Western Texts and New Worlds: Politics of Identity in a Philippine Fan Community

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Media scholar John Fiske asserts that fandom is "associated with the cultural tastes of subordinated formations of the people, particularly with those disempowered by any combination of gender, age, class and race." American cultural theorists have sought to rescue marginalized fans from stereotypes as passive consumers, deviants, and social misfits by representing them as active appropriators and transformers of texts. In the Philippines, however, some fan communities need no rescuing as they are associated not with subordination and social ineptitude but with high cultural and economic capital. This paper uses a cultural studies approach to read the cultural practices of the New Worlds Alliance (NWA), a Philippine science fiction and fantasy fan community whose objects of veneration include such print and media texts as the *Harry Potter* series, *The Lord of the Rings*, *Star Wars*, and *Star Trek*. I argue that the NWA's member composition, its (Western) objects of fandom, its activities and fan products, and its self-representation (i.e., the celebratory construction of the Philippine "geek") highlight the disparities between center and periphery, rich and poor, and local and global in the Philippines. Given the community's privileged class position in the Philippine context, the politics of its identity-construction cannot be adequately explained by fan theories that have been applied to American audiences. Thus, I seek to examine the NWAs discourses of empowerment and cultural superiority in order to critique American models of "geekdom" as exemplifying weapons of the weak or of fandom as liberatory cultural practice.

Keywords: *cultural theory, popular literature/culture, fan studies, Philippine culture, postcolonial theory*

Unexpected graffiti decorates a parking lot wall near a Metro Manila shopping complex: spray-painted are the words "Geek Pride." Similar "geek graffiti" can be seen in a photograph featured on a popular Philippine blog about geek culture, this time with the vandalism appearing on a building along Katipunan avenue near two top Philippine universities (see Figure 1) (Abundo 2007).

Figure 1. A photo of a "graffiti bot" (from *The Mike Abundo Effect* blog reprinted with permission from the blogger).

The subversion of the term "geek," which has long been embraced in the US by geek and fan subcultures, is not surprising. What is intriguing is that this proud self-identification appears in the Philippines, and that it is being spelled out in the illicit and rebellious form of graffiti.

Marginalized Fans

Media scholar John Fiske asserts that fandom is "associated with the cultural tastes" of the subordinated, "particularly with those disempowered by any combination of gender, age, class and race" (Fiske 1992, 30). Geeks and fans have long been negatively portrayed and marginalized in Western media via "images of social, sexual, and economic impotence" (Wiltse 2004, 1). In the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English* (2005)—emphasis on "current"—a geek is described as "a person who is boring, wears clothes that are not fashionable," and "does not know how to behave in social situations." The more authoritative *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) pejoratively defines a geek as "any unsociable person obsessively devoted to a particular pursuit" (OED 3rd ed. 2011) and the overlapping sociocultural category, "fan," short for "fanatic," as someone with an "excessive and mistaken enthusiasm" (OED 2nd ed. 2011). Both labels have not entirely lost their connotations of foolishness and worthlessness. Geeks and fans continue to be maligned or sensationalized by the popular press in the United States, and their interests are often dismissed by academics as trivial (Lewis 1992, 1).

Like other subcultures, geeks and fans have struggled to subvert these negative images. Fiske (1992, 45) uses Pierre Bourdieu's concept to speak of a "shadow cultural economy" to demonstrate that marginalized fans create their own unofficial cultural capital. Their fandom enables them to build self-esteem, gain social prestige, construct identities and, essentially, empower themselves. A number of American cultural theorists in the 1990s sought to defy the stigma of fandom and to rescue fans from stereotypes as passive consumers, deviants, and social misfits. In *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, scholars address academic views of media audiences as "passive and controlled" and the popular press's emphasis on the "danger, abnormality, and silliness" of fans (Lewis 1992, 1).

