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Fight or Flight: The Situation of the Young and Jobless in Morocco

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In the context of the Arab Spring, Morocco faces some of the biggest anti-government protests in recent history, many of which are motivated at least in part by the poor and persistent employment problem. Bearing in mind the staggeringly high numbers of unemployed youth in a country that is also one of the biggest senders of migrants to Europe and North America, I have based my study on the duality of choice Moroccans face. When confronted with deteriorating quality in a given product, as economist Albert O. Hirschman has articulated in his theory on exit, voice, and loyalty, people can either abandon the product by exiting the market or they can try to influence improvement through voice. At a time of near-daily protests demanding jobs from the government, I have sought to understand the decision making among Moroccans to either voice their grievances on the streets or emigrate: fight or flight. Ultimately, the choice is not so exact because of barriers to exit doubled with the interplay of loyalty, which together cause people to remain in Morocco and perhaps, as yet to be seen, influence positive and much-needed changes in the labor market.
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Introduction:

In his work, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States*, Albert O. Hirschman articulates that when confronted with deteriorating quality of a given product, human response can go one of two ways. People can abandon the product and exit the market for this good or they can voice their complaints and try to improve the quality. Persistently high rates of unemployment in Morocco have provoked a similarly twofold behavior response from the nation’s jobless population. This paper conceptualizes such a response as “fight or flight.”

The idea that current socio-economic conditions in Morocco have pushed its people into fight-or-flight mode draws its inspiration from an assumed connection between two key observations: firstly, Morocco has what can only be described as a culture of migration in which moving abroad, most often to Europe but also to the United States and Canada, is desirable, romanticized or at the very least, commonplace. Everyone knows a migrant. Perhaps it goes without saying that people move in search of better opportunities and certainly, economic opportunity abroad versus that of Morocco has contributed to some of the push and pull factors influencing migration. Therein lies the second observation: the unemployment rate has remained high for decades. In my fieldwork, it was not unusual to encounter university-educated people who have been jobless for seven, ten, fourteen years. Corruption and bribery practices fan the fire.

The study as outlined in this paper has tried to understand the motivators of fight and flight in Morocco in the midst of political change across North Africa and the Middle East region. The initial hypothesis opined that the anti-government protests and large demonstrations by unemployed postgraduates signified that people, rather than making the choice of “flight” and emigrating from Morocco, have opted instead to stay and try to create real change. Perhaps social movements in Morocco working toward democratization, or at least the spirit of such movements, were having an effect on the appeal of migration in the minds of the people. This hypothesis makes the assumption that in the past, most Moroccans would go to the West if they could, believing that Morocco had little to offer
them in terms of jobs, money, and favorable working conditions. Looking at the February 20th political movement (an organized political group that calls for democratization of the Moroccan government and constitution), I saw the current era as an optimistic time in which many youth believe they wield the necessary power to influence real change. For this reason, they do not exit Morocco but stay and call on their government to provide their basic necessity of the right to work.

Ultimately, barriers to exit as well as loyalty to one’s country have been the true determinants of fight or flight. In many ways, people do believe they can make change in Morocco, that protesting for employment will ultimately yield jobs, and that they therefore do not need to emigrate. However, there are complexities surrounding this loyalty to their home country that render the behavior choice to protest and make demands on the government not so much a choice, but a necessary act. Visa restrictions, the high cost of travel and living abroad, and fears of racial discrimination and religious intolerance all contribute to why many in Morocco cannot make a swift choice to exit in favor of a better economic atmosphere in Europe or North America.

Yet just as economists see long lines at stores not as a problem but as the market remedying itself, the “no exit” situation that many Moroccans face has the potential to be the most effective solution to grievances in the labor market and beyond. The fact is that Morocco’s unemployed postgraduates, arguably the country’s best and brightest, are forced to get creative in finding a solution to their poor economic situation. This has an overall positive effect on Moroccan society because as they demonstrate in front of government buildings for jobs, they also take part in the greater movement of the current era: better government. This is the result and the true benefit of the “fight or flight” behavior as people confront high rates of unemployment.
Methodology

I will precede my argument on what influences decisions to emigrate versus decisions to protest for change by explaining the processes involved in my research, including how the idea came to be, the methodology involved, problems I encountered, and the limitations of my study. The research represented in this paper was formally conducted in the month’s time following two months of study on migration issues in Morocco. In reality, my findings are a compilation of all of my preceding months in Morocco. Having spent seven months in the country before beginning the project, I have had the opportunity to observe how migration in its broad sense has become embedded in the historical and cultural fabric of Moroccan society. Conversations on buses and beaches, in classrooms and in train compartments, with all kinds of people from students to protesters to taxi drivers to beggars have illumined what I see as the entire street as well as the cracks in the pavement. These exchanges are as innumerous as they are invaluable.

