

Jessica Hautsch

**“What the Geisha has gotten into you?”:
Colorblindness, Orientalist Stereotypes, and the
Problem of Global¹ Feminism in *Buffy the Vampire
Slayer Season Eight***

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[1] In the final season of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Buffy, with the help of her Wiccan friend Willow, changes the world. Together, in a rather overt metaphor for female empowerment, these two powerful women activate all of the potential Slayers, thereby defying the patriarchal rule established by a “bunch of men who died thousands of years ago” (“Chosen” 7.22). Instead of only one Slayer being called at a time, Buffy opts for a more communal empowerment, explaining that “From now on, every girl in the world who might be a Slayer, will be a Slayer. Every girl who could have the power, will have the power. Can stand up, will stand up. Slayers, every one of us” (“Chosen” 7.22). The series ends with this representation of female empowerment and community-oriented heroism that remains one of the major themes of Buffy’s broadcast legacy, although some critics have questioned the ultimate effectiveness of this message.²

[2] In the comic book continuation of the series, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer Season Eight*, produced and overseen by creator Joss Whedon, the world of Buffy is expanded beyond the confines of Sunnydale and the United States. The Slayer organization becomes international and develops into a global network of Slayers, which Buffy describes as embodying the clichéd feminist sentiments of “Togetherness! Unity! Sisterhood!”³ (Espenson, “Harmonic” 19). Readers are introduced to newly called Slayers from a variety of ethnicities and nationalities, most of whom have joined Buffy in her battle against the forces of darkness. This essay focuses on the representation of Satsu, a queer Japanese Slayer, who serves briefly as Buffy’s sexual interest. While present in the text, Satsu’s Japaneseness is largely and problematically marginalized. That marginalization persists until a standalone issue focusing on Kennedy and Satsu and their fight against the nefarious Vampy Cat. It is in this issue, set in Japan, that Satsu’s identity as a Japanese woman is acknowledged and emphasized. However, the approach that the comics take to her Asian heritage is troubling and draws attention to the often racist assumptions about Japanese culture as they are reiterated in Western media. More troubling still is the way in which the issue seems to juxtapose East and West, chauvinism and feminism, heteronormativity and queerness, regression and progression. The construction of this East/West dichotomy in the text draws attention to the implicit middle-class, Euro-American whiteness of Buffy’s feminist message of global sisterhood, and illuminates the way in which the comics minimize racial difference in the service of universalizing feminist discourses of patriarchal oppression and female empowerment.

[3] So far, the scholarly attention paid to Satsu has analyzed her brief affair with Buffy and tends to focus on how the treatment of their relationship fits within the gender and sexual politics of the series. In her essay on heteroflexibility in *Season Eight*, Hélène Frohard-Dourlent argues that the comics take the trope of heteroflexibility and queer it by demonstrating “the cracks in identity politics . . . the moments where our categories fail to recognize the reality of these complex experiences” (43). Frohard-Dourlent suggests that although other characters label Buffy as “straight” and “hetero,” Buffy

herself carefully resists such a simple and potentially reductive categorization (42-43). Lewis Call also suggests that the comics queer heteronormativity through kink (106-07), "erotic relationships between humans and those who are inhuman, transhuman, or superhuman" (107) and what he labels as Buffy's bisexuality (114). Carlen Lavigne, working off of a quote from Whedon in which he speculates about the possible success of the series had it been conceptualized as "Buffy the Lesbian Separatist" instead of the more accessible *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1), concludes the failure of Buffy's relationship with Satsu keeps the Slayer community from the feminist "extremes"; she argues that although Buffy's same-sex affair implies "the possibility of lesbian separatism . . . the comics ultimately retreat from this position," while still continuing to complicate gender norms and normalizing same-sex desire (13).

[4] However, this scholarship, while offering a nuanced interpretation of Buffy and Satsu's sexual relationship and its implications for heteronormative discourses, does not take into account the interracial and international dynamic of their relationship. Frohard-Dourlent and Lavigne do not mention Satsu's Japanese heritage and Call points to it only in passing, referring to Satsu as "a beautiful Asian Slayer" (112). The decision of these critics not to interrogate Satsu's Japaneseness is understandable given the way in which she is constructed by the text. Her ethnic identity is not discussed by herself or the other characters, in contrast to her sexual identity, which receives a good deal of consideration, especially in relation to Buffy. In fact, before the "Swell" (which I will discuss below in more detail), Satsu's ethnic identity is only alluded to by her name and the visual depiction of her, namely her darker skin and almond eyes, her katana, and Andrew's greeting of her as "nude Asian girl" (Goddard, "Wolves . . . Part One" 16). Unlike season seven's Chao-Ahn, Satsu, while apparently fluent in Japanese, is also an adept user of American English and slang. For the most part, the comics minimize Satsu's racial difference and whitewash her identity.

