

**PICASSO**<sup>FILM</sup>

presents

Based on the acclaimed and successful book by Federico Varese



# MAFIA LIFE

LOVE, DEATH AND MAKING  
MONEY AT THE HEART OF  
ORGANISED CRIME



4 x 52 min.

# MAFIA LIFE

4 x 52 min.

## SERIES OVERVIEW

**The series** will take viewers on a journey into the daily existence of members of various mafia organizations worldwide, including the 'Ndrangheta and the Japanese Yakuza. We will use transcripts and wiretaps, journalistic accounts, in-depth research, legal testimony, and biographical information. We will attempt to expose the true reality of the Mafia, which often differs from the glorified and fabricated images presented to the public by Hollywood.

**In the series** "Mafia LIFE," we invite the audience to embark on a journey into the human side of mafia members. Through the narratives of the Calabrian 'Ndrangheta, Chinese Triads, Japanese Yakuza and Russian Vory, we open up novel perspectives on the existential identities and vulnerabilities of different mafia groups worldwide.

We will shed light on issues that are still shrouded in darkness and uncertainty.



Here are some of them by way of example only:

**The rituals that govern a person's association with the mafia**

**The recruitment techniques employed by these groups**

**The consequences for the loved ones of members who breach the code of conduct**

**The path to achieving the highest echelons of power within the mafia.**



**Employing wiretaps,** investigative journalism, historical analysis, legal evidence, and biographical case studies of infamous criminal figures, we will provide an intimate view of the everyday life of the world's most elusive organizations.

**Through four episodes,** the audience will witness mob recruitment ceremonies and decode the meaning of their enigmatic tattoos that are inked onto their skin as symbols. Themes like death, romance, fear, faith, choice, and drama will be the focal points of our series, placing the different mafia groups within a realistic framework of an opportunistic and brutal world instead of the fanciful interpretations often portrayed in budget movies and plays.

# MAFIA LIFE

4 x 52 min.

## SERIES OVERVIEW (continue)

**We will delve** into the intricate nexus between politics and crime, where mafia groups sometimes emerge as a surrogate for the state or become collaborators with state actors based on mutual gain. The blurred lines between the mafia and the state often make it challenging to distinguish the true power-holders in regions of injustice.

**The relationships** among mafia members will be a crucial aspect of our series. The complex webs of relationships make the series even more captivating and intriguing. We will learn that joining a criminal group is akin to an insurrection- a struggle for existential purpose in which symbols and tattoos serve as the adhesive between the individual and the fraternal organization. The birth of the mob lies in the metamorphosis of a new identity that not only makes the member part of a family but also bestows new roles and responsibilities based on personal rank and merit.



**We will demonstrate** how messages conveyed through symbols, and rituals can transcend time and space. Mafia members come together under the same values, whether in a rural town in Russia or a posh location in a Chinese or European city. These symbols and rituals augment the efficiency of mafia groups, acting like a herd of buffaloes that move together as a team and respond to any attacks with collective strength. We will inform viewers that placing the organization's interests above all else is the fundamental dimension of mafia groups, as we will see from numerous examples related to the Russian Mafia, 'Ndrangheta, Yakuza and the Triads.

**Our series will incorporate re-enactments** of the topics here described to offer a more realistic and understandable experience.

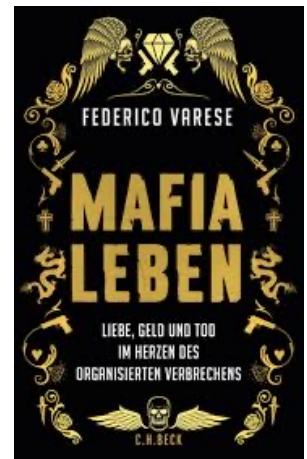
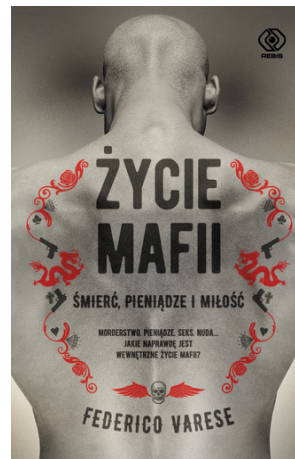
**Mafia Life** will be a unique and unforgettable series !!!

## EPISODE STRUCTURE

Eight elements will form the core chapters of every episode:

