23. The social justice approach in philanthropy

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INTRODUCTION

Institutional philanthropy, defined as large-scale giving by high-net-worth individuals or private charitable institutions, is not a comfortable bedfellow with the notion of social justice. Significant philanthropic resources may simply be directed towards the preservation of elite institutions such as the high arts or top universities. But even when philanthropy appears redistributive, it may not necessarily be just. Gifts from the rich to the poor, entrenched in community tradition, can reinforce hierarchies, unjust social structures, and a sense of obligation from the poor to the rich. The notion of philanthropy as 'giving back' to society after accumulating large sums of capital can be construed as a means of maintaining the legitimacy of the prevailing economic system in an era of growing economic inequality – and hence supporting the class interests of those who are accumulating disproportionate wealth (Piketty 2017). Even progressive philanthropy – explicitly intended to change the social conditions faced by the disadvantaged – can be criticised for its top-down paternalism, its privileging of philanthropists' preferences over the voice of the beneficiary, and its lack of democratic accountability.

Recent decades have seen the emergence of discourses and fields of action that seek to reform philanthropy according to critical understandings of power and social justice. This 'social justice philanthropy' movement is not a single phenomenon; it has different names, multiple origins, and diverse assumptions and behaviours. But at its deepest core, social justice philanthropy has two characteristics. First, it seeks radical structural change in society, often associated with the disruption of embedded systems of power and oppression. Second, this focus on structural change and the transfer of power from the privileged to the marginalised creates a fundamental challenge to the practice of philanthropy itself.

Our starting point is an acknowledgement that social justice philanthropy is a complex and contested phenomenon – at once a set of social movements, a dynamic discourse, and a range of specific behaviours and strategies. The first section therefore develops a conceptual framework through which the phenomena of social justice philanthropy can be described and analysed. The second and third sections provide a thematic description of the emerging trajectories, dimensions, and characteristics of social justice philanthropy. The second section provides a typology of the diverse philanthropic actors who are driving this movement; the third section sets out the fields in which these actors operate and the mechanisms they use, and considers their interests and perspectives around social justice. The fourth section explores the reformation of philanthropic practice that is driven by social justice approaches. It is argued in the fifth section that strong forms of social justice philanthropy have distinctive implications for social policy. Four positions are advanced: social justice philanthropy places the state at the centre of accounts of social change; it facilitates the development of social movements and alternative public spheres of discourse; it provides resources to civil society actors to hold

powerful institutions to account; and it challenges constructions of effectiveness and evidence within social policy discourse.

SOCIAL JUSTICE PHILANTHROPY: BOUNDING THE TERM

The phrase 'social justice philanthropy' is used in varied, imprecise, and sometimes contrasting ways. This is unsurprising, since social justice is a term subject to ideological contest (Craig, 2018). As a complication, multiple other terms are used to describe similar phenomena or behaviours, such as 'social change philanthropy', 'radical philanthropy', 'post-capitalist philanthropy', or 'trust-based philanthropy' (Reichstein Foundation, 2023; Herro and Obeng-Odoom, 2019, p. 884; Cameron and Shaffer, 2024, p. 18). Sometimes these terms are synonyms; sometimes they indicate subtly different ideological focuses.

One plausible response is to acknowledge the dynamic discourse at the core of this fusion between social justice and philanthropy: what matters is not so much a formal definition, but instead an exploration of the changing discourse and meanings associated with the term. Alternatively, it is suggested that attention is moved from definition to prescription of which practices work (Ruesga, 2010). Such approaches, however, reduce the concept's utility as a frame to analyse distinct emerging behaviours and their implications for social policy and societal well-being. In this section, therefore, we develop a conceptual framework of 'social justice philanthropy' that both captures a specific and bounded set of emerging structures, objectives, and behaviours in the field of practice and also enables the identification of points of contestation or ambiguity.

The framework exhibits a sequence of philanthropic beliefs and behaviours (Figure 23.1). The sequence is not a progression of time, but of institutional radicalism. There are five steps: each step builds upon the previous; there is a claim to some kind of social justice at each step.

1. Focus on equity and justice — Objective is the wellbeing and rights of the most disadvantaged and marginalised

2. Focus on the root causes — Focus on the root causes of social and environmental problems

Limited focus on power

3. Power as central diagnosis — Acknowledge the inequitable distribution of social power and economic resources as a fundamental cause of injustice

4. Profound structural change — Seek profound structural change in society across economic, political and normative dimensions, in particular to resolve the inequitable distribution of power.

Central focus on power

5. Transform philanthropic process — Amend philanthropic processes in order to redistribute power over economic and social resources.

Source: Authors.

Figure 23.1   *Social justice philanthropy: a framework*

But with each step, the approach to philanthropy and the notion of social justice becomes more radically disruptive and more centred on the fundamental issue of power. As a first step, there is a focus on social or environmental problems of a particular kind – those that are centred on some idea of 'equity' or 'justice' for the most marginalised. Social justice philanthropy thus lies within progressive approaches to social problems. At the next step, there is emphasis on addressing the 'root causes' of social problems, and not simply offering emergency help when problems arise (Sanghera and Bradley, 2016; Resource Generation, 2022; Reichstein Foundation, 2023) – the distinction, as an example, between offering medical aid to those suffering from disease, and resolving the living conditions which enable disease to flourish. Taking these two dimensions together, 'social justice philanthropy focuses on the root causes of social, racial, economic and environmental injustices' (Resource Generation, 2022).

