

## *The Rise of Tamazight in Algeria: Fighting an Uphill Battle*

By Abderrezak Dourari

[It's a strange and truly a marvelous history, this ethno-sociological transformation of many millions of Berbers by some ten thousands of Bedouins.]<sup>1</sup> - Gabriel Camps

The violent controversy within the PPA-MTLD<sup>i</sup> between partisans of the “Algérie arabe”(for the official stand) and the “Algérie algérienne” (for the opposing one) pervaded the Algerian national identity contests, giving birth to a long-lasting political and cultural unease. In fact, this is a domain where languages, cultural, ideological and political segments overlap.

### **1) Sociolinguistic Situation**

Despite the persistence of this unease about language and identity, scientific studies of this phenomenon are scarce. We can barely cite some examples<sup>ii</sup>.

Historical Algeria and the Maghreb have always been multilingual. One can hardly imagine a country as big as the Maghreb (from the Egyptian-Libyan frontiers to the Canary Islands, then to Mauritania, Mali, Niger and Nigeria in the south) with so many dispersed human groups who would miraculously speak the same language in an epoch when communication means were rudimentary!

The amazighness (Berberness) of this space is no longer contested and the diversity of the Tamazight varieties is beginning to be accepted as a normal socio-historical and sociolinguistic fact. Classical Arabic penetrated this space early among some townsmen elites, but no larger social tissue was touched. The Arab conquest under cover of Islam succeeded in the 8<sup>th</sup>. Century, yet they made no population colonization and relied on their Berber clients to run their interests. The eviction of the Hilâlians before the Banu Soleim and the Banu Ma'qil (11th. century A.D.) to North Africa was due to their endemic unrest in the Fatimid

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<sup>1</sup>All translations into English are my own

Caliphate. They settled in such small numbers, some ten thousand according to Gabriel Camps<sup>iii</sup>, that they could not profoundly change the indigenous demography. Since the 13<sup>th</sup> century A. D. their language has spread for sociolinguistic reasons<sup>iv</sup>. Camps writes:

[This Maghrebi Arabic derives from the Bedouin language introduced in the 11<sup>th</sup> century by the Hilalian Tribes; it is them who effectively arabized a great part of the Berbers.](Camps, 1996, 56)

Such a situation is rare. Camps himself emphasized:

[The successive population contributions of the Beni Soleim, then of the Mâ'qil who settled in the Moroccan Sahara, did not bring the population of Arab origin to more than one hundred thousand individuals who penetrated North Africa in the 11<sup>th</sup> Century] (Ibid. 57)

The hypothesis of an exclusively Arabic origin of the Maghrebi language is contested by Abdou Elimam, who thinks that it derives from Punic<sup>v</sup>. Our hypothesis is that because of the diversity of the Tamazight varieties, communication and transactions were rendered difficult. The need of a common language would have made the Hilalians' Arabic a lingua franca, which shared linguistic affinities with Punic and Tamazight and helped prevent cousins' jealousies due to the symbolic values attached to the social position of the holder of the norm.

The Hilalians' language, mixed with Tamazight and Punic, may have given birth to the Algerian Arabic (the Maghrebi) now spoken by a great majority of Maghrebis. Through the centuries this native language has been an identity marker for the Amazighs. For symbolic and historical reasons, scholarly Arabic<sup>vi</sup> and French have become the languages of the formal domain while the native languages (Tamazight varieties and Algerian Arabic) are overwhelmingly found in the domain of interpersonal relations.

## **The Linguistic Policy after Independence**

The imposition of the pan-arabist ideology conjoined to a conservative perception of Islam as unique cultural references led to a political and ideological conflict that transformed the linguistic query into a vital confrontation in which the educational system, next to the judiciary and the media, became one of the main battlefields. This cleavage continued in the 1949 crisis' stands between partisans of an "Algerian Algeria," and those who stood for an "Arab Algeria." The "Idir al Watany" brochure<sup>vii</sup> produced in the heart of the Algerian nationalism, in 1949, expresses the attitude of the first:

[The linguistic factor has also contributed to the making of our national conscience; the spoken language as well as the classical one [...] the Algerian person, Arabic or Berber speaker, uses nowadays his own mother tongue proudly and feels less the desire to speak otherwise, in French, for example. He seeks, on the contrary, to study classical Arabic to know Islam and the Islamic culture to which our people have contributed.](17)

But the Arabization policy, imposed since Independence, aimed at the deletion of any reference to Tamazight. The Trojan horse of this policy was the Islamist ideology, which acted as a sweetener. This is the meaning of the official slogan "*I'm an Amazigh arabized by Islam.*" Everyone knows that Islam was a mere adjuvant because the Koranic Arabic (classical Arabic) and the Maghrebi Arabic are different. As we just observed, the turbulent Hilâlîans who arabized the Maghreb were neither known as pious Muslims nor for being speakers of classical Arabic.

