

Introduction

Everyone has heard of Chernobyl, most of us have heard of Fukushima, probably only a few have heard of Three Mile Island. But who has heard of Żarnowiec? Even students of environmental and antinuclear movements, familiar with iconic names like Wyhl, Fessenheim, or Aldermaston, will probably be at a loss. Yet the protests against the construction of a nuclear power station near the village of Żarnowiec had a significant impact on Poland's history and are the only example of a successful campaign against nuclear power in the Eastern Bloc.

Someone might be outraged that we are putting here side by side the three biggest nuclear disasters in history and a power plant on the Baltic coast in Poland that was never built. But in a sense, Żarnowiec was also a disaster: a catastrophic waste of money and resources, a waste of time and energy of hundreds of people, those who were involved in its construction as well as those who worked to stop it.

Unlike declared nuclear power enthusiasts, we will not mourn Żarnowiec as an irreparable loss and a missed opportunity for Poland to join the nuclear club. For us, Żarnowiec is rather a warning—against reckless planning, the hubris of those in power, and the capture of the energy sector by a unanimous technocratic lobby. It is an illustration of the weakness of communist governance and the fragility of Polish democracy. It is a story about the failure to get along and the unfortunate consequences of secrecy, of limiting political participation, and of ignoring dialogue.

But our book has yet another purpose. It is also a story of the determination, sacrifice, and—we are not afraid to use this word—courage of dozens of people who considered it their duty to stop what they saw as a bad political decision, a risky investment in unnecessary infrastructure. Two of the coauthors were active participants in those events. Unfortunately, one did not live to see this monograph's publication.

This book, therefore, is a memorial to the dedication of many people, but in a special way it is a memorial to Tomasz Borewicz né Burek, known during his years of dissent under the nickname “Belfer.” Tomasz was an inspiration to many—throughout his adult life, but especially when it seemed that antinuclear protests in Poland had no chance to succeed. Perhaps without him the story would have turned out differently, perhaps the construction of “Żarnobyl” would have been brought to completion. Certainly,

without him this book would not have been written, and thus the history of Poland's antinuclear project would remain untold.

This book was many years in the making—not least because one of the authors passed away while the text was being written. It is worth thinking of the book as part of a larger story. The process of writing the history of the antinuclear protests began when two of us—Tomasz and Janusz—met so that the latter could conduct a lengthy interview with the former, on the topic of antinuclear protests (Waluszko 2011a, 2011b). The next step was Janusz's 2012 thesis, published in 2013 by the Institute of National Remembrance (Waluszko 2013). That study focused on Żarnowiec, the Gdańsk area, and the independent movements (one of the currents of democratic and anti-communist opposition, as we will later explain). Kacper joined the writing team in 2014, having conducted research on dissent, environmental protests, and Polish antinuclear mobilization (Szulecki 2011, 2013; Szulecka and Szulecki 2013; Szulecki, Borewicz, and Waluszko 2015). We set out to take the third step: to write a monograph bringing together all antinuclear protest in Poland, one where documents and secret police files would be supplemented by testimonies of all the actors involved. The first draft was completed in 2014, and Tomasz still had time to start working on the revisions suggested by a group of academic reviewers as well as helpful friends. After Tomasz died in late 2015, the project lost much of its momentum. In 2018 and early 2019 the manuscript underwent a massive overhaul, and the result was published by the European Solidarity Center in Gdańsk in April 2019 (Borewicz, Szulecki, and Waluszko 2019). The present book is our fourth step. We quickly realized that the significance of the story we want to tell goes beyond regional and national contexts, and that there is an important gap to be filled in the history of European environmental and antinuclear protests. For these reasons, the book had to be rewritten again, parts of it from scratch, while new chapters were added to put the main story in its proper context. This work is reflected in the current order of authorship. But that is not the end of the journey. Tomasz dreamed of creating an archive of the Polish environmental movement, collecting relevant accounts, memories, photos, flyers, stencils, and documents. This is a task for the coming years, though the work on the earlier steps of our project has already allowed us to gather a significant corpus of materials.

