



Hiding place near Westerbork used by the Westerweel group. This organisation assisted Jewish fugitives to escape from the Netherlands.

Source: WO2-Beeldbank NIOD

# JEWISH SELF-HELP AND RESCUE IN THE NETHERLANDS DURING THE HOLOCAUST IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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Amongst historians it is widely acknowledged that the Nazi's exterminated a significantly larger proportion of the Jewish population in the Netherlands than in France and Belgium during the Second World War. Studies of self-help and rescue of the Jews, however, have been largely confined to national historiographies. This article aims to further investigate this issue by comparing the organisational structures of the Jewish communities and the groups that tried to help them in the three countries.

Discussion about the roles of self-help and rescue in the survival of Jews during the Nazi occupation of Western Europe has been largely confined to the national historiographies of the Second World War and there have been only limited attempts to provide a more nuanced comparative analysis.<sup>1</sup> This is perhaps most pertinent in the Netherlands where the mortality rates were appreciably higher than in neighbouring Belgium or France, and where the reasons for this marked difference has been more extensively debated than elsewhere.<sup>2</sup> In the Dutch case, the fundamental insight provided by van der Leeuw still holds good; namely that unlike other countries, there was no 'favourable factor' that could be seen to have assisted Jews in escaping Nazi persecution.<sup>3</sup> Whether one examines the nature of the persecutors, the position of the victims, or the circumstances that pertained during the occupation, the

Jews in the Netherlands were in a more perilous position than their co-religionists elsewhere in the West. The nature of German rule, the prominent role of the SS, the conformity and collaboration of the Dutch bureaucracy and the disadvantageous circumstances for the Jews more generally have all be cited as salient issues. More recently, some scholars have attempted to find more precision in the debate by using localised quantitative data to assess the importance of particular factors – in the process marginalising some and highlighting others.<sup>4</sup> That said, this is not an attempt to reopen the whole debate on Jewish survival in the Netherlands but to look specifically at the incidence of self-help and rescue through escape or through hiding in a Western European comparative context that can help in understanding their importance in the Dutch case.

## Jewish Self Help

It is widely acknowledged that the Dutch were singularly ill-prepared for the realities of Nazi occupation.<sup>5</sup> Whether the Jewish community had bought into the idea of neu-

1 See, for example: Helen Fein, *Accounting for Genocide: National Responses and Jewish Victimization during the Holocaust* (New York 1979); J.C.H. Blom, 'The Persecution of the Jews in the Netherlands: A Comparative Western European Perspective', *European History Quarterly* 19 (1989) 333-351; Michael R Marrus and Robert O. Paxton, 'The Nazis and the Jews in Occupied Western Europe 1940-1944', *Journal of Modern History* 54 (1982) 687-714.

2 Most recently: Pim Griffioen and Ron Zeller, *Jodenvervolging in Nederland, Frankrijk en België* (Amsterdam 2011); Bob Moore, *Survivors. Jewish Self-Help and Rescue in Nazi-Occupied Western Europe* (Oxford 2010).

3 A.J.van der Leeuw, 'Meer slachtoffers dan elders in West-Europa', *Nieuw Israëlitisch Weekblad*, 15 November 1985.

4 Marnix Croes and Peter Tammes, "Gif laten wij niet voortbestaan": Een onderzoek naar de overlevingskansen van joden in de Nederlandse gemeenten, 1940-1945 (Amsterdam 2004); Marnix Croes, 'The Holocaust in the Netherlands and the Rate of Jewish Survival', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 20 nr. 3 (2006) 474-499.

5 H.W. von der Dunk, 'The Shock of 1940', *Journal of Contemporary History* 2 (1967) 169-82.

trality as a protective shield any more fervently than their Christian counterparts can only be guessed at. Neither their religious leaders nor their secular organisations were equipped to deal with what befell the country in May 1940. Thus the practical response was characterised by a last-minute rush to escape the oncoming Germans – across the North Sea to Britain, or southwards to the presumed safety of France. Numbers also took refuge in suicide,<sup>6</sup> but the majority of Jews in Amsterdam and elsewhere in the Netherlands had to take the same pragmatic view as their non-Jewish neighbours – that they had neither the opportunity nor the resources to go on the road and become refugees. In the first months of occupation, the worst fears of what Nazism would mean failed to materialise and the community was allowed to continue largely unhindered, save for some minor initial discriminations and restrictions. Again, this may have served as reassurance that would serve to stifle any attempt at more proactive contingency plans within an overwhelmingly law-abiding and *gezagsgetrouw* population.<sup>7</sup> While this characterisation undoubtedly held good for the Dutch Jews in the Netherlands, the same should not necessarily have been true for the 20,000 or so non-Dutch Jews in the country, many of whom had come as refugees from Germany and Austria in the 1930s and thus already had first-hand experience of Nazism. Yet it is here where the greatest contrasts between the Netherlands on the one hand, and

France and Belgium on the other can be seen.

