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Export Production in Casablanca, Morocco: How Declining Globalization Affects Emigration and Unionization

Producción para la exportación en Casablanca, Marruecos: cómo la globalización en declive afecta la emigración y la sindicalización

Kathryn Kopinak[1]

ABSTRACT

This paper assesses the effects of declining globalization on the emigration and unionization of export employees in Casablanca, Morocco. Ninety-two in-depth interviews (2015-2017) were analyzed using qualitative methodology. The supply chains of export companies which had facilitated emigration deteriorated over many crises. Emigration and the desire to emigrate declined. Many union gains were diminished or cut. Unions resisted greater precarity, fighting losses and/or making compromises. Sixty percent of interviewees rejected emigration. Unionized migrant men and women want to emigrate most, especially younger men, but unionized Casablancans were a close second. Non-unionized migrant men and women reject emigration most. This research helps to predict how emigration in the present and future will be influenced by the division of the world into new regional blocks replacing globalization. As a case study, generalization is limited, but comparisons can be made.

Keywords: 1. emigration, 2. unionization, 3. exports, 4. Casablanca, Morocco, 5. supply chain.

RESUMEN

Este artículo evalúa los efectos del declive de la globalización sobre la emigración y la sindicalización en exportadoras de Casablanca, Marruecos. Con metodología cualitativa, se analizan 92 entrevistas en profundidad (2015–2017). A lo largo de múltiples crisis, se deterioraron las cadenas de suministro que habían facilitado la emigración, y disminuyeron la emigración y el deseo de emigrar. Muchos logros sindicales se redujeron o recortaron; los sindicatos resistieron mayor precariedad, luchando contra las pérdidas y/o haciendo concesiones. El 60% de las personas entrevistadas rechazó la emigración. Quienes más desean emigrar son migrantes sindicalizados (hombres y mujeres), especialmente hombres jóvenes; los casablanquenses sindicalizados fueron un cercano segundo lugar. Los migrantes no sindicalizados (hombres y mujeres) son quienes más la rechazan. Aunque es un estudio de caso con generalización limitada, permite comparaciones y ayuda a anticipar cómo la emigración presente y futura estará influida por la división del mundo en nuevos bloques regionales que sustituyen a la globalización.

Palabras clave: 1. emigración, 2. sindicalización, 3. exportaciones, 4. Casablanca, Marruecos, 5. cadena de suministro.

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[1] King's University College at Western University (https://ror.org/00h3d0p13), Canada, kopinak@uwo.ca, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4535-1539

INTRODUCTION[2]

Morocco served as a labor migrant pool for industrial countries to its north (Massey et al., 2011). Many of the pool's participants work in export industries (EIs) which emerged in the nineties. This is a form of offshoring, i.e., the relocation of production over (a) national border(s). Companies offshore to increase their competitiveness. Wages are six to eight times cheaper in Moroccan EIs than in Europe (Mizuno, 2018). EI employees are often denied the right to unionize because their countries use them to attract international investment (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2014). This paper examines the effects of the decline in globalization on the emigration and unionization of Casablanca EI employees.

The focus is timely because offshoring, which is the "essence of globalization," has recently changed (Piatanesi & Arauzo-Carod, 2019, p. 806). The stagnation and decline of offshoring began with the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) starting in 2007 when risk aversion among investors increased. It may be less of an option due to international trade protectionism which has altered global value chains (Zahoor et al., 2023). The further deterioration of supply chains has been catalyzed by later events, among which are COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine, discussed below.

Theory linking multinational investment and emigration suggested that the buildup of transportation and communication structures across borders led to the international movement of employees from the areas receiving investment to capital's place(s) of origin (Massey et al., 1999). This formulation appeared in the middle of the free-market revolution which the West (the U.S. and its NATO allies) produced (Diesen, 2024). That economic era is over (Rubin, 2024).

The GFC led to organized opposition to globalization by Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS), whose goal was to remake the global financial order, trade and development. Many more countries have joined, and China has become more powerful among the members (Stuenkel, 2016). Morocco has a long history of neutrality, being an original advocate for the Non-Aligned Movement, but now must evolve diplomatically to adjust to new realities.

The recession caused Europe, Morocco's primary trading partner[3], to lose political and economic influence, while the BRICS demanded changes reflecting their growth and importance. Morocco became more attractive to European investors instead of more distant countries because it is in their sphere of influence. It signed an Association Accord with the EU in 1996 which moved toward free trade (Arango & Martin, 2005). Relocation of production to Morocco, or nearshoring, has many of the advantages of offshoring, such as lower labor costs, plus other benefits, such as quick delivery and reduced geographic, cultural and linguistic differences (Foerstl et al., 2016).

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[3] Trading partners from greatest to least are France, Spain, Britain, Italy, and Germany.

We are currently between world orders, with the majority of countries desiring multipolarity instead of the hegemony of one nation such as the U.S. (Diesen, 2024). Results of this study can help us predict what changes in the world order might mean for future Moroccan human mobility. The following questions are addressed. As globalization declines, what do unions do for EI employees and how does unionization impact emigration? Do EI employees continue to wish to emigrate? How was and is emigration accomplished?

Casablanca is Morocco's economic capital, its main industrial pole and is fundamental to its labor market. This research site provides an opportunity to study the impact of nearshoring on emigration. It is closer to Europe than many other offshore locations and is central to the golden triangle, which stretches from the southern city of Laayoune to Tangier in the north and Fez in the east (M. Chtatou, personal communication, 2017). The government has directed investment to the golden triangle, creating jobs and wealth there. The Greater Casablanca Region (GCR), located on Morocco's North Atlantic coast, is currently made up of the prefectures of Casablanca, Muhammedia and the provinces of Nouasser and Mediouna. As the most densely populated region, it has over four million of the country's 37.5 million inhabitants. More than half are under twenty, representing 13% of the national population.

