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Great Expectations: A Critical Perspective on Open Educational Resources in Brazil

Giselle Martins dos Santos Ferreira[a]* and Márcio Silveira Lemgruber[b]

[a]*Department of Education, Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro, PUC-Rio, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil;* [b]*Post-Graduate Programme in Education, University Estácio de Sá, UNESA, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil*

Address for correspondence: Department of Education, Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro, Rua Marquês de São Vicente 225, Gávea, Rio de Janeiro, 22451-900RJ, Brazil.

Biographical notes

Giselle M. S. Ferreira is a Lecturer at PUC-Rio. Previously, she was a Lecturer at the Post-Graduate Programme in Education of the University Estácio de Sá, UNESA (2011-July 2018) and a Lecturer at the United Kingdom Open University, UKOU (1998-2013), where she was also a Visiting Researcher (2013-2016).

Márcio S. Lemgruber is a Lecturer at the Post-Graduate Programme in Education of the University Estácio de Sá since 2012. Previously, he was a Lecturer at the Department of Education of the Federal University of Juiz de Fora, UFJF (1991-2012).

Great Expectations: a critical perspective on Open Educational Resources in Brazil (6922 words inc. title)

Nearly two decades have passed since the Open Educational Resources (OER) movement was launched. Its success in Brazil can be illustrated with the establishment of a UNESCO Chair in Open Education in 2014, in one of the country's most prestigious universities. Crucially, OER were included in the 2014-2024 *National Education Plan*, a key piece of national educational legislation, as a category of educational technologies framed as tools. Assuming metaphors such as this play a key role in the ways we think, speak and act, this article presents a critical perspective on OER in Brazil. Examining the implications of the main metaphors used to construe OER in local media and academic sources, the text argues that these metaphors reflect hegemonic discourses on educational technology, concealing the non-neutrality of technological artefacts, obscuring issues concerning curriculum and pedagogy, and overlooking actual local needs. The article discusses issues concerning local OER advocacy, positioned in respect to specificities of a context where education, albeit a constitutionally established right, may be poised to undergo radical changes in the near future.

Keywords: Open Educational Resources; Open Education; critique; metaphor; Brazil

Introduction

It has been nearly two decades since *Open Educational Resources* (OER) became a worldwide movement launched and strongly supported by UNESCO. Currently viewed as part of the broader Open Education (OE) movement (Weller 2016, 2017), the acronym OER functions as an umbrella-term that accommodates multiple communities engaged in practices of producing and freely sharing educational materials on the Web under open licences. The movement thus contributes to disseminate democratic values that assumedly drive such practices. In Brazil, OER advocacy has been progressing steadily. In particular, a UNESCO Chair in Open Education was established in 2014 in one of the country's most prestigious universities,[1] and OER have been explicitly included in core educational legislation (e.g. Brazil 2014, 2018), indicating a stable rise in local awareness and organised support for values and ideals promoted internationally, at least amongst some of the stakeholder groups involved in policy formulation.

However, with digital technologies providing an essential contingency of the movement as a global enterprise, OER rhetoric reflects broader trends in education associated with discourses that construct educational technologies as a benign endeavour through ideas such as *innovation*, *efficiencies* and *disruption* (Selwyn 2015a; Bannell 2017). Hence, OER rhetoric is overall marked by profound contradictions,

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1 See http://educacaoaberta.org.

which tend to remain tacitly unexamined within the scope of pragmatic agendas that privilege questions of a more practical nature and, therefore, promote focus on issues pertaining to the sustainability of the movement and its initiatives, Intellectual Property Rights and Copyrights (IPR-CR), and interoperability (Ferreira, 2012). Such trends also characterise core ideas on OER circulated in Brazil, a country that is yet to solve problems related to blatant inequalities and is currently living through times of significant political volatility.[2]

