

TRANSCRIPT

Episode Title: “Plant-Based in Portugal” with Neria Bento

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NERIA [00:00:00] The thing is in Africa, people speak so many languages, because we want to speak with everybody. If I go to Gabon, I will speak French. And then in Gabon, they have like, nine different provinces. And then each of these provinces have their own language. And then French is the national language. You know, so you speak French. And then if you go to Equatorial Guinea, you have the Bubi, you have the Fangs, they also have their own language, the dialect. Plus we speak Spanish. Spanish, in Equatorial Guinea is national language, but each province have their own language. So in Africa, people speak different language, you know, and you don't need to go to school to learn them, because just communicate with the people around you. And you pick up a bit of this.

CHRISTINE [00:01:00] 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, while also exploring living abroad as a pathway to wellness. Yes, welcome back to the show. If you are tuning in again, hey. And if you're new, hey, thanks so much for checking out the show. I am your host, Christine Job, a Black American expat currently living and thriving in Barcelona. I'm a business strategist that helps Black women and women of color leverage their talents and their skills into viable and sustainable online businesses so that they can be professionally fulfilled, and financially abundant while they pursue a thriving life abroad. Because, why are you going abroad to endure or to struggle? That's not cute, don't do that. All right. So welcome back to the show. I'm so glad that you guys are back with me for this week. Thank you so much for all of your support. And shout out to everyone that tuned in to the *Flourish In The Foreign* Moving Abroad chat that I had on Saturday. It was such a great group of people. Super intimate, super kind, warm, welcoming, and we just had a great time. We chatted for like two hours, it was supposed to be one hour, but y'all got me for two because when I get started, I can't stop. And it was such great energy. So thank you so so much for stopping by. And for everyone that checked out the live Instagram chat on Sunday with Amanda Bates of *The Black Expat*, thank you so much for just being in an engaged audience. We had a great Kiki. Oh, my goodness, we chatted and chatted again for almost two hours, because I can't stop. I can't stop myself and I'm having a good time. So thank you, thank you all so so much. And I just wanted to thank you guys again for just supporting the podcast and showing so much love to the podcast. The podcast was featured in a BuzzFeed article last week. Yes, it was. It is called *16 Black Women Inspiring International Moves You Should Be Following in 2021*. Yeah, it's awesome to wake up and be featured in a BuzzFeed article to be honest. It's dope. So thank you so much. And let's get to all the ways that you can support this here podcast, right? Because this podcast is a labor of love, but y'all know labor nonetheless. And I have a lot of really cool things coming out for you all even this week. Yes, I do. So you can contribute to the labor that this Black woman is doing by becoming a Patreon supporter. You can become a Patreon supporter at

www.patreon.com/flourishforeign. You can Cash App a podcast which is basically like a tip jar. And you can Cash App the podcast at *\$flourishforeign*, any amount that you would like, appreciate you. And of course, if you have a business or have a service, you can place an ad within the podcast. Just hit me up at www.flourishintheforeign.com/contact. I just want to stress the importance of you all sharing the podcast, subscribing, following the podcast on Instagram and things like that, and leaving reviews. Because I feel like that's how we got picked up for BuzzFeed. And even more people and more women are exposed to these incredible stories. So please, please continue to do so. Tell your mama, to your brother, to your uncle, to your friends. Tell everybody all right? Thank you all so, so much for your support. And I do want to let you all know that *Flourish In The Foreign* does have a YouTube channel. It's a baby YouTube channel, all right. I am new in this content creation game anyway, and I'm super new to YouTube. So come over and show *Flourish In The Foreign* some love. Subscribe to the YouTube channel. And also check out the latest video which is all about building wealth abroad by a true blue expert, her name is Acquania Escarne. She has her own podcast called *The Purpose of Money*. She is just the real deal. If you follow another podcast called *The Read*, she and her investment collective were featured last week in *The Read's* Black excellence portion of their show. So she she's doing it, she's doing it big. And she had time to share with you and me all the ways to build wealth abroad. Because not only is she just a bad mama jamma in the finance and investment space, but also she is a three time expat. So go ahead and give that video a look-see, and then let me know what y'all think in the comments. Okay. All right. I've given you all so many ways to support this here podcast. And I hope y'all chose at least one way to support today. Okay, on to the next episode.

CHRISTINE [00:07:09] So today's episode would not be possible without my mom. Shout out to mom, hey. I mean, in general, most things probably wouldn't go without you, so thanks. But I was introduced to today's guest through their shared passion of plant-based living and eating and yeah, so shout out to mom. Our guest today is Neria. And Neria is oh my goodness, such a light. Her story of being born in Spain, living across the continent of Africa, returning to Europe, and now being settled in Portugal, I think is just so interesting. She speaks, I don't even know how many languages she speaks... A lot. She speaks a lot of languages. But I'm gonna let her tell you all about it.

NERIA [00: 08:08] My name is Neria Bento. And I'm, well, I'm 40 plus, and I'm in Portugal at the moment, I'm in the Algarve in Lagos. I was actually born in Spain, I was born in the Canary Islands. But my parents are from the island of São Tomé and Príncipe, in West Africa, in the Gulf of Guinea. I don't know if you heard of São Tomé and Príncipe. Used to be a Portuguese colony, and is an independent country now. So my parents left Africa and somehow I don't know the whole story, they end up in Canary Islands in Spain. My mom and dad they met in Canary Islands. And yeah, and so I was born. I remember that I was very young when we went back to Africa. When we had no for some somehow we left Spain. And we went back to Africa, my mom, my dad, and brother and sisters. And we end up going back to the island of São Tomé. So we stayed there for, I don't know, maybe a few years, before my mom decided to go to another

