



Algerian Haiku in the Mirror of Criticism : Reading Stakes and the Classification Dilemma

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Abstract: This study examines critical discourse on the haiku experience in Algeria, exploring the theoretical and methodological foundations that have shaped its interpretation. It also addresses the significant challenges that critics have faced when dealing with this new literary form. Furthermore, the study analyses the concept of haiku, whether by accepting or rejecting the term or by classifying it within literary genres.

The study is based on the hypothesis that the challenges encountered by Algerian critics in approaching haiku stem not only from the nature of the haiku text itself, but also from the diversity of the theoretical and critical frameworks which have they relied, including Japanese, Arabic and modern critical approaches. This diversity has resulted in significant differences in perspectives and evaluations. One of the key issues is the disagreement over the term 'haiku', which extends beyond purely linguistics to reflect a deeper divergence in the conception of this literary genre and the boundaries of its affiliation.

This study analyses the challenges involved in critically reading Algerian haiku. It examines the approaches adopted by critics and the limits of their ability to capture the distinctive characteristics of haiku texts. The study also addresses the dilemma of classification resulting from the overlap between haiku and other short literary forms, such as the flash story, anecdote, signature, epigram and short poem. The study attempts to identify the reasons for this overlap and the validity of the conclusions reached by critical discourse.

It concludes that differences in Algerian criticism reflect the modernity and openness of the haiku experience in Algeria to diverse cultural references rather than confusion. However, this diversity calls for a comprehensive re-examination of critical concepts, terminology and tools to develop a critical framework that better accommodates the specific characteristics of Algerian haiku and the evolving nature of this literary genre within Arab cultural contexts. This study was prompted by a number of questions, the most important of which are: How has Algerian critical discourse on haiku taken shape? And to what extent has Algerian critical discourse been able to construct a coherent critical conception of haiku, given the divergence of its positions on the term, the varying interpretive approaches, and the persistent dilemma of classification?

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Introduction

In the Arab poetic scene, and particularly in Algeria, haiku has evolved from an imported literary genre that caught the attention of poets because of its brevity, to become the subject of complex critical issues that transcend the boundaries of creative writing, to encompass questions of concepts, terminology, methods of interpretation, and classification.

As the scope of poetic practice in this art form has expanded, so too has the need for critical discourse capable of grasping its aesthetic and cultural specificity. However, this discourse has not followed a single path. Its theoretical premises have varied, its references have been diverse and its conclusions have differed.

This has caused the haiku to transform from a short poetic text into a critical issue that continues to generate unresolved questions.

This complexity partly stems from the nature of the haiku itself as a genre rooted in a civilisation and culture different from those of the Arab world. Consequently, its introduction into Arabic culture involved more than just linguistic adaptation; it also encompassed differences in worldview, aesthetic sensibilities, and poetic traditions. Rather than simply reproducing a Japanese poetic form, this transition involved reimagining the genre within a new cultural environment. This has led to Arab and Algerian haiku practices in their own languages, drawing on their own references, imagery and concerns, while preserving certain defining features of the original genre. This has given rise to a question that has accompanied the experiment from its inception: Are we dealing with Japanese haiku written in Arabic, or Arabic haiku distinct from the environment in which they originated?

Perhaps this question was the initial spark that ignited a series of more complex critical enquiries, as critics soon found themselves confronted with a text that resisted established assumptions and transcended the boundaries of traditional literary genre theory. Some insisted on the need to preserve the Japanese framework when defining and interpreting haiku and regarded any deviation from it as a distortion of the genre. Others believed that haiku's transition into Arab culture necessitated re-examining many assumptions because a text cannot be separated from its production environment, language, or cultural references. Numerous critical positions emerged between these two trends, leading to a proliferation of definitions, confusion over terminology and divergent judgements. Ultimately, agreeing on a unifying concept of haiku became more difficult than agreeing on its artistic characteristics. The disagreement did not stop at the concept itself but extended to the term itself, as critics were divided between those who viewed retaining the term "haiku" as a scholarly necessity to preserve the identity of this literary genre—since it is a global term whose usage has become established in most languages—and those who argued that the term carries a cultural specificity inseparable from its Japanese context, and that retaining it uncritically perpetuates a form of terminological dependency and opens the door to conceptual confusion and blurring. This terminological dispute was not merely a formal or linguistic issue, but rather an expression of a deeper divergence in the conception of what haiku is and the boundaries of its cultural and literary affiliation, which made the issue of terminology one of the most prominent topics in Arab and Algerian critical discourse.

While the terminological issue revealed divergent theoretical perspectives, the debate over interpretation revealed another significant divergence. Some critics adopted a rhetorical approach to haiku, while others approached it from stylistic, semiotic, cultural or interpretive angles. As a result, the same texts often received markedly differences in the interpretation and evaluation of the texts. This divergence in results did not stem only from differences in the texts themselves, but was often a direct consequence of differences in the interpretive frameworks. Consequently, examining critical discourse becomes as important as examining the literary texts themselves, as understanding critical judgements requires an understanding of the frameworks that produced them.

The question of classification has remained the most persistent and controversial issue. Critics have found themselves faced with a text that shares certain characteristics with the 'flash', the 'aphorism', the 'epigram', the 'signature', and the 'short poem', but does not fully merge into any of these categories. Some have therefore regarded it as an independent literary genre, while others have viewed it as merely a form of the short poem or an extension of flash fiction. A third group, however, has chosen to transcend this debate, considering the haiku an open poetic practice that takes shape according to its cultural context. This divergence has led to an absence of a unified critical perspective, contributing to the ongoing debate over the haiku's identity, boundaries, and criteria.

Based on these facts, this study does not aim to examine Algerian haiku from a creative perspective or analyse the poetic texts themselves. Rather, it takes Algerian critical discourse as its subject of study and analysis. The study seeks to examine how this discourse is shaped, the theoretical and cultural references on which it draws, the issues that have shaped its interpretations and the challenges that have hindered

the development of a comprehensive critical framework for Algerian haiku.

