NAMING THE BOOGEYMAN: CONSTRUCTING MARGINALIZED RELIGION AS THREATS TO WHITE BODIES IN *THE X-FILES*

by

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of
The University of North Carolina at Charlotte
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts in
Religious Studies

Charlotte

2023

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ABSTRACT

OLIVER RICHARDS. Naming The Boogeyman: Constructing Marginalized Religion as Threats to White Bodies. (Under the direction of DR. SEAN MCCLOUD).

The X-Files is an American science fiction television series that ran from 1993 to 2002, spawning an extended universe of books, two feature films, and an additional two seasons of the show which aired in 2016 and 2018. The show revolves around two FBI agents, Fox Mulder and Dana Scully, who specialize in unsolved cases featuring potential paranormal phenomena. This thesis focuses on the ways that *The X-Files* constructs marginalized religions as threats to the American body politic, represented through white womanhood and white bodies. In this thesis, I examine three episodes from *The X-Files* as examples of how *The X-Files* is engaged in a broader project of boundary maintenance. I argue its constructions of the paranormal function to maintain and negotiate certain cultural narratives around what religion looks like in the United States. In the world imagined by *The X-Files*, marginalized religions are dangerous, and the narrative consequences of the episodes demonstrate this threat.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Sean McCloud, whose continued guidance and support has shaped this project in innumerable ways. I am also deeply grateful to the other members of my thesis committee and their support for this project, Dr. Eric Hoenes del Pinal and Dr. William E.B. Sherman. Additionally, I would like to thank Tabitha Rice, Shai Wolff, Dr. Joanne Maguire, and Keaton whose continued support throughout this project has been invaluable. Finally, I would be remiss not to thank Dr. Marcus Harvey at UNC Asheville, who guided the beginning steps of this project's foundations.

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INTRODUCTION

> SCULLY: Mulder, voodoo only works by instilling fear in its believers. You saw how Bauvais tried to intimidate me. I'll admit the power of suggestion is considerable but this is no more magic than a pair of fuzzy dice.[1]

In *The X-Files* episode "Fresh Bones," Haitian refugees are accused of using vodou, or voodoo, as the episode names it, in retaliation for the human rights abuses they have suffered at the hands of US marines. While Mulder offers his white stamp of approval, reaffirming that this is the only strategy that is available to them, he does not successfully push back against Scully's pronouncement that voodoo is an illegitimate religion better relegated to the realm of superstition. The episode, which will be examined in more depth later in this paper, is an example of how marginalized religions have been represented as dangerous or threatening in *The X-Files*.

The X-Files trades on lingering uncertainty and instability, destabilizing the idea of what the truth could look like. As the film studies scholar Theresa Geller notes, within the episodes "FBI special agents sought to resolve mysteries only to find aliens and paranormal phenomena that often made rational narrative closure impossible."[2] It is the narrative instability of *The X-Files,* where episodes end with the possibility of the paranormal being true, that in part provides space for the show to successfully exploit what the feminist cyborg scholar Donna Haraway argues are the "speculative potentials" of the genre to "represent something different about difference itself."[3] The writer Eric Greene offers an additional reading of Haraway's argument, although his analysis is focused on the *Planer of the Apes* franchise. He writes that "The *Apes* movies were also *political* films which, to use Haraway's description of the stories told by

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[1] "Fresh Bones," *The X-Files* (Fox, 1995).
[2] Theresa L. Geller, "Race and Allegory in Mass Culture: Historicizing 'The X-Files,'" *American Quarterly* 69, no. 1 (2017): 94.
[3] Geller, 95.

scientific primatologists, were 'science fiction, where possible worlds [were] constantly reinvented in the contest for the very real, present world.'"[4] Science fiction is an opportunity to destabilize and question cultural norms, imagining fictions that are not just reflections of, but in conversation with, and responding to, broader social forces. was not just a mirror of the time but a response to it. As Greene points to, "films are not simply indiscriminate reflections of society, nor are they disinterested," but they, and television shows, engage intentionally with the world around them.[5]

However, while *The X-Files* may seek to destabilize institutions and question cultural truths, it centers whiteness as the default representation of humanity. Geller pulls at the colonization metaphor that runs throughout *The X-Files,* pointing out that the show repeatedly

> "Presents conventional white, middle-class characters who are menaced by unknown forces, that compromise their self-contained (white) bodies—threatening disease, hybridization, and ultimately, physical colonization. Through the conventions of the representation of difference, these themes are racially coded. The codes are determined by a process of racial marking that is accomplished through the conceptual framework of Whiteness: the normative white subject's fear of and desire for the Other."[6]

It is this white, and often gendered and classed, subject's fear of the Other that comes into play in the ways that marginalized religions are portrayed and imagined in *The X-Files*. What Geller hints at here, and I would mark more explicitly, are the ways that whiteness is constructed in *The X-Files* as something that designates more than simply a racial category. Rather, whiteness, or the correct performance of whiteness, is also heterosexual, Christian, cisgender, and middle class. Whiteness is also vulnerable and constantly under threat. The episode "Fresh Bones" imagines Haitian Vodou as a dangerous black magic that penetrates and threatens white bodies,

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[4] Eric Greene, *Planet of the Apes as American Myth: Race, Politics, and Popular Culture* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1998), 11.
[5] Greene, 10.
[6] Elspeth Kydd, "Differences: The X-Files, Race and the White Norm," *Journal of Film and Video* 53, no. 4 (2002): 73.

particularly those of white women. The tulpa in "Arcadia" invades the sanctity of white, upper-middle class homes. In "Miracle Man," class status plays a key role in defining not only the show's ideas of correct religion, but also who is allowed within the exclusionary category of whiteness. These are part of a broader social project that collapses space for religious diversity and precludes the idea that religious diversity can be benign. Instead, diversity is recast to be deviant, dangerous, and outside the bounds of what religion is imagined to be. To create the paranormal presented in *The X-Files*, the show relies on the axiom[7] that marginalized or otherwise non-mainstream religions are a threat to white bodies. While Mulder may offer his white stamp of institutional approval, as seen in "Fresh Bones," or the narrative itself draws on Biblical allusions, as in "Miracle Man," the consequence of each episode is that any engagement with these religions is dangerous.

