



From Brooklyn to Kuwait: Female Identity and Ethics of Care in Contemporary Fiction

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Abstract

This paper conducts a comparative analysis of two female protagonists from The Book of V. by Anna Solomon and The Pact We Made by Layla AlAmmar through the application of Carol Gilligan's Care Ethics theory. Grounded in feminist moral philosophy, Care Ethics emphasizes empathy, responsibility, and interpersonal relationships. The study examines how American individualism and Arab collectivism shape women's social roles, autonomy, and identity across distinct cultural contexts. Employing a qualitative textual analysis informed by Care-focused Feminist theories, the study investigates the influence of care, pain, and gender roles on the moral development of female characters. The analysis reveals several cultural disparities, including variations in religious influence, family structure, and social mobility. Nevertheless, the findings indicate that both protagonists grapple with fundamental ethical and emotional challenges, particularly tensions between personal freedom and social obligation and the responsibilities associated with caregiving. These findings demonstrate that literature transcends cultural boundaries to address universal ethical dilemmas. They also offer a multinational perspective on identity, duty, and resistance within the framework of Care Ethics.

1. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary literature usually tackles themes of freedom, responsibility, and identity as persistent motifs in relation to women, transcending cultural and social boundaries. These concepts resonate deeply within women's inner realities, highlighting the juxtaposition of personal aspirations and societal expectations. Women are often socially conditioned to prioritize the care of others, rendering them responsible for providing comfort and nurturing, while adhering to familial and societal norms. This often results in the subordination of their own desires and rights, raising critical questions about the implications of such sacrifices on their agency and well-being. Exploring these dynamics within diverse cultural contexts enriches our understanding of the intricate interplay between identity and emotional labor. This paper critically examines the moral and emotional struggles faced by women across two distinct cultural settings, employing Carol Gilligan's Care Ethics as a robust theoretical framework. By integrating feminist analysis within this cultural lens, the study underscores a significant shift in moral development from traditional, abstract notions of justice to the more nuanced emotional labor and relational responsibilities that women frequently navigate. This perspective not only illuminates the complexities that contemporary female characters

encounter but also reveals the limitations of existing scholarship that often overlooks the intersectionality of gender, culture, and ethical responsibility.

Through this critical approach, the paper contributes to the broader discourse on feminist ethics and literature by advocating a deeper exploration of how cultural narratives shape women's experiences and the moral dilemmas they confront. Ultimately, by foregrounding the ethical dimensions of care and the relational aspects of identity, this study seeks to foster a more nuanced understanding of women's roles within both literature and society, presenting new avenues for further research and inquiry.

The analysis centers on the characters of Lily and Dahlia in *The Book of V.* by Anna Solomon and *The Pact We Made* by Layla AlAmmar, respectively. While Lily confronts the challenges of womanhood and motherhood in modern Brooklyn, New York, Dahlia navigates similar issues in Kuwait, a society that often imposes stringent expectations of strength and authority on men. Although the social expectations and pressures faced by each woman differ, both narratives illustrate how caring can be both a burden and a site of resistance. The study examines the intersections of gender, culture, and emotional labor as they provide insights into the diverse experiences of women across different cultural contexts, the United States and Kuwait. In both contexts, women face similar challenges with societal expectations, gender roles, and emotional responsibility. By highlighting these commonalities, such research fosters solidarity among feminist movements worldwide and contributes to the evolution of feminist theory, particularly regarding the significance of emotional labor and care work. Furthermore, these studies promote cross-cultural dialogue, inform policy and practice aimed at addressing gender inequality, and enrich literary criticism by applying feminist frameworks to contemporary narratives. Collectively, this work advances both academic scholarship and practical efforts toward achieving gender equality as one of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Carol Gilligan's theory of Care Ethics (1982) has been central to feminist moral criticism. It examines how women navigate social pressure, relational responsibility, and the formation of selfhood. By prioritizing empathy and emotional responsibility over abstract notions of justice, Gilligan reframes ethical decision-making as inherently relational. This framework explores how female protagonists balance social obligations with the pursuit of autonomy and self-care. Feminist literary scholars have since applied this framework to analyze how female protagonists negotiate social obligation while also attempting to preserve autonomy and self-care. Several studies demonstrate the usefulness of Care Ethics in literary contexts where women are expected to prioritize family and communal needs over personal fulfillment. For instance, Barokah (2022) applies Gilligan's theory to *The Holy Woman* and illustrates how Zarri Bano's ethical dilemmas are shaped by cultural expectations that demand female self-sacrifice. On an equal grounds, Santari (2020) applies care-focused feminism in her analysis of *Woman at Point Zero* and shows how female characters interpret resistance to injustice as an ethical responsibility rather than an individual choice. Collectively, these studies highlight care as the moral burdens women carry; however, their focus on specific cultural contexts limits the broader implications of Care Ethics in diverse settings.

