

## Abu al-Eid Doudou: From Linguistic Transfer to the Creative Act

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### Abstract

The experience of the Algerian translator Abu al-Eid Doudou stands as a rare example of translation evolving from a mere linguistic operation into an integrated cultural and creative project. Doudou transcended the traditional model of the intermediary translator to embody the figure of the “intellectual–translator,” one who reproduces texts through interactive critical and interpretive visions rooted in encyclopedic knowledge and a profound understanding of cultural and linguistic systems.

This paper is based on an in-depth analysis of his translational project as a creative act and a form of secondary writing, wherein the translating self intersects with the spirit of the text, and translation is positioned as a civilizational dialogue between cultures rather than a simple literal transfer. Abu al-Eid conceives translation as a complex act that requires self-formation and continuous practice, while questioning prevailing notions regarding translators’ competence. He emphasizes that mastery of language alone is insufficient without a deep understanding of its cultural contexts.

His theatrical experience, particularly in *Al-Turab* (The Soil) and *Al-Bashir*, further demonstrates how translation enriches creative writing and leads to the reconstruction of texts in light of the recipient’s specificities without compromising the spirit of the original. Through his works, Doudou affirmed that translation is not merely a means of communication, but also a means of producing knowledge and expanding the horizons of shared understanding. He also showed that the true translator engages intellectually and aesthetically with the text, contributing to its reshaping in ways that serve both the recipient and their culture.

This paper concludes that Doudou’s translational project constitutes an intellectual production akin to authorship itself, restoring translation to its rightful place as a cultural act that enhances human dialogue and builds bridges between civilizations.

**Keywords:** Abu al-Eid Doudou – Translation – Translator – Recipient – Intellectual Translator.

### Introduction

Abu al-Eid Doudou’s experience in translation represents a landmark in the trajectory of modern Arab culture due to its uniqueness, richness, and diversity, all of which reflect an authentic epistemic openness toward various forms of intellectual and literary discourse, both locally and globally. His work does not fall within the confines of translation in its mechanical or merely literal sense; rather, it opens onto profound creative and theoretical dimensions that reveal the vision of a translator-thinker who combines critical sensibility with intellectual depth, and who reconciles the literary and cultural roles in approaching texts.

Abu al-Eid does not merely translate; he recreates texts within new cultural contexts while preserving their spirit and remaining open to their possible meanings. As an encyclopedic intellectual and cultural actor, he transcends the role of transmitter to become a genuine partner in the production of meaning and the shaping of thought.

This study aims to deconstruct the components of this ambitious translational project, which moves beyond conventionality and celebrates difference, pleasure, and plurality through questioning texts and approaching them in a manner that interrogates and reshapes them within a distinct epistemological and aesthetic horizon. From this perspective, translation in Doudou's work becomes a truly creative act in which the linguistic intertwines with the aesthetic, in an intellectual adventure fraught with challenges and fundamental questions, foremost among them: How does Abu al-Eid translate? What motivates him to engage in translation? And for whom are his translated texts intended?

### **1. A Brief Biography of the Translator Abu al-Eid Doudou**

Abu al-Eid Doudou was born on January 13, 1934, in the village of El-Ansar in the province of Jijel, Algeria, into a poor family. Yet these harsh circumstances did not stand as an obstacle to his academic journey; rather, they became a driving force from an early age. His father, Belkacem, enrolled him in a Qur'anic school so that he might memorize the Holy Qur'an and receive the foundations of religious instruction, reflecting his deep conviction that his son's future depended upon knowledge and learning.

Fate, however, had other plans. His father passed away while he was still a young boy, forcing him to leave the Qur'anic school. Nevertheless, he was not abandoned, as his mother, Qaddour Aljia, took responsibility for his upbringing and education, enabling him to continue along the path of learning. Perhaps this early deprivation of paternal affection became an inner motivation that drove him toward diligence, perseverance, and an unwavering pursuit of knowledge. He excelled among his classmates at school, yet life continued to test him. In the 1980s, destiny struck once more with the loss of his mother, depriving him of the last parental support he had. Despite this, he remained steadfast in the face of adversity, armed with knowledge and determination.

He later moved to Baghdad, where he studied at the Teachers' Training College for four years and obtained a Bachelor's degree in Arabic Literature. He then moved to Austria, where he earned his doctorate in 1961. He returned to Algeria in 1969 and joined the Department of Arabic Language at the University of Algiers.

