

How Far the Ecowarrior Will Go: An Ecofeminist Reading of Disney's *Moana*

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ABSTRACT

This article attempts to look into the fictional narrativization of women's significant and distinctive relationship with nature in Disney's Moana. Emphasizing the power and the unity of women and nature in Polynesian indigenous culture, Moana suggests that the destruction of nature results from exploitative and manipulative masculinity. Through ecofeminist perspectives, this essay observes that Moana offers critical views and promotes awareness of gender and environmental issues. These ideas are communicated through the visual and verbal depiction of power relations that defy patriarchal tradition alongside the expressions of protest against devaluation and abuse of nature and women. To put it in the context of the development of themes in Disney's princess line, Moana's presence can be a novel alternative to the typical images of women, namely a new portrayal of a female character whose primary concern is not romance but instead the sustainability of the environment where she lives. This study also confirms that Disney's animated princess films continuously adjust with the dynamics of global feminist discourse.

Keywords: Disney film; princess narrative; women; gender; environment

INTRODUCTION

Moana, released in 2016, is one of the few Disney animated films that offers a distinct storytelling formula in terms of its characterization, plot, and setting. *Moana's* narrative is contextualized in Polynesian indigenous culture with an apt exploration of its meaningful patterns and elements that lend themselves to the narrative's theme. Central to the narrative's theme is a classic metaphor of nature as a female deity named Te Fiti. *Moana* (2016) features a story of an adventurous voyage across the sea in order to restore Te Fiti's heart, which was stolen by a male demigod named Maui. Compared to other Disney animated films, *Moana* incorporates progressive gender representation, which is nearly unprecedented in the history of Disney's princess and fairy tale animation films. *Moana* is neither a princess with a crown on her head nor a young maiden waiting for a prince to save her. She is the daughter of the Grand Chief of Motonui and a protagonist who undergoes dynamic character development on her journey to find her most authentic identity as a way-finder. Besides the film's strong characterization which draws on the unique relationship between women and nature, this animated film also articulates a profound ecological interdependence between human and all-natural elements. Through the lenses of ecofeminism, this article critically investigates the distinct conversations between indigenous women and nature which take place alongside ecological interconnectedness represented in the film. Further, this article assesses how far *Moana* articulates critical notions of gender and environmental ethics and, therefore, it offers crucial insights into gender and ecological representation in popular culture.

As the world's fourth-largest entertainment and media group in the 21st century (Institute of Media and Communications Policy, 2020), Walt Disney Company has shaped children's morals and imagination on a global scale through the myriad of films it has produced. Many critics have highlighted how Disney's films, particularly its princess films, have contributed to, and are in part responsible for, instilling and perpetuating perceptions of gender roles in their audiences' minds. Deborah Ross (2004, p. 54) explains that quixotic

fantasies in Disney films *Alice in Wonderland* (1951), *The Little Mermaid* (1989), and *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) can affect the way young girls imagine and learn about gender whether to “burst the bound of traditional femininity” or to submit themselves to conservative femininity stereotypes. The ambiguous as well as inconsistent gender portrayals of Disney’s princess characters can lead to confusion among the audience. Courtney Gazda (2015) also emphasizes that Disney does not genuinely provide moral pictures of its princesses as inspirational role models for young girls. In fact, Disney’s massive empire accentuates the princess-prince stereotypical dichotomy of traditional gender roles where a woman’s primary purpose is centred around finding her counterpart. In the thirteen princess narratives examined which include Snow White from *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), Cinderella from *Cinderella* (1950), Aurora from *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), Ariel from *The Little Mermaid*, Belle from *Beauty and the Beast*, Jasmine from *Aladdin* (1992), Pocahontas from *Pocahontas* (1995), Mulan from *Mulan* (1998), Tiana from *Princess and the Frog* (2010), Rapunzel from *Tangled* (2010), Merida from *Brave* (2012), and Anna and Elsa from *Frozen* (2013), Gazda highlights the similarities in the story plots, moral embodiment, and the princesses’ physical attributes, and also the ubiquitous presence of a charming prince (except in *Brave*) who helps the princesses achieve their dreams and at the same time acts as a romantic interest.

