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# “Taken to German Villages and Liquidated.” The “Selbstschutz” Organization and the Bogdanovka Massacre in 1941

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**Abstract:** The killing of up to 40,000–50,000 Jews in Bogdanovka in the winter of 1941–1942 represented one of the largest murder operations carried out during the Holocaust outside of Auschwitz, Sobibor and Treblinka extermination camps. The massacre was the result of a cooperation between the German "Sonderkommando Russland" with the support of the "volksdeutscher Selbstschutz" as well as the Romanian gendarmes and their Ukrainian auxiliary forces. This article examines this massacre in three different aspects. The first part reconstructs how Transnistria was administered on a bilateral level between Nazi Germany and fascist Romania, and became a place of mass extermination. The second part of the article deals with the reconstruction of the massacre in a micro-historical perspective by using chiefly eyewitness interviews of local residents. The last part of this work, which is based on an organizational sociological approach, examines the mobilization and willingness to kill of those ethnic Germans who were recruited by the Sonderkommando Russland.

**Keywords:** Bogdanovka, oral history, perpetrator research, Transnistria, volksdeutsche

## 1 Introduction

The killing of up to 40,000–50,000 Jews in Bogdanovka in the winter of 1941–1942 represented one of the largest murder operations carried out during the Holocaust outside of Auschwitz, Sobibor and Treblinka extermination camps. The massacre was the result of a cooperation between the German "Sonderkommando Russland"

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(SK R) with the support of the "volksdeutscher Selbstschutz" (SeS) as well as the Romanian gendarmes and their Ukrainian auxiliary forces.<sup>1</sup>

In a "Foreign Office" document about the deportation of Jews across the Bug river, there is a note dated May 14, 1942: "In Transnistria, the 28,000 Jews were taken to German villages. In the meantime they were liquidated."<sup>2</sup> The murder in this note sounds like a "matter of course". The "28,000 Jews" resemble a mass whose origin does not require any mention, the "German villages" stand for the naturalness of the killing, and the word "liquidation" replaces the slaughter. A historian is faced with two tasks due to the character of this note, which I will scrutinize in this work. The word "liquidation" is to be deciphered through the thick description of the Bogdanovka massacre. This mass murder, which is summarized by the Nazis only in a marginal note, requires a closer look to describe the fate of the victims in more detail. Furthermore, one of these "German villages" and its perpetrators will be analyzed. It is not self-evident that ethnic Germans participated in the Holocaust. In advance, processes had been set in motion to mobilize this group for the German Reich and ultimately for the Holocaust. This thesis will deal with these two issues, which in the view of the National Socialists, as well as the allied Romania, seemed to be a matter of course.

Research on the Bogdanovka massacre has grown significantly in recent years. Ancel had provided extensive documentation and research on the mass killings in Transnistria since the 1980s. In the most recent research literature on the mass murders in Transnistria, a number of trends are emerging, which in part extend or correct Ancel's findings. Eric Steinhart's work on the involvement of ethnic Germans and Sonderkommando R in Transnistria and Diana Dumitru's analysis of the local population's behavior in Transnistria in comparison to Bessarabia are particularly noteworthy in this regard (Dumitru 2016; Steinhart 2010a, 2010b, 2015). In addition, a very detailed article by Dumitru has shed light on the local cooperation between the Romanian police and the "SK R" (Dumitru 2019). Also remarkable are the studies by Vladimir Solonari, which succeed in showing how the Bogdanovka massacre cannot be explained solely in functionalist terms, and neither do the local actors alone provide a sufficient explanation for the massacre

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<sup>1</sup> It is impracticable to give the exact casualty figures. On the one hand, one must distinguish between the murder caused by the catastrophic conditions in the camps, the robbery murders of errant Jews, the murder of about 4000 old and disabled people by burning and the shootings at the Bogdanovka ravine. Nevertheless, in some sources straight figures can be found. The general consensus seems to be to assume a range of 40,000–52,000 Jews as the total number of victims. In the bill of indictment at the trial in Romania of the first group of war criminals there can be found the total number of 48.000 (Deletant 2014, 181; Dumitru 2019, 173).

<sup>2</sup> Bundesarchiv-Außenstelle Ludwigsburg, B162/2289, Compilation of previous knowledge, 16.11. 1961, p. 153.

(Solonari 2017a). It should be emphasized that the respective works on Bogdanovka keep adding details about the crime and the perpetrators, and that a phase has now been reached in which it is important to re-evaluate sources already used and to delve further into the oral history documents. Although Steinhart has already dealt in detail with the perpetrators from Bogdanovka, this study will attempt to analyze the common denominator of those ethnic German perpetrators, namely the organization "Selbstschutz" (SeS). This will be done based on the organizational sociological approach of Stefan Kühl (Kühl 2014).

My research will draw on a variety of sources, which require a brief introduction. First, Ancel provides documents from the Romanian archives in his book "Transnistria 1941–1942: the Romanian Mass Murder Campaigns" (Ancel 2003). Although Ancel provides profound insight from the Romanian side's sources, it is limited to that perspective because the blame for the crimes in Transnistria is attributed exclusively to the Romanian civilians and military authorities (Buchseweiler 1984, 378).

Second, I will bring findings from the archival records of the "Central Office of the State Justice Administrations for the Investigation of National Socialist Crimes" into this work. This institution in Ludwigsburg was established to counteract the crisis in the federal German justice system with regard to the investigation of National Socialist (Nazi) crimes. The Ludwigsburg institution systematically investigates the crimes based on place and time. For historical work with files from this collection, interrogation transcripts, indictments, verdicts, and remarks on the case are available in an abbreviated form. It is also necessary to point out the interrogated persons' imponderables. Through the files, it is possible to compare the very same person's several statements (Kunz 2009, 225–28). Many of the ethnic Germans from Transnistria heard in the investigation of Nazi crimes had come to Germany with the withdrawal of the Wehrmacht (Völkl 1996, 92).

Third, conclusions will also be drawn from the work of the Soviet investigative authorities. From the files of the Bundesarchiv-Außenstelle Ludwigsburg (BAL) B162/2308 and B162/2313, the cooperation of West German and Soviet authorities in the investigation of Nazi crimes can be seen. These files are a translated report on the "Administrative Committee for State Security at the SM [Ministry of Security] of the USSR in the Nikolaev region".<sup>3</sup> In order to place these process files in historical context, the following should be noted: starting in 1941, People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD) began its investigations of collaborators. Those who had committed crimes against the civilian population or the Red Army were threatened with 15–20 years in labor camps. During the first postwar years, about 300,000 Soviet citizens were arrested for collaboration (Pohl 2009, 132). The files from the court case in Nikolaev from 1967 will be used here. Especially in the 1960s, many

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3 BAL, B162/2308, translation, p. 39.

ethnic Germans were put on trial. A large part of this group had already been sent into exile immediately after the end of the war. The trials are more significant from a legal point of view. There was a change in the conduct of proceedings against collaborators, and individuals were tried in elaborate trials (Ibid., 136–37). For historical researchers, these trial records are useful for learning biographical information about the perpetrator organizations and microhistorical processes (Ibid., 139–40). Although it seems "counterintuitive" regarding the long history of politicized justice and manipulation of legal matters in the SU, these trial files are appropriate source material for historical scholarship as Vladimir Solonari notes (Solonari 2017b, 193).

Fourthly, eyewitness interviews of the organization "Yahad – In Unum" (YIU) conducted during research trips in the area around Bogdanovka will serve. The organization founded by the French priest Patrick Desbois has set itself the goal of opening up the extermination sites of the "Holocaust by Bullets" with the methods of "oral history". The eyewitness interviews are usually from the perspective of the so-called "bystanders" of the Holocaust (Raul Hilberg). Working with this interview material posits several problems: first, the person must remember incidents in the past, some of which were traumatic. In addition, most of the contemporary witnesses were children or adolescents during the war years, which makes recourse to memory questionable. Second, the eyewitnesses sometimes recount their experiences for the first time. Other accounts are narrativized through rehearsed storytelling, enriched by extraneous memories. An open narrative structure characterizes the interpretations containing the contemporary witness' personal experiences during the war, information of the local Jewish population and the circumstances of their execution. Thirdly, due to the age of the witnesses, they are the last persons who can give an account of what happened. In places, their accounts are difficult to structure due to memory weaknesses and lack of concentration. As a result, contradictions sometimes occur. Fourth, the interview does not take place in front of a backdrop, but, if possible, in the very places of the events. Not only the familiarity of the place, but in some cases that of the language also provides the eyewitness opportunity to unfold better (Szczepan 2017, 124–25).

Despite these difficulties, when researching the Holocaust it is important to draw on the perspective of the bystander. They allow us to understand the dynamics outside the perpetrator-victim dichotomy because the "bystanders" are at once the closest and most distant witnesses to the event. The narrative does not stop where the physical violence stops, but also shows the impact that the Holocaust had on an entire village community (Ibid., 132).

## 2 The Local Final Solution

### 2.1 The Acquisition of Transnistria and the Two Phases of Deportations

In order to understand the Bogdanovka massacre, it is necessary to understand the political events that led to the emergence of Transnistria under Romanian control. With the invasion of the Soviet Union (SU) in the summer of 1941, the cooperation between fascist Romania and Nazi Germany intensified. First, Bessarabia was reconquered, which had been annexed by the SU in 1940 with the approval of the German Reich. By July 1941, Bessarabia was once again under Romanian administration (Steinhart 2010a, 298–300). This was followed by placing Transnistria under Romanian rule as well, according to Adolf Hitler and Ion Antonescu's agreement at a meeting in Munich in July of the same year. The Transnistrian area, located between the Dniester and Bug rivers, had already been under Soviet control for some time, unlike Bessarabia. On August 30, 1941, in the "Agreement of Tighina" the responsibilities for Transnistria were settled between Brigadier General Nicolae Tătăranu and Major General Arthur Hauffe. The seventh point of the treaty stipulated that Jews could not be temporarily deported across the Bug River and were to be interned in "concentration camps" at the Bug River.<sup>4</sup> In September and October, the Romanians began to make the Transnistria area administratively viable as a "military colony". They appointed sub-prefects, most of whom were local nationals.<sup>5</sup>

The political agenda of Transnistria, was in line with the policy set by Ion Antonescu in the "Regat Romania." The population policy, which had been carried out in Romania from 1940, foresaw the ethnic homogenization of the country. On October 6, 1941, at a meeting the Council of Ministers decided to deport the Jews from Romania to Transnistria (Achim 2009, 153–57). On the same day, Antonescu ordered the capture of all Jews in Transnistria. They were to be taken further to the camps by the Bug River, as previously planned by Transnistria Governor Georghe Alexianu (Ancel 2003, 559 [Document No. 63, October 6, 1941]). The anti-Jewish measures in Transnistria had been preceded by deportations of Jews from Bessarabia and Bukovina in the summer and early autumn of 1941 (Heinen 2007, 127). During this phase, the Jews from the rural areas were forced into transit camps and from the cities into ghettos. They were gathered on the western bank of the Dniester River while the status of Transnistria remained unclear (Ioanid 2000, 122). In early August

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<sup>4</sup> Mihok 2009, Dokument 1: Die Vereinbarung von Tighina, 30. August 1941, 241–43.

