Nation Building and the Role of Leadership

A Case Study of Tensei Shitara Slime Datta Ken

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Abstract:

In this paper, I consider the isekai anime *Tenseishitara slime datta ken* (English translation: *That Time I Got Reincarnated As A Slime*), examining its potential messages in a new light. As this anime spotlights the main character's semi-diplomatic attempts to build a nation out of the blue, I will argue that critically analyzing the strategic ends and means used by the main character can give insight into the mindset of an archetypical understanding of how and under which circumstances leadership and politically-oriented social interaction are presented in a Japanese context. For a better understanding of this specialized topic – leadership as portrayed in isekai anime – I will begin by presenting the current state of research regarding isekai anime. After a synopsis of the series of interests, specific aspects and actions of the main character will be highlighted to contribute to a better and critical understanding of the general messages *Tensei shitara slime datta ken* is sending: the promotion of autocratic and anti-democratic leadership based on fear and strength.

Keywords: Nation-building, militarization, isekai, representation, Anime

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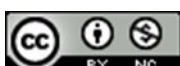
Introduction

Although Japanese popular culture is highly researched, specialized research in anime has gained particular momentum over the last decade. One of the most frequently cited texts is Bolton's[1] *Interpreting Anime*, whose methodological argumentation on how to "read" anime is very closely linked to qualitative descripton as used in sociological research and Ethnomethodology. The "reading" that Bolton suggests "means coming to a greater understanding of the text and its particular features through interpretation and critical consideration."[2] His understanding of "reading" visualized material is aligned with several analytical questions in terms of the presented material and rearrange it in a more tangible way. As anime are multimodal narratives (i.e. sound, vision, emotion, and social actions appear simultaneously), Williams[3] calls for a "critical framing" approach. In analyzing anime, she uses the thematic approach by Coiro et al.,[4] who argued that a deep analysis "involves contextualizing and critically interrogating ideas from multiple perspectives."[5]

Tensei shitara slime datta ken falls into a particalur subgenre of anime called "isekai"(meaning located in another/different world), and this particular isekai anime spends much of its run time following the main protagonist as he builds his own new nation from scratch. Because of this focus, I will consider the series with regard to five aspects: First, I will examine how the series shapes and presents the image of a "nation" and the way such a nation should be organized. Second, I will consider how this nation is represented, by whom, and in which organization or by which means. Third, I will deal with the aspect of naming – a specialty of this particular isekai anime, as here only powerful beings are capable of assigning names

to less powerful or "lower" order creatures. Fourth, I examine the aspect of incorporating or assimilating, which is a special ability of the main character, who repeatedly uses this ability to kill or copy his opponents. Finally, I analyze the series's treatment of leadership, and specifically, how leaders here present themselves and are perceived by others.

As *Tensei shitara slime datta ken* has grown in popularity, reaching a wider audience than most isekai once did, it thus becomes worthwhile to take a closer look at the repeating structures and messages central to this series. By doing so, I hope to highlight and interrogate the ways this anime depicts certain expectations of nationhood, leadership, and a leader, while also opening up more specialized avenues of research regarding isekai in general.

Isekai Anime

Isekai generally refers to anime or manga productions whose settings are located in a different world from our own, which is limited to neither a special time or particular place. At present, though, this subgenre is not covered much in English-language scholarship. For example, while Bolton's important study has great merits, the word 'isekai' does not appear there; there is no reference to this particular subgenre of anime at all, and even beyond Bolton, research on this topic is scarce. Thus, scholarship on *Tensei shitara slime datta ken* or other anime of this specific subgenre have few frameworks and findings to rely on, in terms of analysis by standard references such as Bolton's. For *Tensei shitara slime datta ken* in particular, there is only one article focused on it as of this writing[6], and even then, that work is more focused on narrative structure, dealing with differences between the original web novel and the adapted animated series.

