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Not another typical story, yet not a new critique. A journey to utopia across standardized assessment

Não é uma história comum, porém, não é uma nova crítica.
Uma viagem para utopia por meio da avaliação padronizada

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Abstract: This is an approach to standardized assessment built on Foucault's work. Assessment is taken as a *dispositif* that allows the exertion of power, in terms of governmentality. Diverse discourses about assessment circulate among national and international agencies, which promote its "goodness" for progress and development of nations. This paper, by historicizing the present, aims at mapping the continuities and discontinuities of discourses about standardized assessment in Chile and at portraying how assessment systems govern subjects. The structure of this paper is not the typical academic structure. Instead, it uses the plot of two movies to articulate and to depict assessment systems as a *dispositif* of power.

Keywords: standardized assessment, *dispositif*, historicizing the present, Foucault.

Resumo: Este trabalho é uma abordagem da avaliação padronizada construída sobre o trabalho de Foucault. A avaliação é considerada como um *dispositif* que permite o exercício do poder, em termos de governamentalidade. Diversos discursos sobre avaliação circulam entre agências nacionais e internacionais, que promovem sua "bondade" para o progresso e o desenvolvimento das nações. Este artigo, ao historicizar o presente, visa traçar as continuidades e descontinuidades dos discursos sobre a avaliação padronizada no Chile e retratar como os sistemas de avaliação governam os sujeitos. A estrutura deste artigo não é a estrutura acadêmica típica. Em vez disso, usa o enredo de dois filmes para articular e descrever os sistemas de avaliação como um *dispositif* de poder.

Palavras-chave: avaliação padronizada, *dispositif*, historicizar o presente, Foucault.

Caution!

This is not the typical story about assessment. This is not a story about a method to select, certify or control groups of students (Jurdak, 2014). It is not about forms of pressure to "deliver" and to exclude students (Ball *et al.*, 2012), neither about equity (Gipps, 1999) nor inequity (Cooper and Dunne, 2000). This is not a story about a promoter of active feedback (Black *et al.*, 2004),

neither about a gatekeeping dispositive (Björklund Boistrup, 2017). This is not a story about the goodness of assessment for progress, economy and development of nations (Kellaghan and Greaney, 2001). This is not a story about a report on international comparisons of children's curriculum knowledge (PISA), nor a national system to improve every improvable aspects or agents of schooling (SIMCE in Chile). This is a story of none of these and, at the same time, about all of these. This

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is a journey to utopia across a path of continuities and discontinuities, of hopes and dreams about assessment in school².

Chapter 0: Monologue

[Voiceover] Well, we meet again. I remember the first time I saw you. I was so naïve. I thought we were friends, but I didn't know you had other plans, that you were going to talk behind my back, against me. You questioned everything I thought I knew and you still do. Are you mocking me? Do you enjoy judging me? Probably I didn't take you seriously. Was I foolish? I believed everything you promised me; everything they told me about you. You were going to help me help others. That was the plan³! You were going to help me decide whom to help first, whom to help next. I relied on you! You would tell me what they needed, what they lacked, to decide what to do⁴. I still remember when we chatted about equity and quality, about harmony and equality, about our hopes of a brighter future. We were supposed to make everything better. But I was so wrong! We sounded so much like hippies... youngsters' dreams. And I know what you are going to say to me. *"What are you talking? I didn't judge you; I was the only one able to say what you truly were and what you could become. I was being your friend, your only friend"*. But you were not my friend, and you never will. What do you want from me? Are you analysing me? You will not be able to escape, not again. So, let our little dance begin.

Chapter 1

...You and me we have no faces. They don't see us anymore. Without love as they had promised and no faith for what's in store⁵.

Numbers, numbers, numbers. You and I didn't think this would be it, didn't we? Was it worth it? Measuring progress, quality, performance, effectiveness, achievement, measuring them, us... everything! Numbers,

so powerful and so meaningful, yet so tricky to work with. You can play with them as you please. Numbers, little tricksters!

Numbers, numbers, numbers! So closely linked to competition and accountability. Are we pursuing a business? Are we some sort of enterprise? Numbers to arrange, to allocate, to identify, to test, to conclude, to elude, to increase, to decrease. Numbers, so powerless and so meaningless unless you give them power. And that is what we all did, did we? We played with them, we used them, we thought we needed them, and now we got used to them. They became part of us, of who we are, of what we do, of what we know.

