



Institutions and critiques in tobacco cultivation in Rio Grande do Sul – Brazil: institutional changes and reaffirmation

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Abstract

This study focuses on issues surrounding tobacco production in Brazil, seeking to understand the changes occurred in tobacco farming out of criticisms and changes in the environment. Based on the theoretical and methodological conceptions from Sociology of Critique and institutionalist theories, semi-structured interviews were conducted with relevant actors in the central region of Rio Grande do Sul, adding to documentary analysis, with a view to analyze the institutional changes that have been occurring in tobacco production. First, devices of local and global criticism were identified, as well as the transformations that engender uncertainty in the tobacco farming environment. In this set of disputes, as responses to criticism, it was possible to map the institutions that have been supporting tobacco growing. Based on this, the transformations in the actions of tobacco companies were analyzed, which appeared to be mainly semantic, aimed at requalifying the Integrated Tobacco Production System and, thus, reaffirming the institutions that support tobacco growing. Findings showed that, in the environment of tobacco-growing family farmers, institutional changes are heterogeneous, affecting both the connections with and interpretations about tobacco. As a result, some farmers are being excluded from the system, and they need government support to change their realities.

Keywords: Tobacco-producing family farmers. Institutions. Criticism. Institutional change.

Instituições e críticas na produção de tabaco do Rio Grande do Sul/Brasil: Mudanças e reafirmações institucionais

Resumo

Este estudo versa sobre a situação problemática em torno da produção de tabaco no Brasil, com o intuito de compreender as mudanças no cenário da fumicultura a partir das críticas e das transformações no ambiente. Com base na concepção teórica e metodológica da Sociologia da Crítica e de teorias institucionalistas, foram realizadas entrevistas semiestruturadas na região central do Rio Grande do Sul e análise documental com o objetivo de analisar as mudanças institucionais que vêm ocorrendo na produção de tabaco. Primeiramente, foram identificados os dispositivos das críticas locais e globais, bem como as transformações que geram o ambiente de incerteza em que a fumicultura está inserida. Nessa relação de disputas, como respostas às críticas, foi possível mapear as instituições que vêm sustentando a fumicultura no RS. Partindo disso, foram analisadas as transformações nas ações das empresas fumageiras, principalmente de forma semântica, requalificando o Sistema Integrado de Produção de Tabaco (SIPT) e, assim, reafirmando as instituições que sustentam a fumicultura. Como principal resultado verificou-se que, no ambiente dos agricultores familiares produtores de tabaco, as mudanças institucionais são heterogêneas, com mudanças nos vínculos e nas interpretações sobre o tabaco. Por outro lado, com base na conduta das empresas fumageiras e de um grupo de agricultores que apostam nessa perspectiva de futuro, estima-se que ocorrerá uma seleção dos produtores mais “aptos” ao sistema e às novas exigências legais e de mercado. Como consequência disso, produtores estão sendo excluídos do sistema os quais necessitam de um apoio governamental para a mudança de suas realidades.

Palavras-chave: Fumicultura. Instituições. Críticas. Mudança institucional.

Instituciones y críticas en el cultivo de tabaco en Rio Grande do Sul / Brasil: cambios institucionales y reafirmaciones

Resumen

Este estudio aborda la problemática situación que rodea la producción de tabaco en Brasil, con el objetivo de comprender los cambios en el escenario del cultivo del tabaco a partir de críticas y cambios en el entorno. A partir de la concepción teórica y metodológica de la Sociología Crítica y las teorías institucionalistas, se realizaron entrevistas semiestruturadas en la región central de Rio Grande do Sul y análisis documental con el objetivo de analizar los cambios institucionales que se han venido produciendo en la producción de tabaco. Primero, se identificaron los dispositivos de crítica local y global, así como las transformaciones que generan el entorno incierto en el que se inserta la producción de tabaco. En esta lista de disputas, como respuesta a las críticas, fue posible mapear las instituciones que han estado apoyando el cultivo de tabaco en RS. Con base en ello, se analizaron las transformaciones en la actuación de las empresas tabacaleras, principalmente semánticamente, recalificando el Sistema Integrado de Producción de Tabaco (SIPT) y, así, reafirmando las instituciones que apoyan el cultivo del tabaco. Como resultado principal, se encontró que, en el entorno de los agricultores familiares productores de tabaco, los cambios institucionales son heterogéneos, con cambios en los vínculos e interpretaciones sobre el tabaco. Por otro lado, en base a la conducta de las empresas tabacaleras y un grupo de agricultores que apuestan por esta perspectiva de futuro, se estima que habrá una selección de los productores más “aptos” para el sistema y la nueva legalidad. y requisitos del mercado. Como resultado, los productores están siendo excluidos del sistema que necesitan el apoyo del gobierno para cambiar sus realidades.

Palabras clave: Cultura del tabaco. Instituciones. Reseñas. Cambio institucional.

1 Introdução

Widely consumed worldwide, tobacco is entangled in events comprising critical moments and disputes over the benefits and harms of its production and consumption. After all, is tobacco a good or a bad thing? Does tobacco production generate development or not? Simplistically, these questions summarize the disputes waged, especially over the last 30 years, between supporters and opponents of tobacco, and the transformations in the tobacco market and need for adaptations. This scenario of contention is the starting point for identifying the critical moments faced by the various actors involved in tobacco production in Rio Grande do Sul (RS) and, thus, understanding which institutions support this production. Given this scenario, this study aims to analyze whether, in this context, there have been changes both in the trajectory of tobacco companies and in the lives of tobacco-growing family farmers. To this end, the actors and the contention environments were identified, as well as the discourses mobilized, which produced changes in the conduct of tobacco companies aimed at reaffirming tobacco production in Brazil. On the other hand, the life courses of tobacco-growing families were analyzed, showing processes of institutional change and institutional reaffirmation.

Different events have marked the historical development of tobacco farming in Brazil. It gained production scale in the southern Brazilian states since the late colonization by Italian and German immigrants and the installation of a processing industry for light tobacco. Despite the consolidation of the *Complexo Fumageiro Agroindustrial* (Tobacco Agroindustrial Complex) in the end of the 20th century, based on integrated relationships of production and commercialization, tobacco cultivation remains essentially in the hands of family farmers associated with the tobacco agribusiness in the three southern states of Brazil, where most of the Brazilian tobacco production is concentrated (ETGES, 1991; SILVA, 2002; PAULILO, 1990).

Many studies on tobacco growing in Brazil are critical to this farming, denouncing the production relations it involves, the harms of tobacco production and consumption, seeking to bring the relations of domination or exploitation to which farmers are subject to light, and to produce normative solutions aimed to changes deemed necessary (e.g. SCHNEIDER, 2010; FREITAS, 2015). On the other hand, many have wondered why family farmers remain tied to tobacco production (e.g. ETGES, 1991; REDIN, 2011; RUDNICKI, 2012). These diverse movements of criticisms and justifications by different actors, including scholars and the movement of tobacco farmers, were drivers that led us to analyze the context of contention and transformations in tobacco farming.

