

NEW YORK CITY TRANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

ITA SEGEV

Interviewer: Aviva Silverman

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Aviva Silverman: Hello, my name is Aviva, and I will be having a conversation with Ita Segev for the New York City Trans Oral History Project. This an oral history project centered on the experiences of trans-identifying people. It's February 28th, and it's being recorded on Zoom. And Ita, where are you right now?

Ita Segev: I am in Los Angeles, California.

Silverman: And I am in Queens, New York, but the magic of the digital space has brought us here. I was wondering if you could share more about your name.

Segev: How? Just— just about my name? Generally? Like...

Silverman: You don't have to, just any details.

Segev: I guess...My first name is sort of the first syllable of my— of a two-syllable birth name, and so it's sort of the nickname I've had since I was a kid. The sort of original name was like...a biblical dude. But it turned out sort of nice because the *Ita* is sort of— in Hebrew, *Ita* means *with her*, not in the Hillary Clinton way [laughter], but like just generally. And also sort of *Ita* is like usually the feminine abbreviation in Spanish, which is my mom's first language. She's from El Salvador. So, I think those two and sort of maybe the fact that I was so far from home and wanted to keep something a little familiar was sort of— that's kind of how the first name came to be. And my last name is actually a sort of— I was born in Jerusalem and sort of... Part of the Zionist project was to erase any sort of sense of like diasporic-ness amidst Jews to sort of like invent this new kind of "Israeli" identity. And so, they would change names that sounded either Eastern European or Arab Jewish in other cases to these like, "Hebrew" names, and so, *Segev* is actually a version of that, of a different name, and. Yeah, it's interesting, it's— I have some feelings about that, I'd also have a bit of a more tumultuous relationship with like— my father, if I'm being honest, so I think there was some questions around that last name, but also— I in the end of the day, I feel like it sort of tells part of the story, even if it's not the parts that I'm necessarily like only proud of, but that is also part of who I am. Yeah.

Silverman: Right, and so you mentioned that your parts of your name connected you to being closer to home, so I was wondering if you could describe that, your earlier childhood or where you first called home.

Segev: Yeah, I was born and raised in Jerusalem. Jerusalem. I was born in 1989, so sort of, I think — it was, I think it's a very specific time to be born generally. It's kind of— I don't know, I guess, I guess depends on what era you're in, but there's some sort of tension between, I think, old and kind of "new world" and the '90s were coming, the Berlin Wall just fell. Like the fucking Soviet Union just collapsed. Neoliberalism kind of like is starting to do her thing. And I think in Palestine, Israel specifically, it's after the first Intifada, it's when the US starts like getting into— sort of more militarized obsession with the Middle East and the Gulf War was happening, so I was like, just a bit that I think— I was I was a baby when we were sort of like—when those,

when those like alarms were going off from the fear of some sort of like biological weaponry. So that's kind of my first memory. I didn't mean to start so— so stark. And... Yeah, and then I spent the majority, like almost all of my childhood in Jerusalem. Which is— at a very specific place, I don't... exactly know how to like, sum it up in English, but I think it's like, it has weight to it, you know, it's it's it's old, like it's literally old. You're sort of walking around these— these stones. It's very important to a lot of people. There's a kind of like heavy reverence that I think when you're from there can be a little wild and almost silly, like I think a lot of my sort of like humor comes from sort of like seeing these people from all over the world take this thing very, very seriously that you're like, is just, you know, it's— you like climb on these trees near your house and then you realize that they're like the trees that supposedly made Jesus's cross, you know what I mean? And there's like, suddenly it was like, *oh, my God, this is a lot*. And it's like. It's intense, it's kind of everyone is in everyone's business in this way, it's like there's a kind of friction or tension that— can be really scary, but also kind of warm and familiar. In a certain point, it erupts. I was like in elementary school and middle school when the Second Intifada started. So, there were more like buses that were like exploding not too far from my home. And that kind of became like part of my childhood experience. And then there's... Obviously, also this untold narrative of the people who lived there before, untold narrative of the people who lived there before we got there, that's present and not present. And... Yeah, and it's it's, it's somewhat, you know, it's, it's religious and sort of like— so it's a little pervy in a way, but also sexy, like I feel like it's sort of like there's the sort of like outwardly, very sort of like... Hetero/family/religious structure that is obviously very difficult for queers, but then I think because there's so much pressure around that, there's actually also this whole kind of like underworld where, you know, it's always like when I go home and I open like a dating or a hook up app, it's always these, like, priests and Orthodox religious people and all these very kind of like people who might deal with a lot of suppression, and then there's like this specific kind of hunger, so it's like fucked up, but also sexy in a way. I know I'm probably just rambling, but I'm trying to—

Silverman: Were you aware of any parts of the underworld when you were younger? Or like aspects of like queerness or transness that—

Segev: Um. Yes and no, I mean, I was like. This is— I was— I think, I think transness was like— I think I was aware of gay people, and I think there was, there's this weird term in Hebrew where you call someone like *coccinelle*, which is actually the name of a very famous sort of like old school French transsexual showgirl who I think was one of the first girls who got some sort of gender affirming surgery, but she was sort of touring around and she came to Palestine, Israel, and her sort of visit was so like outrageous that it kind of became the, the equivalent to *tranny*, which is to this day, it's a slur, but is also reclaimed by some. And it's sort of... you know, I think it's, it's, it's kind of like an umbrella term that like. Is relates to trans women and *sissies* and *faggot*, you know, it's sort of like the derogatory— so I was sort of aware that an embodiment of a certain kind of femininity exists and is really bad. And I think there were trans women. There were a few trans women we knew about, but they were all, you know, it was rough, like today, I think they're amazing and iconic and kind of...Part of my power, I sort of like claim them as models, but back then it was like, you know, they were in the streets and they were

