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“I’m not a princess”: *Moana’s* Ecofeminist Heroine

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

*Moana* is a Disney film released in 2016. It tells the story of Moana, a teenage girl and the daughter of the chief of a Polynesian village called Motunui. She is supposed to inherit the position of her father in the near future and, in order to be ready for that role, she needs to take part into the activities of her community. Yet, Moana is not interested in these activities. She wants to sail away, which she is not allowed to do because of a law enforced by her father that prohibits any inhabitant of Motunui from sailing past the reef. When the natural landscape of the village starts to deteriorate due to external forces (crops become infertile and fish disappear from the area), Moana feels that she needs to go on a trip beyond the reef to restore the natural order.

The film had an overall positive critical reception. Most reviewers agree on the fact that *Moana* breaks from the Disney princess tradition and its stereotypes. A.O. Scott writing for *The New York Times*, argues: “Moana is an inspiring heroine, a smart, brave and decent young woman whose individual aspirations align perfectly with a larger, world-saving mission.” Similarly, Peter Travers from *Rolling Stone* points out how the portrayal of Moana separates from the traditional representation of Disney princesses: “The point here is Moana’s growing independence, her lack of a love interest and the quietly revolutionary way her body differs from the skinny-Barbie image of most Disney princesses.”

The aim of this essay is to analyse the female protagonist from *Moana* and her relationship with the most relevant female and male characters appearing in it to show that Moana is an emblem for ecofeminism. This essay starts with an overview of the evolution of Disney female characters from 1937 onwards as described by Amy M. Davis in her book *Good Girls & Wicked Witches: Women in Disney’s Feature Animation*. The analysis of the film focuses on the experience of Moana, the protagonist

of the film, and the aspects and features in which this female character has differed from the previous Disney princesses. Her relationship with the relevant men and women in the film will also be analysed to argue that, in the film, men and women are equally important and necessary for the happy ending of the film.

## 2. FEMALE CHARACTERS IN DISNEY FILMS

This section explores the evolution of female characters' representation in Disney films. It is based mainly on Amy M. Davis's book *Good Girls & Wicked Witches: Women in Disney's Feature Animation*, which explores the portrayal of female characters in Disney films from the year 1937 to 2004. As Davis herself explains, her book "is based on the assumption that, in their representation of femininity, Disney films reflected the attitudes of the wider society from which they emerged" (1). For the films released after 2004 other sources have been used, mainly, Danielle Morrison's *Brave: A Feminist Perspective on the Disney Princess* *Disney's Female Gender Roles: The Change of Modern Culture* and Sarah Wilde's "Repackaging the Disney Princess: A Post-feminist Reading of Modern Day Fairy Tales"

Davis's classifies the representation of female characters in Disney films in three main periods: the "Classic" Years (1937 – 1967), the "Middle" Era (1967 – 1988) and the "Eisner" Era (1989 – 2005).

The "Classic" Years comprises a period of thirty years, beginning in 1937 and ending in 1967. During this period, Davis claims, female characters were portrayed as "fairy tale princesses" with very defined features such as long, blonde hair and blue eyes.

Even if, for Davis, both female and male characters in Disney films in this period were interested in finding love and marrying, there was a key difference in the representation of both genders regarding "the level of agency demonstrated by each group's members. (95)" Within this period, Davis distinguishes between the representation of adult female characters and young girls. Some of the films mentioned by Davis belonging to this era are *Snow White* (1937), *Cinderella* (1950), *Alice in Wonderland* (1951) and *Peter Pan* (1953).

The female characters in *Snow White* and *Cinderella* are passive characters who regard marriage as the ultimate goal in life. They are good-natured, innocent and naïve girls. On the other hand, Alice from *Alice in Wonderland* and Wendy from *Peter Pan* are little girls who are allowed to experience several adventures. This may imply that only little girls can enjoy their life and experience adventures, but as soon as they grow up these adventures have to stop and they must focus on finding love.

The next period, the “Middle” era, goes from 1967 to 1988. It includes only eight animation films, most of which have animals in the protagonist roles such as *The Aristocats* (1970), *Robin Hood* (1973) and *Winnie the Pooh* (1977). The most relevant film of the period regarding the representation of female characters is *The Black Cauldron* (1985).

