Ignacio Rivera
Narrator

Andrea Jenkins
Interviewer

The Transgender Oral History Project
Tretter Collection in GLBT Studies
University of Minnesota

November 7, 2015

The Transgender Oral History Project of the Upper Midwest will empower individuals to tell their story, while providing students, historians, and the public with a more rich foundation of primary source material about the transgender community. The project is part of the Tretter Collection at the University of Minnesota. The archive provides a record of GLBT thought, knowledge and culture for current and future generations and is available to students, researchers and members of the public.

The Transgender Oral History Project will collect up to 400 hours of oral histories involving 200 to 300 individuals over the next three years. Major efforts will be the recruitment of individuals of all ages and experiences, and documenting the work of The Program in Human Sexuality. This project will be led by Andrea Jenkins, poet, writer, and trans-activist. Andrea brings years of experience working in government, non-profits and LGBT organizations. If you are interested in being involved in this exciting project, please contact Andrea.

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Andrea Jenkins -AJ
Ignacio Rivera -IR

AJ: Good morning. My name is Andrea Jenkins and I am the oral historian with the Transgender Oral History Project at the University of Minnesota. Today is November 7, 2015, and I have the distinct honor and pleasure of sitting down with internationally known performance artist, activist, sex educator, facilitator extraordinaire, artist, writer, blogger, and just a really, really special person on the planet, Ignacio Rivera.

IR: Thank you.

AJ: So, Ignacio, if you could state your name and maybe spell it just so that our transcriptionist gets it right, and then let us know your preferred pronouns, your gender identity currently, and your gender assigned at birth.

IR: OK. My name is Ignacio Rivera, that's I-g-n-a-c-i-o R-i-v-e-r-a. I identify as transgender queer, two-spirit person. I was identified female at birth and my pronouns are they/them/theirs.

AJ: Wonderful, thank you. So, Ignacio, what is your earliest memory? What's the earliest thing you remember? It doesn't have to be gender related, just . . . if it is gender related, that's great.

IR: The earliest thing I remember in life?

AJ: Yeah.

IR: Earliest thing I remember – oh, I know. One of the earliest memories I have is of my father about to leave the house, an apartment that I actually never recalled living in but I remember the steps – the stairs going up and down to the apartment, and my father was leaving. I remember I probably had to be about one and a half, maybe two years old, and I was crying because I wanted him to take me with him. I remember that because after that, we lived in the place where I grew up in and that was from two years old on up until when I left when I was a teenager.

AJ: Where did you grow up?

IR: In Brooklyn, New York, in Bed Stuy.

AJ: So, a New Yorker. So, you went to elementary school in this house, I suspect, since you lived there for 16 or 17 years. What was that experience like? What was the name of your elementary school?

IR: It was Benjamin Banneker Elementary School, which was one block away from where the projects were where I lived.

AJ: Is that right? That's interesting. I went to a Benjamin Banneker school myself when I lived in Chicago. I guess big, large cities with large Black populations get that name, probably not in the suburbs.

IR: No, probably not.

AJ: So, how was your experience with school? Did you experience any bullying or any teasing or those kinds of things related to your identity or your gender expression?

IR: No, actually . . . I mean, going to elementary school at that point, I was very much, for lack of a better way of saying it, female oriented. I don't think I had any real knowledge of gender identity, gender expression, and the thing that I got teased at in elementary school was not about my gender but more about culture or race.

AJ: Wow, that's interesting. Say more about that.

IR: My school, the neighborhood that I grew up in, was predominantly Black and, at that point, Puerto Rican specifically. And so, my family is a mix of Black, Puerto Rican, indigenous and so . . . but, we were viewed as Puerto Ricans, dark-skinned Puerto Ricans like my mother's side of the family.

AJ: Afro-Puerto Rican.

IR: Yeah, Afro-Puerto Rican. Being light skinned and Puerto Rican and speaking, sometimes, Spanish here and there or culturally with other Spanish students, the way we greeted each other or sometimes spoke in Spanish, I got teased a lot for that. So, it was about probably difference and . . . I think also just people thinking that we were talking about them because we were talking Spanish. I think it was just uncomfortability with some new stuff, so that's what mostly I got teased about in elementary school. But, when I got to high school, that's when I was really starting to express my gender and, at that point, it wasn't any teasing, it was more of an empowering thing for me. And, I suspect, because I was presenting . . . well, I was seen as a woman or a young lady and it was more acceptable for me to dress in men's clothing and be a little androgynous. In high school, it seemed very cool. Some people used to call me GQ, like the magazine *GQ*, so I used to kind of mess it up. I would have really red lipstick on and I had cut my hair really, really short and part it to the side and very slicked back and wore jackets and wore my brother's shoes. So, for everyone else, it was a fashion statement and it was cool. So, at that point it was OK – possibly because I was still wearing lipstick and things. It was very clear that I was a girl but I was just messing around with clothing.

AJ: Playing with this sort of gender expression, particularly around clothes.

IR: Yeah. So, it was affirming, and especially because I was so . . . I was pretty shy and kind of kept to myself. I had a small group of people that were my friends and so, there was a point where I felt like I was growing into myself, like trying to figure out who I was. I think that started because I was in a co-op program at school and starting working for myself. Up until then, my parents would buy all my clothes and I had no say in what I wore. So, when I started working, I had this opportunity to start searching for things that made me feel good and so that's when I started really navigating how do I want to express my gender, without even having the language. I wasn't thinking about it as, "This is my gender identity."

AJ: Right, yeah – no.

IR: This is my gender expression.

AJ: Sort of this natural or organic, which is . . .

IR: And it felt great and I was like, "Oh, I love how this feels and what I look like," and I wanted to keep going. When I did cut my hair, too, in 9th grade, it was a huge thing because my hair was really long – past my ass.

AJ: Wow.

IR: So, when I cut my hair, my mom was really upset about it. She let me cut bangs for the first time when I went to 9th grade and then after I got the job, I went and kind of cut it all off. So, that was a big step. Of course, it was about messing with my femininity, this idea that, "You're so pretty, why are you cutting your hair?" "People are going to think different things," so I think sexual orientation stuff was . . . I think people have more ideas of sexual orientation than about gender identity and expression.

AJ: So, that was starting to bubble up. What year do you think you were in 9th grade?

IR: Oh, gosh. I'm so horrible at that. It was in the 1980s . . . yeah.

