

The Global Notion of “Contract killer”: Impact of Regional Adaptations

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to explore the concept of a “contract killer” (“hitman”) by analyzing scientific knowledge and research conducted by the Memory Institute, including field research conducted by Expeditionary Corps (special unit of the Memory Institute), under the leadership of Ph D. Oleg Maltsev. The Expeditionary Corps focused its research in 2019 on the philosophy of Southern Italy. By combining insights from various sources, this article aims to shed light on the intricacies of the “contract killer” concept and provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon within the context of Southern Italy’s philosophical backdrop. This article also considers the fundamental differences between a serial killer (maniac) and a contract killer (hitman).

Keywords

contract killer, hitman, serial killer, criminal organizations, criminal tradition of Southern Italy

Introduction

This article examines case studies from regions such as Southern Italy, Southern Africa, and Imperial Russia to illustrate the origin, tactics, and training systems that directly influence the psychological profile of contract killers. Various interdisciplinary studies focus on the criminogenic situation in these regions (Auckloo & Davies, 2019; Breen et al., 2019; Kollmann, 2020; Nese et al., 2018; Terranova et al., 2017). The concept of contract killers or “hitmans” as we envision them today emerged in the turbulent 1990s (known as: “dashing 90s”), a period marked by pervasive coercion. The article explores the origins and

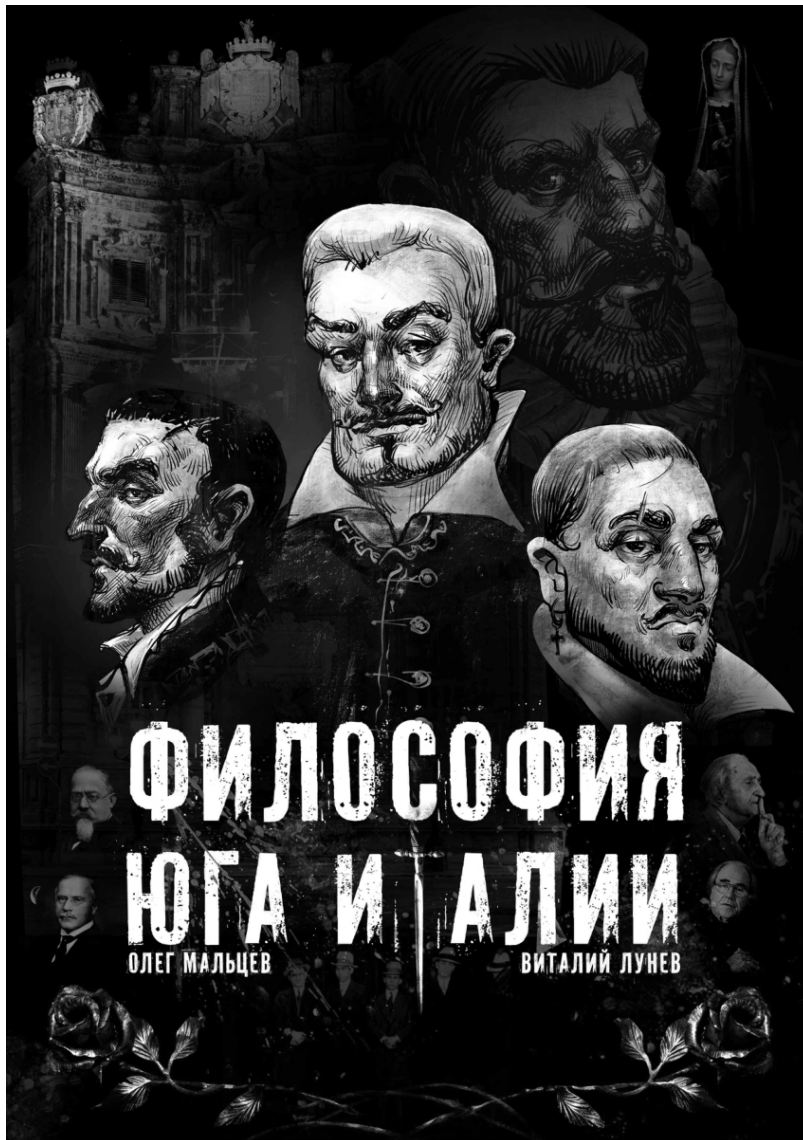


Figure 1. Cover of the book "Philosophy of Southern Italy" (Maltsev & Lunov, 2020)