I have so many questions. Do you see them as consumers?⁶ Are you judging if we sell them valuable tools? No wonder why we have to redistribute efficiently our resources⁷, are you helping us to achieve that? Are you giving us numbers to reward? Numbers to reward our best sellers and their skills for consumers to be content with the final product. But, our customer service is still full of complains⁸. Is that what you are helping us with... to improve our products' quality?

A marathon, running, rushing to be on the top... Tripping, colliding, hoping not to be last... Falling, failing... Training exhaustedly, eating properly, buying the best clothes, seeking for advisors, making decisions, monitoring every move, trying to reproduce what winners do, investing for our success. Is that what you want us to be? Runners?

Numbers, numbers, numbers! Wait... *"...Memory's not perfect. It's not even that good. Ask the police. Eye-witness testimony is unreliable. The cops don't catch a killer by sitting around remembering stuff. They collect facts, they make notes and they draw conclusions. Facts, not memory! That's how you investigate. I know. It's what I used to do. Look, memory can change the shape of a room. It can change the colour of a car and memories can be distorted. They're just an interpretation. They're not a record. They're irrelevant if you have the facts"*⁹. That's it! Facts!

² All quotes have been translated from Spanish and French to English by the author.

³ The Chilean assessment system for measuring the quality of education (SIMCE) aims at improving quality of education "by providing data about learning outcomes [to]: monitor and inform decision-making [...]; provide feedback to schools [...] improve teaching practices; foment accountability and parental and school community involvement" (Meckes and Carrasco, 2010, p. 234).

⁴ SIMCE is recognized as an accurate system for "monitoring and managing the decision-making process" to improve the quality of education (Olivares, 1996, p. 195).

⁵ Scene's background music. (*No one's there*, by KoЯn).

⁶ Assessment systems "can augment efficiency by making principals and teachers more accountable to parents. [...] parents-consumers can voice their discontent and demand better services" (Benveniste, 2002, p. 92).

⁷ SIMCE has been taken as an efficient system to allocate resources to the most vulnerable educational sectors (Olivares, 1996).

⁸ "[T]he role of the State has been dislocated from its central position leading the development of educational policies, being now just another stakeholder [...] These] also raise questions regarding the health of the Chilean democracy and the legitimacy of evaluation policies targeting the broad population, but tailored to the needs of a cluster of neoliberal entrepreneurs" (Campos-Martinez et al., 2015, p. 121).

⁹ The character quotes Christopher Nolan's film *Memento* from 2000, when Leonard talking to Teddy.

Numbers to collect facts, to gather data, to produce variables, to explore, to report, to compare, to show, to prioritize, to select, to appraise, to research. Numbers that numb. Numbers to bring order to the chaos, they said. Numbing numbers. Numbing the ones judging or the ones that are being judged? Perhaps both. But what are numbers seeking? Are they seeking the failure to bring quality, an average quality?¹⁰

I can hear you coming, step-by-step, walking towards me. Well, we meet again... (Back to: Chapter 0).

Chapter 2

*...To all these nameless feelings I can't deal with in my life. To all these greedy people trying to feed on what is mine...*¹¹

Before the 1990s, we were four little gullible dreamers in this end of the world¹²; we were the ones you convinced first. After that you spread like a virus¹³. Do you remember how everybody used to say you were the one able to make things better? The redeemer of our sins and failures... weren't they using you to set standards? Weren't they using you to tell us what to do and how to behave?

[The phone rang] Who is this?

I don't understand it. You expanded so quickly and you still do. They see you as the Holy Grail, as if you were the key to unlock all answers. You are trained to seduce others with your greatness. I just couldn't see it. You have many masks. Are you truly teaching them how to behave?¹⁴

[On the phone] At that time, in the sixties, it was all about social change and progress. Intuitive and global interpretations

were left for scientific approximations. We were seduced by the abstraction of models and paradigms. We were so into economic progress¹⁵, into the promises of foreign lands. "Theories of modernization"¹⁶, they used to call it...

Do you remember the World Bank, OREALC, the Interamerican Development Bank or UNESCO? They were all interested in you. Of course, they said that quality was prompted by decentralization, accountability and market competition¹⁷. You were just a puppet. Have you heard about TIMSS or PISA? You are just one of many others¹⁸.

[On the phone] Americans thought that their industrial society and also the European one were the ideal models we had to follow. Why? I didn't really know, but we believed them¹⁹. Did we feel insecure, unevolved, or less-developed?