In line with Ross and Gazda, Cassandra Stover (2013) suggests that there is actually an interrelation between the representation of female characters in Disney princess films and women’s rights movements occurring in the United States. Mindful of not generalizing her research by framing it within a global context, Stover’s classification of Disney’s princesses’ historical trends proves that Disney seeks to refurbish and reframe relevant princess narratives within existing and evolving socio-cultural dynamics. The *first wave* of Disney’s princesses such as Snow White, Cinderella, and Sleeping Beauty represents pre-World War II domestic expectation and Depression-era escapist images of women (Rosen, 1973). This group of princesses is categorized as “voiceless beauties” since they embody the traditional female stereotype of “docile, beautiful objects waiting for their prince to come,” whereas the latter group is composed of a more modernized version of princesses that seem to be deliberately produced for a post-feminist audience. The group containing Ariel, Belle, Jasmine, Pocahontas, Meg from *Hercules* (1997), Mulan, and Tiana is categorized as a *new wave* of Disney heroines since they possess determination and goals independent of their love interest. They are “focused, ambitious, and in the case of Pocahontas and Mulan, literally heroic as they perform the traditional prince role and save the day” (Stover, 2013, p. 3).

Juliana Garabedian (2014, p. 23) highlights a similar transformation in her article, which explores how Disney has redefined modern princesses. She divides Disney’s princess films into three groups based on gender progression reflected through the princess characters. In general, her *pre-transition* and *transition* groups share common ground with Ross’ *first wave* and *new wave* classifications. A visible difference is that Garabedian places *Brave* and *Frozen* into a third category, named *progression*, as the leading princess characters are progressing towards the ideal modern gender roles. Yet, even as Merida heroically says, “I am Merida. Firstborn descendant of Clan Dunbroch, and I’ll be shooting for my own hand” (Chapman, 2012), and strongly opposes the idea of hyper-femininity which her mother perpetuates, there is still implicit male superiority in *Brave*. For instance, Merida’s father gives her a bow and arrows as a birthday gift, to which she later attaches her strength as a female character. In other words, the princess’s power is not intrinsic, but it is granted and directed by the male character – the father. In the case of *Frozen I* (2013), although the powerful Snow Queen Elsa is not depicted as having romantic interest, the traditional model of storytelling that a woman needs a handsome, strong, and kind man to protect her is still evident. Desperately coping with her monotonous and lonely life as a princess, Elsa’s younger sister, Anna, thinks finding the prince charming is the only game-changer to make her life happier and meaningful. It leads to Anna’s

careless decision to marry a deceitful Prince Hans before she finally bumps into Kristoff, the iceman, whose role is central in rescuing Anna's life.

Compared to all the previous Disney princesses, Moana might share the most common ground with Merida. Neither the two leading female characters have handsome princes as their counterparts nor present themselves in the hyper-feminine looks. On top of that, Moana and Merida possess the self-determination to accomplish their missions independently. Their inner intuition drives both to respond to nature's calls and achieve their dreams. Merida's spirit for adventure and self-exploration can be seen in this film's empowering theme song's lyric *Touch the Sky*,

When the cold wind is a calling,
and the sky is clear and bright,
misty mountains sing and beckon,
lead me out into the light, I will ride, I will fly

(Mandel, 2012)

Equally empowering, Moana's yearning to understand nature's call is shown in *How Far I'll Go*. Apart from showing the tension she feels between her reality at home and what her heart desires, this powerful ballad signifies Moana's boldness and willingness to test her own limits.

See the light as it shines on the sea? It's blinding
But no one knows, how deep it goes
And it seems like it's calling out to me, so come find me
And let me know, what's beyond that line, will I cross that line?
One day I'll know, if I go there's just no telling how far I'll go

(Miranda, 2016)

However, in a more nuanced analysis of the story, one can see that Moana's characterization has an authenticity that has never existed in Disney's princess films. First, she rejects the title and attributes of a traditional princess. In the movie, she clearly declares, "I am not a princess" (Clements & Musker, 2016). As the daughter of the tribe's chief, Moana is meant to be her father's successor, responsible for maintaining the order of Motonui Island. In terms of gaining power, Moana does not have a ceremonial coronation scene familiar in other Disney princess films. Still, she manages to demonstrate her leadership qualities by initiatively completing a dangerous mission to save her people and the environment. At a glance, there seems to be absolutely no gender bias in this representation of women and power. At the end of the film, instead of finding a charming partner to live with, Moana's mission is to discover her true self and lead the way on new voyages with her people. This kind of storytelling certainly does not fit the prescribed princess narratives.