The diagnosis of root causes is, of course, contested. Poverty in a developed country, for instance, can be variously attributed to the behaviours of individuals and communities, a weak education system, or the economic effects of modern capitalism. The distinctiveness of stronger forms of social justice philanthropy lies in interpreting the 'root causes' of injustice through a particular lens – the lens of power. A third characteristic, therefore, is the identification of the inequitable distribution of social power and economic resources as the driver of injustice and social problems. Such unjust systems of power are associated with overarching economic and political structures, such as capitalism and colonialism, as well as social and communal cultures, such as patriarchy, racism, and disablism (Herro and Obeng-Odoom, 2019; Edge Fund, n.d.).

This focus on the central importance of power in turn may determine a particular approach to social change. The fourth step of social justice philanthropy is to seek a profound redistribution of power and resources across multiple dimensions of social, political, economic, and cultural action (Ostrander, 2005). The achievement of such a redistribution demands transformative structural change in society (Ostrander, 2005; Herro and Obeng-Odoom, 2019). This focus on power, finally, has implications for the conduct of philanthropy itself. For some philanthropic actors, the philanthropic process cannot be separated from the objectives that it seeks. The traditional enactment of philanthropy can be construed as an act of elite power; the concentration of wealth that underpins philanthropy is attributed to exploitative systems. The fifth characteristic of social justice philanthropy is, therefore, embracing the restructuring of philanthropic processes to redistribute power over economic and social resources (e.g. Miller and Jones, 2019).

This incremental framework supports understanding of tension points in discourses and behaviours around social justice philanthropy. There is, for instance, a tension between steps 2 and 3. Philanthropic activities that support long-term solutions for the disadvantaged may be a sufficient criterion for social justice – without any necessary acceptance that an unjust distribution of power underpins social problems. The outcomes-based movement in philanthropy (Brest, 2020) or market-based social entrepreneurship (Dees, 2012) emphasise solutions and prioritise the disadvantaged but without attributing a central function to power. A further tension point lies between steps 3 and 4. Does rebalancing power necessarily imply the transformation of existing social, economic, or political structures? Or can marginalised communities be sufficiently empowered through economic and cultural resources that they can participate fully within existing structural arrangements? This is a significant fault line for philanthropy, and it is explored further below; for the remainder of the chapter, approaches at steps 4 and beyond are termed 'strong form' social justice philanthropy.

The framework assists in the analysis of the place of different philanthropic institutions within the practice and understanding of social justice philanthropy. It allows the inclusion of mainstream philanthropic institutions, to the extent that they commit to the assumptions within each stage. The approach of many progressive foundations meets the criteria for steps 1 and 2 – a commitment to long-term solutions for social problems affecting the disadvantaged. Far fewer philanthropic institutions are placed at the more radical steps 3–5.

This framework, and the ambiguities and tensions within it, in turn resonates with theoretical understandings of social justice. Emphasis on prioritising the provision of basic goods to the most marginalised is consistent with Rawls' liberal theory of justice (Rawls, 1971/1999). Some emphasis on the distribution of power is also present in Rawls' work, particularly in proposals for durable political and social institutions that guarantee civil rights and enable equality of opportunity. More aggressive focus upon the restructuring of oppressive power-laden systems is characteristic of critical theory and its sub-theories. Some philanthropic institutions explicitly use the framing of critical theory. Thus, the Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice (2019) describes the location of its work within 'intersectional feminism as part of a wider struggle for social justice, recognizing that sexism, transphobia, homophobia, misogyny, and restrictive gender norms harm everyone.' This focus on intersectionality is characteristic of critical theory and of some approaches to social justice philanthropy (Herro and Obeng-Odoom, 2019) – an awareness that systems of structural oppression are best understood not in isolation, but as interacting axes of 'social division' that magnify injustice (Collins and Bilge, 2016, p. 2).

There is a connection, finally, to the use of the term 'social justice' within the discipline of social policy. The use of 'social justice' in social policy is variable, but it focuses on some idea of fairness (Piachaud, 2008). As Chapter 2 in this *Handbook* describes, a contrast is drawn between 'social justice' approaches that emphasise citizenship rights, human rights, and justice, and an instrumental perspective that emphasises technical solutions to the delivery of basic goods. The latter approach, inasmuch as it targets solutions for social problems that affect the disadvantaged, can be consistent with step 2 of the framework; but 'social justice', as typically used in social policy within narratives of rights and power, lies at step 3 and beyond.

SOCIAL JUSTICE PHILANTHROPY: ACTORS AND INSTITUTIONS

Social justice philanthropy is a disparate collection of actors and approaches with multiple origins and multiple perspectives across multiple geographies. It has commonly arisen in contexts where systems of power are being normatively challenged. Thus, the US civil rights movements in the 1960s saw the emergence of philanthropic funding of social movements (Ostrander, 2005); more recently the murder of George Floyd and subsequent Black Lives Matter protests have been the catalyst for the development of new institutions of social justice philanthropy (for instance, the Baobab Foundation, see below) and new resource flows (Koob, 2020). The emergence of a distinctive conceptualisation of social justice philanthropy in Africa is founded upon a growing critique of institutional philanthropy as a structure of colonial oppression and the aspiration to return to local practices of African philanthropy (Mpofu et al., 2021).