<sup>5</sup> BAL, B162/2289b, Compilation of previous knowledge, in Ludwigsburg on November 16, 1961, pp. 145–46.

1941, the Romanians made the first attempts to deport Jews from Bessarabia to Transnistria. This led to a conflict of interest with the German commanders in the area around Securenî (Sokyryany), east of the Dniester River. The German military considered the sudden appearance of several thousand Jews without a broad-based Romanian guard a security risk. The Germans drove the Jews back to Bessarabia, west of the Dniester (Ioanid 2000, 120). This grotesque "interplay" continued for about a month. Here the deportations and the conditions of the camps became increasingly hostile, resulting in up to 150,000 deaths from epidemics, starvation, and violent acts by the Romanian soldiers who accompanied the death marches (Ibid., 170–75). The exact number is difficult to determine, as it is impossible to estimate how many Jews were evacuated under the Soviets. Likewise, the numbers of arriving deportees in Transnistria vary.

However, as Armin Heinen put it, the Romanians had pursued their own "logic of violence in handing over responsibility over the Jews to the Germans (Heinen 2007, 127–28)." For the second phase of deportations to the southern bank of the Bug within Transnistria, similar patterns to the camp formation on the Dniester can be identified. The Jews were to be driven eastward across the Bug and thus handed over to the German occupiers in the "Reichskommissariat Ukraine" (RK U). Once again, the calculation did not work out (Steinhart 2010a, 312). However, there were special circumstances as this area was partially under German administration. As a result, despite the conflict being in the Romanian-administered territory, the German side also developed a need for action.

## 2.2 The "Sonderkommando R" in Transnistria

Besides the issue of exterminating the Jews from Romania, Bessarabia, Bukovina and Transnistria, the Germans had other racial-political interests in Transnistria. In August 1941, various military units ("73. Infanteriedivision") and special units ("Organisation Roland") "discovered" German colonies in Transnistria (Angrick 2009, 82). In order to protect the ethnic Germans from attacks by the Romanian army, the axis powers agreed on a permanent presence of a German "Sonderkommando" in the respective colonies. The "Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle" ("VoMi") took care of the dispatch of the so-called "Sonderkommando Russland", which set out from Berlin with about a hundred vehicles between August 1941 and spring 1942 and established an administrative network in the Black Sea area. Sonderkommando R divided the areas into 18 "Bereichskommandos" (BK), each of which was subordinated to an officer of "Sonderkommando R" (Angrick 2009, 86–87). The officers had usually been active in "völkisch" movements for some time and as "old fighters" and activists of the Freikorps who had by then become violent

perpetrators of the Holocaust. The head of the "SK R" Horst Hoffmeyer moved into the headquarters in Landau (Shyrokolanivka) (Steinhart 2015, 46–48).

In addition, the members of the "Bereichskommando XI" must be mentioned, who took up positions in Rastatt (Poritschtscha). "BK XI" leader Rudolf Hartung was a "Volksdeutscher" born in Bucharest in 1905. He held the rank of "SS-Obersturmführer" and had spent the interwar period in Galicia. His commitment to the German cause, and his knowledge of the Russian language and the Eastern territories brought him into the ranks of the "VoMi" under Hoffmeyer (Steinhart 2010a, 315–17). Hartung was a superior to SS-Untersturmführer Johann Stettler, "Nationalsozialistischer Kraftfahrkorps (NSKK)-Oberscharführer" Walter Petersen, and another member of the "NSKK", Hans Gleich (Steinhart 2010b, 75).

Tensions repeatedly arose between German and Romanian interests. The relationship was burdened by the lack of comradeship between Heinrich Himmler and Ion Antonescu (Steinhart 2015, 73). Besides, on the local level, especially the arming of the "Volksdeutsche" caused disputes with the Romanians.<sup>6</sup> A contractual solution for the ethnic Germans in Transnistria was reached only on December 13, 1941, when the governor of Transnistria Gheorge Alexianu and Hoffmeyer signed a treaty transferring the sovereignty of the German territories to the Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle.<sup>7</sup> This authority was responsible for the organization of all "Volksdeutsche" outside the German Reich. From this moment on, the presence of the "SK R" in Transnistria can be understood "as a state within the state".<sup>8</sup>

## 2.3 The Decision to Murder the Jews

The treatment of the Jews and the accompanying conceptualization of the Final Solution in this bilateral relationship are under different starting conditions. The Germans had created units for the extermination of the Jews with the "Einsatzgruppen". In Romania's politics under Antonescu, this orientation of the National Socialists toward the Jews was not met with any opposition, but the interests collided on occasions. For the Romanians, the solution of the Jewish question meant the disappearance of Jews from Romanian land into formerly Soviet territories. Frictions arose, primarily on the timing and jurisdiction of the extermination of the Jews. The Germans had made it clear that the extermination of

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<sup>6</sup> Hoppe/Glass (2011), Doc. 307 on 19.11.1941, pp. 792–93.

<sup>7</sup> Ancel (2003), Document nr. 265 on December 13, 1941, pp. 613–14.

<sup>8</sup> BAL, B162/2289b, Compilation of previous knowledge, in Ludwigsburg on November 16, 1961, p. 150.

the Jews in Transnistria could not be accomplished with ongoing military actions. The 600-man strong "Einsatzgruppe D" in "Reichskommissariat Ukraine" (RK U) was already overburdened with the liquidations of the local Jews in southern Ukraine (Ioanid 2000, 121–22). Not only did the Romanians hope for the executions to take place in "RK U" but Horst Hoffmeyer also contacted the head of "Einsatzgruppe D", Otto Ohlendorf.<sup>9</sup> Finally, all parties were confronted with the requirement for the shootings to take place in Transnistria. Therefore, the decision to murder the Jews was made. Recent research by Dumitru has shed more light on the Romanian complicity in the Bogdanovka crimes. Yet she concludes: "In the case of Bogdanovka massacre, historians were not able to locate an order issued directly from Bucharest" (Dumitru 2019, 163).

The Romanians were prompted to carry out the extermination of the Jews in Bogdanovka for two reasons. First, in the spatial concepts of order that Alexianu had about Transnistria, the presence of Jews was a risk. On the other hand, the disastrous conditions in which the Jews were interned had affected the local population and the Romanian soldiers. The Romanians had already suffered massively from the spread of typhus during the First World War (Ancel 2003, 121). Other factors playing into the Romanians' decision to kill the Jews at Bogdanovka arose from national purge discourses, and the lack of empathy toward Soviet Jews (Dumitru 2019, 164).

The "SK R" participated in the shootings for similar reasons. The "German villages" project was also threatened by epidemics. Mass killings had not been a task of the "VoMi" up until then. However, it can be presupposed that members of the "SK R" had already internalized certain strategies of action through other missions. In the work of the "SK R" on the ground, spontaneous decisions were necessary to manage large areas (Lower 2006, 196; Steinhart 2010a, 314–16). Hartung, who already had some experience, could have carried out this decision to a large extent without consulting Hoffmeyer, since the shootings had taken place chronologically before the other "BKs". In addition, there was a conviction of the shootings being a one-time job. The further deportations, which later arrived in the other German colonies had not been predictable at the time.<sup>10</sup> Additional background will be shown in the micro-historical analysis.

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<sup>9</sup> According to Vahldieck, communication between Hoffmeyer and Ohlendorf did not take place until spring 1942. Nevertheless, it is possible that communication also existed because of the shootings in Bogdanovka. BAL, B162/2295, „50.000 Juden aus Odessa“ Report by Walter Vahldieck, pp. 25–27.

<sup>10</sup> Vahlendieck's report covers those deportation trains that came from Odessa and were reported by the "BK leader" Bernhard Streit and Hoffmeyer only in early 1942. BAL, B162/2295, „50.000 Juden aus Odessa“ Report by Walter Vahldieck, pp. 25–27.



## 3 The Massacre in a Micro-historical Perspective

### 3.1 The Micro-historical Perspective

To analyze the violent practices and the dynamics of violent acts, a micro-historical approach is needed. The following chapter will describe the violent act on a phenomenological level. The events carried out in Bogdanovka at the end of 1941 will be scrutinized in the context of the massacre. The question of "why" will not be discussed in this part, but rather answers to the question of "how" a massacre was made possible will be presented. It serves to illustrate a process involving mass killings in an occupied society. In search of causes of the massacre, several aspects can be emphasized. It was the result of an occupation in a military and political context; of a particular village community having been remodelled into a *Volksgemeinschaft*; and, ultimately, actors in this situation. These circumstances require a thick description. The micro-historical perspective on the individual events of the Holocaust helps better understand the individual actors situationally. According to the approach of Desbois, microhistory is "a way to give back the responsibility to everyday people (Lustiger-Thaler 2017, 140)." The role of the local population sometimes is an important factor in the implementation of the Holocaust. In her description of the mass murder in Bogdanovka, Dumitru assumed that „No other civilians from the surrounding area were involved, either in the shooting or in logistical support (Dumitru 2016, 227–228).“<sup>11</sup> I will argue that this statement is at least debatable.

### 3.2 Bogdanovka Immediately Before the Massacre

The events, which took place in Bogdanovka and its surroundings are described in the Black Book by Odessa survivor Elisabeth Pikarmer as follows: "One would need the talent of a painter to draw a picture of the horror that took place [...]" (Altman and Grosman 1995, 136).<sup>12</sup> In mid-December, the number of Jews deported to Bogdanovka was about 52,000 (Ancel 2003, 117), and the death rate of Jews at that time rose to five hundred people a day in sub-zero temperatures (Ancel 2003, 117).

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<sup>11</sup> Steinhart arrives at a similar conclusion as Dumitru: "From the available records, it is unclear why the killing operation leaders did not draw more heavily on local Ukrainians from the town of Bogdanovka to provide logistical support for the murders (Steinhart 2010a, 335)."

<sup>12</sup> She talks about the Domanevka camp, which was located about 20 km further north of Bogdanovka. Nevertheless, it is an authentic characterization of the catastrophic conditions in these places across the many camps on the Bug.

