Representing public service and post-militariness in *Bodyguard* (BBC, 2018)

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ABSTRACT
The opening episodes of BBC1's *Bodyguard* (2018) broke records for a drama debut, the highest launch figure for any new drama across all channels in the United Kingdom since 2006. This article examines the hit series with a particular focus on notions of public service and post-military identity. The paper explores how the drama conveys 'public service' in the UK context at this specific historic moment, adding to writer Jed Mercurio's oeuvre of dramas that explore the professional ethics of public servants. More specifically, I argue that the analytical lens of 'post-militariness' offers a nuanced way to better understand the complex cultural and political work of the traumatized war veteran from the 9/11 wars, as portrayed in popular media culture. *Bodyguard* is only one of many dramas representing contemporary war veterans who are often depicted as struggling to transition to civilian life. 'Post-militariness' accounts for both the persistence of military identity as a source of pride and as a source for feelings of betrayal.

Introduction

The returning soldier has long attracted cultural fascination, a figure idealised in various artforms but with the potential to haunt civilian society, as the bodily reminder of often devastating foreign policies. The opening episodes of BBC1's *Bodyguard* (2018), written and created by Jed Mercurio, employed such a figure, and broke records for a drama debut in the United Kingdom, with a consolidated figure of 10.4 million viewers: the highest launch figure for any new drama across all UK channels since 2006 (BBC 2018a). The series finale was the most-watched episode of any drama since current records began in 2002, with over 17 million viewers over the first 28 days (BBC 2018b).

PC David Budd (Richard Madden), as the titular 'bodyguard', arguably offers the most prominent fictional portrayal in UK popular media of a contemporary war veteran from the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

It is primarily this central depiction which stimulated my own interest in how this series engages with notions of public service and post-military identity in the 'fag-end' era of the war on terror. The value of public service, and by extension the work of public servants, appears to be simultaneously culturally venerated and under attack economically in these times of political turbulence and austerity. While citizens' relationships with politicians have become strained and remote, both factual and fictional representations of the working lives of police, fire crews, health workers, prison officers, and even soldiers 'mucking in' during national crises, have come to dominate television screens. But how does this drama convey 'public service' in the UK context at this specific historic moment? More specifically, how are the military veterans recently returned from war portrayed, and how might the concept of 'post-militariness' help us to better understand the cultural and political work of the traumatized 'returning soldier' figure in popular media?

Bodyguard was broadcast on BBC1 on Sunday nights from 26 August-23 September 2018. As a political thriller, the programme counted scheming politicians, terrorists, criminal gangs, security services, police and war veterans among its main characters. The key protagonists are defined by the nature of their public service – whether as former soldiers, police officers or politicians. Of particular interest here is the way in which lead character David Budd's PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), following his experiences as a soldier in Iraq and Afghanistan, is deployed as a dramatic device to convey not only his own fractured psyche but to signal the vulnerability of a nation-state facing multiple and opaque threats.

This article is informed by scholarship regarding the writer and creator of *Bodyguard* (2018), Jed Mercurio, alongside literature on crime and espionage dramas, political entertainment, and media representations of war veterans. Specifically, I draw upon Brunsdon's (1998, 2017) writing on the 'discursive contexts' for crime drama, which provides a suggestive framework for examining how drama is shaped by and shapes pertinent political and social concerns. Mercurio's dramas are especially interested in institutional environments and professional identities, and so the portrayal of 'public service' offers a particularly rich area for discussion. The eponymous bodyguard in this series is not only a Personal Protection Officer assigned to the Home Secretary following his brave thwarting of a terror attack, he is also an ex-soldier: physically, morally and mentally injured by his combat experiences suffered whilst serving his country abroad. I argue that it is the condition of 'post-militariness' where the programme engages with its most challenging but ultimately problematic discursive context.

Beyond the case study itself, another aim in this article is to build bridges between television studies scholarship and political communication or popular geopolitics traditions. Writing on crime drama, for example, is

interested in the way fictional narratives affirm the authority of institutions and explore social anxieties (McElroy 2017), whilst the study of dramas representing the political realm and geopolitics has been especially prominent since the 'war on terror' (Lacey and Paget 2015). The article contributes by bringing these literatures together, drawing upon insights from research specifically about the war veteran as a culturally contested and politically charged figure (Cree and Caddick 2019; Danilova and Purnell 2019; Woodward, Winter, and Jenkings 2009), and supported by popular geopolitics and feminist International Relations theory, which takes seriously the aesthetic and emotional dimensions of global politics (Shepherd 2013; Duncombe 2019). Especially in relation to the 'war on terror', such scholarship recognises that there is a dogged persistence in the way that films and television feed anxieties about the dangerous 'other', in often problematic depictions of the terror threat and the security response (Tasker 2012; Dodds 2015).

I discuss how the war veteran has become a familiar dramatic trope in popular media, and how, in this case, the persistence of military identity for veterans, or 'post-militariness' (Parry and Thumim 2017), is aligned with embodying both masculinised decency in the face of institutionalised corruption, but also a (self-)destructive and violent ambivalence. I argue that post-militariness offers an insightful analytical lens because it recognises the complex dialectical tension between military experience coded as both a source of pride and of trauma, and perceives post-military identity as signifying both an enduring commitment to public service and as embodying a sense of betrayal.

Jed Mercurio as a British 'showrunner'

Bodyguard (2018) was written and created by Jed Mercurio, for the production company World Productions. Mercurio has been likened to the US 'showrunners' due to his 'forensic ability' across all aspects of production (Simon Heath, Executive Producer, quoted in *Bodyguard* DVD extras), and the kind of creative autonomy that most writers and producers aspire to, especially following the success of *Line of Duty* (2012–2021, BBC), which focuses on the fictional police anti-corruption squad AC-12.