This and the following sections provide a description of developments. The approach is not a chronological history but an analytic overview that identifies, in turn, the diverse

types of institutional actors within this movement and the fields, mechanisms, and behaviours characteristic of social justice philanthropy. Two limitations are important. First, the most developed (or at least most closely documented) approaches and discourses are in the United States, a reflection of both the concentration of philanthropy and the public nature of debate around critical theory, power, and equality. There is, therefore, a bias towards US accounts. Second, given the chapter's focus upon philanthropic grant-making at scale, this overview does not explore in depth radical smaller-scale and grassroots philanthropy. Such philanthropy – whether exercised through community philanthropy, giving circles, or mutual assistance between the disadvantaged – is a central and historic element within social justice movements and within interpretations of social justice philanthropy in the global South. It too has emerging importance for social policy (Hodgson, 2020; Carboni and Eikenberry, 2021).

SOCIAL JUSTICE PHILANTHROPY INSTITUTIONS: A TYPOLOGY

Over half a century, different institutions and actors have emerged in the field of social justice philanthropy. Four categories of institutions can be identified, as described below. The typology simplifies an intricate reality, but it is a useful device for representing the trajectories of social justice philanthropy and interpreting the motivations and behaviours of diverse actors.

The first category, and perhaps the most central, is *philanthropic institutions that have emerged within marginalised communities*. The origins of social justice philanthropy lie in part within the mutual social movements that have sought to gain power for marginalised communities, typically gaining momentum through the 1970s and 1980s. This development of community-controlled philanthropy can be traced most clearly within the feminist movement (Ostrander, 2005), but is visible within other rights-based movements. Significant grant-giving institutions are now managed by marginalised communities or by philanthropic actors from those communities. To give a sense of the scale achieved, the African Women's Development Fund made grants of $11 million in 2022 (AWDF 2024), the Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice has made grants of over $40 million since its establishment in 1977 (Astraea Foundation, 2024), and the Global Fund for Women has awarded grants of over $184 million over 32 years (Global Fund for Women, 2024).

The structure and operation of these philanthropic institutions are diverse and often distinct from traditional endowed foundations. Akin to social movements, the central focus is typically on resource mobilisation, not on spending from a pre-existing endowment: this is unsurprising, since marginalised communities do not have access to large accumulations of capital. The philanthropic institutions take on the resourcing structure of 'cash-in-cash-out' grant-making bodies, in which funds are constantly raised anew from multiple sources, including general appeals to the public.

Beyond individual funds or foundations, aggregation and coordination are achieved through funder networks – whether networks of individual donors, such as the Donors of Color Network in the US, or networks of funds themselves, such as the global Women's Funding Network of over 120 women's funds (Women's Funding Network, 2024). The aggregation of a community's philanthropic funds in this way is held to bring power and autonomy. As described by the Black Feminist Fund (2024),

> By connecting Black women donors to grassroots Black feminist organizations, we have shifted the narrative of how Black women: create, sustain, and fund their own movements.

Resource mobilisation extends beyond the community to mainstream philanthropic foundations or to government. Community-led institutions have emerged that act as intermediaries between traditional funders and grassroots social justice organisations. The Baobab Foundation in the UK was established in 2020 to address discrimination in the philanthropic funding of Black African/Caribbean & Global Majority People of Colour (Baobab Foundation, n.d.). It is a community-controlled grant-maker to grassroots organisations but derives a significant proportion of funds from mainstream foundations and corporations. Leading from the South, a consortium of four major women's funds in developing countries, similarly receives significant funding from government and mainstream philanthropy (in this case the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Fondation Chanel), which it reallocates to projects around advocacy for women's rights (Leading from the South, n.d.). Such organisations are, in principle, a means of channelling the increased interest of mainstream foundations and government in social justice approaches, whilst asserting community control over resource allocation.

Within these various institutions, there is an emphasis on the substantive transfer of power to marginalised communities. Leadership in philanthropy resides with members of the marginalised community – a transformation of the power relations of philanthropy representative of stage 5 of the social justice philanthropy framework. As an example, all the institutions cited above (Baobab, Astraea, Black Feminist Fund, Leading from the South, AWDF, The Women's Funding Network, Global Fund for Women) are led by people of the global majority.

A second set of institutional actors active in social justice philanthropy are, by contrast, *elite foundations reorienting their activities towards social justice*. Some of these foundations have a longstanding history of providing funds for social justice. The Ford Foundation's activities in this area stretch back to the US civil rights movement in the 1960s – as an example, funding voter registration schemes for black citizens. For others, the readjustment has been more recent. Numerous US foundations, for instance, now fund projects around race or gender equality. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, founded in 2000, announced its first gender equality strategy in 2019, to which it committed funding of $2.1 billion two years later (Gates Foundation, 2024). Sanghera and Bradley (2016), defining social justice work broadly as activities that support the marginalised (such as prisoner rehabilitation, racial equity, financial inclusion), identify numerous elite UK foundations with a social justice orientation.

