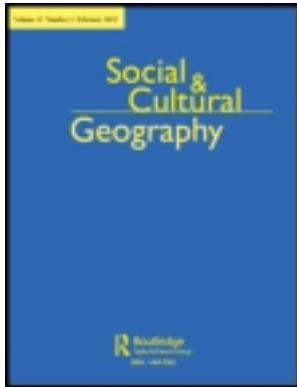


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# Unstrategic essentialism: material culture and Hawaiian articulations of indigeneity

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*Often rendered synonymous with deep historical attachments to particular landscapes, indigenous identities are inseparable from questions of geography. The meeting ground of place and nativeness is fecund with politics. All over the world, claims of indigeneity have become indispensable in struggles over territory, natural resources, and basic political rights in place. This article focuses on both a handful of cases from the secondary literature and empirical research on Hawai'i's Ala Kahakai National Historic Trail. It discusses essentialist expressions of indigeneity around the preservation and interpretation of Native Hawaiian material culture. Engaging with the literature on articulation theory and indigeneity, it suggests that these essentialisms emerge unintentionally rather than strategically. Its central claim is that the materiality of heritage objects, artifacts, sites, and landscapes plays an unnoticed role in shaping discourses around indigenous identity. The article concludes by suggesting that such unstrategic essentialisms pose real political risks for Native Hawaiians and offer suggestions for a more intentional engagement with the essentializing properties of indigenous material culture.*

**Key words:** indigeneity, material culture, essentialism, Hawai'i, National Park Service, Ala Kahakai.

## Introduction

Geographers, like anthropologists, have long examined indigeneity's intersection with place (Braun 2002; Castree 2004; Fabian 1983; Neumann 1998). Often rendered synonymous with deep historical attachments to particular landscapes, indigenous identities are inseparable from questions of geography. Crucially, that meeting ground of place and nativeness is fecund with politics. All over the world, claims of indigeneity have become indispensable in struggles over territory, natural resources, and basic political rights *in place*.

Indeed, landscapes have been central to such claims and struggles in at least two ways. First, as ancestral homelands, they afford the spaces in which indigenous lives and livelihoods unfold; indigenous landscapes are territory. And second, as both sites and archives of material practice, these cultural landscapes embody physical manifestations of indigeneity on the ground. Whether through the presence of material artifacts and other cultural alterations to the physical environment, or by serving as cultural mnemonics through toponyms, memories, and stories attached to specific places (e.g., Bacchilega 2007; Basso

1996), landscapes are a medium for tangible manifestations of indigeneity.

The Hawaiian Islands are no exception. Marked by a distinctive colonial history, Hawai'i has witnessed a flourishing and diverse set of indigenist politics since the 1970s.<sup>1</sup> As in other postcolonial locales, the material expressions of indigenous heritage—from the most minute of artifacts to landscape-scale archeological sites—have been central to Native Hawaiian political struggles by helping to materialize, enact, and otherwise give voice to indigenous identity. This article examines the particular roles that the material artifacts and landscapes of indigenous heritage play in the construction, performance, and maintenance of nativeness, with a particular eye to their discursive political ramifications. That is, it seeks to start a conversation about the influences that objects and sites exert over the fundamentally politicized expressions of indigeneity.

Focusing on both empirical research around a specific case of historic trail preservation on Hawai'i's Big Island and a handful of cases from the secondary literature, this article suggests that interpretive struggles over the artifacts, sites, and landscapes of indigeneity exhibit unintentionally essentialist discourses of authenticity. I then argue that the material expressions of indigenous cultural heritage, as tangible, apparently unbending manifestations of identity, exercise a constraining influence on Native Hawaiian politics. The hard materiality of landscape and indigenous artifacts can provoke *unstrategic* essentialisms that ultimately obscure the actual dynamic and fluid political identities of living Native Hawaiians, thereby undermining indigenous political power. Finally, this article suggests that theoretical developments around 'articulation' (e.g., Clifford 2001, 2004; Li 2000) and strategic essentialism (e.g., Lee 2006), while

fundamentally valuable, tend toward certain celebratory analyses that may overlook the emergence of these unstrategic and destabilizing essentialist discourses around artifacts, sites, and even entire landscapes.

## Hawaiian indigeneity<sup>2</sup>

Given the archipelago's history, the politics of indigeneity in the islands today is markedly postcolonial. American businessmen overthrew Hawai'i's last Queen, Lili'uokalani, in an 1893 coup and, for many, the island kingdom's ultimate incorporation into the USA is a case of persisting colonial oppression. Indeed, since the 1970s, a diverse and complex set of indigenist politics has flourished in the islands, often vociferously contesting the role of US federal institutions in Hawai'i and rejecting the legal authority of agencies like the National Park Service (Langer 2008; Linnekin 1983; Meller and Lee 1997; Trask 1993). Native activists and cultural practitioners alike frequently single out tourism as a particularly acquisitive neocolonial phenomenon (Trask 1993). These tensions and contests have been especially visible around cultural and environmental resources, with many Native Hawaiians doubly mobilizing such sites both as objects of indigenous authority and as persuasive material symbols of that authority.

One category that has become central to post-1970s elaborations of Hawaiian indigeneity is the concept and practice of *mālama 'āina*, literally 'care for the land.' Described by cultural practitioners and activists as an ancient and 'indigenous Hawaiian, ... economically wise, [and] spiritually based ethic of caring for the land' (Trask 1991), *mālama 'āina* historicizes Native Hawaiian relationships with place and carries significant moral



**Figure 1** A 1976 demonstration organized by Protect Kaho'olawe 'Ohana. Photo courtesy of Ed Greevy.

and political weight. First, it implicitly argues that landless Hawaiians have been deprived of their cultural and spiritual heritage. Second, it prioritizes collective indigenous ownership of the land while suggesting the fundamental destructiveness of foreign, particularly Euro-American, environmental ethics. Third, its claims to territory and political legitimacy resonate powerfully with an array of popular, increasingly global environmentalisms growing since the 1960s (Guha 2000; Hays 1987; Rome 2010; Tsing 2005).

Figure 1 illustrates the use of imagery and performance to signify the persistence of ancestral practices, including concepts like *mālama 'āina*. Taken during a 1976 protest staged by Protect Kaho'olawe 'Ohana (PKO), the photo documents PKO's agitation for Hawaiian (and therefore proper) care and control of an island long occupied for training exercises by the US military. Organizations like PKO played a central role alongside artists, cultural practitioners, and other activists in the

rise of a forceful indigenous politics emphasizing native community building and cultural production. This cultural renaissance nourished indigeneities founded on claims of timeless occupation of the islands and an intimate spiritual and material relationship with the earth, all in pursuit of collective territory and ultimately even sovereignty (Blackford 2004; Langer 2008; Linnekin 1983; Trask 1993).

With such work emerging in the 1970s, then, Native Hawaiians increasingly secured important gains in visibility, cultural authority, and political legitimacy, especially through deployment of concepts like *mālama 'āina*. In fact, similar expressions of timeless, ecological indigeneity have proven equally advantageous for indigenous groups around the world, from the Americas to Southeast Asia (Li 2000; Sundberg 2003; Valdivia 2005).

In such a context, the emergence of a National Historic Trail (NHT) meant to preserve and interpret Native Hawaiian cultural heritage becomes a particularly

contestable process. Situated at the intersection of indigeneity, national and state historic preservation interests, and Hawaiian tourism, the Ala Kahakai National Historic Trail embodies a particularly charged encounter between Native Hawaiian identity and claims over the artifacts and landscapes of indigenous cultural heritage. As a vivid case, the Ala Kahakai National Historic Trail provides ample material for exploring a more general phenomenon: the ways indigenous material culture evokes and gets intertwined with essentialist discourses of nativeness.

