



# Justice without care is abstract: an exegetical quest to decode Albert Camus's ethics of rebellion

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Received 2 Jan 2026; Accepted 3 Feb 2026; Published 23 Feb 2026

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.64171/JSRD.5.1.73-75>

## Abstract

*"The only way to fight the plague is with decency." (The Plague)*

This paper explores the philosophical intersection of care-based and justice-based ethics, seeking to mitigate the traditional dichotomy that exists between these two axiological spheres. By performing an exegetical analysis of Albert Camus's 1947 novel *The Plague*, this research identifies the "Ethics of Rebellion" as a vital bridge between androcentric, principle-driven frameworks—ranging from Kantian deontology to Rawlsian justice—and the feminist "Ethics of Care" propounded by Carol Gilligan. The study posits that justice, when stripped of compassion, remains a sterile abstraction; conversely, care provides the essential germination for the pursuit of true justice. To validate this theoretical crossover, the paper examines four landmark Indian movements: the historical Nupi Lan and Naga Mothers' Association, and the contemporary Shaheen Bagh protests and #MeToo movement. Through these case studies, the article demonstrates that rebellion is not merely a political act, but a moral necessity born of care. It concludes that the impulse to revolt against systemic negligence is nurtured through an ontological commitment to those we care for, asserting that no meaningful rebellion is possible in the absence of a justice rooted in human interrelatedness.

**Keywords:** Feminist ethics, NMA, Nupi Lan, Rebellion, The plague, Care ethics, Albert Camus, Ethics of rebellion, Ethics of care, Social justice, Feminist movements, Carol Gilligan, Axiological dichotomy, Political resistance

## 1. Introduction

*"Rebellion cannot exist without a strange form of love." (The Rebel)*

The tension between justice-based ethics and care-based ethics has long defined the periphery of ethical theory. Traditional ethical frameworks often emphasize universal maxims and impartial autonomy, whereas feminist ethics prioritize interdependence and emotional connection. This paper endeavours to understand whether the principle of justice is truly alienated from the attributes of care. Through the lens of Albert Camus, this research suggests that the line isolating principles from emotions is obsolete, as principles are human constructs inextricably bonded to sentiment and conscience.

## 2. The Debate: Care Versus Justice

The dualism between care and justice is often viewed as a "tussle" where one domain must trump the other.

### 2.1 Traditional perspectives

Traditional male ethicists, including John Rawls, John Stuart Mill, and Immanuel Kant, argue that ethical actions must be guided by universal moral maxims. Under this view:

- Moral maturity is defined by the capacity for impartial and autonomous decision-making.
- A regimental and calculative approach serves as the base for the moral agent.

### 2.2 Feminist critique and the care alternative

Feminist ethicists criticize the traditional approach for its failure to recognize that people exist in constant connection with others.

- Care, trust, and compassion provide the impetus for moral behaviour rather than absolute isolation.
- However, care-based ethics are also criticized for being too relative in scope and potentially trapping women in patriarchal gender stereotypes.

### 3. Camus's ethics of rebellion

*"Every act of rebellion expresses a nostalgia for innocence and an appeal to the essence of being."- The rebel*

Camus breaks the dichotomy by establishing that justice and care are not antagonistic but conjoined.

#### 3.1 Lessons from *The Plague*

In *The Plague*, the character of Dr. Rieux exemplifies the "Ethics of Rebellion" when he enters a "Mad Revolt" against the government's denial of the plague.

- His urge to rebel is triggered by the compassion he feels for a dying child.
- Similarly, the reporter Rambert transitions from selfish desires to becoming a rebel for the common good once he develops compassion for the citizens of Oran.

### 3.2 The synthesis of care and justice

Camus argues that an action becomes oppressive precisely when it abandons care.

- Justice not grounded in care becomes "abstract" and ultimately unjust.
- Rebellion is the process of restoring care to the human condition.
- "Caring" defines the boundary between just and unjust acts.

### 4. Case studies in rebellion

*"Every act of rebellion expresses a nostalgia for innocence and an appeal to the essence of being." (The Rebel)*

Two historical movements in Northeast India provide empirical support for the claim that care-driven compassion fuels the fight for justice.

#### 4.1 The Nupi Lan women's movement (Manipur)

Started in 1939, Nupi Lan ("women's war") began as an agitation against oppressive rice export policies during a food shortage.

- Manipuri women held a privileged status in the agrarian economy and managed internal trade.
- The rebellion was spurred by care for their families and society, as the women could not tolerate the hunger caused by the state's profit-seeking exports.

#### 4.2 The Naga Mothers' Association (NMA)

Established in 1984, the NMA is an umbrella organization dedicated to peace and solidarity in a region torn by militancy and the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA).

- The NMA rebels against the "draconian rule" of the government and the violence of militant outfits.
- Their strength to stand against army tanks and conduct "naked walks" for justice is derived from the "heart of steel" that flows from maternal care and devotion.
- The NMA proves that mothers possess immense power to rebel because the issues of conflict hurt everyone in the community.