1-THE PRESENCE OF HAIKU IN THE ALGERIAN POETIC SCENE:

Algerian haiku has established a distinctive presence through the aesthetic appeal it offers, which has drawn readers and audiences to it, and through its aesthetic qualities and captivating charm that cast doubt on its beautiful themes, revealing its foundations through a distinctive intellectual depth. Consequently, Algerian poets have expressed a desire to explore this new literary form, drawn by its concise vision and condensed meaning, which have become defining features of their poetic vocabulary; this has led to the emergence of a substantial body of Algerian haiku. Perhaps this is due to those astonishing sensory scenes, as well as to the unique vision they offer for expressing a rich literary reality. Thus, their fertile and profound experience has firmly established their significant presence among the various literary forms. **For “the haiku poem is visual, not auditory. This brings haiku poetry close to the art of painting. A haiku is a painting with words rather than lines and colors.”¹**

Ever since this art form began making its way into the Algerian cultural scene, it has attracted not only the attention of poets but also that of critics. However, their interest was not initially directed toward elucidating its artistic aesthetics or revealing its stylistic particularities, but rather toward questioning the legitimacy of its presence within Arab culture and verifying the extent to which it deserves to be considered a poetic genre capable of finding a place for itself on the map of contemporary Arabic poetry. Thus, the haiku in Algeria did not enter merely as a text, but as a critical question that sparked more controversy than it did certainty.

2-Algerian Critical Discourse on Haiku : From Legitimacy to Identity

Haiku is one of the imported poetic forms that has sparked widespread critical debate in the contemporary Arab context, particularly in the Algerian experience, which has treated it as a problematic text that transcends the boundaries of traditional literary genre classifications. Its presence was not merely the transfer of a poetic form from one culture to another, but also the transfer of a set of aesthetic and cultural concepts that raised fundamental questions about the nature of poetry, the boundaries of the poem, and the possibilities of critical reception. **Abdelkader al-Jamoussi states: “Since the beginning of the millennium, engagement with haiku has taken diverse paths—reading, translation, creation, and criticism—and poets writing haiku have been preoccupied with the quest for a different poetic language through which to express their sensibilities and their new vision of the world” (2).**

In the Algerian context, critics did not accept this literary form as a given, but rather as a problematic phenomenon in which questions of terminology, identity, and classification intertwined, leading to the emergence of a critical discourse marked by divergent positions and perspectives. Between a school of thought that clung to the original term “haiku” as part of this literary genre’s identity and another that called for questioning the term or reformulating it within the Arab context, a terminological dilemma emerged that, at its core, reflected differing conceptions of the nature and boundaries of this art form.

The haiku is considered a rebellious poem in its form and technical style; for this reason, it emerged as a new stylistic innovation in the modernist era. Poetry, **as Holorlin puts it, is “foundation”—and “is the chemistry of the haiku”. “A poem that does not merely rely on the rhythm of nature to be immortalized, but to be life itself, a breach, and a dream—in contrast to the rhythms of other poems haunted by doubt and uncertainty, even though all poems gather at the table of letters, bells, and the tapestry of prophecies.”³**

What governs the art of haiku **“is neither concept, nor logic, nor feeling, nor rationality; and even if we find an idea within it, it will be something permeating the very fabric of the entire artistic work, like air”⁴**, Among its most important characteristics are objectivity and the haiku poet’s avoidance of personal feelings; haiku also derives its power from the relationship between the two poetic images, and is therefore an objective form of poetry that draws its aesthetics from the aesthetics of the subject matter. Specifically, the haiku demonstrates that **“the depth of the idea allows for multiple open interpretations”⁵**; for it is an art **“not so much the art of constructing imaginary images as it is the art of seeing the things that already exist around us, and making others see them as well”⁶**; it is a cosmic allure, and through those three lines composed for it—with their compact structure, intense condensation, and brevity—this reduction is compensated for by a flood of meaning and suggestion.

Accordingly, The haiku, **“The distinctive one is like pointing a finger at the moon; and since the finger is studded with jewels, it will block your view of the moon.”⁷**

This divergence also extended to the realm of critical concepts, where interpretations were divided between those who considered the haiku to be poetry based on condensation and suggestion, and those who viewed it as a complete short poem, while others chose to approach it within related genres such as the flash poem, the epigram, the aphorism, and the short poem. This led to what might be called a

“classification dilemma,” in which critics seemed unable to establish a definitive place for this literary form within the genre system.

1-1- The Beginnings of Critical Awareness of Haiku in Algeria :

In Algeria, interest in haiku has begun to take shape in recent years, particularly among a new generation of poets who have leveraged digital media to publish haiku, whether on Facebook, blogs, or online magazines.

Algerian critical awareness of haiku did not emerge all at once, but rather resulted from a gradual process preceded by a remarkable creative movement characterized by a vast quantity of haiku texts; Poets benefited from Arabic translations and the growing openness to Japanese literature, while critics continued to observe this experiment with caution, wavering between viewing it as a poetic phenomenon worthy of study and regarding it as a fleeting literary trend that might soon fade away.

Arabs have worked to **“develop their rhetoric through a fruitful interaction with the poetic traditions of the peoples and cultures with which they have intermingled in a continuous process of cultural exchange ”**⁽⁸⁾, and thus haiku has come to **“serve today as a bridge for dialogue among poetic traditions and human cultures across the world... It exists to integrate, not to clash; to interact, not to confront... given that human existence on this earth is characterized by cross-pollination, interaction, and a yearning to build a shared human foundation”**⁽⁹⁾ to enrich Arabic poetry , not as a substitute for any of its forms. The aesthetic structure of the haiku poem relies on the charm of language and its evocative transformations; this also indicates that **“the clear word in the haiku is not used for its clarity, but rather for its ability to convey a meaning beyond clarity, and this is another of its characteristics”**¹⁰ This statement indicates that a haiku is not merely a moment, or the linking of one simple meaning to another through seemingly clear words; rather, the art of haiku is, in fact, the art of breathing new life into words.

