



State Interactions in Indigenous and Intercultural Contexts

Shared Life Trajectories between the *Public Employee* and the *User*

Francisca de la Maza

Abstract. – The article presents the results of an ethnographic investigation into the implementation of public policy in indigenous and intercultural contexts. In particular, it analyses the life trajectories of public employees, both indigenous and nonindigenous, in three municipalities in the Araucanía Region, Chile – the traditional territory of the Mapuche people. The main thesis is that those who implement public policy have life trajectories and styles that are similar to those of the beneficiaries of these policies (known to social programmes as “users”). Although by different routes, both groups achieve appropriate ways of implementing those programmes, based on personal and power relations implied by their positions as local representatives of the State. [*Chile, Mapuche, public employees, state interactions, life trajectories*]

Francisca de la Maza, PhD in Social Anthropology (CIESAS, Mexico 2007). – From 1999 to date she has been teaching at the Villarrica Campus of the Catholic University of Chile and from 2006 until January 2013 has served as Deputy Director of Research. Currently she is subdirector and principal investigator of the Interdisciplinary Center for Intercultural Studies and Indigenous ICHS. – She has conducted several research projects in the areas of public policy, interculturalism, ethnography of the state, education, rurality, and local development.

1 Introduction

The article addresses the construction of the state in intercultural contexts based on an analysis of public policies in the local space. In particular, it studies this problem by focusing on the public employee as the principal implementer of policies in the local space, who deals with the population face-to-face and puts state actions into practice. The main object is to report on an element, which we consider central in the construction of the state and intercultural

relations, namely, the links between the life trajectories of public employees and the public targeted by the policies.

Public policy operates at different levels of society, and public employees or state agents play an important role, depending on the specific context in which it is implemented. This comprises a particular territory, with historical and sociocultural characteristics, and state presence and action. In this article, the particular context is the Araucanía Region, which is part of the traditional territory of the Mapuche indigenous people. It was occupied by the Chilean state in the late 19th century by military force. Subsequently the land was shared out between the emerging new cities and Chilean and foreign colonists; the Mapuche were granted land in the form of “reductions” (small community reserves). These reductions or indigenous communities represented about 5% of their original land, scattered across the Region. The lands originally granted as reductions have been whittled down by causes such as usurpation, expropriations, and fraudulent sales, and have also been affected by the presence of forestry plantations, rubbish-tips, hydroelectric plants, etc.

Growing out of this historical situation, the presence of the Chilean state became stronger from the first years of the 20th century. However, the state presence, as we see it today, became consolidated in the local space in no more than three decades through a variety of social programmes operating in even the most remote localities. The presence of the State in the Araucanía Region represents not only

the action of the public policies of successive governments, but also the despoilment of land and unresolved disputes linked to a national project which denied the existence of aboriginal peoples. In the Araucanía Region, in particular, this situation is the more acute due to the concentration of various ethnic and political conflicts arising from land claims in certain areas where land has been despoiled in the past. This leads to fairly regular events of violence and confrontation between Mapuche community members, colonists, and *carabineros* (uniformed police).

Today, Araucanía contains a total of 32 *comunas* (municipal districts) with a population of 869,535, of whom 67% live in urban zones; the indigenous population is 24% of the total.

The article analyses the common ground and the differences between the ways of life of public employees and users. The public employee is a state agent operating in the local space of the municipal district, while the “user” is the name given to subjects who are the object of policy as expressed in a particular social programme. We present their life trajectories and the local state interactions to analyse the many divergent forms of state construction from the local point of view.

2 Methodological Perspective

The methodological perspective used in this study is called “state ethnography”, developed by various authors.¹ The ethnographic method is applied in state spaces and the study subject is constructed and defined in concrete social action. In the present work, this is limited to the relationship of state agents with citizens, concentrating on state interactions and social practices.

State ethnography implies analysis of the everyday practices and the discourse of state construction in public culture (Gupta 1995). Ethnography makes it possible to identify and analyse the interrelation of the practices of bureaucracies, their institutions and employees in relation to society. The purpose of this perspective is to “conceive a study of political processes and the everyday reality of the administration such as to enquire into a culture, world-view or rationale native to this space that we know as the state, the presence or absence of which in different realities appears to be of key importance for conceiving our society” (Schavelzon 2007: 41).

This article is based in part on an investigation carried out in three *comunas* in the southern sector of Cautín Province, Araucanía Region, which focused on social programmes oriented either towards the population as a whole (with no ethnic distinction), or exclusively towards the indigenous population. In Chile, the *comuna* is defined as the state’s smallest territorial and administrative unit, governed by a town hall. The latter plays a fundamental role in implementing local social programmes and coordinating regional and national programmes. The results presented describe the situation of the three *comunas* studied, however, the methodological and theoretical characteristics are such that they can be projected to higher levels.