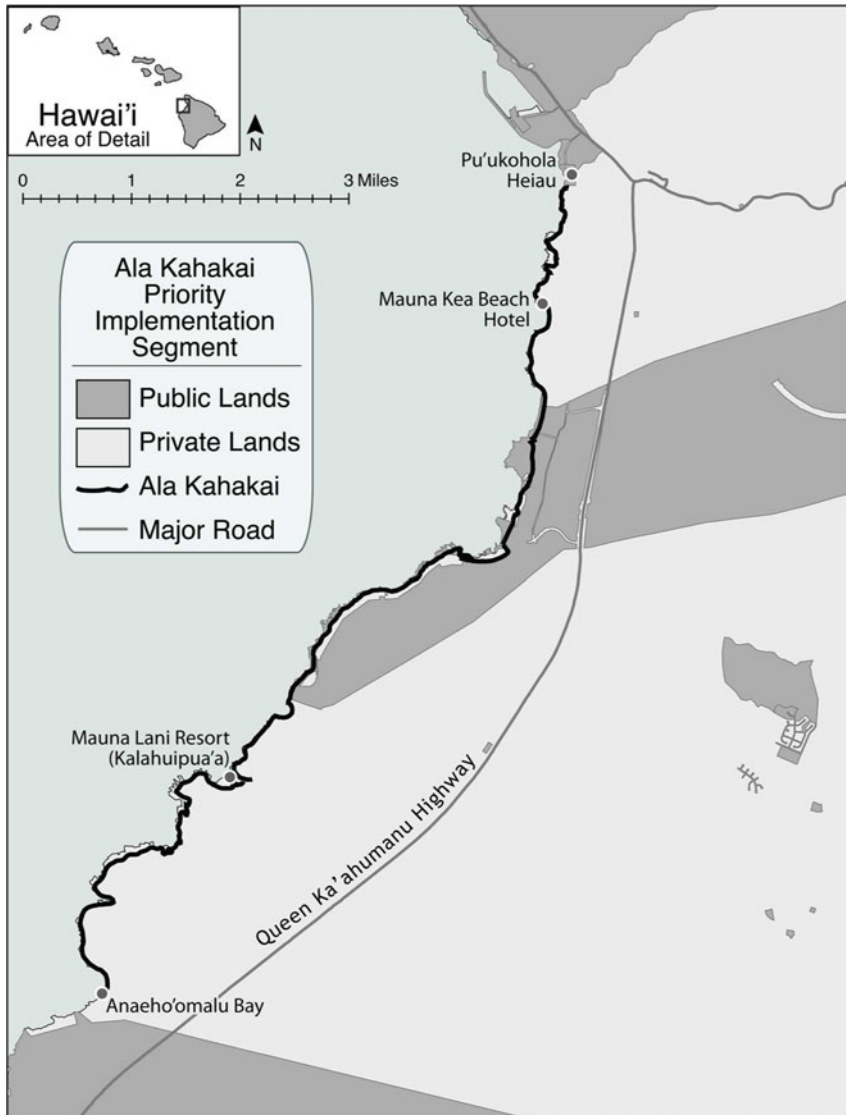
The phrase ‘indigenous material culture’ here refers simply to the broad array of *physical* artifacts and objects, sacred sites, archeological remains, and other human modifications to the landscape associated with both a historical and contemporary Native Hawaiian presence. Debates around the nature of materiality in both geography and a variety of disciplines working on material culture studies might suggest this to be a rather narrow definition (Anderson and Tolia-Kelly 2004; Cook and Tolia-Kelly 2010; Hicks 2010; Whatmore 2006). Yet, as is made much clearer in the final sections of this article, there are important reasons for this focus on the presence of concrete, physical objects, as opposed to, say, the more ephemeral materialities of human practices and affects. My concern here is with the capacities of physically present material objects to become influential mediators (though not determinants) of social relations and human values (cf. Cook and Tolia-Kelly 2010; Hoskins 2007).

Empirical research for this project involved three months of fieldwork over the summer of 2007. During that time, I conducted 27 semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders ranging from National Park Service personnel and trail preservationists to Native Hawaiian activists and cultural specialists.<sup>3</sup> Interviewees

were selected based on their degree of expertise and involvement in the trail and to include not just a range of professional backgrounds, but also political perspectives (e.g., Native Hawaiian stakeholders ranging from sovereignty activists to bona fide conservatives aligned with Hawai‘i’s Republican Party). Interviewees were identified by snowball sampling and almost all major players were interviewed at least once. Opinion forms, letters, and other documents on file with the trail’s National Park Service office served as a proxy for stakeholders at the heart of the debate who could not be reached. I also examined planning and legal documents at both the Park Service office and the County of Hawai‘i Planning Department. Finally, a 15-mile segment of the trail’s priority implementation area (Figure 2) became a key element of my methodology through hikes, photography, and repeat visits to several locations along its length.<sup>4</sup>

### The Ala Kahakai: an indigenous trail in a colonized kingdom

Lying largely on the arid, leeward side of Hawai‘i Island (also known as the Big Island), the Ala Kahakai National Historic Trail is composed of numerous remains of centuries-old coastal walking trails. Hewn and polished out of rough lava fields by the bare feet of precontact Hawaiians, these paths have been the focus of growing public fascination since the 1970s. Indeed, the US Congress authorized the Ala Kahakai as a National Historic Trail (and thus as a unit of the US National Park Service) only in 2000, after almost three decades of various management proposals (e.g., Friends of the William Ellis Trail 1974; Rutka 1973; State of Hawaii 1973) and over 10 years of concerted research and lobbying by trails advocates. Although



**Figure 2** Fifteen-mile segment of the Ala Kahakai priority implementation area, marked in black. Map by author, 2007.

still in implementation stages, the trail corridor follows 175 miles of Big Island coastline (Figure 3). By connecting the remains of both precontact and nineteenth-century trails and by filling gaps with both modern and restored paths, the Park Service hopes to

approximate the coastal *ala loa*, or ‘long trail,’ thought to have once encircled the island (National Park Service 2009).

Linking traditional resource-gathering sites, dramatic—and often sacred—archeological artifacts, and a wealth of both natural beauty



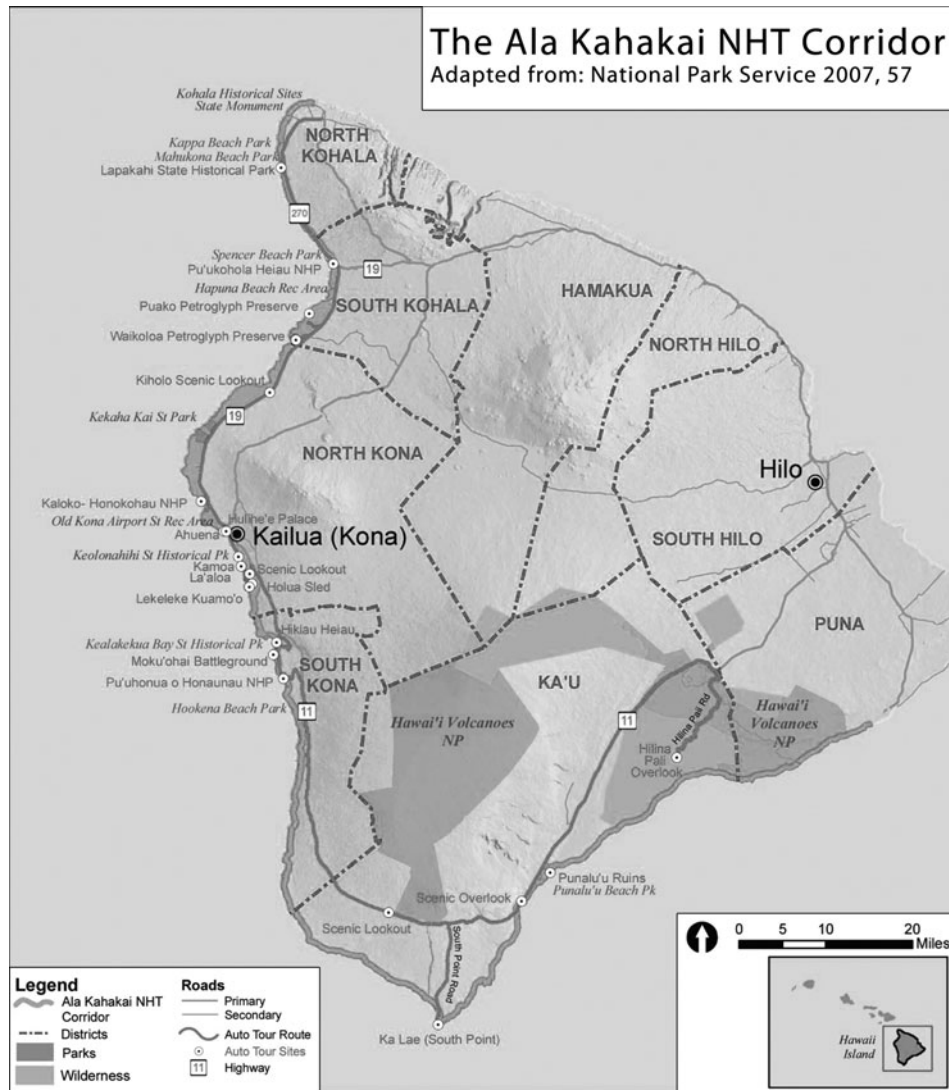


Figure 3 The Ala Kahakai National Historic Trail corridor, marked in grey along the coast. Adapted from National Park Service (2007: 57).

and ecological richness, the relict *ala loa* weave together a geography of indigenous cultural sites and artifacts that inspires in contemporary observers intense emotions ranging from nostalgic romance (e.g., Huynh 2006; Krauss 1975; Lucas 2006a, 2006b; National Park Service 1998: 178) to ethnic pride. Again, at the

intersection of indigeneity, an array of historic preservation interests, and Hawaiian tourism, the Ala Kahakai materializes a complex and sometimes tense meeting of indigenous identity and claims over its material culture.

According to the National Historic Trail's website, the project is committed to the

‘preservation, protection and interpretation of traditional Native Hawaiian culture’ (National Park Service 2011) and many aspects of its mission reach beyond the typical institutional goals of the Park Service. Steve Elkinton (phone interview: 12 July 2007), Program Leader for the National Trails System in Washington, DC, observed that many people ‘don’t feel that it’s just a trail, but something else, something more.’ He went on to describe the trail superintendent’s expectation that it will serve as ‘a catalyst for strengthening that movement of re-legitimizing Native Hawaiian culture.’

Indeed, Aric Arakaki (interviews: 11 June 2007, 10 July 2007), the superintendent for the trail, wants to leverage the National Historic Trail beyond the recreational, preservationist, and interpretive goals consistent with most other projects in the National Trails System. Although not native by ancestry, Arakaki has established credibility among many Native Hawaiians through both marriage into the community and his own career history. In the late 1990s, he worked as the program planner for the Department of Hawaiian Homelands on Maui and was instrumental in the creation of an off-grid, self-sufficient, Native Hawaiian homestead called Kahikinui.