A look at the early beginnings of Algerian critical discourse reveals that interest in haiku did not arise out of a vacuum, but rather emerged in a context marked by a notable openness to global literary genres, a surge in translation activity, and an expansion of cultural exchange networks—all of which made Algerian creators more willing to experiment with new forms of expression that differed from traditional poetic conventions. Therefore, **“haiku is more than a virtual space for experimentation, and more than a creative field for adventure”**⁽¹¹⁾; accordingly, we find many Algerian poets who have established themselves as devotees of this beautiful art form: **(Maachou Qarour), (Lakhdar Berka), (Achour Fenni), (Afraa Qmeir Talbi), (Ahmed Meliani), (Reda Didani), (Samia Ben Assou), (Ahmed Lakhdari), (Faysal Al-Ahmar).**

However, the transition of the haiku from its Japanese context to the Algerian context was not a simple one; for it was not accompanied by the text alone, but rather by a whole system of questions concerning the concept of poetry, the nature of the poem, and the boundaries of literary genres—which left critics facing a literary phenomenon that could not easily be subjected to the standards they were accustomed to applying. **“Suggestion or an open ending, the poet’s non-intervention in judgment, and sincere objectivity in conveying the experience—these are what constitute the spirit of the haiku. Furthermore, the physical phenomena in the experience are presented as they are, without embellishment through devices such as rhyme”**¹².

Perhaps the first thing that catches one’s attention in Algerian critical discourse is that it has not treated the haiku as a fully formed genre, but rather as an experience still in the process of taking shape—which explains the hesitation of many critics to issue definitive judgments about it. Some critics were preoccupied with establishing the legitimacy of this art form before moving on to evaluating it, while others believed that priority should be given to reading the texts themselves, rather than defending their classification within a specific literary genre. Between these two positions, a critical discourse began to take shape that was characterized more by caution than by decisiveness, and more by questioning than by certainty.

Haiku entered Arab culture laden with cultural and aesthetic particularities that made many critics wary of falling into a literal transposition of an experience that originated in a different cultural context. Thus, the question that arose from the outset was: Is it sufficient for a text to take a short form to be called a haiku? Or is the haiku a vision of the world before it is a formal structure ? And do literary genres transfer in their forms, or do they transfer through their aesthetic spirit? These questions have led to a clear division in critics’ positions and have helped steer critical discourse toward a discussion of issues of legitimacy and identity before moving on to the analysis of the texts. The spontaneity of haiku poetry and the spontaneity of the moments it captures have made this art form appealing to the reader, who is drawn to its captivating aesthetics in terms of activation, interaction, and aesthetic stimulation. In other words, every poetic art form has its own aesthetics and creative textual visions that make it an appealing aesthetic value in the stimulation of poetic texts.

“ Because haiku poetry comes close to the language of silence and creates another language full of allusion, implication, and concentrated meaning, Japanese haiku has become the form of poetry that most closely reflects the pulse of humanity and the spirit of the age. ”¹³ Consequently, the poetic essence of haiku lies in the interplay between the eloquence of silence and that of speech—and at times even surpasses it. For “in Japanese haiku, silence plays a role as significant as that of words”¹⁴ . Through this silence, the haiku poet opens up a vast space for the reader, breathing life into the poem and allowing it to be completed with each fresh reading.

It could be said that Algerian literary criticism did not begin with the haiku by asking, “How do we read this text?” Rather, it began with a deeper question: “What are we reading in the first place?” Before critics could explore the aesthetics of conciseness, suggestion, blank space, and the poetic moment, they found themselves compelled to determine the nature of the text at hand: Did it truly belong to the haiku genre, or to one of the short poetic forms that Arabic literature had known prior to its emergence? This explains why Algerian critical discourse, in its early stages, focused on establishing a conceptual framework to help understand the phenomenon before moving on to its evaluation.

Perhaps the earliest stirrings of Algerian criticism were not merely a phase in the history of haiku reception, but rather the stage in which most of the issues that would later accompany this poetic genre were born. It was during this phase that the debate over terminology emerged, the disagreement regarding the concept of haiku began, and the question regarding its nature was raised: Is it poetry or a poem? It was also during this period that the first signs of the classification dilemma emerged, which makes studying this phase essential for understanding the direction subsequent critical readings took—not merely a historical account of the emergence of haiku in Algeria.

“Maasho Karour” defines the haiku as “a ruler for capturing the scene and taming its surprise... There is no literary form that rivals the haiku in seizing the fleeting moment; indeed, it elevates it to the level of any serendipitous surprise ”¹⁵ ; this means that the essence of the haiku lies in its visual nature and in seizing the fleeting, opportune moment to transform it into a poetic snapshot that mythologizes its visionary and aesthetic dimensions.

Amina Belala states: **“A three-line poem consisting of a total of seventeen syllables and containing an image of nature or impressions of it, along with all that it encompasses in terms of rituals, customs, and living beings”**¹⁶ By this definition, she does not shy away from acknowledging that the classical Japanese haiku is rooted in nature as its primary material and addresses the universe through those rituals and living beings.

This disparity between creativity and criticism reveals an important truth: Algerian critical discourse did not emerge as an authority preceding the text, but rather arose in response to a creative reality that gradually asserted itself. As the range of published texts expanded and Algerian names emerged that established haiku as a poetic project, criticism found itself compelled to examine this phenomenon and attempt to define its place within the Algerian poetic landscape. Thus, the emergence of criticism was not the result of a pre-existing theoretical conception, but rather the fruit of an accumulation of texts and their growing presence in the cultural sphere.

However, this transition from creative reception to critical awareness was not a smooth one, because critics were not dealing with a genre whose standards were already established, but rather with a literary form that raised more questions than it provided answers. For this reason, early readings focused on attempting to define the concept of the haiku and uncover its characteristics before moving on to evaluating the texts themselves. This led to the predominance of a definitional approach in much of the early critical writing, as critics seemed primarily concerned with answering the question: “What is a haiku?” before addressing the question: “How do we read a haiku?”