The three *comunas* have some elements in common. None contains more than 30,000 inhabitants, and the indigenous population ranges between 21% and 51% of the total, rising to over 60% in rural sectors (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas [INE] 2005). Due to the poor, rural nature of the *comunas*, a high proportion of the population benefits from social programmes and participates in one way or another in interactions with the local state organ. The presence of the state and its public policies, implemented through social programmes, therefore, is very important in the local context. The town hall occupies a central place in political dynamics, since it is the point where other programmes are coordinated and a reference for the population.

The fieldwork was carried out during 2009–2012, with a total of 180 days in the field. This included observing municipal employees in their work routines, both in the town hall and outside, and particularly in their interactions with the population in different contexts. Observation included participation in everyday state interactions, plus a total of 34 interviews of public employees and 20 of users. In particular, the interviews focused on the life trajectories of both public employees and users, with the subjective aspects of their experiences and their present perceptions of the elements of their past which led them to work as public employees. Subsequently, during 2013–2014, various follow-up actions were carried out and meetings held relating to these territories.

3 Theoretical Perspective

3.1 State Interactions and Practices

The perspective of our analysis is sustained by a view of the state as a cultural construction, as Corrigan and Sayer propose (1985). Based on the strate-

¹ See, e.g., Gupta (1995, 2005); Sharma and Gupta (2006); Hansen and Stepputat (2001); Joseph y Nugent (2002); Das and Poole (2004); Wanderley (2009).

gies of those in power in specific contexts, this construction defines the acceptable forms and images of social activity and individual and collective identity, as well as generates ritualised, symbolised social classifications in the state. This perspective requires us to demystify the state as a monolithic entity and examine it in its broader, more quotidian forms, understanding it as a dynamic and often contradictory process (Lagos y Calla 2007), not as an universal construction but as one with different histories, logics, and practices (Hansen and Stepputat 2001).

Under this perspective the routines of power, the everyday spaces of state interaction and practices take on greater importance as they enable us to uncover the forms of domination and cultural construction. This focus seeks to analyse the state “from within,” based on a study of the relations between the life trajectories of those who implement public policy in the local space and those of the users.

Interaction in the state ambit takes the form of a meeting between two or more persons in a specified context and for a motive or purpose defined by both or one of them; it may be planned or spontaneous. This concept is taken from Goffman (1993) and also from Long (2001: 243), who addresses the concept of interface as an ambit for analysis of a meeting or intersection between worlds of life, social fields, or levels of social organisation. State actions are a space of meeting and dialogue where public employees represent the state to the population through state discourses and practices from local and/or national government. These interactions occur between state agents and between citizens in specific contexts and motivations, in which the communication codes and accumulated experience of the actors involved are manifested. They are constructed in private interests and power relations and are situated historically, but at the same time they have an active, inventive, improvisational dimension. They are manifested in everyday interaction, for example, in politeness, gestures, approach rituals, and vocabulary (Wanderley 2009).

As Nuijten (2003: 2) says, mechanisms of intermediation play an important role, and personal relations and the exchange of favours are central in sociopolitical life; explanatory frameworks constructed around these mechanisms are inadequate in addressing the diversity of power relations. Social practices are understood as the forms of personal relations which are established in the interaction between local state agents and indigenous citizens, in which public policy reaches down to act and the citizen becomes the user or beneficiary of the system. This space of interaction constitutes an area for negotiation and power struggle, not ex-

empt from conflict, in which consensus must finally be achieved to make policy effective. This face-to-face relationship is fundamental for such an understanding of the power relations and spaces of contention in society and the impact that these models and policies have in the everyday life of citizens and in identity construction. It is from this perspective that “bureaucratic encounters” (Kravel-Tovi 2012) are important, because they are keys to understanding – from a subjective, individual, micro perspective – large-scale state processes which affect the whole population.

3.2 The Role of Public Employees

The role of public employees is important for the analysis of this idea of the “strong state” and of absolute power over the whole of society. Relations between state agents and the receivers of their actions are shot through with the subjectivities of both parties as well as the many informal negotiations and agreements which hinder the task of drawing a dividing line between the state apparatus and “civil society” (Martínez 2013: 165).

