

Baseball Nationalism from “the South:” Dominican Baseball and the Use of Nationalist Rhetoric

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Abstract: Sport and expressions of nationalism go hand-in-hand. In looking at political and cultural relations between the global North and South, we have to see them as iterations of centuries of ruthless extraction of human toil and resources by wealthy European and American overlords. But, in the sanitized language of contemporary international sporting bodies and their corporate presentation of self it is difficult to see the neo-colonial relations at work. They continue, however, just below the surface. This study of the relationship between Major League Baseball and the Dominican baseball scene looks at the continued efforts of the former to “mine” talent as cheaply as in that past. In the face of growing power and resistance from below, however, American hegemony that operates so successfully in other areas of Dominican economy and culture, are, in this sport being challenged. I show how an unregulated sector of the Dominican baseball world has wrested control of young talent and is attempting to change the power dynamics in the sport. There are other political and economic changes –some planned, and others unintended going on as well, and they all indicate growing Dominican presence couched in the nationalism of resistance.

Key words: Theory-from-the-South, political-economy, commodity chains, *buscónes*, unintended consequences.

Resumen: Los deportes y las expresiones de nacionalismo van juntos. Al fijarnos en las relaciones políticas y culturales globales entre el Norte y el Sur estamos obligados a ver las repeticiones históricas de siglos de extracción del trabajo y recursos humanos por los ricos caciques americanos y europeos. Pero es difícil ver el funcionamiento de las relaciones neo-coloniales en el lenguaje aséptico de la relaciones internacionales de las organizaciones deportivas y sus presentaciones corporativas; continúan, sin embargo, justo bajo la superficie. El estudio de las relaciones entre la Liga Mayor de Béisbol y la situación del béisbol en la República Dominicana se fija en los esfuerzos continuados de la primera para “minar” el talento de una forma tan barata, como ya sucedió en el pasado, pero enfrentándose a un poder de resistencia de abajo cada vez mayor. Sin embargo, ante este poder y la creciente resistencia que viene de abajo, la hegemonía americana, que funciona con tanto éxito en otras áreas de la economía y

la cultura dominicanas, se ve cuestionada a través de este deporte. En este artículo se hace evidente cómo un sector no regulado del mundo del béisbol dominicano se ha hecho con el control del talento joven y está intentando cambiar la dinámica de poder de este deporte. También están ocurriendo otros cambios políticos y económicos —algunos planificados, otros no buscados— que indican una acentuada presencia dominicana que se expresa en el nacionalismo de la resistencia.

Palabras clave: Teoría desde el Sur, economía política, cadenas de las mercancías, buscones, consecuencias no buscadas.

Nationalism in Dominican baseball is commonplace yet unique. As we see every four years in the World Cup and the Olympic Games, sport and nationalism fit easily together. Dominican baseball offers us a closer look at nationalism to show that it is linked to agency and opportunity. In my analysis, I show that nationalist discourse is a primary weapon used by a group of Dominicans who develop players (*buscónes*), and who have gained control of the nation's supply of young, unsigned talent. This has come about in the face of every effort by Major League Baseball (MLB) to undermine these people and return Dominican baseball to a neo-colonial relationship. A political-economic analysis allows me to detail the transnational system that has emerged in finding and developing players for MLB. While there is a system at work, unintended consequences occur when individuals and groups try to gain access to a system that either excludes or seeks to control them.

In my examination of Dominican baseball, Jean and John Comaroff's ("Theory") treatment of "Theory from the South" provides a valuable framework. For the Comaroffs, "... 'the Global South' assumes meaning by virtue not of its content, but of its context, of the way in which it points to something else in a field of signs — in this instance, to its antinomy to 'the Global North,' an opposition that carries a great deal of imaginative baggage congealed around the contrast between centrality and marginality, kleptocracy and free-market democracy, modernity and its absence" (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2012). In this iteration, the "Global South" lends itself to a form of nationalism that is relational. It is also the descendent of earlier theories. Call it: Dependency Theory 3.0; Imperialism revisited; neo-colonialism surgically augmented. What I mean is, that for almost 500 years scholars have been studying North-South relations as they have morphed into ever more nuanced systems, but the essence is unchanged. It is a relationship founded upon and fueled by the unquenchable thirst for resources, labor, and riches by those more rapacious from those less able to stop them.