country to go to Gabon. But first she went to Equatorial Guinea. And so as you can see, I come from a family of travelers, always looking for a better lifestyle, a better place. So for some reason, we end up in Equatorial Guinea. But this time, it was only me and my mom, and my brothers and sisters, some of them not, not all of them. And I suppose the marriage didn't go well. So my mum went back, went to Equatorial Guinea and she took me with her. So this is where I spend I think maybe I was about 6, 7, when I went to Equatorial Guinea. And I left there when I was maybe 8, 9 years old, to go to another country, Gabon. I remember, we were always moving, always listen to a story from far away and look for a better place. So if whenever my mom had an opportunity, she will travel somewhere else, sometimes by herself, and sometimes she will take her kids with her. When I look at the news, and I see all these people trying to reach to another country, like, in any way possible. And I feel for them, I feel for them. Because I remember when I was a child, I went through the same thing. Because we wanted to go, as I say to you, my mom was always looking for a better place, a better country. And so we wanted to go to this country called Gabon, wanted to go to Libreville, which is the capital of Gabon, in West Africa. And for some reason, she get in contact with some strange, strange, weird people. And I remember people telling her like, "Oh, you can go to Gabon in no time, you know. You only have to come with us, you pay a little bit. You pay less than what you're supposed to pay on a plane or on the boat. And you don't need a visa for that. And then we'll take you to Gabon." You know, because it wasn't easy to get to Gabon. The visa, a lot of paperworks and all of that. So my mom decided to go with these people. And she went there with me. So we went on an adventure, we're going to Gabon instead of taking the normal road, the normal, the legal way, she decided to go with these people. And we ended up walking at night, between dense forest, trying to avoid the main road, trying to avoid being seen by other people. I have no... I didn't know what was happening. I have no idea what was an illegal immigrant, what was being an immigrant. For me, or just in an adventure, we're just traveling. I was going to Gabon and I was all excited about. But no, it wasn't the case, we were actually being dragged by these traffickers. you know, who will promise you a better life, a better lifestyle, a better opportunity. And yes, so we end up with no clothes, no money, no food, nothing, in the middle of the forest. No human contact, only those people that we were traveling with. It was a group of people. But then for some reason, they decided to separate my mom and I and my cousin. And then they send the others, which were only men, somewhere else. And then we stay with that men. So it was very strange situation. Were very, very afraid. And then he took us to his village. He put us in this room, closed the door. I don't know where it was. I don't know which country. I was too young. We didn't even know where... Maybe my mom didn't know where she was. And he put us in this room and then he locked the door. So for like a week we were in that place, trying to figure out how we will escape and where to go. Because everywhere was just dense forest. We didn't have contact with other people. We didn't even know the people living in this village, apart from the family of that man. And then thank God we managed to escape one night that he left the door open. Maybe he thought we will not... Forgot to escape. He left the door open. My mom just grabbed my hands, grabbed my cousin's hands, and we just start running. We were running towards the beach. And we saw this man, coming from a fisherman, and he came in. We just ran to him and we cry for help. We managed to get to Gabon with this guy, this man that we've found on the beach. And he took us to Libreville, to Gabon. And from there, we went straight to the São Tomé embassy, you know. So it was like a really, really, really scary moment, which we

didn't think we could make it out of there. So it's something I want to just like pass to people who are immigrants or who want to immigrate out of the country, especially from Africa, or poorer country. Please be careful. Please try to do it the legal way. Please try to get your visa even if you have to get a student visa or a tourist visa. Try to do it the better way, because just for the sake of yourself, or your life, or your family. I see that people are still playing with other humans' lives. You know, when you see all these people crossing the borders, or you see women with young children traveling in insane conditions, in this massive giant sea, to get to a better place, a so-called better place. Because we believe that Europe is a better place and where we are in Africa, that we are going to be able to, just as soon as we get here, get a job, get a big house, get a car. Oh, you know, just have all the opportunities, all these doors are going to open. And it is not like that, it is not like that. Unless you are in a country where there is war... This is another situation, I'm not going to go in there because I don't know, I cannot really pass any judgment about it. But if it's just for normal traveling that you want to come for a better life like that we all do. Because when you leave your hometown, when you leave your country, you are looking for a better experience, a better life for you, for your family. And you're looking for going and more experience. So just be careful. Just be aware. I know the promise that it's cheaper, you're going to get there early, and you're going to give you the job as soon as you get there, no. Doesn't happen like this. So for me, it made me very aware and very sad. Every time I listen to the news, I'm like, "This is still going, after all these years, is still going? People still falling for this?" And I just think to myself, some parents are back home. I will speak about Africa, because the experience I have. Some parents back home maybe thinking, "Oh, my son, my daughter went to Europe and they forgot all about me." And what they don't know, that the child died in the sea. You know, the child died in the sea because they couldn't make it. You know, you have a small boat with I don't know how many hundreds of people, in rough condition, no food, trying to escape maybe the guards, the police, the sea patrols, to get to Europe. And then they all send to this camp, you know. I fear for them. I fear for them. And it saddens me that in 2020, this is still happening in people's life, has still been treated like if it was nothing. So unless you're in a country where there is war, please just be careful, and try to make it the legal way possible.

CHRISTINE [00:17:58] When Neria told me the story you just heard about her experience being involved, basically in trafficking, it was crazy. And I think that her story brings it home, at least for me and for perhaps you as well. Sometimes we see things on the news, and we sympathize. But to hear this story, this first hand account, deeply, deeply moved me. And I just thank Neria so much for sharing it with me... Sharing it with all of you. I asked Neria if she studied at university, and she told me that she hadn't. And so I asked her, what did she do instead?

NERIA [00:18:50] I didn't go to university. I thought school wasn't that important at the moment. Which is one of the... It's something I do regret. And I suppose because when you're a teenager, and you feel like it's your life, you know, and you want to do your own things. And so I didn't go to university. And yes, I wanted to work, I wanted to travel, for sure. I wanted to explore the world and just live my life on my own terms. So I ended up getting married very young. I had a child. And things didn't go as planned. And then I decided to start a new life, so I got a divorce.

