

Akame Ga Kill!: A Critique of Power Politics and Authoritarian States in Popular Media

Erlangga Rizal Ramadhan

Universitas Komputer Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia

Sylvia Octa Putri

Universitas Komputer Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia

Pitri Haryanti

Universitas Komputer Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia

Rino Adibowo

Universitas Komputer Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

This study explores the way the Japanese anime *Akame ga Kill!* represents the dynamics of power as a critique of authoritarian states in global politics today. By applying qualitative textual content analysis with a focus on cultural and political theory, the work critically examines all 24 episodes of the series. In particular, the paper focuses on the symbolic representation of the state organization, the emerging distribution of power among its elites, and the presence of resistance movements. Despite the existence of constitutional monarchy in the series, the results demonstrate that the actual government is that of personalistic authoritarianism camouflaged in form of empire with a ruling elite exercising real power. The systematic use of coercion and state law as means of oppression is likely to produce major structural inequalities. Discourse in turn confirms the idea that the naturalization of oppression usually leads to radical reactions against the system. Paradoxically, despite being inherently oppressive, authoritarianism seems to possess a fragile nature. In sum, this paper demonstrates that *Akame ga Kill!* is not only a work of entertainment, but a classic allegory of international property relations and ongoing delegitimization of state rule. As such, the anime emerges as an important tool for the political discussion about systemic injustices and complex issues related to authoritarianism in international context.

Keywords: *Competitive Advantage, Contemporary Beverage Business, Digital Literacy, Product Innovation*

INTRODUCTION

The development of popular culture shows that entertainment products especially Japanese anime become more and more platforms for the expression of social and political ideals. Real world social problems, such as power disparity, governmental aggression, and opposition to political dominance are often shown in anime. According to earlier research, anime functions as a global cultural text that influences viewers conception of authority and power dynamics in the global community while also shaping their aesthetic experiences (Akbaş, 2018). As a result, popular fiction can serve as a potent tool for critical analysis of international political dynamics.

Akame ga Kill! follows Tatsumi, a villager who learns that his ostensibly wonderful nation is run by a corrupt, oppressive political elite, as an example of this convergence of fiction and political commentary. The prime minister, who manipulates the law and normalizes state violence and holds real power with the youthful Emperor, serving only as a symbol of legitimacy. Tatsumi joins Night Raid, a revolutionary organization working to topple the government in reaction to this structural injustice. Beyond its action scenes, the anime highlights processes related to the normalization of violence and the concentration of power by symbolically depicting an authoritarian framework in which the law is a tool of dominance.

Although previous research recognizes anime as a medium for power representation and social reflection (MacWilliams, 2020), there are still few studies that explicitly place Akame ga Kill! within the analytical framework of global power dynamics. The majority of studies focuses on morality or social representation without going into great detail about how it reflects the global political system. Thus, the main emphasis of this study is how power dynamics existing in modern international political practices are reflected in the state representation in Akame ga Kill!. It seeks to show how texts from popular culture can be essential tools for political criticism of the legitimacy of the state and its power systems.

The study uses a qualitative text analysis design within the framework of cultural and political studies to accomplish this, the 24 episodes of the anime make up the material object of study and information was gathered by closely observing situations and conversations involving the ruling class, government representatives, and revolutionary organizations. By connecting these story components to ideals in international relations like authoritarianism, hegemony, and resistance, the analysis explains them. This way provides an opportunity to analyze Akame ga Kill! not in relation to any particular country but as an ideological symbol, which makes it possible to interpret Akame ga Kill! as criticism of today's geopolitical relations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There has been considerable academic investigation into the role played by anime in providing social commentary. The increasing trend has seen anime being examined not only for entertainment value but also as a cultural artifact that embodies meanings related to matters such as power, identity, and social relations. This means that anime can be used to reflect reality in different aspects. In this regard, according to MacWilliams (2020), modern anime helps to build social awareness by representing elements like conflicts, injustices, and domination in a way that prompts individuals to think critically about reality. When viewed from the perspective of international relations, according to Candelaria (2024), it becomes clear that anime successfully reflects power dynamics, legitimacy issues, and ideological conflicts relevant to the international political realm.

Moreover, academic research has thoroughly studied the portrayal of authoritarianism and state domination in various popular franchises. For instance, Sugawa (2020) indicates that several narrative franchises feature centralized and oppressive states similar to real-life authoritarianism, whereas Castagnetti (2021) elucidates complex relationships of domination, dehumanization, and morality of absolute authority in franchises like Attack on Titan. Despite these substantial investigations, scholarly work that considers Akame ga Kill! through the lens of global power dynamics is still lacking. Hence, this research seeks to fill this lacuna by examining how the portrayal of the state in Akame ga Kill! mirrors modern-day global politics and serves as a unique platform to criticize this authoritarian trend.

