

**“For Queen. For Country. For Kicks.”: Post-Apocalyptic Patriotism, Youth and Gender  
in *Spooks: Code 9* (BBC Three, 2008)**

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*Spooks: Code 9* (*S:C9*) was commissioned by BBC Three for broadcast in summer 2008 as a youth-oriented “spin-off” series related to BBC One’s long-running, adult spy series, *Spooks* (2002-11). The narrative setting for this new series was, however, markedly different from the original *Spooks*: while the seasoned London-based spies in *Spooks* repeatedly succeed in defending a present-day Britain from terrorist attack, *S:C9*’s young and inexperienced team of MI5 recruits find themselves in a near-future Britain, approximately eleven months after the terrorist detonation of a nuclear bomb at the 2012 London Olympics has fundamentally altered the country’s geopolitical landscape. *S:C9* is, therefore, not only differentiated from its parent series by a temporal shift, but also by a post-apocalyptic backdrop that presents its audience with the prospect of life in a society transformed by terrorism. In this article, I will be arguing that *S:C9* employs nationalistic and conservative viewpoints that counter the rise of more progressive views evident in British youth culture around the time it was first broadcast. Formal aspects of this series will therefore be analysed with reference to relevant historical events and socio-cultural context in looking at the ambivalent and, at times, crudely dismissive ways in which this series engages with the concerns of youth audiences.

In religious eschatology, the apocalypse is the ultimate moment of divine retribution, bringing the end of the world to an individual, a group of people, or all people. Yet, as James Berger points out, even in theological apocalypticism (whether this is derived from Judaic, Christian, or Islamic traditions), ‘the end is never the end’ (5); the souls of believers are saved, evil is punished, and survivors continue to exist in a post-apocalyptic paradise or purgatory. This is a powerful and affecting narrative, capable of inducing both fear and hope, and, as such, has been avidly appropriated by secular media culture and used to various ends.

Still, this appropriation doesn't mean that all religious content or reference to religion is necessarily expunged, as the secular apocalyptic often alludes to religious tropes or includes explicit engagement with religion in one form or another, whether this works to signal the dominance of non-religious doctrines in the contemporary world or to underpin a moral message. In entertainment media, the science fiction genre has provided us with some of the most discernible examples of the secular apocalyptic. The atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the end of the Second World War brought about the shocking revelation that, through science, humans had now developed God-like powers of destruction. Science fiction was therefore well-placed to address the fears and hopes of the nuclear age that was to follow and to offer up cautionary depictions of post-apocalyptic worlds brought about by the misuse of science.

Adapting to the changing contexts of the secular world, the science fiction genre has continued to provide us with numerous depictions of a post-apocalyptic future triggered by a variety of technological or human-made disasters, although the destructive power of nuclear weaponry remains as an originary sign of apocalyptic hubris in the secular world. So, it is no surprise that *S:C9* uses the explosion of a nuclear bomb in its first episode ('A New Age', 10<sup>th</sup> August 2008), to quickly communicate the critically changed state of affairs for the team of young spies at the centre of the series.

The series' post-apocalyptic backdrop is established in a short flashback sequence at the opening of the first episode, which begins with a fast cut montage featuring a Union Jack flag and zoom-in shots of London's Big Ben, the London Eye, and the Olympic Stadium. A series of mid-shots then reveal large crowds of spectators gathering at the stadium for the opening ceremony of the games, intercut with close-ups showing CCTV cameras, sniffer dogs and a timer device counting down to zero. Next, a progression of slower cut long shots takes in the ensuing nuclear blast, accompanied by a retrospective voice-over informing us that the bomb

instantly killed about 100,000 people and left many more to face a slow death from radiation poisoning. A faux archive television news report follows, with an “on the spot” reporter covering the subsequent mass evacuation of London and explaining to camera that the seat of government is being relocated to Manchester, that “controversial new security measures” will be initiated across the country and that a “complete restructure of the security services” is underway. With Thames House gone, we learn that MI5 is decentralising its organizational structure by launching a nationwide system of separate Field Offices and is carrying out a widespread recruitment drive in its search for a new generation of young intelligence officers to replace those lost in the London attack. Finally, before the episode takes us to the future-present day in which the series is set, we are shown a succession of quick clips from the recorded job interviews undertaken by five eager MI5 candidates: Jez (Heshima Thompson) a former criminal gone straight, Rachel (Ruta Gedmintas) an ambitious ex-police officer, Rob (Andrew Knott) who was a junior doctor when the bomb struck, Vik (Christopher Simpson) who wants a career in MI5 rather than his family’s business, and Kylie (Georgia Moffett) a psychology student. Along with Charlie (Liam Boyle), a mathematics student who we meet later in the episode, this group are set to become the core cast of rookie spies that constitute West Yorkshire’s Field Office 19, which is initially led by the older, more experienced MI5 operative, Hannah (Joanne Froggatt). So, this snappy flashback opening, which only lasts for 2.45 minutes in total, effectively introduces the audience to the particularities of both setting and central characters, at the same time as it establishes the distinctive cross-genre construction of this spin-off as a post-apocalyptic “spy-fi” series.