And then my sisters who were living in Spain at the time, invited me over and just for a change of scenery. A new start, a fresh start. So I decided to come to Spain. When I was back in São Tomé, before I came to Spain, I was working in a travel agency, you know. I remember thinking that I want to travel again, I want to go back to Spain. I wanted to go to go America, I wanted to go to France. I want to go to all these countries that we see on TV on all the shows, and you know, the documentary. And I'm like, definitely one day I'm gonna be traveling, but I didn't know when was that going to be possible. So to make things short, my sister invited me over, you know, because you can have like a letter of invitation. I mean, maybe from America... For Americans it's not necessary. But from other countries, you do need like a letter of invitation for the person living in Spain. And also, they have to declare that the... Self-sufficient to take care of the person they're inviting. So my sister did this letter for my daughter and for myself. And then I managed to Spain with a tourist visa. So when I got here, everything was... Everything was like, very, very exciting and very interesting. It was a strange feeling, because it was cold. I came in December, so it was like winter. And I'm like, "What is this weather?" you know. And it was a bit strange. But I was excited for a new life. And I came to my sister's house. I haven't seen my sister for maybe over 20 years, maybe over 20 years or more. Because when we went back from Canary Islands, when I was younger, we went back to São Tomé, back to Africa. She stayed there only for a year, and she was determined that she is not going to stay in Africa. She's like, "I'm going back. This is not the place for me. I'm going back to Spain." So she managed to come to Spain, and she got married, and she had her own kids. So we only be talking like by letters, and sometimes on the phone. And so we didn't know each other for like 20 years. We only have letters, you know. And it was very, very funny, because when you're back in Africa, when you're talking on the phone, every minute counts, you know. So you have to make it quick, to just say what you need to say. And then when you write a letter, it would take maybe like, two, maybe a month or something like that, to get there. And yeah, so this was the only contact and sending pictures and seeing how each other were doing. So it was the first time seeing my sister as an adult. It was a readjusting. There was a sister with, you know, that you have.... You have no real contact with. And so you have to learn how to live with the person. How to adjust to people's roles and how to adjust to the lifestyle. How to adjust to your new surroundings, you know. Even though I was a young mother, I had my daughter with me. I wasn't used to have somebody... Someone telling me what to do, where to go, what time to come home, you know.

I was like, (Spanish word, inaudible) you know, I'm free! But, so in the beginning, it wasn't fun. It wasn't fun, because I had to adjust to rules. And you have to come home at nine o'clock, ten o'clock, and I'm like, "What? Oh, don't don't do that to me," you know? But anyway, we managed to do it. And at the end, when I was a bit more confident who I was, I managed to get a job. Not the job I wanted. I managed to get a job like cleaning. When I was a bit stable, I decided to move... Move out and find my own place. I remember going for other jobs like receptionist, work in a hotel, or... You know, but it wasn't easy. It wasn't easy. Because that time, maybe not anymore. At that time, even though you say you're Spanish or whatever, at that time just because of the color of your skin, maybe your accent or whatever, they will say to you, "Of course," very kindly, "You're not the person we're looking for," you know. And I was like, "Yes, but I can speak French, I can speak Spanish, I can speak Portuguese, I can speak English. So

you need a receptionist? Here, I am. I work in real estate in São Tomé.” So you need to have a university degree to work in a reception. So that was experience but I managed to do. I managed to work, find my own voice, my own place. It wasn't easy when you have a young daughter. Because back in Africa, everybody helps everybody. So that saying of “you need a village to raise a child” in Africa it's actually true. Because everybody, your neighbors, your cousins, your... The family, you know. You say like... I can say something like, “Oh, please look after the child for me, I'm just going to the market.” So you know that the child is taken care of, you know. She's gonna be fed, she's gonna be taken care of. But in Europe, it's not the same. When you are a young mom here in Europe, it's a real struggle. Because if you cannot afford to pay somebody to take care of the child, you know, it's very difficult. Because you have to look for a job, you have to sometimes say to the people, “Can I bring my daughter with me because I have nowhere to leave her.” Just really your salary will go to paying the babysitter and to paint the house and the electricity and the water. The fact that you were born in Spain is irrelevant, you know, if you're not what they call Spanish. Because of your... Maybe the color of the skin, maybe because of your accent. Yes. So what? So what? You were born in Spain... What? You know, you were born in Spain, but you're not really Spanish, you understand what I'm saying? I don't think they actually look at it like you are... Like, if you are Spanish. For some people, you're not Spanish. But the funny thing is, for some Africans you're not African either. So you like in between, like in a limbo. You're trying to figure out who you are, or where you stand, or your own voice. Also, for some of my fellow countrymen in São Tomé, I'm a foreigner. I am a foreigner, I'm a Spanish. And for the Spanish, I am a foreigner, I'm São Toméan. So when they ask me so many times “Where are you from?” So many times I'm like, “Yeah. If you find out, please let me know. Because I have no idea,” you know. I'm from here, I'm from there. My papers say something but the reality is something totally, totally different. Yes. But in general, they treat me well. And I didn't have like a major racist situation. I remember my daughter was the only Black girl in kindergarten. So it was funny, because some of the kids will touch her skin, you know. Like, touch her skin like that with their hands, and then see if the color will come out. There will be a sort of surprise with the hair. And then some other thing that was very funny, the teacher will ask me like, “Do you dance a lot at home?” And I'm like, “Sometimes, why?” “Because your daughter, I mean, she is so young, but she has the moves. Like, do you practice?” And I'm like, “No, this is just Black people thing.” This is in our bloods. The music, the beats, the moving. This is us, you know. So no, we don't need to practice that. It's just come out naturally.

CHRISTINE [00:28:03] I asked Neria what was it like dating in Spain, knowing that she was coming back to Spain after not living there for such a long time. She was a single mother, a divorcee. What was that experience like for her?

NERIA [00:28:21] Dating was very interesting. Because for me, like, when you meet somebody... I suppose maybe because I was so naive, probably. I had the idea, you know, the love idea. Like, romantic idea. When you meet somebody, when you're going out with a guy or with a boy. And then after a few months, you get married, you know, you don't go for like... I

