



# **A Place Called Home the Gunggari Struggle for Land: A Native Title Case Study**

*Anne-Katrin Eckermann, Lynette Lavina Nixon*

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A Place Called Home chronicles the Gunggari's people struggle for recognition of their Native Title. Like many colonized people throughout the world the Gunggari who belong to the South West of Queensland in Australia have had extraordinary obstacles placed in their way to achieving Native Title. For Gunggari, like all other traditional owners in Australia, the journey was made doubly difficult because treaties were never signed between the colonisers and the people they dispossessed. Gunggari laboured from 1996 until today to establish their rights to the land before the Australian courts. Their quest was confounded by changes in the legal system as well as obstruction from Aboriginal groups who clearly abused their powers. Nevertheless, Gunggari stayed united and focused and through their spokesperson, Robert Munn, negotiated skillfully until in 2012 the Native Title Tribunal recognized their rights to the lower part of their country, Gunggari continue their struggle today and hope that the Native Title Tribunal will recognize their rights to the upper part of their country by the end of 2015. Many of the things in this book illustrate the level of cultural vitality and resilience which marked the people and their activities throughout the last 120 years since colonisation.

The Gungarri of South West (SW) Queensland, Australia, have lived in, and taken care of, the country reaching from the headwaters of the Maranoa River in the Chesterton Ranges to the junction of the Maranoa and the Balonne for centuries before Europeans began to occupy the country about the mid-1850s.

Despite dispossession, dislocations and disruption, the Gungarri survived over the past 170 years in terms of language, kinship and descent, bound together by history, common experiences and a rich oral history. They identify themselves as Gungarri, their knowledge of ritual and spiritual associations is strong and they continue to identify with the country, which has been handed down to them by their forbears. As a people, they have never surrendered their lands to the invaders and they have over the years followed a number of strategies to retain and regain possession of their lands when the opportunity arose.


This account of the Gungarri struggle for recognition and acknowledgement of their rights to their country, invites the reader to participate in their efforts by focusing on:

- Gungarri traditions and beliefs, social organisations and lifestyle before colonisation
- Gungarri resistance to colonisation, the imposition of non-Gungarri laws, land dispossession and dislocation
- the ways in which the Gungarri have retained their connections with the land and their efforts to regain it, where possible, over the last two decades.

The information presented is based on existing literature dating back to the mid-1800s, as well as oral traditions collected over the past 45 years by means of interviews, focus groups and workshops.

It's not always an easy book to read because some of the stories are sad. People were removed from their country, they were excluded from Australian society, their children were taken from them. They were put in the lowest strata of society in the country town in which they lived. But it's also a hopeful book because it shows how both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in the end began to forge a united platform in terms of Gunggari native title rights to that region of South West Queensland.

"The land is everything. It's where we were born, it's where we hunt, it's our spirit, and where we belong. It comforts us and gives us hope for the future." Lynette Nixon, Gungarri woman, 2014.

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