Arakaki’s goals for the trail are ambitious. According to his vision, the Ala Kahakai provides opportunities to strengthen communities using approaches ranging from community-based development projects organized around historic land divisions (*ahupua’a*), to a philosophy of ‘geotourism,’ which ‘sustains or enhances the geographical character of a place—its environment, culture, aesthetics, heritage and well-being of its residents’ (National Park Service 2009: 71–72). For Arakaki, preserving Hawai‘i’s trails and the cultural sites they connect ‘provides a venue for the practice of the culture at these places and

the preservation of the culture in place.’ This, combined with an emphasis on reconnecting communities to the land through education and *ahupua’a*-based stewardship programs, Arakaki’s hopes could one day help support a shift toward greater economic and agricultural self-sufficiency in Hawai‘i. These elements of Arakaki’s vision for the trail, despite his nonnative ancestry and despite being attached to the National Park Service, seem to reflect the mixture of tradition and modernity that marks contemporary indigenous identity (cf. Braun 2002; Deloria 2004) and that scholars such as Clifford (2001, 2004), Johnson (2008), and Li (2000) describe as ‘articulated.’

Somewhat similar to strategic essentialism (Lee 2006; Spivak 1987)<sup>5</sup> for its roots in Gramsci, articulation theory emerged in response to scholarly debates in the 1980s and 1990s around invented traditions (e.g., Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983) and incarcerated-versus-mobile identities (e.g., Appadurai 1988; Gupta and Ferguson 1992). At its best, research on indigeneity inspired by these two schools of thought managed to reveal the hidden risks of essentialized indigeneity. Essentialist representations of nativeness—especially as imposed by outsiders ranging from colonial administrators to experts and tourists—could confine indigenous peoples to those narrow geographies, traditions, and epistemologies that convey authenticity. By reifying the categories of traditional authenticity, these representations could become prisons built out of exotic, premodern livelihoods, and isolated, pristine landscapes. Of particular concern was the possibility that indigenous attempts to embrace modernity from within those constraints would be perceived as corruptions of native legitimacy, thus becoming grounds for (further) disempowerment (e.g., Braun 2002; Conklin and Graham 1995; Krech 1999; Neumann 1998; Slater 1995; cf. Deloria 2004).



But while these skeptical positions revealed some risks inherent in essentialist representations of identity, they were also perceived as a threat to already-marginalized indigenous authority. The language of ‘invention’ was too often understood as a code for ‘inauthentic’ while the emphasis on mobility and connection tended to disparage notions of rootedness and homeland as parochial obstacles to political liberation. In Hawai‘i, for example, the US Navy used anthropologist Jocelyn Linnekin’s work on ‘invented’ Hawaiian traditions to question the legitimacy of PKO’s claims to Kaho‘olawe Island, thereby delaying its cession by the military. At their most insensitive, such analyses appeared to be scrutinizing indigenous politics like those of PKO as a form of anachronistic political opportunism.

Indigenous groups and thinkers—alarmed at the potentially devastating legal, economic, and political consequences of what publicly could be understood as *inauthenticity*—began to reject the academy’s growing preference for invention and mobility over authentic essences and roots (also see Clifford 2004).<sup>6</sup> In response, scholars began discussing the possibility of avoiding deconstructionist ventures that might debunk or otherwise undermine indigenous political claims (for debate in the Pacific, see Friedman 1993; Handler and Linnekin 1984; Jolly 1992). Bacchilega (2007: 172–173, no. 16), for example, argues that cases such as the Linnekin/PKO debacle demand scholars have a responsibility to do more than understand authenticity as a constructed category. Rather, they must ask who needs such categories and why (also see Bendix 1997; Castree 2004).

Attempting to move beyond politically toxic binaries of invented/authentic and mobile/incarcerated, anthropologists thus began drawing on Stuart Hall’s scholarship (see

Slack 1996) to propose an alternative understanding of indigeneity. Articulation theory developed as an orthogonal perspective to those prior questions of invention and incarceration. It emphasized the nonessentialist nature of identity proposed in preceding work around invention and mobility without wholly dismissing the value of authenticity as a category, nor denigrating rootedness and heritage as backward-looking ideological prisons. Articulation theory allows scholars to observe selective and strategic deployment of indigenous traditions and essentialisms in pursuit of political agency without at all suggesting that such phenomena are “‘merely” political, invented, or opportunistic’ (Clifford 2001: 273). It rejects the dualisms inherent in discourses of invention and incarceration in favor of an understanding of authenticity as both dynamically constructed in the present and traditionally grounded in the past. Which is to say, indigenous identity not only unfolds as a living, contemporary, socially contingent process, but also draws on a deep and historically rooted cultural repertoire (Clifford 2001, 2004). Articulation theory, then, is a reconciliation of essence/being and process/becoming in scholarship on indigeneity and allowed scholars to understand how indigenous communities might simultaneously embrace *both* modernity and tradition, autochthonous roots and cosmopolitan mobility [for Pacific-Islander examples in particular, see Gegeo (2001), Teaiwa (2001a, 2001b), and White and Tengan (2001); also see Hau‘ofa’s influential essay, ‘Our Sea of Islands’ (1993)].

Figure 1 illustrates an excellent example of modern-day Native Hawaiians ‘articulating’ ancient idioms with their contemporary daily lives as part political protest and part affirmation of indigenous identity (also see Nelson 1999; Teaiwa 2001a; cf. Goodale 2006).

Johnson (2008) documents the articulation of indigenous identity through Hawai'i's most famous canoe, the Hōkūle'a. Built in the 1970s as an experiment in proving the intentionality of ancient Polynesian migration throughout the Pacific, the canoe came to play a significant role in the decade's emerging Hawaiian cultural and political renaissance. Having made voyages as far as New Zealand and Japan without the aid of navigational instruments, the Hōkūle'a now stands as a symbolic, material, and practical manifestation of ancient traditions articulated with contemporary pan-Pacific identities. The canoe not only acts as a site for practices once consigned to oral history, but it also—with its fiberglass hulls, dedicated following of paparazzi, and role in launching a new international Native Hawaiian diplomacy—serves as a clear example of the thoroughly modern bricolage that underwrites contemporary indigenous traditions (cf. Goodale 2006).

Similarly, it would be a mistake to oversimplify *mālama 'āina*, as either a purely invented performance or an inflexible, anti-modern prison. Rather, articulation theory helps reveal that indigenous cultural practices and politics in Hawai'i today represent the integration of pasts and presents, and tradition and modernity. Kahikinui, the off-grid Native Hawaiian homestead on Maui that developed in part, thanks to the work of Ala Kahakai superintendent Aric Arakaki, serves as an excellent example. While residents and newspapers in the 1990s described the project as a chance to live 'the native way' or as 'Hawaiian ancestors did centuries ago,' Kahikinui livelihoods were in fact far more contemporary than such rhetoric suggests. Assisted by modern technological infrastructure including fog-based water catchment, composting toilets, radio transmitters, and renewable energy

systems, life on the homestead was much more an articulation of native tradition, rather than a return to an essentialized, 'primitive' indigenous lifestyle (Cox 1997). Kahikinui represents an articulation of *mālama 'āina* that is simultaneously traditional and modern, parochial and cosmopolitan, and ecological and technological.

Returning to the Ala Kahakai National Historic Trail, Arakaki's program demonstrates a primary commitment to supporting Native Hawaiians by focusing on livelihoods and indigenous community-building through place-based, participatory economic development and selective, intentional use of traditional practices and idioms. Yet despite these characteristics, Hawai'i's colonial legacy greatly complicates Arakaki's efforts. For indigenous political activists and their sympathizers, the Ala Kahakai National Historic Trail is a far more ambivalent project.

Retired attorney and sovereignty activist Clarence 'Ku' Ching (interview: 20 July 2007), for example, resents the very notion of Hawaiian statehood, let alone federal administration and preservation of native trails. For Ching, the Hawaiian Islands are under ongoing colonial occupation by the USA. If not for Arakaki's dedicated engagement with Native Hawaiian communities, Ching would have rejected the National Historic Trail as tantamount to looting.

More radical<sup>7</sup> sovereignty activists are far less forgiving. For these actors, the Ala Kahakai appears at best to be a Native Hawaiian cultural museum imposed by *haole*<sup>8</sup> bureaucrats and their local collaborator, Aric Arakaki. At worst, the project seems to be a neocolonial appropriation of native resources for tourist consumption.

In a *mana'o* (opinion) form faxed to the Park Service on 30 June 2000, sovereignty activist Anthony Ako Anjo rejected the trail as

a ‘*haole* concept’ and accused the Park Service of creating a phony project:

There is NO Ala Kahakai trail; this is a fictitious position that [the Park Service], [Senator] Akaka and other haole groups wish to use to generate income at the expense of desecrating sacred Hawaiian sites, burials, heiaus, etc. These areas are all Kapu,<sup>9</sup> except to those of us connected to the various ahupuaa.<sup>10</sup>

While Anjo’s radicalism marginalizes his views in some quarters, his perspective represents an important segment of Hawai’i’s indigenous political landscape.

Anjo’s accusations of inauthenticity actually reveal a curious aspect of indigenous politics around the Ala Kahakai. While native critics like Anjo may reject the notion of a federally administered National Historic Trail, the historical accuracy of the name ‘Ala Kahakai,’<sup>11</sup> or the public-access and tourism elements of the project, Native Hawaiians generally offer little criticism of Park Service plans for *interpreting* the trail. As we shall see, the Park Service’s proposed interpretive frame for the Ala Kahakai embodies a purified notion of indigeneity not unlike that espoused by Native Hawaiian stakeholders, whether cautious supporters or vociferous opponents. This common ground between the Park Service and a diverse Native Hawaiian community (including more radical activists) suggests a widespread discursive paradigm for interpreting the material artifacts of Hawai’i’s indigenous past: purification and an accompanying set of unstrategic essentialisms.