[5] Whitewashing, the result of the ideology of colorblindness, eliminates the representation of racial difference and is not uncommon within the Buffyverse, nor in American television in general. In some cases whitewashing refers to developing shows in which the main cast (as was the case in *Buffy*) is mostly white; in others it means casting white actors to play minority characters; but it also can mean casting actors of color in colorblind roles. An attempt to resist racialized stereotypes (at which *Buffy* has not been always successful: see Kent A. Ono, Mary Alice Money, Naomi Alderman and Annette Seidel-Arpaci, Hautsch, Lynne Edwards, and Elyce Rae Helford), writers create characters of color that are "racially neutral: e.g., white" (Warner, "Colorblind" 21). As Kristen Jamaya Warner argues, the problem with whitewashed, or colorblind, characters is that they deny the experience of racial difference and instead universalize the experience of whiteness. She explains that

oftentimes actors of color are cast to prove that multiculturalism is important. However, the characters often have little cultural specificity and are only different in terms of skin tone. While this type of sameness on the surface may appear to offer a sense of racial parity, it actually encourages the opposite. Colorblindness works to make race immutable and objective, which inevitably disallows difference and instead outputs 'whiteness' as the normative standard. (x)

Thus while actors of color bring an "'illustrative' look of difference" (9) to their characters, racial difference is erased and the white experience is presented as the universalized norm. Warner argues that colorblindness and whitewashing are

ideologically assimilationist and function not to authentically explore multiculturalism, but to make race invisible (viii). She notes that very often the roles of whitewashed characters could just as easily be assumed by white actors (36), which suggests that these characters provide an illusion of diversity while still privileging the stories and experiences of whiteness. In addition to universalizing whiteness, colorblindness also obscures the ways in which racism has been institutionalized and minimizes the everyday struggles of people of color (see Brown et al.).

[6] Throughout its broadcast history, *Buffy* had a tendency to universalize whiteness and marginalize the experiences of non-white, non-middle class characters. As Ewan Kirkland has asserted, *Buffy* is overwhelmingly white. Not limited to “the leading cast’s skin color,” he argues, “White sensibilities inform the series, producing an extremely white view of the world, of history, of the universe, and white people’s role within it” (Kirkland 1). And these “white sensibilities” and “white world view” are often extended to characters of color. For example, the character Kennedy, played by Mexican-American actress Iyari Limon, is presented as, ostensibly, white. Only Limon’s visual appearance marks Kennedy as racially different, but her experiences as a Latina woman are not explored. In fact, the ethnic identities of the “token” non-white characters added to the show in its final season, namely Principal Robin Wood⁴ and a few Potentials (including Kennedy) are infrequently acknowledged and never explored by the show.⁵ The representation of Charles Gunn, a young man of color, on *Angel*, *Buffy’s* spinoff series, is also troubling, as Michaela D.E. Meyer notes; because whereas Gunn starts from a (stereotyped and not unproblematic) space of racial difference, he becomes increasingly white as the series progresses. The invisibility of racial difference and silencing of these characters’ intersectional subjectivity normalizes and universalizes whiteness within the representative discourse of the Buffyverse.

[7] Despite the international setting of *Buffy Season Eight*, the comics retain the “white sensibilities” and “white world view” (Kirkland 1) of the television show. Although the comics do introduce some supporting, non-white characters, the primary characters remain white. Also, two of the most prominent characters of color, Renee and Satsu, are romantic interests of the white characters, and once they have served this function, they largely disappear from the text (Renee dies during the “Wolves at the Gate” arc, and after *Buffy* ends their relationship, Satsu determines to stay in Japan⁶ (Goddard, “Wolves . . . Part IV” 30)), suggesting that their stories were only of interest in so far as they related to the stories of the white characters. Their racial identities are also largely erased from their stories,⁷ and in both cases, despite the “‘illustrative’ look of difference” (Warner 9), their experiences of race are largely marginalized, minimized, and ignored.

[8] As stated above, one of the reasons for this colorblind construction of characters is the avoidance of racial stereotypes. As a Japanese woman in American-produced media, Satsu has a racial and sexual identity that is threatened by a history of stereotypes and sexualization, objectification and Orientalization. Asian women, Sheridan Prasso argues, are haunted by what she terms the “Asian Mystique—the fantasy of the exotic, indulging, decadent, sensual Oriental” (5). Perpetuated in Western popular culture, this mystique is the product of the imperial discourses of Orientalism, which, as Edward W. Said explains, seek to differentiate “the familiar (Europe, the West, ‘us’) and the strange (the Orient, the East, ‘them’)” (43). The stereotypes associated with Asian women differentiated them from their Western counterparts, Othering them and crafting a mystique around them which excused, even invited, colonial and sexual conquest. Western media continues to perpetuate this mystique, employing two primary

and oppositional stereotypes of Asian women. Prasso argues that “These depictions can and sometimes do cause Asian woman to be perceived in Western Culture as gentle geisha or china Dolls—servile, submissive, exotic, sexually available, mysterious, and guiding; or as a Dragon Lady—steely and cold as Cruella de Vil, lacking in the emotions or the neuroses of real women” (xiii). In both cases, Asian women are presented as the exotic, erotic, and Other, while being denied the subjectivity, realism, and character development afforded to representations of white women in Western media.

[9] In the comics, Satsu seems to negotiate her identity by refusing to conform to these stereotypes. She is too rebellious to be a “gentle geisha.” She is by no means demure and mild-mannered, and she questions Buffy’s orders and refuses to follow them (Goddard, “Wolves . . . Part II” 12, Goddard, “Wolves . . . Part III” 13, 16), in both cases challenging Buffy’s authority. And while Satsu might embrace the toughness and physical prowess of the Dragon Lady or Martial Arts Mistress, (Buffy refers to her as her “best fighter” after all (Goddard, “Wolves . . . Part III” 16)), her emotional vulnerability negates this stereotype. After having sex with Buffy, Satsu is visibly hurt by Buffy’s assertion that their relationship has no future (Goddard, “Wolves . . . Part I” 11), and she remains emotionally attached to Buffy even after physically separating from her (DeKnight 6). As a nuanced character and complex queer woman, Satsu’s presence in the text, then, would suggest a disavowal of these racist representations of Asian women.

