

**SOCIAL REPRODUCTION IN LAURA KRISKA'S
*THE ACCIDENTAL OFFICE LADY***

THESIS

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**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LITERATURE
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES
UNIVERSITAS ISLAM NEGERI MAULANA MALIK IBRAHIM
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THESIS

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In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of *Sarjana Sastra* (S.S.)

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MALANG
2026**

STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP

I state that the thesis entitled "Social Reproduction in Laura Kriska's *The Accidental Office Lady*" is my original work. I do not include any materials previously written or published by another person, except those cited as references and written in the bibliography. Hereby, if there is any objection or claim, I am the only person who is responsible for that.

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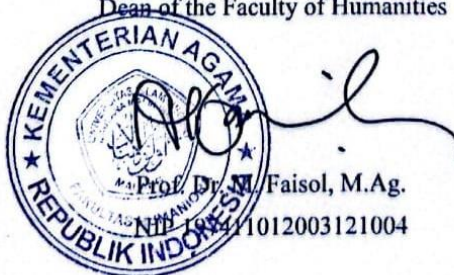
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MOTTO

*“The feminine section of the proletarian army is of particularly great significance.
The success of a revolution depending on the extent to which women take part in it.”*

(Vladimir Lenin)

*“Their Lord has answered them, ‘I will not allow the deeds of any one of you to be
lost, whether you are male or female; each is like the other [in rewards]”*

(Qur’ān, 3:195)

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to me (Deva), my beloved mother (Laili), my beloved father (Moch. Nadif), my beloved brother (Alva), and my dear advisor (Mr. Miftahul Huda). Many people have helped me in this journey, but five of them are the most important in my life.

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May Allah bless all the good things and all the people who have accompanied me throughout this journey. The researcher is always open to any criticism and suggestions that may be useful for this research.

Malang, 10 May 2026

The researcher

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Deva', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

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ABSTRACT

Vahry, Muhammad Deva Rifqi (2026). Social Reproduction in Laura Kriska's *The Accidental Office Lady*. Undergraduate Thesis. Department of English Literature, Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. Advisor: Miftahul Huda, M.Pd., Ph.D.

Keywords: memoir, Marxist-feminism, naturalization, social reproduction

This study examines how social reproduction is depicted and naturalized in Laura Kriska's memoir *The Accidental Office Lady*, which recounts her experience as the first American woman to work at the headquarters of Honda Motor Company in Tokyo, Japan. Using Silvia Federici's Social Reproduction Theory as the main theoretical framework, this study addresses two research questions: how social reproduction is depicted in Laura Kriska's *The Accidental Office Lady* and how it is naturalized to exploit office ladies. This study applied literary criticism. The data were collected through close reading of the memoir and analyzed by focusing on textual evidence related to women's labor, workplace routines, corporate discipline, and gender hierarchy. The findings showed that social reproduction is depicted through three main dimensions: the mandatory uniform that erased women's professional identities, morning rituals of cleaning executive workspaces that reproduced gender hierarchy, and emotional compliance that regulated women's speech and emotional expression to support male authority. The naturalization of social reproduction operates through three mechanisms: tea service as an unpaid subsidy, the commodification of affective capacities such as appearance and tone of voice, and the invisibilization of gendered labor. These mechanisms made women's reproductive work appear natural and feminine rather than economically valuable. This study concludes that the Japanese corporate office in Kriska's memoir functions as a site of institutionalized femininity, where domestic social reproductions are integrated into formal corporate structures without being fully recognized as work that deserves equal compensation.

مستخلص البحث

فاخري، محمد ديفا ريفقي. (٢٠٢٦) التكاثر الاجتماعي في رواية "موظفة المكتب بالصدفة" للكاتبة لورا كريسا. أطروحة البكالوريوس. قسم الأدب الإنجليزي، كلية العلوم الإنسانية، جامعة مولانا مالك إبراهيم الإسلامية الحكومية في مالانج. المشرف: مفتاح الحودا، ماجستير في التربية، دكتوراه

كلمات أساسية: مذكرات، النسوية الماركسية، التجنس، التكاثر الاجتماعي

تبحث هذه الدراسة في كيفية تصوير «التكاثر الاجتماعي» وتطبيقه في مذكرات لورا كريسا المهنية بعنوان «موظفة المكتب بالصدفة» (١٩٩٧)، التي تروي تجربتها بصفتها أول امرأة أمريكية تعمل في المقر الرئيسي لشركة هوندا موتور في طوكيو باليابان. باستخدام نظرية التكاثر الاجتماعي لسيلفيا فيديريكي كأطار عمل، تجيب هذه الدراسة على سؤالين: كيف يتم تصوير التكاثر الاجتماعي في كتاب لورا كريسا "موظفة المكتب بالصدفة"، وكيف يتم تطبيقه لاستغلال موظفات المكاتب. تستخدم هذه الدراسة نهج النقد الأدبي مع تقنية القراءة المتأنية للمذكرات. وأظهرت النتائج أن التكاثر الاجتماعي تم تصويره من خلال ثلاثة أبعاد: الزي الرسمي الإلزامي الذي يحو الهويات المهنية للنساء؛ وطقوس الصباح المتمثلة في تنظيف أماكن عمل المديرين التنفيذيين التي تحافظ على التسلسل الهرمي بين الجنسين على أساس يومي؛ والطاعة العاطفية التي تنظم كلام النساء وتعبيرهن العاطفي من أجل دعم سلطة الرجال. يعمل تطبيق التكاثر الاجتماعي من خلال ثلاث آليات: طقوس تقديم الشاي، وتسليم القدرات العاطفية مثل المظهر ونبرة الصوت التي تُبنى على أنها أنوثة طبيعية، وليس كعمل ماهر؛ وإخفاء العمل القائم على النوع الاجتماعي، حيث لم يعد العمل التكاثري لموظفة المكتب يُعترف به كشيء ذي قيمة اقتصادية، سواء من قبل النظام الذي يستغله أو من قبل النساء اللواتي يقمن به. تخلص هذه الدراسة إلى أن المكتب الياباني في مذكرات كريسا يمثل موقعاً للمؤسسة. تخلص هذه الدراسة إلى أن مكتب الشركة اليابانية في مذكرات كريسا يمثل موقعاً لإعادة إنتاج الأنوثة المؤسسية، حيث تم دمج منطق إعادة الإنتاج الاجتماعي المنزلي في الهياكل المؤسسية الرسمية دون أن يُعترف به قط كعمل يستحق أجرًا متساوياً.

ABSTRAK

Vahry, Muhammad Deva Rifqi (2026). Reproduksi Sosial dalam *The Accidental Office Lady* Karya Laura Kriska. Skripsi. Program Studi Sastra Inggris, Fakultas Humaniora, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. Pembimbing: Miftahul Huda, M.Pd., Ph.D.

Kata Kunci: memoar, Feminisme-Marxis, naturalisasi, reproduksi sosial

Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana reproduksi sosial digambarkan dan dinaturalisasi dalam memoar *The Accidental Office Lady* karya Laura Kriska. Memoar ini menceritakan pengalamannya sebagai perempuan Amerika pertama yang bekerja di kantor pusat Honda Motor Company di Tokyo, Jepang. Dengan menggunakan Teori Reproduksi Sosial Silvia Federici sebagai kerangka teori utama, penelitian ini hendak menjawab dua rumusan masalah: bagaimana reproduksi sosial digambarkan di *The Accidental Office Lady* karya Laura Kriska, dan bagaimana ia dinaturalisasi untuk mengeksploitasi para *office ladies*. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kritik sastra. Data dikumpulkan melalui *close reading* terhadap memoar tersebut dan dianalisis dengan berfokus pada bukti tekstual terkait kerja perempuan, rutinitas di tempat kerja, disiplin korporat, dan hierarki gender. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa reproduksi sosial digambarkan melalui tiga dimensi utama: kewajiban mengenakan seragam yang menghapus identitas profesional perempuan, ritual pagi berupa pembersihan ruang kerja eksekutif yang mereproduksi hierarki gender, dan kepatuhan emosional yang mengatur cara bicara serta ekspresi emosional perempuan untuk mendukung otoritas laki-laki. Naturalisasi reproduksi sosial bekerja melalui tiga mekanisme: layanan teh sebagai pekerjaan tidak berbayar, komodifikasi kapasitas afektif seperti tampilan dan nada suara, serta invisibilisasi kerja berbasis gender. Mekanisme-mekanisme tersebut membuat kerja reproduktif perempuan tampak alami dan feminin, bukan sebagai kerja yang bernilai ekonomi. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa kantor korporat Jepang dalam memoar Kriska berfungsi sebagai ruang feminitas yang dilembagakan, tempat reproduksi sosial domestik diintegrasikan ke dalam struktur korporat formal tanpa sepenuhnya diakui sebagai kerja yang layak memperoleh kompensasi ekonomis yang setimpal.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the background of the study, research questions, significance of the study, scope and limitation, and definition of key terms.

A. Background of the Study

The field of literary studies has developed over the past few decades to include not only fictional works but also autobiographies, memoirs, and personal narratives. These forms of writing are now considered important literary and cultural texts because they show how personal experiences can reflect broader social issues. Memoirs, for example, not only tell individual stories but may also reveal how power, ideology, and social structures operate in everyday life. The practices can be seen, for example, in the expectation that women should take care of the household, even if they also work full-time, or in the assumption that certain jobs are more “suitable” for a particular gender. Such norms are rarely questioned because they are considered normal in everyday life, when in fact they are shaped by larger social and economic structures.

In this wider field of literary study, the relationship between capitalism and gender has become one of important topics of discussion. Literary representations of productivity, work, and even domestic duties often reflect wider social and economic structures that determine who is expected to work, under what conditions, and for whose benefit. The workplace, particularly in the global corporate system,

functions not only as an economic institution but also an ideological place where values such as compliance, efficiency, and professionalism are internalized and constructed by the relevant parties (Hartmann, 1979; Vogel, 2013).

The Accidental Office Lady by Laura Kriska is a memoir that offers strong potential for cultural and literary analysis as it uses narrative techniques that are often associated with literary writing, such as first-person narration, dramatic scenes, symbolic elements, and introspective commentary. Through these techniques, Kriska portrays her experiences as the first American woman to work as a “regular employee” at the headquarters of Honda Motor Company in Tokyo, Japan. By treating the memoir as a literary text, the work can be interpreted not only as a record of the author’s personal experience, but also as an ideological narrative. It becomes a space where language, structure, and representation reveal the social dynamics of capitalism and patriarchy. Smith and Watson (2019) argue that individuals can negotiate and reproduce the dominant social order by turning personal experiences into “cultural performances of the self.”