Methodologically, we understand that tobacco cultivation takes roots based on an institutional network shared by a network of actors who claim valuing principles that qualify beings and the relationships between them. The concept of institutions, thus, refers to interpretations and shared justifications that give meaning to the conduct of actors (BOLTANSKI, 2011, 2013; BOLTANSKI & THÉVENOT, 1991, WEBLEN, 1983). However, as part of social life, several events have occurred throughout the history of tobacco farming and the studied region, which challenge the prevailing institutions. Consequently, the established classifications, forms of judgment and qualifications are questioned, engendering what Boltanski & Thévenot (1991) call “critical moments”. Such moments are constituted by interconnections

between global and local aspects as part of broad issues involving tobacco. Hence, the agreements are destabilized by critical moments that, in contentious arenas, can engender new agreements, showing a process of either institutional change or reaffirmation of existing institutions. In view of this, the question arises: What is the network of institutions that sustain the tobacco industry in RS? What are the critiques, denunciations of injustice and changes in the environment that destabilize these institutions? Did these movements lead institutions to change or to reaffirm themselves?

To understand the various events and their critical moments, as well as the influences over the processes of institutional change and reaffirmation, we sought theoretical and analytical resources in Boltanski and Thévenot's (1991) Theory of Justification and in Boltanski's (2011) Theory of Critique, which enabled us to look differently into the relations established in tobacco farming. Boltanski (2011) points out the need for social sciences analyses to focus on the effect of critiques and justifications on social life, taking criticism seriously, not as a product of sociology, which can enlighten individuals, but rather as everyday practice of people, who make normative demands on themselves, explain critiques and justify them.

Therefore, the main objective of this article is to analyze institutional changes in tobacco farming in Rio Grande do Sul. It aims, particularly, (i) to map both global and local criticism involving the actant tobacco; (ii) to identify institutions that support tobacco production in RS, examining them from within contentious arenas; (iii) to determine the actions and devices used by tobacco companies; and (iv) to analyze changes in the course of life of tobacco farmers. The theoretical and methodological path that guides the analysis in pursuit of these objectives will be presented next.

2 The study's theoretical and methodological path

The study comprised four analytical stages, corresponding to its four specific objectives:

- The first stage consisted in mapping the criticisms involving the tobacco actant;
- The second stage, is focused on which and how institutions support tobacco growing in Rio Grande do Sul;
- The third aims to understand whether there have been institutional changes in tobacco farming and if and how these changes have been induced/fostered by the response of tobacco companies to criticism;
- The fourth stage analyzed the institutional changes induced by changes in the environment influence the life course of tobacco grower families in the studied region.

Methodologically, we sought to monitor the network that has mobilized criticisms, to identify the actors and devices that have destabilized the routines of tobacco production. To this end, media coverage and international and national mobilizations were analyzed, focusing on the World Health Organization's (WHO) initiatives and on the consolidation of a network called by some authors anti-tobacco (BOEIRA, 2002; SCHEIBLER, 2006) and which we will name also tobacco's vilification network. Complementing this, we analyzed tobacco-growing family farmers and

their complaints, aiming to identify all actors and devices that contribute to vilify tobacco at all levels of relationship with this actant.

The analysis of the criticism is based on the Sociology of Critique by Boltanski (2011), according to which sociological analysis must focus not only on the agreements, but also on the disputes within relationships. According to the author, while institutions confer stability to reality, the situations of test make room for critiques, which constitute opportunities to reevaluate and rectify the state of affairs. In other words, it constitutes the moment when the value of the situated entities is put to the test, in the face of a mismatch between the state of affairs and symbolic forms, that is, between interpretations and what actually happens.

The notion of test is an analytical device presented in the book *On Justification: Economies of Worth*, by Boltanski and Thévenot (1991) to delimit the moment when individuals use their reflexivity and critical capacity, through which worths are distributed based on what the authors call a qualifying operation. In other words, the passing of a judgment is qualified in relation to existing common valuing principles and which at times of test can be destabilized, creating uncertainty. This occurs because elements with different meanings are mobilized, which judge the same behavior or the same being differently and, thus, contention is established. In such moments, individuals can use their reflexive capacity to qualify, criticize, retreat or take advantage of certain justification(s) (NACHI, 2006). Based on this theoretical and methodological framework, we delve into the relationships involved in tobacco growing, with a focus on identifying the actors and their reflexive movements/reaction at the moments when the tobacco cultivation was put to the test. To do so, we mapped the mobilized devices and qualification directions that produce contention.

In addition to critiques expressed in this global contentious environment, a microsocial analysis was conducted on complaints presented by tobacco-growing family farmers. In the arena settled during debates on the Framework Convention for Tobacco Control (FCTC) we observed a coalition between farmers and tobacco companies in opposition to the group that supported ratification of FCTC (SCHEIBLER, 2006). In these disputes, farmers were represented by their associations, what made us wonder whether the discourses at that arena really expressed the concerns from individual farmers or the dominant concerns of their representatives.

Therefore, the results were drawn from semi-structured interviews carried out with 28 tobacco-growing families (or former growers) in three municipalities of the central-eastern and central-western regions of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. In addition, representatives of the Rural Workers' Unions, of EMATER - RS and the Association of Tobacco Growers of Brazil (AFUBRA) were also interviewed. The interviews were qualitatively analyzed according to the proposed theoretical and methodological approach.

At a second stage, these same interviews were analyzed as to which institutions support tobacco growing in Rio Grande do Sul. To this end, additional interviews were conducted with so-called “intermediaries”, who once also worked as tobacco growers, and other actors’ narratives were collected from digital media. We analyzed the life course of tobacco-grower families, particularly the justifications that emerged regarding both external and internal critiques of tobacco production.

In addition, questions like “what does tobacco represent in your life?” sought to understand the references that are used to qualify and justify their actions. Therefore, the analysis compiled interpretations so as to transcend the individualization of the answers and find the references shared by farmers, what enabled us to identify the institutions that structure and give meaning to the life of tobacco growers.

The interviews carried out with tobacco-growing family farmers were understood as public justifications in the face of dispute, as the researcher proposed questions that brought back criticisms previously expressed in other public spaces, or even criticisms that emerged from the farmers’ speeches during the interviews. For Dodier (1993, p. 99-100) the interviews are conceived as “moments at which the researcher’s questions induce people to produce justifications, to provide reasons for their actions”.