The repressive attitude against plurality could no more be justified after Independence. But authorities did even worse: they forbid a lecture by Mouloud Mammeri on the "Kabyle ancient poetry" at the University of Tizi-Ouzou in April 20<sup>th</sup>, 1980! This ruling led to brutally repressed upheavals known as the "tafsut n imazighen" (the Amazighs spring).

### **3) Opening horizons after 1989**

After 1989, the superficial political pluralism was accompanied by a disincarnated monolingualism. The 1976 presidential ordinance, stating the necessity of total Arabization, was reinforced in 1996, stating the immediate and total Arabization under penal sanctions if any other language came to be used.

The novelty was the opening of two Tamazight language and culture university departments in Tizi-Ouzou, in 1990, and in Béjaïa in 1992. The popular slogan « *Tamazight di lakul* » (Tamazight at schools) was implemented in 1995, after the creation of the Higher Authority for Amazighness (Haut Commissariat à l'Amazighité)—consequence of the “school bag strike” that rattled Kabylia in 1994. Yet, the introduction of Tamazight in the educative system was hasty: with no pedagogical programs, with no text books and with no trained teachers.

The April 2001 « tafsut taberkant » (black spring) contestation held by the Aarouch<sup>viii</sup> and citizens' organizations, that lasted three years because of unpunished crimes committed by police against young protesters, was perceived as a crowning of cultural, social, and economic disarray—complicated by corruption and lack of democracy—resulted in elevating Tamazight to the rank of national language in the amended Constitution of 2002. The polynomial Tamazight acquired, after 23 years of dire struggles, what it naturally had already by virtue of history and territory. But the obsession of total unity cultivated by the leaders of the State was not buried yet (A. Dourari, 2002).

#### **4) Standardization Institutions of Tamazight**

Tamazight has now been introduced into the constitution, in school, in the media, and in the political discourse. Three university institutes for teaching and research are dedicated to it, and the Ministry of National Education has created the National Pedagogical and Linguistic Center for Tamazight Teaching (CNPLET)<sup>ix</sup> after calls by the Higher Authority for

Amazighness (HCA) and the Ministry of Higher Teaching and Research published National Research Programs Calls for Tender in the domains of Tamazight.

These Institutions suffer from diverse handicaps such as the lack of scientific researchers in the CNPLET or the HCA, an institution with no head after the death of late Mohand Idir Ait-Amrane some years ago.

After having received some formal recognition, Tamazight now faces qualitative demands: First, it's a polynomial language and, second, it is still taught with an appalling methodology. Third, the teachers of Tamazight, who are university graduates from Tamazight departments', have no training in the field of didactics. Fourth, the language is not standardized and, fifth, each teacher operates intuitively from what he knows based on his own mother tongue variety, using numerous repulsive neologisms. Last and above all, there is no agreement over the issue of scripts among promoters of the Arabic script, the script adapted from French, and those who covet the Tifinagh script. The scholarly Arabic specialists look down on Tamazight but would prefer that it be written in Arabic script; the French specialists have supported Tamazight since the seventies and would like it to keep the French script, viscerally rejecting the Arabic script. The Kabyle speakers, however, who constitute the elite in the Tamazight demand of recognition and symbolic elaboration, refuse that their language be transcribed into the Arabic script; the Chaouia and the Mozabites speakers to some extent prefer the Arabic script, and the Touaregs prefer the Tifinagh script! On which criteria can this issue be decided so as to keep acceptability from the users?

