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## **Protectors of Pluralism: Religious Minorities and the Rescue of Jews in the Low Countries during the Holocaust**

By Robert Braun. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019; pp.xxi, 278, ISBN 978-1-108-47102-2 hardback, <https://www.cambridge.org/9781108471022>.

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When a social group suffers a horrifying threat of violence or genocide, who is most likely to step forward to offer them protection or to engage in clandestine rescue efforts? Our intuitive response to this important question tends toward the properties of the individual or organization. Do they have altruistic motives? What is their tolerance for risk? Do their networks and resources allow for collective efficacy and secrecy? What is their ideological position vis-à-vis the oppressive group that is responsible for the threat?

In *Protectors of Pluralism*, Braun offers a novel, ecological argument that calls our attention to the social environment of potential rescuers as a driver of their empathy and capacity for mobilization. The book draws on an unparalleled archive of historical documents detailing the rescue and victimization of Jews in the Netherlands and Belgium during German occupation. This archive of roughly 175,000 records is complemented by the analysis of newspapers and postwar testimonies, historical surveys, trial data, Nazi archives, and, most impressively, geo-referenced data on rescue networks and Jewish residents. Together, these records provide the most complete portrait to date of rescue activity on the part of individuals and organizations in the Low Countries during the Holocaust.

The historical puzzle that animates the book is compelling: why did Catholic organizations spearhead successful rescue efforts in some parts of the Low Countries, while Protestant (and,

especially, Orthodox Protestants) do so in other parts? The puzzle defies conventional microlevel accounts that tie pro-sociality to religiosity or the identity that comes with membership in religious communities. Braun points instead to a simple, but powerful explanation rooted in the prevalence of a religious group within a locality or region. Where Catholics were in the minority, they had more empathy for Jewish residents and more capacity to mobilize in the face of oppression. In other parts of the Low Countries, this minority “advantage” accrued to Protestant rescue networks that were deep in Catholic territory. For Braun, a crucial scholarly benefit from his focus on the Netherlands is that the country had historically been partitioned into Protestant and Catholic territories, each interspersed with minority religious enclaves, thus creating natural comparisons to test his minority hypothesis.

With this puzzle in mind, the book lays out a careful, multilevel argument about the role of the religious minority position in collective mobilization. Braun first shows that religious commitment, an antecedent condition, is stronger for co-religionists who are located in “enemy” territory. Then he traces pro-Jewish and anti-Jewish discourse in Dutch newspapers during the years leading up to the Holocaust. Catholic minorities were more likely to emphasize their pluralism, similarities with Jews, and religious opportunity in supporting Judaism. Catholic majorities were more likely to frame their discourse in terms of the perceived religious, economic, or political threat posed by the Jewish population. By the 1940s, the impact of these discursive frames could be seen in the spatial pattern of Jewish evasion: escape from Nazi roundups was more likely to occur when Jewish residents were close to minority Catholic churches in largely Protestant regions.

A distinct feature of these ecological effects is that they are indeed very local in nature. In line with recent perspectives on micro-segregation (e.g., Grigoryeva and Ruef 2015), many of the rescue efforts transpired among neighbors, across fences, and within walking distance. Part of the elegance of the book lies in Braun’s ability to map and analyze these patterns using sophisticated geographic information systems (GIS). The book also leverages case studies to good use when information on clandestine rescue efforts is particularly rich. In Twente, an eastern region of the Netherlands, Braun is able to draw from the recollections of *non-rescuers* in order to avoid the success biases that affect most social movement studies. He also does not shy away from those

cases that would appear to complicate his argument, particularly majority rescue networks that are located in “friendly” territory or secular rescue organizations with no religious underpinning at all. When viewed in light of their geographic isolation or political marginalization, these cases provide useful material for refining Braun’s minority hypothesis.

The arguments in the book are a must-read for scholars with an interest in social movements and historical sociology. As the concluding chapter shows, the minority thesis can readily generalize to collective mobilization during other episodes of mass persecution, ranging from the Rwandan genocide to abolitionist activity and slave rescue networks in antebellum America. Moreover, Braun’s book should be of considerable interest to organizational scholars, who have increasingly come to situate the selection of organizational activities within a spatial and historical context (Aldrich et al. 2020). Under the most challenging of circumstance, when silence and timidity are the norm, *Protectors of Pluralism* suggests why some individuals and organizations are willing to act heroically.

## **References**

Aldrich, Howard, Martin Ruef, and Stephen Lippmann. 2020. *Organizations Evolving* (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition). Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar.

Grigoryeva, Angelina and Martin Ruef. 2015. “The Historical Demography of Racial Segregation,” *American Sociological Review*, 80(4): 814-842.