<sup>1</sup> There, he became the first professor to teach Comparative Literature and the Theory of Foreign Literatures in Algeria. His efforts were divided between teaching, translation, and authorship, as attested by Professor Abu al-Qasim Saadallah, one of the leading figures of the Algerian university at the time, who stated:

"Doudou carved his path competently within the university and imposed himself upon the academic and cultural milieu through his refined pen, despite living in the heart of Europe... He also participated in the Committee for Educational Reform in Algeria."<sup>2</sup>

He taught alongside a distinguished group of professors such as Mohamed Messaif and Abu al-Qasim Saadallah, among others. Yet in the final years of his life, he endured marginalization in Algeria and suffered from poverty. This was mentioned by Dr. Mohamed Saidi during the program "Shores of Liberation", prepared and presented by Dr. Mohamed Saleh Kharfi for Jijel Regional Radio, where he remarked:

"Abu al-Eid Doudou died after making tremendous contributions to Arab culture and translation. He died poor, unable even to buy heart medication for his sick heart."<sup>3</sup>

He passed away in January 2004.

## 2. Concepts of Translation

Translation has long been, and continues to be, one of the foremost civilizational and communicative means through which peoples have drawn closer and interacted culturally across the ages. It is not confined to transferring meanings from one language to another; rather, it constitutes a human bridge across which thought travels, and through which consciousness and experience are conveyed. From this perspective, the statement that translation is “the path through which a foreign language enters society”<sup>4</sup> precisely captures the essence of this elevated human act.

When a foreign language enters a society through translation, it does not arrive merely as a passing guest; rather, it integrates into and enriches the cultural fabric of that society, granting it renewed momentum in knowledge and vision, and opening before it intellectual horizons that had previously remained unexplored. At the same time, the receiving society does not remain in a position of passive reception; instead, it rediscovers that foreign language through its own mirror that is, through its system of values, cultural perspectives, and epistemic needs. Thus, a dialogical relationship emerges between the two cultures, contributing equally to the development of both. Translation, therefore, is not merely the replication of discourse from one tongue into another, but a creative process involving interpretation and the bridging of distinct intellectual worlds.

If we examine the role played by translation from a deeper angle, we find it to be an effective means of enlightening peoples, awakening their consciousness, and enhancing their capacity to perceive and understand the diversity of the Other. Through translation, ideas, philosophies, literary schools, and scientific theories are transmitted. It is also through translation that productive cultural interaction takes place, where experiences meet and intersect, generating new forms of knowledge that transcend the boundaries of language and origin. In this way, translation becomes an urgent human call for knowledge and dialogue, an affirmation of the values of understanding, tolerance, and solidarity among humankind. It further encourages the convergence of opinions and emotions among different peoples, regardless of the distances or civilizational differences that separate them:

“A human call that insists upon knowledge and understanding, affirms harmony and solidarity, and encourages the rapprochement of opinions and feelings among peoples.”<sup>5</sup>

If we reflect once more upon the dimensions of this statement, we realize that it expresses the fundamental aim of translation as a tool for reshaping human relations on the basis of coexistence and mutual respect. Translation transforms languages from barriers separating nations into bridges connecting them, and makes words instruments for constructing a global social contract founded upon mutual recognition and ethical awareness rather than competition or exclusion. Consequently, translation does not merely function as a means of conveying meaning; it rises to become a cultural force that reshapes human consciousness and establishes a new perspective that sees plurality as a source of enrichment rather than a cause of conflict. It affirms that the future of humanity depends upon its ability to listen to one another in different languages, yet with one shared spirit.

## 3. Translation as a Distinctive and Singular Experience

Abu al-Eid Doudou’s translational experience “embraces distinction and otherness,” an otherness characterized by plurality and aesthetic pleasure, revealing the presence of a critical consciousness that rejects conventionality in translation. For Doudou, translation is not a mere repetition of the original discourse; rather, it is an interrogation of that discourse and a multifaceted engagement with texts of various kinds poetry, prose, philosophy, history, and beyond.

Drawing upon a solid scholarly and cultural background, as well as a sharp critical awareness of the role of translation in building bridges between languages and cultures, Abu al-Eid Doudou emerges as a model of the intellectual–translator who transcended the traditional instrumental conception of translation in order to establish for it an advanced creative and epistemological vision. As the discourse suggests, he employed a range of diverse linguistic and cultural resources that contributed to refining his intellectual experience and enriching his cognitive horizon. Consequently, he did not limit himself to mastering a mechanism for transferring between languages; rather, he elevated translation into a creative interpretive act that requires the possession of complex cultural and intellectual tools.

Within this context, Abu al-Eid Doudou emphasizes that his translational project is not merely a mechanical linguistic activity, clearly indicating that translation, in his view, constitutes an integral component of creative writing itself rather than a secondary act derived from the original text. This position reflects a profound awareness of the translator’s function as a cognitive agent participating in the production of meaning, not simply a linguistic intermediary.

