

NEW YORK CITY TRANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

AYELET HASHACHAR ADELMAN

Interviewer: Aviva Silverman

Date of Interview: March 11th, 2023

Location of Interview: Ridgewood, Queens

Transcribed by M Goldstrom

NYC TOHP Interview #216

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Aviva Silverman: Hello, my name is Aviva Silverman and I will be having a conversation with Ayelet Hashachar Adelman for the New York City Trans Oral History Project. This is an oral history project centered on the experiences of trans-identifying people. It's 3:11? Yes. And it's being recorded in my bedroom in Queens. And Ayelet just told me another significant part of this date, which— could you tell everyone?

Ayelet Hashachar Adelman: Yeah, I mean, I just was like, I was just looking online and I was like, *oh my god, it must be the three year anniversary of the pandemic, one of these days*, and I guess March 11, 2020 was the day where it was internationally declared as a pandemic.

Silverman: How did it make you feel when you saw that it was today?

Adelman: Yeah, so many feelings. Um. And also like— and also almost the numbing absence of feelings, where it's just like... and feelings about the disparity between how that anniversary has made me feel in previous years and how it made me feel like in this moment, where I just, yeah, glanced upon it. Yeah, I don't know, a lot of different feelings.

Silverman: Mmm. Yeah, well, here we are.

Adelman: Here we are, yeah. [laughter]

Silverman: I was wondering if you could tell me about your name.

Adelman: Yeah, so my name, Ayelet. It's kind of— it's funny, because I'm also a Hebrew teacher, so I might get... I might just be a moment where I talk about grammar for a second.

Silverman: Go. For. It.

Adelman: Okay, great. So, Ayelet is a name that's often translated to 'deer' or 'gazelle' or something in that kind of animal family. But it kind of technically means 'deer of', or specifically 'female deer' or 'doe of'. And the full version of that is Ayelet Hashachar, which means 'doe of the dawn'. And it's this biblical Hebrew expression that was used in various poetic writings, such as Tehillim or the Psalms, in reference to the morning star, which I guess is Venus, or the first/ the last star. I guess it depends on the way you think about it— the first star in the sky in the morning or the last star remaining from the night-time. So yeah, that's a little bit about my name.

Silverman: So beautiful.

Adelman: Thanks, yeah.

Silverman: Mmm. And you said you were a Hebrew teacher?

Adelman: Yeah.

Silverman: Could you talk more about that?

Adelman: Yeah, that was an interesting, I guess like life twist and turn. I was very much immersed in Jewish spaces as a kid. I went to Jewish day school and synagogue and my dad is a Jewish studies scholar. And eventually my family moved to occupied Palestine/“Israel.” And when I moved back to the States, I was having this, I guess, moment where I didn't want to continue doing the kind of work that I was doing. And it's just, I guess interesting how certain... I guess it's interesting the different ways that certain experiences can be monetized. And I started working as a Hebrew teacher at this language school called ABC Languages in about 2013 where I was teaching modern Hebrew. And I did that for years. And eventually during— leading up to and during the pandemic, I started offering that skillset kind of explicitly from my positionality as a trans and anti-Zionist Hebrew teacher. And I felt like that came at this moment where a lot of people for many different reasons were finding themselves in this process of wanting to return to Judaism, but from those specific positionalities or in proximity to those specific positionalities. And so, yeah, so I've been teaching. I've been teaching Hebrew for many years and specifically from this lens of, I don't know, I'm your friendly neighborhood transsexual, anti-Zionist Hebrew teacher. And I wanna accompany you on the process of re-exploring Jewish roots and Jewish lineage, but from this place of being... yeah, politically aware of the ways that Judaism and Jewish trauma has been manipulated into supporting Zionism. And also, I don't know, it's like, *okay, you're trans, I'm trans, or you're queer, I'm queer*. And we kind of have this understanding that might be absent from some other spaces.

Silverman. Hmm, and I know that Hebrew is gendered. How do you work with that when people that are trans or queer want to, you know, change aspects of that or use it in a different way?