Eilonwy, the female protagonist of *The Black Cauldron*, resembles the princesses of the classical era in her looks. Yet, she differs from them because she is strong, independent, adventurous and has motivations other than love. In addition, she has magical powers, which was an innovation because none of the previous characters had had magical powers before. During the film, she is trapped in a dungeon and she needs “someone’s help to escape, rather than to be rescued. (157)” Taran is the boy who helps her escape. They become a team: neither of them is dependable on the other. There is a certain degree of equality between them that did not exist in previous Disney films. The romantic factor could not be let aside as both grow feelings for the other in the course of the film. However, this romantic factor is not the focus of the film since adventure and teamwork are given more importance. According to Davis, the character of Eilonwy can be considered a consequence of an increase of feminist consciousness. Yet, she is the only female character that is not an anthropomorphic animal in the period, which could also

be pointing out at how difficult it was for Disney to find a balance in the representation of women.

The last period, the “Eisner” era, goes from 1989 to 2005. According to Davis, “feminist ideology had entered into mainstream American middle-class values (172)” and this was reflected in the representation of women in cinema and media culture.

Disney integrated ideas about integrity and equality and changed its perception on the representation of love, independence, goodness and evil. Female characters are no longer passive or inactive, they become active and develop their own interests and motivations. According to Davis, by 1990s there were three basic categories of Disney animated heroines: the Princess, the Good Daughter and the “Tough Gal.”

In the first category, the Princess, we find Ariel from *The Little Mermaid*, Jasmine from *Aladdin* and Pocahontas, among others. They are princesses because they are the daughter of a king or ruler, so their identity and status are defined according to a man. However, princesses from this era are independent, determined to rule their lives and fates. They are also hard-working, adventurous and true to themselves and their own quests. However, the presence of love and need for a man is still present in the three films.

In the second category, the good daughter, we find characters such as Belle from *Beauty and the Beast* and Mulan. The definition provided by Davis is the following: “a young woman who, out of loyalty to her good but naïve father, finds herself in a potentially threatening situation and must use all her personal resources to survive. (186)” Mulan and Belle fit in this description since Mulan goes to war, disguised as a boy, to prevent her father from going to battle, and Belle sells her own freedom in order to recuperate her father’s. Neither Belle nor Mulan fit in the society they live in. None is, at least initially, interested in finding love, and all of them support their father’s goals rather than having their own. Interestingly enough, these traits separate them from the princesses

of the first category of this period since Ariel, Jasmine and Pocahontas rebel against their fathers.

The third category, the 'Tough Gals', includes women such as Esmeralda from *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1996) and Meg from *Hercules* (1997). Like those in the second category, they are not princesses (Esmeralda is a gipsy woman and Meg is a woman enslaved by Hades). Yet, what they share with the other two categories is that, they are independent, strong and self-confident. Meg, for instance, states "I'm a damsel. I'm in distress. I can handle this." However, towards the end of the film, both of them fall in love. Meg, for example, is bitter towards men but eventually she falls in love with Hercules. This tendency of falling in love with a man towards the end of the film is also a feature that women from the other categories share.

Disney films in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are marked by progress and although feminist ideology is very present, the representation of female characters in Disney films is still carrying, to a certain extent, the patriarchal ideology of the past and some of its stereotypes, for example, the romantic affair between men and women is still present in some films and the beauty standards are very obvious in the depiction of female characters.

As Davis' analysis includes Disney films until 2014, the analysis of the films belonging to the following years will be based on my own assumptions and researches.

Tiana is the protagonist from *The Princess and the Frog* and she is the first dark skinned princess from Disney. She is not the first non-white princess (see Pocahontas and Mulan) but the first Afro-American princess. Tiana is a hard-working girl who works as a waitress and wants to start her own business. She has her own dreams and goals in life. This film raises awareness of the fact that a woman can achieve her dreams and goals by



herself without the help of a man. Nevertheless, it continues with the stereotype of needing a man and needing romantic love at the end of the film.