never understood this thing of dating somebody for 10 years. I'm like, "What?" That's not dating anymore, you know, you're married to the person. It was a funny thing to discover that in Europe, people just date and break up like that. And it's normal. I mean, not in Africa. My mom would beat me up just because I'm trying to date and break up. Even when I decided to get divorced back in Africa, they were like "No, you're not getting a divorce. You have to put up with it," and I'm like, "No, I don't have to." If things is not working, you know, as it should, that's it. We're all adults, we're all normal people, just go your way, I go my way, and that's it, that's fine. And they were all trying to talk me out of it like, "No, no, you have to put up with it." "Well, how do you think your grandma before you, other women before you, did it?" You know, "You are the wife. You are supposed to just let it go," and, "This is how men are," and stuff like that. So, and then I remember when I went to sign my divorce paper, even the judge in the court was like, "But how dare you? How dare you divorce a man? How dare you ask for divorce?" And I'm like, "Please, Jesus. Please, Jesus. Let's just sign this and let's get out of here." So I, in my head, I'm like, "Okay, (inaudible), I'll just date for a while. And then I get married again." Because I mean, I'm a Christian. I didn't want to just to get involved with the person and live with the person, and for years and years, like, you know. And I'm like, I'm thinking, "I have a daughter that I want to give this example, I don't want just to be dating somebody forever. So what will she think about me?" And so this was my idea of dating. It wasn't easy for me to understand, because some of the guys, they only wanted maybe just a night. Or just like, especially when they know you have a child when, you know, you have a daughter. And so it wasn't anything serious. And I was very frustrated because I was like, "What's wrong with me? What's wrong with me? Well, don't they want anything serious?" You know. But it took me a long time to understand that. I mean, this is Europe, you know. We don't date one person for 400 years, you know. You don't date one person and you get married and that's it. No. You date the person, and then you move on. You date somebody else, and then you move on, and then you date somebody else. And I'm like, "But where is love about... What is love?" I mean, don't you love the person that you're with? So how can you just decided that, "Oh, it's not you, it's me. I need to find myself. I need to." Okay, so dating wasn't easy. It wasn't easy. But then I met this not so young man, English man. And we started to date. And then he asked me to marry him and I'm like, "Yeah, whatever." This guy is talking like he's joking, he's just saying that so I think stay with him. But actually, he was very serious. I wasn't sure he wanted to marry me because I was like, "Yeah, I have a daughter. And I mean, he's older than me. What is the story behind this?" You know. No, he just wanted to be with me. He loved me with the way I am, the way I was. The way I am now. We've been married for 16 years now. And yeah... The best thing ever.

CHRISTINE [00:32:27] So for Neria, dating in Spain was fruitful. She got a husband. So I asked her, what was it like being in an intercultural marriage?

NERIA [00:32:38] My culture is a bit of whatever I've been before, whatever I picked up on the way, you know. So this is who I am. And yeah, but it's interesting, because I have a bit of Spanish culture, African culture, now I have some English culture. There is things that I can't stand. And you know, because I'm like, "Oh," and then I realized that I got this from my husband,

it has nothing to do with me. And other things is like, totally African behavior. And I'm like, "Oh, my goodness, so much conflict inside one person." Now, it was interesting, because I remember that when I met my husband, he cooked for me the first night. We, like, together, he cooked for me. And it was so strange. First of all, a man cooking, like. I'm like, "Oh, this White people, what's going on with them?" So he made this beautiful dinner, and I'm thinking, "Oh, he's so sweet. He hired somebody to cook, and then set the table." So I'm like, "Oh, the food is very nice. The lady, the cook is a great cook." And he's like, "Oh, I did it all." And I'm like, "Yeah, yeah whatever." He's like, "Yes, yes. I cooked the whole thing." I'm thinking there's no way... Because I don't remember seeing any Black man before... Now I see, now I'm older, I travel the world. I see different nationality, different people. So I see a lot of Black men doing things that maybe I didn't see before when I was back in Africa. So, and he's like, "No, I cook. I cook for you." So I was very shocked. And I'm like, "Okay, he's a keeper." There was one point for him. So he's a keeper. And then it was like, a few things like, he will have like, food for winter, for summer, for spring. And, maybe I want to eat... Let's say it's summer, and I feel like I want to eat some African food, which is like maybe some, I don't know, beans and rice with some soup or whatever. And he's like, "This is so hot, how can you eat this? This is winter food." And I'm like, "We didn't have winter back in Africa!" Or saying that this is winter food. If I want to eat this in summer, I eat it in summer, that's it, you know. So it was those kind of little things that I was like, "Why? Why?" But now I understand. Of course have the seasons, and you have different food. But even now, if I want to eat something and its winter, and I want to eat salad, and I eat the salad, so I don't have to keep myself only for one season to eat. So we have the differences. As well, I speak very loud, I laugh very loud. And he's more like, quiet. And I just come in, I'm like, "Okay, I am in your face," you know. So it is interesting. Everyday we learn about each other. But I think by now, we just understand this is who we are, and we just respect each other. He respects me and I respect him. And he gave me so much freedom. I remember when I got married, it took me a long time to realize that I was with somebody because I've been for so long on my own. I think it was like maybe nine years or my own, only my daughter and I. Being a single mom, have all the control. I had of all the decision in deciding what to do with my daughter. Where to go if we have to travel somewhere. I didn't need to ask anybody opinion, I just take my daughter, and we go. So suddenly, I had to report sort of. I have to say, "Oh, I'm going out with my friends to somebody else." And I was like, "What?" So I totally forget about that. And I remember one day I was going out and I was all dressed up, and he's like, "Where are you going?" And I'm like, I just realized I didn't tell him, and I totally forgot that I had somebody now in my life that I have to, not report like, as I said before, but just to inform that, "Oh, I'm going out with some girls. I'm going out for a cup of coffee with friends. I'm just going for walk." And he's like, "You can go. I'm not asking you to ask me for permission, I just want you to tell me or let me know that, you know, that you're going out so I know where you are and who you with. And that's it." You know. He was also very interesting about the hair. And because every few months I will be changing my hair. Maybe I cut my hair, I have my hair short, my hair long, I have extension. So he will be like, "Oh, I have a new wife now. Who are you? I don't know if my wife will allow me to meet you."

CHRISTINE [00:37:48] Hey, everyone, I hope you're enjoying this episode of *Flourish In The Foreign*. And if you are, please be sure to take a screenshot. Tag *FlourishForeign* and share across your social media networks. It's really important to share these stories. Since you are enjoying this episode. Be sure to support this podcast by becoming a Patreon supporter at www.patreon.com/flourishforeign. Tipping the podcast via Cash App at *\$flourishforeign* or purchasing an item off of the podcast Amazon wishlist which you can find at www.flourishintheforeign.com/support. All right, on to the rest of the show.

CHRISTINE [00:38:46] I asked Neria to describe to me her journey to Portugal.