Western feminist scholarship further explores the tension between care and individual identity, especially in relation to motherhood and self-definition. Sutanto (2016) examines the concept of "social mothering" in Western feminist novels and focuses on women who struggle to define themselves both as autonomous individuals and as mothers. These narratives often present motherhood as a role shaped by social expectation rather than personal choice. This tension resonates in Lily's narrative in *The Book of V.*, where she questions the assumption that motherhood and family life should be a woman's primary source of fulfillment. Female characters in Western feminist fiction frequently question their individual desires while continuing to perform culturally prescribed maternal roles (Khom, 2007). Zhou's (2017)

research on maternity and employment supports this perspective and demonstrates that women's gender attitudes often shift as they navigate work, caregiving responsibilities, and social pressure.

When Middle Eastern literature discusses the role of women, it often looks at the angle of obligation and family honor. Teke-Lloyd (2018) explores how the ethics of care undermine women's freedom in certain cultural contexts. She observes that characters in novels from the Arab world often prioritize their families' needs over their own personal aspirations. According to McQuillan and Greil (2008), women's priorities and self-perceptions can be influenced by the cultural value placed on parenting, which, in turn, reinforces the emotional and moral burden associated with caregiving in situations such as Dahlia's.

Across both Western and Middle Eastern feminist criticism, emotional labor remains a recurring concern in discussions of women's ethical and emotional responsibilities. Hochschild (1983) defines "emotional labor" as the often-invisible work women perform to sustain relationships and maintain social stability. This concept has shaped feminist literary analysis by drawing attention to the care work expected but rarely acknowledged. This framework is further refined by Wong (2024), who underscores persistent gender inequalities embedded in intimate relationships, even in contexts where equality is purportedly established. Her research reveals power imbalances that remain hidden within marital expectations and emotional obligations. These dynamics are evident in the experiences of both Dahlia and Lily, whose roles as caregivers demand constant emotional regulation and self-sacrifice. However, while the existing literature adeptly analyzes emotional labor within specific cultural paradigms, it frequently lacks a comparative approach that examines these dynamics across both Western and Arab contexts. This gap creates an opportunity for further research to examine how emotional labor manifests differently or similarly across diverse cultural landscapes, ultimately enriching our understanding of women's ethical and emotional responsibilities within varied societal frameworks.

Feminist literary scholars have examined *The Book of V.* through a biblical feminist lens, especially how it tells the story of Queen Esther from a feminist perspective. Koester (2020) looks at how modern feminist retellings of religious texts challenge standard patriarchal readings. This is similar to how *The Book of V.* is structured and what it is about (Koester, 2020). In the same way, Draine (1989) looks at feminist literary theory in terms of new interpretations of the Bible. She says that books, like *The Book of V.*, challenge male-centered views of history and religion by giving women's opinions a chance to be heard (Draine, 1989). These reviews stress that *The Book of V.* is both a retelling of history and a modern feminist critique of structural oppression that goes through generations.

