“I hear those voices that will not be drowned.”

Genres, Themes, Patterns: Teasing out a Possible Macro-Structure in

*Hikayat Kerajaan Sikka*

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The Kondi and Boer documents on the origin of the Rajadom of Sikka, edited with detailed commentary by E. Douglas Lewis, like all rich composite tales, can be read on many levels. While interpretation of mythic tales is all but limitless, certain linguistic, ethnological and ideological boundaries must be recognised. The following take is by a Catholic theologian conversant with biblical theology who has been living in Maumere for four decades.

**INTRODUCTION**

**Genre**

In *The Stranger-Kings of Sikka*, an integrated edition of two previously unpublished accounts of the origin and history of the Rajadom of Sikka translated, edited and analysed by E. Douglas Lewis (2010), Lewis notes that there are no terms for either “myth” or “history” in the Sikkanese language. Wendy Doniger maintains that myth is, “the positive connotation of something culturally richer and psychologically more revealing than history alone, a portal into civilisation’s inner self”, adding, “myths reveal to us the history of sentiments rather than events, motivations rather than movements” (2011, ix, xiv). Linking myth to history and faith conviction, Raimon Panikkar writes (1983, 98):

“A myth seen and lived from within is an ensemble of facts that forms the basic fabric where what is given stands out as if against a horizon. Myth thus serves as the ultimate reference point, the touchstone of truth by which facts are recognised as truths. Myth, when it is believed and lived from inside, expresses the very foundation of our conviction of truth ... historical facts are only transitory examples – often deceptive and always partial – of a reality that is always trans-historical.”

Myths give us stories to live by, they order experience by creating value and shaping life. Mythic-narratives link theology with daily reality by promising that life can be meaningful, by conveying practical wisdom about life, by inculcating values, and by defining the identities of their own leading characters (Cupitt 1991, 77). Meanwhile history “evolves over the weeks and the years as the provisional outcome of a contest of stories. Reality is a battlefield, an endless struggle between many rival stories about what’s going on. Truth is the state of the argument ...” (Cupitt, 20)

\footnote{From the opera *Peter Grimes* (1945) by Benjamin Britten (1913-1976). These words are cut into *The Scallop*, a shell-shaped stainless steel sculpture dedicated to Britten on the stony beach of Aldeburgh, Suffolk, UK.}
What genre, then, did the two Sikkanese author-compilers of the manuscripts, Dominicus Dionitius Pareira Kondi (1886-1962) and Alexius Boer Pareira (1888-1980), employ?

Writing in the first half of the twentieth-century during the final decades before Independence and the demise of the rajadom, Kondi and Boer, two early literate members of a hitherto oral cultural community, charted social change as their community moved from orality to literacy, from colonialism to national independence. Pre-history, recited in ritual verse, was transcribed by the compilers in their mother-tongue of sara Sikka, with just a few verses in the neighbouring vernacular of sara Lio. Recorded history, from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, and the authors’ ongoing commentary throughout, is written in a mid-Florenese dialect of Malay. Lewis notes (2010, 44): “The one the voice of Sikkanese myth and prosaic narrative and the other, Malay, which lent itself to narrative, commentary and, indeed, history.” Myth and history flow into each other in a community where myth, custom, history and language formed the warp and weft of a single piece of fabric. Even the dates that pepper segments of the pre-recorded history, and extracts from the mundane reports of the Dutch administrators, are embedded in the mythic imagination.

And so Lewis gives these untitled manuscripts the heading of “Hikayat”, the Malay term for tale, story or narrative:

“In the hikayat earlier mythic episodes serve to establish the ground of later, historical events while the historicity of later episodes serves to legitimate earlier mythic episodes. Thus Kondi’s text relates both myth and history as a single, chronologically ordered narrative. The hikayat is something and somewhere between history and myth.” (pp.56-57)

As a Christian theologian who studies the Tanakh (Hebrew Bible), I am not unfamiliar with composite, mixed-genre, “pre-Enlightenment” narratives. For instance, in the biblical account of the origin of the cosmos and humanity (Genesis 1 – 11), we find a collage of genres, that post-Enlightenment scholars have identified as hymns, myths and legends, woven into a composite fabric and then, without a suggestion of a seam, attached to both the pre-history and the recorded histories of Samaria and Jerusalem. And this is not the only point of contact between the Hikayat and Genesis.

Themes

Placing the Hikayat in the context of ethnological studies in the area, Lewis notes that, “Throughout the eastern Lesser Sunda Islands, one way of establishing the legitimacy of states of affairs, social relations, claims to status and authority, and one’s position in a community is by tracing one’s own origins in relation to those of some contemporary central figure.” But then Lewis goes on to note the uniqueness of the claim of these documents:

“In Sikka, the central figures to whom reference is made in tracing an origin are often descendants of Sikka’s ruling house or of its noble houses. In these reckonings

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2 Lewis has long grappled with the impact of literary on hitherto oral societies, for instance in “The Tyranny of the Text”, 1998.
of relationships to centres, the dynastic genealogy of Lepa Getê, the royal house of Sikka, is crucial. Thus, contemporary Ata Sikka make claims to title, power, authority, and precedence not by reference to their own antecedents or to the mythic traditions of Sikka alone, but also by reference to a dynastic genealogy of the rajas. 