Until fairly recently the Global South has born this burden inaudibly. I say “inaudibly” rather than mutely because we in the North rarely hear of their resentment or about their responses unless it requires military intervention. But on the streets, and in homes and shops of the developing world it is expressed daily, audible to all. In using the notion of ‘theory from the South’ we are centering our examination at the local level-adopting the vantage point of the subaltern, and extending the notion of “grounded theory.” In this way, “Big Theory” is appropriate because it gets retrofitted so that every norm, rule, pronouncement etc. is translated from the language of the dominant into back alley speak (Scott 2012).

For Dominicans, just about everything is filtered through their relationship with the US, prompting the oft stated quip, “Americans cough, and we get pneumonia.” Despite the US coming into the country after the Spanish, Haitians, and Cubans, American domination has been the most thorough going. The Dominican Republic (referred here also as DR) would have been an American protectorate had the American Congress swung a few more votes in that direction when Dominican President Buenaventura Baez in 1869, lobbied the US Congress to officially annex his country. President Grant supported him, and the measure was only narrowly defeated. That willingness to become an extension of the US gained traction by the chronic indebtedness of the Dominican government, a situation that in 1903 allowed the American owned San Domingo Improvement Company to take over the administration of the Dominican Republic’s national customs revenues as security on the loans taken. The Roosevelt Corollary in 1904 (furthering the Monroe Doctrine), many argue was directly targeted at the DR. Two US military occupations (1916-24; 1965-66) followed. The result of all this is that American control and Dominican acceptance of it has gone unchallenged. One of the only exceptions to this has been developing in the relationship between Major League Baseball (MLB) and the Dominican baseball world.

The following is a sport study of baseball in the Dominican Republic, but it is built upon a contest for political and economic control over Dominican baseball resources of their sport. American enterprises operating in places such as this are accustomed to foisting their laws and conventions onto others. The relative civility in political and legal transactions often mask unbending economic goals that Americans bring to the table. For the most part, Americans go unchallenged, but when confronted it is often in nationalist terms. What I am arguing for in this

examination is that discourse, while dramatic, without the requisite economic power is empty.

What's been called "Third World nationalism" in post-colonial studies is very different from the kind of nationalism witnessed in the developed global north. The latter, assumes its preeminence, seeking to promote, defend, regain, and extend it. Third World nationalism, on the other hand, seeks the birth of its power, not usually an extension of it. Third World nationalism seeks sovereignty: to ensure that identities of Third World peoples are authored for the most part by themselves, not colonial powers. But, because post-colonial nations continue to "dance with the devil," with their partners in the north, nationalism is forever being honed and made ready for use to resist foreign influences. Nationalism from the South is a language of outrage and is always expressed in relation to the alien host. Evo Morales', for instance, nationalized Bolivian lithium production, an act that was framed in zero sum language. Bolivia rises to the degree that multinational corporations fall (Revette 2016). There's a language for that that is informed by both indigeneity, and indignation. Dominican baseball is no different, and has long been a conduit for nationalist sentiment; and as the economics of the game became more contested, feelings of nationalism grew more overt and bold. Dominican baseball is built around its tendentious relationship with Major League Baseball (MLB), a relationship that officially goes back over 65 years. In its essence, American baseball interests have operated with the same arrogance, lack of local awareness, and expectation of compliance as other US interests. As a result, Dominicans use of nationalist rhetoric and discourse is not born out of convenience, rather it is essential—crafted out of common experience, and shared understanding of the foreign presence in their country.

Political-Economy and Nationalism of Dominican Baseball

Early Dominican Baseball

Baseball was brought to the DR during the last decades of the 19th century by Cubans looking to escape the wars for liberation in their country. Cuban brothers Ignacio and Ubalde Alomá immigrated to Santo Domingo in 1880 to ply their trade as ironworkers. By 1891 they began playing their game with teams made up of compatriots and a handful of Dominicans (Ruck, 1999: 5). In the interior, another Cuban, Doctor Samuel Mendoza y Ponce de León established the game

at La Vega at about the same time as the Alomás. Dominicans took to the game quickly, playing it in both the Capital (Santo Domingo), and rural sugar refinery towns, played among the educated elite as well as working poor. Baseball rooted quickly, perhaps in part because there wasn't much of a sports pantheon in place. For the children of the elite in the Capitol it was a sporting tradition based on modernity and leisure that may have driven them. In the countryside, it was a diversion from hard labor of cane cutting that fueled their desire to play: that, and being rewarded by refinery managers (with time off) for beating a neighboring refinery. Large fan bases, local heroes, loud rivalries and lore soon followed (Ruck *ibid.*; Klein 1991).