Unlike the Netherlands, both France and Belgium played host to Jewish migrants from the later nineteenth century onwards. This meant that there were appreciable foreign Jewish communities in both Brussels and Paris long before the Nazis came to power in Germany. Their numbers were then augmented by refugees who fled from increasing levels of persecution in the Third Reich in the 1930s. These discrete immigrant groups also gave rise to working class (political) and welfare organisations that were separate from the existing Jewish communal institutions. For example, in France, the *Main d'Oeuvre Immigrée* (MOI) was created by the communists, but there were other groups allied to the Bundists or the Zionists and the community as a whole was large enough to sustain a thriving Yiddish press.<sup>8</sup> After the armistice of June 1940 and the flight of many Jews southwards, only the Jewish Communist Party and the MOI had remained active in Paris, albeit underground, as leaders of the Jewish community's Central Consistory decided to stay in Vichy. This vacuum saw the creation of the Amelot Committee, made up from Bundists, the left and right wings of Poale-Zion, and two other organisation, the *Fédération des Sociétés Juives de France* (FSJF) and the *Colonie Scolaire* both of which had operated in the field of Jewish welfare before the occupation.<sup>9</sup> As with many other immigrant organisations, its leading lights Léo Glaeser, Yéhuda Jacobovitch and David Rapoport had all been politically active in Tsarist Russia long before they arrived in France.<sup>10</sup> Similarly in Belgium after the occupation began, the *Main d'Oeuvre Étrangère* (MOE) and *Solidarité Juive* were amalgamated into a single organisation, the *Comité de Défense des Juifs* (CDJ) under the auspices of Hertz Jospa, a Polish Jewish immigrant who eventually succeeded in welding these disparate groups into one coherent national body which was in turn closely tied to the Independence Front (FI) resistance organisation.<sup>11</sup> In both cases, these semi-clandestine organisations were rooted in pre-war welfare and left-wing political groups and provided an alternative focus and source of support for Jews when faced with the German-inspired Union Générale des Israélites de France (UGIF) and the Association des Juifs de Belgique (AJB).

- 6 W. Ultee, F. Van Tubergen, et al., 'The Unwholesome Theme of Suicide: Forgotten Statistics of Attempted Suicides in Amsterdam and Jewish Suicides in the Netherlands for 1936-1943' in: C. Brasz and Y. Kaplan eds., *Dutch Jews as perceived by Themselves and by Others* (Leiden 2000) 325-354.
- 7 This has become contentious, with Croes suggesting that the idea of *gezagsgetrouwheid* cannot be seen as a worthwhile variable when applied to comparatives between municipalities. However his test of this is a very narrow one that does not necessarily engage with the idea of being law-abiding. Croes, 'The Holocaust in the Netherlands', 488-9.
- 8 Lucien Lazare, *Rescue as Resistance* (New York 1996) 17-18; Camille Ménager, 'Le Sauvetage des Juifs à Paris 1940-1945 Histoire et mémoire' (Unpublished Masters Thesis, Institut d'Études Politiques de Paris, 2005) 7 cites David Weinberg, *Les Juifs à Paris de 1933 à 1939* (Paris 1974) 8.
- 9 Béatrice le Douairon, 'Le Comité "Rue Amelot", 1940-1944 à Paris. Assistance aux Juifs et Sauvetage des Enfants' (Maitrise, Paris 1 – Sorbonne, 1994) 1-2; 8.
- 10 Le Douairon, 'Le Comité "Rue Amelot"', 10; 25.
- 11 CEGES-SOMA R123 232.159, 8 Ans au Service du Peuple, 4; Steinberg, 1942 Les Cent Jours de la Déportation, 60-1; Steinberg, Le Comité de Défense des Juifs, 39; CEGES-SOMA AB2167 De Lathower, Comité de Défense des Juifs, 2; Saerens, 'Die Hilfe für Juden in Belgien' in: Wolfgang Benz and Juliane Wetzell eds., *Solidarität und Hilfe für Juden während der NS-Zeit* Vol.2 (Berlin 1998) 250.

In contrast, the Dutch Jewish community was dominated by a commercial and intellectual elite that had worked with a government keen to suppress any form of political organisation among immigrants or refugees in the 1930s. The pre-war Comité voor Joodse Vluchtelingen (CJV) remained implacably opposed to any form of political activity by the people it supported, sometimes even colluding with the authorities to expose communists among new arrivals. The Netherlands was therefore never a preferred destination for left-wing Jewish refugees in spite of the long tradition of Jewish involvement in working-class social democracy. The small political refugee groups, both socialist and communist, which did emerge in the pre-war era managed to develop an ability to operate in clandestine fashion but were never of any size. For example, the van Dien group, formed originally in 1937, later became a centre for various forms of illicit activity, including help for other refugees living in the country illegally and after the occupation began, distributed underground newspapers, forged documents and helped people go into hiding. Initially independent, the group later allied with other resistance organisations and also sought to help those arrested and taken to the Westerbork transit camp.<sup>12</sup> However, none of these small groups were ever on the scale, or well-enough connected to compare with immigrant-led Jewish opposition in either Belgium or France.

Another salient factor for the Netherlands was that the Germans demanded the creation of a Jewish Council in Amsterdam earlier in 1941 than in either the AJB in Belgium or the UGIF in France. As this devolved to the same Jewish elite group including Abraham Asscher and David Cohen that had created the CJV, it was logical that its personnel (both Dutch and refugee) were used as the administrative core for the new organisation. Thus the pre-war refugee organisation could never act as an alternative focal point when the persecution began. Worse still, the Jewish Council became an integral part of the German machinery for the identification, isolation, pauperisation and deportation of the Jews, with members of the community ultimately entirely reliant on its bureaucracy for every aspect of their everyday lives. Its *leitmotif*, that the collaboration should continue

'lest something worse befall', meant that there could be no collusion with attempts to avoid being called up for 'labour service in the East'. Although the Amsterdam Jewish Council was eventually made responsible for Jews across the entire country – and all Jews were ultimately removed to Amsterdam before being sent to Westerbork – there was a short term opportunity for the local Jewish Council in Enschede to take a different line. In contrast to groups elsewhere in the country, its leadership, made up of leading manufacturers and traders, actually encouraged the community to go underground, aided by warnings of imminent raids provided by a sympathetic police force and local authority that was not Nazified until the winter of 1942.<sup>13</sup> Its creation had come about in October 1941, crucially after the first arrests of Jews in the area as reprisals for acts of sabotage. It was also a border area that had had its own refugee committee in the 1930s and first-hand experience of what had befallen the Jews in Germany. Thus the Council was more attuned to the threats posed by the Nazis and more willing to countenance illegal activity at an early stage.<sup>14</sup>

