Introduction

This issue of the *Cracow Indological Studies* stems from the 5th Coffee Break Conference "Space, culture, language and politics in South Asia: common patterns and local distinctions", held in May 2014 in Rome. The Coffee Break Project focuses on scholarly methodology and aims at creating a platform for comparing not only data from different fields of research, but also concepts and vocabulary of different traditions of scholarship that constitute the different approaches of disciplines such as, e.g., anthropology, history of religion, and theatre. This volume contains, on the one hand, the development of the reflections emerged during the conference (see the papers of Cristina Bignami, Katrin Binder, Piotr Borek, Giorgio De Martino, Ewa Dębicka-Borek, Sarah Merkle and Elena Mucciarelli), and, on the other, contributions that are the result of the "distant" dialogue on the topic of "Cosmopolitan and Regional" with the scholars who joined the project afterwards (see the papers of Hermina Cielas, Robert Czyżykowski, Ilona Kędzia, Vera Lazzaretti, Olga Nowicka and Katarzyna Skiba).

When we look at something regarded as tradition, be it literature, religion or performing arts, we are confronted with a bundle of social and historical components that impinge on the development of cultural phenomena, thus creating a picture in which it is hard to pinpoint the different strata and layers. During the conference, we intended

to approach this kind of Gordian knot mainly relying on a gradual spatial-geographical parameter, that is to say on the different degrees of diffusion and influence of a given phenomenon in the territory;[1] more specifically, we decided to explore the complex relation between the two concepts of 'local' and 'cosmopolitan'. These two terms primarily refer to the linguistic richness of South Asia, and to the historical analysis proposed by Pollock that around the first millennium the Sanskrit language gained a prominent position in the Subcontinent representing the medium for courtly and political expressions as "cosmopolitan" language, while at the eve of the second millennium the regional idioms challenged its functions and prestige (the vernacular era).[2] Starting from the linguistic perspective, we shall understand these two terms as also indicating the ingredients of other components of the society as, e.g., religious and political concepts, as well as artistic artifacts. As Pollock has clearly pointed out (Pollock 2006: 11–12), the term 'cosmopolitan' has its drawbacks being unhistorical and hybrid since it is etymologically connected with the idea of the political structure of the city (*polis*) in ancient Greece, which was not cosmopolitan at all. On the other side, this term evokes the strong connection between power and culture, which is also at work in the history of the Indian subcontinent, and, at the same time, the idea of trans-local cultural sets.

The aim of this volume is to show that the contrasting notions of cosmopolitan and local may help in untying the Gordian knot without cutting it. More precisely, the intention behind this volume is to look at the concepts of cosmopolitanism and regionalism in the belief that the complexity of the Indian subcontinent allows for no effective all-encompassing description. The contributions collected here are indeed a piece of evidence in this direction. In fact, these two elements,

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[1]   It might help to think of a linguistic map showing the different isoglosses.

[2]   For a precise definition of vernacular and cosmopolitan, as well as for the difference between trans-regional and cosmopolitan, see Pollock 2006: Introduction.

cosmopolitan and local, are not mutually exclusive, and therefore they should be read as a continuum. Through this volume, we hope to show that the image conjured up from the different articles is that of a river, a flow of mutual influences: a mechanism of coexistence between different cultural traditions, religious and social functions, that come into existence only in the intersection of cosmopolitan and regional tendencies. In this sense the paradigm we are proposing is not that of an alternation, as often applied to these contrasting concepts, but rather that of a non-discrete, fuzzy amalgam.

On a first level the cosmopolitan and local tendencies can be seen as parameters in relation to the territory. In this sense, they produce a map of the diffusion of global and local phenomena. In one case the expansion outside the borders represents the degree of diffusion of a cosmopolitan phenomenon in a vast area; with an opposite aim, the vernacular and local phenomena fix their boundaries in the restrictive zone. As highlighted by Pollock (Pollock 1998), the vernacular intellectuals define a literary culture in opposition to something bigger and broader. They choose to write in a language that does not travel, which remains within the edges of something smaller and easily recognizable, but at the same time they appropriated themes of the Sanskrit royal discourse localizing them, as, e.g., in he foundation legend of the Hoysaḷa king (see the papers of Bignami and Mucciarelli in this volume) or in the Sanskrit drama *Vāsantikā-pariṇayam* (analysed in Dębicka-Borek's article). In this context, the new geo-cultural space is imaged as an enclosed and comfortable zone where the cultural references are part of the humus of the place of the inhabitant community. These distinguishable features are the basis of the conscious choice of a regional phenomenon, as emerges from the article of Nowicka. She focuses on the local hagiography of Śaṅkara bound to the Kerala area, in particular in the city of Trichur, that contrasts with the better known travels of the philosopher to the four corners of the Indian Peninsula (*digvijaya*). In this way, the legendary map of Śaṅkara's life was recreated and inscribed in the geographic location of Trichur and the physical space of the city was metaphorically