A Note on Language: While on the subject of intercultural exchange, I want to highlight how language has contributed to a few misgivings in my project. For one, I have the difficult position of a study abroad student, doubly attempting to study migration in Morocco and also learn Arabic. There have been several occasions in which I speak Moroccan Arabic to my subjects, like demonstrators on the street, for the purpose of communicating with them in their own language. Unfortunately, doing so sacrificed some information because I did not understand all that was said. Although informal interviews with Moroccans in darija have opened me up to data that would have been inaccessible otherwise, I regret that there have been a few lost conversations along the way as well.

Secondly, the language barrier has led to some communication failures during my study. This issue was a common problem I encountered and often a cost on my budget. Moreover, I was disadvantaged by the fact that important sources of information, like relevant books, newspaper articles, online documents, i.e., were often in either French or Arabic. Especially with regards to information-gathering on current events and protests, my project suffered from my lack of skills in the important languages of Morocco.
**A Note on Participants:** For this study, I did a questionnaire among forty-five private university students, a focus group of four public university students, conducted informal interviews with approximately twenty university students in various cities in Morocco and used observation methods. For information on unemployment protests and current movements for social change, I drew on the knowledge and expertise of university professors and academics as well as resources from the Internet. I also visited an unemployment agency in Tangier, the Agence Nationale de Promotion de l'Emploi et des Compétences, for information about job placement mechanisms. Lastly, I conducted qualitative interviews with five unemployed post-graduates and implemented observation methods.

It was much easier to extract information from individual and personal accounts than it was from formal organizations. My overall feeling was that to benefit from information at European Union delegations, for example, or related non-governmental organizations would require more time than allotted. I found such contacts difficult to get a hold of and overall, unavailable. However, the true value of actually residing in the country of study is the accessibility to those very people my project seeks to understand. In my case, I benefited from the constant availability of jobless young people – the unemployed post-graduates protested almost every day in Rabat during my study time. It was similarly easy to access opinions among youth about going abroad because students are everywhere.

That being said, there was a found willingness among all my interviewees to participate – and by this I mean to fill out student questionnaires and/or speak about the topics of migration and joblessness, often from personal experience. No one declined participation and actually, I was amazed and pleased with how easily the Moroccan people and organizations opened up to me, not even as a researcher, but as a person. I am grateful to all of these students, academics, and agency employees because their information has been the basis of my work.
Unemployment in Morocco

Soaring unemployment is not a new grievance among the Moroccan population, but is instead a persistent problem that has improved in recent years. There were large unemployment spikes throughout the 1990s, eventually reaching 21.5 percent in 2000 (Lucas 2005, 57). Although a precise measurement is difficult to reach, the rate of unemployment as it stands in 2011 is at 9.8 percent, as estimated from 2010 data (Indexmundi 2011). Joblessness is particularly prevalent among youth, as one in five people under the age of twenty-five is unemployed, according to Guardian writer Giles Tremlett (2011). Moreover, university graduates represent another demographic that is by and large unemployed.

One reason for this lack of jobs is the absence of a strong and competitive private sector in which businesses can grow and flourish. Although the public sector has the capacity to employ people, give them a sizeable income and favorable working conditions, it can only provide so many jobs. As Souhail Karem noted in a Reuters Africa article on April 14, 2011, the unfortunate case is that there is a lack of transparency and monopolistic industries dominate. Thus private funders do not have confidence in the investment market in Morocco, providing an obstacle to growth in the private sector and disallowing the creation of jobs. As Karem points out, Morocco does not have the
resource wealth of other Arab states and therefore depends more on foreign investment to stem unemployment.

In characterizing the unemployment situation in Morocco, it is important to draw attention to one of the main problems with the country’s labor market: corruption. Bribery practices and officials not abiding by laws is one of the main problems in the Moroccan government. In fact, a main demand among political protesters is to end corruption, the main areas of concern being the judiciary, police, and hospitals. According to a CNN article by Martin Jay from April 19, 2011, this problem causes an approximate 2 percent loss in Morocco’s gross domestic product. Although corruption in the labor market is a smaller case in comparison to these main problematic areas, practices of buying one’s position for a high amount occur.