Studies of *The Pact We Made* place the novel within Arab feminist literary discourse and emphasize the social pressures faced by women in different cultural settings. Alshammari (2022) highlights how Dahlia's feelings of guilt and inner conflict reflect the expectations placed on Arab women to prioritize family honor and collective responsibility over personal freedom. Similarly, Djohar, Budiantari, and Ni'mah (2023) examine themes of bodily autonomy and gendered oppression. They argue that Dahlia's struggle represents wider limitations placed on women in Middle Eastern societies. While these studies offer important insights into cultural constraint and resistance, they give less attention to care as an ethical practice that shapes women's moral choices.

A considerable body of research has been conducted on Care-Focused Feminism, emotional labor, and gender roles in literature, but more is to be investigated in relation to how these theories have been applied to compare feminist literature from different cultures. Most research that has been done so far only looks at Western or Middle Eastern feminist stories. There haven't been many that look at how Care-Focused Feminism works in different cultural settings, especially in modern literature. This study closely looks at Lily from *The Book of V.* (2020) and Dahlia from *The Pact We Made* (2019) from a feminist point of view. It shows how women's challenges with care ethics and autonomy show up in differently in Western and

Middle Eastern contexts. So, the study questions how the selected characters within different social and cultural contexts manage societal expectations from the point of Care-Focused Feminism, and what their experiences tell about the overlap of gender, culture, and emotional labor. It presents examples of women's experiences as they try to find a balance between their own needs and those of society. In addition, feminist conflicts in current Middle Eastern and Western literature are compared showing how cultural norms affect women's responsibilities. This is explored through identity, marriage, and motherhood themes.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study applies a qualitative method that focuses on feminist literary analysis using Care-Focused Feminism (Carol Gilligan, 1982). It uses comparative textual analysis to investigate how two the female protagonists, Lily and Dahlia negotiate gender roles, emotional labor, and cultural expectations in their respective locations of modern-day America and Kuwait. The research method involves a detailed reading and textual analysis of the novels, and the use of feminist Care-Focused theory. A comparative analysis of the protagonists' experiences is conducted showing their struggles, and moral decision-making in various cultural situations.

The data collection process is based on literary analysis of the two novels applying Care-Focused Feminism and emotional labor. Data is collected using a structured approach: the novels are chosen based on their representation of female protagonists battling with societal expectations, gender roles, and care-centered ethics in different cultures. Topics identification required comparing crucial feminist concepts such as emotional labor, patriarchal oppression, marriage, and motherhood. Carol Gilligan's Care-Focused Feminism is applied as the theoretical framework to examine how the protagonists make decisions based on emotional and relational ethics rather than abstract fairness. A comparative feminist analysis investigates the differences and similarities between Western and Middle Eastern feminist narratives through the characters of Lily and Dahlia.

Textual analysis of the novels is the primary method that directs data collection, with a focus on identifying quotes, themes, and character development, with Lily and Dahlia's experiences organized around shared feminist themes. Data analysis takes a structured approach, beginning with thematic analysis to find key themes like care ethics, gender roles, and emotional labor, and then moving on to comparison analysis to point out the differences and similarities between Lily and Dahlia's issues. Applying feminist theory allows us to investigate how Care-Focused Feminism explains the characters' ethical issues and decisions, while the combined analysis of findings links the work to larger feminist literary discussions. This qualitative study offers a thorough feminist literary analysis of how gender roles, care ethics, and social norms influence women's stories in modern literature.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There are different values and social expectations in Kuwaiti and American culture, especially when it comes to the roles of women in society. In Kuwaiti culture, tradition, religion, and changing social norms, all play a role in how women are treated (Al-Mughni 2001; Longva 1997). Most of the time, social expectations center around marriage, being modest, and keeping close family relations (Tétreault 2000). A lot of Kuwaiti women are now going to college, getting jobs, and being active in public life—a shift that reflects a collective cultural framework. Even with all of this growth, traditional gender roles and societal pressures, especially when it comes to marriage and family duties, still have a big impact on women's lives (Al-Mughni 2001).

