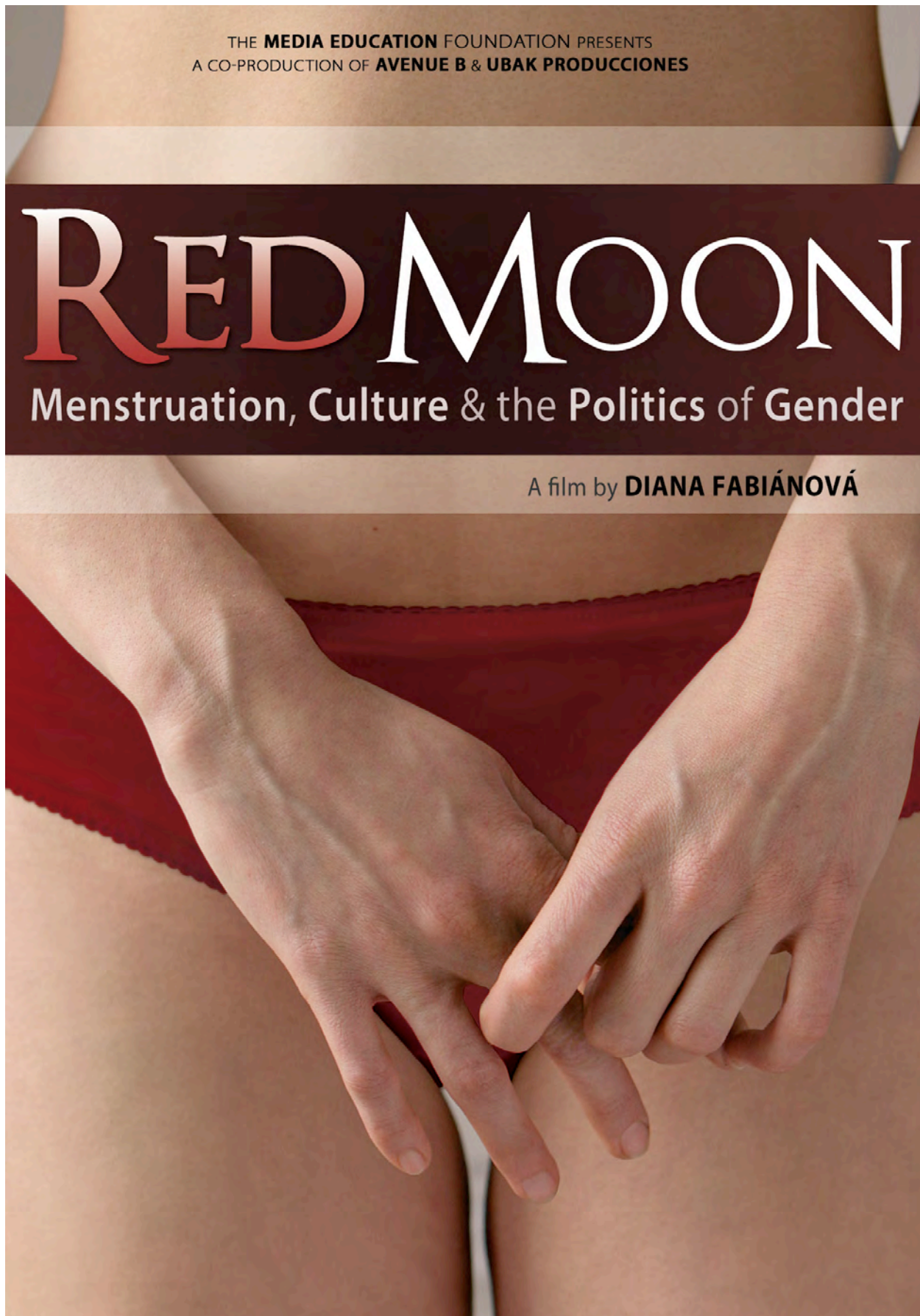


THE **MEDIA EDUCATION** FOUNDATION PRESENTS  
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# RED MOON

Menstruation, Culture & the Politics of Gender

A film by **DIANA FABIÁNOVÁ**



## FILM SYNOPSIS

When filmmaker Diana Fabiánová reached puberty, she found herself irremediably trapped in menstrual etiquette. She carefully hid the evidence from her father and brother first, and later on, from most of the other men in her life. And no matter how bad she felt, she pretended she was fine. The taboo far exceeded the scope of her family: it was all around her. Periods were a "girl thing." Periods were shameful. Periods were inappropriate for public discussion. End of the story? Not quite. Something in her was reluctant to accept and suffer in silence. Why did the sign of what all societies consider a blessing -- women's ability to give birth -- happen to be described with names and expressions like "the curse" (in England), the "English war debarquement" (in France), and "to be on the rags" (in the U.S.)?