The first decades of the 20th century saw Dominicans take on foreign teams, but while well attended, these games generated only minimal nationalist expression. The occupation of the Dominican Republic by the US Marines from 1916-24, on the other hand, was a lightning rod for Dominican nationalism. Fellito Guerra was highly acclaimed for what he did on the mound, and as a patriot for what he didn't do there. After he dominated teams from Cuba and Puerto Rico his reputation led to him being sought after by American teams to play for them. He loudly refused them however, citing as the reason his opposition to the occupation of his country by the US Marines. For that very public decision, Dominican crowds hailed him wherever he went as their hero and patriot. (Klein, *ibid.*: 20) Enrique (El Indio Bravo) Hernández was another stalwart who pitched for Nuevo Club in the teens and 1920s. His luster grew exponentially when he repeatedly beat American teams from the U.S. Navy, in particular a no-hit, no-run game against a team of Americans from the Navy cruiser, Washington. These victories took place two years before the Marine occupation, but grew to legendary proportions once the Marines landed. During the U.S. Marine occupation contests between Dominicans and U.S. occupying forces continued but took on hostile tones. A 19-year-old Francisco Rodríguez, playing for the legendary Licey team, prompted all of the DR to rejoice when his home run in the ninth inning tied the score (Licey would go on to win in the 10th) against a team of U.S. Marines. The Marines had dismissed the Dominicans as, “Champions of nothing,” which when leaked into the Dominican press, further enflamed hatred of the U.S. forces. Nationalism and resistance were twin strands not easily separable. The Occupation gave rise to a guerilla war in the eastern provinces, but sporting contact led to as great or greater local interest because the meta-warfare that comprises baseball was translated easily

into publicly performed spectacles of resentment: baseball nationalism as “engaged acrimony” (Klein 2017).

The Modern Era

Though both are built on resentment, the early expressions of nationalism in the game are quite different from what we have occurring in contemporary Dominican baseball. The game’s structure has changed completely from the early 20th century, and significantly from 1954, when the first Dominican, Ozzie Virgil got to the Major Leagues. In both of those eras there was no meaningful North American presence on the island. Back then, racial desegregation in baseball had only begun, and Cuba had for some time been an established center for Latin talent for major league teams. After the Cuban Revolution, and certainly once the Cuban Blockade was in place interest shifted slowly to the DR and Venezuela. Until the 1970s, however, Dominican prospects and player development was haphazard. (Klein 1991). “Bird dogs,” part time Dominican scouts, would alert any American scouts they knew if they saw someone of interest. Only a few teams heeded these calls enough to send someone to Santo Domingo to casually watch a player. MLB created a “working agreement” with Dominican baseball throwing a few coaches their way in exchange for using professional teams down there as repositories for anyone they wanted to develop in the off season. They forced Dominicans to play their game in the winter to accommodate MLB’s summer season— a clear indication of how little was thought about Dominican: “But, through the 1970s, increasing numbers of Dominicans were beginning to shine the major leagues,” and the first modern attempts to systematically “mine” players were established. They are called “baseball academies,” and initially they were crude, foreign outposts, relatively unconnected to U.S. operations. Their function was to sign Dominican players to professional contracts, and to develop and store them until they could be sent to play in the U.S.