Because of the persistence of corruption and the general sentiment that people cannot acquire jobs without being either well connected or willing to shell out dirham in the tens of thousands, Morocco’s young and jobless (and perhaps, inspired after revolution in Tunisia) have been motivated to go out on the streets in protest. Having studied hard to achieve their degrees, unemployed post-graduate protesters believe they are deserving of jobs by qualification alone. They should not need to be connected or wealthy in order to work. The accessibility to work and provision of life for oneself and one’s family is precisely what North African protesters mean when they call for “dignity.”

Although it is common to find protesters who have been unemployed since they graduated from university, a decade of joblessness, as was the case for many, has not impoverished them. This is because the family support base in Morocco disallows members of the family from suffering in this way just because they have not found something to do with their degrees. While one’s quality of life varies depending on family situation, it is important to understand that long-term unemployment does not doom people in Morocco as it might in other countries.

Even so, the jobless face tremendous difficulties. “We study, study, study… and for what? Where is our job?” exclaimed one young woman who commutes almost every
day of the week by train in order to protest in Rabat. Frustrations of joblessness manifest themselves in a personal way, as seen by this example, as well as in relationships with family. Although the family is a support base for unemployed members, youth in Morocco are often not only responsible for themselves, but are also expected to eventually make money to support their parents, grandparents, and siblings.

In addition to this stress on personal relationships, joblessness also affects the degree of freedom people have. In particular for women, lack of their own source of money negatively impacts the power they wield within the family or in terms of independence. This could become problematic in cases of domestic abuse, for example. Additionally, many of the jobless youth spoke in interviews about living very modest lives, buying only simple and necessary items. They did not have the freedom to travel in Morocco, for tourism or to visit family. Characterizing their lives without jobs, those interviewed unanimously responded by saying life is saeeb – hard.

As the situation currently stands, the Moroccan government has attempted to respond to the demands of the protests, and finding opportunities to jobless youth has been a long-term objective of King Mohammed VI and his administration (CIA World Factbook 2011). The government has have offered public sector jobs to four thousand PhD students and created a task force, the Economic and Social Council (CES) with the mission of solving the problem of youth unemployment.

**First the Flight: people move to find work**

Wealth and the promise of jobs in Europe, the United States, and Canada have motivated mobility throughout the world in their direction, the case of Morocco being a prime example. In 2007, the number of Moroccans residing on the European continent was 2,837,654, a figure comprising 86.2 percent of the total number of migrants abroad. 100,000 reside in the USA and 60,000 in Canada (Di Bartolomeo, Fakhoury and Perrin 2009, 1). This large outpour of Moroccans into Europe and North America has in the past been a result of the lack of opportunity in-country and the belief that emigration can remedy economic woes. Historical trends emphasize how migration has been influenced by economic factors.

“Migration from Morocco diminished significantly with expansion in modern sector employment per capita in Morocco, and rose with both GDP per capita in the
destination countries of Europe relative to that in Morocco, as well as with employment growth in Europe” (Lucas 2005, 57).

Such data sheds light on what has motivated exit from Morocco. When there were jobs at home, people were less likely to exit; yet when returns in Europe were higher in relation to in Morocco, there was more emigration. As Albert Hirschman has stated, the choice of exit is an economic one.

Migration within Morocco: a Tangier case study

Although the common discourse on Morocco and its surrounding migration issues usually focuses on flight out of the country, the relatively high value placed on in-country job opportunities also contributes to migration within. Evidence of this type of movement that does not cross borders comes from the work of the unemployment agency, ANAPEC. Administered and funded by the Moroccan government, the National Agency for the Promotion of Employment and Skills (official title in French: Agence Nationale de Promotion de l’Emploi et des Compétences) was founded in 2001 and serves as an intermediary between jobless individuals and employers seeking workers. There are seventy-seven agencies throughout Morocco, but the organization’s work in the very up-and-coming city of Tangier sheds light on how unequal economic factors can influence migration among cities (or cities and rural areas) and not just among nations.

The ANAPEC in Tangier is unique among all of the others because of the sheer amount of job applicants and employers. Where ANAPEC agencies in other cities can serve clients with three or four counselors, the twenty in Tangier are not enough to satisfy all of the companies seeking workers. The situation is explained by the amount of jobs in demand that is so high that the agency cannot work fast enough to find people to fill all of these positions. For example, a company by the name of Delphi asks for one hundred workers every day.

