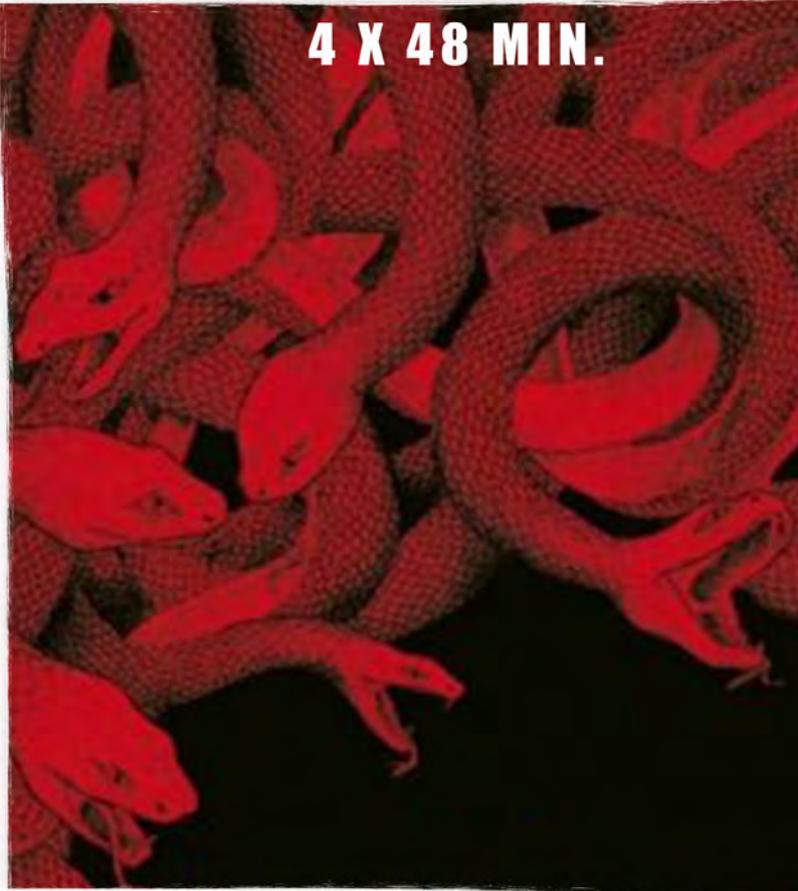


THE MAFIA'S DNA

4 X 48 MIN.



INITIATIONS, RULES, SYMBOLS & CODES

What's the deal?

The Mafia : 'Ndrangheta, La Camorra, Gangsters, the Crips, the Bloods, Hoodlums, Racketeers, Bootleggers, Triads, Yakuza, Syndicates, Crews. . . There are many names for the Mafia and similar organizations throughout the world. But all crime gangs, wherever they're from, wherever they operate, have this in common; **they are tightly bound groups of individuals, who often resemble families, or at the very least, clans, that make their living from organized crime.**

Their top money-making industries are well-known: drug trafficking, human trafficking (often for prostitution), smuggling migrants, dealing in illegal firearms, selling weapons, trafficking in natural resources (like diamonds), trading in endangered wildlife (including poaching), selling fraudulent medicines, and spreading cybercrime. What they do, is well documented. How they go about their trade, and what life really looks like from the inside of these organizations, is less well known.

In this series we will not focus on telling the chronological story of the various Mafias and their origins; there are enough television programs out there that have already done that. Instead, we will examine the unique symbols, rules and codes that characterize some of the world's most notorious names in organized crime. We will investigate their secret oaths of silence, their initiation ceremonies and established hierarchies, and the application of their "Codes of Honor". We will try to understand their unique languages, their signs, their gestures; in short, we will look at their communication, which is so often full of intricate codes. We will also look into their complex hierarchical organizations, from the men-of-honor, the foot-soldiers and assassins, right up to their great leaders in command. In short, we will analyze, episode-by-episode, the true DNA of the leading Mafias of the world.

Here are just some of the questions that we will be unearthing the answers to in our hard-hitting series:

- Why are the Yakuza (the Japanese Mafia) covered in tattoos? What do they mean?
- And what is meant by amputation of the finger?
- What does the Italian Mafia's "code of honor" mean, and what strict rules must all members follow?
- Can you belong to the 'Ndrangheta only if you are Italian?
- And what about their incredible "Initiation Rite"?
- The Russian mafia, "The Vory", also has tattoos – but how is their meaning different?
- Are the Vory now the scariest organized crime group in the world? Is it true that they often use military tactics?
- Is it true that the Los Zetas (Mexican Mafia) are one of the best armed paramilitary groups in the whole of Central America
- Are they responsible for the undeclared but very real Mexican civil war?
- Is it true that the Los Zetas win the "prize" for exhibiting the greatest violence and brutality, over all the Mafias?