Viewing fandom as "a product of a hierarchical social system in which privilege and value are accorded to only the few" (ibid., 3), Joli Jensen and Lawrence Grossberg counter negative representations of the fan, the latter arguing against assumptions that "popular culture appeals to the lowest and least critical segments of the population" and that fans are "incapable of recognizing that the culture they enjoy is actually being used to dupe and exploit them" (ibid., 51). In *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*, Henry Jenkins "rescues" fans from "a scandalous category in contemporary culture, one alternatively the target of ridicule and anxiety, of dread and desire," by presenting them as intertextual

readers, and as active appropriators and transformers of texts and of their own identities (Jenkins 1992a, 15).

The New Worlds Alliance and the Filipino Geek Community

Do such hierarchical power relations apply to Philippine fan groups? There are, of course, many types of local fan communities, some of which lack economic capital and have little control over or even access to official or bourgeoisie culture—for instance, fan clubs of local celebrities and local entertainment shows. I am interested, however, in a specific local fan community which uses the term "geek" in celebratory self-designation, and yet which is not associated with subordination and social ineptitude. This is made up of the self-proclaimed Filipino geek—that is, the local fan of science fiction and fantasy, comic books, anime, and online/video games—who, I argue, enjoys both economic and cultural capital.

This fan group is the New Worlds Alliance or NWA, "a network of science fiction and fantasy-focused fan organizations in the Philippines" founded in 2001 (NewWorlds.ph 2013). The objects of fandom of its more than twenty member groups include such print texts as J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, C.S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia*, J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, Frank Herbert's Dune series, Anne Rice's vampire novels, and media texts like *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, *Transformers*, *Charmed*, and *The X-Files*. The group's official website, originally known as The New Worlds Alliance: Home of Pinoy Science Fiction and Fantasy Fans, and now simply called NewWorlds.ph, functions as a forum site and online news magazine for "Filipino enthusiasts of sci-fi, fantasy, horror/supernatural, and pop culture."[1]

Although the name of the group does not indicate the nationality of its members, its description and goals specify this. Former website editor-in-chief Chiqui Perez (2007) wrote in a feature entitled "About the New Worlds Alliance" on the NWA's official website that the group was formed "to provide a venue for *Filipino* science fiction and fantasy fans to interact, hold activities, and express themselves and their love for their respective fandoms" (my emphasis). In 2005, the NWA's headquarters, Fandom Café, was opened as a physical venue for what the café's official website describes as "*local* science fiction and fantasy fan communities" (Fandom Inc 2013; my emphasis). Interestingly, the words "Filipino" and "local" describe the members of the NWA and not their objects of fandom—fans based in the Philippines, and not literature, television shows, or films created here. Virtually all of the "new worlds" that these fans consume in

"emotionally involved" ways (Sandvoss 2005, 8) are global/Western texts, created by British or American writers and producers. Only one NWA member group, the Alliance of Eclectic Gamers and Interactive Storytellers (AEGIS), is devoted to a local product, a role-playing adventure game called *Anito: Defend a Land Enraged*. Moreover, the NWA has social ties with fan clubs of the United States or United Kingdom, and not with other Philippine fan clubs devoted to local celebrities, texts, films, and television shows.

Fandom has been theorized by cultural critics as "potentially, a source of empowerment in struggles against oppressive ideologies and the unsatisfactory circumstances of everyday life" (Lewis 1992, 3). However, the NWA's member composition, its Western objects of veneration, its activities and fan products, and its celebratory construction of the Filipino geek not only highlight but preserve the disparities between center and periphery, rich and poor, and local and global in the Philippines. In this paper, I read the practices of the NWA from a cultural studies perspective to examine how it constructs the Filipino geek via its self-representation and fan activities.

