"You'll probably tell me that your grandmother was an Indian princess": Identity, Community, and Politics in the Oral History of the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, 1969-1980[1]

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Oral history interviews with current and former members of the pan-tribal political organization the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs (the Union) provide important insight into both the history of the modern BC Indian movement, as well as the nature of oral interviews themselves. This article examines how narrators of Union history discuss contentious twentieth century political concerns, keeping in mind the continued currency of these issues. This study argues that oral history interviews are negotiated political spaces wherein historiographical and political interpretations are debated between interlocutors and involved listeners. As such, oral interviews of Union members are political on a personal level, whereby narrators engage with the listener to navigate multiple and shifting positions, the relationship between academy and community, and shared knowledge in order to create an acceptable interview space. They are also political in a historiographical sense, in that narrators use the interview to negotiate with their own memories as well as with other activists to produce, debate, and shape the narrative of the Union. This article challenges the prevailing tendency of oral historians to emphasize concepts of collaboration and stable identities in oral history research, and reveals how oral histories of Indigenous protest movements complicate these relationships and the resulting historical narrative.

As I drove up the circular driveway in front of Penticton hereditary Chief Adam Eneas' house, I paused to consider where best to park.[2] After pulling in directly

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[1] I would like to thank the organizers and participants of the "Talking about Protest: Oral History Methodology in Social and Political Movements Research" conference at the Institute for Advanced Study, University of Warwick for their commentary on an earlier version of this paper. I would also like to thank Professors Mary-Ellen Kelm and Wendy Wickwire, Madeline Knickerbocker, and the anonymous reviewer whose insightful comments improved this work tremendously. This research was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and Simon Fraser University.

[2] The oral history interviews conducted for this research were approved and regulated under the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2). Under this policy, narrators were asked to complete a detailed ethics form through which they could determine the use of their materials. This form included spaces for narrators to remain anonymous, redact portions of their interviews, and withdraw from the project altogether. It also stipulated whether or

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behind another vehicle, I reconsidered and, hoping no one was watching from inside, moved my car beside the other. As I gathered my things and headed for the door, I silently cursed myself for being concerned about something so unimportant. In the moments before Eneas opened the door, I continued to reflect on first impressions. I wondered, as I usually do before first interviews, how Eneas would perceive me and how our interaction would go. Certainly these thoughts are common to most people in social situations, but in oral history interviews, the personal and professional converge and the stakes are somewhat increased. Beyond wanting to appear qualified and respectful, I was often confronted with how my complex cultural heritage would factor into my interviews with Indigenous political activists. As a person of Secwepemc ancestry, my interest in Indigenous politics, and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs (the Union) in particular, stemmed from my family's history. My appearance as a young, non-Indigenous academic, however, often presented an alternate positionality to activists and these circumstances helped shape the oral history interview.

I knew from previous encounters with activists that my cultural identity mattered, when, for a different project, a Stó:lõ political activist used my perceived identity as a non-Indigenous scholar to silence my research and resist sharing knowledge and authority within the interview space. Vehemently opposed to the practice of white scholars entering his community to conduct research, this man activated his own political goals and power to protest non-Native appropriation of Stó:lõ history, and used the oral history interview as a forum for this political stance. Despite my First Nations ancestry, my visible whiteness prevented me from establishing a historical dialogue with this individual. I soon learned to expect identity-based evaluations by potential interviewees, and yet, my experiences with Union activists further revealed the complexities of intersectional identities.

As we began our interview, Eneas spoke generally about the problems of outsiders entering Indigenous communities to conduct research. Suggesting that these outsiders often justified their research by claiming to have Indigenous ancestry, Eneas said jokingly, "You'll probably tell me that your grandmother was an Indian princess."[3] Though he took a light-hearted approach in his commentary, Eneas was expressing serious concerns about academics working in

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not their materials could be used for future projects, teaching, and publications. Because this specific article uses oral history interviews in a unique manner, evaluating the process through which they were created more so than their content, I requested specific permission from the main contributors to use their interviews in this manner. In instances where the political narratives were potentially harmful or controversial, I chose to preserve the anonymity of the actors in my bid to avoid unnecessary friction. Special thanks are owed to Chief Adam Eneas and the late Chief Delbert Guerin for their valuable input into this article.

[3] Adam Eneas, interview with author, Penticton, BC, June 3, 2013.

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Indigenous communities. Eneas referenced these academic rationalizations for conducting research with Indigenous communities and resisted my perceived attempt to use disingenuous claims of Indigenous ancestry to gain access to community knowledge. I was sensitive to this phenomenon, yet I was also aware of tendency for individuals with genuine ancestral connections like myself to leverage those relationships, however tangential, into personal and professional benefits. Although Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith and other Indigenous academics note the problematic nature of shifting and hybridized Indigenous identities and suggest that these realities complicate attempts to decolonize research practices, many Indigenous researchers continue to view their ancestry as an unproblematic solution to colonizing scholarship.[4] Following this logic, Indigenous ancestry could also potentially absolve researchers from self-serving intentions leaving researchers unaware of the ways in which power dynamics continue to manifest within cultural groups. Shared ancestry does not eliminate other forms of privilege, and it does not necessarily obscure other identity differences such as age, gender, and education, which are often more pronounced. In light of these considerations, Eneas' barbed comment made it too uncomfortable to for me to admit that my politically active grandmother is a status Indian living on the Kamloops reserve, and that was a significant factor motivating my interest in Indigenous politics. In part, the legacy of Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars who believed Indigenous ancestry could grant them unrestricted access to Indigenous communities silenced my self-reflection about my cultural identity. More broadly, this interaction exposed the often-uncomfortable realities of negotiating identity and relationships in a political setting.