Tangier is a very competitive city and large foreign investments, like from Spain and France, contribute to its growth. Just walking around the city, one can observe this growth, symbolized by constant construction, posters advertising a new shopping and entertainment center to come in 2012, the prevalence of upscale cafes and restaurants, and the sheer amount of people and cars crowding the city streets.
For these reasons, it is no wonder that most people who come to ANAPEC in Tangier are seeking work in Tangier. Although the organization has an international branch that places people in positions abroad, the increased development in this northern city has caused a significant amount of inter-country migration. ANAPEC is partnered with a corresponding organization in France called ANPE, together working to accomplish employment contracts internationally. Also, some Spanish companies ask for summer workers, commonly in strawberry picking. Despite opportunities to go abroad in order to work, the case of Tangier exemplifies an impetus to stay in Morocco to take advantage of its economic opportunities. As an employment counselor at ANAPEC stated, “people come from everywhere,” from cities all over Morocco in order to seek employment in Tangier. In this way, unemployment causes inter-country migration, perhaps before motivating people to seek jobs in Europe or North America.

**Effects of Flight**

*Brain Drain:* “Premature and excessive exits” of a nation’s most skilled and educated can engender a loss on the sending country’s best human resources or, in the jargon of economics, human capital flight (Hirschman 1970, 81). Often termed as brain drain, this unfortunate process can take a toll on a country’s capacity to develop because those who care most about quality are also the most likely to exit early when quality turns downward.

This paper defines the brain drain in Morocco as the emigration of the country’s most skilled and educated for the purpose of acquiring (a) a better education, (b) better job opportunities or work conditions, or (c) a preferred lifestyle. With respect to the labor market, Morocco’s degree-holders and talented workers are most concerned with quality and hence, deteriorating quality in-country, especially in comparison to nearby Europe, is a factor that leads them to exit. At the same time, these people are also the ones most equipped to influence solutions to the very problems that lead them to exit. They are the “most active, reliable, and creative agents of voice” (Hirschman 1970, 47). Where Morocco could benefit from their power of voice, it is disadvantaged when they choose exit.

*Positive effects of flight:* In spite of the problem of educated people leaving the country that educated them, the Moroccan case exemplifies benefits from skilled
workers and educated citizens residing abroad. For example, it is commonly known that people with education and skills, like in languages or a trade, are more likely to cross the border safely. In this way, research shows that the dream of Europe might cause people to seek education in higher numbers in order to better their chances of success (Egger, Hartmut, and Felbermayr 2009). Additionally, better banking systems emerge as people trying to send money home to Morocco call for their improvement. Better banking systems shed light on an interesting occurrence in which migrants, although they have already exited Morocco’s labor market in favor of a foreign one, still call for quality in their home country by voicing their opinions. In this way, emigration positively influenced the banking sector because it allowed for those most concerned with bank quality to speak out for improvements.

**Remittances:** A crucial way to observe the extent to which Morocco has benefited or suffered from the massive emigration of its people is to look at remittances. Remittances, or the money sent from abroad to Morocco (usually families), represent a significant portion of the country’s GDP, reaching nine percent in 2007 prior to the global financial crisis (MPI Data Hub 2007). Most of the remittance receivers are households “whose migrants are male spouses or brothers, generally have no education or only a primary level of education, but have paid work, primarily in Europe” (van Dalen, Groenewold, & Fokkema 2005, 383). If this inflow of money capital resulting from the outflow of human capital has positive effects on home community, then perhaps the brain drain as it manifests itself in Morocco is not so harmful.

**Remittances causing exit:** As Albert O. Hirschman has argued in his work, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty*, the choice to abandon a certain good is an economic choice (15). In applying his findings about consumer choice to decisions to emigrate, it is useful to examine how remittances influence migration behavior. As found in a 2005 study conducted in Morocco, households receiving remittances were twice as likely to express intention to migrate than were those living in “non-receiving households,” (fourteen percent compared to seven percent) (van Dalen, Groenewold, & Fokkema 2005, 386). This is a significant figure because it shows how migration choices become influenced by the experience of other migrants, with particular consideration to moneymaking opportunities. If people see a family member profiting enough from his job abroad to be able to send it home to Morocco, they have a greater impetus to also leave the country.
Findings
Hirschman’s argument referred to a readiness with which those most concerned with the quality of a given product exit a market at early signs of deterioration. In my study, I inquired about perceptions of quality among Moroccans pursuing higher-level education. Gathering data from questionnaires at Al Akhawayn University, a focus group at Ibn Tofail University and numerous informal interviews with students, I ultimately found that perceived differences in quality of education at home and abroad led people to exit for the purpose of degree-seeking; yet for the long-term, the factor of loyalty surfaces as a determinant of decisions to remain in Morocco.

In order to gauge students’ perceptions of quality, I first surveyed forty-five students from Al Akhawayn University, the top university in the country. The students’ areas of study were mostly in engineering or business, and the grand majority of those surveyed were undergraduates (96 percent).

