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Protectors of Pluralism: Religious Minorities and the Rescue of Jews in the Low Countries during the Holocaust. By Robert Braun. Publisher: Cambridge University Press, 2019. 242pp.

A monument containing all the names of Holocaust victims from the Netherlands is planned to be erected in Amsterdam mid-2020. However, we still don't know much about which factors increased or decreased Jewish survival chances. Braun's central argument is that Jews living close to religious minorities were more likely to survive Nazi-persecution. This minority thesis emphasises the local position of church communities and not so much anything inherent to religion itself [p. 15]. Two mechanisms link minority position to rescue operations [p.6]. The first mechanism is the capacity to translate opposition to genocide into action as minorities have an advantage when setting up a clandestine network that are immune to individual betrayal. The second mechanism involves the empathy to resist genocide as leaders of religious minorities themselves depend on pluralism for group survival.

The main test of the minority thesis is on the Nazi-persecution of Jews in the Netherlands. The study starts with an observational comparison of two neighbouring municipalities Almelo and Borne. In the former, Catholics rescued many Jews while being a minority and, in the latter, no successful rescue network emerged while being a majority. This puzzle resulted into an innovative analysis to test the minority thesis using address information on retrieved municipal registration lists of Jews matched to commemoration books and return lists of Jews to determine who had been deported and address information of all Catholic and Protestant churches to locate them in Dutch municipalities. Using geocoded data, Braun's statistical analysis shows, in line with his minority thesis, that proximity to Catholic churches in protestant municipalities and vice versa increased a Jew's chance to evade deportation. To explore this quantitative finding further, Braun conducted several case studies of rescue networks in different, though mostly rural, parts of the Netherlands, concluding that religious minority networks formed shells of protection around Jews, supporting his quantitative finding. Repeating this analysis on data for Nazi-persecution of Jews in Belgium replicated his finding on minority rescue for the Netherlands.

Despite the Netherlands being religiously fragmented and consequently many local religious minorities, the overall Dutch Jewish victimization rate (around 73%) is one of the highest in Europe. Braun's minority thesis, nonetheless, might be relevant for explaining local differences in Jewish survival rates. His analysis, though, has a few concerns. Within the Netherlands secularisation was rising and socialism became more popular during the first decades of the 20th century resulting in different local denominational compositions. In Amsterdam, for example, where more than half of the Jews in the Netherlands lived and only about 25% survived, was about 22% Catholic, 21% Dutch Reformed, 4% Orthodox Reformed, 35% religiously unaffiliated, and 18% belonged to another religious affiliation according to the 1930 census. Rotterdam, The Hague and other Dutch cities had similar fragmented denominational compositions, raising the question how these municipalities fit in Braun's 'five different types of counties' [p. 95] to categorise municipalities in majority Protestant or majority Catholic places.

A Jew living in a neighbourhood where 60% or more of all churches were minority churches was taken as a measure of proximity to a minority community [p. 94]. However, given the ecological nature of this measurement one cannot infer associations at the individual level as Jews could still have been saved by the local majority group. Persons of Jewish origin who had left Judaism lived more remote from Jewish areas or neighbourhoods and closer to other denominational groups (Tammes 2011). To account for degree of Jewish assimilation, Braun included in his model some

indicators such as married to a gentile and converted to Christianity. However, he didn't include other important local factors such as starting date of local deportation, proportion of collaborating policemen within local police force, rural location, and degree of segregation (or pillarization) within a municipality (Tammes 2019). These factors could alter the association presented between proximity to minority communities and evasion of deportation.

Concerning the two mechanisms linking minority position to rescue operations, a stronger degree of pillarization could on the one hand strengthen the capacity mechanism but on the other hand reduce the empathy mechanism. Other factors might have influenced these two mechanisms as well. For example, the deportation by the Nazi-occupiers of a few hundred Jews converted to Catholicism, who were initially exempted from deportation, after the protest of the Catholic church against the deportation of Jews in July 1942 could have reinforced empathy among Catholics to help Jews.

Minority networks might have played a huge role in attempts to rescue Jews as we know that thousands of Jews in the Netherland had been hiding, though many not successful as they were caught and deported. Despite some methodological and analytical concerns, Braun's minority thesis therefore deserves to be further explored as an important factor for local differences in Jewish survival within the Netherlands and as a potential factor for increased survival during genocides such as the Tutsi killings in Rwanda or more recent the killings of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar.

## References

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