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Untangling Agricultural Ethics: Women's Collective Agriculture in India as Alterbiopolitics

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Summary

Alternative food narratives imply an ethical relationship to food production and consumption practices. Organic food and agriculture are known as ethical alternatives since they use methods which counter dominant food systems and markets dependent on industrial agriculture and chemical inputs. The organic movement itself, although global, is locally articulated and relationally situated in ecologies, cultures and politics. However, 'Organic' is also a global brand, with global ambitions. This paper aims to tease out the discrepancies between global ethical discourse and situated ethical practice by bringing together existing ethnographic insights from women's organic agricultural collectives in South India with a discourse analysis of the joint annual reports by FiBL (Research Institute of Organic Agriculture, Switzerland) and The International Federation of Organic Agricultural Movements (IFOAM - Organics International). In problematising the inner workings of the narratives found in these reports, the paper unpacks their colonial continuities, demonstrating the biopolitical regimes of representation they help reproduce. The practice of organic collective agriculture in South India, I argue, represents an 'alterbiopolitics' which questions the universalist assumptions of IFOAM - Organics International's 'growing organic world'.

Keywords: collective farming, organic, India, colonialism, ethics, alterbiopolitics

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