*The Forgotten Role of Home-based Manufacturing Work in Italy.*

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**Abstract:** In textiles, clothing and leather industry female workforce has historically played a crucial role at global level. This role has been particularly experienced in Italy because of the relevance of this industry in the economic growth of the country, since the last century. In this industry, women - with their ‘natural aptitude to pay attention to details’ and the scarcity of other employment opportunities – have found: a way to escape from the boundaries of their household; an opportunity to acquire new skills; their economic emancipation but also a source of exploitation and self-exploitation. Women employed in this industry, trough formal and informal work, have added value to many low capitalized firms and also contributed to the international recognition of fashion houses. Nevertheless, women’s commitment has been largely obscured and inadequately paid, especially those who worked at home for the manufacturing firms. In small business areas and in industrial districts the territory has played a central role in the industrialisation process and has defined the identity of the local communities. The social morphology of the territory has also created a specific productive structure, by shaping the organisation of economy, which has based its growth on labour intensive and small scale productions. It has also been proved that for a long time its institutions have been the cornerstone of its growth; they have assured a strong social cohesion and a high level of productivity, at the same time. In the industrialisation process the role of family has been meaningful: it has cut down the cost of workers, thanks to an increase in casual wage employment. The economic growth of traditional manufacturing sectors has been based not only on the enlarged family structure but especially on the role that women have played in order to assure the social cohesion while allowing the saving of welfare provisions. The widespread of the work at home explains the peculiarity of this productive structure: women, by working at home, both for family and for industrial production, have freed other family members from domestic tasks and have allowed them to work all day outdoors. So, women played a strategic role in the industrialisation process: specialised productions in textiles, clothing and leather industry have been maintained and extended by the high skill level of women who work at home, while their wages and the social recognition of their work have always been very low. The paper will analyse the home-based work in Italy in a long term frame by deepening the existing connections between this working activity and both the economic structure and the lack of welfare provisions. In particular, the paper will focus on the relation between the patriarchal division of labour and the state regulation in Italy and its effects on women’s condition.