Doudou further demonstrates that translation is not the product of talent alone, but rather the fruit of a determined will to learn. This points to the importance of self-formation and continuous practice in refining the translator’s skills and broadening both linguistic and cultural horizons. Among the assumptions that Doudou explicitly and methodically refutes is the widespread belief that possessing a language necessarily implies possessing the ability to translate. He asserts that mastery of a language does not automatically entail translational competence:

“A translated work, before being a linguistic transformation, is a comprehensive cultural product in which the creativity of the author and the translator’s conception meet in light of the latter’s experience with both the source and target languages.”<sup>6</sup>

This statement, which carries a distinctly deconstructive dimension against reductionist perspectives, restores translation to its status as a complex epistemic practice that transcends mere familiarity with grammatical rules or vocabulary. According to his conception, translation is not a purely linguistic transformation, but rather an all-encompassing cultural synthesis arising at the intersection of cultural and cognitive systems, within a creative interaction between the translator’s subjectivity and the particularities of the source text.

Such a perspective reinforces the interpretive dimension of translational activity and highlights the dialectical interaction between text and translator within specific cultural and intellectual conditions. From this standpoint, translation is not merely the reformulation of discourse in another language; it is an interpretive and hermeneutic practice that requires critical awareness, aesthetic sensibility, and a deep understanding of the cultural contexts from which texts emerge and toward which they are directed.

#### **4. Translation as a Creative Act Equal to Authorship: Abu al-Eid Doudou’s Experience in Theatre**

Doudou’s translational project constitutes an intellectual production comparable to authorship and closely akin to creative writing. Such an approach transcends the traditional view that regards translation as subordinate to the original text. In this perspective, the translator is not merely the shadow of the author, but rather a writer of a special kind who rewrites the text in light of different cultural and linguistic conditions, a task that requires the possession of complex interpretive and intellectual tools.

The Algerian writer Abu al-Eid Doudou undertook a remarkable experience in the field of dramatic writing, although his name was primarily associated with the worlds of the short story, translation, and literary criticism. Despite the limited scope of his theatrical production, which consisted of only two plays *Al-Turab* (The Soil) and *Al-Bashir* this endeavor was far from a passing experiment. Rather, it represented an extension of his efforts to revive theatrical art in Algeria and to enrich a cultural scene that was then suffering from a clear absence of national and Arab dramatic texts.

His broad and profound familiarity with Western literatures enabled him to develop a solid intellectual background and an accurate understanding of dramatic writing techniques and methods, granting him the confidence and awareness necessary to venture into this field. Abu al-Eid Doudou's theatrical writing is distinguished by a number of characteristics that reveal his deep vision of theatre as both a cultural and a militant instrument. He consistently sought to connect his struggle to historical and civilizational heritage while remaining open to universal human horizons, rejecting confinement within a negative intellectual shell.

The technique of citation also constitutes a fundamental pillar in the construction of his dramatic characters, through which he expresses a transformation of values marked by the emergence of new principles replacing older ones. The crisis of heroism in his resistance-oriented works appears through a constant internal conflict embodied in the tension between reality and dream or, more precisely, between two conflicting systems of values.

The play (*The Soil*), written by the writer and activist Abu al-Eid Doudou, is considered one of the most prominent dramatic works produced during the Algerian Revolution. He composed it in the very first year of the revolution, though it was later published in 1968.<sup>7</sup> The play vividly reflects the fusion between literature and struggle. Belonging to the tradition of resistance literature, it demonstrates a mature dramatic structure and a literary style characterized simultaneously by depth and attractiveness.

The play presents an intense conflict between patriotism, love, and sacrifice, while questioning the human conscience through philosophical dialogues that reveal intellectual awareness and maturity of thought. Its characters represent not only Algerian society in its various classes and categories, but also humanity in general as it confronts destiny and history.

The title *Al-Turab* (The Soil) itself carries profound symbolic significance, referring to the land upon which the Algerian people were born, a land described by the author as "bound by ropes that time itself cannot sever," a powerful indication of attachment to land and identity. The events unfold against the backdrop of the revolution and portray the circumstances that paved the way for its outbreak. We witness how the revolution comes to occupy the minds of the protagonists, becoming the center of their daily concerns and conversations. Everything begins from it and returns to it, reflecting the extent to which the national cause permeated the details of everyday life.

Likewise, the play *Al-Bashir* carries a profound symbolic dimension reflected in the precise harmony between its title and content. *Al-Bashir* is presented not merely as a dramatic character, but as a symbol of the enlightened intellectual returning from his journey of knowledge bearing a reformist vision aimed at shaking the rigid mental structure of his society. Here, knowledge is not acquired for individual gain, but employed as a tool to liberate minds from the grip of superstition and deception within a social context dominated by herd mentality, where the ignorance of the masses is exploited by opportunists such as the "The Charlatan Taleb", who represents the forces of reactionism and exploitation.