Aimed at an international audience, the present book seeks to add Poland to the existing literature on the origins, mobilization, and triumph or decline of antinuclear protest movements. This is a considerable body of research, dating back to the early 1980s, when the first accounts and analyses of Western antinuclear protests were written (e.g., Chafer 1985; Touraine 1983). Germany has attracted most of the scholarly attention over the fol-

lowing three decades, largely due to the visible political significance of its environmental and antinuclear movement, reflected in the emergence and growth of the Greens (Joppke 1991; Radkau 2009; Augustine 2018; Mayer and Ely 1998; Milder 2019). Only recently has the transnational turn in contemporary history resulted in analyses that speak of *an* antinuclear movement with national organization but operating across borders (Tompkins 2016; Milder 2019), or that seek to provide an overview of antinuclear protests across Europe and even globally (Arndt 2016).

This large body of literature, as well as the broader scholarship on environmental protests and social movements, provides answers to important questions that, in the Polish context, were hitherto not even posed. The most general of these is: What were the drivers of antinuclear protest? However, in the context of Communist Poland, where the first antinuclear mobilization occurred only in the mid-1980s, one should also ask: Why did the antinuclear movement emerge then, and why so late? What was the antinuclear movement's relationship to the older opposition, the Solidarity trade union, and to the post-Solidarity government? Finally, how did the transition—from a communist autocracy to a capitalist parliamentary democracy—impact the antinuclear protest movement, and how was that movement grafted onto the changing political landscape? In the remainder of this introduction, we briefly explain our argument, the approach we adopted to tackle these questions, and the chapter-by-chapter structure of the book.

The Argument

Utopian aspirations per se are not dangerous. . . . Where the utopian vision goes wrong is when it is held by ruling elites with no commitment to democracy or civil rights and who are therefore likely to use unbridled state power for its achievement. Where it goes brutally wrong is when the society subjected to such utopian experiments lacks the capacity to mount a determined resistance.

—James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State*

In 1982, shortly after the military takeover in Communist Poland, the decision was taken to construct the country's first nuclear power plant by the Żarnowiec Lake near Gdańsk. The administrative work and early construction efforts went unchallenged by society at large. However, after 1985 new movements emerged within the broader democratic opposition, and environmental protection became an issue that mobilized surprisingly many Poles. When in 1986 an unprecedented accident occurred in the Chernobyl

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atomic station in Soviet Ukraine, a wave of antinuclear protests swept across Poland, and in the second half of the 1980s domestic nuclear energy projects began to galvanize protest, both in big cities and small towns. But nuclear dreams outlived communism, and while the Polish United Workers' Party (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza—PZPR) agreed to semidemocratic elections and a peaceful handover of power in 1989, the construction at Żarnowiec continued. The antinuclear movement became increasingly alienated. Finally, in 1990, after a prolonged battle that saw desperate hunger strikes, violent clashes, grassroots mobilization, and expert debates on the economics of nuclear energy, the construction site was shut down and domestic nuclear plans shelved for almost two decades.

Why was the antinuclear campaign in Poland the only successful one in the Eastern Bloc? Where did the antinuclear movement emerge, and to what extent can we speak of a “Chernobyl effect” on societal mobilization



Figure 0.1. Map of Poland before 1991, showing planned and constructed nuclear facilities, waste disposal sites, and cities where the most important protests occurred. Authors' own elaboration.

and bottom-up protest? This monograph casts the story of antinuclear mobilization in Poland against the broader background of the political processes that occurred there in the second half of the 20th century, and it situates this mobilization in the context of political dissent and growing environmental awareness. We often speak of the environmental or the antinuclear movements, which we do not see as formalized organizations or networks, but as *social movements*. They are, like all social movements, examples of a “distinct social process, consisting of the mechanisms through which actors engaged in collective action are involved in conflictual relations with clearly identified opponents; are linked by dense informal networks; share a distinct collective identity” (Della Porta and Diani 2006, 20).

We devote the most space to Żarnowiec because the protests against the construction of this nuclear power plant lasted the longest and had the most dramatic course. In addition, their ending—only in the autumn of 1990, long after the 1989 Round Table Agreement and the June 1989 semi-free elections, and after the swearing in (and even the resignation) of Tadeusz Mazowiecki’s noncommunist government—is an issue that eludes the dominant historiography of transition in Central and Eastern Europe.