In this thesis, I argue that *The X-Files* is part of a broader cultural project engaged in boundary maintenance, what the religious studies scholar Megan Goodwin describes as a "collaps[ing] space for benign religious[...] difference in the United States" through a process of delegitimization and constructing the other as a threat to an idealized self.[8] In other words, *The X-Files* and its constructions of the paranormal function to maintain and negotiate certain cultural narratives around what religion looks like in the United States. This work, which is contingent on the creation and maintenance of the "other," means that the intentions of *The X-Files* are ultimately betrayed by the portrayals of marginalized religious traditions they create in these episodes.

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[7] The show relies on the audience understanding and accepting that marginalized religions are a threat to white bodies as some kind of self-evident truth or underlying belief structure.

[8] Megan Goodwin, *Abusing Religion: Literary Persecution, Sex Scandals, and American Minority Religions* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2020), 4.

Here I use the scholarship of Megan Goodwin as the primary theoretical partner in my analysis of *The X-Files*. In her book, *Abusing Religion: Literary Persecution, Sex Scandals, and American Minority Religions,* Goodwin identifies how stories "about the religiosexual peril of contact with outsiders" function within their cultural contexts.[9] These narratives "foster anxieties" within the body politic that then need to be resolved in some form.[10] The American body politic, "allegorized as white womanhood and/or childhood," must be protected against the physical colonization or "insemination by religiosexual predators."[11] These narratives reaffirm that, as Goodwin put it, "strange religions force and/or dupe white women and children into sexual depravity."[12] In "Scully, the Victim: The Legacy of Gendered Violence on *The X-Files,"* writer Sadie Graham succinctly notes that "*The X-Files* has always explored the invasion of women's bodies."[13] The episodes I look at in this project, and the broader narratives of *The X-Files,* are interested in exploring difference and the threat of the Other through metaphors of colonization and setting a particular population as the representative of humanity. This reproduces what Goodwin has named "contraceptive nationalism."[14] This contraceptive nationalism is a form of "gendered white supremacist Christian nativism" that deems American religious outsiders as dangerous threats to be minoritized and demonized.[15] *The X-Files* trades on these anxieties of threat and boundary maintenance in different ways, relying on a construction of the dangerous Other.

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[9] Goodwin, 6.
[10] Goodwin, 6.
[11] Goodwin, 3.
[12] Goodwin, 3.
[13] Sadie Graham, "Scully, the Victim: The Legacy of Gendered Violence on The X-Files," *Bitch Media*, January 29, 2018, https://www.bitchmedia.org/article/gendered-violence-on-the-x-files.
[14] Goodwin, 3.
[15] Goodwin, 3.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The work in this thesis draws on three categories of texts: texts of *The X-Files,* texts on *The X-Files*, and texts outside *The X-Files*. The first is the episodes of *The X-Files* themselves, "Fresh Bones," "Arcadia," and "Miracle Man." The second is the small body of literature on *The X-Files, both* as a general subject of popular cultural guides and of academic articles paying detailed attention to ideas of marginalization and coloniality in the visual text. Finally, I draw on a collection of academic scholarship on marginalized religious traditions, race, class, and gender that guides my analysis, relying most heavily on Megan Goodwin's *Abusing Religion: Literary Persecution, Sex Scandals, and American Minority Religions* as my primary theoretical partner. Additionally, Eric Greene's media analysis in *Planet of the Apes as American Myth: Race, Politics, and Popular Culture* provides a language to engage critically with popular culture that is particularly helpful in guiding my media analysis of texts that could otherwise be misread as inconsequential. Sara Ahmed's work around naturalized narratives and dis/orientation in *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* offers a supporting lens to understand how *The X-Files* functions in the cultural landscape and the construction of an idealized self. Sophia Rose Arjana's *Buying Buddha, Selling Rumi: Orientalism and the Mystical Marketplace,* and Jane Iwamura's *Virtual Orientalism: Asian Religions and American Popular Culture* supply an analysis not only of Orientalism but also the ways that the Other is constructed in order to be consumed in different spheres.

The X-Files

The X-Files is an American science fiction television series that ran from 1993 to 2002, spawning an extended universe of books, two feature films, and an additional two seasons of the show which aired in 2016 and 2018. The show revolves around two FBI agents, Fox Mulder and

Dana Scully, who specialize in unsolved cases featuring potential paranormal phenomena. This project centers on three episodes from the original *The X-Files:* "Fresh Bones" (1995), "Arcadia" (1999), and "Miracle Man" (1994). While these are not the only episodes of *The X-Files* that explicitly engage with religion, I have selected these particular episodes as examples of how the show translates marginalized or minority religions into paranormal threats. Instead of taking the episodes in chronological order, I will be organizing the rest of this paper based on how the analysis builds on the previous episode. I will start with "Fresh Bones," which most explicitly demonstrates the intersections between whiteness and gender. "Fresh Bones" is set in and around a United States Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) compound in Folkstone, North Carolina. This INS compound detains and processes male Haitian refugees. Mulder and Scully are called out to investigate the apparent suicide of a Marine, who drove his car into a tree marked with a veve, or Haitian Vodou symbol.

The next episode in the analysis is "Arcadia," which takes place in a planned community in California, where multiple people have mysteriously disappeared. This episode demonstrates how class can intersect with whiteness and anxieties around boundary maintenance. Mulder and Scully go undercover as a married couple moving into the community, revealing that the homeowner association president has been controlling a tulpa to kill those who rebel against the community's strict guidelines. The tulpa, as Mulder tells Scully, is a Tibetan thoughtform.

The final episode I am looking at is "Miracle Man," which has Mulder and Scully traveling to Clarksville, Tennessee. This episode is the last in my analysis, despite being from the first season because it involves whiteness, class, and gender in how religion and threat are being constructed. Mulder and Scully have been called to investigate a young Pentecostal faith healer

who has been accused of murdering members of his father's ministry through the practice of laying on hands.

All three of these episodes are one-off episodes, also colloquially known as 'monster of the week' stories. These narratives can stand alone, with the audience not needing to know the overarching narrative arc of the show in order to understand them. While they are disconnected from the broader narrative arc of the television show, they still engage with anxieties of colonization that permeate the rest of the episodes.

