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FACULTY OF LETTERS AND LANGUAGES  
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH**



**A Tale of Two Women: A comparative Study of FadhmaAïth  
Mansour Amrouche's *Histoire de Ma Vie* (1968) and Helen Keller's  
*The Story of My Life* (1903)**

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**Submitted by Supervised By**

- **Ms. Khaoula Terki**                      **Mrs. Idres- Amari Ourida**  
- **Ms. Assia Kali**

**Members of the Jury**

**Chair: Mr. Kaci Farid**

**Supervisor: Mrs. Idress- Amari Ourida**

**Examiner: Mrs. Chioukhe Benali Ounissa**

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### **Dedication**

To my parents, for providing me with a decent life and teaching me patience and resilience.

To my beloved cat, the quiet and comforting companion who never left my side.

To Yasmine Sadat and Yacine Dali, for being the older siblings I never had, your unwavering encouragement and friendship have meant the world to me.

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And to someone very dear to my heart, thank you for being my strength, my calm, and my greatest source of love.

**KhaoulaTerki**

## **Dedication**

It is with a heavy heart and enduring love that I dedicate this work to my aunt Chadia who left us soon, may peace be upon her.

With love and gratitude, I thank my parents who facilitated my process of learning and provided me with a valuable education. I also thank profoundly my siblings Yacine, Zakaria and Asma.

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## Abstract

The present dissertation undertakes a comparative study of two female autobiographies, Fadhma Aïth Mansour Amrouche's *Histoire de ma Vie* (1968) and Helen Keller's *The Story of my Life* (1903). It focuses on their narrative of self and sociocultural aspects that underpin the common ground of marginalization that both authors experienced in different contexts. Through a critical reading that intertwines autobiography and sociocultural context, the study reveals that Amrouche and Keller represent themselves by autobiography writing. This type of writing acts as a kind of border space shaped by narrative strategies and sociocultural dynamics, which serve as subtle layers for their introspective storytelling. Ultimately the study reveals overlooked elements in autobiographical writings of women who have been historically silenced due to societal constraints or disability

Key words: Autobiography, Sociocultural Norms, Keller, Amrouche, Identity.

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## **General introduction**

All along History, life has been the focus of human curiosity. Every culture has its mythology which is transmitted through generations. Literature has very much contributed to this transmission so as to keep the communities' as well as the individuals' origins alive. In other words, where do we come from? Why do we have different cultures, different languages?

Algerian literature, among many others, is an example of such multiplicity. Linguistically, it is produced in Arabic, French, and Tamazight displaying the diversity that makes Algerian culture and history. Internationally, it holds a central place in North African literature and in postcolonial studies. This has been reinforced with the emergence of female writers who have introduced new themes such as gender, patriarchy, and women's place and rights within Algerian society. Generally based on personal experiences, many novels by women are classified as biographical or autobiographical.

American literature is similarly rooted from different contexts, reflecting its history, colonization and migration. However, it displays broader and more diversified evolution, from early slave narrative to modernist genre and forms of writing.

Within these cultural dimensions, life writing encapsulates experiences that intersect with broader cultural and political realities. In the literary world, life reciting or "autobiography is a retrospective account of a man's whole life (or a significant part of a life) written as avowed truth and for a specific purpose by the man who lived the life" (Mandel 217)

The contribution of women to the genre of autobiography is significant, yet often overshadowed when compared to male autobiographical works. Women's autobiographies



however, tend to raise more questions, making them all the more compelling to investigate (Smith, Watson 4).

In this context, two women emerged as prominent contributors in life writing: Fadhma Aith Mansour Amrouche, one of the earliest Algerian Kabyle writers and poet and Helen Keller, an American writer and an activist in Progressive Social Movement. These two authors are urged to narrate their lives which reflect two culturally different but theoretically intersected traditions. The Algerian woman's autobiography, a specific form of writing that recently some Algerian female writers took as a mean to reveal past experiences, particularly war that is a driving cause to recount their traumatic experiences or even their contribution to war as done by the Algerian of French origin, Evelyne Safir Lavalette (1927 – 2014) in her novel *Juste Algérienne: comme une tissure* (2013) in which she recounts her experience as a member in the National Liberation Front (FLN). Most of such female autobiographical works are historical documents that intertwine individual experiences with socio-political contexts, including themes of colonialism and patriarchy resistance. However, American women's autobiographies often evolved from puritan to contemporary narratives, exploring both female subjectivity within self-examination grappling with the use of "I" for both personal and societal contexts such as prominent social movement of civil rights, western expansion and abolition....etc (Culley).

This work undertakes a comparative study of two autobiographies written by two women: *Histoire de ma Vie* by Fadhma Aith Mansour Amrouche, and *The Story of My Life* by Helen Keller. The central aim is to analyze how both of them used autobiographies as means of self-assertion and a voice to their distinct forms of marginalization. Furthermore it explains how their life narratives function as socially and culturally constructed. This study is driven by deep interest of marginalized voices, those who are silenced due to disability, colonization or social restrictiveness. The motivation also stems from the noticeable gap in comparative

literature especially those autobiographies and from the shared titles and themes. Despite their differing cultural and historical milieu, both authors had the urge to narrate their life stories. Therefore, this research aims to respond to the following question:

How are the autobiographies of both Helen Keller and Fadhma Aïth Mansour Amrouche not only self-referential but social and cultural constructs?

Many previous studies have examined the autobiographies of Fadhma Aïth Mansour Amrouche and Helen Keller separately. While Helen Keller's work has been extensively studied and critiqued, Fadhma Aïth Mansour Amrouche's work has received comparatively less scholarly attention. However, even though Amrouche's work has not been studied in isolation, it is incorporated into many studies as a significant and remarkable literary contribution.

In the broader field of autobiographical studies, a set of critical questions were raised about woman issues. It responds to the society in which they are produced, such concern is tackled in "Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader" by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, the two scholars examined how women's autobiographies are shaped by factors such as gender, race, class, and cultural identity. It highlights the evolution of critical thought in this area, challenging earlier essentialist views of women's experiences, the idea that all women share a single, universal experience simply because they are women, and incorporating broader, more intersectional global perspectives. By anchoring the literature review in the insights provided by Smith and Watson, this study situates the works of Amrouche and Keller within a wider feminist and theoretical discourse

Fadhma Aïth Mansour Amrouche's *Histoire de ma vie*, has been the center of several research, attracting scholarly attention for its profound engagement with themes of cultural transmission which Fadhma not only embodied but actively passed on to her children, most

notably within the broader literary contributions of the Amrouche family. *Histoire de ma vie* enriches the landscape of Algerian Francophone literature

This focus on cultural memory and identity in *Histoire de ma vie* finds further resonance in Faiza Aitel's *The Development of Algerian Berber Identity in Twentieth-Century Literature and Culture*. Ascholar, who is specialized in North African studies, explored the Kabyle Berber identity in the 20th century and argued that the Amrouche family, including Fadhma's children, Taos and El Mouhoub, played a key role in preserving their Kabyle identity through oral and written narratives. In *Histoire de ma vie*, Amrouche's identity is affirmed despite writing in French, as she draws heavily on village life and Berber traditions, embedding her narrative with Berber heritage. The book also addresses the complexities of living in colonial and post-colonial societies, reflecting on themes of exile that are prevalent in Berber writers.

In "Voix, mémoire et écriture: transmission de la mémoire et identité culturelle dans l'œuvre de Fadhma et Taos Amrouche (2006) ", a doctoral dissertation by Nathalie Malti, the focus shifts to the preservation of cultural heritage through autobiographical writing. Malti explores the autobiographies of Fadhma and her daughter Taos, particularly how they represent repressed thoughts and silences in their lives. In a chapter titled "Écriture de l'autobiographie au féminin," Malti discusses how Fadhma's autobiography is used as a tool for self-discovery and the expression of long silenced voices. The theme of identity is explored through the geographical spaces and houses that reflect different phases in Fadhma's life, and how the French colonization disrupted communal identity, leaving Fadhma's identity "in-between." (122-142)

In parallel to the cultural and maternal legacy explored in Fadhma Amrouche's *Histoire de ma vie*, Helen Keller's *The Story of My Life* has also received significant scholarly

attention, particularly for its powerful depiction of perseverance, intellectual awakening, and the transformative role of education.

Joseph Edgar Chamberlin, an American journalist and essayist, had a close friendship with Helen Keller. In an article published in the *American Annals of the Deaf*, titled “Helen Keller as She Is”, he recounts his experiences with Keller during her stay at his home. Chamberlin describes her remarkable ability to navigate life despite her disabilities, noting the significant progress she made through her curiosity and desire to learn.

In addition to the article of, “Radicalizing Reunion: Helen Keller’s *The Story of My Life* and Reconciliation Romance”, Travis Montgomery provides a nuanced analysis of Keller’s autobiography, exploring it through the frameworks of American selfhood and Southern identity. Montgomery argues that while Keller portrays herself as a model of American perseverance and success, her narrative is deeply intertwined with her Southern heritage. Her connections to historical figures, such as Robert E. Lee, add complexity to her identity as a symbol of North-South reconciliation. Montgomery also highlights Keller’s adherence to the Franklinian ideal of self-made success while integrating elements of Southern culture and history.