Key questions explored here are: (1) How do NWA's cultural practices and products empower the member of this local fan community? and (2) What are the implications of the NWA's politics of identity within the Philippine context? Liberatory claims in fan studies, particularly theories of fandom's relationship to empowerment proposed by critics such as Fiske, Jensen, and Jenkins, are not entirely applicable to what is arguably a privileged group in the Philippine context. Thus, this paper problematizes and seeks to expand American models of "geekdom" as exemplifying weapons of the weak or of fandom as liberatory cultural practice in relation to the politics of the NWA's identity-construction.

If "fandom is an aspect of how [people] make sense of the world . . . in relation to [their] historical, social, cultural location" (Jensen 1992a, 27), then the first point of interest is the fact that the NWA labels itself as a geek community. The word "geek" noticeably appears frequently on website posts, articles, and other communications. The WikiPilipinas entry on "The New Worlds Alliance" equates these "Filipino science fiction and fantasy aficionados" with "Filipino geeks" (Wikipilipinas.org 2011). The term is similarly embraced in various web articles posted on the NWA's original website. In "Fruits of First Labor," Perez (2006a) speaks of "Filipino geek culture" in relation to the NWA, in "The Saga Continues" (2006c), she refers to the group as "the Filipino geek community," and in "New Worlds: The 1st Philippine Science Fiction and Fantasy Convention"

(2006b), she calls the NWA's first public gathering a "Philippine geek convention."[2] The current editor-in-chief, Regina Layug-Rosero, writes "I am a geek, and I am proud" in "NW Archives: A Portrait of a Filipino Geek," a feature about the beginnings of the community which was originally published in *Woman Today* (Layug-Rosero 2011b). Another member fondly recalls "fans screaming," a "stampede of fans," and the "*rabid* buyers" of fan memorabilia at his first convention, which he discovered as an outlet for his "TV-movie *weirdness*" (Gabot 2006; my emphasis). An anonymous poster praises the community by contrasting the unpleasantness of alienation with the NWA's welcoming atmosphere which brought about the happy discovery that "other geeks" exist in the Philippines.[3]

The NWA's embrace of the geek identity and its deliberate and repeated use of the term imbue it with positive meanings that confer prestige upon the Filipino science fiction and fantasy fan. Like other subcultures, the NWA reclaims a formerly derogatory term as a badge of honor and glories in the fervor and "oddity" of fan behavior. The question, however, is: What exactly is the subversive potential of celebrating "geekdom" within the Philippine context? Does this express an opposition to the norm or to official culture?

On the one hand, the NWA certainly does not receive the same sort of institutional support or social legitimization that artists and academics do. On the other, since its members are not exactly deprived in terms of economic and, arguably, cultural capital, they may not be the most likely dissidents and revolutionaries. After all, one cannot be a science fiction and fantasy fan in the Philippines—a "geek" in the NWA's sense of the word—without enjoying a relatively comfortable position in the Philippine economic and cultural hierarchy.

Western/Global Objects of Fandom

The print and media texts that NWA members consume—texts which are produced in the US and UK—bring to light these Filipinos' privileged status in a variety of ways. Firstly, despite designations that emphasize Filipino-ness, like Pinoy Harry Potter, The Philippine Order of Narnians, Star Wars Philippines, or Pinoyslayer, the NWA is a predominantly metropolitan rather than a national group in terms of membership. While some subgroups, for instance, the Philippine Order of Narnians (tPON), have members from different regions and from Philippine communities around the world, their official gatherings or "Summons" are held in Metro Manila. Significantly, the imported books they

read, the Hollywood films and television series they watch, and the games they play are most accessible in the nation's capital. The NWA's most active members are, therefore, Metro Manila residents. Access to global culture is a membership requirement, and being from Metro Manila more readily grants this access. Here, book and video stores feature larger inventories, cinemas screen films first, cable television services offer more channels, malls house more specialty gaming shops, and Internet service is most reliable—at least for those who can afford it. In the majority of towns and cities in the periphery there is limited or no access to the global texts consumed by science fiction and fantasy fans. In some provincial areas, book stores carry only school supplies and textbooks, cable service is limited, and Internet connections are faulty or slow. In largely rural areas or in poorer communities away from city centers, people may not even own television sets or personal computers.