Texts About The X-Files

Several books about *The X-Files* have been published over the last twenty-odd years, but religion outside of Scully's own Catholicism has remained noticeably absent. These books, such as Darren Mooney's *Opening the X-Files: A Critical History of the Original Series* and Jan Delasara's *PopLit, PopCult, and The X-Files: A Critical Exploration,* clarify the general cultural reception that the show has received and the overarching ideas of the show itself. As Mooney identifies, "across its nine seasons, *The X-Files* repeatedly engages with the idea of integrity and self—whether in biological, philosophical, or political terms."[16] Delasara provides a study of *The X-Files* by examining the genre, content, characters, and themes alongside the cultural context of the show, although she sidesteps any question of religion entirely.[17] These books, whether they are casual popular culture guides or take a more critical and scholarly approach, are not prepared to discuss marginalized or minority religious traditions in any serious detail.[18] While they offer

[16] Darren Mooney, *Opening The X-Files: A Critical History of the Original Series* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2017). 49.
[17] Jan Delasara, *PopLit, PopCult, and The X-Files: A Critical Exploration* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2000).
[18] In the section on "Miracle Man," Frank Lovece pays more attention to Scully's Catholicism in his book *The X-Files Declassified: The unauthorized guide to the complete series*. Scully's Catholicism is named, while the Ministry is left as a form of unlabeled Christianity. Darren Mooney rarely mentions religion in *Opening The X-Files: A Critical History of the Original Series.*

insight into the broader cultural context that *The X-Files* was developed in, they are less relevant to the questions of this project.

On the other hand, several scholarly articles in the same period have paid detailed attention to topics of race, marginalization, religion, and coloniality. These articles are more helpful in this project. Filmmaker-scholar Elspeth Kydd's work identifies the conceptual framework of Whiteness that she argues is undergirding the colonization metaphors and threats in the series as a whole. As she writes, "at the center of *The X-Files* narrative is the fear of colonization and invasion, fear of both invasion of the planet by the extraterrestrial aliens and fear of human bodily occupation by the disease of extraterrestrial organisms, that is, colonization by hybridization."[19] Thus, she argues, "despite the reversal of the colonization scenario, *The X-Files* relies on assumptions that associate Whiteness with certain positions and manifestations of power that are threatened by difference."[20] In "Race and Allegory in Mass Culture: Historicizing *The X-Files,* Theresa L. Geller digs into the historical context of *The X-Files*, focusing on its representation of the New Jim Crow.[21] Geller makes the argument that in many ways, "*The X-Files* was the first television show to register the emergency of a new caste system—the massive (and systematic) infrastructural and discursive shift that, thanks to Michelle Alexander and other critical race scholars and historians, we now shorthand as 'the New Jim Crow.'"[22] She also focuses on the narrative complications that challenge the boundaries separating monster of the week and conspiracy mytharc episodes.

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[19] Elspeth Kydd, "Differences: The X-Files, Race and the White Norm," *Journal of Film and Video* 53, no. 4 (2002): 73.
[20] Kydd, 73.
[21] The New Jim Crow, in short, refers to the ways that "mass incarceration in the United States had, in fact, emerged as a stunningly comprehensive and well-disguised system of racialized social control that functions in a manner strikingly similar to Jim Crow." Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow* (New York: The New Press, 2010), 4.
[22] Geller, "Race and Allegory in Mass Culture: Historicizing 'The X-Files.'" 96.

Literature and film studies scholar Katherine Kinney offers a way to understand how *The X-Files* navigates questions of borders and boundaries, particularly in the context of the Post-Cold War world the series takes place in. She writes that "by returning again and again to the history of military secretiveness, *The X-Files* suggests that the enemy is quite literally within, the uncanny return of the secrets that inevitably belong to the house."[23] Her work points to what she calls "the crisis of credibility" that undergirds the series, particularly in the ways that the "haunted military," which shows up again and again in the show, "more than any other feature, speaks to the post-Cold Ward crisis in narratives of American nationality."[24] This crisis of nationhood is also explored by Paul Cantor, who writes that "far from presenting neat distinctions between the United States and its enemies, the central plotline of The X-Files suggests that at various times U.S authorities have been in collusion with Nazi scientists or linked up with covert Soviet operations."[25] He notes that *The X-Files* "time and again delivers ambiguity, thereby reflecting a loss of faith in the national government that the Bureau represents."[26]

The genre-shifting nature and aesthetics of the show are the focus for both Lacy Hodges, an English Ph.D. candidate, and the cultural studies scholar Douglas Kellner. Both write about *The X-Files* in the context of Postmodernism and the aesthetics of the series. Hodges writes that the genre hybridity of *The X-Files* "allowed the series to occupy a liminal space between the mainstream and the margins […] the hybridity and liminality of *The X-Files*—in terms of genre, visual aesthetic, and narrative progression—reflected the paranoia and instability of the 1990s

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[23] Katherine Kinney, "The X-Files and the Borders of the Post-Cold War World," *Journal of Film and Video*, Winter 2001-2002, 53, no. 4 (2002): 58.
[24] Kinney, 58.
[25] Paul A. Cantor, "This Is Not Your Father's FBI: The X-Files and the Delegitimation of the Nation-State," *The Independent Review* 6, no. 1 (2001): 119-20.
[26] Cantor, 120.

zeitgeist."[27] Kellner argues in "*The X-Files* and the Aesthetics and Politics of Postmodern Pop" that the show serves "as an example of a popular form of postmodernism that engages in pastiche of plot-lines, genre conventions, iconography, folklore, and bits of history found in the forms of previous media culture[...] that enables us to interrogate both the aesthetics of television and postmodernism."[28]

Work like that of Mikel Koven's on the golem, *The X-Files,* and the Jewish horror movie genre, are examples of how others, particularly in film and cultural studies, are reading through representations of religious traditions in the text. Koven offers a reading of the episode "Kaddish" that "point[s] to a number of issues concerning the nature of 'monstrosity' and 'horror,'" arguing that the errors in representing golems in this episode "are not mistakes, but perhaps operate to define the monstrous within Jewish culture."[29] The media studies dissertation by Leanne McRae is a thoughtful piece marking the kinds of truth and cultural knowledge that *The X-Files* appears to be interested in producing. Of particular interest is her insight on bodies, as she writes that "the body is a site for infestation, invasion and possession, and the program insistently searches for knowledge and meaning *within* as well as through the body."[30]

While these books and articles cover a wide range of topics related to *The X-Files,* there is still a noticeable gap in the conversation about religion in the show that I hope to begin to address in this thesis. When marginalized religions are discussed in this literature, they are taken as individual case studies, not necessarily in conversation with other episodes. With this project,

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[27] Lacy Hodges, "Mainstreaming Marginality: Genre, Hybridity, and Postmodernism in The X-Files," in *The Essential Science Fiction Television Reader*, ed. J. P. Telotte (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2008), 231-2.
[28] Douglass Kellner, "The X-Files and the Aesthetics and Politics of Postmodern Pop," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 57, no. 2 (1999): 161.
[29] Mikel J. Koven, "'Have I Got a Monster for You!': Some Thoughts on the Golem, 'The X-Files' and the Jewish Horror Movie," *Folklore* 111, no. 2 (2000): 217.
[30] Leanne McRae, "Aliens, Bodies and Conspiracies: Regimes of Truth in The X-Files" (Perth, Australia, Edith Cowan University, 1999), https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses/1247. 3.