AJ: 1980s. Cool. Because that's a very, sort of specific time period, particularly you're talking a lot about your hair, so hair styles were going through some . . . for Black and brown people, Jheri curls.

IR: It was shifting from that to the salt and pepper bob.

AJ: Exactly. It was interesting when we look back over time and how hairstyles sort of define various eras and that kind of thing. What was your home environment like? I mean, you talked a little bit about it. So, you had both of your parents in the house?

IR: Yes, both of my parents. And, we were . . .

AJ: How many siblings?

IR: A brother, who is the oldest, a sister who is the middle child, and myself, the baby. My brother is six years older than me and my sister, five years older than me.

AJ: OK.

IR: It was . . . it's funny, growing up and it's like, "This is normal." I had a normal family, we lived in the projects, we were on welfare for some time when I was growing up. My parents both came from Puerto Rico, not knowing any English and started working, my father worked as a custodian at the Towers, until the Towers went down.

AJ: Really?

IR: He was there for 25 years, I think. My mom was a homemaker for a while, very much an entrepreneur – made jewelry, sold Tupperware, sold clothing from the house, did all these things to kind of supplement for money. I always saw my mother as a very strong go-getter woman and welfare helped us out for a long time while she went to school and got her degree and ended up getting a job within Human Services. So, yeah, I grew up with my mom being the

one mostly doing a lot of the cooking and the cleaning and things like that – very kind of traditional roles.

AJ: Sort of traditional female roles.

IR: And then it shifted, actually – it shifted somewhere in the middle where my mother is asthmatic, severely asthmatic, so growing up we spent a lot of time in the hospital with her . . . she had a lot of asthma attacks. Once she even died and we thought we lost her and they revived her after being dead for quite some time.

AJ: Wow.

IR: So, everything shifted at that point, so my dad took a lot of the responsibilities of doing grocery shopping, cleaning the house, because she couldn't do it because of dust and all that stuff. So, roles kind of shifted and normal as well due to health issues.

AJ: Dad cooking and . . .

IR: Cooking, no – he would not do that. My mother wouldn't let him in the kitchen. My mother is a bad-ass cook, so it's her food. She could throw down, she could put her foot in some stuff. My father, he basically went to the grocery store, did all the cleaning, did the laundry, all that stuff. Then us, growing up, we had age appropriate chores to do in the house.

AJ: Do the dishes, take out the trash.

IR: So, pretty much in that way.

AJ: Yeah, wow – that's awesome. When was the first time you realized that something was happening with your gender? Or, you were not the gender you were assigned at birth.

IR: I would say that in high school, when I was doing all the different dressing, I definitely felt more alive and more in tune with who I was supposed to be, I knew that. I didn't have the language around it, that's for sure. And, I've always been a very fluid person, I have a tattoo on my chest that says, "Fluid," because I've always been . . . when I finally figured out that term, or that identity, I was like, "This is it, this fits me because it's always been that way since I was young. I've always kind of navigated back and forth with very feminine identity to masculine identity, without seeing those things, so it's always been that fluctuating back and forth.

AJ: Wow.

IR: And for a while . . .

AJ: Does that freak people out?

IR: Yes. Yeah, it did because what I found was a lot of people didn't know how to connect with me, especially if they were interested in me. They didn't . . .

AJ: Which energy do I try to tap into, right?

IR: Exactly. And, for a while, I thought something was wrong with me. I thought something was wrong with me because I was like, "Do I actually know who I am? Who am I?" Because

somedays I want to wear a dress and I want to do this and other days I express a very masculine energy – the way I dress, the way I walk, everything, everything about me. So, for a little while, all of that felt good, but at the same time, it felt very much like . . . that I was fake. I felt like I was a fake person because I just didn't understand. People were just like, "Pick, just pick what you are." So, later on, I guess I got the permissions through community and learning some more about gender identity and expression, that I don't have to pick and that this was true to me and it felt right. So, I think high school was the beginning kind of process of that. When I came out, back then at 19 . . . at 19, I came out as a lesbian. And when I did, I was able . . . it's funny, I was able to express my gender a little more, so I shifted from being kind of a high-femme lesbian to dyke-identified and more masculine. I think the people or the partners that I had in my life helped me to express those different parts of me.

AJ: OK, how so?

IR: The very first girlfriend I had was a militant dyke.

AJ: OK.

IR: She taught me a lot about politics and sexual orientation and she wore combat boots and jeans, t-shirts, so she was very masculine.

AJ: Fatigues?

IR: Yeah. She basically was just like . . . when she met me she was like, "These things are oppressive to women," like make-up and this and that. I was like all about it. I was like, "All right, I'm going to listen to what you're saying," but it was so easy for me to make that shift. It wasn't like she made me do anything, she kind of opened my eyes to some stuff and I was like, "OK," and kind of shifted more masculine. So, we were two masculine lesbians, which was something that you didn't see very much, especially as my first relationship. We were two dykes, like hardcore combat boot dykes.

AJ: You don't see that very often.

IR: And that felt great. And then, after her, I met a woman who . . . I met her very dykey and then she said that I would look really nice in this outfit that she bought me, which was a dress. I put it on and I was like, "Yeah, I do look good." With her, I was very feminine and it also felt completely right. So, I was doing a lot of shifting and I think . . . for a while I thought, "Is my identity wrapped in other people?" And then, finally, I came to the conclusion, I was like, "No, it just made it more easier and they were open to that, they didn't question that fluidity." So, it made it much easier for me to express that. And, it's just been like that ever since.

AJ: That's fascinating. Now, I think I've known you for probably about the last 10 years or so and my experience of you and being with you has been a much stronger, sort of masculine of center identity. Are you feeling more comfortable in that identity now or is there still this sort of expression fluidity that is happening?

IR: It's interesting because there were certain things . . . so, I've identified as a trans person for probably now 10 years, I would say. When I first came out as trans, there was no passing so

even the way I expressed the pronoun that I used as well. When I first came out, I said, "I want people to use she and he, even in the same sentence – like simultaneous." That didn't work. People just didn't know how to do it and so they chose what they felt more comfortable with which was usually she . . .

AJ: She, and stuck with it.

IR: Right. I felt like my identity wasn't being validated and so I used that for a while and then I was like, "OK, I'm not being validated here, people don't know that I'm trans because I'm not passing." At that point, I was identifying as a no-op, no-ho trans person – so, no operation, no hormones. And, I was very clear in talking about trans identity in the sense that your transness is based on you and what you feel, it has nothing to do with surgery or hormones, it could be everything to do with it and it could have nothing to do with it. So, I was at that point and I always expressed that . . . right now I'm right here, but I don't know where I'll be in five years or six years because I knew that my fluidity would take me elsewhere.

