

Transcript

Politics and Power in the Maghreb

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Speaker: Dr Michael Willis

University of Oxford

Dr Michael Willis: Thank you. It's lovely to be here. As a former graduate of the LSE, a painfully long number of years ago, it's very nice to be back here. I'm also absolutely delighted and very flattered to be invited by the Society for Algeria Studies. The society thanks to the work for Zeinab and particularly John King who has kept the society going for many years and has done wonderful things for what was often an unfashionable subject, but he has kept it going by inviting academics who have interest in the subject. I'm very grateful to the society.

And in fact, I'm particularly grateful because it was the Society for Algerian Studies that actually invited me to give my first ever public lecture back in 1997 and, on that occasion, it was to speak about a book I had just written based on a PhD I had completed the previous year, *Islamist Challenges in Algeria: A Political History*. I'm therefore grateful that the society has invited me back this year to talk about a book I have written – indeed, my second. Yes, I am very aware, before anyone points it out, the number of years that have passed between my first book and this book, something that both my publisher and my employer are very aware of as well. But it is finally here and literally it arrived literally 20 minutes ago. It is the first time I have seen it.

There is a link between this book that has come out today and my previous book. This book, *Power and Politics in the Maghreb*, builds on what I did for my first book. Shortly after giving my lecture to the Society for Algerian Studies back in 1997, I moved to Morocco to take up at position teaching politics at Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane and my study of Algeria for my PhD together with the opportunity to study Morocco really first hand through living and working in the country. I spent seven years there in total and it led me to develop, while at the university, a course entitled “North African Politics” to look at both countries. I was also teaching an introductory level course on comparative politics and this led me to teach the North African course in a more comparative way. I'm very, very pleased that a very pleasant surprise about 10 minutes ago was I saw a veteran of both classes from the university in Morocco – Lubna – who I haven't seen I think since then who is here tonight. So it's very, very flattering having heard me talk years ago that she still has an appetite to hear me talk again. Sucker for punishment some people would say. But thank you very much for coming, Lubna.

So I added the study of Morocco to Algeria and for good measure, I added Tunisia, a country I visited seven times that seemed to fit very well with – and a logical addition to looking more at a comparative study of both Morocco and Algeria. Now, being based on the US system, the course at Al Akhawayn University required a central core text to recommend those students taking the course and it was really the absence of a core text on the comparative politics of the Maghreb, of North Africa, that really gave me the idea to write this book. More correctly, I should say, the idea came from the students in the class who actually suggested, “Well, if we don’t have a text, Doctor, why don’t you write one?” So it was that idea that I subsequently put to Michael Dwyer at Hurst and Co whom I’m delighted to say responded with enthusiasm. And with that, everything began.

Now my reasons for seeking to write a book on the comparative politics of North Africa were academic as well as a pedagogical. Those of us who study and work on the Maghreb region, certainly in this country, have long become used to our feeling the poor and neglected relation of Middle Eastern studies with virtually all scholarly attention usually focused on the other end of the Arab world, the Gulf, the Levant and Egypt. And I got used to speaking to academics and even senior diplomats at events who, when hearing I studied the Maghreb, would look rather blankly at me and say I’ve never really been west of Cairo and then look rather brightly and say, “Well, my wife’s cousin went to Morocco a few years ago and apparently it’s very, very nice there.” And that was as far as I got as a discussion on most events in the Maghreb -- that if it was west of Cairo, it didn’t really happen.

The conflicts I think in Israel, Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq and the Gulf are a good way obviously to explain why more outside attention is focused on the eastern end of the Arab world. But they do not, however, account for what seems to be a near total neglect of political events in the Maghreb, which are maybe not reaching much of the impact and magnitude of crises in the Mashreq, in the eastern Arab world, which contain their own sizeable conflicts and are said to have sent ripples beyond the region. The Maghreb is not without impact. Most prominently, there was a dramatic unfolding of events in Algeria in the 1990s which saw not only one of the most complete political openings and unfettered sense of elections hitherto seen in the modern Arab world, but which also came close to electing the Arab world’s first Islamist majority government. This, however, received brief coverage in the world

media and a tiny proportion of that devoted to Hamas' victory in the Palestinian Territories, a decade and a half later.