Besides coming from the nation's geographical center of power and privilege, NWA members also have the resources to perform their fan and geek identities. As an example, purchasing the seven books in the *Chronicles of Narnia* collection will set a fan back between P2,100 and P2,500, and the ten graphic novels in Neil Gaiman's *Sandman* series will cost a fan from P800 to P1,000 each.[4] Although these prices may seem low by Western standards, the amounts become significant when contextualized by Philippine poverty statistics. According to the 2009 press release of the National Statistical Coordination Board, the monthly income required for a Filipino family of five to "meet the basic food needs" is P4,869, and P7,017 is required to "stay out of poverty" (Virola 2011).

Fan expenditures such as these cover just the basic objects of fandom, not the luxuries that fans covet. For instance, when the much awaited final installment of the *Harry Potter* series was released in 2007, the NWA offered online pre-ordering so its members could opt for the first, hardcover edition of the book, which cost a steep P1,175, nearly three times as much as the paperback copy released a year later. Getting the first taste of an anticipated media product is also costly: Tickets to advanced film screenings attended by NWA members cost two or three times as much as those for regular screenings. Then there are the spinoffs, merchandise, and other fan accoutrements, which are neither inexpensive nor always easily accessible. Fan collectibles like figures, statues, models, and weapons, which can run to thousands of pesos, are carried by only a few local stores. NWA members have the capacity to purchase rarer items abroad at shops or conventions or order them online and shoulder exorbitant shipping fees. Some objects of fandom may be bought second-hand, pirated or illegally

downloaded but, just like arbiters of official culture, fans are discriminating and generally prefer "authentic" texts. For example, NWA member and Star Wars fan Oneal Rosero (2011) says that he does not buy pirated DVDs; he purchased all the *Star Wars* videos and DVDs and has pre-ordered the pricier BluRay edition.

Significantly, the fan community's entrée into these global print and media texts entails fluency in English, a marker of class identity in the Philippines. English is considered the language of the elite, and command of it denotes status, wealth, and "educational and social superiority" (Villacorta 1991, 38). While members of the NWA and attendees of their Philippine science fiction and fantasy conventions make up a "very varied demographic" in terms of age and profession (Layug-Rosero 2011a), it seems safe to conclude that they are English-speaking youths or professionals, part of an affluent minority in the Philippines.[5] Many active NWA members are university graduates, and quite a number are from top schools like the University of the Philippines, De La Salle University, and the University of Santo Tomas (Layug-Rosero 2011c). Given their educational background and linguistic competence, they also have more social opportunities; many are professionals with disposable incomes to spend on their fan-geek interests. In a Facebook message to the author, Layug-Rosero reports that most active NWA members are professionals and that many are in the humanities as writers, artists, musicians and teachers, or Information Technology professionals like programmers, project managers, and call center trainers and agents (ibid.).

These Filipinos' objects of fandom also signify a form of cultural security rather than a lack. While geeks in the US still battle against anti-intellectualism, geekdom's relationship with intelligence and technological competence takes on a positive light in the Philippines. In "A Portait of a Filipino Geek," NWA member Layug-Rosero (2011b) remarks that people she worked with thought she was "weird" because of her "penchant for correcting their grammar and... [for] being such a bookworm," traits that she associates with her geek identity. Yet while members of this fan community may believe that their interests and behavior are perceived as odd, within the Philippine context, their appetite for Western science fiction and fantasy—their "weirdness"—distinguishes them as booklovers, intellectuals, "techies," and even masters of the English language. Being a geek demands rigor to read numerous and lengthy English-language science fiction and fantasy novels or to gather and store massive amounts of information about a film, television series, or game, tasks at which the average Filipino student, much less the average Filipino, would balk. NWA members even organize and participate in trivia contests wherein fans prove their "geek cred" (Layug-Rosero

2011a)—or basically demonstrate their expertise in the print and media texts they consume. Exposure to mythology, folk and fairy tales, and medieval literature is often the precursor for interest in fantasy genres, while a grasp of basic sociology is necessary to the appreciation of science fiction, which is essentially about the human condition and which speculates about social issues. The liking for science fiction is also associated with interest and competence in science and technology, knowledge domains of the intellectually superior. Moreover, the tastes of the NWA are tied to other socially legitimated interests, for instance in literary and sometimes highbrow texts, in academic discourse on objects of fandom, and in publishing articles and essays about fandom.