oftentimes loud in relationship to all this kind of bashing. And there was— they were hypersexualized and there were talks about violence. So, I think they were— and you didn't sort of like see them really co... coexist in society, like outside of these like nightlife street spaces. So, so that was sort of one introduction to trans people and women specifically, and then there was sort of like— there was randomly a very famous trans woman who like won the Eurovision Song Contest on behalf of “Israel”, who's this iconic, Jewish Yemeni trans woman named Dana International. And she was sort of this anomaly. And I think, you know, later on, I learned that if you want to be trans or queer and accepted in society, that that you sort of need to take on this nationalism and then you are of use, you know, to the agenda. So, once she won this competition on behalf of, “Israel,” after it wasn't won in a while, she was suddenly considered an icon. But... a lot of the talk shows and things that I remember her talking on were, you know, it was a lot of sort of—this kind of 90s, like obsession with transition, with genitalia, with and this kind of— this kind of mockery that she had to be one step ahead of, so it wasn't— it wasn't exactly— there wasn't, she didn't— I don't think she had kind of the possibility of a kind of transparency or vulnerability that would allow me to be from that allowed me to be like, *oh, yeah, I recognize myself in her*, you know. So that was... yeah, so transness wasn't really a possibility, but I didn't know about... growing up like... about sort of some idea of queerness and then I think wantingly or not was also always... attracting this kind of attention and these ways that were confusing. I have an older sister and she's really beautiful and we look alike and all these dudes from school who went to school with us would be like, *oh, my God, like. You look so much like your sister, I would put a like long wig on you and da, da, da, da, da*. So, there was sort of this... hinting at attraction to me because of femininity, but then it was like tied to my sister, which is all fucked up, so it was sort of... messy or happened in these ways that were kind of like illegible and chaos, like the chaotic— yeah.

Silverman: Yeah. And... how did you relate to religion at that time, since you were in Jerusalem and you were— yeah.

Segev: I mean. I come from, I guess, what would be considered according to sort of like Israeli standards as like a secular family, but I would say there was sort of a division between the two sides of my family, like my dad's side of the family is like devout atheists kind of and are like very sort of anti-religion and like religious imposition specifically sort of like the idea that like. The sort of like Jewish very religious people are trying to take over Israeli society and dictate, you know, in Jerusalem, it's like... when we grew up, like coffee shops were an open on Shabbat, there were no buses and every time there was one coffee shop that would want to open, there would be like demonstrations in front of her— in front of the coffee shop or like, you know, there was talk of like a supermarket that might be open so they're sort of like. Like. Like, like a certain kind of religious Jewishness is this very embedded in that city and my dad's side was very resistant to that, but then also sort of. Like, my— like my dad and uncle would be like, *we're not Jewish, we're Israeli*, but also... Clearly, they knew that the type of “Israeli” they were — was a different very different time than like a Palestinian who had an Israeli passport and they weren't quite like accounting for... you know, the Jewish supremacist like that they are they are being— they have access to so much because they are considered Jewish, whether they

they want to identify that way or not. And also, obviously, what brought their side of the family there, it's sort of all tied into the story of Jewish people. But in terms of religion, they were very anti that and then my mom side of the family were not so much religious in terms of like concepts of God, but very— tradition was super important. So, like, I never missed a Friday night dinner at my grandma's place, and we went over every — you know, we did all the holidays, we maybe fasted on Yom Kippur, we like. Like the— the cultural life was structured around Jewish cultural identity, but less like a God thing. And but they also came much later, so most of my mom's side of the family is between— currently between El Salvador and the US, so I think they have a much more sort of like diasporic Jewish... like, within these very in El Salvador, there's like 200 Jewish families or something, and everyone else is Catholic, so I think you're sort of like your sense of identity is very different.

Silverman: And did they immigrate from the war to El Salvador or how did—

Segev: Yeah, so my grandma ran away when she was 13, my great grandma heard Hitler's election speech and was like, *we're out of here* and managed to get a visa to Sao Paulo to Brazil. And so, they, like, went on a boat with nothing to Brazil and my grandma was 13 and my grandpa did the same thing. So, they went after Hitler came to power, but before the sort of extermination started. And so, they, like, went on a boat with nothing to Brazil and my grandma was 13 and my grandpa did the same thing to El Salvador and actually went back and forth to sort of save a bunch of Jews. So they went after Hitler came to power, but before like the sort of extermination started. Yeah, and then they were there for many, many years, and then the sort of civil war started in El Salvador. Which is not *not* similar to— you know, it's kind of America's fault, too. And my grandpa's cousin got kidnapped and killed and sort of they were at risk from a very different position this time. Like, they were they were white, moneyed people in El Salvador, you know, so I think it was— it was in their experience. They had to be displaced for the third time or something, but also the position was very different than the one they had in Eastern Europe. But, yeah, that's sort of how they—

Silverman: And how did your parents meet?

Segev: So, my mom immigrated, my dad was born— my dad was born in Tel Aviv, my mom was in El Salvador and she sort of immigrated to so-called Israel when she was in her early 20s. She was actually kind of like a socialist and the late 60s anti-war movement gal. And I think was sort of lied to and was under the illusion that she'll move to a kibbutz, and actually, Israel is going to be this like equal sort of like anti-capitalist society as opposed to El Salvador and the US. Um, which obviously didn't quite turn out as she thought, but she was there, and she went to a Purim party and my dad was at the Purim party. I think he was drunk and dressed as a pirate and she flirted with him and that's how they met.

