

Book review



Waiwhero: The Red Waters

A Celebration of Womanhood

He Whakahirahiratanga o te Ira Wahine

Category: Book Reviews / Māori

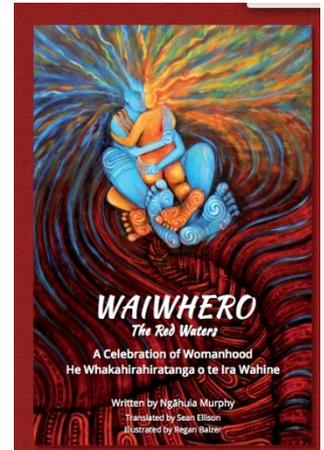
Author: Ngahuia Murphy

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ISBN: 9780473258665

Audience: For Māori, Supporting Myself



Summary: A beautifully written book on the traditional Māori teachings of menstruation.

This beautifully written book by Ngahuia Murphy is for all women of Aotearoa, New Zealand living in the new millennium. You may wonder what this cultural book on menstruation can teach you that you have not already experienced.

I was nine years old when I had my first menstrual period and as an adult endured painful and heavy menstruation. Every month I dreaded and regretted my mate (the name given by my aunts). In my later years I went to a specialist for treatment to reduce the pain and discomfort. I took contraception on and off for several years as it prevented pregnancy and stopped my monthly menstrual period.

Reading Waiwhero and learning the traditional Māori teachings of menstruation has been life changing. I know that I would have made different life choices if I knew these teachings of our tupuna. Learning the whakapapa of Waiwhero and the connection to Papatuanuku is a significant breakthrough for my own reconnection with Te Ao Māori.

Waiwhero also highlights the struggles of women from the Victorian era and made me appreciate Queen Victoria's achievements as a woman and a mother. It provided me with a better understanding of woman settlers and their struggles in a male-dominant society and how this continues to impact the women we are today. I felt a sadness that I was not taught the traditional teachings by my own aunts and kuia and am left pondering whether my English ancestor influenced the teachings that were passed down to me by my aunts.

As a middle-aged Māori wahine I celebrate knowing we were honored and admired nurturers and protectors of the whānau, ensuring whakapapa continued. I am grateful that I am aware of these teachings and can pass them on to my mokopuna. It has given me a deeper understanding of who I am, allowing me to celebrate my tupuna, my body and my wairua in a way that no medical specialist could prescribe.

Ellen Norman, Māori Development Manager, Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand

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