Our book shows the fluidity of the political situation under the conditions of transformation—and also the continuity between the 1980s and the 1990s, surprising for many present-day observers. This is not, in any way, a prelude to a conspiracy theory or revisionist history characteristic of the anti-communist Right. The protagonists of the events described here were active in the 1980s and entered the new reality of the 1990s—the reality created by the negotiated transition—marked by all their previous experiences, conflicts, ideas, and hopes. In this sense, the dominant way to analyze the 1980s and 1990s—where the former is left to historians, and the latter is (still) seen as part of an extended “present” and thus the domain of social scientists—is inadequate. Historians of communism very often purposefully refrain from seeing the object of their study as the root of present-day cleavages and conflicts, while political science and sociology students—“transitologists”—who have analyzed the post-1989 evolution of political systems and societies have a stake in emphasizing change over continuity, and are often unaware of the long-lasting effects of the socio-political phenomena they describe. Furthermore, unlike most historians of opposition in Poland, we see the movements that we analyze as national incarnations of social phenomena that are transnational in nature.

For that reason, and thanks to the uniqueness of the Żarnowiec protests as a bridge between the 1980s and 1990s, we can look at the environmental and antinuclear movements in Poland as elements of the much broader late-modern and (post)industrial processes of social, cultural, economic, and

political change. The struggles of the 1980s have their roots in earlier events, and thus require us to look back at least to the 1960s. The conclusion additionally highlights the significance of the events that took place over thirty years ago for today's politics.

We also try to deal with some popular misconceptions. First, while antinuclear protests in Poland occurred some five to fifteen years after they took place in Western countries, this should not be interpreted as a sign of backwardness. In the first chapters of the book, we explain the different orientations and preoccupations of Polish activists. We also emphasize their roots in the particular experience of the Polish 1968, which at the same time made them part of a transnational generation and set them apart from Western counterparts.

Second, we strongly object to the simplistic notion that antinuclear protests were driven solely by emotions, particularly fear, and as such were at their core irrational. The roots of antinuclear movements are manifold, but fear, or the question of nuclear safety, is neither the sole nor even the most important driver. In the literature on antinuclear protests, there are many conflicting concepts regarding what drives antinuclear mobilization: fear and reactor safety (Radkau 2009), local NIMBYism (Tompkins 2016, 29), environmentalist and postmaterialist values (Inglehart 1994), and resistance to technocracy and democratic revival (Augustine 2018). Historians of Poland could also add anti-communist more than anti-systemic motivations.

Especially in the final chapters of the book we show the political struggle for recognition, participation, and democratization that occurred around the nuclear issues, as well as the way expert knowledge and scientific arguments were employed by both sides of the controversy, which indicates that rather than a clash of irrationalism with enlightened knowledge, the Żarnowiec issue was a political conflict cutting across many divides. This problem touches upon broader questions: Why do people dissent in the first place? Is it because of relative deprivation? Is it an expression of rational self-interest? Or is it perhaps the effect of resource mobilization? The latter implies that as political dissatisfaction and conflict exist in all societies, the formation of social movements depends on the creation of organizations to mobilize this potential (Dalton and Kuechler 1994, 9). The title of our book—"The Chernobyl Effect"—should already imply that we see in the Chernobyl catastrophe an important catalytic event, which helped to mobilize and channel resources that would otherwise have remained untapped. But saying this is not the same as saying that Poles opposed nuclear power after Chernobyl because they were afraid of accidents, and that the mere improvement of safety standards would translate to social acceptance of the technology.

Third, we challenge the history of Poland's democratic transition as it is most often told—through the eyes of political elites and with political elites as the sole important actors. This is not only a Polish fallacy but rather the result of disciplinary divisions. Whereas social movement scholars are interested in protests, dissent, and bottom-up processes that lead to political transitions, other scholars produce narratives centered on elite actors. With regard to the three phases of regime transition and democratization—liberalization, transition, and consolidation—most of the current writing on Poland sees space for civil society actors and social movements only in the first phase, occurring before 1989. Transition is said to be an elite endeavor, while consolidation remains something unproblematic in hindsight. We see our contribution in looking at the role of independent activists and social movements across these three phases.

As Sidney Tarrow, one of the most important theoreticians of social movements, notes: “Most scholars of democratization have either ignored movements altogether or regarded them with suspicion as dangers to democracy, while most students of social movements have focused on fully mature democratic systems and ignored the transition cycles that place the question of democratization on the agenda” (Tarrow 1995, 221–2). The reason for this skepticism might lie in protest itself—and in its unconventional positioning in the repertoire of political engagement. Defined, counterintuitively perhaps, as “nonroutinized ways of affecting political, social, and cultural processes” (Della Porta and Diani 2006, 165), protest and direct action in modern democracies are accepted forms of political engagement and no longer seen as deviancy. However, for authoritarian regimes they constitute forms of open dissent, which can hardly be tolerated. Is it possible that established elites, who occupy the same conflictual situation but on the opposite side, share this view of protest as something dangerous that has to be tamed?