Silverman: And, um, yeah, so how did kind of growing up in such a deeply politicized and also religious— a religious household, how did that influence the choices that came next for you in

terms of like teenagehood, adulthood, how you perhaps began? I know it's a larger question, but—

Segev: Yeah, that's hard to—

Silverman: OK, so I'll ask, yeah, what were some sort of ways that you started to kind of see outside of the framework of how you were brought up?

Segev: I think that was sort of, you know, that— I think there was like a very— early connection I made between things that were going for me interpersonally and things that were going large, much larger-ly in the region, like as a kid, I was, I think I had this experience of kind of experiencing some abuse in my household and that being sort of gaslit or asked to be normalized because of— the trauma of the of the person or people enacting it. And so, I think I had this deep feeling that this isn't fair, and I think that kind of created this affinity with these contacts or people who I recognized. Emotionally, I didn't have language, obviously, but this is kind of the same. Um, so that was kind of my childhood. I was actually very political, very young. Um, and then I think when I entered, like, teenage years. I was sort of like, um. Starting to realize that I'm— I'm I didn't have language, but that I'm queer or there's— there's something that is different in this way that puts me like, at risk. And I think I immediately associated that with a need to like, assimilate into certain power structures, so I was like, *okay, in order to sort of like— kill this part of me that— I won't survive if it will be out there. I need to become this version of a “man”, which means going to the scouts and going to the army and doing sort of like all these—* You know, the, the— gender and nationalism are tied very deeply. Um, so I think that was sort of— in some way, this really awful period. Um, but that— but the flip side of that association with kind of like this freedom, I think, because I sort of like, try to fake it, try to fake it, try to fake it. And then there was like, um. It kind of all came crashing down at the same time. Um, I was in, I was like, in combat training. I had this girlfriend who I didn't— you know, I was attracted to men, but I had this girlfriend and like. She broke up with me. I got injured during training. And there was this moment where I was like, this, this attack on, um. Gaza started that a lot of my people who I was in unit with went to and I sort of was saved and from both causing harm and having harm done on me in that way by being injured. So, there was this moment where kind of like the whole, this whole thing I was trying to build really collapsed and I was just too tired to— put up that kind of front anymore. Um, and so I think because it was all tied in, it kind of like in a toxic way, it also allowed me to kind of be like, okay, I. I get a chance to, I don't know if start over, but I get a chance to like. Reinvent myself, like, let this shell of me die with these beliefs and kind of like reinvent myself in a way, or something. I mean, to be honest, I first tried to escape it. Um, but then that— that didn't work either. And then I was like, okay, I... So, I don't know if that answers your question, but.

Silverman: I mean, that's a beautiful start. I guess I'm also wondering since you said you— yeah, tried to escape it. What does that look like? What did that look like?

Segev: Um, so. So, when I finished my sort of mandatory army service, which, um. I obviously wouldn't, I don't know why I feel the need to say this disclaimer, but wouldn't— it would have never... You know, I would, I would obviously have refused to go today. But I didn't back then and when I finished, I think there's sort of like the. The, the, the common thing in, in Israeli culture is for, for these kids who finished the army to go for a year somewhere cheap in the global South to sort of like, do drugs and spiral and see beautiful things and then, like, get reintegrated into society as students. It's the sort of like weird, really accepted— Uh, year that. It's probably a lot to say about, but I, I didn't have that impulse at all. Um, 'cause I think by the finishing, you know, during my services, when I came out as, as at the time gay and sort of there was, and. Yeah, there was like— it was really intense in Jerusalem. It was really intense with my — my family, my dad specifically, there was like some. Thoughts that I should go to like conversion. It was really a fucked-up time. Um, and so I knew I needed out, but I also felt that I like, wasted a lot of time. Um, like my main feeling about the army and then was like, *wow, what a fucking waste of three years of my life. Like I'm never getting those back.* And so, I think I was sort of like eager to— discover. Discover myself within the context of a new place. So, I, I, I sort of went to New York for like a few months, uh, what was supposed to be a few months and then, um, fell in love and all this stuff happened. And I sort of ended up having the like opportunity to stay. Um, and so I think my first few years in New York were, I wasn't aware, but I think I was also, I was partying a lot. I was doing a lot of drugs. I was in acting school. I wasn't— I wasn't really politically involved in any way. I was sort of frustrated when people would immediately, when I would sort of say my name or where I'm from and, you know, people have a very specific reaction. I sort of like wanted to distance myself from that. I was like, *why don't I just get to be like a normal girl*, whatever. Um, and also I think I sort of, it was an interesting time because this was right around when like gay marriage was, um, becoming like legal and, and all that shit. So, I think there was a part of me that still was like, *okay, I get to sort of like. Kind of be with the people I'm attracted to.* Like I got to be with men or whatever. And so, um, I kind of latched onto the opportunity of sort of like supposed normalcy. I was like, *maybe if I, maybe if I stick to like gay, I can still have these like ideas of children and a family and a job* and, not again, fall into that sort of like scary pit of what I knew... trans women to be, I wasn't conscious of this, but that's what I mean by escape. It was kind of like avoiding both the gender stuff and the political stuff and kind of trying to, in some ways, assimilate.

Silverman: And when you came to New York, where did you first land? Like, where were you living? What school were you going to?

Segev: Um, I went to this acting school called the William Esper Studio. Uh, it's like a Meisner acting studio in New York. It had a two-year program that to be honest, was quite easy to get into. And also provided, um, like a visa, which was, which was part of the decision, but also it has, it has a good reputation, no shade. But, so I was— I was studying there and I was living in this, like, honestly, pretty gorgeous room in Clinton Hill, um, Fort Greene border, um, which obviously I, I, I, in some ways contributed to the gentrification. So, this is not saying that I didn't, but I— and also it was just like a very different neighborhood than it, than it is today. So, it was 2011. Um, and, um, yeah. And then I, I, I sort of, the, the man I was in love with was a DJ,

amongst other things, and he lived in this like sort of infamous pop-up nightclub. So, it was this house that was also a music studio and they would throw these giant parties that went into—

Silverman: Could you name the nightclub or what the parties were called?