### **Purifying the landscape I: authenticity and the National Park Service**

In 1966, the US Congress passed the National Historic Preservation Act, creating a National

Register of Historic Places that would play a central role in the development of historic interpretation programs in the USA. The National Register has, since inception, been administered and managed by the Park Service and over time has crucially reshaped the National Park Service’s approach to both history and preservation (Alanen and Melnick 2000; Watt et al. 2004). In fact, the basic criteria used to determine eligibility for listing on the National Register of Historic Places have, since 1966, come to serve as a kind of *lingua franca* for Park Service evaluations of historic sites and artifacts. For example, although the Ala Kahakai did not need National Register certification to qualify as a National Historic Trail, the Park Service still deferred to those standards in evaluating the trail’s historical significance (National Park Service 1998: 13–15).

National Register standards—and by extension, the preservation and interpretation standards of the Park Service—however, have their critics. Evaluation criteria tend to focus on distinct periods of historic significance and *unchanging* elements of the landscape, thereby ignoring the dynamism and multiplicity of both history and place. Sites thus tend to become tied to a specific historical period and, in order to retain their ‘historic’ qualifications, must be maintained and interpreted as exemplars of that period. The result is a proliferation of historic sites that, much like more absolute categories of indigenous authenticity, are ‘frozen in time’ and purified of multi-layered meanings and histories (Alanen and Melnick 2000; Cook 1996; Watt et al. 2004; cf. Appadurai 1988; Braun 2002; Gupta and Ferguson 1992). Moreover, National Register standards are quite hostile to the more recent past and erect significant obstacles to interpreting ‘young’ sites or landscapes, particularly those of less than 50 years of age (Alanen and Melnick 2000).

Given these institutional tendencies, it is perhaps unsurprising that the National Historic Trail avoids interpreting both those elements of the landscape that do not read as purely native and most events following the end of Hawaiian sovereignty in 1893.

Many such erasures take place in relation to the more recent past. For example, in 1973, a group of white residents organized a reenactment of missionary William Ellis's 1823 journey around the island, a journey that largely followed the *ala loa*. In retrospect, the reenactment was plagued by white privilege and cultural insensitivity, including a trail-preservation proposal that commemorated the *ala loa* in William Ellis's name rather than for any Native Hawaiian historical figure (Friends of the William Ellis Trail 1974). The 1973 William Ellis II Expedition was also, however, absolutely central to reviving public awareness of the *ala loa*. Indeed, it laid the foundation for all trail preservation plans that followed, including the proposal for the National Historic Trail. Nonetheless, the Ellis expedition reenactment goes completely unmentioned in Park Service planning documents (also see Mandelman 2008). Because of an institutional tendency to narrowly frame the scope of indigenous history in Hawai'i, Park Service plans for interpreting the trail erase this key event.

But these kinds of omissions grow even more glaring for the period the Park Service is most committed to interpreting: the precolonial past. Here, the project is just as remarkably inclined toward presenting a historically distinct—in this case, a purely indigenous—narrative. Although Ellis's (1825) journal remains today the earliest written record of Hawaiian trails and one of the few written primary sources about life in early nineteenth-century Hawai'i, mention of his 1823 journey is entirely absent from National Historic Trail planning documents. These silences around Ellis are emblematic

of the Park Service's failure to acknowledge the multi-layered, interconnected histories and interpretations around Hawaiian foot trails. In place of the cultural and historical assemblages that make up the trail, the Park Service presents an indigenous culture scrubbed clean of outside influences and dynamic change.

Yet, the Park Service is not simply purifying the stories it tells about Hawaiian trails. It is also purifying the material landscape of the Ala Kahakai. Lying along a 15-mile segment of the trail's priority implementation area in South Kohala (Figure 2) is a profusion of artifacts spanning several centuries of human habitation. Petroglyph fields, *heiau* (temples), and portions of ancient trail tread intermingle with the most highly engineered landscapes on the island. Here, barren lava fields have been transformed into luxury tropical resorts, complete with monumental architecture, interactive dolphin pools, and historically themed shopping centers (Figure 4(A)–(D)). Walking down this segment of the trail, one is hard-pressed to ignore the complex stories and ironies of this palimpsest landscape.

No Park Service document, however, makes more than a passing mention of this odd collection of artifacts, both ancient and modern. The Comprehensive Management Plan's (National Park Service 2009: 23–24) list of 'high potential sites' for interpretation stands as the material-culture counterpart to the work of narrative purification described above. The list classifies each site as ancient (precontact), historic (1778–1892), or some combination of the two. The 1892 cutoff is significant for the Park Service because it marked a passage of Queen Lili'uokalani's Highways Act, a piece of legislation guaranteeing prior public rights of way (like trails) would remain in the public domain in perpetuity. But 1892 also marks the final



**Figure 4** (A) Pu'ukohol? Heiau at the beginning of the trail's Priority Implementation Area. (B) Sign describing archaeological remains of the Kanikū settlement adjacent to a new development near Anaeho'omalua Bay. (C) The Waikaloa Hilton resort along the Ala Kahakai, Anaeho'omalua Bay. (D) Watch for golfers along the Ala Kahakai. All images by author, 2007, 2010.

year of the Hawaiian monarchy: Queen Lili'uokalani would be ousted by mid-January of 1893.

Nowhere in this framework is there room for the Ala Kahakai's resort landscapes nor the questions they raise about twentieth-century Native Hawaiian lives and livelihoods. Nor is there room for those elements of post-1892 history necessary for interpreting the trail in terms of Hawaiian experiences of occupation and annexation, plantation economics, the multiple waves of colonization and immigration that have shaped Hawaiian identities, the peculiarities of tourism, or, ironically, the indigenous cultural and political renaissance that began in the 1970s. The only artifacts

admissible for interpretation in this frame must date from the final months of the Hawaiian Kingdom or prior. As Aric Arakaki, superintendent for the trail (interviews: 11 June 2007, 10 July 2007), notes:

Right now we try to concentrate more on what we call ancient, and maybe post-ancient or early historic periods. . . . [W]e generally are looking at more in the 1800s and more at the Hawaiian culture as opposed to the plantation culture or the sugar culture. . . . We probably will be getting into some of the early 1900s where modifications were made to the trail and to the shoreline, because of the war effort. So, as you're going along the trail, you need to know that those walls over there were



built by Marines as defense and that it's not archaeology.

Although Arakaki allows that the project should acknowledge some twentieth-century sites, he suggests it should do so mainly to identify those artifacts deemed insufficiently historic or Hawaiian for actual interpretation. While the project rhetorically emphasizes the importance of engaging indigenous Hawai'i's past and present, when it comes to the trail's material artifacts, the recent past is only worth discussing as a contaminated, inauthentic counterpart to a distant, more purely indigenous era (also see National Park Service 2007: 15–18).

Considering Arakaki's social and cultural goals for the Ala Kahakai, then, there exists a clear tension here. On the one hand, we find his deep commitment to a living, dynamic, 'articulated' indigenous culture, and on the other, the Park Service's institutional tendency to narrate only the anti-modern, purely native histories of the trail's material landscape.

That tension, however, is not solely a product of the Park Service's National Register-driven approach to the past. Rather, it also emerges across the various Native Hawaiian communities invested in the trail, including those most opposed to the project. Using native archeological artifacts and material culture to invoke an authentic, sovereign indigeneity, these stakeholders reject the administrative meddling of the National Park Service while embracing very similar interpretive perspectives.

### **Purifying the landscape II: unstrategic essentialism along the Ala Kahakai**

Native Hawaiian activists opposing the National Historic Trail tend to do so for two

reasons. First, preservation and interpretation would take place under the auspices of a federal, rather than native, agency, thereby undermining sovereign control of indigenous cultural patrimony. Second, the project would increase public access to a variety of fragile sacred and archeological sites.<sup>12</sup> Aside from these objections over administration and access, however, the interpretive frameworks proposed by the Park Service tend to more or less match perspectives on indigenous history from across Native Hawaiian communities, albeit for political, rather than institutional, reasons, at least at first glance.

For these indigenous activists as much as the Park Service, it is the precolonial history and imagery associated with Hawaiian coastal trails that provide the most evocative and powerful indicators of authentic indigeneity, albeit for motives having little to do with the National Register of Historic Places. Ku Ching (interview: 20 July 2007), a sovereignty activist and retired attorney, stated that in relation to the Ala Kahakai, 'the important history is that of the ancients.' Similarly, Eric Kaponu (interview: 12 July 2007), a trails advocate and consultant for native entrepreneurial ventures, favored an interpretation of the trail that described cultural erosion and demographic collapse in the face of European contact:

I would probably focus on pre-contact. Then I would talk about the Kamehameha era. Then I would start to talk about missionaries—population decline—which is why the settlements aren't there anymore.

Likewise, Danny 'Kaniela' Akaka, Jr (interview: 17 July 2007), a Native Hawaiian cultural practitioner and Director of Cultural Affairs at Mauna Lani Resort, focused on the persistence of a premodern past along the trail



through ghostly hauntings and spectral permanence:

The trail is already established and no matter what you do, the trail is still there. It might be erased, but it's still there. And it's still used, even by people you cannot see.

Ku Ching (interview: 20 July 2007) echoed these sentiments, observing that:

Even though you can't see it [segments of trail vanished from resort landscapes], you can't touch it, you can't do all these things, you can know that it's there, you can feel it, you can still enjoy it, you can still respect it, and all of the other things that go with that. So if you're talking about the lobby of the Hilton, the Mauna Lani, the Waikoloa, whatever, the trails are still there!

