

Teyvat's Governance: A Reflection of the
Real-World: From Fantasy to Reality —
Analyzing Political, Cultural, and
Societal Parallels Between Teyvat and
the Real World

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Parallels of Vigilantism and Justice in the Realm of Fiction – The Intersection of Fiction and Reality: A Sociological Analysis

Introduction to the Vast Fictional World of Teyvat

A nation ruled by scholars who claim to seek knowledge, yet suppress those who challenge their authority. A city where justice is dictated by divine decree, leaving no room for doubt or appeal. These are not just stories from a fantasy world—they are echoes of our own political and social struggles. In September of 2020, MiHoYo Co., Ltd. released a RPG (short for role-playing game) that shot to worldwide fame during its release. Known for its stunning visual and extensive open world feature, it quickly solidified its place within the anime, comic, and gaming communities worldwide. The game follows twin siblings who unfortunately get separated at the beginning of the game. The player takes on the role of one of the twins, known as the Traveler, and embarks on a journey across the fantastical land of Teyvat to reunite with their lost sibling. While traveling throughout Teyvat, the players are faced with different unique systems of governance with their distinct political, cultural, and societal-world themes. These systems reflect broader issues like authoritarianism, social inequality, and the ambiguous morality of power, weaving complex narratives that critically examine crime, law, and justice. In this paper, I will be analyzing vigilantism and justice in the game through the lens of social theory. Through analyzing these fictional narratives, I will aim to illustrate how they mirror and critique social and political real-world issues surrounding crime, law, corruption, vigilantism, and the complex dynamics surrounding power and governance.

Vigilantism and Extrajudicial Actions

The theme of vigilantism and extrajudicial actions is woven heavily throughout the various storylines and quests present within the game. It comes in the form of actions taken by several characters the Traveler meets on their journey in Teyvat. These characters are driven by their own backstories and operate based on their moral agendas, with some even taking justice into their own hands, bypassing formal legal systems. The first major vigilante the players are introduced to is Diluc, a highly esteemed nobleman in Mondstadt, a nation in Teyvat known as the “City of Freedom.” He’s quite known for his quote,

“Knights of Favonius, always so inefficient” (*Genshin Impact*). The Knights of Favonius is the official military organization of Mondstadt and the main governing body. Once a member of the Knights, even holding the prestigious title of Captain, Diluc's life was forever altered after the death of his father, which he believed was caused by the corruption and inaction within the Knights themselves when one of his superiors refused to further investigate the case of his father's death, going as far as to cover it up. After further investigation on Diluc's end, he finds out that his father's death was linked to the Fatui, a powerful and shady military force hailed from another nation. The Fatui's relentless pursuit of power and their interference in Mondstadt's internal affairs, including their attempts to control resources and manipulate multiple individuals, contributed to Diluc's hatred for the organization.

In Diluc's personal story quest, the players come to find out that he actively pursues criminals and enacts justice outside of the official structures of the Knights of Favonius under a guise in the middle of the night, symbolizing his shift from a noble knight to a lone vigilante. His personal vendetta against the Fatui and his distrust of official authority is what drives him to operate as a lone vigilante. What drove Diluc to vigilantism in the first place could probably be explained through the profound sense of anomie he feels. Anomie, according to Emile Durkheim, is a state of normlessness. For Diluc, anomie manifests as a deepened sense of disorientation after the justice he knew and looked up for all his life has failed him. The death of his father was what ultimately drove Diluc towards this current path of his. He recognized that the established legal and social structures in Mondstadt, which were meant to protect him and his family, had failed him. This profound sense of injustice fuels his desire to take matters into his own hands, to become the force of justice that society has failed to be.

Diluc's actions can also be analyzed through the lens of strain theory, developed by Robert K. Merton. Merton argued that individuals experience strain when they are unable to achieve culturally valued goals through legitimate means. This “strain” might encourage individuals to resort to alternative methods that may lead to deviance in order to reach their desired outcome. Diluc, despite his wealth and privilege, finds himself unable to achieve the goal of justice and security through the established legal system. The corrupt officials within the Knights of Favonius, who he believes are complicit in his father's death, further exacerbate this strain. “They call themselves protectors, yet they turn a blind eye to the suffering of the people. They are no better than

the Fatui," Diluc laments, highlighting his disillusionment with the existing power structures. Diluc's vigilantism, while driven by noble intentions, presents a complex ethical dilemma. While he strives to protect Mondstadt from harm, his methods often involve breaking the law and operating outside the established legal framework. This raises questions about the nature of justice and the legitimacy of vigilantism. After all, if the law fails to protect the people, who then has the right to define justice?