Segev: Yeah, it was, it was called the Marcy Hotel. And it was, started by this record label of actually, which was funny cause he wasn't Jewish, but they were all ex-Orthodox Jews who grew up in Brooklyn and then left religion and found rave culture. Um, so it was sort of funny to be on the other side of the world and like fall in love with this *goy*. And then he was like, here are all my friends. And they were all like, *Zev, Gadi, Eti, Chayad*, like they were all these, um, which I guess was also very, they're wonderful people. And it was also like familiar in that way, but, um, they had this sort of club called the Marcy Hotel, um, that honestly threw pretty amazing, like, very drug-fueled and somewhat chaotic, but also amazing parties that, um, I was just like, *Oh, this is New York*, you know? I, but looking back, I was like, *wow, this is a sort of wild scene to just stumble— stumble upon*. So, I spent a lot of time there and eventually lived there, too.

Silverman: Wow. And so, beyond sort of like— or perhaps it's only that, but what other kinds of people were you connecting to at the time?

Segev: Um, I think I was connected to those people. I was sort of connected to this international group of students who were all, I feel like all my friends, my best friends from acting school were this amazing girl from South Africa named Tuli and this girl from Norway named Heidi. And sort of, we were kind of the international crew, um, and, and then at some point during acting school, it was a bit of a, it was, it was, you know, somewhat of a— it was a bit of an identity crisis because I would be very, very sort of anxious by these— I was positioned in a very specific way because this was before I transitioned. So, I would have to sort of like, there was something about performing and kind of like exploring like the relationship between like narrative and body and like that whole process that they allow you to do in acting school that felt very right. But then there was something about the roles I was given that felt very wrong. And I think that made me like very anxious. And the more anxious I got, the more they kind of pigeonholed me into these kind of roles in school. They were like, *oh, you have to be sort of like the neurotic Jewish kind of gay, whatever*. So it was, um, it was difficult. And I had one, um, really amazing movement/Alexander teacher named Judith Grodowitz who I still love, who I felt like was the only one who kind of saw some power in me, and saw something sort of beautiful and special. Um, and that was kind of a segue to get introduced to um, downtown performance, movement, dance, experimental theater world, which— which was the segue to get introduced to kind of like a different kind of — there were a lot of queers there. Um, I think it was comfortable because in that context, I could perform and I didn't need to kind of be a gender on stage. Like I didn't— it wasn't, you know, it wasn't like that kind of naturalistic *I am a singular character*. I could be a starfish if I wanted to, you know? So, um, so at some point that was sort of also an introduction, that and light life was how I got kind of had a bit more also friends or community that were like queer people. Outside of my friends from home, like I didn't mention it, but my sort of probably biggest life blessing is that my two, two of my closest friends since— that I've

known since elementary school were, were both queer. And we happened to like grew up together in like elementary school, high school, and continue to be really good friends. So, it was funny because I actually had more of a queer community back home than I did in my first years in New York, but then it kind of— yeah, that was how I got there.

Silverman: And did you stay in New York or, um, what's the trajectory after your early years?

Segev: Yes. So, I stayed in New York pretty much for 12 years. I mean, on it, I left during the pandemic, which we can get to for a bit, but I was— New York was home. So, I— I stayed in New York and then sort of slowly started to come into my, like, at the time queerness and, um, and politics.

Silverman: Yeah, I would love to know more about that.

Segev: Uh, yeah, I think it's— it's again, hard to sort of point to a specific moment, but there's these, I think sort of, um, 2014 was a year where I started taking these performance workshops or making work in more of a queer context. And sort of through that also like reading more books by queer— by and about queer people. And I remember I put like nail polish for the first time, which felt like a very big deal. And, um, in the summer of 2014, I was nannying this, uh, this, this child, I was sort of au pairing with this family that, uh, was from the US but they got a job in Paris and London. And they were like, *do you want to come au pair for us?* And I was like, *sure*. So, I au paired there that summer and that summer there was a really, um, intense attack on Gaza. And I think it was maybe the first one of that scale, since I was there. And since I was sort of, uh, you know, more deeply involved, I think— again, I didn't have language, but in 2009, when I was in the army and my friends went into Gaza, um, was sort of, that was a— that was a huge moment of dissonance for me because it seemed so awful, both for them from their experiences. And also, some of them were telling these like horrific stories kind of lightheartedly about sort of the ease in which, entire Palestinian buildings were being bombed and destroyed. And so I was kind of getting more of a first-hand experience of how terrible it is, but then also seeing the news and the national narrative about it being heroic and self-defense. And I think that was kind of a dissonance that I didn't want to really deal with. And then when it happened again in 2014, I think I was sort of triggered in a way and, and activated. And I think it was the first time that I kind of viscerally realized that, the fact that I leave doesn't make the thing stop. Um, and it's actually, not, uh, it will only stop when it stops. Like it... being far away doesn't, um, it's where I'm from. It's, it's part of— it's a huge part of who I am. Like I couldn't, like, I, I think whatever denial I tried to do or whatever cut I tried to do between past self and current self kind of dissolved in that way. And I was in London and there were these giant Palestinian protests and everyone around me was sort of like, *God, be careful. Like you're Jewish and queer. Like you shouldn't go to these protests*. Like as if the people in the protest would sort of, um, be especially like antisemitic or homophobic or transphobic or something. And something in me was like, *I actually feel like I want to protest the thing that's going on*. And I sort of went and, it was, it was nothing like those warnings. It was a beautiful, powerful, sad, heartbreaking, big action, in— of predominantly Palestinians wanting to defend their people and their home. And,