The NWA's Cultural Practices

According to Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst (1998, 121), it is through fan activities that "people are helped to construct particular identities." What Fiske (1992, 36) calls the "enunciative productivity" of fans (i.e., how the NWA members create and share meanings in their community) further underscores their high social and cultural position. For one, they not only consume Western English-medium texts, but they also carry out their communication, marketing, and self-representation in English. Articles posted on the official website are entirely in English, while forum posts are mainly in English with only a few instances of Taglish. Secondly, much of the group's communication takes place via email and posts on the official website and on social networking sites like Facebook or Twitter, discourse that requires access to computers and the Internet. Other types of technology enable members to remain in touch with science fiction and fantasy entertainment news, for instance, via a downloadable New Worlds application or "app" for Nokia cellular phones.

Participating in the NWA's activities—many of which may be viewed as acts of conspicuous consumption—requires investments of both leisure time and money. According to founding member and website administrator Paolo Jalbuena (2011), it takes a few hundred thousand pesos to organize a convention, and members have to find sponsors and put up their own money to raise the required amount. Costumes worn at these and other events range in price from P5,000 for more "homemade" or locally sewn designs to over $2,000, the latter for a C3PO suit of which there are only fifteen worldwide (Catiang 2011). In a forum discussion on the Hogwarts Philippines website (2013), the cost of Hogwarts robes (not including the school uniform, tie, and scarf) is around P1,600 (yvaine,

Hogwarts Philippines Forum, comment posted June 15, 2009). Star Wars Storm Trooper costumes can cost anywhere between $450 to over $1000, and an R2D2 model costs roughly a quarter of a million pesos (Rosero 2011). Gaming meets, or gatherings of tabletop game enthusiasts, entail investments in expensive imported board games, party card games, trading/collectible card games, and miniature war games (which incorporate miniatures that need to be modeled and painted). The availability of leisure time is required as well for such fan activities constructing and maintaining costumes, props and exhibits, practicing for combat demonstrations, and vying for "geek recognition" in trivia contests.

Lastly, public NWA gatherings themselves are commercialized affairs or are validated by institutionalized culture. Conventions are held at high-end shopping malls that cater to a predominantly upper-class crowd and that are located in Makati City, Metro Manila's business district. The NWA also has a strong relationship with the culture industries, book stores, movie distributors, gaming companies, and media institutions which sponsor their events. As a result, their freedom to appropriate objects of fandom and express resistance to corporate packaging can sometimes be curtailed by these sponsors. For instance, the third science fiction and fantasy convention in 2005 was sponsored by the Star Wars Licensees, which meant that the NWA had to be careful about its choice of other sponsors and follow strict licensing rules in the planning of its activities and marketing strategies (Perez 2006c). Furthermore, academics from top universities are often invited to be speakers at NWA conventions, a practice which grants cultural legitimization to the community's discourse.

The NWA's Cultural Products

Completing the picture of the NWA as a privileged community is what Fiske (1992, 39) calls "textual productivity" or the crafting and circulation of fan products. For the NWA, these include fan artwork like a Philippine Tolkien Society member's one-of-a-kind figurines of LOTR characters inspired by the Peter Jackson films, Narnia-inspired sketches and paintings featured on the website of the Philippine Order of Narnians (tPON), spinoff fan fiction, fan films or videos, as well as specialized niche-market merchandise. An example of the latter is one CharmedPinoy member's line of "Halliwell Wellness Products," named after the three Halliwell sisters in the witchcraft-centered television series, *Charmed*.