In keeping with BBC Three’s younger, teenage to young adult, target audience, the adoption of the post-apocalyptic narrative clearly provides this series with a convenient justification for the swift insertion of a new set of suitably youthful protagonists, but it also offers the opportunity to present a different outlook from its parent program on issues of

nationhood, national security and the role of Her Majesty's Government in the protection of its citizen-subjects. In fact, preliminary marketing suggests that a change in viewpoint is its central selling point: while *S:C9*'s relationship to *Spooks* is made known, initial press reports also include quotes from various production and cast members that emphasize differences between these two shows. For example, in a feature in the *Sunday Sun*, the producer, Chris Fry, asserts that while "some elements of Code 9 will be familiar to *Spooks* viewers [...] this is a completely new show" (Anon 57), and in a published interview in the *Wales on Sunday*, Georgia Moffett even goes as far as to say, "I don't think there are many similarities between the two shows" (Anon 2). Further, statements in BBC Entertainment News declare that the young spies in this *Spooks* spin-off "follow a different rule book" ("*Spooks* Spin-Off Set for BBC Three") and the BBC Press Office proclaims that *S:C9* will bring a "more maverick, younger perspective" ("*Spooks*: Code 9 - a new drama for BBC Three from the team behind *Spooks*") to the *Spooks* franchise. These promotional declarations are highly reminiscent of BBC Three's earlier *Doctor Who* spin-off, *Torchwood* (2006-11), which attracted rave reviews and broke ratings records for the channel when it first came to air. The similarities are striking, as announcements in the press about the first series of *Torchwood* described it as an "investigative sci-fi drama" (Deans) centred upon the activities of a "special ops organisation" (Jivani) that "sets its own rules" (Ings 16). With its broad assortment of young central characters, who collectively exhibit and explore a range of gender identities and sexual preferences, *Torchwood* appears to fulfil its publicity promise as a "modern and exciting drama, looking at all aspects of the human condition in the 21st century" (BBC Spokesman quoted in Stephenson 3), and press reviews celebrated it as a show designed to appeal to a young and enlightened audience. BBC Three's commissioning editors undoubtedly hoped to repeat this earlier spin-off success with *S:C9*, only to see it panned by critics, its audience ratings plummet and its intended second series abruptly cancelled.

In part, this article speculates on the reasons as to why *S:C9* fails to engage its target audience, but it also approaches this series as a useful case study that can be read against a specifically British socio-political backdrop. Unlike *Torchwood*, I will argue that *S:C9* does not live up to promotional hype in several important areas. Instead, it presents audiences with a distinctly conservative repackaging of contemporary British society that does not sit well with the more progressive or rebellious qualities associated with British youth television, or with the less politically partisan and questioning viewpoint that broadly characterizes British science fiction television at this time. In advancing this argument, I will begin by examining *S:C9* alongside the development of BBC Three's channel identity and the codes and conventions of both post-apocalyptic science fiction and the spy thriller, before moving on to analyse the representation of youth and gender in this series in the context of the aftermath of the 2005 "7/7" London bombings, the global financial crisis of 2007-8, and the ensuing economic recession that lasted through to mid-2009 in the UK.