The Hikayat demonstrates the legitimacy of the hierarchical order of the Sikkanese under their ruling house (lepa getê). The question of the sovereignty of Sikka’s stranger-kings and their legitimacy in the eyes of, and acceptance by, the community, is analysed in terms of marriage alliances and the path of ivory in marriage alliance itself, but also in parallel fashion, as symbol of ruling authority. Accordingly Lewis interweaves key cultural symbols, social relations and claims to status and authority.3

This analysis leads Lewis to question one of the foundation givens of ethnologists since the time of van Wouden (1935/1968), namely that diarchy is part of the “cultural core” of eastern Indonesian cultural domains. Lewis finds no trace of diarchy in Sikka, apart from the very different division between secular raja (stranger-king) and the incoming Catholic Church (stranger-religion). “I am left to conclude that the tale of origins of the Sikkanese Rajadom is not one of the creation of a secular and ceremonial diarchy but one which charts the rise of a hierarchical social system in which diarchy is wholly absent.” (Lewis, 123)

Patterns

Moving on from key themes to overall structure we find another parallel with Genesis 1 – 11. In the Hikayat Lewis observes:

“… a general movement … that begins with the creation of unity among disparate groups of autochthons in myths, a-historical time, progresses to the dissolution of unity in metrically chronological, historical time, and ends with the political reunification of the rajadom during the reign of Thomas da Silva.” (Lewis, 59-60)

Further,

“The work (of Kondi and Boer) cannot be read, as I first read it, as a curious jumble of juxtaposed myth and history. Rather, it encodes the origin structure of the society of Sikka and legitimates the political and social precedence of the Sikkanese rajas, a pre-eminence in local affairs that survived for at least two centuries.” (Lewis, 101)

Mixed genres woven into intertwined themes within an integrated text with an overall pattern; perhaps someone familiar with the Bible could bring that competence into reading the Hikayat.

STATUS QUAESTIONIS

3 “… myths of origin are not histories for the sake of history … but the way in which those groups came to form society. That formation is … the result of actions by the central, founding group alone. Hence … the history of Sikka is the history of the royal house.” Lewis, 1996, 173.
A Structured Literary Work?

Lewis recognises “the identity of persons and events in terms of time and space” as the organising principle that underlies Boer’s and Kondi’s works (p.63), adding

“I am always suspicious that I am missing a whole domain of meaning and order simply because my knowledge is insufficiently complete, even after thirty years of intermittent work on the problem.” (p.64)

This raises for me an intriguing question. Lewis has uncovered a clear purpose in the writing of the Hikayat in his meticulously detailed study of each genre (micro-analysis) as well as more broadly in the major themes and flow of the documents (macro-analysis). The purpose and the major themes unify what otherwise appeared to be “a curious jumble of juxtaposed myth and history”, initially presumed to be jotted down by barely literate writers. However, over the years and with painstaking care, Lewis undertook a lineal reading of the whole, uncovering its depth and its unity, which he has divided into a prologue and three epochs or periods (“dewasa”). Further, he has identified a thematic flow from beginning to end, from the creation of unity (in myth and a-historical ritual language) to the dissolution of unity (according to a historical chronology) and ending in reunification (mythic representation in metrical time, a mythic-history) (p.60).

My question is: can we also locate significance in the documents in their overall literary pattern? Did these early literate author-compilers write according to a macro-structure, that is, complete narratives with a beginning and an end, and not just a patch-work of disparate oral and written materials in more or less chronological (linear) order, but complex compositions whose structure pinpoints the intent of the author-compilers? Is there a message in the medium, in the pattern of the whole?

If there is a distinctive pattern in the Hikayat, this may help us make sense of what remains somewhat ambiguous or even superfluous. Lewis has already discovered that the Hikayat “encodes the origin structure of the society of Sikka and legitimates the political and social precedence of the Sikkanese rajas” rather than consisting of simply “a curious jumble of juxtaposed myth and history” as first supposed. The existence of an overall literary pattern would imply that the Hikayat, transcribed from diverse and distinctive sources, times and authors, is a complete work in itself, a developed literary work structured according to a recognizable pattern. Would such a work be feasible from the hands of early literates with no written model to follow?

Context and Critique

Lewis recognizes that these two narratives were written when the ruling house of the Sikkanese community was becoming increasingly aware of its fragility. The community was being buffeted by rapid social change. The local popular Catholicism of centuries was being brought under the aegis of the hierarchically-structured Catholic Church. Village schooling under the sponsorship of the Catholic Church was shifting generational relationships and so unsettling the adat. A new elite was emerging in the person of the school teacher and local administrator. There was political upheaval within the rajadom itself with unrest and revolt in the district of Kanga’e, and political uncertainty in Java as the nationalist movement gained momentum (influenced by the rise of China and Japan). All this called for a record of who the Sikkanese ruling family were and
how they came to run the local political-cultural establishment. The Hikayat justifies the status quo ante as they positioned themselves for the upcoming shifts in the socio-political tectonic plates.

