

NEW YORK CITY TRANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

JULIANA MORAES

Interviewer: Sebastián Castro Niculescu

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Transcribed by Brittany Flaherty

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Sebastián Castro Niculescu: Hello, my name is Sebastián Castro Niculescu and I will be having a conversation with Juliana Moraes for the New York City Trans Oral History Project, in collaboration with the New York Public Library's community Oral History Project. This is an oral history project centered on the experiences of Trans identifying people. It is August 15th, 2018, and this is being recorded at the New York Public Library offices in midtown Manhattan. Hi Juliana.

Juliana Moraes: How are you?

Niculescu: Good, how are you?

Moraes: Great.

Niculescu: Um, how are you feeling today?

Moraes: Feeling better now that I'm here. I was a little bit anxiety—you know little bit anxiety kicked in.

Niculescu: Um, so what are you excited to talk about in an interview setting?

Moraes: I am excited to, I mean, share my experience as a Trans person of color. As a you know, person that migrated here in the 1984 before all this um, everything, you know, going on now with Mr. 45 [President Trump]. You know I came through that way. I came through Mexico, through, you know, the border which they're trying to create the wall. I was born as those people back in the day. My mother brought me in her bags, I still have flash backs. I remember the sky being dyed purple, the dark purple, right before sunrise, you know, over the Rio Grande.

Niculescu: Wow, wow, so let's get started then. Where were you born?

Moraes: Brazil.

Niculescu: OK, where in Brazil?

Moraes: Um, Rio. My Father Was Colombian so we moved to um, Columbia, Cali, and from there, I was growing up, I was just, a child that, I guess you know, was always like outspoken. They said I was always um, gross, you know like. It was, I'll called always, um, outspoken child and it was always like, it was, they looked at upon as rude. Feminine, rude, you know, outside the box always. Since young, I express our femininity at such an early age and you know, machismo and egotistic takes part of a big Latin culture, you know, it's part of the culture. So, it's, I was shunned upon by my aunts and uncles, and my grandmother was more um, lenient with me. She was more, you know comprehensive. She wasn't so rough like my parents were and stuff. You know coming from a religious background, Jehovah's Witness, and all that. At that time we were Christian but then later on... But pretty much like that. Then we just got to this country. I remember moving from state to state and reaching what's called Jersey [New Jersey]. Jersey, growing up over there. Remember, you know, high s—in grammar school, everything from, I

repeated a couple of grades and everything was because, it was like, at that time we didn't have counselors like, we did have counselors but people really they didn't listen to us, as a person. It was just like, it was everything on the standards of cis gender people. It's a disgusting mode that has created so much anxiety and trauma in my life. It's like, I live by myself and I try to just coexist and just leave all negativity outside, you know what I mean? People are so toxic to us, they could be so, and forcing their ways. When you grow up hearing that you're wrong, everything you do is wrong and they're right. It's like you blame yourself and you shun yourself. It's like, ridiculous. Then when you grow up and, you know, 37 now and it's like, you know better now, like wait a minute, I was right all along. I wasn't a fucked-up child. I wasn't a messed-up child. They were the messed-up people. Society makes us look like were the villains meanwhile were some gentle flower. I wasn't the prettiest boys —another thing I noticed, because I was a dark child, I was black. You know I'm black like, I'm light skinned now because of the hormones but as a person of poc [Person of Color] I was, my parents, like everyone would look at me like [opachin?] the black little kid. So I was really the black duckling of the family. And I suffered racism because of that, like my mother's friends, they would make fun of me and I would feel so bad, so bad. So music was my escape, samba was in my soul. And I would put music and just dance, and dance my worries away. Today dance is my therapy, it's brought me out of a lot of, you know I cope with a lot of things with music. Music is therapy for me, it's in my blood. My ancestors gave me that you know what I mean? That's my life now I practice my [coomba?] which is the religion that Africans brought with them and this is what I, feel comfortable with all this now.

Niculescu: So, I have a couple questions because, I'm really interested but, starting off the phrase you used, what was it? That had to do with like your darker skin? What was the phrase? I think was in...

Moraes: Just a black boy. Like giving birth to a black boy, everybody was like, yea the tot was cute but then as you get older, people like, you could feel little micro aggressions towards you. And you don't notice it til later, I'm like, wait a minute. It was so wrong these people were doing that, how dare they. But you're so vulnerable and you don't know better because this is systematic oppression is terrible. And it's embedded in the cultures. It's whitening the culture and gentrification, you know what I mean?

Niculescu: Yeah, yeah. You're speaking specifically about like Brazil and Latin America?

Moraes: Yes, yes, and then these people have these thoughts and then they, you know, it's just terrible.

Niculescu: So, at what age did you go from Brazil to Columbia?