The reasons why elite foundations reorient towards social justice activities seem diverse. Some commitments to social justice are apparently catalysed by societal events. The Cleveland Foundation, The W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and The David and Lucile Packard Foundation announced multi-million dollar programmes around racial equity in the period 2020–21 following the Black Lives Matter protests. The foundations' interventions in this field did not begin at that moment, but the increase in funding was exceptional. Movements such as Black Lives Matter can influence, at least momentarily, elite foundations' behaviours by raising the normative saliency of a social issue. Reorientation sometimes follows intergenerational transfer of control – the Reichstein Foundation saw a strategic redirection towards social justice and community-led approaches when control switched from the founding philanthropist to his daughter (Reichstein Foundation, 2023); it can also be associated with a transition away from family leadership (e.g. the Tudor Trust – see Hunjan, 2024). The Gates Foundation (2024) identifies both moral and economic motivations for pursuing gender equality: a commitment

to the human rights of girls and women, and a proposition that gender equality can unlock significant economic prosperity. Finally, there can be some sense of moral restitution. The Lankelly Chase Foundation, a UK institution with a £130 million endowment, announced in 2023 its intention to close and distribute its assets to community-led organisations. It identifies as a driver a moral realisation that 'the traditional philanthropy model [… is] so entangled with Colonial Capitalism that it inevitably continues the harms of the past into the present' (Lankelly Chase Foundation 2023). The prioritisation of funding to Native-led organisations by the Northwest Area Foundation is directly connected to the origins of the foundation's wealth – the railroad that brought social upheaval to the US north-west (Walker, 2021).

A third set of institutional actors are *new wave philanthropic foundations* that are intentionally constructed by those with wealth to follow the principles of strong-form social justice philanthropy. The phenomenon is not new: an early example is the Haymarket People's Fund in the US, founded in 1974 by progressive inheritors of wealth to fund activism and community organising (Ostrander, 1995). The phenomenon has recently accelerated, associated with the emergence of next-generation philanthropists who have revisionist attitudes to accumulated wealth and philanthropy. The Chorus Foundation, for instance, has focused on a socially just transition from fossil fuels to a green economy, including the redistribution of economic and political power; the Guerilla Foundation, funded by a group of young inheritors of wealth, supports grassroots movements that are perceived to have the potential to achieve major systemic change. Some new wave philanthropic foundations are established by actors from marginalised communities who have attained wealth, such as the Clara Lionel Foundation, founded by the singer Rihanna, which has funded grassroots activism to support climate justice.

Finally, some *large corporations* appear to engage in social justice – either through direct philanthropic gifts or through funding from related corporate foundations. Again, while the involvement of corporations in social justice has a longer history, the Black Lives Matter movement was a catalyst for US corporations to commit substantial philanthropic resources. In 2020, JPMorgan Chase committed $30 billion of investment to racial equity programmes, of which $2 billion was philanthropic loans and grants to support the economic inclusion of 'Black, Latinx and other underserved communities' (JPMorgan Chase, 2020). IBM (2020) partnered with historically black universities and pledged $100 million of in-kind resources to develop an inclusive technological workforce. Nike's 'Jordan Brand' pledged $100 million to organisations focused on racial equity, placing its intervention as a response to structural injustice – 'the ingrained racism that allows our country's institutions to fail' (Nike, 2020).

SOCIAL JUSTICE PHILANTHROPY: ACTIVITIES, BEHAVIOURS, VALUES, AND MOTIVATIONS

We next explore the interaction of philanthropy with social policy fields. Our view of social policy is broad. We regard in particular social activism and advocacy to be fundamental constituents of social policy, both because they are essential to the process of policy formation and policy contest, and because they hold actors to account for the implementation (or lack thereof) of social policies. We also briefly consider philanthropic actors' motivations and values around social justice and social policy.

Social Policy Fields and Mechanisms of Action

Social justice philanthropy operates in fields, or with emphases, that are specific and often different from mainstream philanthropy. There is a significant presence in thematic topics that directly address issues of structural power and oppression across social policy fields, such as racial equity, gender equality, LGBTQ+ rights, and intersections of these (e.g. Astraea Foundation, 2019). There is also targeted action within vertical social policy fields in which inequity or oppression are perceived to occur, such as criminal justice, land ownership, reform of agriculture and food systems, workers' rights, community economic development, and democratic engagement. Examples include campaigning and policy work to improve support and services for asylum-seekers and refugees in the UK (Lloyds Foundation), support for the rights of female informal workers and street vendors in emerging economies (Ford Foundation, William and Flora Hewlett Foundation), and climate justice funding to facilitate resilience and adaptation among marginalised communities (Clara Lionel Foundation).

Given that stronger forms of social justice philanthropy call for structural change and political action, some modes of action funded by social justice philanthropy are distinctive. Most obviously, there is emphasis on providing resources to activist groups and social movements. Such funding can be given directly to grassroots or community activist groups (Deepak and McHarris, 2022), or it can facilitate the development of coalitions or the coherence of a social movement field. The Chorus Foundation, for instance, worked with activist groups and other funders to develop a strategic alliance in the field of climate justice activism; the foundation was not simply a funder, but a participant in the development of the activist ecosystem (Mascarenhas, 2023). Alternatively, resources are channelled to new modes of advocacy and activism, and especially to those that may support normative or cultural change (Astraea Foundation, 2019), such as storytelling and the arts: these modes of action are seen to challenge embedded norms, to enable expression by the marginalised, and to provide avenues of creativity and innovation (Kendeda Fund, 2024; Walker, 2023). Other social justice media supported by philanthropy include documentary films (such as the Ford Foundation's JustFilms subsidiary) and pop culture (e.g. the Pop Culture Collaborative).

