

Transcript

Episode Title: “Becoming a Writer and Comedienne in Madrid” with Khephra White

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CHRISTINE [00:00:22] Hey, everyone. Welcome back to *Flourish in the Foreign*, the podcast that elevates and affirms the voices and stories of Black women living and thriving abroad. I'm your host Christine Job, a Black American woman living and trying to thrive in the midst of a global pandemic here in Barcelona. If this is your first episode, thanks for coming. Thanks for stopping by. *Flourish in the Foreign* is a labor of love, but labor, nonetheless. If you are enjoying this podcast and you believe in the elevation, the affirmation of the voices of Black women, go ahead and become a supporter of this podcast. You can become a Patreon backer of this podcast by going to www.patreon.com/flourishforeign. Thank you to our latest Patreon backer, Kylie. Thank you. Thank you so much for supporting the podcast and believing in the podcast. I just appreciate it so much. So, y'all, if you do become a Patreon backer, I will shout you out here on the podcast. So go ahead and do that. You can also Cash App the podcast. That's right, you could Cash App the podcast at \$flourishforeign, and if you have a business or service that is in alignment with this podcast, you can actually place an ad in this podcast. If you're interested in doing that, go to the *Flourish in the Foreign* website www.flourishintheforeign.com. Go to the contact page, drop me a line and we will discuss how that can happen. Also, please be sure that you have subscribed to the podcast. Yes, that you have rated and reviewed the podcast is super important to rate and leave a review of the podcast. It is how people decide to listen to podcasts and it also helps in the search engine optimization. So if you haven't left a review, please do that today. Like right now or right after you listen to this episode. It is very, very important. We already have so many lovely reviews and I need your reviews. Also follow *Flourish in the Foreign* across all social media platforms, Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook. It's all @FlourishForeign. Go ahead, do that. Alright, that's the important portion of the podcast. Just a heads up, in this episode there is strong adult language being used. So you might want to pop in your headphones, if need be. All right. On to the next story. Our next story is with Khephra, a New Orleans and Atlanta native. She claims both cities, whose journey abroad has created the space and the time for her to really dive into different opportunities. She is hilarious that I'm gonna let her tell you all about it.

KHEPHRA [00:03:45] I'm Khephra White. I am a comedian, I'm a writer, and an actress. I'd love to be an actress. Hire me. I like work. And I say occasional musician because I often play instruments and sing, but I don't do it professionally or anything. I'm a dancer, I love to dance. I am from New Orleans, Louisiana, with a side of Atlanta, Georgia. I say that because joint custody is a thing. I was raised in two major cities shuttling back and forth. I call both of them home. I have wanted to move abroad since I was a child. I remember running around speaking

in this terrible English accent getting on everyone's nerves. But I've wanted to do it since I was a kid. I did not go to university as a teenager, in my late 20s, actually, I was a 27 year old freshman. When you're in college, especially as an older student, you have more responsibilities. I had rent, I had bills, I had a cat, and other things that kind of tied me to where I was, and on top of that was working several jobs to get through university. I couldn't afford to study abroad. I applied for scholarships and didn't get them. I was applying to graduate schools. I applied to Trinity in Dublin because I studied acting and theater. I was looking at applications to schools in England, I was looking at applying for a Fulbright in India to study Shakespeare. I couldn't apply to anything in Panama, where my grandfather is from because my Spanish was terrible. I applied to programs in Japan, in South Korea, and I applied to a few places. But my teachers, I took Spanish in university, and my teachers were from Madrid and Abila. And I said, "Why not Spain? Maybe I will go to Spain." A friend of mine moved abroad. Well, he went for a year and he came back, and he said, "Well, my friend mentioned something. She did this program where she lived there for a year and got paid." I was like, "Ooh, paid. I like paid money. Yes, I like money. Tell me more." And he sent me a link to what turned out to be the auxiliary program. Every time I said the first program to say yes, that's where I'm going. Madrid said, Yes, they were first. When I heard about the language system program, the auxiliary program that I'm in, at first, I thought I hadn't gotten that. Because there was something with the email that year where I got a congratulations letter and I was so happy. I was so excited. I went and got myself a celebratory coffee, and everything. And then I got home and my phone reconnected to the WiFi and I got an email that said, "Sorry, that was a mistake. We sent out a bulk email. You haven't been accepted." And I just lost it. I was like, "I'm never going to go, I'm never going to go, I'm never going to make it. This is obviously not in the cards and it's not going to happen." I was devastated for several months and I had told people that I was applying for the program, and I was so excited about it. Of course everyone is just like, "Did you hear anything from Spain?" And I'm like, "No, stupid, don't you think you would know if I heard? Don't you think I would be talking to the Live Crew on my desk? You will know when I've gotten news," and I just basically said, "I don't want to hear about Spain. Don't ask me about it. I don't even want to hear the word Spain. Don't talk to me about it. Leave it alone. I didn't get in. I'm not going, I'll try again next year." I remember sitting on my porch with my poor beleaguered mother on the phone, just sobbing, saying, "I'm never going to go. I'm never going to make it." And I actually said the words, "The only way I'm gonna see Spain is in a box," and what's crazy is it happened right when I gave up. I had completely given up and then a month later, I got an email. After work, I was on my way home, and I got an email all in Spanish. And it just said (Spanish inaudible) placement, Madrid and I hollered. I just got off the bus. I hit the bell and got off at the next stop, and I called my mom immediately. And I was like, "I'm going." And she's like, "You sure?" I was like, "No, I'm joking. This is it. This is the one, this is real. I really got it." So it was after I had accepted that, that I wouldn't make it and put it out of my head and just focused on, I don't know, making my life work. And just doing what I was doing. It was after I'd given up and I got it.