Maasho Qarour says:

**A ball of wool In her hands-
a retired flight attendant,
mimicking the weaving of clouds**¹⁷

“Maashu Krour” opens his text “A Ball of Wool in Her Hands” with a simple visual scene: familiar, seemingly unremarkable. The second line, however, reveals the identity of the character holding that ball of wool; the pause inserted by the author is not arbitrary, but rather intended to make the reader wonder: Whose ball of wool is it? Then comes the answer, which completely changes the meaning of the scene: it is a retired flight attendant. Here the semantic shift occurs; the scene no longer suggests merely an elderly woman knitting with wool, but a retired flight attendant who spent years of her life close to the clouds—indeed, flying among them—only to end up in a quiet domestic space; Here, retirement has not erased her past, but rather reshaped it into a different form, just as the idea of wool is not merely a tool for knitting, but a medium for evoking memories of the past. It is that sudden aesthetic moment known as “satori” that has managed to transform a simple, fleeting action into a metaphor for an entire life.

In this way, the text achieves one of the most important characteristics of Japanese haiku in general and the Algerian context in particular: the transformation of a fleeting everyday detail into a moment of existential contemplation, in which memory, time, and nature intertwine to create a poetic structure of intense condensation and suggestion.

2- THE SPECIFICITY OF ALGERIAN CRITICAL RECEPTION:

While haiku entered Arab culture through translation, its entry into Algeria took a more complex path, because Algerian critics found themselves confronted with a text bearing a foreign name and belonging to a distant cultural context, yet at the same time written in Arabic, expressing an Algerian reality, and drawing its imagery from local nature and Algerian cultural memory. This is what caused the critical inquiry to transcend the boundaries of form and become a question of identity.

The art of haiku “began **to take its place in our cultural landscape as a possible avenue for contributing to the liberation of Arabic poetry from the grip of the ready-made model**”¹⁸.

From this point on, two trends began to take shape in critical discourse. The first trend emphasized the need to preserve the foundational characteristics of haiku so that it would not lose its aesthetic identity, while the second trend argued that its transition to a new environment requires recognizing its right to evolve, and that Algerian texts should not always be measured against the Japanese experience, because differences in language and culture necessarily lead to differences in modes of expression and perspectives of reception.

It should be noted that this divergence was not so much evidence of a crisis in criticism as it was an expression of the vitality of the experience itself. Critics did not disagree because they lacked the tools for interpretation, but rather because they were dealing with a new literary genre that was still searching for its place within Arab culture. Therefore, many of the judgments that appeared contradictory on the surface were, in reality, attempts to answer the same question: How can the haiku preserve its identity while simultaneously acquiring its Algerian specificity? In the preface to his collection ***There, Between Two Absences, We Meet***, Achour Fenni attempts to ground Arab modernism, which—as he puts it—stood at the threshold of the West and forgot its Eastern roots, which are closer to it. He also outlines in his preface the origins of his relationship with the haiku, which began with his connection to the French poet Paul Éluard,” which served as one of the keys that led Achour Fenni to the image in search of an experience that responds to its daily existence in its eternal dimension: **“immersion in what is immediate and tangible without losing the spiritual dimension of the holistic human being; the mind alone cannot be the path to understanding the world and introspection”**¹⁹.

Thus, the early critical works did not establish a definitive concept of the haiku, but they did lay the groundwork for the major issues that would subsequently permeate critical discourse, foremost among them: the problem of terminology, the debate between poetry and the poem, and the dilemma of classification—issues that will form the main themes of this study.

A reading of these early works reveals that critics did not initially disagree on the evaluation of the texts themselves, but rather on the very subject of that evaluation. The debate centered on the nature of the haiku and the extent to which it could be transferred from its Japanese context to the Arab context without losing its identity; questions also arose regarding the relationship between the original characteristics of this art form and what Algerian poets produced. Thus, in its early stages, the haiku was not merely a short text, but rather a critical challenge that compelled scholars to reexamine concepts of literary genre, the boundaries of poetry, and the mechanisms of reception.

What distinguishes Algerian critical discourse is that it did not stop at mere transmission or passive reception, but sought—to varying degrees—to construct a unique conception of haiku in light of the Algerian experience. However, this endeavor was not easy; it was confronted by a multiplicity of critical references, differing methodologies, and divergent positions on terminology, causing opinions to range from a strict adherence to the Japanese model to calls for recognizing the distinctiveness of Arab and Algerian haiku.

Consequently, a study of the formation of Algerian critical discourse does not merely entail tracing the history of haiku in Algeria; rather, it involves analyzing how this art form evolved from a new creative phenomenon into the subject of a broad critical debate—a debate from which issues regarding terminology, interpretation, classification, and the relationship between haiku and other short poetic genres.

Maasho Qarour states elsewhere:

On the piano—

black ebony keys are struck

by a blind pianist's fingers²⁰

This haiku depicts a quiet musical moment, yet it carries a deeply moving human significance. The scene begins with the piano, then draws attention to the black ebony keys, before revealing in the final line that it is a blind man who is playing them. Herein lies the irony: it is the person who cannot see colors who

awakens these lifeless keys and gives them sound and life, and thus humanity has succeeded in transforming what appears to be a deficiency into a source of creativity.

The beauty of the text lies in the fact that it does not portray blindness as a deficiency, but rather as a different way of perceiving the world. The pianist does not need his eyes to find the keys, because his fingers have memorized the path to them, as if they have come to see in his place. Thus, the movement of the fingers becomes a silent language, and music becomes a form of inner vision.

Also noteworthy is the poet's choice of black keys over white ones, as if blackness here is not merely a color, but part of the pianist's world—a world lived far from the light, yet one from which he creates melodies brimming with beauty. In this way, the text establishes a subtle contrast between darkness and light; darkness dwells in the eye, but light emerges in the form of music.

For this reason, this haiku seems to be more than just a scene of a pianist; it is a quiet celebration of willpower and of art's ability to transcend the limits of the body, where fingers become eyes, and music becomes light that requires no sight.

3- THE TERMINOLOGICAL CONTROVERSY : BETWEEN ACCEPTANCE AND REJECTION

The debate over the term "haiku" in Algerian literary criticism was not merely a formal dispute concerning the name itself, but rather a reflection of a deeper divergence in the conception of this literary genre and the boundaries of its cultural affiliation. When haiku moved from its Japanese context to Arab culture, it did not merely transfer as a poetic form, but also as a term carrying a specific historical, aesthetic, and cultural significance. Consequently, critics found themselves faced with a question that was not easy to resolve: Should the Japanese name be retained as a universal term established in literary studies, or does the genre's transition to Arabic necessitate the search for a name more in harmony with the Arabic terminological system?