The nature of justice has long been debated, particularly when institutions fail to uphold it in the first place. In Diluc's case, his actions challenge the notion that justice must always be administered through legal channels. In this case, the "legal channels" refers to the Knights of Favonius. Diluc's disapproval of the inefficient ways the Knights of Favonius deals with problems reflects a broader reality: when systems meant to protect the people instead serve corrupt interests, individuals may feel compelled to take matters into their own hands.

Vigilantism, then, emerges as both a form of resistance and a moral quandary. While Diluc's actions address the immediate failures of the system, they also blur the line between justice and retribution. If the legitimacy of law is eroded by corruption, does that justify defying it? Or does acting outside the system risk further destabilizing the very order he seeks to protect? Diluc's story underscores the tension between law and morality, forcing us to consider whether justice is defined by legality or ethicality when institutions fail to bring proper justice. This tension between law and morality raises another critical question: can Diluc's actions be seen not just as vigilantism, but as a form of civil disobedience—a deliberate challenge to an unjust system in pursuit of true justice.

One can argue that yes—Diluc's actions can definitely be seen as a form of civil disobedience. Diluc disobeys the law by operating outside the legal system and using his own methods to apprehend criminals. In a way, by taking matters into his own hands, Diluc is advocating against how Mondstadt's current government is run and challenging its authority.

According to Henry David Thoreau, the one who popularized the term civil disobedience, states, "Must the citizen ever for a moment, or in the least degree, resign his conscience to the legislator? Why has every man a conscience, then? I think that we should be men first, and subjects afterward" (2). Diluc's "conscience"—in other words, his moral compass—brings him to uphold justice on his terms. Essentially, despite his actions being "against the law," his

conscience compels him to act as he believes is right, even if it means defying the established order.

Another example of vigilantism that many players often fail to consider is the players themselves. As an outsider not bound to any of the seven nations, the Traveler often intervenes in situations where the established authorities fail or are unable to act. For example, in Mondstadt, the Traveler actively deals with the Fatui, an action that the Knights of Favonius seem to have struggled addressing on their own, preferring to maintain a steady relationship between nations rather than prioritizing the safety of its citizens. Mondstadt's current foundation would most likely coincide with John Locke's theory on social contract. Locke believed that individuals enter a social contract to ensure the protection of their natural rights (life, liberty, and property). In Mondstadt, the residents seem to have chosen freedom and self-governance as their "contract." It can be said that Mondstadt runs on a decentralized government.

Philosophers such as Elinor Ostrom has touched upon the delicate, yet strong intricacies of a community that are able to come to an agreement about a certain way to live all that operates on a decentralized system, and Mondstadt exemplifies many of the principles she outlined in her work on polycentric governance and the commons. Throughout her works, she mentions multiple examples of communities who have managed to successfully work together. One such example is her analysis of "a series of inshore fisheries located along the coast" in Maine (Ostrom 37), highlighting how local groups are capable of establishing rules, monitoring usage, and resolving disputes to sustainably manage resources. The fishermen created rules to regulate fishing areas as well as the amount of fish that could be caught. Over time, the fishing community continued to adapt and refine its rules based on their own experience and changing conditions. This is considered one of the many successful real-life examples of humans being able to effectively manage their resources through self-governance. Even without an external force (like the government) to "force" people to adhere to rules, Ostrom underscores the significance of social norms and peer pressure has to ensure that the whole community is compliant with the rules put in place. However, it's important to note that while Mondstadt's citizens generally share values of freedom and cooperation, not all factions within the city align perfectly with this ideal. Groups like the Fatui introduce a complicated layer of conflict that messes up the operations of a harmonious self-governed nation. In real-world applications, Mondstadt's

decentralized approach will undoubtedly face challenges when it comes to different parties having their own agendas and goals.