CHRISTINE [00:08:55] When you choose to go abroad, your family can have a range of emotions about it. I asked Khephra how her family felt when she told them that she was moving to Spain.

KHEPHRA [00:09:10] My family was very supportive, very supportive. They had questions, of course, because I said I'm going to go teach. My aunt said, "You can't teach here?" And I was like, "I can but I don't have to go through metal detectors there." I said something flipped like that. My family has been amazingly supportive, which is so important when you're taking such a big step. And when you're making such a big move, I see people posting all the time about how their family tries to discourage them and doesn't want them to go. My mother flew in from Atlanta to hire a u-haul and helped me pack and clean my house. My family would rather die, they had my back, and they still do.

CHRISTINE [00:09:55] I always say, "Traveling abroad is very different from living abroad," And you can also say, "Moving abroad is actually very different than being boots on the ground, living and exploring your new home." I asked Khephra how she felt when she landed in Madrid.

KHEPHRA [00:10:19] I arrived in Madrid during the Christmas holidays. I arrived two days after Christmas, I had no idea really what that meant. I hadn't heard of the Three Kings, let's raise Malygos, no idea. I booked a hostel for two weeks and I said, "You know, I'll be sorted, I'll have an apartment." Lies a web of lies and garbage. Thank God, I was able to extend my stay at a hostel. I found a room from a board of language assistance in Madrid, someone contacted me and said that they had a room open in their apartment, and it was the first place I looked at and they say never fall in love with the first place you look at but I loved it from the moment I saw it and no other place kept up. I had an apartment in under a month but this was six years ago. Now it has gotten a lot harder to find apartments in Madrid. The struggle is so real. I was really lucky. I paid 250 for that room in 2014. And I left for a year and I remember I tried to come back and the landlord had raised the rent 100 Euro, which I was like, "Okay, cool, because I know I have a place and I used to live here. Fine, whatever." But I ended up getting the bigger room that was open for the same price but even 250-350 for a room, and this is in a neighborhood north of Madrid called Barrio del Pilar. So it's a working class neighborhood, not many foreigners, not many tourists running around in Spanish AF. And I loved it there. Folks think that because they hear that Spain is "cheap", quote unquote, or how affordable it is. And it can be but y'all are talking about major cities like Madrid and Barcelona. Cheap is not really in the lexicon. For example, when I was apartment hunting, four years ago, I was looking for my own place. I ended up a little closer to the center, actually a place called (Spanish inaudible) and I found a one bedroom for 430. I even looked in (Spanish inaudible), which is apparently the hip. upcoming neighborhood which was funny because before I moved here, I met a Spanish woman in New Orleans. And she basically told me (Spanish inaudible) was where I was most likely to get stabbed. She was like, "Oh girl. No. Why would you want to move there? It's so dangerous now." It's like you realize we're in New Orleans right This place is standing in front of a bar that's been robbed six times this month but okay girl, but yeah, (Spanish inaudible) was dangerous (Spanish inaudible) and all that. And I looked at a two bedroom. It's a small two bedroom, but it was a two bedroom. I looked at a two bedroom for 450. I was so mad when someone beat me to that apartment. I was livid.

CHRISTINE [00:13:14] Khephra moved to Madrid with the auxiliary program, which is a language assistance program run by the Spanish Ministry of Education. I asked her to explain in more detail what the program is about, and what was her first experience in a Spanish school.