This encounter reinforced what I already knew; that oral history interviews were negotiated political spaces shaped by intersectional identities and the politics of the personal. What I soon learned, however, was that oral history interviews could also be negotiated political spaces wherein historiographical and political interpretations are debated between interlocutors and involved listeners. Using community-engaged research with current and former Union members, this article will examine how narrators of Union history discuss contentious twentieth century political concerns, keeping in mind the continued currency of these issues. Challenging the prevailing tendency of oral historians to emphasize concepts of collaboration and stable identities in oral history research, this article reveals how oral histories of Indigenous protest movements complicate these relationships. This research examines difficult encounters amongst narrators and

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[4] Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (New York: Zed Books, 1999); Linda Tuhiwai Smith, "On Tricky Ground: Researching the Native in the Age of Uncertainty," in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln eds. (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2000): 85-107.

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listeners, which serve to disrupt the assumed power differentials within the interview space and considers how researcher and narrator subjectivities, issues of authority, political ideologies, and high political stakes interact to complicate inter- and cross-cultural dialogue within these oral narratives, while concurrently providing space for progress on Indigenous rights to be made. Looking closely at both the process and product of oral histories demonstrates how, in the context of the Union, collaboration and shared authority are influenced by the political nature of the interview itself. Indeed, the oral interviews of the Union are negotiated political spaces in two senses. First, they are political on a personal level, whereby narrators engage with the listener to navigate multiple and shifting positions, the relationship between academy and community, and shared knowledge in order to create an acceptable interview space. Second, they are political in a historiographical sense, in that narrators use the interview to negotiate with their own memories as well as with other activists to produce, debate, and shape the narrative of the Union. The highly politicized setting of Indigenous politics in British Columbia similarly influences these oral history interactions, as politically fluent Union activists remain cognizant of the continued relevance of the Union. This allows these political actors to explicitly use interviews to navigate their relationships with the listener, themselves, and other activists to promote a particular understanding of Union history and to influence the future of Indigenous politics.[5]

Although Indigenous peoples in British Columbia had been resisting settler-colonial political forms since the 1870s, inter-community divisions, government obstruction, and the challenging nature of BC's vast territory had consistently undermined these political efforts. In 1969, however, when Pierre Trudeau's Liberal government introduced its *Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy,* better known as the White Paper, Indigenous peoples in BC were given an added incentive to find an effective formula for pan-tribal unity. Under the banner of equality, the White Paper sought to abolish the Indian Act which governed the lives of First Nations peoples, negate treaties which guaranteed resource rights, annuities, and other privileges, and eliminate the special status and recognition of Canada's First Nations population. In British Columbia, where treaties were limited and Indigenous rights went unrecognized, the White Paper meant that the historical reality of colonial dispossession would be permanently ignored.[6]Acknowledging their structural and representative

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[5] Erin Jessee also addresses the ways in which politicized settings influence the oral history interview. Erin Jessee, "The Limits of Oral History: Ethics and Methodology Amid Highly Politicized Research Settings," *Oral History Review* 38, no. 2 (Summer-Fall 2011): 289, 292-293.

[6] Menno Boldt, *Surviving as Indians: The Challenge of Self-Government* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 21; Harold Cardinal, *The Unjust Society* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1999); J.R. Miller, *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens: a History of Indian-white Relations in Canada* (Toronto: University of

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weaknesses, leaders from three of the organizations operating in BC – the North American Indian Brotherhood, the BC Indian Homemakers' Association, and the Southern Vancouver Island Tribal Federation – arranged for a Chiefs' meeting to discuss province-wide unity to oppose the White Paper and pursue the land claim.[7] The 1969 "All BC Chiefs' Conference" drew leadership from 144 of the 192 First Nations bands in BC and was the most broadly representative meeting in the province to that date.[8] It was at this meeting that the Union of BC Indian Chiefs was born. Aware of the challenges of uniting such a diverse population, organizers decided that the Union would operate on a broad provincial and pan-tribal platform and would not overtake local politics or interfere with Band autonomy. Instead, it would act as a coordinating organization where Band Chiefs could develop a unified stance on issues of Indian status, land claims, and claims based on Aboriginal title.[9] Drawing strength from global social movements and an enduring history of activism throughout the province, and appealing to a shared desire for "spitting out the foreign society," the Union quickly emerged as a leading voice for Indigenous rights.[10] Still in operation today, the Union is one of the longest standing pan-tribal political organizations in BC's history and, with many current and former members available to consult, provides an important glimpse into the modern BC Indian movement of the long Sixties.[11]

Toronto Press, 1989); Paul Tennant, *Aboriginal Peoples and Politics: The Indian Land Question in British Columbia, 1849-1989* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1990).

[7] The key players and organizations involved are a matter of debate for some activists. Some activists insisted the Native Brotherhood of BC and the Nisga'a Tribal Council were also involved in the organization of the Chiefs' meeting, while others note that the leaders of the Native Brotherhood and Nisga'a Tribal Council did not respond to the original call for organization made Cowichan leader Dennis Alphonse. Tennant, 152.

[8] There is some discrepancy over the actual number of Bands represented at the first meeting. Paul Tennant suggests that 140 British Columbia Bands were represented at the 1969 meeting, while the minutes of the meeting indicate that 144 delegates were present. Further complicating the matter, Chief Clarence Jules, who helped organize the first meeting and hosted the 6-day affair, insists that only 2 Chiefs were missing, while the March 1971 edition of the National Brotherhood's Indian Voice insisted the Union represented 188 Bands. Regardless of the actual number, all can agree that this was a widely-attended meeting with almost universal support. Tennant, 53; Peter McFarlane, *From Brotherhood to Nationhood: George Manuel and the Making of the Modern Indian Movement* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1993); UBCIC, "Minutes of November 22, 1969," in Indian Chiefs of British Columbia Conference, November 17-22, 1969, UBCIC Resource Centre, Vancouver, BC; Clarence Jules, interview with author, Kamloops, BC, June 12, 2012; "B.C. Chiefs, Ottawa Fail Indian People," *The Native Voice* 1, no. 5 (March 1971): 1.