training of hitmen, as well as the distinctions between contract killers and serial killers, commonly referred to as "maniacs." Emphasize that there is much more modern research devoted to serial killers and serial murder (Hodgkinson et al., 2017; see also Fridel & Fox, 2019; Petherick & Petherick, 2019; Reid, 2017; Yaksic, 2018). It also raises the question of whether society, in some way, contributed to the emergence of this problem. By analyzing these aspects, the article seeks to shed light on the complex phenomenon of contract killers and their role in contemporary society.

The research conducted by Academician Oleg Maltsev and the Expeditionary Corpus, focusing on the philosophy of the south of Italy, with the research results serving as the foundation for the work "Philosophy of Southern Italy," provides valuable insights into the training and preparation of assassins (Maltsev & Lunov, 2020). The term "contract killer" implies that these individuals undergo specialized training to carry out their deadly tasks effectively. This notion is supported by the fact that assassinations require careful planning, coordination, and support from a group or organization. Assassins typically do not act alone; they operate as part of a structured group that collaborates to achieve their objectives. Such groups are highly organized.

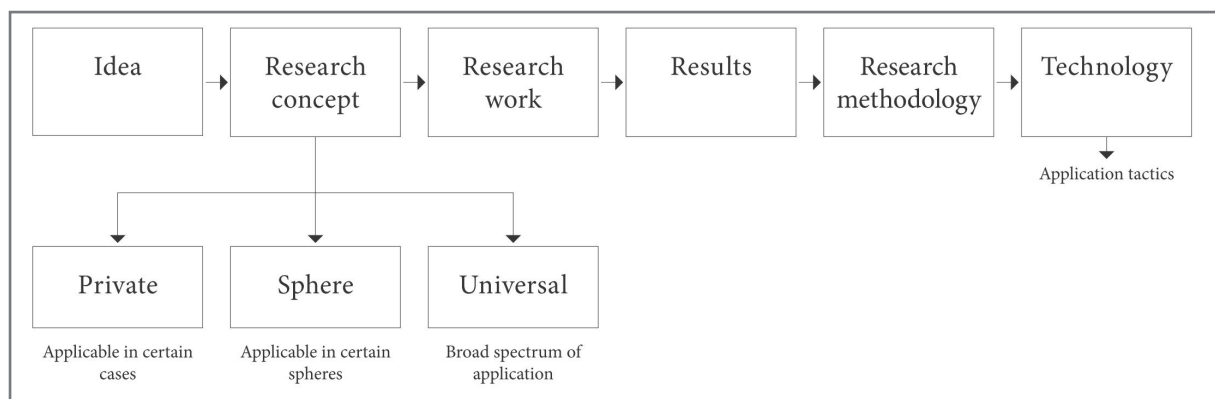


Figure 2. Scheme of the research concept

Methods

Concerning the content of this article, it is important to highlight that its basis stems from an examination of the philosophies of southern Italy, a research endeavor led by Oleg Maltsev during his fieldwork in the region. This exploration involved Maltsev's application of a scholarly approach through the utilization of the research concept. This approach exhibits certain distinctions from the conventional perception of the "work of the modern scientist." Utilizing this method, the Expeditionary Corps successfully addressed the research problem concerning Southern Italian philosophy, treating it as a comprehensive system encompassing historical, cultural, psychological, anthropological, and prototypical aspects, along with the causes and distinctive features that have shaped it over the centuries. It is emphasized that the resolution of this intricate scientific and philosophical task is unattainable and impractical without the application of the "research concept."