The occupational and social structure of the Dutch Jewish community also militated against a climate of self-help. The Jewish elite and middle classes may have believed that their wealth and social position would help them, but there were instances where this acted as a retardant. Escape southwards in May 1940 was difficult and fraught with danger, and contemplating leaving homes and wealth to go underground even later in the occupation proved too much of a wrench for some. Even more pertinent was the protection afforded to some privileged individuals and their families through the system of exemption stamps that became a feature of the Jewish life in the Netherlands between July 1942 and September 1943, when the last of

12 Ben Braber, *Passage naar de vrijheid. Joodse verzet in Nederland, 1940-1945* (Amsterdam 1987) 39; 88-9. See also: idem, 'De rol van het joodse verzet in de tweede wereldoorlog', *TerHerkenning* 13 (1985) 227-237. There were also other groups, for example one centred within the 400 Jewish workers at the Hollandia-Kattenburg clothing company.

13 Jacques Presser, *Ondergang. De vervolging en verdelging van het Nederlandse Jodendom, 1940-1945* ('s-Gravenhage 1977) 406-7; Marjolein J. Schenkel, *De Twentse Paradox. De lotgevallen van de joodse bevolking van Hengelo en Enschede tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog* (Zutphen 2003) 82; 89-92.

14 Schenkel, *De Twentse Paradox*, 138-141.



Portrait of Abraham Asscher, one of the chairmen of the Dutch Jewish Council.

Source: WO2-Beeldbank NIOD

these stamps were rendered invalid and the remaining cohort of Jewish Council leaders were sent to Westerbork. Again, belief in the protection of the stamps militated against any step into illegality. For the far more numerous Dutch Jewish proletariat, there were fewer opportunities for bureaucratic protection through exemption stamps, but a lack of resources made living in hiding equally difficult to contemplate. What is more difficult to assess is whether impoverished Amsterdam Jews were any more isolated from their non-Jewish neighbours than their contemporaries in other Western European cities. As in Paris and Brussels, the working class Jews tended to be concentrated in specific districts but there were points of contact between Jews and non-Jews; in the neighbourhood, in social environments and at the workplace. Judging how important these factors (or their

absence) might be in fostering links when the first roundups took place in the summer of 1942 can only be judged at a neighbourhood level and the paucity of survivors from the Netherlands makes any empirical study fraught with difficulties.

### Escape

The possibilities for escape from the Netherlands were inevitably limited by distance from a neutral frontier. After the initial rush to the coast and southwards into France in May 1940, the logistics of making the journey across several hundred miles of German-held territory held many dangers. Unlike its neighbours to the south, the Netherlands had not been directly involved in the Great War and there were therefore no traditions of opposition and resistance to frame a civil re-

sponse to the events of 1940. In Belgium and Northern France, there were expectations of what a resumption of German hegemony would mean, but there were also some features in common with the Netherlands. Early forms of organised opposition often emanated from the ranks of the extreme left who had been involved in clandestine and semi-clandestine activities before the war or from among servicemen. The first instances of escape came about almost as soon as the war began, with soldiers who had been overrun or surrendered by their commanders and who were technically liable for internment, but who donned civilian clothes in an attempt to demobilise themselves and return home. In this, they were helped by the first embryonic civilian networks that provided food and shelter for those on the run. Given the chaos of May and June 1940, it is unclear how much effort the Germans put into tracking down evaders, but they were certainly interested in the British service personnel (both aircrew and the victims of the retreat to Dunkirk) who were also on the run. Even in these early days, helping pilots was seen as being of direct help to the ongoing war effort and it soon became clear that civilians could expect imprisonment and possible torture if caught, while most of their charges only had to show their service identity discs to be handed back to the military authorities.<sup>15</sup>

The civilians who formed the backbone of these early networks came from a wide variety of backgrounds. Many of the older generation in Belgium clearly remembered the occupation of 1914-1918 and needed no prompting to despise and hate the Germans. Indeed there were some who had been engaged in illegal work in that conflict and saw the events of 1940 as a reason to resume their clandestine activities. Perhaps the best example is of Walter Déwé's First World War network, 'La Dame Blanche' that became 'Clarence' in the later conflict. While many early networks remained specialised, or moved into other forms of resistance such as clandestine newspapers or sabotage, there were some organisations that started out by helping pilots or servicemen but later extended their rescue activities to include Jews. In these cases, the penalties for discovery were equally shared between rescuers and rescued. This seems to have been the case in

the Netherlands where early escape networks involving priests and local farmers began by helping escaping Belgian and French soldiers in areas near the German border. Similar groups and individuals near the southern border were able to expedite illegal frontier crossings into Belgium. Many of the problems of helping Allied airmen on the run; of appearance, language and lack of identity papers – were also to be evident in helping Jews later in the occupation. These first networks were often only concerned with a specific section of route, across a frontier or crossing point. They took the fugitives and transferred them onto the next staging post, often having no idea how the pilots or escaped prisoners might ultimately be moved to safety in neutral Switzerland or Spain.

Central to the work of these early escape networks were techniques for crossing frontiers and providing cover in the form of false papers. While the communists had pre-war experience of avoiding the scrutiny of state agencies, other groups had to learn by trial and error or harness the services of professionals. 'Passeurs' were an integral part of the frontier scene across Europe, making a living from the illicit movement of goods (and sometimes people) across international boundaries. After the arrival of the Germans, their services as conduits into Spain or Switzerland from both occupied and unoccupied France became increasingly sought after. Varian Fry had to find reliable guides for his fugitives across the Pyrenees and the Dutch-Paris network similarly used local expertise to spirit people across the Alps into Switzerland. This intersection of otherwise respectable opponents of German Nazism with the criminal classes was not restricted to border crossings as networks also required a source of forged or stolen papers to cloak their fugitives. Here again, there was a mixture of self help with individuals within networks with members turning their hand to forgery or theft, or employing criminals.