#### Youth Media Culture and Context for *Spooks: Code 9*

Certainly, *S:C9* has much in common with the line-up of drama pilots commissioned as part of BBC Three's rebranding strategy in 2008, like *Being Human* (18<sup>th</sup> February 2008), *The Things I haven't Told You* (17<sup>th</sup> March 2008) and *Dis/Connected* (31<sup>st</sup> March 2008). Collectively, these pilots mark a darker dramatic turn for the channel in comparison to its more usual output: with the exception of *Torchwood*, BBC Three programming had been dominated by sketch comedy shows and light-hearted sitcoms up to this point. In contrast to the laughably mundane existence and routine preoccupations of central characters in comedy series like *The Smoking Room* (BBC Three 2004-5) and *Gavin & Stacey* (BBC Three 2007-8; BBC One 2008-10), any semblance of ordinary life is coloured by the spectre of mortality and death in these new pilots; whether this presents itself in the humorous struggles of a

young group of undead misfits (*Being Human*), the disturbing near-death experience of its central teenage character (*The Things I haven't Told You*), or the dramatic aftermath of a suicide amongst a group of college students (*Dis/Connected*). In this context, death could be said to operate as a catalyst for self-discovery and maturation for the young protagonists in these new BBC Three dramas. Indeed, the use of death as a metaphor for growth has a long history in narrative literature aimed at the younger reader, which these 2008 BBC Three dramas appear to draw upon. For example, child characters often face the demise of an elderly person in children's stories, which has traditionally served to symbolize the need for separation from the parent as an essential step on the path toward individuation and independence. However, as Roberta Seelinger Trites points out, in contemporary literature aimed at the young adult or adolescent, young protagonists are frequently required to witness the untimely "death of someone who is not necessarily going gently into that good night" (120). Rather than simply symbolizing the need for independence, the shock of gratuitous death, according to Trites, compels the young reader to face the fact of their own mortality and to understand death as a real and constant threat (119). Picking up on Trites' argument here, it is my contention that, over recent years, gratuitous death has been increasingly deployed across media aimed at the young adult, which suggests that making the journey from adolescence to adulthood is increasingly represented as a fearful and harrowing process that necessarily involves a somewhat acute awareness of mortality. This is made abundantly clear in *S:C9* as its use of this trope takes a heightened form, given the large-scale death and destruction that defines its post-apocalyptic setting. In this sense, the series seems to mark an especially traumatic transition to adulthood for contemporary youth, at a time when they are confronted by the adult world of work together with the complex political, economic and social crises facing British society. Also, in moving beyond the narrower focus of BBC Three's earlier pilots upon the internal psychology and private lives of individual characters,

it seems that *S:C9* attempts to speak to the mind-set of a British millennial generation and to address the wider socio-political climate of the country they are set to inherit.

As a sub-genre of science fiction, the post-apocalyptic narrative has traditionally been dominated by the exploits of adult male protagonists, and, as I have argued elsewhere (see Cornea 2014), has been most concerned with the re-birth or survival of a masculinist world order. For example, a recurrent narrative trajectory emerges in looking back at well-known post-apocalyptic novels and films, like *Earth Abides* (George R. Stewart 1949), *The Day of the Triffids* (John Wyndham 1951), *The Drowned World* (J. G. Ballard 1962), *Lucifer's Hammer* (Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle 1977), *The Postman* (David Brin 1985), the earlier *Mad Max* films (George Miller 1979, 1981, 1985) and so forth. These all follow an adult male protagonist, who, in the aftermath of disaster, adopts a kind of hero-saviour role in order to secure a future for his followers or to lead a disordered remnant of humanity back to civilization. In these narratives, hetero-patriarchal law is therefore adamantly re-established through trauma, hardship, and violence. More recently, however, younger characters have risen to prominence within this sub-genre, as witnessed in popular US and UK young adult books, like the “Book of Ember” novels (Jeanne DuPrau 2003 - 2008), *The Carbon Diaries* (Saci Lloyd, 2009 - 2010), “The Last Survivors” books (Susan Beth Pfeffer 2006 - 2013) and *The Hunger Games* trilogy (Suzanne Collins 2008 - 2010), as well as the post-apocalyptic film cycle that followed in the wake of the critical and commercial success of the 2012-2015 *The Hunger Games* film adaptations (e.g. *How I Live Now* [2013], *The Maze Runner* films [2014, 2015], the *Divergent* trilogy [2014, 2015, 2016], *The 5<sup>th</sup> Wave* [2016]). While these young adult books and films each paint a different picture of life in their respective post-apocalyptic worlds, what their young protagonists generally have in common is a lack of trust in adult authority and in the established institutions that govern their respective societies. In comparison, the television series that I have chosen to focus on diverges from this pattern.