The operations of qualification are understood as shared interpretations that confer meaning to things so as to demonstrate their pertinence. For Boltanski (2009; 2011; 2013), such function of confirming reality is conferred on institutions. Boltanski’s institutionalist approach along with the contributions of Veblen’s (1983) old institutionalism and of Boltanski’s and Thévenot’s (1991) Convention Theory provide insights for understanding the qualifications that justify the relationship of the studied family farmers with tobacco production. In this study, institutions are understood as shared interpretations and behaviors that justify the analyzed social reality. Therefore, the reality is maintained by the institutions, which, thus, will provide answers as to why people act in a certain way. According to Boltanski (2011), to analyze them, it is necessary to identify their semantic functions, because institutions are “instruments geared towards the construction of reality through the intermediary, in particular, of operations for qualifying entities – persons and objects – and defining test formats” (BOLTANSKI, 2011, p. xi). Thus, it is through a process of classification and qualification, which are descriptive and normative, that things acquire a valuing referential framework (BOLTANSKI, 2011, p. 68). It is understood, therefore, that institutions constitute settled agreements between the parties involved, which sustain social life, emerging from experienced habits that evolve and are shared among a certain group, and from moments of disputes based on world views that conflict with reality.

The proposed theoretical and methodological approach reveals a reality of tobacco farming impacted by criticism, tests and, also, by disruptions that point at times to changes, and at times to reaffirmation of the current institutions. The institutional reaffirmation movement shows the preservation of the integrated tobacco industry. Based on this, the third stage of the analysis aims to understand how tobacco companies and their representatives respond to criticisms from the anti-tobacco network, forming a network with the tobacco growers and their representatives. This analysis allows us to understand whether there have been institutional changes in tobacco farming. For this purpose, information produced by tobacco companies such as booklets, press releases and other communications, presenting responses to criticisms pointed out by those networks, were analyzed.

The reaffirmation of the institutional network that confers meaning to tobacco production occurs more globally, both affecting and being affected by the local institutions network. In view of this, the fourth stage of this research analyzed

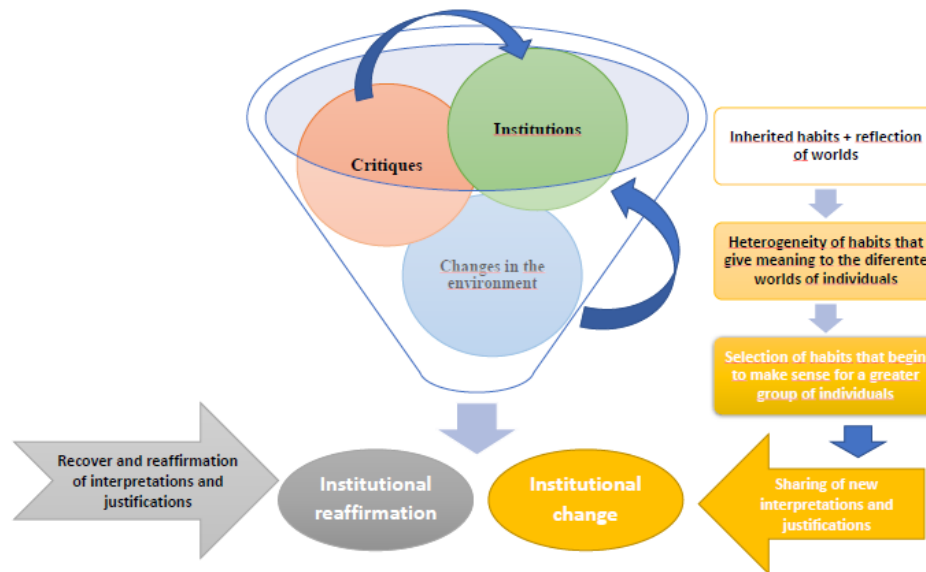
institutional changes based on the life course of tobacco grower families in the studied region. This analysis answers that part of the research question that sought to understand whether, in view of all the events and criticisms, changes in the environment and responses to these movements, and, more specifically, of changes in public policies and in the market, there were changes in the way tobacco farming families conduct and interpret their lives. The analysis was based on 28 semi-structured interviews conducted with tobacco grower families.

The theoretical-methodological approach aimed at understanding change or persistence of institutions. It draws on the evolutionary contribution of the old institutionalism in its reading by Hodgson (2004; 2006; 2007), associated with the elements and the change process proposed by Boltanski and Chiapello (2009) when analyzing the transformations in capitalism, by Boltanski and Thévenot (2006), when building the Theory of Justifications, in addition to Boltanski's (2009) work, *De La Critique*.

The research postulates the joint analysis of transformations in the micro and macro spheres, involving integrated social, cultural, economic and political dimensions. Institutions as an analytical category, according to its already described concept, allow analyzing life and society in all their dimensions. Thus, its supplementation with some notions of the Theory of Conventions of Boltanski and Thévenot in *De la justification* and of Veblen's old North American Institutionalism, as part of the historical Institutionalism, backs the quest for understanding behaviors and justifications in both the micro and macro spheres of social relationships.

Based on this, a set of analytical tools was assembled, as a result of the sum of notions presented here, to examine the changes or the propensity to changes in the reality of tobacco farming families. Understanding institutional change, by means of such analysis, consists in understanding how different individuals interpret, conduct and formalize habits that are per se heterogeneous and non-linear in their occurrence, what demonstrates the dynamism and complexity of changes in institutions (AGNE, 2014). Furthermore, an environment of uncertainty, caused either by the emergence of critical moments, or by changes in the environment, requires the actors to reflect and mobilize justifications that confirm their reality or to transform their behaviors. The new interpretations and justifications will translate in new habits originating in the world of an actor who starts to be imitated, as the new habits make sense for more actors and, thus, will end up institutionalized, producing new realities.

Figure 1: Analytical framework on institutional change that guide this research



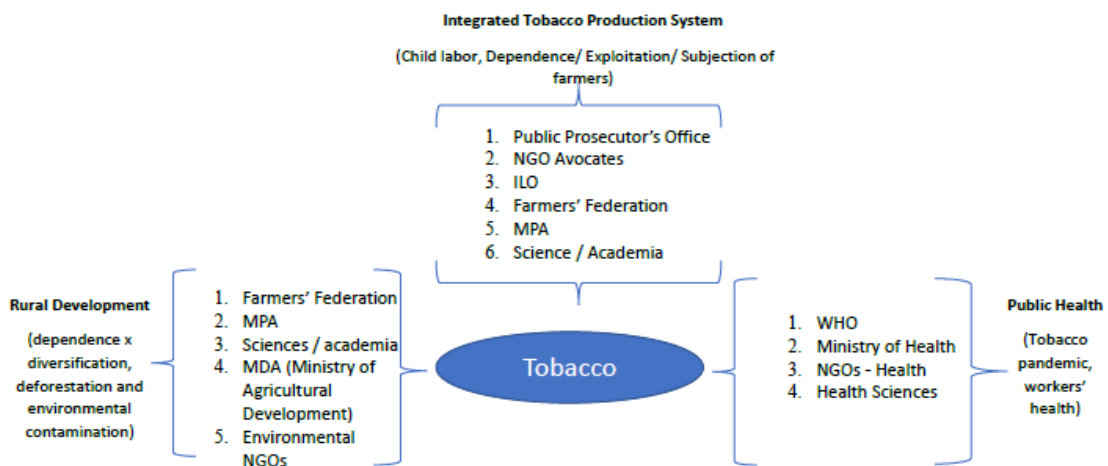
Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Thus, institutional changes emerge from the interaction between processes of criticism and changes in the environment, which occur in a cycle involving the macro and micro institutional environment. These triggers can bring about institutional change, which is observed in changes in the way actors interpret, conduct and justify their activities. Else they can ratify the existing institutions, imprinting new contours on them, though without causing changes in the way actors conduct their activities, interpret and justify their behaviors.