Protests, especially strikes, often constitute precipitating events that start liberalization, spreading the perception among the authoritarian elites that there is no choice other than opening the regime if they want to avoid a civil war or a violent takeover of power by democratic or revolutionary actors (Della Porta 2013, 133; 2014, 12; Bermeo 1997). Donatella Della Porta, the world's leading expert on democratization and social movements, observes that in the normative and empirical literature the importance of civil society and social movement organizations in the construction of democracy is increasingly emphasized, while democratization literature has focused on elites (Della Porta 2013, 125–26). The already mentioned tradition of “transitology,” although replacing the focus on macrostructures with a focus on agency, has emphasized elite leadership and elite strategic choices. What is more, transitology “tended to consider movements and protest actors as

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manipulated by elites and focusing on very instrumentally defined purposes” (Della Porta 2013, 130). In the Polish case, this is illustrated by the attention the Solidarity trade union (established in 1980) receives as an example of the incredible potential of civil society mobilization and self-organization, while accounts of the transition of 1989 are most often limited to elite negotiations between prominent dissidents, the Communist Party leadership, and the Catholic Church (Codogni 2009; Skórzyński 2014). In contrast, our analysis does not suggest that elites do not matter but rather emphasizes that the dynamics of social movements are not reducible to elite manipulation. The protest that is analyzed in this book has been sustained not just despite but against elite steering of the transition.

We know from studies of social movements across the globe that, in the transition to democracy, movements have often participated in large coalitions asking for democratic rights as well as social justice. This is crucial in building support against authoritarian regimes. So it happens that the more radical protesters help the moderates, giving them legitimacy to negotiate. This is often forgotten in Polish accounts of the transition written from the perspective of the Solidarity elite, which at times cast the protest movements that remained active throughout 1989 and 1990 as villains, on par with the illiberal, hardheaded party apparatchiks. Again, such vilification is not a purely national trait.

Furthermore, what we see in the history of the environmental and antinuclear movement in Poland is an illustration of pushback from the remnants of a social movement and its adherents’ contestation of a new hegemony and mode of democratization before it gained the upper hand. This brings us to the last misconception we try to challenge: that the Polish transition to a particular form of parliamentary liberal democracy was swift and unproblematic, and that “there was no alternative”—as if the final outcome was clear when the process started. This is similar to the problem that we see in so-called modernization theory, which is good at explaining the survival of established democracies but “tend[s] to ignore the role of social actors in crafting democracy,” leaving the timing and tempo of democratization processes unexplained (Della Porta 2013, 126).

Yet social movements are also active during consolidations, a step that is generally considered to start with the first free elections and with the implementation of a minimum quality of substantive democracy. As Della Porta notes, “Social movements active during liberalization and transition rarely totally disband; on the contrary, democratization often facilitates the development of social movement organizations” (Della Porta 2013, 133–34). What is more, the networks connecting movements play an important role

in mobilizing against persistent exclusionary patterns. Keeping elites under constant pressure can help in consolidation. Movements' alternative practices and values help to sustain and expand democracy (Della Porta 2013, 134). Last but not least, in the commotion of transition away from bureaucratic and authoritarian communism towards a liberal regime with a capitalist economy, where market forces are not yet regulated by democratic rules and practices, new social movements often oppose both business and labor in conflicts around environmental and antinuclear issues. This is related to the visible opposition of populist (in the more traditional sense) and participatory values to the bureaucratization of interest groups (Dalton and Kuechler 1994, 11). The last chapters of our book contribute to the still very limited research on the input of social movements in postcommunist democracy consolidation and the molding of the exact shape Poland's democracy would eventually take.

The Approach

Since this is the first monograph on the Polish antinuclear protest movement, our book necessarily follows a roughly chronological approach and describes a long series of protest events. However, it is not a chronicle but an analytical narrative. Using the terms coined by Charles Tilly, and later developed by Sidney Tarrow and Donatella Della Porta, the book combines some of the elements of an *event history* and *eventful history* (Tarrow 1996; 2012, 116) but is perhaps best understood as an attempt at writing what Tilly termed *events-in-history*, combining an account of protest episodes, performances, and repertoires (Tarrow 2012, 124–26). We seek to reconstruct protests during episodes of democratization, investigating protests' origins, characteristics, and short-term effects. To achieve this, we analyze the frames, repertoires of action, transnational influences, social and political opportunities, and organizational characteristics of social movements (Della Porta 2014, 20–22), as well as the characteristics of the authoritarian regime that is the backdrop of the protest movements' activity.