The article suggests that Keller’s autobiography goes beyond personal triumph to reflect broader social and historical contexts, particularly the complexities of post-Civil War reconciliation in America.

In order to this comparative study, the dissertation is structured into a comprehensive framework. It is divided into three chapters. The first chapter establishes the theoretical foundation of the research, drawing on Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytic theory and Philippe Lejeune’s concept of the autobiographical pact to examine the construction of selfhood and memory in life writing. The second chapter presents a biographical and contextual overview

of Fadhma Aït Mansour Amrouche and Helen Keller, outlining the historical, cultural, and personal circumstances that shaped their narratives. The third chapter offers a comparative textual analysis of *Histoire de ma vie* and *The Story of My Life*, focusing on key themes such as identity formation, personal struggle, and the expression of inner experience.

The dissertation ends with a general conclusion that synthesizes the insights gained from the comparative study, followed by a bibliography that lists all the sources referenced throughout the research

## **Chapter one: Theoretical framework**

# Chapter One: Theoretical Framework

## Introduction

This chapter serves as a theoretical framework for our research; it provides clear insight of the theoretical perspectives about the research question, which examines how autobiographies are written not only as self-referential narratives but also as products of psychological and sociocultural constructions.

Fadhma Aïth Mansour Amrouche's *Histoire de ma Vie* and Helen Keller's *The Story of my Life* will be examined through a rigorous theoretical framework to fully grasp their autobiographical significance. The two autobiographies will be analyzed within the framework of *Le Pacte Autobiographique* (1975) of Philippe Lejeune and psychoanalytic theory of Sigmund Freud. The former serves as a referential framework for defining and exploring the autobiographical genre and its perspectives, providing a fundamental tool for discussing self-narration, truth, identity, and life writing as a distinct literary form from other hybrid genres. The second, the psychoanalytic theory of Sigmund Freud, delves into the psychological complexities of individuals surrounded by both internal and external factors.

From this we can deduce the complementary relationship of the present two theories that are shaped under interrelated lenses to exploring the life narrative of individuals in general.

### 1. Autobiography as a Genre: A Brief Overview

The etymology of the word *Autobiography* is formed within English, by compounding, perhaps modeled on a German lexical item (**auto-** comb. form1, **biography** n). Based on the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), autobiography is “an account of an individual's life given by them, often written and published in the form of a book or it refers to the process or the genre of writing such an account”. This kind of writing can be applied beyond its strict definition; which means that it is not just a personal account but a flexible

concept used across different media and disciplines. The concept of autobiography first appeared in the late 1700s, but its earliest use dates back to 1797 in the writings of William Taylor, a reviewer and translator. This indicates that many earliest works existed before, such as Augustine's *Confession*, but the term was not in use at that time.

Autobiography emerged as an inchoate form before becoming a fully recognized genre. There exist forms like letters, diaries and journals within informal autobiography. The letters of Horace Walpole, a man of letters, edited in W.S. Lewis's correspondences, along with the composer Mozart and the poet Byron, each in quite different ways, are among the most revealing of letter writers. In the same vein, diaries offer another form in which we mention only two, the young Jewish girl Anne Frank and Samuel Pepys offering insights of their historical periods. There are also journals like the notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci, and William Wordsworth's sister Dorothy's sensitive recording of experience in her *Journals* (1897), in addition to French foreign minister Armand de Caulaincourt who recounts his trip to Russia with Napoleon in *With Napoleon In Russia: The Memoirs of General de Caulaincourt, Duke of Vicenza* (1935).

There are autobiographers who provide a glance at only what is remembered instead of recounting their whole life; this belongs to the category of Memoir or Reminiscences. As it emerges, the formal autobiography is the special category that shapes life by recollection such as the known works of St. Augustine confession, by the 5th century and Julius Caesar's Commentaries, as a greatest example of formal autobiography.

Autobiography is broadly classified into intellectual, religious, thematic and fictionalized. Religious autobiographies range from Augustine and Kempe to the autobiographical chapters of Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* and John Henry Cardinal Newman's *Apologia* in the 19th century. Intellectual autobiographies consist of the severely

analytical *Autobiography* of the philosopher John Stuart Mill and *The Education of Henry Adams*.

The existence of the genre of autobiography was a conflicting point to theorists to be determined, claiming that it is attributed to the Christian era on one hand, while others affirm its origin ever since the light of civilization. In an article, a research scholar Riya Mukherjee explores the autobiography revolution, synthesizing various perspectives of well-rounded theorists such as Philippe Lejeune, Roy Pascal, Paul De Man, Watson and Smith.

There has been an autobiographical tradition in oral and written records of worldwide cultures, China, Egypt and in Islamic Arabic literature that were dealt with neutrality. From Caesar's Commentaries and Augustus' Monumentum Ancyranum to Augustine's Confessions, autobiography shifted from an objective religious examination to a personal introspection and secular, embracing psychological, political self-exploration. With the rise of movements like the Renaissance, romanticism and enlightenment, autobiography was fueled by individualism. External factors that arose in the postmodern and postcolonial era, questioned the value of autobiography, truth and selfhood. It became a space for debate, seen as a "site of contestation" by Smith and Watson, often shaped by power and identity issues. (Mukherjee 2013).

## **2. Philippe Lejeune's *Le Pacte Autobiographique* (1975)**

### **2.1 Definition and Core Principles**

*The Autobiographical Pact* (1975) is a foundational theoretical source for autobiographical studies. Thinkers like Sidonie Smith, Julia Watson and Gérard Genette have expanded, refined, and critiqued the applicability of Lejeune's autobiographical pact and its traditional boundaries. Building on this framework, Lejeune later refined his theories and



expanded the scope of autobiography to include new forms of self-writing, as seen in (*Jeestunautre* (1980), *Signes de vie* (2005)).

The core of *Le Pacte Autobiographique*, lies essentially the implicit contract of truth between the author and the reader. Lejeune defines the core of autobiography as “ un récit rétrospectif en prose qu’une personne réelle fait de sa propre existence, lorsqu’elle met l’accent sur sa vie individuelle, en particulier sur l’histoire de sa personnalité” (Lejeune 16).

To highlight the significance of the autobiographical pact, Lejeune focuses on basic notions and principles that shape life writing and delve into self-introspection.

As for the characteristics of the author, the theorist established in his criteria that they interfere in avoiding ambiguity and uncertainty when it comes to the identity of the *author*. According to Lejeune, the author, narrator and the protagonist are all in the same person. It is explained as a tripartite identity (author=narrator= protagonist) (Lejeune 18).

Authenticity and truthfulness are the main principles of Lejeune which distinguish autobiography from fictional genre, since the intention of the text presents itself as a sincere account of real event. “Par opposition à toutes les formes de fiction, la biographie et l'autobiographie sont des textes référentiels : exactement comme le discours scientifique ou historique, ils prétendent apporter une information sur une vie réelle”. (Lejeune40)

The delimitation of autobiography in relation to other genres like fiction is the autobiographical pact concern .Stating first that autobiography is a referential text as any other scientific discourses that depict reality, he explores the blurred boundaries that distinguish autobiography from other forms. By referring to André Gide and evaluating his narrative in the context of the contradictory norms of the autobiographical pact, which blend truth and artistry, it is argued that autobiography serves as a tool to evoke and judge the sincerity of the work. (Lejeune 46)

The very clear aspect of all the autobiographies is the title on the cover that reveals the genre of the literary work. “[...] l’emploi de titres ne laissant aucun doute sur le fait que la première personne renvoie au nom de l’auteur (Histoire de ma vie, Autobiographie...etc)” (Lejeune 30); this unveils the question of identity of the author by using different signs such as the title name, the use of pronoun “je “, the first section of the first chapters...etc. It enhances the autobiographical pact which the author advocates at the beginning.

Building on the previously discussed elements in the theory, the influence is evident in the way both Helen Keller and Fadhma Aïth Mansour Amrouche construct meaning and identity. They adhere to the established framework which reveals its complexities, on one hand, Keller’s memory constraints and ambivalent literary stylistic, on the other hand Aïth Mansour Amrouche’s blending of individual and collective identity.