This dilemma reveals that the dispute was not purely linguistic; rather, it was linked to differing conceptions of the nature of haiku itself. The camp that upheld the term argued that the name is part of the historical identity of the literary genre, and that replacing it could obscure its distinctiveness and subsume it into other Arabic genres that differ from it in terms of aesthetic and philosophical references. The camp that had reservations about its use, however, argued that the term is not a neutral element but carries within it a network of cultural connotations tied to its original context, which necessitates re-examining it when transferred to a different cultural context.

The significance of this debate stems from the fact that it did not stop at the issue of nomenclature but extended to the way texts are read and evaluated. If the haiku is considered an universal genre that retains its identity wherever it goes, the criteria for judging it will remain tied to the Japanese model. If, on the other hand, it is regarded as a genre capable of being reshaped within different cultures, then the term itself becomes part of a broader discussion about literary identity and the boundaries of genre classification. Thus, examining the problematic nature of the term provides a gateway to understanding many of the differences that emerged later in Algerian critical discourse—whether in the definition of haiku, its classification, or approaches to reading it.

3-1- The Position in Favor of Retaining the Term "Haiku":

This school of thought in critical discourse tends to retain the term "haiku" as is, without modification or Arabization, based on the view that the term is an inseparable part of the historical and aesthetic identity of this literary genre. According to this view, the name cannot be separated from its Japanese origins, because the term does not serve merely a linguistic function but carries with it a cultural and philosophical structure that took shape within a specific cultural context.

This approach is based on the idea that "haiku" has today become a global term used in various languages without translation, just as is the case with certain other literary terms that have retained their original form despite their transmission across cultures. Therefore, changing the name or Arabizing it may, in their view, lead to a terminological break with the original reference and weaken the ability to trace the evolution of this genre within its global context.

Proponents of this view also believe that retaining the term helps unify the critical framework and prevents the terminological fragmentation that might result from multiple names. A standardized term, in their view, ensures a degree of conceptual stability and allows researchers to compare different experiences in Japan, the Arab world, and Algeria without getting bogged down in naming issues.

However, this approach—despite its apparent commitment to scientific precision—raises a fundamental question regarding the neutrality of the term itself, since retaining the name "haiku" does not necessarily mean retaining the same conceptual framework in which it originated, especially when the text is reproduced within different cultural contexts that may reshape its meaning and function.

Second: The Position Calling for a Critical Examination of the Term or Its Arabization

Conversely, another school of thought in literary criticism argues that retaining the term "haiku" without critical scrutiny may lead to a kind of fascination with the source and to the continued dominance

of Japanese references in the interpretation of Arabic texts. In this view, the term is not merely a linguistic sign but a cultural carrier that reflects a worldview; if it is transferred as is without deconstruction, it may impose on Arabic texts standards of interpretation that do not necessarily align with their contexts.

This position stems from a fundamental idea: that the transfer of literary genres between cultures is not a neutral process, but rather a reproduction subject to shifts in language, taste, and intellectual frameworks. Consequently, retaining the Japanese term may obscure the distinctiveness of the Arabic experience and perpetually place it in a position of subordination to the original model, rather than allowing it to be read as an experience with its own specific conditions.

Proponents of this view also argue that the search for an Arabic equivalent or an alternative terminological description does not necessarily imply a break with the original; rather, it can be an attempt to integrate this poetic form into the Arabic critical system in a manner more consistent with its conceptual framework. However, this position itself is not without its difficulties, because any attempt to Arabize the term may in turn raise new issues concerning the accuracy of the designation, the limits of meaning, and the possibility of reference to the unified global model.

2-3 Toward a Critical Reading of the Two Positions:

The contrast between the two approaches shows that the dispute over the term “haiku” was not a simple linguistic disagreement, but was, at its core, a dispute over the nature of this literary genre and the boundaries of its cultural affiliation. Whether to retain the term or Arabize it is not merely a formal choice, but rather a reflection of a broader critical perspective concerning how to understand the relationship between text and context, between origin and interpretation, and between the universal and the local. Consequently, the issue of terminology reveals that Algerian critical discourse was not unified in its view of the haiku but was divided between two perspectives: one that tends to preserve the genre’s global reference point, and another that seeks to reintegrate it into the Arab and Algerian cultural framework. This division will remain present in the remaining issues, particularly in the question of “poetry or poem” and in the classification dilemma, where it becomes clear that the dispute over the name was merely a prelude to a deeper disagreement regarding the nature of this poetic form itself.

4- HAIKU BETWEEN POETRY AND THE POEM: THE CONCEPTUAL DEBATE BEFORE THE CLASSIFICATION DILEMMA:

The question of whether the haiku is poetry or a poem does not appear to be a mere matter of terminology; rather, at its core, it touches on one of the most contentious issues in literary theory: defining the concept of poetry and the boundaries of the poem. The debate sparked by haiku in the Algerian context did not stop at determining its place within literary genres; rather, it extended to questioning the foundational concepts themselves: What is poetry? What is a poem? And can the two even be separated? This conceptual overlap reveals that the problem does not concern the haiku text alone, but rather the conceptual framework upon which criticism relies in classifying short poetic forms. Any attempt to define the haiku necessarily leads to a reexamination of the concept of the poem—and vice versa—thereby opening a broader discussion about the extent to which the Arab critical apparatus is capable of accommodating modern poetic forms.

4-1 A school of thought that views the haiku as poetry rather than a poem:

This perspective stems from the view that poetry cannot be reduced to a specific structural form, because its essence lies in aesthetic energy, the capacity for suggestion, and the creation of surprise—not in the number of lines or the structure of the text. According to this view, the poem is merely a form and one manifestation of poetic expression, while poetry remains a broader concept that encompasses diverse experiences and styles. Haiku is considered poetry in the aesthetic sense of the word because it is based on condensation, suggestion, linguistic economy, and semantic openness; it offers the reader the opportunity to participate in the creation of meaning.