[10] But this complexity is also paired with her colorblind characterization and the marginalization of her Asian identity. In the standalone issue “Swell,” Satsu’s identity as an Asian woman is explored in more detail, and representations of Asianness are troublingly reliant on the stereotypes that have plagued Asian women, which Satsu, until this point, has managed to resist. The implication is that Satsu had been allowed to be complex, to avoid these stereotypes, because her character’s expression of Asianness is limited to her visual representation. Once that Asianness is emphasized, her character becomes a caricature and she loses that complexity to stereotypes. This problematically implies that Satsu can be a complex queer Slayer, but not a complex queer Asian Slayer. The conflation of colorblindness and complexity suggests that in order for a character to be nuanced and well-developed in *Buffy Season Eight*, that character must also have fully assimilated to the “white sensibilities” and “white world view” (Kirkland 1) of the comic.

[11] Elana Levine has noted this same problem in the television show’s reductive depiction of non-white characters. She examines the way in which the Jamaican Slayer Kendra, like Satsu, is denied the “multiple identities” afforded Buffy, which suggests that “the show can be read as presuming a white, middle-class hold on the problems and potential to be found in a multiply-positioned identity” (175). By focusing disproportionately on white, middle-class characters, Buffy ignores and denies the subjectivities, experiences, and multiple identities of other, non-white, non-middle-class women. Despite incorporating additional characters of color and an international setting, *Buffy Season Eight* does little to readdress the problematical portrayal of race in Other[ed] women.

[12] This reliance on stereotypes when Satsu’s racial identity is addressed forecloses her subjectivity as a non-white, non-whitewashed woman. In “Swell,” Satsu is possessed by Vampy Cat, an evil and demonic plush toy intent on destroying the Slayers through coerced heteronormativity, forced hyperfemininity, and “suck[ing] [them] dry”

(DeKnight 18). Satsu's enactment of heteronormativity is paired with stereotypical representations of Asian women, offering a racialized depiction of gender performance, wherein her Asian ethnicity, which until this point had been marginalized, is explicitly connected to compulsive heterosexuality and hyperfemininity. Vampy Cat, who physically enters her body in a metaphor for rape, forces her to literally internalize these gendered and racial stereotypes in a violent act of patriarchy which violates her subjectivity as a queer Japanese woman.

[13] In the first panel after her possession, Satsu appears dressed in a bright red kimono with a floral design. Upon seeing Satsu, Kennedy, a fellow Slayer, who like Satsu



identifies as queer, demands "What the hell are you wearing?" (DeKnight 12). Satsu informs Kennedy that her kimono is a furisode, traditional Japanese grab. She explains that "Girls wear them when they come of age to show they're single and available for marriage. My parents bought it for me. Before I destroyed them with my gayness" (DeKnight 12). Thus, in this panel, heteronormativity and traditional Japanese culture are conflated. The hyperfeminine costume Satsu wears represents her readiness for marriage *and* her ethnic heritage, the two thereby becoming inseparable. This connection also situates her Japanese heritage, as embodied through her traditional dress and parents, as regressive and oppressive, suggesting a connection between Asian ethnicity and culture and patriarchic power and coercion.

[14] This representation of Eastern cultures as "hopelessly backward and patriarchal" is not uncommon within the Western feminist discourses (Herr 5). Orientalism, Said argues, constructs a discourse which legitimizes imperialism and colonialism, establishing "the ineradicable

distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority" (42). Within the context of feminism, this means presenting the gender and sexual politics of the "East" as backward or regressive, while holding up the Western model of feminism and enlightened progress. As Chandra Talpade Mohanty argues, the western feminist construction of the "average third world woman" represents this woman as leading "an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and being 'third world' (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, etc.)" (56). This, she asserts, "is in contrast to the (implicit) self-representation of Western women as educated, modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities, and the freedom to make their own decisions" (56). The portrayal of Satsu in traditional Japanese dress rearticulates this difference, especially when it is contrasted with her "normal" colorblind representation; the East remains

associated with tradition, regression, and (hetero)sexual constraint, while the West is associated with empowerment, progression, and (homo)sexual freedom.

[15] The next panel is a close-up of Satsu's face. She smiles widely, her eyes little more than slits. In the panels where the Vampy Cat possesses Satsu, artist Georges Jeanty significantly narrows the Slayer's usually almond-shaped eyes, even when a panel, like this one, offers a close-up of her face. This visual recalls earlier American graphic representations of Asian characters. As Sheng-Mei Ma observes, the portrayal of Asian women in comics since the 1930s and *Flash Gordon* has depended partly on "slant eyes" to represent exotic Oriental otherness (11). The exaggerated slant of Satsu's eyes in these panels, then, functions to visually highlight her Asian ethnicity and her racial Otherness. And again, this racial Otherness is associated with heteronormativity; in this panel, she says, "Ah, they were so right! The whole kissing girls thing? Blechh! Girls should kiss boys and have their babies" (DeKnight 12). Satsu's Asian ethnicity is visually connected with a heteronormative ideology. Her homophobic exclamation of "Blechh!" highlights the way in which same-sex desire is rendered repulsive, aberrant, and perverse by the discourses of heteronormativity as employed by her traditional parents and, ostensibly, their repressive culture. This exclamation, then, indicates that her queer subjectivity has been violently silenced by coercive patriarchic ideology and Asian stereotypes, which she has been forced to internalize, endorse, and perform.