#### 4.3 The Shaheen Bagh Protest (2019–2020)

What began as a small sit-in by Muslim women in a Delhi neighbourhood escalated into a nationwide symbol of resistance against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC).

- **The Impulse of Care:** The movement was led primarily by "Dadis" (grandmothers) and homemakers. Their rebellion was not born from abstract legal theory but from a visceral care for their children's future and the fear of families being torn apart by statelessness.
- **Care as Infrastructure:** The protest site was a "Bagh" (garden) of communal care, featuring interfaith prayer rooms, community kitchens, and a street library called "Read for Revolution." This environment proved Camus's point: the rebellion was an effort to restore a space of care that the state's "abstract" laws threatened to erase.

- **Justice through Presence:** By occupying public space for over 100 days, these women reclaimed their identity as citizens through the lens of maternal and community protection, turning "private" care into a "public" demand for justice.

#### 4.4 The #MeToo Movement in India (2018–Present)

The #MeToo movement in India represents a radical shift in how sexual harassment is addressed, moving from silent endurance to "Mad Revolt" through digital and social solidarity.

- **The Ethics of shared trauma:** The movement relied on the "Ethics of Care" by creating a supportive network where survivors felt safe to speak. The act of "believing women" is an expression of care that provides the moral foundation for the rebellion against institutional silence.
- **Rebelling against "Abstract" protection:** For decades, legal frameworks (like the Vishaka Guidelines) existed as abstract principles of justice that failed to protect women in practice. The #MeToo rebellion was a collective strike to humanize these laws by infusing them with the lived experiences and emotional truths of victims.
- **Interdependence and Solidarity:** Much like Camus's Dr. Rieux, who realizes he cannot be happy alone while others suffer, the participants in #MeToo demonstrated that justice for one is inextricably linked to the care and safety of all women in the workplace.

### 5. Discussion

The paper's central thesis that justice becomes truly compassionate and collective only when rooted in care, transforming rebellion from isolated principle or self-interest into a restorative act of human solidarity finds profound resonance in both Albert Camus' existential allegory *The Plague* and the lived resistances of women in Northeast India and Delhi. This discussion extends the conclusion by interrogating how care functions as the ethical foundation for sustained rebellion, why individualistic paradigms falter without it, and what these examples reveal about the limits and possibilities of justice in oppressive or absurd conditions.

In *The Plague*, Camus presents rebellion not as triumphant heroism but as a persistent, unglamorous labour against an indifferent universe. Dr. Rieux's refusal to accept suffering as divine will or inevitable fate exemplifies revolt grounded in human solidarity rather than abstract principle. He rejects Paneloux's theological explanations and Rambert's initial self-centred escape attempts, instead forming sanitary teams that embody practical care: treating the sick, burying the dead, and alleviating isolation. This care is not sentimental but defiant—Rieux describes it as "common decency" in the face of absurdity. Without this relational commitment, rebellion risks collapsing into despair or opportunism. Tarrou's quest for "sanitation" (metaphorical purity from complicity in evil) similarly evolves from personal idealism to shared human effort. Camus thus illustrates that justice detached from care remains sterile or punitive; only through compassionate service

does it humanize both oppressor and oppressed, restoring bonds frayed by plague-like alienation.

All these above contemporary cases highlight why purely individualistic or principle-based rebellion often lacks endurance. Individualism can fuel initial outrage but falters without relational glue—care provides the emotional and material sustenance (food, shelter, moral encouragement) to withstand prolonged adversity. Principle alone risks abstraction or dogmatism; care grounds it in lived humanity, making justice functional and intimate. As the paper argues, care shifts justice from self-service (e.g., personal escape or punitive retribution) to compassionate service for all.

Maternal framing can reinforce gender essentialism, limiting women's roles to peace making while excluding them from formal negotiations (as seen with Naga women's marginalization in official Indo-Naga talks). Care-based rebellion may appear "soft" to state powers, inviting dismissal or violent crackdown. Still, its strength lies in moral authority: tanks hesitate before mothers, winter cannot fully extinguish communal warmth.

Ultimately, these examples affirm the thesis: rebellion for justice thrives when care is its root. In Camus' absurd world and India's contested margins, care converts resistance into affirmation—of life, dignity, and interconnectedness. It reminds us that true justice is not won through domination but restored through persistent, compassionate presence. Whether facing plague, ethnic strife, or discriminatory laws, the most enduring rebellions are those that heal as they resist, weaving care into the fabric of a more human order.

## 6. Conclusion

Rebellion for the sake of justice requires a level of dedication that a purely individualistic or principle-based paradigm cannot provide. As seen in both *The Plague* and the movements in Manipur and Nagaland, care is the root of rebellion. This paper concludes that justice and care are intimately functional; justice moves from self-service to compassionate service for all only within the context of caring. These contemporary movements reinforce the document's central thesis: justice and care are intimately functional. Whether it is the Naga mothers standing before tanks or the women of Shaheen Bagh braving the winter, the strength of their rebellion stems from an innate sense of compassion. Rebellion is not a rejection of order, but a restoration of the human bond.

*"I rebel; therefore, we exist."* — Albert Camus

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