The film *Tangled* has as leading character a renewed version of a traditional princess: Rapunzel. Whereas in the tale of 1812 written by the Brothers Grimm the princess needs to be saved by a prince and then she instantly falls in love with him, in this new version, Rapunzel is not interested in love. There is a clear dichotomy between the Brothers Grimm's representation of Rapunzel and the contemporary one, who is an active, independent girl while the princess of 1812 is dependent and passive. Nevertheless, her physical representation is still stereotypical: long blonde hair, big blue eyes and slim body.

*Brave* is one of the most controversial and transgressive contemporary Disney films and, in this sense, it is the film with more similarities with *Moana*. Merida is a princess in medieval Scotland, but she is not interested nor in love, nor in her role as a princess. She is wild, strong and independent. She is also the first princess who, at the end of the film, is still without a love interest and happy about it. McKenzie Barber argues: "Disney created a story about a princess that would completely break the pattern and stereotypes of all the princesses that came before her. [...] A princess can be independent and unique, and realizing that their worth is so much more than marriage and babies. (20)" For the first time, a princess, Merida, is a close representation of a girl belonging in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As Danielle Morrison states, "*Brave* is a big step for Disney toward a positive representation of women and an upholding of feminist messages. [...] *Brave* offers viewers an alternative model to the traditional princess and, because it was released by Disney, it has been widely viewed and has made a substantial impact. (9)"

Although it has been a long way, the contemporary representation of women in Disney films has finally abandoned patriarchal stereotypes from the old times (delicate,

passive, naïve girls waiting for a prince). Disney female protagonists are now independent individuals able to take care of themselves and achieve their goals without the need of a man. However, despite the fact that at the beginning of those films, princesses are not interested in any romantic affair, towards the end of it the majority of them develop feelings for the male counterpart, showing that, up to a certain extent, the films cannot conceive a happy ending that does not include the promise of heterosexual romance. As was mentioned above, Merida, from *Brave*, is probably the first female protagonist in a Disney film that shows no interest in love and that, even at the end of the film, is still single. Later examples would be Elsa (from *Frozen*), Vanellope (from *Wreck it Ralph* and *Ralph Breaks the Internet*) and Moana. Not only the fact that Moana is not interested in a romantic affair makes her special and unique, but also the solidarity that we find among the women appearing in the film. This female solidarity can also be found between Merida and her mother, Vanellope and Shank (the girl from the racing game in *Ralph Breaks the Internet*) and Anna and Elsa.

In the same line, *Moana* challenges all those stereotypes and even goes beyond the subjects discussed by all those contemporary princess films. In the next section, I will analyse the character Moana and her portrayal as a princess and as a woman.

### **3. MOANA**

#### **3.1. Moana as Disney heroine**

Although, as explained in an article of the CBS News website called “Disney’s “Moana” a box office hit, but is it offensive?”, the film’s plot is set three thousand years ago, Moana is a 21<sup>st</sup> century princess, and as such, she differs from the classical princesses in almost every aspect. She is the first Disney princess that rejects her assigned role in order to become a leader on her own terms.

The main point of this section is to establish the similarities and differences between Moana and the princesses from the periods described by Davis. Although we can find similarities among them, Moana goes one step further becoming a leader and rejecting previous stereotypes as will be discussed in this section.

The moment when Maui meets Moana, he tells her that she is a princess based on its traditional description: “if you wear a dress and you have an animal sidekick, you are a princess” as Maui argues. However, Moana insists on being “the daughter of the chief”, not a princess. This way the film shows its awareness of the Disney tradition in which it is inscribed in order to separate from it. In spite of being the daughter of the chief, wearing a dress and having an animal sidekick, Moana proves that she does not fit in that category and she even breaks new ground into a new category: she becomes a heroine and a leader to her community. This can be proved when comparing Moana to some other princesses. In fact, it could be said that Moana is the first Disney princess who happens to be a leader, since none of the previous princesses had managed to be a leader before (Elsa from *Frozen* was a leader since she saves the world all by her own but she was the one causing the problem at first). Also, Moana’s journey is an identity quest: as she learns to sail, she discovers her real self.