In *The Accidental Office Lady*, the importance of the analysis lies in how the memoir portrays the corporate workplace of gender-based system of control. Kriska’s experiences as a Western foreign woman entering Japanese corporate culture show how the logic of patriarchy and capitalism can intersect within today’s modern institution. Marxist-feminist theorists such as Vogel (1983), Hartmann (1979), and Federici (2004) argue that capitalism is built upon a gendered labor organization, in which (re)productive labor is divided and women’s subordination

is normalized. Vogel (2013) further explains that capitalism transforms domestic and emotional labor into an invisible foundation for economic accumulation.

In corporate culture, women often perform certain forms of labor that are shaped by gendered expectations. Japan is no exception. In Japanese corporations, women may be expected to show patience, cheerfulness, obedience, and emotional support as part of workplace harmony. These expectations can be understood as a form of effective discipline that benefits the organization economically.

Gender inequality continues to exist in Japan, especially in the business sector, because of traditional social expectations and economic structures. In today's globalization era, these inequalities are not always eliminated. Instead, they may be reinforced when patriarchal standards are integrated into capitalist systems. Liu (2024) states that capitalism turns social relations into a tool of gender control. In this context, Marxist feminism is useful because it reveals the interconnected nature of class and gender exploitation (Bhardwaj, 2019).

Previous studies on *The Accidental Office Lady* have generally explored the memoir from various perspectives, but most of them are still limited to the surface phenomena experienced by Kriska. For Example, Septiana (2007) examines gender discrimination against Kriska in her corporate life through several indicators of unfairness in employment, such as uniform regulations and domestic office duties. Another study conducted by Susanti (2007) focuses on the clash of work ethics between American and Japanese cultures and how Kriska is able to dynamically adapt to Japanese corporate life. Although both studies make valuable

contributions, their approaches tends to be descriptive and not yet examining the wider structures of power that shape the people's experiences.

In contrast from the above previous studies, recent studies have begun to use Marxist-feminist frameworks to examine the structural and ideological aspects of gender inequality. In literary studies, Akhter (2025), Larasati and Kasih (2023), and Saragih et al. (2024) conceptualize women's labor as a form of economic exploitation and ideological constructions. Akhter (2025), for example, uses Silvia Federici's theory to analyze Mohsin Hamid's *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* to show how unpaid domestic and reproductive labor becomes the foundation of patriarchal and economic systems. Meanwhile, Larasati and Kasih (2023), in their research on Adichie's *Americanah*, highlight the intersection between race, gender, and migration in the commodification of women's labor. Saragih et al. (2024) strengthen this discussion by mapping several forms of systematic exploitation, including ideological compliance and the double burden carried by women workers. Weng (2019), through an analysis of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Les Misérables*, also shows that the logic of capitalism can penetrates romantic relationships and class structure in literary works.

Expanding this structural approach, some scholars have begun to integrate Social Reproduction Theory (SRT) to analyze the relationship between gendered labor and capital accumulation. By adopting Tithi Bhattacharya's SRT framework in the analysis of Mohsin Hamid's *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, Ali and Chandio (2024) argue that women's domestic, emotional, and reproductive labor becomes an invisible foundation for the success of male capitalist subjects. Deckard

(2024) further expands this framework through the perspective of world literature and ecocriticism. The study shows that the Markandaya's novels, *Sembène* and *Tekin*, represent women's daily labor not only as an object of capitalist exploitation but also as a potential space for organized resistance. Okoth (2024) and Sánchez-Russo (2024) also contribute to this conversation by showing how narrative form itself can be shaped by reproductive structures. Their studies suggest that the novel is capable of making visible the forms of labor that capitalism renders invisible. De Loughry (2024) develops this framework by combining Federici's theory of witch hunts with ecofeminist social reproduction theory, showing through Yaba Badoe's works how global resource extraction is directly connected to women's reproductive lives. Houlden (2024) similarly traces of what she calls "reproductive violence" in Pat Barker's *Union Street* and Mike McCormack's *Solar Bones*. Her findings reveal that neoliberalization intensifies the burden of social reproduction on women's bodies across generations.

Despite these important frameworks, previous studies have not yet applied Marxist feminist literary criticism or Social Reproduction Theory to *The Accidental Office Lady*. This gap is important because Kriska's memoir offers a story about how Japanese corporate culture organizes and controls women's labor in the workplace structures.

Laura Kriska, an American woman who completed her degree in Japanese Studies and accepted a job offer as the first American Trainee at the headquarters of Honda Motor Company in Tokyo, Japan. However, the image she had imagined

about Japanese corporate life was immediately challenged by reality on her first day at work, when she was required to wear uniform intended only for women.

Kriska's career started from simple tasks, such as serving tea to office executives and cleaning her boss' desk. As time progressed, she moved to the public relation division and later became involved in developing training programs for Japanese employees who would be placed in America. During her working life, Kriska struggled to adapt to traditional Japanese corporate culture, but she gradually learned to understand and survive in it. The peak of her journey is marked with her initiative to campaign for making the use of women's uniforms optional. This initiative resulted in a response beyond her expectations.

This memoir becomes evidence of an outsider's journey into the center of Japan's corporate world. It describes issues of gender inequality experienced by women workers in different parts of the world, while also highlighting the importance of cultural sensitivity in a working environment that is different from one's own culture.

Therefore, this study aims to fill the gap by reading *The Accidental Office Lady* through a Marxist-feminist lens, with particular attention to how social reproduction operates within the specific context of Japanese office culture. The memoir has rarely been examined as a literary text within Marxist-feminist criticism. Previous research mostly focuses on intercultural communication or general gender issues, while its potential as a critique of globalized capitalist patriarchy remains underexplored.

B. Research Questions

Based on the background above, this study formulates the following research questions:

1. How is social reproduction depicted in Laura Kriska's *The Accidental Office Lady*?
2. How is social reproduction naturalized to exploit office ladies in the memoir?

C. Significance of the Study

This study offers theoretical, practical, and academic significance. Theoretically, this study expands the use of Marxist-feminist literary criticism by connecting feminist theory to the capitalist logic of production, discipline, and commodification represented in *The Accidental Office Lady*. It shows how capitalist ideology operates beyond economic relations by shaping social reproduction and naturalizing the exploitation of office ladies in workplace. Through this perspective, the study reveals how corporate culture may reinforce patriarchy by presenting women's labor, obedience, and emotional discipline as part of professionalism.

Practically, this study draws attention to subtle control mechanisms that continue to exist in global business contexts, such as gendered expectations, emotional regulation, and hierarchical conformity. By examining Kriska's experiences as a Western woman negotiating Japanese corporate patriarchy, this research shows how women from different cultural backgrounds may still experience systemic inequity hidden behind modern corporate values. This understanding is expected to encourage readers, educators, and professionals to

reflect more critically on workplace practices and to support more equal, inclusive, and gender-sensitive working environments in both local and global contexts.

Academically, this study contributes to the development of Marxist-feminist analysis in non-fictional life writing, which is sometimes disregarded in literary criticism than fictional works. It addresses an academic gap by bringing together Marxist-feminism and Social Reproduction Theory in the analysis of Laura Kriska's memoir, *The Accidental Office Lady*.

D. Scope and Limitation

This study focuses on Laura Kriska's *The Accidental Office Lady* (1997), a memoir about her experiences as a foreign woman working in a Japanese corporation. The scope of the study is limited to the depiction and naturalization of social reproduction in the memoir. The analysis uses Silvia Federici's concept of social reproduction as the main theoretical framework, supported by Marxist-feminist perspectives on women's labor, capitalism, and patriarchal control.

The limitation of this study lies in its text-based nature. The analysis is based on explicit and implicit textual evidence found in the memoir. This study does not conduct empirical research on Japanese corporate culture, nor does it compare the memoir with other literary works. As a result, the findings are limited to the representation of social reproduction and women's labor within *The Accidental Office Lady*.

E. Definition of Key Terms

1. **Memoir** is a form of life writing in which, writers recount and interpret their own life experiences. According to Couser (2012), memoir is the literary face of a fundamental human activity: the narration of our lives in our own terms. In this study, *The Accidental Office Lady* is understood as a memoir, or specifically business memoir because it presents Laura Kriska's personal and professional experiences in a corporate workplace.
2. **Marxist Feminism** is a theoretical perspective that connects women's oppression to capitalist economic structures. According to Hartmann (1979) and Vogel (2013), Marxist feminism argues that gender inequality is related to the exploitation of women's productive and reproductive labor. In this study, Marxist feminism is used to examine how women's labor in the corporate workplace is shaped by both patriarchal expectations and capitalist demands.
3. **Naturalization of social reproduction** refers to an ideological process in which socially constructed inequality is made to appear normal and natural. In relation to women's labor, naturalization occurs when women's domestic or supportive work is treated as something naturally attached to women rather than as labor shaped by social structures (Armstrong, 2020). In this study, the naturalization of social reproduction refers to the way women's supportive labor in the office is presented as ordinary and part of corporate professionalism.
4. **Social reproduction** refers to the activities, relations, and institutions that produce and reproduce labor power in capitalist society. According to Carlin and Federici (2014), social reproduction or reproductive work includes various

forms of labor that support people's ability to work, such as domestic work, child-raising, emotional support, and other caring activities. In this study, social reproduction refers to the gendered forms of labor performed by office ladies in the corporate workplace. This theory serves as the most extensive and comprehensive analytical framework. Emotional Labor, commodification, and invisibilization are examined as the specific forms, processes, and outcomes of such social reproduction in the corporate environment depicted in the memoir.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter presents the theoretical foundations and scholarly discussions relevant to the analysis of *The Accidental Office Lady* within the scope of Marxist-feminism. This study uses Silvia Federici's concept of social reproduction as its theoretical lens to examine how capitalism and patriarchy intersect in structuring women's labor and subordination. The naturalization of social reproduction is also used as a supporting concept to explain how women's unpaid, invisible, and feminized labor sustains both domestic life and formal workplace structures. These perspectives are used to understand how gender, labor, and power operate within corporate environments, particularly in the context of Japanese corporate culture.