Can you tell what they are doing with you? Reports in the newspapers, all carefully aligned for everyone to see. Judgment day²⁰. Everyone judges, everyone points²¹. Do you think they do it to be transparent? Probably they do, but... numbers are tricksters, remember? What if you are not at the top of the list? Will they start drawing conclusions? Will they feel the need to track facts to explain the failure? What could they track... conditions, income, backgrounds, staff's quality, previous movements, previous outcomes, owners, consumers' background, believes, globalization, the over use of social networks, the position of the moon? How far will they track? How many factors will they consider?

[On the phone] ...Modernization was the only path to overcome poverty. We had to become less underdeveloped and, also, ensure welfare. We started approximating scientifically to education. In 1967 we run the first test²². A revolutionary

¹⁰ SIMCE collects "detailed background information from students and their educational establishments [...] Schools receive individualized reports comparing their test outcomes to the national average and a regional average" (Benveniste, 2002, p. 97).

¹¹ Scene's background music (*No one's there*, by Коян).

¹² Until 1991, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, and Mexico had experience with systemic evaluations (Benveniste, 2002).

¹³ During the 1990s, assessment systems flourished throughout all Latin America (Benveniste, 2002).

¹⁴ Within formal assessments surveillance is combined with normalization: "There is qualification and classification taking place simultaneously, as well as the exercise of power and education of a specific knowing" (Björklund Boistrup, 2017, p. 3).

¹⁵ In Chile, during the first half of the 20th century, "the focus of social analysis shifted from an interest from 'culture' itself, as an expression of forms of living, to 'culture' as a normative element for economic and social transformation" (Larraín, 2001, p. 112).

¹⁶ The first ideas of modernization in Chile "were the American ideas of the sociology of development, usually denominated "theories of modernization", which emerged in the late 40s and at the beginning of the 50s" (Larraín, 2001, p. 112).

¹⁷ "National assessment systems support a new vision for a lean, noninterventionist state model [...] The logic underpinning this model of assessment is the promotion of decentralization, market competition, and consumer accountability" (Benveniste, 2002, p. 93).

¹⁸ Since 1996, OECD has prompted nations to shift governmental concerns away from mere control over the resources and contents of education toward a focus on outcomes (OECD, 1996).

¹⁹ Americans authors "moved forward the idea that developing countries [...] are in transition from a traditional society into a modern society and that European and American industrial societies are the ideal model. Modernization is taken as a historical necessity" (Larraín, 2001, p. 112).

²⁰ Since 1995, SIMCE's scores "have been widely publicized in newspapers. Student achievement data is meant to inform parent-customers about the quality of service provision and to assist them in the selection of an educational establishment for their children" (Benveniste, 2002, p. 103).

²¹ "The publication of results caused mistrust among teachers, [...] since the low scores were simplistically interpreted by the public as resulting from poor school performance" (Meckes and Carrasco, 2010, p. 238).

²² The national examination by the Ministry of Education began in 1967 as a participation in the international study of the International Education Assessment (IEA) (Cariola and Meckes, 2008).

aptitude prediction system aimed at measuring capacities, knowledge, abilities, decision-making, and actions. We were so proud of it, asking relevant questions to measure their abilities for the prediction of their future performances...

Pressure... *"pushing down on me, pressing down on you, no man asks for. Under pressure, that burns a building down, splits a family in two, puts people on streets"*²³ ... pressure to be normal, to be average, to fit in. But everything is always moving, changing. So they become chasers, hunters of a dream, pursuers of an illusion. Why? Because that is the standard! Then, they train, they instruct, they run tests, they monitor progress, they practice, they improve, they hope, they fear, they chase²⁴...

[On the phone] No, of course not. You have to monitor it...

You are so stubborn. Yes, they can blame themselves for their own failure, but isn't everyone involved? Aren't published results making all actors accountable? Aren't you creating a culture of evaluation?²⁵ And suddenly everything collapse, a training culture emerge, playing the game only to survive one more day. Was all of this because of you? But how? After all, you are just numbers. Numbers, numbers, numbers... (Back to: Chapter 1)

Chapter 3

*...So what can it be? No one hears me call,
Echoes back at me. No one's there...*²⁶.

I give up! It is impossible to talk to you. You refute anything I say because other people are using you and you don't even realise... you are even more naïve than

me. Do you think you are the best option and that everything should turn around you? Do you even care?

[On the phone] That's why in 1978 we started developing a new test²⁷. In 1982 we tried it again. We called it PER, the "assessment program for school achievement". In those years, the ministry of education was in charge of all educational services, a giant task...