The Los Angeles Dodgers and Toronto Blue Jays developed the first iterations of the baseball academy in the mid-to-late 1970s. Dodger head scout in the DR, Ralph Avila, worked tirelessly to build an infrastructure and relations between his upstart academy comprised of rented fields, a pensión, and part— time coaches, and established Dominican organizations (Dominican professional teams). He also worked to insulate his players as much as possible, removing them from other influences so that he might be able to give them the skills needed. In time, he convinced ownership to invest in the future, and Campo Las

Palmas was built in 1986, for the then extravagant sum of \$400,000. It would be the state of the art facility for the next 15 years, and seal Avila's legacy as a pioneering force in Dominican baseball. Avila's aim was to protect Latin players who would have to journey abroad and face the daunting tasks of functioning in a foreign setting without the use of language, while continuing to develop and excel at baseball. Many baseball prospects failed miserably when sent to play in the U.S., not because of lack of skill, but because of culture shock. The academy he conceived of could deliver the language acquisition, cultural remediation, and baseball instruction. For the next few decades Campo Las Palmas did this better than any team in baseball. They had dorms, a cafeteria, medical care, full-time coaches, and two fields. Those who signed with the Dodgers were treated in ways that Dominicans rarely were— as professionals, traveling in style, meticulously uniformed, and seen by the rest of the country as baseball royalty.

Major League Baseball and its teams were by the late 1990s more firmly in control of Dominican baseball than ever before. All facets of the game (amateur and professional) were more strictly under control of MLB, a sober fact relayed by former Dominican Baseball Commissioner Luís Rosario, whose office is little more than a rubber stamp for MLB's requirements, “This office should be able to defend cases, but...[MLB] is a monopoly, and it's their monopoly. They're the ones who govern the business and make the rules of the game. Those people take advantage of [our] poverty” (Klein 2014).

Unintended Consequences

But Avila's academy would become part of something much more ambivalent. Unintended consequences, of the sort that Robert Merton wrote about would come to both heighten MLB's influence and then to erode it. I will show, below, that the unintended consequence of the success of the baseball academy would allow a sector of Dominicans to emerge who would confront MLB, but first the academy system would blossom. The success of the academy system led to more teams replicating what the Dodgers had done, and that in turn, led to increased competition, more money being poured into baseball development. The economic attention being lavished on Dominican baseball by the 1990s meant that young players were increasingly scrutinized, and interfered with. Practices that Dominicans had forged during the decades that they were being ignored would now be subject to major league interference. I've examined this in terms of a “global commodity chain,” model, as

part of a neoliberal political-economic system that seeks to extend its domination (Klein 2012).

Something went awry. As the numbers of Dominicans in the MLB pipeline mushroomed, younger players who worked their way up the amateur ranks of Dominican baseball began to bypass these local leagues and head straight for the academies asking for tryouts. In the late 1980s, I watched larger, and larger groups of youngsters (14-17 year olds) gather in front of the gates of Campo Las Palmas waiting to be let in for a tryout. If this trend continued it would, I predicted, impact the structural integrity of Dominican baseball, "...the organizational presence of baseball academies run by major league franchises in the Dominican Republic has fundamentally undermined the long-standing sovereignty of Dominican baseball" (Klein, 1991: 158). Without a steady flow of youngsters, the amateur leagues would wither, but the Dominican professional teams would be hurt as well. They had been a feeder system for professional players in the DR and even American minor leaguers to hone their skills in the winter. The academy system hurt professional Dominican ball when it established its own league: the Dominican Summer League (DSL). The DSL used its own players (all signed rookies), and in short time grew to include all 30 major league teams, and upwards of 1000 young signed professionals. The academy system would in time short-circuit the flow of talent that had fed major league teams, but by 2000 MLB was large and in charge. A chain had developed better linking all parts of the Dominican Republic with major league teams in North America.

- (1) Major League Baseball.
- (2) Minor League Baseball.
 - AAA baseball;
 - AA baseball;
 - A baseball;
 - Rookie Leagues.

North America

Dominican Republic

- (3) Dominican Baseball Academies.
 - Dominican Summer Leagues.
- (4) Developing Unsigned Young Players and Signing them with Teams.

Everything was predicated on keeping the flow of talent (#4 in the chain, above) coming and this piece of the chain was the only part not directly controlled by MLB. As noted, the weakening of Dominican amateur baseball threatened the flow. A stratum of unaffiliated part-time scouts emerged to fill this void. The *buscón* (Spanish *buscar* for one who searches) was the name they got. It was now these people upon whom major league baseball depended for young prospects.