[9] UBCIC, "Minutes," in Indian Chiefs of British Columbia Conference, November 17-22, 1969, UBCIC Resource Centre, Vancouver, BC

[10] Reuben Ware, interview with author, Vancouver, BC, August 20, 2012.

[11] The use of the 1960s as a temporal classification or category of analysis had been much debated by scholars. The term has been applied to denote a particular decade, period, or set of ideas with discussions ranging from equating the 1960s to the formation of the New Left, which has been similarly debated; speaking of the 1960s in terms of social movements, which expand beyond the

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Despite the long history of Indigenous activism in British Columbia and its continued relevance, Indigenous organizations are poorly understood. In part, this can be attributed to the limitations of the existing historiography, which is dominated by studies of community-based activism and comprehensive analyses of Indigenous political mobilization. These two trends tend to produce studies that are either too narrow or too broad to capture the nuances of Indigenous politics.[12] Focusing on the political activity of communities such as the Lillooet and the Nisga'a, for example, the works of Joanne Drake-Terry and Daniel Raunet illustrate the unique political strategies of specific tribal communities without emphasizing links to larger political trends. This creates the impression that Indigenous political activity in British Columbia was isolated and immune to inter- and intra-tribal coalition and conflict. Broad political surveys, on the other hand, demonstrate tribal interaction as well as the impact of Indigenous politics on Canadian structures, yet these studies often lack detailed ties to community dynamics and tribal identity.[13] For instance, Paul Tennant's seminal work on British Columbia Indigenous politics focuses on provincial trends rather than individual community contexts or culturally specific political ideas. Tennant also

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temporal boundaries of the 1960s; and speaking of the 1960s in strict temporal terms to designate a specific decade and the events that occurred within it. Reacting to predominant trends that focus narrowly on 1960s, Lara Campbell, Dominique Clément, and Gregory Kealey appeal for a broader definition and suggest that the 1960s is conceptual and ideological rather than temporal. Following this definition, it seems the "Sixties" as a concept can comfortably encompass social movements and New Left ideals, along with other themes outlined by M. J. Heale such as prosperity and youth, politics of race and culture, and cold war dominance. My treatment of the 1960s in the context of BC Indigenous politics will draw on these wider definitions to consider the sixties in terms of broader concepts and movements—acknowledging the interconnectivity of multiple movements through space and time—and will adopt Alice Echols' notion that the 1960s represents aspects of both continuity and change. Lara Campbell, Dominique Clément, and Gregory S. Kealey, eds., *Debating Dissent: Canada and the Sixties* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012); Karen Dubinsky, Catherine Krull, Susan Lord, Sean Mills, and Scott Rutherford, eds., *New World Coming: The Sixties and the Shaping of Global Consciousness* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2009); Alice Echols, *Shaky Ground: The Sixties and its Aftershocks* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); Van Gosse, *Rethinking the New Left: An Interpretive History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); M.J. Heale, "The Sixties as History: A Review of the Political Historiography," *Reviews in American History* 33, issue 1 (2005): 133-135; and Bryan Palmer, *Canada's 1960s: The Ironies of Identity in a Rebellious Era* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009).

[12] Peter Carstens, *The Queen's People: A Study of Hegemony, Coercion, and Accommodation Among the Okanagan of Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991); Tennant, *Aboriginal Peoples and Politics*; Joanne Drake-Terry, *The Same as Yesterday: The Lillooet Tribal People Chronicle the Takeover of Their Territory* (Lillooet, BC: Lillooet Tribal Council, 1989); Daniel Raunet, *Without Surrender, Without Consent: A History of Nishga Land Claims* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1984). See also: D. Duane Thomson, "A History of the Okanagan: Indians and Whites in the Settlement Era, 1860-1920" (PhD dissertation, Vancouver, B.C: UBC, 1985).

[13] Laurie Meijer-Drees, *The Indian Association of Alberta: A History of Political Action* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002); Tennant, *Aboriginal Peoples and Politics*.

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emphasizes the role of tribal factionalism in political breakdown, but discounts how interactions between tribal groups produced alternate political relationships and flexible communities including new pan-tribal identities.[14]

To address this historiographical gap and to provide a more comprehensive picture of the Union, this article employs ethnohistorical and critical oral history methods. Ethnohistory "is the combination of the oral history, cultural focus, and field work of the ethnographer with the archival research and temporal context of the historian."[15] Initially conceptualized as a practical methodological solution for addressing Indigenous land rights issues in the United States during the late 1940s, ethnohistory used documentary evidence to support Native American tribes' claims against the government in the Indian Claims Commission.[16] Through its development, ethnohistory has weathered early resistance regarding the validity of oral history sources, which resulted in an overreliance on largely Eurocentric documentary sources, as well as doubts about whether Native American peoples, who had typically been relegated to the cultural sphere, could be studied in a historical manner. Smith also implicated ethnohistory in her concern that research on Indigenous peoples perpetuated colonization.[17] In the late 1940s, however, the field began to embrace its hybridity as a historical and anthropological discipline and honed its interdisciplinary toolkit.[18]

According to ethnohistorians Keith Carlson and John Lutz, as well as archaeologist Dave Shaepe, ethnohistory continues to mature and has recently entered a new era focused on Indigenous community-based research. These scholars have suggested that the "new ethnohistory" promotes more meaningful and engaged scholarship and is collaborative, mutually beneficial, reflective, and self-aware. Unlike previous iterations, which focused more on the narrator, the new ethnohistory recognizes the multi-sited role of the researcher in the community, as well as the impact this presence and its accompanying "cultural baggage" has on the narrator and the project itself.[19] The academic process also views narrators as equal participants and the discipline refrains from bestowing all the benefits of research onto the interviewer alone. Ethnohistorical practices have employed this dedication to equalizing the research relationship by following

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[14] Tennant, *Aboriginal Peoples and Politics*.
[15] Keith Thor Carlson, John Lutz, and David Schaepe, "Turning the Page: Ethnohistory from a New Generation," *The University of the Fraser Valley Research Review* 2, issue 2 (2008): 1.
[16] Michael E. Harkin, "Ethnohistory's Ethnohistory: Creating a Discipline from the Ground Up," *Social Science History* 34, no. 2 (summer 2010): 113-119.
[17] Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies:* Smith, "On Tricky Ground".
[18] Harkin, 119-124.
[19] Carlson, Lutz, and Shaepe, 2. See also: Joan Sangster, "Telling our stories: Feminist debates and the use of oral history," in *The Oral History Reader*, Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, eds. (London: Routledge, 1998): 94.