NERIA [00:38:51] Well, I've been living here for, what, five years now. When I was in Spain, I went after Madrid and moved to Valencia because life in Valencia was cheaper compared to Madrid, the capital of Spain. And then I met my husband. So I moved from Valencia to another place called Altea. And then I got married. And I lived there for I think 13, 14 years. So one day my husband is like, "Okay, let's go to Portugal." And I'm like, "What, what, why Portugal? Let's go to Italy." And he's like, "Let's go to Portugal because of the better lifestyle here." And then as well, Portugal was still offering a scheme for like, people coming here, live here and buying a place, or investing in Portugal. And you have like, 10 years where you don't pay the taxes. And so this is all legal, done by the government to attract more visitors and to help the country's economy. So we came here, in that note, we came here to Portugal. In the beginning, it was difficult for me to adjust. Spain and Portugal. I mean, Spain will always forever be my heart. I love Spain, I had the best time ever in Spain. But after two years in Portugal, I started to really, really like it. And now it's like, "Yes, this is where I'm supposed to be. This is where I am." I'm liking the journey. I'm enjoying every day. And I'm very grateful to be here. Portugal is a very, at the moment, is a very safe country. You don't have you don't have so much violence. You can walk outside at night by yourself. There is no... I mean, here, I walk outside. I don't have this sensation of being been followed, or you have this feeling of fear. No, you don't feel that. You feel so free, you feel safe, you feel welcome, you know. And the Portuguese people, they're very welcome. They mind their own business. But even though they're watching you, you know, they, they have some radars on you, but the mind their own business. So, if you want to come, make sure you, you have all the proper documents in the proper way. My daughter, she didn't move with me to Portugal. She went to university in Galicia. When we were in Spain, all of us, we were in Spain. And then she got into university in Galicia, because we were living in in Alicante region. And then she moved all the way to Galicia up in the north of Spain, you know, and for the first time we were separated. And it was a massive, massive change in my life, especially. I suppose her's as well. But I wasn't prepared. I mean, I wanted her to go to university to study, to live her own life and find her own way. But when it happened, I wasn't emotionally prepared. So she went too far to Galicia, she moved there. She is very, very intelligent. She just... She's so smart. She is quiet, not like me, I may be too loud. I may be a bit more crazy than she is. So I don't know who she got it from. She studied English literature. And she met a boy there, a Spanish boy, and she got married. So once she found that boy she's like, "Mom, I have a boyfriend." I'm like, "That's it. That's it. That is it. She is not coming back," you know. And there I

was, there I was keeping her room tidy for when she comes back. No. Never again. She only came for vacation. But yeah. So she met this boy, his name is Victor. And her name is Lynn. And they got married and she's still living in Galicia.

CHRISTINE [00:43:10] So Portugal is just such a hot country right now, right? It's just super popular. Everybody wants to move to Portugal. And I mean, even I... I mean, I'm on the Iberian Peninsula. I'm in Spain, and I'm like, "What's going on in Portugal? I want to go see what's happening." So I asked Neria if there was a Black community in Portugal and specifically, where she lives in Lagos.

NERIA [00:43:36] Okay, first of all, for, let's say, where I lived in Spain, I didn't see so many Black people. There are areas in Spain where you have like, Black community, and stuff like that. But in where I lived in Spain, I didn't see many Black people. So every time I see a Black person, I will always make sure to say hi, to say hello. I got myself in trouble because I'll be like, "Hi! Hello!" And the people were looking at me like "What are you doing? I don't know you." But I was so happy to see another Black person that I would be so excited to say, to shout out hi. And my husband be like, "You know them?" I'm like "No, but he's my brother." "But why? Only because he's black?" I say, "Yeah, precisely," you know. So I just want him to know that I saw him. I see you, I see you. So make sure to say hi. And then when it came to Portugal, especially when I went to Lisbon, I was totally shocked because I am like, where am I? Am I in Europe? in Am I back to Africa? Because it was so many Black people everywhere that I felt like I was back home, back in São Tomé. You have people from Guinea, from Angola, from São Tomé, from Cape Verde. So many Black people living here from all the different African countries that Portugal hold like in the past, which are now free, independent country. But they all come here to Portugal and living here and working here. So it was really exciting, exciting to see so many people, I was very, very happy. So this was one of the... One difference, for me. Maybe if I live in an African community in Spain, I will not maybe feel it that way. But when I came here, and I saw all these Black people, I was very happy to see that. And then the other thing as well, the Portuguese, they are very, very educated. Very, very calm. Very into their own space, you know. They're so polite, they don't want to invade... They don't want to invade your space. So, it's not as easy as the Spanish who are maybe louder, who are maybe very friendly. If you in a lift with a Spanish person, you may be talking in the whole way until you know, until you get off the lift. You'll be chatting where you're from, what do you do, and your name, and everything. And then the next day, when they see you on the street, they will say hello to you, you know, because they remember you from yesterday or from the day before. But not the Portuguese. The Portuguese, they need time to know the person. They need time to understand that they're not invading your space. So they're very, very polite in that sense. So maybe if you meet a Portuguese person in your lift, and they don't... They just say hello and they don't speak to you, don't take it personal. They're just polite this way, just trying not to invade your space. Because as soon as you ask for, I don't know, some help or direction, well to get so and so, they're very, very friendly. They're there to help you. And then also they're... Once they become your friend, they're your friend for life. You know, this is something really important. It takes time for them to

warm up to you. And then, once it's done is like, "Yes!" This is real. I'm in Lagos. I don't see so many Black people here. So many Black people here. It's not like like when you go to Lisbon. When you go to Lisbon it's different, it's everywhere, you know. This is more touristic area. I don't know how to describe it really. No, I don't see a lot of Black people here.

CHRISTINE [00:47:35] I don't know if I asked her exactly how many languages she speaks. But she speaks, I think at least five. At least five languages. And I asked her how, like, how? How did she come to speak so many languages? And this is what she said.

