

The background of the cover is a complex, light-colored line drawing on a dark blue background. It features a mix of architectural elements, including floor plans, structural frames, and curved, organic shapes that resemble a stylized globe or a network of connections. The lines are thin and white, creating a technical and intellectual feel.

Routledge Studies in Development and Society

THE GATES FOUNDATION'S RISE TO POWER

PRIVATE AUTHORITY IN GLOBAL POLITICS

Adam Fejerskov



The Gates Foundation's Rise to Power

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has established itself as one of the most powerful private forces in global politics, shaping the trajectories of international policy-making. Driven by fierce confidence and immense expectations about its ability to change the world through its normative and material power, the foundation advances an agenda of social and economic change through technological innovation. And it does so while forming part of a movement that refocuses efforts towards private influence on, and delivery of, societal progress.

The Gates Foundation's Rise to Power is an urgent exploration of one of the world's most influential but also notoriously sealed organizations. As the first book to take us inside the walls of the foundation, it tells a story of dramatic organizational change, of diverging interests and influences, and of choices with consequences beyond the expected. Based on extensive fieldwork inside and around the foundation, the book explores how the foundation has established itself as a major political power, how it exercises this power, but also how it has been deeply shaped by the strong norms, ideas, organizations, and expectations from the field of global development. The book will be of interest to scholars and students of global development, international relations, philanthropy and organizational theory.

Adam Moe Fejerskov is Researcher at the Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS). He holds a PhD in international studies from Roskilde University. His research lies at the intersection of global development and international relations, with a focus on norm dynamics, rising state and non-state powers, as well as organizational and sociological theory.

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To Janni for distracting me towards more important things in life than academia, and to our little boy who will one day open this book and come to find that his dad is kind of a nerd.



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Preface

My story with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation began in 2013 when I became part of a large collaborative research project that studied how seven different organizations work with, and engage in, norms of gender equality and women's empowerment. My initial interest in the foundation was from a perspective of understanding its work on gender, but it soon expanded into trying to comprehend this intriguing organization more broadly. It was with this dual aim in mind that I approached foundation employees, grantees and partners, conducting more than 100 interviews over the course of three years, from 2014 to 2016. I spent nearly a year in the US (and the greatest part of that in Seattle, WA, home to the foundation), but also followed the foundation's work around the world, visiting grantees as they came together in Istanbul, Turkey, and observing its work in India, both in the capital of New Delhi but also out in the fields on the outskirts of Bhubaneswar, in the state of Odisha. I am deeply thankful to all the current and former programme officers, advisors, fellows, directors, and grantees of the Gates Foundation without whose invaluable contributions this book would not have been possible. All of you know who you are. The same goes for the many other organizations and individuals who have provided inputs to the book. In particular, I owe my deepest gratitude to Lars Engberg-Pedersen and Peter Kragelund for steering me through three years of research on the Gates Foundation with vital encouragement and advice. Had it not been for Lars' untiring support and collegiality through the years, I would not be where I am today, if at all in academia.

Many of the issues explored in the book revolve around intraorganizational processes and struggles, between individuals, units and departments. As such the endeavour has been sensitive, and all interviewees have been aware (and some worried) about the potential danger of exposing colleagues. To me, however, there is no objective of exposure or comparable drama in the book, with many of the sensitive organizational spectacles or developments likely being experienced in everyday organizational life across the world. Still, to gain as truthful an insight into the foundation's work as possible, I protect my interviewees by securing their anonymity. Several names do appear throughout this book, but they belong to people who are to be seen as public figures, or who have allowed me to use their names. Throughout my interviewing, the intention has been to allow informants

to elaborate at great length about the issues and processes discussed, allowing for as high a degree of information as possible, and many of the interviews were followed up by repeated talks in order to explore new aspects of the issues discussed. In particular, it was an explicit aim for me to combine formal meetings inside the foundation's walls with more informal conversations and meetings, where employees felt safe discussing sensitive issues, away from 'work'. That conversations could take place outside of work was even more eagerly suggested by my interviewees than by me, with many people insecure about discussing intimate work relations in their shared offices or in common rooms.

