

Transcript TSV 010:

Shameless and Free: A Trans Diaspora Story

with CasSandra Calin

Axis Mundi: [00:00:00] Axis Mundi.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Welcome to Teología Sin Vergüenza, Queer and feminist theology from Latin America and its diaspora to get those spiritual justice juices flowing. I'm your host, Reverend Sex. You may not have heard from a lot of folks who live shamelessly as both queer trans feministas and people of faith, but you're about to!

Even if you don't know it, we are everywhere. We do our work in the academy, in the church, in our homes, and on the streets. We fight for our communities and for our own lives. We are not macho, but we are many. We're irreverent Queer feminists who are shamelessly faithful, and we're faithful [00:01:00] theologians who are shamelessly activistas. We are shamelessly, las sinvergüenzas.

We pluck the ripest fruit from the Bible to make juicy, queer feminist Latine theology that refreshes your spirit and quenches your thirst for liberation. In this episode, you'll find delicious decolonial theology for the real world, right now. So get your cup of coffee, pull up a chair 'cause you belong here.

Now let's get down to pleasure.

Hey there. Welcome to this episode Teología Sin Vergüenza. Today I'm overjoyed to be talking with CasSandra Calin, who is a queer feminist, Black-Cuban healer who's passionate about spirit work, identity, divinity, and pleasure. She studies the mental and spiritual wellness of LGBTQ+ activists and has recently returned to school to get her PhD in social work.

Cassandra is part of Soulforce, has been on our Board, and [00:02:00] has been part of Soulforce since 2015, when she was part of the Southeast House Fellowship. So we welcome her and we're so excited to hear her story today.

Hi Beloved, welcome to Teología Sin Vergüenza!

CasSandra Calin: Hi Alba, thank you. I'm so excited to be here.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): I feel like we have been on a journey, a spiritual journey for a decade now, and it feels like it's time to get it on the record.

It's time to have the conversation that other people get to hear, you know, not just us in our pajamas late at night, but like the rest of the world gets a little insight into all this goodness.

CasSandra Calin: Yeah, I'm excited too.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yeah, I can't wait for our audience to hear from you. So the first question, as you know, always the same.

Do you identify as a Sinvergüenza? Why or why not? And particularly because we're speaking to an English audience this season, tell us about your relationship to that word. Was that something you heard growing up? Is it [00:03:00] something you've learned recently? What does it mean to you? In case folks don't know that word. So tell us about your sinvergüenzura.

CasSandra Calin: So, sinvergüenza to me, just means shameless, and I think it's a really, really powerful concept. It's not one I had heard about before Soulforce started this podcast so long ago. I was familiar with vergüenza as a Spanish vocabulary where it means shame, and have a long history of familiarity with shame itself, but hadn't heard that word.

Definitely claim it as, uh, a characteristic that I identify with, being sinvergüenza. I can share a little bit with your audience about how I got here from the

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yeah.

CasSandra Calin: more shameful place. I, yeah, I've experienced shame on this kind of leveled, like multi-layered way, and it's been around like race, ethnicity, gender, and queerness.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm.

CasSandra Calin: As a Black Queer woman, there's been a lot of [00:04:00] opportunities to internalize shame, to be fed these shameful stories about who I am or should be and what's wrong with me. Hmm.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm.

CasSandra Calin: And I would say I absolutely received and internalized those stories. I think a big piece of how they were fed to me and why I internalized them was that they came with this coding of God and divinity.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm-hmm.

CasSandra Calin: And religion. And so the more ashamed you were, the more humble and good you were. There was a morality that came with being ashamed. Um, and there was a lot to be ashamed about. And there was this relationship between like God's or Jesus's sacrifice being greater because we are so shameful and that made his love.

It was, it was a lot. And I ate it up. But, um, some of the impacts that I noticed as a [00:05:00] result of internalizing that shame was disconnection from myself, from my body, from my desire. And, um, even just like personality, I spent a long time trying to change who I was.