While some research on isekai anime and manga has been conducted, the aims, research interests, and methods of such work vary widely. For instance, Price has found out that the term isekai was only sporadically used before 2013 before its use drastically increased.[7] In his opinion, 2013 marked the year where isekai really became established as its own category of anime and manga, finally separating itself from high fantasy or other genres that it had been previously summarized as. In his broad analysis of several hundred isekai stories, Price reports that the majority "are highly influenced by role-playing games and show patterns of responses that appear to reflect the views and concerns of different demographics of readers."[8] Likewise, Mendlesohn has developed a general framework to further divide the different settings of isekai stories according to their temporal aspects.[9] Out of her four archetypes (portal, immersive, intrusion, liminal),[10] I would classify the subject of this analysis as an immersive one, as those types of stories take place only in the fictional world and have no connection to the "real" world of the present-day reader.

Despite still being a relatively smaller subcategory of anime, isekai has gathered great attention in recent years, with several well-known productions such as *Sword Art Online* or *Re:Zero*. Muhamed[11] has theorized their popularity – especially in Japan – in terms of the function they serve in Japanese society: "Although *isekai* take place in fantastical worlds that are at first glance highly unrealistic, they serve to emphasize the feeling of despair both its protagonists and young readers feel toward the worlds they do live in."[12] Even if the specific settings and plotlines of isekai anime differ,[13] they tend to share certain premises in common: the main protagonist is transported to another world (fictional, pseudo-medieval, or fantastic), and often gains special powers through the process of transformation, which mean that they are free to do as they please in this new world. Even if the main characters often

praise Japanese values and traditions, which they import very quickly into their new surroundings (especially Japanese bathing culture), they can, as a matter of their unrestrained powers, shape the world as they like.

Tensei shitara slime datta ken was chosen for this analysis due to its popularity in combination with the sensitive topic of its main narrative. As the analysis section later in this paper demonstrates, nation-building is central to the protagonist's daily life, but it is presented in a matter that can make it seem very harmless, childish, or even unrelated to the story and narrative content.

Because there is no research on the visual presentation of nation-building in isekai, a brief overview of relevant literature should suffice to make the reader familiar with the few existing pieces that are currently present. I further argue that valuable insight can be gained from analyzing such fictional work, as when of Ramadah[14] analyzed the main character of the isekai *Re:Zero – Starting Life in Another World* according to the psychoanalytic theory of Carl Gustav Jung.

This is because to simply take isekai anime as a current hype restricted to Japanese popular culture would be a severe misunderstanding of both its impact and influence. Lu has found that from 2012 to 2018 around 6 isekai anime were airing per year, but starting with 2019, a peak of 14 new series per year were released – an upward trend that would continue in recent years, with even more series worth discussing.[15] Recent research in this area has brought up the complexity and intertwined nature of this specific style of anime, as seen with the highly popular anime *Goblin Slayer*. As Gottesman has shown, the anime *Goblin Slayer* – although not an isekai per se - serves not simply as an entertainment tool, but rather, also encompasses a wide array of topics and concerns.[16] First, this anime "demands a high

amount of media literacy from its audience, not only on the presumption that one is familiar with the character references across games and anime but [also] that one is literate in the 'deconstruction, parody and pastiche' required to participate in internet meme culture."[17] Second, and even more noteworthy, *Goblin Slayer* functions as a mediation tool to justify Japanese colonialism, presenting and relativizing racism as well as sexual aggression.[18] If such broad and powerful topics are inherited by just one sample of anime (and presented to a vast audience through that medium), then the question arise why shows that are supposedly just entertainment act as messengers for such topics or even try to reframe historical aspects of Japan's past.

To return to our primary focus: the enormous success that *Tensei shitara slime datta ken* has enjoyed – which of course also re-emphasizes the rising popularity of the isekai genre – can also be traced to its sales in the light novel branch. According to BookWalker (one of Japan's biggest online stores for purchasing mangas and other light novels), *Tensei shitara slime datta ken* was amongst the Top Ten in 2018 (with 7th place in the overall ranking),[19] 5th in 2019 (where in the first half of the year it placed 1st),[20] and 4th in 2020.[21] This pattern repeated itself in 2021, where out of the Top 20 most popular manga, 11 were from the isekai genre, and *Tensei shitara slime datta ken* advanced up to 3rd place.[22]

Thus, given the evergrowing audience and reach that isekai anime and manga enjoy – and *Tensei shitara slime datta ken* in particular – it immediately becomes beneficial to have a closer, and more critical, look into the content that such media are promoting and the patterns by which they do so.