Our protagonist has little to do with princesses from Davis' first period (the "Classic" Years). Those princesses, as I have mentioned before, were naïve fairy tale princesses with blonde hair, blue eyes and had love and marriage as their main goal in life. Moana is the antithesis of this kind of princesses: she is a Polynesian girl with dark skin, messy curly dark hair and a body that separates from the traditional Disney canon. Moreover, she has defined goals and is determined to achieve them all by herself. Although two men are involved in her life (Maui and her father), she is not interested in finding a romantic partner. She does not even seem to be aware of such a thing.

Only one princess in Davis's "Middle" era is relevant for this essay: Eilonwy, from *The Black Cauldron*. Her physical appearance is similar to that of the previous princesses, but she is strong, adventurous and independent, which none of the previous princesses were. Moana shares all these traits with Eilonwy but she differs from her in the fact that at first Eilonwy seems to have no love interest but eventually she falls in love. A correlation can be established between Eilonwy and Moana in the fantastic scope: Eilonwy has magical powers and Moana shares a magical relationship with the ocean, which guides and helps her through her journey.

Moana has several features in common with Disney princesses from the categories from Davis' third period, the "Eisner" era.

In the first category, the Princess, we find princesses such as Ariel, Jasmine and Pocahontas. They resemble Moana because they are the daughters of a ruler, who is always a man, so they are defined according to a male figure. Like Moana, these princesses (Moana as well) are subjected to the rule of their fathers and they rebel against it. They are hard-working, independent and determined to rule their lives. The main difference between Moana and the princesses from this category is that their cause to rebel is the fact that they have fallen in love with a man. Characters like Ariel, Jasmine

and Pocahontas rebel against their fathers to end up being dependant on another man. However, Moana rebels against her father following her instincts and with the purpose of protecting her village. Her reasons to escape and disobey her father are not motivated by a man, she is independent and can make her own decisions based on her own thoughts and opinions.

In the second category, the Good Daughter, we find princesses such as Belle and Mulan. The most remarkable aspect in which they resemble Moana is that they do not fit in the society they live in. All of them strive to fit and be as society wants them to be, but they never manage to do it. Princesses of this era are characterised for being loyal to their fathers. This male figure is the most important one to them and everything they do, they do it for the sake of their fathers. In the case of Moana, although she tries at first, she cannot be who her father wants her to be. However, when she manages to find her own identity and restore the natural environment of her village, she is able to rule the community even better than her father had ever thought. So, in this case, it is the daughter who teaches the father a lesson. Moana is not the first princess on doing this. For instance, Mulan does it too when she proves that although she could not be what society demanded from her, she was very good at other things and finally found a man that fitted her. What differentiates Moana from her is that, even at the end of the film, she is still not interested in love.

In the third category, the Tough Girls, we find women such as Esmeralda and Meg. These women resemble Moana in the fact that they are independent and strong. Meg and Esmeralda are also self-confident from the beginning of the film, however Moana finds her confidence through her journey to restore the heart of Te Fiti, which is at the same time her identity quest.

There is a similarity between some of the contemporary Disney princesses and Moana:

On the basis of race, Tiana is the first Afro-American Disney princess, while Moana, Lilo and her sister Nani (from *Lilo and Stitch*) are Polynesian, although the last two mentioned are not princesses but common girls. Also, Tiana and Rapunzel are still portrayed following the stereotyped canons of beauty used by Disney. Moana has taken a step away from them: she is not extremely thin, her hair is messy, her arms and legs are visibly strong and even her ankles are well-defined. Nevertheless, she has not separated entirely from that stereotyped representation since her complete look is appealing to the audience. Another example would be that of *Frozen*, a film about Elsa and Anna, two sisters who happen to be princesses. There is a clear dichotomy between both of them. They have very different personalities in spite of being sisters: Elsa is an independent woman and Anna is a woman who is willing to find a man to fall in love with but also who fends for herself. The film portrays that it is fine whether you decide to share your life with a partner or not, and that, above all, family matters the most. There is a similarity between this film and *Moana*, since for Moana her family and her village is the most important thing. More remarkable, Merida and Moana have several traits in common and they are the most transgressive Disney princesses up to today. Both films are representatives of contemporary feminism and their protagonists break, to some extent, with established patterns and stereotypes. They are no longer subjected to the figure of a man (not even at the end of the film) and they become complex individuals moved by their own motivations. Neither of them shows any interest in love, nor in their role and duties as princesses. They follow their own path trying to find their own identities. Moreover, the physical representation of these two characters also differs from the stereotyped physical representation of the rest of the princesses.

