way society organized itself around male authority, the way women were expected to accept and endure without questioning, all of this was so deeply embedded in everything she had ever seen and experienced from her very first moments of consciousness that it carried no smell of injustice to her. It smelled like ordinary life. And that is

precisely what makes it the most complete form of imprisonment there is, not the cage you can see and struggle against, but the cage that feels like the open air. that the world had become a vast prison from which there was no escape."There is no escape" because wherever she went, whether it was her childhood life, her marital life, her social life, or her life in prostitution, all of these things were subjugating her and isolating her, isolating her from herself, from her body and from her own intellectual identity. So how can she escape when wherever she goes she finds the same isolation. First the childhood isolation, then the forced isolation of marriage, then the forced isolation of society, then the forced isolation of prostitution. There was no room, no escape at all. Wherever she went the same system was waiting for her, the same cage in a different form. And that is why there was truly no escape from this vast prison. Ibrahim later tells her: "**You belong to me. If you try to leave, I will kill you.**" (Line 50). This proves philosopher Achille Mbembe's concept of Necropolitics. Necropolitics is the power to decide who lives and who dies. Ibrahim's words show this directly: her life depends on obedience. The text itself proves the theory. Finally, in prison, Firdaus says: "**I am more free now than I have ever been**." (Line 80). This proves the paradox of isolation. Prison, though the harshest cage, is the first space where she is not consumed. Goffman's theory of "Total Institutions"applies here too: Firdaus has passed through so many institutions that prison, despite being confinement, is the first space that does not demand she give herself away. The text itself shows this paradox.Placed side by side, both women are forced into spaces they did not choose, stripped of identity, and denied voice. Gilman's narrator is imprisoned softly, Firdaus brutally. The texts themselves prove that isolation is not accident but deliberate control.

Systematic Dehumanization

When we say systematic dehumanization, we mean that a person who has power, whether it is a husband, a doctor, or a pimp, uses that power to make another person less than human. They do not recognize the other person's feelings, choices, or identity. Instead, they treat them as an object, a child or a body to be used. This is exactly what Achille Mbembe describes in his theory of Necropolitics. He explains that power does not only decide who lives and who dies, but also who is allowed to live as a full human being and who is pushed into what he calls a death-world. In a death-world, a person is alive physically but stripped of dignity, rights, and recognition. They are kept alive because they are useful, but they are not treated as human. In The Yellow Wallpaper, John dehumanizes the narrator by calling her his "**little girl**" (Line 100). This is a perfect example because it shows how he reduces her to a child. She is not seen as an adult woman with her own mind. She explains: "**He is very careful and loving, and hardly lets me stir without special direction.**" (Line 105). Here, John controls her movements completely. She cannot act freely. Because this control is disguised as love, she cannot resist it. Later, she reflects: **"If a physician of high standing, and one's own husband, assures friends and relatives that there is really nothing the matter with one but temporary nervous depression, a slight hysterical tendency, what is one to do?"** (Line 110). This shows that her own account of herself has been erased. John's authority defines her reality. She is no longer recognized as a person with valid feelings. She is processed into a patient with a label. Another moment makes this even clearer: "**John says if I don't pick up faster he shall send me to Weir Mitchell in the fall.**" (Line 140). Here, she is threatened with being sent to another doctor, showing that her fate is decided entirely by others. This is Mbembe's death-world: she exists, but she is denied full humanity.

In Women at Point Zero, Firdaus experiences dehumanization even more directly. She explains: "**They were not looking at me. They were looking at my body.**" (Line 200). This line proves that she is reduced to a commodity. The men who pay for her do not see her as a person. They see only a body to be consumed. Ibrahim makes this even clearer when he tells her: "**You belong to me. If you try to leave, I will kill you.**" (Line 220). This is the most explicit example of Mbembe's Necropolitics. Ibrahim claims the power to decide whether she lives or dies. Her existence depends

entirely on obedience. Another moment shows the same logic: "**Bayoumi locked me in the flat for days, and men came in to use me.**" (Line 180). Here, she is literally imprisoned and treated as an object to be passed around. She is alive, but her life is owned by others. This is the death-world: she is kept alive because she is useful, but she is not treated as a full human being.Placed side by side, Gilman's narrator and El Saadawi's Firdaus show two versions of systematic dehumanization. Gilman's narrator is dehumanized softly, through affectionate language and medical authority. Firdaus is dehumanized brutally, through violence and commodification. Yet both are denied recognition as human beings. Both are pushed into Mbembe's death worlds, where they exist but are not allowed to live freely. The texts themselves prove Mbembe's concept: systematic dehumanization is the process by which power strips away humanity and reduces a person to bare life.