The appeal of the West: superior education
One of the most significant figures I found was that 100 percent of the students planning to pursue a master’s degree plan to do so in the United States or Europe. It can therefore be deduced that among Morocco’s highly educated and perhaps most advantaged college youth, there is little perceived opportunity structure in terms of education. The exact same result was found among students in the English department at Ibn Tofail University in Kenitra, a public school in the city outside of Rabat. Although the focus group was limited in size – only four people attended – all of the students there shared this perception of superior academics abroad and consequently, planned to pursue their master’s degrees in Europe or North America.

Another group of Kenitra university students, however, gave an opposite response and declared instead that they will stay in Morocco for their master’s degrees. Mixed in gender and year of study, they shared the same major: sociology. Although they expressed plans to remain in Morocco to pursue their master’s studies, they attributed this reasoning to the excellent sociology education in the country. The quality education in this case is in Morocco. They were not tempted to go abroad for reasons of academics or otherwise.
**Reasons for studying English: migration not a motive**

Further evidence that perceptions of quality dictate the choice to emigrate (at least temporarily) is exhibited in the Moroccan students’ decision to study English. I had hypothesized that the choice of studying this language had some basis in future plans to integrate into English-speaking societies; however, student surveys, focus groups, and interviews revealed that English study was not motivated by migration.

One main and commonly stated reason was that English is the first language of the world. There is thus a perceived value given to the language that motivates the students to study it, rather than a general interest in English-speaking societies. Some of the other stated reasons were relevant to migration, or at least transnationalism, but they did not imply any intentions to use their degrees as a gateway to the West. Such reasons include the use of English in confrontation with foreigners (the tourism industry being one of the main fields in which graduates of English can enter), as well as “knowing the ‘other.’” In these ways, the English language, like all languages, provides a link between cultures. Lastly, speaking for themselves and others in the department, the students pointed to the general importance of studying a foreign language, and that the choice for them was between English and French. Many chose English because they believe the grammar is easier or plainly, they are better at it.

Among the Kenitra English students, I found a similar non-interest in integrating into European or North American society even in the presence of intentions to study there. Although, like the case at Al Akhawayn University, every student in the focus group expressed intention to pursue a master’s degree in the West, this made no implication for him or her about desire to emigrate. Their migration, therefore, will be temporary and for the strict purpose of acquiring a degree they see as more valuable than if pursued in Morocco.

The benefits of studying abroad in Europe or North America, as perceived by the participants in the study group include: acquisition of a degree students perceive to be superior for whatever reason, better chances of later career success, and the opportunity to master English. Importantly, these responses exemplify the students’ use of their planned study abroad as a means by which to improve their situation in Morocco, and not as any part of a future plan to migrate.
When I posed the general question of, “Do you want to eventually live abroad?” in an informal way to a table of English and Sociology students at Kenitra’s public university, the overall answer was a resounding no. “Morocco forever!” they cheered. I was slightly surprised by this viewpoint because it was a straight refute of the idea that all Moroccans want to emigrate, or the “Moroccan dream” about which I had heard so much in my prior study on migration in the country.

The overall opinion among these people and those in my focus group was that they might want to go Westward in order to study (for all the aforementioned reasons), but ultimately, Morocco is their country and they would rather work there than anywhere else. Rather than freely departing the home country in favor of better opportunities elsewhere, absent of any sense of responsibility to one’s home country, those surveyed demonstrated reasons to work in-country that amounted a sense of loyalty.

The faith that their university degrees will yield jobs is part of the reason for this observed “Morocco forever!” attitude among students. This is certainly the case among students at Al Akhawayn University, where students can feel almost completely secure that they will find work once they graduate. Yet even at the less-renowned public university in Kenitra, where post-graduation entrance into the labor market is not so secure, students overall expressed confidence that they will find work in Morocco – that their studies will pay off. At the very least, they plan to seek jobs in Morocco first and if need be, they will turn their sights abroad. Whether they should or should not feel like their future employment is secure, the surveyed students were confident that they will work in Morocco. Seeking work abroad, as they see it, is neither necessary nor desirable.

Before turning to analysis on “fight” and the ways in which people have confronted economic grievances by speaking out, I would like to qualify my conclusions thus far. In my findings, I do not mean to say that something new is happening here – that the enormous out-migration from Morocco about which we have heard so much is out of date or inaccurate just because I have found a clear desire among university youth
to stay in Morocco in the long-term. I realize that most Moroccans stay in-country and that it only takes a small percentage of the population to want to go live in Europe, the U.S. or Canada to make up the large numbers we see in these places today. We cannot assume that migration desires have changed just because I have not surveyed this percentage.