At least eight other interviewees offered similar interpretations of the trail's material legacy and its relationship to surrounding resort, or otherwise modern, landscapes. Opinion forms on file with the Ala Kahakai's Park Service office similarly document numerous stakeholders' attachment to the trail's premodern archeology and artifacts.

Meanwhile, those Native Hawaiians so completely hostile to the project that they also reject the Park Service's interpretive frame argue that the agency has failed to adequately understand and engage with the *truly* authentic, precontact essence of the trail. For these stakeholders, the Park Service's purifications of history and landscape are not sufficiently thorough. Recall that for Anthony Ako Anjo, the Ala Kahakai is an entirely fictitious concoction of the present. Management and interpretation of the trail should be grounded in a purely indigenous framework based on traditions and knowledge reaching back to precontact

times. Access to Hawai'i's coastal trails and the artifacts they connect should only be granted to Native Hawaiians with ancestral ties to those particular *ahupua'a*.

Similarly, an anonymous employee of an indigenous land trust (interview: July 2007) insisted that hiking was incompatible with the trail's legacy and not merely because of the pressures—trash, trail wear, nuisance activities—such access can promote. The interviewee argued that hiking is a contemporary, 'Western' activity at odds with the spiritual and cultural beliefs of the Hawaiians who created the trails and their artifacts. When asked about the programs Aric Arakaki envisions—i.e., reviving elements of traditional land management in pursuit of contemporary ecological, economic, and educational goals—this interviewee argued that for traditional land management to be truly authentic, granting access to the trail and its sites would involve a dramatic set of permitting processes:

You do not enter an *ahupua'a* in a traditional way, without permission. You have to state your purpose, they have to know who you are. And that permission is conditional.... In a traditional *ahupua'a* and you're a visitor, you ask permission and you're granted permission, and you go only to what that permission is granted. Any deviation results in death.

While this individual was clearly trying to be provocative rather than prescriptive, their comments reveal a deeply essentialist perspective on what counts as an authentically traditional engagement with the material culture of Hawai'i's coastal trails.

Thus, for those who most stridently oppose the project, the National Historic Trail embodies an interpretation of the landscape that, despite the Park Service's anti-modern perspective on Hawai'i's indigenous history, is

in fact *insufficiently* purified of contemporary and nonnative approaches to Native Hawaiian material culture. While questions of administrative sovereignty seem to place indigenous objections to the National Historic Trail in direct conflict with the Park Service, the two camps' perspectives on historical authenticity and indigeneity actually share a great deal in common. The National Historic Trail's purported interpretive failures are revealed as a matter of degree, rather than as a matter of content. Native Hawaiians and other citizens who otherwise object to the Park Service's authority to manage and administer the trail almost wholly endorse the pre-1892 and precontact emphases of the project. Those cultural practitioners and activists radical enough to wholly reject *all* aspects of the Park Service's plan, meanwhile, oppose the agency's interpretive perspective for inadequately capturing the indigenous purity of the past landscape.

What accounts for this absolutist paradigm in interpreting the indigenous material landscape? What accounts for this common ground among bureaucrats, preservationists, trails enthusiasts, and an array of Native Hawaiian stakeholders that includes a resort employee, educators and land managers, a variety of sovereignty activists, and an indigenist ideologue? It is, of course, important to distinguish the very different motives at work here.

The National Park Service's interpretive goals emerge from an institutional desire to conserve and promote consumption of 'authentic' landscapes, and with some degree of nostalgia. Moreover, while Park Service tendencies to favor both the deep past and more fundamentalist notions of authenticity can be observed in any of its historical projects, regardless of whether native peoples are involved, it is also impossible to ignore the

role of colonial bureaucracy that the Park Service partially plays in this story. This remains a fact despite Aric Arakaki's active engagement with Native Hawaiian communities over the project.

By contrast, Native Hawaiian interpretive perspectives are fundamentally rooted in both a politics of indigenous identity and Hawai'i's colonial history. Claims around authenticity and historically pure indigenous landscapes are inseparable from questions of Native Hawaiian political power, access to resources, and even territory/sovereignty. Any essentialism at work in Native Hawaiian claims to history, landscape, and material culture cannot be separated from efforts to decolonize indigenous experience.

The common ground underlying these interpretive essentialisms, then, is largely a matter of convergent evolution, at least in terms of the politics at stake. And yet, I would argue that part of what drives that convergent evolution is the materiality of the trail's artifacts, sites, and landscape. It is through the kind of explicit intersections of Native Hawaiian identity with its material culture as embodied by the Ala Kahakai that observers—whether native or not—tend to essentialize indigeneity. Finally, regardless of where essentialism originates—whether invoked by colonial bureaucrats or mobilized as a source of indigenous power—it is important to recognize that its effects can be the same. The genetic metaphor of 'convergent evolution' here is thus particularly apt. Where otherwise defined by the dynamism, complexity, and fluidity described by articulation theory, indigeneity's encounter with its material heritage often provokes rigidly anti-modern and unstrategic essentialisms that work beyond the control of their Native Hawaiian interlocutors and seem to pose no less a threat of incarceration.

## Materiality and essentialism

Kobayashi (1994) observes that imagining the unessential can be a supremely challenging task because of the ways social constructions get naturalized and thus rendered opaque. Arguing that this opaqueness is sometimes so impenetrable that even the most critical perspectives can overlook it, she suggests a geographical method for moving beyond the occlusions of essentialism and naturalism. Scholars, she offers, might work to ‘understand how discourses are produced and sustained, by uncovering and engaging social constructions *on the very sites* where they are produced and nourished’ (Kobayashi 1994: 78, emphasis mine). While Kobayashi does not elaborate much further, I take her suggestion to mean that the most challenging and difficult essentialisms to deconstruct are those so naturalized that they appear built into the very fabric of place. Or, as geographers Mitchell (1996) and Schein (1997, 2003) have argued, the seemingly unyielding materiality of cultural landscapes can so instantly and stealthily naturalize social categories that they appear pre-given.

Similarly, scholars of material culture studies cite Bourdieu’s research on Kabyle society to elaborate on the ways arbitrary social values manifest in and get maintained by a ‘world of things’ (Tilley 2006b). That is, social orders, values, and ideologies are made to appear timeless and self-evident—naturalized—in part because of the relentlessly present materiality of the cultural objects that humans produce and use. In the words of Tilley, ‘humans leave behind a vast array of artefacts which, quite literally, *objectify* their past presence . . . . Personal, social, and cultural identity is embodied in our persons *and* objectified in our things’ (2006b: 60–61, emphases mine; also see Fowler 2010).

Moreover, people regularly embrace those objectifications. For example, museums, historic preservation districts, antique collections, heirlooms, and so on all often play significant roles in imparting national, ethnic, or other social identities (e.g., Hagen 2008; Hoskins 2007; Mills 2010; also see Hoelscher and Alderman 2004; Till 2003). Similarly, historically significant material culture has often been preserved as stable repositories of tradition and roots in the face of disruptive forces of war, social change, capitalism, and modernity at large (Connerton 2009; Lowenthal 1996; Tilley 2006a; Wilson 1997). The same goes for indigenous material culture that acts as a source of tangible authenticity and a record of prior occupation in the landscape.<sup>13</sup>

Yet, while this work on the materialization of social values (and the embrace of those materializations) is suggestive for the Ala Kahakai, it does not fully describe what is at stake around the trail. The ways cultural landscapes and artifacts naturalize social categories and values through ‘objectification’ (Tilley 2006b) or ‘materializing discourse’ (Dwyer 2000, 2004; Schein 1997) do not quite explain the phenomena at work when it comes to the pervasiveness of essentialist interpretations for the project. I would like to suggest a move in the opposite direction. Rather than people producing concrete, naturalized expressions of culture and ideology through artifacts and landscape, I argue that the material landscape and its things exert their own essentializing influence on discourse. After all, absent the interpretive demands posed by the physical sites and artifacts along the trail, almost all native stakeholders actually embody *anti-essentialist* conceptions of Hawaiian indigeneity in their daily life, if for no other reason that they almost all live more-or-less integrated within contemporary Hawaiian society.<sup>14</sup>

Material culture (understood broadly to include cultural landscapes) is not simply the objectified spoor of human society. It also exerts its own influence on social lives and values. There is a dialectical relationship at work in which the material objects of human worlds shape cultures and identities as much as cultures and identities shape those objects. To once more quote material-culture scholar Tilley, through ‘making, using, exchanging, consuming, interacting, and living with things people make themselves in the process.... Culture and material culture are two sides of the same coin. They are related dialectically, in a constant process of being and becoming’ (2006b: 61).

If we are to take this dialectic relationship between people and their objects seriously, then we need to see how the material products of human culture do not simply reflect ideologies, lives, and values, but in fact actively shape and influence them. In the case of the Ala Kahakai, it appears that there is a close relationship between, on the one hand, the objectification (via landscape) of indigenous culture, values, history, and so on and, on the other, a corresponding essentializing of discourse *by those very things* (cf. Jones 2010: 189–190). The widely shared interpretive epistemology of purification and essentialism around the Ala Kahakai is not pre-given, but emerges because the materiality of its places and objects offer such seductive, concrete interpretations of the indigenous past as it relates to the indigenous present. These interpretations then suggest erasures of those elements of Hawaiian indigeneity that fail to conform to fundamentalist notions of authenticity.