In order to broaden its viewer base and target girls and young adult audiences in a global context, Disney has transformed its princesses according to the values of the prominent women's movements while also adapting folklores from other ethnic groups outside the Western cultures. For instance, Disney's current trend of remaking the animated classics into live-action films, e.g., *Cinderella* (2015), *Beauty and the Beast* (2017), *Aladdin* (2019), and *Mulan* (2020), involves necessary socio-cultural adjustments in terms of the representation of women. Vágnerová (2018), Gilbert (2019), and Zirger (2020) confirm the positive changes in the new live-action princesses. Yet, the live-action versions of *Cinderella* and *Belle* do not entirely leave the old archetypes of fairy tales which centred the narratives around romance and the idea of happily ever after. Meanwhile, the new *Jasmine* and *Mulan* have gone far, leaving troubling images in the earlier animated versions behind. These princess characters perform solid leadership qualities of becoming women of their own, battling against the conservative social expectations. Responding to this remaking trend, Gilbert (2019) identifies

two rebranding ideological considerations behind Disney's remakes, i.e., recognizability and social progress. With these two measures, Gilbert (2019, p. 52) further explains that "the Disney brand was able to cater to their dedicated audience by presenting familiar content, as anticipated by its fans, while still updating the plots to represent current values, showcasing the company's awareness of modern expectations."

Although *Moana* has received a relatively positive response from global audiences regarding its progressive protagonist that meets modern expectations, the ecowarrior girl still has to fight the invisible snare of patriarchy in a very subtle way. In her journey of self-discovery, Moana has to fight against double oppression and devaluation that befell women and nature. The following section discusses the ecofeminist premises used to examine how *Moana* presents women and environmental issues.

ECOFEMINIST PREMISES

Ecofeminism is a way of looking at women's position as equal to nature. This is the first fundamental premise of ecofeminism. Ecofeminists subscribe to the idea that patriarchal hegemony within society has resulted in the oppression of both women and nature. In addition to their equivalent predicaments, many ecofeminists discern that women and nature share homogeneity in the qualities they exhibit (Sangeetha and Rathna, 2021, p. 160). As a relatively new branch of feminism, ecofeminism is becoming an increasingly popular and relevant approach to examine today's global reality where environmental awareness is on the rise along with an increasingly alarming environmental crisis.

Examining the historical development of ecofeminism, Carolyn Merchant wrote *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (first published in 1980) which expressed her concern about the shifting perspectives in gender and nature as a consequence of the Scientific Revolution in the 16th century. This book has become one of the most critical ecofeminist texts and, therefore, has been reprinted and updated throughout the last decades. In the new preface of her book (published in 1989), Merchant coins another fundamental premise of ecofeminism: nature is female. She argues that the interrelated concepts of women and nature as the center of life were once historically and socially constructed and were proven with myriads of myths about the ancient Goddesses and the abundance of female symbols, statues, or images in traditional communities. However, she further explains:

Between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the image of an organic cosmos with a living female earth at its center gave way to a mechanistic world view in which nature was reconstructed as dead and passive, to be dominated and controlled by humans. (1989, p. xvi)

The image of a loving mother as a metaphor of nature in the Western culture had gradually declined due to the rapid emergence of science. Ironically, scientific and technological development which is dominantly driven by capitalistic and patriarchal ideology also has arisen inversely to nature: a wild and dangerous image of woman who potentially causes catastrophic hazards and must therefore be tamed. The Scientific Revolution has changed the way humans make sense of nature as it was no longer seen as the source of life that must be cultivated with great care but rather become a resource for exploration and experimentation to yield capital gains. Over time, *man vs. nature* has become the primary descriptor of the human-nature relationship found within Western culture, as if humans live to wholly dominate nature.

In the Western tradition of thought and literature, the binary of nature and culture was initially promoted by Raymond William in his writings, *The Country and the City* and *Culture*,

published in the 1970s and 1980s (Nayar, 2010). For this binary, gender characteristics emerged subsequently: nature is feminine and culture is masculine. Addressing a similar issue, Sherry B. Ortner (1972), in her article “Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?” warns of the implications of the women/nature and men/culture dichotomy that would only result in the devaluation and exclusion of women from culture. In line with Ortner’s ideas, from the perspective of ecofeminism, masculine culture has led to patriarchal ideologies and responses normalizing the exploitation and oppression of both women and nature with the assumption that women and nature possess the innate function to serve and perpetuate masculine power.

