



## The national politics of nuclear power: economics, security, and governance

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onto the level of international relations' (16), since the struggles have not disappeared but have shifted to the 'colonization and postcolonial confrontation,' to 'a war between nations' (ibid.). In his view, this constellation has taken new shape after the end of the cold war, since 'it is no longer capitalists who fear revolution, but workers who fear competition from immigrants' (17).

Yet, it is not only national belonging that marks exclusion these days. For Balibar, there are explicitly two groups that – though differently – find themselves 'excluded from the democratic polity: the excessively rich and the excessively poor' (273). While the former – new class owners and managers – have no longer an interest in 'playing the game of national politics and accepting its constraints' and therefore 'establish themselves materially and symbolically, beyond the national-foreigner distinction', the latter, the 'exploitable workers' are 'forcibly treated as threatening or superfluous internal foreigners' and are consequently 'pushed or left outside' (274).

*Equaliberty* is both an exciting, although sometimes not easy to read, essay collection and an insightful and challenging theoretical concept. As a concept, it allows us to further elaborate on (the entanglement of) the (nation) state, democracy and collective political agency as well as to grasp contemporary political processes and demands. Emphasizing at the same time social, economic and political equality, Balibar aims at 'defending and extending a social citizenship that has been profoundly called into question' (160). His goal is as ambitious as it is driven by a transformative, or even revolutionary, desire: in neoliberal times, where national borders are simultaneously transgressed and reinforced, he calls for the institution of a form of citizenship that 'can no longer be defined as exclusive belonging or as a reserved status but only . . . as . . . a community of co-citizens that crosses borders' (293) – this is what he calls 'diasporic' or 'co-citizenship' (276). It is not least the power of 'resistance, insurrection and subordination' (277), as he clearly stresses with the final essay's title, which can help us to come closer to this goal.

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**The national politics of nuclear power: economics, security, and governance**, by Benjamin K. Sovacool and Scott Victor Valentine, Oxford, Routledge Global Security Studies, 2013, 292 pp. (paperback), ISBN-13 978-0415748100

Axiomatically, the nuclear debate is complex. Sovacool and Valentine set out to work with this necessary complexity. They recognize that discussions around nuclear run parallel to, and are often preconditioned by, (a) differing takes on issues relating to military security and deterrence, (b) differing values associated with the economic internalization of negative environmental externalities, (c) differing interpretations on the role of energy production in a warming world and (d) differing attitudes to the value of precaution when considering high-impact low-probability risk.

The book, written immediately after the accident at Fukushima, makes a significant contribution to the evolving post-Fukushima literature (Eliot 2012; Ramana 2013;

Dorfman, Fucic, and Thomas 2012) and the developing range of literature that neither preferences nor purifies science or society (Welsh 2000; Wynne 2004).

Formerly, nuclear theorists tended to distinguish between two versions of knowledge – either a natural or social construct. However, the argument that the integration of both scientific and cultural constructions is fundamental to the development of a cogent analysis of is as compelling as it is well rehearsed (Welsh and Wynne 2013). Thus, in order to understand better the nature of the defining conditions for nuclear power propagation, the authors adopted a two-fold approach – both multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary. In doing so, they allow for a finer-grained analysis to emerge, providing a composite amalgam comprised of both social and natural elements.

Sovacool and Valentine's analysis identifies and develops six key drivers as being historically, and currently, essential prerequisites for the development of nuclear power in any one state. These common array of forces are (1) the substantive imperatives of national security (including energy security) and secrecy, (2) the dominance of technocratic ideology in decision-making processes, (3) enhanced economic interventionism, (4) a centrally controlled energy stakeholder network, (5) the subordination of opposition to political authority and (6) the social peripheralization of nuclear opponents. In a sense, it could be argued that the last three drivers could be rolled into one – as they deal with elements of the same dynamic – yet, given their significance, the book provides a more than adequate rationale for working them through separately.

Within the context of these six defining conditions, the book elaborates sets of differing sociopolitical structures and energy landscapes necessary for nuclear to proliferate within a broad range of eight differing States: USA, France, Japan, Russia and the former Soviet Union, South Korea, Canada, China and India. Via this extensive comparing and contrasting exercise, the authors succeed in demonstrating that their defining preconditions are largely generalizable. They then reflexively account for the significant levels of complexity and uncertainty inherent within the debate by contextualizing these drivers via a further eight explanatory insights.

And this gets to the heart of the matter. Whilst some have argued that the key issue relates to the human health and environmental impact of the nuclear project, the authors point out that a complex set of preconditioning sociopolitical formulations and structural economic formulations achieves a convergent *fait a complis* before the question of the relative safety of reactors, emissions or waste becomes a foreground issue. By these means, the reification of the nuclear project is achieved without reference to, or the means to internalize, the potentially significant negative externalities.

By unveiling the exigencies of military deterrence and energy production, the book reshapes and rehearses the inter-locking socially abstracted influences that shepherd scientific risk judgment. Drawing on a weight of relevant literature and empirical evidence, and taking the reader through the nuts and bolts of the nuclear power landscape, the book unveils the nuclear complex as an admixture, a proliferating hybrid performed by heterogeneous industrial, military, social and economic practices.

In terms of criticism, I wonder why the UK, such a key, almost paradigm case at the frontline of the nuclear debate, was not included in the analysis – perhaps because of the subtle nature of the forces at play in the UK system? That said, the UK seems to exhibit all the six preconditioning drivers, albeit in a uniquely British way (Dorfman et al. 2008). On an equally Eurocentric track, Finland's situation seems even more complex, especially in the context of the balancing act between participatory and representative democracy concerning decision-making around new nuclear power construction.

Also, an element of the book seems to take a slightly constrained approach to the analysis of the conception, role and future of nuclear reprocessing given the current state of play regards the relative achievability of reprocessing and the potential for developing future fast breeder technology.

But these critiques are peripheral to the main thrust and intention of the book. As the authors suggest:

The emergence of a global nuclear power program is highly dependent on social, political, and economic conditions. It is conditional and contingent: it is not inevitable. The development of nuclear power programs is not merely about transferring technology but molding societies to exhibit the requisite norms and values, political systems, and economic perspectives to support centralized planning, technocratic development strategies, and subordination of political and social opposition. Manufacturing, fueling, operating, and decommissioning a nuclear reactor is complicated enough. Manufacturing the social and political conditions necessary to support nuclear power development in an increasingly well-informed, electronically connected world add a new dimension of convolution. (p. 251)

The development of sustainable and affordable low carbon energy remains a growing economic sector with huge potential for job creation. Whilst it is clear that the challenge of achieving a transition to sustainable energy will involve different options, these options will vary in their acceptability to differing sections of policy and public energy stakeholders, and will also vary from state to state – given their differing cultural, industrial and energy landscapes. So we are faced with collective choices. Here, building on earlier substantive work (see also Sovacool 2013), the book provides a critical insight into the nuclear drama – which once performed exclusively on darkly lit stages is now emerging into apparently more enlightened times.

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