



# Members in Profile

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## Natascha Klocker

I am a Lecturer in Human Geography at the Australian Centre for Cultural Environmental Research (AUSCCER) at the University of Wollongong. I've been at the University of Wollongong since 2010, after finishing my PhD at the University of New South Wales in 2008. In between, I spent some time working with the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation in Melbourne on research projects exploring the link between racism, anti-racism and health. I've been a Councillor of the Geographical Society of NSW since 2010, and Honorary Secretary since 2012. I am also on the Editorial Board of the Society's Journal: *Australian Geographer*.



I became passionate about Geography as a teenager, in large part due to my Geography teacher at St George Girls High School – Mr Colin Murray. Mr Murray showed us that Geography was a tool for understanding political conflict and social unrest and injustice throughout the world, and in Australia. His classes got me interested in international development and, at a more local scale, in racism. I remember that my Senior Geography Project investigated racism in the St George area, and my interest in that topic has persisted over the intervening years. Mr Murray was also the first teacher who pushed me to become a better writer. While recognising that I could write, it was obvious to Mr Murray that I had a problem sticking to the point. I remember the horror I felt when he failed me for an essay that I had put an enormous amount of work into. His one comment at the end of the document read: 'Answer the bloody question!' I have carried that message with me since.

Strangely enough, I also have to thank the former Prime Minister John Howard and his Immigration Minister, Phillip Ruddock, for my career as a Human Geographer. As an undergraduate student at UNSW I studied Environmental Science (with a major in Geography) and Arts (with majors in Political Science and Development). I had planned to conduct my Honours research on an acid sulphate soils project. But Howard and Ruddock's asylum policies left me so aghast that I had no choice but to drop those plans to investigate what was going on with asylum seekers instead. What a pity that so little has changed about our asylum policies more than 10 years on.

Being a Human Geographer has afforded me fantastic opportunities to travel. My PhD research (on child domestic work) was conducted in Tanzania, where I lived for three years. Geography provided me with a great range of tools to think critically about complex questions of poverty, development and neo-colonialism during that time. Since returning to Australia, my research focus has shifted back to questions of cultural diversity, immigration and racism, with a particular focus in recent times on the experiences of inter-ethnic (or 'mixed race') couples and families. I've also become increasingly interested in how debates over population, immigration and the environment are playing out in Australia. I've been worried about the potential for environmental concern to feed into strident anti-immigration and xenophobic sentiments in our community. Geographers have a long history of engaging in population-environment debates in Australia. I think we have a unique capacity to contribute to public discussion on this heated issue in a measured way, bringing together our concern for the environment, a commitment to social justice and an awareness of our global and regional connections and responsibilities.