A further new mode of action is particular forms of impact investing. For some, impact investing, far from advancing social justice, is a means to sustain and extend an unjust capitalist system (Chiapello and Knoll, 2020). On the other hand, capital specifically from philanthropic investment firms, foundations, or funds or can be used to address systematic inequity and bias within the market system by targeting the development of economic power amongst marginalised communities – whether by investing in enterprises within marginalised communities, in companies led by actors from marginalised communities, or in products that will especially benefit marginalised groups. The Equality Fund, founded by a collective of women's funds, seeks to use capital investments to transform the financial system itself: it invests globally in 'women-led and women-focused funds, products, businesses, and services (inclusive of girl-led and trans-led actors)' (Equality Fund, 2024).

Interests, Motivations, and Visions of Social Justice

A diverse range of philanthropic actors with a mix of interests drive social justice philanthropy. Some are aggregating and distributing funds for the emancipation of their own community; others are supporting such emancipation through an act of altruism, at least at face value. The

development of social justice philanthropy amongst elite foundations presents particular challenges of interpretation. Do we regard these activities as an authentic infusion of social justice principles into the elite? Or are these interventions superficial and not tackling central issues of power? These are questions partly of motivation. In some cases, there appears to be a real commitment to the redistribution of power and therefore a real sacrifice of the interests of the socio-economic group to which the philanthropic actor belongs. The proposed dissolution of the Lankelly Chase Foundation is one example; the mission of the Patriotic Millionaires movement to raise taxes on the wealthy is another. Sometimes social justice philanthropy is associated with actors who have a dual identity and dual interests, being both wealthy and a member of a marginalised community.

But foundations' activities can also be viewed as maintaining elite interests. Marshall (2015) suggests that elite foundations funded the US civil rights movement not because of any commitment to justice but to safeguard the corporate and financial interests represented on their boards. Those interests, according to Marshall, were best served by gradual and managed social change rather than radical disruption. Corporate philanthropy that strengthens disadvantaged local economies or provides educational opportunities for marginalised groups may also align with medium-term corporate interests by strengthening a local market or securing a flow of talented workers. The firm's self-interest within a corporate social responsibility relationship is not a negative phenomenon – it is, after all, a powerful motivation for firms to engage in philanthropy. But such prosocial behaviour is unstable since it will only endure as long as it aligns with the current business strategy (Le Grand and Roberts, 2021). More negatively, some corporate social justice activities carry obvious reputational benefits that raise the possibility of social justice-washing – visible philanthropic contributions to social justice activities that obscure unjust corporate practices. In other cases, however, the alignment with business interests is less obvious – for instance, in the work of Fondation Chanel around women's and girls' rights, or the Timpson Foundation's activities to integrate ex-offenders into the company's retail workforce in the UK.

Beyond motivation, there are questions of values and process – different perspectives within elite philanthropic institutions of how social justice, social change, and power are enacted. The social justice philanthropy framework is a useful analytic tool. The steps within it are not smoothly incremental. The gap between recognition of unjust power imbalances in society (step three) and accepting the essential requirement for transformative structural change (step four) is wide and deep. According to research by Sanghera and Bradley (2016) in the UK, progressive philanthropic foundations, although committed to a notion of social justice, are reluctant to take risks on disruptive change around class, capitalism, or other oppressive systems: there is nervousness at how far foundations can legitimately be involved in political change. But the gap between steps three and four also represents a fundamental normative dispute about how power is redistributed. At step three, power imbalances are addressed by helping marginalised communities to access and gain assets through the capitalist system, not by transforming the system itself. Gender equality projects funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation have a strong focus on transferring power and agency to women, but with the intention of inclusion within the present market system. The focus lies upon empowerment at the individual level. Such projects, their links to the market, and their emphasis on individual capacity-building are criticised by those who prescribe structural transformation of society in order to dismantle systemic injustices (Girard, 2019; Friedson-Ridenour et al., 2019).

Other foundations articulate an objective consistent with steps four and five of the social justice philanthropy framework. Ford Foundation president Darren Walker (2023) emphasises structural change and the need to transfer power and decision-making to marginalised communities. The W.K. Kellogg Foundation expresses an aspiration for 'transformative change in the systems and institutions that uphold inequities' (W.K. Kellogg Foundation 2020); the recipients of its racial equity grants include radical activist organisations (W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 2022).

Answers to these questions of motivation and vision will differ across different philanthropic actors and require empirical investigation of institutions' philanthropic processes, behaviours, and impact over time. There are important questions concerning elite foundations' understanding of social justice and the redistribution of power, and also whether commitments around social justice are sustained and not simply a reaction to events.

This brief description of emerging activities, mechanisms, and values indicates again the multidimensionality of social justice philanthropy. The account begins to reveal both changes in the processes of philanthropy, to which we turn next, and also interactions with government and social policy – in particular, but not solely, the use of philanthropic resources to fund activism that may be intended to influence or confront the state.