Your friends have been supporting you, and promoting you amongst nations, for you to arise as the salvation, as the only answer²⁸. They are using you to identify standards and encourage others to reach those same ideals, been shepherded like sheep. They say you are important but only because they have to, because they need to. Have you seen what are you doing to people?²⁹

[On the phone] And the idea remained... we thought we needed a system to guide our future actions. Standardized educational measurements! That was the key, that was the tool we created to guide our decisions³⁰. The neoliberal Chilean experiment led us to negotiate with the World Bank, UNESCO, and OREALC in Santiago³¹. Decentralization was our motto³².

People cracking, failing, doubting, competing, deteriorating, fading, people being advertised, accountable people, good publicity for some, bad publicity for others, for sellers, for consumers, for products, for factories. Blame to share by all of them, and none of them³³. Is the system breaking?

[On the phone] Then, standardized tests were all they talked about. UNESCO began to promote international agendas to improve these methods for the collection of information and how to use the resulting data to make proper decisions³⁴.

²³ The character sings a fragment of the song *Under pressure*, by Queen.

²⁴ "Even those educational establishments that manifest opposition to teaching with SIMCE in mind report escalating pressure from central and district authorities to align themselves closer to the test. Some municipalities organize mock tests to give schools an opportunity to prepare children for the national evaluation. Others offer financial incentives for high-scoring schools. Some teachers fear their jobs might be at risk if their students do not perform adequately in the evaluation" (Benveniste, 2002, p. 112).

²⁵ "The main lessons learned are that a census-based assessment system focuses attention on learning outcomes and impacts everyone, that published results make all actors accountable, that effectively communicating results is as important as accurately generating them, and that these elements help develop a culture of evaluation (Meckes and Carrasco, 2010, p. 233).

²⁶ Scene's background music (*No one's there*, by KoЯn).

²⁷ In 1978, the Chilean Ministry of Education started developing a national test aimed at comparing schools (Campos-Martinez *et al.*, 2015).

²⁸ "Standardized tests have become a more important—and more controversial—element in the policy debate. [...] testing methodologies have improved, making these assessments the best indicator available for measuring performance" (Vegas and Petrow, 2008).

²⁹ "[SIMCE] became the first step of knowledge consumerism and of a marketable education/society [...] This marketing of schools and teachers leads to the most utopian non-sense practices" (Andrade-Molina, 2017, p. 1309).

³⁰ "SIMCE was created under the military government as a complementary tool of a policy of privatization and of transferring to municipalities the management of education, according to the predominant market economy model to the time" (Cariola and Meckes, 2008, p. 38).

³¹ "The idea of introducing standardized educational measurements, understood as a tool to guide decisions in the emerging education market, was the notion logically discerned from the neoliberal principles imposed during the dictatorship" (Campos-Martinez *et al.*, 2015, p. 109).

³² "The [World] Bank encourages continuation and strengthening of decentralization of education" (Holsinger, 1991 in Campos-Martinez *et al.*, 2015, p. 110).

³³ Since 2000, "Policy-makers and some academics began to question the usefulness of an assessment system in which published results contributed to the deterioration of teachers' self-esteem, as well as of the educational system as a whole" (Meckes and Carrasco, 2010, p. 239).

³⁴ "Planning the quality of education through informed decision-making requires the availability of accurate and timely information that links together resource inputs to education, teaching-learning conditions and processes, and appropriate indicators of the knowledge, skills, and values acquired by students" (UNESCO, 1990, p. 3).

Chile was no exception... SIMCE left Chile at the top in Latin America. We were so avant-garde!

They said you were aimed at monitoring quality³⁵, was it at any cost?³⁶ Was it by trying to control every move?³⁷ They said you were going to change everything. You were going to be a revolutionary system, so visionary, but for whom? Quality equality was your slogan³⁸. Egalitarian opportunities, knowledge, and skills, they said. For all! Those were the hopes of a brighter future, full of utopian promises... You came here to stay and we became more dependent; do we know how to live without you?³⁹ With you it's easier to make strategies and to test them, trial and error, until we reach the top. By copying past winners, by enchanting others to follow the path to victory. More and more to be higher and higher!

