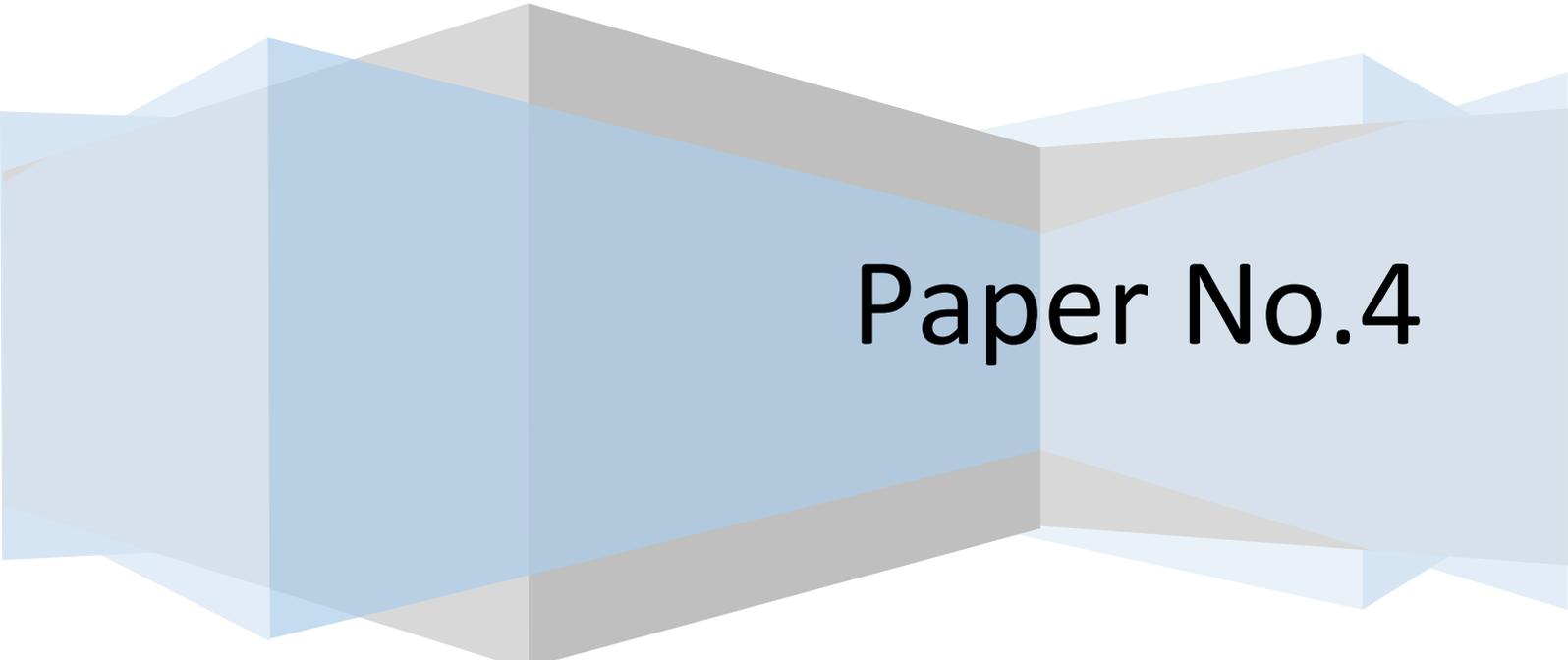


The Libertarian Ideal

**For secession, decentralism, mutualism and organic tradition**

# **Constructing the Household Economy**

Chris Shaw



**Paper No.4**

# Constructing the Household Economy

*This essay looks at the problems surrounding the organisation of resistance amongst home-based workers. It investigates a variety of home-based worker movements and activist groups that are developing resistance through multiple different logics. The major problem for organisation currently emanates from the amount of control held over home-based workers by a combination of patriarchal household control and corporate centralisation which contracts and subcontracts out to households, integrating them as flexible production units in wider neo-Fordist forms of production and exchange. From this reality many discursive narratives are produced that legitimate the position of home-based workers in global supply chains. They are seen as micro-entrepreneurs or as a form of Westernised worker, who are in need of legal representation and regulatory apparatuses that provide stability while maintaining degrees of risk and flexibility. This masks the degrees of precariatization these labour forces face. Thus resistance that overly focuses on the identity of home-based workers as 'workers' is problematic as such identities are still integrable to globalised production processes and corporate control. Instead, looking toward new ethical/value systems that develop a wider household political economy, like certain movements are already beginning to do, can develop new infrastructures and means of resistance against these centralised forms of control.*