Methodology and Approach

My methodological approachhere stems from Schütz,[23] who in his paper "Der Fremde" has written about the sociological problemthat results when someone unfamiliar with a social setup attempts to understand it. He articulates such an issue using this logic: "Der Soziologe [...] ist der uninteressierte wissenschaftliche Betrachter der sozialen Welt."[124] That is, to such an observer, due to his disinterest in the new (to him) social world surrounding him, he is not limited to an already existing hierarchy and order of norms, values, motives, and the like in his observations. On the one hand, those already inside that social world (Schütz calls these people"the acting ones" or "actors") are bound to these limitations and order all their social experiences accordingly – not necessarily in a formal scientific way, but in such a way that is suitable for bypassing everyday struggles and interacting with little to less friction with other such "actors." Conversely, the observer can remove himself from this web of meanings, though that network may help members of the already constituted group to orient themselves in a manifold of social interactions, but at the same time makes them blind to their deeper meaning: that is, their abstract relevance as well as their 'constructed' essence.[25] In taking on the role of a disinterested observer, then, the researcher is a "foreigner" to these daily ceremonies, symbols, and socially meaningful interactions and can therefore question them more ably: "Und gerade der Fremde [...] teilt die oben erwähnten Grundannahmen nicht. Er ist wesentlich der Mensch, der fast alles, das den Mitgliedern der Gruppe, der er sich nähert, unfraglich erscheint, in Frage stellt."[226]

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[1]Translation: *"The sociologist [...] is the disinterested scientific observer of the social world."*
[2] Translation: *"And it is precisely the stranger [...] who does not share the basic assumptions mentioned above. He is essentially the person who questions almost everything that seems unquestionable to the members of the group he approaches."*

While the theoretical approach of Schützis over 50 years old, his thoughts have shaped the work of many successors and taken into account into standard works of ethnomethodological resesearch. Ethnomethodology refers to the study of how social interactions shape, change, or construct social order. It represents one of the more practical branches of sociology and is used in a mainfold of different social situations and settings, ranging from the observation of 'doing waiting' in front of an elevator to the creation of racial connotations and social inequality. Also worth noting, though, is this method is applicable not only to observations made by the researcher on the spot, but also to visual material created by various groups and communities – such as, here, isekai anime. Hence the ideas of Schütz, even if not so prominently discussed in the English-speaking world, are still the basis for recent research about the Life-World.[27] Garfinkel, for example, had vivid contact with Schütz and modified some of his ideas after discussing them with him[28]. More importantly, two of Schütz's students who later became just as renowned, Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, developed his ideas even further, making his philosophical work applicable to encountering and analyzing everyday social actions.[29]

One of Schütz's most important insights related to this study is the correlation between fantasy and the real world. Schütz argues that people often fantasize about something that has never happened or about things that they have never seen. Yu has summarized the Schützian relation between human fantasies and the real world thus: "However, the contents of fantasies are shaped by their experiences or stocks of knowledge. Fantasy, therefore, originates in everyday life. In Schutzian terms, agents enter into utopian relations with their fellow people according to their experiences."[30] Following this insight, then, we might say that there can be a limited

but certainly direct correlation between ficitional work, the everyday-experiences or imaginations of the producer, and the people helping him to create his ficitional work. To put this another way, we might argue that fiction can develop out of the intrinsic or previous experiences (Schütz calls them "sediments of experience") of the agent fantasizing them.