[On the phone] SIMCE quickly became an information provider, of extremely useful information for developing policies⁴⁰. At the beginning, it was thought as a tool to quantify quality... Yes, quality it was, at that time, in terms of the knowledge students had, obviously according to curricular expectations⁴¹. SIMCE was aimed at improving the quality, not just as a mean of quantification... SIMCE's outcomes were thought to be helpful to improve equity too⁴². What a dream!

Is that why they train and agree to be trained? Are you making them athletes against their will? But they have to be athletes to belong, to not be indicated as failures in the system. You need sellers to perform flawlessly. Is that why they train and agree to be trained? They agree

because they believe in you, in your mighty wisdom. Do they doubt about themselves? Do they agree on not to disagree?

[On the phone] We thought that by not releasing individual students' scores we would be able to avoid undesirable consequences. You know, exclusion or selection of students by their scores in SIMCE, competition between students, and all that jazz. We aimed at protecting their privacy⁴³. Even journalists became an important part of SIMCE to avoid undesirable perceptions about the test. They were very important for the appropriate dissemination and public communication of SIMCE's outcome⁴⁴. You see... we had nothing but good intentions....

But they are alone, if they scream what will they hear back? Silence? You are making them follow a path by guiding every step⁴⁵. They are like little children picking up each candy you toss on the floor. You reward every step they take towards victory⁴⁶. What are they to you? What are they to your friends?

[On the phone] There were no hopes and dreams. There were facts! SIMCE was nationally acknowledged for been a reliable, credible, and rigorous system⁴⁷. In Latin America we were praised for its stability, coherence, coordination, and quality in the dissemination of outcomes⁴⁸. We had created the perfect system to overcome inequity⁴⁹...

*"... I find the answers aren't so clear. Wish I could find a way to disappear. All these thoughts they make no sense. I find bliss in ignorance. Nothing seems to go away. Over and over again"*⁵⁰. You only care about

³⁵ "It was expected that the market, in which all actors would have the necessary information, would regulate the quality of education itself" (Cariola and Meckes, 2008, p. 39).

³⁶ "Schools, in competition to attract students and the associated financial resources [...to avoid loss] would do their utmost to improve the quality of education to attract and retain their pupils" (Cariola and Meckes, 2008, p. 39).

³⁷ "During the second half of the 1990s, SIMCE began to be used more as a tool for monitoring educational policy" (Cariola and Meckes, 2008, p. 44).

³⁸ "[The quality of education assurance law] stipulated the creation of a national system of quality of education assurance, in order to improve the quality of education of Chilean students within a frame of equality of opportunities" (ACE, 2012, p. 3).

³⁹ "[Since SIMCE] was implemented, the trend has been to increase the amount and the role of assessment—more standards, more assessment and higher consequences are being demanded and being introduced" (Meckes and Carrasco, 2010, p. 246).

⁴⁰ In 1995 SIMCE's scores were ranked, this led to individualize schools' performances and compare its results over time. Scores were linked to teacher's incomes, which prompted to a reward system (Campos-Martínez et al., 2015). It also helped to create new standards for students, teachers, head teachers, and for designing models for efficient management of schools (Bravo, 2011).

⁴¹ "[SIMCE] seeks to find the level of students' achievement in diverse areas of knowledge" (Martínez, 1996, p. 1).

⁴² "[SIMCE's] aim is to improve the quality and equity of education by providing data about learning outcomes at the national and school levels" (Meckes e Carrasco, 2010, p. 234).

⁴³ "[SIMCE] was conceived as a tool for school rather than student assessment. Individual data on students' performance has also been protected to avoid undesirable consequences, such as exclusion or academic selection of pupils" (Meckes and Carrasco, 2010, p. 246).

⁴⁴ Journalists are considered as important to improve the dissemination or public communication of SIMCE's outcomes (Ravela, 2004).

⁴⁵ "The recent efforts of the SIMCE and Curriculum Unit to develop a common framework of standards for reporting national test results and guiding school-based assessment [...] is a promising initiative for building a bridge of meaning between large-scale assessment and teachers' practices" (Meckes and Carrasco, 2010, p. 246).

⁴⁶ "Reward systems tied to testing outcomes may also prompt educators to direct greater efforts toward teaching practices that increase student achievement" (Benveniste, 2002, p. 92).

⁴⁷ SIMCE is a source of objective, reliable and valid information (MINEDUC, 2003).

⁴⁸ According to the consolidated index of institutional capacity for assessment (Vegas and Petrow, 2008).

⁴⁹ "The important role of SIMCE data in the design and development of national education policies aimed at reducing inequities" (Meckes and Carrasco, 2010, p. 246).