[16] The following panel zooms out to include a shocked-looking Kennedy, complete with wide eyes and dropped jaw. Satsu, her eyes still narrow and slanted, is angled toward Kennedy, and her hands are pictured as pressed together in front of her chest, gesturing toward the traditional Buddhist bow. She continues by exclaiming "Mmm, babies! We should make some like normal girls" (DeKnight 12). Satsu parrots the ideology of reproductive heteronormativity, which Michael Warner identifies as reproductivity (9). He defines reproductivity as "the interweaving of heterosexuality, biological reproduction, cultural reproduction, and personal identity" (9), asserting that "it involves more than reproducing, more than compulsory heterosexuality; it involves a relation to the self that finds its proper temporary fulfillment in generational transmission" (9). Satsu rearticulates the imperatives of reproductive fulfillment, suggesting that Slayers could find more identity actualization through having babies than through fighting the forces of evil. She even goes so far as to explicitly state that heterosexual reproduction is something that "normal girls" do, thereby reaffirming that her own queer sexual identity is abnormal, nonnormative, unfulfilling, and perverse.

[17] She continues by contrasting Slayers with "normal," feminine, and heterosexual women, "instead of running around hitting people all of the time. I mean, why are slayers so aggro? With the hacking and the chopping and the staking! We should be ashamed of ourselves bringing so much misery into the world!" (DeKnight 12). The



patriarchal logic in this section seems to be drawing on the Western stereotype of the Gentle Geisha, which depicts Asian woman as gentle, demure, feminine, and heterosexual, the kind of woman who acts as a salve to misery, not the cause of it (Prasso 8). Satsu's endorsement of this racialized brand of femininity, associated with Asian women, expresses hyperfemininity and heterosexuality in distinctly stereotypical Asian terms, contrasting these with "aggro" aggressiveness and the third-wave feminist Girl Power associated with Buffy and the other Slayers.

[18] Kennedy's comments to Satsu in the next panel also draw a connection between the Japanese Slayer's hyperfemininity, heterosexuality, and ethnic stereotypes. In response to Satsu's denouncement of same sex desire and her endorsement of resexuality, Kennedy says, "I don't know what the Geisha's gotten into you . . ." (DeKnight 12). Western stereotypes of the Geisha have erroneously constructed her as a "prostitute... sexually available to Western men" (Prasso 200) and as "submissive, docile, and gentle" (Prasso 210). The term "Geisha," then, evokes, at least to Western readers, a racialized understanding of Asian women's sexuality, one which highlights submission, erotic availability, and compulsive heterosexuality. Kennedy's use of the term here suggests that she too has recognized Satsu's performance of hyperfemininity and heteronormativity as distinctly and stereotypically Asian.

[19] However, Satsu's racial identification shifts from Geisha to Dragon Lady in the two next panels. In the first, she strikes Kennedy, flinging her across the room, while saying "Take your stinking paws off me, you damn dirty slayer" (DeKnight 13), the allusion to *Planet of the Apes* evoking the heteronormative ideology which constructs homosexuals as subhuman, perverse, unclean, and unnatural abominations. The next panel shows Satsu gripping Kennedy by the throat while continuing her heteronormative and resexual rant, in which she reduces women to their reproductive organs. The violence of these panels, like the hyperfemininity of the previous ones, is racially coded as Satsu adopts the role of Dragon Lady.

[20] Satsu's representation in these panels seems to suggest that both gender and race are performative. Up until this point, Satsu's character has resisted gender and racial stereotypes, and in doing so, her representation suggests that neither of these identities are inherent, but rather are culturally constructed. This idea is in keeping with the work of Nadine Ehlers, who uses Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity and Michel Foucault's explanation of discipline and subjection as lenses for her examination of the cultural construction of race. Defining race as "a discursively generated set of meanings that attach to the skin" (14), Ehlers argues that race, like gender, is largely performative; she suggests that individuals are

compelled to recite these norms (of blackness or whiteness) in order to survive as discursively recognized and tenable racial subjects. Yet it is precisely *the very reiterative repetition* of said normalized acts that give the semblance that the identity being expressed is *natural and unified* rather than a performative fabrication These conventionalized norms become 'ideals' that the subject seeks to embody through the performance or practice of identity. (70-71, emphasis original).

Ehlers argues that in order for race to be recognized, individuals must adopt and perform a racial schema that marks their identity and racially codes them. These schema, she suggests, are culturally constructed, not biologically essential, although they are discursively tied to skin color. There are no traits or expressions of race that

are inherently Caucasian, just as there are no traits or expressions of race that are inherently Latino, Asian, or Black. The representation of Satsu's coerced performance of Japaneseness could invite a queer reading and reinforce the idea that the Western stereotypes of "ideal" Asian womanhood are culturally constructed and culturally specific not "natural and unified." Her performance suggests Asian women are not essentially demure, submissive, and heteronormative gentle geishas nor cold, dominating, and heteronormative dragon ladies. Rather, these stereotypes of Asian womanhood are the products of Western discourses of race that Asian women are forced to perform.