The Jews were held like cattle. In the adjacent sovkhoses, infectious dwellings, such as pigsties were cleared to confine the Jews in (YIU/325U). Haim Cogan, one of the survivors of the "Arbeitskommando" estimates there were about 20–50 such stalls (Ancel 2003, 117). However, according to a resident, there were only 20 stalls (YIU/483U). Another Ukrainian witness stated that the sovkhos had room for 22,000 pigs (YIU/482U). In short, all the stables of the adjacent sovkhoses were used to intern the Jews. Pictures taken by the Soviet Commission in 1944 show that the stables were only provided with thatched roofs and holes in the walls open to the side. Survivor Meir Feingold describes the pigsties:

Every place I approached was full. People were lying on top of one another, inside one another in pigsties. [...] Hundreds of Jews died every day. [The authorities] gave no food. Ukrainians from the villages in the area would come to the fence with potatoes, onions or milk and barter for a pair of galoshes, pants [...] We had nothing (Ancel 2003, 115–16).

The Jews died on the streets, during the deportations and in the pigsties. Insufficient hygiene led to the outbreak of typhus, added to the lack of food and cold were the major factors leading to mass mortality. It was not possible to bury the bodies into the frozen ground. Even the feed silos along the Bug were so full of corpses that there was no room for more dead bodies (Ancel 2003, 117). Finally, the corpses were disposed wherever it was possible. Many Jews tried to hide if they managed to escape from the death marches. There were local residents who hid some of the Jews nevertheless, the danger posed by the local population was quite high. A local witness reports that an ethnic German from nearby almost killed him. His family managed to hide 14 Jews throughout the war. Occasionally, Jews roamed the villages begging for food and clothing. Some of them still possessed valuables that they could exchange (YIU/326U). False identification documents could be issued with bribes (YIU/2463U).<sup>13</sup> Their chances of surviving the harsh winter of 1941 outdoors were close to zero. A local resident reports that the "Selbstschutz" threw the frozen bodies of the dead into wells therefore the water was only fit for the cattle. Such desperate solutions only increased the danger of the transmission of typhus to the local population (YIU/326U).

By mid-December, more and more Jews had died of hunger. It was then forbidden for the rest of them to leave the stables. The only possibility to organize food was to trade with villagers who still dared to go to the stables (Ancel 2003, 118). Several Ukrainian residents reported that it had been possible to bring food in secret to the pigsties at night. The pigsties were constantly guarded, and the Jews were hardly allowed access to water (YIU/326U; YIU/2463U). At the beginning of

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<sup>13</sup> The Voloshin family was included in the Righteous Among the Nations list in 2012.

December, shortly before the beginning of the extermination of the "camp",<sup>14</sup> the Romanian police chief Georghe Bobei from Golta (Pervomaisk) came to Bogdanovka. Bobei went around with a Jew named Izu Landau and approached specifically those Jews who appeared to be hiding valuables. Landau conveyed to them that the Jews' forced contributions would be logged and compensated by the Romanian National Bank (Dumitru 2019, 173 Fn. 102). Ancel characterized this method as "robbery by protocol" (Ancel 2003, 118).

To collect the last valuables of the Jews, Praetor Isopescu or Bobei<sup>15</sup> used a perfidious method on December 13 and 14: he ordered the local Ukrainian population to bake bread, which he then sold to the Jews for five gold rubles per loaf. He carried the captured valuables and money with him when he left again for the local police headquarters in Golta.<sup>16</sup> The experiment lasted only five days because most of the Jews were destitute by then. Nevertheless, it was a success for the praetor, who extorted several thousands of rubles (Ancel 2003, 119). After most of the Jews' valuables were collected, the execution of the Romanian-run camp at Bogdanovka proceeded. Steinhart notes that despite the decision to murder the camp inmates, deportations from Odessa continued (Steinhart 2010a, 338–39). These columns, which had been forced in the direction of the Bogdanovka camp, were then diverted to the settlements of the "Volksdeutsche", were they had been received by other "SeS" units who escorted them through the villages.<sup>17</sup> Thus, even during the shootings, further march of Jews were on their way to Bogdanovka.

### 3.3 The Bogdanovka Massacre<sup>18</sup>

For various reasons the village of Bogdanovka functioned as a bottleneck-shaped arrival point for deported Jews from Bessarabia and Bukovina. The Bogdanovka massacre of 1941 marked the beginning of the second phase of the exterminations

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<sup>14</sup> The word "camp" is too euphemistic to describe the living conditions of the Jews in the pigsties in Bogdanovka. However, this term appears again and again in the literature. Leo Spitzer points out that there are some overlaps with the terms used in the German camp system (Spitzer 2017, 106–107).

<sup>15</sup> The different assumptions as to who sold the bread can certainly be traced back to the vague statement of V. K. She speaks only of the police chief from Golta. BAL, B162/2311, Statement of the resident K., V. in a report of the Soviet investigation commission of May 2, 1944, p. 28.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> BAL, B162/2303, Interrogation of S., E. on October 17, 1964 in Spalt, p. 40.

<sup>18</sup> The events described here are particular for the shooting at the ravine south of the Bug in December 1941. Other shootings by Selbstschutz, Romanian gendarmes, members of Sonderkommando R and Ukrainian auxiliary troops, which happened at other locations in Bogdanovka, have already been mentioned or are being described.

of Jews in southern Transnistria. Prior to that, the "Einsatzgruppe D" had been shooting Jews and communists (also of ethnic German origin) immediately after the military invasion of Transnistria<sup>19</sup> as well as, the "SK R" had also been carrying out individual shootings (Angrick 2009, 82–84). The activity in the entire Black Sea region can also be reconstructed quite well from the event reports of the Einsatzgruppen.

Some of the shootings in Bogdanovka were decentralized. Ivan Pastushenko, one of the "SeS" men, mentioned in his interrogation: "I shot people in the village of Bogdanovka, on the estates of Bogdanovski, Velikovka and Makarovka."<sup>20</sup> Despite many sources' familiarity with the various shooting sites, it is not possible to get a clear picture of the spatial and temporal framework of the massacre. However, what is certain that the largest shooting took place near the Bogdanovka sovkhos at a ravine, in the period at least from December 18 to 29.<sup>21</sup> Another problem is the exact identification of the perpetrators. The sources on the cooperation between units on the Romanian side and the "SK R" are very scanty.

On December 18,<sup>22</sup> the Ukrainian police guarding the camp began sealing the entrances of two large pigsties. Inside, they forced all the inmates of the camp who were too frail to reach the ravine two to three km away (Ancel 2003, 127–28). This ravine had been previously scouted as a suitable place for their plans with the inmates. On the same day, December 18, they began to exterminate the Jews in large numbers,

a passenger car came into the camp, in which 2 German officers and a civilian were sitting. The aforementioned persons, accompanied by the head of the local gendarmerie Melinescu, visited the camp and its surroundings and photographed [...] [the] ravine that stretched towards the river Bug.<sup>23</sup>

This statement by the survivor F. K. is one of the few sources providing information on Romanian-German cooperation on the ground. It is very likely that the two officers were members of the "Bereichskommando XI".

There were about 2000 people in each of these stables. According to a survivor of the massacre, Haim Cogan the Ukrainian auxiliary forces set fire to the stables with the 2000 people inside (Ancel 2003, 127–28). While the stables were burning,

<sup>19</sup> BAL, B162/2291, Interrogation of Zeeb, Jakob on February 16, 1962 in Velbert, pp. 49–51.

<sup>20</sup> BAL, B162/2308, Interrogation of Pastuschenko, Ivan on May 29, 1967 in Nikolaev, p. 95.

<sup>21</sup> BAL, B162/2311, Document of the Investigative Commission on the Bogdanovka shootings, p.35.

<sup>22</sup> Ancel gives the date for the burnings of the 4000 Jews as December 21, 1941 (Ancel 2003, 127–128). Steinhart gives December 18 as the date (Steinhart 2010a, 320).

<sup>23</sup> BAL, B162/2311, Statement of the resident K., F. in a report of the Soviet Investigation Commission of May 2, 1944, p. 28.

it is likely that local Ukrainian neighbors were forced to bring straw to the site. One resident describes the situation threatening for those who had to deliver the straw: "I know that people, men, were forced to bring straw. They were shot if they didn't" (YIU/325U).<sup>24</sup> This straw was then placed by the stables as additional fuel (Ioanid 2000, 183–84). Straw was continuously thrown on the huts: the fire burned all people alive (YIU/325U). According to a statement of the ethnic German perpetrators, the "SeS" from Bogdanovka was not involved in these burnings.<sup>25</sup>

On December 20, about sixty "SeS" men arrived in the village, whom Hartung had been able to recruit in Rastatt, München, Michialovka, Mariankova, Lenintal and from the farms "Neu-Amerika" and "Bogdanovka".<sup>26</sup> In addition, Dumitru claims to have identified yet another ethnic German firing squad. They are said to have been a mixed group of Ukrainians, Romanians and ethnic Germans who had come from Golta (Pervomaisk) (Dumitru 2016, 170). This conjecture is also supported by the following statement of a Ukrainian from Bogdanovka. He reports that ethnic-Germans from Grushevka (Lichtenfeld), which is situated close to Golta, participated in the massacre:

They worked here, shooting Jews in Bogdanovka. They were Germans not only from the hamlet of Bogdanovka but also from other settlements, for example, from Grushevka. They passed by our village every evening on their way back from the ghetto with large bags of Jewish belongings (YIU/2463U).

The "SeS" units from Bogdanovka reached the execution site in their own carts. They had to drive 18–20 km to the shooting place.<sup>27</sup> The "SeS" units met the SS men only at the Bogdanovka ravine. It cannot be clearly determined when and how long the SS men Hartung, Petersen, Stettler and Gleich were present. However, according to the information provided by the perpetrators of the "SeS", it is very likely that all the men of "BK XI" attended the executions at different times.<sup>28</sup>

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**24** Another case is mentioned at Solonari, according to which a local Ukrainian named Samulia refused to deliver straw for the fire (Solonari 2017b, 201).

**25** BAL, B162/2315, Interrogation of Koch, Florian on June 3, 1967 in Nikolaev, p. 22.

**26** This were the villages under the command of Hartung. It makes sense that they were involved, but there is no exact source. BAL, B162/2308, Interrogation of Koch, Florian on June 5, 1967 in Nikolaev, p. 117.

**27** BAL, B162/2308, Interrogation of Pastuschenko, Ivan on May 29, 1967 in Nikolaev, p. 95.

**28** BAL, B162/2308, Interrogation of Feldenheim, Ivan on June 1, 1967 in Nikolaev, pp. 105–107; Also, a resident of the village reports about a special unit, which carried the sigil of the SS. She says that they were few. This also applies to the members of the "SK R". Moreover, she could determine that they came from Porechtchi (Rastadt), where, according to her, there was a German colony (YIU/339U+340U).