AJ: Right.

IR: And so, I went from he/she kind of simultaneously to asking people to use he because I think it was mostly because I didn't pass so when someone referred to me as he, there was an indication that I was trans for these people who didn't know me at first meeting me. And then after about a year or two of using he, it didn't feel right for me completely and so I started using they, which I had a friend who was using they and it was just like the heavens opened up – it was the perfect thing for me, because it doesn't indicate whether you're male or female, it's very androgynous and ambiguous – I loved it.

AJ: But, it still is a positive affirmation of your humanity, right? You're still a human being, you're a they and not an it.

IR: Right. Exactly, exactly. And, I didn't have any hormones or any surgery up until two years ago . . . two years ago. So, I've identified as trans for all this time and I've always said I don't know where my gender journey is going to take me, so two years ago I decided that I was going to have surgery and start taking hormones – or hormones was first. I started taking hormones for about a year before surgery. I actually did have a hysterectomy but it wasn't associated with my gender identity.

AJ: It just needed to be gone.

IR: Yeah, it just so happened and it kind of worked out that way, it was for medical reasons. And then after that, I decided to have top surgery and top surgery, for me, was about a lot of different things. It wasn't just about gender identity – it was about gender identity, it was about safety - it was a huge thing around safety because as I was on hormones, I was starting to pass more and as I was passing when my breasts were noticeable, it became very dangerous.

AJ: Yes.

IR: So, a lot of looks, a lot of aggressiveness from people, especially men and me being completely terrified that something was going to happen.

AJ: Absolutely.

IR: At that point, I guess because of my fluidity and because I had identified as trans for so long and because I was in my 40s already, I felt it was the next piece of the journey for me. So, I decided to get surgery, and I did. And so now, I'm passing more and it depends on which circles I'm in – sometimes I pass as a gay man and sometimes I pass as a straight man. And so, as I'm passing more, I'm seeing that I'm coming again full circle in this way that I want to continue being this fluid person and so, the way I've expressed my gender now is masculine but also feminine. And so, the gay male kind of identity is kind of pushed forward, which I'm actually happy about.

AJ: Awesome.

IR: And so, I wear feminine clothing or sometimes very androgynous clothing, so I really do like the androgynous kind of realm. But, being on testosterone now, I don't know where that's going to take me and it's almost a wonderful . . . this wonderful journey and surprise for me because I'm not sure if I'm going to end up with a beard or not or what. I'm excited for all of it and how my gender is going to unravel or develop or evolve. Yeah, I see it as I have no idea what I'm going to look like, I have no idea if I'm going to stop testosterone, if I'm going to continue on or what. And, the thought of all of that feels like it is a part of my journey.

AJ: Wow, that's fair. That's awesome. This interview is awesome. You're answering my questions – like one of my questions is what terms do you use to describe yourself and how has that changed over time. You just bust that out.

IR: When I first came out the term that I was using was trans entity. One of my lovers at the time kind of coined that term and I really loved it.

AJ: Trans entity.

IR: Entity – yes. I liked it because he said it was about your spirit, so what your spirit feels – so entities that were in transformation. So, for a while I used trans entity, I've used words like transformer – I love that. "I'm transformer, I'm more than meets the eye." I like that because you never know. It's any idea that anyone would have any kind of . . . when people make assumptions, people make assumptions about anybody. You don't have to be trans and somebody could look at you and make assumptions about your education, where you live, your politics, how you have sex – anything. And so, I like that with the trans entity and the fluidity and stuff. I mean, people will still make assumptions but there is more of an inquisitiveness about it – like, "What does that mean to you?"

AJ: Wow, thank you. I was going to ask about medical interventions and you just . . . you went there. Thank you. What's your current relationship like with your birth family and/or chosen family?

IR: My relationship with my family is good. I am super privileged for that. It's taken many years to get to the point where I am right now and when I came out as a lesbian when I was 19, I wasn't even living at home. I left home at a very early age – and, I got pregnant at an early age. So, at 17 I got pregnant, at 18 I had my daughter.

AJ: You have a daughter, wow – you were young.

IR: Yes. My daughter is 25, her name is Amanda.

AJ: Who is clearly a part of your birth family.

IR: Yes. So, in the beginning when I first came out as a lesbian, it was super difficult for my mother. It was a really hard time for her, she didn't understand. I think the reason she didn't understand was because I had had relationships with men – I mean, I had a child.

AJ: Clearly.

IR: She was like, "I don't get this." It's interesting because I have a cousin who is gay and when they look at him, they've always known he was gay. He's the epitome of born gay, so he came out and everyone accepted him in the family because it was from the beginning. So, that was easier for my family to swallow rather than me who has had crushes on boys and now I have a child and then all of a sudden, you're a lesbian. So, my mom was like, "Who did this to you?" Like, "Who influenced you?" And so, we had a little strain in our relationship in the beginning but, after time, because I continued talking with her and pretty much spoon-feeding her information, little by little she started coming around and she realized that I was still her child, that I respected her, that I was trying to live my life and be a good person in this world, trying to uphold the values of our culture. And she, she got with the program, she was OK with it. And now my mom, even though she might not have all the language or terminology or any of that stuff, I care less about that, she has defended me to family like crazy – totally shut people down. "You don't talk about my child like that."

AJ: I love it.

IR: And my daughter, my daughter has always known this. When she was born, I was out as a lesbian when she was one year old, so pretty much her entire circle – my chosen family, her chosen uncles and aunts, have all been queer and trans and that's all she's ever known. So, that's all normal stuff.

AJ: That's beautiful – that's a beautiful thing. Have there been . . . or, I'm sure there's been some, but what have been the challenges that you've faced since you've began to really fully express your gender identities?

IR: Challenges. I mean, the challenges that a lot of trans people face in that . . . the bathroom issue, that was . . . now, I'm able to go into male bathrooms, but interestingly enough, I don't feel comfortable in male bathrooms. And, because my outward expression of the way I'm passing is so recent for me, I am still getting used to it. I'm still getting used to what people see when they see me. I'm used to people responding to me and talking to me as, "I know you're trans and I'm going to respect you, but I can see that you were born female." Now, I forget because I talk to people and they're seeing me straight up as you were born and identified as male at birth.

AJ: Yeah, they don't see that little girl anymore.