Working from this insight into socially constructed realities, I utilize this as my approach to the constructed realities of *Tensei shitara slime datta ken* without going into the deep cultural context that has borne them. I do so for two reasons: first, this constraint is required in order to apply the Schützian view of a stranger, otherwise it would not be applicable. Second, I am already well-placed to take this approach, as I do not have the deep academic background about all aspects of Japanese culture and history, which is letting me benefit from being a real stranger to those practices and thus capable of remodeling the 'web of meaning' from an outside viewpoint. Additionally, Bolton's suggested way of "reading" anime also fits into Schütz's model regarding methodological sensitivity with questions such as: "This kind of reading has several steps, but it begins by looking carefully at the formal qualities of specific works: what is shown and how is it shown? [...] How is each scene composed and edited, and how is the narrative structured? How does a given anime look – meaning what does it look like, but also how does it see the world?"[31] His last question in particular – how the anime perceive the world – can offer fruitful insight when, as is the case with *Tensei shitara slime datta ken*, the main story is centered around concerns such as nation-building. What Bolton describes during his steps in the quote above is very closely correlated to ethnomethodological observation, as Francis & Hester have shown in their work.[32]

From an ethnomethodological point of view, two aspect of *Tensei shitara slime datta ken* are of particular interest to this analysis: the "conversational objects"and the "membership-categorization." The first item here deals with "structures that were oriented to and used interactionally by participants to conversations,"[33] making it possible to dive into the underlying meaning of conversations that readers encounter across the anime. The second "is concerned with the organization of common-sense knowledge in terms of the categories members employ in accomplishing their activities in and through talk,"[34] which will be of interest when analyzing protagonist Rimuru's social stratification and order of his self-made society. Despite the fact that the show is a work of fiction, it is embedded in the social order of real people and must perform its notion of social order in ways that are comprehensible to its audience – all characterstics that can be analyzed and understood according to Schutzian logics.[35]

Synopsis

A normal day in the life of Japanese citizen Satoru Mikami is the starting point of the series. During a meeting with two of his friends, an assailant stabs him and due to his severe wounds, he dies on the spot. During his transfer to the afterlife, Satoru remembers several points in his life, things he regrets, and even makes comments on his current situation. What he is not aware of is that a mysterious voice is transforming all of his past regrets and comments together and shaping a new body with 'skills' (special abilities not

Figure 1: Official Announcement of the series[xxi]

available to everyone), before Satoru is eventually reincarnated as a slime. In this new world where he finds himself, slimes are being perceived as the weakest creatures, but due to the mysterious voice who has translated Satoru's regrets and wishes into 'skills,' he instantly becomes one of the most powerful beings.

In the beginning, Satoru is not aware of how to move; he cannot speak or see and randomly wanders around at the bottom of a cave with no other living creatures to encounter. As time passes, Satoru learns that he can incorporate everything he wishes, and so he starts harvesting magical ore and plants out of boredom. Only by chance does he encounter another voice who offers to teach him how to see, and so Satoru befriends the Storm Dragon Veldora, who was sealed away in this cave 400 years ago by a mighty hero with a barrier even he cannot break through. During their conversation, Veldora offers Satoru his friendship and changes his name to Rimuru, which the character uses from this point onward.

As Rimuru sees that his friend desperately wants to break through the barrier, he offers to engulf him with his unique skill 'Predator' (the ability to gulp everything) and promises to analyze the barrier with his second unique skill 'Great Sage' (the voice of a woman he can ask everything he wants to know): together, he will use these two skills to unleash the dragon as soon as possible. When Veldora agrees, Rimuru gains his powers, encounters various monsters that he easily defeats, and escapes the cave to venture on untamed paths in this new world. Right at the beginning of his journey, he stumbles upon a tribe of Goblins, begging him to protect them against a rival pack of Direwolves. Rimuru easily decapitates the leader of the direwolves and subjugates them; then, after casually naming the whole Goblin tribe and Direwolf pack, they all evolve into stronger versions of themselves. Rimuru

subsequently encounters all species living in the great forest he slowly urbanizes, ultimately leading to problems correlated with organizing the lives of his subjugates, providing enough shelter, creating a whole new economy, and finally declaring his territory an independent nation, which then leads to diplomatic talks with other state-like entities. At the end of the first season, Rimuru has befriended the most powerful beings in this isekai world, which are demon-lords, and is attempting to become a demon-lord himself.

A case for *Tensei shitara slime datta ken*

Tensei shitara slime datta ken is build around an unique feature that is not omnipresent in other currently airing anime, even other isekai: this is the way that the show presents the desired social order of a nation, and as a result,the skills and behavior its ruler should have are central to the narrative. According to the methodology described above, then, this analysis will deal primarily with these two objects of interest.