- 1. Birth :** In "Birth", we will describe a key character belonging to one of the Mafias of our series. How to become a member. Recruitment. The fraternity and admission ritual. The initiation rite. The oath. The Brotherhood. The process of rebirth for the future member. The Code to follow. The marks on the body (Tattoos and symbols). Death and Birth in the new "Family". The new Father.
- 2. Work :** In "Work", we will focus on the Bosses. The head of some mafia family in Calabria, or the Father of some Yakuza Family or the character and personality of the Russian Boss. We will try, based on expert advices, interviews with investigators and criminologists to reconstruct how "THE WORK" of the various "Boss Managers" really works.
- 3. Management :** In this section of the episode we will learn important management lessons. How do they manage their organization? How do they communicate? The diplomacy and brutality with their enemies. The alliances and the management of internal wars. Their complex and delicate strategies. Sometimes worthy of a real high-level manager.
- 4. Money :** The mafias have to do something with the money they accumulate. In "Money", we will follow the traces of the assets of the various mafias ranging from Moscow to New York, Naples and Caracas, London, Rome, San Francisco...
- 5. Family & Love :** The intimate relationship between a mafioso, his family and his partner. We will discover the complicated ties and strict rules that govern Family and feelings. Several if not opposites in the 'Ndrangheta and Russian mafia. We will explore the family concept of the Yakuza. The immobile rigidity of the Chinese Triad Family or the very strong family Italian Mafia. We'll try to understand the untouchability of the "Women", punished, in some cases even with the highest penalty: the death or exclusion from the group with very severe consequences.
- 6. Self-image :** We will discover the true meaning of the "Man of Honor". The code of Omertà. The level of respect that must be earned. The image is important at every level and in every Mafia. The personality of each member is also established through one's own image. The image at the social level or more simply the image in the territory that the Mafias control. The image serves to earn the respect of the people who live in that particular neighborhood and consequently makes every operation much easier. We will, therefore, try to understand how to construct an image within a Mafia.
- 7. Politics :** In "Politics", we will explore how a mafia can become a state and how states often resemble a mafia. Mafia and politics, common demonimator in innumerable cases, in all forms of organized crime whether we speak of the Russian Mafia, 'Ndrangheta or Narcos. The intrigues, the corruption and the politicians "payroll".
- 8. Death :** Describe some of the Mafia's favorite techniques to kill people. We will conclude by discussing the policies that would weaken, and eventually kill, the mafias themselves.





## The Author

**Federico Varese** is a Professor of Criminology and former Head of Department. Since April 2023, he has been a Professor at Sciences Po in Paris.

Professor Varese's main area of research is the study of organised crime. He has written on the Russian mafia, Soviet criminal history, migration of mafia groups, Somali piracy, the dynamics of altruistic behaviour, and the application of Social Network Analysis to criminology. Currently, he is involved in research projects on the governance dimension of organised gangs in the UK, cybercrime markets, the Russian mafia and sub-standard medicines.

He is the author of three monographs - [The Russian Mafia](#) (OUP, 2001), [Mafias on the Move](#) (PUP, 2011) and [Mafia Life](#) (2018), and an edited collected, *Organized Crime* (Routledge, 2010). His books have been translated into eight different languages.

**Professor Varese** has published papers in journals such as *Social Networks*, *The British Journal of Criminology*, *Law and Society Review*, *Crime and Justice*, *Archives Européennes de Sociologie*, *Political Studies*, *Cahiers du Monde Russe*, *Rationality & Society*, *European Sociological Review*, and *Trends in Organized Crime*, among others.

**He contributes** to *The Times Literary Supplement* and, in Italy, the daily *La Repubblica*. His work has been featured in *The Economist*, *Newsweek*, *The BBC News & World Service*, *ABC*, *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, *The Monkeycage Blog* and *Freakonomics blog*, among others. *Mafias on the Move* was the Recipient of The International Association for the Study of Organized Crime 2012 Outstanding Publication Award. *The Russian Mafia* was The Co-Recipient of ED A. HEWETT BOOK PRIZE awarded by The American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies.

**Professor Varese** holds degrees from Bologna University, Cambridge University and Oxford University. He was a Prize Research Fellow at Nuffield College, Oxford, and a visiting professor at Yale University, City University of Hong Kong and Milan University. He is currently on the editorial board of *The British Journal of Criminology* and is a past Editor of *Global Crime*.

**John le Carré** has written: "Federico Varese is two writers rolled into one: a fearless fact-hunter who goes after his quarry with the zeal of a thoroughbred journalist, and a dedicated academic who examines and analyzes his catch with relentless detachment. Throw in a robust understanding of the impact of contemporary history on the behavior of a globalized criminal underworld and you have both a compelling read and an impeccable work of reference."

## EPISODE 1: '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.

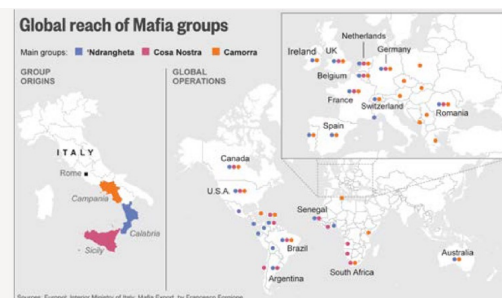
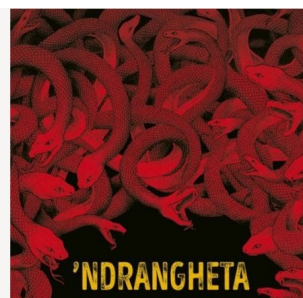
Naturally, the 'Ndrangheta has close associations with the Mafia and Camorra, and, having spread to Northern Italy in the late 1970s, it has now gone global, with branches everywhere from Australia & Argentina, to Canada & The US, to the UK & Germany. In 2020 their income was said to be around 55 billion dollars. 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 organised 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.