METHODOLOGY

Within the context of cultural and political studies, this study employs a qualitative methodology with a text analysis design. Instead of quantifying phenomena, a qualitative methodology was selected to evaluate the symbolic meanings of state representations and power dynamics in Akame ga Kill! (Bowen, 2009). Texts are viewed in popular culture studies as cultural artifacts with particular ideologies and discourses that need to be critically examined, rather than only as entertainment.

The whole anime series Akame ga Kill! is the research's material object which has 24 episodes. The state and power dynamics that are depicted in the plot, dialogue, and character development, on the other hand, constitute the

formal object. Direct observation method of pertinent episodes were used to gather research data, with an emphasis on scenes that depicted interactions between the ruling class, government officials, and revolutionary organizations.

The imperial systems power structure, use of violence and the law as political tools, and the portrayal of resistance as a reaction to structural injustice are the three categories that make up the unit of analysis. The evaluation systems follows stages of identity, type, and interpretation. To increase the validity and credibility of the evaluation, this research employs literature triangulation (Carter et al., 2014), comparing the outcomes of interpretations of anime with previous research findings regarding anime as a medium for social complaint.

DISCUSSION

The The illustration of the empire in *Akame ga Kill!* indicates a power shape that appears to be a constitutional monarchy however certainly works as a personalistic authoritarian regime. The Emperor stands as the final image of legitimacy and has the very best formal authority. But, prime Minister honest completely takes over decision-making. This clean imbalance reflects the framework defined by using Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2018). they are saying that during those regimes, a powerful elite group manipulates country institutions without real accountability, preserving formal systems in area just to preserve a fake sense of balance and legality. The anime consistently highlights this dynamic thru the interactions among the younger ruler and his foxy advisor. The Emperor blindly trusts the false reviews he gets and acts as a naive puppet to make sure the continuation of the dynasty. The Prime Minister places a relentless pressure in pursuit of advancing his agenda, all the while managing to hide behind the façade of divine powers attributed to the Emperor. This dichotomy between legitimacy and politics creates a tool that allows the ruler to be isolated from the facts forming the country. People continue to give allegiance to a man who holds no real power. Power is exercised through secretive actions that use the machinery of the state to benefit personal ambitions.

This example serves clearly to illustrate how the process of degeneration of imperial rule occurs not through dramatic changes but due to institutional manipulations. The elites continuously manipulate the system to ensure that their decisions are legalized and that the use of state violence is justified according to law. This example shows very clearly the process of institutional corruption discussed by Fukuyama (2016). While the empire has very good state capacity demonstrated through a powerful army and bureaucratic efficiency, it lacks one key aspect: the rule of law. it's far instead a effective weapon utilized by the Aristocracy to torture and kill the decrease classes without any worry of result furnished they do now not go the crucial elite. The story often shows aristocratic families luring harmless tourists from the provinces most effective to issue them to awful abuses. The country protection forces actively overlook about the ones crimes because the perpetrators belong to the covered better beauty. This demonstrates a complete erosion of justice wherein the United States fails its most important duty to defend its residents. The management keeps to function robotically but it has lost all ethical direction.

The regime actively controls and filters records to preserve this exceptionally unequal and oppressive system. Neither the Emperor nor the general public gets the entire image of the atrocities dedicated by means of the empire across the provinces. they're as an alternative fed heavily manipulated propaganda to preserve a comforting phantasm of peace and prosperity. Guriev and Treisman (2019) conceptualize this contemporary approach of manipulate as informational autocracy. The empire in the story demonstrates that public executions and open terror are no longer the only means of authoritarian existence Through manipulation of the public sentiment, the elite successfully conceals the social disparities and maintains their power without having to constantly fight using arms. In order to attract naïve young people from the poor peripheral communities, the capital is portrayed as a symbol of civility and economic success to them. However, this portrayal leads to young people falling victim to the manipulations of electrified exploitation in an environment that seems promising but is actually very hazardous.