IR: No, and it's . . . my goal was never to fully pass, my goal, for me I guess, was more about maybe the androgyny or the gender fluidity, like having that acknowledged all the way around. So, it's

interesting how people respond to me because they think something . . . because of the assumptions. So, I would say bathroom issues for sure, relationships for sure, who I enter into intimate relationships with can be really challenging because of my fluidity, because people sometimes want the thing – I met you as a masculine trans person and that's what I want. That's what I want, I don't want this flaming little thing on the side sometimes, I don't want you talking in this particular way and that feels stifling to me. And so, that's been challenging at some points – or, if people know that I'm fluid but they really are connected to one side of me. So, that's been a little challenging as well. I've been fortunate.

AJ: You articulate that so well, I have a hard time really explaining that to people.

IR: Even especially because of trans identity, people want to be so respectful so they think they have to uphold you in a certain way – and I get that. People are still learning about trans identity and things like that, but there is a realm of trans folks who really navigate a whole spectrum of that trans identity.

AJ: Right, exactly.

IR: I think that this is the next realm of how we talk about transness and how policy is talked about in terms of someone who might be gender queer, gender non-conforming and fluid. Like, how do you work with that in an employment setting. How do people respect that and how can you be safe in those situations? So, it's also employment-wise, I've been working as a performer and a lecturer and a facilitator for . . . wow, probably over 15 years or maybe more – maybe more. And, that has been a privilege because when people hire me they know who I am, they're hiring me because I'm trans, I talk about race and class and all these things. So, I go into it with privilege, right, because that's what they want me for.

AJ: Sure.

IR: But, in terms of moments when things are . . . when gigs aren't coming in and money is really bad and I'm struggling, I have to consider jobs. That is huge anxiety for me because I'm trans, I have sex work experience in the past that I do not hide – it is a huge part of who I am, my life and my struggle.

AJ: Right.

IR: And, bringing all of myself into an organization, how would that be taken? It depends – if it's an LGBT non-profit organization, some might be OK with that because they see the connections with economic justice and sex work and all of these things that are very much connected – not to all trans people but just to the struggle that marginalized people go through.

AJ: People face – right, exactly.

IR: Or, they don't want anything to do with that because they want to align themselves with the mainstream, respectable, LGBT movement and also if there's another job that's really, really good, a job that's out there that I want to go to that's not LGBT, how to navigate that, there's a huge fear for me in that. Fear that my identity as a gender-queer person will be completely lost because I have to navigate as a male in those spaces just so I don't have to deal with stuff. And

so, those things come up. Employment, relationships, the bathroom issue, even health care – just going to the doctor. When I was going in . . .

AJ: Yeah, not only can I imagine it, I have experienced it.

IR: Going in to go to the gynecologist when you look like this and people . . . I remember going into a space where I had to go get a check-up and I was sitting in a space with all women and then myself.

AJ: Of course, you're in the gynecologist's office.

IR: Right. And it's supposedly an LGBT-friendly space and so when they call me . . . and I put on my form I'm trans-identified, these are my pronouns, when they call they say, "Miss Rivera, Miss Rivera."

AJ: Wow.

IR: I was so upset.

AJ: Yeah, absolutely.

IR: I got up and I said, and I said it loudly, "This is an LGBT-friendly establishment, isn't it?" And they were like, "Yes." I was like, "Oh, I'm confused because I'm trans and I put that on my form and you're calling me Miss Rivera." So, they were like, "Oh, my goodness, I'm so sorry." They apologized, apologized, apologized, but this is why a lot of trans masculine or trans men or gender non-conforming folks who were identified female at birth don't go to the gynecologist because it's the hardest thing to go and be in those spaces and then go in and show your vulnerability in a way that even if you are very much attached to your nether regions, right – even if you are OK with it, totally attached to it, and it's still something to look a certain way, be in stirrups, and then talk about things – and then also doctors having huge assumptions about what you do with your nether regions and the words that they use to describe what's happening and other doctors coming in and saying, "She." So, a lot of that stuff, getting that daily stuff – it takes a lot on your spirit, it takes a lot on your soul.

AJ: The microaggressions of everyday life for trans people.

IR: Yeah.

AJ: What are some of the positive aspects?

IR: Positive? My mental health.

AJ: That's a good thing.

IR: I feel extremely happy that I am able and privileged to express my gender the way I want – although there are pockets of times where I can't fully express my gender due to safety reasons. When I'm traveling, I know that I can't wear a skirt if I want to go . . . there are certain things I just can't do because it's just purely about safety.

AJ: Sure.

IR: But, I do have lots of privilege in comparison to so many people that can't ever express or express it in hiding or in little . . .

AJ: Small spaces and places.

IR: Yeah, so I'm happy about that. I'm happy . . . positives is my community, being connected to my chosen family who are predominantly queer and trans people of color. Also, the educational aspect of me living my life really educates people around me, especially as a speaker, as someone who travels internationally, that I have the capacity and also another privilege to educate folks on how people are expressing their gender in different ways, one aspect of how I express mine. And also, my life and other trans people's lives helps to give permission to other trans people or people who are struggling. I've had so many people come up to me and say, "Oh, my God, I've always felt a certain way about my gender, but you just said what I feel and I didn't think that that was right. I thought that I had to be identified in the binary."

AJ: All male, yeah.

IR: And I say this to say nothing against binary trans people, but I wanted to be that all of it is accepted – trans binary folks, the gender queer, gender non-conforming people who transition this way and then that way. It should all be a part of that experience.

AJ: Absolutely.

IR: So, all of those things are very positive to me, which will help inform how policies are being passed at the . . . if those of us who are privileged enough to speak, talk about our lives and share our stories, it helps other people to understand, it helps to humanize us and it helps to change laws that completely affect us – and it also shows that all issues are trans issues because trans people are everywhere.

AJ: Everywhere. I love that you frame that as a privilege to be able to go out and speak and educate and talk to people. I just know . . . and I don't want to take up a lot of space in your interview, but just know that a lot of trans people feel put upon when asked to do those kinds of things and, as a person who has had that privilege of doing that, it is quite an honor and a privilege to be able to do that.

IR: I think that there is definitely . . . I constantly think of *This Bridge Called my Back,* the book, and the conversations or the stories in there. And that book really talked about women of color being that bridge, for educating people about the issues that women of color are facing and that sometimes it's just tiring, you just don't want to do it anymore.

AJ: Absolutely.

IR: And that people need to take agency and try to learn on their own as well.