In her keynote address at an international conference entitled *Ecofeminist Perspectives: Culture, Nature, Theory*, Charlene Spretnak (1987) explains that ecofeminists “address the crucial issues of our time, from reproductive technology to Third World development, from toxic poisoning to the vision of a new politics and economics – and much more.” Likewise, the optimism towards ecofeminism is expressed by Ynestra King (1989) who argues that the ecofeminist agenda, unlike the previous feminist theories, is antidualistic and, therefore, potentially becomes global ethics and movement. Ecofeminists’ goal is to reconcile culture and nature, in this case, humans and the nonhuman parts of nature. She explains that,

the task of an ecological feminism is the organic forging of a genuinely antidualistic, or dialectical, theory and praxis. No previous feminism can address this problem adequately from within the framework of their theory and politics, [...] we have seen the same position appear again and again in extending the natural into the social (cultural feminism) or in severing the social from the natural (socialist feminism). Each direction forms two sides of the same dualism, and from an ecofeminist perspective both are wrong because they have chosen between culture and nature. (King, 1989, pp. 130–131)

Ecofeminism, in other words, covers and expands women’s issues into a broader realm of intersectionality. This is in line with Karen J. Warren’s ideas:

Important connections exist between the treatment of women, people of color, and the underclass on one hand and the treatment of nonhuman nature on the other. Ecological feminists claim that any feminism, environmentalism, or environmental ethic which fails to take these connections seriously is grossly inadequate. Establishing the nature of these connections, particularly what I call women-nature connections, and determining which are potentially liberating for both women and nonhuman nature is a major project of ecofeminist philosophy. (1997, p. 3)

The next essential premise of ecofeminism is interconnectedness (Bennett, 2005). In this context, interconnectedness means humankind and nature exist in an interconnected network where individuals’ actions can impact other individuals’ lives or the natural world. This principle demands a radical reflection on the industrial and capitalistic mindset of today’s society. It questions the devastating impacts of capitalism on both historically marginalized groups, i.e., women and nature. Therefore, increased awareness of humans’ impact and interconnectedness with the natural world can further progress towards fundamental human and environmental rights. For example, buying certain beauty products can support the continuous exploitation of female and child workers in developing countries; additionally, consuming mass-produced, franchised meat products can prolong public ignorance of animal rights or exacerbate animal cruelty and suffering at factory farms. Ecofeminism calls for the public’s recognition that all human production and consumption activities holistically have direct effects on nature.

The ecofeminist struggle is more progressive and inclusive than mainstream feminism as it incorporates environmental issues along with gender discrimination. However, to achieve ecofeminists’ goals in promoting gender equality and ending devastating environmental exploitation, Janis Birkeland (2010) declares that challenging the patriarchy is the only way to bring equality among men, women, and nature:

We cannot change the nature of the system by playing patriarchal “games.” If we do, we are abetting those who are directly involved in human oppression and environmental exploitation. We must, therefore, withdraw power and energy from patriarchy. (p. 20)

Further, Stephanie Lahar (1991, p. 28), in her article *Ecofeminist Theory and Grassroots Politics*, discusses the ambitious goals and promises of ecofeminism. She believes that ecofeminism’s vitality is due to the “close links between theory and political activism.” Greta Gaard (2010) adds that ecofeminist writers and scholars tend to prevent problematizing the categorical differences of race, class, gender, or sexuality in order to concentrate on the benefit of theoretical possibilities they might explore. Considering the future of ecofeminism, Gaard theorizes potential advantages that ecofeminism can obtain if it attempts to intersect with other egalitarian non-anthropocentric paradigms such as sexual and environmental justice and the interspecies paradigm.

Amid ongoing conversations about the Anthropocene, Merchant (2020, p. 87) suggests that “instead of the Anthropocene (or age of man), we should be entering the Gynocene, an age in which women can contribute policies and power to help resolve climate change.” She further underscores that ecofeminism, “which evaluates the history and cultural connections between women and nature,” is a pertinent approach to envisage women’s roles in that new era. Merchant believes that ecofeminism is capable to empower women to fully engage in the environmental decision-making.