From a general perspective, discourses of OER advocacy in Brazil are consistent with local policy aimed at widening participation in education, echoing UNESCO's (2002) recommendations and Hylén's (2006) repeatedly quoted rationale for OER adoption. As they appear convincing and profoundly seductive, such discourses remain largely unexamined, reflecting locally a Foucauldian 'heterotopia of desire', an 'attempt to create an "enacted utopia" which is created and maintained in order to compensate for what is regarded as a morally imperfect and corrupt mainstream' (Gourlay 2015, 7). Selwyn's (2014 position 1854) insight also provides an appropriate description of what happens in the country: 'besides occasional criticism of the veneer of self-righteousness that can pervade discussions of open products and practices, they [open technologies] remain widely welcomed and promoted within discussions of educational technology'. OER tend to be promoted worldwide as a counterhegemonic form of education (Knox 2013), which may even be the case in some ways. However, much is obscured when these resources are regarded merely as yet another *product* of contemporary Educational Technology (EdTech), the conception that underpins a fundamental piece of Brazilian educational legislation, the *National Education Plan 2014-2024* (NEP 2014-2014) (Brazil 2014).

The NEP 2014-2024, which is purported to guide policy and programme development in the sector for a decade, presents OER as a category of educational technologies, which are framed as *tools* to support key goals of national education to be achieved: widening participation, improving *quality* and *innovating* pedagogy. Technologies are suggested as neutral artefacts, corroborating a view of Educational Technology as a disinterested, apolitical and ahistorical area. A focus on assumedly neutral and essentialised artefacts also supports casting objects as subjects, which is frequently the case in educational policies in Brazil, according to Barreto (2019). In this manner, conflicts between ideologically charged agendas remain concealed (Selwyn

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2 The new president, who took office at the beginning of January this year, has already earned himself an entire section on *The Guardian* (https://www.theguardian.com/world/jair-bolsonaro). Concerning education, specifically, a new minister has already been appointed, following public outcry against his predecessor's inability to manage one the largest budgets in the country, amongst other charges (c.f. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/apr/09/brazil-replaces-far-right-education-minister-with-conspiracy-theorist).

2011), whereas profound tensions are discernible through a more careful consideration of discourses that naturalise the relationship between education and technology.

The idea of OER as an alternative to textbooks (Rossini 2010; Santana, Rossini & Pretto 2012) is a welcome challenge to a highly profitable industry that has come to dominate the supply of teaching materials to Brazilian public compulsory education (Cassiano 2013).[3] In this context, OER advocacy tends to be supported on the idea of OER as *parts* that can be assumedly 'picked and mixed' to replace costly goods provided by an industry essentially maintained by public funds. Other key issues, however, remain to be more carefully examined. Crucially, these issues acquire renewed significance as the government elected in late 2018 begins to enact new legislation potentially at odds with fundamental principles enshrined in the country's 1988 Constitution.[4] Assuming critique as a means to bring some of these issues to the fore by approaching language as a form of social practice (Fairclough 2010), this paper adopts a critical discursive perspective to examine, in particular, the implications of conceiving OER simply as *pieces*, *parts* and *tools*.

Discourse, Metaphor and Education

Conceiving OER (and, more broadly, educational technologies) as *pieces* (*parts* or *tools*) constitutes a fundamental (Perelman & Tyteca-Olbrecths [1969] 2008) or conceptual (Lakoff & Johnson 1980) metaphor, i.e. a mapping between different domains of thought that encapsulate specific ways of perceiving, thinking and relating with the world. From this perspective, metaphors guide perception, further conceptualisation and action (Lakoff 1993). This view runs counter to the traditional view of metaphors as ornaments, often rejected or unwanted in academic rhetoric.

Metaphors also have a pragmatic function: they may constitute linguistic representations that aim at influencing and convincing, often in subtle manners. Hence, metaphors constitute powerful argumentative techniques in that they present ideas and things in a specific light, emphasising some aspects whilst obscuring others (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca [1969] 2008). As a 'discursive persuasive act', metaphor can be used to 'save face' (Charteris-Black 2004, 13). When a metaphor is chosen over

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[3] For 2019, government has spent in excess of 1.1 Billion Brazilian Reais (approximately US$ 280 Million) in textbooks through the National Didactic Book Programme (c.f. https://www.fnde.gov.br/index.php/programas/programas-do-livro/pnld/dados-estatisticos).

