

Power of memory: the Kelara people of Savu, a myth deconstructed

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Abstract

In oral societies, only the knowledge an individual or a group of people cares about is transmitted to further generations. However this knowledge does not necessarily become cultural or collective memory. Sometimes it is kept as the group's secret, as its binding element. In NTT a popular legend about the Kelara people of Savu is sometimes printed in local newspapers and magazines. On my way to Savu I have been often asked if I knew about the mysterious Kelara people and if I was familiar with the story of those invisible people who worked at night and hid during the day.

I happened to meet people of the clan Kelara who recounted me their dramatic story and told me how they were banished some 12 generations ago (late 18th Century). Despite the freedom of expression in the Post-Suharto era, groups of people who have been ostracised and became socially 'invisible' for a long time have not yet found the means of expression to be able to transform their group's memory into cultural and/or collective memory. Thus myths survive as long as no one is interested in knowing a different truth or has the power to rehabilitate certain groups. The paper deals with the potential powers entailed in individual, social and collective memory. "The struggle against power", Milan Kundera writes in *The book of laughter and forgetting*, "is the struggle against forgetting". The paper explores two aspects: active counter-memory and passive resistance as expressions of a 'local genius'.