Moraes: Uh, shortly after like 3 to 4. I came to this county in 1984 so it was going like, pretty much, I was jumping already. I was a gypsy already, young at age, traveling, my life has been from one place to another, and I still today live in a certain place but it's not my place. It's like, things have gotten so, backwards. Things are supposed to get better but in a way yeah we have laws, we have this but mentalities, have not changed. Go back to Mr. 45, he hasn't made it easier for us.

He's made all these bigots and all these racisms is out there, really. And I myself, you hear what he says, like, kinda get accustomed for it, and it's terrible. I'm like "no wait a minute, that's not right. That's not right, wait a minute". You kinda have to stop yourself. I have to kinda stop myself, like, oh my god, get outta here, shouldn't be listening to this.

Niculescu: So, do you know what prompted a lot of the moving, and having to jump around?

Moraes: Just, together with coming to this country, that's part of moving. Moving in mentally, physically, and specially. First of all it's the moving around, trying to get situated in this country. Trying to get citizenship, trying to get, established with school, going to work, this and that and the third. The actual transition, you know what I mean? So the, hormone therapy as far as the physical appearance, cosmetic point of view. The rhinoplasty, breast imitation, butt implants, silicone, all that. Which later on, of course, lead to complications nowadays. And, I just had some silicone removed and if I wouldda known that years ago but you know society puts us on a, like you have to fit a certain mold. Or else you're not accepted by cis gender world. A woman has curves, a woman has this, a woman has that. It's just ridiculous. It's a lot of stress. Can you hear it in my voice? It drains a person. They don't know what they doing. They don't know what we go through. Cis people, yet they have problems but, they're not as bad as us. I mean us as Trans and people of poc and queer people, gender non-conforming. They don't understand that concept, there is only, there is a binary for them, for all they know. You're either male or female, there's no queer, or gender non-conforming, or if you wanna feel like putting on men's clothes or women's clothes a certain day for each sex, whatever. Everything is so systemic. Everything's like divide and conquer. It's all a part of, the oppression. So many things with this capitalism right now, it's just disgusting, you know. It's a rat race here in New York. Ugh! Getting here was like, oh my, like oh my god. Everybody's like, talk about push comes to shove, literally.

Niculescu: So, what was the process for you, and the experience of moving from Columbia and through Mexico into the United States? Can you talk us through that a bit?

Moraes: Well like I said, I was very young. So it already inflicted fear in my life, in my heart. Having to, like, duck down, without making a sound. You gotta, still have to whispers in the back of you head: "immigration, Immigration. Duck down, duck down". they will go around with that flashlight like a beacon of light, going around in a negative way though, like their trying to capture you. And you just have to throw yourself down in the floor. And it's like, praying and everything you have. Sweat coming down your, forehead. And it's like, that fear, it's disgusting that feeling, that gut feeling that your scared because your hands on them, on the system. Trying to make it here for a better life. For freedom. For more entitlement.

Niculescu: So, how old were you when you actually arrived in the US?

Moraes: Five.

Niculescu: Five? Oh wow, OK. So, how much jumping around did you do before you got to New York?

Moraes: Well like I said I was through the whole Central America, little countries. You know, Mexico, Matamoros, Rio Grande, past that go to Texas, and then I don't even remember the rest. I just remember we were having to be in New York, in Queens. Big Latino neighborhood over there. Still is. And, then we just moved to, we lived there for a couple of years, when queens was real nitty and gritty like. I mean it's still a little but it wasn't as bad as before. The drugs, and I remember the house got robbed and everything. It was a scary feeling. I remember the Mets were the World Series at that time. Darryl Strawberry 1985 I remember everybody seeing walking down on Roosevelt Avenue, with the "Mets" shirts. Have flashbacks see? New York. And from there I remember just living there, and going to the corner store and getting a pack of Cheetos. Little stuff like that. Hearing the train loud [makes rail sound effects] that 7 train. The lifeline of the Queens. [Both laugh] Yeah, and later on we just end up moving to Jersey to West New York to town. Started going to school there, and that's, started pretty much. Going to school it was like, I always liked to dance. I remember my, kindergarten teacher, she was like, I used to grab her and start dancing. Very flamboyant, I was like oh my god. She was, at that time, (doing a voice) "You have a lot of rhythm little boy". Because it was in my blood. And I remember I repeated, I repeated. I repeated like two times. I had a lot of complications in school. I was a good student until I started really maturing, and then puberty kicked in and that's when you really wake up and be like, your hormones and everything. You start waking up, like, I thought I was just a feminine gay boy. I still remember looking at my father's underwears, like, the cartage that brang the men modeling those underwears. I found extremely attractive. I was like, oh my god, why do I like this so much? This is bad, because Jehovah's Witness it was a sin. So I remember I would look at that, I would lust at five years old, I was like six years old, I was looking at that and I felt so guilty inside, because my family would shame me so much growing up Jehovah's witness. Man should not sleep with man, women should not, yada, yada, yada. That's like a little Jewish, yada, yada, yada. You live in the city, you...