But the dissent into civil conflict which followed the elections and the tens of thousands of Algerians that lost their lives in the blood-letting that followed, received even less attention, despite the death toll being far higher than the much more comprehensively covered conflicts further east in Lebanon, the Gulf and Israel-Palestine. Many more people were killed in Algeria, but that received a fraction of the attention. Now drama and violence not being limited to the Algerian part of the Maghreb, the conflict between Morocco and the Polisario Front over the Western Sahara developed into a full scale war that other regional states such as Algeria and Libya contributed to. The dispute remains unsolved after three and a half decades and now occupies one of the longest serving peace keeping operations in the world. Yet few outside of the region and the corridors of the UN even know anything about its conflict or its causes. It's one of the great unknown conflicts in the world.

Now if Tunisia's lack of domestic turmoil and involvement in territorial conflicts better explains its absence from the headlines than its Maghrebi neighbours, the dramatic events of January 2011 of course demonstrate that even it, too, was worthy of attention. So all three countries I think have come to show their importance in very different ways over time, but it has not been without event, not been without developments in that part of the world.

Now in parallel to the lack of media attention, particularly in the Anglo-Saxon world, there has been a surprising lack of interest from the academics on North Africa and Maghreb. Attention to the Maghreb, while present, has been scant certainly in comparison not only to the Mashreq, but also to comparative regions in the world. So whilst one can regularly find studies on the politics of Central America, Southeast Asia, the Balkans, West Africa, few such studies exist of the Maghreb region, despite all of the reasons I've just set out for having them. Those studies that do exist are frequently excellent, but they are relatively few in number and are dwarfed by similar studies of the Mashreq. Moreover, much of the academic work on the politics of the Maghreb has focused on individual countries and even those works that attempt to look at the whole region predominately consist of discussions on the individual countries and separate sections and only limitedly attempt to put forward a broader

discussion of the developments and issues across the states. Therefore, the academic need for a broad, comparative text, addressing the politics of the Maghreb region therefore also explains my motivation in writing this book.

The absence not only of a single text dealing with the politics of the region, but also the broad modern history of the Maghreb, especially for the post-colonial period, has led me perhaps ill-advisedly to try to address both the politics and modern history of the Maghreb in a single book. To try to satisfy these two objectives, most of the chapters in the book address political actors, themes and issues, but within each are largely chronological and narrative approaches adopted to explain the development of a topic, like issues of the military, the issues of Berber identity, regional relations, Islamism etcetera.

In this way, the book is intended to be an introductory text to the study of the Maghreb and therefore existing scholars of the region are unlikely to find much is novel or unknown in it. The original contribution I hope the book makes is therefore providing a broad and comparative study. It draws heavily on existing secondary literature to construct its narrative and analysis, not least because the excellence of much of what has been written already on the region over the past 50 years and the desire to integrate what were often texts on the individual countries into a comparative analysis, but also as a way of pointing the readers to looking at this literature in more detail, particularly the classics that were written on the three countries. Use should also be made of media sources, especially those produced in the region itself. I was very keen that it wouldn't be a history from the outside. A famous Moroccan historian – **Abdullah Alawi** – always complained the Maghreb was written as if it was an extension of Middle Eastern history or European history. If you looked at the history, it was either when the region was controlled by Europeans or controlled by Arabs and people who actually lived in the region never seemed to have any say, never seemed to have any agency in what they did. He wrote a history of the Maghreb in the late 1970s to try to counter that and say there were things within the region that were actually much more indigenous and had deeper roots and it wasn't just a case of is it Arab or it is European. A lot of people who have studied the Maghreb ask that question, but I don't think it's actually a valid question. It has very much its own origins, drawing on its own range of different influences geographically, and culturally and historically. The book also contains material I have

gathered myself with both political actors and ordinary people during the periods I have visited and lived in the region over the past 20 years.