It is difficult to find an exact count of industrial jobs in Morocco due to long term disagreements between the government's Ministry of Industry and the High Commission for Planning (HCP), an independent administrative body established in 2003 (Sylla, 2021). Manufacturing made up 11% of total employment in 2012 (Danish Trade Union Development Agency, 2018). In contrast, the informal sector (mainly unpaid agricultural work) made up 60% of all employment in Morocco (Sylla, 2023). The main sectors in free zones were textiles/garments/shoes (45%), electrical, electronic metallurgical industries (37%), services (7%) and agro-industry (7%). At the national level, small and medium textile and clothing EIs comprise 1 628 businesses with 189 000 employees (Idbendris & Debbagh, 2024). This represents 27% of all jobs in Morocco.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Europe actively recruited Moroccan immigrants during the French Spanish Protectorate (1912-1956). More went to Europe in the 1960s as part of guest worker programs (De Haas, 2014). Primary family reunification caused much emigration in the 1970s and secondary family reunification in the 1990s. Emigration to oil-exporting nations began at this time also. In the 1980s, unskilled emigrants went to Italy and Spain while the skilled went to the Gulf region, Canada, and the U.S.

During the GFC, structural conditions contributing to emigration worsened, with foreign direct investment being especially low in North Africa and the western Mediterranean in 2006, 2010 and 2011 (Elu Terán, 2011). Immigration to Spain declined in 2008 and 2009 but did not end. While receiving countries tightened restrictions to renew immigration documents and unemployment was high in unskilled jobs held by immigrants, some European countries simultaneously continued to compete to attract the best specialists and professionals. While Moroccans have been less likely to

go to Spain, Italy, Belgium and the Netherlands, new destinations have emerged such as Nordic countries, Austria and Switzerland, and Japan and Korea (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2017).

A team of researchers has contributed to the knowledge about the relationship between EI employment in Tangier-Tetouan and migration/emigration with data collected before the GFC. Hennebry et al. (2014) show that Tangier's EIs are an important part of a migration hub which brings together internal Moroccan and international migrants who seek to emigrate to the EU. Trinidad Requena et al. (2015) found that Moroccans migrated from interior locations where there was little or no work to Tangier-Tetouan, expecting to improve standards of living. In response to frustration by low EI wages, intense and repetitive work many emigrated using the EI indirectly. With the support of EI employers, they attained tourist visas, crossed the straight legally, used savings from their EI wages to get a foothold in Europe, and did not return except on vacation. Kopinak et al. (2016) showed that women employees of EIs preferred marriage to work outside the home. Moroccan women desired to emigrate due to insufficient wages but were inhibited from doing so due to restrictive gender norms.

Kopinak et al. (2019) demonstrated that EI employees in Tangier-Tetouan were motivated to emigrate when their skills were systematically downgraded to lower wages. Insufficient remuneration plus poor working conditions could not be rectified by unionization because employers fired employees when they joined unions. Barros Rodríguez et al. (2021) found a dual EI labor market, made up of internal migrants and those native to Tangier-Tetouan. The former, with families dependent upon their remittances, would work for less under miserable working conditions, while the latter were sometimes denied jobs, and were able to emigrate with the assistance of greater social capital from their families nearby.

Trade unionism in Morocco and neighboring countries is a relatively under-researched topic (Feltrin, 2020), perhaps because the country has a long history of repressing unions. The country's first union formed in Casablanca in 1955 and actively participated in the struggle for independence. Of the more than twenty-six trade union centers in Morocco, the largest in 2015 were the General Moroccan Trade Union (UGTM), the Moroccan Labour Union (UMT) and the Democratic Labour Confederation (CDT), with 750 000, 335 000 and 61 500 members respectively (DTUDA, 2018). Unionized workers are more likely to be present in EIs than in non-EIs. Foreign firms have more experience working with unions in their home countries. The majority of domestic companies are much smaller than EIs and family managed. In this region, stronger unions contribute to democratization (Feltrin, 2019). The Moroccan monarchy still has great discretion, having the final say on major policies and projects. However, unions and political parties restrict the King so he cannot totally disregard the formal rules (Chokri, 2022).

Delegates present company officials with complaints and claims concerning working conditions and employees' rights. Historically, company employees could elect each other as delegates. With the Labour Code adopted in 2004, this system can coexist with trade union representative delegates in companies with 100 or more employees. The Labour Code sets out a

scheme for collective bargaining with the goal of encouraging social dialogue, which is defined as all types of negotiation, consultation and exchange of information between representatives of employers and workers, and perhaps also governments (ILO, 2025). However, there are no collective agreements in EIs because companies wish to avoid formally recognizing the status of workers' representatives. Negotiations taking place between companies and employees usually terminate in the signing of simplified agreements "in the form of a report or agreement protocol." (Filali Meknassi & Rioux, 2010, p. 9)

The outcome of collective negotiations may be cancelled by companies' unilateral legal amendments, which the Labour Code allows companies to require of employees' representatives prior to an agreement. Filali Meknassi and Rioux (2010, p. 17) conclude that these labor relations have not achieved social dialogue because "contractual provisions remain essentially in the domain of company agreements." They identify the negotiation of agreements as developing towards a dual model, small companies selling to local markets and larger businesses with up-to-date human resource management that work with national and international markets. They suggest research on what happens in practice, which is the intention of this study.