In this respect, the Netherlands during the Second World War again shows few differences from its neighbours, with continuities from behaviour patterns in the First World War and in the traditions of smuggling

15 M.R.D. Foot and J.M. Langley, *M19 Escape and Evasion 1939-1945* (London 1979) 83.

inherent in border regions. Charel Willekens was a native of Neerpelt in Belgium who was credited with helping at least 75 Belgian and Allied servicemen by collecting them and then putting them in touch with an escape line and assisting around 25 Jewish families from the Netherlands to cross the frontier on their way southwards.<sup>16</sup> However, his expertise as a *passeur* and illegal worker had been honed during the Great War when, by his own testimony, he had smuggled people, goods and mails across the Dutch frontier. Similarly, Maria Josepha (Miet) Cornelissen-Verhoeven had been caught and sentenced to death by the Germans for smuggling people and information during the First World War.<sup>17</sup> Reprived by the armistice in 1918 and decorated for her heroism by the Belgian state, she later married and went to live in the Belgian enclave of Baarle-Hertog where she ran a textile shop as well as raising a family of eight children. After the capitulation in 1940, she became involved in providing clothing and ration coupons for soldiers trying to escape internment. From here it was only a short step to a greater involvement – in smuggling people over the frontier, albeit this time in the opposite direction.<sup>18</sup> She was able to use her wider contacts outside the village, including traders and wholesalers elsewhere in Belgium as well as the smuggling community, eventually making contact with the Belgian resistance group Witte Brigade.<sup>19</sup> Even in 1940, her clientele included Jews as well as escaping prisoners and aircrew. Her network lasted until 1944, but at some point, it was betrayed to the Abwehr in Antwerp who allowed it to continue functioning, but

arrested the pilots when they arrived in the city. Only when the Allied advance moved into Belgium did the Germans act to round up the entire group.<sup>20</sup> Miet and two other members of the group were executed by firing squad on 10 September 1944.<sup>21</sup>

There were organised escape networks that originated in the Netherlands and had routes all the way to Switzerland or Spain, the most famous being Dutch-Paris and the Westerweel group. However finding and making contact with these groups was not easy.<sup>22</sup> Individual Jews or small family groups found it hard to make the journey southwards without outside help. Enlisting the assistance of local *passeurs* to cross frontiers was fraught with difficulty. As one fugitive who made it from the Netherlands into Belgium reflected

*They had usually fled in a hurry, often without any Belgian currency, arriving in a situation and a country that was totally alien to them, dog-tired and with shattered nerves. That is why it was vitally important to know someone that you could go to. Without contacts it was virtually impossible to save yourself.*<sup>23</sup>

Both the Dutch-Paris and Westerweel networks were created by motivated individuals who looked for routes to help Jews escape from Nazi persecution. They were built up through contacts with like-minded people and through association with other resistance groups, although how such links were initially made is sometimes clouded in mystery. Both were heavily dependent on the work of single individuals and although both networks survived the occupation, they were far from intact and most of their initiators had been arrested and/or executed, or gone to ground long before the liberation. The level of attrition involved here is testament both to the difficulties of maintaining security and to the assiduous nature of the German measures taken to apprehend these networks.

### Hiding

The first raids on Jewish neighbourhoods in Paris, Brussels and Amsterdam in the summer of 1942 produced very similar patterns, with the persecuted looking for whatever help they could from their non-Jewish friends,

16 *Het Volk* (Belgium), 16 June 1972.

17 Els Hofke, *Vrouw in Verzet. Miet Pauw en de bezetting in Baarle* (Baarle-Nassau 1989) 9-10.

18 *Ibidem*, 23-7.

19 *Ibidem*, 29-30; 35; 39.

20 Bob de Graaff, *Schakels naar de Vrijheid. Pilotenhulp in Nederland tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog* ('s-Gravenhage 1995) 106-7; Hofke, *Vrouw in Verzet*, 50. This seems to have happened after the arrest of a man waving a Dutch flag during *Dolle Dinsdag*. In the days thereafter a series of raids led to arrest of most of the network's members. Unusually, her husband had taken no interest in his wife's work and knew little of what was happening.

21 Hofke, *Vrouw in Verzet*, 52-62.

22 See: Moore, *Survivors*, 70. Yehudi Lindeman, 'All or Nothing: The Rescue Mission of Joop Westerweel' in: David Scrase et al eds., *Making a Difference. Rescue and Assistance during the Holocaust* (Burlington VT 2004) 242-263. De Jong, *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog* ('s-Gravenhage) VI, 340; Paldiel, *The Path of the Righteous: Gentile Rescuers of the Jews during the Holocaust* (Hoboken NJ 1993) 144.

23 CEGES-SOMA AB1491 N.Hamme, 'Een Hollander in België ondergedoken', 1.

neighbours, workmates and Christian religious leaders. Again, it is impossible to ascertain response rates to these appeals, or indeed how they were made. Requests for short-term shelter, to avoid the threat of a raid, could later turn into long-term commitments for help and security, but neither the victims nor the rescuers could really comprehend this at this early stage. In institutional and psychological terms, the non-indigenous Jews in France and Belgium were potentially better placed as the Amelot Comité in Paris and the Comité de Defense des Juifs were able to mobilise help from wider resistance networks and exploit contacts with non-Jewish bodies including local priests, welfare organisations and individual social workers. In the case of France, this included the Quakers and the YMCA through their charitable work during the Spanish Civil War, and most notably the Protestant Comité Inter-Mouvements Auprès d'Evacués (CIMADE), established in 1939 to help refugees evacuated from the frontier zones of Alsace and Lorraine.<sup>24</sup> When the first mass round ups took place in July 1942, the communists distributed a special leaflet directed at the immigrant Jews.