So hopefully, that gives you a rationale and an explanation about why I have written this book. So what did I conclude at the end of writing it? Although one of my main purposes in writing the book has been simply to set out in an accessible manner, the fundamentals of a modern history and politics of a region, given the fact that most people arrive to study the Maghreb with a very low base of knowledge. I teach a course on Maghrebi politics at Oxford and 90 percent of the students start by saying they have a zero base of knowledge on the Middle East. They knew about the Arab East – they knew what was happening in the Levant, in the Gulf, but with virtually no base of knowledge. So I wanted to produce a book that could be taken by someone that was not aware of what was going on in the Middle East and give some introduction and begin to open up a discussion of what has been happening in the Magreb. So that was one of the things. I also wanted, in addition to giving an introductory text, to draw out some broader conclusions and observations about the whole region.

Now as I drew the constituent parts of the book together in the Autumn of 2010, the overall observation I could not avoid -- and what began to form the basis of what I began to put in my conclusion and the theme that I wanted to run throughout the book -- was the remarkable continuity of politics in the region in the three countries, in Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco. As the first decade of the 21st century drew to a close and the three countries marked a half century of independence from European colonial rule, the politics of the states in the central Maghreb seemed to have settled into a very stable pattern. Having weathered the political and economic storms of the 1980s and 1990s, Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia have appeared to have succeeded in establishing a form of political equilibrium. Moreover, one that was remarkably similar to that which has been put in place in the years that followed the achievement of independence from European colonial rule nearly a half a century later. In other words, at independence and at the end of the 21st century, politics looked remarkably similar in each country. Relatively little had changed.

Most striking was the continuity in the forms of political leadership and power in the three countries. Starting in Morocco, a hereditary monarchy claiming near absolute

political authority based on religion ruled. In 1956, it had been Sultan Mohammed V and in 2010, it was his grandson, King Mohammed VI. In the east in Tunisia, an all-powerful individual president backed by a hegemonic political party held sway. In 1956, it had been Habib Bourguiba and the Neo-Destour Party. And in 2010, it was President Zine Ben Abidine Ben Ali and his rally for constitutional democracy, the RCD party. Between them, in Algeria, there was a civilian president, but whose rule was heavily circumscribed by the hierarchy of the country's military who took nearly all the key decisions of the state. In 1962, the country's military had been the kingmakers in the appointment of Ahmed Ben Bella as independent Algeria's first president whom they were to remove three years later in 1965. And in 2010, Ben Bella's foreign minister, Abdul Aziz Bouteflika was president who, having been brought to power by the generals in the military and in the intelligence services, struggled to exert influence independently of them.

So really you saw this amazing continuity. The faces had changed, but the structures were virtually intact. Very similar structures. What I wanted to try and do in the book was to explain how has this occurred? How come you can have 50 years of history, upheavals, everything and the basic structures of all three countries look remarkably similar to what they did 50 years earlier? Whilst it was true that some of the visible forms of politics had changed over the intervening decades, these central political realities and political powers in the three states remained remarkably unmoved. Key political debates and decisions continued to occur behind closed doors, carried out by a very small number of people and this is a common theme across the region. In Morocco, the king and his advisors in the Royal Palace in Rabat continued to make all the key strategic decisions in the kingdom. In Tunis, it was a president and his senior advisors and, increasingly, his family that made all the key decisions. And in Algeria, it was a conclave of senior military leaders with some input from the president that made all the decisions.