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research codes and utilizing research questions determined by community members, as well as facilitating collaboration on the analysis and dissemination of the final product. For example, Julie Cruikshank, Leslie Robertson, and Wendy Wickwire worked directly with First Nations individuals and communities to produce collaborative and, at times, even co-authored work deemed appropriate by the communities themselves.[20] Like these scholars, my work is also community-driven and community-minded as Union narrators largely control the nature and direction of our conversations in the hopes of allocating the risks and advantages of research more equitably. To share the benefits of research between the narrators and listener, as well as between academy and community, community repositories such as the Union Resource Centre, the Stó:lõ Research and Resource Management Centre, and the Tseshaht First Nations archives will house the oral history narratives and final products produced through my interactions with Union activists.[21]

Just as the new ethnohistory provides important guidelines for conducting meaningful cross-cultural research, this study also benefits from the theoretical discussions of oral history practices. Since the 1990s, oral history practitioners have engaged in sustained conversations about power differentials within the interview space, researcher reflection, and achieving genuine collaboration. After Michael Frisch coined the phrase "shared authority" to capture the dialogic nature of the interview as well as the dualistic authority between narrators and listeners, oral history experts have been increasingly concerned with how narrators and listeners interact.[22] Explaining Frisch's notion of shared authority, Steven High argued that narrators were granted authority within the interview because of their lived experience, while listeners accessed their power through professional training and expertise.[23] As a part of the reflective turn of the 1990s, oral historians such as Frisch sought to locate both the narrator and the researcher within the interview to understand how one's identity, experience, and socio-

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[20] Julie Cruikshank, *The Social Life of Stories: Narrative and Knowledge in the Yukon Territory* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1998); Julie Cruikshank, *Life Lived Like a Story: Life Stories of Three Yukon Elders* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990); Leslie Robertson, *Standing Up with Ga'axsta'las: Jane Constance Cook and the Politics of Memory, Church, and Custom* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2012); Wendy Wickwire, *Nature Power: In the Spirit of an Okanagan Storyteller* (Vancouver: Talon Books, 2004); Wendy Wickwire, *Write it on Your Heart: the Epic Works of an Okanagan Storyteller* (Vancouver: Talon Books, 1989). See also: Henry Pennier, *Call me Hank: A Stó:lõ Man's Reflections on Logging, Living, and Growing Old* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006).

[21] My consent form includes a place where narrators can donate their interview materials. Sometimes activists wanted copies for themselves or their families, but often they also chose to donate their materials to local archives or resource centres.

[22] Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990).

[23] Steven High, "Sharing Authority: An Introduction," *Journal of Canadian Studies/Revue d'etudes canadiennes* 43: 12-13.

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political knowledge shaped the oral interview. "This self-reflective approach," adds Celia Hughes, "is a relational dialogue in which two subjectivities are at play, and in which new subjectivities are created, on the part of both interviewee and interviewer, that result from interactions between them."[24] Oral history actors viewed this awareness as a crucial factor in creating meaningful dialogue.

The turn towards analyzing the implication of one's presence in the research experience has also been the subject of criticism, however, particularly by oral historians who believe that such reflection is self-indulgent and not analytically rigorous. Joan Sangster cautions listeners about leaning too far in the spectrum of self-reflection towards a level of narcissistic "soul searching" that might damage oral history relationships by undermining the value of the narrator's experience to accommodate the subjectivities of the listener.[25] Through her work female factory workers in Peterborough in the first half of the twentieth century, Sangster notes that endless questioning of how listeners can relate to or interpret the experiences of narrators can "sometimes take on a condescending tone."[26] Certainly placing oneself wholly apart from the experiences of narrators so not to appropriate or infringe upon their lived realities has its drawbacks, as does ignoring one's role in shaping the interview.

Keeping these debates in mind, research on the Union benefits from combining the new ethnohistory with High's adaptation of Frisch's concept, which stresses "sharing authority" rather than "shared authority".[27] High places emphasis on the relational, fluid, and active nature of the oral history relationship. My oral history interviews, then, became expressly process- rather than product-based, while discussing a highly politicized history of one organization's intervention into Indigenous politics. Seeking to address Smith's call to decolonize research practices, my work has redefined parameters of power and provided room for Indigenous community members to reclaim histories and situate the broader Indigenous political agenda within the domain of research.[28]

Using these methodological approaches in community-based research with Union members was challenging, particularly in terms of navigating complex identity sites. As mentioned earlier, Union members also used the interview space to deploy their political agendas concerning the conditions under which Indigenous history and the history of the Union should be discussed. Often this dialogue centred on my multi-sited positions.[29] After Eneas made his initial

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[24] Hughes, 71.
[25] Sangster, 94.
[26] Sangster, 94.
[27] High, "Sharing Authority," 12-14.
[28] Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*; Smith, "On Tricky Ground," 91.
[29] Janice Antoine, interview with author, Merritt, BC, June 5, 2013; Kukpi7 Wayne Christian, interview with author, Spatsin te Secwepemc First Nation, Enderby, BC, June 4, 2013; Adam Eneas; Percy Joe, interview with author, Merritt, BC, June 5, 2013.