*Do not passively wait in your homes... Take steps to hide your families with non-Jews. If arrested, resist the police by all possible means: barricade your apartment, call for help, fight, do whatever you can to escape.*<sup>25</sup>

In Belgium CDJ links with non-Jewish organisations allowed it to find addresses and hiding places, and also secure a supply of false papers through its association with the Onafhankelijkheidsfront resistance organisation (FI), and co-operation sympathetic local mayors and amenable civil servants who incorporated false identities into existing population records.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, this system seems to hold the key to understanding how so many adult Jews survived with the help of the CDJ, not so much by hiding 'underground' but living false lives more or less in the open, while limiting their movements to reduce the risk of scrutiny of their papers. In total, the CDJ may have helped 15,000 in hiding and up to 30,000 individuals overall with false papers, encompassing not only the Jews inside Belgium, but also those passing through the country as well as several thou-

sand labour draft evaders. These favourable factors are in stark contrast to the advice encouraging compliance given by the Jewish Council in Amsterdam. Moreover, the non-Jewish organisations and networks that developed to help Jews in the Netherlands only began after the deportations had begun and their relationships with wider resistance groups were also thereby delayed.

While initial attempts to escape or go underground were similarly individual and localised in all countries, the pre-existence of links to supply ration cards and false papers needed for people to remain underground was potentially very important. In the Netherlands this problem was made particularly pressing by the comprehensive system of population registration and identity cards pioneered by Jacob Lentz, systems that were far less efficient – and far less efficiently enforced – elsewhere in Western Europe. The contrast between the Netherlands and France and Belgium here is stark. Whereas Jewish self-help in the latter was linked to the embryonic resistance movements from 1940 and 1941 onwards, the situation in the Netherlands produced neither much in the way of a resistance movement nor any organised clandestine Jewish response to persecution. Thus when the first deportations began in July 1942, the Jewish communities in Amsterdam and elsewhere had only their personal resources to fall back on. Indeed, the first truly widespread initiative to help people in hiding came only in October 1942 with the creation of the Landelijk Organisatie voor Hulp aan Onderduikers (LO). Primarily conceived to assist those on the run from compulsory labour service, over time it grew from its provincial roots to encompass most of the country, amalgamating or co-operating with existing rescue organisations as it encountered them, but even then, there was a tendency to segregate the help given to Jews into specialist networks because of the additional risks that such work was perceived to have.

The role of the major Christian denominations; their leaders, clerics and congregations,

24 Jacques Adler, *The Jews of Paris and the Final Solution: Communal Response and Internal Conflicts, 1940-1944* (New York/London 1987) 193.

25 Adler, *The Jews of Paris*, 194 cites *Dos Vort fun Vidershtant un Zieg*, A collection of illegal Yiddish publications 1940-1944 Mimeographed (Paris 1949) 105-6.

26 CEGES-SOMA AB2167 Comité de Defense des Juifs: Temoignages et Documents, 15.



has been much discussed in the literature on rescue. A comparison of Catholic leaders in France, Belgium and the Netherlands, namely Cardinal-Archbishop Pierre-Marie Gerlier of Lyon, Cardinal-Archbishop van Roey of Mechelen and Cardinal-Archbishop Johannes de Jong of Utrecht provides an example of how apparently differences in approach could make a substantial difference to responses within the wider world of clerics and congregations. In France, Gerlier had expressed his solidarity with the Jewish community, both in 1933 and again after *Reichskristallnacht* in 1938,<sup>27</sup> but was reputed to have 'an instinctive dislike for the Jews' based on their supposed role in the failure of the Union Générale bank that had led to the collapse of his family's fortunes. At the same time, he had good relations with the Jewish community leaders in Lyon and was viewed by them with respect.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, like the French population at large, he and his colleagues could be found making a distinction between the treatment meted out to foreign Jews, which they accepted as 'necessary', and the extension of the prejudicial legislation to French Jews, which they did not. Some of the leading clerics did choose to speak out. For example, Jules-Géraud Saliège, Archbishop of Toulouse promulgated a pastoral letter on 23 August 1942 affirming the position of the Jews as part of the human race. He was

followed soon afterwards by Pierre-Marie Théas, Bishop of Montauban and then by Gerlier himself, who spoke for, if not with the authority of, all the Catholic clergy in France and condemned the deportations while reaffirming his loyalty to the Marshal.<sup>29</sup> These admittedly prominent clerics were nevertheless a small minority and the Catholic Church was far from united on the issue. Influence was therefore largely limited to private advice to both clergy and lay-people within particular diocese to support Jews in hiding.<sup>30</sup> For example, Gerlier told the authorities in Lyon that if the police attempted to take Jewish children from Catholic institutions, he could not be responsible for public order in the city.<sup>31</sup>

