

Historical Analysis of Japanese Colonization in the Dominican Republic

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Abstract

Throughout the history of the Dominican Republic, conflict with the neighboring nation of Haiti has led to the implementation of various foreign policies. Analysis of the diplomatic and cultural relationship between the Dominican Republic and Haiti during the rule of Generalissimo Rafael Leónidas Trujillo Molina provides the political and economic basis for Japanese colonization. This study is a thorough historical analysis of the motivating factors for Japanese migration to the Dominican Republic and the significant contributions imparted by the Japanese on the cultural and agricultural spheres of the Dominican Republic.

Introduction

This study is part of a larger project on the linguistic and cultural impacts of Japanese colonization in the Dominican Republic. This segment analyzes the cultural, economical, and political impacts of the systematic colonization of Japanese migrants that occurred from 1954-1960 under the dictatorship of Generalissimo Rafael Leónidas Trujillo Molina. Following WWII, Japan suffered an economic depression in which food shortages and a high unemployment rate were met with unsuccessful attempts at economic recovery. Examination of this catalytic event demonstrates the correlation between migration to the Dominican Republic and Japan's national economic and political crisis. Analysis of the political and economic basis for intentional recruitment of the Japanese is tied to an exploration of the historical conflict between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Throughout this discursive analysis of the diplomatic and cultural relationship between Haiti and the Dominican Republic, the concept of race according to the Dominican and Haitian cultures is thoroughly dissected. The placement of Japanese colonies along the border as a human "buffer zone" against Haitian expansion demonstrates the racist nature of President Trujillo's immigration policy as well as the enmity between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. The economic and cultural impacts of Japanese immigration to the Dominican Republic can be traced to this unusual historical event.

The ultimate goal of this treatise is to understand the cultural/political bond and how this correlates with the policy-making decisions of a nation. Further research will focus on the linguistic impacts of cultural preservation and cultural assimilation has among Japanese colonists.

Timeline of Conflict: Haiti and the Dominican Republic

Throughout the history of the Dominican Republic and its Haitian counterpart, conflict concerning definitive demarcation of not only geographical significance but also cultural distinction defined the complex relationship between the neighboring nations. Thoroughly integrated, the sociopolitical relationship between the Dominican Republic and Haiti has contributed to subsequent institution of policies and laws attempting to promote nationalistic desires for improvement in infrastructure. Analysis of the origination of the complex relationship between the Dominican Republic and Haiti oftentimes focuses through a simplistic lens, thereby excluding significant factors that contributed to the sociopolitical discord between the two nations. The two countries occupying a part of the same island “[have] been fraught with a history of antagonism through which no civil dialogue can occur” (Matibag, 2003, p. 1). Limiting the scope of interactions to antagonistic ethno-historical lines contributes to the reductionist paradigm, or a one-dimensional framework that eliminates the possibility of a non-polarized fluid relationship. To avoid a simplistic examination of the linkage between the contrasting countries, a thorough investigation of the interrelatedness between nationalistic desires for colonial independence and the geopolitical significance of location in the struggle for cultural and political independence is essential. This foundation is necessary in developing an adequate historical analysis of selective immigration under the leadership of Generalissimo Rafael Leónidas Trujillo Molina.

Nationalistic desires for colonial independence began to fester during the 1800s, culminating in Haitian slave revolts that resulted in the death of 40,000 mulattos and French colonists. After continuous subjugation and mistreatment, the Haitian slaves of the French colony, under the leadership of Toussaint L’Overture, led a fervent revolt that resulted in Haiti’s subsequent Declaration of Independence from France. This hard-won autonomy had significant consequences for their Spanish-ruled counterparts:

The second of the major conjuncture is figured in the event and consequences of the Haitian Revolution; that is, the revolution that founded the Republic of Haiti but also drew the colony of Santo Domingo into a complex dialectic of identifications, separations, and instantiations with relation to its agnate territorial neighbor. (Matibag, 2003, p. 9)