A. Marxist-Feminist Approach in Literary Studies

Recently, there has been renewed interest in applying Marxist and Marxist-feminist perspectives to literary works, particularly as researchers reconsider how capitalism, social reproduction, and gender are portrayed in narrative forms. Several streams of scholarship are especially relevant to this study. The first concerns the renewal of Marxist criticism across regional literatures. The second includes theoretical works that revisit social reproduction and Marxist-feminist critiques of capitalism. The third consists of applied studies that use Marxist-feminist perspectives to read novels and other narrative forms. These studies show that Marxist-feminist themes are still relevant in examining literary texts.

First, edited volumes and special issues have argued for the ongoing relevance of Marxist methods to literary studies. Recent work, for example, has refocused Marxist critique in African literary studies and has more widely called for renewed class-based readings of literary works in the context of global capitalist restructuring. This approach offers methodological and political values for researchers who combine class and gender analysis (Fyfe, 2020).

Second, theoretical discussions of social reproduction and Marxist-feminist criticism have gained increasing interest in recent years. Scholars have reexamined the ways capitalism relies on unpaid and undervalued reproductive labor, e.g., childcare, housework, and emotional support. These forms of labor are considered essential to capitalist accumulation and therefore need to be made visible in cultural and literary analysis. This strand of criticism that broadens the scope of Marxist feminism by connecting reproductive labor to precarity and gendered consequences of the economy. It also encourages literary critics to pay attention to representations of invisible labor in narrative texts (Lange, 2021).

Third, since around 2020, an increasing number of applied studies have used Marxist-feminist perspectives to interpret specific literary and cultural works. Several case studies show how Marxist-feminist analysis can reveal the commodification of women's bodies and labor, the normalization of gender roles, and the relationship between economic systems and narrative representation. Studies of literary works in some journals, for example, use Marxist-feminist perspectives to examine how characters' reproductive responsibilities, class limitations, and gendered expectations are narrated and normalized. These applied

studies often employ close reading and social-historical contextualization to connect textual elements (e.g., dialogue, narration, and symbolism) with the material realities faced by women under capitalism (Pinontoan et al., 2024).

While the above study trends successfully apply Marxist-feminist frameworks to fictional and cinematic texts, they rarely extend the analysis to life-writing or memoirs. As a result, the ideological function of organizational rituals in corporate cotexts is still underexplored. Furthermore, although studies on social reproduction and Marxist-feminism emphasize emotional and reproductive labor, there is still limited research that connects these concepts to the everyday rituals, clothing rules, and symbolic practices of corporate life. This study addresses that gap by examining *The Accidental Office Lady* as a memoir that represents the relationship between women's labor, corporate discipline, and capitalist patriarchy.

Among the various schools of thought within the Marxist-feminist tradition, Silvia Federici's Theory of Social Reproduction occupies a distinctive position and is highly relevant to this study. Classic Marxist-feminist thinkers such as Hartmann (1979) and Vogel (1983) have made important contributions by showing how capitalism and patriarchy intersect in shaping gender inequality and the division of labor. However, these frameworks tend to focus on productive work, that is, work that enters the wage system and produces measurable commodities. What is often less theoretical in such approaches is the vast area of work beyond the wage relationship: cooking, care, cleaning, emotional maintenance, and the daily reproduction of human capacity. Federici identifies this gap not simply as negligence, but as a structural feature of capitalist ideology itself. His theory of

social reproduction does not simply add reproductive labor to the existing Marxist-feminist framework, but rather reorients the entire analysis by arguing that capitalism cannot function without this hidden foundation, and that the systematic devaluation of reproductive labor is one of the most effective mechanisms of exploitation of capitalism. Federici's framework is therefore well suited to analyze *The Accidental Office Lady*, in which women's work does not operate primarily through wages and factory production, but rather through daily rituals, body discipline and affective appearance in corporate life.

B. Silvia Federici's Social Reproduction

This study uses Silvia Federici's theory of social reproduction as written in as its main analytical framework. Within Marxist-feminist tradition, Federici argues that capitalism depends on the exploitation and control of women's labor, both paid and unpaid. The exploitation operates through several processes, including naturalization, invisibilization, and work discipline. Her theory is useful for this study because it helps explain how women's labor is often treated as ordinary, supportive, and naturally feminine, even though it plays an important role in sustaining capitalist institutions.

1. Theoretical Foundations

Federici's theory builds on the classic Marxist-feminist school of thought, but at the same time significantly expands on it. If Marxist-feminism in general argues that capitalism and patriarchy intersect to produce gender-based exploitation, then the classical approach often focuses primarily on productive

labor, i.e. work that enters the wage system and produces surplus value. Federici shifts the center of analysis towards reproductive work: work that sustains life, regenerates labor, and maintains the social conditions that allow productive work to take place. This shift is not simply an expansion of the scope of the subject, but a theoretical reorientation that reveals how capitalism depends on the entire domain of work, which is predominantly carried out by women who are simultaneously exploited and denied recognition as work. Historically, women have often been positioned as the main actors in biological and social reproduction. This includes childbirth, childcare, domestic work, emotional support, and the maintenance of workers' daily lives, especially male workers (Federici, 2004). According to Marxist-feminist thinkers, this reproductive role guarantees the continuity of the labor force from one generation to the next. However, it remains structurally unrecognized in the wage system.

Federici (1975) in her book *Wages Against Housework* expands this criticism by arguing that household work, such as cleaning, cooking, raising children, and providing emotional care, functions as an unpaid subsidy for capital accumulation. She does not view this neglect as a simple mistake, but as part of a structural system. By refusing to recognize reproductive labor as real labor, capitalism shifts the burden of human reproduction onto women's bodies, time, and energy.

Furthermore, women are often placed as a reserve of flexible and low-cost labor. They are pushed into subordinate positions not because their contributions are less important, but because capitalism has made their work look economically

invisible. In this context, women's labor is important to the system, but it is not fully acknowledged as 'productive' labor.

In *Caliban and the Witch*, Federici (2004) traces the historical roots of capitalism by examining how violence against women and the control of reproductive work became central to the formation of capitalist society. She argues that the transition to capitalism required the subjugation of women's bodies and the limitation of reproductive capacities within the structure of the family. Thus, women's unpaid domestic labor became a hidden foundation that sustained the wage labor system.

Unlike classical Marxist theory, which often focuses on production in the factory, in *Revolution at point zero*, Federici (2012) emphasizes the importance of social reproduction. It refers to all forms of labor needed to sustain life and also regenerate the labor force; this includes childcare, caregiving, emotional maintenance, and household management. These forms of labor may not always produce commodities directly, but they make paid labor possible. Federici (2012) also extends this argument into the neoliberal economic sphere. She shows that contemporary capitalism continues to exploit the value of women's work and emotional service while presenting them as expressions of women's natural femininity. As a result, exploitation does not appear as labor exploitation, but as something that is considered normal and inherent in women.

Before proceeding to the specific mechanisms of social reproduction, it is necessary to clarify the conceptual boundaries between the four key terms used in this study, namely social reproduction, emotional labor, commodification, and

invisibilization. These four concepts are interrelated, but operate at different levels of analysis, and the differences between them are important to maintain the accuracy of interpretation in this study.

Social reproduction is an extensive framework in this study. This concept refers to all forms of work, both domestic, emotional, and institutional, that sustain human life and regenerate the workforce. Emotional labor, first theorized by Hochschild (1983) and then developed by Wharton (2009), is one of the concrete forms of reproductive labor: the conscious and consistent management of expression, tone of voice, and affective behavior in the workplace. In other words, social reproduction describes the structural logic of gender-based exploitation, while emotional labor identifies the specific affective and performative practices through which that logic is carried out.

Commodification, in Federici's sense, refers to a capitalist process in which women's affective capacities are absorbed by the corporate system and converted into economic value. Doing emotional labor does not automatically mean commodification. Commodification occurs at the moment when the results of the labor are; A welcoming smile, a gentle voice, a attentive presence that is systematically taken to serve the image or productivity of the company, while at the same time not being recognized as work that requires expertise on the grounds that it is a natural expression of femininity. Invisibilization, ultimately, is the ideological result of successful naturalization. When reproductive and emotional labor has been sufficiently naturalized as feminine qualities, they are no longer recognized as labor

at all, neither by the institutions that utilize them, and often not by the women who do them.

2. Commodifications of Women's Labor

Commodification refers to the process of transforming human capacity, activity, or relation into economic value. In Federici's perspective, women's labor is commodified into two interconnected ways. In Federici's (2004) perspective through *The Caliban and the Witch*, women's work is commodified through two interrelated ways. First, women are often involved in paid work that provides low wages and puts them in marginalized positions. Second, women also do unpaid reproductive work that secretly sustains capital accumulation.

In corporate environments, this logic extends into administrative, emotional, and supportive tasks. Hochschild (1983) argues that in the formal workplace, the management of feelings, appearances, and interpersonal attention is a form of work that is systematically demanded of workers but is rarely recognized as a contribution that requires expertise. Kindness, appearance, attentiveness, patience, and emotional care shown by women are often treated as natural feminine attributes rather than as forms of labor. Because these qualities are considered naturally attached to women, they are often not recognized as productive contributions that deserve proper appreciation or compensation. This concept is important for understanding how women's work can be exploited even within formal workplaces.

3. Corporate Space as a Site of Reproductive Labor

Although Federici's theory of social reproduction is primarily constructed from the analysis of domestic labor, Bhattacharya (2017) argues that the logic of social reproduction extends beyond the household and into any institutional space in which worker capacity is produced and maintained. This is particularly relevant in contexts where women's work is organized to support male productivity and maintain organizational hierarchies, as shown by Acker (1990) in her theory of gender-structured organizations.

Women's entry into the Japanese corporate world did not necessarily disrupt the logic of reproductive work. Instead, it often moved this logic into a new domain. During Japan's postwar economic development and the strengthening of salaryman system in the 1950s and 1960s, women were integrated into corporate structures, but not always as equal professional subjects. They were often positioned as supporting figure whose work maintained the daily activities of the organization. The office lady (OL) system institutionalized a gender-based division of labor in which men occupied productive positions with increasing career path and wages each times, while women carried out administrative, relational and emotional work that is necessary to maintain the conditions for male productivity. From Federici's perspective, this arrangement reflects the movement of domestic logics into corporate culture.