Mercurio had already explored the institutional setting of the National Health Service (NHS) in both *Cardiac Arrest* (1994–96, BBC, three series) and his two-season series *Bodies* (2004–6, BBC). As Bruce (2017, 2) notes, there is an 'interest in professional selves, professional identities and professional ethics' that run through both *Bodies* and the police corruption drama *Line of Duty*. Mercurio drew upon his own experience as a doctor for *Bodies*, as well as his service in the Royal Air Force medical branch during his medical training. The writer has spoken of his 'revisionist' approach to the

medical drama, where not all doctors are good doctors, and of 'swapping reassurance for reality' in his approach to policing in *Line of Duty* (Mercurio 2012; see also Joy 2014). The 'world of work' is clearly a preoccupation (Hughes 2015) and it is a world where incompetence, stress, failures of leadership and imposed targets are shown to have disastrous human consequences. As Bruce writes, 'Managers and professionals in *Bodies* are tribal identities, defined by oppositional allegiances to, respectively, the hospital-as-corporate-entity and successful-treatment-as-professional-*raison d'être*' (2017, 13). But even if *Bodies* depicted hospital doctors mocking market-driven managers under their breath, it is the doctors' culture of 'sticking together' that also leads to a failure to expose the institutional problems described in that series (Bruce 2017).

In *Line of Duty*, Mercurio transferred his forensic critique onto the pursuance of targets in the police force, within a broader context of public spending cuts (Curtis 2012). As Joy (2014, 158) writes, the series is organised 'around a particular conceptualization of policing as an ethical public service under threat from bureaucratic red tape and imposed performance targets'. In this manner, Mercurio attempts to weave wider socio-economic considerations into complex and intricately absorbing plots. Indeed, Mercurio is considered a master in leaving audiences waiting in anticipation for the next episode. Such twists create an atmosphere of uncertainty, ambivalence and excitement. But Mercurio's scripts for his police procedural interviews in *Line of Duty* are also famously lengthy and full of acronyms, presenting a challenge for both actor and audience. Finally, it is worth noting that Mercurio is renowned for killing off major characters early on in the series: 'The first thing you do is check that you're not dead', says actor Adrian Dunbar of *Line of Duty* when receiving new scripts (cited in Gilbert 2019). As we shall see, this penchant for killing off main protagonists was also a dramatic device used (and possibly abused) in *Bodyguard*.

Identifying the relevant discursive contexts for crime drama

One sub-field relevant to this case study is the scholarship on crime drama. Crime dramas give viewers an intimate insight into professional lives behind the curtain, where the audience gets to play detective alongside the often-troubled souls who provide the dramatic embodiments of the police force. Bruce's observations, cited above, on Mercurio's attention to professional identities were made in reference to the medical drama *Bodies*, but 'target culture' has also been identified as a theme or 'discursive context' in the genre of police dramas. Charlotte Brunsdon (1998) originally identified three 'relevant discursive contexts' for the production and consumption of police dramas in the 1990s: an increasingly punitive 'law and order' rhetoric; 'privatization' and private enterprise; and the discourse

of 'equal opportunities', manifested in terms of both casting and plotlines. Providing an updated version for the twenty-first-century police series, Brunsdon (2017) suggests revised discursive contexts for this state-of-the-nation genre: the 'anti-terror state'; 'target culture', which takes the earlier shifts of privatisation and marketisation for granted across the public sector; and 'bad sex', where systematic sexual abuse, human trafficking and paedophilia are repeatedly referenced in narratives.

In relation to the first relevant discursive context, Brunsdon argues that dramas are set in places (historical, rural) and devised in a manner which deliberately *avoids* the invocation of the anti-terror state. This is due to a 'hollowing out of the consensual legitimacy of policing in the contemporary British state and a kind of crisis in the integrity and trajectory of the genre' (2017, 35). Instead, questions of surveillance, torture and terrorism do not quite fit in to the police genre world, appearing instead in 'serious' conspiracy dramas, such as *Spooks* (2002–10, BBC) or *Complicit* (2013, Channel 4). One strategy that Brunsdon suggests is employed to avoid the trauma of dealing with the uncomfortable questions of the anti-terror state is the prominence of female lead characters in the genre, with personal and professional lives entwined, and even a favouring of the melodramatic and psychological drama. Brunsdon is not the only one to notice this shift from 'law and order' to storylines underpinned by broader anxieties about 'terrorist' threats (even if she notes a reluctance for UK crime drama to represent this explicitly). In the US drama context, Tasker (2012) argues that crime drama has developed a distinct set of conventions for dealing with the terrorist as national or cultural 'other' in post 9/11 narratives, foregrounding political violence and action-oriented in style.

Mercurio's *Bodyguard* appears fashioned to engage head on with Brunsdon's discursive contexts. The first episode was both celebrated and ridiculed by commentators for the number of women depicted as occupying professional roles and positions of authority. The opening scenes included a female train guard, suicide bomber, senior firearms officer, police sniper, and bomb disposal expert. In prominent positions of power, the Home Secretary, the Head of the Counter Terrorism Command and the titular bodyguard's own Chief Superintendent are all women. But there is no avoidance of the anti-terror state in this programme. Indeed, the drama is not really a police procedural drama, but a hybrid political thriller more in line with the 'serious' conspiracy dramas mentioned by Brunsdon. In the case of *Bodyguard*, the psychological trauma is not that of leading female characters but is instead that associated with the lead character's PTSD. As a veteran of the Afghanistan war, PC David Budd is shown struggling with the transition to civilian life. He is reluctant to seek help for his poor mental health, has separated from his wife, repeatedly attempts to speak to her when drunk, and is prone to night terrors.

I therefore suggest that an important discursive context for *Bodyguard* is not only the 'war on terror' as an anti-terror state concern, but more specifically 'post-militariness' as a discursive context that plays out at both a personal and societal level (Parry and Thumim 2017). The 'ends' of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have seen the proliferation of the damaged war veteran figure across popular media culture genres, and I argue that the mediated treatment of such figures is always politically significant and conflicted. War veterans serve as reminders of the bodies broken by war and the broken politics of a nation-state unable to come to terms with its foreign policy disasters (Achter 2010).