Niculescu: ...you kind of absorb it all...

Moraes: Yeah, the cultures. That was a little Jewish, Yiddish. Yeah, and then throughout, I started waking up, like really waking up, with my sexuality at like when I got to 7th, 8th grade. I would do all the decorations for school, I was super talented kid, not to like, to be [inaudible]. But I was going to Alvin Ailey School, I was the only kid in the school going to Alvin Ailey, yeah, I was getting, a bus would pick me up and I was going there because they saw the potential in me. But I had no support from my parents. It was terrible. I could have became, I only dance now because I freelance and I do what I can because when it's in your system your talented no matter what. It's like a painting, when you're born with it, you got it. It's in your genes, you know what I mean? You just don't, "oh I'm gonna do this, I'm gonna do th—" it's in my genes so it's, at that time, that's how I started doing my art. That's how I would express myself. I would do decorations, decorate the gym for spring dance, and I was always that kid. Always thought outside the box, always. Costumes, I was always designing my costumes for Halloween, I was always winning. I remember the last year, oh no, that was high school, that was high school. Can we go to high school now yeah?

Niculescu: Uh, if you want we can go back and forth.

Moraes: High school, I remember, [inaudible] freshman year, it was scary. You start working out because, you kinda have to like, hide myself, my femininity, so I would like dress myself up with baggy clothes. You know, back in the 90's that was the urban look. Guys would dress up in these big jean, jean jacket, and jean, jean overalls, like MC Hammer look. And that was the way, I would cover myself and try to like, man up. Because you were like bully and ostracized, a lot. It was, like, ridiculous. So you had to camouflage your femininity. It was like "OK, OK..." and then I remember, just things like that. Joining every club, the modding club, and this and that, and the third. It just bullied, bullied. It was disgusting. I remember I could count my friends on with my fingers. I had two guy friends that were supportive, that weren't judgmental, and a girlfriend. Like, I would date girls when I was younger. I did it mostly, even though I'm bisexual, I don't have, I don't really, I think I'm queer today. I'm Trans, queer, whatever. I don't really like, if I like somebody I like somebody because its. As you get older it's like, what makes you happy? You have to look at your sanity and what makes you happy. That plays a big role. So, as high school went on, and it was very uncomfortable going to gym class. Having to wear those [inaudible] with the things and they make you lift weights. It was so uncomfortable, I did not want to do that. I wanted to preserve my slim body, because that was my only femininity. I took off my clothes and I saw myself in the mirror and I put my penis between my legs, and I would see, like, "well, all I need is my breasts and my head" I was already feminine, soft skin. As years went on in high school, as I started going down to the city, and going to the village. I remember my councilor told me one time, because I want to go to the village parade, back when I was 14, 15...

Niculescu: Your school councilor?

Moraes: Yeah. She happened to be lesbian later on, I didn't know at the time. It's so funny, it's, I jump a lot because there are so many thoughts that come to head. Um, going to high school, I would tell my councilor, I think I told me teacher, yeah! Everybody's like "what will you do for Halloween?" I'm going to the Halloween parade in the village! They're like "oooooooooo". That's was like "oooooooo" 14, 15 year old at that time going to the village for the Halloween parade. Halloween Parade was known like the [goros aroma?]. So it was like very out there, it was famous for being artsy, and all queer people, and it was a celebration. It was all at once and you can get away with stuff because it's Halloween. And Halloween was when you would dress up as whatever you want, and you would less be judged, people would less judge you because it's Halloween, so it's an exception that day. That was like an escape. Halloween was an escape. Started dressing up little by little and I would go to Halloween. I remember I made a mask, in art class, and that mask had like all the colors in it, like the LGBTQ flag and I didn't even know about the LGBTQ flag at that time, but yet I had it, a rainbow on my mask, with feathers coming out. It was so simple yet so, my teacher would be like "wow" you know what I mean? But I added feathers, I did all these extra stuff. I was like always thinking outside the box. I remember wearing that, and I would dance to like, I had a white suit on, I wore that and I put my mask on. And I went with the samba school in the city at that time was, still is, Manhattan samba, which is, they pretty much raised me up. They are the ones I used to run to. They used to have gigs at SOB's, and it's not son of a bitches it's Sounds of Brazil on Varick and Houston [street intersection in Manhattan].