No matter the unique insights I have gained into the foundation's work, the study undertaken to prepare a book like this will likely always be faced by certain challenges just as there are natural limits to the book's exploration. It first and foremost concerns itself with the international ambitions and work of the foundation, and does not engage deeply in its efforts in US education. That is so despite the foundation's obvious influence there, with Gates having been referred to as 'the real Secretary of Education' in the US. Furthermore, it attempts to cover a broad scope of issues as they pertain to the foundation's work, and thus cannot make up for singular in-depth case studies of only one side of the foundation's influence, such as in global health, though it certainly contributes with in-depth knowledge to such. Even for a field like global health, the foundation's involvement is so expansive and vast that it is difficult to comprehend, let alone collect material on, all the subfields it remains engaged in, from vaccination coverage to low cost nucleic acid detection technologies. Furthermore, data poses a general challenge to the study of private foundations. Very little comparative data is available on the scale, reach and engagement of these actors in global development. The Gates Foundation is consistent in preparing annual reports and financial statements, but these are at a fairly superficial level, and have deteriorated over the last decade, from dozens of pages covering internal reform and organization to now only consisting of core financial statements of a few pages, as well as Bill and Melinda Gates' annual letter that targets an issue of importance to them.

Another challenge, and perhaps the one mostly intriguing colleagues and people hearing about this work, regards access (*how did you get in?*). Rather than a single door to be opened, I tend to think of access as a long hallway with a multitude of doors. Some of these are open; some are closed; some open only periodically in response to a variety of actions or talk, and may close soon after. Entering through a door is only the beginning, and one may quickly realize that not much lies beyond it. Neither is there ever a stable outside and inside, in which the researcher may reside calmly. The objective then becomes to convince the person on the other side of the door to open it, underlining the strong relational element to access. Just as in the world outside of research, such relationships need to be nurtured and upheld in order to maintain their usefulness. I usually respond to questions of access by saying that my somewhat delimited focus on gender-work meant that individuals were less suspicious of my motivations and undertaking. Like all of the foundation's areas of intervention though, it naturally has many sensitive elements to it, not least because of its status in the foundation

as an emerging area in which experience and knowledge was in the process of being built up, creating some degree of uncertainty.

After all, and at all times, empirical research will be at the mercy of the real world, shaped by the people we engage with. As social scientists, we have long left the laboratory's stable conceptions and artificial usage of reality, and replaced it with complexity and unpredictability, the true 'natural' condition of reality. While complicating the design and practice of research, the inspiring and stimulating challenges this poses remain one of the core reasons why many do qualitative research. Nonetheless, it also often creates a significant discrepancy between what is hoped for and what is achieved, and especially so when it comes to the collection of empirical data, something we should be honest and open about. For research traditions that further stringent objectivism and a positivist-reductionist attitude to such processes, this human face of transparency of the researcher is often left behind in a double-sided misconstrued perception that ignoring such concerns is both scientifically possible and commendable. In this line of thought, research is a logical and linear exercise of designing, planning and executing. This has not been so, and I am grateful for the way people have opened their hearts, minds, and networks for me to exploit. In the end, research is to be found somewhere between hopefulness and the unpredictability of reality, and that is not an entirely bad thing.

1 Introduction

On the West Coast of the United States, way up north in the state of Washington, lies the 'Emerald City', Seattle. Nicknamed after the capital of L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, Seattle is perhaps better known as one of the liberal strongholds of the US, for its almost 70 per cent white population, and, most of all, it is known for its rain. In reality though, the city only ranks 44th nationwide in annual rainfall. Of all the city's landmarks the most famous is the Space Needle, a 180-metre-tall observation tower that attracted great attention as the tallest building west of the Mississippi River when it was built in 1962 for the Seattle World Fair. Today, this attention has largely shifted to its most novel neighbouring building. In June of 2012, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation moved into its new \$500 million, six-story, 7000 m², and 12-acre campus headquarters. The campus houses the majority of the foundation's more than 1,400 employees. Visitors without business in the foundation can appreciate the new headquarters from a viewpoint overlooking the campus. Or they can venture into the foundation's 1000 m² visitor centre, a presentation of its self-proclaimed history and results to the public. Here, they can try their luck at developing a vaccine for malaria by positioning a set of different levers in the right combination, or watch a movie in the cinema on the foundation's partnership with one of the world's largest football clubs, F.C. Barcelona, and its star player Lionel Messi.