Finding the political in dramatic treatments of politics, security and public service

Drama 'tells us stories about ourselves, and others, that nurture the public imagination and offer significant resources for making sense of the world and for organising our feelings in relation to it' (Richardson and Corner 2012, 923). Over the past 15 years or so, political communication scholars have started to look beyond the news towards other media texts to examine the various ways in which citizens engage with politics, construct political meanings and build identities (Tenenboim-Weinblatt 2009). In recent years, terrorism and the war on terror have become prominent themes in television (and film) drama – *24* (2001–2014) in the US, *Homeland* (2011–2020), originally adapted from Israeli drama *Prisoners of War* (2010–2012), and UK drama *Spooks* (2002–2011), to name just a few examples. The second series of the Danish international hit, *The Killing (Forbrydelsen II)* (2009), also revolved around a plot related to military veterans and a political cover-up of civilian murders in Afghanistan, whilst those involved attempted to pass the blame onto Islamist terrorists in order to ease the implementation of anti-terrorism laws. In each of the dramas mentioned above, the policies of politicians are interwoven with the execution of such policies by those 'in the line of fire'.

The themes of homeland security and political violence have been much discussed in the US drama context (Tasker 2012; Castonguay 2015), with less attention to UK dramas, although *Spooks* is the exception here (Izgarjan and Djurić 2016; Oldham 2017; see also Lacey and Paget 2015). The security services also feature prominently in *Bodyguard* and the 'spy and conspiracy genre' is intertwined in this hybrid thriller. The spy genre is arguably the main televisual genre where the 'war on terror' theme is tackled most directly, and espionage dramas are often divergent stylistically and thematically from the everyday domain of the 'boys in blue' (Brunsdon 2017). They are also framed as 'quality' prestige programmes; attractive 'products' for international markets.

Public servants as mediators of the state

For most citizens the state is experienced through the public servants on the 'frontline' of administering the laws or services our democratic institutions preside over, whether as law enforcement, health, education, social services, border officials or other 'street-level' bureaucrats (Zacka 2017). In addition to personal encounters in everyday lives, the ethos of public service is continually celebrated and tested in both factual and fictional media portrayals. In the UK context, the popularity of fly-on-the-wall style documentaries in police stations (*24 Hours in Police Custody*, 2014-present, Channel 4), hospitals (*Ambulance*, 2016-present, BBC; *One Born Every Minute*, 2010-present, Channel 4), schools (*Educating*, 2011-present, Channel 4), and more recently prisons (*Inside Prison: Britain Behind Bars*, 2019-present, ITV; *Crime and Punishment*, 2019-present, Channel 4), demonstrate a fascination with the challenging working lives of those dealing with depleted resources whilst maintaining good humour and making ethical and efficient decisions on behalf of public institutions.

Arguably the most extreme form of implementing (foreign) policy decisions at 'street-level' is the work undertaken by military personnel in conflict zones, of those signed up to fight for 'Queen and country' in whatever part of the world they are told to go. As servants of the Crown rather than public servants per se, members of the armed forces are trained to kill, see others killed and possibly be killed 'in the line of duty'. The nature of such service remains, troublingly, both alluring and alienating to a wider public. Indeed, as has been observed by various scholars, the idealised soldier often stands in figuratively for the nation-state, embodying the virtues of the nation (Achter 2010; also see Millar (2019) for a recent discussion). An obsession with war fighting has long pervaded popular culture (Paris 2000), but the lived experience of serving in the military, and how returning veterans communicate that experience to those who have no direct knowledge of conflict, has only more recently come to the fore in political or security studies scholarship, often collected under the burgeoning field of critical military studies (Basham, Belkin, and Gifkins 2015; Bulmer and Eichler 2017; Cree and Caddick 2019).

Bringing the war home: the war veteran as a contested figure

Interest in the depiction of war veterans is not new. Concerns about how to integrate those returning with both visible and invisible injuries following the First World War can be found in contemporary reports (Swift and Wilkinson 2019). The 'golden generation' of the Second World War tended to be fêted as idealised heroes, especially in the bourgeoning Hollywood film industry of the time (Dawson 1994). In the television era, the shame of losing the Vietnam War became projected onto US veterans via many popular culture forms, as disturbed

and alienated loners in films such as *Taxi Driver* (Scorsese 1976) and *Rambo: First Blood* (Kotcheff 1982). In the US, the group particularly treated with contempt were the Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW), who aligned themselves with the 'hippie' counterculture and were not afraid to detail atrocities which highlighted the horrors of war that they had themselves witnessed or even participated in: 'the VVAW's conscious attempts to "bring the war home" to the American people had the unintended effect of making the American people afraid that veterans would literally bring the war home by committing violent acts on the populace' (McClancy 2013, 63). Kathleen McClancy argues that the media created two stereotypes of the Vietnam veteran by the end of the war: 'the fascist war machine and the desperate revolutionary', each feared as 'psychotically dangerous' (64) by certain sectors of society.

The 9/11 wars have led to new portrayals of the war veteran, whether in the media, theatrical productions, museum displays, novels and memoirs. Concurrently, such cultural productions have brought renewed attention to the veteran as a culturally contested and politically charged figure (Cree and Caddick 2019; Danilova and Purnell 2019; Pitchford-Hyde 2017; Webber and Long 2014), alongside broader concerns about militarism and 'hero-fication' of military personnel and values (Kelly 2013).

In addition to the concerts and award ceremonies for 'heroes', reality television shows, the Warrior and Invictus Games, and documentaries that examine the difficulties faced by 'battle-scarred' veterans, the war veteran has become a familiar trope in fictional portrayals. There are too many examples to list here, even limiting discussion to the UK context, but these range from: characters in both soap operas *Coronation Street* (ITV) and *EastEnders* (BBC) who return from Afghanistan and struggle with PTSD and domestic violence; the BAFTA award winning *Occupation* (BBC 2009) in which three Army soldiers return to Basra in Iraq following struggles to adjust to civilian life; to various crime dramas in which events during the Iraq or Afghanistan wars provide motives for murder (for example, episode 'Sandancers' in *Vera* (2012)). The drama *Southcliffe* (Channel 4, 2013) featured both a returning soldier from Afghanistan and a character who claims to be a former SAS soldier, but who goes on a killing spree after his lies are revealed and he is beaten and humiliated. In these dramas, the war veteran often cuts a tragic figure in such dramatic depictions: embittered, grief-stricken, alcoholic, injured, traumatised, violent, suicidal.