With humor and refreshing candor, Fabiánová's *Red Moon* provides a fascinating, often ironic, take on the absurd and frequently dangerous cultural stigmas and superstitions surrounding women's menstruation. As liberating as it is informative, the film functions as both a myth-busting overview of the realities of menstruation, and a piercing cultural analysis of the ways in which struggles over meaning and power have played out through history on the terrain of women's bodies.

## CREDITS

Written and Directed by: Diana Fabianova  
In collaboration with Marion Doussot and Mona Leon  
Executive Producers: Jeronimo Molero and Julie Paratian  
Director of Photography: Jeronimo Molero  
Editing: Tatjana Jankovic  
Sound: Blazej Villicka  
Sound Editing: Melissa Petitjean and Jocelyn Robert  
Sound Mixing: Melissa Peititjean  
Original Score and Musical Supervision: Publicmusic.eu, Olivier Samaillan and Pierre Bats

Running Time: 53 minutes  
Year Released: 2009

## CONTACT INFORMATION

### **Diana Fabiánová | Writer & Director**

Educated in Slovakia by a hippy mother and a psychologist father, Diana, aged 30, presents her first documentary. In 2004, while studying filmmaking at the SCAC in Cataluña, Diana had to come up with a final course project. About what, she asked herself? About periods, she decided, because femininity for her has never been evident but always a source of serious problems. She then met Jerónimo Molero, a well-known director of photography in Spain. Together, they decided to go deeper into what was originally a college project and turn it into a creative documentary. The result is a four-year immersion into the heart of this taboo. A tireless traveler, Diana crossed all the continents in search of the opinions and advice of experts and therapists, but also those of men and women all over the world.

### **MEDIA EDUCATION FOUNDATION | Educational Distributor & Sales Rep**

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## DIRECTOR'S NOTES

When I was 6 years old, my grandmother died from womb cancer. Due to an unhappy series of coincidences, I was convinced that it was my fault. A year later, my mother was diagnosed with the same disease. How could a simple human organ become the cause of such great sadness? Then my first period started. In my eyes, the pain and depression that came along with them every month were nothing but a fair punishment for my crimes. But then, why did millions of other women suffer just like I did? What were they paying for?

As time passed by, I realized that neither my grandmother's death nor my mother's disease was connected to my actions. However, I was irremediably trapped in the menstrual etiquette. Conditioned by the clear message from home: "No men should ever know you are menstruating," I carefully hid the evidence from my father and brother first, and later on most of the other men in my life. And no matter how bad I felt I pretended I was fine. It was obviously the right attitude: everybody at school – then in college, then at work – behaved just like me. How could this natural process be "inappropriate" when a quarter of the female population was experiencing it at any given time? Why couldn't we even imagine the ideal bodies we see in magazines and on TV being indisposed? How could prejudices as stupid as "a menstruating girl can't make mayonnaise" possibly survive until nowadays? Why couldn't men talk about menstruation without blushing? Was the cause of all this negativity and denial just the inconvenient bleeding and cramps? Of course it wasn't.

By questioning the culture of concealment surrounding these issues, by showing what women actually go through, by listening to men also, *Red Moon* aims to deconstruct the menstruation phenomenon, until its two-fold nature clearly appears: an intimate experience and a social construction.

Let's talk about menstruation on our terms now. Let's distinguish between what our society says about menstruation and what we really experience. Also since menstruation is much more than a physiological reality, the body of information of the film was built around meetings with some experts chosen from different fields: medicine, sociology, anthropology, psychology, philosophy. The prejudices about periods are faced, and hopefully revealed, with the most efficient weapons: creativity and humor.

I hope the devices used in the film help some of us to mourn the old superstitions and social archetypes. Or at least recognize them as such. Both familiar and unmentionable, known and unknown, *Red Moon* aims to offer not just women but also the male audience the chance to achieve a greater understanding of a neglected yet important human experience, thus helping them to overcome the traditional definitions of gender.

## INTERVIEWEE BIOGRAPHIES

### **Victoria Agudo | Gynecologist | Spain**

Victoria Agudo is a practicing Gynecologist in Spain. Her insights on women's health have provided the film with details concerning health and menstruation.