The position adopted by Cardinal van Roey and Catholic institutions are also central to any understanding of the ways in which rescue developed in Belgium. Beyond neighbours and acquaintances, Christian leaders such as bishops and priests were often the first port of call for Jews who were forced to look for reliable help outside their own community. Initially this was often to obtain (false) baptismal certificates to exempt the holder from deportation, but later also encompassed requests for shelter, ration cards or help to escape the country altogether.<sup>32</sup> It is recorded that van Roey personally intervened on behalf of at least 52 people incarcerated at Mechelen or elsewhere, although few were saved. He remained opposed to public appeals to the Germans, even after the deportations had begun, preferring private interventions for individuals and small groups. His reasoning was that previous appeals on other issues had achieved nothing, that the Germans had promised not to touch Jews with Belgian nationality and that any protest might bring adverse consequences for Jewish children hidden in Catholic institutions.<sup>33</sup> There is no doubt that van Roey knew exactly what was happening in the Catholic cloisters and orphanages across the country and he had even privately sanctioned such actions personally, no doubt being aware of the complicity of his secretary, René Ceuppens in this work.<sup>34</sup> He was also aware of the deportations and wrote to the Vatican about the brutality and cruelty that revolted the Belgian people.<sup>35</sup> Van Roey therefore trod the same tightrope as many of his colleagues elsewhere in German-occupied

27 W.D.Halls, *Politics, Society and Christianity in Vichy France* (Oxford 1995) 97.

28 Halls, *Politics, Society and Christianity*, 99; 106. He was also a friend of Heilbronner, the chairman of the Consistoire Israélite de France, with whom he had studied law.

29 Francis R. Nicosia ed., *Archives of the Holocaust. Vol. 4 Central Zionist Archives 1939-1945* (New York 1990) 161-6 shows that these pastoral letters were widely distributed and known outside France. Rayski, *The Choice of the Jews under Vichy. Between Submission and Resistance* (Notre Dame IN 2005) 118-119.

30 Jeannine Frenk, 'Righteous Among the Nations in France and Belgium: A Silent Resistance', *Search and Research* 12 (2008) 55.

31 Sutters, *Archives of the Holocaust. Vol. 2 Pt. 2 American Friends Service Committee, Philadelphia 1940-1945* (New York 1990) 367; AFSC Lisbon, Confidential Memorandum, 19 September 1942, 3.

32 Saerens, 'Die Hilfe für Juden', 258.

33 Mark van den Wijngaert, 'Les Catholiques Belges et les Juifs durant l'occupation Allemande 1940-1944' in: Rudi van Doorslaer et al eds., *Les Juifs de Belgique. De l'immigration au Génocide, 1925-1945* (Brussels 1994) 121; Brachfeld, *Ze hebben het overleefd*, 72-3; Lieve Gevers, 'Catholicism in the Low Countries During the Second World War. Belgium and the Netherlands: a Comparative Approach' in: Lieve Gevers and Jan Bank eds., *Religion under Siege, I, The Roman Catholic Church in Occupied Europe (1939-1950)* (Leuven 2007) 222.

34 Gevers, 'Catholicism in the Low Countries', 222.

35 Leon Papeleux, 'Un Liégeois qui sauva des centaines de Juifs (1940-1944)', *La Vie Wallonie* (1980) 283; Van den Wijngaert, 'Les Catholiques Belges et les Juifs', 123. He also wrote a private letter to Cardinal Gerlier in Lyon condemning the deportation of the Jews.



Cardinal-Archbishop Johannes de Jong.

Source: WO2-Beeldbank NIOD

Europe, balancing the humanitarian and religious obligations of his office with the need to protect the secular interests of his church at a time of crisis.

In the Netherlands, the Roman Catholic Church took steps to protect the small number of Jewish-convert children in its schools and also refused to have signs prohibiting Jews placed in Catholic public institutions when these were introduced at the beginning of 1942. Soon after the deportations began, Cardinal de Jong's protest was read from every pulpit, prompting the Germans to arrest and deport most of the Catholic converts.<sup>36</sup> Ostensibly, de Jong had gone further than his counterparts in condemning the Nazi's actions in 1942, but thereafter seems to have been less proactive. The actual differences in the attitudes of the three men may have been little more than nuances, but they were enough to have a major impact in what happened 'on the ground' in individual

parishes. That said, it is also important to recognise that the Dutch Catholic Church had less of an 'institutional' and welfare role than its counterparts in France and Belgium. Nonetheless, the differing attitudes of leading clergymen and the very organisational structures of their churches were to have a profound effect on the incidence of rescue in the areas where they had influence. The important word here is 'influence'. Leading clerics had to be circumspect in their public pronouncements and it should be remembered that their control of religious and lay Catholic institutions was by no means complete as many owed their allegiance directly to Rome or to the headquarters of order concerned. Likewise Gerlier was only one of 94 archbishops in France and van Roey had only

36 Robert M.W. Kempner, *Twee uit honderduizend. Anne Frank en Edith Stein* (Bilthoven 1969) 102-110; A.P.M. Cammaert, *Het Verborgen Front. Geschiedenis van de georganiseerde illegaliteit in de provincie Limburg tijdens de tweede wereldoorlog*, Vol.1 (Leeuwarden/Mechelen 1994) 388-9.

limited control over his episcopal colleagues in other parts of the country. Thus 'influence' was exercised in more subtle ways with subordinates invoking their names in order to persuade the faithful to help shelter Jews or making it clear that they were 'following the directives' of the Cardinal.<sup>37</sup>

This is not to suggest that the influence of the Catholic Church was completely absent from the structures of rescue in the Netherlands. In all three countries, the hiding of Jews could take place in the cities where they lived or involve a move into the provinces. If the initial links were forged with clergymen in urban areas, they would often use their contacts with others whom they knew in other parts of the country. Thus parishes in rural districts could be harnessed to provide shelter for Jews through the mediation of the priest or pastor. This may help to explain the apparently random but concentrated distribution of fugitives. Some individual villages would have large numbers of Jews sheltered within their boundaries, while others would have none. The famous French examples of the Huguenot villages of Prélénfrey-du-Guâ and Le Chambon-sur-Lignon and the Catholic Dieulefit were all surrounded by other parishes where few if any rescues took place. Likewise in the Netherlands, there were hotbeds of activity, for example in Sneek and some of the nearby villages in Friesland where large numbers of Jews were hidden in private homes. In all these cases, the impetus came either from the priests or from motivated lay people who acted as network organisers but mobilised particular communities to help. This would sometimes grow – as demand for hiding places increased – beyond the realm of a single parish. In this regard, one can point to the work of Arnold Douwes in Drenthe as showing what could be achieved. However, even he was at pains to point out that even the active sanction and support of the local clergy was often not enough to persuade people to take the risk of harbouring Jews on the run.

