

**Nunn** Patrick, University of the Sunshine Coast (Australia), Loredana Lancini, Le Mans Université (France), Rita Compatangelo-Soussignan, Le Mans Université (France), *Stories of Catastrophe: Volcanic Risk Management in Oral Societies*

### **Abstract**

Many oral cultures have stories about cataclysmic events which occurred long ago. Most of these stories have been treated as cultural artefacts with no value to science-based explanations of geological phenomena. Today it is clear that many such stories are not only based on eyewitness accounts of such phenomena but often contain information about which modern/science is ignorant.

Using examples of volcano stories from Australia, Colombia, Italy, New Zealand, Russia, and the United States, this paper proposes that these stories were intentionally created and passed on orally to warn subsequent generations about the threat of volcanic eruption. The stories were not intended as history without purpose. These stories represent a type of risk management comparable to that which is common in most places that are today periodically threatened by volcanic activity.

It is concluded that in oral (pre-literate) societies, the imperative for effective risk management was felt as keenly as it is in modern societies. The implications of this work are that such ancient stories can be considered as the remnants of 'disaster risk manuals' that articulate societal policies and reflect cultural attitudes towards volcanic risk. If this is correct, then these stories can be interrogated to better understand the worldviews of people in deep history.