An autocratic leadership style and a functionalistic-mechanical political body that is called a 'nation' are perceived as desirable. As audiences see, no one in Rimuru's new nation is jobless, bored, or has any trouble making a decent life. But in order to have access to basic securities and commodities, these inhabitants of the region must all subjugate themselves under the absolute rule of a semi-aristocratic system that follows a strict hierarchy. Detached from representing numbers, political will is first and foremost built by the power that separate tribes and/or species inherit. A fact often neglected even in casual discussions of the show is that the main character often talks to himself to repeat his goal to build a nation where everyone is free and equal; but the series offers counterexamples for that sole goal, as when

Benimaru, one of his generals, put it bluntly: "Well, there is one undisputable rule in this world, all monsters follow: Survival of the fittest. This is the way things have always worked for our kind" (Episode 15, 03:16). In reality, despite his higher musings, Rimuru only accepts this given reality and transfers it into his domain, making himself the fittest and forcing others to cooperate with, instead of killing, one another. During the first season, the series creates the impression that social norms, rules, and restrictions cannot simply be shackled off, but rather must be acknowledged as given and made the best use of . Even though the main character relinquished to let only the fittest serve him, he links inherited and referred values of each tribe and species he encounters, then makes them visible in political participation, even over characteristics such as longevity, political interests, or numbers. Orcs, for example, have no say in Rimuru's nation, despite being the most numerous race, while the most powerful monsters, the Kijins, can participate in full despite having lesser numbers.

Furthermore, not all individuals are viewed as equal when facing Rimuru. As my analysis of the social interaction of the main character will show, only six persons are viewed as equal, whereas the rest of his subordinates are either willingly subjugated under his presence or else forced to do so. Killing a resisting opponent is not the method of choice, but the last resort to exert absolute autocratic power and authority. Even if the bulk of Rimuru's allegiances are acquired through negotiations and peaceful interactions, all of them fall under a distinct rule that perpetuates control over the peoples thus controlled. In exerting the power to give names to his underlings, the main character can transform whoever he wants into a higher being and secure their everlasting loyalty without ever fearing political opposition.

Besides the power of naming persons and therefore transcending them into a new form, Rimuru possesses another crucial ability that further bends the boundaries of social reality. Integrated into his unique skill "Predator" he has the option to mimic everything he has ever defeated or incorporated. For example, his main appearance as a young human was obtained by dissolving the body of another character in this isekai world, a girl named Shizu, as her last request. Not only can Rimuru then appear as the person or monster he has just dissolved, but he can also use their skills and techniques, accelerating his ascent towards power. This fits with how Baudrillard discusses the impact of copies on our everyday life and the problems that occur with them.[36] For one thing, the better the copy, the harder it is to find out whether or not it is a fraud. Due to his power and its origins, Rimuru could certainly be understood as what Baudrillard calls a 'simulacra.' He simulates even people, and as a simulation of them, "threatens the difference between the 'true' and the 'false', the 'real' and the 'imaginary.'"[37] In becoming a simulacra, the main character of the show is detached from reality, rendering himself a fictional character who detaches himself from fiction (here, in appearing human even still being a monster). Morris has argued that such simulacra, even if fictional, can create their own world and exist parallel to reality,[38] which would make Rimuru a simulacra par excellence, as he contains his own meaning, which makes him even more superior compared to other beings of the show. Even though it can be seen as a social fact that the individual is confronted with copies in everyday interaction,[39] they contribute to bending social reality. Rimuru uses these two options in a way to strengthen his position as a leader despite the potentially adverse effects his actions may have.

Analysis

As Rimuru has left the cave where he finds himself at the beginning of the show, he has unrivaled powers and comes to view the new world as akin to an empty slate. His ambitions to build a community, and later on a nation, are already visible in Episode 3, where, after defeating the Direwolves, their pack was integrated into the Goblin village. Immediately after the battle, he orders the village elder to look for food, shelter, and clothing (Episode 3, 09:46),[40] aiming to secure a base for his subordinates and strengthen their position. After gradually accumulating crafters, travelers, and merchants, the former Goblin village has been transformed into a thriving town.