Unlike Mondstat, however, Liyue (another nation in Teyvat) runs on a capitalist economy and is ruled by a group of oligarchs named the Qixing. There are multiple minor instances where the Traveler comes across corruption within Liyue's political and business circles and subsequently investigates suspicious activities that the local authorities fail to address. In fact, the game consistently places the player in scenarios that require the Traveler to take matters into their own hands, reflecting the player's active role in shaping justice, often bypassing the limitations or failings of the existing authorities. The player's experience serves as a reflection of the conflict between personal agency and institutional authority in the pursuit for justice. While the Traveler's intervention is definitely different from Diluc's where the Traveler is not actively seeking to dismantle the existing power structures, their intervention with conflicts can still be seen as a vigilante-like engagement. The Traveler's unique position as an outsider definitely puts them in a different position compared to Diluc, who's a citizen of his own nation. As an outsider, it allows them a degree of freedom and autonomy that transcends the limitations of local power structures. This aligns with the concept of nomadism, where individuals or groups operate outside of established social and political boundaries challenge fixed identities and power structures.

Another instance of Traveler stepping into conflict would be when she traveled to Inazuma. In the beginning of her travels to this nation, the players find out about Inazuma's Vision Hunt Decree, an order enacted by the Raiden Shogun. The Raiden Shogun is a stern ruler, determined to eliminate Visions—magical symbols of elemental power and the symbolization of a person's ambitions—from her people in order to enforce her ideal of "eternity." This serves as a stark example of an authoritarian government. And the confiscation of Visions, an item that symbolizes ambition, represents the suppression of individual freedoms for the sake of societal stability. The Vision Hunt Decree will lead to a widespread rebellion within Inazuma, exposing the flaws of autocratic regimes that prioritize control over human rights. In real-world terms, Inazuma's policies evoke comparisons to authoritarian states where laws are used as tools of oppression rather than justice, emphasizing the importance of balancing state power with individual liberty. In many ways, the decree reflects the dangers of an overly centralized government. Not to mention, the people of Inazuma are unable to leave their own nation, as the borders are

tightly controlled, further isolating them from the outside world. Does that sound any familiar? Inazuma's state surely bears a striking resemblance to the authoritarian rule of present-day North Korea.

When the Traveler reflects the chaos caused by the Vision Hunt Degree, she thinks: "A decree that takes away the very thing that makes people who they are... ambition, hope, and dreams. Is this truly justice?" (*Genshin Impact*). In this moment of self-reflection, the Traveler teeters on the edge of the philosophical implications of this decree. How can a system that strips away the core aspects of human identity—ambition, hope, and dreams—be considered just? This question challenges the very definition of justice in an authoritarian state, where laws are used not to protect the rights of the people, but to maintain control and eliminate perceived threats to the established order. Moreover, the Traveler's reflection underscores a deeper philosophical concern. Specifically, it touches upon the dehumanizing impact of such a regime, where individuals are reduced to mere subjects of the state, stripped of the very qualities that make them unique. Led by this moral dilemma, the Traveler decides to intervene which could be seen as an act of resistance against this oppressive regime. By the near end of the Traveler's journey in Inazuma, a sense of class consciousness begins to emerge among the populace. This class consciousness among the citizens of Inazuma is precisely what led to the end of the Raiden Shogun's exploitation of her people.

A perspective that I personally think is worth noting is: "Justice is not just a matter of law; it's a matter of what's right. Sometimes, the law doesn't know what that is." This statement emphasizes the idea that the law is not necessarily made to be just. It implies that the legal system may serve the elite rather than true justice, mirroring the systemic issues of bias and oppression. This theme is not unique to the game itself. Across the globe, we see the law being used as a tool to enforce systemic injustice—whether it's through biased policing, unequal access to legal resources, or laws that disproportionately affect certain communities. The idea that justice is more than just following the law challenges us to question whether the systems in place are truly serving the people or just maintaining the status quo. What this perspective ultimately drives home is that we, as individuals and as a society, have a responsibility to redefine what justice means. It's not just about what's legal; it's about what's fair, right, and compassionate.

Conclusion

Genshin's storyline effectively explores elements of vigilantism through the action of its fictional characters. The game demonstrates how individuals, driven by a sense of justice and disillusionment with existing systems, may resort to extrajudicial actions when they feel that the established order has failed them. While the game's setting and characters are fictional, the moral conflicts seen within these characters can be used to reflect the complexities of vigilantism in the real world. Although people in real life don't necessarily have magical powers to clash with villainous organizations or have to figure out how to survive a life or death battle with a deity, the struggles we encounter can still feel as monumental as those depicted in the divisions of nations in Genshin Impact. By further analyzing these fictional narratives, we can gain a deeper insight towards the factors that drive people towards vigilantism, and critically examine the potential consequences and ethical implications of such actions.

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