

Women of Honor: Madonnas, Godmothers and Informers in the Italian Mafia

Milka Kahn

Anne Véron

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Almost unnervingly detailed, Women of Honor recounts grim and humorous tales of the women caught up in mafia life.

Women of Honor takes a penetrating look at how a notorious criminal syndicate ensnares the wives, mothers, and daughters of mafiosi. Authored by jurist Milka Kahn and journalist Anne Véron, the book compiles the experiences of women who opted either to remain loyal to the organization or to defiantly escape it, the latter choice sometimes resulting in tragic consequences.

The book focuses on the main branches of the Italian mafia—Sicily's feudally allegiant Cosa Nostra, the complex 'Ndrangheta of Calabria, and the flamboyant and colorful Neapolitan Camorra—with their collective involvement in drugs, prostitution, extortion, and various forms of commerce.

Almost unnervingly detailed, *Women of Honor* recounts stories of young women married as teenagers, then beaten by their husbands as a matter of course, all following childhoods that were haunted by murders and funerals. Some women wielded great power behind the scenes, while some were used as pawns in their husbands' illegal activities and were even sent to prison. Others committed suicide because of the intense psychological conflict of testifying against their families.

After the generally grim chapters on the Cosa Nostra and 'Ndrangheta, the exploits of the Camorra women offer more liberation and twisted humor. Camorra women are shown to pride themselves on their sense of style and fashion, and to be more directly involved in business enterprises. They are also presented as not above murdering a man for infidelity, rather than being victims of honor slayings themselves.

As times change even for the Mafia, *Women of Honor* cautions against what it calls "pseudo-emancipation," or women taking on the negative values of the culture rather than moving beyond it. One of the best accounts in the book involves Giusy Pesce, who testified against her 'Ndrangheta clan and now has a new life through a witness protection program. Her actions greatly inspired students at a Calabrian high school, who on International Women's Day in 2012 praised her for her courage and for speaking out against the silence of "fear and shame."

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