Women have many roles in American society today, all of which are shaped by ideas of individualism, equality, and self-expression (Hofstede Insights, 2025). Many people agree

that women make important contributions to all parts of society, including the workforce, politics, education, and culture (Douglas and Michaels 2004). Even with all of this growth, women still have to deal with social expectations about caring for others, how they look, and doing emotional labor (Chodorow 1978; Douglas and Michaels 2004). Many women are able to balance work and family life, but there is still pressure to "do it all," which can make it hard to balance work and family life and keep your mental health in check. Also, things like the pay gap between men and women, the lack of women in top positions, and societal views on motherhood and womanhood still affect women's lives (Douglas and Michaels 2004).

3.1.Marriage and Power

In both *The Book of V.* and *The Pact We Made*, marriage is shown as a very moral place where women fight to find a balance between duty to society and freedom of choice. However, because of the different cultures involved, the pressures these women face are very different. As a young Kuwaiti woman, Dahlia lives in a society where marriage is expected and cannot be avoided. It is an important event in her life that shapes her morality and adulthood. She has to deal with the unspoken rule that her worth depends on her chances of getting married. She sums this up in the line "the family honour sat on my little shoulders" (AlAmmar, 2019). Her quiet defiance, choosing to judge possible suitors based on their voices alone, "Their voices would decide my choice." "Nothing more..." is a quiet way for her to claim her power in a society that limits her freedom. This action fits with Carol Gilligan's idea of the "different voice," which says that women show their moral thinking not through rules or rebellion, but through subtle relational logic that puts connection over conflict. Lily, on the other hand, is an American wife and mother who deals with different but still harsh pressures.

Expectations of perfect home life and political behavior in the 21st century have shaped her marriage. Lily's connection with Vashti, "She is Vashti" shows that she is becoming aware of the patriarchal power at work in her marriage, which seems to be very modern (Solomon, 2020). This conflict reflects what Wong (2024) found in her research on marital decision-making, which revealed that gendered imbalances in power persist even in modern, supposedly equal partnerships. Many couples believe that power and duties are shared equally, but women frequently shoulder a disproportionate amount of the emotional and practical strain of maintaining a relationship. This is known as the "myth of mutuality" (Wong 2024). The way Dahlia and Lily are expected to maintain relational harmony while surrendering their own autonomy, even when their acts of rebellion are hidden or symbolic, is similar to this unseen inequity. Dahlia fights back by keeping quiet, while Lily fights back through symbols and mental space. Both women's stories show that when patriarchy demands care, it turns into a source of control instead of relationships. Gilligan makes this point when she says that care ethics should focus on the woman's voice instead of what society expects. (Gilligan, 1982; Khom, 2007).

3.2.Motherhood and Emotional Responsibility

Some cultural norms about caring make Dahlia and Lily both feel very responsible for other people, even though only one of them is a mother. They treat Dahlia like a mother even though she is not one. They expect her to protect their family's honor as if she were. "For the sake of my reputation, my future, my sister's and cousins..." The way she speaks is shaped by how deeply she feels this part. (Al-Amman, 2019). This mental burden, which can't be seen, is like being a mother you have to deal with care, shame, protection, and silence. In her culture, caring is seen as an obligation and is used to keep things in order. This is a reflection of the way society glorifies motherhood as an essential part of a women's identity, as women are expected to put family responsibilities and caregiving above all else, even if they are not mothers themselves (McQuillan and Greil 2008). In these situations, providing care turns into a moral duty associated with females in general rather than just motherhood. Gilligan's theory

helps us understand that Dahlia's silence isn't a moral failing but a way for her to show care that is limited by society.