I am interested in looking at how *The X*-Files deals with marginalized religions across multiple points in the series with a focus on whiteness and the threat of the Other. The representations of marginalized religions in the show's narrative are, as religious studies scholar Jørn Borup notes in his work on cultural narratives, "engaged with circulating scripts, master narratives and collectively shared webs of meaning" that further the idea that these religions and those who practice them pose a threat to white American bodies.[31]

Theoretical Texts

Alongside *The X-Files* and texts that are centered on some aspect of the television show, I am drawing on several authors who provide research models and theoretical frameworks that are helpful for this work. The scholars I have found the most helpful have work that focuses on cultural narratives and power structures, or whose work focuses on an aspect of class, race, and religion in the United States.

In this thesis, I draw heavily on the research and theoretical frameworks of religious studies scholar Megan Goodwin and her book *Abusing Religion: Literary Persecution, Sex Scandals, and American Minority Religions*. Goodwin discusses cultural narratives and the power that they hold, writing that "narratives like the ones anchoring *Abusing Religion* characterize American religious outsiders as a sexual menace," something that she identifies as *contraceptive nationalism.*[32] This contraceptive nationalism is a "form of gendered white supremacist Christian nativism that minoritizes certain American religious traditions."[33] The narratives she works with are intended to "evoke deep public sentiment and incite public responses without meaningfully disrupting established institutions or challenging structural

[31] Jørn Borup, "Branding Buddha--Mediatized and Commodified Buddhism as Cultural Narrative," *Journal of Global Buddhism* 17 (2016): 53.
[32] Goodwin, 3.
[33] Goodwin, 3.

inequalities," and instead, they "privilege whiteness, specifically white sexual innocence or purity allegorized as white womanhood."[34] She argues that the eroticization of white—particularly white women's—suffering at the hands of a constructed other, is a tool to maintain white supremacy. As I will explore later in this thesis, the construction of white womanhood and white bodies in *The X-Files* is inseparable from the perceived threat and vulnerability to sexual violence.

Alongside Goodwin's work on cultural narratives, Eric Greene's book *Planet of the Apes as American Myth: Race, Politics, and Popular Culture* is a guiding text in this project in terms of discussing popular culture as a relevant cultural text as well as the process of self-identification. In his introduction, he asks "how can popular fictions and entertainments engage social and political conflicts?"[35] Greene's work is particularly valuable in his articulation about why questions about popular culture are important. He points to the fact that texts like *The X-Files* are not constructed in cultural vacuums, and that they function not just as a mirror, but as active and creative responses to society. active creation element to it within the contemporary American imagination.[36]

In conversation with Greene's work on cultural narratives, I have found the work of feminist studies scholar Sara Ahmed in *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* to be helpful. Ahmed points to narratives as one of the ways that we orient ourselves in the world. She writes, "It is by understanding how we become orientated in moments of disorientation that we might learn what it means to be orientated in the first place."[37] The disorientation that *The X-*

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[34] Goodwin, 7.
[35] Greene, *Planet of the Apes as American Myth: Race, Politics, and Popular Culture*, 3.
[36] Greene, 7.
[37] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others.* Duke University Press: Durham, 2006. 6.

Files offers provides the potential to identify and push back against naturalized narratives that serve to marginalize certain religious experiences.

In *Buying Buddha, Selling Rumi: Orientalism and the Mystical Marketplace*, religious studies scholar Sophia Rose Arjana brings out the concept of muddled Orientalism. This refers to how the colonization of different Asian religions is often sloppy or haphazard, a "careless mixing of images, terms, and tropes from the imagined Orient."[38] This idea of muddled Orientalism, especially when paired with religious studies scholar Jane Naomi Iwamura's concept of virtual Orientalism, is a useful framework to view how Asian traditions and practices are reinvented for an American audience to consume. Iwamura's work in *Virtual Orientalism: Asian Religions and American Popular Culture* argues that by examining the network of representations that Edward Said identified in his book *Orientalism,* "this system of representation reveals much about the Occidental subjectivity from which it emerges."[39] The term 'virtual Orientalism' comes out of this work, which includes a "type of cultural stereotyping by visual forms of media," such as television.[40]

The work that religious studies scholar Yvonne Chireau does in her book, *Black Magic: Religion and the African American Conjuring Tradition,* traces a history of African-diasporic religions and knowledge traditions and of the response they received from those in power. While I am interested in the representation of Haitian Vodou in *The X-Files*, rather than Conjuring as Chireau discusses, this book provides an important cultural and historical background to understand how we get to visual texts like "Fresh Bones." Alongside the work of Chireau, the

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[38] Sophia Rose Arjana, *Buying Buddha, Selling Rumi: Orientalism and the Mystical Marketplace* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2020), 3.
[39] Jane Iwamura, *Virtual Orientalism: Asian Religions and American Popular Culture* (London: Oxford University Press, 2011), 7.
[40] Iwamura, 7.

religious studies scholar Ina J. Fandritch's article "Yorùbá Influences on Haitian Vodou and New Orleans Voodoo," contextualizes the representation of Haitian Vodou in *The X-Files.* Leslie Desmangles notes in "Replacing the Term 'Voodoo' with 'Vodou': A Proposal," that the word "voodoo is a Western term that derives from the late 19th and early 20th centuries' views of Haitian culture."[41] Desmangles' article, when paired with Chireau and Fandritch, really gets to the ways that the term voodoo as it is used in American pop culture is deeply entangled in racist ideas about African and African-derived religious practices.[42]

Class and its intersections with American religion play an important role in how *The X-Files* not only constructs the default representation of humanity, but also in defining what is and is not a threat. To better understand the ways that class interacts with representations and understandings of marginalized religious traditions, I have turned to *Divine Hierarchies: Class in American Religion and Religious Studies* by religious studies scholar Sean McCloud. He writes that "Class concerns boundaries, those distinctions we make between ourselves and others," and that because of this, "class entails relationships, identities, meaning, and power. It foments comfort and discomfort."[43] In many ways, the classed anxieties and concerns of these episodes can slide under the radar, and it is this analysis that I have found helpful in teasing out the ways that class is constructed and demonstrated in these episodes.