Oh that was like my escape right there. On Saturday nights they had like a whole venue, with a whole bunch of Brazilian artists and they were the last ones to play at 2 o'clock. I remember I would be outside and I was underage. They took me under their wing and I would go in there, just get a drum and go in in there "yeah, yeah!" don't show your face, just bring the drum in like your one of the drummers. And I remember those were my happy days. Outside my family. Going out and just dancing the night. Sweating, I remember sweating. I used to dance so much he put me on stage. Yeah, as a dancer. I always been a dancer. Going on stage, just, you know I was a regular there. Till today, were family. That one of my chosen family's. And everybody there was like, literally an outcast. We all were there for some reason. We used to go there, just to like dance and, everybody was like, hey, friendly. It was a family, still are. And that was one of my things that I remember being young, one of my escapes besides clubbing. I was a club kid. I toned down, but that was my thing. I would club Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. I remember the limelight back in the 90's. The limelights, which is now like a spa. It was a church, converted. Then you know the tunnel right there, an old warehouse, everything by the west side highway. I remember to, across the street was Twilo. Twilo was a big gay club and I remember go in there and be like, so many men so little time. How can I choose? All these hot men without a shirt. I was in Nirvana. I was like "Oh my god, this is so awesome!" I never got into the heavy drugs though. Everybody was taking e pills at that time. That was a big thing, even Junior Vasquez and all those DJ's. Oh, so many clubs, you know the limelight, the cafe con leche. You grew up in the city?

Niculescu: Yeah.

Moraes: OK, so you know what I'm talking about?

Niculescu: A little bit, before my time.

Moraes: OK, studio, not Studio 45 but like Cheetah lounge, Vinyl's, that was like a real big place for poc, people of poc. It was like just, bring your sweats and your t-shirt and they would put powder on the floor and everybody was just, dance to gospel house. It was amazing. I used to go there with my best friend Kenya. She was a Afro-Cuban girl and I loved it because we knew each other, we got each others aura. We were best friends. We danced and we lived, and we loved life at that time. That was our escape. From school, from everything and we go to school Monday morning. I didn't even sleep. Just go home, take a shower, pick up my green book bag, at least I love green, and just go to school, you know, for green day. That was my best pen.

Niculescu: So when did you start going out to clubs? Do you remember your first night kind of, discovering the clubs and who brought you?

Moraes: Who brought me? It was like just follow the crowd. When I first... Right before, I think, well yeah. This is how it started: I started, I went to that village parade, then after that, that was of course October. By the time the summer came, then I was like "OK, let me go to the village in the day time." I used to wake up, I had some money saved from my little allowance, whatever I had. And it was like follow the yellow brick road. Get off at 42nd street at that time, at the dollar bus, the [chitny?] buses were like \$1.25, it wasn't as expensive as now. When Times Square was

Times Square, that's how, I got to see the last of Times Square. It was nitty and gritty and exciting and everything of the above. Right before Giuliani kicked in. I remember, getting off that thing and literally walking down from 42nd street, down to the 7th avenue. Getting down to Christopher [NYC street approximately 30 blocks south of 42nd]. It was like, looking around, the sights, the sees, the stores. It was full of hippies, and poc, and punks. The punk music, that was a big scene, punk back then. St. Mark's place [a stretch of E 8th street in NYC between Tompkins's square park and 3rd Ave] and all that. It was so dirty and nasty and gritty, and, it was New York. It was raw and there, and it was exciting. [both laughing] I just had to laugh, it was so much fun. I missed New York, I missed those days. It was so edgy, it was so fun. I remember I would go there in the daytime and then I would leave by the time it was 8 or 7, because I have to go home. For my mother want anything, like, for all she knew I was around the neighborhood somewhere.

Niculescu: Oh, in Jersey?

Moraes: Yeah, and then I remember I started going at night. And the first time I went at night was like "oh my god, this is a whole different story at night". I remember, right before crossing the piers, right where there was that book store, you know the porno store and all those, and it was full of them. Right before crossing the street I was looking over and I was like, "What is this? My god, what is this?" My heart was pounding as a little kid as I looked upon the queer people, you know, queer, LGBTQ people, it was the pier. It was pier, you know what I mean? It was that Marsha P. Johnson, it was that Silvia Rivera pier that they used to live in. It was dirty and nasty, and everybody was out there hanging out. People were voguing [a dance movement that started in the 1970's or 1980's primarily among the black gay community in Harlem]. It was so expression and now was like, it was dangerous but it was a safe space at the same time. Unless you crossed that street, west side highway was known as the death road here. Crossing that, getting there was like, I'm just sitting there, I was so nervous, I was a nervous wreck sitting there just [panting]. I was overwhelmed, happy, nervous, everything at the same time like a virgin. Looking around, I remember this older guy approached me, it was a gay guy, older guy, and he was like "hi, how are you?". Actually no, actually he made believe he was a, I forgot, what did he say, he could speak sign language?

Niculescu: Oh, Deaf?

