

**Robert Fatton Jr.**

*Haiti: Trapped in the Outer Periphery*. Boulder CO: Lynne Rienner, 2014. 227 pp.  
(Cloth US\$55.00)

For social scientists considering the case of Haiti, the legal or normative functions of the state become a real challenge, since the country functions within the dysfunctional zone that Robert Fatton Jr. identifies as the extreme margin. He refers to this as “the Outer Periphery.” Fatton’s work focuses on the catastrophic neoliberal agenda in Haiti and the way in which the world economic system has contributed to encaging the country within a hyper-marginal zone. This “outer periphery” where Haiti is trapped has become a dogmatic, problem-laden zone of uttermost failure due largely to the Haitian political class’s incessant fight for power, as well as its corruption and banditry, and the profound negative impact of “imperialism in the age of globalization.” All this has exacerbated acute poverty, and grotesque inequalities “brought about by neoliberalism,” qualitatively transforming the “world system whereby the periphery itself has fragmented and spawned an outer periphery” (p. 25). Additionally, Fatton remarks, “Haiti’s growing dependence on the Dominican Republic has all the characteristics of the typical economic relationship between peripheral and core countries” (p. 69).

This book is a must read, particularly for the bleeding liberals who might make matters worse by injecting additional Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) into the country. Staunch conservatives would benefit from reading Fatton as well, in light of their refusal to accept blame for policies under “the pretense of a universal defense of human rights [that] masks the realities of the core’s imperial drive” (p. 44). *Haiti: Trapped in the Outer Periphery* bears witness to the falseness of “nation building.” Fatton further claims that it “is a mimicry of an imaginary liberal world, for the liberal world, as it really exists, is full of contradictions between rhetoric and reality, between the egalitarian universalism it preaches and the global calamities it unleashes” (p. 45).

Fatton’s book is, above all, a quintessential reminder of the vulnerability of deprived human beings who inhabit political and economic spaces where the very notion of social justice is absent. “In Haiti, unproductive capitalism has transformed proximity to state power into the prime site for acquiring wealth by those not born into the elite class” (p. 5). Fatton is aware of his privileged position; as “a member of the U.S. professoriate, of the Haitian bourgeoisie, and of the diaspora who has opted to adopt U.S. nationality, I must acknowledge that I am a privileged individual living in a cocoon of fundamental contradictions” (p. viii). Pointed contradictions like this have allowed him to write with lucid conviction about a subject that occupies his political,

national, and professional selves—the objective as well as the subjective. Thus, when he writes, “liberal imperialism, however, is not about imposing political order per se, let alone a liberal order. It is about operating profitable private corporations in any territorial space that receives the contractual authority of a nation-state” (pp. 38–39), he presents not only an accurate reading of liberal imperialism, but also a level of disappointment, knowing that one of the nation-states that obliges the economic will of the liberal imperialist countries is Haiti.

Fatton’s reading of Haiti’s corruption is very astute when he claims that the Haitian politics of the belly is well entrenched, and even “the position of prime minister was ultimately a matter of selling and buying parliamentary votes. This pattern decidedly is not new; it is rooted in the patronage system that has traditionally characterized Haitian society” (p. 121). His book provides a convincing reading of Haiti’s disastrous relation to liberal imperialism and the dire consequences to the environment as natural resources are once more replaying the Western policies that began with Christopher Columbus. “Once again, neither the international community nor the government has shown much interest in developing gold rush policies that would promote equity and transparency, much less alleviate poverty and food insecurity” (p. 174).

Fatton’s position as a member of the bourgeoisie is of substantial importance because it validates the known fact that “the ruling class has neither a social or national project, except the day-to-day political management of retaining its position of power, wealth, and prestige” (p. 122). It is the “opportunistic convergence of interests” that has plastered Haiti’s existence as a dysfunctional nation-state where proper institutions and political norms cannot be rooted within a functioning, transparent, and equitable democracy. The problem with Haiti is that even with the new constitution of 1987, and with an expressed desire to establish a good society, Haitians “cannot obliterate class interests, dependence on foreign power, and the quest of privileged groups to maintain their dominant position in the existing order” (p. 144).

Unfortunately, the inherited condition of unfairness that one experiences is a given within a structural process of bringing rights-bearing subjects into nothingness where sexual abuse, military occupation, and imported infectious diseases such as cholera occur, and are “contributing to the growing popular discontent.” Somehow, Fatton claims, “they must reclaim their capacity to make their own history on their own terms” (p. 176). But, how is that possible, given the voracity of liberal-imperialist countries and the self-interested bourgeoisie? Sure, Haitians were the first, in 1804, to proclaim liberty from below, but the conditions and the players are no longer the same, especially considering that “whenever the masses have risen, they have confronted the repressive

apparatus of the state and, frequently, imperial opposition too" (p. 56). Of course, Fatton recognizes the issue of co-optation and the lack of financial resources.

*Haiti: Trapped in the Outer Periphery* pinpoints prevailing concerns, but does not suggest ways for Haiti to remove itself from the outer periphery. Perhaps Fatton did not provide a relative blueprint because he realizes that the status quo and the "inequalities are pronounced and leave little room for social mobility" (p. 56). This book, while largely analytical, should serve as a principled and thoughtful policymaking tool that would place the issues of security at the summit of an uncompromising agenda about participatory democracy and nation-state sovereignty.

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