AJ: Yes.

IR: But, they are also those of us who that's what we signed up for. Right? So, as an educator, as a lecturer, I am consenting to be at least one of the pieces of the bridge for a little while at least, right? Until it gets to a point that I need to take care of myself. So, it's a balance. It's a balance

of being an educator and sharing, but also not giving so much of yourself, not being a token, that you are taking care of your mental health, your wellbeing and not being burnt out because this continually happens with the different movements – within the gay movement, within women's movement, with POC movement – all of those movements where people are picked out and just completely used for this education and to further the causes of other people or organizations. So, it definitely is a balance and it is a privilege to be able to have a mic, to be on a stage and be able to talk to hundreds, thousands of people, it's a beautiful thing.

AJ: It is, thanks for framing it like that. That's helpful and inspiring to me. Talk about . . . I know you've been doing so much work out here in this world. Tell me about some of the organizations that you have been involved in or helped to formulate. I know there have been many and they have hugely, really impactful organizations.

IR: When I first came back to New York, because when I . . . like I said before, when I was young, I got pregnant when I was young and I left home at a young age, I ended up moving to Massachusetts for a little while when my daughter was one. We lived there for about eight years.

AJ: Boston or . . .?

IR: It was Merrimack Valley, like a half hour north of Boston. And, the only reason I moved there was because I couldn't afford to live in New York, I was living in the shelter systems with my daughter. I was pregnant in the shelter systems and then I had my daughter. I briefly went back to my mom's house after I had my daughter and that wasn't working.

AJ: That just didn't work out, yeah.

IR: I needed to leave, and so I moved to Massachusetts, went there . . . at that point, I had dropped out of high school and I got my GED. I had never considered . . . college was never even on my radar, I just wanted to get the hell out of high school and get out of my house. When I got there, literally boredom brought me to college because there was nothing there to do. I mean, being a New Yorker coming into this little town and it was absolutely nothing – the busses stopped running at 6pm.

AJ: That's hilarious – boredom brought me to college.

IR: The busses stopped running at 6pm so it's like you needed a car and all these things. So, I went to the local community college and I just decided I was going to sign up. I was able to get a Pell Grant and things like that to go and I was like, "I'm going to check it out." I fell in love with it. Regular high school and elementary school, I was not a student that excelled at all. I was pretty much average and that's it, nothing pretty exciting about me, nothing grabbed my attention, and when I got to college, it was different. And so, I loved it. I went there for a while and that's where politically I got started organizing and things like that. While I was there, I went to school. I got my associate's and after getting my associate's, I went straight to getting my bachelors and then my masters. So, for six years straight, no breaks, I went to school and . . .

AJ: With a young child?

IR: And working three jobs. So, this is what I did for six years. It was one of the most difficult things that I had to do. I cried a lot while I was doing it but I wanted to keep going and at that point it was a lot for my daughter as well. So, once I got my masters degree I knew that I was going to leave to go back to New York because I figured, "Now I have a masters, I can get a job, I can live in New York now," and that's where my family was. So, came back, and when I came back, I started working for the Anti-Violence Project and I worked with them for two years as the Volunteer Coordinator and educator, so I would train pretty much everyone on the 24-hour hotline, made sure the volunteers were oriented and things like that.

AJ: Did that organization have a queer- and trans-analysis or were they pretty much hetero?

IR: Yes, it was the New York City Gay and Lesbian Anti-Violence Project – yes.

AJ: Thank you.

IR: Yeah, I needed to work in the LGBT organization. So, that was good. I developed a lot of skills there and afterwards I took a job as the racial and economic justice policy analyst for the National Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer Task Force now.

AJ: Right, exactly.

IR: That's what it's called now. So, I took a job with them doing that and that was rewarding in that I got to meet a lot of people across the country. I built up my network base and I learned a lot.

AJ: Did you live in New York or DC then?

IR: In New York, in the New York office. After that job, I had had my fill of non-profit organizations. I just worked for two non-profits and that was that. I felt the politics and how grant money kind of steers stuff . . . so, I decided at that point, because I had built up a good network of folks, I was going to do some contracting. So, I contracted with the Latino Commission on AIDS for a while doing some research around queer women and HIV and then I was a part of . . . one of the founding board members for Queers for Economic Justice.

AJ: QEJ?

IR: Yeah, QEJ. I was on the network for a long time and then about . . . a good solid 10-12 of us were the ones who kind of created the bylaws, created the name, started it up – from the ground up. That was one of the most wonderful experiences working with a wonderful group of diversely economic . . . different economic classes.

AJ: Right.

IR: So, doing that for a while. I started my own project, it's not an organization, it's Poly Patao Productions and that's the work that I've done around sexual liberation work.

AJ: Poly Patao.

IR: Poly Patao, yeah.

AJ: P-o-l-y?

IR: Poly . . . so the name Poly is for polyamorous.

AJ: Right.

IR: And then Patao, in Spanish pata is like a dyke and pato is faggot, so these derogatory words that I've kind of took and put together, it's kind of my fluidity, so Poly Patao Productions.

AJ: P-a-t-a-o?

IR: P-a-t-a-o, yes.

AJ: Patao. OK.

IR: And, then doing that work, doing education in the queer and trans POC communities around relationships, safer sex negotiation, consent, things of that nature.

AJ: So, is that the container that holds sex work for you?

IR: No. I talk about it in the same . . . the website that I have, it's kind of integrated in there but mostly that was created around just connecting with my community of color to really talk about how we form relationships and also thinking in a broader context, which is not . . . trying to get people to think about it and that it is not just associated with whiteness. Kind of debunking the idea that being poly or non-monogamous or being kinky or being any of those things are white, because this is what we see in media. It got me asking a lot of questions about then why don't I see people of color in these spaces? Why is it that when I go I'm like one of maybe two or three people of color? I know that my community is engaged in these kinds of activities and are talking about it, but how are they talking about it? So, I did my own informal research and I basically hung out at every event that I could think of, go to bars, and I just started talking to people and outing myself as a poly and kinky person and asking questions and started creating events and a lot of educational opportunities for folks to come in and ask questions. In New York, I definitely had some part in creating a broader analysis on kink and the sexual revolution, the new sexual revolution, and what it means for people of color in the midst of racism and economic justice and also in the midst of just oppression – systematic oppression over POC bodies, queer bodies, and trans bodies, and how we need to be talking about sex and putting sex in kind of a center framework in discussing our lives. When we think of sex we think of the act of sex, right? But we don't think about sex and the politics of sex as being things that are associated and connected with the sterilization of poor women, women of color and women with disabilities. We don't see it as what was once on the books as sodomy laws, we don't see the care, or lack of care, people of color got when HIV hit, we don't think about the abstinence until marriage sex education, we don't think about welfare reform and how welfare reform is connected to abstinence until marriage sex education and how that affects people of color and poor people. This all has to do with sex, it has to do with our relationships, it has to do with our family units. This is a sex conversation, so we needed to broaden the scope and talk about sex in a more broader context in terms of we've constantly talked about sex as a desire and pleasure-based, which is fantastic because learning about sex we don't talk about the pleasure and desire, we talk about the mechanics of it and the outcomes, which is a child.