Although *S:C9* is undoubtedly influenced by the growing popularity of the post-apocalyptic in young adult fiction in the early 2000s, our youthful team of heroes do not display the same degree of distrust in adults or government. In fact, they work *with* and *for* the existing government in an effort to uphold the status quo and to preserve the legacy of the past. Instead of attempting to assert their independence through resistance, rebellion and a demand for change, the team in *S:C9* form an alliance with what is left of the adult world and seek agency through the power bestowed upon them, as spies, to act on behalf of the state. It is here that the codes and conventions of the spy genre come to the fore and, I would suggest that the conservative drive behind the actions of the team in *S:C9* is more closely allied to the reactionary ideals of recent British “secret agent” novels for the younger reader. As Ronald Paul points out, the slew of teenage and young adult spy novels that emerged in the early 2000s—including the “Alex Rider” stories (Anthony Horowitz 2000-17), Robert Muchamore’s *CHERUB* series (2004-10), and Charlie Higson’s “young Bond” books (2005-8)—seem to share a “reassertively patriotic subtext” (10). For Paul, the distinctly backward-looking principles found in these novels can be read alongside a recurrent cultural fascination and celebration of Britain’s colonial past and Victorian values, which he sees as functioning in support of the neo-colonialist/globalist agendas of UK governments since the 1980s. However, although *S:C9* adopts the regressive conviction evident in so many recent young adult spy novels, I would contend that it does this in the service of a more defensive, as opposed to expansionist, conservative agenda that, in the wake of 7/7, the “Great Depression” and the ensuing Eurozone crisis, reflects a contemporary cultural shift away from the concept of a politically integrative globalization and toward the idea of the rebirth of Britain as a separate and guarded sovereign nation.



Coming to air in 2002, the original *Spooks* can definitely be viewed as a post-9/11 series, representing an overt cultural response to the attacks on Washington and New York by foreign al-Qaeda terrorists the previous year and the ongoing conditions of the “war on terror”. This is made clear in character dialogue in the opening moments of the very first episode when a journalist asks a Thames House tour guide, “how much has (MI5’s) remit changed since September last year,” and, later in the episode, when MI5 Head of Section D, Harry Pearce (Peter Firth), exclaims to a colleague, “we’re in the middle of fighting a war against terrorists.” Also, although MI5 is ostensibly focused on countering terrorism and espionage within the UK, *Spooks* tends to look outward, beyond British borderlines. For instance, several episodes across the series feature US presidential visits to the UK, MI5 is frequently seen working with other foreign intelligence agencies, and UK intelligence officers are often called upon to carry out investigations overseas. In this way, the threat to the UK is, for the most part, externalized and largely understood as emanating from overseas. In comparison, the apocalyptic explosion that provides the focus for the opening flashback sequence in episode 1 of *S:C9* obviously resonates with the 7<sup>th</sup> July 2005 Islamist suicide bombings in London, carried out the day after the city won its bid to host the 2012 Olympic Games, which means this spin-off is best understood as a post-7/7 series. Unlike the 9/11 terrorists, the 4 young men who perpetrated the 2005 London attack had all grown up in the UK (3 were British-born UK citizens and one had been resident in the UK since he was 5 years old) and 7/7 was therefore quickly perceived as an instance of “homegrown terrorism” (see Crone and Harrow). This context might, in part, explain the more inward-looking focus of *S:C9*, which sees our young spies working exclusively within British borders and concentrating on internal threats to the security of the nation. Equally, I would argue that these narrative confines serve to delineate the literal and figurative boundaries within which

our young spies are allowed to operate and the carefully contained perspective of this youth-oriented series.

The geographical and ideological limitations imposed upon the post-apocalyptic environs of *S:C9* are brought together in an overt display of nationalism. This is not only apparent in the activities of our young spies, but also in the visual styling of the series. For instance, Union Jack flags are everywhere—most notably, a billowing Union Jack is used to mark scene transitions and the actions of our rookie spies are frequently paused while a Union Jack pattern is overlaid on the face of a surveillance target. As if this isn't enough, the flag is continuously peppered throughout the *mise-en-scène* and, in episode 1 the team even force Charlie to undergo what they call the “Union Jack Challenge”, to gulp down red, white and blue shots of liquor, as part of his initiation into Field Office 19. Of course, as Michael Denning explains in his book, *Cover Stories: Narrative and Ideology in the British Spy Thriller*, the espionage or spy genre is traditionally about “nations and cultures, and the spy acts as a defender or subverter of the nation in the face of the other” (13-14). At some kind of basic level then, the spy narrative is about the nature of citizenship, about the relationship between the individual and the state, and about concepts of civic duty and national identity. Nevertheless, while many spy narratives use the codes and conventions of the genre to question or complicate the normative construction of national identity and the covert activities of government, *S:C9* enthusiastically represents patriotic retrenchment as a route to power and agency in the adult world for our young spies. This is made clear early on in the series when, out on operations in episode 1, Charlie and Vik are seen queuing with the general public at one of the many security checkpoint barriers set up in cities throughout the UK since the nuclear attack in London. At the barrier, a gruff policeman demands that everyone hold up their ID card ready for inspection and Vik subsequently flashes his and is allowed to pass. However, Charlie can't find his card and, in the face of the urgent command