NERIA [00:47:57] The thing is in Africa, people speak so many languages, because we want to speak with everybody. If I go to Gabon, I will speak French. And then in Gabon, they have like, nine different provinces. And then each of these provinces have their own language. And then French is the national language, you know. so you speak French and then I have my friends... So they have their own language, so maybe I'll learn a bit of the dialect. And then if you go to Equatorial Guinea, you have the Bubis, you have the Fangs, they also have their own language, the dialect. Plus we speak Spanish. Spanish, in Equatorial Guinea is national language, but each province, I don't know if I should say tribe, they have their own language. So in Africa, people speak different language, you know, and you don't need to go to school to learn them, because just communicate with the people around you. And you pick up a bit of this, you pick up a bit of that, and then... So you can have a conversation with your neighbors. And because we travel a lot when I was a child, my mom looking for a better lifestyle, for a better way to raise the children. She went from different countries in Africa. And so, before I spoke English, a bit of English, we spoke something called book English, which is a mixture of different language. And in at home... So at home, I remember speaking Spanish already because we came from Spain. So my mom will speak in Spanish to us, and then she will speak in Portuguese, which was her original language. And then we speak French. And then we speak the book English. If we didn't want people to know what we're talking about, we just break it... Mix some new language. That was it.

CHRISTINE [00 49:53] And so like I said before, I became aware and met Neria through my Mother because they both share a love of plant-based food and are plant based chefs. And so I asked Neria, what was her journey to a plant-based lifestyle and wanting to be a plant-based chef?

NERIA [00:50:18] I remember when I was a child, I was always fond of animals, you know. When you are kids, you want to become like, you want to become a soldier, you want to become a firefighter, you want to become a president, you want to become a veterinarian, you want to become a doctor. And so you have all these dreams. And I remember, like, I want to take care of animals. I want to become a veterinarian. And in Africa, where I lived in in Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, in São Tomé and Príncipe, eating meats was a luxury. You didn't have

access to meat the way you have here, in Europe, or maybe in America. So the staple food was maybe fish, so you have fish everyday. And then you have a lot of vegetables. Loads of vegetables. Things that I cannot even pronounce, because it's like African names. You have Fufu, you have (inaudible), you have (inaudible), you have (inaudible). So they were all prepared with loads of vegetable. You have like, a tiny little bit of fish. And sometime when a special occasion, you will have a bit of meat. But let me tell you, it was like a little bit of meat. And so I grew up eating a lot of vegetable, and eating, most of all, eating fish. So meat for me wasn't something like I was like, "Oh, I have to have it," you know. I do remember like, in special occasions, when it's like somebody's birthday, or a wedding, or the Christmas, or New Year, we will maybe have a chicken, or somebody will will kill another animal. Maybe somebody will kill like maybe a lamb, or something like that. And then they will share with the neighbors. Of course you pay for it. And so you have a bit of meat. But that was like a special occasion, you know. And then you would guard that meat in your plate with your life. Because always your cousin or your older brother will try to steal it. So you will be eating with one hand covering your plate, you know. And then the other hand, you'll be like, with the fork or the spoon, trying to eat your food. So your plate will be like a lot of salad. And then you have like beans, you have rice. You have other things like banana, the plantain, you have (inaudible). You have bread foods, different things. You have (inaudible). And then you have your sauce. And then you have this tiny bit of meat. So you just save the meat for the end, you know. So you eat everything first, and then you save this little piece of meat for the end so you can enjoy it. And then maybe in the household, normally the father or the older brother will get more meat, because he is the like man of the house. So they get more meat before anybody else. We just get the tiny little thing, so he was really, really something special. So this is my memory back in Africa with eating plant-bases. And then when I went to Gabon, I became a Seventh Day Adventist. And I remember like the message of the Seventh Adventist is a vegetarian, you know, like trying to have like the eight natural remedies of God. So which is the sunshine, taking enough vitamin D. Resting, that's why we have the Sabbath day for resting. And then you make sure you have plenty of sleep. And then you have the nutrition... Make sure you're eating the right food for your body because your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Make sure you're drinking plenty of water so you keep yourself hydrated and healthy as much as possible. So you can be strong enough to help the people around you, you know. And then, so you have all these rules that you try to follow, and but really food wasn't something I really pay attention to. I knew it was important, but not really. And then I came to Europe, and then people were talking about vegetarianism all the time. And I was like "Why? Why is this so important?" Anyway, but I continue my life eating meats very, very few, I didn't went overboard. Like I love to eat chicken and stuff, but didn't go like "Oh, I have to have... Now that I'm Europe I have to have lamb and I have to have whatever." My husband actually he was shocked because being from England, meats is like, if there is no meat, we're all dead. The life is finished, it's over. And I'm actually very happy if I have a bowl of rice and red beans. And for him, for my husband, he was like, "Why are you enjoying this thing, there's no meat in it." But that was my heaven, that was my paradise. I was happy having this bowl of rice with beans. My husband, he wanted to have meat on his plate. So I remember when I was in Spain, I got a call from my doctor and from my gynecologist, and she's like, "You need to come ASAP, we need to do some tests on you. And because we found something very, very strange." And I was scared, I was like "What's