Lily, on the other hand, has to put on a show of caring in Brooklyn's liberal, middle-class environment where she has to be the perfect wife and mother. "They peek into each other's apartments and comment on how one person never seems to have any toys on her living-room floor," she says. At times like these, she gets angry (Solomon, 2020). These comparisons show how other women police care in her world, making it more of a performance than a personal thing. Zhou (2017) examines how becoming a mother regularly changes women's gender attitudes, demonstrating how moms in middle-class Western society are often under pressure to show idealized forms of emotional labor and caregiving. Lily's discomfort at being observed and evaluated by other mothers demonstrates how social monitoring shapes caregiving as a performance. Gilligan would say that both Dahlia and Lily are using care as a moral principle, but one that is shaped by what other people expect of them and how responsible they feel about their actions. Both women fight to find a balance between being themselves and the caregiving roles that their cultures have given them, whether they do this through silence or performance.

3.3.Friendships and Female Bonds

In both books, female friendship and community are both moral guides and sources of moral insight. However, the settings of these books change the nature of these interactions. Lily is surrounded by women in the U.S. who seem to be there for her but often reinforce social norms by making subtle judgments. "They move on to other subjects deemed more worthwhile, husbands or politics or the careers they've put on hold" (Solomon, 2020) shows that her social group's moral conversations are all about how they look and how well they do at home. Even though these women are close to Lily physically, they hold her to the same standards that limit her mentally. Wong (2024) offers a crucial perspective for understanding this dynamic. In her research on modern friendships and relationships, she presents the idea of the "myth of mutuality," according to which women think their relationships are supportive and equal but, in reality, they can reinforce gendered expectations. This is seen in Lily's social circle, although her female acquaintances seem forward-thinking on the surface, yet they maintain silent hierarchies of judgment that limit her. Despite being surrounded by women, Lily feels alone, demonstrating how emotional ties may sometimes worsen rather than lessen the urge to fit in. She is aware that this type of friendship lacks genuine empathy and independence, which is why she is upset about being watched and compared, even by other women.

Dahlia, on the other hand, is originally cut off from other women because she lives in Kuwait. The conservative society she lives in doesn't allow her to talk about her feelings openly, but over time, she starts to feel better when people share stories and feel slightly united. Lily's moving moment: "No strand was long enough by itself, but they added up when they were all together." "Thank you" is used as a reference for female friendship in both books (Solomon, 2020). Gilligan calls these relationships "the moral space of dialogue," which is a place where women's views become clearer and stronger when they are with other women. Gasztold and Rabinovich (2022) agree with this and say that friendship and stories in *The Book of V*. help women change how they see themselves. For both characters, mental growth doesn't come from rebelling alone, but from thinking about right and wrong with other people.

3.4.Personal Desires vs. Social Expectations

At the heart of both stories is the struggle between what you want and what society expects of you, but it plays out in Kuwait and America in different ways. Dahlia lives in a world where rules are clear and hard to break. She says it straight out: "*In our culture a daughter is not thought of as an adult until she's married... we just played at being adults*" (AlAmmar, 2019). The interests of her family and society as a whole make it very hard for her to make personal choices. Gilligan would call this a struggle between taking care of others and taking care of oneself. Women are taught to find this balance, often at their own cost. According

to McQuillan and Greil (2008), parenting and family responsibilities are viewed as essential to a woman's identity and purpose in many cultures, especially in more traditional or conservative contexts. Dahlia's emotional responsibility to act as her family's protector and moral compass, despite the fact that she is not a mother, limits her personal autonomy. Her wishes are rarely respected unless they are consistent with upholding family honor. This pressure illustrates how social norms frequently take priority over personal initiative, turning caring into an imposed moral duty rather than a choice.

