Pragmatism, partnerships, and persuasion: theorizing philanthropic foundations in the global policy agora

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Abstract

Foundations are one of the oldest organizational forms globally; their number and resources, as well as their socio-political and economic importance, have steadily continued to grow. Yet, foundations' attributes, activities, and actual achievements remain underexplored and poorly understood. This is particularly noticeable in the context of global policy and transnational administration, an area where foundations tend to be subliminal players, acting as a widely unrecognized socio-political undercurrent. Addressing the resulting need for better and alternative conceptualizations of foundations, our paper uses French pragmatic sociology of critique (FPSC), a non-structuralist, post-Bourdesian, approach to sociology, to theorize philanthropic foundations within the policy agora. Through FPSC, we present foundations as a composite setup of activity, where critically reflexive actors bring normative ideologies and knowledge to policy, providing a new avenue for how scholarship can interpret and critique foundations and their influence.

Keywords: philanthropy, pragmatic sociology, global policy, transnational administration, AGRA

This paper explores philanthropic foundations and their role as transnational actors in global policy. It contributes to scholarship on the global policy arena as a space that contains non-state and state actors that operate within decentralized, networked partnerships (Bauer & Trondal, 2015; Bauer et al., 2016; Deacon, 2007; Hale & Held, 2011; Moloney & Stone, 2019; Stone & Ladi, 2015). This space represents a "global policy agora" (Stone, 2008), where ideologies of policy are justified among a variety of actor groups involved in policy creation. In exploring how foundations operate in the global policy agora, this paper has two aims: to critically analyze foundations' role in the soft transfer of policy and to propose a theoretical framework that interprets the organizational form of philanthropic foundations and their work in the global transfer of policy.

While foundations operate within these evolving modes of international governance, their involvement in and influence on international development policy is nothing new (Jung & Harrow, 2019). However, their current operating environment as players in global policy creation requires revisiting. Working in networks as partnership brokers through private–public partnerships (PPPs) or product development partnerships (PDPs), foundations can affect a "soft" transfer of their policies through normative forms of knowledge. In doing so, foundations appear as vague, pragmatic, and contradictory organizational forms as their influence is dispersed across the marketplace of policy creation (Moloney

& Stone, 2019; Stone, 2008; 2010; Stone & Ladi, 2015; Stone & Moloney, 2019). There is a need to recon-ceptualize foundations' role in this global policy agora with both interpretive and critical research: The former will assist in understanding the foundation's ideological policy work conducted in a diversity of contingent situations, and the latter will assist in understanding how critiques of this work mediate changes in policy.

Addressing the need for better and alternative conceptualizations of foundations that account for their empirical complexity in the global policy agora, our paper uses French pragmatic sociology of critique (FPSC) (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2018 [1999]; Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006 [1990]; Boltanski, 2011 [2009]; Boltanski, 2013; Boltanski, 2013 [2004]), a non-structuralist, post-Bourdesian, approach to soci-ology, to theorize philanthropic foundations as "composite setups", as opposed to "unified entities" (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006 [1990]: 18). As FPSC frames organizations through their pragmatic action, we accordingly frame the organizational form of the foundation through the ideological and governing pragmatism that foundations bring to global agora of policy. Applying FPSC to a vignette on foundations' role in the Alliance on the Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), we show how situated partnerships, nor-mative justifications, and the role of critique speak to the dynamic organizational form of foundations and their role in the global policy agora. In doing so, we do not explore whether foundations sustain their influence on the policy environment; rather, we start from the position that foundations exert influence and explore how they do so (see Kneipp et al., 2023; McMeel Guthman, 2008; Moran & Stone, 2016), ultimately providing a new avenue to critically view foundations' role in the global policy agora with an eye to their organizational complexity and nuance.

The global agora of policy

While classical approaches to political science, policy scholarship, and public administration research have epistemologically separated state from non-state actors, with the state serving as the unit of analy-sis to understand policy creation, more recent scholarship has turned attention to the role of non-state actors in global policy and transnational administration (Bauer & Trondal, 2015; Stone & Ladi, 2015; Bauer et al., 2016; Deacon, 2007; Hale & Held, 2011; Moloney & Stone, 2019). As globalization has germi-nated the conditions for global policy to occur within a multi-networked realm, boundaries permeate nation-states and non-state actors, such as international organizations, advocacy coalitions, and actors from the private sector and civil society (Moloney & Stone, 2019; Stone, 2008; Stone & Ladi, 2015). In this sense, the rise of the non-state in global policy creation (tied to the idiom "governing without gov-ernment" (Reinicke, 1998) has not replaced or deconstructed the state in policy creation (Ruggie, 2004); rather, non-state actors have "enmeshed" nation states in decentralized webs of governance (Cerny, 2007): 22). Likewise, private actors are "deeply imbricated" in the role of policy creation that can affect national policies (Moloney & Stone, 2019: 108).