I read the Hikayat as a Christian theologian. I am aware of the ongoing contribution of ethnologists and social anthropologists to the exegetical study of the Bible. Seeing similarities between, and the common issues behind, the quite distinctive accounts of the Hikayat and the Bible, which writings emerged from extraordinarily dissimilar cultural domains, I would like to look at Lewis’ study of the genres, themes and overall flow of the Hikayat Kerajaan Sikka with the aid of contemporary biblical exegesis. In looking for a possible macro-structure, I shall be turning to the work of Mary Douglas who in later life analysed the patterns of ancient texts, in particular certain books of the Hebrew Bible.

Caution is needed, lest I reduce the rich, complex texture of the texts to a monochromatic, monolithic worldview, or to a single, boring megaphone message. While both Kondi and Boer, as individual author-compilers who channelled the flow of the narrative, side with the ruling caste of Sikka, in the transcribed ritual language one can hear a variety of voices, and, as in all rich resources, there is much ambivalence and ambiguity. Such a range of sounds gives space for a critique from within the text itself. Such internal critiques are found throughout the narratives of the Hebraic-Christian scriptures. In this inter-cultural conversation I shall try to tease out those silent voices that will not be drowned.

A DIACHRONIC READING OF THE HIKAYAT

Micro-Critiques from Biblical Studies

Since the Enlightenment at least six distinct, albeit interrelated, schools of historical criticism have arisen in attempts to understand the origin and composition of, and various levels of meaning in the Hebrew Bible. Scholars have endeavoured to elicit the historical context or tradition, of the purported author-compiler. Within these traditions others discovered the sources which the author/editor may have used. Still others drew attention to particular forms or genres by which the traditions were handed on, while other scholars were more interested in the theological traditions behind the texts. Each of these four approaches resulted in the

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4 Of the vast and ever increasing library by biblical scholars, two classic books worth mentioning are Thomas W. Overholt’s Cultural Anthropology and the Old Testament (1959) and Hans Walter Wolff’s Anthropology of the Old Testament (1974). More recently the extensive and original work of Norman Gottwald on socio-literary exegesis of the Hebrew Bible has had a major influence, in particular The Tribes of Yahweh (1979) and The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-literary Introduction (1985; revised edition published as A Brief Socio-literary Introduction, 2009). Many works have been published on individual books or issues, for instance Shigeyuki Nakanose’s Josiah's Passover: Sociology and the Liberating Bible (1993). For a social anthropologist’s take on biblical texts, see the next footnote.

5 I attended lectures by Mary Douglas in the mid-nineteen sixties, later published as Purity and Danger (1966), and Natural Symbols (1970). Her two later works on books of the Hebrew Bible with which I am acquainted are, In the Wilderness: The Doctrine of Defilement in the Book of Numbers (1993), and Leviticus as Literature (1999).

6 J. Wellhausen (1885) pioneered “source criticism”; Hans Gunkel (1928) “form criticism”, G. von Rad (1966) and M. North (1966), and more recently W. Brueggemann (2005), have been influential in the “theological tradition” school, while B.S. Childs (1989) initiated “Canon Criticism”.

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“fragmenting” of the text as exegetes sought major, albeit diverse, influences that brought the final composite text to birth.  

More recently two schools of biblical criticism have arisen that look at the text as a complex whole. Some scholars have honed in on the influences on the final stage of revision, on the concluding redaction of the whole work while others took up the entire Bible and read each text as part of the whole collection or canon. 

Susan Gillingham (1998, 157-170) arranges these six historical readings to give a diachronic reading of the origin narrative of Genesis 1 -11. Exploiting the study of E. Douglas Lewis, I attempt a similar reading of the *Hikayat*. 

**A Diachronic Reading of the Hikayat**

From Community to Author

In biblical studies *tradition criticism* identified significant oral traditions or themes within a text, the religious-cultural soil from which the composite literary account grew. These underlying traditions embody major cultural values in the community. Cultural values characteristic of Sikkanese society that gave rise to the major traditions behind the *Hikayat* can be identified as social order (alliance and precedence), sovereignty (legitimacy and acceptance) and religious-cultural identity (Sikkanese-Christian). Each of these was generated through creative alliances, but also antagonistic relations, with outsiders.

*Source criticism* attempts to identify who was handing on the traditions. In composing the *Hikayat* Kondi and Boer obtained their material from a fair number of elders, from members of the lepa geté (ruling house), and from the Dutch *Dagboeken* in Maumere. The uniqueness of the *Hikayat* is that it is a first attempt at drawing together into a composite narrative a variety of genres from diverse sources. While each separate genre has its meaning in its individual ritual setting, each now acquires an added meaning as part of a broader text.