## **2.2 Limitation:**

Autobiography, as an evolving literary concept, has continually been refined by scholars seeking to define its boundaries and ensure its authenticity. Among the most influential contributions to this field is Philippe Lejeune’s theory of the Autobiographical Pact, which he himself revisited and reassessed throughout his later works. Significantly, Carole Allemand’s article, “*The Autobiographical Pact, Twenty-Five Years Later*,” adopts the same title as Lejeune’s 2002 reflection, signaling a direct engagement with his evolving thought. As Allemand notes, “The most outspoken critic of the ‘autobiographical pact,’ one might add, is without a doubt its creator, who analyzed its shortcomings in ‘The Autobiographical Pact (bis)’ (1983) and ‘The Autobiographical Pact, Twenty-Five Years Later’ (2002)” (Allemand 51). This critical dialogue highlights how Lejeune continuously revised the concept in light of new autobiographical practices and theoretical debates, acknowledging its limitations while reaffirming its foundational role in life writing studies. The theorist Lejeune did not stick to one definition and perspective, as in his first

structuralist theory, later on, he revisited the concept in “The Autobiographical Pact, Twenty-Five Years Later” arguing that it is yet a performative act rather than a contractual act, which means it is not simply about recounting past events but it is actively shaping their life through writing. It made it open to influences and aligned to modern techniques. Philippe Lejeune refines his concept of the autobiographical pact by reassessing its definition and addressing methodological concerns. He responds to critiques by revisiting his initial framework, treating it as a starting point rather than a fixed definition. This evolution reflects his commitment to a more dynamic understanding of autobiography, this means that Lejeune came to view it as more flexible, complex, and sensitive to different contexts and forms (Lévesque 418). Lejeune was influenced by other theorists who intervened in a way to autobiographical writing such as Elizabeth W. Bruss, and Serge Doubrovsky in his engagement with refining autobiographical pact, as it is criticized by Paul de Man and Michel Beaujour. Lejeune expands on the question of identity, referentiality and the autobiographical “I” (*je est un autre*), he insisted that autobiography is based on the contractual agreement between the author and the reader; he clarified the challenges that autobiography may encounter. “Le Pacte Autobiographique” is concerned mostly with *Le Pacte Romanesque*, which shares the same narrative techniques. To question the autobiographical ambiguity and examine the reader’s suspected view, Lejeune claims that *le Pacte Romanesque* is mimicking autobiography, and it takes inspiration from real life and modifies the events using imagination. A resemblance is taking place between autobiography and fictional autobiography because both of them are written in prose. Rousseau’s *Confession*, the fundamental figure in autobiography narrates a sincere account but uses dramatized techniques like those of novels. He employs dramatization, detailed scene-setting, internal monologue, suspense, and character development, techniques more commonly found in fiction.

In “The critique of Autobiography (1982)” Marc Eli Blanchard challenges the traditional assumption of autobiography, which is for him a rhetorical and ideological construct rather than just a self-reflection. In this way, he critiques Philippe Lejeune’s authenticity approach that idealizes the idea that the author is always honest, while the narration cannot fully align with an objective reality, without taking into account language, memory and emotion as hinders. Blanchard, critiques the relationship between the author and the reader, the narrator tells his life to the reader despite the distance between the present voice and the one narrated about the past, and the reader in his turn accepts to fully believe in the account. He adds that autobiography is not just a personal self-experience but it speaks the universal human, it actually deviates from individual specificity and betrays the auto self-narrative (Blanchard 98-100). In his essay “Autobiography as De-Facement,” Paul de Man argues that defining autobiography as a literary genre is not straightforward—it is complex and unstable. He views autobiography not as a fixed category, but as something shaped by language and rhetorical structures, particularly the trope of prosopopoeia, which involves speaking in the voice of another or giving a face to something abstract. De Man points out that autobiographical writing often borrows elements from other genres like fiction or memoir, making it hard to clearly separate truth from storytelling.

According to de Man, autobiography doesn't simply reveal the author's life; instead, it constructs a version of the self through language. This process means that the author doesn't fully express his life but instead creates a selective, literary version of it—one that is shaped and limited by narrative conventions. While Philippe Lejeune focused on the autobiographical pact as a way to ensure sincerity and authenticity, de Man's focus is more theoretical, questioning whether autobiography can ever truly represent the self. (De Man 920, 923)

### **3. Sigmund Freud's Psychoanalytic Theory.**

#### **3.1 Definition and Core Principles :**

Sigmund Freud is the founder of psychoanalysis, simultaneously a theory of personality, a therapy, and an intellectual movement. He was born into a middle-class Jewish family in former Czechoslovakia. At the age of 4, he moved to Vienna, where he spent nearly his entire life. In 1873 he entered the medical school at the University of Vienna and spent the following eight years pursuing a wide range of studies, including philosophy, in addition to the medical curriculum. After graduating, he worked in several clinics and went to Paris to study under Jean-Martin Charcot, a neurologist who used hypnosis to treat the symptoms of hysteria. When Freud returned to Vienna and set up practice as a clinical neurologist, he found orthodox therapies for nervous disorders ineffective for most of his patients, so he began to use a modified version of the hypnosis he had learned under Charcot. Gradually, however, he discovered that it was not necessary to put patients into a deep trance; rather, he can merely encourage them to talk freely, saying whatever came to mind without self-censorship, in order to bring unconscious material to the surface, where it could be analyzed.

(Freud v-vi)

According to Sigmund Freud, Psychoanalysis is a theory that focuses on both the human mind and therapeutic methods. It is based on the understanding of human thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. It helps explain why people act the way they do, it uncovers unconscious motivations, and analyzes the impact of past experiences on present actions. In literature, psychoanalysis provides a deeper view into character development, themes, and narrative structures, so in an autobiography, Freud's theory explores how unconscious desires, childhood experiences, and social influences shape self-narration. It examines memory, identity formation, trauma, and repressed emotions, revealing deeper psychological, cultural and social meanings behind the author's life story.

Sigmund Freud's theory stands on five main principles, each one divided into Sub components.

- The unconscious mind consists of three levels: Consciousness which is the thoughts a person is aware of, Preconscious is the memories we can access with effort and Unconscious is the deep hidden desires and repressed experiences.
- The structure of personality also consists of three components that assure its functionality: The ID is the primitive, instinctual desires that are driven by pleasure , the ego is the rational, decision making part and the Superego is the moral consciousness shaped by society and upbringing .
- Defense Mechanisms are strategies the ego uses to protect itself from anxiety and pain; it can be manifested in different forms such as repression, denial, projection, displacement and sublimation.
- Dream analysis is a method used to explain how dreams are a mirror to memories and unconscious desires.
- Free association is a method where a person says whatever comes to their mind to uncover unconscious thoughts. (McLeod)

Even though psychoanalysis focuses on the individual's psyche and the relevance of its deepest thoughts, past experiences, unconscious desires and early traumas in shaping one's identity, it also explains how both culture and society play a role in mending an individual's personality and behavior.

Following the principles of Sigmund Freud we can explain how autobiographies and personal narratives are not only a product of personal unconscious desires and drives but also a deeply influenced subject by social and cultural forces. Psychoanalysis can help understand the identity of both FadhmaAïth Mansour Amrouche and Helen Keller and the social cultural

structures that shaped them to explain the sense of their narratives that are a mirror of bigger influence.

The role of the unconscious mind in social frames is not only from personal construction but a result of social and cultural contexts in which an individual life is influenced by cultural norms, social structures, gender roles, class structures, and shared memories. All of these factors may shape the repression and the anxieties of an individual. Such influences can be repressed or suppressed and shown through behaviors or emotional conflicts. For example, the colonial repression that appears in *Histoire de Ma Vie* has affected FadhmaAïth Mansour Amrouche as a person and her identity formation as an oppressed woman within colonial Algeria, the environment in which she live in has influenced her perspectives of life and expectations.

A personality is not built only from inner effort but also from outside factors which lead to conflicts between both the ID and the superego because of the contradictions of the inner desires and the morals and social norms that impose restrictions and decide on what can be thought, expressed or felt. In order to lead a balanced social life, the ego plays a role of the navigator so the demands of ID and the superego are balanced and through this process a person develops their sense of self according to society and culture. It means that the superego plays the biggest influence on someone's actions and behaviors. For example Helen Keller's language development was not only motivated by personal desires and her inspiration by her teacher but also by the social pressure the 20th century imposed on women to be educated and independent.

Both autobiographies discuss themes such trauma, displacement, war and non- belonging. In each narrative the authors speak about the negative experiences they faced and how they overcame and dealt with them. Psychoanalysis explains how Defense Mechanisms are the way a person copes with anxiety , conflict or emotional distress to protect the ego from

feelings such as guilt, shame, fear or other painful emotions that arise from either internal psychological conflicts or external social pressure. Fadhma Aïth Mansour Amrouche used the colonizers' language, French, to gain education and criticize colonial oppression. Helen Keller, despite her isolation, saw language as a tool for education and advocacy rather than resentment toward her society. The act of learning language for both the authors is a form of Defense Mechanism particularly called sublimation which is a positive transition of instinctive, aggressive, and socially unacceptable impulse into constructive work such as art, science and literature. Both Fadhma Aïth Mansour Amrouche and Helen Keller transitioned their personal struggles into a productive, intellectual and emotional outlet. Their ability to write their life narrative is a form of reclaiming power over their identities shaped by both personal experiences and social powers.

### **3.2 Limitation :**

Even though Freud's psychoanalysis theory was highly influential, it faced significant criticism from various scholars, psychologists, and philosophers.