Habib Allah MANSOURI<sup>x</sup> states in this context:

[They are surprised (the Oran Algerian Arabic speakers) that the Tamazight speakers use French letters to write their language; for them, this would rid this language of any historic legitimacy and link it to a foreign civilization.] (H. Mansouri, 1999, 48)

From another angle, there is the question whether to teach Tamazight to Algerian Arabic speakers as well as to Tamazight speakers? But what variety is going to be taught and to whom? Will it be compulsory or optional? All these endocentric issues, practically submitted to the unthought-of, undermine the planning of a linguistic corpus (codification) on scientific bases and bring up a fuzzy presence of Tamazight in the societal landscape.

Actually, the teaching manuals of Tamazight are full of unauthentic texts, generally French texts (badly) translated into Kabyle for the mere sake of fitting in a specific typology. Translations provide plenty of frustrating neology due to the different encyclopedic backgrounds of the two languages. It remains unclear how these texts are to be used in the competence approach perspective! (See M. Sabri, S. Ibri, and N. Berdous, 2006; 2007; 2008; 2009). Or recourse is made to the Kabyle folk tales, whose rural and pastoral semantics are unfit for pupils in the present cultural context. These latter are, moreover, subjected to the French and English modern methodologies and pedagogical contents!

In a study conducted by the CNPLET in 2009, the issue is presented this way:

[The teaching of Tamazight is has introduced in 1995 in the educative system syllabus. A teacher's textbook was given to the teachers and learners since 1997/98. Since then, three types of textbooks have been made. The last type in use was elaborated by the GSD (Specialized Group) members (inspectors and teachers) of the MNE (Ministry of National Education). Up to now, all the stages from the primary school 4<sup>th</sup> year to the secondary school 3<sup>rd</sup> year have had textbooks of this type. [...]. In the programs the aims of the teaching of Tamazight as well as the competences and the learning contents have been specified. The accompanying document contains details as to the way the textbooks must be used and how to construct a lesson. [...]. Even before the

beginning of the teaching of Tamazight at school, there existed pedagogical aids:

–Mouloud Mammeri, *Tajerrumt n tmazight*, Maspero, 1976. (Grammar book of Tamazight)

–Groupe d'Etudes Berbères / [R. Achab], *Langue berbère. Initiation à l'écriture*, Imedyazen, 1979. (Initiation to Tamazight writing)

–R. Achab, *Tira n tamazight* (Nouvelle édition), Tafsut, 1990. (Tamazight writing)]

In addition to the grammar book and the initiation to writing Tamazight, one can note the use of authentic documents like the traditional tales, ethnographic texts, songs, oral ancient and modern literature, translations, etc.

In the years 1995-1996 the MNE proposed a booklet program of seven pages containing methodological orientations entitled, “Proposed methodology for the teaching of Tamazight, third cycle of fundamental teaching; aims, contents, orientations.” Unfortunately, the tools that the teacher would use to reach the defined goals are not in this booklet. For every didactic unit, there are three texts in five Tamazight varieties: Kabyle, Chaouia, Chenouia, Mozabite and Targui. These texts have no author or are fabricated and transcribed in three scripts (Arabic, Latin, and Tifinagh). The teaching of Tamazight made another step forward in 2003. The teachers now had for the first time an official program and textbook. The programs of the MNE were based on the competence approach whose methodological framework is the project pedagogy. As opposed to the former ones, these latter manuals are really being used. In addition, the Tamazight contestation has given birth to collateral psychological remnants of the aggressive governmental propaganda against this language presented as a colonial plot to disintegrate the nation and as a backward language and culture that deserve no consideration. Othman Saadi, one of the most resolute ideological denigrators

of Tamazight, affirms straightforwardly that the Amazighs don't exist and are, indeed, Original Arabs<sup>xi</sup>—when everybody knows that even the Hashemite Prophet Mohammad himself is not considered an original Arab<sup>xii</sup> Playing the role of a linguist Saadi derives the Tamazight lexicon from an Arabic origin: “Tamettuth” (woman)<sup>xiii</sup> is said to be derived from “Tamath” (meaning “menstrual” in classical Arabic). He neither tells us whether the Amazighs had a name for their women before the Arabs came to North Africa, nor why the Arabs themselves didn't call their women that way!

In this statement of Othman Saadi, an Amazigh Chaouia, we have an idea of how self-hatred has been cultivated officially reaching nihilism. If any self-esteem should have survived, the introduction of Tamazight in the Educative system has severely weakened it because of its messy presence in the societal scene causing disenchantment.