The biblical Genesis traditions were handed down in certain genres revealed through *form criticism*. Forms are “temporally-extended patterns or sequences; they are cultural structures, and they equip us to overcome chaos, order experience and shape our lives” (Cupitt 1991, 25). Form criticism uncovered the myths, legends, genealogies, blessings, curses, laments, hymns, proverbs, oracles, lists and love songs that were woven into the composite Genesis text. Similarly in the *Hikayat*, Lewis identifies myths, sayings, aphorisms, ritual language, sagas, allegories, typologies, genealogies, and extracts from the *Dagboeken* of the Dutch administrators in Maumere, as well as copious commentaries and accounts by the author-compilers themselves. A classification of the text into specific forms or genres indicates the particular life-settings for specific religious ideas – who recited what to whom on which ceremonial or familial occasion. In isolating individual groups of genres (micro-structures), the exegete focuses attention on the community with its ritual cycle as the preserver and inspirer of tradition. By identifying literary forms and their life-setting we can feel the personality of the community as the creative element.

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7 The identification of theological traditions is not immediately relevant for a study of the *Hikayat*, and so I shall limit myself to the three other approaches.
in this process. However, deciding on a life-setting for each particular genre is very much an intuitive art, above all when we are considering the mythic past where creative individual

agency gives way to representative types and settings.\(^8\)

Such micro-analysis takes into consideration each characteristic of Sikkanese verse which is marked by “rigorous semantic parallelism and a subtle interplay of metaphor and metonymy”

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\(^8\) In his ethnological studies Lewis gives weight to the creative role of individual agency (for instance in his major study of the Ata Tana ‘Ai (1988a); this possibility would be open in a comparative and diachronic study of the *Hikayat*. 
Oral culture is transmitted by reciting action-guiding universal narratives – myths, legends, aphorisms and the rest. Some material belongs to marriage negotiations, others perhaps to night-long recitations in the lepa geté, still others to adat disputes. While each myth and legend is free to flourish on its own and the written sentence is no longer tied to a particular moment or the circumstances of its ritual utterance, myths are primarily context-sensitive and in the Hikayat can be read diachronically.

Hence themes are uncovered through tradition criticism and genres through form criticism, while source criticism identifies both themes and genres. This entire process, whereby major traditions/themes/characteristics/values were expressed in particular albeit diverse forms which can be traced to a number of sources, maps out a movement from the community to an author-compiler, from orality to literacy, from a stable, coherent cultural domain to a fragile increasingly complex society facing an uncertain future. The drawing together of local traditions, genres and sources into a composite text (which itself underwent a number of revisions for over two decades) traces the prolonged process whereby the decentralized inter-ethnic communities of the Sikka hinterland gradually shifted towards a more unified, composite people.

**From Author to Community**

After micro-analysis through the lens of linguistics and ethnology, biblical exegetes turn their attention to the final document, to macro-analysis.

In the case of the Hikayat, redaction criticism concerns the author-compilers of the two extant accounts, Kondi and Boer, as well as Lewis himself who has abridged and edited these documents into a single narrative. My concern is primarily with this, the final stage of the text, with what the editors actually believed, the selection and final arrangement of the texts. As with the Tübingen School in biblical exegesis, the concern is with identifying the overall ideological tendency of the editors (Tendenzkritik) to discover the compilers’ distinctive contribution within the composite final text. Here the emphasis shifts from the role of the Sikkanese community as a whole to the distinctive contribution of Kondi, Boer and Lewis, who, having edited and reedited the material they have selected, brought them together into a single narrative now available to the literate public.

**TEASING OUT A POSSIBLE MACRO-STRUCTURE**

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9 In a meticulous study, Lewis explains how parallelism confirms the state of affairs without imparting new knowledge (and so is rife in ritual oration) while chiasmus, open to newness and surprise, is excluded from oration but present in ostension. He concludes, “Parallelism obviates chiasmus.” See, “Parallelism and Chiasmus in Ritual Oration and Ostension in Tana Wai Brama, Eastern Indonesia”, in Boris Wiseman and Anthony Paul (eds.), Chiasmus in the Drama of Life. London: Berghahan Books (2014). The concern of this present essay is not with such mini-linguistic constructions, vital as they are to the well being of ritual chanters and their societies, but to the overall mega-structure of the whole.

10 In biblical exegesis there is one more level of historical criticism, namely canon criticism which takes up the final text as we find it in the whole Bible and its place in the a particular section of the Bible, for instance in the Torah (first five books), the Ni’vim (prophets) or the Ketuvim (writings). There is, as yet, no extant comparable text with which to compare and contrast the Hikayat Kerajaan Sikka. And so I shall concentrate upon Lewis’ study of the pattern and flow of the entire text.
“Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold.”"11

The final work of Mary Douglas, published in the last year of her life, was on the ring composition of many ancient texts which she recognized also in certain books of the Hebrew Bible. She describes this overall ring structure of a given work as, “a construction of parallelisms that must open a theme, develop it, and round it off by bringing the conclusion back to the beginning.” (Douglas 2007, x) Through many examples, Douglas teases out seven conventions in ring composition, each with its clear place in the composite whole.12

I am not proposing that either of the Hikayat narratives follow a ring composition; without access to the complete manuscripts in their original languages, such a proposition cannot be explored. Also, from the large extracts available in the Indonesian edition of the Hikayat (Kondi and Boer 2008) it seems highly improbable that either narrative follows the seven ring conventions identified by Douglas, except, as I suggest below, the first convention (prologue), the fifth (central loading) and the seventh (closure at two levels).