Sigmund says that human behavior is largely determined by unconscious drives and early childhood experiences, which means that individuals have limited control over their actions. This perspective implies that free will and personal agency play minimal roles in shaping behaviors. Such a deterministic outlook overlooks the human capacity for change and adaptation throughout life. Carl Rogers is a figure in humanistic psychology, who criticized Freud's psychoanalysis for being overly deterministic. He advocated for a more positive view of human nature, emphasizing self-actualization and the potential for personal growth. Furthermore, the theory lacks scientific testability. Many psychoanalytic concepts, such as the id, ego, and superego, are abstract and challenging to measure objectively. Additionally, Freud's reliance on case studies rather than large-scale empirical research raises concerns about the generalizability of his findings. As highlighted in a publication on the history of



Freud's psychoanalytic theory, Hans Eysenck, prominent psychologist in post war Great Britain was known for his controversial and nonconformist approach to psychology. He argued that psychoanalysis was unscientific, lacking empirical support, and that Freud's theories were based on speculation rather than on rigorous experimentation.

These critiques have led to the development of more contemporary psychological approaches that emphasize resilience, personal growth, and the potential for change throughout an individual's life.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, the autobiographical pact reveals the reality of self-narrative and its authenticity while psychoanalysis explains how this narrative is formed and where it came from according to the psychological state of the author, both work as complementary theories to understand how autobiographies are a product of true self narration and an outcome of social and cultural influences. After framing the research question with theoretical insights, we will delve specifically into the two author's backgrounds and discuss the narrative and structural aspects of their autobiographies.

## **Chapter Two: Literary Background of the Selected Autobiographies**

## Chapter two: Literary background of the Selected Autobiographies

### Introduction

This chapter serves to highlight the necessary contextual elements that situate the selected autobiographies within their literary and cultural context; it provides an insight into the selected works, *The Story of My Life* by Helen Keller and *L'histoire de Ma Vie* by FadhmaAïth Mansour Amrouche. The two authors will be introduced including their upbringing, social background and the story behind the writing of the two autobiographies. In this chapter we will also summarize the two autobiographies, highlighting the crucial milestones of each story to give an idea about the lives of Helen Keller and FadhmaAïth Mansour Amrouche. We will examine the key themes and the social historical backgrounds in which the texts were written and shaped by self-expression and identity formation. Keller's work emerged in a western literary tradition where empowerment, education and activism were main parts of the narrative and FadhmaAïth Mansour Amrouche's work speaks the colonized and patriarchal society.

### 1. FadhmaAïthAmroucheMansour's *Histoire de Ma Vie* :

#### 1.1. Summary and Themes :

FadhmaAïth Mansour Amrouche is an Algerian Kabyle writer, poet and folk singer, known for "Les Chant Kabyles". She was born in 1883 in the town of TiziHibel ,TiziOuzou, Algeria. She is the mother of the poet Jean El MouhoubAmrouche and Marie-Louise Taos Amrouche, one of Algeria's first Francophone novelists. Born of wedlock, our writer was placed in the care of the French nuns missionaries at the French secular school by her mother, an orphanage at Tadarth Ou Fella where she extensively received French and Christian education. Later on, she worked as a nurse in the Hospital of AitMenguellet among the French

nuns where she met a catholic Kabyle, Antoine Belkacem Amrouche , whom she married in 1898.

They had eight children, but only two of them remained alive after her, Jean El Mouhoub and Marie-Louise Taous Amrouche. The feeling of unbelonging and the challenged cultural complexities pushed the family to leave their homeland to Tunisia and to France later on.

During her time there, the devoted mother Fadhma made a considerable contribution to the works of Jean and Taous Amrouche, Jean, in his turn, compiled and translated his mother's songs, passed down orally, into French, and published them in 1939 as "Chants Berbères de Kabylie" and Taous made a music album in Kabyle bearing the same title. Fadhma Aïth Mansour Amrouche died at the age of 84 in France.

Fadhma Amrouche's remarkable work , *Histoire de ma Vie*, was written in 1947 but was not published until 1968 by her son Jean . More than a personal account of her life, the author shares her own life story in particular and more broadly that of the Kabyle community. She reflects the complexities of her surroundings during the time of the French colonization in Algeria, regarding the tranquil days and the turbulent movements, the tension of confrontation and the balanced coexistence, as well as the cultural dynamic of language and identity...

The autobiographical book is divided into three chapters, starting with the prefaces of Vincent Monteil and Kateb Yacine. While Monteil is a French orientalist who's known for his extensive works on North African culture and on the interpretation of Maghrebin literature, Kateb Yacine is another leading figure in Algerian literature, particularly interested in themes like colonialism and identity. In addition, the book includes a letter by Jean to his mother and a dedication by the mother to her son.

The narrative is structured according to a chronological order of the writer's life events starting from "Le chemin à l'école" to "Entrée dans la famille Amrouche" then to

“L’exil de Tunis”. Each chapter is divided and offers details and an introspective approach to her life. Through a vivid reflection, she emphasizes the significant moments of her life that shape her identity and personal growth.

In the first chapter, Fadhma put her mother at the center of the events when she impulsively committed an inconvenient act to her society. She was in a relationship with a neighboring young man called Kaci in which Fadhma was born out of wedlock. She and her mother had to grapple with the reaction of the society. They faced the rejection and the harmful action of the Kabyle neighbors for both Fadhma and her mother Aini. This led the mother to let her child in the hands of the French nuns of the missionary school of Thadarthou Fella in order to be protected and recognized. Fadhma started her journey in the school, so eager to learn, she described the daily activities and the life routine that was better than enduring the harsh living at home. After finishing her studies, she later joined the Cours Normal, a teacher training school where Fadhma was hardly accepted because it was uncommon for girls to resume higher studies. It did not take a long time for she was sent home again. Fadhma stayed at home, embracing the simple Kabyle life in town, she portrayed the basic endeavors, fulfilling survival tasks in a time where her family persisted in poverty, and meanwhile she worried about her future and what she could become. She received a letter from the hospital of for work, a different atmosphere from her school with non-French speakers and religious people. In the midst of the difficulties she faced at work, she met her future husband Antoine BelkacemOuAmrouche.

A new chapter opens in her life, The Entry to the Amrouche's Family on Ighil Ali; she recounts the changing dynamics within her family shaped by various viewpoints and issues like illness, crime, marriages and divorces which affected the family life and structure. This shaped the hardship to build both refuge and family for Fadhma. Exile struck her early even in

her homeland and religion played a significant role blending Christian beliefs with Muslim tradition.

The final chapter took a different direction and ultimately defined the story of Amrouche's life through exile. In Tunis, Fadhma and her family adapt to a new life among the Arabic speaking Tunisians, whose language, culture and religion differ from theirs. The conditions are unstable so they move between houses and occasionally return to their homeland, as she made several trips to France where her children Jean and Taos built their careers. Determined to forge the path of her children, Fadhma works hard to build a life as close as possible to her desires, free from the subjugation of the Amrouche family in Kabylia. Progressively, the family established a more stable livelihood. In her later years, Fadhma endures the death of some of her children which profoundly impacted her feeling of sorrow and loneliness, but she continued supporting her surviving children despite the hardships.

Fadhma died far from her homeland carrying the burden of rejection and exile until the end.

The autobiographical book introduces a tapestry of themes that intertwine and offer to the reader a profound glimpse into the challenges imposed by the society that shaped her journey.

### **1.1.1 Identity and Cultural Memory:**

The self, the collective culture, and memory form an essential theme in Fadhma Aïth Mansour's autobiography. She portrays herself as deeply rooted in her society and culture, consistently identifying as an Algerian Kabyle woman shaped by traditional customs and social norms. At the same time, she is also a Christian-educated individual who spent her childhood with French nuns, receiving a French education, speaking their language, learning their songs, attending Catholic sermons, and practicing their prayers. Through memory recollection, the present author reconstructs her past experiences, cultural customs, and the

historical events that have shaped her personal journey. In doing so, she represents herself as both a product of her cultural environment and of her complex, often conflicting upbringing. This interplay between personal memory and collective history reveals how cultural memory contributes not only to the shaping of the individual but also to the identity of the broader community.

### **1.1.2 Exile:**

Amrouche's experience of exile was marked by displacement and instability, particularly after her engagement with the Amrouche family, leading to her relocation with them to Ighil Ali and occasionally to her grandfather Hacen's house due to family conflicts. Tunisia became their first destination, followed by frequent moves, before settling in France, where the children established their lives. Amrouche and her husband, Belkacem would visit Tunisia or Kabylie but never truly settled. Exile served as a means of escape from harsh realities, offering the hope of a better life, yet it also brought a sense of not belonging, disorientation, and an ongoing feeling of in-betweenness. She confesses, "Je suis restée, toujours, l'éternelle exilée, celle qui, jamais, ne s'est réellement sentie chez elle nulle part"( 208 ) capturing the emotional weight of her life long cultural displacement.