The conception of a household economy is mired in the simplistic understanding of households as outlets of consumption, generally seen as the domain of the housewife where the products of the market are converted into their latent use value. "When people today use the term 'household' they tend to think of a family or, if they have a social science background, of a small number of co-residents who consume together"<sup>1</sup>. However such a view ignores the mass of household forms that exist in the modern world, and the socio-economic relations and institutions that are borne from such a heterogeneity of households. In this sense, the household is a conceptual structure in the wider economy, something not simply defined in relation to capitalist market relations.

Instead, it can be seen in "a broad institutional sense"<sup>2</sup> as a separate economic unit, with its own diverse logics and forms of knowledge that, while amenable to markets, is distinct and multifaceted. From this understanding, we can see that the household contains particular power relations, from its integration into global supply chains and capitalist modes of production through to the production of discursive power when female household workers are classified as housewives or mothers, making their work part of a wider nexus of understandings that suggest household work is purely domestic and consumption-oriented. However, as Foucault noted "where there is power, there is resistance"<sup>3</sup>, with many forms of household organisation developing resistance against these overt power relations and attempting to create regulatory apparatuses and alternative socio-economic foundations which can challenge the power of supply chains and corporate distribution networks in both the Global North and South.

These resistance movements have ranged from the local to the global, focusing on recognition of the importance of household workers to the wider economy, and attempting to use this recognition to push for reforms to employment law and workers rights which understand the needs and precarities of household workers. While there have been successes amongst the multitude of these movements, from greater recognition to the enactment of particular rights through government legislation, there have been significant barriers to organisation and to the development of a full recognition of households as conceptually distinct socio-economic units. Even with greater recognition, the integration of households into global production chains has not been significantly critiqued, and alternatives to it have received little in the way of development or construction.

Rather the rise of neo-Fordism/post-Fordism, a method of capitalist production characterised by a "major revolutionization of the labour process that tends to replace the mechanical principle" of a division of labour controlled hierarchically with "the informational principle of work organized in semi-autonomous groups"<sup>4</sup>, has led to the integration of household-based production units as semi-autonomous groups in a wider supply chain controlled through corporations who can contract and subcontract work into decentralised, fragmented units. This form of control engenders the artificial separation of households into units of consumption, rather than as complex socio-economic institutions. It is much easier to control households when they are given a distinctly domesticated, feminised identity which limits their recognition as workers, thus limiting claims to rights and the ability to unionise.

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<sup>1</sup> Swedberg, R. 2011, 3

<sup>2</sup> Swedberg, R. 2011, 4

<sup>3</sup> Foucault, M. 1990, 95-96

<sup>4</sup> Aglietta, M. 2015, 167

This discursive guise, where households are treated purely as family-related outlets for consumption, produces a lack of recognition and rights for household workers, leading to a situation of precariatization that has been exacerbated by other institutional events. With the development of a globalised workforce in the both the North and South, new regimes of indebtedness and privatised Keynesianism have developed which encompass the household. Forms of social provisioning that subsidised childcare, housing and other elements of household provisioning have been cut back, with the burden to provide these services being placed on domestic workers and families which raises the cost of living and furthers precariatization. This itself has been given a discursive guise, where the development of a risk society has been painted as something that provides new opportunities, where one can get on in life unencumbered by typical forms of employment and instead be a micro-entrepreneur.

Such a discursive framework provides nominal claims of independence amongst household workers, making them into entrepreneurs who have chosen to take on the risks associated with it. However, the reality is that household workers, both in global supply chains and on the economic peripheries, are under the control of centralised networks of power. Thus resistance needs to move beyond the discursive, where recognition and legislative action is prized, and toward a wider socio-economic critique that places households into a new political economy with different value structures where household workers are seen neither as informal labour nor as some developing entrepreneurial class. This resistance can help develop a wider household political economy that encompasses the diverse movements associated with household workers and the informal economy while at the same time pushing toward an alternative that develops values of reciprocity and communal understanding, and where the global and the local can be bridged under the rubric of new understandings that emplace the household as something more than an outlet of consumption.