The question still arises: what overall pattern, if any, are the two authors employing? Lewis suggests that they had no ready model at hand (Lewis 2010, 383) which is entirely plausible, for there was no literary model available to them. But were oral models available, overall structures commonly used by ritual leaders for ceremonial speeches, victory odes, funeral orations or indeed for joyful community celebrations, overall patterns that tied lengthy recitations together, that made memorising possible and listening interesting? Are there not common, albeit complex, conventions for the solemn recitation of myths of origin?

Without imposing a ring construction on the extracts of Boer’s and Kondi’s work, I suggest that we can detect a pattern apart from the linear-chronological scheme of the recorded historical narrative. This in no way questions that there is a clear linear flow in the Hikayat. As Lewis notes, “the clear sequences of the episodes in the two texts allowed me to interdigitate those episodes from the two texts into a temporally and textually continuous narrative” (Lewis 2010, 52). However, just as Mary Douglas discovered, while scholars considered many ancient texts lacking a coherent construction with much “repetition” and “clumsiness”, she found a non-linear structure that made sense of every item in the texts she studied.

In abridging and editing the material to integrate the works of Kondi and Boer, Lewis was guided by, “the overriding principle ... to edit in such a way as to emphasize the coherent narrative of Sikka’s origin tale that is somewhat obscured by both authors’ additions of interesting but diverting material” (Lewis, 52). Kondi and Boer almost certainly jotted down interesting material that was not crucial to their primary task. Nevertheless, in their narrative, written on whatever paper came to hand, is there another ordering, one possibly found in lengthy recitations and not simply in the chronological pattern of recorded history which might make sense of the placing of this “interesting” material?

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11 From “The Second Coming” (1919), W.B. Yeats (1865-1939).
12 These are 1) Prologue, 2) Split into two halves, 3) Parallel sections, 4) Indicators to mark individual sections, 5) Central loading, 6) Rings within rings, and 7) Closure at two levels. (Douglas 2007, 36-38.)
Kondi himself divides his work into four periods: 1) the creation of the rajadom, 2) the life of Don Alésu, 3) the life of Raja Mo’ang Mbako I, and 4) the life of Raja Andreas Jati da Silva (Lewis, 57; Kondi, li-li). Lewis himself reduces these four periods to three: 1) the arrival of the newcomers through to the reign of Dona Ines, 2) the “middle rajas” focusing on Mbako I and Mbo, and 3) the late “historical” rajas, beginning with Andreas Jati. Lewis then details the characteristics of each of his three eras (Lewis, 58-63). Is there another way of understanding the ordering of the material?

Both texts were composed over a long period, possibly from the 1920s until the 1940s with later addendums (pp.38-41). Each compiler spliced together diverse voices from numerous sources in a number of quite different genres, Kondi’s amounting to 82,100 words in length, Boer’s reaching 63,000 words. Clearly the selection of source material, oral and written, was decided by the overall theme and purpose of the work, namely the origin, development and organisation of the Sikkanese rajadom. But did the compilers also arrange their material according to a mega-structure, an overall pattern that makes sense of the content, vocabulary and placing of each inclusion in order to highlight the purpose of the whole – even possibly slipping in a critique?

My intuition is that the opening and ending of Kondi’s work form an inclusio or framing devise, and that the narrative has a centre, and that these three key components underscore the key themes of the entire narrative while at the same time critiquing certain underlying cultural assumptions. I do not have ready access to Boer’s version as Lewis understandably uses the longer account of Kondi drawing on Boer for additions and alternate readings only. Boer does not venture into recorded history, finishing his narrative with Raja Mbako Kikir Hiwa.13 So I leave Boer’s account to one side; a search for an oral-based, non-linear structure in his work would entail a separate study of his entire document. I limit myself to Kondi’s rendering as presented in the Indonesian (Kondi 2008) and English (Lewis 2010) versions.