of the policeman, his infantilization is made palpable as he nervously tries to offer up an explanation, like a child answering to a parental authority figure. Taking no notice of Charlie's appeals, the policeman shouts "hand, now", unceremoniously grabs Charlie's arm and pulls him toward a computer screen for a fingerprint and face scan. A subsequent close up on the computer readout not only establishes Charlie's identity as a British citizen but reveals the freedoms afforded by his special status as an MI5 intelligence officer, at which point the policeman immediately adopts a deferential manner, saying "sorry about that sir", and politely guides him through to the other side of the barrier. Charlie is delighted and turns to Vik, exclaiming, "he called me *sir*—how cool is that". This moment seems to function as a literal rite of passage into adulthood for Charlie, who, upon passing through the barrier, immediately drops his sheepish expression, straightens his posture and smiles broadly, conveying a new-found sense of confidence and self-assurance.

The kinds of security protocols that we witness in this checkpoint scene are undoubtedly extrapolated from contemporary counter-terrorism measures set in motion in the UK in the immediate aftermath of the 7/7 bombings. For instance, the 2006 Identity Cards Act sought to bring about the introduction of biometric ID cards and the establishment of a National Identity Register. There was also a push to revitalize the so called "ring of steel" network of police checkpoints around the City of London, first set up at the height of the IRA (Irish Republican Army) terror attacks on the British mainland during the 1990s. In addition, the UK government re-visited its controversial 2003 counter-terrorism strategy, known as CONTEST, releasing a revised version in 2006 that placed greater emphasis upon the "Prevent" strand of the strategy. According to a 2008-9 House of Commons Home Affairs Committee report, the Prevent strand is designed to "strike at the taproot of extremism" (10) and is concerned with protecting vulnerable British citizens, particularly the young, from radicalization. Prior to 7/7, Prevent had played only a minor role in counter-terrorist

initiatives, but, given the relatively young age of the British 7/7 bombers (2 were teenagers, aged 18 and 19, and the others were 22 and 30 years old respectively), increasing pressure was placed on institutions like schools and universities in the UK to identify potential extremists amongst their student populations and to develop safeguarding measures against radicalization. My point is that although counter-terrorism measures instituted after 7/7 infringed upon civil liberties across the population of the UK, what amounts to state imposed monitoring was and still is especially focused upon the young.

Directly after 7/7, Prevent was primarily used in attempts to curtail the radicalization of Black and Muslim youths, but its agenda was significantly expanded over proceeding years to encompass a broader spectrum of young people and a greater range of associated cultural and political activities. Government and security service anxiety surrounding the young was then exacerbated by the onset of the recession, leading to growing concerns about a possible link between economic downturn and increased risks of terrorism from, in particular, disaffected youths unable to find legitimate and meaningful paid employment. This was addressed in a MI5 Behavioural Science Unit Operational Briefing Note, dated 12 June 2008 and entitled “Understanding Radicalisation and Violent Extremism in the UK”, which was subsequently leaked to *The Guardian* newspaper. According to *Guardian* writer, Alan Travis, this Briefing Note not only commented on the previously unacknowledged ethnic diversity of young extremists and the need to offer “attractive alternatives” to terrorism, but further warned that MI5 should not ignore non-Islamist movements that may also inspire violent and extremist activity (“MI5 Report Challenges Views on Terrorism in Britain”). The implication here is that rapidly decreasing employment opportunities for young adults might lead to a rise in various forms of terrorist activity associated with a wide variety of political, social or religious causes, potentially justifying the blanket monitoring of a whole new generation of British citizens.