Post-militariness as an analytical lens

Fictional portrayals of the war veteran offer a personalised and emotionally charged representation, often attracting large audiences, as was the case with *Bodyguard*. Examining post-militariness provides an analytical lens that not only examines how troubling normalisations of military values in civilian life are

mediated in popular culture (militarisation); it looks at how the impacts of war training and war experience persist in fictional veteran bodies who are depicted as carrying their former military identity and martial masculinity into civilian spaces. The word 'carrying' is a deliberate reference to Tim O'Brien's book *The Things They Carried* (1990) about his own experiences of being a soldier in the Vietnam War. Blurring fiction and non-fiction, O'Brien's stories not only conjure up the physical carrying of heavy equipment, but the way stories and memories are carried between those who have experienced war. The collective veteran identity that is thought to bind ex-soldiers together can also be exclusionary; if you weren't there, you cannot know. The 'discursive context' of the war on terror era is therefore manifested here in the consequences revealed in the damaged bodies and minds of returning soldiers from the 9/11 wars. As Constance Duncombe (2019) has argued with reference to the bodily suffering of female lead characters in US dramas, the individualised pain and suffering of bodies in popular culture images serve as visual signifiers for the moral pain of the wider body politics (see also Achter 2010). Post-militariness is manifest in individual bodies but is also social because those individuals are part of society. Most directly, the families of returning soldiers are also affected by post-militariness. Whilst the term militarisation implies an overarching concern with military values and militarism permeating civilian society, post-militariness is more specifically concerned with (post)military bodies and the memories of combat they carry with them. Popular culture provides a resource for exploring how the dialectical tensions of pride and trauma are imagined in the portrayal of transitioning from militariness to post-militariness.

I now outline a brief plot synopsis for those unfamiliar with the programme. This cannot do justice to the complexities of the plot but serves as a pared-down description to ground the later analysis. I then turn to analysis of the programme, thematically organised into sections about the discursive contexts of the anti-terror state and three interconnected features of post-militariness: the veteran as a dangerous threat; as needing help for trauma and injuries; and as embodying an enduring commitment to public service.

Bodyguard: plot synopsis

Bodyguard eschews traditional character introductions or title credits in its first episode by immediately presenting a tense 20-minute scene in which off-duty specialist protection officer David Budd averts a suicide bomber on a train bound for London, talking the apparently frightened woman, Nadia Ali, out of detonating her bomb, whilst ignoring various protocols to resolve the situation by putting himself in direct danger. In doing so he reveals he fought in Afghanistan and attempts to bond with her by stating they have both been failed by politicians: 'you and I, we're just collateral damage'. Following this act of bravery, Budd is appointed as the Personal Protection

Officer for the Home Secretary, Julia Montague, a controversial and ambitious politician who is seeking to pass the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA 18), which would give police and intelligence agencies new powers to surveil personal online communications. This makes her a target for terrorists and criminal gangs, who are conspiring to assassinate her.

When PC Budd saves Julia Montague's life during a sniper attack, the shooter is revealed as his fellow veteran friend from the Afghanistan war, a peace activist, Andrew Apstead. Before this, Apstead and Budd are shown talking about their shared trauma and how they had earlier discussed killing the politicians who sent them to war; and so Budd's loyalties are questioned – is he part of the conspiracy? This aspect is complicated by the illicit romance that develops between Budd and Montague. After surviving the sniper attack on her car, Montague is later killed by an explosive device while giving a speech. Budd is distraught when she is killed, blaming himself for his failure to protect her, which leads to a suicide attempt. The police are uncertain of his motivations and mental stability. Political machinations between Montague, the security services and other members of the Cabinet keep the viewers guessing about who exactly is involved in the murder conspiracy. In the final episode, the criminal gang members kidnap Budd and knock him unconscious. Budd wakes up wearing a suicide vest in Central London, giving the police reason to believe he is a terrorist. He manages to safely defuse the bomb, escape the police, and finally reveals both the plan to frame him and the conspiracy among his own police boss, the terrorists and the criminal gang. Whilst the security services are implicated in other dubious activities, the politicians and spies are ultimately shown to be involved in power games, but not in terrorism or murder plots. Budd finally seeks help for his PTSD and is joined by his estranged wife, Vicky, on a family trip in a final, hopeful, scene.

Findings: the discursive context of the anti-terror state in *Bodyguard*

As noted above, the 'war on terror' features in the storyline in a dual manner: immediately in the opening sequence we see the threat of a suicide bomber (Nadia) intending to detonate a bomb as it reaches London. Secondly, it is in the politically-centred storyline of the RIPA 18 legislation that Julia Montague as Home Secretary is attempting to get through parliament. Mercurio has said he tries to avoid immediate topicality, such as the Brexit debate, because politics moves on so quickly (cited in Hughes 2018), but the programme is undoubtedly imbued with the discursive context of the anti-terror state. The Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA 18), dubbed

the 'snoopers' charter', resonates as a familiar political response to post 9/11 and 7/7 terror attacks – the increase of powers for security services to 'listen in' to social media and other communications.

Returning first to the terrorism plot and the opening scenes of the first episode, as noted above, Budd attempts to create a communal bond with Nadia, stating they are both 'collateral damage' of the politicians' failed policies.

> I was in Afghanistan. I saw mates get killed. Nearly got killed myself. For what? Nothing. Politicians. Cowards and liars. Ours and theirs. People full of talk but will never spill a drop of their own blood. But you and I, we're just collateral damage. Don't let them win, Nadia. Don't let them win.

Whilst this is expressed within the context of an accidental negotiator role and so its authenticity could be questioned, Budd's contempt for politicians who supported the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan is a recurrent theme in the series. His hatred of politicians serves as a motivation for his possible duplicity, with the audience initially kept guessing about his involvement in the murder conspiracy.