The numbers of Dominicans had grown with each decade: 22 in the 1960s; 38 in the 1970s; 65 in the 1980s; 133 in the 1990s; 280 in the 2000s. At present, there are more Dominicans on Opening Day rosters in any year than there were during the entire decade of the 1980s. Hundreds of Dominicans play in the US Minor Leagues, and over a thousand in the Dominican Summer League that MLB also tags as a Minor League. Because of their position at the base of the chain, *buscónes* were taking a commanding position, and they were affecting the way North Americans were doing business in the DR. As Dominican players became the game's most elite players signing bonuses began to skyrocket. Until roughly 2000, teams almost never paid more than \$10,000 for a player (Hall of Fame pitcher Pedro Martínez signed for \$7500 in 1988), but with increased numbers and rising excellence players were, by the late 1990s, beginning to command six and even seven figures. The profitability of MLB was being impacted. "Signing on the cheap," (the euphemism for signing Latin American players) was being threatened, and the owners demanded that cost of talent be returned to what it had been. *Buscónes* were responsible for this. They were growing into full service operations. They found players, housed and fed them, cared for their families, and developed them for years before parading them before major league scouts. For this, they get a 30% commission of signing bonuses. Their indispensability, as the only men capable of securing the mushrooming numbers of young players now needed, was the source of their increased numbers and power. Their emerging power was an unintended consequence of the academy system that saw them as anathema.

The *buscónes* were targeted by North American baseball as harmful to the game, and with the assistance of the North American media, MLB began depicting *buscónes* as Dickensian criminals, as in an ESPN Magazine piece, "A decade of scandals has spawned a sequel, a horror movie beset with villains called *buscónes*: middlemen in a festering, corrupt hellhole who lie about players' ages, keep them out of school, inject them with animal steroids, then take most of their signing

bonuses...” (Arangueré and Cyphers, 2003: 23). The term “Buscón” always had a connotation of being a swindler, and MLB pushed it. This characterization had the effect of painting all Dominicans in negative fashion however, “It always seems like it’s something in the Dominican [Republic]. Every year there is a new story, new problem or new controversy,” declared writers for *Baseball America* (Manuel and Kline, 2005: 3).

In demonizing Dominicans, we see how “theory from the South” works. Americans inability to grasp just how difficult it is for people in the Global South to “play by the rules,” furthers a view of the inferiority of the developing world. In the developing world, however, the infraction committed is not seen as a moral failing, but rather as an ethically rationalized choice fueled by caring for one’s family. Consider the following, “During the World Series my friend who scouts for the [major league team] got free tickets from the club because he works for them. He sold them for \$2000, and when the team found out they fired him. [They said] he did something illegal. He said to me, ‘What am I gonna do? I could feed my family for three months with that money’ (Klein, 2014: 130). Northern rules are outweighed by the Southern morality of family.

Age and identity fraud is far and away the most frequently committed offence. An especially evocative case of this is that of a former Little League pitcher named Danny Almonte. (Klein, 2008; 2014). In 2001, Dominican Danny Almonte, had recently arrived in the Bronx and played on the local Little League team made up primarily of other Dominicans. That year, as a 12-year-old he threw the first no-hitter in 40 years of Little League World Series history, and Danny became a media darling. He followed that performance with two more overwhelming pitching performances, allowing only three hits in three games. In the media clamor, however, it was discovered that Danny Almonte was actually 14, a full year older than the rules allowed. His team was stripped of its victories, and the public soured on him. The case quickly became a flashpoint for nationalism.

The American media and public looked to fix blame, and it quickly fell on his parents. From the vantage point of the Global North, manipulating children in this way was a travesty, “.... adults have used Danny Almonte in a most contemptible and despicable way,” declared New York Times reporters (McFadden 2001). Even President George W. Bush weighed in, “I’m disappointed that adults would fudge the boy’s age” (*ibid.*). Americans saw the case as a scandal, but Dominicans