The Haitian Declaration of Independence signified a shift in the relationship between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. During the 14 years of revolution that eventually led to the emergence of Haiti as an independent nation, a see-saw relationship was established between the neighboring nations in which “the increase in the one colony’s autonomy was perceived by many as posing a threat to that of the other” (Matibag, 2003, p. 54). The national destiny of one nation became tied to the national destiny of the other. Emboldened by their Hispaniola neighbors, the Dominicans fought and won independence from their Spanish subjugators in 1821. In spite of a forthright declaration as a sovereign nation, the Dominican Republic was invaded by Haitian forces. A twenty-two year occupation ensued with Haiti intent on cultural domination, and an extension of Haitian sovereignty. In 1844, the Dominican Republic reasserted its independence from both Spain and Haiti. In the following years, however, raids carried out by Haitian troops and hopeful expansionists persisted along the borderlands, which further exacerbated the growing seeds of animosity between Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

To defend themselves against the Haitians, the Dominican Republic resorted to a brief reannexation with Spain. The Haitians fervently opposed this reannexation, having since recognized the interdependent relationship between the two countries:

None will contest that Haiti has a major interest that no foreign power establish itself in the eastern part [of Hispaniola]. When two people inhabit the same island, their destinies in terms of foreign initiatives are necessarily interdependent. The survival of one is intricately linked to the survival of the other; each is duty-bound to guarantee security of the other (Matibag, 2003, p. 120).

In contrast to the reductionist paradigm, the struggle for independence in Haiti signified the increase in momentum for the establishment of a self-sufficient nation no longer dependent on slave labor. After Haiti and the Dominican Republic declared independence, an underlying movement occurred by which focus shifted from ousting their European occupants to asserting their independence from the bordering nation.

One major source of conflict between the two nations is the issue of border line demarcation which signifies a geographical point of division as well as a cultural separation: “The events of the third major conjuncture were the post-revolutionary struggles to define national identities within the insular space” (Matibag 9). Historically, border lines are areas of cultural overlap and political instability where national identity becomes blurred. Such lack of clarity is tolerated only when a state or nation is immature and the power of the central authority is weak. In order to establish sharp contrast between two states, policies concerning border demarcation were characteristically nationalistic (Augelli, 1980, p. 19). With the insular nature of conjoining nations, the border line signified the demarcation line between two distinct cultures:

Competing claims on the island’s territory have contested time and again the reach of political jurisdictions, the rights of territorial domains, and the legitimacy of property titles. Patriotic and ethnocentric definitions of national and cultural identity have been formulated with reference to the border. (Matibag, 2003, p. 13)

Haitian excursions across the border continued to exacerbate the long-standing enmity between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Scarce lands, poverty, and a lack of natural resources in a country where the economy primarily depends on agriculture forced migration to Haitian cities and the Dominican Republic. Haitian laborers sought available jobs in the Dominican Republic, where a thirty percent unemployment rate persisted. These Haitian workers provided cheap labor under conditions similar to that of slavery. Economic distrust between these nations significantly contributed to racial tensions and cultural antagonism. In particular, *la mentalidad de la frontera*, or ‘border mentality,’ expressed the Dominicans’ rejection of Otherness elsewhere in Haiti, while ignoring Otherness within unity, or the Dominican Republic. This polarizing mentality simplified the tension between the two countries by offering a black and white viewpoint of the origination of the sociopolitical conflict apparent on the insular level.

Of striking significance is the Haitian-Dominican frontier, a borderland where relations between divided lands was thoroughly established fostering a interstitial region for cultural interaction: “yet culture itself, as with Haitian culture or Dominican culture... is a phenomenon that originates in and inhabits an interstitial zone, one in which boundary crossing repeatedly negates delimitation, where demarcations are erased only to be reinscribed (Matibag, 2003, p. 14). The distinct peoples of Haiti and the Dominican Republic created linkages of communication, kinship, alliance, and custom that yielded noteworthy cultural and linguistic manifestations. In an attempt to maintain cultural and sociopolitical differentiation, the Dominican Republic implemented policies and laws that prohibited Haitian border-line crossings and immigration.