What identities do the NWA members construct via the products of their participation with and reaction to the originary Western/global texts? As fans, NWA members "make their culture out of commercial commodities" (Fiske 1992, 46), but do they do so in ways that "fill the gaps left by legitimate culture" (ibid., 33)? To a limited extent, I believe they do, at the very least by breaking the "disciplinary distances between the text and reader" (ibid., 41) and by making something out of their perspective of the books, films, or games that they consume.

Fan fiction and comics that circulate among other science fiction and fantasy fans around the world, as well as fan films like "Twilight Jedi" by Star Wars Philippines and "The Juan" by Matrix Philippines, allow Pinoy fans a form of ownership of the Western texts that they rework. NWA members also staked their claim on these texts via their own online talk show called Fandom…Live!, which aired from 2008 to 2010 via UStream.tv and later in various websites like YouTube and Multiply. The show, which was hosted by various members and which featured information about NWA member groups, geek interests, and a geek-oriented quiz show, allowed even more fan participation and reading. Such activity is what Michel De Certeau (1984, 175) describes as type of "tactics and games played with the text" through which fans mine their objects of fandom for materials that they can appropriate and fit to personal experience.

Like other fans around the world, NWA members generate energy and passion, establish a sense of control over their lives (Grossberg 1992, 64), and question "established hierarchies of cultural value and authority" (Urrichio 2004, 86). As Filipino science fiction and fantasy fans, they stake a Filipino claim on these Western/global texts and, via their links with global culture, place the Philippines on the map. Their practices and products provide a Filipino perspective from which to view these texts—whether it be dressing a Matrix agent in a *barong tagalog*, or integrating Filipino cultural elements into their activities. Pinoy Harry Potter, for instance, offers classes designed to promote the exploration of Filipino culture and mythology, while also aiming to help enhance their skills in selected areas like writing, art, and literature. So far, the NWA does not include any member group devoted to local science fiction and fantasy, but at least its emphasis on the value of these genres drives its promotion of related Filipino works such as speculative fiction and comics. The NWA sponsored the first Philippine Graphic/Fiction Awards in 2006, and it continues through its ties with organizers of Komikon, a convention highlighting Filipino comics and their creators.

But, to a more significant degree than playing with a text and projecting a Pinoy voice that can be heard globally, do the NWA's fan products enable political engagement?

Expanding American Models of Fandom

Contemporary cultural theorists depict fans as "marginalized or subordinated in the dominant culture" (Jenkins 1992b, 213) and credit them for responding "to difficult, and often unjust, social conditions" (Lewis 1992, 6). Yet, as I have shown, the NWA's fan-geekdom does not fit neatly into American interpretive models. Its members have an economic advantage over the impoverished, the uneducated, the working class, and people in the periphery—the truly disempowered in the Philippines. Their knowledge and tastes, like those which comprise official culture, translate into career opportunities and earning power. Their tastes and competences even receive, to some extent, social legitimization and institutional support through the NWA's ties with academia and the culture industries. NWA members do not bear the typical "'improper' identity" (Hills 2002, xii) of fans. In fact, their self-identification as geeks is a performance of cultural superiority since the Western objects of fandom that they embrace, although not exactly high art, are associated with a high class and cultural status.

Current models of fandom need to be expanded to analyze both the nuances of Filipino fan-geekdom's liberatory potential as well as the unique dangers it poses in the Philippine context. According to Fiske (1992, 36), fans who suffer less from "structures of domination and subordination" are more likely to develop a "habitus" or set of identity-related beliefs and practices that "accords in some respect with that developed by the official culture." The NWA's position of power makes it more likely to validate rather than subvert existing power structures in the Philippine context. Its practices and products, and even the celebration of Filipino geekdom, may inadvertently promote the value and authority of the culture industries that subsidize its activities. This, along with the danger of upholding the value and authority of the Western texts its members consume, may tend to limit the NWA's subversive potential.