Reclamation of Sovereign Autonomy

In "The Yellow Wallpaper", the narrator's reclamation of autonomy builds gradually until it explodes in the final pages. She begins tearing the wallpaper: "**I pulled and she shook, I shook and she pulled, and before morning we had peeled off yards of that paper.**" (Line 300). This line proves that she merges with the woman behind the wallpaper. The repetition of the phrase "**I pulled and she shook, I shook and she pulled**" is very important to understand. For the whole story the narrator has been completely alone in her suffering. No one believed her pain was real. No one stood beside her or helped her carry the weight of what she was going through. But in this moment she is not alone. She and the woman she sees behind the wallpaper are working together, moving together, pulling together toward the same freedom. And the woman behind the wallpaper is not someone else. She is the narrator herself, the hidden and suppressed part of her that was trapped and strangled behind the bars of the wallpaper pattern, the part that John's authority tried to destroy and silence forever. By working together with this hidden self, the narrator is bringing herself back together. She is reclaiming the parts of herself that were taken from her piece by piece throughout the story. The suppressed self and the narrator are no longer separate. She locks the door, throws away the key, and begins creeping around the room. When John breaks in and faints, she steps over him and continues. The text itself proves that she has reclaimed autonomy. She is no longer governed by John's authority. She is ungovernable, outside the system's reach.There is an other prime example of Reclamation of sovereign autonomy from the text. "**I've got out at last, in spite of you ....And I've pulled off most of the paper, so you can't put me back!**" This is the first moment in the entire story where the narrator speaks with complete confidence and complete certainty about her own experience. For the whole story she has been unsure, hesitant, and afraid to trust her own feelings. She used the word perhaps when she suspected John was making her worse. She hid her journal because she did not feel safe writing openly. She accepted John's version of her reality again and again even when everything inside her knew it was wrong. But in this moment there is no perhaps. There is no hiding. There is only a clear and certain voice saying exactly what happened and exactly what it means. The words "in spite of you" are directed straight at John and they carry the full history of everything he did to her. She is not confused about who put her in the cage. She knows it was John. She knows it was his disbelief, his restrictions, his laughter at her feelings, his control over every detail of her existence that built the prison around her. And she got out in spite of all of it, not because of any kindness he showed her but in direct opposition to everything he tried to do to her. Those words "in spite of you" contain within them the entire story of his oppression and her survival. The words "you can't put me back" are her declaration that this freedom cannot be undone. John can perhaps restrain her body again. But he cannot return her to the woman she was before, the woman who doubted herself, who hid her journal, who accepted his laughter as normal. That woman is gone. She has been replaced by someone who has seen through the system, torn down its walls, and spoken her own truth out loud. And that cannot be taken back. She choses insanity of liberation

over being trapped system of authority.This is the clearest application of Mbembe's idea of resistance in the death-world. Mbembe argued that when almost everything has been taken, the final act of sovereignty is to claim one's own body, even if it looks like madness or death. The narrator's words prove this directly: by tearing the wallpaper and merging with the imprisoned woman, she asserts that her mind belongs to her, not to the institution. Madness becomes her only space of freedom. The text itself demonstrates Mbembe's theory, she reclaims sovereignty by stepping outside the system's definitions entirely.

In Women at Point Zero, Firdaus reclaims autonomy in death. She refuses to appeal her execution: "**I will not appeal. I will not beg.**" (Line 400). This line proves that she asserts sovereignty over her death. When Firdaus says these words from inside her prison cell, she is making the most complete act of reclaiming herself that appears anywhere in either of these two texts. The system that put her there expects her to submit. It expects her to come before its authority with her head down and ask for mercy, to admit that it holds power over her life and that she needs its permission to keep living. But Firdaus refuses completely. She will not appeal. She will not beg. And in that refusal she takes back everything that was taken from her across her entire life. She recalls killing Ibrahim: "**I felt powerful, like a god, and I was not afraid.**" (Line 390). This proves that she reversed necropolitical logic. Ibrahim claimed the power to kill her; she killed him first. The text itself demonstrates Mbembe's theory: she takes sovereignty into her own hands. By refusing to beg, she asserts that her death belongs to her, not to the system .Placed side by side the both text, the narrator and Firdaus show two versions of reclamation. The narrator reclaims autonomy in madness, stepping outside the system's definitions. Firdaus reclaims autonomy in death, refusing to beg and asserting sovereignty over her ending. The texts themselves prove Mbembe's theory: even those reduced to bare life can reclaim sovereignty in their final acts.