So relatively a very small base made all the key decisions in all the key countries. Significantly, there was little or no meaningful input from the wider populations of the countries into decision making processes. To be sure, electoral processes had become part of the formal political calendar in the three states by the 1990s, but the elections they produced were fully incapable of fundamentally altering political power structures let alone removing or replacing existing political levers. In Tunisia,

elections were skewed and rigged to insure that the sitting president and the ruling RCD always won with a crushing majority. And in fact, President Ben Ali stood for five presidential elections and his vote fell each time to a disastrously low level. I think 89.5 percent in the last elections in 2009. In Morocco and Algeria, the real wielders of power – the monarchy in Morocco and the senior military leadership in Algeria – were, by definition, unelected and thus outside of the scope of even theoretical electoral control. All three political regimes had passed through periods of decades following independence when it looked like they might experience some fundamental mutation. In the early 1970s, the Moroccan monarchy had narrowly survived two attempted military coup d'états. In the last 1980s and early 1990s, Tunisia and Algeria opened up their political systems to what appeared to be more genuine competition for power before successfully closing down those apertures in the years it followed. In the 1990s, Morocco appeared to making at least a step in the same direction through the appointment of the outer mosque government, as it became known, led by the longtime opposition party, the socialist party the USFP and headed by a veteran critic of the lack of democracy in the kingdom. But this proved to be no real shift in political power as the monarchy slowly reasserted its power during the 2000s.

Now the more profound openings that occurred in Algeria and Morocco, and as political power became centralised once more in the two states, there were suggestions that both Algeria and Morocco might be seeking to emulate a particular political model and that political model was Tunisia. The Ben Ali regime had succeeded in creating a highly stable political environment accompanied by modernization and apparent economic prosperity. Any domestic opposition and criticism had been suppressed and marginalised largely through co-option of state largesse and in the minority of cases, by force. External approval had been brought through the whole of political processes, but mimicked, at least in thought, those of little democracy and more crucially through the argument that the alternative to the existing regime was liable to be a radical and fundamentalist religious one. And the Tunisian model began to be discussed and you began to hear things in both Morocco and Algeria, discussions that politics was essentially passé, that what should be done is development, was economics. Politics and those sort of things was really a distraction and a waste of time and really the people in the country were

not interested in how they were governed, in politics or elections or parliament. This was irrelevant. Business development, economics was everything. This was exactly the kind of discourse that was operated by Ben Ali in Tunisia for 20 years.

Of course, we all know what happened to the Tunisian model. The startlingly swift collapse of the Ben Ali regime in the opening weeks of 2011, thus overturned many of the assumptions and much of the received wisdom about the existing and future parts of the regimes and their political systems in the Maghreb. The continuity and resilience of the political structures in the region have thus come to be seen as perhaps their fundamental characteristic. And again, this rather challenged the conclusion that I was building up to write. I actually came back from Christmas at 2010 and had closeted myself away to do my final conclusion on the book and I was receiving calls from Al Jazeera saying can you comment on something going on in Tunisia. And my initial reaction was nothing is going to happen in Tunisia. And then I realized that something was happening in Tunisia. I then realized that I needed a little longer to finish the book which is my excuse and I'm sticking to it.

But the forces and dynamics behind Ben Ali's fall were not particular to Tunisia, amply demonstrated by the swiftness with which dissimilar movements of popular protest spread throughout the rest of the Arab world, barely sparing a single country. Algeria and Morocco felt the impact of these changes, but notably much less than many countries in the Arab Mashreq. This raised questions as to whether the states of the Maghreb were as similar as had been thought or whether it could be thought of as a distinct region as we see very different experiences of the Arab spring across the region.

There were clear potential reasons as to why Algeria and Morocco had not experienced the same levels of upheaval witnessed by Egypt, Libya, Bahrain and Syria in the months following the collapse of the regime in Tunis. In the case of Algeria, I think it was predominantly painful memories of the violent turmoil of the 1990s, was the main disincentive for ordinary citizens for coming onto the streets of Algeria. I think also together with an ongoing experience of extensively locally based socioeconomic unrest, something not particularly known outside the country is that over the last three or four years, Algeria has been having tumult at local levels with

disputes and problems on very specific local issues that local authorities tend to deal with.