In addition, all of the contemporary princesses mentioned above are active, independent girls who have their own goals, follow their values and work hard in order to achieve their purpose in life. Nonetheless, all of them, except Elsa (*Frozen*), Merida and Moana, end up falling in love with a boy, even if this was not part of their initial plan. In this period, Disney is portraying love and romantic relationships as something unexpected but necessary.

Moana challenges established gender roles and norms that we are used to see in Disney films. She shows no interest on finding love. Besides, her sexuality is not made clear. There is no interest on specifying her sexual orientation, she is a fluid entity.

Moana is an independent woman who aims to follow her own path, and to do so she has to rebel against the forces that oppress her, that is against patriarchy.

### **3.2. Moana as an emblem for ecofeminism**

Moana is the first Disney princess to rebel against the authority of her father (the ruler of their community) for a reason other than falling in love with a man. She faces not only her father, but also all the rules he imposes and the metaphorical meaning he conveys: Moana is fighting against authoritative figures, masculinity and patriarchy that do not only oppress her, but every woman and man in their village telling them how to behave and what they should do. She has to fight against them in order to make her own voice heard.

From the beginning of the film, it is set clear that she will be the next chief of the village, which, traditionally, has been a man's role. But being a woman is never a problem for Moana to be the leader and she is never questioned as a woman in this respect. Although at the end of the film she ends up being the chief (as her father wanted her to be), she leads her people in her own way, true to her principles and even teaching new things to her village.

In the course of the film, Moana faces mainly two male figures: her father and Maui. First, she stands up to her father. She does not obey the rules imposed by him and chooses to follow her own path. Her father represents fear of sailing, which was its ancestors' main occupation in the village. He rejects it despite being in the DNA of the community. He is the beginning of the realization of the fact that something is oppressing her. Disobeying his orders, which have been imposed for decades, is the first step towards freedom and independence from patriarchy. Her father, as a representative of patriarchy, shows that patriarchal forces rule every aspect of the life of the community.

In her rebellion, Moana is not only a representative of feminism, but also an emblem for ecofeminism. Ecofeminism was a term coined in 1974 by the French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne. According to the book *Third Wave Feminism: A Critical Exploration*, "ecofeminists cohere around an interest in the relationship between the feminisation of nature and the naturalisation of women's lives" (228). It argues that patriarchy is a form of oppression and domination not only to women but also to nature and establishes a relationship between feminism and ecology.

Moana is born in an island surrounded by a natural landscape. So, there is a connection established between her and nature from the beginning. But she grows up in a natural surrounding dominated by men. This domination is portrayed first by her father and later by Maui. The main difference between Moana and the two male figures in the film is that Moana understands nature and there is a connection between her and the natural environment that surrounds her. As stated by Lynne Segal, ecofeminism "suggests that women must and will liberate the earth because they live more in harmony with 'nature'", and this is exactly what Moana does.

Maui represents selfishness and domination. Domination because he wants to trap Moana into his cave, and he tells her what she is based on his own assumptions: a princess.



He does not let her define herself. The cave in which he wants to lock her up does not only trap Moana, but, metaphorically, exerts domination over all women. It is not only literally a cave, but also a metaphorical one since patriarchy has always oppressed women, trapped them inside metaphorical caves and told them what they should do and what they should be. This cave also represents his selfishness because he locks her up in order to steal her boat for his own instead of sharing it with her. He only cares about his own interests without thinking on the consequences of his actions, like the transformation of Te Fiti into Te Kā after having her heart stolen by him. However, Moana manages to escape knocking down a stone statue with Maui's shape, suggesting that she is able to defeat him and thus, defeat patriarchy and its impositions. No matter how much Maui (and patriarchy) wants to mute her, she will make her voice heard. Moana represents all women who fight against patriarchal ideologies.

