

Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger*: A Critical Analysis

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Cubism was an early 20th-century visual art style that was highly influential. Artists Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso were its main pioneers (Chave, 1994). This style represented a new reality in paintings, revolutionizing the European art scene. A cubist painting is a flat and two-dimensional picture. It does not include traditional techniques such as chiaroscuro, linear perspective, modelling, or foreshortening. Pablo Picasso's painting, *Les Femmes d'Alger*, embodies some of the most recognizable characteristics of cubism, demonstrating the painter's mastery of the style.

Les Femmes d'Alger is considered the foundation and paradigm of modern art. Through this masterpiece, Picasso de-idealized the human form, exquisitely disusing illusionistic space and deploying a mixture of visual idioms (Chave, 1994). This art piece is also credited as being a meaningful act of destruction and creation. It triggered cubism: the cubist revolution (Chave, 1994). This artwork presents explicit depictions of gender, race, and cubism. In its historical context, the painting was deliberately provocative in response to the artwork of another painter, Matisse. Religious groups widely condemned artists for being provocative and creating unfavourable depictions during this time. *Les Femmes d'Alger* was one such artwork, as it depicted a period when the road from Avignon to Barcelona was notorious for its brothels.

Women are portrayed as subjects of the male gaze. The female gender was heavily sexualized and made to fulfill the sexual fantasies and demands of men (Buci-Glucksmann, 1986). In this day and age, society pressures women to have the idealized body structure and size. Men define aspects of beauty, and women are expected to conform to such stereotypical

restrictions. The sexualization of women is portrayed in almost all social elements, with evidence observable in film and throughout mass media. For instance, women are idealized as being beautiful, curvy, and yet, slender. Those who do not conform to such societal stereotypes are pressured to shape up. Such trends have resulted in mental health issues among women of all ages, even as young as preadolescent girls.

Moreover, some contemporary societies sexualize women's roles and consider them inferior to men. Prostitution is still prevalent in modern society, especially among financially disadvantaged groups. Women continue to be exploited by men to fulfill their sexual desires and fantasies. They are pawns in a man's game of chess (Chave, 1994). Analysts of modern society can observe Picasso's depiction of women in the nineteenth century and draw distinct similarities between it and the portrayals of today.

Women continue to be viewed as exotic beings whom men can appreciate. Prostitution in Picasso's art is portrayed as an excess of sexuality. Meanwhile, women in most societies are still used as sex objects to quench men's sexual urges. These traditional and gendered yokes still weigh women down and prevent them from attaining complete financial and economic independence. Women's empowerment remains elusive in all societies. Even though significant strides have been made in empowering women, their sexualization is still intertwined with charge. Even as women attain educations and pursue high-profile careers, the gender-wage disparity, lack of representation at higher corporate and governance levels, and gendered jobs persist. For instance, despite outperforming the men's team, the United States Women's National Soccer Team has received lower allowances and benefits for a long time.

Similarly, women who hold the same jobs as men may receive significantly lower salaries and associated benefits even if they have similar or better academic qualifications than their male counterparts. Also, the continued gendering of the nursing profession has stereotyped it as being distinctly feminine, and sometimes male patients insist on having female nurses to care for them. Patients have been conditioned to think that the ideal nurse is female.

The themes of racial discrimination and inequality explored by Picasso in his painting persist in contemporary society. In addition to being sexualized, women also suffer from racial discrimination. *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. Version O)* was based on factual observations of disgruntled prostitutes (Buci-Glucksmann, 1987). It highlights the racial disparities in society. People of different races are viewed and treated differently and discriminatively despite doing the same work as others. The women with African masks in the painting have facial structures that are distorted compared to those of the other women. The three women on the left have flawless bodies and are depicted as beautiful. The painting depicts African women as an inferior race. Such disparities persist in contemporary society and negatively influence social cohesion, cross-cultural interactions, and institutional impartiality. They have propagated racial injustices and sustained a socioeconomic inequality that has corroded various cultural beliefs. The continued racial discrimination makes it a daunting task for Black people to coexist with other races and achieve social or economic prosperity.

Picasso's cubist painting offers a visual representation of the society of his time. However, the issues captured in it remain relevant to contemporary culture. Modern society still experiences racial inequality and discrimination, while women are stereotyped and forced into gender roles. These issues affect cross-cultural interactions, cultural diversity and universality,

social cohesion and tolerance, and economic empowerment. Affirmative action and cross-cultural awareness are necessary to foster social cohesion, racial integration, and acceptance.

In conclusion, Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. Version O)* revolutionized the cubist movement. However, the painting presented issues that remain relevant in contemporary society. It captured factual and observable matters in the community such as gender, inequality, and race. These issues still contribute to the social and economic disparities in society today.

References

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