uh, I think that to me in the sort of like Palestinian solidarity front was kind of in some ways when I transgressed something in a way that there was kind of no going back. Um, and then in the trans stuff, it was slower. It was, it was— it was like me being fascinated with trans things, but acting like it's just cause I'm, I'm quote unquote— like me buying a book, you know, like me being like, I need to read Janet Mock's memoir, but also having this like existential crisis when I go to the book, like going to the bookstore five times, picking it up and putting it back down, but I'm not understanding why it's so scary. And then like buying it and in, Bluestockings and like sitting on the Williamsburg Bridge and reading it front to back and just like weeping and not understanding why. So, I think encounter with these trans narratives, and then in some way bravery, there was moments where I was sort of— the first time I kind of like went out wearing more explicitly femme clothing. I got attacked, not too intensely, but I mean, intense, I— more intense things happened after, but at that time it was like, I think that sort of sent me back in, and eventually there was just a moment where, I went to this consultation and therapy or something. I remember sitting in front of a person and saying, *I don't know, I don't know, I don't know, I don't know, I don't know*. And then the person was like, *I think you do know*. And then I sort of took a moment and it was sort of, I like said it out loud for that. It was like, *I think I'm trans*. Um, and it kind of was so terrifying, but also there was this strange sense of alignment. There was a strange feeling of feeling so lost on, on so many levels for so many years. And suddenly there was this force that I was like, *oh, I know, I know what I have to do*. And that, that was kind of worth risking everything for, I guess.

Silverman: Yeah. And when you say you knew what you had to do, what did that mean?

Segev: Um, it was— honestly, I was at the time in a very toxic relationship with my father. I was in— I was married. I got, I got gay married partly because I was with my partner and partly to stay in the country, but I was in— I was living with a person I was with from the moment I moved to New York and we were together for six years since I was 22. And I knew he couldn't handle that on, on a variety of levels. And so, I think— I think it was a combo of things. It was like stopping talk— like I stopped talking to my dad. I got a divorce. Um, I like, um, thought more explicit and my art and everywhere that this is sort of like what's happening, which I think sort of like positioned me in this very, like I was suddenly making with and for trans people in the context of my work. Um, and then eventually it was that sort of like, that sort of big learning curve of learning how I want to look and what I want to wear and if and how I want to do my makeup and my nails. And, um, and then sort of like pursuing a medical transition. I think there were— yeah, I think there was sort of, you know, I think, I think there's something about, I don't want to talk for everyone's experience, but I think there's something about trans femininity where you don't really— unless you're in a very particular situation, you don't really have the luxury of space and time for these kind of minute and lush explorations, you know, like you realize something about yourself, you step in the street and you encounter violence, and then you sort of like immediately have to decide what to do in relationship to that. Um, I think that's something I get sometimes frustrated that it's sort of misunderstood and almost like— sometimes I feel like there's almost like this moral superiority by certain people in trans community about an ability to be agile or fluid that, that isn't necessarily understood as in direct

relationship to safety. Um, but it was, it was— I was in a, I was in a, I was in a bit of a rough neighborhood. It was rough, you know, I, I, it was rough. So, it was pretty immediately like, okay, how do I defend myself? And in some ways, how do I— how do I transition both to feel closer to myself, but also so this day-to-day hell in the street stops.

Silverman: And what were some solutions you came to around defense or safety in that regard?

Segev: Um, honestly, nothing ground-breaking, like a girl, you know, my friend Tien gave me mace and, uh, I like started carrying a self-defense thing around. And, you know, it also, it also changed because the type and way the violence work changed. Like, I think at first, when I started transitioning, I was kind of leaning into a sort of more gender non-conforming aesthetic. That was like, um, it was like *looks*, it was out. It was a, it was a bit more like, uh, like the word I'm looking for as it coming to coming to mind, but it was sort of like— it was, it was queer and, and, and sort of like not gender non-conforming in this specific kind of way. And I think that kind of functioned as armor, which I think in some ways, um, brought this more— a lot of, a lot of like mockery and looks and these kind of like micro-interactions that just add up in a nightmarish way. But it was, it was less of the sort of what later on became more of this, sexualized *does the person know, or does it know?* Um, like, I think once your trans womanhood or femininity is, is legible in a certain way that the type of gaze and violence changes. So, it became less frequent, but in some ways more— more intense when it did happen. And I think that's actually— so I think at first my strategy was like, *I don't give a fuck, like blah*, but, but really being triggered most of the time. And then at some point it was like, *Oh, I just need to be on— on real alert, I can't afford a certain kind of like daydreaming*. And, and, and a million other things that, that are— I don't exactly know how to name, but you just like, it's, it's, it's a, it's a very vast skillset, you know, you just kind of learn to get better at a bunch of shit, or not better, but more— more skilled, I guess.

Silverman: And were there other friends or peers to talk to about this?

Segev: Sorry for this noise.

Silverman: Oh, sorry. Um, I was asking if there was other peers or friends to talk to about this, or did you feel isolated in your experience?

