

Group-Contextualized Identity Politics and the Trolley Dilemma: The Failure of Kotoamatsukami and the Silent Struggles of Itachi and Shisui Uchiha in the Preindustrial Animation Naruto Shippuden

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The Asian Conference on Ethics, Religion & Philosophy 2023
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

The sequel anime Naruto: Shippuden (debuted 2007) continues to gain worldwide popularity since the early 2000s; it built upon the model of a fictional multinational configuration in a surreal, semi-modern world with a central focus on the Land of Fire or “Hidden Leaf Village”, and included a rich context of characters, romantic, and political tragedies which are threaded into a bitter story of personal growth and revelation. This article explores the story of Itachi and Shisui Uchiha, two complex characters of the story who struggled severely with group politics and identity, but who brought significant philosophical messages to us the audience. We aim to provide an analysis on the tragic failure of Kotoamatsukami, a fictional jutsu (ninja technique) to control people’s minds, and the silent struggles of the two in the preindustrial animation setting. We also propose a suggested analysis and solution to the parallel trolley dilemma as a conclusion.

Keywords: Naruto, Uchiha, Identity Politics, Preindustrial Animation, Trolley Dilemma

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Introduction

In the anime series of *Naruto/Naruto Shippuden*, the notion of identity is central and throughout the story. In this presentation two members of the Uchiha Clan are the main characters of discussion: being in a struggling position, Itachi and Shisui Uchiha are both part of their clan and part of the bigger village at the same time. In the story, they work for multiple departments in the Hidden Leaf Village, being simultaneously a family member of their own families and clan. The multiple roles they have make them struggle with their identities and, potentially, be confused and morally painful.

The character of Shisui Uchiha may not be very well known to the audience of *Naruto's*, but the audience must be familiar with the other one, Itachi Uchiha, and his little brother Sasuke Uchiha, who is one of the two protagonists in the entire *Naruto* anime. Here, in particular, the stories of Shisui's and Itachi's are on the darker side of the anime.



Figure 1: World map of *Naruto's* (fan-made)

The Hidden Leaf Village (with reference to Figure 1) or Konohagakure (木ノ葉隠れの里) is known as the “Land of Fire”, in a preindustrial, fictional world. It was co-founded by the First Hokage (火影) Hashirama Senju and Madara Uchiha (the eldest ancestor of Uchihas), a rivalry of two greatest ninjas in history. The majority of the village is normal ninjas and people, led by the Hokage; “Uchiha” as a clan coexists with others in the village, both as an elite and as a slightly separated group. The Uchihas are normally very good ninjas.

A number of Uchiha's are “genius ninjas”, such as Shisui Uchiha “the Teleporter” and Itachi Uchiha; a major part of a Uchiha's talent/power is determined by their overall ninja (jutsu) capabilities but also the usage of dōjutsu (瞳術) using their Sharingan (写輪眼); Sharingans allow the Uchihas to be very observant, making them at an advantage in combats. The world of the village is configured as two components, the ninjas, which is similar to the military, and the civilians; on top of them, there is a “committee” who is the stakeholder in charge of big decisions and as the owner of the land. Besides and more importantly, the Uchiha clan also plays the role of policing for the village. As police is sometimes feared by people when they are being too harsh.

Group Context of the Uchihas in the Village

There are several aspects of the group context of the Uchiha clan living in the village. First of all, there is “cultural politics”: being perceived as the “elite clan” in the village, the Uchihas are faced with higher expectations on their performance than other ninjas. Second, there is a regional perspective; the village had ordered the Uchiha clan to live in a designated area in

the village, a “special area”, quite separate from the rest of the village—this makes their identity politics more regional and more intense. Third, the Uchihas also take charge of the Konoha Military Police Force, as police are being feared at times when they are too strict on policing. “Human beings are entitled to and can hold many, and sometimes conflicting, viewpoints,” remarked Diggins (2018).



Figure 2: Image of the Konoha Military Police Force (Narutopedia, Fandom)

As the village’s leaders had ordered the Uchihas to live in a separate, designated area, they are no longer living with the rest of the village’s civilians or ninjas—this creates a geographical segregation, with increased tension between the clan and the leaders of the village.

Kotoamatsukami: Stopping the Clan’s Coup

“It’s great to be a family. I can’t help but feel that every time I see those two,” once remarked Shisui Uchiha; he only works for the leaders but not the police force. However, the Uchiha Clan is secretly planning a coup—a military action to attack and take over the village, to gain their independence and power. This information is revealed by Shisui to the leaders of the village; as Shisui talked to the leaders and suggested to Lord Third to use his Sharingan/dōjutsu on the Uchiha clan, to stop their plan.



Figure 3: Itachi and his little brother Sasuke

“You’ll forever be branded with the sin of using the jutsu against your own clan,” said the Lord Third. It is indeed a serious decision as using that (visual) jutsu would mean that Shisui is openly against his own clan, and he would be in a dangerous and morally painful situation afterwards.



Figure 4: Shisui Uchiha suggesting his way of stopping the coup

After the agreement upon Shisui's plan, Shisui was about to use his Kotoamatsukami on his clan (to stop the coup), but Danzo came and stole one of his eyes.



Figure 5: Danzo attacking Shisui (image credited Naruto Shippuden E358)

After the fight with Danzo, Shisui managed to stay away from pursuers and came to meet Itachi. He said to Itachi, "It's too late to stop to coup (rebellion) by the Uchiha. If civil war breaks out at the Leaf Village, other nations are sure to attack, which means a full-scale war. I was going to try to stop the rebellion with my Kotoamatsukami, but.. Lord Danzo took my right eye... He doesn't trust me... I suspect he'll come after my left eye as well. So I want to give it to you before he has a chance."

Conclusion

What is a clan? And what is the village? To find out which one(s) you belong to is the hardest moral task faced by Shisui and Itachi Uchiha. Arguably, in Uchiha Clan's coup plan, the village is similar to an "at risk" or "victimized" population, where the coup is like the trolley in the trolley dilemma. Then the problem is converted to how to solve this trolley dilemma and, in this case, Shisui has chosen the best approach—to stop the train/trolley from running by using his magical jutsu—although the result was unsuccessful because of Danzo's interference.

References

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