Hartung gave his orders to the leaders of the "SeS" and they also made it their business to direct the shootings.<sup>29</sup>

Also, on December 20 and 21, about 60 men from Golta reached the shooting site in Bogdanovka (Dumitru 2019, 165; Ancel 2003, 620) led by Afanasii Andrusin, a Ukrainian from Bessarabia (Ancel 2003, 125–27). Most likely, there were 15 Ukrainians among the 60 men, whom Andrusin had selected in advance as shooters. The rest of them probably were Romanian gendarmes (Ancel 2003, 125–27). Andrusin carried with him an authorization of the events in Bogdanovka, signed by the regional prefect of Domanevka. The order was:

Bogdanovka gendarmerie post: Mr. Andrusin of Golta will be reporting to you with 70 policemen, and they will execute the Jews of the ghetto. The gendarmes will not interfere. Valuables will be handed over to me. Mănescu Vasile, December 20, 1941.<sup>30</sup>

This order was then handed over to Nicolae Melinescu, the head of the Romanian gendarmes in Bogdanovka, who had previously refused to carry out the executions himself (Heinen 2007, 127–28). Likewise, in a post-war trial in Bucharest, Melinescu accused the prefect of the police of Golta Isopescu. Allegedly, a special preparatory meeting concerning the massacre had taken place in his house before the massacre (Dumitru 2019, 167).

### 3.4 The Shootings at the Bug Ravine

Only after Afanasii Andrusin, a volunteer from the Romanian side, had been found and the leader of "BK XI" had engaged the responsible "SeS" members, did the shootings begin. The first phase of the shootings lasted from December 21 to 23. Haim Cogan, one of the survivors of the so-called "Arbeitskommando" reported that the shootings began on the last day of Hanukkah, December 21 (Ancel 2003, 117).

The participation of the approximately eighteen "SeS" men from Bogdanovka in the shootings was as follows. They were divided into three units: the first unit assisted in guarding the pigsties. Ukrainian auxiliary forces had already been standing guard from the previous night (Steinhart 2010b, 81–82). Another six men escorted about 20 Jews at a time to the ravine, which lay to the east of the "Bogdanowski" farm. Finally, the last six men made sure that the Jews undressed, handed over their valuables and did not resist the upcoming shooting.<sup>31</sup> Many of the Jews were no longer able to oppose the shootings. They were ordered to keep their heads still (YIU/480U). The "SeS" men armed with clubs and iron bars beat to death those who still resisted

<sup>29</sup> BAL, B162/2308, Interrogation of Hipner, Vladimir on June 1, 1967 in Nikolaev, p. 74.

<sup>30</sup> Ancel (2003, 620).

<sup>31</sup> BAL, B162/2308, Interrogation of Hipner, Vladimir on June 1, 1967 in Nikolaev, p. 74.

(Steinhart 2010a, 321–22). Thereafter, the men stood behind their victims and shot them in the head or neck, which was done under the direction of Hartung and the rest of the SS men. To their relief, the men took turns in this process.<sup>32</sup> The bodies fell into the ravine where a fire had already been burning. Small children were killed together with their mothers by using one bullet or they were thrown into the fire alive. This inconceivable action is supported by several statements.<sup>33</sup> One survivor reported:

We couldn't see it but we could hear the screams. Because they only shot the adults, and they threw the children into the burning straw still alive. Those screams were atrocious (YIU/2462U).

This fire was kept lit by the so-called Jewish "Arbeitskommando". The already emaciated bodies were placed next to the more obese bodies to fuel the fire with the body fat (Ioanid 2000, 184). An "SeS" shooter reported that during the fire breaks he had to guard the pit with the corpses. His task was to prevent the escape of those Jews who were merely injured.<sup>34</sup> At the end of a day, the "SeS" from Bogdanovka alone killed about 200–300 people (Steinhart 2010b, 81–82).

The shooting Ukrainians developed a similar *modus operandi* to the perpetrators of the "SeS". The Ukrainians took turns shooting. One of them wore a long coat and a whip. The survivor Feingold, who reported these details, had been selected, and sent to "work" at the pit. He was given the task of throwing the bodies into the ravine. The Romanian gendarmes stood at the side, giving orders to the 16 Ukrainian policemen shooting (Ancel 2003, 130–131). Other Ukrainian policemen directly from Bogdanovka were posted as guards. One witness states that these policemen did not shoot (YIU/488U). According to the testimony of a witness, policeman Nikora from Domanewka is said to have shot Jews with a pistol who were still alive in the pit (YIU/2463U). The Jews about to be shot had to undress. Rings were partly cut off along with the fingers and gold teeth were pulled or knocked out. Then they had to stand on the slope and after a shot in the neck, the bodies fell into the ravine (Ancel 2003, 127–28). The shooters probably used rifles with explosive ammunition according to the "Black Book" of Altman and Grosman (Altman and Grosman 1995, 144; Ioanid 2000, 184). A local resident reports that Ukrainians from Bogdanovka, who had been previously assigned to police service by the Romanians, also had to participate in the shootings. The Domanewka police chief, Nikora is said to have supervised them (YIU/2463U). Solonari also mentions Aleksandr Nikora as a police chief involved in the shootings (Solonari 2014, 527–528). The Romanians appointed people responsible for the village:

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<sup>32</sup> BAL, B162/2308, Interrogation of Hipner, Vladimir on June 1, 1967 in Nikolaev, pp. 74–75.

<sup>33</sup> BAL, B162/2311, Statement of the resident K., F. in a report of the Soviet Investigative Commission of May 2, 1944, p. 29; YIU/480U.

<sup>34</sup> BAL, B162/2308, Interrogation of Koch, Florian on June 1, 1967 in Nikolaev, p. 113.

a starost. A starost was a contact man between them and the village population. This administrative system stems from the Soviet period (YIU/2463U).

One of the strategies to increase efficiency, developed by the perpetrators, was the use of the already mentioned "Arbeitskommando". This work commando consisted of two hundred Jews selected because of their physique, who were to burn the corpses, to push the corpses into the pit and to sort the clothes. Most of the survivors are thank to these "Arbeitsjuden" who had a chance to save their lives by committing to forced labor at the execution site (Ancel 2003, 130–31). A Ukrainian resident from the village of Konstantinovka [located on the other side of the river in the "RK U"] was able to observe the shootings from a distance with binoculars given to him by a German soldier. He observed the "Arbeitskommando": "Those that didn't fall, were pushed by a village Jew who was a bit of a simpleton (YIU/482U)." Forced to work, the "Arbeitsjuden" faced the highest danger to their lives. Some who did not perform their duties quickly enough were arbitrarily shot and replaced by any other suitable person. However, the members of the "Arbeitskommandos", encountered some relieving circumstances: they slept separately from the other Jews in closed rooms of the collective farms; in addition, they were able to feed themselves with food waste from the farms (Ancel 2003, 132). A witness who sneaked to the site of the shootings as a young person, reports that the labor Jews "[...] were Jews from Moldavia, they chose the strongest ones among those in the ghetto and forced them to work (YIU/2463U)."

For all the other Jews to be murdered at the Bogdanovka ravine, there was no prospect to escape the murder. Bribes of any kind were no longer possible at this stage. Until the summer of 1941, the deported Jews' resources were still sufficient and the corruption of the persecutors great enough to allow a "mild" atmosphere. This "fine-nerved system of give and take," as Armin Heinen characterizes it, had ceased (Heinen 2007, 39). Nevertheless, several villagers from Konstantinovka and Bogdanovka reported that some Jews still had managed to escape. It is possible that Jews who were only wounded by the shot and fell to the side of that pit and not directly into the fire managed to climb out at nightfall. Some people managed to survive, taking refuge in grottoes on the rock face. They then swam through the Bug at night, which was guarded only during the day (YIU/483U). An escaped Jew named Sokolov is said to have later joined the Red Army and fought in the liberation of the village (YIU/480U).<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Sarah Rabinovitz also managed a similar escape. It is not quite clear whether the case took place in Bogdanovka or Domanevka: „She barely made it. She was holding her daughter's hand near the large body pit when they shot her but killed the girl instead. Sarah fainted and fell into the pit. She woke up feeling the weight of the bodies piling on top of her and managed to climb on top of them and get out. She received the invitation to testify against officer Slivinka [...]". USHMM RG-50.120.0047, Oral history interview with Esther Gelbelman on May 13, 1993, p. 7. The same



The perpetrator from Golta (Pervomaisk), took a break from the executions between December 24 to 26. During this time, the Jews were forced to build a 12-m-long and 1.8-m-high dam at the execution site so as to prevent the blood of those shot from entering the Bug.<sup>36</sup> Survivors of the "Arbeitskommando" reported that they were standing knee-deep in blood (Steinhart 2010a, 321–22). On December 24, the shooting stopped earlier. Isopescu reached the shooting site with two German officers. Melinescu reported during his trial that screams and groans could be heard from the pit: apparently, there had been still some people alive in the pit. The Ukrainians used a hand grenade to kill the remaining Jews. Isopescu was festively dressed that day. He took a few photos of the corpses, the forest, and the loot; and went back to Golta. Although by December 24, close to 30,000 Jews had already been shot, the pigsties were not yet empty. It is extremely difficult to give an exact number of victims who died in the shootings. Ancel cites the 30,000. Steinhart assumes 25,000 deaths by the shootings and another 25,000 victims who had already died in the stables (Ancel 2003, 132–33; Steinhart (2010a, 325–26). While some of the perpetrators celebrated Christmas with their families, Jews were exposed to freezing temperatures, typhus and hunger at the edge of the forest in Bogdanovka (Ancel 2003, 132–133).

On December 27, the shootings picked up again and continued until December 29. After the break, the shootings proceeded sluggishly as the perpetrators increasingly turned to drinking. This was reported by Esther Gobelman, who was in charge of cooking for the firing squads.<sup>37</sup> A local resident who later attended the trial of the shooters also reported: "It was a punitive brigade from Pervomaisk [Golta]. They drank vodka all the time, they were drunk when they shot (YIU/488U)." On December 29, 1941, Antonescu sent a message to Isopescu in which he proclaimed that in the future, relief supplies for the Jews in Transnistria would be allowed. This small admission to the Jewish federations in Romania, had not changed the fate of the thousands of victims in Transnistria (Ancel 2003, 133).

On December 30, there was another break. Many of the gendarmes went home for the New Year, bringing back looted property and food (Ancel 2003, 134). By this time, some of the ethnic German units were no longer involved in the shootings. A few went on a military training to Rastatt (Poritschtschja) to prepare them for their

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perpetrator is also mentioned in a contemporary witness interview from Bogdanovka in connection with a trial as the perpetrator "Slivchenko" (YIU/488U).

<sup>36</sup> This is reported by various residents (YIU/1262U; YIU/487U); BAL, B162/2311, Statement of resident K., F. in a report of the Soviet investigative commission of May 2, 1944, p. 29.

