

# Contrasting feminism in "what now my love" and "people of the whale"



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Carole from *What Now My Love* by Floyd Salas and Ruth from *People of the Whale* by Linda Hogan are both strong women who are symbols for feminism in their time. They both showed that woman can be equal to men by showing their independence, showing that they can be self-thinkers and decision makers instead of just going along with what the men in their lives and communities want. Although these women are from different cultures, both Ruth and Carole are able to use the momentum built for the feminist movement that occurred during and after the 60's to shape the views on what their role should be. Carole using her sexuality and Ruth using her morals and strong-willed personality both were pillars for feminism in the novels.

Both Carole and Ruth were very outspoken throughout the text, both speaking out to voice their opinions even exerting themselves over the males they are speaking to who would normally be the decision makers in society. Carole speaks out against Miles' decisions and how he thinks things should be handled or what their gangs next move should be. Even though Miles had experience running from the police, Carole argues with him and speaks out against his plan because she believes her plan is just as good as his. Ruth also speaks out against the male authority in her community. In the *People of the Whale* the decision to hunt the whale was made by Dwight and the other men. However Ruth believing that the decision to hunt was wrong, stood up to the entire council to voice how she felt despite the fact that the men who were the decision makers for the tribe voted that they should kill a whale.

Also both Ruth and Carole are portrayed as strong independent women Ruth although married to Thomas who would have assumed the role as head of the household after he leaves for the war she is capable of taking care of herself, raising a child while also fishing to support her and her son. In The people of the Whale the majority of fishermen were men while Ruth is the only woman who also uses profession this to support her and her son. Carole was also shown to be independent; although she was with Miles she did have her own apartment along with a passport while Miles didn't have one which suggest that Carole could have been doing some traveling on her own. Both Ruth and Carole displayed feminism by showing that they are independent and have their own thoughts and had no problem speaking out against the men to have their voices heard.

Although they are both symbols of feminism they have different characteristics that separate they ways they display feminism. For example unlike Ruth, Carole uses her sexuality to empower herself over others. While Carole doesn't need any men, she uses her femininity to control men and impose her will. For example she is constantly able to influence Miles's decisions by flirting and using her sexuality. Although Miles is driving and seems to be in control of the gang his decisions and emotions seem to be driven by Carole's actions. Also along with the decision making is Sam in the backseat who also agrees with anything Carole suggest throughout the novel. However Sam is also influenced by Carole's femininity since he too has been flirting with Carole throughout the car ride so it assumed that he also is being influenced by Carole. " Carole looked back to Sam for support, and I saw him switch his eyes toward her in the rear view mirror, though he

kept his face fully turned toward me because he knew I was watching him, then he slid his hand across the back of her seat and touch her lightly on the arm" (Salas 34). Also there are multiple times throughout the novels where Carole displays herself to people to get out of situations. Before they are able to reach Mexico the group is pulled over by a police officer. While Miles and Sam are nervous about the police officer Carole remains calm and confident and even purposely shows herself to the police officer which immediately gave her power over the police officer because after this he was very uncomfortable while she could remain calm since she had shown that she was completely comfortable with her body. " Her long legs, illuminated in the pale tights, were carrying her at a relaxed glide past the headlights, and when she opened the door and got in, she stuck one leg in first and sat down, letting the other bent leg stick way out so that her legs were spread clear to the crotch and the copper could get his kicks if he wanted to, though she had probably outraged the guy, he was frowning so badly" (Salas 47). After this the police officer is not able to take control of the situation and could have possibly found the money but due to Carole taking control they were able to get away without too much trouble from the cop.

Ruth on the other hand does not use her sexuality throughout the text. In this respect she is very different from Carole. While Carole used her sexuality and femininity to empower herself as a woman Ruth is more masculine in the way she dresses and acts which also allows her to be taken more serious when she is talking to the men. Unlike Carole Ruth does not wear dresses and it is mentioned multiple times that she is wearing a T-shirt and jeans. Also while Carole used her body along with flirting to get what she wanted Ruth

directly challenged the men and their plans. " She's only heard a few women talk that strongly. At home they have other ways of getting what they want, not so direct. Ruth is dressed in T-shirt and jeans. Women at home in Vietnam wear skirts and blouses these days, but it's changing there, too" (Hogan 222). This also shows that the feminist movement has started to begin in Vietnam which shows that Ruth is part of only a few woman who are spear-heading the feminist movement. Along with this she implies that they use sex to get things that they want back home, which also is a form of female empowerment as shown by Carole.

Ruth constantly fought against what Dwight and the council wanted to do with the tribe. Also when Lin comes to America to visit Thomas Lin is impressed multiple times when she sees how Ruth conducts herself in front of the men of the village. First when Ruth begins to yell at Thomas for his treatment of his daughter who had just arrived. Also again when Ruth finds out how much she is charged at the hotel she is staying at. When she finds out that Al had not only over charged her but made her stay in the smallest room available she demanded that he return her money back to her. " I see the receipt here and you over charged her to start with. I know your rates, and the room wasn't clean. The heater doesn't work and you put her in the smallest room you have when the rest are empty. In fact, I don't even know when you made it into a room instead of the closet where you used to keep linens, are you going to give her money back or am I going to make a public scene and publicize this "(Hogan 221). Instead of using her sexuality to empower herself Ruth was much more serious and dressed more masculine to set her apart from the other women to show she did not want to be

treated like the other women and wanted a role in society equal to the men. " You know what they hate, Al? They hate that I am honest. They hate that I believe in truth" (Hogan 222). This moment also shows Ruth's morals and how they empower her. She is able to stay true to her beliefs and use this as part of her feminine strength to not compromise her morals for what the men of the village want but to continue to fight for her beliefs.

Ruth and Carole are both strong symbols for feminism, they are both outspoken and make it known when they have ideas that may differ from those of the men in charge. However while Carole being more feminine than Ruth and uses this to raise her on the social ladder by using sexuality and mind games. Ruth takes a different approach being more serious and upfront, she wants to be seen apart from the other woman by distinguishing herself by her attire and wants to be seen as an equal of the men who are the decision makers for the tribe. Carole being and young adult in the 60's is influenced by the feminine movement and uses her greatest asset to her advantage and take charge of her environment. Ruth in the 80's has already matured and having gone through these feminist movements instead uses her morals to make her voice heard among the men of the village.