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comment about my ancestry, he continued to outline the multiple ways in which he identified me as outsider such as gender, age, and education. I decided not to immediately disclose my Secwepemc ancestry, and in doing this, I enacted my own agenda for the oral interview and assuaged my own discomfort. This allowed me to draw on other elements of my identity to gain common ground with Eneas. After we had been speaking about Union politics for quite some time, Eneas admitted that he had originally felt nervous about the interview when he saw "an uptight young white girl" pull up to his house. Through this Eneas revealed his unease about discussing protest and politics with someone he felt he could not relate to.[30] He referred to my appearance and (lack of) parking skills as a way to emphasize how my position as a young academic ran counter to his lived experience as an activist. These revelations exposed how Eneas had effectively denied my authority within the interview space when we first began speaking.[31]

Like his "Indian Princess" remark, Eneas used humour and sarcasm to facilitate serious misgivings, but unlike his earlier comment, this one was made to illustrate that his opinion about me had shifted, and that his position as the sole authority within the interview had also changed. By this time, we had been talking about the history of the Union and Indigenous politics for over an hour and our shared identity as individuals interested in these topics began to overshadow the many ways Eneas had identified me as an outsider. Although my perceived cultural identity was an important consideration for Eneas, his interest in my political knowledge and sympathies soon eclipsed this. Anthropologist Kirin Narayan has suggested that locating and acknowledging our concurrent multi-sited identities serves to disrupt problematic insider/outsider dichotomies and facilitate meaningful research, and this was certainly apparent in my exchange with Eneas.[32] Through our interaction in the interview space Eneas had accepted our common ground and ignored our real and perceived differences.[33] This shared knowledge and interest gave me access to a degree of authority and agency within the interview that was denied moments earlier.[34]

While these exchanges stress the importance of questioning fixed and one-dimensional identities, they also highlight a phenomenon discussed by practitioners of Indigenous research methodologies whereby research on

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[30] Adam Eneas.

[31] High, "Sharing Authority," 12-34.

[32] Kirin Narayan, "How Native is a 'Native' Anthropologist?" *American Anthropologist*, New Series 95, no. 3 (1993): 671-686. High also notes the fluctuating boundaries between "researchers" and "community members" and discusses how these overlapping categories can influence the oral history record and relationship. High, "Sharing Authority," 21-22.

[33] Mahmood Mamdani, "Beyond Settler and Native as Political Identities: Overcoming the Political Legacy of Colonialism," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 43, no. 4 (October 2001): 661.

[34] Eventually, I confided in Eneas about my heritage and we spoke frankly about both of our concerns and questions regarding ancestry, status, and the veritable quagmire of legal-cultural identity sites.

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Indigenous peoples, once viewed only as a tool of colonization, becomes an instrument for self-determination and development.[35] Oral interviews with Union members such as Eneas facilitated a sub dialogue between activists and me, allowing them to evaluate my personal and political motivations, identity, and historical knowledge, before granting full access to their historical narratives. Eneas was the gatekeeper to the interview space, and directed the process of "sharing authority" in unexpected ways. He also simultaneously used this arena to pursue his own political agendas and socio-political positionalities.[36]

Oral histories of the Union were also sites of internal dialogue for activists as they navigated their memories and their ideologies to determine what to include in their accounts. Memory presents a challenge in oral history, and according to Ronald Grele, among historians "The dominant tendency has been to be overly enthusiastic in public print, and deeply suspicious in private conversation."[37] Despite this trend, scholars continue to dispute criticisms about the fallibility of memory and the inaccuracy or problematic nature of oral sources. Alessandro Portelli has suggested that rather than representing a methodological weakness, oral history narratives can provide a more thorough and holistic view of an event than what written material alone can glean. Noting the value of spoken cues such as tone, expression, and volume, Portelli reveals the multi-dimensional nature of oral records.[38] Unfortunately, according to High many scholars continue to struggle with unleashing the potential of these sources. Frequently, oral sources are translated into written transcripts that are more easily integrated into traditional written works, and the result is that many of the vocal details of the records are lost.[39] And yet, while the loss of this potential is mourned by High, his concept of sharing authority makes room for the relevance of oral interview to expand beyond its final product. Kukpi7 (Chief) Wayne Christian argues, for instance, that the process of creating oral histories is more important than the final product of the oral history interview and its application. This is especially true, Christian maintains, for First Nations leaders who exercise traditional skills of orality, often devalued in a settler-colonial context, in the oral interview. [40] This practice of orality is a form of activism and a key process in

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[35] Smith, "On Tricky Ground," 87.
[36] Lorraine Sitzia, "A Shared Authority: An Impossible Goal?" *The Oral History Review* 30, no. 1 (Winter-Spring 2003): 96.
[37] Ronald J. Grele, "Movement without Aim: Methodological and Theoretical Problems in Oral History," in *The Oral History Reader*, Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, eds. (London: Routledge, 1998): 38.
[38] In Jessee, 290.
[39] Steven High, "Embodied Ways of Listening: Oral History, Genocide, and the Audio Tour,"*Anthropologica* 55 (2013): 74.
[40] Kukpi7 Wayne Christian.