[4] Local commentators are particularly concerned with plans to legalise distance learning at all levels of compulsory education (currently permitted only in a few cases) and home schooling (whilst school-based public education is a constitutional right) – c.f. https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/internacional/en/brazil/2019/01/government-seeks-to-legalize-homeschooling-with-executive-order.shtml.

another, a specific way of representing things in the world is implied, determining particular forms of identifying, classifying and evaluating these things.

Hence, the critical analysis of metaphors may enable insights into beliefs and attitudes, allowing identification of ideological aspects underlying discourses that construct specific viewpoints. As Fairclough suggests (1992), tensions amongst discursive practices have a bearing on the ways in which different aspects of experience are metaphorized, and diverse manners of metaphorizing reality may imply conflict and invite new modes of resistance. Indeed, metaphor analysis integrates various approaches to Critical Discourse Analysis (Wodak & Meyer 2009).

Discourses on Education are besieged with politically-charged conceptual metaphors that have become demetaphorised and, thus, naturalised. Commodified conceptions of education have been (and continue to be) disseminated through metaphors such as 'education as market', 'delivery of education' and 'educational content'. These metaphors are underpinned by a perspective of education as product, supporting an objectified view of processes and subjects to the detriment of evolving relationships. Indeed, metaphors can be widely identified as the basis for a growing variety of labels (Selwyn 2015b) that characterise the relationship between education and contemporary technology. In Brazil, discourses that disseminate such labels are overwhelmingly focused on technicalities and, crucially, devoid of historicity or consideration of difference and inequality (Rosado, Ferreira, and Carvalho 2017). This reductionist perspective is reflected in Brazilian media and policy discourses. The latter, in particular, predominantly cast the presence of technological artefacts in education in one of two ways (invariably based upon a *solutionist* view of technology – c.f. Morozov 2013): on the one hand, superficial and conservative ('more of the same') changes; on the other hand, replacement (partial or total) of human aspects of education with machines (Barreto 2017).

OER in Brazil: An Overview

From a broad perspective, the polysemy of OE and OER reflects the variety of underlying conceptions of *openness* and can be examined on the basis of two dichotomies related to wider sociocultural and historical aspects: *innovation vs. tradition* and *inclusion vs. exclusion* (Ferreira and Carvalho 2018). Although choices and allegiances to epistemological and ontological bases may vary, discourses on OE share an ideological core that underpins discourses of inclusion, widening participation and learner empowerment. These globalised discourses reverberate strongly in Brazilian talk about OER, as suggested by the continued advocacy of OER production by teachers and students to foster authorship, critical thinking and autonomy.

Although OER in Brazil have been more extensively discussed as a desirable alternative to commercial textbooks in public compulsory education (e.g. Rossini *op. cit.*), it is in Higher Education (HE) that ideas defended by the OE movement, more broadly, have had a stronger uptake. Indeed, the Brazilian Open University (BROU), in practice a consortium of 'traditional' public Higher Education Institutions (HEI)

previously in operation, has been one of the most significant realisations of these ideas, enabled by legislation passed in the late 1990s and further developed in the early 2000s. The BROU's launch in 2005 was part of a significant expansion of the country's HE since the turn of the millennium. The consortium remains a key player in teacher education, a priority for a country of continental proportions (Mota 2009; Mill 2012), although recently announced changes in public funding have cast doubts on whether financial support to the vast structure at stake here will remain forthcoming.