<sup>37</sup> Ancel (2011), Interview with Esther Gobelman in Tel Aviv 1990, p. 345.

front-line duty.<sup>38</sup> On January 3 or 4, the shootings continued. The remaining Jews were led out of the stables. Those who could no longer walk were shot on the spot. On January 9, the shootings ended. According to Ancel, Isopescu referred to his actions during the shootings in a "coded" message. The school openings are metaphorical for the shootings:

Typhus wreaked havoc from December 1, 1941, until January 8, 1942. All schools in the district were closed during January 8-20, 1942. The schools were [re]opened, but since the epidemic had not completely disappeared, the schools were closed again until new orders were received. On March 18, 1942,<sup>39</sup> a large number of schools were opened (Ancel 2003, 135).

### 3.5 After the Shootings

In the end, it remains unclear how all parties involved solved the question of reward, i.e. the distribution of Jewish valuables. Without a doubt, the members of "Sonderkommando R" and the Romanian officers were at the top of the division pyramid. One of the "Selbstschutz" members reports about the "Bereichskommando" leader: "Hartung had to decide about the valuables and the personal belongings of the shot. Some things, the less valuable ones, he left to the policemen [...] He carried a safe with him."<sup>40</sup> Hartung delivered a part of it to the command office of the "SK R" in Landau (Shyrokolanivka) and a part kept for himself.<sup>41</sup> Above all, the members of the "SeS" profited from the clothes of the murdered Jews. In the hard winter of 1941–42, these items were valuable resources for exchange. One resident reports: "They [SeS] left more than 20 people in the mills behind our village in order to come back the next day to loot and shoot. And we saved them" (YIU/2463U).

An order stipulated that all valuables collected by Andrusin and his firing squad were to be handed over to Vasile Mănescu.<sup>42</sup> One incident is known in which Andrusin was suspected of having shot a corrupt Ukrainian policeman in Bogdanovka. A secret letter to the prefect of Golta (Pervomaisk) Isopescu states: Andrusin arrested the man, who subsequently went missing, "because he supplied food to Jews [at the Bogdanovka camp] in exchange for gold and other valuables."<sup>43</sup> Theft of valuables was punishable by death. However, it is possible that the Ukrainian policemen kept an unreported amount of gold and jewelry themselves. In the meantime, the Jews who had been assigned to burn the corpses found

<sup>38</sup> BAL, B162/2308, Interrogation of Feldenheim, Ivan on June 1, 1967 in Nikolaev, p. 106.

<sup>39</sup> This date is concerning the end of shooting in Domanevka.

<sup>40</sup> BAL, B162/2308, Interrogation of Pastuschenko, Ivan on June 1, 1967 in Nikolaev, p. 102.

<sup>41</sup> BAL, B162/2295, „50.000 Juden aus Odessa“ Report by Walter Vahldieck, p. 26.

<sup>42</sup> Ancel (2003), Document nr. 290 from December 20, 1941, p. 620.

<sup>43</sup> Ancel (2003), Document nr. 393 from January 31, 1942, p. 648.

gold in the ashes. They divided the gold among themselves and sold it to the Ukrainian population for bread (Ancel 2003, 138). An eyewitness reports that after the war, children often ran to the pit to look for gold at the ravine (YIU/1262U).

By the end of the Bogdanovka massacre, only 300–360 "Arbeitsjuden" had remained (Ancel 2003, 135–37). However, soon after the shootings half of them died due to the adverse conditions. They had to continue working while being guarded, to ensure that the mass of corpses in Bogdanovka were cremated. They cut up those Jews' bodies who had not died directly at the ravine and carried them there on their backs. They continued to burn the bodies throughout January and February (YIU/483U). One of the Jews from the "Arbeitskommando" reported, "We turned our brethren to ashes, and in the fierce cold we warmed ourselves by the heat of their ashes" (Ancel 2003, 137). Isopescu was occasionally in Bogdanovka to check on the proceedings. On this occasion, he saw the "incineration commando" slapping themselves to brave the cold so he allowed them "to warm themselves with the boiling ashes of their brothers, who were murdered and fried, so you shouldn't say I'm a bad man" (Ancel 2003, 138).

For the local population, the silencing of the shooting did not mean the end of the certainty that they had been witnesses of a massacre. There was no mistaking the smoke emanating from the ravine in Bogdanovka: the stench of the burned bodies was characterized by one of the residents as "unbearable" (YIU/326U). One resident reported that the fire was still burning when the Germans had left the site and "[t]he people of the village were gathered to throw earth" (YIU/483U).

However, there are statements by local villagers who speak of a requisition of Ukrainian villagers for logistical purposes. Desbois argues that above all items, such as in this case straw, planks, food, liquor etc., were requested from the local population. He tries to evaluate the involvement of the local population in the massacre:

We're not talking about the murderer or the victim but about a crime technician, like a stagehand, who transports the flats for theater productions from location, to location, only the production in question was the spectacle of putting one's Jewish neighbors to death (Desbois 2018, 116–17).

There remains an ambivalence about the Bogdanovka crime when looking at the role of the local Ukrainians. There were those Ukrainians who were actively involved in the shootings as "Schutzpolizisten". However, in the shadow of the German and Romanian will to exterminate the Jews, a gray area existed in which the behavior of local individuals did make a difference. According to the above mentioned documents, the spectrum ranges from those forced requisitioners who ended up as stagehands in the crime scene, (see Desbois), to those who actively hid Jews and thereby risked their lives.

## 4 The Bogdanovka Selbstschutz as an Organization

### 4.1 Methodological Remarks on the Organizational Sociological Approach

In the procedural account of the Bogdanovka massacre different actors have been identified. Namely the Romanian gendarmes, the Ukrainian auxiliary forces, the SS men of the "BK XI" and finally the "SeS" units of the "BK XI" area. Primarily the actors who were untrained in military and police matters were directly involved in the shootings. This can be stated at least for the "SeS" units. The fact that the massacre was neither the result of a pogrom of sudden violent masses nor of a marauding militia brings the question of the organization of the perpetrators to the center of the analysis as 99% of the killings of Jews in the Holocaust were carried out by violent state organizations (Kühl 2014, 22). The "SeS" units, which were under the command of the "SK R", can also be perceived to belong to this category. They differed from non-state violent organizations in the legitimacy of their actions, which was pronounced by the state. The conventional explanations, which have been put forward in general but also specifically in perpetrator research, exhibit the problem of competing individual explanations. Therefore, I will explore the question of the perpetrators' motivational means within an organizational framework using an organizational sociology approach.

In the last three decades, perpetrator research has become increasingly differentiated and interdisciplinary approaches are now available to gain better insight into the actions of the perpetrators during the Second World War. For the first time, Christopher Browning opened this field with his study of the Police Battalion 101, which dealt with the murder of the Jews in Józefów. The perpetrators were not understood in advance as highly ideologized people and ready to kill; instead, greater consideration was given to dynamics that developed only in the course of the operation and ultimately turned "ordinary men" into murderers (Browning 1992, 213). Goldhagen's approach was followed by a study of the same battalion, which increasingly focused on the Germans' willingness to readily exterminate the Jews as a common national project (Goldhagen 1996, 104–105). Harald Welzer's study was followed by a socio-psychological approach that operates both with the shifting of norms of an entire society, but also of radicalized micro-groups. In doing so, he poses the question not only of how ordinary men and women become perpetrators, but also of how, during the act of killing, they can retain their psychological integrity and thus continue to participate in mass murder (Welzer 2006, 40). The most recent "turn" in perpetrator research is the

organizational sociological analysis of perpetrators. Kühl starts from the premise that most of the murderers, during the Holocaust, involved members of Nazi state organizations. He focuses on the motivational tools used within the organization to encourage members to perform various tasks, including killing. He assumes that organizations specialized in killing are no different in structure from organizations in democratic societies (Kühl 2014, 22).

For this purpose, Kühl published "Ordinary Organizations", an extensive study on the organizational framework of the "Reserve-Polizei-Bataillon 101" in the massacre in Józefów, Poland (Gruber and Kühl 2015; Kühl 2014). It makes sense to apply Kühl's methodological approach also to analyze the perpetrators of the "Selbstschutz" in the Bogdanovka massacre. The many differences in comparison to the "Reserve-Polizei-Bataillon 101" make a review of the findings and hypotheses interesting.<sup>44</sup> The most striking difference is the regional connection of the members. Likewise, a key difference from the police battalion is that Major Trapp allowed his subordinates to be exempt from shooting. In the broader context, the question of voluntariness is discussed more in terms of exit options. It was much noted that Major Trapp gave his subordinates the option of non-participation. In contrast, little discussed is the fact that releasing individuals would in no way have jeopardized the entire operation (Kühl 2014, 172).

The search for the perpetrators' motives is always a matter of anticipating the plausible motives. No authority could give the perpetrators validity to the reconstructed motives. Not the victims, "bystanders" or the perpetrators themselves. Instructions, orders, guidelines, and norms, again, provide no information on what the perpetrator "really" feels, reflects, or thinks before, during, or after the act of killing.

This research analyzes predominantly the Bogdanovka "SeS" members' statements using the means of motivation established by Kühl.<sup>45</sup> When reconstructing the motives, the interaction between the person who names the motive for their action and the person who ascribes motives to the acting person is analyzed. Motives are not only ascribed to the acting person during and after an act but can also be anticipated. These motives can also be identified when entering an organization. At the same time, an organization also has formal expectations providing the members with basic principles when joining the organization (Kühl 2014, 83–84). Both, member of the "SeS" and the "SK R" are interested in the

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<sup>44</sup> Kühl and Gruber even indirectly point this out: "It would be interesting, for example, to investigate whether there are [...] Nazi organizations whose members go home to their families quite normally in the evening (Gruber and Kühl (2015, 25))."

<sup>45</sup> In addition, statements from members of the "SeS" from other locations are also used to determine more about the organizational structure of the "SeS".

motivation to enter and the maintenance of performance, therefore, this interacting relationship must be constantly balanced. In addition to the organization's formal expectations, there are also informal expectations by the members or by bonuses (Kühl 2014, 84–85). It can be assumed that the "SeS" members were not informed in advance of their exact tasks. This is also a fundamental break with the self-defense organization that may have existed before the German occupation. Nevertheless, the relationship between the "SeS" and the "SK R" is not characterized by mistrust or ignorance but rather mutual expectations. For the "SK R" it was crucial not to disappoint the ethnic Germans so much, that they would hinder the functioning of the organization. This balanced relationship can be understood with the concept of the zone of indifference. That is, the area in which the members of the Selbstschutz are indifferent to the tasks required of them (Ibid., 91–92) so the organization retains the capacity to act (Gruber and Kühl 2015, 18). This approach can describe the dynamics of the organization members' already existing expectations, which are both stimulating, and strengthening the bond of the associate(s) (Kühl 2014, 84–86). These means of motivation are 1. identification with the goal, 2. coercion, 3. comradeship, 4. money and 5. the attractiveness of activities (Ibid.). Each means of motivation is explained in more detail below.