Jima Bedaso and Jirjahn's (2023) review of the literature relating unionization and migration found mixed results, with some studies showing that immigrants had lower unionization rates and others that unionization differences were not related to immigrant status. Their own study in Germany showed immigrants were less likely to join unions than natives due to lack of workplace and societal integration. This is because immigrants have less information about the services unions provide, are less influenced by social pressure than natives and are discriminated against by natives. In Canada, immigrants who emigrated tended to have higher incomes and levels of education (Bérard-Chagnon et al., 2024). Among those with such high human capital, doctors, health sector managers and information technology workers were identified. It is noted that those occupations do not tend to be unionized.

METHODOLOGY

The data for this research were collected from 92 in-depth interviews of current and former export employees conducted between 2015 and 2017. Interviews took place in union offices, industrial parks, bus stops, interviewees' cars and homes, or wherever was most convenient for the participants. They lasted from approximately 30 minutes to one hour.

All had experience working in EIs, but many had lost jobs via dismissal or company closure. Although interviewers attempted to carry out individual interviews, participants were often with a fellow employee who added to answers. Sometimes the interviewee would ask the other person for help answering. In union offices, there were sometimes groups of people answering. This enriched interviews which were tape recorded, translated from Moroccan Arabic (Dariya) and transcribed. Interviews with more than one person were counted as one interview. Table 1 presents the characteristics of the workers interviewed in Casablanca.

Table 1. Characteristics of Interviewees in Casablanca by Sector, Unionization, Sex, Age, Education, and Level of EI Job, 2015-2017

Sector	*Men*	*Women*	*20-29 yrs.*	*30-39 yrs.*	*40+ yrs.*	*Education* [1] *0*	*1*	*2*	*3*	*Worker* [2]	*Administrator* [3]
Garments											
(U)[4]	9	15	2	4	18	6	5	11	2	21	3
(NU)[5]	6	6	2	3	7	1	3	6	2	7	5
Shoes											
(U)	7	4		6	5		3	7	1	10	1
(NU)	3	2	1	1	3	1	1	3		4	1
Electrical											
(U)											
(NU)	2	3	2	2	1		1	3	1	5	
Agri/Food											
(U)											
(NU)	4		3		1	1	1		2	2	2
Other											
(U)[6]	5	4	1	4	4			2	7	4	5
(NU)	11	11	10	11	1		1	6	15	15	7
Total	*47*	*45*	*21*	*31*	*40*	*9*	*15*	*38*	*30*	*68*	*24*

Notes: [1] Education: 0= no formal education (but some took a workshop), 1= primary, 2= middle, and high school, 3= post- secondary; [2] Worker: includes worker, technician, and mechanic; [3] Administrator includes head of line, supervisor, secretary, quality control inspector, manager, physician, and technical consultant; [4] (U)= unionized; [5] (NU)= non-unionized; [6] The largest sectors within "Other" are vehicle cables, call centers, aeronautic, services.

Source: Calculated by the author.

The sample consists of 47 men and 45 women. A higher proportion of women (23/45) had union experience than men (19/47). Among the unionized, there were four secretaries general and/or presidents. Regarding age, there are more interviewees at forty years and older due to the presence of older unionized garment workers (18), most of whom (15) are women. The mode for education is middle and high school (38), but this is only a little higher than post-secondary, graduate and professional schools (30). There are almost three times as many workers (68) than administrators (24).

This non-random sample differs from the overall Moroccan workforce in that it is more unionized, has a higher proportion of women, more older people and fewer people with no education. In 2014, the national labor force participation rate was 73% for men and 27% for women (Araji & Soto Iguarán, 2017). In terms of age categories, middle-aged cohorts (from 25 to 59) had a 60% participation rate. The participation rate for those with no education was 48.3%. Of all Moroccan employees, 23% are unionized (DTUDA, 2018). Indicators for Moroccan export employees show that growth in exports has caused a decrease in women's labor force participation

because export growth has mainly occurred in male dominated sectors which are capital intensive, unlike the apparel and textile sectors (Roche Rodriguez et al., 2025).

Qualitative methodology was used to understand what interviewees said. Sociological discourse analysis, as specified by Ruiz Ruiz (2009), guided the investigation on three levels: textual, contextual, and sociological. To code interviews, statements were labelled and interpreted sociologically, creating variables. This affected sampling, directing interviewers to others who would help round out the variables. These were grouped into themes (Ryan & Bernard, 2003).

RESULTS

A. Who Emigrates and How?

Many interviewees (13) had left the country before the interview. The most frequent reason (8) was European vacations, with another going to Mecca. One interviewee said that her employer held lotteries with the prize being funding for the pilgrimage. Two had worked abroad temporarily, one when he was studying there. Two had been sent to Europe by their EI employers for training. Several (7) had tried to emigrate but failed. Eight interviewees said they had wanted to emigrate when younger, but had not due to marriage, children, and male relatives disapproving. Almost all interviewees had relatives and/or friends who had emigrated. These people often communicated with interviewees, especially when they returned for summer vacation. There is a strong culture of migration in the country, where people have detailed information about emigration, even if they are not emigrants themselves.

Almost all interviewees said that emigration had greatly decreased with the crises. A 36-year-old man making electronics said: “actually, there’s nowhere to go[...] These are bad times [...] There is no illegal emigration” (8,[4] survey interview, May 18, 2016). A 33-year-old male shoemaker wanted to emigrate, but his uncle in Italy became unemployed and told him to stay home. (5) On the other hand, a 34-year-old-man working in cables said that young EI employees had been motivated to emigrate due to crises which caused their employers’ bankruptcy (15, survey interview, May 19, 2016). A 19-year-old female call center employee said that the majority of young people thought of emigrating because they would have more human rights abroad (73, survey interview, February 12, 2017). A 54-year-old male shoemaker said destinations changed:

> Now, they don’t go to Europe. Now they go to countries of the Gulf. We heard that Europe doesn’t have jobs like it did before, and there is not much respect on the part of the Europeans. In Dubai, there is a law, as in the U.S. [...]You work in exchange for a good wage. I know someone who went there with a contract that he bought. It was legal and he fixed his passport; It cost him 30 000 MAD [official Moroccan currency] and he works well and he brought his friends with him. (36, survey interview, May 21, 2016)

[4] All interviewees were given numbers.