The authors I have turned to for the more theoretical frameworks and scaffolds for this project are religious studies scholars, feminist studies scholars, and American studies scholars. While there is some overlap between them, each brings a different perspective or concept to

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[41] Leslie G. Desmangles, "Replacing the Term 'Voodoo' with 'Vodou': A Proposal," *Journal of Haitian Studies* 18, no. 2 (2012): 26.
[42] Desmangles, 26.
[43] Sean McCloud, *Divine Hierarchies: Class in American Religion and Religious Studies* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 2.

better unpack the ways that *The X-Files* is engaged in a cultural project that relies on and supports the continued marginalization of certain religions and the construction of the self through a threatening Other.

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Fresh Bones, Old Narratives

> COLONEL WHARTON: It's hatred, plain and simple. They hate us and all I can do is see that they're processed as efficiently as possible.
> MULDER: Colonel Wharton, a, uh... A certain ritual sign was found at the scene of both deaths. Is there anything you can tell us about that?
> COLONEL WHARTON: Not much. Apparently, it's some sort of voodoo marking.
> MULDER: But you haven't investigated it as a possibility.
> COLONEL WHARTON: Possibility of what? All I know is voodoo caused a riot in my camp. One night they held some secret ceremony. The next day all hell broke loose.[44]

Fears of colonization and invasion are at the center of *The X-Files*, and they are made explicit in the season two episode "Fresh Bones." The episode's narrative relies both on a body politic that is allegorized as white women and children and also that this constructed representation is vulnerable and must be protected from invasion and racialized threats, including sexual violence and the violation of the physical body.

In "Fresh Bones," Mulder and Scully travel to Folkstone, North Carolina to investigate the suicide of Jack McAlpin, a marine stationed at a United States INS compound that processes detained Haitian refugees. The blame for his death, the suicide of another marine, and continued heightened tensions between the marines and the Haitian refugees is placed on Pierre Bauvais, whom Colonel Wharton identifies early on as both a voodoo practitioner and "the one responsible for instigating all the trouble."[45] The episode follows Mulder and Scully's investigation, including the reappearance of a living McAlpin, grave robbery, and the murder of

[44] "Fresh Bones."
[45] "Fresh Bones."

Bauvais after it is revealed to the audience that Colonel Wharton has been abusing the refugees to get at Bauvais and his knowledge.

"Fresh Bones" was written in response to reports of U.S. military personnel committing suicide while stationed in Haiti.[46] The decision to focus on Haitian refugees was made due to the producers being unable to film on location in Haiti.[47] The narrative twist at the end of the episode attempts to reframe the story as one that is sympathetic to the Haitian refugees. However, that and Mulder's stamp of approval when he tells Scully "Wharton's left these people no choice but to fight back with the only weapon they have," do not negate the ways that this episode heavily relies on constructing Haitian Vodou as a threat on multiple fronts.[48]

Language plays a considerable role in constructing Haitian Vodou as a threat in "Fresh Bones." The choice to use the term voodoo to describe Vodou brings with it what Leslie Desmangles notes are "racist denotations and ill-conceived notions about a religion that is practiced by millions of believers in Haiti, in West Africa, in the United States and Canada, as well as other parts of the world."[49] Part of this is because voodoo is not a term that applies to the religion being represented in this episode. 'Voodoo' more accurately describes "the Afro-Creole counterculture religion of southern Louisiana," whereas Vodou is "the popular syncretic Afro-Creole religion of Haiti."[50] However, as the scholar Ina J. Fandritch notes, voodoo is often used in American English as a catch-all term for "any African-derived magical or religious beliefs and practices, often associated with black magic and witchcraft."[51] The religious studies scholar Yvonne Chireau echoes this idea, writing that "voodoo, as it is used in the American context,

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[46] Brian Lowry, *The Truth Is Out There: The Official Guide to The X-Files* (New York: Harper Prism, 1995), 197-8.
[47] Ted Edwards, *X-Files Confidential: The Unauthorized X-Philes Compendium* (Boston: Little & Brown Co., 1997), 114-5.
[48] "Fresh Bones."
[49] Desmangles, "Replacing the Term 'Voodoo' with 'Vodou': A Proposal," 27.
[50] Fandritch, "Yorùbá Influences on Haitian Vodou and New Orleans Voodoo," 779.
[51] Fandritch, 779.

connotes an illicit form of spirituality, and many images have been used to bolster the notorious associations between it, racial blackness, and evil magic."[52] It is these connotations of illicitness and evil that *The X*-Files draws on in the episode. In using the term voodoo, *The X-Files* relies on a category that stems from colonial "views of African and African-derived New World ritual practices perceived as untamed and uncivilized," collapsing any space for difference.[53] Chireau writes that "white observers generally linked supernatural harming beliefs with what they considered to be the social deficiencies of black people," something that is replicated in the episode "Fresh Bones."[54]

The language spoken by the characters in this episode also contributes to the construction of threat, functioning as a marker of civilization that is constructed in opposition to Black Haitian identity within the episode. The unnamed man who grabs Scully as she and Mulder walk through the Folkstone INS camp is marked not only as being a Black man, therefore understood in the contemporary American imagination to be inherently dangerous to a small white woman, but also by his use of Creole instead of English.[55] In contrast, the young boy Chester who comes to Scully's rescue, initially speaks Creole but quickly switches to English. This use of language to mark civilization or the lack thereof is seen near the end of the episode as well, where Scully is attacked by a shadowy Black man appearing from a cut in her hand, who, as he chokes her, speaks in Creole. These two instances of Creole being used within the episode are the only times in which the language is utilized by Black men, and is in the context of a white woman being grabbed or attacked by a Black man who is seen as being out of control, "Too much rum," or

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[52] Yvonne Chireau, *Black Magic: Religion and the African American Conjuring Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 7.
[53] Desmangles, "Replacing the Term 'Voodoo' with 'Vodou': A Proposal," 26.
[54] Chireau, *Black Magic: Religion and the African American Conjuring Tradition,* 82.
[55] As noted within the subtitles.

threatening.[56] In this way, the language becomes associated in this episode with a lack of civilization as defined by a white society, of not being in control or able to have that self-control.