Broadly considered a turning point in Brazilian educational policy, the LDBEN/1996 (Brazil, 1996) is a piece of legislation that not only legitimised Distance Education (DE) in the country but also created, according to Chaves (2010), two major trends in national HE. On the one hand, it fostered the fragmentation of HE via a multiplication of HEIs and associated expansion of the private sector. On the other hand, it enabled the creation of oligopolies from the fusion or purchase (often via the stock market) of smaller private HEIs by national and international investors. The Brazilian HE 'market' is currently dominated by large multinational conglomerates that hold, together with a few independent private institutions, more than 75% of the local student cohort (INEP 2016; Bianchetti and Sguissardi 2017)[5]. Clearly, these trends reflect broader processes and changes in Education globally (Beech 2010; Ball 2017), but they are met with polarised reactions in a context where universities are still vehemently defended as a public good and education is conceived as a social right that is constitutionally guaranteed.[6]

The tendency towards this polarisation is particularly discernible in academic debates on the introduction of technologies in educational settings, with yet unrealised possibilities often reduced to the limited set of DE models and practices implemented in the country. In this context, DE tends to be conceived pejoratively as the worst mode of 'industrialised education': technocratic, dehumanising and, above all, deskilling of the teaching profession. Indeed, whilst official discourses conveyed by legislation foment 'innovation' and 'development', one of the most controversial debates in HE concerns

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5 This scenario may change in the near future, as companies like Kroton, the 'market leader' in private HE in Brazil, have begun to invest on the compulsory education sector, following changes in funding for HE that have made this a less desirable sector for private investment (c.f. https://www.competitionpolicyinternational.com/brazil-cade-approves-without-restriction-the-purchase-of-somos-by-kroton/).

6 Recent public mobilisation in defence of public education illustrates the extent to which these values are shared (c.f. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/may/31/students-protest-across-brazil-over-jair-bolsonaros-sweeping-cuts-to-education). Other sources suggest over one million people took to the streets in the second protest (c.f. https://www.brasildefato.com.br/2019/05/30/30m-atos-em-defesa-da-educacao-terminam-com-chamado-a-greve-geral-de-14-de-junho/).

tutoring: with the 'tutor' construed as a different category from '*professor*'[7] in the *National Framework for Quality in Distance Education* (Brazil 2007), the role tends to be reduced to a kind of precarious customer service that is badly remunerated, strongly micro-managed within rather inflexible structures and little respected. The same document further categorises tutoring as 'face-to-face' or 'virtual', with the former provided in local 'hubs' described as 'educational ATMs' by Lemgruber (2008), and the latter provided over the Internet, mostly through forums in Virtual Learning Environments. This arrangement suggests itself as a compromise to suit a context where the physical presence of a teacher is conceived as key to learning and 'talk & chalk' is still the main approach to teaching, which together, perhaps, still constitute strongly ingrained expectations of students.

Digital technologies, in particular, Internet and Web-based technologies comprise a fundamental contingency shared by DE (as conceived with basis on the models currently implemented in Brazil) and the OER movement. MOOCs, one of the notions that emerged from a more explicit rapprochement between OER and DE, continue to receive a measure of attention in the country, but the OER scenario remains generally consistent with the general picture described by Santos (2011), which provided an inventory of local projects underway at that time. This inventory suggested that most of the projects were concentrated in large cities, funding was predominantly public and, in some cases, the situation with IPR-CR was unclear. Although original advocacy actually pointed to HE as the core sector for OER development in the country (Santos 2006, 2009; Litto 2009), a significant proportion of those initiatives (some already defunct) was targeted at compulsory education.

As already noted, attention has also been paid to the potential of OER in teacher education (c.f. contributions in Portuguese to Okada 2014), which remains a priority of the UNESCO Chair.[8] The Chair has provided a focal space for the local community engaged in OE/OER promotion, which involves actors associated with local projects as well as international organisations (e.g. Open Education Consortium, Open Knowledge International, Creative Commons). On this basis, the movement has successfully supported development of various pieces of legislation already in force (c.f. Amiel, Gonsales and Sebriam 2018) and fostered a variety of other actions (Sebriam, Markun, and Gonsales 2017). However, the lack of financial support comparable to the type of income received by international projects targeted, in particular, at OER production is reflected on an apparently predominant focus on encouraging reuse and the multiplication of small, mostly localised grassroots initiatives and action-research projects.