3 Moments When tobacco is put to the test: destabilizing routines

The network of actors involved in demobilizing tobacco is based on international actions carried out along the last 30 years, which begin with denunciations from either the scientific universe or other worlds of the actors, then reaching collective spaces and becoming accepted and legitimized by a growing and plural group. We focused initially on the anti-tobacco and anti-smoking network studied by Boeira (2002), formed by NGOs, churches, the pharmaceutical industry, health organizations and advocates of alternatives to tobacco production, to map and analyze the devices and complaints they mobilize. Next, we focused on some actors who were more accessible during the research.

Figure 2: Actors who mobilize the respective objects and beings that form their grammars for vilifying tobacco consumption and production



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

One line of analysis observed the scientifically supported denunciations issued by the World Health Organization (WHO) that point out the harm of tobacco consumption, warning of its dangers to public health, which is a common good. Having mobilized several countries, WHO is the protagonist of the Framework Convention for Tobacco Control (FCTC) that Brazil ratified in 2003 and that aims at building strategies for warning about risks and reducing tobacco consumption, besides also seeking alternatives for tobacco growers. In view of this, Brazil created the CONICQ (National Commission for Implementation of the Framework Convention for Tobacco Control in Brazil), which coordinates what can be called the Brazilian tobacco vilification network (BRASIL, 2003).

One of the main members of CONICQ is INCA (the National Cancer Institute), an auxiliary body to the Ministry of Health for the coordination of integrated actions for prevention and control of cancer in Brazil. The harms reported by scientific research that underlie the actions of this network are related to the association of nicotine with various diseases, as well as with addiction. Furthermore, denunciations include the various chemical components that are used in the manufacture of cigarettes, which are also related to diseases such as cancer (INCA, 2017).

Both WHO and INCA have expanded their arguments exposing the problems caused by tobacco, re-signifying and disqualifying it as a threat to public health. Thus, not only harms to smokers, but also denunciations of risks to the health of rural workers are incorporated into criticism and vilification of tobacco, focusing on the so-called “green tobacco sickness” (GTS). Over the years, criticisms regarding tobacco have outreached smokers’ health to warn of harms to the health of tobacco farming workers, due to their contact with pesticides, considered necessary for cultivating tobacco, as well as with the tobacco leaf itself, in humid conditions, and with the strong smell of the plant in its drying process.

Another line of analysis concerns child labor in tobacco fields, a focus of denunciation all over the world led by the International Labor Organization (ILO). These accusations resulted in the enactment of legal provisions specifically prohibiting the work of children and adolescents in tobacco production, since 2009 in Brazil, with the Public Prosecutor's Office being responsible for the inspection. The grammar of denouncing the exploitative use of child labor in Brazil does not directly blame the children's parents for exploiting their labor, but rather attributes it to what is deemed a relation of exploitation by the industry of the work of family farmers. Thus, despite the emphasis on child labor, denunciations also fall on what they call domination or exploitation promoted by the industry.

In this sense, Almeida (2005) denounces the lack of autonomy of farmers, "[...] tobacco does not guarantee small-scale farmers the necessary economic and financial autonomy to dispense with the exploitation of child and youth work" (ALMEIDA, 2005, p. 41). A grammar also present in the study by Bonato et al. (2010), which accuses the low profitability of farmers as an argument for the need to use their children's labor in some stages of tobacco production.

Also worth noting are movements by individuals in allegations of subjection and unfair treatment by tobacco companies of their contractor farmers who establish direct contracts with companies for purchase of their tobacco produce and supply of inputs. Thus, the Integrated Tobacco Production System (ITPS) is put to the test by NGOs, the Public Prosecutor's Office and other actors who seek to defend farmers from what they consider a process of exploitation of farmers by tobacco companies. The denunciation grammar falls, therefore, on a contractual system deemed to be unequal, which is vilified by means of a justification that diminishes the ITPS in the face of the virtue of equitable commercial relations.

The third line of analysis focused on scientific research, including not only the areas of health and environment, but also social and rural development sciences that debate the meaning of tobacco for rural development. In this scenario, alternatives to tobacco production have been raised and discussed as solutions for rural development and mitigation of what they consider to be a dependence of farmers on tobacco companies and tobacco cultivation, and proposals have emerged of production modes considered more sustainable (SCHNEIDER, 2010; RAMBO et al., 2013; FREITAS; RAMBO; SARTORELLI, 2015; FREITAS, 2015; 2016). These proposals of initiatives in defense of farmers and against tobacco production constituted privileged objects for building legitimate grammars that put the institutions that support tobacco in Brazil to test in the context of rural development.

Once mapped the denunciation devices and worths mobilized by the anti-tobacco network, we sought to analyze the complaints brought by tobacco-growing family farmers. The field work revealed that farmers are immersed in such critical movements, daily absorbing the denunciations against tobacco from the media, their social relations etc. In view of this, in both their social interactions and with non-humans, in their experiences, they build interpretations, bring complaints and justify their conducts.

Historically, one of the main complaints from farmers is the tobacco marketing relationship, which demands better conditions for negotiation with tobacco companies. Therefore, it is at the time of tobacco sale that the ITPS is put to the test and, sometimes, devices such as demonstrations and other negotiation

strategies emerge in those moments. On the other hand, farmers express self-criticism for the lack of cooperation between them in the marketing of tobacco, what makes negotiating with companies difficult, since it is an individual action, in which farmers hold little power regarding the terms of the transaction.

The fatigue of manual labor in agriculture is another point of discontent and the target of criticism, which appears to be associated with the lack of appreciation, mainly related to commercial results. Family farming today is described by local farmers and their representatives as being essentially manual, especially when it comes to tobacco production. In addition, due to the fragility of tobacco, extreme care is required for the leaves that will be harvested and then dried and that, in the end, will be evaluated according to their color and texture, giving the product its selling price. Moreover, tobacco harvest is a harsh work carried out in the summer and characterized by the painful work of pulling the leaves or cutting the entire stem of the tobacco under a scorching sun. Therefore, it is observed that the reflections that emerge from the farmers' worlds also concern the paradoxical relationship between the satisfaction of living and working in the rural and the arduousness of working with an agricultural style that they consider strenuous and painful.

These are, therefore, elements that emerge from the farmers' worlds when they are confronted with daily experiences that trigger reflection on and questioning of their realities. These elements of denunciation are triggered together with the reflection on the harms of pesticides. Their criticism, based on their own experience, regarding the harmful effects of pesticides are paradoxical for demonstrating their reflection on working with or without these products. Having to opt between a painful labor and the use of pesticides as a way of reducing this pain, they choose the harm that suits them. Despite denouncing the strenuous work and the pesticides harms for their health, farmers argue that tobacco production uses less pesticides than other crops, such as soy or rice.