Within such a corporate structure, OL performed functions that were closely related to reproductive roles in the household. These functions included preparing and serving tea, maintaining office cleanliness, managing interpersonal

relations, and meeting the needs of superiors and executives. Although these tasks may not produce added value in the classical Marxist sense, they are important for maintaining the smooth operation of the corporate environment. They support male workers' productivity by reproducing the social and affective conditions needed for paid labor. Therefore, through Federici's framework, the work of OL can be viewed as a form of socialized reproductive labor. It is reproductive work absorbed into the formal workspaces, but is still undervalued and insufficiently recognized.

This absorption of reproductive labor is maintained through the naturalization of femininity. In *Caliban and the Witch*, Federici (2004) argues that capitalism conceals reproductive labor by framing exploited capacities, such as caring, emotional support, patience, and interpersonal harmony, as natural expressions of femininity rather than as skills with economic value. In the context of Japanese corporate culture, this can be seen in ideal image of OL. Her kindness, appearance, obedience, and willingness to serve are often viewed not as professional competencies, but as natural qualities of women. As a result, the corporate system avoids the need to recognize these contributions as labor that deserves proper compensation.

This naturalization is further strengthened through bodily discipline and appearance. Uniform regulations and appearance standards made the female body part of the reproduction of patriarchal corporate order. OL are seen as feminine supporting figures, but not as independent economic subjects with equal professional aspirations. Therefore, the Japanese corporate office can be understood not only as a workplace but also as a site where femininity is reproduced,

disciplined, and institutionalized. In this process, constructed femininity is absorbed into the service of capitalist and patriarchal accumulation.

C. Naturalization of Social Reproduction

In the Marxist-feminist framework, naturalization refers to an ideological process in which social relations that are historically and economically constructed are presented as if they were natural, biological, and unchangeable facts. In other words, conditions created by capitalism and patriarchy are made to appear “natural” or inevitable, so that the exploitation is no longer easily recognized as exploitation.

Federici (2004) identifies naturalization as one of the main ideological mechanisms that allows capitalism to exploit women’s labor without facing systematic resistance. She argues that the transition to capitalism requires not only material accumulation but also ideological control. This control worked by constructing femininity as a set of natural dispositions that served the needs of the system. Before women’s labor could be effectively exploited, women had to be made to believe that such work was an expression of who they were, rather than a demand imposed by the system.

The above process is closely related to reproductive labor. Reproductive labor, as theorized by Federici (2004), refers to a broad set of activities necessary to sustain human life and regenerate the workforce on a daily and generational basis. These activities include parenting or child caring, cooking, cleaning the house, and

maintaining the emotional balance in the household. Federici (2004) emphasizes that reproductive labor does not stand outside capitalism. On the contrary, it is one of the hidden foundations that makes capitalism possible.

Federici (2004) also shows that the historical transition to capitalism could only be realized through the systematic control of women's reproductive capacity. This process confines women within the domestic sphere while also taking away the economic recognition they deserved. As a result, became essential to capitalism, but it was not fully acknowledged as real labor.

Therefore, reproductive labor becomes one of the main mechanisms through which gendered exploitation is made to appear normal. Naturalization does not operate only in an abstract way. It works through specific mechanisms that can later be identified in the memoir. These mechanisms include unpaid subsidy, the commodification of affective capacities, and the invisibilization of gendered labor.

1. Unpaid Subsidy

The first aspect of reproductive labor is its function as an unpaid subsidy for capitalist accumulation. Federici (2004) argues that the exclusion of domestic labor from the wage system is not simply a negligence, but a deliberate structural feature of capitalism. When women cook, clean, and care for workers without pay, they reduce the costs that capitalists would otherwise need to spend to reproduce labor. This allows capital to shift the cost of human reproduction onto women's bodies, time, and energy.

Federici argues that wages function not only as payment but as a political tool. Wages create a hierarchy between waged and unwaged workers. As a result,

those whose work is outside the wage system are considered less productive or less valuable. This hierarchy naturalizes the subordination of women's reproductive labor as labors are necessary for capitalism but still outside formal economic recognition.

2. Commodification of Affection

The second aspect identified in Federici's framework is the commodification of women's affective capacities. In *Beyond the Periphery of the Skin*, Federici (2020) argues that under neoliberal capitalism, the exploitation of women's labor has expanded beyond the domestic sphere into paid and corporate work environment. Women's emotional sensitivity, interpersonal attentiveness, and affective availability are absorbed into the paid economy.

However, these capacities are often not recognized as skilled labor that deserves proper compensation. Instead, they are framed as natural extensions of femininity. Capacities that were historically formed through domestic reproductive roles are used within formal workplaces without being fully acknowledged as productive contributions. This process shows how femininity itself can be turned into an economic resource while still being treated as something natural.

3. Invisibilization of Gendered Labor

The third aspect of Federici's framework is invisibilization. Invisibilization refers to the process by which gendered labor is made invisible as labor. In *Revolution at Point Zero*, Federici (2012) argues that successful naturalization leads to invisibilization. When women's work is sufficiently naturalized as an expression

of femininity, it can no longer be recognized as work that has the economic value and deserves compensation.

Invisibilization operates through two mutually reinforcing pathways. First, it works through institutional channels. Corporate systems often do not formally measure, record, or compensate the reproductive work of OL as a productive contribution. Second, it works through ideology. The women who perform the work, and the institutions that benefit from it, may not recognize the work as labor.

Duffy (2013) asserts that the economic invisibility of reproductive labor is a deliberate structural feature, not a historical accident. The system maintains this invisibility because the making reproductive labor visible would require recognition of its value and could lead to demands for fair compensation.

Taken together, these three dimensions (i.e., unpaid subsidy, commodification of affective capacities, and invisibilization of gendered labor) form a useful framework for understanding how reproductive labor operates as a structural support for capitalist accumulation. Federici's theory of reproductive labor is valuable for this study because it reveals the mechanisms through which women's labor sustains a larger system while remaining economically and socially undervalued.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHOD

This chapter presents the method used in conducting the study. It consists of research design, data source, data collection, and data analysis.

A. Research Design

This research uses literary criticism with a text analysis method. This approach is used because the object of the study is a literary text, and the main purpose of the study is to interpret how social reproduction and its naturalization are represented in Laura Kriska's *The Accidental Office Lady*. The analysis is conducted through a Marxist-feminist perspective. Social Reproduction Theory by Bhattacharya (2017) is also used as a supporting reference to clarify the wider space of Social Reproduction Theory as a critical framework.

The study is mainly guided by Federici's concept of social reproduction, which explains that capitalism depends not only on productive labor but also on reproductive labor. Reproductive labor refers to the labor that is needed to sustain life and generate labor power, including domestic, emotional, and supportive work (Federici, 2004). In this study, Federici's theory is used to examine how gendered labor operates within the corporate environment represented in the memoir.

The concept of the naturalization of social reproduction is also used as a supporting framework. This concept helps explain how women's reproductive labor is made to appear natural, feminine, and ordinary, rather than as work that has

economic and social value. In this study, Federici's framework is operationalized through three analytical concepts: unpaid subsidy, commodification of affective capacity, and invisibilization of gendered labor.

Unpaid subsidy is used to examine how the reproductive tasks performed by OL are treated as natural feminine behavior rather than as productive work that deserves compensation. *Commodification of affective capacity* is used to analyze how femininity, appearance, and emotional attentiveness are constructed and used as corporate assets. Meanwhile, the *invisibility of gendered labor* is used to trace how reproductive work becomes unrecognized as work, both institutionally (through the absence of formal recognition and career advancement) and ideologically (through the internalization of gendered subordination by women who perform it).

B. Data Source

The data source of this study is Laura Kriska's memoir *The Accidental Office Lady*, originally published in 1997 by Tuttle Publishing. This study uses the 2011 Singapore printed edition, which consists of 256 pages. This work was chosen as the research object because Kriska's firsthand account as a Western woman adapting to Japanese corporate culture offers a unique narrative for examining the mechanisms of social reproduction and reproductive labor in a formal work environment.

The data were taken directly from the text of the memoir. They consist of words, phrases, sentences, dialogues, and narrative passages related to workplace

routines, gender roles, organizational rituals, and women's labor in the Japanese corporate environment presented in the memoir.

C. Data Collection

The data were collected through close reading techniques. The process was conducted through the following steps:

1. Reading Laura Kriska's *The Accidental Office Lady* thoroughly to gain a comprehensive understanding of the memoir.
2. Rereading the memoir closely to identify passages related to workplace norms, gendered rules, office ladies' duties, and corporate hierarchy.
3. Marking relevant dialogues and narrative descriptions that show the representation of social reproduction and the naturalization of women's labor.
4. Selecting the data that are most relevant to the research questions.
5. Classifying the selected data based on the main theoretical concepts used in the study, namely social reproduction, unpaid subsidy, commodification of affective capacity, and invisibilization of gendered labor.
6. Organizing the classified data to support the analysis in Chapter IV.

D. Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed based on Silvia Federici's Social Reproduction Theory and the concept of naturalization. The analysis was conducted through the following steps:

1. Identifying the context of each selected passage in relation to Kriska's experience and the gender dynamics in Japanese corporate life represented in the memoir.
2. Interpreting the data based on the depiction of social reproduction, i.e., the uniform as institutional discipline, morning rituals as the daily reproduction of gender hierarchy, and emotional compliance as social reproductive mechanisms.
3. Relating the findings to Federici's concepts of unpaid subsidy, commodification of affective capacity, and invisibilization of gendered labor as three dimensions of the naturalization of social reproduction.
4. Explaining how each dimension shows the way the Japanese corporate system institutionalizes reproductive labor, so that women's contributions become economically invisible and structurally uncompensated.
5. Synthesizing the findings to answer the research questions concerning how social reproduction is portrayed and how it is naturalized to exploit office ladies in Laura Kriska's *The Accidental Office Lady*.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the findings and their discussion. The discussion connects the findings with Silvia Federici's theory about social reproduction and the supporting concept of the naturalization of social reproduction.

A. Social Reproduction Depicted in *The Accidental Office Lady*

This section examines how social reproduction, as theorized by Silvia Federici, is depicted in Laura Kriska's memoir *The Accidental Office Lady*. This memoir tells the story of Laura Kriska as the main character and narrator. In this analysis, social reproduction is examined through gendered rituals, institutional norms, and other aspects of Japanese corporate life.