Such a global policy environment now amounts to what Stone (2008) illustratively calls a "global agora" of policy. Drawing from the "agora" of ancient Greece, which was, in its simplest terms, a mar-ketplace or public square, Stone (2008: 21) uses the idea of the agora to "identify a growing public space of fluid, dynamic, and intermeshed relations of politics, markets, culture, and society" ultimately constructed by the actors involved within it. With a wide array of political relationships within a com-municative network, in which actors proverbially "sell" politics and policies that contain normative ideologies within them, the agora blends the characteristics of a marketplace and public sphere because it becomes the locus of and platform for everyday ideological and value-based justifications, ultimately serving as "heart of intellectual life and public discourse" (Stone, 2008: 20). Yet, it can also serve as a "militarized space" (Stone, 2013: 13) whereby conflict, contention, and inequalities play into politics and policy creation.

Analogizing the agora to the globalized sphere of policy creation means highlighting how both state and non-state actors likewise bring normative ideologies to the restructured, decentralized policy envi-ronment in which "policy networks and self-regulation privatize decision making" (Stone, 2008: 22). This occurs through a "soft" transfer of policy-making, whereby knowledge about policies is dispersed across a global setting of standards, often via transnational policy communities (Stone, 2008, 2010, 2012). While such communities can occur at the state level via "intergovernmental networks", soft transfer of policy involves actors who bring program funding, build agreement, pool their author-ity, and share responsibility, making for forms of authority that are "quasi-public or semiprivate" (Stone, 2008: 28).

As Moloney & Stone (2019) point out, in any discussion of global policy and transnational adminis-tration, global civil society requires inclusion as philanthropic foundations have served as key players in recent years. Foundations have boomed in a global sense (Johnson, 2018): With private flows growing significantly since 2000 (Desai & Kharas, 2014), foundations have been bringing in "new instruments of aid", with a focus on technical development interventions within specific sectors, such as global health and agriculture (Moran, 2011; Moran & Stone, 2016). Though packaged as a "new" remit for globalized philanthropy, foundations have long participated in international development. The Rockefeller Foun-dation, in its inception, aimed to "promote the well-being of mankind throughout the world", while the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace was established to abolish "international war between so-cald [sic] civilized nations" (quoted from Jung & Harrow, 2019: 623).

Given their long-standing influence across global policy, scholarship has followed philanthropic foundations as transnational actors through the realm of international networks of knowledge and soft policy transfer (Moran, 2011; Moran & Stone, 2016; Stone, 2010; Moloney & Stone, 2019). This is because, within the growing PPPs and networks, private philanthropy increasingly occupies a seat at the policy-making table. Global developmental assistance now amounts to bilateral and multilat-eral networks of private donors (Desai & Kharas, 2014) with the increase in PPPs and participation by non-state actors (Moran & Stone, 2016). Foundations' strategic control over significant sums of money, their claims to respond to a diversity of social needs, and their general resource independence position them to influence global policy (Jung & Harrow, 2019: 627). As transnational philanthropy promotes the "transnationalization of policy" (Stone, 2010: 3), foundations can serve as providers of seed funding and interconnectors between organizations and initiatives. Foundations accomplish this partnership bro-kerage in which they may serve as intermediaries among actors, bringing resources (both material and in-kind) to structure global policy relations (Moran, 2011).

Product development partnerships (PDPs) provide one such example of foundations operating as "transnational administrations in their own right" (Moloney & Stone, 2019). PDPs began in the 1990s amid a gap in global health development funding (particularly for diagnostics, drugs, and vaccines) and organized around the orbit of The Rockefeller Foundation. Moran (2011) shows how an organic coalescence among a variety of actors, such as the World Health Organisation, World Bank, various overseas development agencies, and other international organizations, were formalized when The Rock-efeller Foundation provided a meeting and planning space at their offices in Lombardy. Drawing on their organization's reputational ability and their own philanthropic risk capital to unite diverse (and some-times hostile) actors, such as pharmaceutical (Boltanski, 2011 [2009]) companies and Non-governmental Organisations, The Rockefeller Foundation would eventually broker lasting transnational policy groups, such as the International Aids Vaccine Initiative, the Global Alliance for TB Drug Development, the Inter-national Partnership for Microbicides, the Paediatric Dengue Vaccine Initiative, and the Centre for the Management of Intellectual Property in Health R&D (Moran, 2011).