Further evidence supporting this comes from Chtatou (2016) who says that many fathers and families encourage their daughters to migrate to Gulf countries to work as prostitutes. Before the crisis, men from the Gulf had come to Morocco for the sex trade; post-crisis, women followed them back. In 2012, there were 36 724 Moroccan citizens in Saudi Arabia and 15 935 in the United Arab Emirates (De Haas, 2014). Morocco is among the top 10 African countries sending migrants to Gulf Cooperation Council countries, with numbers increasing from 1990 (5 099) to 2017 (13 704) (Atong et al., 2018).

When companies send employees abroad for training, they help them get documents. It should be noted, however, that the larger sectors such as garments and shoes train employees locally. Some implied that EI employment had a social psychological impact on emigration. A 31-year-old man working in leather said "Maybe it [EI work] creates that idea of emigrating" (44, survey interview, May 19, 2016). A 23-year-old man working as an accountant's assistant in textiles said "Export industries facilitate emigration because one sees that they have better conditions than the other companies and one wants [...] the possibility of going to another country and working better, with a better wage, much better" (45, survey interview, May 19, 2016).

Other participants pointed to more material ways in which EIs facilitate emigration. A thirty-six-year-old man who worked washing jeans said:

> There are no companies which help to emigrate, but there are others that do not let you think about emigrating [...] There are some companies which work legally, and they take care of their workers, and they treat them well, so that they would never think of emigrating. And there are some companies which incite you to emigrate. (32, survey interview, May 21, 2016)

A 34-year-old male packer gave examples of how one could accumulate social capital.

> You can know other people. There are people who have contacts with other people, and they help them to emigrate. There are those who emigrate clandestinely, knowing people who drive trucks with containers. And there are those who had friendships with people who know of methods [...] to emigrate, and they pull it off. (41, survey interview, May 19, 2016)

These contacts may be in the migration industry. A 36-year-old man washing jeans said:

> Some companies that do not work legally [...] help in the process of emigration. There are people who [...] tend to be... responsible. They watch the company [...] and usually receive money from the unemployed person, to help them try and get them out of the country; They facilitate the process. (32, survey interview, May 21, 2016)

Others mentioned the acquisition of human capital in EIs. A 46-year-old man working in leather said:

> They possibly facilitate emigration because they train people to be able to do more abroad, if they have learned to do their job well and have golden hands [...] For example, if someone who has worked very well making shoes in Morocco goes to Italy, he could work making shoes there. (47, survey interview, February 5, 2017)

A 49-year-old woman in garments said: “because one learns a job and when you go abroad [...] they need you [...] you are now an expert [...] you know how to work” (68, survey interview, February 11, 2017).

Supply chains are central to the transportation and communication structures crossing borders which lead to the migration of EI employees to the countries from which capital comes (Massey et al.,1999). They include the delivery of materials to the manufacturer, the activities and technology used to make products, transport and marketing to the consumer. During the GFC, supply chains were severely cut back and sometimes failed due to rapid declines in orders. Supply chains used in globalization were dependent on just-in-time delivery, but this was hampered by the reduction in the number of truckers and warehouse workers who quit due to stagnant wages and poor working conditions (Moody, 2021). A 53-year-old woman working as the head of technical consulting in an Italian garment EI summarized some of the processes involved in her company’s supply chain.

> A client comes and gives you the terms and conditions of the product he wants you to make [...] He asks about the fabric [...] either the client provides their own fabric or you make the fabric [...] He wants this, and the other, and he gives you a table of measurements [...] We provide them with a budget [...] If they accept, the design phase begins. We cut [...] we start from zero until the article reaches the production line. (1, survey interview, November 25, 2015)

Once produced, quality is inspected. Merchandise passing inspection is packed, loaded onto trucks and delivered.

A 25-year-old man working as a quality controller in fishing said “when a company wants to present a product abroad, it sends someone from here to present that article. The company facilitates that person to travel and get to know another country” (56, survey interview, February 7, 2017). This is a clear example of EI employees utilizing the supply chain to emigrate. In this sense, the provision of transportation was often mentioned. “Because they export the jeans in containers [...] many people emigrated in those containers” (32, survey interview, May 21, 2016). Many interviewees spoke of truck driver contacts as intermediaries. Hiding in trucks was said to be less prevalent than previously due to the installation of scanners at the border. Trucks carrying merchandise are an important part of the supply chain. Scanners, however, serve as chokepoints in the supply chain for emigrants.

A 42-year-old woman who had worked in garments said: “when foreign personnel come to visit the Moroccan operations they can offer their Moroccan employees jobs abroad” (89, survey interview, February 17, 2017). This is an example of the contractor moving through the supply chain in the reverse direction of the products, which can result in the drawing of EI employees to capital’s origin. EIs provide social spaces where personal relationships can be used as bridges to other lands.

