

## Protectors of Pluralism

Why do some religious groups protect victims of genocide while others do not? This book argues that local religious minorities are more likely to save persecuted groups from purification campaigns. Two reinforcing mechanisms link minority status to rescue operations. First, religious minorities are better able to setup clandestine organizations because their members are more committed and inward looking. Second, minority elites empathize with targets of purification campaigns, imbuing their networks with preferences that lead them to resist genocide. A geo-referenced dataset of Jewish evasion in the Netherlands and Belgium during the Holocaust is deployed to assess the minority hypothesis. Spatial statistics and archival work reveal that Protestants were more likely to rescue Jews in Catholic regions of the Low Countries, while Catholics facilitated evasion in Protestant areas. Postwar testimonies and secondary literature demonstrate the importance of minority groups for rescue in other countries during the Holocaust as well as other episodes of mass violence, underlining that it is the local position of church communities – and not something inherent to any religion itself – that produces networks of assistance to threatened neighbors.

Robert Braun is an Assistant Professor of Sociology and Political Science at the University of California, Berkeley. His research focuses on civil society and intergroup relationships in times of social upheaval. He has been published in several esteemed journals, including the *American Journal of Sociology* and the *American Political Science Review*, and has received more than twenty scholarly awards.

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*Continued after the index*

# Protectors of Pluralism

*Religious Minorities and the Rescue of Jews  
in the Low Countries during  
the Holocaust*

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CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-108-47102-2 — Protectors of Pluralism  
Robert Braun  
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CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom  
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA  
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia  
314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,  
New Delhi – 110025, India  
79 Anson Road, #06–04/06, Singapore 079906

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)  
Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781108471022](http://www.cambridge.org/9781108471022)  
DOI: 10.1017/9781108633116

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First published 2019

Printed in the United Kingdom by TJ International Ltd, Padstow Cornwall

*A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.*

ISBN 978-1-108-47102-2 Hardback  
ISBN 978-1-108-45697-5 Paperback

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978-1-108-47102-2 — Protectors of Pluralism  
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*Een Driewerf Hoera voor de Barmhartige Samaritaan!*

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-108-47102-2 — Protectors of Pluralism  
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## Acknowledgments

Studying genocide is intriguing but challenging. It poses the ultimate puzzle: it feels impossibly far removed from our daily lives, but it is actually extremely close. Only two generations ago collective killings organized by the Nazis threatened the lives of ancestors on one side of my family, while other members of my family saw the killing machine roll out its tentacles yet decided to do nothing. How could all of this happen to people very much like myself in the streets that I know so well?

The main challenge of genocide studies is trying to remain excited and non-cynical about the academic enterprise of answering a research question without losing sight of the fact that “your empirical puzzle” involved the suffering of thousands and thousands of innocent people. This became crystal clear to me eight months into my fieldwork when, on a Monday morning, I arrived in the archives to see stacks of Jewish registration cards waiting for me on my desk. My first thought was one that blended demoralization and frustration, a feeling very similar to the one I had when a waiter in the restaurant where I was employed as a dishwasher at a university loaded yet another pile onto my workstation. I was living the banality of evil. Was this the same feeling that Hitler’s bureaucrats – who had written these registration cards in the first place – had when they arrived in the office after the weekend? This realization disturbed me, as it stood in stark contrast with how I came to think about genocide early on in life.

My first exposure to the Holocaust came in elementary school when my teacher decided to dedicate an afternoon session to a discussion on the destruction of Dutch Jewry. This decision was taken in response to

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something that had happened during the morning break. Several Dutch kids had beaten up a Turkish boy. When the teacher stepped in to end the assaults, the main instigator legitimized his behavior by accusing the victims dad of stealing his father's job. The teacher explained to us that this was a typical case of racism. This brief introduction to the Holocaust in the Netherlands drove home the point that racism was dangerous and should be fought with any means necessary. Having done nothing to end the fight myself, I remember feeling embarrassed after class ended. Especially since the Turkish boy was one of my best friends at the beginning of the school year. Ever since, the relationship between the protection of pluralism and the Holocaust has been edged in my soul, although the words I used back then were very different.

I started thinking about these issues in more depth for the first time as an undergrad in the back row of KC-07, the main lecture hall of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. Here, Geert de Vries, a bowler hat and suspenders-wearing sociologist, introduced me and many others to the ideas of Durkheim, Weber, Goffman and Elias. His extraordinary lectures changed my life and turned me into a social scientist (although he would probably not like this term). Under the wings of Harry Ganzeboom, Ruud Koopmans and Rens Vliegthart, who all happened to be at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam at the time, I published my first papers on racist violence. Ruud and Harry taught me how to think systematically and urged me to apply for grad school in the United States.