While the above example shows how foundations can serve as a catalyst for policy development, foundations can also be brought into policy creation via transnational governmental groups. This is evident by, for example, in the creation of the 2012 NetFWD, or, the Global Network for Foundations Working for Development, hosted by the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), an intergovernmental agency committed to promoting democracy via the market economy. NetFWD, consisting of what they call a "close-knit community of foundations", provides "a bridge to OECD expertise" that creates a "unique venue for foundations to meet policymakers from all the world's regions, as well as partners in multilateral organisations" (OECD, 2023). One such example includes the "Schools+ Program" which creates policies that aim to connect "schools in a learning circle to co-create solutions"…and "co-develop resources" (OECD, 2023). NetFWD therefore resembles the soft transfer of policy via reciprocating knowledge between state and non-state actors, with states hearing their key messages from foundations and foundations accessing the "internal knowledge base of the OECD". And on a broader scale, NetFWD's relationship to the OECD resembles the market-oriented principles of the policy arena, where knowledge bases and their normative functions are exchanged in the networked, globalized marketplace of ideas.

Overall, we see twin functions of foundations within the global agora of policy, consisting of coali-tion building and establishing institutional aid mechanisms for aid delivery (Moran & Stone, 2016). The organizational form of the philanthropic foundation therefore works in the global agora as both a gov-erning and ideological force: Within the networked relationships involving state and non-state actors,

foundations enact, develop, and advocate for global policy via a soft transfer of normative philosophies on international development. As they operate alongside, and sometimes on behalf of, the interests of nation states, philanthropic foundations blur their roles as "private" or "public" institutions.

While foundations and philanthropy have long been defined as an arm of civil society, or as actors in the space between governments and markets (Henderson & Vercseg, 2010), foundations' endowments are tied up in markets and increasingly operate within the marketplace of the policy agora. Conversely, while foundations may consider themselves private institutions with private interests, they operate publicly under a political context perspective where their activities (and how they justify these activities) are focused outwardly (Fernandez & Hager, 2014: 431). Therefore, despite their empirical significance, foundations represent paradoxical anomalies within the space of global policy, making them difficult organizations to theorize, as discussed further in the following section.

Perceptions of philanthropic foundations

Despite being one of the oldest organizational forms in history, dating back millennia (Borgolte 2017) philanthropic foundations have been under-theorized as an organizational form. As scholarship typically blankets foundations along the US label, it largely misses important differences between national contexts that prescribe different civil or common law distinctions (Jung, 2020). To enable a pluralist view of foundations' diverse practices while allowing transnational comparisons, a typological view of foundations uses taxonomy to frame their organizational work, often classifying them based on their outputs (Anheier (2018); Jung et al., 2018; Leat, 2018). In doing so, typological theories frame foundations through thematic grouping that may be applied to different contexts. In general, this has largely grouped foundations according to a grantmaking operating binary. Anheier (2018) typifies foundations through their outputs via a triangle, grouping them by activities focused on relief, protection, or change. Jung et al., (2018) offer a typological framework that frames foundations by context, organizational demographics, and strategy.

Shifting from pluralistic typologies, critical scholarship has by and large theorized foundations through their own field of power. As wealthy philanthropic entrepreneurs [tied to the realm of "philanthrocapitalism" (Bishop & Green, 2008)] increasingly create foundations to influence national and international development, critical scholarship has characterized the influence of organized philanthropy as one of the hyper agencies (Schervish, 2005) with heavy donor control (Ostrander, 2007). Critical management scholarship has framed foundations through Bourdieu's theories of power to show how elite philanthropy extends control over domains of capital (Harvey et al., 2020; Maclean et al., 2021). This is usually framed through a Bourdesian lens focused on capital (economic, cultural, symbolic, and social), field (social spaces of objective relations between positions), and habitus (internalized dispositions). This critical scholarship questions the normative legitimacy of foundations, meaning it questions the philosophical basis of what foundations should do (Jung, 2020) and whether their perpetual endowments actually perpetuate systems of inequality, leading to a view that foundations are regressive actors (Reich, 2020). Other critical scholarship explores the "empirical legitimacy of foundations", highlighting, for example, that global foundations, while lauded for their generous grantmaking, do not give as much as they say they do (Riddell, 2007; Sulla, 2007).