Black foreign men and their religious practices are set up as the threat for most of the episode, with white women and children as the targets of said threat. Even when Colonel Wharton, a white man, is revealed to be the villain of the episode, he is still utilizing Haitian Vodou, which has been deeply intertwined with ideas of foreignness and Blackness in the episode. There are anxieties around border and boundary maintenance present throughout the entire narrative. In the opening scene of "Fresh Bones," Jack McAlpin is shown lashing out at his white wife and child while under the influence of Vodou. Later in the episode, McAlpin's wife is anxious because she has found a conch shell in her child's sandbox with the same veve painted on it that was found at the scene of her husband's suicide. Scully is targeted by Vodou at different points in the episode, including a scene near the end where a Black man emerges from a cut in her hand, having invaded or penetrated her body. The entire episode is dimly lit, demonstrating visually the ways that the threat of Vodou has escaped the confines of the INS compound and permeated the entire town.

Goodwin's concept of contraceptive nationalism allows us to understand how the conch shell in a child's sandbox and the invasion of Scully's body by the apparition of a Black man are doing similar ideological work. In both parts of the episode, racialized religious outsiders are seen to attack white women and children, invading the boundaries of their bodies or their homes. The additional layer of the threat coming from Haitian refugees caught in the liminal state that is the INS compound serves to emphasize that the violation of America's body politic in the episode, allegorized as the bodies of white women and children, is also "a violation of America's

[56] "Fresh Bones."

domestic sovereignty."[57] This is furthered by the threat and implication of sexual violence against Scully in this episode. When she and Mulder first arrive at the INS compound, a Black man reaches out to grab her only to be chased away by a young boy. In the second half of the episode, her hand is pierced by a thorn from a bramble branch wrapped around the car's steering wheel. The wound that Scully receives can later be read as penetrative, as it is that same scratch that a Black man appears from, pulling himself out of Scully's body. The boundaries of Scully's body have been violated by Vodou and by Black men. Narratives like this construct marginalized religions as not only threats to an idealized and racialized womanhood, but also as "enemies of the American people and the American nation-state."[58] The episode is literally presenting Black foreign men as an invading threat to white women and children that must be punished in some form or fashion. While Colonel Wharton's abuse of Bauvais and other refugees is presented as going a step too far, there is still an underlying thread that these Black men and their religion must be contained, if not eradicated from American soil. Colonel Wharton is the villain in the end, but it is still Vodou, marked by its associations with "racial blackness, and evil magic" that gives him his power and ability to be a threat.[59]

While the episode "Fresh Bones" attempts to renegotiate the narrative it tells in the last few minutes of the episode, it is unable to undo the damage it has done in its representation of Haitian Vodou. The episode tells a story that reinforces the idea that Black men and marginalized religions are threats not only to white women and children, but to the American nation-state that they represent.

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[57] Goodwin, *Abusing Religion: Literary Persecution, Sex Scandals, and American Minority Religions,* 136.
[58] Goodwin, 136.
[59] Chireau, *Black Magic: Religion and the African American Conjuring Tradition*, 7.

Arcadia, Untamable

> MULDER: A tulpa. It's a Tibetan thought-form. It's a living, breathing creature willed into existence by someone who possesses that ability—an ability I think you picked up on your whirligig-buying excursions to the Far East. Why'd you do it? I mean, is it so damn important for everybody to have the same color mailbox?
> GENE GOGOLAK: It's important that people fit in.
> MULDER: But you didn't know exactly what you were getting into, did you? I mean, you can summon its existence, but ... you can give it life, but you can't control it. The best you can hope for is to stay out of its way.[60]

In "Arcadia," Mulder and Scully go undercover as a married couple moving into a planned community where multiple families have disappeared under mysterious circumstances. The two FBI agents soon discover that the white homeowner association president, Gene Gogolak, maintains strict control over the visual presentation of the community. As he explains to Mulder once he has been confronted, "It's important that people fit in."[61] When Mulder attempts to break the rules—putting a basketball hoop up, placing plastic flamingoes in his yard, destroying their mailbox—the neighbors are on high alert and prepared to do damage control. At the end of the episode, it is revealed that Gogolak has been marking households he cannot control with a tacky whirligig that breaks the rules of the community, signaling to the tulpa he has created that a particular household is now an acceptable target. The villain of the episode is, as TOR writer Meghan Deans notes in her review of the episode, a man who is "so obsessed with perfection that he has conjured a Tulpa to brutally discipline" any community member who falls short of his idea of white, upper-middle class perfection.[62]

The world of the episode is enclosed within the boundaries of "The Falls," a planned community in San Diego, California built on the remains of a landfill. The episode begins with

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[60] "Arcadia," *The X-Files* (Fox, 1999).
[61] "Arcadia."
[62] Meghan Deans, "Reopening The X-Files: 'Arcadia,'" TOR, *Reopening The X-Files* (blog), December 6, 2012, https://www.tor.com/2012/12/06/reopening-the-x-files-arcadia/.

Dave Kline driving up to the gate on his way home, and it ends with a final shot of Mulder and Scully driving away. When characters do leave the neighborhood, they do so offscreen, returning into view once they are once more inside the boundary of the gated community. Even in death, community members are unable to leave the neighborhood, as Mulder believes that their bodies have been buried in the yard. One of the impacts of the decision to ground the narrative in a particular geospatial location that the camera does not leave is that it contributes to a sense of being trapped, that the characters (and in some ways, the audience) are stuck and unable to change their circumstances. The suburban claustrophobia of this also enhances the feeling that the threat of the episode is crossing intimate boundaries. Not even the white, comfortably upper-middle-class families in their neatly ordered houses are safe from colonization and invasion from a threatening Other.

The anxieties around borders and boundaries, as well as the suburban claustrophobia, are compounded by the eventual reveal of the tulpa. A tulpa, as Mulder tells us, is "a Tibetan thought-form. It's a living, breathing creature willed into existence by someone who possesses that ability."[63] In the case of "Arcadia," the tulpa presented may have more resemblance to that of Theosophy than any concept found in Tibetan Buddhism, but it cannot be ignored that the episode itself explicitly names it as something Tibetan, going so far as to describe it as something Gogolak picked up on his "whirligig-buying excursions to the Far East."[64] The tulpa originates, most likely, out of the works of "nineteenth-century Western esotericists."[65] This concept would later be "attributed to Tibetan Buddhism by early-twentieth-century adventurers, and

[63] "Arcadia," Transcripts, Inside the X, n.d., http://www.insidethex.co.uk/transcrp/scrp613.htm.
[64] Natasha L. Mikles and Joseph P. Laycock, "Tracking the Tulpa," *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 19, no. 1 (2015): 88, https://doi.org/10.1525/nr.2015.19.1.87. "Arcadia," 1999.
[65] Mikles and Laycock, 89.

