Elite indigenous masculinity in textual representations of Aboriginal service in the Vietnam War

Journal article


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Abstract
This article analyses three texts that feature Aboriginal soldiers or veterans of the Vietnam War as protagonists: the novel Not Quite Men, No Longer Boys (1999), the play Seems Like Yesterday (2001) and the Redfern Now television episode “The Dogs of War” (2013). In all three texts, military service in Vietnam inculcates among the protagonists sentiments constitutive of what Brendan Hokowhitu refers to as elite Indigenous masculinity—the mimicry and appropriation of white hegemonic masculinity. Constructing themselves as elite Indigenous males allows the Aboriginal soldiers/veterans to position themselves as superior to “other” Aboriginal males. Through the course of the texts, though, the protagonists come to realise that elite Indigenous masculinity is a myth because civilian (white) Australia will continue to judge them the same as other Aboriginal men. Through encounters with other Aboriginal men, the Aboriginal soldiers/veterans are able to reconceptualise their own masculinities and to accept the legitimacy of multiple Aboriginal masculinities.

Keywords
Aboriginal; Vietnam War; literature; masculinity

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