Such pluralistic and critical theories indeed address overly simplified and overly romanticized perceptions of philanthropic foundations, but they do not speak to foundations' pragmatic and fluidity characteristics evident in their role in the soft transfer of global policy. Typological nomenclature assigned to foundations, often presented as mutually exclusive, ignores important shades of overlap within practice: For example, the grantmaking versus operating binary ignores that one often involves the other. While typological perceptions show choices that foundations theoretically have, these miss the situated and contingent environment where choices are pragmatically made. Similarly, as critical framings question the legitimacy of foundations' choices, they likewise use an entrenched asymmetry as the point of departure for analysis, which glosses over the decentered and networked governing influence of foundations. Critical scholarship assumes that dominant actors exercise command over resources, while subordinate actors pursue subversive strategies to undermine the positions of dominant actors and create new positions (Shaw et al., 2013; Harvey et al., 2020). This overlooks the networked and soft forms of influence that occur in global policy, in which actors of all shapes and sizes use their partnerships to leverage agency. Theories of foundations therefore need to frame them

as co-constructive organizational forms within networks of other players. This does not mean abandoning critical questions at hand; rather, it means showing how long-term partnerships serve as a "(re-)emerging power in international development policy" (Moran & Stone, 2016: 298).

Along with reframing foundations governing power through heterarchical partnerships, as opposed to hierarchical control, theories also need to account for foundations' pragmatic ideological character. As foundations provide funding for "best practice" in policy to global networks, they likewise apply pragmatic ideals of what is "best" about these practices in the first place. Additionally, while critical arguments against foundations rightfully address the subtle, and, at times, invisible "taken-for-grantedness" (McMeel Guthman, 2008: 1243) of ideological ties to neoliberalism, these critiques are hard to leverage, given that foundations have funded nearly all social reform movements of the past (Arnove & Pinede, 2007). While they largely advocate for market-driven norms in these spaces, different ideologies play into their practices, too: The Open Society Foundation Network, for example, applies a gambit of political ideas to inform policy, from social justice initiatives to microfinance and entrepreneurship.

Given the limitations of the pluralistic-critical dichotomy, there is space to contribute a theory of the philanthropic foundation that highlights a pragmatic fluidity in their organizational form and in their movement across the decentralized global policy agora. We propose that this can be accomplished through FPSC—a non-structuralist form of sociology that shows the persistence of uncertainty as organizations cross time and space, while accounting for the pragmatism of their governing and ideological forms. This framework amounts to a complex, methodological situationism (Diaz-Bone, 2011), which shows how organizations exist within situations of normative justification and critique as they work with or against other networks of actors. The following section introduces this theory in further detail and illustrates how it can usefully theorize our understanding and critiques of foundations in the global policy agora.

FPSC

FPSC began in the 1980s at the University of Paris and made its way to the Anglophone world in the early 2000s. Luc Boltanski, along with theorists in economics, sociologists, statisticians, and politics from the Groupe de Sociologie Politique et Morale, endeavored to rethink the wider remit of French sociology. Boltanski and his peers aimed to "reformulate the question of critique" ((Boltanski, 2011 [2009]): 23), away from researching as a critic toward becoming analysts of critique. Such a position was an explicit departure from Bourdesian sociology. This is mainly due to Bourdieu's "excessive weight placed on the delusion of the agents" (Boltanski, 2013: 44). Distancing from Bourdieu's overall conviction that social relations are a result of entrenched, asymmetrical power dynamics (in which everyday people are dominated without knowing it), FPSC finds that actors, with their reflexive, critical capabilities, construct and dispute reality in symmetrical social "situations" (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006 [1990]: 1). In doing so, FPSC reinterprets classical economics that explore how "equilibrium is constructed as the unintended result of individual choices" (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006 [1990]: 25) toward the assumption that "transactions rest on different conventions of quality" (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2018 [1999]: XXX). Therefore, the overall ontological view of pragmatic sociology lifts from both Latour (2004: 53–90), who argues that reality contains "compositions of the collective", and Rawls, (1971) who points toward "a form of universal validity even though it is historically circumscribed" (Boltanski, 2013 [2004]: 257n1). By extension, the overall task of FPSC is to extract the dynamic and complex situations in which critical actors justify or critique such normative conventions.

From the outset, applying FPSC to philanthropic foundations means seeing their organizational forms not as "unified entities" but as a "composite assemblage" that includes arrangements deriving from "different worlds" (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006 [1990]: 18). This requires considering how ideologies play in situation of policy creation with actors involved—an argument first proposed in their seminal *On Justification*, which argues that actors justify various normative ideologies in critical situations to construct and create reality. They propose that subjective normativity (clustered under conventions, politics, repertoires, ideologies, world views, and politics) amounts to Grammars of Worth (GoW). Initially tied to different political philosophies that manifest in contemporary management handbooks, the GoWs contain (but are not limited to) six grammars: a market grammar, an industrial grammar, a civic grammar, an inspired grammar, a domestic grammar, and a fame grammar (Table 1). Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006 [1990] recognize that the GoW "must not be read in isolation, independently of the overall objective" of pragmatic sociology because an in-depth analysis of each would take a lifetime and be

Table 1. Overview of GoW based on canonical political philosophy.