The NWA's promotion of such global texts may also detract from interest in local texts. Worse, through assimilation or imitation of Western fan practices, the NWA may also promote cultural homogeneity resulting from what has been termed as cultural imperialism. Its rise as a seemingly subversive

subculture may, furthermore, cause attention and power to be drawn away from other emancipatory movements which focus on the genuinely sub-altern. The NWA's cultural practices further widen gaps between the metropolitan center versus the rural peripheries, between the upper and lower classes, and between the globally connected and the locally isolated.

Cultural context is also implicated in the needs and desires addressed by Philippine science fiction and fantasy fandom and in the alternatives that these texts offer to the "alienation and superficiality" (Jenkins 1992a, 280) of NWA members' everyday lives. Layug-Rosero (2011b) describes the communalism and sense of belongingness that fandom brings to Filipino geeks: "You cannot know how it feels, to treasure a whole universe on your own for so long, and then to discover that you can explore this universe with so many others. It's like coming home." The implication is that NWA members feel isolated and alienated in the real world; the Philippines is not "home" to this community. Being with other fans, as Layug-Rosero (ibid.) asserts, is "like having green skin or pointy ears and finding beings with tentacles for hair or spotted skin or webbed fingers," and Karen Anne Liquete (2007), who featured the fan group in a *Manila Bulletin* Lifestyle article, describes the NWA as a venue for "like-minded" Filipino fans to share their love for science fiction and fantasy.

In seeking this alternative social community, in consuming these types of Western texts, what exactly do NWA members seek to escape? A more comprehensive study of the community and their objects of fandom is necessary to answer this question, but I will venture a few speculations. These texts perhaps speak to dissatisfaction with Philippine realities like poverty and illiteracy, political and technological backwardness, or patriarchy and gender discrimination. The new worlds of science fiction and fantasy offer acceptance and community, intellectual challenges, creative outlets, and the opportunity to explore social conventions and gender stereotypes.

New Worlds and Spaces of Agency and Freedom

Objects that are "popular with the lower or middle class, relatively inexpensive and widely available" are associated with fandom while those that are "popular with the wealthy and well educated, expensive and rare" are deemed "preference, interest or expertise" (Jensen 1992, 19). In the Philippines, fandom and expertise intriguingly merge: The NWA's affiliations with Western texts and Western fan

practices produce a culturally legitimated fandom, a geekdom that is equivalent to expertise, and a community of wealthy and well-educated metropolitan fans. The writing on the wall—the proclamation of geek pride—may spell out not rebellion against authority but a validation of it.

Clearly, as Filipino geek culture continues to stake its claim in the general public's consciousness (cf., Perez 2006b), current models of fandom will need to be expanded to account for the unique cultural dynamics involved. What remains to be explored is whether the fictional worlds of the West inhabited by the NWA will reify the oppressive social orders of their real world, or whether they will be able to welcome Filipinos into new worlds and spaces of freedom and agency.

Notes

1   Some of this quoted material comes from the original website of the New Worlds Alliance, which in late 2010, was hacked. Site moderators are currently attempting to recover lost articles and old forum posts.

2   Perez's articles were posted on the original NWA website. Only one has, so far, been recovered and reposted: "New Worlds: The 1st Philippine Science Fiction and Fantasy Convention."

3   This quote is from a post on the discussion forum of the original NWA website.

4   Prices are taken from *Fully Booked Online*, accessed 14 April 2011.

5   Paolo Jalbuena, a founding member and current website administrator of the NWA, says that members range between the ages of 13 and 64 (qtd. in Liquete 2007). Layug-Rosero (2011a) says the age range of attendees is anywhere from 16 to 50, and that they are made up of "kids, students, yuppies, parents, doctors, teachers."

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