KHEPHRA [00:13:33] The auxiliary program, the language assistant program is basically you're a TA. You're a teaching assistant paid to work in public or private schools, depending on which program you go with. You assist the teacher, you prepare activities, powerpoints, you prepare supplementary materials for the teachers to use in their English classes. Sometimes, you lead the classes. Sometimes the teachers will chill in the back and grade stuff or check their Facebook while you run their class. It depends on the school. My first year was an adjustment because I graduated in 1997 and had not been in a public school setting since then. When you're standing in front of a group of children, it's real, I really remember almost floating through the school looking at the kids, "Oh my god this is happening. Wow. Look, they're children and everything. This is a school." Now, I was placed in a village called (Spanish inaudible) in the mountains of Spain. I've never seen a mountain before. They look pretty cool in pictures, there's snow and everything, and they were amazing. From the moment I walked in the doors so supportive, they were like, "If you need anything, let us know we're here to help you. We want you to be comfortable and happy here," and then they were absolutely fantastic. They really showed me the ropes and Javier was one of the teachers. He was in orientation, basically a guidance counselor, and he lived in Madrid. He and his wife were nice enough to meet me maybe once a week, to show me around Madrid and help me learn Spanish because, Lord. My knowledge in Spanish was Dora the Explorer and the menu at Taco Bell. I needed a lot of help and they would take me out and help me with my pronunciation. All the teachers who knew I couldn't understand a word they were saying, helped me and taught me. It was such a wonderful, supportive environment. It was funny because I was a late placement into the program. Renewal applications for language assistance with the government program opened then on January 10. Now, I started work on January 8, when they were just like, "Do you want to come back or no? And I'm like, "Well, I just landed, so..." "But you have to make that decision." And I knew, then, six months, would not be enough to see what I've waited my whole life to see. It just wouldn't. Right when I felt I was getting some grasp of the language, I traveled to Granada and Malaga for my Easter holiday. Lord, that was an experience, lots of Google Translate, then I was just starting to really understand when I was being spoken to. I had come out of hiding, and started speaking to people and meeting people, and then it's time to go home. No, but I just got here. And I remember, my school, some of the teachers, one or two, didn't really speak to me at first, because the language assistance usually are usually here for one year, and sometimes it's a gap year, and you're going to go back home after a year and there'll be a new person next year. There's kind of this, "Why should I get to know your name? Why should I really get to know you when you're just going to be gone? And some new teachers, or guy is going to be here next year." And when I renewed for the next year, they were all shocked. And I didn't understand why. Because they were like, "You're coming back next year, really?" And I was like, "Oh, yeah, I'll do this. This is awesome. I'll be back." And they said, "Well, no one's ever come back. No one's ever done a second year." And I was just like, "How could they not and the commute wasn't easy." I'm not gonna lie, some of these commutes, because you're in smaller villages, yeah, my bus was an hour and a half each way to get to this school. A lot of sleeping, a lot of podcasts, a lot of studying. Some people, I guess they decided the commute was not worth it. I disagreed. I didn't care. This was a great school with great people and great kids, and I felt I'd be stupid not to come back if I could. I renewed and before Easter break, they had a teacher's lunch. They said, "No language assistant got involved with the school and with the community."

No one had ever stuck around, they do their job. And then they leave.” They have this teacher’s lunch and I was like, “Sweet, I’ll be there. I’m still going.” And I’m sitting with the table of people understanding every third or fourth word, and it was so cool. And it’s just, I feel welcome, and I feel at home, and they were surprised and delighted that the assistant showed up to lunch because that had never happened. And then sometimes I have breaks, of course at work, I would walk around the village. I just walk around, see what it’s like. I’m in this village. There’s a mountain across the street, I got an hour off. I’m just going to take a look. There’s this cool little park, the secret garden looking place where I could sit and read a book, the little neighborhood bar because this is a small town, there’s only one I take a walk and half the teaching department are in the bar and they don’t have any tables. They’re outside with drinks and, “Khephra, Khephra, come here!” And the next thing I’m having a glass of wine with the other teachers and I’m like, “Is this okay? I have class in an hour.” “Don’t have class!” and they all started cheering. It reminds me a lot of New Orleans. I was just like, “This is really amazing.” I like it here and yeah, it was like, “Khephra, when’s your next class?” “In two hours.” “Yeah, let’s go get a drink.” “But we have to come back.” “Yea, we all have to come back.” “Yeah, you’re so American. Come on. Relax. Get this girl a glass of wine.” I went home for that summer break and I was talking to my mom in the kitchen and I just said, “I’m never coming back. The school I work at now is different in the way that I work in a neighborhood called (Spanish inaudible), where there are a lot of people of Roma descent, a lot of, as they say here, gypsies. I got some kids who are as brown as berries, and it makes me so happy. I have some black students and I have a lot of Latino Dominican students. I’ve got kids from Honduras from Guatemala. I’ve got Peruvians, they’re very proud of their culture, we have had some arguments over who has the best food, And Spain has never won that argument, in that aspect. My school is very inclusive, actually, more students look like me than anyone else, and I think that’s pretty dope. But like I said, that is this neighborhood. This neighborhood is full of immigrants, very diverse in that aspect, as diverse as Spain can get. It is interesting, because it seems like the ethnically Spanish I guess you would say, “Kids, in my class, are the minority.” So when one kid starts screaming something, “Viva Espana, we’re the best country in the world.” And one was like, “Shut up, Pablo, sit down.” And I’m like, “Pablo, I can’t tell you this, because I’m a teacher, but shut up and sit down. So page 65...” So the interactions in my class are very interesting and the diversity is pretty lit. I love my school for that, and I think it’s because like one girl, she is Rama, and she was like, “Some people treat me a certain way, because I’m a gypsy,” but not here. Not at school, because I always teach that my class is a safe space. And that’s very important to me. I like the fact that they do feel that they are safe and protected and teachers don’t treat them a certain way because they are different, because they are another ethnicity. I’m really happy about that. I’m good with that.