### **Globalisation, Production and the Household**

"The employment status of the home-based workers can be seen along a continuum of dependence, from being completely independent to being fully dependent on the contractor/middleman for design, raw material and equipment and unable to negotiate price of the product. They constitute a separate production system forming a different layer or segment both in the product and labour markets"<sup>5</sup>.

This definition of home-based workers encapsulates the full aspect of the household economy. Household workers are neither purely amenable to dependence on contractual work or the global supply chain, but nor are they an independent micro-entrepreneurial that have made a conscious choice. Home-based workers are an extremely important part of the modern economy, constituting a major source of employment internationally (particularly in the Global South) and comprising a significant share of major industries, predominantly within "garment industries, the leather industry, carpet making, and electronics"<sup>6</sup>. These forms of home-based work constitute a major area of employment for women<sup>7</sup>.

Household workers involvement in industry generally runs the gamut of subcontracting or direct contracting by a larger company in an internationalised supply chain. Such can be seen in bicycle production in Ludhiana, or Beedi production. Both relied on a fragmented system of households that could circumvent labour and welfare rights and rely on the social position

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<sup>5</sup> Sudarshan, R. & Sinha, S. 2011, 5

<sup>6</sup> Carr, M., Chen, M.A. & Tate, J. 2010, 127-128

<sup>7</sup> Carr, M., Chen, M.A. & Tate, J. 2010, 128

of women, where their movement was controlled and resistance existed to women leaving the household<sup>8</sup>. With the development of globalisation and a neo-Fordist economy of flexibilised workforces, home-based workers "appear as the optimal labor force for companies seeking flexibility by subcontracting and by hiring contingent workers" due to their vulnerability, isolation and lack of legal protection<sup>9</sup>. House-work has been integrated by companies into global supply chains so as to have access to "a class of flexible and invisible contractual labour, largely female"<sup>10</sup> that is fully amenable to international production flows and the needs of global corporations.

The processes of global integration generally favour the most mobile of individuals and collectivities, particularly the interests and owners of capital. This "mobility of capital"<sup>11</sup> comes to the disadvantage of forms of labour, with the workforce becoming amenable and flexible, in hoc to global production flows. "The net result of these and other trends is that the informal sector, long considered incompatible with economic growth and industrialization, has been expanding in both developed and less developed regions"<sup>12</sup>. Such can be seen in the processes of shea butter production and distribution. The industry has been a traditional element of West African societies, where it was collected and processed by women. Recently, shea butter has become an extremely profitable market in Western countries, thus bringing forth new standards and forms of pricing that accrue benefits to a number of middlemen, exporters and other links in the global supply chain, while these significant cost mark-ups (shea butter can be sold up to 84 times higher than the price female procurers/producers receive for the raw material<sup>13</sup>) do not benefit the original producers in West Africa. "The peripheral workers constitute a labor reserve, allowing the industry to manage labor"<sup>14</sup> and hold control over a set of decentralised socio-economic units, with the functions of control coming through pricing mechanisms and the forms of subcontracting that are maintained vertically, from the top-down.

Globalisation can be seen to be producing a society of control, where the heterogeneous household is made to fit into wider forms of international market exchange, limiting the effectiveness of organisation and resistance. The household is placed within "the corporate form" where the economy is "excised from the domain of transformation"<sup>15</sup> and placed within a society of control that is focused on modulation and the constancy of change<sup>16</sup>. Flexibilisation and a nominal decentralisation of activity is developed, while centralisation within the wider corporation or supply chain produces a power relation that benefits capital. This nominal decentralisation can be seen in the false discourse of independence that home-based workers are supposedly in possession of. Home-based workers aren't under the direct control of an employer/company, yet receive directions from work-givers when it comes to things like assemblage, product design and the outlets and methods of distribution and sale<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> Sudarshan, R. & Sinha, S. 2011, 3

<sup>9</sup> Prugl, E. & Tinker, I. 1997, 1474

<sup>10</sup> Sudarshan, R. & Sinha, S. 2011, 4

<sup>11</sup> Carr, M., Chen, M.A. & Tate, J. 2010, 125

<sup>12</sup> Carr, M., Chen, M.A. & Tate, J. 2010, 126

<sup>13</sup> Carr, M., Chen, M.A. & Tate, J. 2010, 134-135

<sup>14</sup> Carr, M., Chen, M.A. & Tate, J. 2010, 129

<sup>15</sup> Graeber, D. 2006, 81

<sup>16</sup> Deleuze, G. 1992, 4

<sup>17</sup> Prugl, E. & Tinker, I. 1997, 1475

"Most (home-based workers) provide their own means of production" but have "no access to a profitable market or to alternative buyers"<sup>18</sup>.