B. How Do Unions Support EI Employees with Declining Globalization?

A few interviewees reported that their union did nothing for them, or used to support them in making gains, but no longer did. Others said it depended on the union, since they varied. A young call center employee said he did not think unions defended people's rights because unions try to solve problems so both sides win and not by striking. "Owners can move to other places, which is happening in this sector, with many now opening in Senegal, or in the Ivory Coast [...] They flee there [...] if a union begins to demand or pressure the director or [...] owner" (95, survey interview, July 17, 2017). Senegal and the Ivory Coast may also be considered nearshoring. Senegal is on the Atlantic Coast of Africa, a 35-hour drive south of Morocco. The Ivory Coast is only a little more to the south. French is an official language in both.

Most interviewees said that the union helped to improve EI jobs. Unions help workers to win pay increases to the legal minimum, the SMIG, which many employees had earned less than.[5] They also work to improve wages above the minimum and ensure legally required pay for overtime. They convinced owners to give workers pay stubs, which are necessary for accumulating points to receive a pension in retirement. In some cases, they won many benefits, such as the recognition of seniority, transportation, a bonus to buy basic foods, social security, unlocked and untimed bathroom breaks, paid vacation, etc.

Unions also teach workers labor laws, the knowledge of which they used to fight back against cuts. They organize conferences for delegates and bring in foreign experts on labor relations and economics (51, survey interview, July 2, 2017 and 39, survey interview, May, 25, 2016). Some members felt connected to the world abroad via their unions. "The union is a project [...] which came to Morocco, and it is something international. We need it to improve the situation of all the workers" (36, survey interview, May 21, 2016). They provide social activities for members (e.g., clubs) and entertainment for workers' children on Sundays.

Unions facilitate dialogue between owners and workers and make it more difficult for workers to be fired. A 51-year-old woman shoemaker who was a delegate said that when they formed the union there were two waves of unjust firings. "The company put me on the list of people to be fired three times, according to what the union told me, three times on the list. And not only me. It was the union that helped me" (24, survey interview, May 25, 2016).

A 38-year-old woman working in pharmaceuticals who had been a union delegate for one and a half years said the union empowered women.

> We delegates should be all women, [laughs] [...] no? [...] This is the center where we meet with all freedom, and where we come to talk and claim our rights. It offers us time and information, things that we do not know. It guides us. We even have some mistaken ideas,

[5] The SMIG was 2 571 dirhams (MAD) a month in 2015 when the data began to be collected. At the time of writing, it had risen to 3 260 per month in the private sector.

> and the union corrects us about them [...] A while ago we celebrated Women's Day, and it was good. (39, survey interview, May 25, 2016)

A 48-year-old woman making wiring harnesses who was a delegate in her union said "We women make the union triumphant. The union has got us a lot" (12, survey interview, May 20, 2016). Many workers said that the union had eliminated supervisors who sexually harassed and inappropriately touched women employees. Another function of unions is to mobilize workers for public protests demanding better pay and working conditions. Most interviewees with union affiliation and many without had participated in such protests. This contrasts with protests for the Arab Spring in 2011, which almost no interviewees had attended.

Unions improve the treatment of workers, stopping the insults and bad language of owners and supervisors, so workers are treated with dignity. Disdain for workers, but not managers, was normal in non-unionized companies. A woman shoemaker said: "It was as if you worked in a farmyard, especially the bad language and insults by those in charge" (99, survey interview, July 20, 2017). When the interviewer probed to find out what the insults were, she would only say "They were insults prohibited in our religion." A 42-year-old female garment worker said: "The owner insulted all of his workers [...] he insulted our parents [...] he insulted God" (10, survey interview, May 19, 2016). In unionized companies, insults to workers ended.

The decline in globalization caused unemployment, underemployment and disruptions in remuneration. Many interviewees said that these were "hard times." A 35-year-old male shoemaker added unprompted at the end of his interview "now, always, always there is a lack of work, there is always a crisis [...] if they don't have enough to pay us [...] if the company is late paying workers, the union intervenes. The union intervenes when there is a problem" (31, survey interview, May 23, 2016).

A 34-year-old male shoemaker said that the majority of companies in Casablanca had closed and there was very little work (6, survey interview, November 25, 2015). His income had decreased in 2015 because he worked many fewer hours. He wanted to emigrate to Europe to fulfill his family responsibilities. The head of the technical department in a shoe company, a 39-year-old male, said that production in his firm had decreased in 2017 (92, survey interview, July 15, 2017). Five companies had combined into one and workers lost bonuses. He said that there were too many employees for the work they had, and that the workforce should be reduced. People who were interviewed in union offices had often come there for assistance. Many were looking for work and asked the union to help them. After his company closed, a 54-year-old man who had worked cutting leather for overcoats was unemployed for four months. "The union calls us and tells us it could help if we were here at the office" (35, survey interview, May 21, 2016).

Effectively unionized employees organized to reduce job loss caused by the crises.

> When the crisis came [...] we studied things, we got together with union offices. And we talked with companies' management in a form of solidarity [...] so that there would not be a reduction of personnel or a reduction of work hours. Things went well. There was a

> recession, but no companies closed in 2008. There were job losses in 2009, but companies did not close... Some workers got limited contracts... for a few months. Then they were let go. (12, survey interview, May 20, 2016)[6]

A decline in production caused labor conflict and sometimes increased affiliation to unions. A 49-year-old man in charge of the warehouse in his shoe company with 70 employees had thirty years' seniority. One day they were working normally and the owner told them the company would close. They would receive no severance pay because he had no money. He joined the union and became a delegate. Subsequently, the discussions began, and the owner spoke to the contractor in France, but the employees got nothing from the negotiations.