Adelman: Yeah, that's a really good question. You know, I don't teach modern Hebrew as much anymore. I do sometimes, but a lot of people... You know, it's interesting, because back in the day I'm like, well, I teach modern Hebrew, and it's like my clientele were often people who wanted to connect with Hebrew through the lens of some kind of relationship with “Israel,” and whether it's like they have family there, or they have some kind of, yeah, Zionist ideology. And then I guess most of the kinds of Hebrew that I teach these days are Hebrew that one uses to analyze Jewish sacred texts. And I think that there, you know, there's a lot of gender expansiveness in Jewish sacred texts, but that doesn't really come through as in the gender linguistic sphere. So I teach people the analytical tools to recognize whether a word or a verb is masculine or feminine. And it's a little bit less about expressing oneself and being legible. And then when I was teaching people a little bit more from, how do we use Hebrew to express ourselves, then I think it's interesting. Yeah. There's this project called the Non-Binary Hebrew Project that was founded by these two people: one of them, whose name I forget, the other one's name is Lior, and I'm not remembering their last name. But they created this whole kind of new grammar system. And that has taken hold to a certain extent. I don't know, I guess in North American or at least in US and Canadian Jewish settings, but it's not something that's

present in 48 occupied/Palestine/Israel. And so, it all depends on what's the entry point that people want. And I think in 48/Palestine/Israel, people are a little bit more switching back and forth between masculine and feminine, or using the plural masculine. And it's a little bit less like *let's create a new thing*, it's a little bit more like *let's work with and almost play with what there is*. And often people are like, *let's intentionally confuse people*. Yeah.

Silverman: Yeah. So you mentioned that you grew up in a few different places. Do you want to talk about your aspects of your childhood, where you were and how that, you know—

Adelman: Yeah, I can speak to that. I was born in Long Island, in a hospital in Oceanside. And I lived there just for the first year and a half of my life. And then my dad got a position, I think as — I don't remember if he got a position as the chair of the Jewish Studies Department, or just, I don't remember exactly what the position was, but he got a position teaching Jewish Studies at Smith, in Northampton. So I lived in Northampton for a few years. And then we moved to this larger city nearby called Springfield, Massachusetts. And yeah, we lived there for about 10 years. And then my family— yeah, my family moved to Jerusalem when I was 13, almost 14. I lived in Jerusalem for seven years. I then moved to Tel Aviv and I lived there for about six years. And then in 2010, when I was about 26, 27, I pretty spontaneously, almost impossibly moved back to the US. And yeah, was in Canada for a little bit. And then eventually moved to Brooklyn, spent a number of years there, had enough of the city. It was doing bad things to my body and emotional world. And then I moved to Vermont. And yeah, and just about two years ago, I moved back to the city. It's feels pretty good to be here.

Silverman: Mmm. Can we go back to sort of— that was a long trajectory.

Adelman: Yeah. [laughter]

Silverman: Or a quick trajectory of where we've been. I was wondering how being raised religiously or with a religious background influenced you.

Adelman: Yeah. I guess my parents were kind of like— we would go to conservative synagogues and conservative, I guess like, it's not really in the sense of actually being the most conservative of the different Jewish religious movements, but it's just a little bit more traditional. And so I guess it's interesting 'cause my parents weren't religious, but they were kind of tradition-loving. But the school that I went to was an Orthodox Jewish day school in Springfield, Massachusetts. And then in Jerusalem— at first I went to Orthodox schools in Jerusalem and then more of, the equivalent of the conservative movement. And so, I don't know exactly how to describe it. I think I got this interesting entry point where I think I got to experience what it was like kind of living in an almost protected Jewish bubble. And I think I was, umm... I think I was exposed to kind of like... I guess I was able to develop both a loving relationship with it and also a critical lens. And yeah, it's a good question. I guess I think about it a lot. I think I have this complex relationship with Judaism as a religion. And I think that that was really more complexified by this process of kind of out of this naive protected Jewish bubble, kind of falsely believing, I guess

as a young kid under the guidance of my parents that doing the Zionist's act of moving to "Israel" is kind of like the ultimate realization of Judaism. And I think that a number of those bubbles were burst by living in Jerusalem, which is this really intense place where you can feel the tension in the air, not only... I mean, obviously in the sense of apartheid and occupation and ethnic cleansing, but also in the sense of people having really strong ideas about what Judaism is. And I think I had this experience where... I was, I think, in my own kind of naive bubble, I was like, *we're doing kind of the ultimate act of Judaism*. And then when we actually were there, a lot of people didn't really—I think I felt kind of like the least freedom to be Jewish in the "Jewish" states. And I think that that threw me into this place of really wanting to have some space from Judaism for many years and feeling estranged from it for years. And it's only recently after moving back to the US and kind of, I don't know, coming home to myself in a bunch of different ways that I've been able to reconnect to it, but also from this place of like, I don't know, yeah.