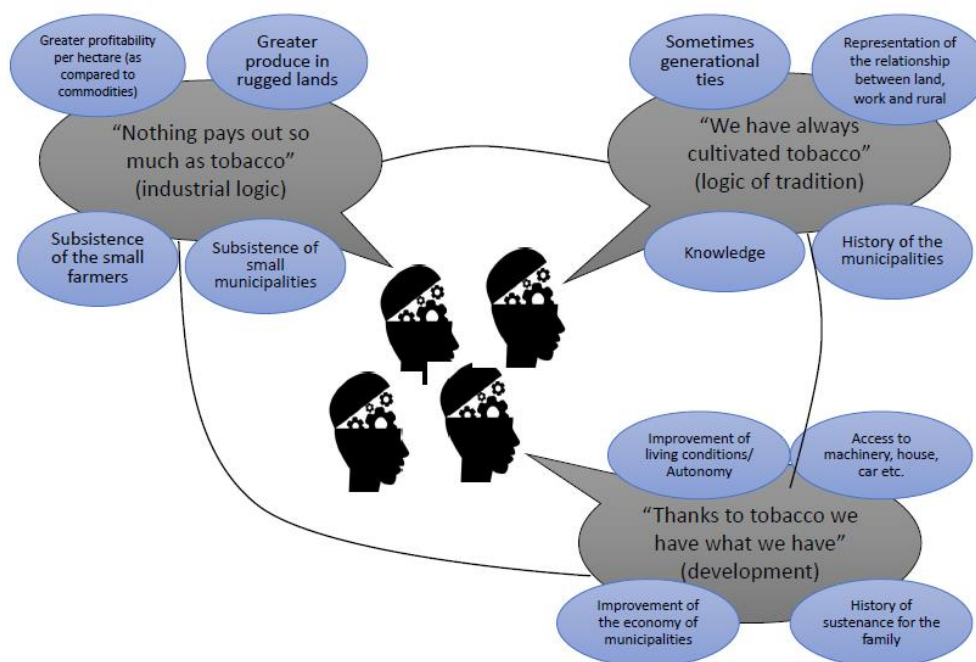
The farmers' complaints also demonstrate reflection on the criticisms and actions by the anti-tobacco network that reach them through their representatives and the media. The ban and the discourse on the end of tobacco bring resentments that add to their criticisms regarding governmental actions that affect not only tobacco growers, but family farmers generally. The analysis reveals that the problems, for the farmers, do not reside in the actant tobacco, as an evil plant, but rather in the lack of valorization and recognition of their role as farmers, represented by the lack of regulation of tobacco prices, as occurs with other agricultural products and, in a broader sense, by the absence of incentive policies for family farming.

The correlation between international, national and local criticisms regarding tobacco production shows discontinuities in the statements, interpretations and claims of the criticisms that emerge from different actors, here categorized into the anti-tobacco network and the network formed by tobacco growers and their representatives (AFUBRA and STR/FETAG). Consequently, it is observed that such discontinuities in what both networks denounce regarding tobacco cause a distancing between actors that could act together in opposition to actions of tobacco companies, despite the family farmer being one of the main actors that the anti-tobacco network seeks to protect.

4 Institutions that support tobacco farming in Rio Grande do Sul: farmer's points of view in the tobacco system

The different critical operations at different levels, as presented, confront each other and generate uncertainties, destabilizing the realities of the actors involved. As tobacco was put to the test by the actors who mobilized criticism, reflective moments were generated in which the actors were forced to think about their actions and views. Thus, as part of social life, it is necessary to stabilize reality anew, seeking to assess and qualify what is happening. Given this problem and under the theoretical and methodological framework described above, can we understand why family farmers continue to produce tobacco even in the face of this universe of uncertainties? Based on this, the logics of tradition and immanence in farmers' lives, the knowledge, the market relations and the development linked to the actant tobacco were interpreted as shared and interconnected grammars of justification that formed an institutional network mobilized by the actors in defense of their actions.

Figure 3: Diagram of the network of institutions that support tobacco farming



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

The logic of tradition used by farmers as a justification for their relationship with tobacco production is represented by the commonly heard expression: “We have always cultivated tobacco”. This grammar carries a meaning related both to tobacco-producing municipalities (collective), demonstrating their historical relationship with tobacco, and to the lives of families. These bring the history of their ancestors back to justify that they learned to work with tobacco since they were children, because their parents cultivated tobacco. Farmers, thus, qualify it as immanent in their lives. Their representations of agriculture, rural and work is associated with tobacco growing, which, in turn, claims a historical of connection that

is sometimes generational. By establishing new families and continuing social reproduction in the countryside, whether on the same land or in the surroundings, the new farmers maintain their relationship with tobacco.

However, this institution should not be analyzed separately, mainly because it is accompanied by other institutions in the arenas where tobacco is put to the test. It is understood, therefore, that the institutions must be analyzed as a network that supports the justifications of farmers and other actors at moments of contention, and that it is not possible to define the main motivation.

While associated to farming tradition in the history of families and regions, tobacco is also justified by the guarantee of profitability on small properties with characteristics of rugged relief. The justification refers mainly to its comparison with other crops (such as soy and rice, also strongly present in these regions) and always emerges when the logic of tradition is challenged. It also refers to the integration of these farmers into a structured production chain, that operates under a logic already known to all, while production alternatives would require structuring, as in the case of short chains often proposed by public policies, demanding from farmers processes of change quite distant from the logic that structures their lives.

Thus, the industrial logic of productivity and profitability that provides conditions for social reproduction of family farmers is claimed at moments of contention. Therefore, a notion was built that tobacco would be the alternative for the survival and development of what they consider “small agriculture”, that is, for farmers who have small plots of land in these regions of rugged relief. This was the argument that has supported the worth of tobacco over the years, what the actors call an alternative for family farming in these regions. It was also observed that this justification is equally provided by farmers who have abandoned tobacco production. Although being pleased for not producing tobacco anymore, they still maintain the tradition and industrial logics as justifications for the persistence of tobacco production in the community.

The justification of profitability in small areas and, mainly, in rugged lands, following the logic of the institutional network that supports tobacco growing, is also accompanied by the view of tobacco as responsible for the development of properties and municipalities. Recalling the history of the municipalities and of their families, all farmers recollect a past of poverty that has been transformed with tobacco income, providing better living conditions. “Thanks to tobacco, we have what we have” is the phrase of a farmer who summarizes the grammar of justification brought by families to exemplify what they consider the development of the property as compared with the past of the family and their ancestors. Historical elements of the municipalities and changes in agriculture also serve as an argumentative basis for building such grammar. Tobacco growers attribute to tobacco a process of development of their properties and their municipalities by sharing a frame of reference that includes access to goods that provide them with amenities and comfort meeting some of their needs, and dreams come true, as a justification for the historical choices of growing tobacco.