Certainly, the recession in the UK, along with later austerity measures, disproportionately affected the young in terms of a lack of employment and a severe reduction in job prospects. As stated in the 2009 Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) report, *Recession Britain*, the labour market was “most volatile for 18-24 year old workers, whose unemployment level grew at a rapidly accelerating rate over the course of 2008” (Vaitlingham 5). Also, a 2014 Briefing Paper produced by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES), which looked at the continuing effects of recession, admitted that “chief among those affected by tough labour market conditions have been young people” (23), with youth unemployment rising above the one million mark in 2011. As Howard Williamson comments, in his 2014 article for the *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, this has led to a “sense of betrayal and anger” amongst the young, “at having been ‘sacrificed’ by the older generation”, as austerity cuts and unemployment appear to be hitting them the hardest.

Austerity measures, first introduced in the UK in 2008 in response to the financial crisis, aimed to reduce government spending and the public services sector faced significant reductions in their budgets. However, at the same time as cuts in government spending were leading to overall reductions in employment across most of the sector, the security services were busy recruiting in record numbers: as MI5’s official website confirms, the “priority given by government to counter-terrorism was reflected in increased funding which enabled MI5 staff numbers to grow from about 2,000 on 9/11 to about 3,600 in 2010-11, with a target of 3,800”. When *Spooks* first came to air, numerous press reports made the connection between the advent of this exciting new BBC spy series and rising levels of applications for MI5—arguing that this program was acting as a kind of recruiting tool (see, for example, Bamber, Kinnes, Murray). Then, following 7/7, advertising for the security services was openly aimed at the young through press adverts and social networking sites like Facebook,

in a recruiting drive that was arguably endorsed with the arrival of *S:C9*. While some insiders were careful to point out to the press that working for the security services bore little resemblance to television series like *Spooks* (see, for instance, Farey-Jones), this didn't seem to stop the MI5 marketing machine from playing upon the appeal of the fictional spy with enticing adverts that made a career in this field sound thrilling and important.

As Adrian Furnham points out, "in adolescence gaining a job has special meaning in marking the end of childhood dependence and representing entry to the adult world" (206). So, at a time of rising youth unemployment, the security services were not only offering the increasingly rare chance for financial independence and a sense of vocational identity, but a career that provided an alternative to the boring routines and menial tasks of other kinds of entry level jobs or unskilled paid work that might be available to those looking for their first job. This picture is most certainly supported by *S:C9*: as the BBC tagline for this series ("For Queen. For Country. For Kicks") suggests, for our young team at Field Office 19, work is fun, and, on the surface at least, their role as spies for the state means they can escape unemployment and side-step some of the more oppressive restrictions imposed in this vision of a post-apocalyptic Britain. For instance, although the team face dangerous, life threatening situations and the responsibility of upholding the security of the nation, this does not stop them from drinking and partying. Replicating the sort of lifestyle associated with the carefree teenager or student, the team all live together in a shared flat and make regular visits to a local nightclub, although this now serves as a cover for their operations and gives them closer access to potential young terrorists. In this way, the series clearly identifies its target audience and seems to suggest that the only way they can hope to retain their way of life is by pledging their allegiance to Queen and country and by spying on other members of their own generation.

## Securing the Patriarchal Nation

The security services advertising campaign outlined above was unprecedented on a number of levels. Firstly, it signalled a move away from the clandestine recruiting practices of the past. Secondly, the use of various advertising channels demonstrated their ostensible aim to build a more diverse and inclusive workforce within the services. Echoing these “real world” developments, the composition and casting of the young team of spies in *S:C9* certainly suggests that white male, upper middle class privilege and an Oxbridge education are no longer prerequisites for entering the spy business: joining the middle class white boys, Charlie and Rob, are Jez and Vik, who represent British youth of Black and Asian origins respectively, and the girls, Rachel and Kylie, indicating a level of gender equality in recruitment to the team. Nevertheless, the treatment meted out to the girl spies, and other young females in this series, deserves some scrutiny. At the beginning of the series we learn that Hannah is busy grooming Rachel to take over her role as Field Office leader. After Hannah is shot and killed in the middle of the first episode, even though Rachel is, in the words of one character, “the obvious choice for leader”, Charlie is instead promoted to lead the team. As the series continues the audience also learn that Kylie is slowly dying of radiation poisoning and Rachel is fatally wounded in the final episode 6 (‘National Catastrophe’, 7<sup>th</sup> September 2008), when she is shot by her older “boss”, Field Operations Director, Sarah Yates (Lorraine Burroughs). Yates, it turns out, is an MI5 traitor and, before she turns her gun on herself to commit suicide, she admits to being responsible for the bombing in London the previous year. So, all in all, the female spies do not fare well in this series.