However, this school of thought often avoids considering the haiku a “poem” in the traditional sense, because the concept of the poem in Arab culture has been linked, historically and critically, to a more expansive structure in terms of composition, syntax, and rhythm, whereas haiku is based on capturing a fleeting moment expressed with the utmost conciseness.

On this basis, a question arises that is no less important than the first: If haiku is considered poetry but does not fall under the concept of a poem, where does it fit within the map of literary genres? Does it represent an independent form, or does it redraw the boundaries between poetry and its various forms?

However, this perspective raises a subtle problem: if haiku is poetry but not a poem, does that mean it falls outside traditional genre classifications? Or does it represent a poetic form that blurs the boundaries between genres rather than reinforcing them?

4-2 The school of thought that considers the haiku a complete poem:

Conversely, another school of thought holds that the haiku can only be understood as a short poem with all its elements intact, despite its extreme brevity. Here, a poem is not measured by length or extent, but by its ability to produce a coherent poetic experience that possesses its own semantic and aesthetic unity. The modern poem is no longer measured by the number of verses or the length of the text, but rather by the artistic impact it achieves and the extent to which it succeeds in constructing a self-contained poetic world.

Based on the foregoing, the poem has become an open space for diverse writing experiments, including extremely short texts. From this perspective, the haiku is not an exception to the concept of the poem, but rather one of its modern manifestations that redefines the concept of poetic “completeness.” However, this position is not without its own problems, as it presupposes a significant expansion of the concept of the poem that might cause it to encompass other forms of flash fiction or fragmentary writing—which could lead to the blurring of boundaries between literary genres, rather than defining them.

4-3 The Middle-Ground Position and the Problem of Poetic Form:

Between these two positions, a third, more flexible approach is emerging, which holds that the haiku should not be confined to the “poetry/poem” dichotomy, but rather should be viewed as a distinct poetic form, defined more by its internal characteristics than by its affiliation with a pre-existing category. According to this view, the fundamental value of the haiku lies not in its name, but in the way it engages with the poetic moment, the economy of language, and the creation of surprise within a confined textual space. It is worth noting that the critics **Mahmoud al-Rajabi and Jamal Elgezeery** have agreed to refer to the Arabic haiku as “**‘hakida and hakid’**.” **Jamal al-Jaziri** explains that the term is derived from the word “haiku” and the Arabic word for “poem”; just as we say “the essence of the poem,” meaning the core of the intended meaning, so too does it convey the meaning immediately and simply in its expression. **Jamal Elgezeery** says, **“This is my first critical book on haiku poetry, or the art of al-hakid, and I have compiled ... material on the haiku poem, or al-hakida.”**²¹

Accordingly, this school of thought prefers to treat haiku as a poetic form with its own independent aesthetic logic, without seeking to subject it to concepts that have taken shape in different literary and cultural contexts. The true criterion, in the view of this school, is how the text functions, not the name given to it.

Nevertheless, this stance does not definitively resolve the issue, because moving beyond classification does not eliminate the need to construct a critical framework capable of comparison and analysis—which is why the question of classification remains ever-present, even among those who advocate moving beyond it.

5- THE CRITICAL STAKES OF READING ALGERIAN HAIKU:

The issue surrounding Algerian haiku is no longer linked solely to its nature, classification, or even terminology; rather, it has come to relate to the way it is received and interpreted within critical discourse. The haiku text, despite its extreme brevity, has not been a simple text in the eyes of critics; rather, it has become a true testing ground for contemporary critical approaches and a space—where multiple readings intersect, yielding varying results depending on the theoretical tools employed. Writing a haiku requires extensive reading and a deep exploration of its nature, vision, and poetic techniques; thus, **“it is possible to write an Arabic ‘haiku’ with a high degree of poetic artistry, one that embodies creativity, originality, and innovation, rather than the imitation, mimicry, and replication we see and read in most of those who write them”** ⁽²²⁾, which means that the haiku requires a poetic language capable of comprehending and interpreting it.

Hence, the differences in readings were not the result of differences in the texts themselves, but rather the result of differences in the critical perspectives applied to them and in the theoretical backgrounds that each critic brings to their reading. This is what makes the study of interpretive stakes a fundamental approach to understanding how the image of the Algerian haiku is shaped within criticism, far removed from the idea of a “final judgment” on the text.

5-1 Formalist Reading and Structural Focus:

The formalist approach represents one of the most prominent critical perspectives that have engaged with the haiku, focusing on the text’s external structure and its technical characteristics, such as brevity, condensation, and linguistic economy. According to this approach, the haiku is read as a tightly constructed linguistic structure, whose value is determined by its ability to reduce language to the absolute minimum without losing meaning.

However, this focus on form—despite its importance in highlighting the uniqueness of the haiku—can sometimes lead to neglecting the semantic dimension and the emotional experience conveyed by the text, making the reading more akin to a structural description than to a comprehensive aesthetic analysis. This raises the question: Is an analysis of formal structure sufficient to understand the haiku, or does this reduce it to a set of technical characteristics? **Abdelwahab Elmessiri** states, **“The fundamental artistic device**

of the haiku is that the poem hints rather than reveals, suggests rather than expresses, depicts things in a weaker or more understated manner than is customary, conveys much through little, and merely reminds us of shadows, meanings, and dimensions without explicitly mentioning them"²³, which we can translate as suggestion, brevity, and condensation.

Second: The Aesthetic Reading and Perception of the Poetic Moment:

In contrast to the formalist reading, some interpretations focus on the aesthetic dimension of the haiku, arguing that the essence of this genre lies not only in its form but also in its ability to produce an intense poetic moment based on suggestion, surprise, and emotional condensation. In this reading, value is not measured by the number of words, but by the intensity of the experience the text succeeds in conveying. Thus, **"the haiku reader can feel the same experience the poet went through, and may then reach the very moment of the haiku that the poet experienced,"** and thus it is the unspoken words and the unfilled space in the haiku that are of the utmost importance to the reader; for it is only through them, and through repeated readings, that the reader finds pleasure in capturing the haiku moment" (²⁴).