happening?” So we went there, it wasn't anything major, thank God for that. But it could have if I didn't catch it on time. And so I went to surgery. So that scared me a lot. And I'm like, “Oh my goodness, I have the message, I have the knowledge and understanding of what I should do for my body. So, okay, I think this is enough now. Stop playing around and embrace it,” you know. So I spoke with few people who were also on to plant-based lifestyle, I get all the information I wanted to get from them. And then I started my own journey. But it wasn't easy. It is funny how the brain function. After I decided to go plant-based is when I was craving all the meat. You know, when I... Before I was like, “Okay,” because maybe because it was available to me and I could have it whenever I wanted. So it was okay. But when I went plant-based, I remember saying to my husband like, “Just let me lick the bone, please. I want just to lick the bone. I don't want to eat the meat. Just let me lick the bones.” And he's like, “Yeah, but I thought you are plant-based?” I'm like, “Yes, yes, but I just need it. I just need a bit.” Like it was a withdrawal symptom I had to go through. And so yes, and then I did an online course for like vegan nutrition. I did that online. And then I went to Thailand where I went to a plant-based center, a plant-based cooking school, and did some learning the... How to you know, the plant-based cuisine. Understanding the produce, understanding the season. Understanding what to give to your body, how to eat, and the importance of plant based lifestyle. And I'm so convinced, I'm so convinced that so many of the illness we have today can be avoided by adopting plant-based lifestyle. It is so important. We don't realize how toxic it is for us human beings to eat other animals. And not only that, I had no idea, I had no idea the suffering going behind backdoor. The suffering going... The animals suffering for us to be momentarily happy. Because you have that meat in breakfast, lunch, this is like momentarily. And so many animals killed, mistreated, for me to have just an egg and omelet. For me to have a glass of milk. The animals... This is not like before where... I remember back in São Tomé, my mom had in the yard, we had chicken you know. And then we would take the chicken back to the market and trade it for something maybe like, some vegetables or a kilo of rice, or a kilo of sugar, for salt, you know. So you will trade the chicken. But you will see the chicken will grow naturally. My chicken, when I was back in São Tomé, we fed them with cones and rice, you know. So you know what you give in to the to the animals. It's not what they're doing out there with the animals, the animals are suffering, like unnecessary, for us to eat them. So I'm also excited, I'm getting more knowledge so I can share with more people's especially from Africa. Black community, Black friends. Because like plant-based or vegan seemed, for me, seemed to be only for like, maybe white people you know, like maybe white privilege people. And so I had no idea that so many Black people are already doing plant-based, already doing veganism. So when I look at some Instagrammer or vlogger or YouTuber in America about plant-based, I'm so happy, I'm so proud. Because everybody... Some people associate like Black people with only eating chicken or only eating meat. But we are actually... I actually think Black people created the movement, only because it didn't suit them to say that. So we had to wait for White men to declare it, to declare its approval. So for them to become like, “Wow, the vegan movement,” that we've been doing it for a long time only it was in a quiet.

CHRISTINE [01:00:34] Neria has a plant based brand, *Mama Benta*. And on Instagram, I know because I follow, her she shares all the delicious foods that she cooks and it's just so wonderful. And so I asked her to tell me more about *Mama Benta*.

NERIA [01:00:52] Mama Benta is the name of my mother, Mama Benta. So everybody call her "Mama Benta." And then I was looking for a name for my Instagram. And now, what is something that is personal to me, is my story, which like englobes everything that I am today? And I remember I said to you before, back in Africa, it's not like we used to eat so much meat, you know. But one thing I remember as well at home, my mom was like the doctor of the house. And not only of my house but also for the neighbors. Like if somebody is pregnant and they get they're about to get the baby, instead of going to the hospital, they will call my mom because she was like the old, older person in that village. So everybody will look up for her and then they will send the kids or the husband, "Go and call Mama Benta so she can help me deliver this baby" And my mom wasn't even a trained nurse or midwife or anything, just a regular person you know. And the funny thing is, she was afraid of blood. When she see blood, she just fainted. But for somehow, when people start calling her to help them with different situation, God gave her this capacity to overcome that situation, that feel of blood. And she bring to the world so many children, you know. So people will be like, "This child is not coming out until Mama Benta is here." And then she will go there with with some leaves, African things that she knew. She will she will help the wife to be calm, to have the child, you know, in the house. And I remember one of the nurses in our hospital told her, "Why don't you go and study how to become a midwife so you are covered by the state, by the government. Because if something happened with one of the baby, you can be sued, you can go to prison." And she's like "I'm too old to study, I'm too old" you know and she didn't want to do it. But yeah, she was she was good at things like that like natural remedies. She will take water from the rain in a nice clean bucket and keep it for years. And then we when we have fever, or when we have some weird strange illness, she would give us like a cup of this rainwater, supposedly have a healing benefit. I don't know. But we will have it, and we maybe have faith in it. And she we have like clay (Spanish word, inaudible) and then she did different (Spanish word, inaudible) of herbs and stuff. She will go to so much. All the roots and in plants and leaves you know. So before she took us to the doctor, should make sure she will she do everything at home first. And then, if whatever she did didn't work at the end, she will take you to the doctor. But normally after a few days you will start sweating, you know, you start feeling better. I suppose all the (inaudible) medicines used to give us, the body say "Okay, I give up I let me get better soon." So that's why. My dream is I want to open my own plant-based academy. I want to open Mama Benta plant-based academy. So to be able to have a wellness center where people can come and have like a plant-based experience, a healing experience, a spiritual experience.

CHRISTINE [01:04:38] I asked Neria, what was her definition of wellness and of living a life well lived on her own terms. And how living abroad, moving abroad, had influenced that definition of wellness.

NERIA [01:04:58] Okay. Just going back, even though I was born in Spain, I wasn't a Spanish citizen. Because when I was born in Spain, the law wasn't like now, because I suppose now when you born in Spain, you become a Spanish citizen there. But in that time, 40 plus years

ago, even though you were born in Spain, you're still from your parents country, you know. So when I managed to get my Spanish nationality, which was very strange, because everybody where I went to the police station, when I went to the Immigration Department, they were like, "Yeah, but you are Spanish. What are you doing here?" And I'm like, "Yes, I am Spanish. I was born in Spain. But I don't have Spanish paper nationality yet. So I need to apply for that." So it took me a long time. I had to wait for a very long time. I had to wait like 10 years, to only to start to apply for my for my nationality. Remember, when I used to travel in my African passport from São Tomé? There will always be a massive queue behind me because as soon as is my turn, people will be like, "But where is this country?" Sometimes I had to look for a map and then show them where São Tomé is. São Tomé is a very small tiny island, next to Gabon. And in the Equatorial Guinea, you know, very, very, very small. So I have to show them my Spanish residency card for them to say, "Okay, okay, let's forget the passport." So for me, wellness was the freedom of traveling. When I had my passport, I remember the first time I got my Spanish passport saying that I was from Spain. And then we were going to Australia. And I remember entering Australia, we went to... we were going to Sydney before we went on a cruise, and we went to Perth. When I got to Australia, and I just got my papers, I just showed them my papers just put the stamp on it... Welcome to Australia. I didn't have to wait. I didn't have to explain why I was from. I was like, "Wow, this is freedom. This is freedom." So wellness is to be able to travel where you want and to feel that you don't have to explain where you are. I mean, sometimes people do joke at me like, "You don't look very Spanish" you know. But beside that, yes. So wellness is one thing for me which is traveling. And wellness for me is my family. My family is my wealth. It's knowing that I have the love and support and they have my love and support. This is a wellness, to have mental health, to have the peace of mind.

