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Between Tradition and Transformation: the Sociology of Chosen Female Masonic Lodges in Contemporary Europe

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Abstract

Female Masonic lodges occupy a distinctive and often overlooked position at the intersection of gender, ritual, and associational life. While Freemasonry has historically been associated with male-dominated networks of sociability and symbolic practice, the emergence and consolidation of female lodges—from the late nineteenth century to the present—challenge conventional narratives of exclusion and privilege. This paper examines the sociology of female Freemasonry with a focus on its organizational cultures, identity construction, and social functions within contemporary European contexts.

Drawing on existing historiographical studies, ethnographic accounts, and recent sociological analyses of fraternal organizations, the study highlights how female lodges reframe Masonic symbolic repertoires in ways that both parallel and diverge from male traditions. Female Masons negotiate continuity with Enlightenment universalism while also cultivating spaces for gendered solidarity, ethical self-work, and collective empowerment. Lodges often become sites for developing civic engagement, mutual support networks, and ritual forms of belonging that differ from—and sometimes critique—the hierarchical habitus of mainstream male masonry.

The paper also addresses ongoing debates regarding recognition, legitimacy, and inter-obedience relations. These controversies reveal broader tensions concerning authority, tradition, and gender equality within fraternal culture. By situating female Masonic lodges within wider sociological frameworks of voluntary association, symbolic boundaries, and identity politics, the research demonstrates how they contribute to reimagining the social meaning of fraternity—not as an exclusively male domain, but as a shared space for reflective community and ethical formation.

Keywords: Freemasonry, Gender, Sociability, Ritual Studies, Voluntary Associations, Identity Formation