Thus, they stopped exporting. After three weeks, the owner brought in a judicial agent who asked them why they had stopped exporting. The employees said they would restart exports if she guaranteed their severance. She refused and went to the courts which gave a rapid sentence. The employees responded with a peaceful sit-in. Then security forces arrived: three all-terrain police vehicles, firemen, and an ambulance. A high-ranking state official came, and the workers spoke to him. The employees spoke to the Haj.[7] When the Haj saw what was happening, he said the employees would have an audience in the prefecture to negotiate.

The outcome was the creation of a protocol which said that the owner would not close the company and that the workers would continue working. The judicial agent asked who the delegates were and wrote down names. Four of the eleven delegates, including the interviewee, were fired and the owner said he would pay their severance. "But it wasn't only four of us who stopped the exports. She should have written down that it was all the workers, but she only wrote down four names" (27, survey interview, May 23, 2016). The four who were fired tried to convince the others to stop working, but they said it was not worth it for sixty-six people to be off work for only four others. The interview took place at the union office where the interviewee had come to get help with his severance pay, which he had not received.

In companies that did not experience such great upheaval, there was often a reduction in hours and personnel. A 46-year-old woman in garments who was a union officer said that her company did not have many employees because there was not much work. Instead of exporting, which it used to do, it subcontracted from other companies which still exported. This led to the end of hiring and overtime. Flexibility increased, with her and other "veterans" doing many different jobs within the company. In a dispute over holiday pay, the employees, with the union's support, settled for 50% because they knew the company lacked clients and money. "There are many companies that went bankrupt [...] There are bosses who closed and called their workers to negotiate with them [...] Others closed and left" (94, survey interview, July 16, 2017). A 48-year-old male shoemaker

[6] This interview occurred in a union office and several officers contributed to this quotation.

[7] An honorific title for someone who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca, but also a person of advanced age (60 +) as a sign of respect.

said that new companies tended to open in small garages and did not provide social security or other benefits (4, survey interview, November 25, 2015).

A 51-year-old male seamstress said that work hours and work weeks had been reduced. Holiday bonuses, such as 500 to 1 600 MAD for the Feast of the Lamb, were suspended. He and his family owned their own apartment because he did non-EI part-time work. A 53-year-old woman in garments said that their 15-minute afternoon break, which they used for praying, had been cancelled (21, survey interview, May 21, 2016). A 48-year-old male shoemaker said that due to the crisis, there was less work, and the company would only maintain workers they wanted, often non-unionized ones, and said they would call the rest. The union contested this and won. "Now all of us are equal [...] If there is no work, then there is no work for anyone [...] If there is work, then there is work for everyone" (4, survey interview, November 25, 2015).

As the crisis got worse, his company fired 250 workers with compensation and cut back hours for the rest, so they only worked half days from January to September of 2015, calling this a restructuring and reducing wages from 2 500 MAD/month to 1 000. His union was disputing this with the company at the time of the interview. They had also been given two partially paid vacations, in March and August. Beginning in 2015, a new government benefit was created, whereby 70% of one's monthly salary in the 36 months before unemployment was paid for up to six months.

A 42-year-old woman supervisor and quality controller in a company washing and tearing jeans said she and her fellow workers joined a union because they wanted their rights, e.g., to be paid the SMIG. They protested with the union and were fired. Subsequently, the company hired workers for six-month periods (10, survey interview, May 19, 2016). Temporary contracts became widespread. A 38-year-old woman making metal parts for planes said:

> We have hiring problems [...] the massive hiring of temporary workers [...] and that happens not only in our company, but in all [...] This is the new hiring system that we can see in Morocco [...] and that unfortunately represents a danger [...] for the labor stability of the workers [...] Now all the owners of the companies [...] when they receive many orders [...] they hire staff temporarily [...] and [...] that's it. When they finish the orders [...] they throw them out [...] Anyone who has a university degree and who works in a company on a temporary basis [...] once they see the opportunity to be able to live at a much higher level [...] they will emigrate. (97, survey interview, July 20, 2017)

C. Unionization and Emigration

Without the negotiation of unions, emigration has been a reaction to labor conflict. A 52-year-old woman shoemaker said: "Many emigrated in 2006 when they were fired. They got pissed off back then [...] because there was no union, and the situation was not good. Those who had patience stayed and those who didn't left" (67, survey interview, February 11, 2017).

To structure this subsection's analysis, interviewees were divided into categories based on unionization and migrant status, building on Barros Rodríguez et al. (2021) finding of the

importance of this to emigration. Groupings included: unionized internal migrants[8] and natives, non-unionized internal migrants and natives, and whether they wanted to emigrate. Frequencies for each category are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Unionized and Non-Unionized Interviewees' Desire to Emigrate by Migrant Status

		Migrants	*Natives*	*Total*
Unionized	Desire to emigrate	15	11	*26*
	No desire to emigrate	3	15	*18*
Non-Unionized	Desire to emigrate	7	4	*11*
	No desire to emigrate	22	15	*37*
Total		*47*	*45*	*92*

Source: Own elaboration.

As can be calculated from Table 2, there is an inverse relationship between union affiliation and migrant status, with more natives being unionized than non-unionized (26 vs. 19) and more migrants being non-unionized than unionized (29 vs. 18). The most frequent reason migrants gave for not belonging to unions was no knowledge of them and not having a union in their workplace. Others said they would get no benefits from unionizing. A few held negative attitudes toward unions, saying they only acted in their own interest and did not behave the way they should.

As for the desire for emigration of the participants, 60% (55) do not want to, while 40% (37) want to emigrate. There is an inverse relationship between unionization and desire to emigrate, with 26 unionized interviewees wanting to leave vs. 18 who do not, and 37 of the non-unionized not desiring emigration, but 11 wanting to go. Among both natives and migrants, the unionized have a greater desire to emigrate.