The process of building a nation in *Tensei shitara slime datta ken* is arranged along similar lines, as represented in the directional lines below. Figure 2 shows Rimuru's nation-building impact across the timeline of the series, with blue representing those who are befriended, green representing persons or groups that are incorporated, and red representing those he killed or won a battle to subjugate.
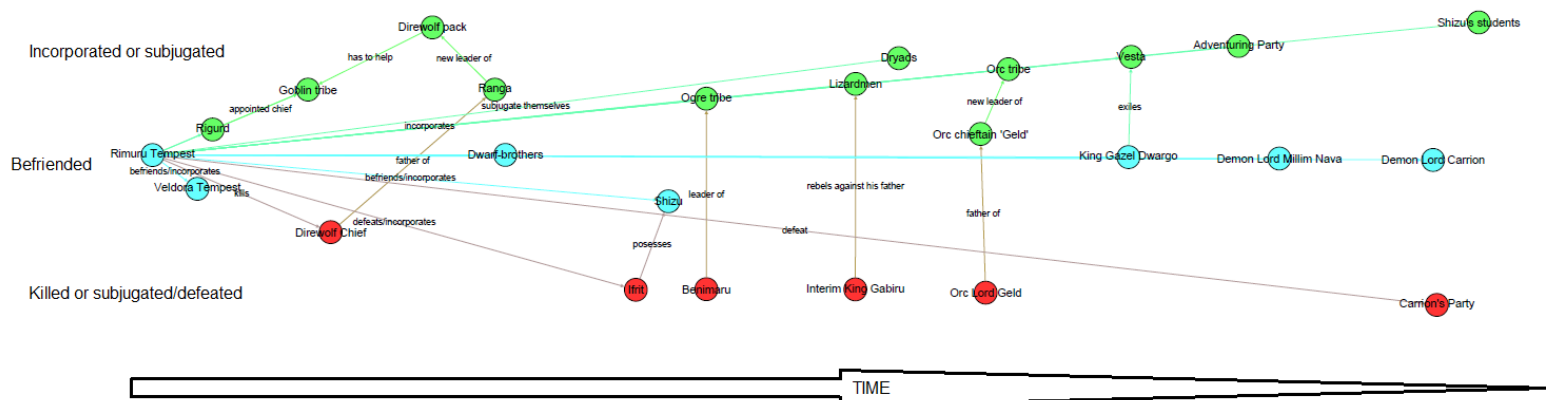

Figure 2: Social network analysis of the main character through time (Source: author)

During the whole first season, only six individuals can be counted as evenly perceived by the main character, even if the tone of the anime suggests that Rimuru is

everyone's friend. However, it seems sensible to argue that rather the opposite is the case. Only those who could offer political power (such as the King of the nearby Dwarfen Kingdom), military strength (such as Demon Lord Milim), or groups that hold critical abilities for the success of his own nation (such as the Dwarfen brothers) could be viewed as equal. The rest of the characters either willingly subjugate themselves or their group, or have been defeated by Rimuru.

Episode 3 offers a good example of this forceful subjugation. As briefly referenced above, in this episode Rimuru has just joined the Goblin village and offers them his protection against a nearby pack of Direwolves, which plans to take over the forest. As the attackers ignore his initial offer to retreat, Rimuru beheads the leader of the pack and shouts to the survivors: (06:42) "Listen up, Direwolves. Your Boss has been slain. I'll give you two choices: You can submit, or you can die!"(06:49). Of course, out of fear of the sheer power Rimuru possesses, the Direwolves submit themselves and swear allegiance to their new master. Similar patterns are found throughout the whole series, as for example,when the race of Orcs is incorporated into his nation only after they face defeat in battle and the death of their king at the hands of Rimuru himself (Episode 14)[41]. Even his closest allies, the Ogres (later called Kijins) only joined Rimuru after their leader, Benimaru, faced defeat in a battle with him and agreed to acknowledge him as a new master. The bulk of Rimuru's subordinates have been accumulated by dint of lesser force or because they willingly subjugated themselves when facing the power and magic Rimuru could wield. As this pattern continues throughout the series, the nation that Rimuru builds is a hierarchical one, with him as the ultimate leader who brought different tribes and warring factions together under one flag. Thus "nation" in this sense is presented as the extension of the presence of the ruler, a personal project which sprang to life

only because a powerful and charismatic individual invested in it – a concept far away from a democratic approach, and much closer to what Weber has labeled autocratic leadership.[42]