This is because the reader **"is not merely a recipient, but embodies a cultural, social, and psychological synthesis that converges with a writer who shares a similar holistic cultural disposition, and the text is the meeting point of these two cultures"** (²⁵).

The reader plays a crucial role in bringing the poetic text to life; for **"the text acquires its diverse artistic values through the reader, who is driven to decipher the poetic text, analyze its elements, and reveal its meanings hidden within its folds. ... The more open-minded the reader is, the more the text is open to multiple interpretations that may even go beyond those of the creator himself"** (²⁶).

However, this conception in turn raises a problem concerning the criteria of aesthetic reception, since the reader's response varies from one experience to another, making critical judgment less consistent and more tied to individual taste. Here, the tension emerges between criticism as objective knowledge and reading as a subjective experience.

Third: Cultural Reading and the Re-contextualization of the Haiku:

This type of reading approaches the haiku as a text inseparable from its cultural context—whether its original Japanese context or the new context in which it has been reimagined in Algeria. According to this perspective, meaning does not reside solely within the text itself but is shaped by the network of cultural and social references that surround it.

Haiku poetry aims to capture that indispensable aesthetic moment; thus, **"the essence of the haiku: the aesthetic moment—that is, the moment of enlightenment that follows turmoil, fragmentation, and the division of existence into subject and object—the moment when the light of humanity's discovery of its profound being in this universe shines forth."**²⁷

From this perspective, reading haiku requires paying attention to the transformations it has undergone as it has moved from one culture to another, and how it has been reshaped within the Algerian poetic experience. However, this approach may sometimes lead to an overemphasis on the contextual dimension at the expense of the text itself, making the reading more akin to a general cultural analysis than to a rigorous textual analysis.

Mohamed Lakhdari says:

mountain—With pain, it echos My screams!!²⁸

This haiku distills an intensely human moment, in which nature and the self intertwine to the point where it is difficult to separate them. The mountain, which evokes steadfastness and majesty, is not merely a backdrop to the scene; rather, it becomes a space that embraces the pain and extends it through the echo.

The echo's role is not limited to repeating the sound; it returns it laden with anguish, as if the pain were amplified as it crashes against the mountain's walls. Thus, the scream, as it returns to its source, seems deeper than it was at the moment it was uttered. It is not a scream seeking an answer, but a scream that discovers that nature responds only with what the heart holds.

The text's aesthetic beauty lies in this delicate interplay between the external and the internal; the mountain reflects nature's stillness, while the echo reveals the soul's turmoil. Through this juxtaposition, the natural phenomenon transforms into a poetic image suggesting that a person carries their pain with them wherever they go, to the point that the place itself seems to echo their lament.

The haiku leaves its ending open; "My screams!!" is not merely a conclusion, but a moment of emotional revelation, prompting the reader to reflect on how a single voice can fill an entire space, only to return to its owner even more sorrowful and lonely. Herein lies the power of the text: it grants silence—not noise—the ability to express the deepest recesses of the soul.

It becomes clear through these multiple readings that the divergence in Algerian criticism regarding the haiku does not stem from the texts themselves, but rather from the differing critical

frameworks that govern the act of reading. Each reading stems from a specific conception of the concept of the text, the nature of poetry, and the relationship between form and meaning—which makes the haiku an open space for multiple interpretations rather than a text with a single, fixed meaning. Hence, these differences pave the way for a transition to a more complex issue: the dilemma of classification, where the question becomes not only how to read haiku, but also how to classify it within a network of overlapping literary genres.

6- THE CLASSIFICATION DILEMMA IN ALGERIAN CRITICISM: THE HAIKU BETWEEN THE FLASH POEM, THE EPIGRAM, THE FRAGMENT, AND THE SHORT POEM

In the Algerian critical context, the haiku appears to be a text that resists classification rather than submitting to it. Any attempt to place it within a specific literary genre is thwarted by its characteristics, which combine extreme conciseness, semantic reduction, and interpretive openness. The haiku has captivated **“the tastes of poets and readers across the globe with its enchanting power of surprise and aesthetic qualities that allow it to stand alongside established forms such as the classical poem, free verse, and prose, as well as short forms such as the epigram, the flash poem, and others”**⁽²⁹⁾.

Therefore, **“How is interpretation a structural element of the artistic architecture of the haiku? How does interpretation transform from content into artistic architecture? How does interpretation become the foundation of the haiku and give it its distinctive character?”**³⁰; **“The term ‘interpretation’ here does not refer to the interpretation or exegesis carried out by the reader or critic, which occurs at a stage subsequent to the creative process—that is, at the level of text reception— but rather the interpretation carried out by the writer during or before the writing process—an interpretation without which the text cannot come into being, for it constitutes the second half of the poem’s text; a half that endows the poem with the characteristic that transforms it into a haiku, distinguishing it from the flash poem, the epigram, and the aphorism”**³¹.

This situation has led to what might be called a “classification dilemma,” in which literary criticism finds itself confronted with a text that intersects with several literary genres without fully dissolving into any of them.

This dilemma not only reflects the difficulty in defining the nature of the haiku but also reveals the limitations of the conceptual framework of Arabic literary criticism in dealing with short poetic forms, which no longer adhere to strict traditional classifications but instead occupy a middle ground between genres, where boundaries overlap rather than remain distinct.

First: Haiku and the Epigram: The Intersection of Concision and Functional Difference

Some critics draw parallels between the haiku and the epigram based on the element of linguistic conciseness and the ability to produce concentrated meaning within a limited textual space. Both rely on linguistic economy and the construction of rapid, striking meaning, which makes a comparison between them seem, on the surface, formally justified.

However, this formal similarity masks a fundamental difference in their respective aesthetic functions. The epigram often leans toward irony, satire, or direct critical allusion, whereas the haiku is rooted in a contemplative moment grounded in an interaction with nature or an existential moment. Consequently, grouping them under a single category may lead to an overlooking of the profound semantic differences between the two genres.