CHRISTINE [00:21:59] I asked Khephra if she really felt assimilated into Spanish culture now that she’s lived there for so long.

KHEPHRA [00:22:08] It’s interesting, because the thing about the simulation is some of us never really achieve it. I still feel very much foreign but I think just because you are, you’re always going to be a little outside. Like, my job is to teach English and a lot of times, I mostly speak it. But when I meet people, they’re surprised that I know certain things. And yeah, when you get to tougher things, you look at where you came from, okay? It’s being an adult in

Español. You have to deal with all the adulting shit that you did in your own country, and now you have to do it in another country when you're barely literate. Because let's say, sometimes I still get my electric bill and I go cross-eyed and I'm like, "Okay girl, just take it out of my account." But those little things lead to bigger things because you're showing yourself that you can do it. When I first came to Spain, there's this website, (Spanish inaudible), where you rent rooms and look for houses and stuff like that. And I remember sitting with my friend, Jay, and I couldn't read. And (Spanish inaudible) then was not available in English. Jay sat next to me and read things for me because I had to be like, "What does this mean?" Or it says, "(Spanish inaudible), what is a (Spanish inaudible)?" "That's a pet. You can't have pets. (Spanish inaudible), that means room. (Spanish inaudible), that means rent." And literally having this man read for me because I couldn't. And now I'm just looking at the (Spanish inaudible). Even two years later, after Jay helped me not be an idiot, and not be homeless when I decided to look for my own place, I could because I knew what to look for, and I knew how to read, and I learned enough. But yeah, it builds on the things and you figure I've come this far. You have to look at everything you did, because the little things add up. Before I had my knee surgery a couple of years ago, I took dance, I love dance. I was learning flamenco, and to be honest, and I think it surprised some people how willing I was to get out there. We went to something that was supposed to be a flamenco show, but it wasn't. It was a bunch of people dancing, and I thought that was super cool. And my friend's father came and asked me to dance with him and I was like, "Okay!" I had no idea what I was doing. And the thing about the dance is if you don't know it, there are four parts to it. It keeps going, you do part one, part two, part three, and it's a continuous thing. Well, we did part one and I was feeling myself, I was so proud that we did the last little final pose and "Ole!" I was like, "Work," and I started to leave. I left the dance floor and he comes after me and takes my hand and he's like, "We're not done. There's three more parts." I was doing my best RuPaul covered walk off the dance floor, and he was like, "We're still actually going." I think if you show a willingness to learn, and a curiosity about the culture here, people are so much more open. People are so much happier to even talk to you, to be quite honest, put yourself out there, which is a phrase I actually hate, but when you are in a different country, you have to.

CHRISTINE [00:25:51] Khephra is a language assistant, among other wonderful things. Her job is to speak English in Spain. So I had to ask her how her Spanish was coming along.

KHEPHRA [00:26:05] I am not fluent in Spanish. It could be better but as I've said, because I spend so much of my time and life in English, I'm actually taking this lovely, extended vacation we have here to study Spanish and have language exchanges with people so I can practice my speaking. Because my speaking is good for what it is. I have good fluency but I need the vocabulary because I did learn on the street. So my grammar is mostly my problem, but I can communicate. I have doctor's appointments, I've been to immigration—immigration is the tough one because they, girl, if you can't understand, they will basically tell you that you're in Spain, and you need to figure it out. And when I went to my last immigration appointment, they clock language assistance on silly hours, they know who we are, because she looked at my application. And she was like, "Mhm, auxiliar, bale, (Spanish inaudible)." And like, "Let's do this." And I always say I'm learning but I can understand, I smell what you're cooking, and we had no problem. I went right through and everyone said (Spanish inaudible), and one of my students