Segev: Both, and I think I got really lucky and it kind of turned around in a way, but I got really lucky because I was— sort of from the beginning of, in the first years of my transition, I was also working on this show that I kind of got a, I got a two year residency for, and it was kind of my magnum opus in some ways. And, um, I got to be in charge. And, and so I had a group of trans women who I was working with on that. Um, and also, we had all these in progress showing and a lot of trans people would show up to that. So that kind of became like a central pillar that— and I, and I became some of very close friends to some of the girls, who I worked with. And so— and so I had like friends, I had community in that way. I think, and I think in other ways that I didn't really know what was, I didn't really have the— there wasn't, there wasn't, in hindsight, I

was like, *wow, you were doing stuff before you took the time to understand what you were doing* in many aspects of my life. It wasn't like a period, like, like trans people who discover or figure out that they're trans probably deserve like a six-month paid retreat. You know what I mean? [laughter] Like there should be a period where you're just kind of like sitting with it and like slowly kind of mulling over what it means to you. But, but I didn't, but that wasn't a possibility. So, it was immediately kind of *go, go, go*. So, I think in that way, I was probably, and probably still am compiled a lot of trauma that I processed that was lonely. And also I think there was in the first few years, this cut between me in New York and me back home. I didn't have really anyone who had gone through that in, in both these spaces. And so, I think, I think I needed to transition in some way back home in order for it to become real.

Silverman: And what did that look like?

Segev: Um, it was a journey. I think I— I didn't go back for a few years, and then my sister got married. So that was the first time where I was like *okay, I have to go back*. And so, it was this weird thing where sort of my first time re-meeting 200 of my family's closest family and friends was at my sister's wedding. Um, and in the sort of performance of the sister of the bride, uh, so there were a lot of layers for that. And it was a very overwhelming. And I also had not seen specifically my dad, which I didn't talk to. There was like a lot of, there was a lot going on there. Um, but, uh, but it was also— kind of ripped the band-aid off in a way, I think. Um, it was, I mean, I was, I guess in some ways very lucky that— you know, people had a variety of ignorant and chaotic and blunt and inappropriate responses, but there weren't at that time in people who were actually still in my life responses that were like, um, explicitly mean-hearted or like the intention wasn't to sort of go again. Like, like, like even the things that were hard, I was like, *okay, I think that I could sense, I think that this is going to be a process, but that there will be growth*. So, I think it was sort of like, in some ways I realized that I won't... oof, this is— yeah, in some ways I realized that I won't be shunned, um, by these people who I didn't know how they would react. I think, I think I really thought that I, there was a moment where I really thought that I might lose everything, you know, lose all my connections. And that didn't happen, which was a blessing. And also, I was like, I know I just needed the physical— I was like, *okay, this is how you, this is how you walk down the street. This is what you do when a person misgenders you here. This is the, like, this is how it works in this language*. Like, there's just like this kind of stuff that even if it was hard, feeling it in person was in some way a relief because it was not theoretical or, or unlike— like I was there, you know? And then I think during the pandemic, I sort of— because of a variety of circumstance found myself there for like six or seven months. Um, which was the first time I— the first time I had spent more than a few weeks there since I left, you know, for 10 or 12 years. And I was also a bit later in my transition. I had gone through some, some— like I'd been on 'mones for a while, like I'd had some surgeries. So, I was being perceived more in alignment with my gender. Like, I think people don't like sometimes when it can get really intense, I'm not saying, I think there's something funny about the fact that people over there don't expect trans people to exist. And so, you're either one thing or another thing, which is of course very fucked up, but there's also, if it kind of works in your favor, it's a bit of a relief because no one— no one kind of gives it a second thought in a way. Like there's, there's

something about— there's something about being hidden that isn't only bad. Um, and so I think that my experience— so I think that that was a time where I both got to integrate myself into relationships with my family and into sort of the experience of walking around. And that was really where I was like, *okay, like I, I am, I understand better how it is here for me, now.*

Silverman: Wow. Yeah.

Segev: Am I talking too much?

Silverman: No, this is— [laughter] you should be talking. Um, I also wanted to ask you, since I encountered you through your, your art, your work. Yeah. If you wanted to speak more towards that in any iteration, if it's about the two-year show you were working on, or what you're making now, just any entry point into your work.

Segev: Yeah. [...] So, you know, I think there was something interesting. I think there was, I think — there was something about sort of like the, the discovery of the understanding of both— of the way of the fact that I'm trans and the ways that unlocked some memories about where I'm from and the relationship between my politics and as an anti-Zionist and me being a trans woman that felt like, like a huge discovery for me, the ways that those two things are connected, and the ways like these narratives were told about who we are and where we're from, exist in a huge gap from reality. And then like, what is the process of sort of like what we then call like the necessary heartbreak of coming to terms with this gap. And so, we sort of, me and my collaborators were like, *let's make this show that kind of like uses that and kind of uses my story*— partly because I was still figuring it out. And also, as kind of like a Trojan horse, because everyone wanted like trans autobiographies, but no one wanted to talk about anti-Zionism to sort of create this kind of, in some ways, epic kind of like many— like I was the only performer, but multi-video many character kind of performance that, that reckons with, that process of coming to terms, with those things. Um, and I worked on that for some years. It was on the one hand, amazing. I learned a lot. On the other hand, today, I also, you know, I have years later, uh, a different understanding. Um, I think there's something interesting about the fact that cis people really love the moment that trans people begin their transition because trans people, when we begin our transition is when the majority of our energy goes to sort of like conceptualize our—the mere existence of our transness or how we got there. Like usually, or not usually, but a lot of times I think for trans people, there's sort of like— yeah, this moment where you realize something and then you need to deliver some sort of narrative to the world to sort of like explain how you got here. So, they— so people join you on this journey, and cis people love that because cis people love reflections on, they love their little juicy reflections on gender where they can like realize something about the, the, their, *their own gap between the ways they were taught to be men and women and da, da, da, da, da, yeah.* And, and, and, um, it's easy to get stuck there because of that, uh, because there's a hunger for that sort of narrative and, and, and gaze, um, that isn't really the question there's like, *okay, well, how did I become trans? What does it mean to me to be trans?* But those questions don't really answer the question of like, *now, how do I live? What is my life about? What is my day-to-day life?* Like,

um, I think like no shade— maybe a little shade that, and I include myself in this, but I think that's why sometimes trans people in their early years are a little annoying. [laughter] I don't know if you could see this in this context, but I was a little annoying because you talk a lot and, you know kind of a little, and, um—