Silverman: Mmm.

Adelman: Also, some emotional distance that I need sometimes.

Silverman: Yeah.

Adelman: I feel like I keep doing the long trajectory and you're asking me about...

Silverman: No, I think that parts of how we connect to our stories are through threading them, from the present to the past and past to the present.

Adelman: Yeah.

Silverman: I was wondering if at that time, were there other people that you had reflecting this that you felt towards the state and towards your, you know, the culture that you're being raised in? Did you have friends or allies?

Adelman: What time in particular?

Silverman: When you're living either in Jerusalem or Tel Aviv.

Adelman: Yeah. I mean... not so much outside of my family unit. And I think that just like, I don't know. I think that, yeah, I don't think I had a lot of spaces to have that kind of reflection back to me. I did with—I did within my family sometimes; I think we would talk about our experiences navigating those spaces together. But I think that just— there was something a little bit limiting about that. But yeah, it's kind of like a funny thing where it's just like, I don't know. It feels like this very privileged experience to, you know, make a choice to move across the world. And then we ended up there and there wasn't, there kind of like, weren't a lot of people who had that

same experience... Yeah. And then there were all sorts of realms of my own experience that, yeah, it was just very different from the people around me. Yeah.

Silverman: Mmm. What else were you interested in in those years? What else did you engage with?

Adelman: Oh my God, I was so confused. I think it was just so hard to know who I was and what my relationship, um, with my own identity and place. And yeah, I think that there was this sense of— I didn't really have, I didn't really have the kinds of worlds of possibility that I had growing up here. And I think I tried to— I don't know. I think that there were some years, especially during high school and all of that, after that, where I was like, *well, I guess I'm going to become an Israeli man*, and what does that mean? It means acting in these certain ways. It means behaving in these certain ways. It means— at first, it means wanting to go to the army. I didn't at first want to go to the army, but I eventually convinced myself that I wanted that. And so it was this strange assimilation process into I guess like, both— Israel-ness and Zionism and also into—a difference...a different flavor of masculinity. And yeah, so I was just very confused that I think I was just a little bit all over the place. I ended up listening to, I don't know. I ended up learning how to play the guitar and just kind of losing myself in, I don't know, either heavy metal or I don't know. I was into a lot of Pink Floyd. I would just lose myself in that really spacey-textured music. I was struggling with a lot of— mental health stuff at the time as well. And so, kind of all that was just like, I felt very dissociated from myself.

Silverman: Hmm. And what— you said you abruptly left at some point?

Adelman: Yeah. Well— I think that the thing I want to highlight in leaving is that eventually I did kind of find myself there and so I want to highlight that part of the story. I ended up— it's interesting just going back in time a little bit— I think another part of the naivety was— I went to this interview to go to the army and I had convinced myself that I'd wanted to, and they refused. They asked me questions I answered kind of really honestly and they refused me, they deemed me mentally unfit. And I think that one of the things that— I think that they were worried about my mental health stuff and I think one of the big secret-not-so-secrets of the IDF or the IOF is that there's a pretty high suicide rate there and yeah, I don't know, I think all that's to say that they refused me, I think they viewed me as a liability and I think it kind of furthered my sense of being lost, but it was the best, probably the best thing that has ever happened to me. And it allowed me to kind of like remove— and there was just such huge stigma around not only not going to the army but kind of being deemed unfit felt like this statement of both my Zionism and my masculinity which I was like, *oh, that is some— the universe giving me some feedback about some things* and I think that that was able to present me with some possibilities that I don't— that would definitely not have been possible. And I eventually found queer anti-Zionist community in Tel Aviv and was part of that scene for a few years and that was really, really— yeah. Important for my— me being who I am today, and I felt really grateful for that. I think that there was also this process of the more that I was able to see just how, how violent Zionism is on an everyday basis and I think I just reached this point where I was just like, I... I need to get out of here. And yeah, and so that was around 2010, that was a year after, there was this wave of protests in this Palestinian village in East Jerusalem called Sheikh Jarrah, which

I think became widely known in the news in 2021.