Second: Haiku and the Poetic Flash: A Moment of Poetic Brilliance

The “poetic flash” appears to be the Arabic literary form most closely resembling the haiku in terms of brevity, intensity, and reliance on a fleeting poetic moment. This similarity has led some critical interpretations to regard the haiku as an Arabic extension of the “poetic flash” or as one of its forms influenced by translation and experimentation. This view aligns with that of **Mohammed Elassaad**, who states: **“The brief, fleeting poem that a large number of poets have begun to turn to, and its Japanese model (the haiku), an artistic model in which expression transcends words to become expression through imagery—as the purest model that grants us a sudden intuition and an understanding that transcends rational explanation and intellectual thought”** ⁽³²⁾. Here, he arrives at the conclusion that the criticism of haiku poetry requires a critical competence capable of grasping the methods of understanding and reading it.

However, this conception in turn faces a problem related to the cultural references of each form, since the poetic flash belongs to a modern Arabic context linked to contemporary poetic experiences, while the haiku belongs to a Japanese aesthetic tradition with specific philosophical underpinnings related to contemplation, emptiness, and harmony with nature. Consequently, formal similarity is not sufficient to establish a genre-based equivalence between them.

Third: Haiku and the Poetic Fragment: Between Discontinuity and Completeness

The poetic aphorism is based on the idea of semantic discontinuity and the absence of a complete structure, where the text remains open to multiple interpretive possibilities without offering a definitive, closed meaning. This is what leads some critics to draw parallels between it and the haiku, based on their shared elements of brevity and openness.

However, the haiku, despite its semantic openness, is based not so much on discontinuity as on capturing a moment that is complete in itself, even if it seems simple or fleeting. It does not rely on textual fragmentation, but rather on condensing the moment and transforming it into a self-contained poetic image—which distinguishes it from the poetic aphorism, which tends toward fragmentation rather than completeness.

Fourth: Haiku and the Short Poem: The Problem of Boundaries

Another school of thought regards the haiku as a form of the short poem, particularly in light of the development of modern poetry and its liberation from traditional constraints. Here, the concept of a “poem” is not tied to length, but rather to the text’s ability to produce a complete poetic experience within narrow linguistic boundaries.

However, this perspective raises a central question about the boundaries of the concept of “poem” itself: If every concise and brief piece of writing becomes a poem, then the concept of the poem loses its distinctiveness, and the boundaries between different poetic genres dissolve, bringing us back to a broader issue concerning the usefulness of genre classification in modern poetry.

It becomes clear through these comparisons that the classification dilemma in Algerian criticism is not limited to the haiku alone, but reveals a deeper crisis in genre-based thinking within contemporary Arab criticism. The overlap between the haiku and other short poetic forms does not merely reflect a formal similarity; rather, it expresses a shift in the very concept of poetry itself, as the boundaries between genres have become more flexible and less rigid.

It can therefore be argued that the haiku does not so much resist classification as it exposes the limitations of classification itself, compelling critics to rethink their conceptual tools rather than merely fitting texts into predefined molds.

CONCLUSION

This study does not aim to offer a definitive judgment on Algerian haiku so much as it seeks to deconstruct the way in which critical discourse surrounding it has been shaped and to reveal the conceptual mechanisms that have governed its reading and classification. The analysis has shown that the issues surrounding this literary genre were not incidental but rather structural, relating more to the nature of critical reception itself than to the creative texts.

First: Regarding the issue of terminology, it becomes clear that the debate over whether to retain the term “haiku” or to Arabize it was not a simple linguistic disagreement, but rather a reflection of a deeper divergence in the conception of the nature of this literary genre. The camp that adhered to the term was guided by the idea of its universality and the established use of the term in literary studies, whereas the other camp viewed the term as carrying a cultural baggage that cannot be separated from its original context. However, the findings of this research indicate that the established use of the term does not resolve the critical debate, because the essence of the disagreement relates more to the conceptual understanding of the haiku than to the name itself.

Second: Regarding the question “Is the haiku poetry or a poem?”, it became clear that this question does not pertain to the haiku alone, but rather touches upon the concepts of poetry and the poem in contemporary Arabic criticism. Some interpretations have regarded the haiku as poetry based on conciseness and suggestion without classifying it within the concept of the traditional poem, while other interpretations have viewed it as a short poem with all the necessary elements; meanwhile, intermediate approaches have suggested considering it a distinct poetic form that transcends the traditional dichotomy. The study concluded that this debate reveals the absence of a unified definition of the poem itself, making the disagreement over the haiku a consequence rather than a cause.

Third: In terms of the challenges of critical reading, the study showed that the multiplicity of readings of Algerian haiku is not due to differences in the texts themselves, but rather to the different critical approaches adopted by researchers. Form-based, aesthetic, and cultural readings each produced a different conception of the text, confirming that critical discourse reflects not so much the text itself as the tools used to interpret it. Consequently, the haiku has become a space for testing critical approaches rather than a subject with a fixed meaning.

Fourth: As for the dilemma of classification, it has become clear that categorizing the haiku alongside genres such as the “poetic flash,” the “epigram,” the “aphorism,” and the “short poem” has not resolved its identity but has instead revealed the limitations of classification itself. The overlap between these genres reflects a shift in the nature of modern poetry, where the boundaries between genres have become more

flexible and less rigid, making the haiku a text that exposes the crisis of classification rather than settling within it.

In light of these findings, it can be argued that Algerian haiku was not merely a passing poetic experiment, but rather a catalyst for rethinking central concepts within Arab literary criticism, such as the concepts of poetry, the poem, literary genre, and mechanisms of reading. Furthermore, the critical discourse that accompanied it reveals a gradual shift from a search for legitimacy to a search for identity, and then to a preoccupation with the problems of classification—a shift that reflects an evolution in the consciousness of criticism itself more than it reflects an evolution in the texts.

Consequently, the most important conclusion that can be drawn is that the crisis of the haiku is not a crisis of the text, but rather a crisis of critical concepts, and that engaging with it should not be limited to attempting to classify it, but rather to understanding the shifts it reveals within the contemporary Arab critical apparatus.

Algerian haiku is still searching for itself and its creative identity; under no circumstances can it flourish in isolation from cultural heritage, the attention of critics, and the critical engagement with this newcomer—nor can it be refined to take on an Algerian-Arab character and an aesthetic sensibility that resonates with our Arab imagination.

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