Venturing into the foundation's campus, its large reception feels somewhere between the most sterile upscale hotel you have never been to, and a waiting room for meticulously well-dressed adults anticipating an oral test with strict examiners. People sit together in small groups or walk around impatiently while talking on the phone. Some with Washington, DC, and some with China. They talk about planned pitches of ideas and projects, budgets, or results and evaluation frameworks. It is fairly easy to see that people are here for the business of funding. From the reception, one moves down and into the centre of the campus, a courtyard of concrete. In what appears as a pedantically controlled area, trees grow in small squares in the concrete, containing and controlling the wildness and anarchy of nature. Three trees are bigger than the rest and are meant to symbolize three different individuals, each of whom played an import role in establishing the foundation: Bill Gates Sr, his late wife, Mary Gates, and the American epidemiologist William Foege, who has been an inspiration to Bill Gates since the foundation started its work.

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Rising on either side of the courtyard are two massive building structures, almost entirely clad in glass, that hold the offices of the foundation's different divisions and departments, and with room for constructing a third building in case the foundation should come to need it. When the campus was inaugurated on a Thursday night in late May of 2012, Melinda Gates took the stage and explained to guests at the reception about the deliberate conspicuousness of the headquarters: 'We wanted to make a statement'.

Contrast these images of relative grandeur to the humble beginnings of the foundation. The Gates Foundation started in the basement of Bill Gates Sr's house in the mid-1990s, from where he would screen incoming requests for charity and pass the most interesting ones on to his son for further inspection and an eventual decision on whether to provide support or not. As the foundation outgrew the basement, it rented scattered and anonymous offices around Seattle, some famously above a pizza parlour. For years, it characterized itself as a small family-foundation, and was lauded by *The New York Times* for its lean bureaucracy and limited head count,¹ though its endowment grew exponentially to heights above the vast majority of American private foundations. Today, the Gates Foundation's rise to global prominence is known to most. Or, more precisely, its present-day position as one of the most influential non-state actors in contemporary international political life, both financially and politically, is renowned. More powerful and vastly greater in size than any other foundation in modern history, the Gates Foundation is not simply following a trend of growing influence for foundations, it literally embodies that trend. At present, the foundation is a titanic influence in numerous areas of global development, health and governance, ever-present in international political discussions in fora such as the UN, OECD, the World Health Organization or the World Economic Forum. Its endowment of approximately \$40 billion is larger than the Gross Domestic Product of more than 50 per cent of the world's countries, and its annual grant-making of approximately \$4 billion dwarfs the majority of OECD-DAC donors' development aid. Wielding a diverse repertoire of political influence through its grant-making, investment of its endowment, advocacy and powerful networks, the foundation always seems to have the right tool for the occasion. Yet, despite the familiarity of most with different sides of the financial, normative, and political weight and influence of this comparatively novel foundation, knowledge of its actual rise, the process of becoming what we consider it today, is superficial at best. The majority of the intellectual attention given to it has been to its role in global health² or in US-domestic education,³ or to its specific interventions, including the founding of Gavi,⁴ and the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa or AGRA.⁵ Insights into the internal workings of the foundation have only occasionally been provided by local media from the Pacific Northwest,⁶ specialist philanthropic and other media.⁷

This book represents the first attempt to genuinely open up the closed book that is the Gates Foundation. Based on fieldwork inside and around the foundation, it provides a glimpse behind the curtains into the processes the foundation has gone through as it has increasingly entered into and sought to establish itself on the

international political scene. Specifically, it is a story of the Gates Foundation – how the foundation and its employees think, act, plan, exercise power and work to influence the environments surrounding it. About how, below its public face of fierce and uncompromising ambition, deep inside the organizational machinery of the foundation, we find anything but a unification of thought in which there is no contestation over discourses, practices, ambitions, or priorities. Instead, we find individuals and groups of people, sometimes with vastly different backgrounds, from public policy makers to medical doctors, and with different mind-sets and missions, who contest over ideas, meanings and resources, each one engaged in internal organizational struggles. Only by lifting the lid and not assuming the foundation to be driven by a single mind of monstrosity, as a streamlined machine, can we properly understand this immensely powerful yet also complex organization. This is not a defence of the Gates Foundation but an argued necessity if we are to genuinely scrutinize the foundation and its influence on issues that have ramifications for millions of people, particularly in the Global South. As we shall see, the story of the Gates Foundation is a story of dramatic organizational change, of diverging interests and influences, struggles over the legitimacy of ideas and practices, and of choices with path-dependent consequences beyond the expected.