But I was going there a lot and I was doing a bunch of other activist-y stuff and drumming in this anarchist drum line called x and I think I just threw myself into that and then—

Silverman: What made the drum line anarchist?

Adelman: It was, so it was part of this network of anarchist drum lines that were kind of really popular, I guess, especially in Europe in the early 2000s called Rhythms of Resistance. And they took, I guess, this model of drum lines from, I guess it was Brazilian Samba-inspired or Brazilian Samba-appropriated. I guess it's hard to know at this point. But yeah, it was this network of kind of— I guess early mid-2000s Black Bloc anarchists or Black Bloc-proximity anarchists. I think that they formed— they formed in, I don't know, I don't exactly remember the history, but it was a lot of people who would just be kind of like, I would say in my, from my knowledge, mostly white, mostly punk or punk-adjacent anarchists in the early to mid-aughts and a bunch of, I guess anti-Zionist, Israeli Jews who would tour with their punk bands in Europe came across that and brought it to Tel Aviv in 2007, 2008. And I guess what made it anarchist was— there was supposedly a horizontal, I don't know, organizing structure, which I don't know, who knows if it— I mean, I have thoughts about that, but I won't get into it. And then there was a website with all the notations of the different rhythms. And so it was set up in this way where it was like, I guess the thinking was that if there are all these like anarchists, drum lines and all sorts of— scattered across Europe, if there was a big G8 or G7 or whatever there was back then summit, then everybody would know the same rhythms and the same conducting hand motions. And they would gather at kind of like these kind of super-groups. And like, there would be five different drum lines playing the same rhythms at these big protests. And I think it was, yeah, it was something powerful to think about. I was never part of something like that, but we did have that with our two— there was a Tel Aviv-based drum line and a Jerusalem-based drum line. So sometimes we would join forces and we would all know the same rhythms. So yeah, that's a little bit about Rhythms of Resistance.

Silverman: Are there other ways you've engaged with music since?

Adelman: I've been less engaging with music recently. It was a really big part of my life for a while when I moved to New York City, I joined this queer political marching band called Rude Mechanical Orchestra. And I was in this kind of queer and trans anti-Zionist anarchist Yiddish punk band for a while called קויט פֿאַר דײַן פֿאַרדאַכט (Koyt Far Dayn Fardakht). And— but I haven't really engaged with music from that— in that sense for a while. I guess I teach people how to... chant from Jewish sacred texts, and so I'm still kind of like, I guess I can engage with music from more of a spiritual or ritualistic perspective these days. And sometimes I talk with a friend of mine about doing a project or something like that, but not so much these days.

Silverman: Do you have any favorite chants?

Adelman: Favorite chants? Like, oh my god, that's such a good question. I feel like I did...um, years ago...um. It's funny. I have this memory of discovering the queer scene in Tel Aviv. And so there's this one chant that comes to mind, which I no longer— I no longer stand by politically, but I think for me, it was just a testament to just how important queerness is and kind of like, I don't know, queerness can just add to things.

Silverman: Could you tell us the chant?

Adelman: Yeah. Well, it was— I'm just thinking about this, you know, they used to, this was more from a “two state solution perspective,” where people would chant in Hebrew, they would chant [chant in Hebrew] which is like *one, two, one, two, two capitals in Jerusalem*, which is something that I don't— I don't support, I don't relate to that. And so I don't know, I almost even hesitate to bring it up. But then, I guess one of my entry points into queerness where I just heard somebody— I heard this chant on this, on this YouTube clip, because I've watched a lot of YouTube clips of queers doing queer stuff before I would actually allow myself to identify in that way. But they, but they were like— [chant in Hebrew], and it's kind of like *hairy legs, hairy legs, or hair on legs, hair on legs, two capitals in Jerusalem*. I was—I mean, again, don't stand by two capitals in Jerusalem. I believe in— yeah, I'm for Palestinian liberation. And I don't know, whatever, but I was just like— *oh*. That's one that stuck with me for whatever reason. Yeah, and I'm sure that there have been a lot of other chants that have resonated with me throughout the years. And for some reason, they're all from that particular, yeah, geopolitical space.

Silverman: Substituting words for body hair. [laughter]

Adelman: What's that?

Silverman: And then queering it by, yeah, talking about the plight of body hair.