⁵⁰ The character sings a fragment of the song *One step closer*, by Linkin Park.

results, numbers is all you see. Why can't we see that? Why can't they see that? Are we so seduced by your "greatness"? Are we so drown by your promises? What do you want us to be? Competitors? Entrepreneurs? I don't understand. Are you just empty promises? Before the 1990s... (Back to: Chapter 2).

Chapter 4

...Oh I wish that I could see, How I wish that I could fly. All the things that hang above me, to a place where I can cry...⁵¹

I wonder how will life be. I wonder if we will rise without you. I wonder if you are the only solution⁵². Is it possible to find other ways?

[On the phone] Of course we were not interested only in SIMCE's outcomes, we complemented our national scores with international surveys. The more, the merrier. We have been participating since 1970 in these international studies. Well, TIMSS, the Civic Education Study... Of course! How could I forget about PISA? Also in the UNESCO one... the Latin American comparative surveys⁵³. It sounds as if tests are the only thing we have in mind, but... that's how you reach excellence...

If you helped to bring harmony to the globe⁵⁴ ... why wouldn't you bring harmony to us? We should continue this journey and see how it ends. We should remain being friends⁵⁵...

[On the phone] At the beginning, we started only with Spanish and Mathematics. Kids need to be able to express themselves and communicate properly⁵⁶. Kids also need to communicate numerically. Mathematics helps to develop abstraction, calculation, and reasoning⁵⁷. Now, if I step

aside, it seems to be out of control. Currently SIMCE has increased and new school subjects are been incorporated... social sciences, history, geography, natural sciences, writing, English, the use of TICs, and physical activity... sports... kids also need to be healthy! Apparently we are a bit obsessed. We even increased the frequency. So, we have plenty useful information to perfectly plan our next moves.

It is inevitable to feel this impulse to doubt... I know there is plenty evidence, plenty of good results, plenty of research, plenty conclusions, but... what if this is not the appropriate step to take? I cannot help thinking about the possible implications...

[On the phone] It has been twenty years now... time really flies. SIMCE has helped us tremendously. It has been an efficient tool to reveal inequities in student's learning, which helped us to connect social disparities with schools' outcomes. That was a fascinating aspect we wouldn't be able to see without the test... A culture of evaluation? It could be, but accountability is necessary⁵⁸... some people might say that SIMCE exerts powerful influence in curricular and pedagogical activities. One of them, they say, is "Teaching to the test"⁵⁹, reducing the national curriculum only to meet SIMCE's expectations, rejecting students⁶⁰. I don't believe it! There are plenty knowledge that the test doesn't cover, so how could that be possible? The system works! Doesn't it?⁶¹

Am I being too negative? Am I being too insecure? I give up! It is impossible to talk to you... (Back to: Chapter 3).

Chapter "23"

You and me we have no faces. Soon our lives will be erased. Do you think they will remember? Or will we just be replaced? ...⁶²

⁵¹ Scene's background music (*No one's there*, by KoЯn).

⁵² "The World Declaration on Education for All [...] recognized that periodic student assessments make a valuable contribution toward the improvement of educational quality" (Benveniste, 2002, p. 91).

⁵³ "Chile has taken part in the Six Subject Study (1970–71), LLECE (1997), TIMSS-R (1998), IALS (1998), IEA-Civic Education Study (2000), PISA Plus (2001), and TIMSS (2003)" (Ferrer, 2006, p. 73).

⁵⁴ "The motives of the new global educational governance are rooted in a specific cultural milieu in the time of the Cold War [...] heading to a harmonious world" (Tröhler, 2010, p. 6).

⁵⁵ "Since it was first conducted in 2000, PISA has become hugely successful and has received considerable media coverage and attention from politicians and policy-makers in many nations" (Sellar and Lingard, 2014, p. 917).

⁵⁶ "Verbal ability is vastly important while expressing and communicating ideas [...] without a proper fluency and mastering of the language, learning practices become precarious and ineffective" (MINEDUC and CPEIP, 1967, p. 5).

⁵⁷ "Mathematics ability represents another great aspect of learning: the capability of abstraction, synthesis, calculation, reasoning [...] every individual should develop a minimum capability of numerical communication" (MINEDUC and CPEIP, 1967, p. 5).

⁵⁸ "[SIMCE] has helped place learning outcomes at the heart of the national debate on education. It has also helped to develop a culture of evaluation and accountability at different levels of the system [...] the information it provides has helped to reveal the country's great inequities in learning outcomes and their relationship to social disparities" (Meckes and Carrasco, 2010, p. 245).