That said, my study is about what is going on in Morocco with regards to perceptions of migration. My results are thereby significant in what they reveal about the desirability of migration among young Moroccans pursuing degrees. This desirability is not neutral. It is not indifferent. These students do not hear my question, “Do you want to live in Europe or North America?” and respond with “maybe yes, maybe no.” It is a clear “No!” and that, as well as the reasons behind such a response, is the value of what I have studied.

It is ultimately this interplay of loyalty that determines the behavior choice of flight or flight. As aforementioned, university students, Morocco’s educated to-be, do not have the desire to live abroad permanently. In general, Moroccans are very loyal to their country, as can be seen most apparently in their resounding love for the king. Even in the current anti-government protests taking place across the country, it is rare to see anyone speak out against King Mohammed VI. As one student put it, “Everyone loves his country, but Moroccans love theirs more.” Whether or not this is actually true, any outsider can clearly view the strong sense of patriotism in Morocco.

In this way, the Moroccan emigration case supports Albert Hirschman’s assertion that where there is loyalty, exit is reduced. Because of the love of country, people want to return home even if they desire experience abroad in the short-term. Hirschman also mentions an internalized penalty of exit, which might also come into the cost-benefit analysis when people choose between fight and flight. Although there are no official penalties for exiting Morocco, and neither the government nor anyone else inflicts retribution on emigrants, it is possible that people feel a sort of pain in abandoning their country.

**The Fight: people voice their demands**

Morocco’s young and jobless face a situation of no exit and are therefore motivated to try to find jobs in whatever ways they can. In the current case, they are gathering in the
thousands to demonstrate in the streets to demand, essentially, better government. Although there are potential problems in the protesters’ proposed solutions to unemployment, especially for the highly educated, Morocco ultimately benefits from their fight.

**Barriers to Exit**

Perhaps many of Morocco’s unemployed would go to Europe, the United States, or Canada if they could. Oftentimes this jobless demographic is extremely qualified to work, but nonetheless faces a lack of job opportunities in their home cities and towns, and in their country overall. An appealing economic choice might therefore be flight, or emigration for the purpose of finding work, income, dignity, opportunity to support family members, and all of the other reasons why employment is so important to life. As evidenced by conversations with students and unemployed postgraduate protesters, they have in the past or might in the future entertain the idea of emigration to Europe or North America at least for the few years it takes to earn money.

*Money*: Despite the appeal of emigration for purely economic rationale, there are a number of obstacles the Moroccan people face to emigration that render such a prospect out of the question. The most prominent barrier is money. The cost of living in Morocco is much less than in the U.S., Canada, or the countries of the European Union. In an interview with one second-year university student, I mentioned that with his skills in English, he could apply for a student visa to go somewhere he wants to study. He responded,

“Of course I want to go to the United States, and my dad is rich so he could help me [do it]. But he left my mom and me when I was little and will not give me money to go. You tell me I can go to the U.S… but how?”

Similar attitudes about the first and foremost necessity of funds to travel abroad surfaced among unemployed protesters. The problem is simple: flight requires money and without it, emigration is not an option.

*The visa requirement*: Even if money were not an issue and people found a way to invest in their emigration – the idea, after all, is that they will soon make money in the new location – there remains the problem of the legality of border crossing. The European Union’s Schengen Agreement requires potential immigrants to prove they
have reasons to return to their home country, a policy with the effect of closing Europe’s doors. Difficulty in acquiring visas to places like Spain, the United Kingdom, France, Belgium and Italy is one of the main reasons Moroccans cite for not traveling to Europe for work, tourism or otherwise.

*Cultural barriers*: Other barriers to exit may be more internal. Through interviews and focus groups with students, I have gathered that barriers to exit include racism, culture shock, and the hardships migrants might confront as Muslims residing in countries where Islam is not the majority religion. Indeed, these fears parallel some of the reasons that unemployed demonstrators mentioned for staying in Morocco to find work. One interviewee, a female who has been unemployed since acquiring her degrees in English, said that she was offered the opportunity to work in the United Arab Emirates. However, there is a very negative stereotype of Moroccan women there and since the pay would not even be very much, she has chosen to remain jobless in Morocco.

Monetary limitations combined with official and self-imposed barriers therefore serve to prevent flight from Morocco, even in the face of poor economic conditions and high rates of joblessness. However, the way in which those most concerned with this problem have chosen to deal with it is with voice, which can potentially be a benefit to Morocco overall.