Adelman: [laughter] Yeah, totally. Totally. Totally.

Silverman: [laughter] So you moved— I forgot, sorry, so you moved to New York after Tel Aviv?

Adelman: Yeah.

Silverman: Okay. And what was that like?

Adelman: You know, it's kind of funny, because it's like, I think I was like, *I don't*— there was part of me that was like, *I don't want to participate in this settler colonial apartheid state, which is based off of ethnic cleansing*. And then I moved to a settler colonial apartheid state that's based off of ethnic cleansing. And I think I— there was part of me that just wanted things to be simpler. In this, again, I think it was like, I wasn't as naive at the time. But I think that there was a little bit—it was many years since I had been in the US and I wasn't— and I hadn't cultivated political awareness here or really tracked what was going on here. As I mean, there's cultural

imperialism. So I could track what arrived to me from the news. But I think it just took another number of years before I was able to just establish a sense of self in/on these stolen lands and in this place. And yeah, and I think I was doing a lot of things that I would consider also a little bit more... Like, not exactly what my heart was telling me, maybe a little bit dissociative, a little bit — evasive of myself and the particular truths that I think were becoming louder at some point. But I did a lot of marching band stuff and music stuff. And I think it took me a while to— actually feel like I was in touch with or bringing my whole self. Yeah.

Silverman: Mmm. And when, I guess in the trajectory of all of this movement across different places, when did you first start to think about or recognize transness?

Adelman: Yeah, I think it was, I mean, I think it was something that I thought about... even, yeah, as a young person, a lot. And so it wasn't unfamiliar to me, but I think I was at times, at times passively, but at times actively trying to suppress that part of myself. And I think that there was something about being in queer spaces in Tel Aviv that was both liberating in some ways and limiting in other ways, where I think things were pretty like, things were kind of like, at that time, in kind of radical spaces were pretty intellectual or academic. And so there was this sense that in order to talk about gender, you had to, I don't know, read Judith Butler or whatever. And there was something a little bit less experiential and be like— I had met trans women and trans femmes in that scene, but very, very, very few of them. And it was definitely not a place where I feel like— that felt like a valid pathway in those spaces. And I think that coming to New York City and seeing, you know, even though there was still a lot of work to do, and still is, obviously, in terms of the way transmisogyny shows up in all spaces and in radical spaces. I just saw more examples of I don't know, trans women and trans femmes doing their thing and operating from the political perspective that I was trying to cultivate. So yeah, I don't — do you mind repeating your question?

Silverman: Yeah, no, you answered it. Yeah, totally.

Adelman: But yeah, I mean, there were all sorts of flavors of that coming up for me. And I remember moments looking back where I'm just like, *oh, that was active suppression of that*, where I was just like, *that was a desire and I suppressed that desire*. And I think that coming— although it took me many years— just being in New York City or in Brooklyn and being, yeah, seeing— I think it was actually really important for me to see trans women and trans femmes living their lives and not having that be some kind of—there kind of—be part of some kind of political arc or something like that. I think that was really important for me. Yeah.

Silverman: Mmm. And how does trans relate to other parts of your identity?

Adelman: Mmm [...] Yeah. I was just listening to your interview with— can I mention other participants?

Silverman: Yeah.

Adelman: I was just listening to your interview with my dear friend, Ita Segev. And I don't know, she is a dear friend of mine, in part because we share this experience of, I don't know, being, in certain parts of our childhood, from Jerusalem and anti-Zionist and transsexual. And I think that, I don't know, she talked about for years, just like the relationship between transness and anti-Zionism, or trans femininity and anti-Zionism. And that was something that I thought about for a while. And how certain aspects of those experiences carry some similarities and are sometimes, I don't know, working in synergy with each other, I guess. Not always, but I feel like in my experience there was this kind of like, I felt like there was a certain period of my life where my internal thoughts about this was the more that I feel solidified in my anti-Zionism, the more I feel solidified in my transness and womanhood and femininity, and then also the more I feel connected to my Judaism. And so they all felt woven together for me, at the very least in terms of a particular moment of time in which they all kind of became, I guess more solidified than ever before. Yeah, I don't know, I think I also just, I have some— I hesitate to be like, I definitely do not, there's this way in which I think a lot of people, myself included, can go back at different ways in which *I struggled in this particular normative social setting for many years*, and it's like, *oh, looking back, it must have been because I was trans*. And so I don't really— I try to, I don't know, do that with a certain level of caution, but I do see some kind of relationship between I don't know, the particular— neurodivergence and mental health stuff that I've experienced, and transness not in the sense of causality, or even in the sense of— they are one and the same, obviously, or whatever, but I do kind of like, yeah, yeah, I don't know, I don't really have words to describe it, but I do see a relationship there.