Specific comments have been made about the importance of the orthodox Calvinist

communities in the Eastern Netherlands in hiding Jews. There are good examples to support this, but claims that their philanthropy owed its origins to the nature of Calvinist belief systems need to be treated with caution – as there are similar examples of communal mobilisation associated with specific Catholic parishes in the Southern provinces. Moreover, the uneven distribution of rescue in apparently similar locations would suggest other underlying factors at work. One other theory is that both Calvinists and Catholics saw themselves as persecuted minorities within the Netherlands and thus had greater affinity with the plight of the Jews.<sup>38</sup> This has been used to explain the relative absence of the majority *Hervormde* population among the rescuers, but it cannot provide a comprehensive answer. In essence, the patterns of communal mobilisation do not vary greatly between one country and another, but what defines the incidence of rescue is the motivation of key individuals capable of mobilising contacts and the communal organisations and hiding places to meet the needs of the fugitives.

Individual rescues were, of course, common to all three countries, but in the Netherlands, the initial lack of organisational structure meant that initiatives tended to remain at the individual and personal level, even when the numbers of those helped grew exponentially. Two cases will have to suffice here. One is the work of the Bogaard family in Nieuw-Vennep; a farmer and his sons who hid Jews brought or sent from Amsterdam. Attempts to broaden the base of their operations by involving their neighbours bore little fruit and the family farms became overloaded with fugitives. Raided on a number of occasions, it was only later in the occupation that the family was arrested. Security could not be maintained but outside help was not available to reduce the burden. A similar pattern can be seen in the work of Corrie ten Boom in Haarlem. Again this was a case of one or two 'guests' in the house escalating to larger numbers with only a limited recourse to other addresses. Her fate was ultimately the same as the Bogaards, namely arrest and deportation to a concentration camp. Other rescuers who were more successful in limiting their operations and who maintained their levels of security, either by luck or judgement, could

37 Yad Vashem M31/7529 Pierre and Henriette Ogier. Testimony of Maurice Ogier, 16 August 1996; Lucien Lazare, *Righteous Among the Nations: France*, 289–290; 413–414.

38 The same argument has been used to explain the disproportionate help afforded to the Jews by the very small Belgian protestant community.



The arrest of fugitives hiding at the farm of the Bogaard family in Nieuw-Venep, 6 October 1943.

Source: WO2-Beeldbank NIOD

ultimately call on help from organised groups and ultimately the LO, but there was no automatic channel for this to take place.

### Children

One feature of the rescue of Jews in the Netherlands is the emergence of specific organisations to help hide Jewish children. In both France and Belgium, this was subsumed into the wider networks of Jewish and non-Jewish clandestine groups, not least the Amelot Committee and the CDJ respectively, but the Netherlands saw the emergence of four specialist organisations devoted to the care of Jewish children. Two of these had their origins among the students of Utrecht and Amsterdam. Traditionally, student life in the Netherlands had been essentially a-political, taken up with the business of learning, sport and student societies. This slowly began to change as German impositions began to restrict student life through curfews and Nazi provocations. The *Utrechtsch Studenten*

*Corps* (USC), gave rise to the *Utrechtse Kindercomité*. This began to emerge at the time of the first deportations when a few motivated individuals began organising hiding places for individual children by involving their families and friends, both inside and outside the city.<sup>39</sup> Later they also harnessed the help of fellow students in Amsterdam.

The idea of specialisation with children came about because those involved believed that this was not seen as such a crime by the Germans, in spite of the fact that it still required many actions that were in themselves illegal, such as finding false ration cards. A further reason for limiting the activity to children was given by another member of the organisation.

39 Bert Jan Flim, *Omdat Hun Hart Sprak: Geschiedenis van de georganiseerde hulp aan Joodse kinderen in Nederland* (Kampen 1996) 31. The three instigators were Ad Groenendijk, Cor Bastiaanse and Jan Meulenbelt. In an interview, another leader, Hetty Voûte claimed that the inspiration came from seeing children in the Amsterdam streets after their parents had been taken away in the first raids. See: Mark Klempner, *The Heart has Reasons. Holocaust Rescuers and their Stories of Courage* (Cleveland OH 2006) 22.

*In July and August we had only a few female students and friends at our disposal. [...] But with a handful of amateurs you could not really do much more than [help] children. Thus it was an essential restriction [...] It was naturally also easier to find addresses. Indeed we did not believe that it was really illegal work. At least, that term was never used.<sup>40</sup>*

The perception that helping children could not be considered as a serious crime by the Nazis was in stark contrast taken about helping adult Jews, as a later quotation from an LO organiser indicates.