in the US and back home saw it differently. Dominicans grew angry at what they saw as anti-Dominican press. Hall of Fame pitcher Pedro Martínez, always a nationalist argued, “If he was from America, that kid would probably be getting a little medal from George Bush. Now all of a sudden because the kid’s from the Dominican, he’s not legal” (Hohler, 2001: 20). When Almonte’s team returned to the Bronx in disgrace, the players were greeted by thousands of Dominicans chanting, “Danny! Danny!” One boy carried a sign defiantly claiming, “12 or 14. So what?” Back in his hometown of Moca, people chanted in front of his mother’s house, “Doce, Doce [12, 12].” Even though the records showed conclusively that he was 14, his mother insisted he was 12, in a thumbing of the nose to what they felt was disrespect to their own. One teenage boy there, got to the core of the matter-circumventing regulations in order to move ahead in life, “I don’t care whether Danny changed his age. He’s still my hero. I would do it too if it [got] me to the major leagues” (McFadden 2001). The press turned its attention to Danny’s father claiming he was unfit to parent. How it was, they asked, that Danny had been in the US for so long without being enrolled in a Bronx school. Without hesitating, his father responded that Danny was “eating,” and “training,” to excel in baseball. Americans were speechless. Parental negligence, they concluded. But in the DR, the elder Almonte was doing what any good parent would do: give their child a chance to succeed by caring for him and giving him a leg up in the baseball world. The correlation between education and economic opportunity is poorly established in the Dominican Republic, making baseball a rational choice for parents looking to gain a better future for their children, a point not at all understood in the Global North with its strong correlation between education and opportunity (Klein 1991; 2014).

Rules are made to be broken

MLB, foreign interests, and even national governments use their operating standards, norms etc. in dealing with locals. For the working classes legitimacy and citizenship is what is at stake. Coerced to comply, locals have to find quasi-legal or illegal methods, yet when detected they get penalized and demonized. Buscónes and players devised ways to maximize their opportunities within the MLB’s restrictive regulations having to do with identity and age. If it was outside the legal bounds, the dire conditions that most faced daily still made it worth the risk.

As unrestricted foreign players, MLB regulations allow major league teams to sign players as young as 16 ½ years of age (if they will be 17

by the start of the next baseball season). July 2nd is the date for these determinations and the offers teams make. By that date Buscónes have toured with their players, showcasing their talents to all interested teams. But MLB has also created a unique wrinkle, and only for Dominican Republic, in which players, independent of specific skills are at their most desirable at 16½. After that they begin to lose value with every month. A 17-year-old throwing at 92 mph is worth more than an 18-year-old doing the same; and the 18-year-old is worth more than 19-year-old doing the same. The system not only demands 16 ½ year olds, it penalizes those who are even the slightest bit older. No other sport views youthful players in this fashion, and it is a view that doesn't exist back in North America where players aren't even looked at seriously until about the age of 18. Dominicans have responded the way they always have, by circumventing the laws, in this instance by falsifying their birth records so that they are younger. "In a sociopolitical milieu where full citizenship rights were difficult to achieve, subject to recurrent verification and at risk of being diminished and even negated, much was at stake in whom people were believed to be," argues Steven Gregory (2006: 121) in his study of Dominican tourism. As a result, "It was not uncommon for persons' identities to be publicly in dispute, ambiguous and shot through with contradictions," he concludes. Dominican pitcher, Joel Peralta, who pitched in the major leagues for 11 years, admitted he was 16½ when he signed, though he was actually 20. "I wish I never had to do that, but if I didn't do it I wouldn't be here! We don't have the chance after [we] turn 18, 19 years old to become a professional ballplayer....in the United States, [players] can be drafted when they're 22, they get a chance to play pro ball. We don't have that. The only chance when you're 20, like I was, to sign was to lie about my age" (Klein, 2014: 122). Buscónes are seen as responsible for this even though it is MLB that created the system that demands 16½ year olds.

The most famous of the Dominican player developers, or buscónes is Astín Jacobo. Dominican born, but raised in New York City, he returned to San Pedro de Macoris as a young man to develop players. As a transnational citizen, he is not only bilingual, but bicultural as well. He knows how and when to think like an American, and he is also not frightened by American attempts to intimidate. On the matter of blaming Dominicans for being corrupt and falsifying documents he points up how this system is rigged to penalize Dominicans and not others, "The Cuban can come into my country, and be 30 years old,

and they’ll [MLB teams] give him all the money in the world. And our kids? Once he’s past 18, they don’t wanna give him a penny...When a Dominican’s 19, he’s old!” (Interview 8/5/2005) Jacobo has repeatedly refused to back down, and has drawn a select group of influential *buscónes*. Together they have met every challenge MLB has thrown at them, and the use of nationalism is their primary standard.