The government also brands political activists and reformists as terrorists in order to scare away people from such revolutionary thoughts. In order for the regime to maintain itself, it is just as important to be able to manipulate the truth as it is to have military prowess. Where necessary, violence takes over from propaganda. Robinson (2017) examines Weber's essential theories on statehood and highlights that a state historically claims the only right to apply bodily force. The anime activates visitors to impeach the ethical limits of this right. state violence loses any moral justification when it ends in public executions and massacres of harmless villages, along deep-rooted structural repression. using historic and pretty effective guns called Imperial palms underscores the sizable power gap among

the oppressive state and the defenseless public. Such types of weapons operate as tools of mass destruction, and their use can only be done through faithful individuals. The state defends the employment of such lethal weapons on the grounds that they maintain law and order as well as national security. However, as the empire continues to forcefully seek stability, its credibility is quickly eroded in the eyes of the oppressed.

Ultimately, such a repression leads to the creation of an irreplaceable legitimacy crisis in the state. The contrast between the claims made by the government propaganda and the actuality of the existing social injustices is becoming unbearable for the majority of the population. According to Hurd (2019), the constructivist approach views legitimacy as a social construction, which requires constant approval of citizens to the exercise of power and authority. This helps to understand why the seemingly omnipotent empire is starting to decay from inside. In the end, it becomes clear that pure symbolism cannot be used effectively without any connection to justice or even humanity. Such a state loses any elements of legitimate power as the result of the loss of its citizenry's approval, as the only thing holding it together becomes fear of the government. Citizens begin to realize that the regime in power does more to sustain itself than support its own citizens' labor and very existence.

The rise of what might be termed "night raids" as a political assassination phenomenon can be explained in light of the harsh but reasonable reality. In cases where any form of political activism and peaceful protest is banned by an adamant political regime, extreme action becomes necessary. The creation of a Night Raid can be explained not only because of some selfish motivations but rather as a quick response to oppression that cannot be fought using peaceable means. According to Napier (2018), it is common practice in contemporary anime films to use dystopian themes in order to express one's opposition towards master narratives of authority and societal worries. The moral grayness in relation to the Nighttime Raids is crucial for increasing the moral complexity of the film, since the organization chooses to use violence and intimidation as the means of conducting revolutionary political change. The members of the group know perfectly well that they have to commit murders in order to fight a much greater injustice, which cannot be fixed by reforming. Therefore, their rebellion is justified due to the realization that an irreparably corrupted system cannot be improved through the system itself.

Akame ga Kill! acts as an effective transnational instrument for criticism of the political sphere of life while simultaneously representing itself as a cultural phenomenon. The visual language of the Japanese animations is thoroughly analyzed by Haryanti and Nurlatifah (2018). The sharp visual contrast between the luxurious and royal capital and the bloody and destitute slums is a vivid illustration of the artists' intentional critique of political decay and socio-economic disparity. The vivid and colorful depiction of the lives of the elites creates an interesting contrast to the dark and grotesque portrayal of the violence imposed on the poor people. By distributing such an allegorical idea of corruption on a global scale, the anime cleverly uses cultural soft power. Through that approach, the anime allows its viewers from around the world to ponder over negative attributes of modern authoritarianism and political problems in general. Because of the universal nature of the theme of elite manipulations and the quest for justice, the story appeals to different cultures. This serves as a good example of how relevant political discussion can be conducted through entertainment.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study reveals that Akame ga Kill! is indeed a significant example of a story representing an authoritarian nation in its portrayal of the dangerous rift between symbolic legitimacy and real power held by the elites. through portraying the normalization of institutionalized violence, the manipulation of law, and the inevitable emergence of radical resistance in response to structural inequality, the anime efficiently encapsulates the middle paradox of authoritarianism, a regime this is coercively solid but legitimately fragile. via its established dystopian a legacy, it serves as an important transnational medium for reflecting on present day global electricity dynamics without focused on a particular nation. consequently, this take a look at recommends that the field of global members of the family increasingly combine popular tradition evaluation into its academic scope, making use of comparative or critical discourse procedures to deepen the knowledge of how complex standards like legitimacy, hegemony, and resistance are produced and challenged within modern visible media.