rediscovered by modern paranormal lore as a 'Tibetan' concept."[66] Religious studies scholar Sophia Rose Arjana draws on the work of Alex McKay when she writes that Tibet is "viewed by many as 'a sacred land in which the paranormal is commonplace.'"[67] This Orientalist perception of Tibet is central to the construction of the tulpa in this episode of *The X-Files,* where Tibet serves as a site of dangerous and exotic power. The episode relies on an imagining of Asia, and Tibet in particular, as a powerful Other that straddles the line that religious studies scholar Jane Iwamura describes as being between romanticized and "heathen" religion, in order to deliver their monster of the week narrative.[68]

"Arcadia" creates a sense of threat and danger throughout the narrative that points to a white man as the perpetrator. Gene Gogolak is understood to be the villain as soon as he is introduced on screen, but much of the episode is spent with the means of his power being unseen and unnamed. At the end of the episode, it is revealed that Gogolak entered Tibet to extract cultural items to be sold as whirligigs to the American consumer and left with a tulpa that he utilizes to control and terrify those within the borders of his domain. While doing that, however, he has also taken on something that is uncontrollable and retributive. Gogolak is the villain, but he receives his power in part because of an uncontrollable Tibetan Buddhist force that is both external to the community in origin and also cannot be tamed by a white man. The tulpa in this episode is an example of how the "fictive Orient becomes the real Orient in the minds of the colonizer," creating a threat that relies on Orientalism to support it.[69] This threat invades the

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[66] Mikles and Laycock, "Tracking the Tulpa," 89.
[67] Arjana, *Buying Buddha, Selling Rumi: Orientalism and the Mystical Marketplace*, 76. Alex C. McKay, "'Truth,' Perception, and Politics: The British Construction of an Image of Tibet," in *Imagining Tibet: Perceptions, Projections, and Fantasies*, ed. Thierry Dodin and Heinz Rather (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2001), 82.
[68] Iwamura, *Virtual Orientalism: Asian Religions and American Popular Culture*, 8.
[69] Arjana, *Buying Buddha, Selling Rumi: Orientalism and the Mystical Marketplace,* 10.

boundaries of white, upper-middle class homes, threatening the stability of a suffocating suburbia, killing families and eventually killing its own creator, and thus, itself.

Miracle Man, Prodigal Son

> SHERIFF DANIELS: "I see you folks got a chance to take in the holy roller sideshow."
> MULDER: "Something tells me you're not a member of Reverend Hartley's flock."
> SHERIFF DANIELS: "Well, I remember Hartley when he was a soapbox preacher collecting dollar bills in coffee cans. Since the boy joined the act, he's got himself a Cadillac for every day of the week, bought for with money that should be used to improve our roads and schools […] 99% of the people in this world are fools, and the rest of us are in great danger of contagion."[70]

"Miracle Man" demonstrates the intersections between whiteness, class anxieties, and gender in constructing marginalized religion as a threat. In "Miracle Man," Mulder and Scully travel to Clarksville, Tennessee to investigate a young Pentecostal faith healer, Samuel Hartley, who has been accused of murder. The episode opens in 1983, where a young Samuel, accompanied by his adoptive father, raises a man from the dead at the scene of a severe car accident. After the title screen, the episode moves forward to 1993, where Mulder and Scully receive a VHS of Samuel laying hands on a member of his father's ministry who dies right after. The rest of the episode deals with Samuel's crisis of faith, another death of a ministry member, and finally, Samuel's own murder at the hands of the local sheriff's men.

This episode constructs Pentecostalism, with a focus on their faith healing practices, as an incorrect Christianity and as a threat to white women in the community. Part of this construction relies on ideas of religion and class that are explicitly named by the narrative, as Sheriff Daniels tells Mulder that Reverend Hartley and his son have risen above their class status, taking money away from the community and putting it in their own pockets. As the religious studies scholar Sean McCloud writes, scholars, and I will add here, popular culture, have "consistently and often

[70] "Miracle Man," *The X-Files* (Fox, 1994).

explicitly deemed the religions of the 'usual suspects'—the poor, minorities, and indigenous peoples—as somehow inferior."[71] Much of the episode is spent constructing the threat of an illegitimate faith healer who has risen above his original class status in ways that are frowned upon by the institutions of power around him, personified by the character of Sheriff Daniels. In this episode, the boundaries of what constitutes whiteness are drawn in such a way that class status is a key exclusionary factor in determining who is allowed to fully participate in that category.

Religiosexual peril and the vulnerability of white women is a central aspect of "Miracle Man." Part of this is visible through whom Samuel physically interacts with. During the course of the episode, the audience sees Samuel lay hands on three people with the intention of healing them. The first, as a child, is Leonard Vance, a white man who later takes out his rage at surviving out on the bodies of white women. The other people who Samuel lays hand on are two white women, both of whom die shortly after. Both women are vulnerable due to their illnesses that have led them to join the Ministry. Given the physical nature of Samuel's healing, there is the implication that he has penetrated and violated the boundaries of their bodies in some form. Sheriff Daniels refuses to allow his own wife to attend the Miracle Ministry, controlling her body to protect her, and assert his own dominance in some way against the feared contagion of Samuel and Pentecostalism.

While Samuel is eventually proven innocent after his own murder, Pentecostalism is still thrown under the bus. At the end of the episode, the question of whether Samuel has legitimate healing powers or is supported through visual Biblical allusions is mostly irrelevant to the way that the narrative has constructed Pentecostalism as a threat to white women and class

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[71] Sean McCloud, *Divine Hierarchies: Class in American Religion and Religious Studies* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 3.

boundaries. As he is beaten to death in a jail cell with the full permission, if not explicit orders, of the Sherriff, lighting is used to draw connections between Samuel and Jesus Christ's crucifixion. Samuel later appears to rise from the dead, visiting Leonard Vance on his deathbed to demand answers for why he betrayed him. This is the continuation of a thread that runs through most of the episode connecting Samuel to Biblical figures in an attempt to build Samuel's legitimacy as a healer, while also adding evidence to him having the power to cause death with a single touch. However, what matters at the end of the episode is that Leonard Vance is a prominent member of the Miracle Ministry who would not have had access or motive to kill the two white women that he does without the church. Samuel may be innocent, but the ministry is still to blame.