Further, it must be mentioned that the nation Rimuru envisioned is not only autocratic, as he remains in control over all important decisions (even if he introduces later on 'meetings'), but also, it is a functionalistic one as well. In Episode 15[43], Rimuru explains to his new allies how they mutually rely on each other (04:10): "The Lizardmen will share their clean water source and fish from the lake. The Goblins can offer housing and our town can provide them with processed goods. And in return for those things, the Orcs will agree to contribute their labor" (04:25). Hence each tribe has a special task that must be fulfilled to keep the nation alive. When it comes to the visual representation of the different races, the political body formed by Rimuru – called the 'Jura Forest Alliance' – mirrors the different values that the leader connects with them. Figure 3 shows a typical form of a meeting between all factions, bound together by Rimuru, in his meeting room. Rimuru, as the distinguished leader, always occupies the middle of the image and is flanked by his female bodyguard Shion on the leftand the military trainer of the Goblins, Hakurou (a Kijin, as the Goblins are not able to evolve by themselves), and his two military advisers on the right, Benimaru (who he bestowed the title of "Samurai General") and Souei (who he tasked with infiltration and intelligence, e.g. his "Spy"). They form his inner circle of trust, not only in terms of visual representation but when it comes to decision-making, these are the people he relies on the most and who he entrusts first with important tasks. The further a participant is sitting from Rimuru, the less importance and representation they have in this meeting. On the right side of the table another Kijin named Shuna is seated, immediately followed by the two most

important Goblins, Rigurd and Rigur, the two characters he had encountered immediately after escaping the cave. At the end of the right side are the two representatives of the Lizardmen, a species Rimuru values only for their contribution to society; compared to their size, their voice is hardly present. On the left sits Demon Lord Milim, who can be counted as a sort of peer toward Rimuru, even if he does not fully trust her. Despite her power and influence, she is a guest in Rimuru's territory and due to their friendship, he could strengthen his position in taking over diplomatic talks with other kingdoms. Next to her sits Guild Master Fuze, a human who helped Rimuru gain access to the human kingdoms, followed by Kaijin, the oldest of the Dwarfen brothers who befriended Rimuru during an encounter in the Dwarven capital. Finally, another Kijin (Kurobe) sits at the table followed by Gobta, a Goblin and leader of the city guard. With their back to the audience, Trainee (a Dryad; woman in green) and Vesta, an outcast of the Dwarfen Kingdom, have their own places at the table. In the left-back of the picture, the wandering Adventuring party is present as a backseater.[44]

Figure 3: Typical formation of a meeting with Rimuru (Episode 18, 16:51)

Here what may sound like a simple formation of fictional species randomly thrown together,actually follows a logic that goes far beyond the pure visual picture, but instead is a perfect example of social stratification. This stratification is best described as hierarchically organized social inequality within a given society and the accepted nature of this unevenly distributed access to parts or only distinguished activities[45]. Although the mentioned five Kijin (Benimaru, Souei, Shion, Hakurou, and Kurobe) are the only ones left from their species, they were each assigned special tasks due to their powerful abilities and fierce character. Additionally, they have a direct link to Rimuru and can suggest further steps in negotiations or issues relating to war and espionage; an option the other races do not have throughout the whole series. On the contrary, by this point Rimuru has incorporated 150,000 Orcs into his new nation as of three episodes before (Episode 15,03:59), none of which has even had a voice or seat in his strategic meetings; moreover, this is a fact that will only change at the end of the first and beginning of the second season, and even then there is only a single Orc called Geld who will be allowed to attend those meetings. Stichweh[46] has argued that exclusion or "functional differentiation," as in this example, must always deal with such discontinua and is in its specific sense multidimensional. When comparing those numbers who comprise Rimuru's strategic meeting, we find five last remaining survivors who all have a distinct voice in his decision-making process, compared to 150, 000 who have no one to speak for them – this we might say that the Kijin represent a social stratum that can be compared to Aristocrats. Zajak and Sorg have traced this behavior in human history when analyzing the historical change of capitalism from a mere accumulation of capital to a transitional movement that accumulated political-economic power and therefore reproduces social inequality.[47] Here even though the Kijins represent the margin of