Kriska was an American trainee at the headquarters of Honda Motor Company in Tokyo. At that time, she was the first American trainee at the corporation. Her expectation of Japanese corporate life was immediately challenged on her first day at work, when she was required to wear a uniform issued only for women. Instead of functioning as a neutral workplace rule, this everyday norm becomes a mechanism through which the corporate system reproduces patriarchal hierarchy. It shapes women's roles, bodies, and behaviour in ways that support male productivity while making women's contribution seem naturally invisible.

Through a close reading of Kriska's experiences with the mandatory uniform as institutional discipline, morning rituals as performance of femininity, and expectations of emotional compliance, this section argues that the Japanese corporate office operates as a site of institutionalized social reproduction, where femininity is constructed to serve the logic of capitalism and patriarchy.

1. The Uniform as Institutional Discipline

This subsection examines about how the mandatory office lady (OL) uniform in Honda's corporate environment does not simply function as workwear. Rather, it operates as a form of institutional discipline that erases women's professional agency and individuality. Following Federici's argument that women's bodies have historically been used as sites where patriarchal-capitalist orders are reproduced and displayed, this analysis reads OL uniforms as a visual mechanism through which the corporate system communicates gender hierarchy. The uniform transforms women from individual professional subjects into interchangeable supporting workers whose subordinate position is marked on their bodies before they speak or perform any single work task.

"On my first Day my first day of work at Honda's headquarters in Tokyo, I walked into the seventh floor Administration Department and stared into a black-haired sea of Honda employees. The Japanese men were dressed in dark business suits, but the women wore blue polyester knee-length skirts and matching vests. I was shocked to see only women in uniforms. They looked like tall Girl Scouts, missing only merit badges and knee socks." (p.21)

This passage occurs on Kriska's first day working at Honda's Headquarters in Tokyo. As an American woman entering the Japanese corporate world for the first time, She is immediately struck by the different ways men and women are visually represented in the office: all the female employees wear identical blue

polyester uniforms, while the male employees are free to wear any dark business suits of their own choices. This visual contrast becomes Kriska's first encounter with the structure of the workplace. Her comparison of the women to "*tall Girl Scouts*" also suggests that the uniform does not present them as mature professional workers, but as a disciplined and feminized group.

The passage shows how uniform functions not only as office attire but also as an institutional marker that visually distinguished women from men in the corporate hierarchy. Men are given freedom in their clothing and are positioned as professional individuals with autonomy. In contrast, women are grouped into an indistinguishable collective. Their professional identities are erased and replaced by a collective identity as supportive female workers. The uniform becomes a visual sign of gendered subordination.

This finding is in line with Federici's view that capitalism maintains gender hierarchy through systematic mechanisms of body discipline. Federici (2004) argues that the female body has historically been used as a medium through which patriarchal power relations are reproduced and publicly displayed. The OL uniform operates in this way. It transforms the female body into an instrument of institutional communication. What is communicated is not women's personal identity, but their subordinate function within the corporate structure.

"Please, take it," said one of the women handing me a skirt as though it was the latest design from Issey Miyake. The material was thin and insubstantial. This uniform offered no expression of status-it sent an entirely different message. It said, "I'm just a woman; don't take me seriously and don't treat me with respect because I am as replaceable as this polyester." (p.22)

The above passage occurs shortly after Kriska arrives in her department, when two Japanese women take uniforms from out of boxes and give one to her.

Kriska describe this ironically. The women give her the uniform as if it were a fashionable design by Issey Miyake, but Kriska sees it as something thin, insubstantial, and degrading. This contrast shows the gap between how the system normalizes the uniform and how she interprets it as a symbol of gender degradation.

Maybe the most important point in this passage is Kriska's interpretation of the message carried by the uniform. The uniform does not need to be explained through direct instruction from superiors because its meaning is already communicated through its material and design. The thin polyester fabric suggests that the wearer is not worthy of serious professional respect. The uniform does more than erasing individual differences. It also shows that women workers can be easily replaced. The uniform becomes a material object that dehumanizes women by transforming them from professional subjects into interchangeable objects in the corporate system.

This dynamic reflects the idea of Frederici (2012) about commodification of women's labor. Women's identities are often transformed into economic value that can be exploited according to the needs of the system. Thus, the uniform is not merely clothing. It is an instrument of commodification as it reduces women to interchangeable units of labor, not individuals with professional value.

"I could see by the woman's expression that I was expected to wear the uniform; my resistance would not be understood. But I felt like I should put up some kind of fight. I wanted to formally register my displeasure before submitting. Shouldn't someone take note that I was consciously making a choice to fit in here? I wanted credit for compromise, but instead I got a perfunctory smile. I took the skirt behind the privacy curtain to change." (p 23)

This passage occurs after Kriska receives the uniform. As she stands before her Japanese female colleagues, she feels the desire to refuse it. However, she also

realizes that her refusal would not be understood by the people around her. This moment shows a clash between Kriska's American sense of individual choice and the pressure of Japanese corporate collectivism, which demands uniformity. In the end, she submits to the rule, but she is fully aware that her submission is a forced compromise, not a genuine acceptance.

The passage also indicates that Kriska does not merely experience subordination; she also observes and articulates its mechanism. The phrase "*my resistance would not be understood*" suggests that the system not only forces compliance, but also removes the space in which resistance can be understood as a legitimate response. The system does not need to explicitly prohibit resistance because it has already made resistance appear inappropriate. Kriska's desire for "credit for compromise" shows that she wants her conformity to be recognized as a conscious decision. However, the "*perfunctory smile*" she receives implies that the system does not acknowledge her discomfort. It only expects her compliance.

That action can be understood from Federici's concept of naturalization. Federici (2012) in *Revolution point zero* argues that patriarchal capitalism operates not only through direct coercion, but also through naturalization, in which women's subordination is made to appear normal and voluntary. The uniform rule is not presented as an explicit act of discrimination, but as an ordinary office practice. Kriska's dissatisfaction is absorbed into the routine of obedience. In this way, the corporate system turns forced adjustment into something that appears natural. Acker (1990) note that gendered expectations are often maintained through mechanisms that do not appear as discriminatory.

However, to understand why uniforms are more than just a dress code, it is necessary to explore the logical flow more explicitly. The uniform is not applied neutrally but specifically target the female body by imposing a certain identity in the wearer. Women who wear the uniform are visually categorized as support workers that easily recognizable, interchangeable, and associated with the function of serving, not leading or giving order. This position is what Federici calls the reproductive position, not merely domestic work, but any form of work that maintains a gender hierarchy and conditions for the capitalist system of production to continue. In the office, the uniform became a visual marker of that reproductive position. It is indeed did not explicitly prohibit women, but placed them in certain roles that felt “natural” because they were already institutionalized in the daily office routine.

To conclude, the mandatory uniform in memoir functions as a disciplinary tool that organizes the women’s body and naturalizes their supporting role in the corporate system. Through the uniform, the office becomes a site where social reproduction is visually and institutionally maintained. Women’s bodies are made to communicate obedience, replaceability, and femininity, while the corporate system presents these meanings as normal parts of professional life.

2. Morning Rituals and the Performance of Femininity

This part analyzes how the structured morning routine of OL at Honda functions as a daily reproduction of gender hierarch. The routine can be understood as a ritual practice through which the conditions of male productivity are prepared, maintained, and normalized even before the official workday begins. Instead of

treating these routines as insignificant office habits, this analysis reads them through Federici's framework as institutionalized social reproduction. The OL prepare the physical, emotional, and affective environment that allows the work of male employees and executives to run smoothly.

"For ten or twenty minutes the chores in the office were attended to. The women used white cleaning rags to wipe the desktops and clean the receivers of each of the two-dozen telephones. They sharpened pencils from the desks in the executive office and made sure that all the cabinets were unlocked." (p.47)

The passage describes the morning routine performed by the OL at Honda before the official working hour begin. Kriska observes how the women collectively and systematically clean the office and its furniture, e.g., tables, telephones, and wardrobes. These activities are performed to prepare the office environment before the arrival of male employees. These tasks are not presented as occasional or additional duties, but as a structured part of their daily routine.

The morning cleaning routine is daily ritual of social reproduction without clear recognition or reward. The OL arrive early not only to perform their formal duties, but also to prepare the social conditions in which male employees can begin their work comfortably. This reflects the adoption of domestic logic in the corporate space. Just as women in the household are often expected to prepare the home before male family members begin their day, the OL at Honda prepare the office before the executives arrive.

Federici (2004) argues that reproductive labor is the hidden foundation that supports productive labor. Without preparatory work, productive labor cannot take place smoothly. The morning cleaning rituals of the OL reflect this argument because they reproduce the social conditions that allow male employees to work

immediately upon arriving at the office. Duffy (2013) supports that argument by explaining that reproductive labor often includes activities that maintain social life condition, including the maintenance of the work environment. Historically, this work has often been delegated to women without economic recognition.

The following passage shows the moment when the official work bell rings at Honda. Kriska observes that all eleven female secretaries are already in their assigned positions, with their bodies and appearances prepared for the workday.

“At 8:40 A.M., when the official work bell sounded, all eleven secretaries were obediently sitting in their assigned seats, hair freshly combed, vests buttoned up, and smiles caffeinated for the day.” (p.48)

The passage shows that the OL prepare not only the office space but also their own bodies and expressions as part of the morning routine. The details of *“hair freshly combed,” “vests buttoned up,”* and *“smiles caffeinated for the day”* suggest that femininity itself becomes part of the work performance. The women are expected to appear neat and pleasant before the official workday begins.

Furthermore, the phrase *“smiles caffeinated for the day”* suggests that smiling is not a spontaneous expression of happiness, but a pre-designed form of emotional performance. Like coffee (caffeine) that prepares the body for work, the smile prepares the female worker to perform affective labor for the whole day. With combed hair and a buttoned uniform, the smile becomes part of the feminine appearance presented in the office. Thus, the female body becomes a work instrument that must be conditioned every morning, just like the desks, telephones, and cabinets that have been cleaned and arranged.

The interpretation illustrates Federici's (2020) work, *Beyond the periphery of the skin*, which argues that under neoliberal capitalism, the exploitation of

women's labor extends to their emotional capacities. Smiles, friendliness, and attentiveness are often constructed as natural expressions of femininity rather than as forms of labor with economic value. Thanem and Knights (2005) also argue that bodies and emotions associated with women or feminine are often marginalized in comparison with rational and masculine forms of professionalism. The morning routine at Honda illustrates this mechanism because the women's smiles and appearances are prepared as part of the workplace order.