Also, there is, I think, the absence of a more personalized individual political leadership against which popular anger could be focused. If you look at the states that have suffered most significantly, particularly if you look at Egypt, Tunisia and Libya, those perhaps most effected by what has happened, it all happened where there was one single leader who had developed, who had been in place for a long time and developed huge personal antipathy from the population. The fact that there was more collective leadership in Algeria, I think, changed the scene somewhat. Of course, targeted revenues from Algeria's significant oil and gas revenues also clearly played a part. The regime was distributing much more money in the absence of the Arab spring and that certainly has made a difference to Algeria, but I think generally the experience of the 1990s has removed some of the appetite for significant political change and people coming on to the streets. And there is Algerians themselves, sometimes with a degree of pride say, we predated the spring by two and half decades in October 1988 where you go the sort of mass unrest across the urban parts of the city that occurred, but led into a period of political liberalisation. So there was the sense that Algeria had already experienced something of that, that perhaps there wasn't the appetite for that.

In Morocco, similar recent popular memories of political reform in the 1990s, in particular, and a generally more liberal political atmosphere and a relatively new head of state in the person of King Mohammed VI, I think served to dilute popular rage against the regime. As one of the leaders of the 20th of February protest movement that emerged in Morocco rudely remarked to me in March last year, "If Morocco had been a little less liberal and we had had a Ben Ali in power, we would be achieving a lot more."

Yet despite the persuasive quality of these explanations as to why the regimes in Algiers and Rabat had not come under serious threat in the early months of what became known as the Arab Spring, there contained strong echoes of the reasons given by the observers of the regimes in Cairo, Tripoli and Damascus in the days that followed Ben Ali's fall, that Tunisia's revolutionary spirit was highly unlikely to spread to Egypt, Libya, Bahrain or Syria. One often forgets that after Ben Ali fell, all

the experts on Egypt came out and said, well, this could never happen in Egypt because of the relationship with Israel, because of the military complex, it is a very different thing. People in Libya said, well of course Libya and Qaddafi are a very different regime, nothing is ever going to happen there. And of course, Syria is completely impossible, it's completely impossible that anything will ever happen in Syria.

So there began **to be all the old assumptions tended to be challenged** and I therefore think it remains distinctly possible that Algeria and Morocco might eventually **suck** the sort of upheaval that their smaller Maghrebi neighbour spearheaded. Political status, corruption, a lack of democracy, high-graduate unemployment, regional inequalities, and a growing gap between the rich and poor were some of the major components of the undoing of the Ben Ali regime and all are present I think in Morocco and Algeria. Whilst less abusive rule, recent experiences of political change and modest attempts at constitutional reform may have bought both regimes some time, failure to address these problems in the longer term is likely to put significant popular and perhaps international pressure on both countries to change at a much faster rate.

Now while fundamental political change remains on a distinct possibility in Algeria and Morocco, it remains in my view a strong probability in Tunisia. Developments since the departure of Ben Ali on the 14th of January last year most closely resemble a genuine and successful revolution as the country negotiates what's seems like a remarkably smooth and successful transition away from the Ben Ali regime. I've been lucky enough to have visited Tunisia quite regularly since the revolution and I've been very encouraged by what is seen and heard since the transformation from when I used to visit in the Ben Ali period. A major milestone in this process was the election of a national constituent assembly in October of last year whose main task is to draw up a new constitution for the country, one that will, in my view, produce a recognizably democratic political system given the near universal consensus among the political parties of the assembly for a new system based on regularly free and elected governments, separation of powers and individual rights. If you look at political parties of all political persuasions, they all share these things and I think it's sometimes been rather obscured by the debate on religion and identity that has

come to dominate some for the discussions in Tunisia. The fundamentals amongst political parties – the main political parties – are quite striking.