In this tense first scene, Budd puts his body between Nadia and the police sniper, ensuring they cannot make a 'critical shot', allowing time for the bomb disposal team to arrive and remove Nadia's suicide vest. Nadia is depicted as in fear of her husband who has left her to be a 'martyr', an assumption made by Budd and exploited by Nadia in later police interviews in order to mislead the investigation. The series therefore plays with the stereotype of the vulnerable Muslim woman, only to reveal Nadia as the bomb maker and architect of the conspiracy in the final episode, in which she appears to physically transform, watched by Budd on the police monitor: 'I built all the bombs. You all saw me as a poor, oppressed Muslim woman. I am an engineer. I am a Jihadi'. This rebuff (and convenient confession) is directed not just at Budd, but also at the audience, whose surprise at the plot twist is designed to be accompanied with reflection on their own possible prejudices. But Mercurio was also criticised for merely replacing one stereotype with another in deploying this twist – oppressed woman in a hijab becomes the terrorist mastermind (Khan 2018).

It is worth noting that in the series, the threats to security are all 'home-grown'. Nadia Ali (suicide bomber), Andrew Apstead (anti-war activist) and Luke Aikens (criminal gang leader) are all British, so that whether a self-claimed jihadi, an embittered veteran, or a criminal, the threat comes from within. This is in contrast to earlier dramatic treatments of the war on terror, in a British context perhaps most famously in *Spooks*, which shifted attention from Al-Qaeda to Russia over its ten series run. In a sense, *Bodyguard* bucks a trend in this regard: both in its story-world action taking place within national boundaries, indeed mostly within London; and in the shared

national viewing experience, in which the nation-as-viewer is realised in its huge Sunday night viewing figures, and amplified in the media commentary and social media responses.

One could argue, as Joy (2014) does regarding *Line of Duty*, that the post-9/11 and post-7/7 environment provides the underlying global socio-political and economic concerns in the series, but there is a distinct lack of reference to threats emanating from beyond the UK, or to international cooperation between political, police or intelligence services. Especially considering the role of such prestige dramas as worldwide commodities, the series is surprisingly nationally bounded in its story-world. Indeed, the only characters that refer directly to experiences outside the UK are war veterans Apstead and Budd, who have fought in the conflicts instigated under the 'war on terror' rubric. It is Julia's support for this past foreign policy that provides the pivotal political tension between her and Budd, and gives him the possible motivation to conspire in her murder. Julia's unrepentant support for the wars is presented in a scene which foregrounds her mediated performance as a politician, and which is re-employed in heavily loaded, repetitious and rapidly edited later scenes, to suggest a conflictual relationship between the two main protagonists.

Being interviewed for the *Andrew Marr Show* (one of a number of real-life BBC news and current affairs presenters who appear in the drama), and watched over by Budd, Julia is asked if lessons can be learnt from the Afghanistan and Iraq wars. Defending her own and the government's position, she notes: 'The Prime Minister has been very clear on how we deal with the present and build a more secure future. That doesn't require apologising for the past'. During this scene, we see Budd's emotions break through his professional demeanour, as he swivels round to watch Julia on the monitor. But it is in the next scene in which the intensity of his response suggests a violent and obsessive character. We see Budd in his apartment watching the clip of Julia over and over, repeatedly playing the section where she says, 'That doesn't require apologising for the past', which is soon shortened to 'apologising for the past', repeated at least four times as he repetitively rewinds the footage in a fixated manner. David's face is seen in close-up, illuminated only by the light reflecting from the television, and then in extreme close-up, intercut with other extreme close-ups of Julia's mouth on the screen (Figure 1(a,b)).

The visually striking emphasis on David's intense gaze suggests a dangerous side to his character, hinted at already in angry exchanges with his estranged wife, Vicky. Such visual conventions and devices are the sustaining elements of political and crime thrillers, designed to obfuscate each character's motivations and keep audiences guessing. But this characteristic of the drama also has political significance; just as Nadia's portrayal is in intertextual dialogue with other mediated images of female Islamic terrorists or women wearing hijabs, such images are part of the 'cultural production' of the war on terror (Castonguay 2015).
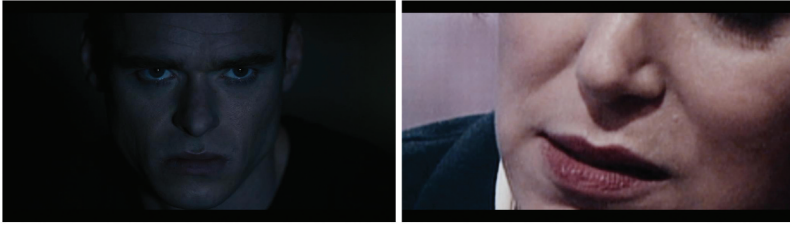
Figure 1. (a,b) Extreme close-up shots of Budd re-playing the footage. Credit: World Productions

As others have noted (Tasker 2012, 47), images of watching and surveillance are not only central themes of crime and espionage dramas, they are also 'an essential part of the aesthetic'. Julia's earlier TV interview is transformed by the obsessive re-watching and cropping described above. Similarly, CCTV footage is recurrently watched and re-watched for traces of evidence; characters are routinely shown watching police monitors of street scenes and of police interrogation interviews. Such police interviews are rarely depicted straight-forwardly from within the interview room for any period of time. Instead, the editing switches to the grainy footage of the monitor, so that the audience is frequently either watching the watchers or positioned as sharing their viewing perspective. This is not an original observation of such dramas, but this aesthetic choice positions the apparatus of institutionalised watching between the viewer and the action, at once a distancing layer of re-mediation but simultaneously inviting a closer inquisitive look from the surveillant viewer (Figure 2).

Budd's potential for violence is hinted at in his obsessive behaviour, but it is in the representation of his fellow veteran army buddy from Afghanistan that a problematic 'enemy within' depiction comes to the fore. The anti-militarist politics of Apstead are distorted so that he becomes an easily manipulated killer rather than non-violent activist for the 'Veteran's Peace Group'.