In this monograph we use a variety of sources. In the notes, readers will find references to archival materials (from local archives in Gdańsk as well as national sources), to records of parliamentary sessions where nuclear power and protests were discussed, to secret police files gathered by the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN), and to official and second-circulation (*samizdat*) journalism, leaflets, and even films. We were also able to compare the written and oral sources with photographic documentation of the events

described, and some of the original photos of protests are also reproduced in this book.

That said, the most important method given the subject matter is oral history. The recollections of the participants in the events make up a significant part of this book—and this is just a sampling of the many hours of interviews conducted mainly by Tomasz Borewicz. If an interview quotation is not accompanied by a citation, this indicates that it was conducted by Tomasz. Unfortunately, before his death he did not pass on a record of when and where the interviews were conducted, though we are in possession of full verbatim transcripts and most of the recordings. Any additional interviews conducted by the other two authors, as well as quotes from interviews published elsewhere, are accompanied by a reference in an endnote.

Basing the book so heavily on oral history affects the style. We tried to edit the participants' recollections in such a way as to preserve the perspective of each of the interviewees and the "spoken" style of narration, but we also strove not to tire the reader and to combine quotations with descriptions and our own comments into a coherent whole. For that reason, we often merge different accounts into one description of an event, particularly if we do not have written sources to draw on.

To tell their story, we invited not only representatives of groups that protested against nuclear power. You will also find voices of supporters of nuclear power, managers from Żarnowiec, ecological experts, and members of parliament. Opponents and supporters of atomic power meet on these pages a bit like veterans of a long-forgotten war, because although they looked at each other from opposite trenches, for many of them the fate of the Żarnowiec Nuclear Power Plant was in some sense a turning point in their lives.

We are trying to present the arguments of all sides here and, through a critique of sources, to arrive at as objective a description of events as possible. Our point of reference, however, remains first and foremost the street. Our departure point is the "politics of small things" in Jeffrey Goldfarb's well-known formulation, starting from a random meeting in the queue in front of a shop, at the kitchen table, at a party, on the bus (Goldfarb 2007). The story of the streets has also remained untold because those who played the most important role in street protests did not have such easy access to the media as other participants in the events. For this reason alone, we take their point of view as the main one. Many of the interpretations are made through their eyes, and the level of detail in the description of direct actions, protests, pickets, demonstrations, hunger strikes, and finally riots is greater than in the description of the progress of construction, the legislative process, and the backstage discussions of politicians.

The Book's Structure

Our book combines a mostly chronological account with a structure based on specific issues and research problems. This means that while the main story advances from chapter to chapter, there are also retrospective parts, which usually bring some additional contextualization. Each chapter is an element of the broader story but also a narrative in itself. Although the years 1989–1990 are the climax of the Żarnowiec protests, we begin our story much earlier. In chapter 1, we explain why the first antinuclear protests in Poland occurred as late as 1985, and why, despite a dynamic civil society that challenged the communist system and spawned the ten-million-strong Solidarity trade union, the evolution of social movements in Poland differed from Western societies. We do this by returning all the way back to the different experiences of 1968, which saw student protests on both sides of the Iron Curtain. The political processes triggered by 1968, however, diverged throughout the 1970s.

Having sketched the context of dissent and opposition to communism, we then trace the gradual emergence of an environmental movement in the early 1980s and its evolution towards political environmentalism around 1985, when the first Polish “new social movement” entered the stage. By the early 1980s, Poland was experiencing an environmental crisis that began to affect all aspects of life, creating an overlap between nature protection and public health. In chapter 2, we explain the mindset that ruled the nature-culture relationship, a communist environmentality, which was important for the way the country’s nuclear energy projects were designed and also constituted the background against which political environmentalism would develop and rebel. Finally, we tell the story of the first antinuclear (weapons) protest in Mrzeżyno on the Baltic coast, a symptom of the Polish activists tuning into the West European frequencies in terms of values, goals, and agendas for the first time since the 1960s.