### **1.1.3 Traditional society and the oppression of women:**

The real concern of FadhmaAït Mansour Amrouche stemmed from her discomfort with Kabyle society, which is both restrictive and conservative. In this context, women are marginalized and minorized. Amrouche and her mother, Aini, were victims of the social constraints imposed by these traditional norms. Her illegitimate birth was a turning and deterministic point in her life, shaping her experiences as a child at school and later within her husband's family, where she was considered "renégate" which means a betrayal of her roots and origins , and was often controlled and humiliated . For instance, she recalls that when she

went out to the street, she was knocked over and trampled. This highlights her resistance to submission and the rigid roles imposed on women.

#### **1.1.4 Colonialism and the hybrid culture:**

Amrouche's story happened during colonial Algeria, when the French colonizers set up missionaries in Kabylie to evangelize the population. Fadhma was assimilated into French culture and language in the Catholic school, partly due to the rejection and inhibition she faced from the Kabyle community. This created a confrontation between two opposite worlds the Oriental and the Western and exposed Fadhma to a hybrid cultural identity marked by confusion and in-betweenness. She never fully belonged, neither to her origins nor to the French Christian world. This duality was reflected in her choice to give her children both Kabyle and French names, symbolizing the split she carried within herself. It is also in Amrouche's love for Christian clothes and the canticles she embraced. At the same time, she always remembered the Kabyle chants transmitted by her mother, along with the culinary skills like couscous and *afdhirouqsoul* she had learned from her.

### **1.2 Social and Historical Context**

The autobiographical work *Histoire de Ma Vie* is an account of a personal life defined by social and historical dimensions. The life of Fadhma Aïth Mansour Amrouche is not a narrative in isolation, the dual surrounding under the French colonizer shaped her as an assimilated woman to French culture and at the same time a kabyle individual rooted in her original traditions.

This identity tension underscores the fact that Algeria was a door to Africa and a jewel to France who exploited their natural resources for economic interests. However, France has adapted the indirect ideology "la mission civilisatrice". It was a project aimed at subjugation



and assimilation, through enhancing the teaching of culture, history and French language (Brown 5). As part of this mission, Cardinal Lavigerie, a prominent French catholic missionary, founded Missionaries, Pères et Soeurs; instructing them to immerse in local life and to assimilate approximately to their language and culture as well, it is an approach that helped the French colonialism to dominate easily. As recounted “‘Lavigerie a donné à ses missionnaires l'habit blanc des habitants de l'Algérie ! On dit même que lorsqu'une Algérienne et une Sœur Blanche se promenaient ensemble, de dos, on ne savait pas distinguer l'une de l'autre !”. Amrouche has developed a deep connection to French catholic education and culture, however her experience illustrates the complex entanglement of French secular education with religious catholic institutions, “France characterized itself (and continues to do so) as a strongly catholic Gallic country at the time of Algerian colonization” (Brown 14).

French used education as a vehicle for assimilation and achieving their economic growth under the guise of civilizing the Algerian people. Instead of providing enriching instruction, the curriculum was superficial and in poorly overcrowded classrooms.

While colonial education sought to repress, it was precisely within this context of oppression that many Algerian women gained respect and power for their contribution to the war of independence. Yet, the empowerment and agency asserted were short-lived. After independence, they all come back to their domestic roles, as the newly independent state quickly reinstated patriarchal norms. This regression is illustrated in our present study on *Histoire de Ma Vie* where Amrouche's experiences reflect the patriarchal constraints in the restrictive Kabyle society that affected her education and her life in her in-law parent's house.

Algerian socio-cultural landscape set pressure and gender inequality on women, categorized them as inferior and set laws that deprived them of freedom which made them dependent on their fathers and husbands. Thus, Family structure and cultural tradition are the

main factors undermining the status of women, relegating them to secondary roles, particularly in matters of decision making and autonomy.

## **2. Helen Keller's *The Story of my Life***

### **2.1 Summary and Themes :**

Helen Adams Keller, an American author, was born on the 27th of June, 1880, in Alabama. She lost both her sight and hearing at the age of 19 months due to an illness called brain fever. Helen Keller's parents were rich and educated individuals, they emphasized on the education and success of their daughter, disregarding her disability. Later on, Helen Keller's parents struggled to find a suitable helper for her learning process; they consulted Alexander Graham Bell who was working with deaf children as a teacher and speech therapist at the time.

Alexander Graham advised them to contact the Perkins School for the blind, the School's director, Michael Anagnos, recommended Anne Sullivan to be Helen Keller's teacher and guide. Anne Sullivan was able to teach Helen Keller both speech and writing by special techniques such as fingerspelling into her hand, tactile learning with real objects, constant repetition, immersive daily interactions, and later, she introduced her to speech through touch and reading through Braille and raised print.

Helen Keller became an international symbol of courage and determination. She was a strong advocate for people with disabilities, and a supporter of women's rights, labor rights, and other social causes. She wrote several books, including her famous autobiography *The Story of My Life*, where she narrates her struggles in life, every milestone that motivated her to achieve success as a disabled person and spoke about all the people that made an impact in her life.

*The Story of My Life* by Helen Adams Keller is a powerful autobiography of one of the most influential American figures. It narrates the early life of Helen Keller. It focuses on how she overcame the challenges of being both deaf and blind and her breakthrough to learn how to communicate with the help of her teacher Anne Sullivan. The autobiography was written when she was in her early twenties; the book details her life from birth up to her time at Radcliffe College; it was published in 1903.

In chapter one, the author starts by putting light on her childhood, how she lost her sight and hearing because of an illness at the age of 19 months, how such a misfortune forced her into isolation and depression because her inability to communicate with other people led her into emotional struggles and tantrums. Throughout chapter eight to chapter fourteen, she narrates a new experience that changed her life. At the age of seven, a teacher assigned from Perkins School comes as a private teacher for her, Anne Sullivan, was her name. She arrives and begins teaching Helen Keller by different methods and techniques meant for the blind and the deaf but the young Helen Keller had a hard time and the process was frustrating because of the unfamiliarity of these methods.

Through the next chapters Helen Keller mentions one of the most important events in her life, her teacher poured water into her hand and she connected the word water to the substance. She understood and adopted this method of learning where relating the actual thing by touch to its name by word, and through it she started to learn new words and concepts.

Helen continues narrating in Chapter fifteen about her learning with her teacher while growing up, her visiting places such Perkins School for the Blind, where she interacted with other blind and deaf students. She started reading Braille and using raised print books. Her interest grew more to other fields such as geography, arithmetic, and even basic speech.

Through her learning journey she grew to be interested in nature and the beach specifically. She narrates and describes how she learned to speak and read lips by touch. In

the last chapter she talks about entering Radcliffe College, despite many challenges, and reflects on the role of Anne Sullivan and others who helped her. Finally, she mentions at the end personal letters she wrote to friends, family, and teachers, showing her growth in writing and communication.

*The Story of my Life* discusses themes that mirror and portray the adventurous, harsh and meaningful life the writer experienced, these themes show the literary importance Helen Keller's autobiography possesses and the importance of the themes it explores.

#### **2.1.1 Perseverance and Determination:**

Helen Keller's story is a symbol of both strength and perseverance; she overcame her disability and showed her determination to learn and succeed in life. This theme is very important because the story of this success is motivated by perseverance and determination.

#### **2.1.2 Education:**

Most of the narrative revolves around the importance of education and knowledge for Helen Keller; it was a tool that helped her evolve into a successful figure and social activist.

#### **2.1.3 Isolation Vs. Connection:**

From the start of the narrative we see how Helen Keller's sickness led her to isolation due to her inability to communicate. With time we understand how she broke that isolation throughout language and how it brought her into the real world, from darkness to the light.

#### **2.1.4 Teacher Student bond:**

The strong and emotional bond between Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan is one of the key elements in the Narrative. It shows how Anne Sullivan's patience and new teaching methods are important to Helen's growth, this theme shows the importance of human relationships and how it can affect a person's life.

### **2.1.5 Identity and formation:**

Behind Helen Keller's story is a journey where she finds herself and constructs her identity, going beyond physical limitations and developing both confidence and independence.

### **2.1.6 Advocacy for the disabled:**

Helen Keller's life later on is only about advocating for the disabled and supporting social causes which are motivated by her early experiences and values that were built throughout time, she gave voice to the unheard community she belonged to .

## **2.2 Social and historical context :**

*The Story of My Life* by Helen Keller is not only a personal narrative, but a mirror to both social and historical realities of American society during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The Autobiography was written in a period where educational opportunities for women and people with disabilities were limited; the writer's book emerged as an icebreaker work and challenged the social norms at the time. Her access to education and later on to advocacy is proof of the social shifts towards progress and reform in the American norms at the time.

The autobiography of Helen Keller existed in a specific social and historical time which is the late 19th century, during that time different fundamental institutions of existence set by society played a role in shaping Helen Keller's autobiography and life.

