

A Mouth Is Always Muzzled: Six Dissidents, Five Continents, and the Art of Resistance

Natalie Hopkinson

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Natalie Hopkinson makes an impassioned case for artists to have a more central role in rethinking societal problems in *A Mouth Is Always Muzzled*.

The book brilliantly recounts the history of the sugar and slave trades, as well as the West's continued plunder of natural resources in developing countries. Particular attention is given to Great Britain's strategically important former colony, Guyana. Interviews help to illuminate the backstories of six writers and artists connected to the small country; they are overlaid with tautly controlled suspense about looming national elections.

Hopkinson's knowledge of Guyanese culture and history adds great depth to her tightly organized analysis. She examines the writings and activism of poet Martin Carter, artist Kara Walker, historian Walter Rodney, and novelist John Berger.

Her interviews and friendships with Guyanese painter Bernadette Persaud and poet/publisher Ruel Johnson are no less well researched, even as they are imbued with concern about the artists' economic independence and personal safety. These are artists, she shows, who changed the public conversation.

Hopkinson's writing is journalistic, creative, and personal, enlivened by outrage and flair. It captures a country that is "economically shipwrecked," cynically divided by corrupt leaders to form a never-ending "grudge match between brown and black sugar workers." She is indignant over violence against women, political corruption, global disinvestment, and soaring suicide and emigration rates.

Hopkinson paints the creative class as essential players in modern society—they "have vision out of a problem" and can imagine an alternative future, away from racial and economic inequities. Belying its title, the book loudly and elegantly articulates why artists are necessary catalysts in that shared better future.

RACHEL JAGARESKI (January/February 2018)

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