Dominican ethnocentric attitudes became institutionalized by policies aimed at preventing the spread of Afro-cultural practices and customs and further intermingling of the Dominican and Haitian cultures. These policies aggravated the existing racial and cultural prejudices, oftentimes reinforcing sentiments of superiority among Dominicans. Dominicans’ fear, bordering on hatred, was deeply rooted in linguistic and cultural differences between the neighboring entities. Haitians, predominantly of African ancestry, maintained many of their African cultural traditions like voodoo. Greatly outnumbered, the Dominicans feared a cultural subjugation as well as a political union with what was referenced to as the “Black Republic” (Asagiri 2000). Exposure to Haitian influence gradually eroded traditional Hispanic customs and Hispanic character from both the border landscape and its Dominican inhabitants. The inhabitants along the border consisted of undiluted Haitians, and *rayanos*, or ‘frontier people,’ representative of both cultures (Matibag, 2003).

In 1925, to prevent “[the] ceaseless absorption of black blood” and to assure “the maintenance of the purity of [their] Catholic faiths,” the Dominican government passed the first law authorizing the establishment of ‘farmer families of white race’ along the Dominican frontier” (Asagiri, 2000, p. 337). Under the thirty-two year rule of the Dominican dictator Generalissimo Rafael Leónidas Trujillo Molina, efforts to reassert Dominican sovereignty on the island of Hispaniola, particularly along the border lands, were rigorously pursued. Trujillo’s resolve to reaffirm Dominican national sovereignty was apparent in subsequent governmental policies enacted:

The existence and functioning of all the components of a nation are manifested largely by its sovereignty-what I [Trujillo] have always considered the most vital of a country’s attributes. Sovereignty resides in the ability of a Nation to decide for itself-without being swayed by outside pressure or influence-not only the nature of its internal regime but also its destiny. (Trujillo, 1960, p. 11)

Improvements in border land infrastructure were implemented to encourage “Dominicanization,” or settlement along the Dominican-Haitian border. Key to the Dominicanization policy was the reorganization and creation of colonies along the border. To evade international condemnation, this policy began to shift towards selective immigration after the massacre of nearly 20,000 Haitians over the span of two days in early October 1937, “a massacre...of such stupendous dimensions that it has still not been assimilated into the nation psyche” (Matibag, 2003, p. 140). Haitian by descent, language, or culture, many of the victims were born in the Dominican

Republic. The massacre was carried out by members of the police and the army at different locations along the border. Evidence indicates that the action was a planned rather than a spontaneous outbreak of violence, with orders originating from the dictator Trujillo himself. To avoid international sanctions, Trujillo implemented a selective immigration policy initially aimed at allowing European foreigners to settle throughout the Dominican Republic. While simultaneously fostering economic growth and improvement, Trujillo sought to combat Haitian influence in the Dominican Republic in order to maintain a purity of culture and language.

Initial Dominican immigration policies focused on the recruitment of wealthy, educated immigrants to improve “the development and economic progress of the country” (Peguero, 1990, p. 97). The Dominican government was more concerned with the expansion of capital and the establishment of the Dominican economy rather than the encouragement of laborers to permanently settle. Because of racial tensions and economic recession, the Dominican Republic shifted its focus to immigrants who would contribute economically and culturally. In a document addressing the agricultural crisis of the Dominican Republic, the urgency for foreign workers in the agricultural department was highlighted with the stipulation that immigrants belong to the white race. Trujillo sought to secure his country against what he perceived as a sociopolitical threat posed by Haitians. In doing so, Trujillo hoped to create a sovereign “Caribbean nation.” Trujillo heightened antihaitianismo, or antihaitianism, by normalizing the long-standing animosity between Haitians and Dominicans by elevating it to the status of ideology.