These findings showed that we should not regard institutions in a fragmented way, since they are jointly evoked by farmers, what made us understand that there is a network or a tangle of institutions supporting and justifying tobacco production. It is, therefore, this tangle that emerges in the metapragmatic moments, when farmers

are urged to reflect about the way they conduct their lives and, thus, bring these elements, qualifying them as a way to confirm and stabilize their realities. This tangle emerged from a trajectory of interactions between the transformations in the environment, the habits stemming from life experiences that generated interpretations and started being reproduced by the group that conferred meaning on them, and then shared by several farmers, as well as by the tobacco companies. These institutions shape social life, which follows its course according to a pragmatic regime of peace, and, in the face of critical moments, of metapragmatic regimes, they are accessed to stabilize reality.

5 Stabilizing critical moments and reaffirming the institutions that support tobacco growing

The movements of criticism that have put tobacco to the test directly affect tobacco companies, which consequently react by promoting changes. Thus, the tobacco companies' movements aimed at redefining and promoting actions to respond to criticisms raised by the movement to vilify tobacco were analyzed.

As a result of critical mobilizations around cigarette consumption, some government and legislative actions have been carried out over the past 30 years. Among them, we highlight the prohibition of tobacco commercials still in the 1980s, which evolved to the prohibition of advertisements and sponsorships in sporting and cultural events in the 2000s, and to mandatory messages warning about the harmful effects of cigarette consumption, prohibition of sales to minors under 18, increased taxation on cigarettes and restrictions on the use of additives in the manufacture of tobacco products (ANVISA, 2014).

With regard to tobacco production in Brazil, criticisms over workers' health, child labor in tobacco crops, deforestation of native forests for curing Virginia tobacco, among other issues related to the Integrated Tobacco Production System, engendered some government actions. Among them, advices from the World Labor Organization and the Brazilian Public Prosecutor's Office against the use of child labor in tobacco crops, greater surveillance regarding deforestation and the search for alternatives to tobacco-growing farmers in view of the expectation of a decrease in global cigarette consumption (Program on Productive Diversification in Areas of Tobacco Farming).

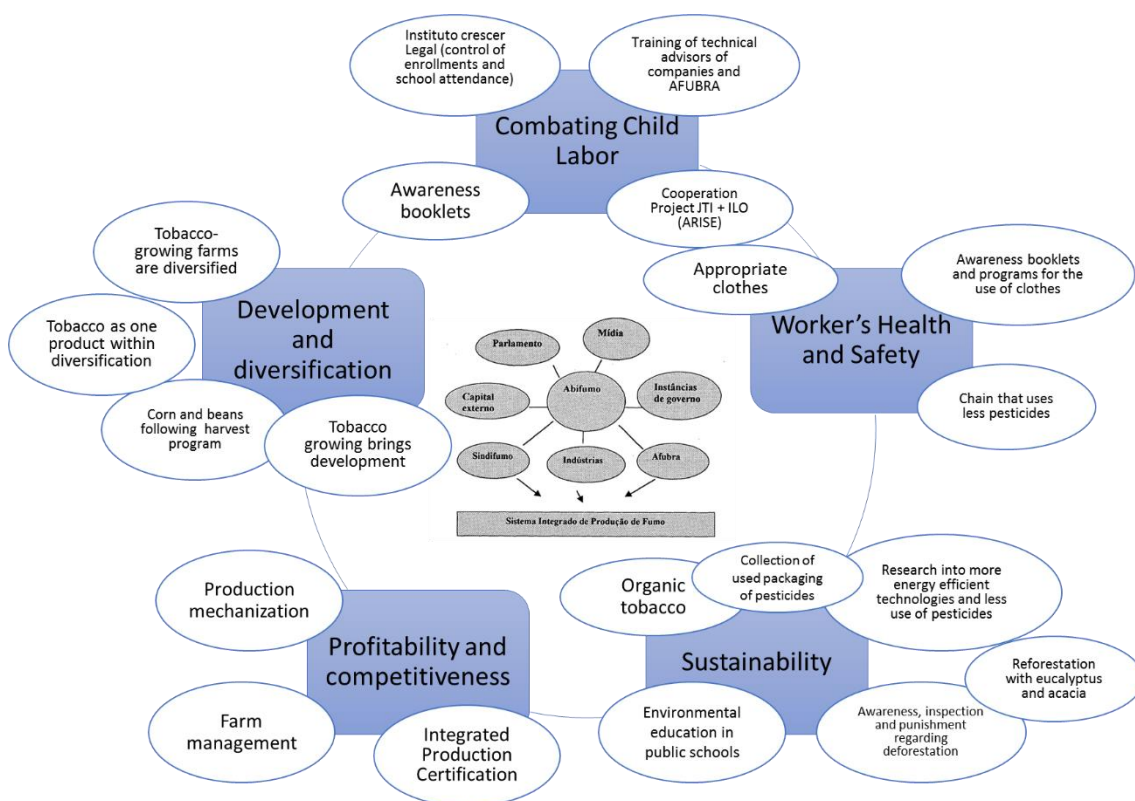
In view of this scenario of criticism and changes in national actions, it was observed that tobacco companies created mechanisms seeking to respond to criticisms and to meet the demands of the international consumer market, as well as Brazilian legal demands, while requalifying tobacco and the relationships around it. Then, a movement of argumentative force was created between actors of the anti-tobacco network and actors of the tobacco supporting network, this latter mainly led by tobacco companies. Boeira (2002) identifies ABIFUMO (Brazilian Association of the Tobacco Industry) as the coordinator of this network, which aims to defend the tobacco sector and, according to the author, includes an entity that defends the farmers' interests.

Using various devices, tobacco companies promoted transformations in the relationships involved in tobacco production and consumption, developing actions towards: preventing child labor in tobacco crops; encouraging reforestation for the

use of wood in tobacco drying ovens; encouraging diversification in tobacco-producing areas; affirmation of tobacco as a driver of development for tobacco-growing regions, among others.

Therefore, the actions coordinated by the tobacco companies or, sometimes, by SINDITABACO or by ABIFUMO, are aimed at qualifying the images of tobacco and of the Integrated Production System related to it. To this end, issues such as deforestation, child labor, workers' health and safety, critically mobilized by the anti-tobacco network, are changed into tobacco qualification opportunities. The requalification operations claim that tobacco production chain is the most responsible and sustainable in Brazil.

Figure 4: Devices and semantic claims for tobacco qualification in response to external and internal criticism and changes in the environment



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

As shown in figure 4, the tobacco supporting network has developed actions that respond to criticisms from both the anti-tobacco network and tobacco farmers aiming to reaffirm the institutions that support tobacco in Rio Grande do Sul. These actions are mobilized by grammars of profitability and competition (incentive to mechanization, farm management courses etc.), sustainability (organic tobacco, research to decrease the use of pesticides, awareness and inspection related to deforestation, incentive to reforestation, collection of pesticide packaging etc.), workers' health and safety (awareness of the use of Personal Protective Equipment), development and diversification (tobacco as one of the products of diversified farms, tobacco as driver for development) and combating to child labor (awareness

booklets, school enrollment control etc.). These actions are widely used in media campaigns, demonstrating the social, environmental and economic responsibility of tobacco companies.