Yet, the book is not only a narrow organizational tale of the Gates Foundation and the changes it has been through since its genesis. The findings and arguments made fundamentally speak to and inform at least three major discussions in contemporary international studies. The first concerns the rise of new actors and powers, whether state or non-state, or what I refer to here as the contemporary meeting between forces of heterogeneity and homogeneity in global development. That is, the exploration of what happens as new actors enter into a field that is increasingly being homogenized through global normative frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals. By uncovering the multifaceted organizational trajectory of the Gates Foundation over time, we come to learn some of the conceivably common processes that rising powers and emerging actors go through as they enter into and engage with spheres of international political life that are governed by norms, rules, and standards, and are being confronted with established and expected forms of behaviour and thought. Much work in this vein has been focused on how rising powers change global development, and while the Gates Foundation certainly challenges established or traditional practices and discourses, it has also been greatly shaped by these over time. The book accordingly shows the ways in which the foundation has slowly but gradually socialized to dominant modes of thought, practice and operation, and today in many stances resembles the established organizations it somewhat attempts to distance itself from. Second, the book speaks to debates about non-state and private actorness by showing how the Gates Foundation exercises a hybrid form of authority that extends far beyond any characterization as only ‘private’. By negotiating and shifting its organizational identity from situation to situation, the foundation is able to draw on diverse tools of influence that sees it sometimes use those traditionally associated with private foundations, sometimes those associated with NGOs, and in other instances those of a multinational corporation and even of states. This fluidity of authority means

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it not only crosses different categories of non-state actors, but also increasingly transcends the public–private or state/non-state divide. Third, the book provides what we can call an organizational sociology of global development, drawing on sociological institutionalist perspectives to enrich the study of organizations in global development. It forms a suggestive framework or theoretical vocabulary fit to study the present analytical challenges of what is sometimes referred to as *big-d* development, that is the global institutional endeavour of development cooperation in the messy interplay between states, organizations and individuals. Exploring and explaining contemporary disruption and change in global development requires an ever-growing conceptual toolbox, and this book provides one way forward in understanding these currents.

Re-emergence of private foundations in global politics

Since the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation opened its doors in 1999, it has distributed more than \$42 billion to national and international issues, with grant-making amounting to \$4.6 billion in 2016⁸ and a current massive endowment of \$40 billion. From an initial focus on education in the US, as well as international spending on vaccine development and delivery, the last ten years have seen the foundation venturing into the field of ‘global development’, where some of its main areas of intervention include agriculture, water and sanitation, and financial services for the poor. Since becoming a formal programme area in the foundation, this has seen massive scaling up over the last ten years, from \$50 million in 2005 to \$1.5 billion in 2015,⁹ but so too has the entirety of the organization. Over the last decade, the annual administrative expenses of the foundation have increased tenfold to more than \$550 million, and the number of employees has risen to more than 1,400 today. The astounding reach and size of the Gates Foundation is underlined by how the foundation accounts for more than half of all global philanthropic giving to development today.¹⁰

The rise of the Gates Foundation is often used as an illustration of the (re)emergence of private foundations in global politics, though its magnitude means it has no equal in the foundation world. Attention to private foundations in global development has greatly increased over the last decade, mainly with a view to their potential dual contribution of providing additional resources and bringing new approaches to the scene, and this can be rudely reduced to commonly fall into two categories. One side holds that institutional logics transferred from the business world by these organizations render them more successful, innovative and effective than traditional donor organizations.¹¹ The other believes that the transfer of entrepreneurial business skills into the world of relief and global development is not necessarily unproblematic.¹² Particular elements from these logics grounded in business and entrepreneurial lines of thought are believed to diffuse to other actors in the field, entailing a privatization of global development. This privatization can essentially be divided into three elements: (1) increased multiplicity and prominence of private actors and innovative forms of providing aid from individuals; (2) growth in private aid flows to developing countries including absolute

and relative financial power of private actors in development; and (3) a shift in the practices and discourses of global development towards ‘Ideas emanating out of business schools’¹³ or what has been referred to as the ‘California consensus’¹⁴ in which managerialist logics such as the necessity of innovation, efficiency and evaluation, results-orientation, quantitative impact measurement, etc., are transferred to practices and discourses in global development.