Like the Mafia, the 'Ndrangheta has its own code of silence, or omertà, which all members must observe, and according to an 1890s court case, the written rules of the code are based on notions of honour, secrecy, violence, blood oaths and solidarity, and mutual assistance.

In summary, the 'Ndrangheta is the biggest Mafia organisation 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 2: THE YAKUZA

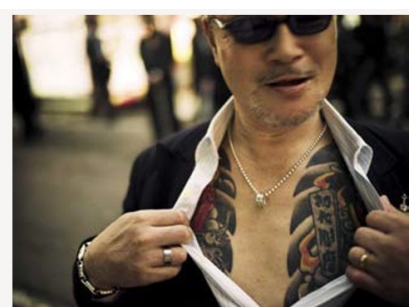
The notorious Yakuza, also known as gokudō, "the extreme path", are a unique band of organized criminals; because, despite their numerous illegal activities, many leaders and members of the Yakuza are still at large throughout Japan, and operate reasonably freely through a mixture of legal and illegal 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 organisation.

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 3: 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. It is estimated that they have as many as 300,000 members among 450 groups.

Vory 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 Vory status. Each new Vory is scrutinized and only accepted by the agreement of several Vors, and then "crowned", through respective rituals and intricate, hierarchical tattoos. To be a Vory 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.

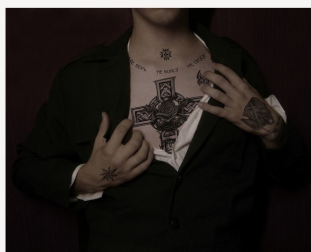
Today, the Vory frequently employ military tactics to meet their criminal ends, and their most common activities are terrorism, organ trafficking, and contract killing. The Vory are the elite of the Russian criminal world, and as we mentioned earlier, their most privileged representatives are "crowned".

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.

Vory consider prison their true home and have a saying, "The home for an angel is heaven, while prison is the home for a Vory" Unlike, say, in the Sicilian Mafia, the Vory have far fewer rules, but the punishment for breaking these is often much more severe.

Among its code, the rules state that a Vory 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 Vory 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.

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





## EPISODE 4: THE CHINESE TRIAD SOCIETY

Starting from a patriotic movement to re-establish the domination of the Ming in China, the triads have subsequently turned to crimes, including drugs, extortion, gambling, prostitutes and the smuggling of human beings. The triad maintains a rigid central control over the behavior and activities of its members, who consider themselves blood brothers and expect them to be loyal and virtuous.

In this episode, with the help of our experts, we will try to analyze their organizational structure, recruitment mechanism, their initiation ceremony, oaths, their rituals, secret codes and their communication system. There are clear rules, codes of conduct and chains of command.

The organization of the triads - the same today as it was yesterday - is of a pyramidal type and each step of the hierarchical scale is identified by a number, whose symbolic meaning must be mainly traced back to Taoist numerology: in the upper part there is the Head of the Dragon or Lord of the Mountain, San Chu, with the number 489, followed by the Vicar of the Chief, Fu San Chu, by the Master of incense, Heung Chu, assigned to the ceremonial, by the Guarantor of the Covenants, Mengzheng, and by the Guardian of Wind, Sinfung, responsible for internal surveillance, all marked with the number 438; then come the White Paper Fan, Pak Tsz Sin, invested in the financial administration, 415, the straw sandal, Cho Hai, deputy to the transmission of information, 432, the Red Pole Warrior, Hung Kwan, head of the military sector and the administration of internal justice, 426; finally, the ordinary members, all identified by the number 49.

The affiliation presupposes an oath which is divided into thirty-six promises, which can be summarized in the commitment to preserve the secrecy of the triad, to provide assistance to members in danger, respect the traditional values, from pain of the imposition of heavy corporal sanctions, up to the death penalty for the most serious transgressions. The Chinese communities in America, Australia and Europe end up being controlled by the triads, which regulate illegal emigration from China to other continents, supplying forged documents (often of legally expatriated sailors) or using those of already emigrated compatriots, whose deaths have been concealed.

The technique of conquering the territory, put to the test in England, Holland, Canada, United States of America and recently also in France, Germany and Italy, passes through the acquisition of all the economic activities of the district and the progressive expulsion - induced or forced - of the residents, until the establishment of a real enclave: the so-called Chinatown, difficult to penetrate both by the police and other criminal groups. In this way, the Tong have supplanted "Cosa Nostra" both in the management of the usual criminal activities - drugs, prostitution and gambling - and, above all, offering completely new services, such as the trafficking of adolescents and the trade of organs for transplants. The difficulty of obtaining up-to-date information on their activities and their numerical consistency, attributable to the strict secrecy constraint that binds affiliates and the low visibility of investments, does not prevent the triads from positioning themselves at the top of mafia organizations for members - estimated at ten thousand only in Europe - turnover and prospects of diffusion, deserving of the definition of **"Invisible Empire"**.





**PICASSO**<sup>film</sup>

# MAFIA LIFE<sup>©</sup>

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