### **5) Weak Institutional Framing**

Conversely, scholarly Arabic captivates the whole attention of the government who make whatever effort to hand large budgets, an Academy, a Superior Council, and many research centers within the ministry of higher education and research. Tamazight—the second national language—only receives crumbs. The Academy project has been abandoned after being approved of by the council of the government; the Higher Authority for Amazighness has been without head since 2004. In addition, there is no research centre depending on the Ministry of higher education (the only institution legally responsible for the implementation of scientific research) despite the fact that this language is in great need of institutional normalisation!<sup>xiv</sup>

### **6) Spatial and Quantitative Regression of the Teaching of Tamazight**



The teaching of Tamazight in Algeria began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, during the colonial period, at the university level, initiated by an Arabic speaker, Belkacem Bensedira.<sup>xv</sup> His Kabyle student Said Boulifa continued this course. The teaching of Tamazight continued until the end of the 1960s, with the chair for Berber at Algiers University held by late Mouloud Mammeri. Except for the Tamazight civic associations, Tamazight teaching by the Algerian institutions was taken up again in 1995. This resuscitated a great enthusiasm before people became disenchanted initiating with the shrinking of the space where it was taught.

A survey of the CNPLET<sup>xvi</sup> shows the decrease of the number of teachers in the following districts:

*–Algiers, where the number was 8 in 1995/96, evolved to 10 the year after and then decreased to 3 in 2002 and 0 in 2007.*

*–Batna: 9 teachers in 1995/96 then 8 in 96/97, and then 0 in 2002. But there was resumption in 2007 when 21 teachers were recruited.*

*–El Bayed: 1 in 1995/96 then 0 in 2002, and in 2007.*

*–Ghardaia: 12 in 1995/96 then 1 in 2007.*

*–Illizi: 3 in 1995/96 then 0 in 2002.*

*–Khenchela: 6 in 1995/96 to 1 in 2007;*

*–Oran: 2 in 1995/96 then 0 in 2002. No change till now.*

*–Oum El Bouaghi: 6 in 1995/96 to 13 in 97/98 then 5 in 2002, and 08 in 2007.*

*–Sétif: 3 in 95 to 8 in 2000 and 4 in 2002, then 5 in 2007.*

*–Tipaza: 11 in 1995/96 then 0 in 2007.*

Notice that in the districts of El-Bayadh, Illizi, Oran, and Tipaza, there is no teaching of Tamazight anymore. However, in the district of Batna, there has been a growth in the number of learners after Tamazight had completely disappeared in 2001/2002. We also notice the

feeble growth of the number of pupils and teachers in the primary, the middle, and the secondary schools.<sup>xvii</sup>

## **7) Toward a Rational, Multilingual, and Citizenship Language Policy**

### **a) The Algerian Languages: Essentials for a Debate**

In March 1990, in a colloquium held by the University of Oran on dialects in Algeria, the idea to teach each variety of Tamazight by itself was defended. An Academy or similar institution would carry out the language planning of this polynomial language. The teaching contents, the textbooks, and the dictionaries would also be concerned and a great effort was to be made by the nation to recover its historic identity and avoid recoiling on itself in a morbid self-loving<sup>xviii</sup>

- French as a Language for Science and Modern Knowledge

The scientific setback of both scholarly and Algerian Arabic and Tamazight (see “the linguistic market” of P. Bourdieu or “the stock exchange of languages” of L.-J. Calvet) and the necessary modernization of the nation are in favor of French, as it is well anchored in the national tissue. The Latin Americans speak Spanish or Portuguese, which are the Latin varieties of their former occupying powers. Kateb Yacine states straightforwardly: [I want to say in French to the French that I am not French.] French has also served during the struggle for Independence as an independence weapon and many French Europeans died for the Independence of Algeria. The Arab modernity is not to emerge soon (see M. Benrabah, 2009), and the present days Arab revolts (2011), despite their decisive role in the overthrowing of dictatorships, testify to this. At present the historic process of society production is customized to produce conservatism mainly through the thought *habitus* everlastingly duplicated by the educative system, the media, and bureaucracy.

