

Editorial

Don't you know you're talking about a revolution
It sounds like a whisper
Don't you know they're talking about a revolution
It sounds like a whisper

Tracy Chapman, *Talkin' bout a Revolution* (1988)

Thinking freedom should mean: freeing freedom from manipulations, including, first of all, those of thinking. This requires something on the order of revolution, and also a revolution in thinking.

Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Experience of Freedom* (1993)

What did we expect when we sent out the call for papers of the second issue of *From the European South*? Titled “Insurgencies from the South: human rights against the grain,” the call was an invitation to investigate ‘insurgent’ thoughts and actions, intended as collective and/or individual examples of forceful claiming and revising of human rights – as discourse and as actual liberties – from ex-centric perspectives. The keywords (insurgencies, south, human rights) invoked desires and actual episodes of self-assertion of people, activists, intellectuals, writers, artists, conveying a thirst for freedom and expressing a longing for equality and balance in the case for humanity. *Which* humanity and *whose* rights was of course open to question, since one of the aims of the journal is to sound ideas of the human and of being in the world as conveyed in epistemologies (and ontologies) of the South, which foreclose the possibility of sealing knowledge and ‘the real’ within a single, hegemonic, uninterrupted narrative.

What you find in this issue is a series of engaging responses to these expectations, which focus on the human, humanism, the humanities, and their radical potential. A spirit of resistance and theoretical repositioning is in the pages that follow: they contain a variety of critical discourses that explore the need and the act of breaking free, rising up, and occupying a public space of transformation. Insurgency comes through as a physical, intellectual, political, social or artistic gesture, predicated on survival, desire and change.

In other words, the articles are militant: they show how postcolonial critical theory continues to open up horizons of possibility, in fertile dialogue with feminist, indigenous, eco-environmental, decolonial and other theoretical frameworks; and they explore historical and contemporary tensions and movements that are unfolding around the world, through novels, poems, spoken poetry, songs, paintings, documentaries, films, photographs, videos, comic

books, graffiti ... They confirm that the role of the arts can easily cross into the realm of activism and socially transformative endeavours, while also suggesting that artistic practices can be more eloquent than any critical theory in conveying 'insurgent' perspectives.

A similar approach seems to apply to the question of human rights. Most of the interventions included in the issue make clear that it is probably more useful to acknowledge the existence and the meaning of shared human rights when we detect, examine, see, feel, suffer the lack of rights or the need for rights in the lives and through the predicaments of human beings. So, what they offer is an array of multiple and varied attempts at performing what rights might mean, particularly through an aesthetic commitment to their representation in the arts. They are willing to face the issue of rights as one of the central political, moral and ethical dilemmas of our times, but they seem to imply that it is only when freedom and dignity are acted out and located, when they circumscribe a set of essentials for the here and now of a culture, an individual, a class, a society, that they can somehow 'speak'. What we can hear, then, is how 'human rights' posit themselves as an essential constituent of the human experience in its manifold locations and declinations.

The experiences of 'insurgent rights' that surface in the texts involve colonized and neo-colonized people, women, migrants, refugees, minorities, the 'garbage' people and disposable workers of globalized economies: these are the 'citizens' of the many actual and figurative 'souths' of the world we live in.

The image, proposed in the call of this journal issue, of a '*percolating South*' that is everywhere, which seeps through all sorts of borders and circulates in the world, has been productively appropriated in various articles, in particular to question deeply rooted concepts of nationality, national borders, belonging and citizenship. The positioning and understanding of the 'subalterns' of the percolating South inflect rights 'against the grain', that is the right to be fully human from marginal, experiential, imaginative and insurgent standpoints.

Annalisa Oboe