[21] However, while the comics reject the stereotypes of hyperfemininity and heteronormativity, and clearly want readers to reject them as well, the racist stereotypes of these panels are not so blatantly dismissed. These panels might have intended to mock these stereotypes, but simply rearticulating them does not actually satirize them. As Thea Lim of *Racialicious* explains, "when you attempt to satirise antiquated images that contain racism, you just perpetuate the racism, if your satire takes the form of a straight copy." Lim is discussing hipster racism, a term coined by Carmen Van Kerckhove, which is used to describe racist representations, practices, and utterances by privileged, and often educated, whites that are meant to be ironic. S. E. Smith explains that "Hipster racism involves making derogatory comments with a racial basis in an attempt to seem witty and above it all The thing about using racist content in an 'ironic' context is that it still perpetuates racist ideas, and it is, in fact, racist." The images of Satsu in her furisode and the implicit connection that the comics make between Asianness and regressive heteronormative ideologies, even if meant to be derisive or ironic, do not challenge the Orientalist ideology responsible for these stereotypes. Instead, the presence of these stereotypes in the comics, like the ironic racism of hipsters, ultimately rearticulates and reifies these racist discourses. Instead of actively critiquing these stereotypes and their effect on women of Asian descent, then, the comics unquestioningly rearticulate them, conflating Asian Otherness and patriarchy, misogyny and heteronormativity, and normalizing this implicit connection between sexism and Japaneseness.

[22] These racist stereotypes are also exacerbated by the fact that throughout the comics, representations of Japan and other Asian spaces are consistently coded as regressive, patriarchal, and situated in opposition to Buffy and the other Slayers. It should be noted here that patriarchy, in the comics, is not exclusively Eastern; the comics also employ the United States military, British aristocracy, and American media, reality television, and celebrity culture (Espenson, "Retreat, Part II") as patriarchal institutions targeting the Slayers. However, Buffy and many of the Slayers are clearly of the West, while the representations of the East are limited to groups that work to disempower them. These include a gang of Japanese vampires who win Dracula's powers in a game of Pai-Gow for a Kawasaki 21000 (Goddard, "Wolves . . . Part II" 22) and who steal Buffy's Scythe (Goddard "Wolves . . . Part I") so that they can use it to reverse Willow's spell (Goddard, "Wolves . . . Part II" 31); the factory that produces Vampy Cat, the Hello Kitty-esque plush toy intent on destroying the Slayers through possession and heteronormativity (DeKnight); and the Tibetan retreat in which the girls sacrifice their magical strength and super powers in order to hide from Twilight, the big bad of the series (Espenson "Retreat, Part II," "Retreat, Part III"). In these cases, the East is stereotypically oriented as a space that is antithetical and threatening to female empowerment. So, while the comic clearly acknowledges that some Western institutions endorse and perpetuate patriarchal and heteronormative ideologies, these problematic

groups are only a facet of the West. In contrast, almost all of these stereotypical representations of the East present it as a space of patriarchal oppression and heteronormativity. Implicit in this dichotomy is the idea that while certain elements of the West might be patriarchal, the East is entirely and inherently so.

[23] Also problematic is the fact that once Satsu has expelled Vampy Cat and returned to "normal" (read: feminist, empowered, and queer), her Japaneseness is once again minimized and her character is once again whitewashed. Upon being freed from Vampy Cat, Satsu exclaims "What just happened? And what the hell am I wearing?" which echoes Kennedy's initial reaction to seeing her in her furisode (DeKnight 17). By having Satsu rearticulate Kennedy's line, DeKnight separates Satsu from her Asian heritage, and once again aligns her with the Western sensibilities of Kennedy. And in the next panels she is dressed in more Westernized demon hunting garb; the same sort of outfit worn by Buffy, Kennedy, and the other Slayers (17). Thus she both visually and verbally orients herself with the West and rejects her Asian identity which is not explored, or even deliberately expressed, again in the comics.

[24] Satsu's rejection of her kimono suggests not only a rejection of hyperfemininity, heteronormativity, and reproximity for the empowerment of being a demon-hunting Slayer, but also as a rejection of her Asian heritage for her colorblind (read: white) characterization. The comics, then, suggest that Satsu's Asian heritage, which until this point, has been ignored or explored almost exclusively through stereotypes, cannot co-exist with her subjectivity as a woman, a lesbian, and a Slayer. These representations imply that Satsu is either whitewashed or Othered; so, while these depictions might demonstrate that race is a cultural construction, the representations also mean denying the reality of the difference of racialized experiences in favor of a universalized performance of whiteness. The representations of non-white characters in this comic are either filtered through the lenses of stereotypes or colorblindness, neither of which allows for the complexity, nuance, or subjectivity of racial experiences. Ultimately, this means that the rearticulation of Western stereotypes associated with Asian women function to deny these women subjectivity and normalize the performance of whiteness rather than to demystify the cultural construction of race.

[25] This episode of possession and its problematic approach to race raises questions about the racial and Orientalist implications of *Buffy Season Eight's* global feminism. While not necessarily endorsing the stereotypes associated with Asian women, the comics uncritically rearticulate these racist representations, using them to contrast the regressive, patriarchal East with the progressive feminism associated with the West. *Buffy*, then, while presenting the Slayer community as transnational, imposes a Western discourse of feminism and a Western understanding of female empowerment upon non-Western women, thereby universalizing the experience of white women, minimizing the experience of racial difference, and ignoring the racist and Orientalist implications of Buffy's brand of feminism.