Academic output on OER in Portuguese has grown perceptibly in the last few years (Zancanaro & Amiel, 2017), but the national trend appears to remain consistent

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7 Portuguese word that may mean 'teacher' or 'lecturer' (or 'professor', if appropriately qualified).

8 See 'Sobre' section on http://educacaoaberta.org/.

with Cobo's (2013) findings: work in languages other than English have not increased exponentially in number. A quick search on Google Scholar (mid-April 2019), using the Portuguese equivalent of OER, yielded little more than 3,000 results, whilst a similar search with the English phrase returned in excess of 37,000 results. Despite the high redundancy level and inclusion of irrelevant results, these figures suggest that, in a country of significant proportions (and considering the size of the Lusophone community as a whole), adoption and dissemination of OER, so far, seems to have been timid at best.

Metaphors of OER in Brazil: Pieces, Parts and Tools

Common images used on Websites that disseminate OER in Brazil include books arranged on a pile or a single open book,[9] echoing the UNESCO global OER logo, [10] which assumedly suggests 'freedom, no borders, progress and diffusion' (...) as well as 'collaboration and collective knowledge' (Mello 2012). However, puzzle pieces and Lego blocks constitute, arguably, the most common bases for explaining and discussing OER in the country, providing the inspiration for widespread imagery on Websites produced locally, and reflecting the historical connection between OER and learning objects that is not always clearly acknowledged by the movement, perhaps in view of the severe criticism levelled at the idea from various perspectives (Wiley 2002; Friesen 2003; Weller 2014).

Interestingly, learning objects remain a topic of interest amongst Brazilian researchers involved in EdTech development, broadly as a technological solution to the issue of textbook costs, a key motivation for the original development of the concept (Wiley 2000). Learning objects indeed represent a trade-off solution aimed at promoting economies through *standardisation*, an idea that is also suggested by puzzle pieces. In this case, standardisation is taken a step further in that *reassembling* a previously fragmented whole is the goal. These metaphors are consistent with the metaphor of OER as *tools*, another Design- and Engineering- inspired metaphor that circulates widely in Brazilian discourses on EdTech. Together, these metaphors sustain the unproblematic conceptualisation of OER as *neutral*. In avoiding problematisation of these ideas, however, local OER advocacy reproduces generalist OER discourses in their eschewing discussion of automation and standardisation beyond technical issues involved in attempts at supporting systems interoperability.

Detached from any contextual specificities, the idea of learning resources as building parts or tools obscures the cultural bases of curriculum, cultural specificities of knowledge production and the time-place positioning of particular experiences of teaching and learning. In encouraging a focus on objects without consideration of their

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[9] e.g. http://aberta.org.br

10 Available at

   https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Global_Open_Educational_Resources_Logo.svg

origins, these metaphors mask contextual aspects related to time, place and actors involved in the production of these objects. Tools, in particular, are designed and built according to specific purposes – tools have a *what-for*, i.e. they are designed and built to materialise specific *efficiencies*.

Talk of OER and, more broadly, educational technologies as tools, which is practically hegemonic in Brazilian policy and academic production (Barreto 2009, 2012), disseminates the idea of technology as mere *support* to educational processes. As 'tools', these are said to promote efficiency by optimising tasks previously conducted in other ways. More generally, they are construed as *solution* to *fix* a *broken* education, which requires *disruption* or *revolution* led by *edupreneurs*, in wording that echoes locally a Silicon Valley narrative (Weller 2015).[11] Discourses of innovation are strongly reflected in the NEP 2014-2024, and considerable pressure is being exerted on teachers at all levels to 'integrate' digital technologies in their practices, generally based on the naive premise that the mere replacement of media will be a sufficient condition to foster more profound change Exaggerated, often cataclysmic language contributes to create a picture in which teachers themselves are cast as broken or obsolete parts of a mechanised system: this constitutes a 'new order' where Barreto's (2017) radical displacement – recasting objects as subjects – is realised.