Such a discursive framework limits the ability for recognition, as the lines between dependence and independence, and voluntary and involuntary action, are blurred beyond recognition within the dichotomous control of the global supply chain, where activity (the means of production) are nominally decentralised while control is centralised. The flows of capital, which control these supply chains and are benefitted by the dynamics of globalisation, are fully deterritorialised (i.e. removed from their social or governmental foundations, and made purely economic) without any subsequent reterritorialisation, whereby governmental or social forces attempt to re-implement a form of control that moves away from pure economism<sup>19</sup>. Welfare and employment rights are effectively circumvented, with the development of recognition amongst home-based workers providing some gains yet still within the wider praxis of globalised capitalism and the control of the corporate supply chain. Such a problem of recognition can be seen with the waste pickers in Pune, India. Within the workforces of waste pickers, women occupy the lowest rung of the employment pyramid, being "scrap collectors or rag pickers"<sup>20</sup> who can face discrimination, police intimidation and general stigma<sup>21</sup> due to their placement in social structures which view waste pickers as existing outside the norms of Indian society. They exist as part of these deterritorialised flows which define the informal economies of India generally, where work is insecure, and women occupy a disproportionate amount of employment within the informal economy. Informal workers (street vendors, home-based workers, waste-pickers, etc.) are seen as the lowest rung on the employment ladder, easily exploited by the machinations of global capital and reinforcing the "links between poverty, informality, and gender"<sup>22</sup>.

Where home-based workers are made integrable to wider production processes, or where they are seen as peripheral and not in need of inclusion, they are made marginal, treated as the problem of other agencies or organisations. They are pushed along its deterritorialising flows, without any subsequent reterritorialisation. Organisation is made extremely difficult in such a fragmented environment, with recognition of home-based worker only one facet for resistance. The whole praxis of the informal economy has become amenable to globalisation and the supply chain, which has resulted in a general precariatization of the household and the workers involved, with pay kept low and control of the means of production centralised within supply networks. When considered with other institutional advents, and the production of a discursive independence-in-name-only amongst informalised home-based workers, this precariatization becomes all-encompassing, limiting autonomy and presenting a significant barrier to organisation and resistance.

### **The Precariatization of Households**

Globalisation's integration of the home-based worker into neo-Fordist production processes and the international supply chain has created a precariatized household and home-based workforce, where "each individual (or household) is to be her own political economy, an informed, self-sufficient consumer of labour markets, personal security markets, and other consumer interests"<sup>23</sup> who can take on risk and have an innate entrepreneurial zeal. This can

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<sup>18</sup> Prugl, E. & Tinker, I. 1997, 1475

<sup>19</sup> Deleuze, G. & Guattari F. 1977, 34-35

<sup>20</sup> Kilby, P. 2013, 215

<sup>21</sup> Kilby, P. 2013, 216

<sup>22</sup> Kilby, P. 2013, 213

<sup>23</sup> Amoore, L. 2004, 186

be seen concurrently with the retreat of the welfare state and the privatisation of social reproduction, with individual households taking on costs of eldercare, childcare and housing provision in lieu of subsidisation by the state. A society of control is produced, with a discursive guise that suggests the taking on of risk, and development of an innate entrepreneurialism is a natural economic progression. Thus we see a false narrative of independence, such as that given to shea butter producers or other forms of home-based worker, which suggests the conception of a micro-entrepreneurial fully independent and with a degree of voluntary autonomy, all the while controlled by the flows of supply chains and the taking on of more risk.

A version of the worker is produced that suggests they be "constantly attentive, constantly attuned to the vagaries of the event" with the developments of globalisation that surround these workers "treated as unquestionable realities that demand a flexible and contingent workforce"<sup>24</sup>. A market citizenship is constructed that treats "individuals (and home-based workers particularly) as abstract and rational economic actors"<sup>25</sup>, with the economy taking the role of a near-perfect market that has provisions for competition and entrepreneurialism and lacks significant entry barriers. There are no real bottlenecks or gendered and racialised understandings. A blank slate is supposedly created through the micro-entrepreneur, who has a full range of choice in their decision-making and use of capabilities. "Market citizenship perpetuates an image...that is classless, genderless and racially and ethnically homogenous"<sup>26</sup>.