The speech delivered by Al-Bashir in the mosque square reveals a bold attempt to break through the wall of silence and stagnation. Yet the shock it provokes among some listeners exposes the deep entrenchment of superstitious thought within society. Al-Bashir does not remain content with theorizing; instead, he devises a symbolic means the theatrical performance itself through which he seeks to attract misguided individuals, making himself a magnetic center within the void of backwardness in order to expose them to the light of reason and consciousness. Through this process, he hopes to heal their souls from the disease of intellectual immunity loss, which has transformed people into beings who receive without thinking and believe without verification. Thus, the play is not merely a critique of superstition, but an urgent call to restore the role of reason as a source of freedom and change.<sup>8</sup>

### **5. Translation as a Cultural Practice**

Before being a linguistic transformation, translation is a comprehensive cultural synthesis a civilizational bridge that transcends languages. From this perspective, Doudou's project goes beyond being a merely linguistic undertaking to become a cultural project that reshapes the relationship between the translating self and the translated text.

As noted in the discourse:

“Abu al-Eid Doudou, in addition to possessing the keys to translation through his reliance on diverse linguistic and cultural resources that contributed to his formation as a creative translator, considered his translational project an intellectual production comparable to authorship and akin to creativity.”<sup>9</sup>

Abu al-Eid Doudou's experience in translation highlights dimensions that surpass the merely technical linguistic level and embody translation as a profound cultural and intellectual practice. He did not simply possess linguistic tools; rather, his translational project emerged from diverse linguistic and cultural resources that shaped him into both a creative writer and an intellectual translator.

From this standpoint, translation for him is not a literal transfer of texts, but an intellectual production approaching authorship and creativity, born from both talent and the will to learn. This clearly indicates that translation is not merely a linguistic competence, but an act requiring awareness of cultural and semantic systems. Within this framework, translation becomes a space for reconstructing meaning in light of the receiving culture, evolving into a comprehensive cultural synthesis that entails an interpretive vision of the original text. Consequently, the translator becomes a civilizational mediator who contributes to intercultural interaction and reshapes discourse in ways that correspond to the particularities of the new recipient, without compromising the spirit of the source text.

### **Conclusion**

Abu al-Eid Doudou's experience in the field of translation truly embodies a unique and inspiring model of what creative translation ought to be when it liberates itself from the constraints of rigid literalism and delves into the depths of literary and intellectual discourse in order to extract its cultural essence and spiritual spirit. His translational project rose beyond the level of a mechanical transfer between two languages to become a refined cultural practice endowed with intertwined epistemological and aesthetic dimensions. Translation, in his work, transcended its traditional boundaries to become an instrument of consciousness, a platform of thought, and a civilizational bridge actively participating in the shaping of identity and the enrichment of the Arab cultural sphere.

What Abu al-Eid Doudou accomplished cannot merely be regarded as accurate linguistic transfer; rather, it constitutes an interpretive construction that recreates meaning within contexts responsive to the specificity of the recipient without sacrificing the authenticity of the source text. His translations were not silent or neutral reproductions, but living dialogues with texts, pulsating with conscious vision and critical engagement. Consequently, they became cultural projects in their own right, extending beyond the limits of language into broader intellectual and artistic horizons.

The importance of this experience lies not only in what was translated or achieved, but also in the new awareness it generated regarding translation as a creative act that plays a fundamental role in constructing and reshaping meaning. It granted the Arab recipient the opportunity to engage with global thought through an open vision and a critical mind. From this perspective, Abu al-Eid Doudou's experience stands as a serious invitation to rethink translation not as a mere linguistic intermediary, but as a civilizational practice grounded in reflection, creativity, and dynamic cultural interaction, one that contributes to broadening human horizons and strengthening humanity's presence within the spaces of thought and existence.

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<sup>1</sup> See Ammar Bouhouche, *Abu al-Eid Doudou as I Knew Him*, 1st ed., Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Algiers, Issue 2, pp. 181–192.

<sup>2</sup> Abu al-Qasim Saadallah, "Abu al-Eid Doudou," *Journal of the Arabic Language*, Algeria, Issue 11, p. 103.

<sup>3</sup> Mohamed Saleh Kharfi, *Haddathani Qala: Fi al-Qadd...* ("He Told Me: About Fate..."), Dar Wamda, Jijel, Algeria, 2003, p. 72.

<sup>4</sup> Mustafa Maher, *Colors of German Literature*, Dar Sader, Beirut, 1979, p. 78.

<sup>5</sup> Abbas al-Jarrari, "Communication through Translation and the Difficulty of Translating Literary Texts," *Al-Manahil Magazine*, Issue 14, 1979, p. 78.

<sup>6</sup> Hafnawi Baali, *The Space of the New Comparison*, Dar al-Gharb, Oran, Algeria, 2004, p. 109.

<sup>7</sup> See Abu al-Eid Doudou, *Al-Turab (The Soil)*, 1st ed., Dar al-Ummah, Algeria, 1968, p. 13.

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