GoW	Political philosophy text	Description
Market	Adam Smith: *Theory of Moral Sentiments* and *The Wealth of Nations*	Related to free competition between individuals and ascribes worth to wealth and winners
Inspired	Augustine: *The City of God*	Related to singularity, creativeness
Domestic	Bossuet: *Politics*	Related to esteem and reputation
Civic	Rousseau: *Social Contract*	Related to collective welfare
Industrial	Saint-Simon: *Du Systéme Industriel*	Relating to technical efficiency
Fame	Hobbes: *Leviathan*	Related to renown

"very presumptuous indeed". The GoW, instead, serve as a guideline for charting normative thinking in society, where normative thinking can underline practices and, crucially, where a variety of normative ideas compromise, clash, or critique against one another.

The GoW helpfully platforms how global foundations bring normative ideologies to policy creation, enabling a nuanced framing that accounts for multiple subjective politics that appear in the discourse of the global agora. By extension, because FPSC assumes that the GoW and their tests of worth exist within "a strategic position at any moment in time, and in particular, social formation" (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2018 [1999]: XXX), GoW can elucidate the roles of ideological pragmatism in the global agora. The notion that everyday actors bring the normative common sense of the GoW to decision-making is consistent with pragmatic schools of "micro-interactionism" (or the importance of big and small everyday interactions among people) (Frère & Jaster, 2019) and highlight the relevance of big-and-small moments of soft policy transfer. Importantly, FPSC's emphasis on the complex situations of social life crosscuts views of domination that "leads to conceiving virtually all relations between actions in their vertical dimension, from explicit hierarchical relations to the most personal of links" (Boltanski, 2011 [2009]: 20) by examining how institutions and critiques related to one another in symmetrical situations.

Boltanski's (2011 [2009]) later book *On Critique* emphasises how in these complex situations (made symmetrical because all actors are endowed with critical reflexivity) mediate situations through critique. The task of critique challenges "the inadmissible character of a particular event and the failure of operations, ritual, or narrative, aiming to regenerate it into the framework of correspondences" (121) amounting to a "hermeneutic contradiction" (Boltanski, 2011 [2009]: 84–92). In other words, institutions are analogical, recognizing clashing ideological forms as they operate in situations of high uncertainty (Petzinger et al., 2021). This naturally ties to the development work of foundations operating in global policy, in which they critique current forms of policy and reinterpret solutions across the network. As organizations use critique to challenge the integrity of a polity, organizations use critical reflexively "open and close their eyes" (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006 [1990]): 232) to different policy battles. This manifests, for example, in transnational foundations' focus on the matters of public health, where they critique current policy fails and offer new solutions. The FPSC therefore also neatly applies to different policy phenomena involving contested norms and moral ambiguities (Gadinger, 2016), such as justifications and critiques of climate change policies, ideologies brought to international agreements and treaties, or how grassroots critiques mobilize against national policies.

By and large, the role of critique in the FPSC has focused on internal situations, in which actors use critique as the point of departure for justifying new ideological and normative policy positions. However, Boltanski updated the case for FPSC in The New Spirit of Capitalism (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2018 [1999]).0, which examines the realm of networked, neoliberal capitalism and how it affects critiques of policy. Ultimately aligning with the decentered and project-based aspects of the policy agora, FPSC introduces a "projective" GoW, which shows how networked partnerships have, in themselves, become ideological forces. While there exists no "higher common principal" of the projective GoW, networks' ideological ability to bring in partnerships serves as the point of departure for justification of policy. As the projective grammar speaks to the decentralized, networked realm of global policy, it likewise speaks to our theoretical understandings of foundations in the policy agora, as foundations, along with other actors, justify policies through partnerships (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2018 [1999]).

As FPSC argues, the projective grammar assigns normative value and legitimacy to the hegemonic socioeconomic system of project-based capitalism, which is capable of withstanding critiques that

simultaneously confirm capitalism's project-based work. In making this argument, FPSC made a slight reconnection to Bourdieu's view of the unwitting presence of power by acknowledging that entrenched systems of domination under capitalism's new spirit indeed exist through a decentralized, project-based network that diffuses the normative weight of external critiques. Therefore, while identifying ideological symmetry between actors in complex situations remains the task of sociologists of critique, FPSC recognizes the necessity to keep the wider societal asymmetry that exists under capitalism's "new spirit" at our fingertips. Such a view enables sociologists of critique to understand how actors *themselves* feel about and critique philanthropic foundations' relationship to the wider inequalities that exist in the world.