REFERENCES

- Akbaş, İ. (2018). A “Cool” Approach to Japanese Foreign Policy: Linking Anime to International Relations. *PERCEPTIONS: Journal of International Affairs*, 23(1), 95-120.
- Bowen, G. A. (2009). Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 9(2), 27-40.
- Candelaria, N. P. (2024). Using anime in teaching and understanding major International Relations (IR) theories: A case study of How a Realist Hero Rebuilt the Kingdom. *Journal of Anime and Manga Studies*, 5, 51–74.
- Carter, N., Bryant-Lukosius, D., DiCenso, A., Blythe, J., & Neville, A. J. (2014). The use of triangulation in qualitative research. *Oncology Nursing Forum*, 41(5), 545-547.
- Castagnetti, R. (2021). Revisiting the Fascist Subtext of Attack on Titan: Some Notes on a Modern Reactionary Anime. *Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 51(2), 21–29.
- Fukuyama, F. (2016). Political order and political decay: From the industrial revolution to the globalization of democracy. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Geddes, B., Wright, J., & Frantz, E. (2018). How dictatorships work: Power, personalization, and collapse. Cambridge University Press.
- Guriev, S., & Treisman, D. (2019). Informational autocrats. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 33(4), 100–127.
- Haryanti, P., & Nurlatifah, Y. (2018). Visual language in Japanese animation. *Proceedings of the International Conference on Business, Economic, Social Science and Humanities (ICOBEST 2018)*, 280–282.
- Hurd, I. (2019). *International organizations: Politics, law, practice* (3rd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Iwabuchi, K. (2015). Pop-culture diplomacy in Japan: Soft power, nation branding and the question of 'international cultural exchange'. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 21(4), 419-432.
- MacWilliams, M. W. (2020). Japanese visual culture: Explorations in the world of manga and anime. *Journal of Asian Studies*, 79(1), 185-188.
- Napier, S. J. (2018). *Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle: Experiencing contemporary Japanese animation* (Revised ed.). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Robinson, P. (2017). Max Weber and the legitimate use of force in modern statecraft. *Journal of Political Power*, 10(1), 22-38.
- Sugawa, A. (2020). Children of the empire: Resistance and assimilation in Japanese anime. *Journal of Popular Culture*, 53(3), 612-632.
- Yoshida, Y. (Producer). (2014). *Akame ga Kill!* [TV series]. White Fox.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Erlangga Rizal Ramadhan, email: erlangga.63822019@mahasiswa.unikom.ac.id

Erlangga Rizal Ramadhan is a final year student currently pursuing a Bachelor's degree in the Japanese Literature study program at the Universitas Komputer Indonesia. he has a research interest in Japanese Culture, especially cultural values of life in Japan and Japanese political culture.

Sylvia Octa Putri, email: sylvia.octa.putri@email.unikom.ac.id

Sylvia Octa Putri Sylvia Octa Putri, S.IP., M.I.Pol, Lecturer and Researcher at the Department of International Relations, Universitas Komputer Indonesia's (UNIKOM). Holds master's degree in international relations from Universitas Padjadjaran (UNPAD) and bachelor from Universitas Komputer Indonesia. Currently serving in two roles that demonstrate a commitment to academic, as the Editor-in-Chief of *Global Political Studies Journal (GPSJ)* and as the Coordinator of Quality Assurance for the Department of International Relations. Research expertise is centered on contemporary global political economy, with a publication record in international journals and conference proceedings on topics including economic diplomacy, digital economy, paradiplomacy, and East Asia Studies.

Pitri Haryanti, email: pitri.haryanti@email.unikom.ac.id

Pitri Haryanti is a lecturer in the Japanese Literature Study Program at the Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Universitas Komputer Indonesia (UNIKOM), Bandung. She completed her Bachelor's (S1) and Master's (S2) degrees in Japanese Language Education at Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, and earned her Doctorate (S3) in Cultural Studies from Universitas Padjadjaran. Her academic fields of study include Japanese language education,

Japanese cultural studies, cross-cultural communication, and the development of Japanese popular culture, including animation. She is a well-respected academician who critically examines Japanese culture and its relationship with education and current society through her research and academic studies. She plays a significant role in the development of Japanese studies in Indonesia due to her contributions made through her research efforts and peer-reviewed articles on Japanese culture and language.

Rino Adibowo, S.IP., M.I.Pol. email: rino.adibowo@email.unikom.ac.id

Rino Adibowo, S.IP., M.I.Pol. is a lecturer and researcher in the Department of Government Science at Universitas Komputer Indonesia (UNIKOM). He received his Master's in Government Science at Universitas Padjadjaran (UNPAD) and holds a bachelor's degree from Universitas Komputer Indonesia. Currently, he holds two key posts that illustrate his dedication to academic achievement: the Coordinator of the Compulsory Curriculum Courses (MKWK) and the Quality Assurance Coordinator of the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences. His field of specialization includes community development and empowerment, public policies, and governance. Notably, he is well-versed in publishing articles in various international journals and conferences related to community development and empowerment, public policies, electronic governance, paradiplomacy, and disabilities.