While I have previously concentrated on the ways in which this hybrid series adopts the principles of the spy genre and picks up on real world political developments in the UK, conventions associated with the post-apocalyptic setting of *S:C9* are clearly foregrounded in

episode 4 ('The Ghost Man', 31<sup>st</sup> August 2008), when Rachel is tasked with going undercover at what is referred to as a local "faith centre", to extract information from a reformed criminal called Luke. As stated earlier, references to religion are not uncommon in post-apocalyptic science fiction, only here this is used to highlight the apparently problematic intersection of female authority, religion, and national identity. Wracked with guilt about his unintentional involvement in the London bombing a year earlier, Luke has turned to the Church for solace and redemption. Rachel is keen to protect him, partly because he is a vital witness, but also because she recognises that he is basically a "good man." Toward the end of the episode, Rachel reveals to Luke that she is an undercover spy and asks him to trust her. With the promise of her protection, Luke agrees to be placed in a witness protection scheme and to provide her with the information she needs to forward her investigation into possible government and MI5 corruption. However, she has made an important error in enlisting the help of an older police officer, Detective Inspector Tom Mallady. Mallady isn't at all happy with Rachel's treatment and protection of Luke and takes every opportunity to undermine her authority as an MI5 agent. Having lost his family in the London bombing, he can only see the faith centre as a haven for terrorists and, at the close of the episode, he goes against Rachel's orders and shoots Luke dead. In this episode, Rachel is certainly presented to the audience as a female authority figure and as a figure offering hope and redemption. However, the moral values and sensitivities she clearly displays are also shown to be ineffectual and somehow misplaced in the patriarchal front-lines context of *S:C9*'s post-apocalyptic Britain.

It is also interesting that although the team's suspicion of corruption within MI5 and within the wider institutions of the nation serves to evoke the sense of anger and betrayal that Williamson identifies as felt by a wide range of young people for the older generation, this is generally played out through the female characters in this series. For example, inter-generational tensions are clearly foregrounded in episode 5 ('Deal', 31<sup>st</sup> August 2008), when



Rob and Kylie are carrying out surveillance on a Korean businessman. Here they find themselves in the middle of an unexpected hostage situation in which eco-terrorists are threatening to detonate a bomb strapped to the daughter of the female chief executive of the bank. The terrorist demand is the exposure of the businessman's lucrative agreement with the British government to bury nuclear waste in Britain. Initially, the team think that the daughter is the innocent victim in all this, but it later emerges that she is, in fact, a member of the eco-terrorist network and is willing to blow herself up, she says, "to save the planet". While this episode is critical of the government's handling of nuclear waste and unethical business practices, the extreme actions of the girl soon deflect further questioning by the team and the girl's viewpoint is also undercut by a focus on the obviously poor relationship between mother and daughter. The suggestion being that the girl's actions are not really the result of her own political conviction, but rather the result of maternal neglect and a lack of paternal guidance. This is also the episode when tensions between Rachel and her older "boss", Sarah Yates, begin to emerge. In her efforts to save the people in the bank, Rachel countermands the instructions she receives from Yates, putting the life of the businessman in danger. She says, "I am not going to sacrifice 20 lives for the sake of one businessman, no matter what Yates or the government says." Yates severely reprimands Rachel for disobeying her orders, even though the team still manage to save the day—by the end of episode, they have stopped the bomb from exploding and arrested the recalcitrant daughter. Again, Rachel's sensitivities put her at odds with what appears to be a prevailing patriarchal nationalism that requires compliance and sacrifice from its citizen-subjects.

According to *The Impact of Austerity on Women Policy Briefing*, produced by Daisy Sands for the Fawcett Society in 2012, government cost cutting measures since the 2007-8 financial crisis have disproportionately affected women's employment, "as around 40% of women in work in the UK are employed in public sector jobs" (6). This same report also