Overall, FPSC can be broadly applied in three thematic situations: (a) arrangements of actors construct the world (and the policies within it) as they operate across their respective affairs; (b) actors bring normative worldviews to these affairs, where they justify the ideological meaning of their work, tied to the GoW; and (c) as actors contain critical capacities that endow them with the ability to reflexively engage with the world, they can level with respond to critiques by "opening and closing their eyes" to various appraisals of their work. We use FPSC to understand how foundations as an organizational form may be understood within their networked working relationships, how they bring ideologies to these relationships, and how critique mediates these relationships, particularly within the realm of the new spirit of capitalism that uses decentralized asymmetry to absorb and diffuse radical critique.

The following section distils the core of FPSC to frame a vignette on the AGRA, a policy group funded by The Rockefeller Foundation, Gates Foundation, and other national groups, compiled through an analysis of AGRA's public communications and the media surrounding it. Documents include a current strategy report from AGRA (2023), used to highlight how the group aimed to persuade the public of their critically reflexive claims to justifiable practice. It also pulls from media that document external critiques from both academic and practitioner literature that challenges AGRA's policy to highlight the mediating role of critique involved in AGRA's policy creation and administration. Through a narrative style, the vignette shows how foundations such as Gates and Rockefeller operate within situations of policy creation, amounting to a composite assemblage with other national governing bodies through networked governance. The vignette then shows how Gates, Rockefeller, and nation states, serving as co-constructors of agrarian development policy in sub-Saharan Africa, partake in the normative justification work whereby multiple ideological grammars come into play on AGRA's policy creation. Finally, it shows how these policies were critically reflected on, both internally and externally: The former shows critical reflection from AGRA that generated purported changes in making policy, and the latter shows the mediating effect of critiques against AGRA and its policies from stakeholder and smallholder groups, which have, as all external evidence would show, fallen on deaf ears, with the ownership of the alliance's responsibility unclear.

Foundations in AGRA

During an international Feeding the World conference in the Netherlands in September 2007, former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan declared, "For Africa to again feed itself and rejoin the league of agriculture-exploring regions, we need an African green revolution". This was the message of AGRA, launched in 2006 with 150 $ in funding from The Rockefeller Foundation and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Based in Kenya, and registered as a tax-exempt non-profit in the USA, AGRA's current strategy places "policy and advocacy" as its foremost objective, conducted by helping governments to improve their enabling policy environments. Strategies include increasing commitment to the agricultural sector by improving flagship design and investment advisory, improving state implementation capacity, and working with governments to improve outcomes tied to the Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Programme Malabo Declaration Targets (AGRA, 2023). More technical strategies include creating seed systems to improve crop productivity, creating inclusive markets and trade to create a "sustained cycle of commercialization and reinvestment", and expanding sustainable farming practices (AGRA, 2023). Situated networks, justification work, and the role of critique show how the work of these foundations enables normative policy creation within their strategic goals.

AGRA's support started with The Gates and Rockefeller foundations, which oversaw the work until 2011, when AGRA became its own entity and governing structure. However, this entity would be funded through the Partnership for Inclusive Agricultural Transformation in Africa (PIATA), which comprised

Table 2. Overview of GoW within AGRA's 2023–2027 strategy document.

GoW	Examples from AGRA (2023) strategy report
Market	*Our work in inclusive markets and trade will help build a 'pull' factor bringing farmers and businesses into a positive, sustained cycle of commercialization and reinvestment* (AGRA, 2023: 5)
Inspired	*Through our policy and state capability work, we will support governments to create an enabling environment for private sector involvement in agricultural transformation* (AGRA, 2023: 5)
Domestic	*Leveraging trusted relationships with farmers to start selling inputs* (AGRA, 2023: 4)
Civic	*AGRA has continuously evolved to tackle the constraints affecting the livelihoods of Africa's smallholder farmers* (AGRA, 2023: 5)
Industrial	*AGRA intends to build strong, efficient, and robust seeds systems that give farmers timely and affordable access to appropriate, quality varieties with traits for better yields and pest and disease tolerance* (AGRA, 2023: 18)
Fame	*We have credibility as an African-led and Africa-centric institution, opening doors to provide guidance to the highest level of leadership* (AGRA, 2023: 5)
Projective	*We support African Governments and collaborate closely with the private sector involvement in agricultural transformation* (AGRA, 2023: 5)

the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Germany's Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, The Rockefeller Foundation, the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, and the US Agency for International Development (USAID). The PIATA claims to "support countries to deliver on the Malabo commitments through AGRA's full business model of grant-making, consultancies, technical assistance, partnerships, communications and convening" (AGRA, 2023), conducted by "working with and complementing" various "national, regional and continental bodies and initiatives." These groups come together every year, with other international private and public donors, during the Africa Food Systems Forum, hosted by AGRA, where knowledge on the African agriculture sector is exchanged through themes such as "women in agriculture", "regional food trade", "rural and market development", "agtech and digitisation", and "sustainable inputs" (AGRF, 2022). These themes spoke to wider priority policy discussions of the summit: taking a food systems approach, innovation, smallholder farms at the center, climate action, nutrition, and investment (AGRF, 2022: 9).