The narrative also relies on the idea that the imagined audience understands that the anxieties and fears that are used as narrative devices are perfectly reasonable. As Goodwin writes,

> "presented as insights into 'what's really going on' in unfamiliar religious communities, narratives of contraceptive nationalism collapse theological and practical complexities of minority religions into what Gil Anidjar might call 'concrete figment[s] of the [American] imagination' and make monsters of those who do religion differently."[72]

This episode collapses the complexities of Pentecostalism and faith healing processes into a threat to the community at large. The final twist at the end of the episode where the truth is revealed (to some extent) works because of a shared assumption that the kind of religious practice represented in this episode is dangerous and illegitimate. Samuel may be visually

[72] Goodwin, 136.

connected to Jesus in the moment of his death, but in some ways, this just reinforces the idea that this kind of religious expression is generally dangerous.[73]

The narrative being told in "Miracle Man" is one that reifies contraceptive nationalism. White women's bodies are vulnerable to "religious and sexual coercion," the lens through which Samuel's healing is read by authorities in his community, while he is also categorized as a religious outsider who threatens pollution.[74] In this episode, the boundaries of what constitutes whiteness are drawn in such a way that class status is a key exclusionary factor, further working to mark Samuel as an outsider and Pentecostalism as a threat.

CONCLUSIONS

As Eric Greene points out, popular culture media like *Planet of the Apes* or here, *The X-Files*, shape the ways that "we see, understand, and misunderstand experiences of the past, present, and future."[75] These cultural texts "demand critical assessment and careful interrogation if we are to understand what they say about the concerns and the values of the people and times that produced them," and should be taken seriously as sites of knowledge creation.[76] Popular culture provides windows into worlds that may be untouchable otherwise, giving their audience the "only 'knowledge' [they] have of races [they] have never encountered personally, places [they] have never been, and experiences [they] have never had."[77] Cultural texts like *The X-Files* are created to help us make sense of the world around us, something that is "particularly crucial

[73] The use of lighting and shadows to cast a crucifix on the wall behind him as he is beaten to death. Also seen in the way that he rises from the dead and disappears. At the beginning of the episode, Mulder compares him to Moses in the way that he was found by his adoptive father.
[74] Goodwin, *Abusing Religion: Literary Persecution, Sex Scandals, and American Minority Religions, 3*.
[75] Greene, *Planet of the Apes as American Myth: Race, Politics, and Popular Culture, 10*.
[76] Greene, 10.
[77] Greene, 10.

in times of tremendous change, conflict, and instability."[78] The framework of the show situates it to engage in a project of destabilization and disorientation, framing Mulder and Scully as truth seekers who reveal institutional structures and conspiracies.

While *The X-Files* trades on lingering uncertainty and instability, destabilizing the idea of what the truth could look like, it both centers whiteness as the default representation of humanity and reaffirms the idea that marginalized religions are a threat to the American body politic. To return to Theresa Geller, *The X-Files* continually "presents conventional white, middle-class characters who are menaced by unknown forces, that compromise their self-contained (white) bodies—threatening disease, hybridization, and ultimately, physical colonization." [79] The fears of colonization and invasion within *The X-Files* that are demonstrated through how it treats marginalized religions as inherently dangerous or threatening can also be read through Goodwin's concept of contraceptive nationalism.

It is the white, and often gendered and classed, subject's fear of the Other that comes into play in the ways that marginalized religions are portrayed and imagined in *The X-Files*. "Fresh Bones" labels Vodou as voodoo, painting it as a dangerous black magic that invades and threatens white communities and bodies, particularly those of white women. "Arcadia" draws on Orientalist ideas of Tibetan Buddhism in its use of the tulpa as an invited, but still invading, danger that threatens white middle-class families. Both of these episodes rely on the idea of the incorrect, but still powerful, practitioner. Col. Wharton and Gogolak are not the intended practitioners of the religious traditions they utilize, their usage of these practices adds legitimacy to the power of these religions even as they are being cast as dangerous. "Miracle Man" presents Pentecostalism as an illegitimate form of Christianity, and as something that threatens the

[78] Greene, *Planet of the Apes as American Myth: Race, Politics, and Popular Culture, 8*.
[79] Kydd, "Differences: The X-Files, Race and the White Norm." 73.

boundaries of class divisions and white women's bodies. These representations of marginalized religions are part of a broader social project that collapses space for religious diversity and precludes the idea that religious diversity can be benign. Instead, diversity is recast to be deviant, dangerous, and outside the bounds of what religion is imagined to be. To create the paranormal presented in *The X-Files*, the show relies on the axiom that marginalized or otherwise non-mainstream religions are a threat to white bodies.

In this thesis, I have argued that *The X-Files* takes part in boundary maintenance, what the religious studies scholar Megan Goodwin describes as a "collaps[ing] space for benign religious[...] difference in the United States" through a process of delegitimization and constructing the other as a threat to an idealized self.[80] In other words, *The X-Files* and its constructions of the paranormal function to maintain and negotiate certain cultural narratives around what religion looks like in the United States. This work, which is contingent on the creation and maintenance of the "other," means that the intentions of *The X-Files* are ultimately betrayed by the portrayals of marginalized religious traditions they create in these episodes. *The X-Files,* like other forms of media, "mirrors larger discourses and assumptions found in American religions and contemporary American culture" and creates narratives that "help us (wrongly) understand how the world works."[81] In the world imagined by *The X-Files*, marginalized religions are dangerous, and the narrative consequences of the episodes demonstrate this threat. As demonstrated in these episodes, the construction of white womanhood

[80] Megan Goodwin, *Abusing Religion: Literary Persecution, Sex Scandals, and American Minority Religions* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2020), 4.
[81]Sean McCloud, "From the Horrors of Human Tragedy and Social Reproduction to the Comfort of a Demonic Cult: Agency in Hereditary (2018)," in *Representing Religion in Film*, ed. Tenzan Eaghll and Rebekka King (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022), 152.

and white bodies in *The X-Files* is inseparable from the perceived threat and vulnerability to sexual violence and violation.

This thesis has begun to ask questions about the boundary construction work that *The X-Files* is engaged in. It is my hope that this line of questioning continues into larger conversations about the ways that marginalized religions are constructed within *The X-Files*. While I have focused on three episodes, there are over a dozen episodes of the original series that deal with religion and constructing marginalized religion in particular as threatening. I could have chosen to work with "Shapes," which is an episode from season one that involves Algonquian religious ideas, "The Field Where I Died," from season four that draws heavy inspiration from the Branch Davidians, or "Theef," from season seven and involves hoodoo and hexcraft. What I am interested in looking at through the specific episodes that I have chosen are the intersections between whiteness, class, and gender in how marginalized religions are treated as dangerous. However, any of these episodes that deal with religion, both mainstream and marginalized, are rich texts for cultural analysis.

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