Kondi’s Beginning and Ending

The Prologue

“We shall not cease from our exploration / And at the end of all our exploring / Will be to arrive where we started / And know the place for the first time”14

In his prologue (pendahuluan), Kondi describes a world long past. He introduces us to a lost world of darkness and ignorance, chaotic and unordered (Lewis, 117) where semi-nomadic people engage in slash and burn agriculture, a world hard to recall let alone understand. Key terms stand out: jungle, dark, wild, dangerous, a mythic world where nature, humans, animals and spirits vie for space:

13 To my mind the one important additional theme introduced by Kondi in his continuing with recorded history, is found in the era of Don Thomas da Silva. The account of the other rajas not included in Boer’s manuscript simply continue with the previous motif of conflict and the struggle for cohesion.
14 “Little Gidding”, T.S. Eliot.
“zaman dahulu kala, dunia Sikka masih muda, ketika itu rimba raya hutan belukar amat banyak dan kampung-kampung terdiri dari satu, dua rumah pun belum berapa adanya, bahkan tempat kediaman pun berpindah-pindah ... berdiam juga binatang-binatang buas dan liar, bercampur gaul dengan tempat jin ... zaman itu pun telah jauh amat dan sudah tersembunyi dalam dunia kegelapan ... laksana sebuah gua yang sudah ditutup oleh laba-laba dengan sarangnya .. sebagai sebuah batu bertulisan yang sudah kabur dawatnya ...” (Kondi 2008, 3-4)

Kondi’s Concluding Paragraph

Almost 82,000 words later, Kondi concludes his *Hikayat* with a portrait of Raja Don Thomas da Silva, the last active raja who was still living at the time of writing, and quite possibly the one who invited Kondi to compile the narrative.

“Personaliteitnya: Barang seorang belum pernah bercakap-cakap dengan beliau merasa diri takut bertemu sebelum melihat wajahnya. Tetapi kalau sudah bertemu satu kali (dan) seterusnya bercakap-cakap ... sifat beliau pandai mengambil hati orang dengan beberapa kata lucu-lucu ... Sifatnya suka mempertalikan diri dengan orang ditinggi sampai kepada orang rendah, maksudnya hendak mengetahui segala pendapat orang lain baik susah maupun senang diperhatikannya ... Sifat tidak suka berseteru dengan orang melainkan ramah tamah dan penasihat serta suka menolong yang bersusah asal orang datang meminta kepadanya.” (Kondi 2008, 328-329)

Contrasts between Kondi’s prologue and concluding paragraph leap from the page and mark the journey taken by the *Hikayat*. The tale begins with a portrait of a “dark” unordered community in the forest, where people vie with wild beasts and dangerous spirits, and ends with a portrait of an enlightened leader in town, administering an ordered society proud of its *adat* and the

“ancient times when the world of Sikka was still young, when the forest was still vast and the jungle still thick, when villages consisted of a single house, two houses were rare, moreover locations were not permanent ... also were wild and dangerous animals, they consorted with spirits ... those times are far distant and hidden in a world of darkness ... like a cave closed by spiders and their webs ... like an inscribed stone whose writing has become illegible ...”
community’s progress. The *Hikayat* describes the journey of the Sikkanese from temporary settlements, more often than not consisting of a single (long-) house, to their living in sizeable, stable villages, with an *adat* of which they were proud, with schools and administrative offices which they largely ran themselves.

But what or who brought this enlightened civilisation into being out of the dark, murky cave of the distant past? Reading Kondi’s narrative in the Indonesian edition, I suggest that the story does have a central point, an axis, which draws together key elements that, over the centuries, transformed the Sikkanese community from darkness to light. I find that centre at the end of the second period (Chapter V in Kondi 2008), namely the era of Ratu Dona Maria, Mo’ang Samao da Silva and Ratu Dona Ines da Silva (Kondi, 139-156; Lewis, 319-332). In any case, I find this an intriguing possibility.

The Centre

My suggestion is that the central section begins and ends with accounts of the two women rajas, Dona Maria and Dona Ines, with the story of Raja Mo’ang Samao tucked in between. While this section is replete with Sikkanese ritual verse, sayings and proverbs, it is also peppered with specific dates - 1563, 29th January 1565, 1581, 10th August 1595, 1598, 1601, 1602, 1637. Each date refers to a skirmish or conflict with outsiders, or to the murder of named Dominican friars. Myth and history merge seamlessly even as the language passes from Malay to *sara Sikka* and back again. Although Kondi and Boer sometimes differ in their accounts (duly noted by Lewis), both compilers claim that the laws and customs for bridewealth were laid down by one or other of the women rajas in order to enhance and preserve the dignity of women. 15 Ratu Dona Maria, “organised the marriage laws so that proposals for marriage (*pinang*) should be undertaken with courtesy and consideration because many women brought complaints to her about the wretched situation and poverty of some of the young girls” (Kondi, 139; Lewis, 319). Later, Ratu Dona Ines, “set out ordinances of bridewealth for all women so that marriage was strictly organised and orderly.” Or as Boer puts it,

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15 When Boer and Kondi compiled their accounts, the colonial government, with the full weight of the Catholic Church behind it, was making numerous efforts to outlaw, or at least, minimize the bridewealth, seeing it as a demeaning practice, a “procuring” of the bride. Almost a century later, in 2010, at a seminar in Maumere, Sister Euschokhia, SSpS, loudly condemned the practice in the name of woman’s rights. She was vigorously opposed by none other than Oscar Mandalangi who claimed, in line with the *Hikayat*, that bridewealth enhanced, not demeaned, the position of woman. One wonders whether, in writing the accounts of Dona Maria and Dona Ines, Boer and Kondi were not consciously defending a practice which was being concurrently attacked by the secular and religious authorities of the time.
“Terlebih diadakan lagi emas kawin bagi segala perempuan oleh sebab penduduk negeri berbantah dan bersetisih tentang anak gadisnya, yang dikawin oleh laki-laki pemuda, serta dibawa ke mana-mana sekehendak hatinya ada yang piara, ada yang tiada, dilepaskan (dibiarkan) saja.
Maka diadakan oleh Dona Ines emas kawin bagi segala perempuan, supaya ibu bapaknya jangan tera mat masgul bila gadisnya dibawa oleh si laki-laki dan terlebih supaya segala laki-laki sayang anak-anaknya dan hartanya yang telah dikawinnya itu.”