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decolonizing research practices.[41] Orality can also initiate collaborative remembering, which Neal Norrick and Lorraine Sitzia have noted is an important element of the oral interview process. As listeners take on an active role by posing questions and asking for clarification, the process of remembering develops through dialogue between the interviewer and narrator.[42] Celia Hughes adds that the history of radicalism presents a unique challenge to the deployment of memory in that narrators might find themselves discomforted by their past. In response, she argues, many of them use oral histories to compose a version of their activist past with which they can easily coexist.[43]

This interaction between orality, collaborative memory, and discomfort was visible when I asked Musqueam Chief Delbert Guerin to tell me about a controversial moment from the 1975 Union annual general assembly. The archival records and meeting transcripts revealed that during this meeting several groups had taken to the floor to perform traditional songs and dances. Guerin, believing these cultural expressions served as a distraction in a political forum such as the Union assembly, asked for the disruptions to cease.[44] This request led to a tense debate between delegates about the role of customary practices within the Union. Supporters of the cultural performances, such as Hesquiat Chief Simon Lucas insisted delegates needed to mobilize their people through traditional politico-cultural activities rather than simply embracing constitutions and "white man's" political structures. Guerin, on the other hand, remained convinced that delegates could strengthen Union politics by speaking in the political language of the Canadian state, and resented the disruption of important political business.[45]

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[41] See Smith, *Decolonizing* Methodologies; Dale Turner and Audra Simpson, "Indigenous Leadership in a Flat World," Vancouver: National Centre for First Nations Governance, 11-13; and Sean Wilson, *Resesarch is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* (Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, 2008).

[42] Sitzia, "A Shared Authority: An Impossible Goal?" 87-101; Neal R. Norrick, "Talking about Remembering and forgetfulness in Oral History Interviews," *The Oral History Review* 32, no. 2 (Summer - Autumn 2005): 1-20. Of course dialogue and collective remembering could work to disempower narrators by allowing the listener to determine the narrative through leading questions or imposing their knowledge on the narrator. This risk is most pronounced when narrators remain marginalized, although new ethnohistorical methodologies serve to lessen this risk. Indeed, Stó:lõ cultural advisor Naxaxalhts'i, Albert (Sonny) McHalsie counsels new researchers in Stó:lõ territory to refrain from interjecting their ideas in the interview space, particularly during awkward moments of silence. Naxaxalhts'i notes the importance of letting narrators control the interview as much as possible, allowing these individuals to dictate the terms and pace of the exchange. Sonny McHalsie, personal communication, May 13, 2007.

[43] Celia Hughes, "Negotiating ungovernable spaces between the personal and the political: Oral history and the left in post-war Britain," *Memory Studies* 6, no 1 (January 2013): 86-87.

[44] UBCIC. Video recording of Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs General Assembly Evergreen Hall, Chilliwack, BC, April 24, 1975. V296 video recording.
< http://www.ubcic.bc.ca/Resources/Digital/7thAGA.htm#axzz2j2M40SqJ> .

[45] UBCIC. Video recording of Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs General Assembly Evergreen Hall, Chilliwack, BC, April 24, 1975. V296 video recording.

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When asked about this event during our interview, Guerin, pausing for a second, replied that he did not remember that exchange.[46] While recognizing the challenges of memory and the limitations of the interview space, particularly for older narrators, Guerin's response surprised me. At 74 years old, Guerin had excellent recall for the minutiae of Union activities, and further, because this interaction was lengthy and bitter, I was sure that it would stand out in his mind.

Employing collaborative remembering techniques, I asked about the individuals Guerin had clashed with hoping to jog his memory. Immediately Guerin responded that he had simply acted to protect the best interests of Union delegates who had spent months preparing for this meeting. Guerin's tone, along with our later conversations, suggested that he did remember the event I was referring to, but he refrained from engaging with the issue directly. Instead, his explanation underlined sentiments he had vaguely expressed in the 1975 meeting: namely, that delegates were there to conduct serious business and that the schedule of events should not be disrupted. He mentioned this without weighing in on whether cultural practices had a place within Union activities.[47] Instead of reiterating his original position or outlining whether or not his opinions had changed, Guerin offered an alternate explanation, which allowed him to bypass the conflict he had experienced. Guerin's political narrative, then, would emphasize his goal of protecting the Union schedule instead of his role in questioning the traditional elements of Indigenous politics. Suggesting that memory recall can be an overtly politicized phenomenon, Hughes notes, "Simultaneously, oral history narratives illuminate the complex relationship between memory, politics and subjectivity." She continues, "For my respondents, the oral history interviews served as a means of remembering not only past activist selves, but also for reshaping political subjectivity […]."[48] Indeed, through collaborative remembering with his listener and by negotiating an uncomfortable radical past through deliberate and politically engaged recollecting, Guerin could use his oral interview to propose a different history of an event. Guerin's fluid positionality was important here. He was not simply a witness to historical events; he was also a contemporary activist with a stake in how the narrative of the Union was constructed, as well as an individual dealing with past actions he may no longer agree with. Guerin was troubled by the events

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< http://www.ubcic.bc.ca/Resources/Digital/7thAGA.htm#axzz2j2M40SqJ> . Dale Turner and Audra Simpson agree, suggesting Indigenous leadership must learn to speak in the language of the state and indigenous political systems to shift the balance of power. Turner and Simpson, "Indigenous Leadership in a Flat World," 11-12.

[46] Delbert Guerin, interview with author, Musqueam First Nation Band Office, Vancouver, BC. May 31, 2013.

[47] Delbert Guerin.

[48] Hughes, 72.

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of the 1975 meeting, and while he did not explain whether this was due to his actions or the events in general, he acted in a natural and acceptable manner to avoid further discomfort. These multiple positions and insights brought renewed significance to how Guerin discussed his political past.

For my part, rather than viewing this exchange as an attempt by a narrator to disrupt the established account of the Union, I chose instead to employ ethnohistorical understandings of collaboration and respect, and focus on the significance of Guerin's remembrances rather than the memories themselves. Guerin's interview exposed intimate details about relationships between Union leaders and helped to explain why the 1975 annual general assembly witnessed a severe leadership crisis. At the meeting, questions about how leaders should conceptualize and employ Indigenous politics within the Union fuelled heated debates about traditional versus elected Chieftainships and the integration of traditional practices into Union political activities. Guerin's interview allowed him to remain silent on aspects of this conflict that, for unnamed reasons, remained unimportant, inaccessible, or even traumatic to him, while allowing him to speak on issues that he believed were still valuable. Guerin's oral history of this event, therefore, revealed the role of conflict, memory, and silence in the narratives of the Union.