It is the task of public employees to interpret the action programmes of public policy. They transfer images of the state and develop strategies, negotiating and resolving conflicts at different levels in the implementation of this policy in the local situation, while the citizens negotiate their expectations, projects, and needs. The local space is fundamental for such an analysis, since municipal governments – the lowest levels of the state – function as basic instances of coordination to generate localised representations of the state. They also administer their own local formations of otherness, ensuring that despite their arbitrary nature state borders have their own materiality (Briones 2008: 17).

Likewise, Martínez (2013: 167) says that public cultural practices and representations serve the apparatus of state domination in its double purpose of legitimising its authority and reaffirming its image as a vertical, all-embracing entity. However, this does not mean that “ideas” about the state are invariably reinforced by meetings with public employees. Very often the disorganised, corrupt, fragmented practices apparent in such meetings undermine this supposed image of coherence and centralised control.

With respect to state representatives, Das and Poole (2004) mention the well-known ability of public employees to move with impunity between legal processes and extrajudicial practices clearly constructed as external or previous to the state.

These demonstrate their capacity to act through the state (and thus not transparently) in a clear division between the legal and extra-legal forms of punishment and the application of the law. The same state documents used to establish identity acquire a different life when manipulated by either state employees or ordinary citizens for different purposes.

4 Results

We present the results of our analysis considering first a description of state interactions in indigenous contexts; and, secondly, the life trajectories of the public employees with reference to the population targeted by policy (the users).

4.1 State Interactions in Contexts with an Indigenous Population

Our ethnographic research focused on various programmes executed at municipal level and which target poor families and small-scale farmers. In general, the programmes studied are directed towards people with scarce economic resources who are seeking to improve the quality of life of their families. On the one hand, we studied production development programmes aimed at rural individuals and families with scarce resources who want to improve the quantity and quality of their production through technical advice, training, and small subsidies. On the other hand, social programmes oriented towards improving the basic needs of both rural and urban people, and extending their access to other social programmes. Some of these programmes focus only on the indigenous population, meaning that all the users are indigenous, while others are aimed at the whole population without ethnic distinction – however, a large percentage of the users are indigenous due to the characteristics of the inhabitants of the district.

The implementation of social programmes in the local space operates according to their orientation and type of user. Generally, one or two public employees are responsible for a group of direct users and beneficiaries with whom they establish a medium-term relationship, normally between 3 and 6 years. This direct relationship is constructed gradually over the years and depends on how long the public employee remains in the post. Conceived in general terms, state interactions are generated in four different spaces: the public office, the community meeting-room, the user's home, and public spaces. These spaces are located in particular phys-

ical and historical contexts, manifested in how the interaction between the persons involved is established.

The municipal office is a transitory space, used to carry out the specific bureaucracy for the programmes. More assistentialist relationships are often established because the user generally comes to ask for help or specific guidance. The hierarchical relationship between the public employee and the user is evident, since this interaction occurs in the space widely known to be “the state”, i.e., the public office. It is the public employee who can provide a “solution” and who manages the state's codes.

Another frequent space for everyday interactions is the community meeting-room.² Unlike the office, in the community meeting-room, it is the public employee who must submit to the rules of the place and the social organisation to which it belongs. This means that he/she must adapt and know the local codes in order to achieve the objectives. Not all organisations have a community meeting-room and the majority are built with public funds. In cases where there is no community meeting-room, meetings have to be held in private houses, or a meeting room is borrowed from another organisation, generating unequal conditions between organisations. However, when the public employee visits the user's home, more important, personalised interactions occur. Their objects are generally direct technical advice on the farm or for personal follow-up on the programmes, and they may serve to build up the relation of trust.

In general, it may be said that the interactions, which occur in these three spaces (municipal office, community meeting-room, and user's home), have to do with a relationship of social support and technical advice, but they also have a strong personal connotation. There is an atmosphere of familiarity, but in some cases also conflicts or difficulties in the forms and codes of communication and in the mutual relations between public employees and users.

Other key sites for state interaction are public spaces. An important example are community meetings like fairs or shows of traditional customs, usually held in summer between December and January and which are organised by the public employees working in various programmes. These meetings

2 The community meeting-room is designed for holding meetings, festivities, and other activities. It generally belongs to a social organisation, depending on the source of financing. There are various types of social organisation in rural, indigenous communities, particularly the indigenous communities created under the Indigenous Law (1993); there are also various types of committee (small-scale farmers, rural water, electrification, etc.).

are a public presentation of state action, where products are displayed and sold.

The dynamics of state meetings form part of the play of politics in which both, users and public employees, play a role, but also demand what has been promised and that “the favour should be returned.” These state practices mean that relations are mediated by access to and receipt of programme benefits. The idea that resources take a long time to come through, of state bureaucracy, or the possibility of obtaining more resources, generate an unequal relationship, in which the public employee must answer for an institutional organisation where he has little control over programme design, being responsible only for implementation.