Figure 2. Police interview watched through the monitor. Credit: World Productions

The politics of the damaged war veteran: post-militariness as violent threat

We are first introduced to Andrew Apstead in Episode 1 following the scene described above, as Budd hovers outside a 'Veteran's Peace Group' meeting, overhearing his friend's anti-militarist address to members:

> For decades the West has been inflicting suffering on the poor and powerless. The war in the desert, in the oil fields, we've brought it back to the streets of Britain. There's kids growing up over here all they hear is what's been done to families and friends over there. Who can blame them if they want to push back?

Apstead talks of the 'cycle of violence' created when politicians respond by restricting freedoms following terrorist attacks, his sympathies clearly lying with the 'so-called terrorists'. We cut to Apstead and Budd sitting on a bench drinking beer with Apstead attempting to persuade David to seek help for his PTSD: 'Mate, you can't beat it on your own. The counselling sessions, they're really helpful. There's a bunch of us now'. As Apstead turns his face, we see for the first time his facial disfigurement caused by shrapnel (Figure 3). But it is David's potential duplicity in a murder plot that is once more highlighted:

David: You said it, out in Helmand.

Andrew: You say a lot of stuff when you've seen your best mates blown to pieces.

David: If you ever found yourself right beside one of those bastards that sent us out there, you'd just close your eyes and pull the trigger. You'd still have a face, I'd still have a family.
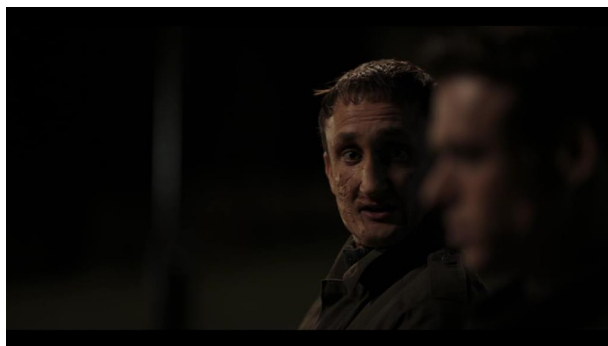

Figure 3. Apstead turns to Budd and his facial scars are revealed for the first time. Credit: World Productions

The conversation captures what both men have lost due to fighting in the war, as well as the injuries they are still coming to terms with, whether physical, moral or emotional. Their later conversation in a pub (Episode 2) reiterates the argument Budd had made to Nadia, but this time with Apstead persuading David: 'That's the way it works. Even in civvy street, it's the same thing. They're in it for themselves, they couldn't give a shit about a bloke like you that takes the risks. You're the mug that suffers the consequences'.

In his chats with Budd, their attitudes towards the politicians who supported the war are expressed in a familiar 'lions led by donkeys' rhetoric; a 'them' and 'us' in which the ordinary soldier suffers in the power games of politicians. The populist rhetoric resonates with current political discourse of 'them' and 'us' when it comes to political elites, but in the suggestion that *they* should also get a taste of suffering, Apstead's moral commitment to anti-militarism and peace activism is skewed in disturbing ways.

Apstead 'becomes' a terrorist without first having to become a Muslim, in contrast to Brody in the first series of *Homeland* (Castonguay 2015). This perhaps speaks to the growing temporal and political distance to the 'war on terror' rubric, in which the once ubiquitous stereotyping becomes less pervasive. The audience is encouraged to question whether David Budd is also part of a terrorist and criminal conspiracy, by revealing only so much through the initial, tense visual storytelling, and later in the repeatedly-watched CCTV footage recorded just before the bomb that kills Julia explodes, to prompt just enough question marks about his complicity. These plot gaps are exploited for the purposes of audience anticipation and later explained away through the acknowledgement that the criminal gang intended to frame David for the assassination of the Home Secretary.

As experienced by the most prominent war veteran in the series, David Budd's PTSD and the violence wrought upon his body, including the attempted suicide (discussed in the next section), provide a dominant visual focus for the series. We follow David as he wrestles with his demons, and watch him watching others in his work environment (Figure 4). In his work clothes, he is strapped in, his bomb vest like a layer of armour, his facial expression mask-like with only a clenching jaw muscle betraying any emotion. His demeanour is buttoned-down, calm and contained, a protector rather than initiator of violent action. In contrast, at home we see his emotional vulnerabilities as well as a softer side. Budd occupies the screen in almost every scene, embodying a conflicted sense of duty in his barely contained anger and desperation.

The actor playing Budd, Richard Madden, is Scottish, but in making the character of PC David Budd also Scottish, the writers add further potential layers of meaning to the character. Budd is an outsider in the
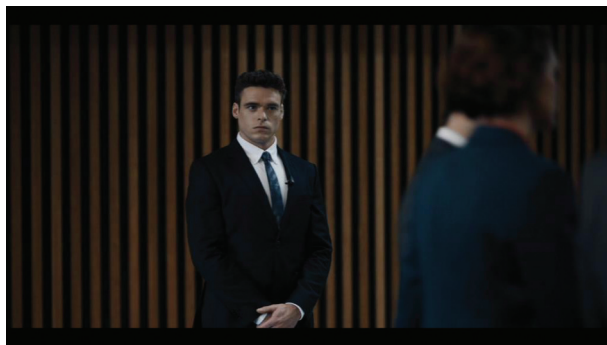
Figure 4. Budd's detached watching of others is a recurring image. Credit: World Productions

London setting, coded via his social class and Scottish identity. Budd tells Julia he wanted to be a doctor but instead spent 10 years in the Army: 'To get into medical school you need work experience. How do you get that? By knowing a doctor who can get you in. I had no idea where to start so I never applied'. This neat elucidation of how social capital works is spoken during a rare romantic scene, with David and Julia under the white sheet of her hotel bed, cocooning them from their real-world responsibilities. She touches the scars on his torso, asking if they hurt. Unlike Apstead whose scars cover his face, Budd's are hidden from public view, the experience of his pain less visible but prompting an empathetic response from Julia and by extension, from the viewer (alongside the more elaborate backstory his character warrants). Budd's hard, trained body is also eroticised through Julia's gaze, but his discomfort at the power differential in their relationship is revealed when she proposes to 'give him a knock' once she has finished her work and he snaps back 'Like I'm room service'.