Moreover, literature and film can be appropriate media to convey the ecofeminist’s messages of gender equality and environmental awareness. According to Ivakhiv (2008), many environmental critics of film concede that the audio-visual media could serve as an effective means to convey messages relating to environmental awareness.

Visual technology, then, has the capacity to productively and communicatively mediate between audiences and the world, a world which extends beyond what is immediately perceivable. The choice of what to make available from that world, of how to organize it, where to distribute it, and so on, takes us beyond the notion that media are extensions of perception and into the realm of culture as perception, reception, representation, and interpretation. Raw materials are turned into cultural products, which are distributed and consumed, their consumption leaving behind its effect in society and in the material world. All of this makes up the production cycle. (Ivakhiv, 2008, p. 20)

Through cinema (and other types of popular arts), ecofeminism can assert its fundamental messages in a way that people can enjoy and quickly understand. This means that an animated film like *Moana* can serve as a tool to introduce as well as reproduce the hybrid idea of feminism and ecocriticism, transforming it from the conceptual realm to reality. However, this paper limits itself to the narrative aspects of the animated film and the possible impact on its audiences rather than a holistic assessment that Ivakhiv (2008) suggests, which includes the production and distribution process. Although the subsequent sections show that *Moana* articulates the premises of ecofeminism, they do not speak of Walt Disney’s corporate ideology in producing and distributing the film.

TE FITI AND TE KA: PASTORAL AND APOCALYPTIC IMAGERY

Moana’s narrative begins with Moana’s grandmother describing the old creation myth of the world. There was a Mother Island named Te Fiti who created all the islands when there was only ocean in the beginning. Te Fiti also makes all the living creatures, their habitats, and provides both material and spiritual foods for them. The world is a harmonious archipelago: humans live on the islands and manage the natural resources from both islandic and oceanic plants and animals, and some nomadic tribes travel across the sea to find new islands to inhabit.

Te Fiti's presence in the film represents what Merchant (1989) calls the pre-Scientific Revolution pastoral tradition in which nature is symbolized as a benevolent female figure in the form of a nurturing mother.



FIGURE 1. Image of Te Fiti in *Moana* (Clements & Musker, 2016)

However, this idyllic life is disrupted when Maui, a demigod of the wind and sea, steals Te Fiti's heart. This bright green gemstone is believed to contain a supernatural power to create life. After losing her heart, Te Fiti turns into an invincible fire monster named Te Ka. Angry, Te Ka blindly fights to regain her heart from Maui. During the battle between Te Ka and Maui, Te Fiti's heart is lost in the ocean. Maui is defeated by Te Ka and stranded on a remote, uninhabited island.

Te Ka's presence in the film can be interpreted as a metaphor for the combative portrayal of mother nature which, according to Merchant (1989, p. 2), is "wild and uncontrollable nature that could render violence, storms, droughts, and general chaos." This association of nature with chaos and disorder emerges along with the Scientific Revolution. This movement led to a gradual change in humans' perceptions of nature – from the nurturing mother to a dominant, dangerous adversary. *Moana* captures these two opposing images of nature that constantly appear today (in philosophy, literature, and religion) as a result of the mechanistic way of seeing inherited from the Scientific Revolution.

Within the ecofeminist discourse, the pastoral image of mother nature actually raises internal debates among ecofeminists themselves. In addition to the ideal perception of nature as a determining entity to support human life, many perceive nature's nurturing role as a sign of weakness. Pastoral's nature as a submissive provider and nurturer allows greedy human exploitation upon nature itself. However, Merchant (1989, p. 3) accentuates that "as long as the earth was considered to be alive and sensitive, it could be considered a breach of human ethical behaviour to carry out destructive acts against it."



FIGURE 2. Image of Te Ka in *Moana* (Clements & Musker, 2016)

After the battle, Te Ka continues to look for the lost stone, and over time, her anger spreads throughout the world. The islands slowly become blackened as if they have been burned, the oceans turn murky and oily, the harvests rot, and fish become scarce. Even nomadic tribes no longer dare to embark on voyages in search of new islands because the ocean turns into an unmerciful and monstrous place that sinks anyone who sails through it.