Rimuru's society, their word counts exponentially more than that of the "labor force", a term used by Rimuru himself (Episode 15, 04:26). Due to their defeat in the Great Battle of the Jura Forest, Rimuru charges the Orcs no harsh penalties and offers them a living in his territory, in exchange for their sheer labor.

Another interesting aspect is the fact that almost all monsters in the world exist without having a name. Only special and powerful individuals have a name that they can refer to and increase their power and abilities with. To put it simply, having a name is quite uncommon in this world. Thus, in possessing the ability to bestow names to his subordinates, Rimuru can exercise control over them in two ways: First, he can bind them even closer to him, as the name-giver has the right to obtain control over the one he has granted a name. Second, he can choose which of his subordinates "evolve" into higher beings: a process often presented during the series. The Ogres, for example, all evolve into Kijins, which are even more powerful beings, and they swear eternal allegiance to Rimuru after accepting his gift. The idea of creating new objects or evolving already existing ones into a new form is closely linked to what Wallerstein has discussed in the role of shaping reality through naming.[48] His thesis, which is that the possibility of naming things is one of the greatest powers ever held by humankind, is presented throughout the series. In giving his underlings names within a setting where such names hold actual power, Rimuru further strengthens the ties between himself and his subordinates, making them eternally grateful and effectively suppressing most disloyalty, opposition, or conspiracies against him. Here it should also be mentioned that once a tribe or species is incorporated into Rimuru's territory, they are not able to leave it (or at least no examples of this are presented in the series). This exclusive inside-outside

dichotomy is formative for the perception of belonging in the system that Rimuru aims to create.

Summary

All things considered, I do not intend to argue that *Tensei shitara slime datta ken* is a propagandistic series or one that aims to deprave the high value of democracy. However, critical engagement has shown that despite the often-repeated argument from the main character that he seeks to build an all-equal nation – a utopia where everyone is free – in reality, an autocratic and anti-democratic nation has been the result of his actions. One has to question why, despite the infinite possibility of all courses of action exactly such a nation, which unmistakably reminds profound historians of pre-World War II Japanese society, is praised so much by its native and international audience alike. I further argue that the lack of recent research in anime, especially isekai, is noteworthy, given their growing interest and popularity among ever wider audiences every year. New shows with similar content worth exploring (examples include *Mushoku Tensei: Isekai Ittara Honki Dasu* eng: *Jobless Reincarnation: I Will Seriously Try If I Go to Another World* or *Suraimu Taoshite Sanbyaku-nen, Shiranai Uchini Reberu Makkusuni Nattemashita*; eng: *I've Been Killing Slimes for 300 Years and Maxed Out My Level*; and especially *Genjitsu shugi Yūsha no Ōkoku Saikenki*; eng: *How a Realist Hero Rebuilt the Kingdom*) begin airing and drawing in new audiences almost every month. I maintain that it is worth questioning whether such isekai series are contributing to a slow shift in the perception of democratic values amongst their audience or if they are just – worthy of research – entertainment. This paper aims to contribute to this

discussion by providing early insights into a little-researched, but highly influential, topic.

Acknowledgements

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5Coiro et. al, *Designing pedagogies*, 120.

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10Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy*. xviii - xxiv

11Muhamed, Fatuma, "Rewriting Your Own Narrative: *Isekai* as a Contemporary Coming of Age Tale"(Master Thesis, University of Washington, 2020).

12Muhamed, *Isekai*, 8.

13Price, *A Survey of Isekai*, 75-85.

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