Thus, it becomes clear that tobacco reaffirmation occurs through some transformations in the actions of tobacco companies, which retrieve the institutional elements that continue to be mobilized for the purpose of maintaining tobacco production in Rio Grande do Sul. That is, the institutionalization of tobacco as the promoter of development of family farmers and municipalities; of the idea that in these regions and in these lands, it is tobacco, as one of the elements in farming diversification, the one that generates income for farmers; and of the idea that there is a historical and traditional relationship with this actant. Despite changes in the sector's conduct towards adapting to the new regulations and responding to criticisms and demands from the consumer market, such changes occur while maintaining the main reference frameworks that give meaning to tobacco production in Brazil

When analyzing the scenario of contention, it becomes clear that this requalification and reaffirmation were possible because anti-tobacco actors did not promote a radical criticism over the system. The main reason is that, as Boeira (2002) noted, it comprises a multifragmentary network, lacking coordination and focus during its critical operations. In addition, the actions by the Brazilian government are considered ambiguous, providing opportunities for semantic negotiations.

6 Institutional Changes in tobacco production: the heterogeneity of life courses among tobacco-growing families

Despite the reaffirmation of the tobacco production chain, by focusing on the microinstitutional dimension of tobacco-growing families, changing processes are observed in behaviors and views regarding the direction of family farms' activities. According to the theoretical and methodological conception previously exposed, these changes in farmers' life course are understood as institutional changes, even if on a global level the tobacco production chain persists. These changes occur according to opportunities, relationships, paths, social, economic and cultural contexts that influence decisions and interpretations.

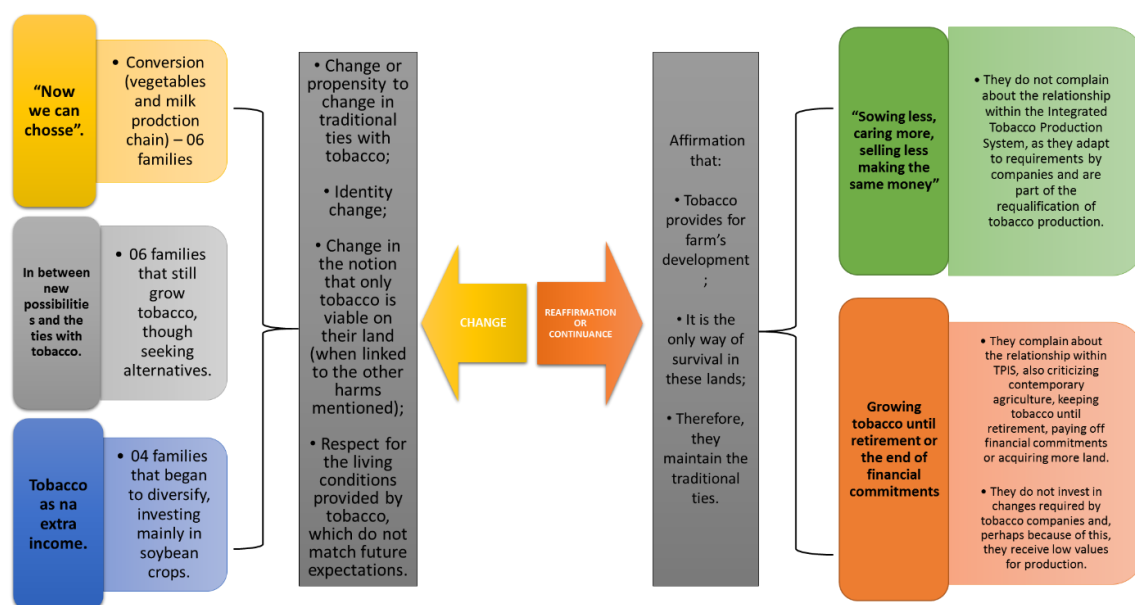
In the scenario under analysis, we observed that the critical manifestations pointed out have created an environment of uncertainty in which the actors were compelled to justify their actions. At the same time, some actors mobilized reflections that, coming from worlds in metapragmatic regimes, led them to question their realities, their actions and to reshape their interpretations about tobacco production. Consequently, they adapted to new habits that emerged in that context, thus selecting new conducts, new interpretations and new ways to justify their actions. Aspects that were noted especially among some tobacco grower family farmers, revealing the heterogeneous paths selected from the changes in habits.

For analytical purposes, the families were categorized according to different directions and interpretations in life courses that showed heterogeneous changes in either interpretation and conduct in recent years, or in expectations and plans for the future. The analysis pointed to five groups of tobacco-growing family farmers, which

illustrate five different paths towards either institutional change or reaffirmation regarding tobacco production, as shown in figure 5.

More specifically, it was possible to identify that this movement entailed changes in the way farmers interpret and justify their relationship with tobacco, often changing their behavior. In this categorization, three distinct paths demonstrate what we understand as processes of institutional change. Three groups of farmers changed their behaviors and interpretations regarding tobacco in reference to the afore mentioned institutions. In other words, these groups reconsidered the understanding of tobacco as the only possibility of crop for the survival of the farm in the context of their lands and the only possibility of development. They, thus, abandoned their historical and generational ties with tobacco and with the knowledge and routine involving it, being willing to build new ties and new identities.

Figure 5: Analysis of the five different paths of interpretation and conduct of tobacco-producing family farmers



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

The first group analyzed corresponds to families that, in the face of this change in views, sought alternative crops, following what public diversification policies have been promoting, and thus managing to cut ties with tobacco farming. "Now we can choose" reports one of the interviewees who promoted the productive conversion of the farm, starting to produce vegetables for direct marketing to consumers. The sentence highlights that the income from tobacco farming over the years has been important in achieving the conversion of the farm. Despite receiving technical assistance from local entities and participating in some government programs, the changes are rather related to an individual drive among families.

Second, we identified a group of families that changed their views in the same direction but that have not managed to change their behavior, because they could not find yet other farming activity that would guarantee the family's subsistence. These interviewees complain about the lack of government support and technical

assistance entities focused on helping with the search and construction of markets. Furthermore, they demand government support for reducing bureaucratization of activities that are encouraged by diversification policies (the creation of agro-industries, horticultural production), public funding policies to start a new activity and access to technologies for small-scale farming.

Finally, a further institutional change corresponds to the group of families that redirected farming activities towards soy crops, producing tobacco only as an extra income and, thus changing their identity from tobacco growers to soybean growers. These are families that stand out as to farming diversification, both regarding production for family subsistence, as for commercialization, but which still had tobacco as their main source of income, at least in their justifications. This redirection is justified by the acquisition, lease or readjustment of land for growing soy, combined with government policy incentives (facilitating the acquisition of machinery) and the commercial scenario of encouragement to this production. It is also related to discontent expressed with respect to tobacco farming, be it because the health of the family, the drudgery, the lack of labor or low profitability, as also exposed by the other families categorized in the processes of institutional change. It is noteworthy that this movement is mainly promoted by young people who see in soy crops a possibility of staying in rural areas.