[26] The universalization of whiteness within the discourses of feminism have troubled American feminist movements since their second wave. bell hooks notes that "white women who dominate feminist discourse today rarely question whether or not their perspective on women's reality is true to the lived experiences of women as a collective group" (3). According to hooks, this "white, bourgeois, hegemonic dominance" (28) causes women of color to feel ostracized by and disenfranchised from the feminist movement (12). Ranjoo Seodu Herr corroborates hooks' observations, stating that

"mainstream second-wave feminism . . . subscribed to the idea that all women everywhere face exactly the same oppression merely by virtue of their sex/gender" (2). The idea of this universal female experience is problematic; as Audre Lorde insists in *Sister Outsider*, "Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface" (60). In order to promote a version of feminism that is truly transnational, feminism must recognize difference beyond the stereotypical representations of non-white woman, which the global feminism presented in *Buffy Season Eight* fails to accomplish.

[27] One of the most troubling ways in which *Buffy* ignores this difference is the way in which feminist empowerment is marked in both the television series and the comics, specifically the reliance on the Slayers' physical violence⁸ and martial arts fighting style, which is coded differently on the *Buffy's* white body than on the body of a non-white woman. Dave West has already noted that the use of martial arts in Western media, like *Buffy*, is problematic, because Western cultures lack the historical understanding of this fighting style and its nuances, and the fights lose some of their meaning (179). Instead, Western viewers inscribe their own meaning onto these fights, and this meaning is often racially and sexually specific. As Deborah L. Madsen argues, the kind of martial arts used by *Buffy* is experienced differently by a Western audience when it is an ethnically Asian woman performing them, because "the martial arts theme functions as spectacle, as choreography of violence that displays the female body and the Asian female body specifically as strong, aesthetically pleasing yet violent," while not freeing it from the male gaze (179). While *Buffy's* physical violence might be empowering, the same symbolic power and inversion of gendered expectations does not occur when a woman of Asian ethnicity is doing the ass-kicking. "Contemporary images of the Oriental warrior woman, then," Prasso insists, "are far from subversive of patriarchal hegemony, working instead to reassert conventional positioning of feminine sexuality" (179). Although these women are strong and violent, they are not free from the stereotypes and sexualization assigned to Asian women by Western media.

[28] The image of Satsu draws attention to the way in which Girl Power is coded differently on the body of a white woman than that of a woman of Asian ethnicity. Her presence in the comics, like the presence of Lucy Liu in films like *Charlie's Angels* (2000, 2003) and *Kill Bill* (2003, 2004), highlights the "Orientalisation" of violence in the Western media (Madsen 166). Madsen asserts that Liu's character "provides a site for the playing out of a complex interplay between feminine (Oriental) sexuality and feminine (Oriental) violence" (166). Likewise, the presence of Satsu in *Season Eight* offers a lens through which we might interrogate *Buffy's* feminist message. Physical strength and violence might be read as empowering for white women,⁹ but the image of an Asian woman performing the same stunts reveals the way in which this violence is racially and sexually coded as an erotic Orientalist spectacle for the male viewer (Madsen 179).

[29] While possessed by Vampy Cat, Satsu's violence against Kennedy demonstrates the way in which kimono-wearing Asian women, like Lucy Liu in Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill* series, present a racialized and sexualized spectacle of violence constructed by the American media and meant for the American viewer: an updated version of the classic Dragon Lady (Prasso 75). Once the Vampy Cat has been expelled, Satsu returns to her normal feminist self, a queer Asian woman who would not be caught dead in a furisode and who thinks kissing boys is "Blechh." Because her empowerment is associated with violence, it is not surprising that Satsu's response to her patriarchal possession is to beat up the patriarchy, or at least the demonic

representation of it, as a reassertion of her agency and a defense of her queer subjectivity: "Whole bottle of mouthwash, and I can still taste that furry little bastard. I want to hit something. . . . A lot," she says (DeKnight 17). Yet, Satsu's ethnic identity troubles this reassertion of Girl Power. Her performance of the Dragon Lady while possessed by Vampy Cat demonstrates that physical strength and violence are not necessarily empowering, especially for Asian women, who have a history of being represented as deadly and desirable killers in Western media. So, while Buffy is able to kick vampire ass while maintaining her femininity¹⁰ as a negotiation of her postmodern, third-wave feminist identity, Satsu's presence demonstrates that this brand of feminism is specifically white and Western and cannot be universalized and simply exported and applied to women in the Eastern world without racial and sexual implications.¹¹

[30] Thus, notwithstanding the apparently widened world of *Season Eight*, the representation of feminism remains rooted in universalizing the white and Western tradition of female empowerment. Both David Lavery and Patricia Pender have noted that Buffy's brand of feminism and female empowerment is distinctly American. They point to the all-American image of baseball, which frames Buffy's speech in "Chosen" and appears again in the opening of the comics issue "A Beautiful Sunset" (Whedon 1), as visually illustrating the thematic feminist empowerment of the series, suggesting the underlying Americanness of Buffy's feminist politics (Pender, "Whose"; Lavery).

[31] A product of western media, Buffy's frame of reference is largely Anglo-European, and it misses the racial and sexual complexities of kick'em-ups for non-white, non-Anglo-European women. Lorde reminds us that "the oppression of women knows no ethnic nor racial boundaries, true, but that does not mean it is identical within those differences" (70). What is at stake for a queer Japanese woman is different from what is at stake for a queer white woman or a queer woman of color or a heterosexual Jewish woman. By presenting one homogenous representation of feminist empowerment, *Buffy* ignores racial, sexual and ethnic difference and presents a form of power that is more empowering for some than it is for others. So, while *Buffy's* goal of transnational sisterhood and feminist empowerment is admirable, its execution, which ignores class, racial, and ethnic difference, is not. Anne Millard Daugherty claims that the challenges Buffy faces are challenges "that face all women" (149), but perhaps it would be more accurate to acknowledge that Buffy's challenges often come from a space of privilege and whiteness and are not necessarily universal.