**Voices of Protest**

Many of Morocco’s youth have made the political move of voicing their grievances to the government in hopes of influencing positive change. In particular, young people who have studied in universities and possess degrees lead this fight and have organized themselves into a social movement. There are a number of groups involved, one of which is the Coordination National des Cadres Superieurs en Chomage, translated to the National Coordination of Unemployed Senior Executives, or post-graduates. All of the members have acquired a master’s degree or PhD and are organized into four different groups, which divide further into subcommittees.

*Goals*: The main goal is integration into public sector jobs. Because they are highly educated and therefore qualified, they
demand direct integration and do not want to have to take any sort of entrance exam before beginning work. They want to be taken into consideration in the 2012 recruitment for such public jobs, yet have expressed the demand to be given accountability. In the past, the government has made promises of jobs that it has not kept. If the king and his administration agree to incorporate these protesting youth into government jobs, it must report this decision to the media.

There is a strict delineation between public and private sector in terms of desired jobs. The National Coordination of Unemployed Postgraduates want only public jobs, which are perceived to be better in terms of working conditions, job security, and pay. The private sector is not viewed as secure. Indeed, there are valid reasons why people do not want employment in private firms. For the future, Morocco needs to improve the private sector, upholding certain labor standards and ensuring fair wages in order to most effectively open opportunities for the youth.

Besides this main and basic goal of job acquisition, the group of unemployed postgraduates has also called for general improvements in the labor market. From slogans during demonstrations and through interviews with several degree-holding protesters, I have gathered that the people want ministerial reform, an end to job discrimination and for the public, the government, and the media to not politicize their cause.

*Connection with current movements for political change:* The goals of the group of unemployed postgraduates align in many ways with those of the newer political movement, the February 20th Movement, which attempts to influence democratization in the Moroccan government through constitution reform. Although the movements are officially bifurcated, they aim to achieve many of the same goals.

One of the main reasons why people protested on the 20th of February comes from the problem of unemployment, as people called for jobs and an end to corruption and bribery practices in the labor market. A sign of the role of social media during the Arab Spring, many attribute a YouTube video to being a catalyst that brought people in masses to the protests on this important day. This video shows a series of testimonies from Moroccans about why they are joining the demonstrations. The very first testimony is from a young male and goes as follows (translated from Arabic):
“I am Moroccan and I am joining the protest February the 20th so I can get a job without protesting.”

Another statement relating to unemployment problems said:

“I am Moroccan and I am joining the protest February the 20th because I want freedom and jobs in this country” (YouTube 2011).

The video lasts just over two minutes, and continues to exhibit people of all age groups speaking in the same pattern (I am Moroccan and I am joining the protest February the 20th…) about their personal reasons for taking part in the anti-government protests. As the two statements above make clear, the political changes in Morocco and its slow but imminent democratization are fueled in some definite ways by the lack of job opportunity.

**Loyalty in the protests:** Albert O. Hirschman’s theory accounts for loyalty as a factor in a consumer’s decision to exit or use voice, asserting that when there is loyalty, the potential for exit is reduced. As evidenced by the barriers to exit by emigration, loyalty is barely needed to keep people like the jobless youth in the country. Even so, loyalty was found to play a role in the unemployment demonstrations and accounts for a main distinction between the political upheaval in Morocco and the demonstrations demanding jobs. The two social movements have varied viewpoints with respect to the king, as the February 20th Movement and others are willing to challenge his absolute authority. An *Arab News* article from March 10, 2011, reports that such political groups as well as labor unions and human rights groups have contested Article 19 of the Moroccan constitution, which gives the monarchy near-absolute power. My personal findings from interviews with unemployed postgraduate protesters as well as from observations of the protests themselves revealed that this group adheres to the camp that loves the king and would never question his authority. Contrarily, they rely on him to meet their demands and have faith he will do so.

The jobless protesters have a sense of loyalty toward the government even in an economic situation that seems to have failed them. An anecdotal example from an unemployed protester proves useful in understanding a probable basis of this patriotism. Despite his excellent foreign
education and years of work experience abroad, he has been unemployed since he came back to Morocco in 2010. A leader in the National Coordination of Unemployed Postgraduates, this man emphasized his group’s allegiance to the king by citing a leading tenet in Moroccan society: God, the homeland (translated by him as “the nation”), the king. These three entities comprise the very foundation of Moroccan society. To weaken any one of them is to detriment the country itself. This philosophy sheds light on the division between “voice” in the traditional sense which is primarily political, and how jobless protesters view their role in demonstrations – mostly economic in motivation. At the very heart of these protests outside government buildings is a loyalty toward the home country and the simple desire for employment in it.