CHALLENGING THE MAINSTREAM PRACTICE OF PHILANTHROPY

The tenets of stronger forms of social justice philanthropy propose not simply different goals for philanthropy, but also fundamental reform to its practice. If the focus of social justice is upon ameliorating power imbalances and unjust structures, then this equally applies to inherent inequity within the institution of philanthropy itself. Reforms cut across multiple dimensions of the philanthropic institution and its processes. They include requirements for transparency and accountability, the use of inclusive organisational practices within the foundation, and endowment investments that are consistent with a social justice mission to reform the capitalist system (Miller and Jones, 2019; Justice Funders, 2024). Two particular revisions are explored here that have especial significance for philanthropic practice – devolution of decision-making and grant-making with few or no conditions.

Given the focus of social justice approaches on the redistribution of power, it is unsurprising that there have been attempts to devolve decision-making to users or communities. There are various mechanisms, from community involvement in the governance and the strategy of philanthropic institutions (Djordjevic, 2022; Cameron and Shaffer, 2024) to participatory or democratised grant-making, whereby communities or users take part in or lead decisions about grant allocation (Gibson, 2017). UK-based grant-maker The Baobab Foundation is structured as a membership association: full membership with decision-making rights is reserved for people of Black African/Caribbean heritage or who are Global Majority People of Colour; members set the strategic direction and make decisions on grant-making. FRIDA, a foundation led by young feminists, asks grant applicants themselves to decide collectively where funding should be directed – reflecting a concern that traditional grant-making processes encourage corrosive rivalry between grant-seeking organisations rather than solidarity (FRIDA, 2015; Djordjevic, 2022). Some foundations have embraced participatory grant-making specifically for their funding of activist movements. New wave philanthropic trust the Guerrilla Foundation (2024) has created an 'activist council' to decide upon grant allocation.

The UK-based Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2024) has established a 'movement assembly' to make grant-making decisions within its Grassroots Movement Fund: the assembly is comprised of 'people who have direct experience and knowledge of grassroots movements'.

Beyond decision-making about resource allocation, social justice approaches address the process and design of philanthropic grants. A key context is the development over previous decades of the 'outcomes movement' in philanthropy – a movement focused on maximising measurable social impact and characterised by emphasis on defined objectives and quantifiable performance targets, impact evaluation and regular reporting, and the privileging of certain kinds of evidence (especially derived from randomised controlled trials) (Brest, 2020). From a social justice standpoint, this approach is contested as a new expression of top-down philanthropic control that restricts the agency of marginalised communities (e.g. Girard, 2019). The remedy is to enable the self-determination of marginalised communities by making grants with few conditions (Resource Generation, 2022). Funds are unrestricted (in other words, not tied to specific projects) and multi-year (Astraea Foundation, 2019; Miller and Jones, 2019); reporting, if present, is light and part of an ongoing supportive relationship (Trust-based Philanthropy Project, n.d.); there are neither fixed performance targets nor evaluation against such targets. Such approaches are a radical shift in practice. They imply a move away from funding short-term bounded projects, often with some singular technical focus, towards building core operations capacity within marginalised communities (Hayman, 2016). Trust-based philanthropy is, of course, open to criticisms around ineffectiveness (how do we know this is impactful?), learning (without monitoring and data, how can we learn what works?), and abuse (how can we check funds are used for designated purposes?); it is also criticised for bias, since funders give resources to those with whom they have strong relationships (Sommer, 2022). Proponents argue that by establishing trust-based partnerships, there can be open conversations between funders and communities that improve the design and implementation of social interventions (Avery et al., 2022).

Such reforms to the philanthropic process have especial resonance in postcolonial contexts in which the relationship between international donors and grant recipients seems to mimic or extend the inequity of colonial relationships (Woodcraft, et al., 2024; see also Chapter 21 in this *Handbook*). African commentators argue strongly for the devolution of philanthropic power to grant recipients and local grassroots communities – not only around grant-making, but also more strategically in setting the agenda and priorities for philanthropic resources (Mahomed and Coleman, 2016). Such devolution of power is seen to restore agency and voice to communities, and also to reinforce traditional local philanthropy, rooted in cultural practices of mutuality and solidarity (Mahomed and Coleman, 2016; Moyo, 2016; Mpofu et al., 2021).

IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL POLICY

What are the implications for social policy of this emerging set of philanthropic resources and behaviours? There is an immediate complication: social justice philanthropy is a differentiated phenomenon. In particular, the divide between stages 3 and 4 of the social justice philanthropy framework, around the fundamental necessity of transforming social and economic structures, implies profoundly different understandings of social action – and therefore different interactions of philanthropy with the state and social policy. Our focus here is upon

stronger forms of social justice philanthropy (stages 4 to 5 of the framework). Such strong-form social justice philanthropy exhibits a strong contrast in its interactions with government and policy compared to mainstream elite philanthropy. Multiple chapters in this *Handbook* (e.g. Jafri, Morena, Bifulco and Caselli, Brooks) describe how mainstream philanthropy has a technical focus (the diagnosed problem is inefficiency and the solution to social problems is technological innovation), and also a preference for the market over government funding and provision (implying a smaller state). By contrast, social justice philanthropy diagnoses the problem as the distribution of power. From that foundation, specific assumptions and roles emerge in relation to social policy, which generally fit within a civil society paradigm – in other words, a primary focus on political activism and advocacy rather than on service provision (although service provision for marginalised communities may still occur). Four substantive elements are identified: the centrality of government and policy as a field of action; the resourcing and development of alternative public spheres of discourse and protest; holding state and market to account; and challenges to constructions of effectiveness and evidence within social policy.