Scholarly interest in private foundations within international studies was instigated in the early 1970s by Peter Bell’s observation that the Ford Foundation resembled many of the features of a transnational actor, and that foundations as a group of actors were interesting to study ‘Not only because of the direct outcome of their grants but also because of their direct and indirect influence on other actors in world politics’.¹⁵ Despite Bell’s work, interest waned over the next decade and more, as state-centric concerns of regimes, hegemonic stability, etc., came to dominate international relations theorization. When academic interest in foundations rematerialized in the 1980s, it transcended historical, sociological and public health research traditions more than it spoke to international relations specifically. Here, the role of American foundations in forwarding pro-US values, their elite-project nature,¹⁶ and their perceived aim of co-optation of counter-hegemonic actors became objects of interest for scholars working from a Gramscian or critical perspective.¹⁷ This Gramscian tradition continues to influence the contemporary critical vein working on private foundations.¹⁸ Somewhat challenging these critical perspectives, others have argued for the importance of studying private foundations in their own right, i.e. decoupled from discussions over whether they are agents of capitalism.¹⁹ This book is situated between these two perspectives, arguing that private foundations are indeed interesting to study as a specific actor-type, and merit attention due to many empirical and theoretical concerns beyond their perceived function as agents of capitalism. Private foundations are too significant and complex a set of actors to be black-boxed, not to mention that they are, in fact, organizations consisting of often conflicting ideas, interests and values. Not presupposing the interests and ideologies of private foundations does not imply that we should not approach them critically, it merely means wide generalizations or oversimplifications of the nature and missions of these do not do justice to their uneven and diverse dispositions. Private foundations are as fragmented an actor-type as any other, and their individual differences imply there is a need to study them as exactly that – individual actors. Doing so does not dilute any critical perspective; on the contrary, it sharpens these because of the increased analytical accuracy to which grounded empirical explorations open the way.

Rising powers: disruption and stability in contemporary global development

The story of how the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has entered into global development and evolved as an organization is a tangible illustration of how this field is caught at the intersection of two concurrent processes of heterogeneity and

homogenization. Embodied in the first is an expanding plethora of organizations and actors with a multiplicity of approaches to aid provision and development work. Development assistance grew out of the Marshall Plan in the 1950s as Europe began promoting economic development in poorer regions and countries, many of whom were former colonies. What began as sporadic work by countries such as the United Kingdom, France, Sweden, and Denmark soon turned into structured aid agencies, policies and formalized partnerships. For the first few decades, Western countries provided the main share of global Official Development Assistance in hierarchized relationships under stable perceptions of, and clear lines between, benefactors and recipients. With the turn of the millennium however, improved macroeconomic conditions in several middle-income countries began making fluid these otherwise stable perceptions of core circumstances of development assistance. It paved the way for a hitherto unseen active and assertive foreign policy from rising powers of striving towards economic and political influence. Complementing this, the last few years has seen a growing involvement of private actors (the theme around which this book naturally revolves), from foundations to corporations and social enterprises, not least through the gradual realization that development aid can do very little on its own to spur economic and social development.