Just as activists used interviews and their changing positions to create an acceptable past, the interviews themselves also provided an internal space for Union members to talk about politics to each other. In some conversations, where activists would reflect on their interactions with Union colleagues, ideological differences and interpersonal relationships became apparent. Although typically interviewed individually, narrators often spoke about other activists, even at times commenting directly on interviews I had conducted with others. Union activists were often interested in learning who I had spoken to. Sometimes it was purely out of personal interest or nostalgia, where they might say something like: "Delbert? So he's still kicking around, huh," before continuing their narration.[49] Other times individuals would comment more specifically on the personal or political relationships they had with certain figures, and might choose to use the interview as a way to express respect or support towards that person or clear the air and apologize for past differences and actions.[50] This may have brought some

[49] Chief Percy Joe had worked closely with many of the Union activists I interviewed and was interested in hearing how his former peers were doing. This sub-dialogue presented another interesting element to the oral interviews of the Union whereby I mediated between individuals, at times helping to rekindle old friendships. Percy Joe.

[50] Rueben Ware; Ken Watts, interview with author, Tseshaht First Nation, Port Alberni, BC, June 28, 2012; Anonymous, author's fieldnotes.

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narrators a sense of closure or relief, particularly since they knew that copies of their interviews would be publically available in the Union Resource Centre.[51]

Others used interviews in a more overtly political manner. This simultaneously exposed the political nature of interviews as well as the continued activism of individuals. Some leaders expressed strong opinions about how their peers incorrectly practiced Indigenous politics. Often diverging opinions about the validity of Indigenous politics centred on issues of elected versus traditional hereditary leadership. After learning that I had spoken with Chiefs elected under the Canadian government's system of Band governance rather than through traditional hereditary leadership channels, some hereditary Chiefs expressed disappointment that I might use the opinions of Indian Act Chiefs in my project. Some hereditary leaders insisted that Indian Act Chiefs were not dedicated to securing complete Indigenous sovereignty and were too accommodating to the state.[52] These opinions addressed a longstanding debate within Canadian Indigenous politics about competing leadership systems. Many believed that government imposed political structures were not legitimate and that only customary hereditary Chiefs had genuine authority.[53] Others believed the two systems could co-exist.

Within the interview space, leaders used their narratives to promote their own political ideologies above others. At times, oral histories could explicitly target the politics and attitudes of other leaders, revealing conflicting accounts of events and ideas. These interactions highlight the type of internal conflict and socio-political negotiation that Sherry Ortner has insisted is missing from studies of Indigenous resistance movements.[54] Criticizing the tendency within the literature to emphasize unity rather than conflict in marginalized populations, Ortner argues that this presents a skewed and romanticized view of these groups. Smith adds that Indigenous societies are fraught with complex relationships of power and prestige. "There are internal relations of power," Smith argues, "as in any society, that exclude, marginalize, and silence some while empowering

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[51] All but one of the dozens of individuals interviewed agreed to place a copy of their interview materials in the Union Resource Centre.

[52] Anonymous.

[53] For more information on competing understandings of acceptable Indigenous leadership practices see: Taiaiake Alfred*, Peace, Power, Righteousness: An Indigenous Manifesto* (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 1999; Keith Thor Carlson, *The Power of Place, the Problem of Time: Aboriginal Identity and Historical Consciousness in the Cauldron of Colonialism (*Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010); Carstens, *The Queen's People*; Turner and Simpson, "Indigenous Leadership in a Flat World"; Dale Turner, *This is Not a Peace Pipe: Towards a Critical Indigenous Philosophy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008) 1st edition, 2006; Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life across the Borders of Settler States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014); Richard E. Atleo, *Tsawalk: A Nuu-chah-nulth Worldview* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004).

[54] Sherry Ortner, *Anthropology and Social Theory: Culture, Power, and the Acting Subject* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 45-46.

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others."[55] Through Union narratives, some leaders were able to emphasize their political agendas of rejecting historical government intervention into Indigenous politics, while simultaneously expressing dissatisfaction with other Chiefs. Much like Guerin, who used his interview to influence the historical interpretation of the Union, other leaders' accounts became contested political sites through which individuals not only sought to establish their interpretation of Indigenous politics as more authentic than others, but also insist that their oral interviews and histories of the Union should be privileged over others.[56] At times these multiple interpretations and narratives were based on strong political rivalries.[57] Other times, they simply represented expected historical divergences.

According to Erin Jessee, this type of intervention is common in oral histories of protest, where the narrator and listener enter the interview space with their own agendas, and often, the necessary political power to shape the outcome of the interaction. This power struggle, Jessee argues, reveals a serious limitation in the role of oral history for the empowerment of marginalized populations and the eventual democratization of history. This is particularly true, she insists, when the voice of one narrator obscures others within the movement.[58] Reading these narrative silences presents a unique challenge but also provides much analytical potential in understanding the significance of why and how some stories are being told above others. In Union narratives, these power structures remain but in altered form as most of the activists are leaders and elite members of their communities. Some leaders drew on notions of Indigenous leadership authenticity and political legitimacy to undermine the political ideals and narratives of others. Amongst these gradations of power, these leaders were engaging in a political dialogue with other politically fluent and influential Indigenous leaders. These interviews, then, illustrate the extent to which oral histories of the Union provided an opportunity for activists to participate in an internal dialogue to negotiate and perform their political identities through various sites and interactions. Further, it also revealed how interviews created an external discourse in the form of a historical record of a collective organization and political movement. Through their interviews, activists talked to each other about how to historicize the Union, and the subjectivities and political motivations of individual activists informed the different histories that emerged.