Haitians became the scapegoat Trujillo needed to establish absolute dictatorial power. Trujillo depicted Haitians as inferior, dangerous usurpers. Infractions committed by Haitians were “the violation of the sanitation law, violation of the immigration law, gambling, violations of property, practice of witchcraft and robbery (Matibag, 2003, p. 146). Thus, the massacre that occurred along the border was justifiable under the pretense of national security, where genocide was neither condoned nor condemned by the Dominican government. However, not all Haitians and Dominicans remained silent. Numerous protests transpired against the manipulation of racial ideology that focused on racial traits as the explanation for violence:

It is doubtful...that the difference of race suffices to explain the explosion of hate that made the region of Dajabón-Montecristi the theater of a bloody orgy. I prefer to believe that that people exasperated by the distress to which the dictatorship of Trujillo has reduced it has acted on the same obscure motives that pushed, in the south of the United States, a pack of “poor whites” to lynch a black, and in Hitler’s Germany a ruined petite bourgeoisie to mistreat a Jew. The dominant classes and the dictatorship agree to support, to provoke those sentiments that divert from them, in the manner of a lightning rod, the fury of the wretched. (Matibag, 2003, p. 150)

The “dominant-class” and the dictatorship gained support by ostracizing members of the Haitian culture. Ironically, Trujillo enacted laws that permitted Dominican sugar companies to contract Haitian and West Indian workers with the agreement that this black labor was temporary. They were to return home once the season ended.

Despite various improvements in the infrastructure of the Dominican government, restrictions instituted under the Trujillo dictatorship resulted in the loss of freedom. Through the utilization of a “secret police” or the Military Intelligence Service (SIM), countless individuals—Dominican citizens or otherwise—were murdered or simply ‘disappeared.’ Any perceived threat to national security or the absolute power of Trujillo was swiftly dealt with. Trujillo’s dictatorship emulated that of a highly personal concept of leadership predominantly practiced throughout Latin America: caudilloism. A country ruled by a caudillo typically resembles a large hacienda in which its leader plays the role of national patrón, oftentimes owning large land holdings and controlling many businesses. Nepotism is enthusiastically embraced, with the family of the caudillo positioned to socially and economically benefit, frequently sharing the wealth and spoils of the caudillo: “The caudillo is usually viewed as a great national father who must take care of his humble children and who must exercise tutelage over his ignorant people” (Wiarda, 1968, p. 14). A true caudillo, Trujillo maintained his power through control of the armed forces, and his domination of the various components of the government. The Dominican Party (Partido Dominicano), led by Trujillo, exercised absolute power, becoming the only legal political party in the country.

Recruitment and Settlement: Japanese Colonization

In order to “protect the country...from losing its characteristics of a purely Hispanic people” (Matibag, 2003, p. 154), Trujillo invoked the principle of racial purity of light-skinned Dominicans as the ideal depiction of the Dominican culture. Beginning in 1939, to prevent Haitian penetration, to divert international scrutiny, and to perpetuate the idea of racial purity, the Dominican Republic became refuge to 3,056 Republican refugees of the Spanish Civil War. The majority arrived between November 1939 and May 1940. Following the Spanish refugees were Jews fleeing the Holocaust in Central Europe, many of whom reached the Dominican shore between 1941 and 1944. Their numbers were estimated at around 700. An additional 4,466 Spaniards arrived between 1955 and 1959. George Warren, a member of the Council Committee of Political Refugees, discerned that “Trujillo, interested in favorable press in the United States, was able to exploit the immigrants in order to establish himself as an humanitarian and to erase the memories of the Haitian incident” (Peguero, 1990, p. 101). Despite Trujillo’s hope that these immigrants would permanently settle throughout the Dominican Republic, particularly along the border, the European immigrants viewed the Dominican Republic as a temporary stop to their ultimate destinations elsewhere in Latin America (Asagiri, 2000).

As a result, Trujillo shifted his selective immigration policy to Japanese immigrants whom he hoped would enhance native agriculture by demonstrating advanced methods of cultivation and animal husbandry. There is speculation that Trujillo may have also been influenced by his father’s admiration for the Japanese. Trujillo’s father was markedly impressed by the Japanese military prowess exhibited during the Russo-Japanese War. Admiring of the Japanese culture, he named his daughter Japonesa or ‘Japanese female.’