As a whole, Te Fiti's transformation into Te Ka can be seen as a representation of the cosmogonic balance between humans and nature before the phallogocentric and patriarchal invasion. Maui's action of stealing Te Fiti's heart is driven by the desire to be an influential and celebrated hero, representing the traits of machismo which are aggressive, exploitative, and manipulative with the sole purpose of gaining dominance. Moreover, Maui's violent actions towards Te Fiti can also be seen as the act of raping the life-balancing authority, feeding his masculine pride by intruding on Te Fiti's body and taking something precious from her. This act ruins the harmony of the Earth and signifies its transformation from a pastoral to an apocalyptic environment.

In addition, Maui's goal of usurping Te Fiti as the all-powerful deity figure, in a way replacing a mother goddess with a father god, can be linked to the rise of patriarchy, male dominance, and the devaluation of nature. Taylor (1997, p. 66) explains that "the rise of male dominance [...] resulted in the subordination and devaluation of female cultures and power, the linkage of women and nature, and the devaluation of both." Unfortunately, Maui fails to achieve his goals. He loses all of his power at the moment he loses his hook. This part of the movie denotes a metaphorical castration as a punishment for what he has done to Te Fiti. However, through good deeds of helping Moana saving the world and apologizing to Te Fiti, Maui's past sins are redeemed. The reconciliation between Maui and Te Fiti at the end of the story is essential. From the perspective of ecofeminism, the ecological healing and Te Fiti's comeback can be seen as a restoration of nature and women to their original sacred position.

EQUAL POSITION OF WOMEN AND NATURE

Moana's narrative presents a unique conversation between women and nature in an effort to restore the balance of nature that has been damaged. From a very early age, Moana, the daughter of the chief of Motonui Island, established a spiritual connection with the sea. Moana's grandmother also has a mystical relationship with nature, especially the sea. This

unique relationship between Moana, Moana's grandma, and the ocean reaffirms the idea that women share similar characteristics with nature.

The film positions women and nature in an equal position. Both are subjugated by existing patriarchal structures in a traditional community. Maui's offense against Te Fiti can be the most obvious example of how masculine pride violates the Goddess and causes catastrophic calamities for the environment. The loss of Te Fiti's heart is a simple metaphor to describe environmental rape and other massive unethical exploitations of Mother Earth. Humans driven by patriarchal and capitalistic spirits have depleted natural resources to the point of leaving nothing but ruin. Since Te Fiti is depicted as a goddess and *axis mundi*, the cosmic center (in the movie, she is also depicted as a woman-shaped island), violating Te Fiti can, therefore, mean subduing both women and nature.

When Moana's father forbids his daughter from venturing into the sea, it looks like it is a natural, protective reaction stemming from a father's love for his daughter. However, from a critical vantage point, it might not be rooted in genuine father-daughter concern. When Moana shows a great interest in sailing and indicates a special proclivity for the sea, her father worries, denies her, and tells Moana that her role is to maintain order on the island, not the sea. Moana's father actually fails to see his daughter's potential. He is not able to comprehend that his daughter might be able to befriend the sea and free his people from the ongoing natural destruction. Another similar tenuous devaluation is when Maui invades and steals from Te Fiti, he clearly does not anticipate Te Fiti's explosive reaction. The male figures in this movie continually underestimate and disregard the significance and power of the female characters.

Further, Moana's friendship with animals also demonstrates a respect for life other than humans. Animal characters have been common in Disney's animated movies. However, *Moana* introduces a provoking question about human and nonhuman relationships: should animals be friends or foods? This first arises as a side joke when Moana eats pork and says, "Mmm! That's good pork" (Clements & Musker, 2016), and she starts to feel awkward and guilty because she receives a sad look from her companion, Pua the pig. Another scene shows Moana defending another companion of her, Hei Hei the rooster chicken, from being consumed by the islanders. She mentions that "sometimes our strengths lie beneath the surface...I'm sure there's more to Hei Hei than meets the eye" (Clements & Musker, 2016).

On the one hand, Moana enjoys eating meats. On the other hand, she has an emotional attachment to her pig and rooster chicken. Although Moana's attitude towards her animal friends seems conflicting, it decently demonstrates an honest feeling and thought that can lead to a broader philosophical discussion of the human-animal relationship. These particular scenes complete the ecofeminist agenda in promoting equal rights of human and nonhuman nature.