The landscape and its cultural artifacts *elicit* the essentialisms at work in *both* Park Service *and* Native Hawaiian attitudes toward historical authenticity along the trail. I argue that

such essentialisms are unstrategic because they emerge partly or wholly without intention. Rather, the rich historical materiality of the objects and sites of the Ala Kahakai call forth such essentialist discourses.

The common story here is that the material objects that constitute a monument, site, or landscape get used to tell univocal stories about culture, society, and the past. Certainly, scholarship on place and memory shows that artifacts and landscapes almost always yield multiple, contingent, and often competing interpretations of the past (Cresswell and Hoskins 2008; Cronon 1992; Dwyer 2004). Yet the literature has also frequently observed conflicts emerging over sites of memory as invested parties and institutions struggle to assert their own particular historical interpretations of places and objects at the expense of others (Hagen 2008; Hoelscher 2006; Hoskins 2007; Wilson 1997; but see Landzelius 2003). The materiality of places and objects seems to suggest hard, unyielding truths about the world, often seducing observers into forgetting that objects have histories, that they are dynamic palimpsests, rather than static, unchanging essences (cf. Daston 2000; Miller 1987, 2005). Meanwhile, objects that date from previous generations exude an especially powerful influence by connecting people to periods beyond the scope of their lives and life experiences. By standing in as the material presence of a lost or intangible (and, in this case, precolonial) past, such artifacts offer an even more rigid univocality or ‘objectness,’ one that seems to demand an equally fixed and ‘true’ set of values or cultural interpretations. Finally, the capacity of objects to influence human values in these ways often goes unnoticed. They are inanimate things and their essentializing auras are made all the more seductive by that inanimate nature. The voices of Ala Kahakai stepping-stones, petroglyph

fields, or ancient temples are all the more powerful because they are silent. The objectness of such sites and artifacts is a kind of dead labor (cf. Kirsch and Mitchell 2004) in that it concretizes an age and culture past in ways that do powerful work in the present, work that often remains unobserved. The objectness of the Ala Kahakai seems to demand that stakeholders eschew process, hybridity, and complexity in favor of frozen, unchanging essences.

And we can observe it in other arenas of Hawaiian material culture as well. Johnson (2008) examined Native Hawaiian canoe voyaging and repatriation disputes as ‘articulations’ of indigenous identity. In addition to the bricolage of the canoe *Hōkūle‘a* cited earlier in this article, he describes the emergence of several canoeing organizations that competitively claim greater degrees of indigenous authenticity. Where one group might cite their exclusive use of traditional materials, another might adopt bylaws requiring that only Hawaiian be spoken aboard club vessels. While Johnson briefly speculates about the ‘intrigue and tension’ (251) that possibly surrounds these competing claims to authenticity, he dismisses it: ‘Surely Hawaiians are not lining up behind the various canoes I have described to pronounce the Hawaiianness of one at the cost of the others. Indeed, despite some micro-politics and struggles, that is not the case’ (Johnson 2008: 254). But that dismissal seems overly hasty. Barely two sentences later in a discussion of the repatriation of native remains, Johnson acknowledges that some struggles over cultural authenticity are in fact ‘considerably more cacophonous and shrill’ (255). Here, over ten groups have been locked in disputes competing over their own authentic Hawaiianness and exclusive authority over ancient Hawaiian burial grounds. John-

son proposes that these conflicts simply represent another articulation of Native Hawaiian identity. In contrast, I would argue that they—along with those hints of acrimony among canoe clubs—suggest much more significantly the manifestation of rigid, unstrategically essentialist discourse around indigenous material culture.

Returning to the Ala Kahakai, however, it is important to again distinguish between Park Service and Native Hawaiian essentialisms around the Ala Kahakai. Anthropologist Miller (1987) has observed that relationships between material culture and identity always unfold in particular social, cultural, and political worlds (also see Fowler 2010). In both cases, the materialities of the trail and its artifacts reduce the full temporal and cultural complexity of ‘articulated’ indigenities to a fundamentalist sketch of some purified notion of nativeness. The political and social contexts that condition those reductions, however, are very different in each case. National Park Service interpretations are borne out of institutional tendencies in US historic preservation—as codified by the National Register of Historic Places—to fixate on ‘authentic’ historical objects. Native Hawaiian interpretations of the trail, however, exist in a distinctly colonial historical context. That some Native Hawaiian groups and individuals may default to essentialist interpretations of Ala Kahakai material culture can only be understood through noting indigeneity’s deep intersections with time (prioriness) and place (homeland). Clifford notes that one of the enduring constraints of articulated indigeneity is place (2001: 481–483; also see Lee 2006). For Clifford, homeland is the primary locus of rootedness for autochthonous peoples (but see Merlan 2007). Place is the medium through which the positioning, voices, and cultural bricolage of contemporary indigeneity

forge their most trenchant articulations with past traditions and practices. But that fundamental grounding in an indigenous homeland is also fertile soil for cultivating unstrategic essentialism. Indeed, it was out of similar observations that anthropologists like Appadurai (1988) and Gupta and Ferguson (1992) first expressed concern over the carceral tendencies of discourses based on homelands and cultural roots.

In the case of the Ala Kahakai, then, the trail's artifacts and landscapes serve as powerful repositories for nostalgic discourses of precontact indigenous purity, timeless occupation of the land, and ecological harmony. The concrete materiality of an ancient indigenous homeland erases those relationships to the past that embody contingency, negotiation, and process (cf. Merlan 2007). Whether as a Native Hawaiian, a Park Service bureaucrat, a preservationist, or a tourist, when looking at the ruins of an ancient Hawaiian temple or the etchings in a field of petroglyphs, it is much harder to see the cultural and temporal hybridity that define contemporary indigenous lives and livelihoods. The material legacies of autochthony, legacies already framed by rigid National Register perspectives on the past, invite the erasure of modern and cosmopolitan elements of indigenous identity in favor of purified, anti-modern discourse of nativeness.<sup>15</sup>

Most Native Hawaiian cultural activists typically describe their indigenous identity in terms best understood as articulated, although Anthony Ako Anjo, introduced earlier in this paper, might be an exception (see endnote 14 for examples). Meanwhile, most (if not all) contemporary Native Hawaiians cannot help but live their identities in such a way that both nonnative and Pacific-Islander scholars would understand as articulated (Gegeo 2001;

Hau'ofa 1993; Teaiwa 2001a, 2001b; White and Tengan 2001). Only a hermit might achieve something close to ancestral purity, and even then, there would be some question as to how perfectly that experience could resemble the past. Despite these realities, however, debates around interpreting the trail's material legacy all converge on decidedly inflexible, fundamentalist discourses of essentialism that erase the articulations of contemporary indigenous life. Such essentialisms, by being both unstrategic and engaging in such erasures, involve the possibility of substantial political risks for Native Hawaiians.

### Recounting the risks of essentialism

As discussed early in this article, an array of scholarship has flagged the potentially disempowering effects of indigeneity's intersection with essentialized authenticity (Appadurai 1988; Braun 2002; Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Krech 1999; Neumann 1998). Tropes of ancient tradition and ecological wisdom—some of the most resonant markers of indigenous authenticity—can freeze cultures in time and place, restricting native identities to very particular landscapes, livelihoods, and cultural practices. These tropes also tend to obscure the historical agency of native peoples by invoking geographical and temporal isolation from modernity and implicitly framing historical change as the product of colonial encounter. Scholars using articulation theory, however, have also made important contributions by pushing back against the tendencies of such analyses to solely problematize indigenous engagements with constructions of tradition and authenticity. Articulation opened a theoretical space for scholars to reject the dualisms that tended to emerge out of these critical, anti-essentialist perspectives.



Categories of authenticity, homeland, roots/tradition, and so on could be understood as profoundly important for the political and cultural lives of marginalized indigenous peoples without at all signaling either carceral or reductive attachments to place and the past. Articulation theory allowed for an understanding of indigenous identity as both dynamically constructed in the present and traditionally grounded in the past, a bricolage of modernity, ancient heritage, native roots, and cosmopolitan mobility.

Nonetheless, it seems ‘tradition’ and ‘authenticity’ continue to deserve some measure of critical attention whenever indigenous material culture threatens to obscure the bricolage and dynamism of contemporary indigenous identities. By evoking indigenities based mainly on ancient tradition or ecological pasts, landscapes like that of the Ala Kahakai can over-privilege the historically rooted elements of articulated Native Hawaiian identities. Such privileging creates treacherous contradictions for otherwise undeniably modern lives. Articulations of indigeneity that increasingly focus on precontact authenticity foreclose on opportunities to embrace interwoven pasts and presents. Such essentialisms not only limit dramatically what counts as indigenous practice and identity, but also invite spurious criticism.

Even a concept as seemingly empowering as *mālama 'āina* can either trivialize Native Hawaiians as romantic archetypes or severely confine them to those ecological and premodern behaviors prescribed as sufficiently authentic (cf. Conklin and Graham 1995; Fisher 1996; Neumann 1998; Slater 1995). Krech (1999: 215) asks what should be made of

Hopi Indians who favor strip-mining, arguing that the most important part of their guiding philosophy and prophecy is to know ‘how to use the gifts of

Mother Earth’? Of Miccosukee Indians, who proposed building sixty-five houses in Everglades National Park against the objections of the Park Service and environmentalists whispering that they are poor stewards of the land and therefore undeserving of special rights as Indians?