Education in the 19th century was a privilege that not every disabled person had; only children of wealthy people had access to knowledge from private tutors who were able to communicate with them correctly. At that time society ignored and isolated individuals with disabilities, offering minimal support and education opportunities unless they come from a rich family. However, throughout time, a more understanding and compassionate attitude

arose leading to establishing special institutions for people with special needs that aimed to educate and care for the deaf and the blind. Furthermore, the disabled were able to integrate into the society and became self-sufficient and empowering individuals and able to advocate for inclusive and equal education.

Women in the 19th century were expected to fulfill domestic roles and take care of children while men were expected to be the primary breadwinners, working outside home and holding authority within the household. Culture and religion gave women certain roles but throughout time women went against these kinds of traditions and sought other roots than what society expected them to follow, they went for education, academic success and financial independence.

The perspective of a woman's role changed, owning a personality and self-representation became normal.

“Joining the Socialist Party of America in 1909, Keller became an advocate of female suffrage, a defender of the radical Industrial Workers of the World, and a supporter of birth control and the unemployed” (Nielsen 7)

According to historian Kim E. Nielsen in *The Radical Lives of Helen Keller*, Keller was more far than just an inspirational figure; she was a radical activist who used her platform to push for the rights of disabled individuals, women, workers, and marginalized groups.

Advocacy was crucial in shaping how society viewed and treated people with disabilities, particularly those who were blind and deaf and Hellen Keller used it as a tool to make their voices heard and noticed.

## **Conclusion**

We can conclude that the life writings of both Helen Keller and FadhmaAit Mansour Amrouche are a collection of events, woven together with rich and complex surroundings.

Through an exploration of their personal stories, new insights about their identities emerge providing a foundation for comparing and contrasting the two narratives

**Chapter three: A Comparative Analysis of Fadhma  
Aïth Mansour Amrouche's *Histoire de Ma Vie* and  
Helen Keller *The Story of My Life***



## Chapter three: A Comparative Analysis of Fadhma Aïth Mansour

### Amrouche's *Histoire de Ma Vie* and Helen Keller *The Story of My Life*.

#### Introduction

This chapter serves as an analytical framework for our research; it provides an insight on how identity is constructed and evolves in the autobiographies of Helen Keller and FadhmaAïth Mansour Amrouche. It examines how cultural , social, and personal experiences shaped their sense of self and explained how autobiographies are a form of asserting their identities through narration , memory, and resistance.

#### 1. Narrating the Autobiographical Self

Philippe Lejeune's theory of autobiography emphasizes self-representation as a central function of autobiographical writing, that is the way individuals reconstruct their identity and the way they express themselves in revealing past experiences, when this process is shaped by internal and external dimensions. This representation is shaped by some autobiographical elements on the authenticity of the writing and the contract of telling the truth(*Le Pacte Autobiographique*).

Helen Keller and FadhmaAïth Mansour engage with the autobiographical pact principles through their narrative of self-representation. Both authors and narrators provided factual personal information, Amrouche was born in 1883 in the town of Tizi Hibel in Tizi Ouzou in Algeria (*Histoire de ma vie*) and Keller was born on June 27, 1880, in Tuscumbia, Alabama(*The Story of My Life*). The book cover is the first authentic marker proving the Autobiographical Pact and that the writers are the narrators of their own story. According to Lejeune , there are three pronouns which are used in autobiographies (*Je, Tu, il*) but the dominant one is “*Je*” . Amrouche and Keller shape their narrative by the use of *I* which Lejeune calls as *la narration autodiégétique* ( Lejeune 34). It represents them as the authors

who wrote the biography, the narrator and voice of the text and the protagonist who lived and dominated the experiences of life. The pronoun “I” embraces the life of a deaf blind child, marked by profound complexities such as social disconnection, an experience that she brings up when she writes “I got used to the silence and darkness that surrounded me and forgot that it had ever been different” (5). When she suddenly lost her sight and hearing, she had to fight against the complexities of her illness, which deprived her from being like other children who can see and hear, read and write.

The contract of authenticity and referential pact, through which the author promises to tell the truth, is present in Amrouche's autobiography. The “I” embodies the Kabyle woman rooted in her homeland and the witness to joys and harsh realities of the Algerian community. She is urged by the desire of writing, driven by the harsh complex life of the Algerian and Kabyle community, challenged by sociocultural factors, which made her life worthy to be written and acknowledged. She implicitly announced that in her letter to her son Jean El Mouhoub:” Cette histoire est vraie, pas un épisode n’est inventé, tout ce qui est arrivé avant ma naissance m’a été raconté par ma mère, quand j’ai été d’âge à le comprendre”.(17)

The narrative structure of Keller and Amrouche autobiography is more likely in chronological order, organized according to significant part of their time period, this linear narrative is evident in Keller’s story for instance in: “ the next step in my education is learning to read.” (Keller 14), this reflects the progression she is making in her learning process.

However the concept of the autobiographical pact is refined in a way that questions its credibility. as it is criticized, the authenticity of autobiography is manipulated, it does not always tell the truth about its author, as Lejeune believes in , while the narration cannot fully align with an objective reality; in other words the story cannot reflect the real world exactly as it is without taking into consideration language, memory and emotions as hindrances.

Moreover, autobiography does not only depict the auto self-experience but it also speaks about the universal human. (Blanchard 98-100). This implicated when Fadhma narrated the life of others besides her own, unveiling the collective memory recollection rather than just a self-representation. It embodies the Kabyle woman rooted in her homeland and the witness to joys and harsh realities of the indigenous Algerian group. For Keller, the structured account of events is manipulated by literary sophistication; she employs stylistic and complex sentences to express the depths of emotion and the gravity of her illness: "light, give me light!, was the wordless cry of my soul and the light of love shore on me in that very hour." ( 11)

The writings of Keller and Amrouche's autobiographies are not just revealing of self but a constructed narrative. Both writings are built through narrative choices and strategies. Therefore, each of Keller and Amrouche emphasize on different devices, and at some point use the same elements which shape the autobiographical writing. As Alfred Kazin notes "Autobiography as narrative obviously seeks the effect of fiction, and cannot use basic resources of fiction, like dialogue, without becoming fiction" (212), this quote supports the idea that autobiography is a personal truth but shaped by narrative techniques, the manipulated tone and the language that blur the lines between fact and fiction, creating an effect similar to that of fiction. More than that, the reflective voice of both authors emerges as responses to broader social reality; as Kazin also stated: "We have all suffered too much from society, we are now too aware of what it may do to us, to be able to dispose of it as literature." (216).

For FadhmaAmroucheAith Mansour her autobiographical "I" is a personal and at the same time a collective voice, reflecting a narrative technique of resistance against the oppressive restricted society and an affirmation of cultural identity. She wrote in colonial French, a deep rich language that she had acquired since she was young. She deliberately

switches to Kabyle cultural terminology as a form of cultural resistance and hybrid identity, through proverbs or idioms such as “ urtwessiara, agujil f yimetawen ” (you don't need to tell an orphan to cry ), it highlights figuratively the impossibility of concealing inner pain. This illustrates how Amrouche narrates with an emotive tone, full of bitterness, pain and anger reflecting her position of marginalization and oppression. At times this tone is also laced with irony, when she exposes the contradiction in the domestic space in Amrouche's family especially in relation to the women who preceded her, “Cette époque de ma vie a été fort triste, mais un jour mon mari aurait une situation et que je pourrais enfin quitter cette maison d'Ighil Ali où j'étais en butte à des jalousies mesquines et considérée comme une renégate” (Amrouche 145). While, occasionally the tone shifts to pride and nostalgia to affirm her identity and recognize her roots. She also recalls fragmented memories often shaped by unstable experiences of a child with illegitimacy assimilated to French colonization and a married woman submitted to her parents in law family.

Helen Keller's autobiography employs a wide range of narrative strategies that convey its central messages. It is infused with a reflective and structured tone, which gives the reader a sense of inspiration and hope, through the progression she had in her life. Helen's narrative was represented in a linear and clear structure; from silence to voice, she worked hard and devoted all her focus to learning and mastery. Keller experiences many turning points caused by her deaf blindness, such as when she connects the sensation of water with the finger spelled word W-A-T-E-R, she stated that “the living word awakened my soul” (11). This event marks the shift from isolation to communication and the beginning of her intellectual and empowering life.

This also paves the way to the use of symbols that shaped the illness of Keller, through the repetitive depiction of darkness, light. Darkness symbolizes a state of ignorance and

repression while light represents awakening and knowledge. These two contrasts allow the narrative to move from a personal story to a universal literary expression.

The structure of the text analysis shows that Amrouche's autobiography is not only a true self-expression but a cultural and social testimony crafted through emotional lenses and broken narrative. While Keller's autobiography is a symbol of potential which is a constructed cultural narrative, and it is not just her personal story .