In this regard, the ability to organise is significantly limited by such a discursive guise. The informal sector and the home-based workers that inhabit it are portrayed as go-getting businesspeople who take on the risks and costs voluntarily. They become entrepreneurs of the self, taking responsibility for their poverty, precariousness and everyday existence<sup>27</sup>. Such a view can be seen in the work of de Soto Polar, who has written of the need to develop universalisable conceptions of private property and legal regimes which standardise such understandings of property<sup>28</sup>. In contrast, the extralegal institutions that are developed amongst informal labourers and home-based workers are seen as problematic due to their lack of universal quality, instead being parochial and too particularistic. Such a decisive property regime is meant to give micro-entrepreneurs easier access to capital and a solid legal system to rely upon. But this in itself reveals an assumptive framework, whereby private property and the engendering of its attendant rights is the main need or desire of micro-entrepreneurs, or even that many micro-entrepreneurs have made a voluntary choice to move into such positions of precarity. Such a discursive framework, provided legitimacy by the idea that private property and capital are universal concepts, act more as a cover for neoliberal power relations that produce a market citizen. It is easier to limit organisation and forms of resistance when home-based workers only require an extra regulation, or a slight reform to the legal framework. The praxis and scale of production, where the exploitation and integration of home-based workers occurs, is ignored.

This precariatization of the household is further seen with the retreat of the welfare state which produces gendered outcomes. Alongside the contingency of modern work, where workers are mainly placed within the vagaries of flexibilised work patterns and forms of subcontracting, there exist regimes of "privatised Keynesianism" where wealth accrued via

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<sup>24</sup> Amoore, L. 2004, 181

<sup>25</sup> Roberts, A. 2013, 4

<sup>26</sup> Roberts, A. 2013, 5

<sup>27</sup> Lazzarato, M. 2012, 51

<sup>28</sup> Smith, B. 2008, 44

household debt act as the means to provision the necessities of social reproduction<sup>29</sup>. Through such provisioning it is those who control the means to assets (banks, capital owners and the general mobility of international capital) that hold power, with a redistribution of "wealth and social power upward, from the poor to the rich, from women to men and from certain racialised minorities to white men and their families"<sup>30</sup> as the indebted are pushed into vertical relations with capital-owners. The extent of this issue can be seen with the huge levels of household debt in Western Europe, with the UK alone holding £1.8 trillion in debt<sup>31</sup>. This shows the burden on household work, where houses are traditionally seen as sources of consumption. It is as much a discursive problem of recognition (where houses are seen as nothing more than consuming outlets) as it is a problem of organisation. Again, if households are viewed as the outlets of consumption, and home-based workers are either seen as micro-entrepreneurs requiring competitive markets or traditional workers who are under the control of a patriarchal household, then organisation becomes all the more difficult due to the need to break down this discursive barrier. Amongst the shea butter producers, this problem is acutely seen, with workers/producers isolated from each other, and market information centrally aggregated into the higher echelons of international supply chains. Costing and pricing are taken out of the hands of the producers, and placed in the hands of middlemen and corporate actors<sup>32</sup>. Any sense of autonomy or economic independence is a falsity, yet the Westernised narrative of entrepreneurialism and a taking on of risk limits the capability of recognition on a global level, with their exploitation at the micro level remaining.

When it is also considered that these regimes of indebtedness, privatised Keynesianism and work and household-based precariatization are constructed by concrete actors, such as governments and particular interest groups, the capability for micro-level organisation is further problematised. In the case of shea butter producers, West African government's decisions to move toward trade liberalisation will further the centralisation of profits by "allowing foreign companies - rather than local women - to take advantage"<sup>33</sup> of the increased scale of market activity and information.

