

Authors: Carlo Andrea Tassinari, Davide Puca.

Subject: food regulation.

Abstract for the international symposium 'Technologies of Law and Religion: Representation, Objects and Agency'.

The hidden notion of 'environment' behind agricultural certifications

Food production is regulated not only by technological means but also by legal representations. Organic and biodiversity certifications imply specific uses of agricultural technologies. These legal and technological implementations associate the product with its "natural" origins. This paper will present a semiotic analysis of the different concepts of "naturalness" these labels evoke.

On one hand, as the authors illustrate, both labels prescribe norms for production that correlate with representations of "real nature" ; on the other, this legal representation underscores the interaction between human (ethics, stakeholders, etc.) and non-human (agricultural techniques, soil characteristics, architecture) elements, resulting in different conceptual compositions of the 'environment'.

We therefore observe that organic and biodiversity labels imply, unexpectedly, two opposite ways of understanding the environment. The organic labels associate human and non-human elements by a relationship of separation, and thus try to inhibit human intervention in natural environmental processes. For instance, organic labels tend to restrict the use of some pesticides. On the contrary, the biodiversity label represents the notion of environmental restoration, bringing the natural elements back to an estimate point of their 'original state'. This approach links human and non-human elements in a social relationship, defined by mutual contamination. For instance, the use of specific materials to promote the natural contact between insects and plants.

Thus, behind these labels, we find different strands of environmental politics, deconstructing the idea of a unique, transcendental being called "Nature".