[32] In addition to the problematic violent and racialized enactment of *Buffy's* female empowerment, the way in which this empowerment becomes global is also troubling. Rhonda Wilcox draws a parallel between the season finale and globalization: "the montage of Potentials being activated by Willow and Buffy is clearly meant to show young women of various natures and forms from around the world: it shows the globalization of Buffy's powers" (104). And, as Wilcox also suggests, when it comes to globalization, we must "contemplat[e] both its negative and positive aspects" (92). While the "activation" and empowerment of all of these young women can be viewed as positive, the mechanism of this empowerment is complicated by the show's lens of white middle-classness.

[33] The finale of season seven and its continuation in *Season Eight* seem to endorse an Orientalist discourse that global female empowerment comes from the work of an already empowered Western, specifically American, feminist, who is the originator and the leader of the movement. Buffy's role as general of the Slayer army mirrors the

problematic leadership of white feminists in global movements. hooks argues that "Racist socialization teaches bourgeois white women to think that they are necessarily more capable of leading masses of women than other groups of women. Time and time again, they have shown that they do not want to be part of a feminist movement—they want to lead it" (54). The comics justify Buffy's leadership; she has been Slaying the longest, and images of her training with other Slayers reveal her superior fighting skills (Whedon, "The Long" 4-5). Her superiority is reinforced, while the "paternalistic attitude" (Mohanty 72) toward the Slayers in training, many of whom are non-white, is naturalized. The comics rearticulate and legitimize the need for white, middle-class feminists to save and lead non-white, non-middle class women.

[34] The suggestion, then, seems to be that feminist progress moves from West to East. As Pender argues, "the whole premise of the Potentials is somewhat dubious. Buffy's radical innovation, her turning of the tables on tradition, involves transferring power from one überwhite, middlingly privileged, Californian teenager to a heterogeneous group of women from different national, racial, and socio-economic backgrounds" (Pender, "Whose" 7). The implication of the season seven finale and Satsu's representation in "Swell" is that that Eastern women need white Western (wo)men to save them from patriarchy, backwardness, and themselves. Thus, Buffy's activation of the world's Slayers and metaphoric empowerment of the world's women risks employing the same Orientalist discourses for global feminism that were used to justify Western imperialism. If "every girl in the world who might be a Slayer, will be a Slayer. Every girl who could have the power, will have the power" ("Chosen" 7:22), it is implicit in the show's discourse that every girl has Buffy and Willow to thank for their empowerment; they are the passive recipients of power, while it is up to a white, middle class women to give it to them.

[35] The character of Satsu offers a complex and often contradictory representation of Asian womanhood and female empowerment. She resists the stereotypes that the West has attributed to Asian women, but only by having her race and culture largely and problematically marginalized in the colorblind construction of her character. When possessed by Vampy Cat, Satsu is forced to internalize its patriarchic heteronormativity and homophobia, while simultaneously rearticulating these stereotypes of Asian Women, using them to represent a racialized endorsement of hyperfemininity and reproductive heteronormativity, so that the two, sexism and Asian Otherness, become indistinguishable and inseparable. While *Buffy* resists the patriarchy associated with representations of Asian women, the use of them in these comics retains the Western racism and Orientalism they embody. These racist and sexist stereotypes are used to contrast the regressive East with the progressive West and images of traditional Japanese womanhood justify and naturalize *Buffy's* narrative of female empowerment being bestowed on the East by white, middle class, American feminists. *Buffy*, then, continues to deny women from the postcolonial world agency or autonomy by crafting a narrative that universalizes white middle class women's experience and that implies that Eastern women are victims of patriarchy and must be empowered by the actions of already empowered Western feminists. Satsu's presence in these comics, as a queer Japanese woman, troubles these assertions while also rearticulating the same stereotypes used to justify them—and suggests how much further *Buffy* has to go to truly change the world.¹²

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Notes

¹ For this purposes of this paper, I use the term "global feminism" to denote a specifically Western and white version of feminism that "advocates transcending national boundaries" and "the single-minded focus on gender as the primary cause of women's oppression [which] led white feminists to believe that Third World women were suffering from the same kind of oppression as white women: universal patriarchy" (Herr 4). The term "international feminism" will be used to denote a recognition of separate (not transcended) nations and states (Herr 4). In contrast, "transnational feminism" will be used to denote international feminist movements and networks that acknowledge and emphasize the racial, sexual, and class experiences of women, resist universalizing the experiences of white women, and problematize this universalization in global feminist movements (Herr 10-11). "Third world feminism" denotes "women's activism in their particular local/national contexts" (Herr 2)

² A number of critics have argued, most notably Arwen Spicer, that this metaphor of female empowerment through power sharing is destabilized by the metanarrative of season seven: Spicer observes that Buffy's "negotiation between heroic leadership and communal empowerment is inadequate" and ultimately undermines its message of power-sharing (par. 4). Others, like Lorna Jowett, Frances H. Early, Patricia Pender, Rachel Fudge, Renee St. Louis and Miriam Riggs, Zoe-Jane Playdon, Mimi Marinucci, and A. Susan Owen (to name but a few of those who have contributed to this incredibly prolific area of Buffy Studies), have interrogated the implications, fortunate and unfortunate, of Buffy's brand of feminism. Others, like Anne Millard Daugherty, suggest that the show's feminist message is effectively conveyed and represented.