noted that, “whilst it has fluctuated in the intervening years, the unemployment rate for men currently stands almost exactly where it did at the end of the recession in 2009 (where it increased by 0.32% - from 1.53 million to 1.54 million), whereas female unemployment has increased by almost 20% (19.1% - from 945,000 to 1.13 million)” (7). A later Trades Union Congress report, entitled *The Impact on Women of Recession and Austerity*, also looked specifically at young women’s employment, which, it states, “fell furthest in the recession years (and) has still not recovered” (1). Since the recession, young women leaving school, college or university are less likely than their male counterparts to find jobs and the employment rate for women between the ages of 18-24 fell from a pre-recession “high of 61% to a low of 55% in 2011” (8). While *Spooks* may well have encouraged applications from young people to join the security services, a few months into its first series, reports also noted a slump in the numbers of female applicants to MI5, which was put down to the gruesome dispatching of female spies in this series (see Keating). As mentioned previously, before *S:C9* came to air, the BBC assured audiences that its new team of young spies would “follow a different rule book”. However, as is clear from my analysis of this series, the same violent and underhand methods are used to gather intelligence and the fate of female agents in *S:C9* is remarkably similar to the original *Spooks*. In fact, pretty well every important female character in *S:C9* has, by the end of the series, been suppressed, defeated or killed off—the inference being that women cannot hope to survive the rigors of the spy business and, by extension, that women are not really welcome in the workplace in a post-apocalyptic Britain. While the boys appear to thrive in the harsh environs of *S:C9*, it seems the girls are literally required to sacrifice their future to assure the survival of the nation in this time of crisis.

## Conclusion

In her account of British science fiction television in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Sherryl Vint argues that this television genre provides a prominent site of critique, which actively resists the hyper-nationalistic culture that, following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, flourished in the US during the George W. Bush presidency. In formulating this argument, Vint makes particular reference to BBC One's post-apocalyptic *Survivors* (2008-10) and *Outcasts* (2011) series as examples that "maintained an ironic distance" and that "refused to allow 7/7 to mobilize (the) imperial patriotism" (159) evident in contemporary British spy thrillers like *Spooks*. While Vint's account does take in youth-oriented science fiction series like E4's *Misfits* (2009-13), she makes no mention of *S:C9*. However, in the context of her argument it is clear that this hybrid spin-off series foregoes the kind of "ironic distance" that Vint sees as common in British science fiction television, rather it prioritizes and is overwhelmed by the "hyper-nationalism" of the spy television genre of this period.

In academia, contemporary discussion of hybridity in film and television often emphasises the positive and progressive aspects of genre mixing. For instance, Kristopher Karl Woofter sees the mix of horror and reality TV conventions in the film *The Cabin in the Woods* (2012) as encouraging a "critical distance" on the part of the audience (273), and Nicholas S. Witschi argues that, due to its hybrid status as a noir-Western, the television series *Deadwood* (2004-6) becomes more socially and politically relevant to a contemporary audience (139). Likewise, Robin Nelson praises the mix of police procedural and science fiction in the series *Life on Mars* (2006-7), which he argues "gives rise to consideration of issues of cultural change such as gender, race, social policy and policing" (21). It could equally be argued that the insertion of action film genre elements in the previously mentioned *Hunger Games* and *Divergent* films makes way for the introduction of strong young female protagonists who can be understood as empowering and socially progressive role models. At this juncture, however, it seems important to note that this kind of genre mixing is not

necessarily in and of itself progressive, as is evident in *S:C9*. Although the casting might suggest that equality and meritocracy are now at the heart of British national identity, I would argue that the mix of post-apocalyptic science fiction and spy thriller in *S:C9* is used to validate the reactionary and masculinist ideals of its parent series. While, on the surface, *S:C9* certainly uses some of the familiar codes and conventions of the post-apocalyptic, any progressive aspects associated with recent iterations of this science fiction sub-genre are undermined and subverted by the series' alliance with the contemporary spy genre.

As made clear at the beginning of this article, *S:C9* was not a success for BBC Three, as low and ever-decreasing viewing figures sealed the fate of this series. Of course there can be many reasons why a television drama is not a hit with its audience—low production values, bad acting, poor scripts, and so forth—but I would argue that key to the failure of *S:C9* is the way in which the BBC and the production company, Kudos, appeared to misjudge their target audience. Hit by austerity and unemployment after the financial crisis, millennials showed little sign of seeking a return to the conservative grand narratives of the past, of class, gender and nation, to the structural forces that previously fashioned their future prospects. Instead, in the face of adversity, many used their energies to form creative alliances to peacefully protest or bring about change, joining movements like UK Uncut, the transnational Occupy movement, UK Feminista, or the youth wing of the Labour Party, Young Labour, which has reportedly more than doubled its membership over the past few years (see Butterworth). Rather, the nationalist values so heavily promoted in *S:C9* tell us more about the levels of institutional anxiety in regard to youth at this time: while this series appears to offer up a route to youthful empowerment and agency in the adult world, it also seeks to contain and mould this power to highly conservative ends.

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