- Arabization is a Language Policy with a Conservative Content

The arabization linguistic policy, whose semantic content and references are well entrenched in conservatism, has completely collapsed. It merely prevented Algerians from access to the French rationalist and scientific literature as well as that in classical Arabic, where advantage is given to conservatism and religious fanaticism and bigotry. When you are an Arabic monolingual, you rarely find access to scientific thought—even the classical older Arabic and Islamic rationalism is well hidden away.

French is truly a second language in Algeria because of its social rooting. A whimsical government cannot decide on the language of modernity. English, French, or Spanish, are almost on the same level of development. But Scholarly Arabic is unable to qualify for the run. Algeria is a linguistically heterogeneous society despite the fact that the great majority of people speak the Algerian Arabic. The other linguistic varieties will still exist next to Algerian Arabic (see A. Dourari (s/d), 2002).

- Multilingualism, Ethnicity, and National Unity

It is necessary to distinguish in thought between linguistic multilingualism and national unity, between religion and language. The type of political organization of the State is also to be distinguished from the notions of national unity and integrity as well as from multilingualism and multipartism. Iran, for example, is a Muslim country but it had not stopped being Persian. The defeated Sassanid never dropped their language and other cultural expressions to such an extent that their contemporary Muslim Arabs accused them of *shu'ubiyya* (ethnicity). Other peoples like Chechens, Turks, Bulgarians, and Indonesians kept their ethnic, cultural, and linguistic autonomy while adopting Islam. Arabs are now a small minority component in the Islamic world. The Maghribi populations (an Amazigh majority) have continued to practice their language (a minority) but have adopted the Maghribi Arabic that they use as a vehicular, now native, language.

The necessity to question these studies, theories, intellectual, and political postures is now established<sup>xix</sup>. Neither the Berberist particularism nor the mythical Arab-Islamic transnationalism can take up the multifarious reality of Algeria. From the point of view of sociolinguistics, the terms of *domination*, *minoration*, *diglossia*, or *linguistic conflict* are not quite adequate to the Algerian reality. Thus, new macro-sociolinguistic approaches must emerge. The hint as to the necessary criticism of the academic praxis with regard to the knowledge of society in Algeria is, by the way, a perspective on our own epistemological options (See A. Dourari, 1996; 2001; 2002).

### **Conclusion**

The rise of Tamazight faces new challenges. What variety is likely to be standardized to subsume all others without raising rejections from speakers of other varieties? Is it not better to standardize each variety for itself and risk the perpetuation of their individuation? At the macro-sociological as well as at the political levels, one must question the modalities of Tamazight integration in a Unitary State where the formal domain is already occupied by French and Scholarly Arabic in a context of a linguistically globalized market. Therefore, what kind of social functionality will this standardized variety expect? The rise of indigenous languages doesn't go smoothly. In fact, social representations and political, economic and financial interests are daunting.

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## Notes

<sup>i</sup> PPA-MTLD: Parti du Peuple Algérien, Mouvement pour le Triomphe des Libertés Démocratique, at that time the leading Algerian nationalist party. The crisis took place in 1949.

<sup>ii</sup> The recent works of N. Toualbi, *L'identité au Maghreb, l'Errance* (Alger : Casbah Ed., 2000) ; K. Taleb al-Ibrahimi, *Les Algériens et leur(s) langue(s), Eléments pour une approche sociolinguistique de la société algérienne* (XXXXX :Ed. El-Hikma, 1995) ; D. Morsly, « Alger plurilingue. » *Plurilinguismes*, N°12, 1996 ; M. L. Maougal, *Langages et Langues entre tradition et modernité* (XXXX :Marinoor, 2000) ; Abdou Elimam, *Le Maghribi alias ad-dârija, la langue consensuelle du Maghreb* (Oran, Algeria : Dar al-Gharb, 2003) , Abderrezak Dourari, *Les malaises de la société algérienne, crise de langue et crise d'identité* (Alger : Casbah Editions , 2003), and Abderrezak Dourari, *Cultures populaires, culture nationale* (Paris :L'Harmattan, 2002)

<sup>iii</sup> G. Camps, *Les Berbère* (France : Edisud, 1996) 56.