A further factor is the instability of the employees’ jobs, since – in addition to their commitment to and vocation for their work – they must comply with the programme’s demands and indicators to enable their contracts to be renewed from one year to the next. Nevertheless, ethnographic analysis shows that the employee has room to manoeuvre and adapt in the interaction, allowing him to make the programme more effective and making better communications and relations possible. It is in these open spaces of policy that the public employee can put his stamp on his work, demonstrating his commitment to the users, promoting actions with different degrees of participation, and giving the users some responsibility for the success of the programme.

4.2 Life Trajectories of Public Employees in Action

We analyse three moments in the life trajectories of the public employees who worked in these social programmes, relating them to the users’ trajectories: origin and education, training and work, and current employment.

a) Origin and Education

The majority of the public employees interviewed and who worked in the *comunas* originate from the Araucanía Region, some from the same *comuna* where they work or a nearby one. A high percentage comes from poor rural families, both from Mapuche communities and of Chilean origin.

Several employees’ testimonies mention their rural, Mapuche background:

My father was a countryman ... my parents were tenant-farmers ... I grew up in a Mapuche community ... I was

born and bred in the country, with oxen and cows and pigs and all that.^[3]

In many – perhaps most – cases, their families suffered economic hardship, especially when their children went away to study. Some spent their first few school years in their home villages and then moved to a town or the regional capital, Temuco. For the families, when their children went away to study, this implied a series of changes in family life, especially when they moved from the country to the town. When the family could not move, the children were sent to stay with relatives. Another possibility was to travel from the country to the town every day, or to attend a boarding school. Access to university or technical education required an economic effort by the family, firstly for the children to finish secondary education:

My parents rented a house in Temuco and my mother came with me, because my brother also wanted to study in Temuco; in the end the whole family moved to Temuco, except my father who stayed in the country (Mapuche public employee, production development programme).

This often created conditions for family life in which children/adolescents were marked by the “sacrifice” including efforts such as getting up early, walking for hours, going hungry, leaving their families, working to help the family economy, and pay for their siblings’ education:

I travelled every day, and at that time there was no public transport as there is now; we had to walk, or sometimes hitch a lift. It was fun, but it was hard too. Many of my cousins who were in the same group gave up, but because I was motivated by my parents I managed to finish secondary school and go on studying (Mapuche public employee, Indian rights promotion programme).

When I reached 10th grade, I had to get a job to finish secondary school and go on (studying). If I hadn’t worked I couldn’t have gone on studying, because my father simply couldn’t help me (non-Mapuche public employee, production development programme).

The families made these efforts to get their children to study, because they saw it as a way out of their economic situation or of ensuring a better future. They are generally the first generation, which had access to complete technical secondary and/or university education, and it was not always possible for all the children. Several of their siblings had to stay in the country to work on the farm, or support the family economy, or help bring up younger children, or look after the old people, etc. Apart from their immediate families, other people made very

3 Testimonies from various interviews with public employees.

important personal and economic contributions, which enabled them to continue their studies – uncles, cousins, and teachers.

The lives described by the people who participated and interacted with the public employees – the “users” – are similar. The majority were born where they live:

I was born here, my grandfather and my parents were the first people to settle here, my husband is from here as well. We are Mapuche (user, production programme).

They lived throughout their life in this territory, benefitting from public policies and even in some cases as community leaders. Like the families of the public employees, their childhood was marked by scarcity and poverty:

We walked to school, with flip-flops, we never wore shoes because my father was poor, we never had any. We used to walk about 15 kilometres in flip-flops (user, social programme).

It was not easy to continue studying. Most of them could only study for a few years in the community school or nearby. Others were able to continue their studies in boarding schools further away, some from when they were very young / from early childhood on, which was a harsh experience. Many did not finish their schooling before they had to start work. Some migrated to cities in Chile and Argentina:

Life has been very hard to me, my father died and my mother re-married, she had a miserable life and she was always poor, very poor. And I drifted here and there. It was never a stable life, I wasn't brought up in one home with a single way of life, I have learnt about life in different ways ... I even suffered sexual abuse, a lot of things when I was very young. That is why I was like that, I had to defend myself from everything in life (user, social programme).