Moraes: Yeah, he faked that he was deaf to approach me. I had sympathy and I always had a good heart, so I was like "oh". He was showing me this flier, do you like this? A guy without his shirt. Do you like that? I was like "Yeah, I'm OK with that, I like that." He's like, you know, it was weird because it took a while and then, I remember he invited me to eat pizza in one of those things. He spoke out, I'm like "oh my god you do speak!" it was like a fairy tale almost. Like "oh my god you do speak". He's like "Oh, yeah, yeah, I do speak, I'm sorry, I just wanted to, I didn't know how to talk to you". At that time they had what was called a chicken hawk. Chicken Hawk? Something like that. Older men that love young boys. Like those men that would cruise the bathroom at port authority, and he was one of those. Like he liked young boys, like I was a brown boy, a young brown boy and, after that we became good friends. He took me to his house, we experimented, I never had gotten f'ed up my ass before. So it's like he put his finger up it "Ah I can't take it, take

it out!" Little things like that you know? And he just became "you better take care of yourself out there", he became kind of a father figure later on. Until like.... I was feminine as a boy, and so many things I just keep jumping back and forth, because it's like, and I started working as a street worker in back of Christopher Street, Washington Street. You know that street called Washington Street in back, of Christopher? That's where I started, I started getting my little money there, my coins. And I remember I had this Jewish man pick me up, and all these guys, and that's how I got my first sugar daddy. It was a Jewish guy, he was so nice. Gobel. So [ting?], so Jewish right? Gobel. And he would have a catering service, so I remember I was treated to good food, that's how I started my good taste. Takes me to every good arts, like real good restaurant that only who knew because of its Zagat ratings at that time. I remember going and, Pellegrino and, have my first cosmopolitan, at my birthday. I wasn't dressing up at that time, later on I started dressing up though. I started feeling uncomfortable, in men's clothing. Even though I was, I would still wear like, little shorts and little flip flops. Always showing skin, I felt comfortable, I always loved my skin. I loved the sun, I loved getting my tans and just, liberal you know what I mean? Wearing a ton of gel in my hair, at that time remember. The gel was like a big thing. Like "uh", tons of gel. Maybe that's why my hair is weakening but [both laugh]. But um, yeah, I remember it started off like that, I started dressing up. I remember I started off with a scarf. I said "you know what, since I'm a person of..." I knew I was a, golden child. I knew I was a brown boy. I was like, you know what, I'm gonna wear what a brown person wears. A scarf for my head. Like the black girls would go to the, you know, get their nails fixed, or when it's a down day so wear my scarf. I started asking my little sister for her clothes. She was slim like me, petite, she started lending me her clothes, I wore her tight jeans, I wore her tight... Like a crop shirt, like those cut shirts here? I would wear little tight clothing, and go in my scarf, and it's amazing, because people picked up on it, some guys did pick up on it, and my feminine soul. And, I succumbed to the city like that. I used to do that, and then I met this lady later on who, she was from the neighborhood, she was a sex worker. She used to work at, train tracks in Jersey over there, by rout 1 and 9. By [tulleny?] Avenue, by the motels. That was a big scene back in the day. And, she kind of like took me, "you're a pretty boy, and pretty boys wear makeup". She grabbed me, she was the same kinda skin tone, she had that like olive, tan, complexion. She grabbed that olivela makeup. I never forgot, with that sponge. She slapped it onto my face, she's like "Come over here" slapping on some, "See? Your beautiful little boy!" And I looked at myself in the mirror, with that makeup, I'm like "ha, this is wonderful!" First time I had makeup on my face, you know that feeling is so, it like, I had so many mothers and fathers growing up. People that saw that. And she took me down and she sat me down where she was working. She's like "when later on when we get some money we'll go out and have some breakfast later on. I remember we had, um, we had meat, what is that? Anyways, we go to the Cuban restaurant and have fried fish, aw it was so good. All night for that breakfast. It was just little things like that, and then I started waking up, and you know putting on eyeliner, this and that, and letting my hair grow. I remember sitting down, at my sisters [brirel?]. You know [brirel?]? Like uh, like where, sit down have to put my makeup on.

Niculescu: Oh oh, yeah like vanity?

Moraes: Yeah, vanity case, you know what I mean? That was a big... Vanity case, yeah. I was sitting there and just, look at myself in the mirror, and brush my hair, would go "shoom, the goddess of

love". Just look into the mirror and be like, "Hmm, I don't what this is but I like it". Letting my hair grow, I don't know what it was, it felt comfortable. Felt so comfortable. And that's how I started. I remember I started like that little by little. Get my little clothes with the money that I would make. As a feminine boy, the money I would use to like, do my little cross dressing at that time, and, my escape and... I remember, yeah, people like, especially you like the attention. You know you got negative attention but then it was so overwhelming when you found somebody that liked you. That liked what they've seen, "see you accept me for who I am and you like me for who I am and we could go to dinner, we can fool around, have fun, and this is OK". It was a happy, a happy camper you know what I mean? It was like "Oh my god I'm so happy" like, you know those feelings are irreplaceable. Cis people don't know what that is, you know what I mean?

Niculescu: Yeah, because it's born out of like, necessity.