## 4.2 Identification with the Goal

Until August 1941, the ethnic Germans living in the Black Sea region had no connection to the Third Reich (Steinhart 2010a, 372–73). During the "discovery" of those German colonies by combat units, the question arose whether the inhabitants should be classified as "Volksdeutsche" or as "Volksfeinde" (Angrick 2009, 82–84). The leveling of ethnic differences during forced collectivization by Soviet policy had led to numerous inter-ethnic marriages (Steinhart 2010b, 83). In the same course, numerous male members of the ethnic German families were deported to Stalin's command in the interwar period. Not infrequently, they had become the owners of larger estates and were therefore considered kulaks (Fleischhauer 1983, 104). Placing National Socialist symbols and slogans in public places introduced ethnic Germans to the aims of the National Socialists visually (Angrick 2009, 85). The display of Nazi policies was not only evident in objects. With the arrival of "Einsatzgruppe D" shortly after the conquest of Transnistria, the first Jews and communists were executed in the villages and towns. This first encounter with "Einsatzgruppe D" had shown the local ethnic Germans the importance of anti-Jewish and anti-Bolshevik measures in Nazi policy (Steinhart 2015, 37). When discussing the anti-Semitism of ethnic Germans, there is the question whether there was a traditional anti-Semitism in this group. The function

of anti-Semitism as a contribution to the German goals, i.e. an adapted attitude supported by the ethnic Germans, is less discussed. In this respect, there were certainly ethnic Germans who already had a basic anti-Semitic attitude. Increasingly, they became more hostile or passive towards the Jews, since this attitude was subsidized by the "SK R".

An example from another "Bereichskommando" should be mentioned here to illustrate this mentality. An ethnic German had a child with a Jewish woman having met at a collective farm. When the Germans came, the woman and the child's escape failed: the ethnic German father commented: "I was quite indifferent to the shooting of my wife."<sup>46</sup> Those men who proved helpful to the Germans gained security and reward, ostensibly.

To identify with the goals of the new rulers, the residents first had to recognize the goals. In this regard, denunciations of Communists and Jews proved to be an important component of Nazi occupation policy. At the same time, it offered the informer the chance to be above suspicion of supporting Bolshevism. With the takeover of the "SK R" in Transnistria, in late August 1941, denunciations continued to be the easiest means to prove loyalty (Steinhart 2015, 85–86).<sup>47</sup> However, it is also clear from the Einsatzgruppen reports that the discussions in the Reich concerning Christianity should not simply be extended to the ethnic Germans, as long as the confessional quarrels did not interfere with the commonalities of the "Volksgemeinschaft".<sup>48</sup> Those ethnic Germans, who had been deemed trustworthy, were given ethnic German identity cards and additional food.<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, the ethnic Germans also had obligations in building a mutual cooperative relationship. The "SK R" members could reduce further control for those who could superficially identify with the purposes of the National Socialists. From the beginning, the "SK R" had the task to politically engage the "ethnic Germans".<sup>50</sup> In turn, the "SK R" depended on the development of the "SeS" for

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46 BAL, B162/2301, Interrogation of Wagner, Julius on July 10, 1964 in Koblenz, p. 21.

47 People who cooperated with the occupying power were required to constantly demonstrate their reliability and loyalty. This can be said more generally about the occupation in the Soviet Union (Kudryashov and Uhl (2014, 220).

48 "Ereignismeldung UdSSR Nr. 108 October 9, 1941", in: Mallmann, K.-M., M. Cüppers, A. Angrick, J. Matthäus, ed. 2011. Dokumente der Einsatzgruppen in der Sowjetunion. Darmstadt, p. 656.

49 Here Kirschstein, born in Preußen, who was appointed for punitive measures in the ethnic German areas by the VoMi, reports that identity fraud to get an ethnic German identity card was punishable by death. He gives several examples of attempts by Ukrainians and Russians to obtain identification cards. BAL, B162/2301, Interrogation of Kirschstein, Herbert on January 28, 1963 in Berlin, p. 21.

50 BAL, B162/2289b, Compilation of previous knowledge dated November 16, 1961, p. 146.

administration.<sup>51</sup> The "SeS" also served as a means of protection against the Romanian soldiers' assaults in the German colonies (Angrick 2009, 86–87). This was in accordance with the traditional concept of the "SeS", as "Selbstschutz" literally means self-protection from external enemies of the village community in times of crisis due to attacks on the German minority in the past (Steinhart 2010a, 374). There were only one hundred "SK R" vehicles deployed to the region between the Dniester and the Bug (Steinhart 2010b, 74). For each of the 18 "BK" there were only four or five people to secure the administration of 130,000 ethnic Germans in the Black Sea region (Lower 2006, 192).

In Bogdanovka, most "SeS" members had been recruited by Rudolf Hartung in a meeting at the "Bogdanowski" estate in October 1941. Two "Volksdeutsche", Johannes Büchler and Josef Faltis helped in advance to register those men with a German background and under 30 years of age.<sup>52</sup> Especially Büchler ensured the cooperation and communication between the "SeS" and the "BK" men. It was not necessary to determine whether one identified with the goals of the Nazi propaganda, racial anti-Semitism, or other ideologies. Primarily, it is important to note, that training in the ideals of the Third Reich only started after the shootings had ended.<sup>53</sup> The identification with the goal happened on a more specific level, for example, by handing responsibility of the "SK R" over to men like Johannes Büchler and Josef Faltis. For both men, the fulfillment of their tasks offered leadership within the organization.<sup>54</sup> In turn, individual members' identification with the goal reduced the control effort (Kühl 2014, 86).

### 4.3 Coercion

In more recent perpetrator research, frequent reference is made to the findings of Browning, whose study of Pol. Btl. 101 and Major Trapp, who allowed his subordinates to decide whether to fire (Browning 1992, 65–66). Likewise, there is no known case of a death penalty if one refused to shoot. Ultimately, this voluntarism can be seen as an integral strategy of a violent organization. It can be assumed that those in command anticipated that either, some would volunteer, or there would be enough gunmen to allow some to be exempted from the shootings

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<sup>51</sup> There it says: "[...] to refrain from sending [a] separate Sonderkommando to Transnistria. The tasks assigned to these Sonderkommando (sic!) were [...] transferred to Sonderkommando Hoffmeyer [...]." BAL, B162/2289b, Telegram from Grote, October 23, 1941 (order on the creation of a Sonderkommando), p. 151.

<sup>52</sup> BAL, B162/2313, Interrogation of Pastuschenko, Ivan on February 7, 1967 in Nikolaev, p. 25.

<sup>53</sup> BAL, B162/2308, Interrogation of Kielwein, Ivan on May 31, 1967 in Nikolaev, pp. 67–70.

<sup>54</sup> BAL, B162, 2308, Interrogation of Feldenheim, Ivan on June 1, 1967 in Nikolaev, p. 105.



at the executions (Kühl 2014, 134–36). That leaves the question: what form of coercion did the members of the "SeS" experience?

Membership in the "SeS" was in most cases enforced. Men of military age were registered in "Volkslisten". The organization of the "SeS" thus exhibited certain military traits in the form of recruitment. Even withdrawal from this organization was only possible under certain conditions. However, coercion alone does not provide a sufficient explanation for the involvement of members in the "SeS". Despite the classification of a coercive organization, certain dynamics can be discerned in the actions of the members, which suggest a relatively high level of willingness to participate in the activities of the "SeS." In return, the organization tried to keep the "exit costs" for the members (Kühl 2014, 87) as high as possible.

Although in the trials all the perpetrators of the Selbstschutz stated that their participation in the shootings was under duress, certain statements by the perpetrators indicate that there was initially no need to leave the organization. Therefore, the alleged coercion should not only be examined regarding the shootings, but also in the development of the "SeS" before the shootings. Josef Hass described the expectation from him in his interrogation: "Hartung declared that the Self-Defense Department was established to protect the place against partisans and from robbery, as well as to maintain order. But this was a deception [...]." <sup>55</sup> This was a deception because for a certain period, the member was able to carry out the tasks of the "BK XI" at will, as looking back at the initial situation he could not have anticipated the supposed "true purpose" of the organization. It is questionable at what point the decision to murder the Jews became valid for the "BK XI". Steinhart concludes that the "SK R" ordered the shootings situationally "rather than by design" (Steinhart 2010a, 367–69). It can be assumed that despite the narrow corridor of possible actions, the members of the "SeS" willingly participated in the shootings, since this act was within the imagined scope of their duties. Accordingly, participation probably took place without coercion, contrary to the men's statements.

However, this does imply that the shootings at the Bogdanovka ravine were deliberate. One reason to confirm coercion of the organization in the shootings as a motivating factor could be the absence of an "exit" option. The members of the "SeS" from Bogdanovka widely agreed that they participated in the shootings under the threat of their own lives. Hartung is said to have threatened the men, "[...] whoever refused [to shoot] would be shot together with the Jews." <sup>56</sup> This

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55 BAL, B162/2308, Interrogation of Hass, Josef on June 1, 1967 in Nikolaev, pp. 81–82.

56 This statement is representative of the statement of a number of other "SeS" men, which also includes other "SeS" units. BAL, B162/2308 Interrogation of Jonus, Alexander on June 5, 1967 in Nikolaev, pp. 85–87.

assertion could also function as the perpetrators' defense strategy. On the one hand, this speaks against the fact that none of the members was actually shot. Only illness, or the psychosomatic resistance of the body to the stressful situation, made it possible to escape from the shootings.<sup>57</sup> Secondly, in one case it is known that an "SeS" member of another "BK" successfully evaded the shootings.<sup>58</sup> Thirdly, during the trial in Nikolaev, acts of violence by the "SeS" from Bogdanovka were documented, according to which they had acted on their own initiative. At the end of December 1941, several members of the "SeS" killed five Jewish women by kidnapping them from the sovkhos "Comintern" at night, then undressed, and shot them. They kept the women's clothes.<sup>59</sup>

It can only be speculated whether members of the "SeS" had been shot had they evaded. It is conceivable that Hartung made threats and that the SS men's behavior toward the "Volksdeutsche" was violent in general.<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless, it is likely that many of the requirements were within the organization's zone of indifference at the time of the members' entry. Furthermore, it is possible that the zone of indifference could be expanded so that in individual cases shootings could be accepted as an integral part of the task. Also, the "SeS" leader Büchler's personal performance during the massacre cannot be sufficiently reconstructed to clarify whether there were also days on which the men of "BK XI" were not present. One case is documented in which another "SeS" leader was given personal responsibility for a shooting action that was also in a neighboring "Bereichskommando".<sup>61</sup>

## 4.4 Comradeship

One specific feature that distinguishes the "SeS" from other active organizations in the Holocaust is the members' spatial relationship through their deployment in their own homeland. Almost all "SeS" members in Bogdanovka had kinship ties. Therefore, the reference to family is a determining factor in the personal expectations of the "SeS" members. Another factor that distinguishes the "SeS"

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<sup>57</sup> Koch did not take part in all the days of the shootings because he was ill with typhoid fever. BAL, B162/2308, Interrogation of Koch, Florian on June 1, 1967 in Nikolaev, p. 112.