Budd's Scottishness is also intertwined with his 'militarised masculinity', understood here as 'a cultural ideal which associates masculinity and combat through the valorization of strength, athleticism, aggression, (hetero)sexual conquest, and brotherhood' (Bulmer and Eichler 2017, 163). Budd's characterisation taps into the stereotype of the Scottish 'hard man' and even the more specific 'Scots-as-warriors' trope (Danilova and Purnell 2019). As Fiona Douglas (2009) writes, in representations of Scottish masculinity there is both a glorification of the working class, skilled worker or hero alongside associations with violence and alcoholism. At one point, Budd tells his young son, who is being bullied at school: 'What have I told you about crying? Never show weakness, they only hurt you more. Right big man, in you go'. This attempt at instilling manliness in his son is, however, undercut in the depiction of Budd's inability to cope with his own emotions.

Budd is depicted as failing to fulfil his caring role as a father and husband, kicked out of the family home due to his reluctance to seek help for his PTSD and for his recourse to alcohol (and possibly violence). Budd's helplessness and hopelessness domestically stands in stark contrast to his bravery and certitude in a professional setting.

But when the two worlds collide and Budd starts a sexual relationship, and then romance, with Julia, she also becomes victim to his night terrors. When he starts to strangle her whilst apparently still asleep, Julia escapes and locks the door between their rooms while he apologises profusely. Julia becomes yet another woman telling him he 'needs help':

Julia: Whatever your training has made you, it's out of control.

David: Do you want me replaced?

Julia: I don't know. But you need to get help. David? David, I know you didn't mean to hurt me.

Despite other flashes of anger and references to earlier marital problems, this is the only scene in which David commits an openly violent act, not in a defensive or protective role. The blame is immediately placed on the 'training' that has 'made' Budd what he is. War experience and training become the reason for violent behaviour, and Budd is cast here as a victim rather than perpetrator, the person needing help and in pain. As Kleykamp and Hipes (2015) argue, narratives of trauma and damage might hold stigma for veterans but are also perhaps intricately related to being viewed as deserving of public support and benefits. Budd is broken by his war experience, a victim rather than a perpetrator of violence.

Post-militariness as needing help

As mentioned above, other characters also tell David he 'needs help', including his wife ('You need help Dave . . . you're getting worse'), Apstead ('Mate you can't beat it on your own'), and sympathetic police officer Louise ('You've got an illness, David. You're traumatised'). At the series finale, we see Budd finally go for counselling: 'I'm David, and I . . . I need some help'. David's need for help is a recurrent motif. The most shocking scene where this is made abundantly clear is when he attempts suicide by shooting himself in the head. This is a remarkable element of the storyline and one which warrants further discussion.

The explosion that kills both his colleague, Kim, and its intended target, Julia, provides the final straw for Budd's sense of self-worth. Finding out at the hospital that Julia has died of her injuries, Budd

returns to his flat and takes out the hidden pistol which the police have failed to find in their search. As we hear the prime minister announce Julia's death ('These plots do not always arise from outside our number. Outside our community … Some fester within'), via the police officers watching it on their screens, the images are intercut with Budd checking his gun and an image of three envelopes addressed to wife Vicky and his children, Ella and Charlie.

The music continues to build as the camera pans from the envelopes to Budd walking across the flat with the gun. Budd kneels, breathing heavily and visibly upset, and puts the gun to his head. In extreme close-up now, the image blurs in and out of focus as his breathing intensifies. There is a momentary respite as Budd collapses in tears, cries into his hands, the music now quieter. He shouts 'fuck' then picks up the gun again, with another cut to a blurry extreme close-up. There is then a quick cut to a picture drawn by son Charlie of 'Me, Dad, Ella', implying he is looking at it, before a rapid cut back as he pulls the trigger (Figure 5(a,b)). We see blood and he falls out of shot. The music builds again and then stops. We cut to the exterior of his flat as the camera pans backwards, now only hearing the hum of traffic, a dog barking and birdsong.

The scene is described in detail because of its intensely shocking and emotional nature. Mercurio appears to have killed off his second major protagonist halfway through Episode 4. The constant blurring provides a visual buffer for the violent self-destructive act on screen, similar to the pixilation of gruesome photographs, whilst the music amplifies the emotional intensity. There is also the visual 'red herring', as the editing cuts between Budd's eyes and the picture of his family drawn by his young son. This cruel editing implies he will think of his children and save himself. Instead he fires the gun. The realisation that he cannot live with himself despite knowing how his death would affect his young family only adds to the sense of dark desperation. Budd only survives because the criminal gang have secretively replaced his bullets with blanks.

Figure 5. (a,b) Rapid cuts between a blurry close-up shot of Budd and a point-of-view shot of Charlie's drawing of them together. Credit: World Productions

To place such a scene in the middle of a popular drama plays into Mercurio's reputation for killing off main characters. But to depict the mental and moral agony, the loss of any meaning required to continue with life, adding to a sense of having already lost his family following his tours in Afghanistan, provides a searing portrayal of a veteran destroyed by PTSD and moral injury. Budd is under suspicion for Julia's murder, the institutions he has served reinforcing a sense of betrayal already nurtured following his combat experiences. We have already witnessed Budd and Apstead discuss the betrayal they feel from their experience in Afghanistan. As psychiatrist Jonathan Shay (1994) writes in his ground-breaking work on *moral injury*, an army is 'a social construction defined by shared expectations and values' (6). When the shared 'moral world' of the soldier is shattered by a leader who betrays 'what's right', such actions inflict 'manifold injuries on his men' (6). Whereas Shay focuses on social betrayal and loss of leader legitimacy as the causes for combat trauma and 'moral injury' (20), later work on veteran mental health expands the definition of moral injury to include trauma caused by 'perpetrating, failing to prevent, bearing witness to, or learning about acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations' (Litz et al. 2009, 700).