Silverman: Well, it's like self-definition is just so— it's all consuming. It's just like—

Segev: Right, right. Which, which I have a lot of compassion and understanding for. And also like, in some ways it doesn't fucking matter. Like it can only give you so much. Like what matters is how you live, what brings you joy, who you love and what's important to you. And of course, all those things are tied into identity and gender, but, but those things aren't like— there isn't some sort of like essay definition that really let, you know, there isn't an organizing principle. Um, but in some way, I think I was aware of that in this show, but I think in some, in other ways I was, I fell into the trappings of that. Um, and it, it, it is a tricky space that I think in some ways I've— I'm still kind of trying to reckon with and avoid because it's so easy to sort of like in today's kind of America, whatever, to be placed as like, um, a placeholder for an identity. Um, and of course they're like, there are some, but there's not many anti-Zionist Israeli trans women in New York making art, you know? So, it's sort of like easy to hold on to this singular identity space, which I think in moments can be powerful and useful, but a lot of times to me feels like a trapping. Um, so— but at the time I was also leaning into— so I think that was, that's sort of where I am in relationship to that show today, that feels very young to me now, but I also love it. Yeah.

Silverman: How does— yeah, how I, since you didn't grow up here and obviously in this era, like identity politics is its own—

Segev: Beast?

Silverman: We said it at the same time! Um, yeah. How do you relate to that as both coming from two different cultures? Since American, especially Americanism is like in the liberal, woke, you know, parts of Brooklyn and New York have its own specific version, especially in a cultural sphere of identity politics.

Segev: Um, how do I, I mean [...] I think it's so— I think there's so many layers. I think a lot of times it feels these days, like noise, it feels, in some ways rehashed, like you're hearing the same catch phrases, the same notions, the same sort of like dogmatic kind of like linear, clean, like easily marketable kind of like, okay, this is how we use this identity to essentially sell this thing. And then you also see a lot of people who are aware of that. And I think there's sort of, that's, that's kind of where it gets tricky is where there's this sometimes feeling where people are like, *okay, this is what I, this is the, this is what I need to do in order to have access to the shit I need.* You know, I think that's the sort of scary thing about capitalism. It's like, it's like, it would have been easy if you're like, *okay, these people, this is all trash,* you know, but it's also like, okay, I, I, people need to do what they need to do in order to survive.

Silverman: Right.

Segev: And I think sort of the, the, the place where it gets especially concerning here, I guess, versus back home is that like, for me, not always, but a lot of times it's like, it's something you can put on and, and, and, and take off. You can enter a space and be like, *okay, I'm going to talk in this kind of way about this kind of issue because it's important to this kind of thing*. Um, but then also like in your interpersonal relationships and the way you conceive of yourself, you can sort of hold space to the fact that it's like, it's all so much messier and more, malleable and unclear, like the way we truly understand ourselves and each other, I think it's not— again, it's not sort of like easily defined. And so, when I'm in situations where there's sort of like a public kind of fronting thing with someone, with someone who is, let's say American, and we're sort of putting on this thing and then keep talking, I meant over a dinner, we're having a conversation and the conversation still feels like we're in a fucking like, like Instagram caption. That's where I'm like, *okay, this is, this is, hard*. Uh, just because I think it— it kind of, it kind of counters intimacy and it kind of counters like an ability to really kind of sense a person. Like, I feel like here, the way I experience identity is that a new person meets you and the first thing they do is sort of like, it's almost like they scan you and they place you on a sort of map of different variables of where you are on the food chain, clout, what privilege or awareness you do or not have. And it's sort of like before there was any energetic exchange, you've sort of like, in some ways been like decided upon. And then you need to sort of learn how to break that. Uh, you, you constantly need to learn how to play with these preconceived perceptions. And, and again, this is a generalization, but sometimes when I'm in different places, I have more of that experience of like, *oh, we're like, maybe experiencing each other. Like, how do we like each other's vibe? Like, what is this doing to our feeling and body that we're talking? Like there's a bit more of like, um, openness to kind of experience the, the, the person as they are*.

Silverman: Right. The nuance.

Segev: Yeah. The nuance. And just like, like I love, and I agree to the, you know, there's this entertainment industry notion of, *I didn't see anyone who looks like me*. As if sort of like the, which, which again, and I'm not sort of like trying to belittle the, the deep importance of that, but, but sort of places that like, the way someone looks, they're like physical body, which again is also gender and race and all those things, um, as the main identifier of connection. And I just think of all these fucking people who I was, and still I'm obsessed with, who don't look like me at all. You know what I mean? Like, oh my God, I saw this random Nina Simone concert on YouTube when I was 17 and something about what she was saying between songs, I was like, *this is how I feel. And like, how beautiful that I'm also able to like, make this genuine connection with someone whose circumstances are like nothing like mine*, you know? And like, I think the way we find connection and affinity and love with people, is not only— is not only based on this, kind of codified like identity marker affinity, um, and thank God. And I also think that's like a really important lesson, especially, I think, you know, I grew up in a sort of like— the era of representation that I came into, um, sort of like being trans with was the beginning of the sort

of like fairy tale chosen family sisterhood model that's meant to counter the kind of like vilifying, you know, murderous sort of like transsexual model, but it's sort of the idea that you come out and you find all these other girls and it's like sisterhood that you've never felt before. And that's it, you know? And I think— I don't think, at least in my experience, that's not always true at all. And you actually experience a lot of— I've experienced a lot of heartbreak because a lot of us are traumatized and messy and we project on each other and we're in pain and no one taught us how to cope with trauma and we're carrying our daddy issues or whatever. And the sort of, I know, I've had to find a balance between sort of a phase where, where history and identity was being erased to compulsively obsessing over it, to it's real and it matters and it informs everything. And also, at the end of the day, you sort of have to trust some sort of emotional intuition and emotional work that your people are your people because they're there for you, not because they like are X or Y or— yeah.