As a result, this book started as a doctoral dissertation in government at Cornell University. Cornell provided a wonderful environment to develop my ideas; my experiences in classes that I took with David Patel, Jessica Weeks and Patrick Sullivan are imprinted in the following pages. I owe a substantial intellectual debt to my advisors, Sidney Tarrow, Christopher Way, Alex Kuo and Kevin Morrison. Alex and Kevin had the rare ability to tear my work apart constructively and supportively. And, as junior faculty, I thank them for having been so forthcoming with professional advice as I navigated the often ambiguous social cues that dominate academia. Chris is arguably Cornell government's most valuable player: his advice improves the quality of your work almost instantly. The fact that his students have won best dissertation awards in international relations, comparative politics, American politics and sociology is indicative of the quality of his graduate student training. Professor Tarrow is a superb advisor and role model. He influenced me intellectually, professionally and personally. I hope, but highly doubt, that I will be able to live up

to his standards. As such, I guess I will always remain a Tarrow student.

Most parts of this book were written while I was a predoctoral fellow and assistant professor at Northwestern University. The Department of Sociology provided me with a warm and intellectually stimulating home. Although people say that all departments have their problems and discontents, I am not able to name a single one for Northwestern Sociology. Its weekly colloquium turned me into a better sociologist and showed me what it means to be a good colleague. Northwestern's Comparative-Historical Social Science and War and Society Programs are the most interesting intellectual communities I have encountered to date. Its interdisciplinary focus and emphasis on contextualized knowledge fit me like a glove. I would like to thank the groups' core members, Bruce Caruthers, Dan Krucmaric, Jim Mahoney, Ann Orloff and Monica Prasad, for being fantastic colleagues and wonderful intellectuals. Outside of these programs, I also thank Ben Frommer and Jörg Spenkuch, who were both always available for much appreciated interdisciplinary exchanges.

Both the Netherlands and Belgium are home to extraordinarily strong academic communities, and I was lucky to have interacted with many members of both. My work on the Netherlands would not have been possible without input from Marnix Croes, Fred Cammaert, Froukje Demant, Bert-Jan Flim, Pim Griffioen, Jan Ramakers, Herman van Rens, Ton Salemink, Annika Smits, Wout Ultee, Hans de Vries and Ruud Weissmann. Dirk Luyten, Lieven Saerens, Laurence Schram and Aline Sax helped me find my footing in Belgium. During my time in Belgium, Peter van Aelst generously hosted me at the University of Antwerp's M2P program, while Bert Klandermans from the Sociology Department at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam did the same when I was doing archival work in Amsterdam.

A scholar of history is worth nothing without the help of archivists. I had the pleasure to work with some of the best and most dedicated archivists in the world, from whom I learned more than I can ever repay. In the Netherlands, Michiel Schwartzberg, Marieke Bos and, particularly, Raymund Schutz from the Netherlands Red Cross, Lonnie Stegink from the Dutch Jewish History Museum, Jose Martin from Kamp Westerbork, Lodewijk Winkeler from the Katholiek Documentatie Centrum in Nijmegen, Aike van der Ploeg from DOCDIRECT Winschoten, and Sierk Plantinga and Gijs Boink from the National Archives provided me with invaluable assistance throughout the process. For Belgium, the same can be said about Dorien Styven and Laurence Schram

## Acknowledgments

xix

from the Kazerne Dossin in Mechelen and Joris Colla at the KADOC in Leuven.