Appropriation, Localisation and Reproduction

The metaphors discussed above are clearly not an idiosyncrasy of Brazil: they are *imports* made via transnational knowledge appropriation and, in particular, expansion of the local technological infrastructure, mostly with basis on purchases of USA-produced artefacts. In this process, images and conceptions associated with machines and automation are disseminated and absorbed into common-sensical ways of thinking and talking. Widely known in Brazilian education circles, Comenius's ([1657] 1907) and Freire's ([1970] 2005) metaphors of *printing*[12] and *banking education*, respectively, operate a depersonification of teacher and learner, situating both classes of actors as *parts* of a larger structure. Yet, these two categories of actors, traditionally central to educational processes, are still represented. In contrast, the OER metaphors examined above do away altogether with these subject positions by focusing exclusively on objects. These metaphors, however, have been directly transplanted to Education from Engineering, Design and Computing. As such, they undergo a process of double

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[11] This is widely disseminated locally by EdTech and innovation sites such as *Porvir* (http://porvir.org/ - also available in English at http://porvir.org/en/) and *StartSe* (https://www.startse.com/), particularly popular sources here for all actors involved in educational 'innovation'.

[12] This metaphor positions students as a blank page upon which the teacher's voice prints knowledge.

translation as national educational discourses incorporate ideas originated in Anglophone parts of the world: when concepts are transferred across national boundaries, appropriation takes place both across areas of knowledge and across languages, further promoting what Canclini (2009) describes as the 'monolingualism of science and technology'. Hence, although the OER movement endorses key humanitarian values, it may also be viewed as a channel for cross-cultural transference of ideas that are not necessarily shared – or shareable.

Discourses around OER repositories and MOOC, which constitute the main bases of OE dissemination around the globe, tend to obscure the selection and exclusion processes involved in constructing curricular elements that are conveyed in their technological and media structure (Edwards 2015). Indeed, literature in the area, in general, is devoid of discussion on questions concerning curriculum and pedagogy, as well as the role of cultural differences in the 'localisation' processes involved in reusing OER produced in other places. Issues that arise in curriculum sharing (or imposing) across boundaries, however, are not easily circumvented by conceptions of 'localisation' as 'reversioning' or superficially adapting materials to another language. Crucially, if 'a borrowed metaphor is a borrowed item of culture' (Oncins-Martínez 2014, 149), the *globalising* effects of metaphor translation and appropriation must be acknowledged and problematised, especially as curriculum sharing takes place in a single direction within an established geopolitical hierarchy.

The OER movement has taken shape in a context that involves multiples stakeholders, including vast transnational corporations that manage publishers and educational institutions, as well as companies which support the philanthropic institutions that fund OER production in specific places, whilst encouraging their mere *consumption* elsewhere. In this context, the attribution of almost magic powers to technology that characterises much of what is said in the area (in Portuguese and in English, at least) is well represented in the rhetoric around OER (in these languages), which, according to Lane (2016, 46), 'is way ahead of the reality and the reality will be less profound than the rhetoric suggests'. In privileging not only scientific and academic knowledge, especially knowledge produced in industrialised countries, to the detriment of other types of knowledge, hegemonic discourses on OER reify the position of developing countries specifically as *consumers* of resources produced, in particular, in Anglophone areas (Alevizou 2015). The metaphors discussed above support notions of standardisation and reproduction within a very specific arrangement. Naturalising these metaphors implies *accepting* this arrangement.

Hence, a paradox emerges: if OER are conceived as mere parts or tools, as these metaphors suggest, they may function precisely as a means to *reproduce* differences and asymmetries that the movement professes actively to oppose. OER as puzzle pieces, in particular, imply reconstruction or re-contextualisation of an 'original picture' that is factory-produced elsewhere and pays absolutely no heed to local knowledge and actual needs. The alternative metaphor of learning objects and, perhaps, OER as 'bricks' that can be put together with 'mortar' assumedly representing contextual specificities (Wiley 2005) does not circumvent the issue of standardisation entirely, as long as these *bricks*

continue to be manufactured, almost entirely, in the global North.