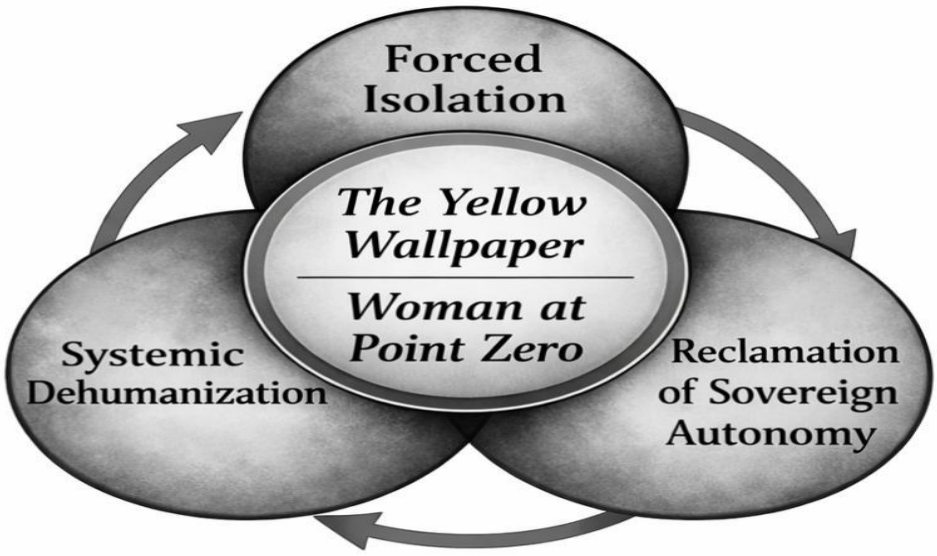

Fig 1.2 Same structure followed in both text

Conclusion

This conclusion reads "The Yellow Wallpaper" and "Women at Point Zero"through radical feminist criticism to show how both texts expose the same pattern of patriarchal control. Using the ideas of total institutions and necropolitics, it argues that both women are forced through a similar journey: first isolation, then dehumanization, and finally a last act of self-assertion. In "The Yellow Wallpaper", the narrator is confined to a room and given the identity of a patient. In "Women at Point Zero", Firdaus moves from her uncle's house to marriage, prostitution and prison, and in each place she is reduced to a useful body. In both stories, institutions strip away individuality and replace the woman's identity with a role that can be controlled. The conclusion also shows that both women are treated as less than fully human. The narrator is denied her voice, her judgment, and her own understanding of her condition. Firdaus is denied dignity, rights, bodily autonomy and recognition as a full person. Through this lens, patriarchy appears not just as oppression but as a system that decides who is allowed to count as human and who is not. At the same time, both women resist in the only ways left to them. The narrator becomes impossible to control, while Firdaus refuses to appeal her death sentence and accepts execution on her own terms. These final acts are presented as forms of sovereign autonomy, because each woman claims the right to decide the meaning of her own ending. Though tragic, these acts become powerful statements of refusal. The conclusion argues that reading the two texts together makes patriarchal violence clearly visible. They are not separate tragedies from different worlds, but two examples of the same global structure working through different social settings. The forms change but the logic remains the same: isolation, erasure, and reduction to bare life. It also explains that Goffman and Mbembe help reveal both the process and the stakes of this oppression. Goffman shows how institutions break down identity and turn people into manageable subjects. Mbembe shows that this is also a political act of denying humanity. Together, they help explain why the women's final refusals matter so deeply. Ultimately, the conclusion presents both women's endings as testimonies against patriarchy. Their stories prove that this destruction is ongoing, structural and global, but they also prove that human will cannot be fully erased.

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