## **2. Social and Cultural Influences that shaped Helen Keller and Fadhma Aïth Mansour Amrouche Autobiographies :**

Same life times but different worlds, Helen Keller and Fadhma Aïth Mansour Amrouche are both authors who lived in the same lifetime which is between the 19th and 20th century. They both are considered as influential figures amongst their societies, they brought a change to social norms and shifted the expectations on women at the time. Even though Helen Keller and Fadhma Aïth Mansour Amrouche lived in the same life line their worlds were completely different contextually. Fadhma Aïth Mansour Amrouche narrative comes from a colonized Algeria, where she faces the pressures of French colonial dominations, Berber cultural traditions and strict patriarchal norms and her struggle as an illegitimate child in a conservative society. Throughout her story she looks for herself and voice within a world that devalues her existence both as a woman and a colonized subject.

Helen Keller's story is built upon Post Civil War American context. Keller as a disabled woman who faces the social perceptions of disability and marginalization within a largely white, middle class environment. Her access to education, mentorship and social support allowed her to transcend certain limitations.

Both the author's life stories not only are a narration of personal experiences, but function as a mirror to political texts that reveal structures of oppression, colonialism, patriarchy, ableism, and marginalization. These different cultural and social settings strongly influence the way each woman constructed her selfhood and response to social constraints.

To deepen the understanding of each author's perspective and why their self-narratives are not only a recount but a mirror to bigger influences, we adopted a "feminist standpoint theory" that explains how the struggles of both authors are the results of systems of power and culture, and it explains how their personal stories are influenced by their environment.

A feminist standpoint epistemology requires strengthened standards of objectivity. The standpoint epistemologies call for recognition of a historical or sociological or cultural relativism, but not for a judgmental or epistemological relativism. They call for the acknowledgement that all human beliefs including our best scientific beliefs are socially situated, but they also require a critical evaluation to determine which social situations tend to generate the most objective knowledge claims. (Harding 1991)

Sandra Harding an American philosopher and feminist theorist known for developing standpoint theory and the concept of strong objectivity, explains how knowledge and self-understanding are shaped by a person's social position. In this case it is all about women and marginalized people ( colonized and disabled ). Their experiences make them realise how the social dynamics that control their lives affects them contrary to the other side of people such as men, healthy people , or wealthy persons .

According to Harding's theory, marginalized groups are socially situated in ways that make it more possible for them to be aware of things and ask questions than it is for the non-marginalized.

These people develop critical thinking and a consciousness that pushes them to refuse certain oppression. In our case ,Helen Keller and FatmaAith Mansour Amrouche grew up in certain environments that shaped their way of living and expectations of them as women.

First, American society in the 19<sup>th</sup> c viewed disabled people as incapable individuals who are not capable of contributing to the economic roller coaster, they are invisible and excluded from education, work and social participation. Very few of them were given

opportunities to participate in active life. They are visualized as pitiful objects that symbolize suffering and acceptance of hardships. However Helen Keller interpretation of such knowledge and her understanding of the Limitations that society imposed on her made her focus heavily on proving that she is intelligent, capable, and worthy of respect. Her autobiography emphasizes education, hard work, and personal triumph, showing that she could overcome society's low expectations for someone who is deaf and blind.

The author was raised in a Christian Protestant environment, where self-help and morals were valued. Through it she found a framework to present her educational journey almost as a spiritual awakening, from darkness to light which is shown in the language she uses : freedom, light, redemption, to describe learning and self-discovery.

In an essay titled "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860" Welter claims that "The attributes of True Womanhood, by which a woman judged herself and was judged by her husband, her neighbors, and society, could be divided into four cardinal virtues: piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity." (3) . Welter's analysis reveals how societal expectations deeply shaped women's identities and self-perception during this period. In the 19 century, cultural expectations were about women being domestic, passive and dependent on a man and a disabled woman was expected to be more helpless. Instead, Helen's autobiography challenged these roles: she was active, ambitious, and intellectually powerful, setting a new example for women with disabilities.

On the other hand, Fadhma Aïth Mansour Amrouch who lived in a traditional Kabyle/Berber society during colonized Algeria, was born as a child of sin where social norms strongly condemned illegitimacy. Aïth Mansour Amrouch as an illegitimate child faced exclusion, humiliation, and shame from her community because of something she had no control over . She was punished because of the principles set during the time. Because of this , her autobiography focuses on narrating her suffering, marginalization, and the need to

resist injustice; it came from a place of pain for the writer where she experienced rejection and hate just because she was born. Her story is shaped by her experience of constantly trying to prove her worth in a society that treated her as inferior.

As a woman born Muslim then raised Catholic in a colonized society, religion was more than faith but a political matter. Islam bends more towards the colonized native and Christianity is closer to colonial power which caused conflicts in FatmaAit Mansour Amrouch's life. She was seen as a “traitor” by Muslims but not fully accepted by the French either, a thin string between the two religions. This rejection by the two communities shaped her feelings of double exclusion, which explains her themes of loneliness, exile, and loyalty to her Kabyle identity beyond religion.

Culturally, kabyle women were expected to be silent, obedient and modest and by writing an autobiography about private shame and social injustices FadhmaAïth Mansour Amrouche defied cultural expectations. She was literally an open book where she goes against all the social and cultural norms that defined women. Her whole life story is an act of resistance against silence and affirmation of personal and collective identity

### **3.Identity Formation**

The two narratives of Helen Keller and FadhmaAïth Mansour Amrouche were shaped by social norms, religious beliefs, and cultural expectations of their different societies.

Their autobiographies are a mirror of how a person's identity can be deeply influenced by the environment they lived in, but it also shows how the influence can be defeated when understood beyond the oppressed and victim mindset.

What is an identity?

Identity refers to how people answer the question, “Who are you?” This question may be posed explicitly or implicitly, at a personal or a collective level, to others or to oneself. Schools of thought within the identity literature tend to emphasize either personal or social



contents and either personal or social processes. However, we argue here that identities are inescapably both personal and social, in their content and in the processes by which they are formed, maintained, and changed over time. The personal and social nature of identity gives the construct its greatest theoretical potential namely to provide insight into the relationship between the individual and society. However, doing justice to this potential requires integrating perspectives on identity and self-processes from social and personality psychology, developmental psychology, cultural, critical and discursive psychology, and beyond." (Vignoles2)

According to Vivian L Vignoles Identity refers to how a person answers the question, «who are you?" both from a personal and a social point of view. It involves a combination of internal self-perception and external social roles, shaped by past experiences and outside influences. He explains how a person's identity is not statistical but dynamic, it is not fixed but it develops, changes and is maintained over time. Because social influences have an effect on personal identity. A person's identity offers valuable insight into the relationship between the individual and society. Understanding identity requires perspectives from various disciplines, including psychology, culture, and critical theory. However; in literature, identity is about how a character or narrator understands and presents who they are, it includes personal feelings, thoughts, social roles like culture, gender and how others see them. Identity in narratives are not fixed, it changes with time, experience, or relationships. In autobiography, identity refers to the way authors construct and present their sense of self through narrative that is shaped by memory, experience, and social context. As Smith and Watson explain, identity in life writing is "an ongoing, dialogic process" influenced by cultural and historical factors.

How social and cultural factors contribute in shaping a person's identity?

A person's identity is shaped by social and cultural factors such as language, traditions, societal roles and expectations which influence self-perception and how others view a person. As Heersmink states, "Cultural identity is materialized in the environment when we retrieve and construct collective memories by integrating information from our biological memory with information in artifacts or in other people's embodied brains." (1). Family, communication or historical contexts like colonization and social movements play an important role in identity formation and not only from individual factors. Furthermore, education and media help define social expectations of success and also define what is normal and what not. Ultimately, identity is not formed in isolation but is influenced by the surroundings which are the social and cultural environment.

### **3.1 Identity Formation of Helen Keller :**

Keller developed her identity throughout time, formed as a composite of experiences from childhood through adolescence to womanhood.

"Have you ever been at sea in a dense fog, when it seemed as if a tangible white darkness shut you in? ... I was like that ship before my education began, only I was without a compass or sounding-line, and no way of knowing how near the harbor was." (Keller 11).

In Helen Keller's narratives, *The Story of My Life*, her identity as a disabled woman in a post-civil war American context evolved passing through main stages that each helped her to become a well-known figure and a voice to the voiceless. In her early years, before learning language, Keller's behavior was driven by her id, the unconscious part of the psyche ruled by instinctual desires. Not being able to communicate she expressed herself through emotional outbursts, frustration, and physical actions. According to Sigmund Freud it is a stage where the id dominates the behavior of Keller because neither the ego (reason) nor the superego (social norms and morals) has fully developed properly. Her environment lacked the help to regulate her impulses and raw emotions so her identity at that point was shaped

mainly by unmet desires and frustration over the inability to connect with the world. She writes, “Once I knew the depth where no hope was, and darkness lay on the face of all things. Then love came and set my soul free. Once I knew only darkness and stillness. Now I know hope and joy” (Keller<sup>7</sup> )

With the arrival of Anne Sullivan and the introduction of language and education to Hellen Keller, she began to form an ego which, in Freudian terms, mediates between the impulsive id and the moralizing superego, using logic and social rules together. Through communication the author started to understand cause and effect, social expectations and personal goals which are important aspects of ego development. Her identity grew from emotionally chaos to a thinking and reasoning self who could make sense of the world and her role in it. Education gave her self-control, a sense of direction and the ability to express herself.