Silverman: Totally. And I would say you didn't have a lot to describe it. That was really helpful. Understanding the intersectionality of how all the ways we exist sort of coalesce.

Adelman: Yeah, totally.

Silverman: So, in coming to New York, what types of communities did you connect to? I heard the marching band was a big thing.

Adelman: Yeah. The marching band was definitely— it was definitely an entry point. I think it was this funny thing where it was like... I don't know, I think it's this funny thing which I think is like... *There are so many different trans narratives around in what circumstance would my gender rock the boat less* or something. Or if it did, then it would just be understandable. I think that I was like, *okay, if I'm a performer or a musician, then maybe that would give me more leeway or wiggle room* or something like that. Looking back, that's something that I think about. So, there was that music scene. And then, one of the realms that I got into was herbalism. And my entry point to herbalism was often through other trans people. My first encounter with an herbalist is this person named Jacoby Ballard. He's a trans herbalist and yoga practitioner. And I eventually took a course at the Third Root Community Health Center. Yeah. I started getting more into herbal medicine and I think that was something that I started getting into when I started feeling a little bit more clarity about who I was and what I wanted to do and what felt

meaningful to me. Yeah. So I would have little herbalist meetups with people who were just at their beginning entry points, as I was back then.

Silverman: And what herbs do you love to work with?

Adelman: Oh my god. What herbs do I love to work with? Well, it's hard for me to answer that question, so I'll tell you. I brought a bunch of nervous system herbs. I do that wherever I go. But one bottle I have here is white peony root. And I love working with white peony, or just peony in general. I feel like peony has been really supportive towards me and towards my clients and just towards so many people I know. The nervous system scents and the hormonal balance scents. And another bottle I'm holding is rose glycerate. And I don't know, rose just feels like this delicious... both heart opening and kind of mildly euphoric, but also very boundaried place. Just thinking about rose and thorns and also having this gorgeous and luscious flower and scent. So yeah, I'll leave it with peony and rose for now.

Silverman: Have you ever had adverse reactions to certain herbs that you've worked with?

Adelman: Yeah, I have. The first time I ever worked with this plant, motherwort. Motherwort is said to be really helpful for things like anxiety as it shows up with the heart. And blood pressure and heart palpitations and things like that. And the first time I drank motherwort tea, I felt a bunch of heart palpitations. And I think that when... I don't with motherwort anymore. But I think that for me that's just a reminder that there's no one-size-fits-all for herbs. And it's really important to take into consideration people's constitution and emotional world. And people are more than the sum of their parts, then so are plants. And I think that's why herbal practitioners and especially herbal practitioners who come from intact traditions of all kinds. And perhaps especially like Black, Indigenous and other people of the global majority. To think about what the energetics and what the kind of like, I don't know, for lack of a better word, yes, motherwort can be said to be good for this thing. But it's like, *what's my vibe? What's motherwort's vibe? Are our vibes matching right now?* That's knowledge that I think like, that's the kind of knowledge that I aspire to keep at the forefront of my awareness as an herbalist. And yeah, I'm just grateful for teachers who have reminded me of this over the years.

Silverman: Mmm. What are some other teachers that you've been learning from in this present era?

Adelman: Yeah, teachers who I've been learning from, oh my goodness. I have learned a lot from... I'm just sitting with that question for a second because there's part of me that wants to just go off and name so many people. And I think I want to name Dori Midnight as a teacher and somebody who's just been an inspiring queer Jewish witch for so many people over the years. I feel like in the realm of herbalism— which I mean, Dori Midnight is an herbalist as well. But yeah, my friend Vilde Chaya Fenster-Ehrlich is somebody who I've learned a lot from. I'm not remembering her last name at the moment, but there is this herbalist named Shabina, who's based north of the border. Who I've— just this reminder to follow the lead of traditions and

often traditions that are not— that are Black, Brown, Indigenous. So yeah, I just really learned a lot from her teachings around that. Goodness, so many teachers. I feel like those are a few... Yeah, I learned a lot from my friend Kes Otter Liefte, about just, I don't know, transness and trans femininity and ecology... Yeah, I— those are, those are some I feel just almost overwhelmed with the prospect of like naming people who are inspiring me. There are so many. And so, if you're listening, I love you and appreciate you.