The next passage appears later in the memoir, when Kriska has a clearer understanding of the work structure in her department:

"In addition to taking turns doing the 'A' and 'B' chores, each secretary started the day by cleaning the directors desks with a white terry-cloth rag from the cleaning bucket in the pantry." (p.102)

She explains that the secretaries divide their daily cleaning duties into two categories ('A' and 'B'), which are performed on a rotating basis. However, outside this rotation, there is one task that all secretaries perform every day: cleaning the directors' desks. This task is not described as part of a formal job description, but it has become an institutionalized practice within the OL's daily work.

The categoried of 'A' and 'B' chores reveal that the reproductive labor of OL is systematically organized. These tasks are not accidental or based only on individual initiate, but as a scheduled system. The fact that cleaning the directors' desks is performed by all secretaries every day shows that this is not voluntary service, but a structured obligation attached to the OL position. The women's labor is therefore shaped by their gender within the corporate hierarchy.

Carlin and Federici (2014) argue that global capitalism organizes social reproduction as a structured and institutionalized system. Women bear the burden

of reproductive labor not simply because of individual choice but by their structural position in the capitalist-patriarchal hierarchy. The ‘A’ and ‘B’ chores at Honda reflect this institutionalization. Reproductive labor is organized and scheduled formal corporate routines, yet it remains unrecognized as productive work that can support the career of OLs. Vogel (2013) strengthens this argument by explaining that women’s subordination in the capitalism is not an anomaly, but a structural feature that helps reproduce labor power without additional costs to capital.

In short, the morning rituals at Honda show how social reproduction operates within the corporate workplace. The OL clean, arrange, smile, and maintain the affective vibe of the office. Through these rituals, the corporate office becomes a space where femininity is performed, disciplined, and used to sustain capitalist and patriarchal organization.

3. Emotional Compliance and the Expectation of Harmony

This section examines how the Japanese corporate system depicted in Kriska’s memoir disciplines women’s emotional expression as a social reproduction mechanism. Emotional compliance refers to the expectation that women should smile, speak kindly, and prioritize the comfort and authority of male colleagues or customers. Therefore, in this analysis, emotional compliance is not seen merely as a Japanese workplace etiquette. Instead, following Federici’s framework, emotional obedience is understood as a systemic demand through which the corporate order regulates how women speak and present themselves in relation to male authority.

The passage below describes the two-day training that Honda provided to Kriska before she started working as a Welcome Lady at an auto show.

"In preparation for my job, Honda provided a two-day training course for me on how to be a Welcome Lady. I learned how to graciously accept business cards and how to delicately decline sexual advances without using the word 'no.' Above all, our job as Welcome Ladies was to smile and create a friendly atmo-sphere for the customers." (p.25)

The training described above is not mainly about product knowledge or technical skills. Instead, it teaches Kriska about how to behave, how to receive business cards properly, and how to refuse sexual harassment without using the word "no." The inclusion of this instruction in formal company training reveals an underlying institutional assumption that women in this position are expected to face inappropriate behavior, but they are not trained to reject it firmly. They are trained to manage it politely so that the comfort of the customer is not disturbed.

The ability to manage sexual harassment becomes part of the Welcome Lady's expected work performance. This is not an informal expectation, but something taught through corporate training. This shows that the corporate system does not merely rely on women's emotional capacities; it actively trains and organizes those capacities for the benefit of the corporate environment. Women's comfort, safety, and dignity are made secondary to the need to maintain a friendly atmosphere for customers.

This condition reflects the argument of Frederici (2004) that women's reproductive capacities are commodified under capitalism. The ability to accommodate and maintain social harmony is transformed into an economic asset for the capitalist-patriarchal system. Thanem and Knights (2005) also explain that bodies and emotions of women, or with what is considered "feminine", are often marginalized when compared with rational and masculine forms of professionalism. In this context, the Welcome Lady's smile and politeness become part of the labor

extracted by the company. Liu (2024) supports this argumentation by arguing that modern capitalism can turn women's social roles into instruments of gender control. Even women's ability to hide discomfort becomes a form of value in such a system.

The next passage depicts the Welcome Ladies' daily routine during the exhibition. Kriska observes that these women not only perform informative tasks such as distributing brochures and explaining product features, but also maintain their appearances throughout the day. At certain moments, they stand on platforms next to Honda products and speak in a soft tone of voice. This depiction positions the Welcome Ladies not only as workers but also as part of the product display.

"Their makeup and glossy pink lips were flawless and checked every hour. All day we smiled and greeted customers and handed out brochures. On special occasions, the Welcome Ladies stood on platforms next to sparkling new Honda products and used the soft, agreeable tones of formal Japanese to explain its features into a microphone." (p.25)

That their makeup is checked every hour is not presented as a personal choice, but as part of the expected performance standard. This means that feminine appearance must be actively and consistently maintained throughout the workday. The women's appearance is treated almost like a work instrument that must be kept in proper condition. Their "soft, agreeable tones" also show that their voices are regulated as part of the same performance. They are expected not only to speak, but to speak in a way that produces comfort, politeness, and approval.

Through this description, Kriska shows how the Welcome Ladies' bodies, faces, and voices are organized to support the corporate display. Their smiles, makeup, and tone do not function as personal expressions. They are part of the company's strategy to create a pleasant atmosphere around its products. In other words, women's bodies and emotions are used to increase the attractiveness of the

corporate image. The Welcome Ladies stand beside the cars not only to give information, but also to beautify and soften the commercial space.

This arguments is related to Federici's argument in *Revolution at Point Zero* (2012) that capitalism extracts value from women through physical labor and appearance. "Femininity" becomes an economic asset. Wharton (2009) explains that emotional labor in paid work involves the management of facial expressions, tone, and bodily appearance. However, this labor is often devalued because it is treated as a natural expression of femininity rather than as a learned skill. The image of Honda's Welcome Ladies standing on platforms next to new cars illustrates this mechanism clearly, i.e., that the women and the products are displayed together to produce commercial attraction and generate value for the company.

B. Naturalization of Social Reproduction to Exploit Office Ladies

This section analyzes how the naturalization of social reproduction operates as a mechanism of exploitation for OL in the Japanese corporate system in Kriska's memoir. By naturalizing women's reproductive labor as a normal expression of femininity, Honda's corporate system is able to benefit from female labor without openly acknowledging it as exploitation. This section answers the second research question by identifying three mechanisms through which naturalization operates in Kriska's stories: the function of OL's work as an unpaid subsidy, the commodification of women's affective capacities, and the invisibilization of gendered labor.

1. Tea Service as Unpaid Subsidy

This subsection identifies tea service as one of the most visible and ritualistic tasks performed by OL in Honda's corporate environment. In Federici's framework, unpaid subsidy refers to reproductive labor that supports productive work without being fully compensated. Tea service becomes a good example as it directly supports male executives' comfort and productivity, yet it is framed as a natural feminine gesture rather than as an economic work. Through the following passages, this section argues that tea service at Honda is more than a cultural custom. It is a structural mechanism that naturalizes women's subordination by making their reproductive labor appear as voluntary feminine hospitality.

"For a week I observed my fellow OLs at work, rushing to answer the phone and patiently analyzing the piles of mail that were delivered six times a day. They served tea and cleaned ashtrays, they washed cups and then started all over again. I had not been asked to serve tea, but I knew there was no way to avoid it." (p.49)

The passage describes Kriska's first week observing her OL colleagues in Honda's administration department. She notices their continuous rhythm of work: answering the phone, sorting mails, serving tea, cleaning ashtrays, washing cups, and repeating the same tasks. Although Kriska has not yet been directly asked to serve tea, she already understands that the task is unavoidable. This awareness does not come from explicit instruction, but from her understanding of the workplace structure.

The description of the OL's work cycle in this passage reveals one of the main characteristics of reproductive labor: it is repetitive and never fully completed. Unlike productive labor, which produces accumulable outputs, reproductive labor maintains the conditions that allow other work to continue. The tea is served,

consumed, and then the cup must be washed so that tea can be served again. The ashtray is cleaned, but it will become dirty again. This cycle does not produce a lasting product. Because of this repetitive nature, the work is easily absorbed into routine and is not considered as a productive contribution.

Why tea service is categorized as reproductive labor and not customer service or administrative duty? that question needs to be answered by looking at who the work is directed to and how it is recognized. Customer service is directed to external parties such as clients or customers, and is explicitly recognized as part of business functions. Administrative duties, although internal, are still recorded as formal responsibilities that are recognized in the job structure. Tea service at Honda doesn't meet both; it is not directed outside the company, it is not listed in the official job description, and there is no additional compensation for it. In contrast, tea service is directed inward to meet the comfort of male colleagues and superiors and its also carried out not because there are formal instructions, but because there are implicit gender-based expectations. This is what puts it within the framework of reproductive labor: it is work that reproduces the conditions of comfort and smooth productive work of others, performed by women as a group, without being recognized as an economic contribution. When Kriska realizes that she can't avoid tea service even though no one directly asks for it, it shows that this work operates not through contracts or administrative rules, but through gender normalization that is already embedded in the office structure.

Federici (2004) argues that capitalism often makes reproductive labor invisible because it does not appear in the form of commodities. Unlike factory

labor, which produces countable objects, reproductive labor produces conditions and comfort. Duffy (2013) expands this argument by explaining that reproductive labor includes activities that create and maintain the social conditions necessary for productive work to take place. Kriska's awareness that serving tea is unavoidable, even without explicit instruction, shows that this invisible labor operates through implicit structural pressures. This is the mechanism of naturalization: women are expected to know and perform the task as if it naturally belongs to them.

"All the secretaries repeated this routine for each executive. Tea was served mid-morning to whoever was at his desk, and again in the afternoon. If an executive had a meeting or returned from an outside event, tea welcomed him back." (p.49)

This passage describes the standardized tea-serving system in Honda's administration department. Tea is served twice a day to each executive who is present at his desk, once in the mid-morning and again in the afternoon. The system is also responsive. If an executive has just finished a meeting or returned from an outside event, tea is served again as a gesture of welcome. Kriska's phrase "*tea welcomed him back*" personifies the drink as if it expresses an emotional function. The tea does not only satisfy a physical need; it creates a sense of comfort.

The tea-serving system described by Kriska functions as a service infrastructure designed to ensure the comfort and continuity of male executives' productivity. The phrase "*tea welcomed him back*" suggests that tea, and the women who serve it, operates as an emotional transition mechanism that helps executives move smoothly from one work situation to another. This is a hidden form of emotional labor. It does not serve physical needs only, but it also manages the psychological and emotional conditions of male workers so that they feel

comfortable and ready to work. The problem is that this labor is carried out by women for men without being recognized as valuable professional work.