THE SEA IS CALLING WHEN THE ISLAND IS RAGING

Moana portrays nature as a living entity that possesses the capability of bold and clear self-articulation. One of the ecofeminist premises, the interconnectedness between all the entities in the universe, is also central in the narrative. The first interconnectedness found in the animated film is between the island and the sea. When the *axis mundi* is invaded and raped, the devastating effect is not limited to a singular island but reverberates all over the Earth. Dreadful misfortunes fall upon the nearby islands. Native people struggle to get resources because many plants suddenly are blighted, and fish disappear without a trace. Ecofeminism proposes that if someone cuts down a single tree in a particular place, it will impact the whole ecosystem. The interesting point in the movie is that the islands are depicted as seeking help from the sea, and the sea turns to women for help.

This kind of cycle can be interpreted as a metaphor for the fundamental premise of ecofeminism. Karen J. Warren (1997), in *Taking Empirical Data Seriously*, highlights why ecofeminist philosophers take empirical data on women-nature connection very seriously.

The Chipko movement is ostensibly about saving trees, especially indigenous forests [...] how understanding the empirical connections between women and trees improves one's understanding of the subordination of women. First, in developing countries women are more dependent than men on tree and forest products [...] Second, women are the primary sufferers of environmental degradation and forest resource depletion.
(pp. 5-6)

From the above illustration of the Chipko movement in India, it is clear that whatever happens to nature directly impacts women. Patriarchal and capitalistic domination, which damages the environment, has the worst consequences for women because they are placed in the most vulnerable position in society. In dealing with the climate change impacts, for instance, U.N. Women Watch (2009) and Terry (2009) confirm that women suffer more than men due to the fact that women population make up the majority of the world's poor countries. Women are the most affected group because they are traditionally responsible for taking care of and providing food to their families, and in doing so, they are primarily dependent on natural resources.

In *Moana*, women-nature connection serves as the primary theme of this film through a nuanced ecofeminist depiction. The interconnectedness between women and nature is beautifully presented in the movie. Women and nature can commune because of an intrinsic connection and interdependence, and therefore, they can understand each other. Nature calls on Moana for help, and the ecowarrior girl answers the call to save the world and her people.

The highlights on women-nature relationships evident in the story signify the danger of patriarchal systems which fail to recognize potential sustainable solutions to critical environmental issues. This filmic ecofeminist message fully resonates with the global realities of women becoming crucial agents of ecological conservation and restoration. UNDP's *Human Development Report* (2011, p. 8) notes that women "show more concern for the environment, support pro-environmental policies and vote for pro-environmental leaders." Besides, the report includes a study of 25 developed and 65 developing countries that reveals the fact that countries with higher female parliamentary representation are more likely to keep the protected land areas and ratify international environmental treaties (UNDP, 2011, p. 63). In the movie, Moana fights against the patriarchal oppression of women and nature. Meanwhile, women in real life deal with gender inequalities and environmental disasters caused by massive industrial practices that also stem from patriarchal hegemony.

CONCLUSION

With *Moana* (2016), the spectrum of Disney's archetypal images of women has shifted. Disney manages to capture the social and cultural dynamics of the 21st century, where women's issues can no longer be separated from environmental problems and vice versa. *Moana* has successfully captured the sustainable spirit of the new century where the ecological crisis has reached its most critical point in civilization's history, and women are present and making concrete contributions in the struggle to protect and preserve the environment. Contextualized among Disney's tradition of princess narratives, *Moana* has gone far beyond Disney's previous version of gender roles and women's understanding of themselves. Therefore, *Moana* can be seen as a novel and distinct formula for Disney's female character.

Although Disney successfully constructs an ecofeminist narrative through *Moana*, its narrative is not entirely free from deceitful patriarchal values. There are still patriarchal

imprints, i.e., exploitation and devaluation towards women and nature reflected in the animated film. *Moana* is proof that Disney makes relevant adjustments to its female characters. Therefore, the development of Disney's female characters is noteworthy and worthwhile because it can be a reflective window to examine the progress of women's movements over time. It is also important to note that today's audience is composed of critical viewers who demand more diverse and fair representations on screen. The next question will be: how far will Disney enable the ecowarrior girl to go? Young girls worldwide are eagerly anticipating other Disney narratives like *Moana* with strong, decisive, and heroic portrayals of women on screen.

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