rearranged in order to actualize the ideological concept. From the opposite point of view, Kędzia analyses the Tamil Siddha medicine focusing on the works of the two respected authors of the Tamil Siddha literature, namely Irāmatēvar alias Yākōpu and Pōkar. The texts suggest features of the cosmopolitan nature of both of the authors, which may be also reflected in the character of their teachings presented in their literature as a transcultural system of knowledge. The importance of the concept of geography in Lazzaretti's article appears in the transposition of the *tīrtha* of Kedāreśvara, from the Himalayan region to the city of Varanasi. In this study the author argues that Kedāreśvara in Varanasi, a major shrine of a pan-Indian *tīrtha*, is constituted by layers of locality and a series of acts of localization and appropriation, which reflect a complex reality in which pieces of trans-regional and stratified local traditions intersect. The concept of locality is here analyzed according to the anthropological theories of Geertz (Geertz 1988), Gupta and Ferguson (Gupta and Ferguson 1992) and Appadurai (Appadurai 1988), where the concepts of 'spatial location', 'interconnection', 'mobility' are part of ongoing processes open to a variety of influences and impulses.

The concept of 'geographical parameter' seems to be replaced by that of globalization, where technology deletes every distance and, consequently, redefines the meaning of 'local' and 'cosmopolitan'. Following the 'global concept' of Appadurai (Appadurai 1996), De Martino introduces the "fading boundaries" hypothesis in the local and global praxis applied to Teyyam as a consequence to the strong and quick pushes of the diffusion of media and new technologies that have transformed them in new forms and interrelations. Moving to another performative art, Kathak, Skiba focuses on its Lucknow *gharānā* ("school") and examines various trends of modernization of Kathak, once more in relation to globalized, metropolitan spaces. The author considers the impact of regional culture, economic conditions and cosmopolitanism as important factors reshaping Kathak art and influencing practice and systems of knowledge transmission.

Local and cosmopolitan elements are present in the performing arts, but often the relation is not with the physical space; in such cases,

we rather deal with unified spaces, complex cultural systems that are conflated in the performative traditions. This blending is shown in Binder's article on the theatrical practice of Karnataka: the stories staged in Yakṣagāna performances, though drawn from the common-shared Sanskrit epics, show the influence of the Kannada and Tulu mythological and cultural background; interestingly enough, whereas some of the props used in this theater-form hint at a connection with the local *būta*-rituals in costal Karnataka, the other— with the Malabar practices of north Kerala.

As a matter of fact, the cosmopolitan and regional elements have always been present in the cultural developments of Indian societies, playing a decisive role in the political dynamics that shaped the public narrative. Under the same king, we might find inscriptions written in the language of the "cosmopolis" together with others that are composed in regional idioms, as it is, for example, in medieval Karnataka: Mucciarelli's article tries to show, through the analysis of the epigraphic sources, how a medieval king made use of both local and trans-local elements merging these two tendencies in the foundation legend in an effort to establish his own lineage. Moreover, if we look, for instance, at the literary life of South India already from the beginning of the second millennium we find Kannada, Tamil and Malayalam poems which are an adaptation of Sanskrit epics. Additionally, the different languages that were used in the same area were influencing and shaping each other, thus creating a common or partially shared cultural background. Both the lexicon and syntactical features of what was the cosmopolitan idiom, i.e. Sanskrit, flew mingling into the regional languages and gave birth to yet only partially understood mixed languages or linguistic phenomena, the so-called *maṇipravāḷam*.[3]

In the context of literary history presented by Borek in regard to the 17th century Maratha court, we find the language, and more precisely the literature (authored by Bhūṣaṇ), used as a medium of a political pattern in which a new hero has to be created. In this case,

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[3]   On *maṇiprāvaḷam* in Malayalam see Freeman 1998 and Veluthat 2013. On the quite different case of Tamil *maṇiprāvaḷam* see Shulman 2016.

we may ask if the choice of the regional idiom, Braj, to praise the king Śivājī has to be read as an attempt of the local to win over the global. Local and cosmopolitan elements were means of legitimation also in the development of literary tendencies in modern South India. The 19th century writer A. R. Rajaraja Varma, in order to strengthen the Travancore progressive movement, combined traditional, modern, local and trans-regional forms and themes in his works. Cielas' article examines Rajaraja Varma's short composition, the *Citranakṣatramālā*, written by the author in honor of his patron, where all these factors are joined. The analysis of selected passages of the work reveals Rajaraja Varma's ability to implement pan-Indian forms on the local Keralan ground and clearly pinpoints a constant amalgam of regional and trans-regional tendencies that interlace one into another.