The assembly in Tunisia also appointed the interim government, an administration to run the country whilst a new constitution was being drawn up and debated. But so many senior figures in this interim administration, drawn from the free parties that have put together a governing coalition in the wake of the election are hugely symbolic former opponents of Ben Ali – Mustafa Ben Jaafar, the Head of the Assembly, the Prime Minister, Mr Jabali, and Moussaf Marzouki, the President of the Republic, all people who had stood up to Ben Ali and suffered for it. They are now the three most powerful men in the country which gives an indication of how much has changed. There really has been a turnover and a change in Tunisia.

Now it is possible that the structures of power established by Habib Bourguiba and maintained in many ways in a much more repressive way by Zine Abedine Ben Ali may at times reassert themselves in Tunisia. And that the dramatic events of January 2011 will come to be seen like the changement that Ben Ali held when he replaced Bourguiba in November 1987, as a temporary and aberrant interruption of a broader and more profound political pattern of control and centralisation of power. It is possible that that may happen, but the balance of probability however in my view is that substantial political change will come about as an enduring product of the January 2011 election. A return to the political configurations of the country's two post-independence presidents is, in my view, highly improbable. The truly popular nature of the revolution has given a sense of ownership and involvement to the ordinary population and has pushed it to avoid being politically marginalized in the political life as it was in the previous 50 years. It is this popular mobilization, particularly of the youth, that could be the most important legacy of the Tunisian revolution and its continued engagement will be the test of the long-term success of the revolution. I think that's the one thing that Tunisia does need to make sure – that the younger people, particularly those involved in the revolution, continue to feel involved in what occurs. And indeed, this will impact on the longevity of the post-revolutionary political system that is put into place.

So my conclusions of December 2010 was that nothing had changed. We now have a state in the region, Tunisia, where there is looking to be substantial political change

that has occurred in a very short space of time and this, of course, has an effect. What effect does it have on the wider region? So I want to look at both the other neighbours and see why I think the Tunisian revolution has and might conceivably affect political developments. Now in Morocco, there was a clear effect through the launching of the 20th of February protest movement which led to a fall of the constitution by the king, early elections and the appointment of a new government, dominated by the main opposition party, the party of Justice and development, an Islamist party. Now opinion in Morocco – I was there just last month – is divide as to whether the Royal Palace in Rabat sees this period of change with the new constitution, elections and the new government as the closing of the effect of the Arab Spring, that a whole chapter, whole episode in Moroccan politics is now closed and that the party of Justice and Development will suffer exactly the same fate as the socialist party in the late 1990s which was brought into government, is unable to do anything and is rapidly sapped of credibility and energy, drops out of the political system and **leaves for** the reassertion of control by the palace. Or whether it actually marks a new chapter, that actually this is seen as an on-going process of political reform that had been stalled in the late 2000s. Now some officials in Morocco are quite aware and anxious that the kingdom has seeded its mantel as the most liberal and progressive state in the region to Tunisia and the consequences it might have for its hitherto favoured-position in the eyes of Europe and the United States. Morocco, with good justification, was generally regarded by the European Union and North America for many years as the most liberal, progressive state and I think Morocco feels that it has begun to slip from its particular position.

Now what I was struck by having visited Morocco last month was in terms of the fact that it's been brought on Morocco is a change of atmosphere in the country where there appears to be a new appetite and perhaps more significantly a reluctance on behalf of ordinary people to accept the failings of the state and I actually believe this will be the biggest and most important and more profound change that the Arab Spring as a general phenomenon will bring in the region. That whereas it may not necessarily change institutionally or overthrow any more leaders or create more changes, it has led to a decline in the fear and passivity that it really marked the attitude of the population or apathy in many places of the population towards political change. There is a sense that people feel that they can actually change things and

make a difference. I certainly felt that in Morocco and you see that around, the people, that they won't accept things that they accepted for many year before.