Shay's definition above of an army as 'a social construction defined by shared expectations and values' could also be applied to other professional identities, especially in the public sector. For those working in frontline or first-responder roles, the shared understanding of authority, constructed both formally, in well-defined hierarchies, and informally, through traditions and social bonds, has to be strong; as Shay writes, 'so great that it can motivate men to get up out of a trench and step into enemy machine-gun fire' (6), or as a more topical example, to treat patients with Covid-19 despite the inadequacy of personal protection equipment or other resources (Williamson, Murphy, and Greenberg 2020). The preferred manner of representing those professional lives in popular media contributes to their social construction; such fictional and factual portrayals work to sustain national heroes and decide who is deserving of collective empathy. The final element of post-militariness recognises how an enduring commitment to serve is in tension with the effects of trauma discussed above.

Post-militariness as embodying an enduring commitment to public service

If being embittered and suffering mental distress were the defining features of post-militariness, the main protagonist of the series might be seen as an anti-hero rather than hero. But the 'coding of heroism' (Tasker 2016, 310) in the character of Budd is also intricately entwined with his militarized masculinity. His job is to 'keep safe' the Home Secretary, and his vigilance and even chivalry (in lending Julia his shirt for her TV appearance) is repeatedly

on show: the routines of checking the apartment, standing guard outside the government offices, the bravery both in the early scenes on the train and also whilst under fire in the sniper attack.

Budd's post-militariness sets him apart from Julia the politician. The bond of public service and sharing of professional lives is a significant theme, where good character is recognised across those working at the sharp end of government policy. In the tense final episode when David is unwillingly strapped into a suicide vest, he sends Vicky to the awaiting police with the *kompromat* evidence that proves he is telling the truth, and asks police officer Sharma to let him try to defuse the bomb he is wearing. To Sharma asking how he knows he'll keep his side of the bargain once Vicky hands over the evidence, Budd replies:

> I've been a soldier, I've been a copper. You get to spot a bloke whose word's his bond.

Budd's words are visually emphasised through the use of extreme close up and narrow depth of field, so that his face is in sharp focus within a blurred setting. Wordlessly Sharma accepts this and asks the bomb disposal officer to approach David with the kit. In a life-or-death, high stakes situation, David's appeal to Sharma, based on their shared values and a form of trust between 'coppers', is sufficient. Sharma's word is 'his bond' despite the severity of the situation, or possibly because of it. Interestingly the use of 'bloke' carries particular connotations, as an informal and exclusively masculine term. David's bravery in these final scenes mirrors his courage when confronted with Nadia, the apparently terrified suicide bomber, in Episode 1.

In *Bodyguard*, Budd demonstrates his exemplary protective manliness without displaying a readiness to use excessive force. The ambivalence of post-military transition is captured in his sense of betrayal and in his PTSD symptoms, but the drama offers a measure of reassurance when it comes to the good character of 'blokes' who share a commitment to 'what's right' and the pursuit of justice, even when that puts them at odds with their superiors.

Conclusion

Television drama is especially powerful in provoking responses of shock, uncertainty, empathy or excitement, due to the audio-visual storytelling devices at its disposal. Whilst open to multiple interpretations as media texts, the personalised and fictional portrayals of war veterans proffered in popular culture entertainment provide moments of identification and emotionality that are less readily available to news or current affairs genres.

The military veterans in *Bodyguard* conform to the paradigmatic representation – they are white men. But the lens of post-militariness could be further enriched with more research into its dynamics alongside social class (mentioned briefly here), ethnicity, nationality, sexuality and gender identities. Military identity is commonly constructed as male, if not hypermasculine, and so representations exploring novel configurations would benefit from further analysis focused on markers of class, ethnicity, nationality, and citizenship.

Ultimately the 'unruliness' (Achter 2010) of the wounded military bodies are tamed or disciplined in the final scenes of *Bodyguard*, where David seeks psychological help, and his hostilities toward political leaders are folded away. He starts to get his family back – the very thing he spoke of losing due to the war – and starts the road to recovery which will allow him to continue in his public service role. This resolution provides narrative closure but it misses an opportunity for critique of the foreign policy and especially the Iraq invasion that Sarah Hughes (2018) refers to as 'the ghost at this particular feast' in an interview with Mercurio, and which Mercurio calls 'the greatest foreign policy mistake of our generation'. There is potential here for the politics of the war veteran to be deployed as a critique of the militaristic state – but ultimately this narrative thread diminishes as the romance and action-led sequences take over. Julia's dubious law is also 'kicked into the long grass' in the series wrap-up. There are multiple conspiracies at play here in a complex plot that ultimately and perhaps ironically seems to support the case for Julia's security-oriented legislation (in the sense that the police are corruptible, but at the same time portraying the security services as shadowy forces above the law). Plot-wise the police are ultimately the ones who harbour the mole with links to criminal gangs and terrorists. The politicians might be self-serving and sociopathic, but in this drama at least they are not as corrupt as the police chief superintendent. The coppers on the ground are the public servants who share the ethos of pursuing 'what's right' (Shay 1994) even when it involves personal sacrifice.

Post-militariness, as a lens to explore representations of veterans and the liminal, disorientating civilian-military world they occupy, allows for the contradictions, ambiguities and messiness that focusing attention onto militarism and militarisation are in danger of underplaying. Post-militariness refers to the persistence of military identity in the veteran subjectivity, characterised at once by an unsettled dynamic ranging from refutation to proud reverence. It recognises the oscillation between the embrace of a heroic militarised masculinity, which works to reinstate the exceptionalised authority only available to those with combat experience, and feelings of betrayal or abandonment when it comes to the consequences for individuals left to cope with injuries, trauma or loss (Parry and Thumim 2017). Pride and hurt; anger and fear; remoteness and brotherhood; resilience and

vulnerability: the ambivalence of (fictionalised) post-military identity allows for political projection which could work to favour nationalism and legitimate further violence, or alternatively augment public sympathies towards a questioning of the necessity in sending more bodies into war.

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Disclosure statement

Notes on contributor

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