Carlin and Federici (2014) argue that, in a global capitalist system, reproductive labor serves as an invisible subsidy that allows capital accumulation to occur without paying the full cost of reproducing labor power. The company benefits from well-maintained working conditions without fully acknowledging or compensating the labor that creates those conditions. Honda's tea-serving system illustrates this mechanism. By ensuring that every executive is welcomed with tea whenever he is at his desk, the company maintains the emotional and physical conditions that support male productivity. However, the cost of maintaining these conditions is shifted to the OL, whose work is considered as routine feminine service rather than as labor that contributes to the company.

In the context of naturalization, this cyclical and invisible nature of tea service is more than just a structural feature. It is one of the most effective mechanisms of naturalization of women's labor that must be repeated continuously without producing a visible output. It is treated as if it were not real work. As a result, the exploitation hidden behind the routine tea-serving becomes difficult to be identified as exploitation.

"I noticed a small paper tag attached to the waistband. In Japanese characters it said 'Ms. Tanaka.' She must have been the employee who had previously worn this uniform. I wondered if she had retired from work to marry. Had she done her time and, like so many women, lived with her parents to save money for her big wedding day? I knew that she had not been promoted out of the uniform because all women, no matter what job they did or how long they had worked at Honda, wore the same uniform." (p.23)

The passage occurs when Kriska receives a used uniform that still has the tag of its previous owner, Ms. Tanaka. This detail leads Kriska to reflect on the

possible fate of the woman who had worn the uniform before. She imagines that Ms. Tanaka may have left her job to marry, which is common for many Japanese women. However, the most interesting point appears in Kriska's conclusion: Ms. Tanaka was not promoted out of the uniform because all women at Honda wore the same uniform, regardless of their position, length of service, or work experience.

The uniform that never changes becomes a symbol of position that also never changes. There is no career path at Honda. Women enter as OL and are marked by the same visual identity, or they leave the company to marry. Their work, no matter how long or how well it is performed, does not accumulate into career capital that can support professional advancement. In this sense, the uniform represents the limit of women's mobility in the corporate structure.

The finding is related to the concept of reproductive labor as an unpaid subsidy. OL invests their time, energy, and working years in maintaining corporate productivity, but their contribution is not returned in the form of recognition, promotion, or career opportunity. Ms. Tanaka's uniform, which is passed on to Kriska, becomes a metaphor that the OL position is designed to be replaceable. The person may change, but the role remains the same.

Federici (2012) argues that one of the ways capitalism exploits women's labor is by preventing it from being accumulated into economic or professional power. Women continue to work, but their labor does not necessarily build a position that allows them to demand greater recognition or compensation. Hartmann (1979) explains that this system is maintained through the synergy of capitalism

and patriarchy. Capitalism benefits from women's cheap labor, while patriarchy helps present this position as natural through the ideology of feminine roles.

Septiana (2007) also notes that gender discrimination in the Japanese corporate system operates structurally through restrictions of women's career mobility. The OL becomes a position with no career path in the corporate hierarchy. Therefore, the used uniform represents not only workplace clothing but also the reproduction of women's subordinate status from one worker to another. Thus, Honda's corporate system keeps women's labor as a continuous unpaid subsidy.

2. Commodification of Affection

This section analyzes the second mechanism of naturalization of social reproduction in the memoir. While the previous section shows how the physical reproductive work of OL is naturalized as a feminine gesture, this section shows how more subtle dimensions, such as appearance, tone of voice, attentiveness, and politeness, are commodified as economic assets for the company. In this process, naturalization operates in a subtle way. Affective capacities that are actually produced as labor appears to be something that women "naturally possess," so that the value extraction from these capacities is not fully recognized as labor.

"Their makeup and glossy pink lips were flawless and checked every hour. All day we smiled and greeted customers and handed out brochures. On special occasions, the Welcome Ladies stood on platforms next to sparkling new Honda products and used the soft, agreeable tones of for-mal Japanese to explain its features into a microphone." (p.25)

The passage describes the daily routine of the OL assigned as the Welcome Ladies during Honda's product exhibition. Kriska observes that these women not only perform informative functions, such as greeting customers and distributing

brochures. They also maintain their physical appearance throughout the day. At certain moments, they stand on platforms next to new Honda products and use soft voices to explain the product features. This physical placement connects the women and the cars as objects of display that support each other in attracting attention.

That their makeup is checked every hour shows that the feminine appearance of the Welcome Ladies is not a matter of personal aesthetic choice, but a performance standard that must be maintained consistently. Flawless makeup and glossy pink lips become part of the labor that they are expected to produce. Along with their “*soft*” and “*agreeable*” tone of voice, the quotation presents women whose physical and vocal presence is carefully arranged to create customer comfort and commercial appeal. In this sense, the Welcome Ladies are placed equally as Honda products. The women and the cars are displayed together to produce economic value for the company. The cars represent technological and commercial products, while the women’s bodies, smiles, and voices create an attractive and welcoming environment around those products. Thus, women’s affective and bodily performance is commodified to support the company’s image.

To understand how commodification works here, it’s important to distinguish it from emotional labor. Emotional Labor is the activity like: managing facial expressions, regulating tone of voice, and maintaining appearance as a form of work that is done consciously and consistently. In this context, welcome ladies do emotional labor every time they update their make up every hour, maintain a smile, and use a soft tone of voice throughout the day. However, emotional labor itself has not automatically become commodification. Commodification is a

capitalist process that occurs when a company takes the affective capacity of the woman and converts it into an economic asset that in this case, Honda's brand image and the commercial appeal of its products. Women don't just work; the value of their attractive work is absorbed by the company and positioned as a competitive advantage, while the capacity itself is not recognized as a skill that needs to be fully compensated for as it is considered to be the nature of women. This is what distinguishes commodification from mere assignment: not only are women asked to do something, but the affective results of their work are transformed into economic value that benefits the company without equal recognition.

Wharton (2009) explained that emotional labor in the corporate context involves the management of facial expressions, tone of voice, and body appearance as part of work, not as spontaneous expressions, but as skills that are learned and displayed regularly. However, what happened at Honda went beyond emotional labor as an activity. Liu (2024) shows that modern capitalism converts women's affective and relational capacities into gender-based control instruments: that capacity generates economic value for the company, but is still positioned as a natural feminine quality and therefore does not require compensation. This is the process of commodification in the sense of Federici's, namely when women's reproductive and affective work is not only taken advantage of, but also naturalized so that its exploration does not appear as to be exploitation.

“‘Wouldn't you like to sit here?’ she asked the speaker, motioning to another chair that looked more comfortable. ‘Shall I order some coffee?’ she asked him, waiting for his nod before placing the call. When we started the meeting, she sat somberly, as though banished from conversation, and quietly translated his words. She seemed to withdraw into herself, occupying the smallest space her body could possibly manage. When the lecturer stopped for a break, she

asked if she could clean his ashtray. Her comments were barely acknowledged with smoky nods.” (p.29)

The passage above describes the behavior of a Japanese female translator in a formal meeting at Honda. Kriska observes how the woman, despite having valuable linguistic skills, positions herself far below the male speaker she serves. She offers him more comfortable chair, orders coffee for him, translates his words quietly, and even asks permission to clean his ashtray during the break. Her behavior is directed to minimize her own presence while increasing the comfort of the male speaker.

The phrase “*occupying the smallest space her body could possibly manage*” is one of the clearest descriptions of the commodification of women’s affective capacity in the memoir. It is true that the Japanese work culture in general values hospitality and humility, including for men. But what distinguishes it from just cultural or corporate etiquette is the contrast between translator’s professional capacity and the role that he or she performs. As a translator, she has the skills that should place her as an important participant, but she instead performs service tasks that in the context of Honda are consistently carried out by women, not men with equal positions. If it’s purely a matter of corporate hierarchy or culture, even junior men will be expected to do the same, but in reality this is not the case. This indicates that what is at work here is not just general cultural norms, but cultural norms that are applied differently based on gender. This translator performs not only intellectual labor by translating, but also bodily and emotional labor by making herself smaller, quieter, and less visible. Her professional skill as a translator should position her as an important participant in the meeting, but it is overshadowed by

her performance as a silent and attentive female assistant. This shows a multilayered form of commodification. Her intellectual capacity is used as translation labor, while her affective capacity, i.e., her ability to serve and avoid taking up space, is commodified as an added value that is never or compensated.

Thanem and Knights (2005) argue that emotional labor carried out by women includes not only the management of other people's emotions but also the management of their own physical presence. The reduction of the body, the softening of the voice, and the minimization of space are forms of subordination. In the translator's case, her smallness is a sign of how the corporate system expects women to make themselves useful without becoming too visible.

"Tom explained that he was the only male secretary in the group, but unlike the female secretaries, it was his job to attend the president wherever he went, whether it was the Tokyo Auto Show or a factory in Brazil." (p.41)

The above passage appears when Kriska gets acquainted with Tom, the only male secretary in her department. Tom explains the fundamental difference between his duties and those of female secretaries. While the office ladies work inside the office and perform localized administrative and reproductive tasks, Tom accompanies the president wherever he goes, from the Tokyo Auto Show to a factory in Brazil. This difference is not presented as a matter of skill or seniority, but as a difference shaped by gender.

The contrast between Tom and the female secretaries reveal the spatial dimension of the commodification of women's capacities in the Japanese corporate system. Although Tom and the female secretaries are both called secretaries, their opportunities are not equal. Tom is given mobility and access to broader corporate spaces, while the women are localized in the office. Their affective and reproductive

capacities are commodified to maintain the immediate office environment, not to support their own professional ambitions. Tom's role suggests that male secretarial work is connected to leadership, travel, and executive access. In contrast, the work of the OL is tied to the domestic space of the office.

Tom's existence as a male secretary does not indicate that the secretary's job is even free from feminization, but it's quite the opposite. The fact that Tom runs a different version of the same job shows that the feminine dimension of secretary work, that are reproductive duties, direct service, and limited space is specifically attached to women, not to the position itself. Tom had the same title, but he was exempt of those duties and he granted broader access. This means that it is not the work itself that is feminized, but the women who performed it.