So this brings us finally to Algeria and again the society for Algerian studies. Now sharing a border with Tunisia doesn't necessarily mean that Algeria will be affected by events to the east. Indeed one observation that I made at several points in my book was that while frequently sharing much in common, the way in which issues could affect the three states is in quite different ways. I look, for example, at the role of the military in the three states and how it could be central to the role of politics in the state in one country. Algeria. It could be completely absent and side lined in the case of another – Tunisia. And in Morocco, it could have had periodic influence. And we can see with a lot of other themes like Islamism etcetera where we see this sort of difference. Could it, therefore, be the case that having seen the Arab Spring leads to the overthrow of the regime in one country – Tunisia – and reform process in another – Morocco – and could leave Algeria relatively untouched?

I think it is extremely difficult and, in all probability, rather too early to say. Moreover, I have to say that out of the three countries, events in Algeria are perhaps most difficult to see or predict. Events in the past 18 months in Morocco and especially Tunisia took most people by surprise, but for those of us who have watched the region more closely over the years what has occurred was perhaps slightly less unexpected. Morocco's readiness to reform itself in the face of popular protests fits with a pattern that established itself, albeit fitfully, over the last couple of decades. There was a willingness to reform and to see where things were heading with Morocco, whether the state would react and form and change. Even in Tunisia, the vast majority of Tunisians themselves predicted the timing of the popular uprising there. Those of us who followed and regularly visited the country with a view that the level of political control over such a relatively well-educated population was unsustainable in the longer run and that when change came, it would never come quite quickly as indeed it would. Indeed, in articles and in early drafts of my book, I had made this point that the absence of any change had led me to remove this argument in the autumn of 2010 and then I was able to cut and paste and reassert it into the final edition. But finally, after much later than I had anticipated, these things actually happened in the wake of the events of early 2011.

Algeria, by contrast, is far more difficult to second guess politically, predict politically. I must confess that despite having written a PhD on the country and having taken several trips there over 20 years, I frequently feel that I have only the most superficial comprehension of it in terms of understanding how its politics works. Part of this is due to the significant opacity of its political structures and power dynamics, perhaps a legacy of the liberation struggle when the revolutionary FLN was forced to hide everything from the view of the French. It is also due to the much more collective form of leadership which I refer to earlier which has operated in the country since independence which makes it much more difficult to work out not only who is making key decisions at any point and what those decisions might actually be. If you know who is making the decisions, you can have a better idea. If you actually don't know who is making the decisions, it's very difficult to even guess what those decisions might be.

Now, I am partially reassured by the fact that many Algerians themselves feel similarly unclear about the mechanics by which their country is ruled and uncertain about where their country may be heading. There is widespread unease that the opacity and the exercise of power in Algeria, which seems to have only increased over the recent years, hides not the careful development of a coherent political and economic strategy by the country's rulers, but rather the reverse: an obscuring of profound political stasis and sclerosis in a political system where tacticians abound, but where strategists are notable for their absence. We therefore find ourselves in a year that has seen significant change, both elections in Tunisia and Egypt and even Morocco. To be today on the very eve, literally, of legislative elections in Algeria tomorrow, where there is no expectation of any noticeable change being brought through the results of tomorrow's voting, it remains to be seen whether this fact, notably the contrast with the surrounding region, moves to break with the status from either the country's elite or the ordinary population whose disillusionment with the formal mechanisms of power is as high as ever and certainly all the indications are that there will be a mass abstention in the elections in Algeria tomorrow. Whatever happens, we would be wise to bear in mind Algeria's capacity to surprise whether it's through the remarkable and allegedly successful struggle against French colonial rule, the popular uprising of October 1988, the multi-party opening of 1989 or even its survival from the riots and the shadow of the 1990s. For, as Algeria and the wider

Maghreb enter the second decade of the 21st century, it confronts more changes to the remarkable continuity of this politics than any other time since the end of European colonial rule in the 1950s and 1960s. It is therefore hoped that my book will provide a useful and accurate portrayal and analysis of the first 50 years of the political life of post-colonial Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco and its even my more fervent hope that any future account of the next 50 years of political life in the region will show an economically prosperous and more politically pluralistic one than my study has been able to show. Thank you very much.