Similarly, Kamehameha Schools is one of Hawai‘i’s largest indigenous land trusts and is a significant force in the maintenance of native cultural institutions. The organization frequently invokes ancient tradition and concepts like *mālama 'āina*. Yet, although it may be more careful about disturbing archeology or pursuing more comprehensive environmental impact assessments, Kamehameha Schools remains a major private landowner and pursues development as most landowners do. Kamehameha Schools is a clear example of an indigenous institution that may not consistently conform to more essentialist imaginings of *mālama 'āina*. While the sheer size and worth of its assets ensures Kamehameha Schools is at little risk of being undermined, critics still attack the organization for failing to meet expectations of authenticity. Indeed, even one Native Hawaiian interviewee confided (anonymously) that, because of its development record, Kamehameha Schools is one of the ‘worst stewards of Hawaiian culture.’<sup>16</sup>

Thus, while tradition and authenticity are powerful, often necessary discourses for establishing native claims to and authority over the land, they also involve fundamental perils wherever they meet the material heritage of indigeneity. By continuously reinforcing what was originally a colonial notion—that modernity and native occupation of the land are mutually exclusive (cf. Deloria 2004; Thrush 2007)—archeological remains and other precontact artifacts can transform concepts like *mālama 'āina* into confining,

absolute, and divisive essentialisms. Elements of tradition and historic identity can thus become—rather than strategic building blocks of articulated indigenities—heavy shackles that forbid activities often central to the livelihoods of many Native Hawaiians, whether hikers or businessmen, tourism workers or sovereignty activists, or scholars or developers. Even if some indigenous people choose to embrace an ecologically sustainable lifestyle—whatever that may mean in practice—where does that leave those whose livelihoods may depend on a ‘destructive Western relationship’ (Trask 1991: 163) with the land? Likewise, if truly authentic Hawaiian identity is located *exclusively* in the preoverthrow or pre-European past, then what chance is there of embodying that identity in the present, let alone the future?

Finally, there is some complicated history here that needs acknowledging. There has been a long tradition of western/European/colonial ‘experts’—from missionaries to colonial administrators to scholars—critiquing supposedly inappropriate relationships between indigenous peoples and their objects. Whether as bearers of Christian theology, ‘modern’ democratic society, enlightenment rationality, or scientific truth, newcomers have often attempted to improve native subjects by liberating them of irrational, fetishistic, and above all incorrect understandings of their material world (Tilley 2006b). While this article attempts to lay out a critique of the unexamined discursive influences of indigenous material culture, it should in no way be understood as a continuation of that tradition.

First, such a liberation is not even possible. People cannot be freed from the influences of their objects. Humans are inextricably entangled with their things and cultural landscapes and there is no escape from the ways they might shape our habits and values.

But second, and much more importantly, recall that the essentializing influence of Ala Kahakai material culture extends equally to the National Park Service, a distinctly modernist Euro-American institution. This article does *not* suggest that material culture inspires unexamined essentialist discourse only among indigenous peoples. While the National Register of Historic Places may have helped codify the Park Service’s fundamentalist attitudes to the past, I would argue that those institutional tendencies are *at least* partly the result of the essentializing ‘objectness’ of material culture.

As such, this article attempts to reveal a general principle through a specific case: one material culture’s unexamined relationship to unstrategic or unconsciously essentialist discourses around indigenous identity. Ultimately, it serves as a call to awareness of the unnoticed objectifying and essentializing influences of material culture, particularly in the arena of heritage or identity politics. It does not call for a supposedly enlightened or liberated abandonment of indigenous heritage, but instead asks what a mindful, intentional engagement with authenticity and the objectness of material culture might look like.

### **Conclusion: de-essentializing indigenous material culture**

Articulation theory has made vital contributions to understandings of indigeneity across a broad array of disciplines. Rejecting the debunking and tradition-phobic languages of ‘invention’ and ‘incarceration,’ it has provided a nuanced frame for examining the dynamic bricolage of indigenous identities in a wide variety of locales. Articulation has allowed scholars to acknowledge, rather than simply dismiss or problematize, the crucial

roles that tradition, authenticity, and homeland play in contemporary indigeneity.

Nonetheless, articulation theory can also be too uncritical when it comes to indigenous politics. Precolonial indigenous material culture tends to emphasize the deep past over contemporary elements of native identity. From burial remains and canoe hulls to archeology and even entire landscapes, objects and places widely recognized as signifying autochthony also rarely evoke hybridity and bricolage. Instead, the historic materiality of such artifacts seems to freeze indigeneity in a state of precontact native purity. Indeed, such material culture, whether in the hands of bureaucrats or indigenous activists, tends to call forth rigid and essentialist discourses of authenticity and historical significance that are far from strategic. The apparent objectivity of these material objects tends to erase dynamism and process in favor of essential, nostalgic, and anti-modern narratives, with all their attendant political risks.

The kinds of history currently embraced by both the Park Service and the Ala Kahakai National Historic Trail's many stakeholders are clear examples of the ways material culture can erase the complex multiplicities of contemporary indigenous identity in favor of unstrategically essentialist discourses. By narrowly defining what counts as authentic indigenous material culture and by allowing little room for multi-layered, multi-temporal notions of the indigenous, the project freezes Native Hawaiian culture and identity largely within precontact and preoverthrow pasts.

Yet that need not be the case. Along part of the trail's priority implementation area (Figure 2), numerous sites and artifacts connected with some of the island's premier resort landscapes present tremendous opportunities for escaping the essentializing auras of archeology. Using these places to narrate

Hawaiian history and indigenous culture *alongside* ancient and premodern archeology would do much to work against both the predominant tendency to purify indigenous material culture *and* the political pitfalls of such purification (also see Mandelman 2008).

Entering one of these resorts on foot via the Ala Kahakai is like arriving by a forgotten back door offering a peek behind the curtain of Hawaiian tourism. Typically, visitors arrive by long and winding driveways that, through gradual landscaping, naturalize the transformation of the island's leeward deserts into engineered paradises. By contrast, having crossed punishing lava fields and scrublands, hikers emerge abruptly into tropical artifice. A few miles of walking along an arid and treeless trail, combined with back-of-the-house encounters with service paths and construction sites, leave any hiker thoroughly inquisitive about the paradise laid out before them. Rather than go ignored as the antithesis of indigenous authenticity, these intensively engineered resort landscapes could, with adequate interpretation, embody histories profoundly part of the Native Hawaiian experience.

Not only do these places tell fascinating stories of tourism's intense reorganization of the landscape and its ecologies, but they also hint at the arbitrariness of such ideal notions of the Hawaiian environment. Resorts along the Ala Kahakai implicitly narrate the history of Edenic mythmaking in Hawai'i and the Pacific, as well as the deep consequences—ecological, economic, political, and cultural—of those myths for the region and its indigenous peoples (see Blackford 2001; Brown 1994; Desmond 1999; Goss 1993; Lafer 2001; Rothman 1998; Trask 1993).

These resorts also serve as rich material for narrating the colonial history of land appropriation in the islands as well as the several ethnically and culturally diverse waves of

colonization that have reached Hawaiian shores. The National Historic Trail runs across private lands (Figure 2) unimpeded as a result of the Highways Act of 1892, which guarantees that rights of way from 1892 or prior remain in the public domain, regardless of the tenure status of surrounding lands. As a record of a landscape once unbroken by privatization, these trails open a window onto the history of land commodification and consolidation that began in 1848 and which underwrote the rise not only of massive plantations in the late 1800s, but also of the resorts that would replace those plantations beginning in the 1960s (Kame'Eleihiwa 1992; Kent 1983; Rothman 1998). Meanwhile, telling stories about the rise of Hawai'i's plantation economy and subsequent evolution into a tourism economy—Lafer (2001) would say a tourism–plantation economy—would necessarily engage a complex history of both brutal labor exploitation and race/ethnicity in the islands. Since Hawai'i's layers of colonial history have profoundly shaped the indigenous world (and vice versa), they are part and parcel of the Native Hawaiian experience. Ignoring their material legacy in the landscape produces several missed opportunities for recounting native history. Approaching the Ala Kahakai as a place of multiple histories—of ancient foot-trails and temples interspersed with relict plantations, proliferating elite vacation homes, and curiously postmodern mega-resorts—would help reveal a wealth of other important, fundamentally Hawaiian stories. Stories of colonial dispossession could be complemented by the histories of contact, compromise, and conflict that arose as Hawai'i became a meeting point for several waves of plantation-based immigration, all of which featured their own oppressed peoples. Ignoring such history elides the fact that contemporary Hawai'i, perhaps more than

many places in the world, is a place of cultural mixing and complexity. Indeed, it actually undermines the pride that many of Hawai'i's mixed-race locals—many also of native descent—feel in their multicultural heritages.<sup>17</sup>

It is, of course, impossible to tell all possible stories about a place. But these stories point to important aspects of Hawai'i's past that cannot be ignored in a project that explicitly constructs indigeneity. In narrating these sites, the National Historic Trail might avoid reifying essentialist anti-modernism in favor of an understanding of indigenous material culture that interweaves modernity with tradition, much as most Native Hawaiians actually do in their everyday lives. Rather than reinforce the emergence of politically risky essentialisms, the Ala Kahakai offers a significant opportunity to develop a material culture that recognizes articulation. Rather than a place purified of the recent and the seemingly nonnative, the Ala Kahakai can promote a Native Hawaiian material culture that helps articulate landscapes and practices of indigenous modernity with landscapes of indigenous tradition. Such a move would not only tell more complex stories about the Native Hawaiian experience, but it would also (and more importantly) serve as a powerful example of reclaiming modernity as a thoroughly authentic element of contemporary indigenous lives and politics. By validating the mutual *inclusivity* of modernity and nativeness, such an embrace of hybrid, multi-layered material culture might help give voice and presence to an indigenous politics that poses fewer risks of unstrategic and incarcerating essentialisms.