CHRISTINE [01:07:59] Thank you so much Neria for just being such a great interview. So sweet, so kind, and just so transparent. I truly, truly appreciate you. And thank you all for listening to Neria's story. If you want to keep up with Neria you can via social media.

NERIA [01:08:23] At the moment you can find me in Mama Benta Plant-Based with Love on Instagram and on Facebook as well. I have a YouTube channel. But at the moment I am a bit procrastinating on the on posting things on YouTube. So hopefully I'll come back soon with recipe. With maybe some traveling videos, and stuff like that, to share with with you, with everybody. But at the moment where you can find me, where I'm almost every day is on my Instagram, Mama Benta.

CHRISTINE [01:08:59] All right, thank you all so much for listening to this week's episode. I appreciate you all so much. If you enjoyed this episode, please consider supporting this Black woman podcast, all right. Please consider becoming a Patreon at www.patreon.com/flourishforeign. Cash Apping the podcast, go ahead and drop us a tip. Put some in the tip jar at \$flourishforeign. If you want to contribute to the upgrade of our production equipment here at *Flourish In The Foreign*, go ahead to our Amazon wishlist and purchase an

item off of that. You can find that in the bios across all of our social media pages or just on the support page of *Flourish In The Foreign*. Be sure to subscribe to the podcast. Be sure to leave a review for the podcast. Yes, and share the podcast far and wide, far and wide. And if you are looking to go abroad but you really don't know where to start, I invite you to join me in an intimate cohort of other aspiring expats, immigrants, people who are moving abroad. With the *Flourish In The Foreign* International Living Made Possible course. It is a five-week live course. Yes, it's going to be live this very first time I'm doing it. And it's gonna be a wonderful experience. One, because it is centered on intentionality. Yes, yes, yes. It is centered on intentionality, we start with the why, we start with visioning, we start with what is going on currently with you. What are the things that you need to deal with before you go abroad or be conscious of when you go abroad. Because I don't want ya'll going to Colombia and I don't want you going into Rwanda and complaining when it's just you, right? We're talking about the importance of intentionality, of knowing yourself, of accountability. We're going to talk about your values, and how that is really the foundation of then country selection. Yes. How your life vision, your values, your why, that is the compass you use to select a country. Then we talk about finances, because you got to be financially well. We talk about employment, and how you're going to sustain yourself, whether it is a job abroad, remote job, or a business. But we also talk about community, and making friends, and how spirit of reciprocity truly is the game changer in making or breaking your move abroad. Because like I tell y'all, if you listen to me here in this podcast and across all other platforms, getting abroad is not the thing, right? It's staying abroad if you want to. And of course, it is thriving abroad, because it'll make no sense to struggle or endure abroad. Ya'll can get that at home, all right. So if this is something that is interesting to you, if you are looking for not only an experience to help you go abroad, but at the end of these five weeks, you're going to have an executable game plan that's centered on your why and your life vision for the next chapter of your life, so that you can cultivate a life well lived around the world. If this sounds something like you want to be involved with, I highly suggest you join me in this cohort, because I am going to have this course again. It'll eventually be an evergreen course, but it won't be live. And because it's my first one, I'm going to be super hands on. You're going to have a lot of access to me that you may not have in the future. Though, the future course is still gonna be bomb, so don't worry about it, it's still gonna be dope. But this is the first time I'm doing it, so I'm gonna be super duper cuddly with y'all. Okay, so if this sounds like something that's interesting to you, go ahead and join me at the *Flourish In The Foreign* International Living Made Possible course. It jumpstarts this Thursday, so don't play around. Don't do it. Don't hurt your own feelings. All right, you can find more information on the course in the bios across all social medias. And again, you can find it on the resource page of *Flourish In The Foreign*, www.flourishintheforeign.com/resources. And of course, you can always just DM me and we can chat about it there. All right, okay. And in you're like, "That's well and good Christine. I know I'm going, and I know I want to start my own business or I have a side hustle that I really love, and I want to scale it so I can sustain myself abroad." You need to go ahead and contact me, all right. I am a business strategist that helps Black women and women of color leverage their talents and their skills so that they can go abroad on their own terms. Yes, making their own money in the currency that they want to, so that they can thrive abroad. If this sounds like something that you are ready to do, I invite you to come and check out my 12 weeks sprint, I have a very intense, I'm always upfront about it, it's an intense 12 weeks sprint, where we get

you from ideation, strategy, implementation, and iteration, right? We're getting you at the very end of the 12 weeks, your first sale with your business, or maybe your first sale with a new product line, or a scaled system. That is what I do. I love it. I'm good at it. Ask about me. If you are ready, it's 2021, and you're like, "I need to make this move. But I also need to make sure that my financial foundation is correct." Go ahead and hit me up and let's chat. Because this is truly my life's work. I love holding space for the manifestation of businesses and services. I firmly believe that entrepreneurship is a pathway to self-actualization, coupled with the immense power of moving abroad and its pathway to wellness. It's been a transformative experience for me and my clients. And I hope that it is for you as well. All right. And as always, thank you, Zachary Higgs for producing the music of this here podcast. Zach is super dope. He's a super great producer. And if you need music for your podcast, or your YouTube channel, hit him up. All of his information is in the show notes of this episode. That is it for this week. Thank you again for stopping by. I appreciate you. And I invite you all to deeply consider or joyfully continue cultivating a life well-lived abroad and embracing living abroad as a pathway to wellness. See you next week.

CHRISTINE [01:17:15] On the next episode of *Flourish In The Foreign*:

NEXT EPISODE SPEAKER [01:17:19] I'm considered a Diasporan, as in someone who came from the Diaspora and has relocated. There can be this line of division, like us versus them, which is very infuriating for me. Because Sierra Leonians who have never left Sierra Leone, like born and raised, they have this, but not all of course, but they have this perception that Diasporans are like, they're either best... There's this inferiority slash superiority complex. And it comes from both ends you know. So both ends point fingers at each other. But having worked with both Diasporans and day-to-day Sierra Leonians, it's just a matter of perception. Some people see diasporans as, they feel that they're superior, they all they do is speak English, they refuse to speak Krio. Which is not everyone.