Centrality of Government as a Focus of Action

Relationships with government are often significant for philanthropic actors. The presence or absence of the state provides a context or driver for philanthropic work (see Chapters 14 and 19 in this *Handbook*). To achieve take-up of their own privately formulated policies and programmes, large philanthropic institutions interact with and seek to influence the state (Lambin and Surender, 2023; Horvath and Powell, 2016): government is a necessary mechanism through which to achieve policy goals. This strategy is shared by social justice philanthropy approaches, which understand the state and social policy as central mechanisms to achieve desired social change. It is ultimately the state, through policy, that can restructure social and economic arrangements towards a more just society in which citizens have equal power and opportunities.

But there is also an essential difference. For social justice philanthropy approaches, the state is more than simply a means to enact a private policy programme. The state is itself the outcome, as only a strong state can guarantee principles of equal citizenship and human rights. The state, therefore, becomes a fundamental site of contest, at once constructive and adversarial (Herro and Obeng-Odoom, 2019). It is constructive, since the aim is a stronger state. But it is adversarial given that the state is not yet enacting the policies required to achieve transformation in the distribution of power. Indeed, the state's policies, influenced by elites and market actors, may support existing structures of injustice.

In consequence, as observed, a principal function is providing resources to enable advocacy and protest for policy change. The impact on the policy process derives not just from extra resources, but also from the distinctive methods through which such resources are utilised. Philanthropic resources can be used to facilitate and strengthen coalitions for social change: the work of the Chorus Foundation (see above) in the climate justice field is one example; while the Kiawah Trust and Fondation Chanel, from a perspective of gender equality, initiated and funded the Early Education and Childcare Coalition to campaign for improved early years provision in the UK (EECC, 2023). Philanthropy also has the capacity to be patient in resourcing structural change. The Campaign for the Freedom of Information, a non-profit organisation campaigning for legislation to force the UK government to be more transparent,

was funded for 16 years by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation before its objective was achieved (Thümler, 2017).

Philanthropic funding of campaigning is not limited to progressive institutions working towards social justice. Especially in the US, conservative responses around, for instance, climate change and abortion are also funded by philanthropy. There is an uncomfortable implication for social policy and democratic governance: political discourse is, in part, a battle of opposing philanthropies.

Social Movements and Alternative Public Spheres

Within this overarching theme of supporting advocacy, social justice philanthropy approaches carry the possibility of opening up new spaces of political discourse for those marginalised from the mainstream public sphere. A useful analytic frame is Fraser's identification of the value of 'subaltern counterpublics' (Fraser, 1990, p. 67). In stratified societies, the public sphere of political discourse – 'private people gathered together as a public and articulating the needs of society with the state' (Habermas, 1989, p. 176) – is exclusive, denying access to people according to categories such as gender, class, race, disability, and so on (Landes, 1988; Fraser, 1990). Even where access is granted, styles and cultures of deliberation within the public sphere can favour dominant groups (Fraser, 1990). In such conditions, Fraser identifies and advocates for alternative public spheres (or 'counterpublics') as safe discursive spaces where those excluded from power (termed 'subaltern') not only regroup and find discursive refuge, but also design campaigns for social change that are targeted back towards the state and the broader public sphere (Fraser, 1990).

Mainstream philanthropy, even when progressive, is implicated in the process of exclusion from the public sphere. There are recurring warnings that philanthropic funding of social movements may constrain radical voices, whether because of deliberate social control by the elite, or because risk-averse funders are unwilling to embrace disruptive social change or prefer to fund professionalised advocacy organisations over less structured activist groups (Jenkins and Eckert, 1986; Minkoff and Agnone, 2010). The result is reduced funding to radical grassroots organisations and pressure on such organisations to drift from their mission as, dependent for survival on external resources, they conform to conventional organisational behaviours and objectives that are legitimate to funding elites (Minkoff and Agnone, 2010).

Certain kinds of social justice philanthropy, however, potentially ameliorate this problem by restoring autonomy to the social movement. Carboni and Eikenberry (2021) make an initial link by showing how identity-based giving circles may serve as counterpublics in which local groups of philanthropists, gathered on the basis of gender or some other characteristic, share perspectives and projects. This argument can be extended to other new philanthropic practices. The emergence of philanthropic institutions and networks within marginalised communities, through which capital resources are controlled and sometimes generated by the communities themselves, reduces dependency on external resources and enables autonomy. Further, processes of delegated decision-making, such as participatory grant-making, unrestricted funding and, in particular, the use of activist boards to distribute funds for campaigning, also move power from funder to community (Ostrander, 2005). In sum, the availability of philanthropic capital that is free of elite oversight – so that social movements are not simply receiving extra funds, but funds without constraints – can enable the development of alternative public spheres that make more equal political discourses around the common good.