### **Jane Bennett | Social Therapist | Australia**

Co- author of *The Pill: Are You Sure It's for You*. The book addresses myths and concerns about birth control and fertility awareness.

### **Elsimar Coutinho M.D. | Professor Emeritus | School of Medicine, Federal University of Bahia | Brazil**

As a professor and researcher at the Federal University of Bahia, Dr. Coutinho created the first injectable contraceptive of prolonged use. Dr. Coutinho also developed a series of other medicines, like pregnancy facilitating drugs, drugs that stop premature labor and spontaneous abortion, and drugs that avoid conception and drugs for hormonal replacement therapy in both sexes.

### **Barbara Duden | Historian, Hanover University | Germany**

Barbara Duden was among the Berlin women who in 1976 started the journal *COURAGE*. Since then her writing and research have focused on the need to recognize the historical nature of the experienced body. At the time when "woman's body" finally emerged as a legitimate public issue, Duden called attention to the danger that this seeming liberation through science based self-diagnosis, would further the disembodiment of women, rather than support their courage to affirm their own self-perceptions.

### **Peter Ellison Ph.D. | Professor of Anthropology and Human Evolutionary Biology | Harvard University, USA**

Dr. Peter Ellison is a Professor in the Department of Human Evolutionary Biology at Harvard University. His primary research is in human physiology and the life history of evolution, particularly reproductive physiology and the regulation of reproductive effort (reproductive ecology).

### **Karen Houppert | Journalist | Washington Post | USA**

Karen Houppert is a contributing writer for *The Washington Post* magazine as well as a freelance writer for other magazines, covering social and political issues. As a 2008 Kaiser Family Foundation Media Fellow, she is currently working on a series of articles about drug treatment in Baltimore.

### **Chris Knight Ph.D. | Catedrático de Antropología | University of London | UK**

Chris Knight is a professor of Anthropology at the University of East London. He received his Ph.D. from the University of London in 1987 for his reanalysis of Claude Levi-Strauss's four-volume study of Native American myths, *Mythologique*.

**Monika Lanzadera | Bioenergetic and dance therapist | Spain**

Monika Lanzadera is a dance therapist in Spain who has created a dance and exercise routine to help women to combat menstrual pain.

**Renu Li | Yoga Tao Teacher and Therapist | Germany**

Renu Li is a senior instructor at the Universal Healing Tao system and teaches mainly in Europe. She has training as a physical therapist and has been involved with holistic approaches to healing the body, mind, and spirit for more than 20 years.

**Martha McClintock | Psychologist | Institute of Mind and Biology | University of Chicago | USA**

Martha McClintock is the David Lee Shillinglaw Distinguished Service Professor in Psychology at the University of Chicago. She is best known for her research on the relationship between mind, behavior, and the functioning of the neural and endocrine systems. Her discoveries include the first conclusive, scientific evidence of human pheromones and their effects on the timing of ovulation.

**Alexandra Pope | Psychotherapist | Australia**

Author of *The Wild Genie: The Healing Power of Menstruation*; and co-author of *The Pill: Are You Sure It's for You*. Pope also runs public workshops on women's leadership as well as lecturing for colleges, universities, hospitals, and community health centers.

**Penelope Shuttle | Writer and Poet | England**

Penelope Shuttle is an author and a poet. She published a book titled *The Wise Wound: Eve's Curse and Everywoman* (1978), dealing with the psychology and creative aspect of menstruation and its part in redefining the role of women; and its sequel, *Alchemy for Women: Personal Transformation Through Dreams and the Female Cycle* (1995).

**Beverly I. Strassman Ph. D. | Biological Anthropologist | University of Michigan | USA**

Beverly Strassman is an Associate Professor of Anthropology at the University of Michigan where she focuses on human evolutionary ecology, life history theory, culture, endocrinology, reproduction, and genetics of kinship.

## NOTABLE QUOTES FROM *RED MOON*

**DIANA FABIÁNOVÁ:** “For generations, the women in my family suffered from PMS and painful periods, which, like a family heirloom, [were] passed on to me. Growing up, I learned the topic was off-limits. I got the message loud and clear that ‘when you are menstruating, no man should know.’”

**PETER ELLISON:** “All our reproductive biology is very intimately connected to our emotional life and our emotional experience – even via pathways that are operating within our bodies.”