Similar issues are witnessed amongst the home-based workers of both Bulgaria and Turkey, where governmental choices have led to forms of precariatization amongst households and their labour forces. In Kaloian, Bulgaria, home-based work has developed due to the transition toward capitalism in the post-communist era in Eastern Europe. Women in particular have been affected as social reproduction has been effectively privatised, with forms of local employment and social provisioning removed from their governmental moorings<sup>34</sup>. Amongst the private businesses that grew, many began to use subcontracting in fragmented household systems as a typical form of employment, with women being a major element of this precariatized workforce. Workers rights themselves have received little legislative action, even after Bulgaria's accession to the EU in 2007. In Turkey home-working is also widespread, and exists as a precarious occupation throughout multiple industrial sectors<sup>35</sup>, with women overrepresented as in Bulgaria. However, Turkish legislation has developed strict regulations surrounding the organisation of home-based workers, where worker associations were until recently not permitted to generate income and forced to

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<sup>29</sup> Roberts, A. 2013, 8

<sup>30</sup> Roberts, A. 2013, 8

<sup>31</sup> Ehrenberg, B. 2014

<sup>32</sup> Carr, M., Chen, M.A. & Tate, J. 2010, 137-138

<sup>33</sup> Carr, M., Chen, M.A. & Tate, J. 2010, 138

<sup>34</sup> Bergan, R. 2009, 222

<sup>35</sup> Bergan, R. 2009, 223

register as companies, limiting "the principle of being solidarity-based, which home-based workers identify as key to successful organising"<sup>36</sup>. Further, informalised workers are banned from entering in or forming trade unions.

What is demonstrated here is purposeful governmental action which limits the capacity for home-based workers to organise except in limited, narrow ways (as with Turkish worker associations). The precariatization of the household can itself be seen as a purposeful project, pushed forth by a combination of ideational understandings which paint home-based workers as micro-entrepreneurs and a neoliberal project of rolling back the state, fully deterritorialising private flows of capital which can capture newly-privatised industries and sectors. The development of household indebtedness presents another mechanism of power, pushing forth precariatization and limiting forms of autonomy and independence. The privatisation of social reproduction and the construction of a discursive guise that portrays home-based workers as a micro-entrepreneurial creates a precariatization of the household, allowing for the degradation of social and economic rights. In the context of household workers, this makes their positions even more precarious, as they are in relations of centralised production (their proximity to the global supply chain and the wider corporation) and relations of credit and debt, making them both marginalised and lacking autonomy in life and work. Organisation in such a situation is further problematised, with resistance limited to certain pathways which maintain particular power relations.

### **Developing Resistance**

The major forms of resistance and organisation amongst home-based workers have revolved around the recognition of these diverse labour-forces as genuine workers, who are deserving of rights and regulations which effect those in the formal sectors of the economy. With the waste-pickers of Pune, recognition became a central mode of resistance where "it was important 'to establish an alternate identity for waste-pickers as "workers"'"<sup>37</sup> who could be formalised, thus limiting their social marginalisation. SEWA have also developed strategies to formalise home-based and informal sector workers, informing them of their legislative rights and welfare entitlements<sup>38</sup>. "For many organisations, raising the status of - or reducing stigma around - their work is part of the process of building a shared and valued identity"<sup>39</sup>, raising their identity as that of a Westernised worker with rights.

However, such an understanding of identity falls into its own unitary trap, similar to the concept of a micro-entrepreneur and their needs as theorised de Soto Polar. A universal identity is constructed which can ignore the particularism and parochiality of household work, and which ignores this heterogeneity in favour of a more malleable concept like 'worker' or 'labour'. That doesn't mean that recognition isn't important or that it is useless. Rather, a singular focus on constructing the 'worker' is problematic when seeing the many different forms of identity and community that surround home-based workers, making their work something more than basic wage labour. In a similar vein, the development of regulatory mechanisms through the apparatus of the state has been the work of groups and associations representing Australian garment homeworkers. "Australian regulatory mechanisms contain key common features for the protection of homeworkers: deeming provisions, record-keeping, and several and joint liability"<sup>40</sup>. Such can be seen in the

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<sup>36</sup> Bergan, R. 2009, 223

<sup>37</sup> Kilby, P. 2013, 217

<sup>38</sup> Prugl, E. & Tinker, I. 1997, 1477

<sup>39</sup> Kabeer, N., Milward, K. & Sudarshan, R. 2013, 252

<sup>40</sup> Burchielli, R., Delaney, A. & Coventry, K. 2014, 94

Homeworkers Code, a voluntary regulatory framework that works to integrate the multiplicitous regulatory systems in Australia, from the regional and state level through to the national. This was seen as a major victory for home-based workers as the Australian garment industry appears monopolistic, able to circumvent regulations and labour rights<sup>41</sup>. The developments were pushed forward by the Textile Clothing & Footwear Union of Australia and FairWear, both representatives of garment homeworkers.

