



Caribbean MOB Project

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Honor Among Thieves: The Evolution and Sociology of Criminal Morality in Global Organized Crime

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About the Caribbean MOB Project

For more than five decades, organized crime and drug trafficking, along with their collaborative networks, have been the subject of extensive research, academic debates, and strategic analysis. From my experience as a scholar in criminology, intelligence analysis, and law enforcement, I have delved into these phenomena from multiple perspectives to understand why they remain highly profitable and, at the same time, a constant challenge for governments.

🌐 In this space, I share reflections, evidence-based data, experiences, and studies that reveal the complex structure of drug trafficking and organized crime, as well as their impact on our societies.

📖 I invite you to read, comment, and share this information and to follow me on my social networks to access specialized content in criminal analysis, strategic intelligence, and crime prevention.

✅ **Key Topics:** organized crime Caribbean 2026, drug trafficking in Puerto Rico, drug cartels in Latin America, anti-crime strategies 2026, Caribbean security policies, regional criminal intelligence, transnational organized crime

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Summary:

Organized crime represents one of the most intricate moral contradictions in contemporary society: illicit organizations that are nonetheless governed by severe internal ethical standards. This article examines the codes of honor, loyalty, and silence that govern conduct within criminal groups across various cultural contexts, including the Sicilian mafia, the Japanese Yakuza, the Russian Bratva, Latin American cartels, and Caribbean criminal systems. Using a comparative and theoretical methodology, it examines how these codes function as mechanisms of social cohesion, internal regulation, and moral justification. The document integrates classical criminological theories, such as differential association, anomie, social control, and rational choice, to elucidate the reasons why individuals internalize these norms. It is concluded that criminal morality does not signify a lack of ethics; rather, it constitutes an alternative ethical framework that arises in environments characterized by inequality, exclusion, and institutional fragility.

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1. Introduction

The concept of honor among criminals is not a literary metaphor, but an empirical reality widely documented in the study of organized crime. Despite operating outside the law, many criminal organizations develop internal dogmatic systems that regulate the behavior of their members through values such as honor, loyalty, respect, and silence (Gambetta, 2007; Paoli, 2004).

These codes serve fundamental social functions: they foster trust in illegal markets, reinforce internal discipline, and give individuals marginalized from formal institutions a sense of belonging and identity. In contexts where the state is characterized as corrupt, absent, or repressive, these criminal structures come to replace the functions of governance and justice (Arlacchi, 2010).

This lecture analyzes criminal morality as a sociological and criminological phenomenon and argues that these honor codes constitute alternative, adaptive, and functional ethical systems, rather than simple expressions of irrational violence.

2. Methodology

This document adopts a qualitative and comparative approach, based on:

- Classical and Contemporary Criminological Studies in Spanish
- Historical and ethnographic analysis of organized crime
- Theoretical review of the sociology of crime

Sources used include academic books, peer-reviewed articles, and papers from university presses in Spain and Latin America. Primary statistical data are not used; instead, theoretical interpretation and comparative analysis are used.

3. Historical and Sociological Foundations

3.1 The Origin

Criminal honor codes historically emerge in societies with a weak state presence. In Sicily, the mafia emerged as a system of private protection in the face of the inefficiency of the Italian liberal state (Gambetta, 2007). The principle of *omertà*, absolute silence in the face of external authorities, was consolidated as a moral virtue linked to masculinity and dignity.

In Japan, the Yakuza inherited values from samurai bushido, transforming ideals such as loyalty, sacrifice, and shame into principles of criminal behavior (Hill, 2007). In Russia, the [Vorovskoy Zakon](#) emerged in Soviet prison camps as an anti-system morality grounded in criminal equality and a total rejection of the state (Varese, 2011).

In Latin America and the Caribbean, criminal codes are grounded in community protection, respect, and informal justice, particularly in contexts of structural poverty and political violence (Santos, 2012).

4. Fundamental Principles of Criminal Honor

4.1 Loyalty

Absolute loyalty to the group is the supreme value. Betraying the organization, especially in cooperating with the authorities, constitutes the ultimate moral transgression. Individual identity is subordinated to collective identity, which makes obedience an ethical virtue (Paoli, 2004).

4.2 Silence

Silence functions as a mechanism of self-protection and a symbol of moral strength. Remaining silent is not cowardice but honor. Silent suffering reaffirms a sense of belonging and commitment to the group.

4.3 Respect and Hierarchy

Respect legitimizes internal authority. Violence is not chaotic, but normative: it punishes disloyalty and restores moral order. In this context, violence is understood as a form of internal justice (Arlacchi, 2010).

5. Comparative Analysis of Criminal Systems

5.1 The Sicilian Mafia

The mafia defines itself as an honor society. Their initiation rituals, oaths, and sanctions build a closed morality that replaces state law (Gambetta, 2007).

5.2 Japanese Yakuza

The Yakuza embodies values of sacrifice and extreme discipline. Practices such as yubitsume (ritual self-mutilation) reinforce individual moral responsibility over collective responsibility (Hill, 2007).

5.3 The Russian Bratva

The Vorovskoy Zakon establishes an anti-establishment criminal ethic. Legitimacy is not obtained from wealth, but from moral coherence with the thief's code (Varese, 2011).

5.4 Latin American posters

Cartels integrate popular religiosity, masculinity, and the media spectacle. Honor is publicly exhibited and becomes symbolic capital (Astorga, 2015).

5.5 Caribbean Criminal Systems

In the Caribbean, especially in Jamaica, the "Don" acts as both a criminal and a community leader. Respect and reciprocity underpin moral authority (Harriott, 2004).

6. Criminological Explanations of Behavior

6.1 Differential Association

Crime is learned. Moral codes are socially transmitted within the group (Sutherland, 1999).

6.2 Anomie and Subcultures

Social exclusion generates alternative value systems that restore status and dignity (Merton, 2002).

6.3 Social Control

Criminal organizations recreate intense social ties that replace the family and the State (Hirschi, 2003).

6.4 Rational Choice

Honor reduces uncertainty in illegal markets. Reputation replaces the legal contract (Gambetta, 2007).

7. A Paradox and the Transformation of Honor

Globalization, technology, and capitalism have weakened traditional codes. Honor is transformed into brand, image, and media narrative. However, its symbolic persistence demonstrates that the need for moral sense does not disappear; it only adapts.

8. Before You Go

Honor in organized crime is not the absence of morality, but an alternative, functional, and profoundly human morality. These codes help us understand why organized crime is not only an illegal economy but also a parallel social order. Understanding this logic is essential for any serious analysis of security, criminology, and social intervention.

9. References

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