It was a very hard experience to work as a housemaid. The first time I went away I was 14; it was traumatic because it was the first time I had left home. I had different customs, I was used to a slow life, and coming to a big city like Santiago, I didn't like it at all. And I always said, I am going to get ahead by myself ... I always saw the discrimination against maids. It was very hard then just to earn a few miserable pesos in order to go on studying ... I was a little girl, and for a little girl to have to do the housework ... it was very traumatic for me (user, social programme).

And after we had grown up, we left home and went out to work. I went to work in Argentina; I brought back the money I earned there by my own efforts. We struggled hard to change our lives (user, production programme).

b) Training and Work

The technical and professional training of the public employees interviewed was acquired through courses that concerned certain production areas, such as agricultural technician, agronomist, forestry engineer, engineer in agricultural execution, and veterinarian; whereas some studied social subjects, such as administrator, sociologist, or social worker. Their motivations to study were varied, ranging from personal motives to unforeseen circumstances, which decided them on a course. One of the main motives for studying a course linked to agriculture was the love of the countryside, their childhood, and family life:

As my father was a farmer, there was a phase when I wanted to study agriculture, too. Apart from teaching, later, I wanted to give something back, and above all because it was what I had wanted as a child, as if it was innate (user, production programme).

Some public employees studied a course that would qualify them to work in the town hall. The following account given by a Mapuche man, who now works in a production development programme, is a good example:

He was born and still lives in his Mapuche community. According to his testimony, he was seeking a way to develop. He realised that there was a lot of very valuable native timber in his village. Then, by talking with agricultural technicians, he was able to do a course. After that, he asked for a loan. With these basic elements he started a serious process of self-teaching: “I had to learn everything myself, and run the whole business; I went step by step”. Then he developed an interest in bee-keeping. Again he looked for a way of getting training, and little by little he taught himself and involved his family and neighbours. Today he works in this field in the town hall, teaching other farmers.

Going from secondary school to university is also a difficult step for the young students:

I was in the first few years of my course and I had to survive by myself; my friends helped me, and my family and neighbours. They often paid my bus tickets (public employee, production programme).

It is equally difficult when they have to leave their homes and live in university hostels. Despite the problems, studying was an enriching experience, allowing them to meet their peers and grow together. However, due to economic instability and other difficulties several public employees had to change courses. They managed to complete their studies though, motivated by the personal, family, and economic effort implied:

I didn't get close to other people, I always focused on getting a good degree. As my parents said: you have to finish your degree because that is what gives you a direction, especially people with scarce resources (Mapuche public employee, Indian rights promotion programme).

Commitment, interest, and vocation felt by some public employees while studying for a degree are remarkable. After they had completed their studies, the young public employees passed through varied life experiences. They generally moved away to look for work. In some cases they started with small, sporadic jobs, finding it difficult to obtain stable employment.

Finally I got my degree ... and I thought like every young graduate that I would find work immediately, but unfortunately it didn't work out that way. For several years after I finished my studies I was doing anything other than the subject I had studied (public employee, production programme).

It's tough finding that you cannot get work at that moment, especially as I have a daughter. Then you wonder: How am I going to keep going, or make progress? It was as if doors were being shut on me. I spent six months without a job, and I was getting desperate, because I looked and looked and I couldn't find anything (user, production programme).

The difficulties increase when people find that their work situation does not meet their expectations, which were to find a job in the area they had studied and not go back to traditional work on the land with their families. Some young people return frustrated:

I was a bit demotivating because I had not found a job which I had studied for. I started to go out with friends, I was starting to drink too much, and a cousin of mine who lived in Santiago said: "If you don't take this lad out of it, he'll go to the bad" ... and I went to Santiago thinking again that there would be an opportunity for me there (Mapuche public employee, Indian rights promotion programme).

Sometimes it was the situation in the families which made them go back to their village or community as, e.g., the health of their parents, the death of a relative, etc., and from there they started to look for work, to get into the market, and project their futures in this new situation with a degree and more experience.

Moving to Santiago or other distant cities is also associated with frustration, but this is forgotten when they find work and form their own family. The types of work they find in the capital varied widely, some starting only with sporadic jobs, but little by little things improve. Their first jobs,

whether in Araucanía or Santiago, were their first experiences in insertion into working groups and organisations. It was also the place, where they initiated contacts with users or beneficiaries of these programmes, although they did not have much experience or training in human relations. This meant, that several of these young people had to seek strategies to improve these relations and to gain personal and professional growth:

What did I learn? I think, that the first thing you develop is working with people. How to communicate with people, because it is complicated; because in the university they do not teach you how to work with a group of people or when you go on a field visit. I think, that was what I learnt in my first job, how to communicate, how to know what people are really like.