AJ: Sure.

IR: And, it's pretty heteronormative, but if we expand that then the next level is the political and what we've seen lately is more of a reactionary political conversation about we're kinky and we need these rights to protect us or polyamorous parents getting their children taken away and thinking about policies in that kind of way and re-constructing what a family looks like, right? So, those are also very good things to concentrate on but also very reactionary, and then we have what I say is the thing that we need to be concentrating on more and that people of color and people really pushed to the margins need to be talking about more is how this idea of sex in this country, at least in North America, has shaped how we are mis-educated or uneducated, how we navigate and maintain healthy relationships, how we're able to be safer about our sex – all of these things are connected to negative harsh policies, money, funding that doesn't go to places that need it the most.

AJ: Sure.

IR: And so, all of this trickles into how these spaces, kink spaces, play parties, things that you see on TV, navigate towards whiteness because there has not been or there is little racial and economic analysis in those things because it's purely on pleasure. So, when you expand that, you see that people of color have had a say and are integrated very much in the sex conversation or at least what has happened has greatly affected us, so we need to be at the forefront in talking about this and those spaces need to be more multiracial because our lives are truly affected. That's why I say that is truly a pleasure to go to a play space, to negotiate your boundaries, to say exactly what you want to get the relationship that you desire is a privilege because there are some people that are raised knowing that they have this right to get whatever they want – just because they have the right as a human being to have the best relationship to do that. And then there are others, "We don't get that – we don't get that at all." We don't get that we have that right because the government and laws and policies have consistently told us you're oversexualized, you have too many children, your sex is disgusting, your body is disgusting – all of these things feed into how we see ourselves and if we can't see ourselves and the government doesn't acknowledge us, then how are we to have anything healthy? How are we to just navigate life and we know that there is a clear connection with any kind of a relationship, whether sexual or not, to our mental health and our happiness and our wellbeing.

AJ: I'm going to feign ignorance here a little bit and just ask what's a play space? You threw that word out there. What is that?

IR: Play space is what folks in the BDSM or kinky community or polyamorous community or swinger community might call a space where people gather and kind of get together to express their sexual desires or a power dynamic desires. It might not be explicitly sexual but kind of integrated into that. So, it's a space that is intentional. You go there with the intent of being around other people viewing or engaging with other people where consent and boundaries are key. People get to act out fantasies and do things in a healthy, safe environment.

AJ: Wow, thank you. And since we just talked about play space, what about relationships? What about love? I know you talked earlier about one of the challenges of being gender fluid and having some of these multiple identities creates challenges around relationships and love. Where is that sitting for you right now? Are you involved in a romantic relationship or you keep

using the word poly, multiple, romantic relationships? Or, maybe they're not even romantic. Maybe some are sexual and some are romantic, I don't know.

IR: Well, for a long time I was not in any kind of romantic relationship, or I should say new romantic relationship. I have a partner, woman identified, cis woman who is bisexual and we've been together for almost 10 years.

AJ: Wonderful.

IR: And then I have another lover who is trans male identified and we are hitting close to two years now. And then, I have play partners, people that I'm not romantic with or people that I care about, some chosen family members that I play with – so, play meaning anything that I talked about, anything where it's power exchange or sexual, more casual, but with people that I trust and love.

AJ: Wow. So, you have some love in your life, which is a beautiful thing.

IR: I do.

AJ: That's a beautiful, beautiful thing. What has been your experience . . . you've talked a lot about your experience in the medical community and how that has been challenging. What about in educational institutions or with the criminal justice system? Or, maybe even . . . I don't want to necessarily ask you to speak for an entire group of people because we can only speak to our own experiences; however, I know you just worked on the U.S. Trans Survey, which I had the privilege of being an advisory committee member on. But, have there been times or situations within those systems that have been negative or created problems for you? Or, has your experience always been really positive in those?

IR: In terms of criminal justice . . .?

AJ: Criminal justice system, the educational system, employment institutions and all of those kinds of systematic institutional spaces.

IR: Well, employment, I talked a little bit about that in that I kind of just opted out of that and if I did decide to go to work within an institution, it would have to be an LGBT organization or an organization that focused on sex workers or around HIV or anti-violence. I think these organizations are organizations that get gender identity expression for the most part, so I would feel most comfortable in those spaces. And, in terms of criminal justice, I have definitely had the privilege of not being arrested and that is a privilege. But, my knee-jerk reaction with police is of total fear because of everyone around me and what I've seen and how they've reacted to me. Interestingly enough, I've had lots of negative interactions with police when I was female identified and dyke. I got stopped a lot by police officers so it might have been around my gender expression, even though I was not identifying as trans at the time.

AJ: But, you were transgressing these gender norms – yeah.

IR: Exactly. So, a lot of arguments and getting stopped by the cops. It's interesting, because then I felt like I had, for whatever reason, I felt like I had more agency in pushing back with police and

maybe because I was female identified, maybe because I felt that I could say some stuff. I don't know if that was silly of me, but that's what I felt at that moment.

AJ: They do slam women to the ground too.

IR: I see this now, yes. And, I'm talking more than 15 years ago so then, I guess, that's what I thought. And, now, interestingly enough, as I am passing more male, I am . . . that fear has skyrocketed around police. I don't interact with police at all. I do not call police when there are issues.

AJ: Wow.

IR: I try really hard . . . I'm a very community-based person so when issues come up, I really try hard to figure out with other people what's the best course of action that does not include the police.

AJ: OK.

IR: That's hard because we are wired to think, "Call the cops," when something happens and I'm trying to get back to community-based stuff where we come up with good solutions for ourselves, especially when people of color or trans people are being killed and just completely mistreated by . . .