<sup>58</sup> In another case, a mother reported about her son, who had been a member of the "SeS" in Worms (Wynohradne), that her son no longer went to the "SeS" for reasons of conscience. BAL, B162/2309, interrogation of S., M. on July 21, 1967 in Wuppertal, p. 21; Solonari (2014, 529–30).

<sup>59</sup> This is not an isolated case of the "SeS" from Bogdanovka ordering shootings without orders. BAL, B162/2313, „Das sowjetische Gericht in Nikolajew stellt fest“, pp. 40–43.

<sup>60</sup> "Among other things, it was known that members of the Selbstschutz were beaten at the Kommandantur." BAL, B162/2303 Interrogation of B., G. on January 12, 1965 in Duisburg, p. 277.

<sup>61</sup> "Hartung and Stettler left Gärtner Peter and Freilich Adam in charge of the shooting operations." BAL, B162/2308, Interrogation of Wildt, Ewgenij on August 12, 1965 in Nikolaev, p. 139.

units from most perpetrator groups is that it was not a "greedy organization" (Gruber and Kühl 2015, 25) that controls the roles of its members. The pre-existing family connection was a motivating factor for joining the organization. This connection did not endanger the organization in its productivity, but it carried with it conditions that undermined the requirements of "BK XI". With regard to the racial-political requirements of the "SK R", the "SeS" Bogdanovka members countered those caveats of higher politics by also recruiting Ukrainians for the "SeS", without endangering the existence of the organization.<sup>62</sup> When researching the respective ancestry of members, the Germans had to rely heavily on the information provided by the ethnic Germans (Steinhart 2010c).

The farm collective, where most of the members of the "SeS" Bogdanovka were recruited, originally consisted of one Ukrainian and one German farm. During the forced collectivization of the SU, these two farms were merged (Steinhart 2010b, 75). Most of the members of the farm belonged to the Ebenal family.<sup>63</sup> Therefore, it turned out that the Ebenal family countered the blood ties in their own way. Alexander Orgiganov, of Russian origin, was also integrated as a member of the "SeS". Orgiganov's wife Silvia, who was a "Volksdeutsche", helped his integration into the "SeS" (Steinhart 2010b). The influence of the remaining family members: wives, children, and other relatives played a decisive role in the actions of the "SeS". On the one hand, the perpetrator is forced in this close spatial relationship to legitimize the deeds in front of his family,<sup>64</sup> in contrast to soldiers, for example, who murdered far away from their homes.

Two reactions from family members of other "Bereichskommandos" illustrate the difference of accepting the participation in the shootings. Solonari brings up examples, based on "SeS" members from other villages, where the wife played a decisive role in how the husband behaved in the organization. In the case of Joseph Röttler, his wife was so upset that he had brought things from the Jews that he then asked to be released from the self-defense unit (Solonari 2017b, 196–99).

Furthermore, a member tries to ensure the safety and sustenance of his family by participating in the activities of the organization. Third, the pressure on the individual member to fulfill the tasks of the organization increases, as he cannot abandon his family, since it seems impracticable in the village context.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>62</sup> The "SeS" members Hipner, Vladimir and Origanov, Alexander are ethnic Ukrainians.

<sup>63</sup> BAL, B162/2290, Interrogation of B. (née J.), L. on January 16, 1962 in Kleve, pp. 163–66.

<sup>64</sup> The interrogation of the wife of the "SeS" leader L. B. shows that the activity in the shootings of Jews was not concealed either. BAL, B162/2310, Interrogation of B., L. on May 21, 1968 in Kleve, p. 8.

<sup>65</sup> An ethnic German from Landau (Schyrokolanivka) describes this cramped relationship: "We knew neither telephone nor radio and hardly any newspaper [...]. Our whole life took place only in the village community." BAL, B162/2302, Interrogation of B., F. on August 17, 1962 in Holthausen, p. 128."

## 4.5 Money

Money is a significant motivational tool in shaping certain hierarchies within an organization. Ideally, the individual performance should be in proportion to the reward. The prospect of higher pay also motivates members of an organization to undertake unpleasant tasks. Especially during wartime, when the exchange of goods for money no longer has a stable going rate, other material rewards also appear as remuneration (Kühl 2014, 88).

In addition to material rewards, joining an organization or performing a job correctly also results in immaterial rewards. This can mean advancement to a higher position, a higher class or, as in the case of the members of the "SeS", entry into the "Volksgemeinschaft". In principle, "Volksdeutsche" affiliation has been a favorable condition for advancement within the social sphere during the German occupation. Historically, for those ethnic Germans in the SU, this opportunity for advancement had been made less accessible. Ethnic German landowners often fell victim to "kulakization" (Steinhart 2010b, 71). As an example, a resident from Worms (Wynohradne) reports that between 1932 and 1937 about two hundred men were deported.<sup>66</sup> The invasion of the Germans and the takeover of the "SK R" led to a radical change in the balance of power of those ethnic Germans in the Black Sea region.

This change of power was also immediately evident in Bogdanovka. The homestead "Bogdanovksi", which had been previously co-administered by Ukrainians, was completely handed over to the ethnic German inhabitants. The wife of the "SeS" leader from Bogdanovka reports: "In Bogdanovka, I and my husband were assigned land by the Germans. Machines and horses were distributed to the inhabitants of the village of Bogdanovka."<sup>67</sup> The land theft of the Ukrainians who were loyal to the Soviet Union probably stimulated a feeling of revenge among the ethnic Germans. For them, it was a direct improvement in living conditions. Against this background, the willingness to serve in the "SeS" may have been quite high. As has already been mentioned, ethnic Ukrainians and Russians were also able to become members, contrary to the requirements of the organization. However, ethnic background alone was not sufficient to become a permanent member of the "Volksgemeinschaft". Strategies on the part of "BK XI" involved an intangible reward system. It was not uncommon in the communication of the "Reich Germans" with the "Volksdeutsche" to keep the securing of legal status vague (Bergen 1994, 573–74). It could also happen that ethnic German

<sup>66</sup> BAL, B162/2304, Interrogation of T., E. on May 20, 1964 in Wolfsburg, p. 67.

<sup>67</sup> BAL, B162/2290, Interrogation of B., (née J.), L. on January 16, 1962 in Kleve, pp. 62–63.

identity papers ("Volkstumsausweise") were not distributed, disappeared or were confiscated by Romanian authorities.<sup>68</sup> From this starting point, maintaining the status of "Volksdeutscher" became increasingly important, especially for those who had faked their German ancestry.<sup>69</sup>

The "BK XI" privileged individual members in an unequal pay system. According to the testimony of Ivan Pastushenko, there were regular and irregular police officers in the "SeS". According to this, there were only four members who had a fixed salary – Johann Büchler, Josef Hass, Joseph Kielwein and Matwej Ebenal.<sup>70</sup> For Johann Büchler it can be reconstructed quite well why he received a monetary remuneration: he was the contact man between the "BK XI" and the members of the "SeS" from Bogdanovka. Hesitant behavior to carry out difficult tasks could thus be prevented by a visible relationship of dependence. For example, he had the task of "listing" the members of the "SeS", in doing so he was responsible for their accuracy.<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, he had to make additional trips to the headquarters of the "BK" XI in Rastatt (Poritschtschja).<sup>72</sup> Thirdly, it was up to him to conceal the shootings at first and then to ensure that the men went to the ravine at Bogdanovka on more days.<sup>73</sup> In addition, he also had the duty to ensure the performance of the "SeS" members for these shootings. These extra duties probably also made possible a reserved relationship between Büchler and the rest of the members, which seems problematic in a face-to-face society. Only monetary means make it worthwhile for him to have entered this restrained relationship.

Josef Hass and Josef Kielwein were Büchler's two deputies.<sup>74</sup> They, too, were assigned tasks that set them apart from the rest of the members. Hass is said to have called further meetings and recruited members for the "SeS". Furthermore, they probably distributed orders to the other men.<sup>75</sup> This shows, that additional remuneration acted as a crucial function in transforming membership motivation into performance motivation (Kühl 2014, 178). Without incentives, hierarchization, and thus the transmission of commands and responsibilities within the organization would not have been possible. Finally, the presence of the "BK XI"

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**68** BAL, B162/2301, Interrogation of Kirschstein, Herbert on January 28, 1963 in Berlin, pp. 121–122.; Steinhart notes in this regard: „In Bereichkommando XI, Hartung did not issue permanent ethnic German identity papers until April 1942 [...] (Steinhart 2010b, 87)“.

**69** This applies to three of the "SeS" members from Bogdanovka.

**70** BAL, B162/2313, Interrogation of Pastuschenko, Ivan on February 7, 1967 in Nikolaev, p. 26.

**71** Ibid., p. 25.

**72** BAL, B162/2290 Interrogation of B., L. on January 16, 1962 in Kleve, p. 165.

**73** BAL, B162/2308, Interrogation of Koch, Florian on January 6, 1967 in Nikolaev, p. 112.

**74** BAL, B162/2308, Interrogation of Pastuschenko, Ivan on May 29, 1967 in Nikolaev, p. 93.

**75** BAL, B162/2313, Interrogation of Pastuschenko, Ivan on February 7, 1967 in Nikolaev, p. 25.

(apart from the shootings) was rather practical character mediated by the leaders of the "SeS".

Even the "SeS" members in leading positions found their membership in the "SeS" attractive precisely because of the participation in the shootings. The "SeS" leader Adam Fröhlich from Neu-Amerika (Gradovka) emphasized that he never had to force anyone to participate in the shootings (Solonari 2014, 529–30). Some even exceeded their goal of shootings in order to seize the clothes of the Jews. It can be assumed that the members of the "SeS" from Bogdanovka developed a similar enthusiasm regarding remuneration. One member stated: "When I returned from the shootings, I saw bundles of things that our policemen were carrying on carts."<sup>76</sup> Without exception, the expropriated Jews' valuables and money went to "BK XI." Nevertheless, during the harsh winter of 1941–1942, the Jews' clothing provided for the "SeS" a good means as exchange in obtaining additional food from the Ukrainian population. These clothes were a welcome reward not only for the men of the "SeS" but the families of the perpetrators; and thus the entire village community profited from the legalized dispossession of the Jewish population.<sup>77</sup> Individual members of the "SeS" also became rich from taking away the Jews' valuables. Josef Hass shot a Jew on his farm in December 1941 who tried to trade boots for food.<sup>78</sup> The cohesion of the organization was strengthened by the common complicity in the dispossessing of the Jews.