Lily's need to keep up a socially acceptable identity always takes precedence over her own wants and needs. The fact that she "*she chose to remain alone*" shows that she was taking care of herself and taking a break to hear her own voice in a noisy world (Solomon, 2020). Even in contemporary, liberal societies, parenthood profoundly alters women's gender perceptions, according to Zhou (2017). Women frequently internalize expectations of emotional work and self-sacrifice, which makes it challenging to put one's own desires first without feeling guilty or afraid of being judged. Lily's experience reflects this, as her mental fatigue and yearning for solitude demonstrate how societal standards may restrict even independence. Even though she lives in a society that values individualism more, motherhood, marriage, and public life still make it hard for her to be independent.

Lily and Dahlia both demonstrate how care ethics become complex when assisting others requires self-sacrificing behavior. Both women discover that their moral choices are limited by what other people expect of them, whether they live in a society that silently enforces compliance yet encourages independence or in a culture with rigid norms. They must continually balance the conflict between autonomy and caregiving, which is a highly gendered battle that Gilligan's theory highlights. Given their cultural differences, they both live in morally similar environments that are defined by emotional responsibility and require that personal desires be suppressed or put off in order to preserve peace in their families and communities.

3.5.Moral Choices and Emotional Consequences

Dahlia and Lily's big choices are always affected by how they feel. Gilligan's care ethics helps us see this not as irrational but as morally rich. Dahlia's decision not to talk about her pain shows care that goes too far, care that ignores the self for the sake of others. Feelings like guilt, fear, and numbness are not signs of weakness, they are responses to a deep moral struggle. In the same way, Lily's inner conflict about how to be a "good woman" in America balancing looks, parenting, and fitting in which drives her to make decisions that help her survive rather than thrive. Lily is also dealing with a type of moral fatigue, although in a completely different context. She is not withdrawing selfishly but rather her discomfort with social expectations, her doubts about parenthood, and her attempts to make room for herself are attempts to redefine what caring should be when it no longer feels meaningful. According to Wong (2024), women are conditioned to assume that there is already mutual support in partnerships, which causes them to accept emotional imbalance. This presumption guides Lily's actions until it starts to fall apart, leaving her with emotionally charged decisions regardless of her course. This set of feelings is part of what Gilligan (1982) calls the "moral psychology of care," which is when self-respect and kindness are at odds with each other. Gasztold and Rabinovich (2022) say that culture myths pass on this kind of emotional work from one generation to the next. It's hard for both women to decide whether to speak up, keep quiet, care, or pull away. It's not that they don't know what's right, it's that doing what's right means picking between hurting others and losing yourself.

3.6.Finding Their Own Voice

Gilligan thinks that a woman's moral growth ends when she takes back her voice. This is the end of every woman's journey. Dahlia's simple but powerful words, "I have chosen," are the moment when she changes from someone who gives in to moral pressure to someone who makes moral choices. This is very radical for her in Kuwait, where speaking out can mean

breaking unsaid rules about how women should act. It's not so much a single choice that wakes Lily up as it is a slow return to herself. Her connection to Vashti as a symbol and her growing opposition to home acts show that her voice is slowly but surely emerging. Gilligan (1982) says that a woman's moral voice often conflicts with the idea that she should put others first. In the stories of both women, coming out doesn't mean turning down care, but it means changing what it means. Different worlds shape their perspectives, but they all share the same desire: to care in a way that respects others without forgetting about themselves.

Zhou (2017) observes that parenthood profoundly alters women's perceptions of gender, frequently reinforcing standards that run counter to individual identities. By refusing to let motherhood define her completely, Lily's voice develops in opposition to these pressures, not because she opposes parenthood. As a subtle type of moral clarity, her opposition undermines the notion that being a good mother entails always being unselfish. In the same way, McQuillan and Greil (2008) demonstrate how many women internalize motherhood as their primary identity, which can make it challenging to distinguish between social obligations and personal aspirations. Although Dahlia is not a mother, she bears the emotional burdens of maternal roles, and it is through this struggle that her voice comes to light.