Episode 1: Yakuza, taking the extreme path

The notorious Yakuza, also known as gokudō, "the extreme path", are a unique band of organized criminals; because, despite their numerous illegal activities, many leaders and members of the Yakuza are still at large throughout Japan, and operate reasonably freely through a mixture of legal and illegal activities and investments, and they are even known for charitable work, following the 2011 Earthquake and Tsunami in Japan. At their height, in the early 1960s, they operated internationally – many Yakuza are ethnic Koreans – and police estimated their membership at 184,100. Today, their numbers are closer to 40,000.

Known for their slick backed hair, smart black suits and intricate, symbolic tattoos, applied with handmade tools, and identifiable by the missing tips of their little fingers (lopping them off to show contrition to their boss is known as "Yubitsume"), Yakuza are often involved in politics and take up positions as directors on corporate boards. They have business cards, office buildings, and frequently show up in gossip columns of newspapers. All the same, the Yakuza are one of the most fearsome and richest Mafias in the world, and their position of semi-legality is unique, unthinkable in other countries.

Aside from their unusual position in Japanese society, their code of honor, handed down from generations is another genuine curiosity, and it consists of three main commandments:

- Do not touch the wife of a fellow Yakuza.
- Do not reveal to anyone the secrets of the organization.
- Always be loyal to your boss.

This last rule was taken from the Samurai code: absolute obedience to one's lord. Formed during the time of the Tokugawa Shoguns (1603-1868), the Yakuza evolved mainly from the Bakuto or gambler caste, and they adopted the traditional Japanese hierarchical structure of oyabun-kobun where a kobun (literally, a foster child) owes their allegiance to the oyabun (foster parent). Much later, the code of jingi (justice and duty) was developed where loyalty and respect became a way of life.

The oyabun-kobun relationship is formalized by ceremonial sharing of sake from a single cup as part of a sworn brotherhood relationship. Much as during a traditional Shinto wedding. And, whilst it is an important part of their identity, Yakuza seldom reveal their tattoos, mainly doing so only when playing cards among themselves, when they open up their shirts and drape them to show off their ink. When new members join, they are often required to remove their trousers as well.

Among other questions, we'll be revealing how to recognize a member of the Yakuza, we will investigate the significance of their tattoos, we will reveal the meaning of Yubitsume, and we will discover how their fiefdoms and families are composed. For make no mistake, while outsiders may view them as gangsters, the Yakuza call themselves "Ninkyō dantai"; a chivalrous organization. A chivalrous organization? That is debatable, but what is without question is that this is one corporate body that no-one wants to get on the wrong side of.



Episode 2: How do you solve a problem like the 'Ndrangheta?

They might not be as famous as the Mafioso of Sicily and its offshoots in New York City, or the Camorra of Old Napoli (Naples), but make no mistake; the 'Ndrangheta, which originated in Calabria, (the toe of the so-called 'boot' of Italy), is today the most powerful crime syndicate in Italy, if not the world.

Naturally, the 'Ndrangheta has close associations with the Mafia and Camorra, and, having spread to Northern Italy in the late 1970s, it has now gone global, with branches everywhere from Australia & Argentina, to Canada & The US, to the UK & Germany. In 2008 their income was said to be around 55 billion dollars, and in 2010, a US diplomat estimated that the organization's narcotics trafficking, extortion and money laundering activities accounted for at least 3% of Italy's GDP. Indeed, the 'Ndrangheta is the only Mafia-like criminal enterprise with presence on all five populated continents. According to Europol the 'Ndrangheta is among the richest and most powerful organized crime groups at a global level.

Again, according to Europol, the 'Ndrangheta *own* the trafficking of cocaine in Europe today. With such a big global presence and considerable control over cocaine trafficking (they import cocaine from Colombia), come considerable powers of decision-making and dominance over the black market economy, making the 'Ndrangheta a powerful criminal organization indeed.

There are two ways to join the 'Ndrangheta: One, the most common, by birth into a family; or, Two, by "baptism", through the "affiliation" rite, which binds the supplicant to the organization for life. Just as with any other self-respecting Mafia, there is only one way to leave the 'Ndrangheta – By dying. Although there are said to be a small number of former members in witness protection programs. Indeed the Second 'Ndrangheta War (1985-91) resulted in some 600 deaths. It supposedly got so bad that to stem the bloodshed, the Sicilian Mafia intervened and (most probably) set up the 'Ndrangheta governing body, La Provincia. Their hierarchy is intricate and complicated, a little like the Masons, in that there are numerous degrees: "Picciotto", "Camorrista", "Sgarrista", "Santista", "Evangelist", "Quartino", "Trequartino", "Godfather" and "Capobastone" are the supposed "Gifts" with which an 'Ndranghetista can be rewarded.