Silverman: Definitely. That was really beautiful. Thank you. Um, I have a few more questions for you if you feel like, how did you support yourself while living in New York?

Segev: At first I had some support from family when I just moved. And then at some point it became— just so many odd jobs. I was, I was nannying for a while. I worked in nightlife context. I, at some point started doing grant writing, which is what I do now. Um, I walked dogs. I, I literally kind of did everything. So, it was sort of, um, yeah, like [...]

Silverman: Totally. And so, I know you, you've mentioned acting and your project that you described those both, I don't know if experimental theater or including acting. And I was wondering, yeah, what you, what you consider your work, what, um, what you're wanting to work towards, what you're dreaming of working on.

Segev: Um, yeah, I'm, I think it's a, it's a combination of things. Um, I'm sort of— I've, I've, um, I've been trying to get more into writing in a TV context in the last few years and just signed this kind of like development deal with this show that I can't really talk about and might happen and might not happen. Um, so I hope that will be a part of it. Um, and then I am currently like a grant writing— sort of working with artists and organizations kind of helping them develop language to, get access to the material stuff they need. Um, so I'm happy sort of with that as like an only day job for a while. Um, but eventually I hope maybe writing for like a TV context can give me the time and space to also like make art that is, um, not commercially-oriented at all and also sort of do some of the organizing that I do that isn't— isn't moneyed. Um, but— and then I, and yeah, so I think sort of like writing, acting, performance, those are—

Silverman: Yeah. And that's, what brought you to LA? I, since, you know, here out of New York now.

Segev: Yeah, partly, um, I was in New York. Yes. Uh, that was sort of like the, the, the job impetus. I've also like, as I said, lived in New York for a really long time and, um, winter was

always really hard and I missed the aspects of growing up where nature is kind of And so I, I also wanted to test it out.

Silverman: How's it going?

Segev: Um, I'm not sure yet. I it's, it's like on the one hand, there's a lot about it that's really nice. On the other hand, moving is hard. It's, it's— it can get a little lonely. And I'm in this funny place where I like, have enough friends. They're just not here. So, I think I'm sort of struggling a bit with the idea of like, *wow, I need to like open up to new people, you know, on an intimate level.* And also, a lot of my work is laptop Zoom work. So, I'm sort of here, but I'm also in my apartment in front of the computer with people in New York for a lot of the day. So, all that to say that I'm— I feel like I'm just in the beginning, still figuring it out.

Silverman: Mm-hmm. That makes sense.

Segev: Yeah. Um, so I guess some last questions for you. This, um, might be too large or just enough, but I was wondering, I know you mentioned some important people in your life, and I was just wondering if there's anyone else you wanted to mention as being sort of formative for you or, you know, being a rock for you.

Segev: You mean like in— in my personal life?

Silverman: Yeah, just someone.

Segev: Yeah, I mean, there's so— I, I think I'm shouting out, yeah, my best friends, Ben and Daniel, who I shouted out. And I would say my friend Yasmin and Yarden, those are like my friends from back home who I— who I deeply love. I'm shouting out my mom, Noemi, she's really great. I'm shouting out my sister, Natalie, and her two kids that made me an aunt, who is, that's pretty, a pretty iconic role, I think, like no downsides to that. Jonathan and Abigail, I'm shouting out— God, there's so many like New York friends, like Lilith, and Rad, and Rocco, and, um, Drea, and Nikki, and Ayelet, and David, and, um, and, and Rio, and Sid, and the whole Survivor crew, who—and Dan. And I'm probably forgetting people, but I would say that like my, probably my main kind of life achievement, I think, or like my— the thing I can go back to most of, like, I probably did something right, is that there's some really, really— some people who I really love, um, who are, who love me back, which is pretty cool.

Silverman: Totally. And I was just wondering if you wanted to add anything else to the record as we— as we wrap up, if there's something that comes to mind that feels important to say in listening back maybe in years to come at this point in your life.

Segev: Yeah, I, I think— yeah, I think, I was thinking a lot about this, the moment that this interview is happening, where there's sort of— I think specifically just it's, it's, it's been a wild few months because in this moment, which I hope will feel like a distant past, but in this

moment of 2023, there was sort of like, you know, an even heightening, even more of sort of like Israeli fascism and genocidal ideology happening alongside the intensifying of, uh, this genocidal ideology against trans people all over the U.S. with so much legislation. So, I think it feels especially like a time for me where, where the future isn't necessarily— guaranteed. Um, and so I guess— I guess in that there's, there's this feeling of sort of just a lot of love and appreciation for people who are fighting for there to be a future, for them to have a future. And I imagine a lot of people, if someone will listen to this, it's, it's either trans people or— so, I guess just a deep wish to us that we take care of ourselves, like that, that it's important that we're here. Like it really is, um, the most important thing, just being alive and trying to be well. Yeah.

Silverman: Thank you so much. It was such a pleasure to talk to you.

Segev: Thank you.