“Moreover Dona Ines introduced bridewealth for all women. The inhabitants of the domain argued and feuded over their young women. They were married by young men, who carried them off wherever they wanted. There were those who were well taken care of and those who were not, but were simply abandoned. So Dona Ines instituted bridewealth for every woman, so that their mothers and fathers would not be too anxious when men took their young women, but more importantly so that all men would have pity for their children and for the wealth with which they married.”

(Kondi, 141-142; Lewis, 321)

Thus at the heart of the narrative two women rajas established the adat around the most important cultural institution that ordered social relations. And the rules on marriage alliance were elaborated only after a delegation of women came to Ratu Dona Maria exposing “the despicable position of women”.

This is not all. Between the accounts of the two women rajas we find the tale of Raja Samao who describes himself as “manumere niang boru tana lewok” (“a cock of unceasing vigilance who redeems the earth” Kondi, 141; Lewis, 320). Samao sent a militia from Sikka to attack “looters” who had set out to destroy the Christian community on Solor island.16 Subsequently, Ratu Dona Ines sent a fighting band from Sikka to strengthen Christian forces battling with Muslims who were threatening Christian communities in Larantuka. Later another band was formed to shield Sikka from incursions from Makassar.

It is also recounted that during the rule of Dona Ines the people of Sikka sailed to Singapore and met Chinese and other peoples. So here we have two motifs intertwined: contact with other peoples for trade, which travel broadened cultural horizons and so brought about a certain pride in their own Sikkanese adat (Kondi, 141-142; Lewis, 321), but also military contact with aggressive outsiders who threatened their Christian identity, outsiders whom they valiantly and successfully fought.17

And so, in this central mid-section we find: 1) rules for marriage alliance; 2) alliances with outsiders to ward off threats to Christian identity; 3) a further tightening of marriage alliance

16 Boer and Kondi refer to the brothers Demong (Christian) and Paji (a Christian who became Muslim and subsequently attacked the Christians). Their interest in this mythic-history is focused on the successful role of the Sikkanese militia. Naturally enough, the legend of Demon(g) and Paji is much richer and can be read on many levels. See the version recorded by Paul Arndt (1938) and the much later Indonesian translation (2002).
17 Lewis has two minor mistranslations from the Malay. “Paderi Fransiscus” is not “The Franciscan fathers” (the Portuguese priests were Dominicans) but an individual named “Father Francis”. “Coster” is not “abbot” (there were no monasteries on Flores, only friaries); “coster” translates as “sacristan”, probably a local who looked after the church building and/or the needs of the priest when he visited. (Kondi, 149; Lewis, 326, 327).
rules; 4) additional military interventions to safeguard Christian identity; 5) relations with the “Portuguese” reinforced with alliances.\(^\text{18}\)

There is one other element of adat promulgated by Dona Ines which relates to outsiders, namely Tada – taboos that forbid the harvesting of crops and fruit before their time by the Sikkanese themselves, but permitted to hungry travellers passing through, whether for trade or on other business (Kondi, 143; Lewis, 322-324).

And so we might conclude that all the key elements of the Hikayat are set out in this pivotal “middle” section: social order and governance, marriage customs and family/generational relationships and the establishment of a strong Christian identity. And this pivotal section is opened and concluded with the rule of the two women rajas. The ordering of marriage alliance ensures social order while protecting the honour of women; alliances with the Portuguese/Topasses ensure the preservation of their Christian identity; contact with outsiders, both threatening adversaries and friendly trading partners and with their Portuguese allies in Timor, sharpen their awareness of their place in the wider world.

As Lewis has shown in great ethnological detail, marriage alliance and the sovereignty of outsider (stranger) are intimately linked (Lewis, 111-132). Precisely because they married into the local community, the incoming Topasses could be accepted as rulers of the autochthons community. Moreover, the symbol of ivory in marriage adat and its symbolic reference to sovereignty reinforce this link between marriage alliance and the governing family (Lewis, 133-159).

For me two key symbols stand out in this central hub: the circulation of ivory and the flow of martyrs’ blood.