Selwyn (2014 position 2031) refers to open technologies as a 'ready vehicle for individualism, neoliberalism and the new capitalist ideology'. A reductionist perspective on the relationship between human and technical is reified by metaphors that allude to a 'bigger picture' of widespread depersonalisation and mechanisation of relationships. Certainly, it is not a coincidence that marketing discourses of digital technologies for education in Brazil offer their products as *solutions* to problems highlighted in biased descriptions of teaching, relationships between teacher and learner, and educational institutions. It is an economically-productive choice that the *tool* metaphor is so often presented in juxtaposition to impoverished caricatures (*straw men* representations) of education, its processes and subjects. When OER are cast as a category of educational technologies, as the NEP 2014-2024 does, their conception as tools contributes to the expansion of 'the interests of business and commerce in education' (Selwyn 2016, 107), a form of colonisation that suggests an uncomfortable dilemma for any local chapter of the OER movement. Indeed, EdTech labels currently used in Brazil appear to combine into a foundation that supports the fragmentation of teaching and learning within a broader movement towards *unbundling* education as it takes on new globalised – and globalising – forms.

Further issues for the Brazilian chapter of the movement are likely to emerge as implications of changes proposed by the recently empowered government. It would be risky to make predictions at this point,[13] but proposals currently on the table appear poised to foster a significant expansion of the e-learning provision in the country. In particular, a combination of draconian education and research funding cuts, the legalisation of DE across all levels of education, and the legalisation of home schooling strongly suggests a glowing future for the private educational technology sector. On the surface, these proposals may appear responses to demands made by assumedly more 'conservative' sectors of Brazilian society.[14] Nonetheless, it seems to us that strengthening the private education industry may indeed be an ill-disguised item in current government agendas, regardless of how confusing they may appear at first sight.

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[13] At the time of writing, the new government has completed little over five months in power.

[14] Growing sectarianism and conservatism, especially amongst the neo-Pentecostal sector, is epitomised by the Minister of Families, Women and Human Rights, a preacher known to some as the Brazilian 'Aunt Lydia' (in an allusion to Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale*). Also, USarian alt-right anti-intellectualism has begun to take roots in the country, with 'cultural Marxism' as well as other strange notions to be found in the talk and writings of government officials (e.g. the newly-appointed minister of Education and, to the horror of educated Brazilians, the minister of External Relations).

Final Remarks

At the height of the initial enthusiasm for OER, associated with UNESCO's (2002) forum and the financial support offered by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, Santos (2008) critiqued Friedman's (2005) 'flat world' metaphor to tentatively explain why the original promise of the movement had not yet been delivered. At that time, the MIT had already launched, with significant repercussion in the Anglophone media outlets, their OpenCourseWare project, whilst other institutions, also financed by the Hewlett Foundation, were beginning to implement or expand their own initiatives. On the one hand, projects multiplied; on the other hand, there was a growing expectation that, soon, there would be evidence of their impact across the globe to justify inclusion of OER in public policy and provision of further financing.

The world was and remains, however, not flat: the very idea of impact, itself a pregnant metaphor, alludes to a process of internalisation of something foreign, disruptive, forcefully *imposed*. In the Brazilian case, despite the laudable measure of goodwill that couches local OER advocacy, universalising OER practices may stand in direct conflict with realities fostered by low pay and resulting overwork experienced by educators, especially in the scenario of growing political and economic uncertainty currently unfolding here. It is only a minority of education professionals in Brazil that are based in a single institution, to mention just one local specificity of major import: many teachers and lecturers, especially in the largest urban centres, may have to work in three or four schools or HEIs, only to make ends meet. In this scenario, there is not a lot of 'disposable' time that can be dedicated to activities not already part of an established routine of paid work, so idealism alone cannot foster sustained development.