**KAREN HOUPERT:** “I think the culture of concealment that surrounds menstruation does influence the way that we feel about our bodies because, in a certain way, we get a message very early on that we are not supposed to talk about periods. And, historically, there’s been, until very recently, no movies that mention menstruation, no books that mention menstruation. No one talks about it in public. So young girls get a message that this doesn’t happen. There’s no mention that this happens in our kind of public conversations. So it’s very disorienting, I think, for a young girl to feel like something like this is happening to her, and happening to her body, but no one talks about it. And so I think it does begin to influence the way you feel. You try to make sense of that. Why does no one talk about menstruation? It’s something shameful.”

**BARBARA DUDEN:** “I think medicine is the institution who gives body, or physics, to the social order. And you can see how medicine in the 19th century first talks about the uterus, and then talks about the ovaries, and menstruation, as a sign that women can not go to university because their monthly blood obscures their capacity to think and so on.”

**KAREN HOUPERT:** “Throughout American history, you can document certain cases where social scientists are enlisted to prove that women are less efficient in the work place when they’re having their period. Those studies tend to crop up at certain points in history when there’s a lot of anxiety about women’s increasing role in public life. For example, when women were first pushing to have access to higher education, to go to college in this country, there was a rash of studies showing that their periods made them unfits scholars and were an indication that they would not be able to handle the rigors of intellectual life because of their periods. And then a little bit later, when the U.S. went to war, during World War II, and the government really wanted women to be in the work force, there began to be studies showing that women were very capable workers regardless of whether they were having their periods. Then, after the war, when the government wanted women to go back into the home and raise their children and give those jobs in the factories back to men, there’s a whole new slew of studies showing that menstruation renders you unfit for efficient work, and that a woman’s place is in the home raising children. When you look at it that way, there are definitely political reasons for periods to be analyzed and questioned and put in front of the public in this way.”

**DIANA FABIÁNOVÁ:** “Religion, science, politics, international corporations – it seems everyone has a stake in making women feel dissatisfied with themselves. Is there any way to rise above the fray? In some cultures, I discovered that women and their bodies were regarded very differently. From childhood, girls were taught to work their bodies and become masters of their uteruses. Exercising the uterus decreased the pain of childbirth, and in some cases, even made it orgasmic. If childbirth without pain was possible, then menstruation should be a piece of cake. So why did these practices disappear?”

**DIANA FABIÁNOVÁ:** “In her lifetime, one woman uses ten thousand pads and tampons. Every day, three million are flushed into our rivers and oceans. Twenty percent of world pesticide production is used on the cotton in the manufacturing process.”

**CHRIS KNIGHT:** “If this is a world made for men, with these clocks, but you are somebody with a menstrual cycle, that really is a problem. There really is a clash. And the problem is that you are biologically female. And so the medical establishment and the people who make Tampax, they say ‘Okay, there’s a problem: you’ve got a clock in your body. Well, how do we solve it? Well, we can give you a pill. Maybe you can be as good as a man if you take a pill, then you don’t have all these ups and downs.’”

**BEVERLY STRASSMAN:** “I spent many years trying to contact pharmaceutical companies and to advise them that they should be thinking about how much exposure to hormones are women getting from their products compared with what women are getting from their own bodies. I think there are many women who will want to be educated on this, and to realize the monthly period is not required. But also there’s more homework for the pharmaceutical companies to do to really level with women and tell them what is the exposure that they’re getting from the patch or the pills that they’re offering, compared with what a woman is getting from her own body, so that she can weigh the risks and the benefits. Because there are some benefits to these hormones, as I mentioned with estrogen, a lower risk for osteoporosis, and then there are also costs. Increased risk for breast cancer, and if the levels go up really high, increased risk for stroke.”

**ALEXANDRA POPE:** “The art of suffering is because we don’t know how to value the cycle. And in my experience of teaching women over many years, when women just start to value the rhythm of the cycle and to recognize that at different times of the cycle there are different moods and feelings, and different levels of energy, to flow with those energies, for one thing, something really beautiful starts to open up.”

**PENELOPE SHUTTLE:** “The moment of truth is the moment of menstruation. And I think it’s because, despite people having physical pain, distress, it’s just probably the most powerful moment in our lives.”

**VICKY AGUDO:** “Periods become an excuse to treat us as if we’re being unreasonable, to belittle us. Understand? And women shouldn’t allow that to happen.”

## STILLS FROM RED MOON

For high res versions, please email [alex@mediaed.org](mailto:alex@mediaed.org).