AJ: And, you talk about anti-violence, in our homes a lot of Black women and Black trans women and trans men are being violently, physically abused by their partners. What would you do in a situation like that? How would you handle that?

IR: In a situation like . . .?

AJ: In a situation where your next-door neighbor, a Black woman, is being physically abused by her partner.

IR: Yeah, those situations are really scary because your first reaction is to help the person – immediate action. I think everything depends on circumstance. It depends on if you had interactions with this person prior, do you know this person, do you know if this person is super dangerous, is there a weapon involved. So many things, because you can't try to intervene and then sometimes those things make things worse for the person. Working in anti-violence myself, you know that sometimes being helpful is just not being helpful because you just make it worse. It is definitely about an assessment there, or sometimes it's about a threat that the police were called when they weren't in fact, to get someone out. Maybe it's about making a noise, banging on the door, yelling fire so they go running out. I try to think of all different kind of things. And then there are moments where yes, the police do have to be called and you have to be prepared to be intervening and trying to advocate or help or assist other folks how to navigate that because sometimes it's just not the best course of action.

AJ: Wow. When was the first time you ever met a trans-identified or gender-queer person?

IR: This is interesting because when I was growing up in Brooklyn, I've got to say 9 or 10 years old, this is my first memory of him, but it was probably . . . I think he was in the neighborhood for a

really long time. I grew up knowing two trans people – one trans man and one trans woman who lived right in my neighborhood.

AJ: Wow, as a child?

IR: As a child. But, that language . . .

AJ: Wasn't – yeah. They didn't call themselves trans men or . . .

IR: It was Manny and Judy, I remember. Manny was this trans guy who wore white t-shirts, put his cigarettes in his sleeve, leather jacket and he was my dad's friend, he was friends with all the guys in the neighborhood. That was Manny. There was no conversation about Manny. Manny had his girlfriends and stuff and everyone knew that Manny was identified female at birth, but everybody just connected with Manny in that way. And then, Judy. Judy is a trans woman who was really best friends with my cousin who I said was born gay – very, very close. And, yeah, she was dating . . . on our block we had a biker gang that lived on our block, that protected the block.

AJ: Oh, wow.

IR: And, she was the girlfriend of the head guy.

AJ: OK, she had lots of privilege.

IR: So, even that context – this is a heterosexual biker gang and the girlfriend of the lead guy is a trans woman. Thinking about that as an adult, I'm like, "That's amazing." That's wonderful in that no one disrespected Judy – no one.

AJ: Nor did they disrespect big daddy leader of the biker gang either.

IR: No, no – not at all. Yeah.

AJ: Oh, wow. That's fascinating.

IR: Without knowing the language and stuff, I knew in my mind that this existed, but I don't know if I truly understood what it was but everyone was OK with it – at least that's what I saw as a kid. I didn't hear any negativity.

AJ: Did that have an influence on your willingness or your . . .?

IR: I still had not made those connections for myself. I just hadn't – and almost forgot about it because that was when I was young until I got older. The only things I did think about were trans women and for me, for a long time, I didn't make the connection with trans women and trans men – or trans masculinity, because that wasn't talked about for a long time. I knew about trans women way before I knew about trans men.

AJ: Trans men were very invisible for a long time.

IR: Right, so I didn't know that. I knew about dykes, I knew about lesbians that were real masculine, butches, diesel dykes or people that identified in that way. But never a woman, a person who was identified female at birth saying . . .

AJ: Do they have softball dykes in New York City.

IR: No, no, no – not where I live, not softball dykes. So, I didn't make that connection really and then one day it just . . . it clicked, you know – it clicked that it was a broader overarching thing around gender and gender expression and that that conversation could be had when talking about sexual orientation as well and trans-ness.

AJ: Man, if I ever get a chance to stick a microphone in your face again, we've got to talk about Judy and biker dude.

IR: Oh, yeah – yeah.

AJ: That's a fascinating story. Just going a little broader, what do you think the relationship is for the T to the L, the G and the B?

IR: And the relationship in terms of the movement or . . .?

AJ: In the broader movement, absolutely. You know, I don't know if you've been following the news this week but just recently in Houston, they repealed this equal rights amendment.

IR: Oh, the HERO.

AJ: The HERO ordinance, which protected all people but it included language around LGBT people and trans people. And so, now this year they had a referendum and repealed that whole thing and was basically based on this campaign about, "Do you want men in the bathroom with your daughters?"

IR: Of course, yes.

AJ: And so, a lot of people are, in this analysis, thinking that the broader LGBT community, the broader LGB community sort of were silent on that part of the argument and that's how it lost.

IR: Right.

AJ: And so, in your mind, your thoughts, what is the connection between those . . . because the T is a gender identity. I was just telling somebody the other day, trans people are gay, are lesbian, are bisexual, are heterosexual so . . . yeah, I don't know. What do you think about these things?

IR: I think that the T, of course, is very much connected, like you said, because in terms of sexual orientation, but it's also connected in terms of the way society sees us and reacts to us. So, for instance, when a trans woman, let's say a trans woman who possibly doesn't pass, is attacked and the attackers use language like faggot and things like that, it's a hate crime in terms of . . . people call that homophobia because the way they saw her was a guy in a dress or something like that. Uneducated people, these people who are attacking and killing and all that, are targeting folks because they think of sexual orientation. I think gender identity and stuff is something even beyond what they're thinking. So, I think in terms of an organized way that we're looking at anti-violence, of course the T fits in LGB, in terms of how violence has been perpetrated against us, what people think and even around education, around the connections of gender identity and sexual orientation, but also the differences and the unique things that trans people go through. So, I think in terms of a unified force, it makes sense in that way, but

at the same time, there lacks unity in a lot of ways when we're left behind, when it should be a no-brainer that all of these things need to be connected, we need to be fighting these things at once. And, I think because the trans identity, or trans people or trans-ness is a beautifully complicated thing, it's not this simple little thing. People want to make it so simplistic . . . I mean, in one sense, it is simple. People have the agency to identify in whichever way they want – period. That's the simplicity and the beauty of it. And then the complicated thing is when people say, "What does this mean about me?" Your identity, who you are, how you navigate or what you look like, affects me – it affects me and I don't like it, so you need to either don't be trans or, if you're going to be trans, pick a binary – and pass, you better pass. So, there's these limitations in the way trans . . . even in organizations, some organizations – not all, but some organizations, who they highlight as transness and what is viewed as transness, which yes that's transness, but it goes so beyond that. It is so much bigger. But, for people who don't know about trans people, it's almost this digestible thing to have the narrative of, "I was born in the wrong body, I was miserable, I knew something was wrong, I needed to change." I get that narrative, because it is a narrative for many, many people.