⁵⁹ "SIMCE has proved to exert a powerful influence in curricular and pedagogical activities. "Teaching to the test," despite being widely criticized by educators as a stratagem to improve children's scores in order to secure a higher position in the public rankings, is commonplace" (Benveniste, 2002, p. 112).

⁶⁰ The unintended consequences of SIMCE "are teaching for the test, narrowing the curriculum that is implemented, schools rejecting or expelling students in order to raise scores, and stigmatising poorly-performing schools" (Meckes and Carrasco, 2010, p. 244).

⁶¹ "The emphasis of Chilean teachers on practicing concurrent problems may indicate an overemphasis on skill drilling instead of mathematical understanding" (Preiss, 2010, p. 350).

⁶² Scene's background music (*No one's there*, by KoЯn).

[On the phone] Does it work? SIMCE is a tool to nationally monitor the whole school system providing orientation regarding decision-making policy process. To achieve quality it becomes necessary to track every school's score yearly, to compare and visualize their progress, if they have any⁶³. Also it is compulsory, in order to achieve our standards, to guide teachers on how to improve their practices by handing them standardized instruments and SIMCE samples⁶⁴. SIMCE is a tool teachers could use to detect their strengths and weaknesses to improve their practices⁶⁵. ... Monitoring? Tracking? Guiding? Detecting? What is this? On the bright side, it is a longitudinal study that has many qualities and advantages for achieving equity of quality. On the dark side... is SIMCE acting as a form of surveillance? It doesn't make any sense, isn't it? Why did we start with mathematics and Spanish? Why mathematics? Of course in the sixties we thought logic was the foundation of every science because it leads to reasoning accurately and rigorously, which is the core of any argumentation and of critical thinking, and, obviously, because it was fundamental to achieve those abilities for pursuing further education, right?⁶⁶. Am I wrong? Did we do something wrong?

*"Imagine there's no heaven, it's easy if you try. No hell bellow us, above us only sky... Imagine all the people, living life in peace"*⁶⁷. I wonder how will life be. I wonder if we will rise because of you. I wonder if you are the solution...

[On the phone] Although... In the 1960s we were trying to develop a scientific system to predict a potential learning and aptitudes towards that learning⁶⁸. And we succeed in it, in my opinion. Nowadays we have a system that is able to predict student's achievement in SIMCE before participating in the test. We have created the "Learning Standards"⁶⁹. No, if you want to achieve... but international tests also... No, we are not stressing out children to obtain a higher score in international tests. It is a matter of achieving quality! We want students to have better opportunities in life, to be

successful... they need mathematic proficiency⁷⁰. Those types of questions help us unveil... Wait... do they help?

I hear them talk about you⁷¹. You seem so complete, so structured. You seem like a good option for us. According to them, you can provide the information we need to be better, to improve...

[On the phone] National assessments should be taken as an opportunity to help teachers and students to unveil their achievements, according to national standards, or what needs to be reinforced, to reach set standards... feedback⁷². Assessment is the only path to help students to be successful and to have a brighter future, better opportunities, and... Yes, they need to be assessed... They have to be assessed! It is the only way to stop with inequity... to have a quality education... This doesn't make any sense, doesn't it?

If you helped them, why not us... What did winners do to be considered winners?⁷³

[Hanging the phone] *"Chapter 23, you can call me Fingering... That number followed me... It was a mistake to think I could escape it... The number had gone after me. And now it wanted her. I was right. She was in danger. I just didn't realize the danger was me"*⁷⁴. But, what more harm can it do? After all is just a number.

I wonder how will life be. I wonder if we will rise without you. I wonder if you are the only solution... *"Now... Where was I?"*⁷⁵

This is...

The whimsical story is inspired by Christopher Nolan's film *Memento* and by Joel Schumacher's film 23. *Memento's* plot is embedded in the first five parts or

⁶³ SIMCE helps not only in visualizing students' performance, but also their progress (MINEDUC, 2003).

⁶⁴ "Schools receive standardized instruments that could be applied themselves, to improve teachers' practices and their outcomes" (MINEDUC, 2003, p. 15).

⁶⁵ "Teachers can find in SIMCE's outcome a mean to detect their strengths and weaknesses for re-orienting and improving their practices" (ACE, 2012, p. 1).