Maui represents egocentricity and vanity because he steals Te Fiti's heart trying to gain the love and affection of humans. Almost at the end of the film, it is revealed that Te Fiti is Mother Earth, a term "used to refer to the planet Earth as a woman or a goddess" (Merriam-webster). Earth is personified as a woman and a mother because nature nourishes all living beings and women bring life to it. So, nature is personified as a goddess, as a being with feelings and thus, placed at the same level as humans. So, as Te Fiti is Mother Earth and Maui steals her heart, he is trying to exert control over nature and, at the same time, over a woman. That is the depiction of ecofeminism's basic assertion.

Furthermore, Maui stealing her heart also represents patriarchy taking women's rights and exerting control over them. There is a parallelism between them: just as Te Fiti's stolen heart will make nature out of control, a patriarchal society will collapse and women will rebel and fight against it as they already have.

The scene in which Maui's magical hook does not resist the battle against Te Fiti proves that human beings are weaker than nature and should not try to control it as Maui does. Moana is the only one who seems to understand it.

Nevertheless, Maui progressively changes his mind and although it seems that he is going to give up and abandon Moana in her quest, he finally returns to help her and both manage to restore the natural order together. The film puts forward a feminist message in which, at the end, men are equally as important as women. Both genders are at the same level, and Moana would not have made it alone.

### **3.3. Solidarity between women and the 'monstrous feminine'**

Although the most remarkable relationship in the film is that between Moana and Maui, women also play an important role influencing Moana, especially her Mother (Sina) and her grandmother (Tala).

Tala, is, together with Moana, the only woman in the village who is different from the rest of the women living there. She is labelled as a crazy old woman, but in fact she is very wise and knows a lot about the cultural tradition of the village. Tala's dance is a sign of her identity because it distinguishes her from the rest of the people in the village and also links her with the ocean, which is revealing at the moment of her death. She gives more importance to finding one's own identity than to pleasing others according to social expectations. She is the only one who openly encourages Moana to challenge her father because she knows that it is Moana's fate to restore the heart of Te Fiti.

Moana's mother, Sina, seems to support the ideas of her husband and she never opposes nor confronts him directly. Moana's mother seems to act as a traditional model whose role is to teach her daughter how to fit in society. In this sense, she represents conformity and submission to traditional roles. On the other hand, when Moana makes up her mind and decides to leave, Sina, instead of trying to stop her, helps her to pack,

showing that she agrees with Moana's decision to follow her heart even if it implies disobeying her father.

The relationship between Moana, Sina and Tala is portrayed through editing and the juxtaposition of scenes that progressively acquire meaning as a continuum of female solidarity.

Tala is lying on her deathbed, with Sina by her side, when Moana and her father enter the room after an argument about their village's past. Moana and Tala are left alone, and Tala encourages her to leave and gives her the necklace she is wearing where she can keep the heart of Te Fiti. This necklace is a prop representing the female bonding between them. Moana refuses to leave because Tala is dying, but her grandmother tells her "[t]here is no where you could go that I won't be with you." There is a tilt shot that goes from Tala's bed to a picture of Maui above a ray fish, foreshadowing in this way Moana's fate: she will meet Maui and Tala will be by her side. Moana puts on the necklace and leaves the tent, rushing to pack the things for her journey. At that moment, Sina appears and helps her pack, showing her support. Right at the door, at the threshold between domesticity and the natural world awaiting Moana, they hug and Moana leaves. Everything is in darkness, but when she is on the boat, the spirit of her grandmother (who has just died) lightens her way into the ocean in the shape of a glowing ray fish. As she promised, Tala will be Moana's guide through her journey. No matter how bad or dark things go, she will lighten her path.

Te Fiti and Moana are connected from the very beginning, since Moana feels the call of the ocean to restore the heart of Te Fiti, and Te Fiti needs her to restore it too. There is a parallelism between both of them since they were deprived of something: Te Fiti had her heart stolen by Maui and Moana was deprived of her freedom to sail and thus, of her own identity. Te Fiti became what is known as monstrous woman after her heart

was stolen by Maui and Moana could suffer the same fate. The monstrous woman or monstrous feminine is not a monster as such, but a woman who has transformed into a monster by a patriarchal aggression.