**The Benefit**

While the policy result of the many protests for unemployment and an improved labor market is yet to be seen, Morocco has already benefited from the behavior of jobless youth, as they implement voice in a functional way to remedy their poor economic situation and improve the country as a whole. The unemployed postgraduates are arguably the nation’s best and brightest group and for reasons of barriers to exit and loyalty to their country, they remain in Morocco despite a dilapidated labor market. Their skills and expertise might under normal conditions lead them to exit in masses. When faced with the cost-benefit analysis of “fight or flight,” flight might win over as an easier option. Exit most often trumps voice (Hirschman 1970, 76).

In the current Moroccan case, however, unemployment grievances have not led to flight but instead to a fight: large and persistent demonstrations that make demands on the government. In this way, the people themselves are taking responsibility for the problems in their country and trying to influence change. Influencing improvements is a far more effective solution to the problem of joblessness. Moreover, as the country’s most educated individuals put pressure on the king and his administration to create jobs for them, they have also voiced demands for other much-needed changes in the government. As aforementioned, they have called for improved accountability, an end to corruption and ministerial reform. These are some of the most detrimental issues to the state of Morocco. Although real change has not yet come, these movements represent
the beginnings of political and economic improvement in Morocco and the inclusion of the population itself in this transition.

Conclusion

As it often does, economic has become political in Morocco as unemployment has motivated people to go out on the streets of Morocco, voice their grievances and fight for their demands. “Fight or flight” behavior in this case has been determined by barriers to exit and not necessarily by any decision making among the jobless. Loyalty functions as a barrier to exit and plays a key role in the decisions of students to stay in Morocco for work, and although it also remains strong among unemployed protesters, it is unnecessary as an instrument to keep people in the country because of the sheer difficulty and near-impossibility of exit.

The simple fact is that migration is not weighable choice in the cost-benefit analysis of “fight or flight” because these people, the unemployed post-graduates, cannot go abroad to find work. Albert Hirschman’s economic model of exit, voice, and loyalty is therefore disrupted by the reality that oftentimes Moroccans do not have the legal right and/or the necessary funds to simply exit in pursuit of a better labor market. Quite contrarily, they are stuck. Although there are inlets to the West, the mindset of the protesters is that Morocco is their country. This is where they should work. Even if finding a job in Morocco is difficult, employment in another country is not seen as a perfect substitute.

There hence arises a situation where an inability to exit Morocco’s labor market allows the people to influence solutions to their own political-economic grievances. Confronted with years of joblessness and forced to take matters into their own hands, Morocco’s youth have put pressure on the government to change policies, become more accountable, and better serve its people. Where flight might be seen as an easier option, the fight has more potential to make far-reaching gains. Whether or not the ongoing demonstrations will ultimately yield the sort of democratic, progressive, and equal-opportunity results to which they aspire, there is a certain benefit in taking the first step of responsibility for the circumstances in one’s own country.
Future research on this topic might want to challenge the extent to which barriers to exit dissuade migration. Many irregular, or illegal, migrants cross from Morocco into Europe, seemingly unimpeded by official barriers against it and the economic cost. Also, the question might be asked of whether or not barriers to exit are actual or only perceived.

Lastly, the government’s response to the demonstrators’ demands has yet to be seen. In order to gauge the true functionality of loyalty and tight barriers to exit as effective contributors to voice, it will be useful to investigate how much the protests influence real change.
Bibliography


Appendix

Student Questionnaire

1. What is your major? _____________________________________________________________

2. Do you study English?  ______ Yes ______ No
   If YES, write some of the reasons you study English:
   _______________________________________________________________________

3. Do you want to go to Europe or North America in the future?  ______ Yes ______ No
   If YES, why? (For example: studies, tourism, work, living there, etc.)
   _______________________________________________________________________
   If NO, why?
   _______________________________________________________________________

4. Do you plan on pursuing a graduate degree? ______ Yes ______ No
   If YES, do you plan on studying in Europe or North America? ______ Yes ______ No

5. Are you personally more likely, equally as likely or less likely to get a job in Morocco
   than in Europe?
   a. more likely;  b. equally as likely;  c. less likely

6. State your opinion on the following statement: There is more job security in Morocco
   than in Europe. ______ True ______ False

7. Do you support democratization reforms in Morocco?
   ______ Yes ______ No

8. With reforms, do you think the Moroccan government will be able to provide job
   opportunities for the people?
   ______ Yes ______ No