The distinguished scientist Academician Grigory Popov, during his era (approximately in the 1930s of the 20th century), provided the following definition: "A research concept is essentially an idea converted into a research methodology, refined through scientific transformations to reach an appropriate technologically acceptable level" (Maltsev & Lunov, 2020, p.10).

Without a research concept, scientific work is nonexistent. It is these research concepts that safeguard scientific discoveries. A research concept efficiently economizes the scientist's time, enabling an immediate commencement of work, unlike methodology. The research concept, as a tool, proves to be more functional and effective compared to methodology. Consequently, it becomes evident that contemporary scientists operate as if "in reverse," comprehending the ultimate data of the repercussions of the research subject, attempting to reconstruct the causes and establish a methodology. This process, in reality, takes more than a decade before they engage directly in scientific work.

The schematic representation of the research concept, in accordance with Academician G. S. Popov, as a mechanism for the scientist's work is illustrated in Figure 2.

Highlighting the benefits of research concept:

- Preserves scientific discoveries.
- Employs a versatile implementation system for application.
- Allows the combination of research concepts to unveil mysteries from both the past and the future.

Utilizing this approach enables us to encompass the extensive facets of criminal traditions in southern Italy. However, within this article, we will delve into distinct examples of origins, tactics, and training systems in various regions, namely southern Italy, southern Africa, and Imperial Russia. The methodologies employed in human training significantly impact the psychological profile of the contract killer, commonly referred to as a "hitman." Hence, only the conclusions drawn from this comprehensive research on the article's topic will be presented here.

Results

To start with, let us examine the case of the south of Italy and how criminal organizations emerged and differ from each other. After the revolution of 1861, several criminal organizations appeared in the region, including 'Ndrangheta, Mafia, and Camorra. While all these criminal entities are often collectively referred to as "Mafia," it is important to note that the term "Mafia" specifically refers to only one of the three major criminal organizations in the southern part of the country. Each of these criminal groups has distinct characteristics and histories, making them unique entities within the criminal landscape of the region.

The mafia is distinguished by a solitary assassin, also known as the "Beati Paoli," as first mentioned. A prominent illustration of such an individual is depicted in Mario Puzo's novel "The Godfather." The corresponding scene in the movie portrays the dialogue: "Do you live in a bad area? — Not that word. Once a police car with two policemen was stolen from our street". Over time, a retransformation has surfaced, revealing a contemporary hitmans as an individual who may align with a small group, yet the norm remains a solitary figure of great authority. Consequently, the status of such an assassin within a criminal organization is remarkably elevated, akin to a bosun on a ship. Nevertheless, the Mafia still tends to favor a lone killer who excels at executing "his job" (Puzo, 1969).

Unlike the Mafia, the Camorra operates as a gang, consisting of two to five individuals. Although it has undergone transformation, the desire for group dynamics persists, as historically, the Camorra functioned in larger groups of 20–25 members across various territories. The driving psychological force behind a Camorrist is often rooted in revenge. These individuals are renowned for their unruliness and primarily associate their activities with street-level crimes.

'Ndrangheta operates on a family-oriented organizational structure, capable of manifesting in various forms. Its members are motivated by a system that rewards loyalty, abilities, and specific skills. Respected individuals are entrusted with particular tasks within the organization. Similar to the Mafia, 'Ndrangheta also conducts planned training for killers, involving specialized instruction. Having risen quietly over the years, today, 'Ndrangheta stands as the most dominant and influential criminal organization worldwide.