These developments of state-based regulatory apparatuses, and focus on recognition, have limiting effects on the construction of resistance and the persistence of representative organisations. They seem to constitute a simple form of reterritorialisation where home-based workers are given some employment rights and the recognition as labourers in a capitalist socio-economic system, while the wider flows of private capital can continue unabated, except with some changes to regulation which may reduce profit margins. It has to be remembered that governments (the providers of regulation and employment rights) were instrumental in pushing forth the privatisation of social reproduction and the precariatization of households and their dependents. As a starting position there is nothing necessarily wrong with this, yet with the developments that have occurred and the problems that still exist, the development of overt regulations which aim at acclimation and don't put a major focus into developing alternatives appear to have developed into a unitary focus. In Australia, this has taken on the form of consolidating regulation and rights. To move beyond this starting position, there is a need to move beyond simple reterritorialisation toward a wider construction of socio-economic relations that creates and encompasses new understandings of production, economies of scale and value structures which shape the wider economy.

Some household and worker movements are moving toward this position, developing alternative infrastructures which provide a means to autonomy and socio-economic independence. SEWA itself has begun to move beyond a narrative of recognition and better regulation, toward the development of alternatives for female house-workers who are marginalised. Problems emerged with campaigns for the minimum wage when informal and home-based workers were attacked, with many women involved losing their employment altogether<sup>42</sup>. In its place, SEWA began to develop local employment opportunities, helping "women make profits through the production and sale of their products and services"<sup>43</sup> and organising individual workers into cooperative units at the local and regional levels. This occurred for both rural and urban household workers, allowing for social provisioning that is relatively independent of centralised governmental systems. This activism has provided a solidarity network that questions the scale and efficacy of globalised economic activity, instead developing local and regional alternatives with cooperative infrastructures that reject both the Westernised concept of the 'worker', and the individuated conception of the micro-entrepreneur.

The West Yorkshire Homeworking Group (WYHG) has done similar work in organising homeworkers and creating solidarity amongst a divergent grouping. Rather than simply involving itself in the construction of a worker identity, it "has become sympathetic to some of its members' aspirations to start their own businesses. It has begun to support microentrepreneurial projects and cooperatives"<sup>44</sup>, developing decentralised alternatives that don't simply integrate home-based worker's needs and desires into global supply chains, but

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<sup>41</sup> Burchielli, R., Delaney, A. & Coventry, K. 2014, 97

<sup>42</sup> Datta, R. 2003, 355-356

<sup>43</sup> Datta, R. 2003, 356

<sup>44</sup> Prugl, E. & Tinker, I. 1997, 1478

allow for the development of new economies of scale that move power and autonomy downwards from the international flows of capital. These movements can be seen as constructing a wider household, one that encompasses supply chains and moves power away from factory/corporate forms of economic control, encouraging micro-entrepreneurial activity that is not fully reducible to a neoliberal growth regime/capitalist mode of production. They instead are developing "imagined communities"<sup>45</sup> which recognise the parochial forms of organisation and identity while being able to create a bridge between the global and the local, resisting the many nodes of capital in its global flows while developing new infrastructures and value systems.

One way of understanding the multi-faceted nature of these movements, such as SEWA, HomeNet (a solidarity network in Turkey who are developing the means to "organise, (gain) access to a living wage, and (form) social protection"<sup>46</sup>) and the WYHG, is through the framework of everyday communism as posited by David Graeber. Everyday communism is a principle that is "always at play to some degree in any transaction"<sup>47</sup>. It is a form of ethics that recognises equal relations of solidarity between different individuals and communities and that has universalisable qualities. When thinking of resistance to existing economic structures through household organising, we see principles of everyday communism come to the fore as organisational ethics that oppose centralising structures such as the omnipotent corporation, and instead aim at constructing a household political economy that recognises households as positive structures<sup>48</sup>, integrable with other socio-economic institutions but that contains its own logics and forms of knowledge that aren't fully amenable to Deleuze's universal society of control. Such a moral understanding allows for an organisational ethic that is neither purely universal nor held down by purely parochial understandings. A wider household political economy is constructed as an imagined community, informed by the ethics of everyday communism that recognises the heterogeneity of households as structures, seeing them as both global and local in much the same way that globalised capital is. This political economy has its own flows and understandings.