told me, he said, this is a quote, he likes going to the gym because he wants to get swole. And I'm like, "Who told you about swole?" He said, "I saw it in a YouTube video." And when I told one of my students, he was (Spanish inaudible) that literally translates to cooler than an eight. I still don't really know what that means. But he was like, "How did you learn that?: And then like, (Spanish inaudible) It's a great exchange, you learn a lot, then it won't always be proper. And I do tell people, "Please correct me." As I have made some mistakes, and you will make mistakes. I tell my kids, "You're afraid of making mistakes and you're afraid of looking dumb. It's going to be epic, and you can either learn to laugh at it and yourself, because other people certainly will, or you can just clam up and not learn anything." When especially because such importance is put on like, inflection and pronunciation and sometimes you just want to scream, "You know what the fuck I mean?" You can't yell at old women but I mean I do sometimes, they deserved it though. Sometimes you gotta be told about yourself and I'm willing to do it in my broken Spanish. Like when they tell me how difficult my name is, "Khephra is so hard for me." And I'm like, "Really, (Spanish inaudible)? You got problems with my name (Spanish inaudible)?

CHRISTINE [00:28:47] I was so curious to learn more about Khephra's journey into stand-up comedy, how she got involved, and what she currently does in the scene.

KHEPHRA [00:28:58] It's funny because I've always wanted to do stand up comedy. I've been told for years since I was a teenager that I should do it, and I should try it, and I never had the guts. I don't think of myself as a gutless person, but even sometimes I get intimidated. I never had the guts. And then I met someone who said, "Well, I run a stand up show. Would you ever think of going up?" I don't know why. I was just like, "Yeah, okay." I think there's a definite 'why not?' to a lot of my decisions here. It's the opportunity, being given the chance to write four things here from my viewpoint, because there aren't many with our viewpoint, being given the opportunity. I've been avoiding this and dodging it for so long, and I always say when people would say, "You should do stand up," and I would always say, "I don't know what I'll talk about. What will I talk about?" I still kind of had that mindset which is funny because I just talk. My mouth opens and words come out and people laugh. It's just a gift I guess, but it's having the chance to do it. I never thought I would make it here, and I am here. My feeling is, "What did I come here for? If not to do what I want, if not to write, if not to do stand up, what would I do? Am I gonna sit at home all night? No, I'm a performer. That's what I love. That's what I do. I found a way to do it, and I would love to do more theater stuff as well but I went from doing stand up to now, I run a show. If you had told me three years, four years ago, that I would be a comedian running her own show at a bar with her own comedy show, I probably would have thought you were nuts. But then again, if you had told me seven years ago, that I would be living in Madrid, Spain, and have my own apartment and be a writer and comedian, I would have been like, "You're drunk, get out of my bar." Life is funny, and it happens. I figured if I wanted to sit around on my couch and do nothing after work, I could have done that in the United States. I crossed an ocean to live this life, so I need to live it.

CHRISTINE [00:31:29] I asked Khephra to describe her experience in Madrid as a Black woman.

KHEPHRA [00:31:36] It's great. There are ups and downs. I've only really had two or three instances where I felt, say, singled out for my race. I was stopped by the Spanish police. I was stopped by undercover immigration. Once, a girl, they popped in on me when I was coming out of the metro and asked me for my passport and my papers. And the thing was, I didn't realize she was a cop because she looked like 19. Spaniards tend to be slender. She was one of my thighs. She was just tiny. She was delicate. She could probably kick the entirety of my ass now thinking about it. But yeah, I thought she was one of those clipboard people to ask you for money outside the metro. So I waved her off. She must have been so confused. I was just like, "No, I'm very happy with my current long distance company. Excuse me." She stepped in front of me and then she held out a badge. And I was like, "Oh, shit, you got badges?" which probably you should not say to the police but I had never seen a Spanish police. And I was like, "Oh, you undercover?" And she didn't understand me. And I'm like, "Undercover son, you a cop, right?" And I was like, "Okay, well, the law says and if you're undercover stopping people, you have to have a partner. Where's your partner?" She didn't understand or that sounds (Spanish inaudible). Where is he?" And then this other dude who looked smaller than her came over, and you can't laugh at the police, you probably shouldn't. But I was just like, "I'm taller than both of you, and I'm only five, five." But yeah, they asked for my papers and I mean, I had them. And the woman said, when the police stop you and ask for your papers, you have to give them your paper. I'm like, Yeah, "I feel you. I hear you. I'm, I'm happy for you. I'm gonna let you finish but I've never seen your badge before." I don't know what kinko's you could have gotten that out of or are you going to have that printed because there was a thing in Madrid at the time where people were posing as undercover agents, asking Americans for their passports. And when you took out your passport, they snatched it and ran off. It was going around that summer, summer 2015, and it was a big deal. And the thing was, I had a date that day, I was on my way to the date and I just bought some new underwear. And I was looking forward to showing it to my date later, I was in my best mood ever, and then I got stopped by the police. So I sent my date a text that said, I'm gonna be late. I got stopped by the police. I'll explain later. And even when I told him about it, he was like, "Yeah, they profiled you." And some people said I should have reported it, that I should report them from racism, and maybe I should have been I didn't because they didn't get violent with me. They weren't assholes, actually, quite the opposite. They were very polite and very cordial. I showed them my Spanish ID. They looked at it and let me go about my business. For me, I was like, "Bada bing bada boom." I went home. I changed. I met somebody, got laid, didn't go to jail, like it was a good day, in my mind.