Barbara Creed has studied this concept in her book *The Monstrous-feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*. She states “[a]ll human societies have a conception of the monstrous-feminine, of what it is about woman that is shocking, terrifying, horrific, abject.” In *Moana*, this terrific trait of Te Fiti is her power over human beings and nature. A woman being more powerful than a man has always been horrifying in a patriarchal society, that is the reason why Maui steals Te Fiti’s heart and, therefore, Te Fiti becomes Te Kā, an example of the ‘monstrous-feminine’. The fact that Te Fiti is attacked by a man is not a coincidence since the term ‘monstrous-feminine’ implies the aggression to a woman perpetrated by a man. So, it is the fault of a man that a woman has become a ‘monster’. As Creed affirms “[t]he phrase ‘monstrous-feminine’ emphasizes the importance of gender in the construction of her monstrosity. (3)”

Furthermore, there is also a parallel between Te Fiti and traditional Disney princesses: just as any Disney princess, she has to wait in order to be saved, but in this case, the woman in need is not saved by a man, but by another woman, which further emphasises the solidarity between women. There is no need of a man because women can support each other. Moana embraces Te Fiti in her most monstrous form because she knows that Te Fiti is in need of help. The basis of this solidarity between women lies in the fact that no matter how bad the conditions in which a woman finds herself are, other women must support her. In fact, *Moana* may be one of the first Disney films in which empathy and compassion between women is depicted. However, the topic of women portrayed not as rivals but as companions has also appeared in other previous films, such as *Cinderella* and *Frozen*, although in this case the two women supporting each other are

sisters, but *Moana* is the first film in which solidarity between a monstrous woman and a princess is portrayed.

After Moana realises that Te Kā is actually Te Fiti and gives her back her heart, a transformation takes place. According to Amy L. Dewitt and Heidi M. Hanrahan: “Te Kā’s transformation back to Te Fiti is an extraordinary event in a Disney film, one catalyzed by a moment of female recognition, empathy, and empowerment.” This shows that the film has chosen to portray support between women and that there is a possibility of change or transformation. Usually, Disney films end with the defeat of the villain, however *Moana* has opted for “renewal, empathy and celebration.” The character of Te Fiti changes the rules of the villain character prototype. She is not only the villain character, but, as Dewitt and Hanrahan remark, Te Fiti “plays the role of the antagonist/villain, but also the role of benevolent mother, and even the woman in need of rescue.” She is referred to as “benevolent mother” because she is Mother Earth, as I have mentioned before, and because she forgives Maui; and “woman in need of rescue” since she needs to be saved by Moana.

Although the problem that Moana has to fix was caused by Maui, the end of the film also integrates Maui into the recovery of the natural order. In this way, the film seems to support a feminist perspective that integrates the role of both genders. In this way the film portrays female empowerment and solidarity between women but also the importance of both genders, male and female, and the impossibility of restoring the natural order without the cooperation of both.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

From the beginning, Disney's princesses films have had an impact over its audience spreading the influence to our daily life (merchandising, toys, clothes, etc.) and, in that way, settling down the stereotypes and gender roles they try to transmit into our society. Gradually, those stereotypes and gender roles found in Disney films have been changing and evolving in the same way our society has evolved. So, female Disney characters have progressively gained a more feminist representation, as can be proved with *Moana*.

Moana is a representative for all the women oppressed by patriarchal forces, which in the film are depicted by Moana's father and Maui. Nevertheless, the issue of patriarchy is, in a way, overcome because, from the beginning of the film, there is no objection to Moana (a woman) being the heiress to the leading role of the village. So, the film focuses more on the aspect of ecofeminism (the connection between women and nature), solidarity between women and equality between men and female and not on the conflict, domination and power relation between both genders. Moana breaks barriers that other previous Disney princesses could not.

Solidarity between women is one of the main themes found in the film, especially the relationship between Moana, Tala and Sina and the relationship between Te Fiti and Moana. The film tries to prove that solidarity and support between women is necessary to end with patriarchal forces. Te Fiti is an example of the monstrous feminine due to patriarchal domination and Moana could suffer the same fate if they do not restore the natural order that has been disrupted.

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