Carol Gilligan's ethics of care and feminist theory can be used to look at Dahlia in *The Pact We Made* and Lily in *The Book of V*. to see how women deal with the conflict between what society expects of them and what they really believe. Both women begin a journey to discover and use their talents. Dahlia finds it hard to talk about her trauma in a society that values privacy and reputation. Lily, on the other hand, slowly reclaims her identity by questioning the roles that have been passed down to her from generation to generation. The choices they make about right and wrong have deep emotional effects. For example, Dahlia's decision to keep quiet about her past hurts her mental health, and Lily's choice to break stereotypes causes both personal conflict and an emotional awakening. Every woman has to balance her own wants with the responsibilities of her society role. Lily wants meaning and freedom outside of her home life, while Dahlia wants to be independent in a society that pushes her toward marriage and obedience. Relationships between women are very important in both stories. Dahlia feels a sense of confidence and comfort from her friendships with other women, and Lily gets strength from the stories and lives of the strong women around her. A strong theme also comes out, motherhood and mental responsibility. Dahlia worries about not only her own well-being but also the mental balance of her family. Lily struggles with what it means to be a mother without losing her own identity. Based on Gilligan's care-centered moral theory, their stories show the emotional depth, moral battles, and relational complexity that are at the heart of women's lives. Despite the two female characters coming from entirely distinct cultures, they share significant similarities in the pressures associated with societal roles

3.7.Similarities and Differences

Across both novels, Lily and Dahlia experience care as a moral obligation shaped by gendered expectations. Each character is expected to manage emotional labor while prioritizing others' needs over her own. Their responses to these pressures often take the form of silence, restraint, or careful compromise rather than direct resistance. Viewed through a care ethics framework, these choices do not suggest powerlessness. Instead, they reflect moral awareness and relational responsibility within the constraints of social conditions. In both narratives, care functions as a source of ethical meaning while also restricting personal autonomy.

Important differences emerge in how care operates across cultural settings. Lily's struggle unfolds within a Western context that values individual choice yet continues to impose expectations tied to motherhood and emotional availability. Her conflict centers on internal negotiation and self-definition. Dahlia's experience is shaped by collective obligation and family honor within a more overtly patriarchal structure. In her case, care is closely linked to

social duty and public expectation. These contrasts demonstrate how care ethics adapts across cultures while remaining deeply connected to specific social frameworks.

4. CONCLUSION

Both *The Book of V*. by Anna Solomon and *The Pact We Made* by Layla AlAmmar provide compelling narratives that explore the experiences of women living in male-dominated societies. Analyzing these characters' choices through the lens of Carol Gilligan's ethics of care reveals that their actions, whether characterized by silence, sacrifice, or subtle rebellion, do not signify weakness. Rather, these decisions reflect culturally endorsed moral frameworks grounded in relationships, empathy, and emotional responsibility. Gilligan's theory invites a reevaluation and reconstruction of conventional narratives surrounding justice and autonomy, emphasizing the strength and complexity of care as a significant moral force. These works not only challenge traditional notions of gender but also illuminate the moral and emotional struggles that many women confront daily. Ultimately, applying care ethics provides a deeper understanding of the positive dimensions underlying these characters' choices, offering a more nuanced perspective on morality in a world that often pressures individuals to remain silent or conform to established norms.

This study presents several avenues for future research. The application of the care ethics framework utilized herein can be extended to other regional and cultural literary comparisons, allowing for a nuanced examination of how moral responsibility and emotional labor manifest across diverse social contexts. Additionally, future research could examine male characters' positions within the care ethics paradigm to determine how gender expectations shape care dynamics and ethical responsibilities. Such interdisciplinary approaches would not only broaden the scope of care-focused literary criticism but also enhance our understanding of morality and identity in literature. Furthermore, exploring the intersections of race, class, and gender within the framework of care ethics may yield valuable insights into the complexities of relational responsibilities and the ethical dilemmas faced by characters across narratives. By expanding the inquiry to include these dimensions, future scholarship can contribute to a more comprehensive and inclusive discourse on care ethics in literature.

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