CHRISTINE [00:34:56] I asked Khephra one of the most popular questions by single people, which is, how is dating in Madrid?

KHEPHRA [00:35:06] Well, I mean, girl the woes are here too. Let me tell you that up front, live, and in living color. Yeah, they should hear either girl. Now before you hashtag not all Spaniards me, I'm sure there are good ones. Some of my friends have gotten married, had children, and everything. I seem to be finding the duds, and I'm a tough bitch to date, to be quite honest. I don't take a lot of shit. I'm a 40 year-old woman. Patience has never been a virtue that I hold and it's even less here, because you are fetishized a lot as a Black woman and people are—men, especially, because I'm bisexual. But men that I've encountered, they start by invoking your skin color. I get these intros, like (Spanish inaudible). Another guy said, "Oh, a Black

beauty.” And I’m like, “The horse? Like son, you’ve already lost.” What do you do with Spanish guys? They feel the need to tell you like, and they say the wording is very specific. “I’ve never tried a Black girl before.” Or I’ve never been with a Black woman before.” And I’m just, “That’s nice. I have. I don’t know where you’re going with this.” That always messes them up, and I’m like, “Well, I have so I wasn’t curious if you’ve been with a Black woman or not, Pedro, you can let that slide.” I have no idea. But they say things, like you’re supposed to be— “Oh, well, let me be your first,” nah, son. That’s not gonna happen. I wasn’t wondering, actually. Some Black women here in Europe are trafficked from other places so some people seem confused with the fact that you are a Black woman here on your own. You chose to come here, you’re traveling, you’re American, and not a prostitute. I’ve been approached, standing outside the metro in my most non prostitute-ish wear, like, you know, literal jeans and a t-shirt, Afro in full effect, and this dude comes up and asks me if I want to take a walk with him. And I’m like, “I’m waiting for my mother.” And he said, “(Spanish inaudible)” “Surprise. Yeah, dude, I have a mother. She’ll be here any minute. What do you want?” He goes, “You’re very pretty.” “I know what you want, though?” “Well, let’s take a walk.” And I was like, “This dude has to be 70 something. You just want to take a walk with me? And I was like, “I’ll take a walk with your grandson.” Yeah, damn, I’m 40 but I don’t need to be trolling the nursing homes yet do I, son? Jesus. But you literally will be existing while Black and people approach you in the most sideways asked manners. I gave up on dating. I cut it all, Tinder, everything. Well, I was into someone that I had been seeing and talking to for a while and I got ghosted, and that really hurt but people will just insult you here. A lot of people seem to be very superficial on these apps, and my boundaries are very clear. Even on my profile, I say I don’t want to talk to you about sex. I am not looking for a friends with benefits situation, and I’m not going to give you free English classes. Dudes do this thing where they swipe right 100 times, and they just see whatever pops up. I matched up with one guy and he sent me a message that said, and this is a quote, “Very, very, very ugly.” And another guy sent me a message in Spanish that basically says, “What a fucking dog.” And so I sent him a troll face. That image of the troll face, laugh meme. And then I screenshot it and put it on my Instagram and my Facebook. I made it public and said if you know this motherfucker, tag him and send it to his mother. I would get stuff like that a lot or people immediately say, “Oh, it says on your profile that you don’t want to talk about sex. Why, don’t you like sex?” Like I’m frigid or something because I don’t want to talk— because I want to know that you actually have a brain in your head, as opposed to knowing that you’re capable of grinding your genitals against another person. God forbid, you use your brain. It’s really such a turnoff to me to discuss sex with someone who is not my partner, really. I’m not opposed to it but I’m not going to just jump into it right off the bat. I don’t even know you and they expect that. When I’d say, “Oh well, maybe we can have a glass of wine or something.” And they’re like, “Is that all? Are we just going to have a drink or are we going to have a good time?” They want guaranteed ass before even leaving the house and I am not about that life. That does not work for me. That is not what I want. And if you could read, this is clearly stated on my profile. And when I said that to someone, he said, like (Spanish inaudible),, which basically means “stop talking stupid.” And I just decided this is not good for my mental health. It’s truly not, this is not good for me. Do I want to keep opening myself up to abuse from absolute strangers? No, I’m not the best looking one out there. I am aware, I got more roles than Pillsbury at times. I know this. These are things I am open and honest with and have written articles about, but just because I’m a big girl, and just

because I'm not, quote unquote, "pretty" doesn't mean that I'll take any dick that comes at me. It doesn't mean I should be grateful that you even spoke to me. And it doesn't mean that you get to abuse me. Absolutely not. I will not stand for it. And when you put boundaries down, and when you let people know that you won't take their shit, they get angry, they get offended and hurt their feelings. And I'm just not here for it. Fuck their feelings. I have them too.