AJ: It is for many people.

IR: And, it is super valid, but then there's the narrative like my narrative. I have never had an issue with my body, my top surgery had more to do with really survival and age – pretty much. And, I've loved every bit of who I have been on my journey. So, I can talk about being a girl, being a woman, and being socialized as a girl and I know that many trans people were not socialized as what they were ~~born~~ identified as, so that's also another narrative. So, I was socialized as a girl and that journey for me, learning how to be a girl or being a girl or what that meant in my family and what I learned to survive as a woman, that informs every bit of who I am today as a trans person. And so, those memories, for me, are beautiful memories, those are good memories. For me, it's just a whole package of who I am, and yet for others it's like that is a horrible distant memory, "I want nothing to do with it," and that is also valid. So, it's about this complexity that people have not wrapped their minds around to be good advocates because we want the nice, neat stuff, we want the good trans person.

AJ: Right.

IR: Just like we've wanted the good Black person, the good . . . you find the right one.

AJ: The good Asian.

IR: Exactly – all the good POCs, the good poor person, this person is on welfare but they're doing good.

AJ: They're working hard.

IR: Right, so it's that kind of idea and what we need to be doing, and I think a lot of people are doing it, is kind of reframing how we're talking about gender in that . . . talking about gender identity and gender expression is not just a trans issue.

AJ: Right.

IR: It's an issue everyone goes through – everyone experiences gender, everyone has a gender identity and gender expression and everyone has some way that they've been introduced to what is the proper gender for them.

AJ: Yes.

IR: Whether it's their family of origin or whether it's TV that they're watching or the friends that they're with – any and all of that. So, when I think about how when we talk to folks who are cis, or cis gender, and talk about the plight of the trans person, we need to be talking about how the rigid ideas of gender affect all of us and really hone in on what that looks like. We have . . . I think the trans community, or the LGBT community, has absolute clear connections to the women's rights movement – absolute clear. And making connections on even what it means to be a woman or a respectable woman or how women are supposed to dress or act or what jobs they're supposed to have – this is all about gender, it's about fighting those ideas and where women have come to in this day and age. Voting or being able to have a job outside of their home, work that is a job but not recognized as such, right.

AJ: A huge job.

IR: Yeah, the biggest. And also, the relationships that they have, what kind of sex they want to have that they can be vocal about what they want, that they don't want to have children or if they want to have children. All of that is a gender issues and even the way men, cis men, are reared in a way to . . . it's like a single narrative for men, this is what a man is and how that's so limiting for how cis men can navigate identity and how it stifles a lot of men. I think a lot of men don't feel or connect to the narrative of what it means to be a real man in this country, but you go with the flow because that's the way it's supposed to be, and you never get to know truly who this person is. I have met many cis men, or cis men who have definitely, in my circle or in private, have expressed a totally different gender. They're not trans but they have expressed their gender completely different than what they do in maybe their family circle and they feel so much freer and happier and healthier, but it's in private. So, this goes beyond the trans issue, what trans people have done has really brought it to the forefront because it's . . . for most of us it's about our lives, it's about this is transitioning, for me it's about my being able to live my true self and it's about my mental health – like really being happy, just being happy, period. So, I think those conversations definitely need to be broadened in much, much bigger ways.

AJ: You're so brilliant.

IR: Thank you.

AJ: Fifty years from now, this is the last question, what do you think the world is going to look like relative to gender identity, gender expression, and how may that vision move humanity forward?

IR: I'd say what I dream of, and what I hope . . . I'm not sure, I'm hoping because 50 years is a good long time so I'm hoping that's enough time, but my little utopia, or my vision, is that people don't make assumptions. We live in a world that we allow children, or young people, to express in a way that they want and makes them happy . . . we don't do the all pink and dolls and this and that, that we offer alternatives and just a variety and allow people to navigate what feels

best for them, that we live in a world where anyone could respectfully try to pick up anyone of any gender, of any sexual orientation, without fear of being killed, that we can express just love interest and someone could reciprocate that or not without fear of any kind, that we're all treated as human beings, that we have basic human rights to have affordable housing, to have employment and that your gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, ability, any of those things does not determine if you live or die in this country, if you survive.

AJ: Wow.

IR: I think that utopia is just more about people being much more open and that the religious right or . . . religious right is not navigating everything, that things are not associated with or controlled by religious ideas. We supposedly live in a country that is separation of church and state, but that is absolutely not true, that is not the case. I would love to live in a place that is truly, there is truly a separation between church and state, that people have the ability to express whatever religious belief that they want, that there is not one religion that rules everything, that there is that separation and that we're free – we're free to be, we're free to be, free to love, free to navigate, and just free to live. It seems simple for me to say that, but there's so many things that need to happen in order for that to be done. But, I think that with the young people coming up, I think we're definitely in a place where revolutions are happening. The Black Lives Matter, all these campaigns, the calling police and the criminal justice system out on all of the horrific things that have been happening.

AJ: Absolutely.

IR: People definitely, especially poor people and people of color, are definitely . . . not that we were never informed, but we are definitely organizing more, more vocal, and seeing the connections . . . that historically how things have just not changed. And so, I think we are at a place where the politics is a part . . . the language of politics is just an every day . . . as a part of our everyday vernacular, that we're raising our kids that way, that we're talking. We have after school programs, we have mentorship programs where we're talking to kids every day to let them know their connection as a Black person, an Asian person, a Latinx person, an indigenous person on any land.

AJ: Sure.

IR: And what that means historically, so I think definitely the education and the resources, we're creating resources for ourselves that have not been there and 50 years from now, I would suspect that everyone is going to be completely full of knowledge and understanding of how these systems work. And, maybe these systems won't even exist in that utopia.

AJ: Right.

IR: The criminal justice system, these systems will be slowly but surely chipped away at and dismantled and we will create what we need and that people who have been oppressed the most, are at the margins the farthest, are the ones that are leading what the movement needs to be looking like.

AJ: Wow. Well, I will say that our ancestors who are in the U.S. territories who endured slavery 200 years ago, 250 years ago, 400 years ago, they dreamed freedom for you and me and that dream has manifested into this reality and so your dream may very well manifest itself.

IR: Achè. That is the hope.

AJ: Yes. Thank you.

IR: Thank you.