*Everything was finished when one [of those present] said, 'I still have a number of Jewish babies', what should we do with them? It was a sort of Jews-market, on all sides, here two, here five, in the end there weren't enough to go round. It was certainly wonderful that the whole problem was solved so completely. But no one would have an adult Jew.<sup>41</sup>*

A third group, the so-called Naamloze Vennootschap (NV) arose from a single Jewish family in need and a single Calvinist pastor. Constant Sikkel used a sermon, in a suitably circumspect way, to ask what might be done to help these people. Two brothers, Jaap and Gerard Musch responded by providing addresses in Friesland, while additional hiding places were furnished by other Calvinist pastors, including Gerard Pontier, who mobilised some of his parishioners in the southern town of Heerlen.<sup>42</sup> The final example is of the *Trouw*-group in Amsterdam, where Hester van Lennep became the prime-mover and was able to call on help from her extended family, members of the resistance

group, and later the networks of the underground newspaper itself.<sup>43</sup>

The absence of independent Jewish welfare organisations and the lack of any wider mobilisation to help the Jews before the call ups and deportations began meant that the first children taken into hiding by all these groups came primarily from personal contacts of would-be rescuers with individual Jewish families. Thus the numbers involved were initially very small. Only as the threat posed by the deportations increased, did the attitudes of Jewish parents begin to change. How they learned about the networks is difficult to determine, but it is clear that supply and demand did not always match. In the case of the student organisations, it appears that it became widely known in the Jewish districts of Amsterdam that there were students working to shelter and hide Jewish children. However, at this stage, only a minority saw the importance of leaving their children behind simply because there was an opportunity for them to be kept safe inside the Netherlands. Initially there was no structure to the work being done, and contacts were loose and often occurred by pure chance. This again contrasts with the more coherent and longer-standing relationships in both Belgium and France. The ways in which children came into the hands of these groups had some similarities across all countries. Doctors, social workers and welfare organisations all acted as witting or unwitting intermediaries, and there were certainly parallels between France, where children were removed from internment camps in the Vichy Zone, and in the Netherlands, where the crèche attached to the Hollandse (Joodse) Schouwburg holding centre in Amsterdam became a major source for many of the rescue groups. With assistance from some of those inside, notably Walter Süsskind and Virrie Cohen, some children were spirited away into the hands of rescue organisations. However, as Süsskind himself pointed out, this minority could only be saved because there were other children to cloak their departure.

### Conclusions

As has been pointed out by others, we do not yet have the local studies to take this analysis very far and conclusions will neces-

40 Flim, *Omdat Hun Hart Sprak*, 41, cites his interviews with Rut Matthijsen, 1 August 1990 and 16 May 1991.

41 NIOD LO-LKP LO/BP2 Het Gooi, LO-werk Oorlog 1940-1945, interview with Mr. Pos. Moore, *Victims and Survivors*, 178.

42 A.P.M Cammaerts, *Het Verborgen Front. Geschiedenis van de georganiseerde illegaliteit in de provincie Limburg tijdens de tweede wereldoorlog*, Vol.1 (Leeuwarden/Mechelen 1994) 410-411.

43 De Jong, *Het Koninkrijk VII*, 924-34; C.M.Schulden, "En verpletterd wordt het juk". *Verzet in Nederland 1940-1945* ('s-Gravenhage 1995) 135-6. The group was responsible for the assassination attempt against the leader of the Dutch troops fighting on the Eastern Front, General H.A. Seyffardt on 5 February 1943. The mortally wounded General implicated students as his attackers and the following day, raids took place against universities in Utrecht, Noord-Holland and Zuid-Holland. Flim, *Omdat Hun Hart Sprak*, 39.

sarily remain impressionistic. It seems clear that the differences between rescue in the Netherlands when compared with Belgium and France are primarily in the structures of the organisations involved. In both France and Belgium, the importance of Jewish self-help generated from migrant political and welfare groups at an early stage in the occupation underlines the speed of reaction when the deportations began. The degree of integration with wider non-Jewish welfare and resistance movements also offset some of the practical problems in helping those in hiding at an early stage. In effect, this meant that a larger number of Jews under threat had the prospect of a source of assistance beyond the German-coordinated 'official' Jewish AJB or UGIF, and that the CDJ and its French counterparts had already established or at least investigated the possibilities of working with other institutions such as welfare bodies, children's organisations and the Catholic (and Protestant) Churches. This is in stark contrast to the Netherlands where there was no such alternative and where Jewish self help could not develop in the same way. While all countries produced individual rescues, it took much longer to develop in the Netherlands and was less well integrated before being at least partly subsumed by the activities of the Landelijke Organisatie. It is also worth noting that in the case of rescuing children – who were considered as a special case in every country – there was a greater proliferation of organisations in the Netherlands because these were instigated by non-Jewish groups.

A further element of comparison can be seen in the attitudes of leading churchmen. Gerlier, van Roey and de Jong have been cited here as central figures of the Catholic Church in their respective countries. At first glance, their public statements do not seem particularly different and indeed de Jong was the most outspoken on the issue of the deportations. However, it seems to have been their private advice and guidance to their subordinates that acted as a spur to harnessing the power of the Church to help Jews in hiding. In this respect, van Roey and Gerlier seem to have been more effective in mobilising help than de Jong, although their roles should not be overemphasised as it is quite possible that motivated individuals may well have used the names of their cardinal-archbishops to en-

courage lay help without their formal sanction. While the role of the prelates has to be taken into account in persuading the faithful to shelter the Jews, it should be remembered that the Church also had resources to provide direct help through its own institutions and that these were far more prevalent in Belgium and to some extent in France than they were in the Netherlands. In the case of the nonconformist churches, which are obviously more important in the Dutch context, there was no possibility of central direction and what links existed were forged between individual clergymen in different parts of the country which in turn may help to explain the distribution of hiding places being concentrated in specific towns and villages. In this Dutch context, perhaps the most pertinent issue is to explain the relative absence of the Hervormde community among the rescuers when compared with their prominence within the population.

Traditionally, national or personal narratives of rescue have dominated the historiography but these can only tell the stories of those who escaped or hid, or highlight the righteous within the non-Jewish community. In the future, it may be the case that more detailed quantitative data will provide some further answers, but in the meantime, comparing the Netherlands with neighbouring Western European countries offers the best way of understanding this elusive subject.

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