Moraes: Yeah, you know what, everything from growing up, playing with Barbie's, and making, designing the Barbie clothes for my friends and, I remember that from my mother's friend was trying to get me out of a room with... Little does she know I wasn't going to do anything to her daughter, I was just there like girl talk. You know cis people, they see a Trans person, they don't understand that. They don't understand that they thought you were just a freak. Or a person that was gonna go in there, or for some reason get their daughter pregnant or something. That wasn't my intentions at all. I wanted to be there just like the other girls. Hanging out, gossiping, listening to method man, and, you know what I mean, hip hop was a big thing back in the 90's and the house music. Were just sitting there listening to music, "m-o-t-h-o-d man" as people of poc. All that stuff I remember, you know what I mean? As I started dressing up, started hitting up the streets, the clubs. I remember the first time going to Elderwise. When Elderwise was on like 45th and like 11th avenue, 12th avenue, I don't remember. Right out front, across the street from the UPS factory. You know that place? Yeah, that was like the Elderwise when I got to see it. Because Elderwise had many locations. Like Sally's Hideaway was a big Trans, poc place, that's where the girls would go. I didn't get to see that because I'm not that old, I'm 37. Elderwise, I remember, that is where... I remember going in there for the first time to. My first wig, and dressing feminine, it was like "wow, all these men are here for Trans women?" It was like a carnival. But then it's like, as I started getting older, it's like, I went through a lot. A lot of transitions. My family moving away to North Carolina, trying to change my ways. They got to move my sister, my little sister, but they didn't get to change me. Because I made the decision right there to leave. I was like, "You know what?" I was like, "it's now or never." They really trying to take me down, they started packing. I remember that day when they were supposed to leave, I said I was going to the corner store or something, I didn't even know I just ran out the house. With a book bag and like, a box. And I left with what I can. I mean I left with boxer shorts, flip flops, and a tank top like I usually would wear, just simple. And I went into a married couple's house. They were like swingers at that time. I know what it is, didn't know what that was. They took me in. They took me in, they were very nice to me. The guy would make girls, women's clothing for me. Make skirts, he would sew. So I would just cooperate with some shorts around the house. Make dinner, make sure I had a roof over my head. They didn't charge me or nothing like that. That was in Bushwick Brooklyn.

Niculescu: How did you find them?

Moraes: I knew them through the club scene. Through SOB's they were the regulars to.

Niculescu: So how old were you when you ran away?

Moraes: I was like 17 going on 18. Whew! So many things, I just got light headed just thinking about all that. It was like a trip, a [380'n?]. Ah, a couple minutes. Drama---

Niculescu: Do you need a second?

Moraes: Yeah, I'm OK. I just drink my water. See, it's just so much stuff.

Niculescu: But it's like all, super interesting.

Moraes: Yeah, it's amazing that the lifestyle. It's like, "If you can make it here you can make it anywhere, New York". Yeah, say that with a New York accent. And they took me in and then from there I just, pretty much started my tran- started everything. I remember singing the yellow [inaudible]. And then, from one of those I went to stonewall. Historic stonewall. I saw somebody giving out fliers. Saw somebody giving out fliers for the Trans club. I was there dressed up. I didn't know where else to go. I was going in there dressed up and there's like, reach out to me, give me a flier, a Trans club, on 14th street. By 3rd avenue, 2nd avenue. Sandy Michelle was the owner of that Trans club. She still has Trans clubs around the city, and in Cali. And I remember I started going there and I started doing gigs. I started doing my, female impersonator, shows. I would get \$20 at that time. Plus tips. That's how I started off. And then you started doing shows, and then sex work and there. Getting money and then later on my life just, I ended up meeting, which became my Trans mother, Michelle de'Brazil. She's still alive today, she's original from SE 8th. From 14th street, back in the days, the real meat packing district where the girls used to work. What I mean by the girls is poc, transgender, non-conforming, all that. It was a big scene for that with a lot of. A lot of people go there meet Trans people. Pick them up. A lot of celebrity's went through there and picked up the girls. And, that's how I started I met her, she took me under her wing, I remember. But that's the first time I got to see the in call scene. I remember she took me to her house that night, I slept over. I remember that night, the next day I woke up, I peeked through the red curtain that she had dividing the room that I was in. Looking through the divisive curtain, and it was just looking and then I see her doing a John. A client at that time. I was like, "wow, in call. Oooh, wow". And then she's like "See, I just made my money, see I could call you in for a couple of dates if you like." and it started off like that. So she kind of gave me my first hormone shot, because everything back in the day we didn't have. We didn't have [inaudible], we didn't have [alupesha?] we didn't have all these, you know, facilities giving Trans healthcare support. We had the center. I remember I used to go to the center before all that. I forgot the center. They had that group, the youth group, at that time, I used to go to it. And that's where I would meet a lot of people and go to clubbing. Go meet up there and, yeah let's go. And then that's how I started, she gave me my first hormone shot, and I would live with her... You know, she would teach you how to put make up on, do this, do that, this is how you do. Cover your body

when you go outside, let's not be so explicit in front of our... Until you get to the block, then you could do whatever you want. That kind of, you know?