³ This is undoubtedly meant to be a humorous moment in the text. Buffy is talking with a new Slayer, a young woman, who, just out of a gang, is skeptical about her place within the Slayer organization. However, while this quote pokes gentle fun at feminist clichés, these ideals do seem to play an integral role within the discourses of Slayer sisterhood. These lines also echo some of the criticism that has been made of Western feminists, who give lip service to these ideas while perpetuating discourses of Western

dominance and colonialism. As bell hooks explains, "The emphasis on Sisterhood was often seen as an emotional appeal masking the opportunism of manipulative bourgeois white women. It was seen as a cover-up hiding the fact that many women exploit and oppress other women" (4). There is something troubling, then, in the way that Buffy, the white, middle class leader of the Slayers, uses these terms to manipulate a young woman of color into joining the Slayers and accepting Buffy's leadership and authority.

⁴ Robin Wood does have one racially charged exchange with Buffy. Wood explains that when he was in high school, he threatened a bully and was suspended, because "talk like that is taken pretty seriously where I come from." Buffy responds by asking "The hood?" Wood corrects her, "Beverly Hills. Which is a hood" ("Help" 7.4). Buffy assumes that because Wood is a man of color, he comes from an urban, economically disadvantaged area. His answer dispels that stereotype, but his racial identity is not addressed again in the series, not even in a discussion of what it was like to grow up a young black man in a predominately white, affluent neighborhood, and so his racial difference is ultimately made invisible, except for his aggressive interactions with Spike, in which he representationally reifies the stereotype of the angry, violent black man ("Lies My Parents Told Me" 7.17)

⁵ An exception of to this rule is Chao-ahn, and the Anglo-American characters' inability to deal with her Otherness is often a source of humor. While the show did poke fun at the cultural insensitivity of its Western characters, Giles's interactions with Chao-ahn also worked to highlight her Otherness.

⁶ While it is true that "Swell" is Satsu-centric, the narrative arc of the issue is about Kennedy helping her resolve her feelings for Buffy and accept that their relationship will not develop. Thus, while the issue is ostensibly about Satsu, Buffy remains a narrative focal point.

⁷ Much like Satsu's race is the focus of "Swell," Renee's race is brought to the fore in one issue, "Wolves at the Gate, Part II" (Goddard). Renee travels with Xander to Transylvania to elicit Dracula's help in defeating the vampires that have stolen the Count's powers. Dracula refers to Renee by the derogatory term "moor" (Goddard, "Wolves . . . Part II" 4), a term that Xander adopts once under the thrall of his master (16), and dehumanizes her by suggesting that she sleep in the stables (4). Xander rejects the explicit racism, asserting that Dracula's referring to Renee as a "moor" is "terrible" (4) and later admitting that he "really [didn't] remember [Dracula] being so racist" (22). However, by relegating racism to the old world vampire (which is rendered complicated by Dracula's own history as a racialized Other), the comics suggest that the kind of overt racism expressed by the vampire is out of date, an anomaly of the post-racial world of *Buffy*. Also, by having this be the one time that Renee's racial identity is acknowledged and expressed, it also suggests that the only racism experienced by people of color is overt, and it renders invisible the way in which racism is institutionalized and normalized in American society (see Brown et al.).

⁸ Although the feminist politics of Buffy go well beyond her superpowers, the metaphor of physical power and violence remains an important embodiment of female empowerment. As Jeffrey L. Pasley notes, when it first aired, Buffy was considered an example of Grrl Power (254), a cultural trend of the 1990s in which female physical prowess synecdochically represented female power. For Buffy, violence, while not absolute, is linked to empowerment. Mimi Marinucci suggests that Buffy's use of force is a direct response to the oppression of and violence against women, especially the violence of rape (69-71). And Pender argues that "Kicking ass offers Buffy psychological and physical relief: it allows her to simultaneously redress straightforward social evils and to palliate more personal sorts of demon" (Pender, "Kicking Ass" 4).

⁹ There is certainly debate about how successful physical violence actually is as a representation of empowerment. Jowett notes that Buffy is still subjected to the male gaze as described by Mulvey, through which her body is objectified and her violence rendered "sexy" (22-23). James Middleton and Daugherty both argue that the show takes pains to deny the male gaze.

¹⁰ Lorna Jowett argues that Buffy challenges the archetypal image of hero as male by offering a hybridization of masculine and feminine traits (20-21). She is both superpowered ass-kicking superhero and "a 'typical' white middle-class high school girl, style conscious and 'feminine'" (20-21). One of the ways in which Buffy's violence avoids overly masculinized aggression is by "reject[ing] technological weapons and guns . . . an assertion of 'feminine' resistance of technological (masculine) weapons" (Jowett 25-26). The martial arts used by Buffy emphasize her body's physical empowerment, thereby also asserting her female empowerment without overshadowing her femininity.

¹¹ Elyce Rae Helford, in her essay about the importance of emotion, especially anger, in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, argues that Buffy's version of feminism is reserved for white, middle-class women. She concludes her essay by observing that Buffy "champion[s] a version of heroism that can be achieved only by indirection and humor from the mouth of a nice middle-class white girl" (34).

¹² My thanks to Dr. Jeffrey Santa Ana and H  l  ne Frohard-Dourlent for their help in the development of this article.