As they spoke, narrators were also aware of the continued currency of Indigenous rights and title issues, and the ways in which the Union narrative could significantly influence the future of Indigenous politics. Many actors spent

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[55] Smith, "On Tricky Ground," 87.
[56] Anonymous.
[57] These types of interactions are also expected within political forums such as the Union where leaders often have strong personalities and opinions and diverging opinions and ideas are natural.
[58] Jessee, 299-300.

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much of their lives working for the Indigenous political movement, and many – though not all – remain actively involved in politics, and are invested in the outcome.[59] Today in British Columbia the current government treaty process has stalled and pan-tribal political organizations have largely lost the confidence of constituents due to close ties with government and conflicting political agendas. The Union remains staunchly opposed to the treaty process and its emphasis on extinguishing Indigenous title to lands not directly covered by future treaties, and government hopes for certainty in terms of the Indian land question.[60] The Union's history as one of the province's longest standing and broadly representative political organizations provides critical insight into these political questions. Union activists, therefore, have an important political stake in disseminating their truths about the Union, leadership, and politics.

Through some of the accounts, some leaders suggested reviving the original mandates of the Union and shrugging off government intervention would facilitate genuine Indigenous sovereignty. Many Union leaders believed that the early days of Union organizing, before generous government funding and burgeoning bureaucracy within the Union, provided the best possibilities for political progress. These Chiefs believed that government money with its accompanying intervention served to dilute the political strength of Indigenous leaders, and in some cases completely corrupt the movement. [61] These Union narratives highlighted the past political strategies that some leaders believed were the most effective, and deeply criticize elements of Union politics, which serve to threaten the Indigenous rights movement. Leaders like Guerin, on the other hand, believed that Indigenous sovereignty and rights needed to be asserted in the language of the state or risk being ignored altogether.[62] Guerin's narrative of the Union emphasized the benefits of business-minded rather than culturally-minded politics, while simultaneously working to erase some of the internal friction of Union politics. Through their interviews, Union activists worked to educate others on the history of politics as well as to incite current activists to enact their

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[59] Many of the activists I spoke to are still Chiefs within their communities and involved either in Union politics or in the tribal councils or pan-tribal organizations in their areas. Others have retired from politics but continue to attend Union and Band Council meetings, or just generally keep up with the political developments across the province. Kukpi7 Wayne Christian; Delbert Guerin; Percy Joe; Marge Kelly, interview with author, Soowahlie First Nation, Chilliwack, BC, May 3, 2012; Don Moses, interview with author, Merritt, BC, June 11, 2013; Arthur Manuel, interview with author, Union of BC Indian Chiefs' Office, Vancouver, BC, August 14, 2012; Clarence Pennier, interview with author, Stó:lõ Tribal Council Office, Agassiz, BC, July 25, 2012; June Quipp, interview with author, Cheam First Nation, Rosedale, BC, June 25, 2012; anonymous.

[60] Don Bain, personal conversation with author, Union of BC Indian Chiefs' Office, Vancouver, BC, April 8, 2012; Percy Joe; Clarence Pennier.

[61] Anonymous; Adam Eneas.

[62] Delbert Guerin.

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particular view of Indigenous politics. The interviews, then, were just as much about historicization as contemporary political motivations.

Ethnohistorical and critical oral history research methods applied to the examination of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs not only open up new avenues of interaction with First Nations communities, but also provide a different understanding of the Union than can be garnered from the archives and existing literature alone. Activating Smith's belief that Indigenous scholars should develop methodologies that draw on Indigenous knowledge, reflections, and analyses of their own lives, the methodological approaches outlined in this article create room for narrator and listener to share knowledge and authority while negotiating the history of the Union within the interview space.[63] By questioning the stable identities assumed in other analyses of shared authority and revealing the fracturing of identity into race, gender, status, age, and knowledge or experience, the interview can be probed in a more meaningful way. Through this we see how oral histories of the Union enacted politics on multiple planes as activists with fluid positionalities talked about Indigenous protest through my presence as a researcher, through their own memories and agendas, and through each other. As a listener with multi-sited positionalties, my access to the interview space and authority within it fluctuated, especially as my presence interacted with the shifting opinions and socio-political motivations of each activist. At times it mattered who I was and what my goals in the interview were; yet, in other interactions, my presence was essentially muted by the overwhelming political motivations of the narrators. In each phase, activists determined whose presence, political ideologies, and historical narratives were appropriate, and thus shaped our understanding of the Union in the process.

This research reminds us that narrators are not actors frozen in time and simply reflecting on past actions, relationships, and ideas from the stable position of their past selves. They are both witnesses to historical events and individuals with a stake in how they remember and talk about the past. The types of historical narratives produced through fluid positionalities and the roles of both narrators and listeners are also decidedly complex and fragmented. As such, they seem to challenge the very possibility of constructing an intelligible and straightforward narrative. Yet, I argue that by paying attention to the changing positionalities of the interview and the narrators, oral history practitioners can gain important insight into how narrators direct their participation, memories, and histories in multiple ways. These realities have the potential to bring new meanings to practices of community-engaged research and collaboration where historians take direction from the varied positions and motivations of narrators within the oral interview space. Ultimately, these oral histories provide an alternative to direct

[63] Smith, "On Tricky Ground," 87.

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historical narratives by embracing rather than obscuring seemingly problematic divergences and conflicts. This research reveals the strong analytical potential for evaluating the product and process of oral histories simultaneously to discuss how multiple histories are navigated and negotiated. The multifaceted narratives emerging here also provide a good example of Indigenous historical research, because it is not simply incorporating materials from oral sources to produce a single narrative of Union history, it is illuminating the very process through which actors negotiate their own roles and their histories. It is truly pre-positioning Indigenous voices in all their complexities. In the context of continuing Indigenous rights issues in the highly politicized setting of British Columbia, the history of the Union and the multiple, shifting, and negotiated narratives of activists demonstrate the relevance of analyzing oral histories of protest.

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