Those who preferred emigration gave socio-economic reasons: to develop one's career, get a better job, have a higher standard of living, get more respect, and have a higher status. Several wanting to leave had been unemployed for months or over a year and could not find work in Morocco. Cultural reasons were also given: that Europeans were good people and did not talk behind your back.

The most common reason for not wanting to emigrate was related to family. Many wanted to go but could not take their dependents (children/parents) with them or had male relatives who did not accept it. This was often mixed with the expression of nationalism and satisfaction in Morocco. The crisis in Europe was also mentioned several times. Furthermore, all union leaders and many of the delegates said they had responsibilities in Morocco and wanted to continue their union activity, with one saying she would leave her EI job if she could work for the union full time. Many of those interviewed in union offices said they would not emigrate because they were

[8] There were no international migrants.

struggling for their rights, e.g., to get full severance pay. In this sense, union involvement can discourage emigration because it engages people in Moroccan society.

This may also be true for electoral politics. A forty-six-year-old woman in garments who ranked her political interest as five out of ten said: "The last time we voted for the party that the union supports. When there is an election, we go to the (union) office, and they explain the ballot" (94, survey interview, July 16, 2017). When asked if he talked about politics with his friends and family, a 54-year-old male shoemaker said: "We talk about politics [...] and now that I am in a union, I have to know about politics" (36, survey interview, May 21, 2016). Almost all interviewees said that political parties did not defend workers' rights. "I am not in any party. I am a unionist" (39, survey interview, May 25, 2016). Interviewee 93, who was a union leader, said: "With the union there is less emigration because the workers have their rights" (survey interview, July 16, 2017). Examples of rights are raising wages to the SMIG and legal payment for overtime. He also said that improved wages and attaining rights would cause return migration.

> If you ask them if they would take the opportunity to return to their country, they will answer that if they give them a good wage, they would return. If they give them their dignity they would return to their jobs. If they give them all their rights, they would return to their country. (93, survey interview, July 16, 2017)

But some wanted more. An administrator who established the union local of the same central in his shoe company and was an officer in it said:

> I have a job but would like to emigrate because in Europe and the U.S, workers have their rights [...] Sometimes export industries facilitate emigration. In the case of a competent executive [...] sometimes the company with which they work can take advantage of their talents (by transferring them abroad). (92, survey interview, July 15, 2017)

To discover why the reasons were given for emigration preference, the categories were compared on sex and age to follow up on Kopinak et al. (2016)'s finding that women preferred marriage to work outside the home (see Table 3).

Table 3. Ages and Number of Men and Women by Category

	Ave. male age *Age range*	*Ave. female age* *Age range*	*No.* *of men*	*No.* *of women*
Unionized natives desiring emigration	39 30-54	47 38-53	8	3
Unionized migrants desiring emigration	38 25-46	43 34-53	10	5
Unionized natives not desiring emigration	41 32-48	48 44-53	4	11
Unionized migrants not desiring emigration	42 42	39 38-42	1	4

(continues)

(continuation)

	Ave. male age *Age range*	*Ave. female age* *Age range*	*No.* *of men*	*No.* *of women*
Non-unionized natives desiring emigration	28 36-37	24 19-28	2	2
Non-unionized migrants desiring emigration	23 23-27	35 27-42	5	2
Non-unionized natives not desiring emigration	38 25-41	37 23-48	3	12
Non-unionized migrants not desiring emigration	36 25-46	32 23-48	14	6
Total	*37*	*38*	*47*	*45*

Source: Own elaboration.

Men want to emigrate much more (53% or 25/47) than women (27% or 12/45). This is accompanied by an age difference, with men wanting to emigrate being younger than their women counterparts. Among the unionized, there is a direct relationship between sex and emigration preference. Male natives (8) and migrants (10) prefer emigration more than women natives (3) and migrants (5). Among the non-unionized, there is an inverse relationship between sex and the rejection of emigration, marked by migration status. Three male natives do not want to emigrate as opposed to twelve female natives, while 14 migrant males reject emigration in comparison to six female migrants.

DISCUSSION

Emigration occurs before and after unionization. A decline in globalization may lead to an increased desire to emigrate. However, EI employees may have fewer means to emigrate, since supply chains have deteriorated or disappeared. People are far less likely to go to Europe, the origin of most of the capital invested in EIs, as Massey et al.'s (1999) theory suggested and go to alternative locations such as the Gulf countries.

Some results concur with past literature. Interviewees saying that no political party defended workers' rights, but that some unions did, reinforces Feltrin's (2019) conclusion that unions contribute to democratization. This study supports the observation of Filali Meknassi and Rioux (2010) and M. Chtatou (personal communication, 2017) that there is dualism in the Moroccan economy. Very few of the interviewees had ever worked in domestic industries and evaluated them negatively.

We interpret the finding of this study that effective unions can exist in Moroccan EIs, even though this requires struggle, as a product of Casablanca's long labor movement history. This finding contrasts with the work of Kopinak et al. (2019) who found unionization impossible in Tangier-Tetouan EIs. Companies there were established more recently by government policy in a greenfield location. Unions already had a forty-year history in Casablanca when EIs arrived.

This study found that natives were more likely to desire emigration than migrants, as Barros Rodríguez et al. (2021) did. However, contrary to the findings of these authors, this study did not find that the reason for this difference was that migrants remitted to their families and natives had social support from their families. Almost all of the interviewees in this study gave their parents or other relatives money or gifts, according to their ability. They did so whether their families needed it or not, as a cultural norm. The finding here of unionized men being most likely to want to emigrate is interpreted in terms of their gender role as (potential) family providers. When EI employees have workplace problems, both men and women go to unions for assistance. But as Kopinak et al. (2016) found, women are more likely to prefer marriage than working outside the home. Women not only do work outside the home in EIs but also domestic and emotional labor, which may make them reluctant to emigrate. Also, unionized older women may be satisfied with the benefits their unions have won, or at least prefer them in lieu of emigration.