I devoted myself to my work, 100%. I cried with these people, they really filled me with emotion, I cried with people over their problems. I thought, that if I took a lot more time, I could really build confidence, first with the family, with the individual, with the qualified informant ... that enabled me to provide more accurate information (public employee, production development programme).

After they had settled down and started to earn money, the new professionals and technicians managed to become independent and found new ways to develop, for example, in terms of political participation and the responsibility of having a job:

I understood what responsibilities and efficiency were ... (at work). We had to be efficient, we had to be quick, we had to be active, we had to be productive, making good use of our time. So if we went out to do something, we had to come back with something... when you feel secure in your job, you have an incentive, your production goes up (Mapuche public employee, Indian rights promotion programme).

Among the users, on the other hand, the possibilities for development and growth were different. Very few managed to finish secondary school and none of them went to university. However, many of them are now motivated to go on studying as adults. The users gradually found a way of life which allowed them to survive and develop. Their types of work are related to farm production, selling their meagre surplus during fairs or on small markets, working on nearby farms or getting a permanent job; in some cases they occasionally managed to get a job in a public or private organisation.

I have a stall at the fair ... I knocked at doors with my vegetables; I went out into the street with my bag of produce – that is door-to-door selling. Later I joined the stallholders' association in the square. Now this is my place, I have been assigned a stall with a number. I love fairs, I love doing what I do, because since I started to work

I have never gone short. I believe, that is what keeps me going, because I love my work more than anything else.

I produce everything. I decided not to work for a boss any more. I wanted to do something but to be independent. I started making jam and selling it everywhere, offering my produce. I have always done well on everything I have learnt, I have persevered, I have never done badly. Then I started to work with my plants, which I still have, with my flowers and medicinal herbs, a lot come from trees threatened with extinction (user, social development programme).

Another important incentive are the training courses offered by public institutions through different state programmes or actions, or by NGOs, etc. With these courses, the target population can have new opportunities. Many users are also community leaders and heavily involved in social organisations, some of which are promoted by the state and are related with access to state funds. What motivates them to participate is their expectation of improving the quality of life of their families and the community where they live.

Assuming the role of leader – or any responsible post – was not easy. Many user-leaders talked about the difficulties arising in the organisation because people do not take part and do not want to assume responsibilities. However, despite the time it takes up and the personal and economic costs, the leaders said that assuming a responsible post is a learning process which implies acquiring knowledge, for example, ways of leading a group, contacting people in public services, making friends, visiting other places, growing, and escaping from the routine.

c) Current Employment

The public employees interviewed found their present jobs by different means, e.g., by public competitive programmes, projects, or political contacts:

... they opened a competition ... I applied and got this job. I think it is because of my apolitical position which has enabled me to survive changes of mayors for so long, and because I was never associated with any political issues. My politics is people, so they cannot say that you have done a bad job because the people are very happy with you. I think it is the other way round; as you have seen, the whole *comuna*, all the people know me, and like me, and respect me. So I think that this is something built up over time, and that is what we have to do.

One makes lots of contacts in politics, and I had the opportunity to get into the institution, without knowing what the programme was ... the process was traumatic ... I learnt as I went along; I picked up the knowledge and acquired the skills, so now I know more than when we started.

I had a chance to come and work in the town hall, and so the mayor at that time – as I had worked a lot in culture and recovering folklore ... – made us an offer: “I will give you a grant, so that you can work here, but you have to be there when I tell you.” But what I was doing was born out of a love of art, what I loved doing; I had taught the children the same love and so I didn’t accept this offer; but the mayor, despite my refusal, said: “I want you to work in the town hall ...” I started at the bottom ... that was how my social spirit was born.

One of the tensions suffered by public employees in their work now is related with the demands of the people they work for and the mayor’s requirements:

It’s complicated, because these are poor districts and the people a lot. The people expect a lot from the town hall. Even the farmers ask for seed, plastic products; and the mayor sometimes sends people to you to identify their problems. Fortunately, I managed things quite well, I think because of my political experience. There is a lot of political work because you have to do what the mayor says; there is technical work that you have to consolidate, but there is also political work to promote the mayor’s image.

In terms of the social and political participation of public employees today, some have best connections with the mayor or a political party, while others say that their work is technical. People with a more political role generally start their social commitment from base organisations. Many started with their families, accompanying their parents to meetings, and then one day found they were part of the organisation. These public employees, depending on their type of work, may suffer greater job instability if they have got their job through political contacts, since any change in the local power structure affects them directly.