CHRISTINE [00:41:09] I asked Khephra if she could give some advice about immigrating to Spain.

KHEPHRA [00:41:15] A lot of fear— a lot of my own, but there are groups on Facebook that give advice. There's a legal advice group that really helps, and you can ask questions on there. I know the Citizens Advice Bureau is one Spain Guru, another one that's really good. And there are two American women who got together and they work with a legal office that they recommend who speaks English, and helps expats with their paperwork, with their immigration issues. There are English speaking lawyers who help. They look at these groups and read legal questions and help. They go out of their way to answer legal questions to make sure people are covered. There are a lot of expatriates, and groups for auxiliars that can help you and they pretty much have every resource you need. And the power of Google, never underestimate the power of Google because there's probably a blog post about it. I found out a lot on my own by researching and googling, but a lot of these expat groups really are there, and they cover anything you need.

CHRISTINE [00:42:30] Both Khephra and I have written about the COVID-19 pandemic in Spain. Me in Barcelona and Khephra in Madrid. I was really curious to get Khephra's point of view on the Spanish response to COVID-19, and how things were going in Madrid.

KHEPHRA [00:42:50] I think they're handling it the best way they can, right now, for what it is. I feel that it's the same thing that other places have done. I think it was taken seriously too late. When they closed the schools, I saw the writing on the wall then. Because Italy had already been shut down for maybe two, three weeks, maybe a month, not completely sure. And they canceled schools. That was a huge red flag for me and I remember the day they closed schools, Wednesday, the first day without kids sitting in my empty classroom. I got sent home early. And I remember that Wednesday morning on my normal commute, getting on the train. Normally I gotta find a seat or to just get in the car. We're packed in like sardines. And this morning, the first day with no kids just tumbleweeds in the commuter train, and I was like, "God, there's no one out." There is no one on the streets. And yes, you can say that because of course the kids aren't there but the adults weren't out either, and that was very striking to me. When I was coming home early, there's this Plaza with a terrace, and I remember every table was full. Everyone was out on the terrace at a table drinking wine, living their best lives. And I was walking to the grocery store to buy food because I said they are going to shut us down. They are going to shut us down. We have a week, at the most, I need to start buying stuff. You see, growing up in New Orleans during hurricane season prepared me to spot the signs of when shit's about to go down. Y'all can stay at the terrace and drink your wine. I'm gonna go buy stuff so I can stay at my house for a month because I just felt that it was coming. And the days went on they closed the museums and the clubs, my show got canceled, of course. And I was seeing

less and less people on the street. You know that movie Vanilla Sky, that part we're Tom Cruz is running through Times Square and it's empty. I went to Granvia Thursday night because I had a friend in town, and walking to meet her, every restaurant was empty. No one is in them. It's completely closed. But we went to Granvia, which is kind of like a smaller Kmart version of Time Square. there was no one on the street. Maybe two or three people. I remember us, we were the only three people I could see for blocks. And I said, "Days we have days. I won't even give it a week anymore. We have days before the lockdown." And that was Thursday night and then lockdown ended up being Saturday. I came home for one last trip to the supermarket and the President of Spain had an announcement that they were starting a lockdown, but I feel like we should have started sooner. People were taking the school closings as an early vacation and everyone was out in the parks and the terraces. When they announced the lockdown, they gave people a day or two before lockdown. People left, and they left Madrid, and went to other parts of Spain, which is how shit spread. They close the universities. Same thing as in the States, if those kids live in dorms, you close the dorms where are they going? The university students from other parts of Spain went home to their villages. And it spread that way. I feel enough wasn't done to contain Madrid and to contain the virus. And it was allowed to spread because people were allowed to leave. It's going to be very interesting when we are able to leave our houses again because people hear the two kisses are very cultural. I mean, we're Southern, we kiss on the cheek as well. But I remember even telling someone to just elbow bump me or something. And she literally pulled me in for a kiss. And I'm like, "Oh God, and literally locked down with a week later." So I was just like, and there's that American bubble thing that we do. I'm screaming internally on crowded trains because I don't like being touched by strangers. "Don't touch me!" which is not very Southern, I understand that. But I've been greeting people with handshakes since I met here and they just laugh and they're like, "Ah, American. You guys come look at the American she wants to give us handshakes." Oh, my God, I've been greeted with the Wakanda salute. I sure did. They looked confused. I'm like, "Don't touch me, but Wakanda forever. Stay over there." But I'm afraid people will be crawling the streets, crowding the parks, and the parks, and will be forced back into quarantine because folks don't know how to act.