The insults and bad language used in non-unionized workplaces prohibit the achievement of social dialogue, which is a goal of Moroccan labor legislation. This explains Filial Meknassi and Rioux's (2010) assertion that social dialogue has not been achieved. Lack of social dialogue can also be due to types of engagement such as owners not accepting unions, firing or replacing employees, especially delegates.

Changes have occurred since the data for this study were collected (2015-2017). Morocco has become a key destination for refugees and migrants fleeing conflict areas in Africa and the Arab countries and could transform from a transit country to a destination one (Zaanoun, 2024). Post 2017, we might expect international migrants in the sample of EI employees. Moroccan unions have continued their activity, with a widespread general strike occurring in 2025, protesting the government's plans to reform laws regulating strikes and to raise the retirement age. To the extent that we have found unions integrating EI employees into Moroccan society, we might expect them to reach out to new immigrants.

Increased employment from trade has mainly occurred in male dominated, capital intensive sectors, leaving behind light manufacturing such as apparel, with a decrease in female labor force participation (Roche Rodriguez et al., 2025). Will such export jobs allow men to earn wages to provide for their families and women to specialize in the household? The Trump administration recognized Moroccan sovereignty over the Western Sahara in 2020, prompting Spain and France to increase investment there (Lovatt, 2025). Will this create more male dominated, capital intensive jobs? With Trump's return to the White House, Spanish news outlets have circulated fears that he may recognize Ceuta and Melilla, Spanish autonomous regions, as part of Morocco.

CONCLUSION

EIs indirectly facilitated emigration in several ways. Employees develop social capital in the form of contacts who can help them leave and human capital to get jobs abroad. EIs lead to some assimilation of Moroccan employees into European cultures and timetables. Such assimilation is more likely to occur within a geopolitical block where nearshoring occurs than in a competing one (Rubin, 2024), and Europe and Morocco are in the same block.

This research is limited by the fact that it is a case study and not generalizable. However, it could be compared with how the decline in globalization impacts emigration in other regions whose economies are based on EIs. The author suggests a comparison with parts of the northern Mexican border. It is predicted that a larger proportion of Mexican EI employees there have visited or emigrated to the U.S, before the decline in globalization.

Supply chains are constructed to produce goods, but they are also structures through which people can move. EI employees learn about their industry's supply chain and use it to help them emigrate, e.g., hiding in trucks, being sent abroad for training and to present products. When foreign personnel come to work at EIs, they can and do hire Moroccan employees and bring them to work in their home operations, using the supply chain in the reverse direction that the products travel.

However, with the decline of globalization, there are fewer supply chains to follow back to capital's country of origin, so that potential emigrants cannot use them as often to leave. This reduces the ability of EIs to facilitate emigration. The article's introduction noted that the GFC began the breakdown of supply lines in 2007; subsequently, this has been followed by other major events operating as catalysts in supply chain deterioration. Consumers caused a crisis in supply chains when COVID-19, beginning in 2020, led them to decrease purchases, halting in-person shopping and switching to buying online.

The proxy war between the West and Russia in Ukraine, starting in 2022, led to unprecedented sanctions which restructured world trade. This caused inflation, especially in the cost of food and energy. Spikes in energy costs caused a second recession in the Eurozone starting in 2022 (Rubin, 2024). Particular to Morocco is the Haouz earthquake of 2023 with shaking and fatalities in Casablanca. This, with the long period of drought, prompted the increased transfer of population from rural to urban areas and abroad. This might be considered a polycrisis, in which independent crises influence and exacerbate each other.

The West is now in economic and political conflict with the BRICS alliance. These mounting tensions have led to "friendshoring," i.e., trading with allies (Rubin, 2024, p. 48). King Mohammed VI has repositioned Morocco's diplomacy to adopt a policy of multi-alignment in a world shifting from unipolarity to polycentrism (Hzaine, 2024). Morocco is a preferred trading partner with European nations and also growing closer to the U.S. While membership in the BRICS would offer Morocco advantages, it will also present risks, such as a loss of Western investment. And as for the rumors that Morocco had made a bid to join BRICS in 2024, they were denied (Faouzi, 2024).

Nevertheless, South Africa explicitly opposed Morocco joining BRICS due to longstanding conflicts.

If European economies recover, nearshoring of export production to Morocco would continue and perhaps increase. This will encourage the drawing of migrants from within Morocco to its industrial poles, who may then want to emigrate to improve their lot further. But Europe's recovery is by no means a certainty at the time of writing. Labor and skills shortages are on the rise in all EU states (Directorate-General for Communication, 2024). With Morocco included in this economic block, it will be expected to continue to deter irregular emigration, especially from other African regions, as it has in the past. But emigration facilitated by EIs should continue with economic recovery. While other research has identified Tangier as a migration hub, this analysis points to the expansion of such a region to include Casablanca. This is the southern part of the regional block constituting Europe and northern Africa.

The world is in a period of interregnum (Diesen, 2024), with new directions dependent on future economic and political events. Some analysts argue that there is a new era of globalization whereby increasing protectionism is simultaneously accompanied by deeper trade integration and international cooperation (World Bank Group, 2023). A rise in protectionism would encourage nearshoring. To the extent that multinational investors return to or get closer to their country of origin, their impact on long distance emigration declines, but it may not deter emigration from closer areas. Those staying behind may be more likely to unionize.

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