In terms of their knowledge of the concepts of cultural diversity or indigenous rights, non-Mapuche public employees said that they have had little contact with Mapuche people before they started working in social programmes – except those who had had contact with Mapuche communities in their childhood, because they were born in the country. So work provides a good opportunity to established permanent daily relations with people of Mapuche origin.

For Mapuche public employees, on the other hand, their relationship with Mapuche affairs started inside their families and the community. Growing up they join indigenous organisations both in the community and at university. In the case of Mapuche public employees, there are several examples where some individuals had influenced their political participation, e.g., a priest, their father, or their

grandparents. These young Mapuche are leaders of a process to position the indigenous issue in different environments, such as the political parties and even the town hall:

We started to work with these political campaigns; there are parties which invite you to take part in support of their objectives and their candidates. We started to see where indigenous policy was best protected and we found that there were some parties that were more committed, more interested in the situation. Now it is across the board, all politicians today accept that they have to work on the indigenous issue ... an indigenous round table has been started in the party.

Indigenous public employees stress the importance and the responsibility of being indigenous and of being the point of contact for Mapuche people. They accept it as a commitment which goes beyond their work, because of the link with their people and their roots; and also because they know the situation from the inside:

I was really always very critical of the system ... I still find it hard to adapt, but I saw in this programme that there was a failing in the system, and so I wanted to stay in this programme. Without knowledge you cannot contribute; or you cannot understand that in public policy we are not here to generate something new, but to hand down the public policies of the government of the day. So I don't know if everyone knows the role we play today – at least we are a bit more organised in what we have to do; we used to be jacks of all trades.

I find it hard to make a distinction, because at town hall level and organisation level, we do not have an opinion; all I have to do is execute the programme. One day I am going to carry out an analysis and give my opinion, but at a different level. I suppose it is because we are employees, that is the difference, we are not leaders ... Now my opinion is long-term, perhaps my contribution is long-term. Perhaps I was used to want everything to happen quickly, but not now ... If I can achieve these small changes in people, if we can get land, we can get people to manage their own affairs, train more people like us ... I do not try to get out of the system, I try to play a good game on the existing playing-field, and to the best of my ability.

Mapuche public employees assume a double commitment because of their trajectories as community leaders and as Mapuche. Despite the internal contradictions that this may cause, the public employee adapts to his job and accepts it with responsibility and commitment.

5 Discussion and Conclusion

Based on the results gathered, our analysis and discussion will be on three levels. First, we will ana-

lyse the relation between the life trajectories of public employees and users; secondly, the role of the public employee “as an equal” in the implementation of public policies and state interactions will be described; and, thirdly, we will analyse the implications of these public employees in the construction of the state.

The life trajectories of the public employees and users interviewed contain common elements. In both cases the majority came from a *comuna* in the Araucanía Region, from a rural sector and poor families. The difference between them is marked by the fact that the public employees were able to continue studying and complete their secondary education and in many cases earn a degree or technical qualification. This allowed them to “leave the farm” in search of new opportunities until they finally got jobs as public employees. The various stories of public employees stress the importance of education and the opportunity of getting a job. In the case of the Mapuche public employees, their efforts were reinforced by their links with their families and communities. This gives them a particular stamp, reinforced by their identification with the users. As a result, they feel committed to their work and they stress the importance of a stable job.

This coincides with the case described by Martínez, who says that the intervention of public employees often has a connotation of personal interests. She observes this feature by noting that the relations between public employees and the target population of the policy studied is mediated not only by the institutional protocols governing official positions but also – and perhaps fundamentally – by the informal relations built up outside the state apparatus (Martínez 2013: 177). So the boundary between the state and the communities targeted by the policy are difficult to draw, because the public employees also belong to these or similar communities. The life trajectories of the public employees show that little by little they managed to insert themselves in the world of work in municipal social programmes. For their professional development their experience was as fundamental as were their links with their families and home communities. The Mapuche public employees participated actively in community and political organisations, like the users today, assuming various personal and economic costs. In their role as public employees, on the other hand, they can maintain their links with their communities and families through their public service.

The majority of the users did not finish their schooling, as they had to face economic difficulties and start work young. In dealing with these problems, they developed a close relationship with their

home communities, some becoming active members of social organisations. This proximity between the life trajectories of public employees and users functions as a mirror in the sense that the public employee identifies with the user and vice versa. However, although both sides are flattered by this illusion, they know that it is not real. This may be observed in their interactions with the state and the ways in which they relate.

In their interactions, although the programmes observed differ, they share some common elements. A form of state practice is identified in which the personal relationship with users is a key aspect. This means, that a proximity exists which is built up over time through the everyday relations between public employees and users. The role of the public employees is not only to hand over the “benefit” (sometimes not a material object but technical and social support), but also to make it compatible with the need to improve their own indicators. In this way, they ensure the success of the programme and also their future in the job.