AGRA's main messaging uses market-based ideologies to explain the value of the organization's practices, with clear language that associated improving agriculture in Africa with strengthening farming outputs to enable market profitability. Likewise, AGRA's justifications of practice via its connection to partners in global policy illustrate projective grammar. But by and large, the justifications for AGRA's policies contain multiple GoW (Table 2).

AGRA exhibits action that suggests critical reflexivity in the promotion of the value of their programs, evidenced by claims of organizational learning. For example, lessons learned from AGRA 1.0 (2006–2017) and AGRA 2.0 (2017–2021) informed the strategy of AGRA 3.0 (2023–2027). Keeping their eyes open to the changing environment ("with external pressures on the rise, hunger increasing, and worsening challenges for rural economies"), AGRA 3.0 aimed to "adopt a sustainable food systems lens which considers all elements, relationships, and related effects within the food system for people, the planet, and prosperity" (AGRA, 2023: 14). Other critical reflections include becoming "more targeted in our approach, sharpening our focus around national priorities for which there is support and momentum" and taking a "more interpreted approach to tackling national constraints, recognizing that strength in policy reform must be matched by implementation capacity" (AGRA, 2023: 14).

AGRA also opened itself up to critique when the Gates Foundation funded an independent program evaluation from Mathematica, stating in the preface to the report that "We, along with other PIATA partners, have encouraged and applauded AGRA's commitment to transparency by making the full evaluation public for the benefit of the greater development community" (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, quoted in Mathematica, 2021: i). Despite being the only macro-level performance review of AGRA released to the public, this evaluation did not include all target countries, and only used metrics tied to specifics on incomes and crop yields (Wise, 2021) The report found that yields for maize increased in only three countries as a result of PIATA, and only one country indicated higher levels of farmer income related to PIATA. Ultimately, the report concluded, "These findings suggest that AGRA did not meet its headline goal of increased incomes and food security for 9 million smallholders, despite reaching over

10 million smallholders through its systems development work" (Mathematica, 2021: 2). In a formal response, AGRA said the finding of the report produced "an expected outcome and a true reflection of the realities that farmers, AGRA, and other institutions that support farmers today live with daily" (AGRA, 2022: 4).

While critical reflexivity is hard to gauge through external data, various media displayed loud external critiques of AGRA's practices. The Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa issued a call to end AGRA's "green revolution" with over 200 organizational signatories, noting that AGRA had "pushed a development model that reinforces dependence on foreign inputs, such as expensive fertilizer, undermining the resilience of African food systems". Academic critiques were levelled by Wise (2020), who explored 1365 pages of policy documents and found no positive impacts on farmers' fields, incomes, or food security. Eventually, the US Right To Know campaign, aware of critiques of AGRA's practices, received internal evaluations by AGRA from USAID through the US Freedom of Information Act, prompting AGRA eventually to disclose the evaluations on their website (reports that, according to Wise (2021), AGRA had previously declined to share with researchers). These external critiques have been received by AGRA with outward denial, calling them "unfounded allegations and uncorroborated reports about AGRA and its work" (AGRA, 2020). The Gates Foundation has not met with any of the critiquing groups, nor has it given any public response to these external critiques (Malkan, 2022). Yet, they, along with The Rockefeller Foundation, remain key funders to this day through PIATA.

Discussion

Framing the AGRA through FPSC yields important insight into the pragmatic work of philanthropic foundations within the global policy agora, specifically the arena around African agriculture reform. First, the GoW show how policy is "softly" transferred through different ideas and norms. One example of this can be found in the agricultural policy of *leveraging trusted relationships with farmers* [domestic grammar, based on trusting, familial relationships] *to start selling* [market grammar, based on buying and selling of goods] *inputs, and our initiatives to strengthen last mile delivery systems* [industrial grammar, based on technical efficiencies]. While scholarship has rightfully highlighted that market-driven ideologies softly transfer into policies, this example suggests instead a "compromise formula" of different philosophies, whereby a common good beyond market value can transcend ideological differences. With such a normative variety, FPSC highlights the need for both interpretation and criticality when viewing foundations: In terms of the former, it highlights that foundations claim ideological multitudes within their policies, making them apparently "worthy" for more than one reason; in terms of the latter, the GoW suggest that foundations package forms of policy that appeal to and persuade different actors and groups, making their value proposition simultaneously justifiable and vague as they proverbially "sell" their policy within the wider policy arena.