As an adult, Helen Keller turned into a moral figure, an advocate for justice, equality, and social reform. It shows the rise of the superego, which represents the internalized moral standards learned from society, family, and culture. She as a person wasn't only functioning in her society but also challenging its limits, guided by a strong ethical vision. Keller's superego was deeply shaped by her early experiences of struggle and support. Her identity matured into one guided by values, empathy, and a desire to help others because of what she faced as a youngster, revealing a fully developed self in psychoanalytic terms.

Helen Keller's identity changed from a pleasure driven id in childhood, to a reasoning ego during adolescence, and finally to a morally grounded superego in adulthood. Each phase was shaped not only by her inner development but also by social and cultural influences such her family, teacher, education, and the expectations of the society around her which aligns with Sigmund Freud's idea that identity is not only internal but also shaped by external relationships and norms.

### 3.2 Identity Formation of FadhmaAith Mansour Amrouche :

The autobiographical narrative of FadhmaAith Mansour Amrouche reveals a quest of identity either personal or collective, representing her position as a woman in her society. “ Auniveau de la relation entre genre et communauté, les textes des auteurs femmes décrivent le passage de la quêteidentitaire en termesindividuelsversunerecherchesocialementélargie. Dans les œuvres de Fadhma et Taos Amrouchepubliées entre 1947 et 1975, les rôlesféminins et les relations hommes/femmes sontvuscommeuneconséquence de la personnalité des individus et de leurshistoires de vie individuelles ( Merolla 123)

The identity formation through the way Amrouche narrates about herself exposes different ambivalent readings. Amrouche as she is really attached to her both Kabyle origins and French culture and language. This coexistence of two cultures, the colonizer and the colonized one, contributes to the formation of hybrid identity, which is according to HomiBhabha ,not fixed but rather creates another identity called “ Third Space”. (1994).

Each part in the life of Amrouche shaped her identity into dynamic and complex, which resonate with the psychological view of identity as a process shaped by memory, repression and inner conflicts.

First as a child who was not recognized by her father, refused to give paternity at that time , she endured the status of being “other” at school , and she was trampled by other children who called her child of sin. We can say by this that she was traumatized by the persistent and brutal events she endured as a child who did not understand until much later.

As she grew up, she spent most of her time with her mother , embracing the life of every kabyle woman, engaged in numerous and often demanding domestic tasks such as making pottery, the washing and the carding of wool, picking figs, and grapes, etc. this in order to meet her household needs. So no one could label her as irresponsible. Amrouche conformed to the traditional livelihood, “Fadhma se rend compteque pour êtrepleinement

intégrée et admise dans ce nouvel espace elle doit se soumettre au modèle de comportement féminin de sa communauté'' (Malti 202) . However, the sense of frustration and instability were present in her recounting, she worryingly thought about her education and her future .

She found a job and started constructing her life with new perspectives toward progression, driven with desire for change and a rejection of the social expectations.

The marriage of Amrouche with Belkacem Amrouche and her engagement with her parents- in law's house, played a new shaping in her identity, and provided a painful account in her life since she encountered a new life and new dynamics which were distinct from those of her mother's house .She was not fully accepted because of the social stigma of child of sin that she bears with her, alongside her Christian faith and French education. She was often burdened with domestic labor and treated as a servant. She was given a room deprived of comfort and cleanliness (91). This created a clash of values between Fadhma and Amrouche family. Despite that she respected and conformed to their expectations and strived to integrate into the household

Exile as well was a crucial phase; it was a turning point that took ambivalent ways. It was a hopeful vision for the future of the family as it was sometimes a phase of hardship, shaped by dislocation and instability, a clash of races and culture. And the attachment to the Amrouche family standards that never left Fadhma and especially her husband who never get over it. This phase placed Fadhma in emotional and cultural in-between-ness, where she was excluded from her native world and alienated. Yet it became a source of resistance and change offering her freedom and a chance for reconstruction.

The majority of critics framed Amrouche as a victim of her status of illegitimacy and the marginalized Christian woman, constrained by a restrictive environment that made it difficult for her to affirm herself and forced to submission to patriarchal norms. From a

general reading FadhmaAïth Mansour appears as profoundly shaped by exclusion, silence and social injustice. These elements suggest that her identity is formed in response to suffering. For example she internalizes shame imposed by society, as a sign of psychological weight, “je n'avais rien, ni bien, ni nom “

Nevertheless, Amrouche is frequently positioned among pioneering figures such as KatebYacine and MouloudMammeri who used literature as a means of colonial resistance and Algerian identity affirmation. Furthermore her deep attachment to her cultural identity is the main point of her agency.

Lynda Chouiten in her article “Un Ego au féminin: Gender and Power in FadhmaAïth Mansour Amrouche’s *Histoire de ma vie*” Argued that Amrouche is contrary to the critics that categorized her as a victim of the patriarchal society , her narrative can be read instead as an act of defiance to the patriarchal code. Chouiten illustrates her argument through the use of assertive pronouns such as *mon* (my) in the narrative, as a sign of resistance and identity claim. (135) . However the main affirmation Chouiten made is the reversal of the traditional gender role by Amrouche that shows her strong will to decision making instead of her husband Belkacem. “... repeatedly in the narrative Amrouche writes “*je décidai*”, *je résolu*” (134)

The autobiographies of both Helen Keller and FadhmaAïth Mansour Amrouche reveal how identity is complex, and an evolving process that is shaped by external forces. Their stories reflect struggles against culture,gender,social norms, and marginalization. Both women used writing to reclaim and define their identities and reply to the question, “Who are you?”

## **General conclusion**

## General conclusion:

Through the approach of narrative analysis within the framework of autobiographical studies, comparing the two autobiographies of Fadhma Aïth Mansour Amrouche *Histoire de ma Vie* and Helen Keller *The Story of my Life*, has revealed that autobiography is multidimensional and extends beyond a mere self-referential account. In the case of Keller and Amrouche the narrative self is constructed in relation to others, to ideologies and to systems of power. This reveals the act of writing as a multilayered process of self-construction.

Despite their geographical and historical differences and their different types of marginalization, Amrouche and Keller particularly articulate resistance through the construction of voice. In both cases, voice becomes a metaphorical and literal tool of resistance against exclusion.

This sociocultural reading of these texts has allowed us to answer the central research problem: Amrouche and Keller autobiographies emerge not merely as a self-definition but as diversified socio-cultural artifacts within broader patterns of narrative and identity construction.

We have used a general to specific approach highlighting theoretical grounding to literary contextualization and close analysis of the texts. Furthermore, we have adapted a social, cultural and comparative literary approach in this research. It helped in analyzing and comparing the different social norms and cultural values while examining the divergences and the commonalities of both narratives and how the experience of each author affected their story. While adapting this approach, we have used a combination of psychoanalysis theory and autobiographical pact to explore how the self is built throughout internal psychic process and external cultural influences.



To the best of our knowledge, this present research has not been the focus of prior studies, thus it stands as a modest complementary contribution to female autobiographical literary works. It emerged as an interesting study which enhances the position of women within literary expression, as it voices their issues and plays the role in the liberation of their identity. However, we encountered several challenges, with time being a crucial disruption that complicated our research and the limitation of sources, as well as the choice of an appropriate methodology to apply.

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## ملخص

يتناول هذا البحث مقارنة بين السيرة الذاتية لكاتبتين: فاطمة آيت منصور عمروش و *Histoire de ma vie*، وهيلين كيلر *The Story of My Life*، وهما عملان يحملان العنوان نفسه "قصة حياتي" لكن بلغتين مختلفتين، الفرنسية والإنجليزية. نسلط الضوء من خلال هذه الدراسة على البنى السردية والأوضاع الاجتماعية التي تشاركتها الكاتبتان، خاصة ما تعرّضتا له من تهميش في نواحٍ متعددة من حياتهما. ومن خلال قراءة تحليلية تهدف إلى فهم العلاقة بين السيرة الذاتية والمحيط الاجتماعي، تُظهر الدراسة أن الكاتبتين لم تكتبا لمجرد التوثيق، بل كتبتا كنوعٍ من إثبات الذات والوجود. وتُعدّ هاتان السيرتان الذاتيتان فضاءً تشكّل عبر استراتيجيات سردية وتأثيرات اجتماعية وثقافية، عملت كعناصر خفية ساعدت في تشكيل سردهما. وفي الختام، تضيف هذه الدراسة بُعدًا جديدًا إلى كتابات السيرة الذاتية النسائية، ولا سيما تلك التي تعود لنساء تم إسكات أصواتهن تاريخيًا بسبب القيود الاجتماعية أو الإعاقة.

**الكلمات المفتاحية :** السيرة الذاتية، معايير اجتماعية و ثقافية ،كيلر ، عمروش ،

الذات