⁶⁶ "Mathematics offers a variety of analytical procedures, modelling, calculation, measuring and making estimations [...] that allow the establishment of relations between diverse aspects of reality" (MINEDUC, 2009, p. 145).

⁶⁷ The character sings a fragment of the song *Imagine*, by John Lennon.

⁶⁸ "The contribution of these tests consists precisely in their capacity to scientifically measure basic learning "aptitudes" [...] Ability tests, for being about "aptitude" [...] are more suitable for measuring potential abilities for a future learning" (MINEDUC and CPEIP, 1967, p. 5).

⁶⁹ These standards are taken as a reference point able to describe what students should know and do in order to demonstrate their achievement (MINEDUC, 2013).

⁷⁰ "All adults [...] now require adequate mathematics proficiency for personal fulfilment, employment and full participation in society" (OECD, 2014, p. 2).

⁷¹ "Because the educational process is a long-term process in terms of time, intermediate controls should be made to ensure that students are learning properly and, therefore, to avoid that a low quality learning advance without correcting its defects, and a final control should be made to ensure students are learning according to the necessities and expectations of society" (Arancibia, 1997, p. 4).

⁷² "The evaluation process helps both teachers and students to know their improvements and what needs to be reinforced [...] With this information, teachers can make decisions to modify their lessons plan and adapt it according their students needs [...] Students could centre their efforts, by trusting that they will improve their results" (MINEDUC, n.d., par. 1).

⁷³ "The expansion of the test supposes [...] the upkeep of the evaluation in reading skills and mathematics, following the most successful educational system's guidelines" (ACE, 2012, p. 4).

⁷⁴ The character quotes the final lines of Joel Schumacher's film 23.

⁷⁵ The character quotes the final line of Christopher Nolan's film *Memento*

chapters. The film presents two separated stories, one moves backwards in time and the other moves forwards in time. One story is about the power effects of assessment as a *dispositif*. It goes backwards in time. The second story, “[on the phone]”, is about the temporal-spatial conditions that enabled the decision making process regarding a national standardized assessment program. It moves forward in time. The 23’s plot is entangled with “on the phone” in the section “Chapter 23”. In this last part, the voice “on the phone” recognizes itself as part of the problem, both the medicine and the disease. Each chapter begins with fragments of the song *No one’s there* by КoЯн. This song portrays the story that goes backward, and at the same time enable to shed light into the power effects of the second story on the shaping of a desired citizen. The discussion raised here is about the historical making of citizens that has been inscribed in a cultural practice of national standardized assessment. By following an analytical strategy of historicizing the present, it problematizes the naturalized truths circulating about assessment among national and international agencies by mapping its continuities and discontinuities. These naturalized truths are: “higher score means better quality” and “competitiveness and accountability leads to higher performance, raising incomes, social mobility and welfare”.

The writing and structure of this story enables to portray standardized assessment in Chile as a *dispositif* of power that governs subjects to conduct their own ways of being and acting in the world (Foucault, 1991). According to Foucault (1980, p. 194), the *dispositif* is where power becomes concrete: a network composed of “discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions”. Within this entanglement of elements, the *dispositif* raises as a formation that respond to historical-given “urgent needs”. In this fashion, standardized assessment rose not solely as an instrument to improve quality of education in Chile by engaging some actors, as teachers and policy-makers, in a process of “self-examination” to help in decision-making practices to achieve higher quality (translated in higher scores). But, also, SIMCE has historically become a heterogeneous ensemble with a dominant strategic function (Foucault, 1980), in which all actors—teachers, students, policy makers, school principals, parents, society, etc.—have been engaged in practices of self-regulation. As Sellar and Lingard (2014, p. 922) argue, the reliability in numbers produced by assessment systems enables comparison as a new form of governance. In which “[Skills] presented as the solution to a range of economic and social problems remains

dominant [...] Skills agenda is now at the very heart of the Organization’s economic work and is linked to its role in neo-liberal globalization”. The first story deals with the awakening of resistance from the power effects of standardized assessment practices, but as a delinquent in prison, there is no scape from the productive side of power, as Rose (1999, p. 161) states, “the new citizen is required to engage in a ceaseless work of training and retraining, skilling and reskilling [...] life is to become a continuous economic capitalization of the self”. Standardized assessment, as a *dispositif* of power, enables to look at numbers as the indicators of success because there have historically been taken as a scientific, and therefore wanted, approximation to education, overlooking all unwanted consequences of SIMCE in society.

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