Second, we highlight how AGRA amounts to a symmetrical "composite assemblage" of actors that create policies, including foundations. AGRA claims to be made up of a network of PIATA, nation-states, and smaller charities that use their relationships to pragmatically navigate agrarian policy creation. This informs our understanding of foundations' presence in the global policy agora as a porous organizational form, whose outputs are interlinked with other organizations' outputs. By extension, the partnerships that make up AGRA do not only transfer policy; as highlighted through the projective GoW, which argues that networked partnerships have themselves become ideological forces, the network of actors that make up AGRA likewise suggests that partnership creation serves as a form of policy in it of itself. AGRA used the (supposedly) connected and aligned partnerships between countries and groups alone to justify its existence. This echoes NetFWD's interest in connecting people through education, whereby relationship building becomes a type of policy output as a nexus to share knowledge and resources.

Third, examining AGRA through FPSC simultaneously highlights the asymmetries that underpin policy reform. As FPSC uses criticality via analyzing the mediating role of critique, we can find the ways that AGRA critically engaged with issues of power. For one, the critical capacities of actors involved in AGRA and the funders at PIATA show a desire to rethink policy on agricultural reform and to bring power to smallholder farmers. The reflexive thinking around how to reshape agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa shows that foundations have "open eyes" to the inequalities surrounding food development. Critical reflection has led to learning within their own policies (for example, in the evolution from AGRA 1.0 to

AGRA 3.0) along with some clashing, unresolved disagreements evident in Germany's threat to pull out funding over disagreements on pesticide use.

External critiques from actors that have experienced the effects of AGRA's policies likewise highlight asymmetries within the global policy agora. These critiques, coming from a variety of actors, (such as the damning evaluation from Mathematica (2021), petitions to get AGRA to close down, or scholarship out of Tufts University) have not mobilized change within AGRA. It appears that the only time that external critique did change practice was with a legal obligation when US Right To Know received previously undisclosed evaluation reports obtained by a third party after a legal appeal through the Freedom of Information Act process. As these issues corroborate how wider asymmetries exist within the global policy agora, making for militarized space whereby actors with more influence subjugate actors with less, FPSC's *New Spirit of Capitalism* theorizes how this influence is sustained: The decentralized nature of the African agricultural policy arena and the decentralized nature of the global policy agora in general blunt the targeted accusations of unaccountability across the network. In other words, AGRA's disengagement with and diffusal of critique from various stakeholders ultimately reminds us of who does and does not have an influential voice within the policy agora.

The case involved here has some clear limitations: Most notably, it does not capture the internal reflexivity in play behind closed doors at AGRA. While AGRA externally suggests critical reflexivity through organizational learning, it does not mention the mechanisms by which this learning happened. Additionally, while the soft transfer in policy is evident in network interactions (for example, at the AGRA conference, where actors exchange knowledge-based ideologies that play into policy), capturing the lived experience of the soft transfer of policy remains difficult without access to the rooms where these conversations happen. Additionally, there is an argument to be made that using FPSC walks too thin of a methodological line to be useful: For example, taking the civically minded statement from AGRA (2023: 5) that "it has constantly evolved to tackle the constraints affecting the livelihoods of Africa's smallholder farmers" does not mean this is true, or should be taken at face value, especially against the evidence provided by other actors that their policy "continues to impoverish smallholder farmers" (Malkan, 2022). However, what FPSC achieves through a symmetrical view is that, by taking actors and their reflexivity seriously, we can examine how they eschew or engage with criticism that recognizes wider asymmetry. Such a view provides a useful platform for theorizing foundations: Instead of arguing whether market-based ideology and influential governing power have enabled foundations in their global policy work, this paper posits how their decentralized power across situated networks and their vague normative form (evident in the GoW) weaken the influence of external critique and ultimately sustain their influence within the global policy agora.

Conclusion

This paper has theorized how philanthropic foundations operate within the global policy agora through FPSC. Addressing the limitations of other theoretical frameworks on foundations, we show how FPSC enables researchers to bring both interpretation and criticality when studying foundations' fungible yet weighty organizational role in global policy creation. Given FPSC's theoretical utility for studying contested or coordinated norms within a variety of policy phenomena, we apply the theory to a vignette on AGRA that shows how foundations exhibit a pragmatic character within the policy arena of African agricultural development. By justifying multiple political philosophies that underpin their policies and enmeshing their outputs across a network of other actors, the pragmatic work of foundations in the global policy arena dampens external critiques. The loud justifications of their worth, supported by a chorus of other actors and organizations entangled in the policy arena, make external critiques of foundations struggle to cut through the noise in the proverbial "public square" of the policy agora, reminding us as scholars to explore the potential promises and problems of philanthropy's role in policy creation.

Conflict of interest

None declared.

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