The organizational model follows that of patriarchal societies, it is a reasonably flat structure based on parental bonds, unlike the Sicilian mafia which has a vertical organization of capo famiglia (i.e. The Don or Godfather), down to the Caporegime, down to Soldato or foot-soldier level and associates, the so-called men of honor. Whereas, in the 'Ndrangheta, it is the family, also called 'ndrina or cosca, which comprises the primary cell. It is formed by the natural head of the family, the Capo Bastone. The individual to whom others are allied, usually through genuine kinship, thus forming the local, i.e. a territorial entity of at least 49 affiliates. It is said that training in the "life" starts at a very young age for 'Ndrangheta children; supposedly, there are entire Calabrian towns consisting of 'Ndrangheta families where the authorities barely dare to tread. Each cell is run by a set of "Ndranghetisti" called "Copiata", almost always represented by the boss, the accountant (or Consigliere), and the crime chief. Each and every Capo Bastone has the power of life and death over his men and expects the right to absolute obedience from his troops.

Like the Mafia, the 'Ndrangheta has its own code of silence, or omerta, which all members must observe, and according to an 1890s court case, the written rules of the code are and based on notions of honor, secrecy, violence, blood oaths and solidarity, and mutual assistance. It is said that training in the "life" starts at a very young age for 'Ndrangheta children; there are entire Calabrian towns consisting of 'Ndrangheta families where the authorities barely dare to tread.

In summary, the 'Ndrangheta is the biggest Mafia organization you've never heard of, although John Paul Getty III heard all about them when they kidnapped him for a 17 million dollar ransom in 1973, in one of the most infamous kidnapping cases of the 20th Century...



Episode 3: The Power & The Vory

Now we come to arguably the scariest organized crime group of them all; the Russian Mafia, known to most English speakers as the Vory. Originating in the Gulags (the forced labor camps) under Stalin, the Vory are a criminal culture with their own slang, codes and laws, and they operate throughout the countries of the former Soviet Union, including some former nations of the Warsaw Pact. To give them their full title, they are the Vory v Zakone, literally, "thieves in law", and there are two equally valid interpretations for this phrase: legalized thieves, and thieves who *are* the law. A former FBI Special Agent once called the Vory "the most dangerous people on earth". It is estimated that they have as many as 300,000 members among 450 groups.

Vor culture sprang from organized crime within the prisons and those origins remain very much embedded within the Vory DNA; only repeatedly jailed convicts are eligible for Vor (or, thief) status. Each new Vor is scrutinized and only accepted by the agreement of several Vory, and then "crowned", through respective rituals and intricate, hierarchical tattoos. To be a Vor is to be a thief, a respected title in the underground. The Vory swear to a code of complete submission to the laws of criminal life, including the rejection of all legitimate forms of employment, refusal to participate in all political activities, and absolute refusal to assist the state in any capacity. For example, even those Vory who joined the Red Army during World War II were ostracized when they found themselves back in the gulag. A far-from-civil war then broke out between the supposedly pure Vory and the so-called Suki (or, "bitches"): men who had faced down the Nazis in brutal war resented being blacklisted and had the toughness and the skills to fight back.

Today, the Vory frequently employ military tactics to meet their criminal ends, and their most common activities are terrorism, organ trafficking, and contract killing. The Vor are the elite of the Russian criminal world, and as we mentioned earlier, their most privileged representatives are "crowned". Prison tattoos, usually performed with rudimentary tools, indicate their rank within the criminal world, their noteworthy criminal accomplishments and places of former incarceration. For example, a tattoo of one cat indicates that the bearer robs alone while multiple cats indicate that he works with partners. An eight-pointed star tattooed on the shoulder is the Vory's main calling card. It's been said that while the Communist Party held a steadfast grip on government and society, the Vory held a monopoly on crime. Vory consider prison their true home and have a saying, "The home for an angel is heaven, while prison is the home for a Vor." Unlike, say, in the Sicilian Mafia, the Vory have far fewer rules, but the punishment for breaking these is often much more severe.

Again, unlike the Italian Mafia with its emphasis on blood ties and family, the rejection of social norms and traditional family values are fundamental aspects of the Vory criminal world. Among its code, the rules state that a Vor must be alone without family, without a wife, or any long-term relationships with women, and he must be without children. Any socially useful work or the desire to take one of the administrative positions while in prison is condemned. If a Vor lives with a family or has children, or withholds money from the common fund, he will be judged by a jury of his Vory peers. And, most especially in cases of theft from the common chest, the crown will be removed... IE: the sentence will be either mutilation or death.