Holding Powerful Institutions to Account

A further function within the social policy area is the use of philanthropic capital to hold powerful institutions to account. Scrutiny is applied to the state inasmuch as the state is perceived to enact policies that enable injustice. As an example, the Reichstein Foundation (2023) in Australia has funded successful legal action against a state police force for racial profiling and discrimination and resourced a campaign to oppose legislation threatening charitable organisations' right to undertake advocacy. Foundations also fund campaigns that hold market actors to account, especially where the state fails to intervene. Multiple philanthropic institutions funded the Campaign for Fair Food, which, led by a workers' organisation, sought to end degrading labour conditions within the Californian tomato industry. The result was a transformation in working conditions, including the establishment of monitoring organisations to hold tomato growers to account (Ditkoff and Grindle, 2017; Oak Foundation, 2023).

An Alternative View on Effectiveness, Knowledge, and Evidence Within Social Policy

Strong forms of social justice philanthropy propose transferring resources to marginalised communities with few conditions and limited monitoring: communities are enabled and challenged to become autonomous by making decisions using their own insights and experience. These approaches, while resonant with some policy approaches that embrace bottom-up community development and participation, in general, challenge not only outcome-focused models of philanthropy but also similar styles of top-down state intervention.

This approach challenges constructions of effectiveness and evidence within social policy. There is simply the evident broadening of the concept of effectiveness to embrace a sense of community (or user) autonomy and control – not simply outcomes of material well-being. There is also, importantly, a reformulation of ideas of 'evidence' and 'knowledge'. The imposition of top-down targets and measures is, as noted, considered an inappropriate exercise of power that constrains local autonomy. Such approaches may be permeated with bias and thus miss central insights, and they may fail to acknowledge valuable outcomes that are hard to measure. Knowledge and learning are therefore seen to reside not within deductive experiments designed by experts that test predetermined hypotheses, but within insights that emerge inductively from the experience of users and communities. Local knowledge and lived experience of oppression enable better understanding of problems and better design of remedies. Donors from marginalised communities, further, on account of their experience of stigmatisation or bias, may have particular insights into effective interventions for social change (Deepak and McHarris, 2022). The apology offered by prominent US non-profit consultancy Bridgespan is instructive (Dorsey et al., 2020):

> Our own focus on rigorous measurement has led those we advise to overlook the potential of organizations who don't fit the narrow definition of "good" such measures create. Those definitions can rely too much on looking back on "what worked" (often offered by a predictable few) rather than moving forward by embracing approaches, ideas, and solutions proposed by a wider tent of voices.

There is, therefore, a challenge to the typical construction of evidence-based policy – or at least to the enactment of that aspiration through quantitative experimentation and data.

Notwithstanding Bridgespan's apology, there is a caveat that raises an important question about the impact (or not) of social justice philanthropy. Is the focus on redistributing power consistent with, or in tension with, optimising impact and improving the provision of essential social goods to the most disadvantaged? Empirical questions remain about whether participative decision-making, for instance, improves or impedes the effectiveness of social programmes. It may, for instance, be vulnerable to the costs and biases inherent in collective decision-making. While trust-based philanthropy transfers power and may enable creativity and sensitivity to local experience, it nonetheless dispenses with the mechanisms that outcomes-based philanthropy has specifically developed in order to ensure effectiveness in the distribution of philanthropic grants. In particular, there is an uneasy relationship between social justice approaches and expert knowledge – whether the expert knowledge of the impact evaluator, the professional in a given field, or the philanthropic professional. Institutionalised expertise can be implicated in oppressive systems, and yet it also bears valuable knowledge. Sophisticated participatory decision-making systems seek a balance or equivalence between different knowledges.

CONCLUSION

Social justice philanthropy is a highly differentiated and contested set of phenomena. This chapter has examined the different approaches, behaviours, and perspectives that occur within this broad area of action. It has identified how social justice philanthropy is enacted both by marginalised communities themselves and by elite foundations that are changing their grant-making strategies. Approaches and perspectives within the label of social justice philanthropy broadly fall into two contrasting sets: first, those that assume that a redistribution of power and social equity can be achieved with only minor amendments to existing socio-economic and political structures; second, a strong form of social justice philanthropy that both emphasises the transformation of social structures to address power imbalances and also demands reformation of philanthropy itself. There is a need for more mapping of these phenomena and more research into their implications. Many of the documented accounts of social justice philanthropy have emerged from the US. There will be distinctive manifestations in different geographies, infused by different histories of power and different conceptions of social justice.

Does social justice philanthropy have an impact? There can be no definite empirical verdict, given the diversity of approaches, and the challenge of causal attribution when evaluating advocacy. But strong form social justice philanthropy provides resources to civil society that enable powerful institutions to be held to account; it can potentially strengthen alternative public spheres or counterpublics. It also provides a challenging alternative account of knowledge and evidence in the social policy sphere. There is the potential for impact at a large scale when social movements are successful in creating normative or legislative change; for some commentators, deep social change resides in the political work of such movements, and not in incremental technical innovations (Ganz et al., 2018; Girard, 2019). Some cases described here – of labour rights in California or freedom of information legislation in the UK – are transformational moments of social change, funded by philanthropy. The successes of advocacy work are sporadic, but the shift of philanthropy towards campaigns for political or normative change is a potential route to remedying deeply unjust social phenomena.

Above all, perhaps, when led by marginalised communities themselves, social justice philanthropy provides opportunities for voice, autonomy, and solidarity that are profoundly impactful. In its strongest form, reformations of practice begin to reverse the polarity of philanthropy, so that power, self-determination, and material funds begin to accrue to the marginalised and not those with accumulated wealth.

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