With an annual turnover of 44 billion euros (excluding money laundering proceeds), 'Ndrangheta stands as the wealthiest, most aggressive, and pervasive criminal organization, excelling at infiltrating the economy and government structures. It holds a unique global presence, establishing branches in nearly every region of Italy, across Europe, Africa, Asia, the Americas, and Oceania. Drug manufacturers prefer to collaborate with 'Ndrangheta due to its unmatched reliability: members of this organization don't talk and don't repent. The organization's family-based structure renders it invulnerable, as "blood is not drained or imprisoned" (Gratteri & Nicaso, 2010).

The strength of 'Ndrangheta lies in its inherent nature, characterized by an impenetrable structure and the power of its primary bonds. Within this organization, "repenting" equates to betraying one's own family, leading to moral and psychological repercussions far more severe than the fear of death or retaliation.

The primary internal relationships among Calabrian ‘Ndrangheta groups, as previously noted, are built on blood ties — the essence of “blood bonds.” Marriages are frequently utilized to resolve violent conflicts or to establish stronger structures. An illustrative example is the marriage between Paolo De Stefano’s son and Franco Coco Trovato’s daughter in 1992, which further enhanced and empowered the De Stefano family, led by one of the most influential ‘Ndrangheta bosses in Lombardy (Badolati, 2014).

In Southern Africa, it is widely recognized that there exist entire organizations solely dedicated to contract killings, known as “killer gangs.” One notable example is the “27s,” which is part of the three major criminal gangs in the Republic of South Africa, referred to as the “Numbers gang” — “26s,” “27s,” and “28s” (Pinnock, 2016).

Now let us turn to the history of imperial Russia. In the history of imperial Russia before 1917, there is no record of a character of a “contract killer” in literature, fairy tales, or other folklore. While murders for hire did occur at the level of the Russian nobility, they were typically conducted in the form of legal duels, which cannot be classified as a profession. Unlike in America, where “bounty hunters” were present, there was no analogous phenomenon in Russia, and the concept of a “contract killer” as a profession did not exist.

Indeed, during a time in Russian history when terror became a political weapon, the first assassins emerged from the Socialist Revolutionary Party (SR). These individuals were characterized by their deep ideological understanding and psychological readiness to sacrifice their lives while remaining committed to executing the organization’s tasks at any cost. Prominent examples of their actions include the murders of the Romanov family and Stolypin. The SRs operated on a military-style organizational model, with cells consisting of 3 to 5 people. While they did engage in robberies, this was considered a secondary occupation. Their primary focus was on the ideology of terror, using violent actions to achieve their political objectives.

After the 1917 Russian Revolution, assassinations for hire evolved and became associated with the state rather than being solely political in nature. Notable instances include the contract killings of General Kutepov P. A. and Trotsky L. D. During Stalin’s era, a group of exceptional specialists in hired killings emerged, targeting state officials and officers, some of whom were prominent figures like Yakov Serebryansky and Pavel Sudoplatov. These targeted assassinations were categorized as state operations until the end of the USSR, reflecting the state’s involvement in carrying out such acts.

Contract killers, as we know them today, emerged in the early 1990s during a period of economic crisis and mass dismissals of various specialists, instructors, state security officers, and officers from military intelligence subversive centers. This time marked a significant increase in organized crime across the post-Soviet space, leading to a widespread prevalence of hired assassinations. During the 1990s, a surge in contract killings occurred, targeting entrepreneurs, competitors, associates, bankers, and even criminals eliminating their rivals and settling disputes through violent means. Weapons became the primary method to resolve any issues during this chaotic period. It is essential to mention that until 1993–94, the newly independent states of the post-Soviet era were not aware of the existence of organized crime, lacked effective methods to combat it, and, consequently, were unable to effectively counteract it.

The existence of two forms of state security and military can be attributed to the state system’s transformation and subsequent retirement, which paved the way for the creation of these syndicates.

We find ourselves in a situation where officers, instructors, and teachers are not the ones being detained, but rather their silent students — the hitmen, who do not tell who trained them. It is reasonable to conclude that we, as a society, have contributed to the creation of this problem that remains relevant today.