In Dominican-U.S. relations what Jacobo and company have been doing is rare. MLB has treated the Dominican Republic as its own neo-colonial private plantation, one that will not be encroached upon by other countries. There are at most only eight or nine nations that play the game at an accomplished enough level to supply MLB players (Dominican Republic, Venezuela, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Canada, Japan, Korea, Taiwan). Small by comparison to FIFA. (Klein 2006). All are economically and politically subservient to MLB.

The Marine’s Again?

The string of scandals that involved Dominicans (age, identity, steroids) prompted MLB’s Commissioner to step in. In 2010, Commissioner Selig sent his second in command, Sandy Alderson to the “troubled” country to straighten matters out. Alderson was a former Marine infantry officer who had served in Vietnam, a Harvard law school graduate, with a wealth of baseball experience. He was a blend of no nonsense, intelligence, and experience; and he came into the DR with the hubris that often accompanies those traits. Within days of his arrival Alderson held a summit of sorts and the entire baseball establishment in that country attended (minus *buscónes*, who were not invited). He laid out the issue, “What we want to do is strengthen baseball in the Dominican Republic, maintaining the country as an attractive venue to sign players and try to eradicate the problems that have affected signings on the island” (DR Sol “MLB”). What he meant was: MLB has decided that the DR was filled with “problems;” that it used to be an “attractive venue” when major league teams could sign players cheaply, but has ceased to be; and we need to return to ‘cost effective’ spending. If these issues weren’t addressed, “...there are many people in the United States who understand that the Draft would be the best option,” Alderson threatened (*ibid.*) The Draft is the way players are selected in the US. It is tightly regulated by MLB, and it means both that Americans would “occupy” the baseball world (by running affairs) in the Dominican Republic, and *buscónes* would be eliminated. This was MLB’s way of

addressing the matter: defining the issue as problematic; locating it in the DR; and threatening the country with foreign occupation.

Those in attendance were silent. The Dominican media were split, some favoring MLB, others tepid in their opposition. Only the *buscónes* had the temerity to protest en mass. While the summit was going on in the Hotel Embajador, the most influential of the *buscónes* organized a hastily put together protest against MLB just outside. Jacobo and his colleagues brought their prospects with them and it was a large, noisy event, “we could have had a half a million people there because baseball is a Dominican passion, claimed one protestor (Nina).

Before we got to the Embajador, an anti-riot squad was set up to stop us from getting any closer. Very scary guys! A line of them were blocking our way and we stood confronting each other. A lieutenant came up to me and said, “Moreno (brown guy), I can’t let you go by.” And I said to him, “Listen, think like this is 1965, and what we’re doing here is defending our nation, our people...Do you have a son or nephew who plays baseball? You know that if MLB gets its way with what they’re trying to do in that hotel, your son will have lots of trouble becoming a ballplayer.” He waved us through (Jacobo interview, 8/18/2010).

To the officer in the anti-riot squad, the nationalist resentment Jacobo expressed made sense. Most Dominicans understood it as such. Ronaldo Peralta, former director of the MLB Commissioner’s Dominican office certainly did, “Remember, baseball here goes with nationalism, and it’s very important for Dominicans. If you try to regulate and affect [the *buscónes*] economic interests, they will go to the press and point out that you are against those who want to develop the Sammy Sosa’s and Albert Pujols’s, that you are forbidding a kid from becoming the next Dominican star...Baseball is the one thing that makes this country great. We have failed in everything we have tried. But we have 91 Dominicans in the major leagues. Who wants to go against that?” (Peralta interview, 5/27/2005). Alderson did, dismissing the mass demonstration outside, joking about buying the protestors lunch.

The march, however, forced Alderson to meet with the *buscónes* and that proved only that they were intractable enemies. After it, Alderson once again declared that he wanted to “help” the game become stronger but issues needed addressing. They ramped up their efforts at oversight: mandatory drug testing; “extreme vetting” (to borrow a term currently in use) of anyone who signs a contract; mandatory fingerprinting; and backed everything up with punishments that would

invalidate any previous contracts signed between players and teams. He was very aware that anything holding up the signing process affects the size of the bonus. Clearly, MLB could adversely affect anything baseball related.