Niculescu: So, you started doing sex work as like a feminine boy? Near Christopher St. and then once you kind of like dressing up you were doing in calls?

Moraes: Well later on, it was in the street at first. I worked in Queens, and Jackson heights. It's pretty decent money back then in that area.

Niculescu: Where in Jackson Heights?

Moraes: All through um, from Roosevelt Avenue and then the back streets. It's still going on, but it's just a lot of... [Inaudible] It's not as easy as it used to be. Not that it was ever easy but, it's like you have more guts. As you get older you don't want to take those risks. You don't need to because then you get your own apartment, you run things on your own schedule. I've done worse, and then I started working for the LGBTQ center later on. Doing the, drop in group, support groups. So all these things come to work later on... A lot of people go to college, and you can learn these things. These are things you learn throughout the year. You acquire life skills through, the school of hard knocks. That's what I went to. You know my generation was the last one to, to play outside, do a lot of things. A lot of things that these millennials take for granted. They have so much technology, everything's an app, everything's, you know what I mean? Everything was word of mouth. The girls were like, everything was a black market. We used to go out, get our hormones from the corner lady. That's how we would buy our hormones. I remember seeing the hormone for the first time, like a girl I would hang out with. I hung out with a little clique in The Pier later on, and then I never notice why I hang out with them, like why would I gravitate to this little clique. And we all turned out to be Trans women later on. Like, oh, that's what we had in common, but we didn't know. I remember seeing the first girl to get her hormones, she already had, like curves and everything, and boobs. And I'm like, "how did she do that? How did she do that? Oh my god!" and then we see a Trans person in the village walking down, I'm like "Oh my god. What kind of water is she drinking?" that kind of active. And then she's like "oh, take this blue pill" just a testosterone block at the time "and this is how you become..." And I was kind of scared, I'm like "Oh, I don't know if that's safe for me." And that's how I started, little things like that you know? Oh, yeah... [Deep breath]

Niculescu: So, can you tell me about, more about the clique, that you were in? Like, what kind of girls were there, how did you meet them?

Moraes: Well, how did I meet them? Just from being out there in The Pier. It's like you just gravitated to this clique. It's like, you had, one side the butch queens, I know you're not supposed to say, but that's how back in the day we knew each other. The lesbians, the dykes on one side, the, people like me, feminine boys. And then you have like everybody else [keeking?] and carrying on. Yeah, these people were like, we were friends, and we would go to each other's houses. I would go to their house, and a lot of them are still around. A lot of them became porno stars or, their activists now and they involved with activism. Some of them are still, I still see them on the

ads. And stuff like that you know what I mean? It was Latin, black, and white. We were all mixed up you know what I mean? And anybody that came in a clique we would walk around and, go to have pizza together. It was so happy, little things like that.

Niculescu: I'm like really interested in how you like, talk about the map of The Piers, like who was where right? So like, how did that change for you going from like a feminine boy to becoming a Trans woman. Was there a different base in The Piers you had to go to?

Moraes: Yeah. It was kind of like, different guys started checking you out as soon as you became, like, you were feminine but, there's a difference between when you're a feminine boy and when you start presenting in women's clothing. I remember like, that's where I got my first boyfriend, I was so happy. I was so happy, that was another happy chapter. Holding his hand, kissing in The Pier, he would take me to a quiet spot. He had a bike, his name was Kameel James. I tried to look him up on Facebook, I don't know, I can't find him. I remember he used to live on the lower east side. But yeah, I remember like, but when I met him I was in between already, I started really feminining letting my hair loose. And that was my first boyfriend. I met him there, I remember him looking at me and I was intimidated, this tall black man he's so handsome. He's like a basketball player he's just like very handsome. Everybody was like, envy me for dating him. Like the black girls were like, "why can't you date a black girl, why are you dating her?" Like a Latina, you know? Because they wanted somebody like really black. Like black, like them, to date. Like African American and I wasn't African American, I was black but not like Latin black. And I remember I was holding his hand, he, we met there, yeah and we would walk. He had a bike and that was out transportation mode. He would ride me from Christopher Street all the way to, uh, Central park. We'd go to central park on the bike, I remember central park was a big cruising area. So it was like, we would go there in the middle of nowhere and just hang out.

Niculescu: Sorry, I think. [Some noise] Sorry we were interrupted for a second, so you were talking about your boyfriend and central park and how it was super cruisey?

