

Living Nations, Living Words: A Map of First Peoples Poetry  
Poem commentary by Mahealani Perez-Wendt, 2020

Speaker: Mahealani Perez-Wendt

Date of recording: June 30, 2020

Location: Wailuanui, Maui, Hawai`i, poet's home

Length: 23 minutes, 42 seconds

START OF RECORDING

[Mahealani Perez-Wendt reads "Na Wai Eā, The Freed Waters"]

Mahealani Perez-Wendt: Thus ends the poem "Na Wai Eā, The Freed Waters." This poem is dedicated to my husband, Ed Wendt, a life-long Kalo farmer.

Their story of this community is very complex, but I wanted in some small way to honor the indigenous farmers, fishermen, hunters and gatherers of East Maui who still live the traditional subsistence lifestyle of their ancestors. They fought nearly two centuries to restore water taken by U.S. businessmen and their successor corporations. Finally in 2018, their dedicated efforts resulted in the largest water restoration in Hawai`i's history. The siphoning off of water away from indigenous communities enabled a U.S. sugar plantation economy in Hawai`i throughout the 1800's up through current times until the last plantation closed down in 2016.

Interwoven in the poem is the story of Hāloanakalaukapalili (or Haloa Naka), the taro plant. Hāloa Naka, child of Papa (Earth Mother) and Wākea (Sky Father) was stillborn. He was buried, his mother's tears at the grave nurturing growth of the first kalo plant, which became our traditional staple food. A second son was born, also named Hāloa, progenitor of all humans. There is reciprocity—Haloa Naka is revered and cared for as our elder brother who feeds and cares for us in return. Other Hawaiian gods associated with *wai*, water, and *`āina*, land, are also important to this story. It is the story of a people whose resistance and unbroken connection to ancestral gods, family, land, water, and all of the universe has sustained them since the beginning, and will continue to sustain them until the end of time. Aloha.

END OF RECORDING