Also, creating working models that permit integration of OER practices with other institutional processes already conducted by educators, a key aim of the movement from its early days, acquires different meanings when a possibly brutal privatisation process may result in the *uberisation* of a teaching profession replaced, in different degrees, by technologies.[15] In this context, rather than promoting the dissemination of knowledge, OER may well constitute a powerful *tool* for profit

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[15] Data-driven technologies have begun to be actively and strongly promoted in Brazil for various purposes, including educational uses (for a sample of the type of 'hype' at stake here, see https://www.wired.co.uk/article/claudio-sassaki-wired-2015) and, as announced recently by the ultra-neoliberal Minister of the Economy, replacement for civil servants set to retire within the next few years, in a move to minimize central State costs (c.f. https://odia.ig.com.br/colunas/servidor/2019/03/5630539-para-a-uniao--reduzir-concursos-e-investir-em-tecnologia-e-necessidade-da-realidade-mundial.html#foto=1). This is consistent with the scenario of radical neoliberal experimentation envisaged by some local commentators.

maximisation to the detriment of jobs, livelihoods and, crucially, an education for citizenship.

Hence, despite the appearance, to external observers, of a widespread enthusiasm for OER as well as various forms of e-learning in Brazil (e.g. Sabadie et al. 2014), it would be much more realistic to consider this an area in its infancy, with the more visible excitement for the values held by the wider international community contained nationally within the boundaries of very specific interest groups. Although OER have begun to achieve some public notoriety, until more championing is conducted to further disseminate the movement,[16] it is a challenging proposition for activists to defend OER beyond what may be perceived as a technocratic imposition, a marketing ploy or yet another imported, soon-to-pass fad that bears little or no relevance to local realities and needs.

It is hard to envisage dramatic changes in these perceptions, and the recently announced refocusing of policies, which were ostensibly democratic in previous governments (albeit favourable to private enterprise), already appears at odds with constitutional principles and democratic practices. Top-down impositions appear to be multiplying under a government (so far) marked by tensions between right-wing conservatives, including a sizeable neo-Pentecostal community with strong congressional representation, military personnel strategically placed at all levels of the State apparatus, and, last but not least, representatives of powerful national oligarchies and multilateral businesses. The question concerning a place for OER in this 'new order' should remain open as many Brazilians wonder about possible outcomes of the volatility that appears to mark the current government so far. Recently, not only the feasibility of NEP 2014-2024 has been called into question, but the document's very goals may soon be subjected to revision.[17]

Notwithstanding potentially sizeable difficulties and challenges, existing realities of contemporary Brazil are inconsistent with stereotypical images of 'developing countries' that have pressing need for OER produced elsewhere: herethere is significant local knowledge-production, as there are multiple cultures, histories and worldviews. However, these are mostly absent voices, marginalised by the unproblematic reproduction of hegemonic, universalist views of OER as generous *gifts* transferred across national borders by an assumedly borderless Internet. Hence, a refocusing of the movement appears to be in order, a reflection on *specificities* that will highlight that which is *local* and not necessarily suggested by discourses supported on

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16 Or, perhaps, further legislation needs to be passed, considering 'a singularly Brazilian characteristic of insisting that everything related to Higher Education is better served if constitutionalised and transformed into a law', as Nunes (2012, p.163) puts it.

[17] c.f. https://g1.globo.com/educacao/noticia/2019/05/27/plano-nacional-de-educacao-esta-com-80percent-das-metas-estagnadas-diz-estudo.ghtml (in Portuguese). *The Guardian* has an interesting selection of articles focused on Brazil that cover a few key issues within local current affairs (c.f. https://www.theguardian.com/world/brazil).

standardising metaphors. Such refocusing seems to be a prime necessity of the area, lest the enormous potential unleashed by the movement is rejected by reactionary processes or *co-opted* out of mere opportunism, possibilities facing the kind of credulity that is a *sine qua non* for any process of creative transformation. More consideration needs to be given to cultural issues and their historical roots, as the lack of historicity may foster, as the only possible outcome, further marginalisation and unfulfilled promises.

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