The public employees are close to the users: they know how they behave, in contrast to the public employees in other studies who do not know the population because of the nature of their work. An example of this is Middleton (2011) in India, who observed a survey of ethnic identification, which shows public employees who are foreign to and disconnected from the situation in which they work. The spaces in which state interactions occur are similar (office, user’s home, community meeting-room), as are the ways in which the public employee-user relationship and dialogue are established. These interactions are also stamped by public employees and users. This link, this form of relation, very often spills over the boundaries of work and extends to other spaces like family festivities and the purchase of farm consumables for own use, for example.

But in this case, the ethnic origin of each party (public employee and user) is of key importance. The public employees have learnt to work in programmes which distinguish between indigenous and nonindigenous users. The way this distinction is incorporated into their work, depends on their life trajectories. For Mapuche public employees the important point is how they have assumed the identity processes; for non-Mapuche it is how they have valued cultural diversity in their personal and work history.

Public employees play an important role in the construction of the state. Although the public employee is “an equal” of the subject who is targeted by the programme, in the end he is a public employ-

ee and represents the state. In our study, the public employee represents and shows a strong state, because it works. Despite the personal relationships and the subjectivities of this encounter with the state, the public employee’s role shows that he is there and has the power to resolve problems or support the subjects with whom he works. The public employee represents a local authority, which is below the mayor in the hierarchy but still an authority in the sense that he has the power to resolve demands or problems, small things perhaps, but which take on a larger dimension in the local space.

The public employees play a leading role because they have links with the local authorities and others who lead the programmes that they execute. In practice, it is they who resolve the users’ problems and needs and, furthermore, this solution is not only a personal triumph for the public employee, for his work, and personal career which positions and reinforces his role at the local level, but it is also a triumph for the local authority, the mayor, and the programme, which are shown in a positive light. If the opposite occurs, the effects will also be negative.

Public employees act and adapt to their work because of their vocation and their proximity to the world with which they work. The interface between state and society occurs in a known context, but one of power relations. The subtleties of these contexts depend on the ethnic origins of the people involved, making things easier when both, the public employee and the target population, are Mapuche. They can read one another’s codes and feel identified. Many of the codes of communication are intercultural; they are appropriated both by public employees and by users, indigenous and nonindigenous alike. They are learnt by the experience of interaction, improving the success achieved in the objectives of state actions, and the subjects who participate in the policy.

As Nuijten (2003) says, public employees also contribute to the reproduction of this image of the state as the central *locus* of power. The adaptation of policy and the primacy of personal rather than technical decisions have been described by some as forms of corruption (for example, the case studied by Das and Poole [2004]). Rather than corruption, the local adaptations made by public employees in the case studied respond to a logic of doing a good job and maintaining this paternalist, assistentialist relationship – and client relationship in the case of the mayor – with the users, is the guarantee for the public employee’s continued employment.

The public employee adapts his work, despite the personal stamp which he gives it, to the demands of the national project, in particular, to the demands

of the programme in which he works, reproducing the state's lines, its forms of dominating and regulating people's lives. The regulation is not a standardisation in the sense that they are all equal; but the project, the idea of controlling and managing society and visions of citizen development, etc. is transmitted, built, and reconstructed in these actions which in the long run give them a national and local identity. They get involved in the everyday lives of the people – both public employees and the subjects of the policy. Despite the cultural differences, this action produces the effect of a national identity – or several identities within the framework of the nation.

The state message is transmitted and adapted to the context; the public employees are able to adapt the technical training to the context and so mould it. Despite the diversity of their practices, which may appear informal, they show the way in which the state is active. On the one hand, they destroy the idea of a solid state, but at the same time they reinforce its strength and importance in the everyday lives of the people.

In conclusion, we may stress the importance of understanding who it is that implements policies and the life experiences of the parties to a state interaction. The local space is ideal for analysing the everyday nature of these state practices and discourses and the ways in which state and society are constructed and interact with each other. We cannot say what their limits are – they must be seen as connected and intertwined, in mutual construction. Seeing the public employees as equal to the subjects of the policy is of key importance for understanding how cultural practices develop and how the project of society is constructed, since, despite its appearance of homogeneity, its development and construction are diverse. The fact that most public employees were born in the region and knowing it well makes it a particular case and shows, that the cultural forms of the state are constructed from the local level. This means, that the various forms acquired in practice by public policies, although they are designed at a national, central level, are diverse and suited to the territory.

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