Chapter 3 concentrates on the Chernobyl catastrophe and its immediate aftermath. The withholding of information on the radiation danger, as well as the uncoordinated and chaotic reactions of the Communist authorities, fueled the first mass protests against nuclear power across Poland. We reconstruct the protest wave chronologically, starting with a spontaneous protest in Warsaw, and then moving on to qualitatively new events that took place in Wrocław and Kraków, signaling the emergence of a new kind of dissent—not only in its focus on nuclear power but, more importantly, in the fresh and engaging protest repertoire that would become the trademark of the new movements, particularly environmental, in the second half of the 1980s. We

finish the chapter by bringing together the elements of a “Chernobyl effect” and highlighting the unique convergence of factors that accounted for the visible change in environmental protest.

In chapter 4, we show how the antinuclear protest that was sparked by the Chernobyl disaster spilled over to the domestic nuclear sector. First, the history of Poland’s nuclear energy plans is outlined, taking the reader back to the 1950s and 1960s, before introducing the Żarnowiec Nuclear Power Plant (NPP) project, which became an object of the first protests shortly after the 1986 accident in Soviet Ukraine. However, the first spectacular and successful protest campaign around nuclear energy was related to a used fuel depot in the old bunkers of Międzyrzecz. We recount this story in detail, highlighting local, regional, and national mobilization patterns; the way activists were able to pool resources using a variety of preexisting structures; and how they managed to achieve unprecedented levels of protest intensity in a small and relatively remote town, far from the main centers of anti-communist opposition.

The story of domestic nuclear facility contestation is continued in chapter 5, which looks at the local campaigns against the planned Kopań and Warta nuclear power plants. These two campaigns were quite different, one expert based, the other relying to a much greater extent on street demonstrations. Taken together, they illustrate the diversity of the Polish environmental movement. Both campaigns also ended during the period of transition from communism and show the ways in which environmental protest was intertwined with the ongoing regime shift. The police violence against the environmentalists and independent activists in the streets of Poznań in early 1989 was puzzling in many respects but provided an important prelude to the finale of the Żarnowiec campaign, as well as to the difficult history of the posttransition environmental movement as a whole (which we briefly discuss towards the end of the chapter).

From chapter 6, we focus entirely on the anti-Żarnowiec campaign and on the democracy transition process that Poland experienced in 1989 and 1990. First, we explain how the new political situation impacted the environmental and antinuclear movement, both in terms of changing opportunity structures and in the way individual activists responded to new political realities. Beginning in early 1989, the anti-Żarnowiec campaign accelerated, first in the form of regular Friday protests in Gdańsk, which saw the mobilization of a new generation of activists, while those who were active before 1989 gradually left the stage. From Gdańsk, the dwindling core group of protesters moved to Warsaw to be closer to the newly established post-Solidarity government and the halls of power, but this attempt was exhaustive and largely futile. In parallel to the events in the streets, we also show how those members of the environmental movement who chose a formal political

path—as Solidarity representatives and, later, as members of parliament—tried to influence the political debate “from within.”

However, faced with the apparent unwillingness of the new government to enter into a dialogue with the protesters, as well as a media injunction against covering the antinuclear demands, the anti-Żarnowiec campaigners could only escalate their campaign with more and more desperate means. Chapter 7 describes four acts of desperation: the physical blockade of the cargo terminal in Gdynia, where elements of the Żarnowiec reactor were transported; an initial limited hunger strike; a subsequent indefinite hunger strike; and finally, the violence that occurred when the terminal blockade was broken.

Although the desperate protests, combined with expert activities and struggles in parliament, brought the Żarnowiec NPP construction to a halt, this was not a formal end to the project. In chapter 8, we discuss the experiments with other forms of democracy and the increasing participation in governance that emerged around the antinuclear movement. Most important among them was a local shift in governance practices that occurred in Różan, a site of a nuclear waste disposal, and in the Gdańsk region, where a social referendum on the acceptance and future of Żarnowiec was held. Organized in barely one week, the referendum is perhaps one of the most interesting untold episodes of Poland’s democratic transition. However, it also illustrates the limitations of such democratic experimentation, as the results of the referendum were not formally acknowledged by the central government, and it took further, transnational protests for the Żarnowiec construction to finally be closed. The conclusion then brings together all the thematic threads of the book and tries to provide answers to the main research questions posed earlier, while also connecting the history of the antinuclear struggle with Poland’s recent energy policy discussions and the observed democracy backsliding after 2015.

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