In this episode we will examine the code of the Vory, and the meanings of their many tattoos, and we will also see how, post Communism, the role of the Vory has changed, with white collar crime becoming a more important part of the mix. According to the International Herald Tribune, today the Vory have spread around the world, to Madrid, Berlin, and New York and are involved in everything from petty theft to billion-dollar money-laundering while also acting as judge and jury across all factions of the Russian Mafia. And while the code can mean life or death to an individual Vor, we must also remember that Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, author of *The Gulag Archipelago*, claimed never to have seen any thief honor the code if it conflicted with his personal criminal needs...



EPISODE 4: Los Zetas – The struggle for Mexico's soul

In this final episode of our series, we come to arguably the darkest, and the most dangerous and nihilistic of the Mafias operating in Mexico – and therefore in the world today – Los Zetas.

Los Zetas – literally, the letter Zees, or Zeds – began life in Mexico, in 1999. At this time, the head of the criminal Gulf Cartel, Osiel Cárdenas Guillén, felt threatened by both his gangland rivals and by law enforcement in the form of the Police and the Mexican military, so he decided to recruit his own real life army. Cárdenas sought out Arturo Guzmán Decena, an officer in Mexico's Special Forces. Over time, Decena brought with him more than thirty deserters from the Army's elite commando unit, the GAFE, to become Cárdenas's personal bodyguards and own private army. The men who had been trained by Israeli Commandos and US Special Forces to track down and combat the nation's gangsters were now being paid handsomely to defend them. So, the private army of the Cartel of the Gulf was born and was christened Los Zetas, named after the radio code of its first commander, "Z1", a code given to high-ranking officers. Other versions of the story claim that Los Zetas are so named after one of the most evocative names of Mexican history, the Z of Zorro.

Whatever the truth of it, Los Zetas are far from being the heroic champions of ordinary, downtrodden people. For, to defend their activities of drug trafficking, sex trafficking, gun running, protection rackets and extortion, Los Zetas engages in extremely violent tactics such as beheadings, torture, and indiscriminate murder. Based in Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, directly across the US/Mexico border from Laredo, Texas, Los Zetas were at one point Mexico's largest drug cartel in terms of geographical presence, overtaking their rivals, the Sinaloa Cartel, who formed their own (less successful) enforcer group, Los Negros. They are the kings of cocaine in Mexico, and they are responsible, along with the other Mexican cartels, for a full blown genuine civil war: seventy thousand dead in ten years, 80 journalists killed and 17 gone missing. Make no doubt; Los Zetas are to be feared. And as Sun Tzu pointed out in the Art of War it's vital to know thine enemy.

Following the capture and extradition of Cárdenas, by February 2010 Los Zetas had become so powerful that they outnumbered and outranked the Gulf Cartel in revenue, membership, and influence. The parasite had no more need of the host. So, in February of that year, Los Zetas broke away from the Gulf Cartel and an unholy civil war began. The Gulf Cartel allied with former rivals the Sinaloa in order to tackle Los Zetas, and as alliances and counter alliances were forged and broken, the body count piled up. At the end of 2016, certain hostilities ceased, when Los Zetas Grupo Bravo (Group Bravo) and Zetas Vieja Escuela (Old School Zetas) formed an alliance with the Gulf Cartel against Cartel Del Noreste (Cartel of the Northeast). That said, there is considerable capacity for future infighting. Their history may be relatively short when compared to the Sicilian Mafia, but theirs is a story of unmitigated brutal violence, with the possibility of more, especially if yet another mafia civil war breaks out.

Over time, many of the Zetas' original thirty-one members have been killed or arrested (only 10 are still alive); although a number of younger men have joined to fill the vacuum. Los Zetas still runs on paramilitary lines with sophisticated military training and hierarchy, and members can even earn a "Los Zetas Commando Medallion" for their service. What's truly distressing about this criminal organization is not only the atrocities they have committed in the recent past, but also the potential they possess to increase their scale of operations and perpetuate more horrors in the future.

Whenever media pundits make predictions about the future of politics and economics in our time – when they discuss key figures, multi-nationals and governments – you will rarely hear mention of Los Zetas. Yet, Los Zetas are among the most influential modern crime syndicates, at one time they controlled 11 of Mexico's states, and they certainly possess one of the most ferocious and efficient business and military structures among the world's Mafias. Rarely do Los Zetas appear on the front pages and seldom do the newscasts deal with them, but







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