Diplomatic relations between the Japanese and Dominican governments were minimal in the 1930s: “In pre-World War [II] years, even the commercial ties were so slight that the two governments ignored formal diplomatic relations and entrusted the issues arising from trade to honorary Consuls” (Peguero, 1990, p. 98). However, Trujillo’s offer in 1954 to accept Japanese settlers was the opportunity Japan needed in order to initiate economic recovery.

Following WW II, Japan underwent a forced repatriation of nearly 7 million Japanese from former colonial territories. Suffering from food shortages and a high unemployment rate, Japan sought economic relief through emigration of its citizens to other countries, specifically Latin America. To facilitate emigration, the Federation of Japan Overseas Associations (FJOA) was created in the emigration section of its Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

By 1959, 37,257 Japanese had immigrated to various countries throughout Latin America. Of these, 82 percent immigrated to Brazil; Paraguay and the Dominican Republic followed with 11 and 4 percent respectively. The remainder settled in Bolivia and Argentina. Negotiations between Japan and the Dominican Republic were first explored in 1954. At that time, official and semi-official missions were sent out from Japan to survey those Latin American destinations with settlement possibilities for Japanese emigrants. Tsukasa Uetsuka led the mission that went to the Dominican Republic. Following negotiations with President Rafael Trujillo, the discussion “resulted in a promise that the Dominican Republic agreed to give Japanese immigrants full rights, financial assistance and housing. Uetsuka returned to Japan with word that 5,000 farmer families could migrate there” (Peguero, 1990, p. 98).

Additional agreements were reached that established mutual responsibilities between the Japanese and Dominican governments. The Dominican government agreed to provide: 1) a furnished house per family; 2) 300 *tareas* of land per family [One acre is equal to approximately six *tareas*]; 3) sixty cents per day for each family member; 4) government tax exemption for the items that the immigrants would bring from Japan. The Japanese government was responsible for: 1) selection of the immigrants; 2) transportation cost, roundtrip; 3) supervision of the facilities and colonial sites (Peguero, 1990).

To encourage emigration to the Dominican Republic, advertisements appeared in Japanese newspapers, alluding to a Caribbean paradise made even more alluring by the favorable incentives offered by the Dominican government. Noburu Uda, one of the first settlers, contributed to the depiction of the Dominican Republic as land of limitless opportunities. Uda described his new home as being a paradise in which “the houses were neat, complete with furniture, cooking utensils and linen. Working conditions were good, and the food was cheap and plentiful” (Peguero, 1990, p. 99). The recruitment of potential emigrants was extremely selective. Family groups with no fewer than three males between the ages of fifteen and fifty qualified for the journey. Single people were restricted from selection, while a brother or other relative could be include as a member in order to meet emigration requirements. Emphasis was placed on laborers, in particular farmers and fishermen.

Dominican preparation for the Japanese settlers’ arrival included the placement of colonies throughout the Dominican Republic, with the establishment of the majority of the colonies along the Dominican-Haitian border. This reaffirms the sociopolitical belief that Trujillo not only sought to “whiten” the Dominican race but also to erect a buffer zone against potential Haitian penetration into the Dominican Republic. Of the eight colonies to which Japanese were assigned between 1956 and 1959, six were located near the Haitian border. La Vigía and Pepillo Salcedo were located along the northern border; La Altagracia and Agua Negra were located along the southern border; La Colonia and Plaza Cacique were established within the Cordillera Central, one near Jarabacoa, and the other on the southern outskirts of Constanza. Upon arrival in July 1956 in Ciudad Trujillo (currently known as Santo Domingo), each family was assigned to a

colony with specific instructions for what crop they were to cultivate. With the assignment of these families, large-scale Japanese emigration came to an end in 1959. The main incentive for many of these settlers was potential for economic benefit. Once the Japanese economy began to recover, emigration to Latin America declined (Asagiri, 2000; Peguero, 1990).