Most of these actors apply limits to their genuine newness, having earlier engaged in collaborative efforts resembling, in part, global development relationships. Yet their engagements today are substantially amplified. Most of the re-emerging non-DAC donors have been involved in forms of charity to neighbouring countries for hundreds of years, but not in the formally institutionalized sense we see today, with emerging national institutions set up to handle such collaborations, nor with the current scope that sees relations easily reaching around the planet. Private involvement too is not a novel matter. International foundation giving was initiated more than a hundred years ago, embodied mainly in the early 'big three' foundations, Carnegie, Ford and Rockefeller (with Ford as the somewhat latecomer), distributing wealth accumulated during the 19th century's rapid industrialization in the United States. Private corporations too have been involved in global development efforts for as long as there has been anything referred to as such, with the genuine difference today probably being the responsibility and anticipations we attribute to them in financing development by spurring economic growth in the developing world. What has changed then is not so much the involvement of these actors *per se*, but rather the size and scope of their engagement, as well as their gradual involvement in more formalized and institutionalized forms of cooperation.

With such increasing heterogeneity of actors predictably comes a set of perceived new or alternative practices of discourse, more or less through a desire for these new actors to separate themselves from established organizations. The both practical and ideational challenge from the Global South to established or hegemonic ways of development work mainly revolves around notions of increasing South–South Cooperation (SSC). Largely articulated around principles of solidarity, (political) non-interference and equality between partners, SSC in its

own perception challenges the unequal power relations of traditionally dominant North–South relations, and has grown in both prominence and in volume over the past years. Partnerships across Southern partners does not necessarily imply equal power relations, however, and the group of Southern countries is as internally heterogeneous as the North–South divide itself; China and South Sudan share very few interests aside from broader ambitions of economic growth and prosperity. We definitely see new power constellations then, but the sometimes assumed equality of these and the inherent purpose of the partnerships to depoliticize conflicts of interests between states should be thoroughly questioned, something occasionally not being done across an often overly optimistic SSC discourse.

From the outset of increased SSC, traditional donors have responded to these changes from the Global South by taking on new discursive regimes or ways of legitimizing development and specific organizational and political changes. These legitimizing discourses especially revolve around *mutual* interests but also geo-economic ones coupled with an emerging re-nationalization among particularly Western OECD countries that sees aid increasingly re-tied to national concerns and interests. This is definitely spurred on by increasing challenges from the economically and politically rising South and perhaps reflect how Western states are becoming more comfortable about articulating their geo-political self-interests because of the equally strong idea of mutual interests in the SSC discourse. But it does not represent an unprecedented series of arguments to legitimize or guide aid spending. Domestic and self-centred concerns were for many years dominating during the 1970s and 1980s, as tied aid ensuring a return of the spending to the aid provider was the preferred form of development cooperation. For many European countries, current developments and crises (whether they regard volatility of global finance, growing inequality, increasing migration flows, or climate change), coupled with a swift breaking down of the boundaries between domestic and foreign policy and developments, have entailed increasing tendencies of neo-isolationism and re-nationalization in a naïve belief that the reach and spread of these crises can be stalled by way of seclusion, border control and the pursuit of narrow interests. Taken together, we see new discourses, modes of practice and patterns of interaction (be they in coordination or competition) emerge. Each of the new actors carry with them particular organizational cultures, contexts, histories and assumptions shaping their internal modes of operation and relations to other actors in the field. Together they have contributed to a definite, albeit importantly fragmented, challenge to established development orthodoxies and hegemonies, many of which have been reinforced by Western countries through time.

Against this backdrop of increased heterogeneity, disruption and flux in global development, however, a second simultaneous process of increasing homogenization can be seen as running counter to it, a process that attempts further stability and conformity in the present chaos. Homogenization in this regard denotes mounting attempts to govern and streamline the way ‘development’ is understood and practiced, furthering a standardization or institutionalization of global development. That is, since the late 1990s global development has

witnessed significant trends towards establishing common frameworks for ‘good development’, including standardized rules and alignment principles. Such norm- and principle-setting is manifested in, for example, the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the contexts of the OECD and the UN. Together, these agreements establish sets of norms that all actors involved in global development are expected to adopt and adhere to, in order to be considered legitimate. Though emerging actors enter global development with a diverse set of ideas and modes of operation, they are not faced with unrestricted room for manoeuvring in which there are no expectations about adherence to certain norms and principles – quite the opposite. This is not to say that contemporary development remains a world culture that easily isomorphs or homogenizes organizations along similar trajectories of path dependency. To be sure, struggles for not just interpretive or ideological, but structural power intensify today and the field has evolved towards a multipolar picture of overlapping spaces and centres of influence and authority, as the distinction between beneficiary and donor, and legitimate and disparaged actors and organizations, becomes gradually more blurred and fluid. However, we are able to identify streams of action and discourse that hold and further an inherent desire to govern organizational action in the field, culminating in both formal and informal rules and principles to which organizations are expected to adhere in order to be considered legitimate.