<sup>iv</sup> See G. Camps, cited supra; W. Marçais, « Comment l'Afrique du Nord a été arabisée? » *Annales de l'Institut d'Etudes Orientales d'Alger* Tome iv : (1938) XXXX et Tome xiv : (1956) XXXX

<sup>v</sup> Abdou Elimam, *Le Maghribi alias ad-dârija, la langue consensuelle des Maghrébins* (Oran, Algeria : Dâr al-Gharb, 2003)

<sup>vi</sup> Scholarly Arabic is a modern derivation of the classical one formerly used in the field of religion, law, grammar and poetry.

<sup>vii</sup> Belhocine M., *Idir al-wataniy, Vive l'Algérie* (Alger : Ed. Le combat algérien, Déc. 2001)

<sup>viii</sup> See for the misleading term of 'Aarch or tribe A. Dourari, « Réponse à Camille Lacoste-Dujardin », Internet Site Algeria-interface, *Les Malaises de la société algérienne, crise de langues, crise d'identité* (Alger, Algeria : Casbah Ed., 2003) 125 sq.; "pratiques langagières effectives et pratiques langagières postulées en Kabylie, à la lumière des événements du 'printemps noir' 2001" *Insaniyyât*, Oran, N°17-18 : (Mai- Décembre 2002) XXXX

<sup>ix</sup> CNPLET, created in 2005, see web site <cnplet.net>

<sup>x</sup> Habiballah Mansouri is now a Tamazight inspector at the Ministry of Education; he conducted a research on Oran population with regard to the Tamazight scripts.

<sup>xi</sup> Othman Saadi, *al-amazigh 'arabun 'ârîba...* He is a Chaouia Amazigh from the East of Algeria, a well-known member of the FLN Party and once an Algerian ambassador to Syria: 'arab 'ârîba, as opposed to « 'arabmusta'riba », (Original Arabs / arabized Arabs).

<sup>xii</sup> Cheikh Ahmad Al-'Iskandarî & Cheikh Mustafâ Annâni, *Al-Wassîf fi l-'adab al-'arabî watârîkhih* (XXXXXX: Ed. Matba'at al-ma'ârîf, 6<sup>ème</sup> edition, 1927) 6-8.

<sup>xiii</sup> "Tamettuth" is derived from the Tamazight verb "Tedh" (stem **TD** = "suck"), in the passive form meaning "the one who is sucked". The phonetic assimilation process makes the link between the two words less clear.

<sup>xiv</sup> See A. Dourari, Interview to the Daily national Newspaper: *La dépêche de Kabylie*, du 21/03/2009, electronic version at (<http://www.depechedekabylie.com/propread.php?id=68156&ed=2069>)

<sup>xv</sup> Belkacem Bensedira is the author of the *Cours de langue Kabyle, grammaire et version*, A. Jourdain, 1887, CCXIII. See formore, Ould-Braham O., Belkacem Bensedira et son cours de langue kabyle 1887, *Etudes et documents Berbères* 21: (2003) 149-190.

<sup>xvi</sup> Namely Akbal-Ibri Saliha, Imarazen Moussa, Sabri Malika, Berdus Nadia and Chemakh Said, (A Study of the Profile of the Tamazight Teachers of the Districts of Béjaïa, Bouira, Boumerdes, and Tizi-Ouzou)

<sup>xvii</sup> The reports of the MNE do not show this; see document entitled "l'Enseignement de Tamazight, Etat des lieux (2007) 14 (The teaching of Tamazight, inventory of the fixtures).

<sup>xviii</sup> See. A. Dourari , ed., *Actes du colloque international du CNPLET, Tamazight langue nationale en Algérie : Etats de lieux et problématique d'aménagement*, Sidi Fredj, 05-07/12/2006 ; and international colloquia in partnership with the Laboratoire paragraphe de l'Université Paris 08 : *Tamazight dans le système éducatif algérien, problématique d'aménagement*, 2007 ; *Workshop sur la normalisation, la numérisation et le e-learning*, 2008 ; *Tamazight, Les TICE et les méthodes d'enseignement/apprentissage des langues*, 2009 ; *La dictionnaire des langues de moindre diffusion, le cas de tamazight*, 2010...).

<sup>xix</sup> Dourari A., « Choix épistémologique et enjeux sociolinguistiques » *Insâniyyât* (CRASC Oran, 2005) XXXX ; El-Medlaoui M., *Actes du colloque international, AIMS Université d'Austin USA, Tanger, Maroc*, 23-26/05/200.