



## Geography Department Speaker Series

**Victoria Ramenzoni**

**Rutgers University**

**Histories of Submerged Islands: the Role of Legends and Islamic Beliefs  
In Understanding Calamity and Disasters In Flores, Eastern Indonesia**



**Friday,  
September 10  
3pm**

**ZOOM**

**Link provided in  
Email  
Announcement**



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There is a large corpus of myths and legends about sea creatures in the maritime world, a record that portrays incredible and wondrous feats, wrecks, calamities, and disasters. In this article, I present an account of the mythological world of the Endenese, a group of fearless seafarers and pirates that scoured the Eastern Indonesian Seas for over four centuries. By discussing the legend of Kota Djogo, an island that disappeared at sea in times immemorial, I reconstruct Endenese explanations for luck and uncertainty in a world plagued by volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, tsunamis, and typhoons. Going beyond the legend's veracity, I build on the study of the narrative of a sinking island to show how symbolic accounts of environmental events can provide important clues to the understanding of the ecology of disasters. I rely on ethnographic interviews to reaffirm the importance of local stories in tailoring human-environmental interactions and analyze indigenous rationalizations of uncertainty associated with environmental changes. Building on anthropological and geomythological perspectives, I argue that rationalizations present in oral legends and myths can function as coping mechanisms that reconcile communities with the unpredictable and the ambiguous. Yet instead of providing a "sense of control" to relieve anxiety, the persistence of these narratives over time emphasizes the variable nature of the world offering a constant reminder of the dynamism of life. Through the causal association of human actions with experienced disasters, these narratives also work as anticipatory devices that shape behaviors about resource use by representing the broader threats connected with their extraction and landscape alterations. In such a way, myths and legends operate as preparedness strategies that help communities deal with what is unexpected yet precedented. I conclude by arguing that natural disaster, risk management, and hazard disciplines can increase policy adoption among indigenous or traditional societies by evoking local stories, symbolic tropes, and prominent cultural beliefs within their frameworks.

Dr. Ramenzoni is an environmental anthropologist specialized in human behavioral ecology, coastal communities, and marine and coastal policies. She is an Assistant Professor in Marine Policy at the Department of Human Ecology, Rutgers University. Through a mixed methods approach, she studies how socio-ecological factors shape human adaptation, the historical ecology of fishing societies, the impact of environmental uncertainty on decisions about resource use, and household nutrition in coastal environments. Her fieldwork includes communities from Eastern Indonesia, Kalimantan, Cuba, and the U.S. Dr. Ramenzoni has a strong commitment to applied science, co-participatory methods, and policy development.