Indeed, a powerful inclusivism has affected right from the beginning the developments of the religious movements as well as the iconographic choices displayed on the walls of the temples in medieval Karnataka that are decorated with local legends together with the main gods of the Hindu pantheon. The paper of Bignami, focused on the iconographic development of two subjects that played an important role in the Hoysaḷa sculptural production, demonstrates the fundamental connection between religious development and sculptural innovations. The local cults that are represented in the medieval temples allow for no clear cut between the regional elements and the royal legitimation practices that called for a trans-regional adaptation. The interaction of regional and trans-regional elements within a given "tradition" is shaped by an uninterrupted overlapping of these elements: if we consider the local features and facets, they both merged into the process of Sanskritization while the local traditions gained or kept their own status. Such a mechanism is evident also in the intersection of religious and political dynamics, as we can see in the development of the cults connected with the town of Ahobilam (Andhra Pradesh). In fact, what might be a challenging aspect in Dębicka-Borek's paper, apart from the discussion of the common pattern of a "mixed" marriage (Narasiṃha and the local girl, as seen

for instance also in a Tamil story of Murugan and his tribal spouse), is the analysis of the literary medium used to narrate the local myth within the Sanskrit tradition, namely a drama, which was often patronized by the royal power. The author suggests to use the idea of "adaptive re-use" as proposed by Freschi and Maas (Freschi and Maas forthcoming) to read the re-elaboration of a very common *topos*, mechanisms, and stylistic devices that are adapted for narrating the encounter of local cults with the trans-regional Śrīvaiṣṇava devotion.

Furthermore, the topic of the volume demands an interdisciplinary approach as long as the same dynamic might be at work in different contexts: for instance, as shown by Merkle applying field research, the cult of the goddess Ellamma contains both Brahmanical and folk elements—actually the name Reṇukā Ellamma itself represents both streams. In modern times, especially over the last few decades, some of the folk-religious practices of the goddess have been questioned and criticized as not fitting either the self-image of India as a modern nation or the rapidly spreading middle-class values. Finally, somehow going back to the territorial and geographical parameter we started with, the work of Czyżykowski on the Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyā tradition in Bengal very convincingly shows that if we do not consider the peculiar geographical and socio-political position of Greater Bengal, we will fail to understand that Sanskrit did not have the same influential status above the whole territory, and therefore misinterpret the dynamics and balance between the cosmopolitan and regional forces.

A similar indication as to the variability and context-bound character of the two concepts of cosmopolitan and local comes from a different vantage point. If we look at the different epistemological approaches and framing concepts used to deal with the main question of cosmopolitanism and regionalism, we find a multiplicity of terms that is not just a nominal issue: "Sanskritization" vs "Localization"; "Deshification", "Downwards-upwards movements"; "Great Tradition" and "Little Tradition". Similarly, this multiplicity cannot be subsumed into a binary relation. The work of Dębicka-Borek to some extent adopts the perspective of acculturation,

which can be applied to the complex net of interactions and mutual influences between two religious communities in Andhra Pradesh. In Nowicka's study, the local variant of an hagiographic narration is different from the cosmopolitan one, even more so if we consider the oral tradition, which is paramount as the canon is oral. In turn, Lazzaretti, drawing also on the contemporary documentations and on her own field work, presents a more cyclical process where the local is constantly redefined and constitutes indeed the context through which pan-Indian elements can survive: It is the local version of a legend that is transmitted and the pan-Indian elements contained in it continue to be pan-Indian insofar they are preserved in the local memory. Finally, Binder thinks in terms of non-mutually exclusive cultural spheres that have significant overlaps and that "together make up a 'cultural configuration'".

We hope that this small introduction might serve not as a survey of the following articles, but rather as a suggestion for a possible alternative to read through the volume with a different approach. Considering the phenomena we want to address, it is evident that the meddling of the trans-regional and regional tendencies can account for many historical phenomena, and it is paramount to avoid the temptation of a dissecting Aristotelian approach, trying to classify and parceling the object of study according to the parameters of local and cosmopolitan. For this study, more fruitful would seem to be the "morphological procedure" as suggested by Goethe in his scientific treatises[4] as he questioned the knowledge that can be gained by dissecting a plant and neglecting the movement of its growing. In his *Metamorphose der Pflanzen* a plant is not the result of each and every portion (pistil, petals, leaf etc.) but rather of a continuous mutation of its components. We argue that the study of cultural and intellectual history might take advantage from this kind of approach.

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[4]   See Goethe (1817) 1987.

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Cristina Bignami, Elena Mucciarelli, Ewa Dębicka-Borek

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