## 4.6 Attractiveness of Activities

There are organizations that retain members only through the attractiveness of their activity. In the case of violent organizations, the attractiveness can also lie in the execution of the violence itself (Kühl 2014, 88). Here, the focus should not be exclusively on participation in the shootings.

In the statements of the perpetrators of the "SeS" from Bogdanovka, there are hardly any self-reflexive explanations. On the one hand, the investigative commission's interviews were not designed to answer these questions, on the other hand, the perpetrators revealed little about their actions. Yet the "SeS" members characterized the "SK R" perpetrators' actions as excessive violence.<sup>79</sup> However, none of the "SeS" members described their own violence as voluntary. Nevertheless, an increase in violence can also be observed in the "SeS" units. It can be

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<sup>76</sup> BAL, B162/2308, Interrogation of Koch, Florian on January 6, 1967 in Nikolaev, p. 113.

<sup>77</sup> BAL, B162/2308, Interrogation of Pastuschenko, Ivan on May 29, 1967 in Nikolaev, p. 93.

<sup>78</sup> BAL, B162/2313, Interrogation of Pastuschenko, Ivan on February 7, 1967 in Nikolaev, p. 25.

<sup>79</sup> BAL, B162/2308, Interrogation of Feldenheim, Ivan on January 6, 1967 in Nikolaev, p. 106.

assumed that with the increasing identification of the men as protectors of the "ethnic Germans" or the village community, a certain desire for violence developed. At least to the extent that committing an act of violence showed success. Two known sources of danger may have played a role in the violent actions of the "SeS". First, the resistance of the "SeS" against the attacks of the Romanian army. Second, the fight against typhus, which was associated with the appearance of the Jews.

The conflicts with the Romanian army were some of the pragmatic reasons why the formation of the "SeS" organization was necessary. To the distress of the Romanians, Hartung equipped the members with weapons immediately after the formation of the "SeS Bogdanovka". Johann Büchler gave every single member a rifle and an armband with a swastika.<sup>80</sup> The handling of the weapons by the "SeS" members was not without problems, so Hans Gleich felt compelled to conduct shooting exercises with the "SeS" members in October.<sup>81</sup> The jurisdiction of those "ethnic Germans" had not been in the area of responsibility of the "SK R before August 1942".<sup>82</sup> The legal gray zone posed a problem for the Romanians. However, it shows how the newly acquired self-confidence of the "SeS" led to violent actions.<sup>83</sup> The day-to-day functioning of the organization may also have been attractive. One member stands out according to the accounts of the other members. Josef Hass, who was 22 years old (at the time of the shootings), was the youngest in the "SeS." Pastuschenko states "[...] that Josef Hass tried to occupy a leading position in the department. [...] (He was) especially proud to occupy a higher rank in the self-protection organization (Steinhart 2010a, 308)." It is possible that Hass wanted to get the recognition of the older "SeS"-members. He, alongside Iwan Büchler, at least took responsibility for the conscription of members.

Another intra-organizational dynamic is the question of the formation of anti-Semitic consensus fictions. Although the intensive propaganda training by the "SK R" took place only after the massacre, there are indications that a moral legitimization was given for the shootings on the part of the "SK R" and the "SeS" leaders. Historical anti-Semitism in the region undoubtedly played a role, but much more strongly the typhus epidemic may have prompted the legitimization to murder the Jews. Raul Hilberg describes this racist explanatory pattern of attributing diseases to the Jews that were actually caused by Nazi actions as a "self-fulfilling prophecy" (Steinhart 2010a, 306). Pastuschenko reports that he

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**80** BAL, B162/2308, Interrogation of Koch, Florian on January 6, 1967 in Nikolayev, p. 110.

**81** BAL, B162/2308, Interrogation of Stolz, Peter on January 6, 1967 in Nikolaev, p. 120.

**82** BAL, B162/2292, Letter from Reinecke to Hauptamt SS-Gericht (secret), August 12, 1942, p. 123.

**83** Glass (2009), S. 792–93. Dok. 307 on November 19, 1941, pp. 792–93; The Germans provided their own office for the settlement of disputes between the ethnic Germans and Romanians. BAL, B162/2301, p. 121. Interrogation of Kirschstein, Herbert on January 28, 1963 in Berlin, p.121.

received explicit instructions from Büchler "[...] that the sick Jews housed in the stable at the Comintern collective farm needed to be shot (Steinhart 2010b, 66)." The typhus that emanated from the pigsties was also a topic of conversation among the Ukrainian residents. It is understood that the ethnic German perpetrators justified their actions in the shootings by protecting the village community from further typhus outbreaks stemming from the Jews. It ended up exacerbating the spread of typhus in German villages as the Jews' stolen clothing further spread the infection. Even if they did not simply adopt the propaganda of the National Socialists, it is assumed that they were indifferent to the supposed "necessity" of the shootings of the Jews. In the "preliminary final report" of the investigators in Ludwigsburg, it was stated: "So far, no case has come to light that a Jew in the German settlements survived the VoMi period."<sup>84</sup>

## 5 Conclusion

In this work, I considered the Bogdanovka massacre taking place in December 1941 from complementing points of view. The points of contact between the Germans and the Romanians in their policy showed that there were two competing forces regarding the responsibility of the Jews in Transnistria. The Romanians' willingness to expel the Jews from Bessarabia and Bukovina without any plans for their accommodation demonstrates a vacancy in actions that was ultimately occupied by local commanders. Indifference to what happened to the Jews once they were on German occupied soil persisted, which was evident not only in policy but also in the actions of Romanian soldiers during the phases of the deportations. Only by the Germans' own interests emerging with the formation of the "Sonderkommando R" for the administration of the 130,000 "ethnic Germans" in the Black Sea region, did the shared responsibility for the extermination of the Jews could take hold. By this, it became apparent that both the Romanian and the German side resorted to militias from the local population for the massacre. The "SK R" mobilized the "Selbstschutz" and the Romanians engaged Ukrainian auxiliary forces for the shootings.

The cooperation in the shootings between the Romanian and German sides was particularly evident in the microhistorical perspective on the massacre. However, same as in previous research, this work could not add new insights to the communication between the SS officers of the "SK R" and the Romanian officers. The possibilities here were limited the contemporary Bogdanovka witnesses' minor insight regarding the political level. By focusing on the point of view and the

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<sup>84</sup> BAL, B162/2297, "Preliminary Final Report," Ludwigsburg, September 7, 1962, p. 107.



possibilities of action of the so-called "bystanders" I was able to investigate another aspect that has received little attention in research so far. Their accounts of the massacre in Bogdanovka had shown that the residents of the region were directly affected by their neighborhood becoming the arrival point of deportations and the site of shootings and burnings. With the eyewitness interviews of local residents in Bogdanovka by the organization "Yahad – In Unum", it was possible to take up a new perspective. Not only do the local voices help gather information about geography, village society, interethnic relations, and pre-war developments but also frequently the villagers' own considerations of possible courses of action, such as rescues, trade relations, as well as denunciations and murder could come to the fore. Their information could help better understand how the Romanians built up an orderly structure of police, starosts and coachmen. These structures were also used in the execution of the shootings. The local police consisting of Ukrainians was also used in the shootings, at least according to several statements and Solonari's text. Furthermore, other civilians were also forcibly reassigned to help with the logistics of transporting the Jews or simply to provide material and supplies during the shootings.

Certainly, shameful details that incriminate the testifiers themselves remain unmentioned. Nevertheless, many small details can be found in the interviews of the local population, which are helpful to understand the process of the shootings in a more accurate way. Thus, the ambivalence of the eyewitness interviews can never be completely eliminated, since misstatements are always possible. Likewise, the local Ukrainians' ambivalent behavior toward the Jewish population cannot be resolved: their actions range from active assistance to the Jews to active participation in their murder.

The organizational sociological view of the perpetrator group of the "SeS" from Bogdanovka has revealed the complex dynamics that occur in a violent organization. In the case of the shooters, it was shown that a bundle of motivational means revealed plural motives of the perpetrators, which could only be meaningfully named by referring to their organized nature. Within the organization, hierarchies were created that ensured the increased responsibility of individuals over the group. With the prospect of rewards, the killing of the Jews moved into an acceptable field of activity. The integration of the entire village structure, which also included family relationships, was a decisive factor for the recruitment and retention of members.

Where do the dynamics, and situational factors, which are often emphasized in perpetrator research, actually begin? It is a difficult undertaking to frame an act of violence in such a way that one does not try to explain the readiness for violence through mentalities that have already existed for a long time, but to point to dynamics that lie within the logic of an organization whose purpose is to kill. There would certainly be possibilities to include more about the historical background of

the ethnic Germans in the Black Sea region in the analysis. However, a problem with perpetrator research is the identification of multiple and variable motivations of perpetrators without giving a common interdependence of these possible explanations. The situation is different when the organization of a killing unit, such as the "SeS", is used as such. For it is difficult to talk about the real motivation of the perpetrators, but the interdependencies that arise between the ethnic German members and the members of the "SK R" can be traced in a meaningful way using the organizational sociological model. The focus is more on the general willingness to maintain the motivation of the members.

On the empirical level, the individual means of motivation could be applied to show that the willingness to kill does not only depend on the narrow time frame of the shooting itself, but shows that processes are already set in motion in advance that either enable a member to be indifferent to the tasks assigned to him, or are ultimately forced upon him by the organization. In the case of the shooters of the "SeS" from Bogdanovka, this variance in the judgment of voluntariness or willingness cannot be answered uniformly and unequivocally. Nevertheless, this research was able to show that non-monetary rewards, direct improvements in living conditions, opportunities for advancement, and consideration to the family contributed to the finely chiseled network of action decisions.

Many details about the Bogdanovka massacre remain fuzzy and can only be made out by further evaluation of archival materials and the collection of more eyewitness interviews. Furthermore, in this work only a very short period of the activity of the "SK R" in Transnistria could be presented. It would be useful to analyze the organization of the "SeS" until the withdrawal of the Germans. Also, an investigation of the relationship between the "SK R" and the Ukrainian population would require a deeper insight.

## List of Abbreviations

BAL	Bundesarchiv-Außenstelle Ludwigsburg
BK	Bereichskommando
NKVD	People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs
NS	Nationalsozialistic
NSKK	Nationalsozialistischer Kraftfahrkorps
RK U	Reichskommissariat Ukraine
SeS	Selbstschutz
SK R	Sonderkommando R
SS	Schutzstaffel
SU	Soviet Union

VoMi      Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle  
YIU        Yahad – In Unum

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