Shortly after assignment to the selected colonies, serious problems led to rising dissatisfaction among the Japanese settlers. Colonists complained that the Dominican government failed to provide the promised amount of land. Crop failures were attributed to inadequate systems of irrigation and poor quality soil. Difficulties arose in cultivation of the crops assigned by the Dominican government. Fishermen sent to Pepillo Salcedo discovered that they lacked the proper equipment necessary to fish in the open Atlantic. In the isolated colonies, promises of medical facilities and schools were unfulfilled (Asagiri, 2000). In light of such serious grievances, the majority of the colonies were abandoned. Most of the Japanese settlers migrated to the colonies of La Vigía, Constanza, and Jarabacoa. This placed further strain on the limited resources of those colonies. Dominican citizens began to resent the economic progress of some Japanese settlers. It appeared to many Dominican peasants that these foreign settlers were receiving large plots of land and an abundance of governmental support. To the contrary, the Japanese settlers failed to receive any support from the Dominican government.

Prior to his assassination on 30 May 1961, President Trujillo was preoccupied with threats from foreign-based political dissidents, increased political tension with the United States, and sanctions imposed by the Organization of American States due to his cooperation in the attempted assassination of President Romulo Betancourt of Venezuela. The Japanese government continued to believe that the complaints of the Japanese colonists derived from lack of effort and ingenuity to improve their situation (Asagiri, 2000). The lack of response from the Japanese government and the absence of Dominican support led many of the colonists to evacuate from the Dominican Republic. Relocation and repatriation of Japanese began in October 1961. By May 1962, 672 Japanese had returned to Japan and 377 had relocated in South America, mainly in Brazil. Of the original 1,319 Japanese emigrants in the Dominican Republic, 276 remained. By 1971 the number of Japanese increased to 574, an increase attributed to natural increase, the occasional arrival of immigrants from Japan and intermarriage with Dominicans who, with their offspring, were included in the count of Japanese (Asagiri, 2000, p. 348). Between 1971 and 1991, Japanese permanent residents totaled 831, an increase of 45 percent.

The Impacts of Japanese Settlement in the Dominican Republic

Regional and urban-village shifts contributed to an overall increase in the number of Japanese families in Constanza and the “districts” of Santo Domingo, La Vega, and the South. Relocation to Constanza in particular occurred because of the increase in expansion of irrigated land. Relocation affected the generation gap between the younger generation of Japanese, many of whom left for urban centers throughout the Dominican Republic, and the aging population that remained in the colonies.

Agricultural impacts can be clearly observed in the singularly successful cultivation of fruits and vegetables in Jarabacoa and Constanza. The products: potatoes, tomatoes, beets, carrots, cabbage, lettuce, onions, garlic, and strawberries, revolutionized the quality of production domestically. In the western Cibao, the Japanese contributed significantly to the development of

improved varieties of rice and improved methods of cultivation, which has led to the Japanese operation of five rice mills (Asagiri, 2000). Cultural impacts are also observed. In keeping with maintenance of the Japanese language and traditions, Club Japonés was established in Constanza; an organization devoted to the preservation of the Japanese culture in second-third generation Japanese. Despite the unfavorable conditions of the provisional sites for the Japanese colonists, the contributions of subsequent generations have significantly altered the Dominican society. Although many of Trujillo's expectations for the Japanese colonists fell short, his hope that they would contribute to the agricultural sphere of the Dominican economy was ultimately achieved.

Discussion

As this research study is a preliminary effort to provide a basis for future research, its significance is apparent. This research study provides a historical analysis of the motivations for Japanese colonization in the Dominican Republic. Providing a historical basis allows for a broader understanding of the political and economic climate of the Dominican Republic under the thirty-two year leadership of Rafael Leónidas Trujillo Molina. Such an understanding of the historical climate will serve as the basis for future investigations into the cultural and linguistic ramifications of Japanese colonization in the Dominican Republic. Primary research in the Dominican Republic will analyze the language behaviors of the *Nisei* (second and third generation Japanese). Of particular interest are the community-internal and -external attitudes and identities that are implicated in language and cultural maintenance and loss. The structural outcomes of language contact will also be investigated in order to determine how the Japanese and Spanish varieties of the *Nisei* differ from the monolingual varieties of the sending community in Japan and in the surrounding Dominican community in the Dominican Republic.

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