

Looking back from the center: Experiences of Italian humanities scholars living and writing abroad

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The Italian university system suggests contradictions and paradoxes often encountered in 'semi-peripheral' countries, striving to adapt themselves to the practices of center-oriented culture (Canagarajah, 2002; Bennett, 2014). After the Bologna process, universities have been pushed to embrace the academic practices of the center, in terms both of mobility and attitudes to research (Attiola et al., 2009). The Italian academic system is a system in transition, both practically and culturally, and it is interesting to investigate if these changes also entail relinquishing traditional discourses and practices. Although much has been written about the "Italian brain drain", both in the press and in academic journals, research has focused mostly on macro-level economic models explaining migration patterns of academics primarily in the hard sciences. Few studies have focused on the individual experiences of Italian academics, either in Italy or abroad (Aittola et.al, 2009; Morano Foadi, 2006; Monteleone & Torrisi, 2012), but none has investigated the experiences of humanities scholars, whose academic discourse is historically and epistemologically divergent from Anglophone traditions (McNally, 1969). This study illustrates the experiences of three Italian humanists currently living in Sweden (but with scholarly experience in English-speaking countries). In-depth qualitative interviews on their personal (academic) history, their views on the Italian university and their experiences with publishing in English, were used to elicit their attitudes towards the discursive and cultural practices tied to publication in both languages. Their words portray complex and at times conflictual individual realities: while writing and publishing in English creates a professional identity for the writer, opening or closing avenues to academic advancement and recognition, these academics do not show an uncritical acceptance of EAD (English Academic Discourse), but rather a refined awareness of genre(s) and discourses in both languages, and how to negotiate the specific conditions of the various publication venues they address.

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Biodata

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