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## Notes

1. The timing of Hawai'i's cultural and political renaissance beginning in the 1970s closely matches similar decolonizing movements around the Pacific and in North America. Indeed, the American Indian 'red power' movement, beginning with the 1969 occupation of Alcatraz Island, arguably provided a key inspiration for Hawai'i's earliest indigenous political actions (see Blackford 2004).
2. I define indigeneity along similar lines as Castree (2004): a relatively new 'world-historical' subject position/category that emerged in the decades after World War II as autochthonous peoples began organizing for sovereignty, political recognition, and both historical and territorial reparations. Indigenous identity, then, is largely inseparable from encounters and struggles taking place with *non*-indigenous peoples. Note that the term 'indigenous' applies to a vast diversity of peoples, places, and histories. The word and all allied concepts are notoriously polysemic with significant geographical variations. While perhaps easier to deploy (though by no means transparent) in the Americas, Australia, or Hawai'i, conceptions of indigeneity grow especially complex when considering cases in, say, Africa or Asia (see Lee 2006). Similarly, there is no monolithic indigenous Hawaiian identity. Cultural and political values among Native Hawaiians form a broad spectrum (Meller and Lee 1997). I use 'Native Hawaiian' to refer specifically to people of indigenous Hawaiian descent. I also use 'native' and 'indigenous' (including any linguistic derivations) interchangeably, although I acknowledge that in other contexts the term 'native' might be problematic (e.g., Canada). These terms are lower case to suggest generality.
3. 'Stakeholders' is an imperfect term. I use it here to describe a variety of invested parties, including employees of the Park Service, preservationists, hikers, and a diverse range of Native Hawaiians. Unless otherwise noted, all interviewees consented in writing to be identified by name and occupation. I have anonymized a few statements either by request or because I felt in retrospect that an interviewee may have preferred anonymity around more controversial statements.
4. A note on positionality: I am not indigenous. I grew up as a westerner in the South Pacific and my family has now lived in Hawai'i for over a decade. I do not claim indigenous expertise, authority, or experience. I am, however, sympathetic to the decolonizing project of Pacific-Islanders and I fully support inclusive models of Hawaiian sovereignty. This paper is partly the product of 7 years' personal reflection on the politics of knowledge, authenticity, and identity in Hawai'i. I once approached my research firmly convinced that only indigenous peoples had the authority to make critical claims about the nature and effects of authenticity. Indeed, my goal was not to engage the category of indigeneity, but rather to show the contaminating influence of a resort landscape on an otherwise purely Hawaiian material culture. My understanding of authenticity was fundamentalist and allowed little room for hybridity. Subsequent research both on the ground and into the secondary literature increasingly suggested, however, that such a perspective lacked critical distance. While it offered a 'common-sense' interpretation of a postcolonial landscape and its indigenous claimants, it ignored the much more complex expressions of indigeneity actually present in interviews, in written discourse, and in the artifacts (broadly defined) along the trail. As my research progressed, it offered a more inclusive perspective on indigenous authenticity that was open to seeing cultural and temporal hybridity, both in practice and materially in the landscape.
5. For some critiques of strategic essentialism, see Kobayashi and Peake (1994) and Lee (2011).
6. Hawai'i also provides a famous example of bitter debate over scholarly authority and indigenous authenticity between activist-scholar Trask (1991) and anthropologists Keesing (1989, 1991) and Linnekin (1983, 1991).
7. Note that I define 'radical' somewhat idiosyncratically. From the perspective of this paper, political sovereignty for a dispossessed indigenous community is hardly a radical proposition. Rather, 'radical' here describes two oft-intertwined positions. (1) Those Native Hawaiian activists who, in addition to sovereignty, would also ultimately prefer to see large parts, if not all, of Hawai'i cleansed of Euro-American and other nonindigenous residents. (2) Indigenist

politics that define Native Hawaiian authenticity via the most rigid interpretations of ancestral practices and values.

8. 'Foreigner.' *Haole* is a (usually) pejorative term reserved for white people, particularly those from the USA.
9. 'Taboo.'
10. An historic land division dating from precontact times.
11. 'Ala Kahakai' is not a native place name; a 1973 management plan first coined the term (State of Hawaii 1973). The Park Service acknowledges this history and argues that the project is an homage, not a faithful reproduction (National Park Service 1998: 173, 162, 122, 129).
12. Anjo, *mand'o* form on file with Ala Kahakai NHT office: 30 June 2000; interview, Dale Fegerstrom, Land Assets Manager for Kamehameha Schools (his views, not his employer's): 16 July 2007; interview, Ching: 20 July 2007; two anonymous interviews: July 2007.
13. Of particular importance for indigenous communities in the 1980s and 1990s when scholarly accounts of invented traditions and constructed identities seemed poised to undermine indigenous authority (Tilley 2006a: 15; also see Clifford 2004).
14. Ku Ching is a retired lawyer and indigenous sovereignty activist who sees hiking as a profoundly personal way of engaging his native heritage, despite the fact that 'hiking' as we understand it is not an ancestral practice. The three employees of Kamehameha Schools that I interviewed all work in various ways to promote traditional Hawaiian values and practices all within an institution that is thoroughly a product of modernity. Eric Kapono is a consultant for Native Hawaiian entrepreneurs and startups. Danny 'Kaniela' Akaka is a Native Hawaiian director of cultural affairs for a major resort. The list could go on and on. Finally, Aric Arakaki, though not native by blood, is absolutely articulated with Native Hawaiian identity given his work at Kahikinui on Maui, his personal attachments to the native community, and his social goals for the Ala Kahakai.
15. This section requires a note on critical indigenous scholarship around these issues. Indigenous thinkers have contributed extensively to a critical literature on archeology and material culture, revealing the ways museums, exhibits, and 'expert' interpretation of artifacts and sites have deep, persistent colonial roots. When it comes to the intersections of materiality, identity, and essentialism, however, I have found relatively little critical scholarship by nonnative thinkers and almost none at all by indigenous scholars.

One example would be Deloria's *Indians in Unexpected Places* (2004). Deloria discusses the ways American Indians used 'modern' material culture (e.g., hairdryers and automobiles) to complicate white understandings of authenticity and indigenous identity. Here, however, material expressions of *modernity* (vs. antiquity) *disrupt* (rather than evoke) essentialism.

16. Corruption rocked Kamehameha Schools in the 1990s (King 2006), but this comment explicitly concerned the organization after reform.
17. Indeed, every one of my Native Hawaiian informants was of mixed ethnicity and each embraced those multiple heritages. In Hawai'i, Filipino, Portuguese, Anglo-American, Japanese, Chinese, and many other ancestries come together in the indigenous community (and beyond), further suggesting the value of a dynamic, articulated understanding of Hawaiian identity.

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**Abstract translations**

*Essentialisme non-stratégique: La culture matérielle et des articulations hawaïenne des connaissances indigènes*

Des identités indigènes sont très souvent rendues synonymes avec des attachements historiques profonds aux paysages particuliers. Elles sont alors inséparables des questions de la géographie. Le point de rencontre entre le lieu et l'identité indigène est fécond en politique. Dans le monde entier, les prétentions à l'identité indigènes sont devenues indispensables dans les luttes pour le territoire, les ressources naturels, et les droits politiques de base. Cet article s'axe à la fois sur une poignée de cas tirés de la littérature secondaire ainsi sur de la recherche empirique menée sur le Sentier National Ala Kahakai d'Hawaï. Il entame une discussion sur les expressions essentialistes de l'identité indigène autour de la protection et l'interprétation de la culture matérielle hawaïenne indigène. En engageant le dialogue avec la littérature sur la théorie de l'articulation et l'identité indigène, il suggère que ces essentialismes se dessinent de manière involontairement plutôt que stratégiquement. Son affirmation centrale est que la matérialité des objets, sites, et paysages d'héritage joue un rôle inaperçu dans la formation des discours autour de l'identité indigène. L'article conclue en suggérant que de tels essentialismes non-stratégiques posent de vrais risques politiques pour les Hawaïens autochtones et il propose des suggestions pour un engagement plus intentionnel avec les qualités essentialistes de la culture indigène matérielle.

**Mots-clefs:** identité indigène, culture matérielle, essentialisme, Hawaï, National Park Service, Ala Kahakai.

*Esencialismo no-estratégico: Cultura material y articulaciones Hawaianas de indigenismo*

Frecuentemente hechos sinónimos con conexiones profundos y históricos de paisajes particulares, identidades indígenas son inseparables de preguntas de geografía. Sobre todo el mundo, demandas de indigenismo han llegado a ser indispensable en luchas por territorio, recursos naturales, y derechos políticos básicos de lugar. Este artículo se enfoca en unos casos de literatura secundaria y una investigación empírica del Camino Nacional Histórico Ala Kahakai en Hawaii. Se discute expresiones esencialistas de indigenismo sobre la preservación e interpretación de cultura material de Hawaianas Nativas. Involucrando con la literatura de la teoría de articulación y indigenismo, se sugiere que estos esencialismos emergen involuntariamente más que estratégicamente. Su declaración central es que la materialidad de objetos, artefactos, sitios y paisajes de herencia toman un rollo desapercibido en formar discursos sobre identidades indígenas. El artículo se concluye por sugerir que tales esencialismos no-estratégicos proponen riesgos políticos reales por Hawaianas Nativas y se sugiere ideas por una involucración más intencional con las pertenencias esenciales de cultura material indígena.

**Palabras claves:** indigenismo, cultura material, esencialismo, Hawaï, Parque Nacional, Ala Kahakai.