As far back as 1893, French sociologist and philosopher Emile Durkheim (1859/1952) introduced the concept of "anomie" into scientific discourse. Anomie refers to a state of society characterized by the disorganization of social norms and institutions, uncertainty, and instability in the conditions of human action. It also encompasses the discrepancy between the goals proclaimed by society and the limited access to legitimate means of achieving those goals for the majority of people. The desire for accepted success and well-being is hindered by restricted access to socially approved avenues for obtaining success, such as education, profession, status, and wealth.

In essence, economic recessions and widespread layoffs, along with military personnel transitioning to civilian life, can lead individuals who could not achieve certain values through conventional means to reject established rules and seek benefits through any available methods. As a consequence, this results in a significant rise in organized crime.

Criminal behavior is predominantly acquired through communication within groups. The frequency, duration, and intensity of such interactions play a crucial role in the adoption of deviant conduct. Learning criminal behavior follows a similar process as any other form of learning, as explained in the theory of differential association by E. Sutherland (1939).

The current political and economic situation in Ukraine is widely recognized as unstable, leading to a low level of accountability for ammunition and explosive devices. These conditions have facilitated access to firearms, which are now being utilized in contract killings. The chosen method of murder can reveal information about the sex of the criminal, their physical strength, special skills, potential occupation, or other experiences, as well as their ability to handle specific types of weapons.

Indeed, the criminalistic characteristic of contract killings can be described as a comprehensive system of information encompassing the methods of preparation, execution, and concealment of the murder, as well as the distinctive traits of the organizer, intermediary, perpetrator, and victim. This system also considers the circumstances of the criminal situation, reflecting the established connections between the involved parties. Its primary purpose is to construct and verify hypotheses to address specific investigative objectives effectively.

In 95% of the examined cases, the perpetrators received monetary rewards for carrying out the murders. Among these cases, 45% involved payment in foreign currency, particularly US dollars. Additionally, in certain instances, the employer rewarded the executor with gifts such as apartments, cars, or other valuable assets (Shchukin & Podgol, 2004).

However, it is important to distinguish these contract killers from serial killers, also known as "lone maniacs." The actions of a trained contract killer differ significantly from those of a serial killer. The methods and preparations employed by a serial killer before committing a crime often involve the following steps: the preliminary selection of the future victim, gaining the victim's trust, choosing the most opportune time for the crime, procuring a weapon in advance, and planning a premeditated alibi. Serial killers like Anatoly Slivko, Andrei Chikatilo, Serhiy Tkach, and Anatoly Onoprienko are notable examples of individuals who targeted women and children and executed these calculated steps in their crimes (Maltsev et al., 2019).

The factors influencing the formation of a serial killer's personality can be categorized into two groups. The first group of negative factors includes heredity, lifestyle, and the presence of transferred or existing diseases. The second of negative factors related to family upbringing, psychological and sexual development of an individual.

Discussion

The exploration of criminal organizations involves the engagement of numerous authors from diverse fields of knowledge. Here are a few renowned authors and concepts associated with the examination of this issue:

1. Roberto Saviano (2012) is an Italian journalist and writer, acclaimed for the book “Gomorra,” in which he elucidates the operations of the Camorra in Naples and Campania. Saviano extensively researches and analyzes criminal structures, unraveling their profound impact on society.
2. Diego Gambetta (1996) is a researcher, author of “The Mafia Code”, which analyzes the structure and internal order of criminal organizations.
3. Antonio Nicaso: university professor, researcher, speaker and consultant to governments and law-enforcement agencies. He is an author of several books about ‘Ndrangheta (Nicaso & Lamothe, 1995).
4. Nicola Gratteri is an Italian magistrate and author. Considered one of the leading figures in the struggle against the ‘Ndrangheta, a struggle in which he has taken an active part since the beginning of his career (Gratteri & Nicaso, 2012).
5. Arcangelo Badolati (2014) is an Italian journalist and writer. His book “Mamma ‘Ndrangheta” is the most comprehensive and exhaustive work written on criminal organizations in the province of Cosenza.
6. Klaus von Lampe (2015) is an associate professor in the Department of Law, Police Science and Criminal Justice Administration at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York City.
7. Federico Varese (2018) is an Italian professor. He currently teaches criminology at the University of Oxford. He has written about organized crime around the world in books such as *The Russian Mafia* and *Mafias on the Move*.
8. James Finckenauer (2012) is an organized crime expert, author, distinguished Professor Emeritus at Rutgers University, former director of the National Institute of Justice, Washington DC. Dr. Finckenauer is an expert in human trafficking, juvenile and international criminal justice. Author of numerous books on Russian organized crime in the US.
9. John Dickie (2013) is an author, historian and academic. Professor of Italian Studies at University College London. He was the host of the television program *Mafia Bunker*, which aired on the History Channel.
10. Letizia Paoli (2014) is a criminologist. Since 2006 she has been a professor of the Law Faculty at Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (Belgium). She has published extensively, notably on international drugs trading.

The research conducted by these authors and the concepts they present contribute to a multifaceted perspective on the issue of criminal organizations. This encompasses an examination of their structure, societal repercussions, political entanglements, and viable approaches to counteract them. These authors offer distinct viewpoints on the subject, incorporating sociological, criminological, political, and cultural dimensions of criminal organizations. The amalgamation of their research analyses facilitates the development of a more comprehensive understanding of the problem and potential strategies for combating mafia organizations.

In broad terms, gaining insight into the issue of criminal organizations necessitates a comprehensive approach that considers various aspects of their activities. The following are key elements for a thorough understanding of the problem and strategies to counter it:

1. Social roots, poverty, and unemployment: Examining the social and economic factors contributing to the allure of mafia structures.

2. Traditional cultural factors: Investigating cultural aspects, such as customs, that may contribute to the support of mafia organizations.
3. Economic aspects: Analyzing how criminal groups infiltrate legal economic sectors.
4. Drug and Arms Trafficking: Examining the economic facets of illicit businesses, such as drug and arms trafficking.
5. Links to political figures: Investigating the influence of mafia groups on political processes and structures.
6. Corruption: Examining corruption and the relationships between organizations and officials.
7. Organized crime techniques: Understanding various types of criminal activities, such as extortion, smuggling, and drug trafficking.
8. Territorial control: Exploring how mafia groups maintain territorial control and engage in power struggles.
9. Sociocultural aspects: Studying how criminal organizations manage their image and adhere to the principle of "omerta" (law of silence).
10. Social Support: Analyzing the impact of criminals on society and understanding reasons for potential support.
11. Coping strategies: Strengthening law and order: Harsh criminal penalties: Imposing strict penalties on members of criminal organizations.
12. Asset confiscation: Implementing measures to confiscate assets derived from criminal activities.
13. Financial monitoring: Introducing rigorous financial monitoring measures to prevent money laundering.

An effective strategy to combat criminal organizations must necessarily be comprehensive and multi-layered, taking into account socio-cultural, economic, and political factors.

Conclusions

The first distinctive quality of the psychological portrait of a contract killer (hitman) is that they have undergone specialized training or acquired certain skills, such as precision marksmanship skills. Despite both serial killers and hired killers intentionally and unlawfully taking the lives of others, there is a significant difference between them.

- The essential distinction between a serial killer (maniac) and a hired killer (hitman) lies in the fact that the former does not need specialized training, whereas the latter requires specific training to avoid imprisonment.
- A serial killer (maniac) selects their own victims, whereas a hitman does not; they are assigned tasks.
- A serial killer (maniac) can abandon their criminal intentions as they have no clients or superiors, while a hitman cannot do so due to obligations and a limited timeframe for fulfilling them.

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