CHRISTINE [00:47:48] So I recorded this episode with Khephra in late March. I asked her to give some advice, some general advice about moving abroad. And I have to say, her advice was eerily onpoint, somewhat of a soothsayer. Have a listen and you'll get what I mean.

KHEPHRA [00:48:11] My advice to people who want to move abroad, just do it. And I understand what goes into moving abroad. Very first thing, understand what it means and what it will mean. Because when the cheeto got elected, my inbox blew up with people just saying, "Get me out of here. I need to leave. How can I get in?" I'm like, "Okay, well, where are you going," though, is the first question because what people don't understand sometimes is, depending on where you're going, every country has different laws. I can help you get to my program in Spain, but I ain't got shit to do with the programs in Peru. You have to know where you want to go, and you have to research that. First of all, you can't just be like, "Well, I'm leaving. Anywhere, I'm going anywhere." No, you're not because some people don't even want

us. So you have to take that into account, know where you're going, do the research for it, and know what they require in order for you to get there. Two, how are you going to get there? How are you going to stay? You got a job? Do you have a skill? Because you can't just go get a work visa. It's not as easy as you think it is. You need to know how you're going to sponsor that, who's going to sponsor you, you're going to pay for yourself. Can you work remotely? How are you going to eat while you're abroad? But I say if you can take the leap, take it. One very important thing when I asked my mom right before I got on the plane and left her and I said, "What if I don't like it? And she said, "I have a second bedroom." At the end of the day. Can you come home? What are you giving up to do it? Because it's easy for me to be like, "Ah, girl, just do it." But that's because I did it and I understand it, I recognize that. For me, there was no other option. I don't like to live my life saying, "What if?" Not other people have that choice and if you don't want to leave something behind, then you need to think about it. Because that's the shit they don't tell you. My grandmother died two years ago, so I had to go home to bury her. Your friends will die. People are going to move to other cities. And just like you're living your life, they or their life still goes on. It's not a time warp. It's not a freeze frame. You have to understand that you will be meeting your children's friends, through Facebook pictures, you're gonna hear about birth, you're gonna be watching life go on without your ass online. You have to be okay with that. People are going to die. You can't go home and bury them because you have a job and responsibilities and apartment to pay for. These are things you need to consider while you're considering taking that leap. I have no regrets. I am very happy and the best decision I ever made for myself was to get on that plane. But like everything else, there are sacrifices you make to do that. And I think that isn't emphasized enough.

CHRISTINE [00:51:25] Thank you so much Khephra, for sharing your story, and just being a wonderful guest. If you want to keep up with her on social media, here's how you can do that.

KHEPHRA [00:51:37] I have my website www.missadventuresinespana.blogspot.com. And I believe my site is www.missadventuresinespana.blogspot.com. But if you search 'Miss Adventures in España,' I have a Facebook page and a website. I will be starting a podcast of my own coming soon. That is my next project. But between my website and 'Miss Adventures in España,' and my partner kit 'Foxworth' is 'Fox Jokes Madrid,' we are searchable on Facebook. When we are able to leave our house, I will be so glad to be offering live comedy again looking for comedians of color, and between those three, you should be good and able to find me.

CHRISTINE [00:52:32] Thanks again, Khephra. Thank you so much for sharing. Thank you all so much for listening. I really, really appreciate it. As always, thank you so much to Zachary Higgs, who produced the music for this podcast. If you're looking for music for your next project, maybe a podcast, maybe a film, whatever it might be. Hit up Zachary. He is a phenomenal producer and he can make whatever you're looking for. I'll leave all of his information in the show notes below. And, like I always try to stress because I think it's something that is vital, wellness. What does wellness really mean? Wellness is the harmony and balance and synergistic movement of all of the major areas of our life, and I really want us all to meditate on how we can really gain a complete wellness in our life. Wellness, not just crystals and, I don't know, Yoni eggs, though I have both. It is deeper than that, Especially for Black women. I want us to really meditate on what are the things that are life draining, and get rid of those things. And

what are the things that are life giving in our lives and feed those things? Nourish those things? Yes, all right. So take care of yourself. All right, until next week, bye. On the next episode of *Flourish in the Foreign*,

NEXT EPISODE SPEAKER [00:54:25] And since I didn't want to get a new, like career in America. When I came back, I was just doing odd jobs. I would work wine tastings, I would do kind of like gig stuff. Oh, you need somebody to work as a vendor at a baseball game. You need a barista at Starbucks for two weeks for conference. Those are things that I was doing, just little light stuff, so nothing tying me down. One thing I knew for sure was I was coming back to Paris.