The multiplicity of household movements shows that constructing this household economy will involve a multitude of informal and home-based workers, operating within the interstices of the global and the local while moving beyond the notions of creating identity to the infrastructural capacity that means identity becomes fully realisable within autonomous frames of governance. Everyday communism in this regard acts as a unifying principle that pivots the micro-entrepreneurial activities of home-based workers away from their characterisation as capitalists-in-waiting, instead seeing them as workers whose identities are informed by complex household relations that involve reciprocity. The work of SEWA has already developed such a framework, by taking the household's conceptual elements of reciprocity and expanding them to the wider community of informal workers and households, integrating them into networks of welfare provision. Such can be seen in their development of a communally-based basic income that has encouraged better development outcomes<sup>49</sup> independent of the Indian national and state structures. Here there exist relations of reciprocity akin to everyday communism, that give a distinct conceptual understanding through which a household political economy. In the same way that capitalist markets are

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<sup>45</sup> Swedberg, R. 2011, 27-28

<sup>46</sup> Bergan, R. 2009, 224

<sup>47</sup> Graeber, D. 2011, 102

<sup>48</sup> Swedberg, R. 2011, 23

<sup>49</sup> Guy Standing, 2013, <http://isa-global-dialogue.net/indias-great-experiment-the-transformative-potential-of-basic-income-grants/>

accorded relations of competition as their axiomatic foundation, a fluid, semi-universal conception of everyday communism can serve the same purpose for households as socio-economic units. Thus households can be removed from the surrounding capitalist and patriarchal framings which place them and the workers within them as either outlets of consumption, there to provide demand for capitalist products or services; or as domains of domesticity, where the woman must remain the housewife, limited by the desires of the husband who is the bread-winner. Reconstructing households can then become the means of resistance, reconceptualising home-based workers not simply as Westernised, unionised workers but as distinct collectivities who have their own economic logics and rights.

## **Conclusion**

Such a critique of current organisational modes amongst home-based worker associations and unions may seem utopian, asking too much of movements that exist among the most marginalised in society. However, what I've proposed has been done to a certain extent in both the Global North and South, through movements as diverse as SEWA and WYHG. Both are developing infrastructures that are questioning the dominance of both state and capitalist modes of production, and creating de-scaled, regionalised alternatives that place autonomy and independence in subsidiarised structures.

They attempt to connect the global to the local, creating ethical and economic flows which can be alternative to the globalised flows of capital. Movements that remain stuck in developing regulatory structures pushed through the top-down methods of governments, or that continue to persist in making home-based workers into the model Western worker, endowed with employment rights and a system of regulation which keeps monopoly and exploitation in check, will simply act to partially reterritorialise the deterritorialised flows of globalisation. They may slightly de-precariatise the household and the working environments that have developed around them, but these efforts will be fully placed within the systems global capital has shaped. And, as seen with the privatisation of social reproduction and the retreat of the welfare state, states and quasi-state organisations reserve the right to rollback the gains workers and employees have been given.

The precariatization of the household can only be pushed against with new value structures and a re-appraised understanding of the position of the household in the economy. "Just as enthusiasm for the market form since the 1980s has led to discussions as well as to concrete attempts to change reality, so could enthusiasm for the household form"<sup>50</sup>. It can lead to discussions of the value structures that can emerge from a household political economy, including the morality Graeber describes with the concept of everyday communism. Such a concept makes households into their own socio-economic structure, integrable to markets or other economic systems, yet also autonomous.

So long as home-based workers remain mired in the relations of global capital, any form of resistance will remain limited, pushed to the peripheries as many different home-based workforces have been. Focusing on simplistic identities (which as seen with the narrative of micro-entrepreneurs are entirely co-optable into wider capitalist discourses) or regulatory systems imposed from the top-down (with some activist involvement) can only limit the extent of exploitation. "Development practitioners and union organizers need to acknowledge the flexibility"<sup>51</sup> which home-based work can provide, and recognise that governments can be

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<sup>50</sup> Swedberg, R. 2011, 26

<sup>51</sup> Prugl, E. & Tinker, I. 1997, 1479

as exploitative or ignorant as the forces of capital. Fundamentally, there needs to be a recognition that a one-size-fits-all approach is problematic. Rather, linking local and global allows for the recognition of different cultural and economic circumstances while providing the means for alternative socio-economic and political infrastructures.

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