Along the way, I benefited enormously from feedback from participants who attended presentations hosted by Yad Vashem, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the Buffett Institute for Global Studies at Northwestern, the Sia Chaou-Kang Center for International Security and Diplomacy at the University of Denver, and from the Departments of Sociology at the University of California, Berkeley, Harvard University, the University of Chicago, Northwestern University, the University of Pittsburgh and Tulane University. Likewise, I am grateful for feedback from the Departments of Political Science at the University of Amsterdam, the University of Essex, Leiden University, the University of New Mexico, Ohio State University, Princeton University, University of California, Los Angeles and Yale University as well as the Department of Justice, Law and Criminology, at American University, the Institute for Political Economy and Governance at Pompeu Fabra University, the Joint Speaker Series Department of Political Science & the Graduate School of Public & International Affairs at the University of Pittsburgh and the Program on Order Conflict and Violence at Yale University. On these occasions, I was particularly grateful for feedback from Mark Beissinger, Carles Boix, Lisa Brush, Ruben Enikolopov, James Evans, Jude Hayes, Mala Htun, Stathis Kalyvas, Orlando Patterson, Maria Petrova, Grigore Pop-Eleches, Burcu Savun, Stephan Skowronek and Tim Snyder. In addition to the useful critiques offered by participants in these seminars, I received important comments and suggestions from Sheri Berman, Michael Bernhard, Nancy Bermeo, Daniel Blocq, Ivan Ermakoff, Chad Goldberg, Brandon Gorman, Patrick Kuhn, Andrew Little, Aliza Luft, Harris Mylonas, Laura Nelson, Jensen Sass, Charles Seguin, Evgeny Finkel and Jason Wittenberg. The latter two have been instrumental for the development of my research agenda. I thank them for having blazed the trail by demonstrating the important lessons that the Holocaust provides for mainstream social science in two spectacular books (Evgeny Finkel, *Ordinary Jews: Choice and Survival during the Holocaust*, Princeton University Press, and Jeffrey S. Kopstein and Jason Wittenberg, *Intimate Violence: Anti-Jewish Pogroms on the Eve of the Holocaust*, Cornell University Press, respectively).

I would also like to thank Marnix Croes, Bert-Jan Flim, Hans Knippenberg, Paul Pennings, Peter Tammes, Herman van Rens, the late Jan Sonneveld, the Dutch Museum for Jewish History, Kamp Westerbork, the CEGESOMA, LOKSTAT at the University of Ghent the Kazerne Dossin

Memorial and the Netherlands Red Cross for sharing data. Onno Boonstra, Gijs Boink, Laurence Schram, Raymund Schutz, Dorien Styven, Peter Tammes, Jean-Emile Veth and Sven Vrielinck provided invaluable help in accessing the digital material. Shapefiles of administrative boundaries were provided by NLgis and LOKSTAT. The Belgium Topographic Map 1939 and the Dutch TMK 1830 are used as backgrounds in most figures. These maps are provided by ESRI Nederland, NGI-IGN and the Kadaster. I would also like to thank Elias Passas for his assistance in finalizing the manuscript.

Financially, this project has been made possible by the National Science Foundation (grant #1122985), the Council For European Studies, the Reppy Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies, the Kellogg School of Management, the Cornell Institute for European Studies and a Saul Kagan Fellowship in Advanced Shoah Studies. The latter fellowship, in particular, enriched my intellectual life by embedding me in a truly global community of scholars working on the Holocaust.

Earlier versions of this book project were published in “Religious Minorities and Resistance to Genocide: The Collective Rescue of Jews in the Netherlands during the Holocaust,” *American Political Science Review* 110.1 and “Minorities and the Clandestine Collective Action Dilemma: the Secret protection of Jews in Nazi-Occupied Europe,” *American Journal of Sociology*, 124.2. I am grateful to Cambridge University Press and the University of Chicago Press for its permission to integrate part of these articles here. The former press also served as a wonderful home for this book. I would like to thank Robert Dreesen and the editors of the Contentious Politics series as well as two anonymous reviewers for their insightful feedback and efficiency.

My family, most importantly Riekje, Rob, Jiska and Bink, have always had my back. Although, they may not always have fully understood what I was up to as I trekked from university to university, archive to archive, their support and love has always been unconditional. The same can be said for Jeff, Lori, Peter and Mandy who were my American family. Lastly, I would like to thank Martha. She is my best friend, confidant, colleague and, most importantly, love of my life. We have always done everything together. I hope this will stay this way for the rest of our lives.

## Notes on the Text

- In this manuscript I make use of testimonies collected in light of an honors pension program. Following an agreement with the Social Insurance Bank, the institution storing and maintaining these files, I will refer to these testimonies anonymously. Detailed information on the individual files can be obtained from the author upon request.
- Names of locations are translated into English. If an English translation is lacking, the name in the original language is used.
- All quotations from written sources in French, German or Dutch are translated into English by the author.
- With a few exceptions in Chapters 5 and 9, visualizations of statistical models are presented in the main text, while regression tables and descriptives are presented in appendices at the end of the chapter.

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978-1-108-47102-2 — Protectors of Pluralism  
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