In another direction, we identified two groups of families deemed to have followed paths towards the maintenance of both tobacco farming and the institutional network that supports it. These two groups differ in their stance on criticisms over tobacco, as well as in their willingness to make investments towards the new requirements by tobacco companies.

The fourth group includes families who are satisfied with tobacco farming, since they have assistance from companies, following their guidelines and, thus, justify that they receive a value consistent with their production. Sometimes prices paid are low, what is justified by possible crop frustrations due to bad weather or to crises in the international market. This group does not present complaints about tobacco farming or tobacco companies, only criticizing government actions. Thus, they conduct tobacco farming activities in line with the requirements of integrator tobacco companies: they follow tobacco quality guidelines, do not promote deforestation, do not use child labor, among other attitudes.

Accordingly, they promote, together with the media campaigns of the ABIFUMO network, the requalification of the tobacco sector and, thus, they reaffirm the institutions that support the tobacco production chain. These are families deemed more “apt” for tobacco production, an aspect qualified by technicians who provide technical assistance to farmers integrated with tobacco companies. Therefore, it is observed that the future scenario of tobacco growing in southern Brazil will be based on the selection of farmers most likely to qualify tobacco production, promoting increased productivity with higher quality and maintaining the amount of raw material necessary for the companies.

On the other hand, there is a group (the fifth group) of farmers who, despite building criticisms regarding both tobacco farming and the relationship with the Integrated Production System, have not changed their interpretations, keeping such crops until they attain some objectives they planned as milestones stipulated for the end of tobacco farming. Despite criticism, these families continue to justify tobacco

growing by the same token as the latter group, saying that tobacco is the “salvation” for their farms, which has so far enabled the survival and development of the farm. However, they consider it a hard work and complain about profitability and the relationship with tobacco companies. For the future, they plan to continue growing tobacco until retirement, or paying off financial commitments or, still, attaining to acquire more land to plan another activity. To a large extent, these families aim to continue their peasant farming way of life, producing for subsistence and surplus sale, provided that they have a fixed income to maintain them. These families are oblivious to new financial commitments such as financing, as these have kept them tied to tobacco companies for many years. Thus, most of them do not want to invest in a new activity.

An overview of the analyzed regions, focusing on the life course of farmer families added to the analysis of the conduct of tobacco companies, allows us to estimate that the tobacco sector in Brazil will take the direction of other cultivations based on the Integrated Production System, which moved towards reduction in the number of growers and improvement of product quality by selecting farmers most “suitable” for the system and the new legal and market requirements. This trend is confirmed by a group of farmers who are betting on this perspective for future. Consequently, some farmers are being excluded from the system, who need government support to change their realities.

On the one hand, some farmers are able to adapt to the new conditions, creating agro-industries, producing fruits and vegetables for local markets, investing in animal husbandry (beef cattle, chicken) or even entering other productive chains such as milk and soy. However, in this universe, there is a large number of farmers who do not see new possibilities, being tied to a condition that they do not consider favorable but which, given the possibilities, is still the one that allows them to live in the countryside. As a consequence, there is a growing rural exodus, mainly of young people, a factor that the interviewees consider one of the main problems for the future of their regions and one of the main causes for the possible end or reduction of tobacco, as well as the production of foods.

7 Final remarks

This article analyzed issues involved in tobacco production in Brazil, seeking to understand changes in tobacco farming scenario stemming from criticisms and changes in the environment, drawing on institutionalist theories and the Sociology of Critique. To this end, the article presented a theoretical and methodological path that involved four stages of analysis: the movements of criticism over the actant tobacco, the institutions that support tobacco production in Rio Grande do Sul, the responses to criticisms and the process of reaffirmation of the institutions led by tobacco companies, and finally the institutional changes and reaffirmations in the life courses of tobacco-growing families.

Firstly, based on semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis, the devices of local and global criticisms were identified, as well as the transformations that generate uncertainty in the environment where tobacco farming is inserted. The mapping of criticisms was based on the anti-tobacco network that operates globally and on manifestations by tobacco-growing farmers. Discontinuities were observed in

the grammars mobilized by these two blocks, as the anti-tobacco network and tobacco-growing farmers mobilize distinct critiques. This entails distancing between actors who could act together in opposition to the actions of tobacco companies, since one of the main actors that the anti-tobacco network seeks to protect with its criticism is the tobacco-growing family farmer.

In these disputes in response to criticism, it was possible to identify the institutions that have been supporting tobacco growing in Rio Grande do Sul. Based on this, in the second stage of analysis, the mobilized interpretations that justify the worth of tobacco farming were identified. The logic of traditional bonds with tobacco, the industrial logic justified by profitability in the rural context, and the association between tobacco and development are the grammars mobilized in responding to criticisms. A noticeable aspect observed was that institutions are not mobilized separately, being interconnected within what we call an institutional network, since when one interpretation is challenged, others are conjointly mobilized.

In the third stage of analysis, seeking to understand institutional changes in this scenario, transformations in the actions of tobacco companies were identified, most of them semantic, aimed at requalifying the ITPS and, thus, reaffirming the institutions that support tobacco growing. We also mapped the movements and devices of the ABIFUMO network led by tobacco companies in the sense of responding to criticisms and legal requirements regarding diversification, sustainability, guarantee of workers' health and safety, prevention of child labor and profitability. Many of these actions were carried out to adapt to the new Brazilian legal requirements, although being always announced by the companies in an attempt to requalify tobacco production and reaffirm the institutions that support it.

By means of a microsocial analysis based on the life course of interviewed families, the fourth stage of analysis identified institutional changes and reaffirmations in the environment of family farmers who grow tobacco. Families were, thus, classified according to such changes and reaffirmations as follows: one group that reaffirms the institutions in agreement with tobacco companies; one group that tends not to change; and three other groups that present different paths of institutional change. The three groups of farmers who changed their interpretations and their ties to tobacco presented three directions of change in conduct: one group stopped growing tobacco, carrying out the farm's productive conversion to produce fruit and vegetables, among other diversified activities; the second group, despite a desire to carry out a productive conversion of the farm, did not find farming alternatives that could completely replace tobacco production; the third group, influenced by government and commercial incentives for soy production, has been converting farming activities to this chain, maintaining tobacco only as an alternative income.

In view of what appears to be a change in the conduct of tobacco companies in an attempt to maintain the tobacco production chain by reducing the number of farmers, keeping the most qualified for the new requirements, many tobacco farmers have been excluded from this productive chain and are in need to find new ways to survive in rural areas. It is at this point that it becomes fruitful for rural development processes to understand reality based on how the actors interpret it and, thus, to learn the real needs of family farmers and their movements.

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