“Symbols produce real events and sentiments, and real and symbolic levels may be simultaneously present in a single text ... myths ... do not merely respond to historical events ... but drive them. For we are what we imagine, as much as what we do.” (Doniger 2011, xv)

One might almost say that the time of Dona Maria through to Dona Ines is presented as Sikka’s “golden age”, the time when the rajas codified the adat and when the community, through inter-island trade, could compare themselves favourably with outsiders, when the rajas saw to the defeat of their enemies, and the Catholic-cultural identity of the Sikkanese community was secured.

Placing the Dona Maria - Dona Ines section as the centre-piece of the whole makes sense when we examine the narrative segments before and afterwards. The section immediately prior to the centre-piece recounts the story of Don Alésu, the first stranger-king who introduces Catholic Christianity to Sikka, and recalls the first shipment of ivory (Kondi, 103-138; Lewis, 285-318). Don Alésu sets the scene for the women rajas (social bonding through Catholicism, and the linking of marriage alliance and sovereignty through ivory). Following on from the central

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\(^{18}\) As Lewis points out, the term “Portuguese” almost certainly refers to Topasses as well as to the colonialists; if so it was Topasses who had married into a Sikkanese family which later constituted the ruling house.
section, Kondi and Boer narrate the mythic-history of two Rajas, namely Mbako I Kikir Hiwa and Thomas Mbo. Their times were marked by numerous conflicts among the people themselves, with Larantuka, and between Sikka and Wolokoli. Boer’s account ends here, while Kondi continues into recorded history until the era of the last raja, Don J. Thomas X. da Silva.

Understood in this way, the macro-structure of Kondi’s Hikayat unfolds as follows\(^{19}\)

prologue → search for meaning → order & identity → struggle for cohesion → ideal personified\(^{20}\)

Darkness → Creation of unity → Golden Age → Disputes (pre-historical & recorded) → Enlightenment

As we move back and forth from segment to segment, we can see how the text opens up an ever-growing horizon of awareness, a horizon provided by myth and realised in history.

**An Internal Critique?**

“I hear those voices that will not be drowned.”

The story of the female rajas is placed at the centre of the Hikayat, women who brought order and fairness (balance) to society, women who successfully defended their Catholic identity and so presided over a proud era. And this in a patrilineal society where male elders make all the formal decisions and pass on the key oral traditions. The presence, role and superiority of the women rajas somewhat muddles an otherwise patriarchal narrative. Do we not stumble, here, upon the key to an internal critique that brings out an inconvenient truth, or at the very least, an alternate voice to balance, or indeed correct, that of the “male-stream” account? In unquestioned myth and unfolding history the author-compilers combine many colours into one living texture, a serene symbiosis between the old and the new, tradition and modernity. Two female rajas rather than the dozen or more male rajas are responsible for social order, survival and gender balance, a mythic overturning of historical patriarchal assumptions, virtually standing them on their head. While male leaders and rajas in the earlier and later segments of the tale create unity and search for meaning, they also cause disputes. Only with the last raja, Don Thomas da Silva, does the Sikka community recover its cohesion and stand tall in facing the outside world. But with persuasive imagination and seductive ambiguity, the ideal golden age is surely located at the time of the two women rajas.

Accordingly, I read this central hub in the Hikayat as a built-in voice subverting the dominant patriarchal paradigm! While acknowledging the overall purpose of the Hikayat as painstakingly uncovered by Lewis, here in the centre the dominant male viewpoint is refracted and we glimpse multi-coloured rays of light through its prism. There is no single, overriding ideology to each and every part of the final text. We can hear voices that will not be drowned.\(^{21}\) "There is not much we can do about the past, but it is certainly within our power to withhold the assent it demands

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\(^{19}\) See Lewis 2010, 60-61 for an explanation of the three periods into which he divides the Hikayat.

\(^{20}\) “In … the liberation of mythic thought and the separation of the person beginning to enter into his own history, there are no watertight partitions … between the notions of person, intelligence, rationality and myth.” Maurice Leenhardt, Do Kamo, quoted by Lewis at the beginning of “A Quest for the Source” (1988b)

\(^{21}\) I am also aware of sobering comments such as, “Really important texts are those susceptible to being richly and diversely misunderstood.” (McNeill 1985, ix).
from us in the present day, as Gandhi famously said, to make sure that it does not happen again” (Sugirtharajah 2012, 186).

TO CONCLUDE

Both Kondi and Boer ventured from an uncertain present to an unquestioned past, trusting that it could be incorporated into the unknown future. Rooted in the final years of the rajadom, aware of their peoples’ fragility, the author-compilers enriched their people by understanding its past. They recovered and recorded their peoples’ mythic-history as a reference to orient them in the future by implicitly commenting on current anxieties. Such was the horizon within which they placed their ambivalent experience of the present. As the oral transmission and cohesion of their myth was loosening, so the community needed to be reassured by the external authority of the written word. Without doubt E. Douglas Lewis has undertaken an exemplary diachronical study of Kondi and Boer’s rendition of their community’s reliable order of truth, having learnt how to move out from his own ‘stand’, his liberal-individualist perspective, in order to ‘under’-stand the worldview of the other.

REFERENCES


22 Term from Raimon Panikkar (1983, 9).