Hartmann (1979) argues that, in the relationship between capitalism and patriarchy, the gender-based division of labor is not merely a reflection of labor market value. It is a mechanism that allows men to maintain access to more mobile, prestigious, and economically valued positions, while women are given more localized work. Grimshaw et al. (2017) also explain that gender segmentation in the labor market places women in less prestigious positions, which reproduce inequality within capitalist labor systems. The contrast between Tom and the Honda OL illustrates this difference clearly. Within a similar position, gender determines who receives mobility and who is localized.

In the context of naturalization, the reduction of the translator's body and the localization of the OL show how women's affective capacities are treated as natural feminine qualities. Actions that actually require conscious effort, such as

politeness, attentiveness, and emotional control, are designed to appear as ordinary feminine behavior. Because these capacities are naturalized, the labor involved in producing them is not compensated properly. Thus, the commodification of affection in Kriska's memoir shows how the corporate system extracts value from various aspects: women's physical work, bodies, voices, and emotions.

3. Invisibilization of Gendered Labor

This section examines the third most significant dimension of the naturalization of social reproduction in Kriska's memoir: the invisibilization of gendered labor. As Federici (2004) explains, invisibilization is the result of successful naturalization. When women's work is sufficiently naturalized as an expression of femininity, it is no longer recognized as work that has economic value and deserves compensation, either by the system that benefits from it or by the women who perform it. This section argues that invisibilization in Honda's corporate system operates through two pathways: (1) the institutional path, in which the system does not formally record or compensate the reproductive labor of OL; and (2) the ideological path, in which women themselves may no longer recognize their work as valuable labor. The following passages reveal how these two forms of invisibilization operate in Kriska's memoir.

"I knew that she had not been promoted out of the uniform because all women, no matter what job they did or how long they had worked at Honda, wore the same uniform." (p.23)

The above passage is Kriska's reflection on Ms. Tanaka's name label that is still attached to the used uniform she receives at Honda. Kriska realizes that Ms. Tanaka most likely left her job to get married, not because she is promoted. From

this detail, Kriska reaches a conclusion that no woman at Honda is promoted out of the OL uniform, no matter how long or how well they work. The uniform, therefore, is not just a clothing for work but a symbol of a never-changing position.

The passage reveals invisibilization in its institutional form. Women's work cannot be accumulated into visible career advancement. The same uniform is worn by a new OL and by those who have worked for years, so there is no visible distinction that reflects experience or dedication. The system erases the traces of women's labor from the institutional record. Their work is performed and used by the company, but it is not recognized as something that can produce professional progress. In this way, what becomes invisible is not only women's work itself, but also the value of that work in the institutional calculation.

Federici (2012) argues that one way capitalism exploits women's labor is by preventing it from being accumulated into economic or professional power. Women can continue to work without ever building a position that allows them to demand recognition or compensation. Ms. Tanaka's uniform, which is passed to Kriska, is a metaphor for this mechanism. The OL position is replaceable and leaves no trace of individual contribution. Septiana (2007) notes that the restriction of women's career mobility in the Japanese corporate system is one of the examples of institutional discrimination.

The next quotation is the moment when Kriska clearly articulates her awareness of the systemic controls that regulate every aspect of her presence at Honda, including how she speaks, dresses, and behaves

"Corporate authority already determined how to speak, what to wear, and how to behave. When would my opinion count?" (p.30)

The rhetorical question “*When would my opinion count?*” shows that Kriska begins to realize that the system is not designed to acknowledge or value her individual perspective. This is a moment of critical awareness that emerges partly because Kriska is an outsider who has not fully internalized the corporate norms.

Kriska’s question shows a deeper experience of invisibilization. She is not only saying that her opinion is ignored. She is questioning whether the system has any mechanism through which women’s opinions can be counted at all. This shows that invisibilization affects women’s physical work and their existence as subjects who have perspectives, preferences, and autonomy. In other words, women are not only made invisible as workers, but also as thinking subjects whose voices deserve institutional recognition.

Armstrong (2020) explains that one damaging effect of the capitalist-patriarchal system is the removal of women’s voices and agency from public and institutional spaces. In this context, women are made invisible as subjects with authority. Kriska’s question, therefore, becomes important because it exposes the absence of space for women’s opinions. Her questioning shows her position as an outsider. Unlike the other OL who may have already internalized the system, Kriska still perceives the absence of recognition as a problem.

The next passage presents Kriska’s observation of an OL colleague who teaches her a long apologetic formal phrase to begin a question.

“It seemed as familiar to her lips as her own name.” (p.30)

While Kriska has to repeat the phrase many times in order to master its sound, her OL colleague speaks it as naturally as saying her own name. The phrase

“as familiar to her lips as her own name” is an example of ideological invisibilization. The OL colleague cannot easily distinguish between the discipline imposed by the system and her own identity. The apology and subordination have become so familiar, and this is the success of ideological invisibilization. The exploited subject no longer sees the discipline as something imposed because it has become part of her speaking and acting habits.

Akhter (2025), in contemporary Marxist-feminist analysis, argues that the moments of internalization are strong indicators of successful invisibilization as an ideological mechanism. When the subject is not able to distinguish herself from the discipline that shapes her, the system does not need any external coercion to sustain exploitation.

“In the pantry after work the women would complain or worry out loud about a director, and the others would console her. ‘He’s so impatient. He’s always making his own appointments and then doesn’t tell me. And why doesn’t he ever call when he’s out of the office?’ they would say.” (p.51).

The passage above describes an informal moment in the pantry after working hours, when the OL gather and share complaints about the directors’ behavior. The complaints are specific and personal. They talk about directors who are impatient, make their own appointments without informing them, or leave the office without calling. In this private space, the women comfort one another and express frustrations that cannot be easily expressed in the formal workplace. This situation shows that the OL are aware of the directors’ behavior that makes their work difficult. However, their complaints focus on individual behavior rather than the wider structure that places them in a subordinate position. They do not question

why they should manage the directors' schedules, why the burden of coordination falls on them, or why this form of responsibility is treated as their natural duty.

The passage reveals invisibilization through ideological path. The women recognize discomfort, but the structural source of that discomfort is hidden. Their frustration exists, but it is directed toward particular individual directors rather than toward the corporate system that organizes their labor. In other words, they desire a more cooperative director, not a different structure of labor. This shows how naturalization works: exploitation becomes embedded in daily routines so that complaints about its structural system is never revealed. Namun penting untuk dibedakan: perempuan-perempuan ini bukan tidak sadar. However, it's important to make a distinction that these women are not that unaware, they are aware that something is weighing them down. What they lack is structural awareness, they identify the problem as lying with a specific director, rather than with the system that placed them in that position in the first place. This distinction is important: it is not a matter of unawareness, but rather of awareness limited by naturalization.

Ali and Chandio (2024) argue that moments in which women express frustration without developing it into structural awareness indicate the false consciousness in capitalist-patriarchal systems. In this condition, exploited subjects feel the burden of their position but are not yet able to identify its broader structural cause. Armstrong (2020) also explains that Marxist feminism often sees false consciousness as one of the effects of successful naturalization. When exploitation has been invisibilized, those who experience it may recognize the discomfort but not fully articulate it as structural exploitation.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The chapter presents the conclusion of the findings in relation to the research questions concerning social reproduction and the naturalization of social reproduction in Laura Kriska's *The Accidental Office Lady*. It also provides suggestions for future researchers and readers who are interested in examining social reproduction and its naturalization in literary works.

A. Conclusion

This research aims to examine how social reproduction is depicted in Laura Kriska's memoir and how it is naturalized to exploit office ladies in the Japanese corporate system. By using Silvia Federici's Social Reproduction Theory as the main theoretical framework and the concept of naturalization as a supporting framework, this study identifies the mechanisms through which women's labor is organized, normalized, and made invisible in a formal corporate environment.

Regarding the first research question, the analysis shows that social reproduction in the memoir is depicted through three interrelated dimensions of Japanese corporate life. *First*, the obligation for OL to wear corporate uniforms does not only function as professional attire. It also becomes an instrument of institutional discipline that suppresses women's individuality and marks them as replaceable workers in the corporate hierarchy. *Second*, the morning routines, such as cleaning director's desks, preparing appearances, and organizing the workspace

before official working hours, show how gender hierarchy is reproduced everyday. Through these routines, the conditions that support male productivity are prepared and maintained by women without any additional compensation for the time and energy they dedicate. *Third*, emotional compliance, such as the expectation to smile, speak politely, and control personal feelings for the comfort of male authority or customer, functions as a social reproductive mechanism that disciplines women's emotions and bodies in the service of the patriarchal-capitalist order.

Regarding the second research question, the study finds that the naturalization of social reproduction operates through three mutually reinforcing mechanisms. *First*, tea serving functions as an unpaid subsidy because the repetitive reproductive work that supports male executives' productivity is framed as a natural gesture of feminine hospitality. As a result, its economic value is not fully recognized or compensated. *Second*, the commodification of affective capacities turns women's appearance, tone of voice, and emotional attentiveness into economic assets for the company. However, these capacities are presented as natural expressions of femininity rather than as skilled labor. *Third*, the invisibilization of gendered labor becomes the result of successful naturalization. When OL's reproductive labor is successfully naturalized as feminine behavior, it is no longer recognized as valuable work, either by the corporate system that benefits from it or by the women who perform it. This invisibilization operates institutionally (through the absence of formal recognition and career mobility) and ideologically (through the internalization of gendered expectations by the OL themselves).

B. Suggestions

Based on the findings of this study, several suggestions can be offered for further research. *First*, this study is limited to one memoir written from the perspective of an American woman as an outsider in the Japanese corporate system. Further researchers may expand the data by analyzing texts written from the perspective of Japanese women themselves to gain a deeper understanding of how invisibilization is internalized by those who grow up within the system. A comparison between insider and outsider perspectives may also enrich the analysis of how naturalization operates in different narrative positions.

Second, this study focuses on the Japanese corporate context of the late 1980s as described in a memoir published in 1997. Future researchers may examine whether similar mechanisms of social reproduction and naturalization still operate in contemporary Japanese corporations, especially after changes in labor policy, gender equality discourse, and workplace culture since the early 2000s.

Third, this study applies Social Reproduction Theory to a memoir, a writing genre that has received less attention in Marxist-feminist literary studies. Future researchers may extend this framework to other narrative genres, such as corporate autobiography or workplace fiction, in order to explore how capitalist-patriarchal ideologies are reproduced, negotiated, or challenged in different representations of the world of work.

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