Another major summit was organized, and this time *buscónes* were invited. Everyone in baseball attended, and the essence of this was not that new information was being passed on but rather that MLB's hegemonic vision of baseball was being performed. At one point Alderson announced that MLB was bringing in \$40 to \$50 million dollars into the country. Jacobo, couldn't resist by reminding the gathering, "I said [to Alderson], 'Thank you for that, but you're making \$7 billion [gross revenues for MLB], and we're the principle guys helping to make that for you'" (Jacobo interview, 10/02/2010).

Jacobo and affiliates had long been anticipating this play by MLB, and a year earlier had laid plans for their own league, one that centralized all of the nation's best players into a tightly controlled association. It was called the, "Dominican Prospect League." It was a streamlined version of finding and concentrating the best talent into 4 teams playing a schedule devised to draw scouts from teams to evaluate them. Jacobo was trying to drive a wedge between MLB and major league teams, most of whom had developed their own relations with *buscónes*. Again, MLB tried to prevent the league from forming. For instance, MLB put pressure on the San Francisco Giants who had agreed to let the DPL hold their All-Star game there to call off their agreement. The All-Star game was held.

In time, MLB started imitating the *buscónes* by starting their own prospect league and holding their own version of the All-Star Game, called *El Torneo Supremo*. When the DPL refused to buckle under to *El Torneo Supremo*, MLB used its administrative muscle to coerce the *buscónes* into bringing their players into the fold. MLB's investigative agency began paying visits to those unwilling to send players to them. It worked with some smaller player developers, but not Jacobo and Company. In fact, they began looking to anticipate and counter their enemy's next move. To that end, they began to develop other markets for their players, in Japan and Mexico—both of which have professional leagues and are independent of MLB. In anticipation of others trying to undercut him from having such exclusive access to young unsigned player, Jacobo devised his own little league system all contained at his complex.

In 2012, MLB once again floated the idea of an international draft to see if they could sneak it into the next bargaining agreement with their players union. Again, Jacobo and others took the fight to them. They fanned out to visit every one of the 30 major league Spring Training facilities, and contacted every single Latin American player on the major league team's 40 man roster. They presented them with a spirited argument against MLB's efforts to extend the draft to their countries. The players responded viscerally and instantly, swearing they would strike before letting MLB have its way. In the end, 164 of 165 Latin players signed their petition that was presented to MLB Players Association. The following year, the player's union voiced strong opposition to this part of the Collective Bargaining Agreement that was being renewed. Rather than risk the ire of the union, MLB once again pulled this threat to the national sovereignty of Latin American countries off of the table. "We beat them," was Jacobo's voice mail to me, "They just declared that the Draft is going to fail!" (Klein, 2014: vii).

Conclusion

For Dominicans, this is a battle for political and economic sovereignty. MLB wants a return to a neocolonial past when it governed all of its affairs in the Dominican Republic. The *buscónes* stand in their way. Because it is the language of resentment and resistance, in this struggle nationalism plays a much larger role on the Dominican side. Nationalist discourse resonates loudly in the Global South as illustrated in the following address made to the Dominican baseball hierarchy in 2013. Astín Jacobo asks, "Which is worse: the major league team that knows a kid is worth \$1 million but pays \$25,000 for him, or me, who knows he's worth \$1 million, gets it and the kid goes home with \$650,000? Which is better for the kid, his family, me, and for the game here in the Dominican Republic? For the last 40 years [MLB] has been taking advantage of us. In the last 10 years, we've evened things out a bit, and they don't like it" (Jacobo *ibid.*).

Astín Jacobo, Enrique Soto, and all of the other *buscónes* preference for nationalist rhetoric is ideal for rallying support because it references difference and power. Enrique Soto, colleague of Jacobo, characterized the matter thusly:

The United States and baseball gives our youth a lot of opportunities. But Americans...They take and take and still want more... We are a country also. We're underdeveloped, we have a lot of problems,

but there are good people here. They don't deserve to be treated like common trash (Bretón and Villegas, 1999: 56).

It is very much a language that understands power and resentment through comparison, again illustrated by Soto, “If the [MLB] teams invest, they're organized...If the *buscónes* invest, we're thieves” (Fainaru, 2001). Such a comparative rhetoric clarifies what the Comaroff's mean when I quoted them early on, that the Global South stands in contrast to the Global North as, “...an opposition that carries a great deal of imaginative baggage congealed around the contrast between centrality and marginality...”

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