Moraes: Yeah, it was so romantic. [Both laugh] Central park yeah, my boyfriend Kameel James, and I remember with him it was like amazing. That was my first love, as a queer person, as a person identifying, it was my crush, and I noticed later on he had broke up with me. And I was crying, I was crying, I didn't know why he broke up with me. And then I see him later on with a Trans person. And then it was like a negative turned into a positive because that was before I was dressing up. See I jump a lot. That was before me.

Niculescu: So just maybe to, earmark it, what age were you when that happened?

Moraes: Oh, my god I was underage. Is that legal? You know back in the day older men used to go out with younger girls.

Niculescu: It still happens today.

Moraes: Really? OK. Because now there's all these consensual, you know, you'll be in trouble. But that's what used to happen. It was love. We didn't know any better. And then, um. Yeah, so later on I found out, when he broke up with me I saw him with a Trans person. You know, a Trans person at that time. I was like, that gave me like the [black ball?], that gave me that smack in the face. It was a hard reality, but it woke me up because it's like "wait a minute, that's what he saw in me, that's who I am! I'm a Trans person but I don't know how to express myself." I thought a feminine boy that was it. I was like wait a minute, there is more to this. So I started, that's when I really started like, hardcore dressing up. Like, "I'm gonna own it. I'm gonna own my sexuality" you know what I mean? That's when I really started getting that inner fire. Remember jumping the gate at my mother's house. Jumping the gate. Because I don't have keys. Jumping the gate with my heels. [Making clomp sound effects of feet falling] You know that thing when you hear? [Another clomp sound] Yeah, jumping the gate. I was always moving like a spider girl. [both laughing] Jumping the gate and going home by 5, 4 in the morning before they wake up. With my make up on, rushed downstairs because I had my room downstairs, washed my face and took my clothes off. "doo doo" nothing happened. So next day, Yeah, that's how I started out.

Niculescu: So this was, before you had run away from home and your family?

Moraes: Yeah, yeah.

Niculescu: OK, and so, at what point were you in kind of like, clubbing and like what clubs were you going to?

Moraes: Oh that's later on, like I said, later on. 17. Well it was off and on, no actually, ugh, it's a mix. I was clubbing when I was 15 already. Remember SOB's and all that? Yeah I was going to that, I was doing that already. I was doing that already. So that was my escape, but then that, I was dressed, presenting as boy. And later on then I started presenting to them as feminine. Like for carnival time I used to wear my g string, my bra top, and my feather headpiece. You know the Brazilian samba dancer girl. [Mulata?] At that time, you know? And that's how I was seen, and when they saw me, it was like, it was a happy feeling again. They're accepting, you know what I mean? Because I was like literally from, I was like that type of child. You wouldn't see me, and then all of a sudden you see me in all my, you know? I had a client one time, he would live right in back of Lincoln Center. I was dressing up, I would always go see him as a feminine boy because he met me at Christopher as a feminine boy. Then one day I said, you know what, let me go as a girl? Let me see, maybe he might like me more? I dressed up, he's like "Ugh, this is not what I like in you." I felt so bad and I left his house. He's like "Next time you come, you come here in man's clothing". Because he liked feminine boys, he didn't like a Trans girl or whatever.

Niculescu: So it sounds like you kind of had to re-situate yourself.

Moraes: For people's likes. All my life, it's been like that. It's disgusting. All my life has been like that. Trying to please others but now that time has ended long time ago. Me, myself, and I honey, if you can't accept me for who I am then there's the door. Enough, enough. Caution to the wind. And I walkin proud when I walk these streets in New York. When people look at me I look at them

right back. I am not afraid anymore. I'm like this [some action not caught on audio and Niculescu laughs]. Yeah because it's like, because cis gender people are so like, you know what I mean? Everyone else can have their dress, they could have their shapes, they could have their curves, they could have their titties out, as soon as it comes to a Trans or person of color it's like you're walking by—like a walking, like a sign on your face. Bully me, bully me. Get the fuck out of here. Let live and let live and let live. What's goin on with you guys? Jesus, you know? It's like that. That's why I'm not bothered. Put on your glasses, grab your bag, bye Felecia. Bury that attitude. You know you have to own this in this city. And there's people that will support you in this city. Were very progressive here, I love this here, I love New York. And I loved New York for what it was you know what I mean? Now we have all these foreigners coming in and all these people that are not native. I'm not a native New Yorker but I've considered myself a New Yorker. I grew up in these streets. I hustled like, been through so much. I been incarcerated, Rikers I went through all this here, you know what I mean? Been through the system, been dogged, been have happy days going down 5th avenue in my heels dancing samba, you know what I mean? And the revolution, that kind of attitude.

Niculescu: So maybe then, your [Clears throat] so you start dressing up more, as like a Trans woman, right? And what are you doing to like, where are you living are you still living in Bushwick with....?

Moraes: No, I live in Queens now.

Niculescu: OK, I mean at the time when you started, um,

Moraes: Transition?

Niculescu: Yeah, Yeah.