Silverman: Totally. In engaging with herbalism and coming back to your Judaism in this present tense also, what are some ways that you kind of work with those agents? Are there like rituals or a group or ways that you feel kind of held in that experience?

Adelman: What are the ways in which I work with— did you say agents?

Silverman: Oh, no, just like aspects of your either spiritual or religious background now and potentially herbalism. Just any, are there rituals or are there ways that, you know, hold these new forms that are also part of your familial lineage?

Adelman: Yeah, it's a really good question...There are some, and I want more. I recently got to teach on this Jewish— this Jewish platform called Shel Maala run by these amazing women, Binya Koatz and R' Xava de Cordova. And I got an opportunity to teach about plants with affinity for what we would now call sex hormones, both in the reproductive agency realm and the gender self-determination realm as in Jewish sacred text and Jewish textual lineage. And through that process, yeah, I got to explore an herb, which is not part of my lineage, but which was very present in this textual lineage, which is saffron. And I don't know, it was just, it was just a meaningful experience where I got to explore it with my trans femme friend, Meenakshi. I guess all that's to say is that there are a lot of experiences, a lot of experiences of trans or trans femme camaraderie that have been happening with herbs as an entry point. But not in, not necessarily in a formalized sense, but kind of like in, in a, I don't know, *it's the friends you meet along the way* kind of sense, but in ways that have been really meaningful to me. I think like, I don't know, you have mutual friends, Elana June Margolis, and I'm really appreciative of the ritual spaces that she crafts in which I don't know, I think I've been able to think about relationships with plants as guides in those spaces. And recently I got to do an herbal glory hole at a Purim spiel that she organized. So yeah, I don't know, I think your question makes me think of wanting more formalized spaces like that. And I think I— I crave that.

I think that, I don't know, I think in the meantime I'm really holding close experiences of like, I'm just thinking about another Jewish trans girl who I met off this Jewish trans femme Signal loop and yeah, she needed some hormones and she came over and we ended up talking and she didn't know I was an herbalist and she's an herbalist and we talked about herbs and I'm just like, yeah, there's something about these mundane experiences where herbs and plants are an entry point which I really am treasuring these days. And yeah, maybe one day there will be something, like there will be some way in which I can facilitate that in a more formalized way.

Silverman: And just logistically, living in New York, what is your experience of healthcare and ways to access what you need?

Adelman: Yeah, that's a really good question... I'm not sure exactly how to answer that in this moment. I have, I don't know, it's hard to think about that question without being like, access to insurance and trans-competent providers and things like that. And so I have access to that and I'm grateful that, you know, I have access to that for now. I'm grateful that I live in this state, especially considering this kind of, you know, terrifying moment we're living through around that... And I think that what feels good to me right now, especially about my current provider is I think that in the past, I think it's just interesting because it's like we talk about access to trans healthcare, you know, as an end point that we're aspiring towards in this moment where that's under threat. And not to diminish that in the least, but I just think that you know, in the ideal world, access to trans healthcare, just access to healthcare in general is actually, you know, it's the floor, not the ceiling where it's great that we have access to insurance and providers who know that they need to be competent. And also I think that there's still even in these, you know, these better-circumstances states like New York state where, I don't know, in the past there's just been providers have prescribed hormones or providers still prescribe hormones. And it becomes a little bit more of a numbers game around estrogen levels. And there isn't, this isn't to put a bunch of blame on providers, I'm really appreciative of providers, but there isn't often the space or the training to troubleshoot or tweak in order so that people not only have access to these things but are in a place where they feel as good as we can feel with our bodies. And so, I don't know, that's something that I'm thinking about. And I currently have a provider who listens to me and who I feel is really attentive towards what I need. And I— I told her what would feel good for me in terms of the kind of hormones and medications, well, hormones that I want to take. And it's good that there's this possibility of having a conversation and not just being like, *we're a trans-competent clinic, we know more than you*. Yeah, so it has been nice having a little bit more of a collaborative relationship around that.