The locus of this book, accomplished by investigating the evolution of the Gates Foundation, is to explore what occurs when these simultaneous processes of heterogeneity and homogenization meet, i.e., what happens as a new actor enters into the increasingly normatively regulated field of global development? Predominantly, work exploring this concern has focused on the consequences for global development itself, centring attention on implications for the legitimacy of established ideas, practices and actors of development.²⁰ To truly understand this concern, however, we must appreciate how change is multidirectional, and that, just as the field of global development experiences substantial changes resulting from the entrance of new actors, so these new actors likewise go through significant processes of change as they are faced with established organizations, expectations, ideas and practices of the field. This book thus explores and explains the ideational and material-organizational consequences for an actor as it increasingly enters into international political life and interacts with a new field.

Private authority in global politics

The story of the Gates Foundation is at its core one of rising private authority in global politics. Founded by one of the forefront capitalist proponents of our time, built on the fortunes of Microsoft, and shaped for almost its entire lifetime by a leadership that finds its roots deep in the US private sector. The last 50 years’ academic attention and inattention to private and non-state actors in international studies is a history well known and told. Work on transnational actors (still a preferred term for some) largely emerged in the 1970s as a reference to ‘Regular

interactions across national boundaries when at least one actor is a non-state agent'.²¹ Keohane and Nye's special issue from which this quote is taken constitutes early 1970s' work on transnationalism that challenged state-dominated views on world politics, though primarily by focusing on MNCs and not the breadth of non-state actors studied today. Non-state actors were and are still typically understood across fluid dimensions of internal structure (formal organizations or more or less loosely connected networks) and constitutive purposes (primarily driven by self-interest or by a notion of the 'common good').²² The attention to non-state or transnational perspectives somewhat faded away through the 1980s, yet, as we approached the 1990s, fundamental changes to state sovereignty and governance beyond the state again redirected attention towards international relations as multi-layered and -dimensional, and this time with renewed strength that could take head-on (neo)realist state-centric theorization. New heterogeneous constellations of actors challenged Westphalian conceptions of power and influence, but also accountability as private authorities rose to influence with little democratic backing, an issue that naturally applies greatly to the Gates Foundation as we will see throughout this book. The late 1990s and early 2000s then saw a (re) surge in recognition of the influence of non-state actors besides IOs and corporations, in particular global civil society and transnational NGOs, networks and other organizational forms.²³ Still, the focus was often on how these actor-types influence international and national policy-making, thus continually seeing them as a peripheral or exogenous source of impact on something else.²⁴

Today, the interest is not in whether private actors are important or if they are at all able to influence nation states and international politics, but rather how they do so and through what means, often through a recognition that they do not stand outside an interstate system and exercise influence but make up a core component of contemporary global governance. Despite this, the broad non-state actor-group is still often thought to occupy spaces left open by nation states, working to influence international politics through means that are removed from a state's way of acting. Thus, they are seen as having distinct ways of approaching influence that includes symbolic actions, agenda-setting, pressure on states or efforts to secure the institutionalization of certain norms, but often working through different means and channels than states.²⁵ As Lindblom puts it 'NGOs and civil society in general are crucial in the raising and expressing of political opinion, in disseminating information and as watchdogs and counterweights to states'.²⁶ Even in cases where they act as co-producers of global governance, they are thought to bring a set of alternative logics and tools to the table to those of states. Nonetheless, private actors do not only assume spaces of influence that states fail or choose not to occupy (i.e., that the emergence of global governance seemingly provides more 'governable room'). Private and non-state actors increasingly challenge and take over forms of influence that we traditionally affiliate with state action. Whether we see this process as one of a weakening or retreat of the state or a gradual nuancing of public-private influence naturally depends on our ideality of the nature of states.²⁷ The argument made in this book is one in which the relation between public and private authority is not an either-or form