Silverman: Yeah, that's amazing.

Adelman: Yeah.

Silverman: And also, in terms of sort of like health and well-being, have you had any safety concerns while you've lived in New York City?

Adelman: Definitely. I feel like that they were most concentrated— I feel like they were most concentrated when I first came out. And also there feels like a little bit of an uptick of that recently. But yeah, when I first came out, I would have— you know, it was definitely this moment around 2014, 2015, 2016, where there was this visibility thing going on, which I think was often perceived as like— yeah, to some people that was a good thing. And I think to most people that was like, I don't know. I don't know if I want to categorize that at this moment. But I think that there are ways in which there was a little bit more of a, not comparatively, but there was a spotlight that I felt at that moment. And so it was, I would almost anywhere I would go,

whether it was on a bus or a train or whatever, I would just get, you know, verbal harassment. And sometimes— I was lucky to never have been physically assaulted, but I've had—I don't know, somebody punched the window of a train, and I was on the other side of that, and so it's um, relatively protected, or just like, just having these moments where it was just like, *oh, did that person who stepped on the gas while I was crossing the crosswalk and I just barely avoided him and then he started shouting something at me— was that just some, I don't know, New York City road rage? Was that directed at me specifically?* which it felt like in the moment. And I kind of feel like, I don't know, this is obviously a subjective experience, and I have access to privilege when it comes to race and class. I feel like there has been some shift around that. But also, I'm feeling like I felt a little bit more, um, I don't know, just— targeted recently. Um, yeah, I don't know if I want to go into the complexities of that, but yeah.

Silverman: Yeah. [Sighing]

Adelman: Yeah.

Silverman: On a separate way of thinking about visibility, I wanted to know if you could describe either one instance or ways that you feel seen in a positive way.

Adelman: Yeah.

I feel seen in positive ways a lot recently. Um, and I feel grateful for that, for sure.

Um, and I think that— I'm trying to think of one specific example...

I actually don't— I'm going to skip over examples from this moment. And I think I want to go back in time to this particular period of time where I felt like, you know, I would leave the house and I would feel really dysphoric and then I would feel like people would shout slurs at me or whatever. And, um, I remember this day, it was um, I think it was the beginning of 2016 or just like, I don't remember exactly when, but I went to this, I went to this show. I had had a really intense anxiety attack that day that really affected me deeply. And I ended up pulling myself together to go to the show. And I was getting more panic attacks on the train. And I was squirting this herb, um, these herbs that were soothing me. Um, but really kind of like an anxious, like a little bit of an anxious mess.

And I went to the show, I think it was called “O, Earth”. And it had, um, it had, um, Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson as characters in the play. And, um, the person who played Sylvia Rivera was Cecilia Gentili. And I didn't know her. I think we maybe emailed once or something like that. But it was just this moment where, I don't know, it was just like young, recently out trans girl. And the way that she greeted me— literally never knowing me, and she greeted me, and it was so loving and so affectionate. And I don't know, that was just like, I don't know, I feel like I'm trying to purposely go back in time. To have this moment of affirmation from this really powerful elder. Um, yeah.

Silverman: That sounds so lovely.

Adelman: Yeah. Um, and yeah, I feel, I don't know, I feel like I'm in this place at this moment where I feel pretty like, I don't know, I feel in my power quite often, which feels great. I don't know. I haven't figured it all out yet. I still, I don't know, I freak out like the rest of us sometimes. I don't know. It's a weird way of putting it, but all that's to say is, I just feel, I feel seen more now than I ever have before. And that feels pretty good.

Silverman. Mmm. Is there anything else before we conclude that you would like to share for the record for yourself?

Adelman: Anything else I would like to share? Um [...]
I don't know. I just feel like, um, I feel grateful to be able to tell my story a little bit. I don't know if this is like, it feels like a little bit, ah, funny to say, but I just, I'm really— I'm really so grateful for the trans women and trans femmes in my life. And yeah, I just feel, I don't know, I feel great about that being a huge part of who I am. I just feel really honored to be in that lineage or in that legacy and I think that— I don't know, we're really powerful, and I love us.

Silverman Mmm. Well, תודה (toda) [thank you], Ayelet. [laughter]

Adelman: [laughter] כיף (b'kef) [my pleasure]