Um, and within that, definitely pushed other people away as well, and had community and interpersonal disconnection.

From externalizing that judgment onto other people and also just trying to find people who would both align with my shame levels.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm-hmm.

CasSandra Calin: And like pray me into a better place. I don't know. But in noticing that shame often came with disconnection and isolation for me, it makes sense then that becoming *sinvergüenza* and ridding myself of that shame also happened in the context of community.

Breaking down isolation, moving towards connection, um, getting to see other people model shamelessness and their queer and other like [00:06:00] expansive identities, um, out loud on purpose and normalize that, but also getting to explore who I wanna be rather than who I should be in community with people who were empathetically vulnerably and really generously attentive to kind of witnessing me through that journey.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes. Amen. Hallelujah. You have been our Board Chair at Soulforce for six years now. That's like the maximum term. So, I feel like you got, um, whatever that was that you drank in the Kool-Aid.

CasSandra Calin: Mm-hmm.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): As a young person, which I was right there with you, you re-, when you turned a new leaf boy, you really did it in a big way because at Soulforce, our mission is to sabotage white Christian supremacy and heal spiritual violence.

And I just feel like your story and your arc feels like one of those perfect examples of how we have a lot of capacity to [00:07:00] accept the stuff that is put on us to control us. And we also have an incredible capacity to like peel, like an onion and bloom into our fullest most beautiful selves. And, um, I just think you're just an amazing, amazing human that does that so beautifully.

Um, I wanted to talk a little bit about what you just said around like, you knew the word from Spanish class, but the identity and all of that stuff were new to you with Soulforce and starting this podcast five years ago now. My goodness. Um. But I think that's a really important point because so many of us in the US who are in diaspora from the places that we originally came from, and our families, especially when we have like mixed heritage and things like that, it's, this is assumption that the only people who can be Latina, Latine, Latinx are people who speak Spanish fluently or as their first language. And [00:08:00] there's all of these, like if at least it's how it felt for me growing up. But there were all these criteria that I had to meet before I was allowed to call myself any of the words connected with my family. And it's like at this point I'm like, I, my mother was an immigrant.

That is just what is true and. It doesn't have to be that we have to all speak Spanish or Portuguese or some other colonizer language or even our indigenous languages that are often lost to be, to claim that and for it to be ours. And I think there's a lot of shame that a lot of us carry around around not being good enough to fit into whatever the identity category is.

And part of the point of this podcast is to expand into English because we recognize that not everybody speaks Spanish or Portuguese or any of the other languages from Latin America as our, as our first or even second languages. And I wonder if you would be willing to talk a little bit about your [00:09:00] journey, especially around that piece, and if that was ever, if shame was ever part of that for you, or if it was ever difficult for you to claim the part of you that is connected to, to Latin America.

CasSandra Calin: I probably recognized, in the last 10 years, the specific moments in my childhood that I could say, oh, that was Cuban. That was Latinidad in my family interactions and culture, but I didn't experience it that way as a child.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm-hmm.

CasSandra Calin: It wasn't contextualized that way for me, and there wasn't kind of a laid out set of stepping stones.

To move towards a thing, claim it. It was kind of just like my aunts and my grandmother spoke Spanish and I was just like bopping around not speaking Spanish. It wasn't taught to me. And so it's absolutely been a process of reclamation. But before that, trying to evaluate if I'm worthy, if I deserve to claim it, if it makes [00:10:00] sense, what my motivation is.

Um, and, yeah. Sometimes it just boils down to like, I have a grandmother who grew up in Cuba and that's really all that it needs to be. Um, and then there's different questions about diaspora and family and legacy and culture. Um, it started, my journey of intentionally reclaiming it for myself Latinidad and my place in it, I would say middle school Spanish classes when I was like, yeah, I choose this. You could do French, you could do German, I chose Spanish. Part of that was absolutely connected to family. And the further into that study I got, the more questions I had. Um, the more access I had. And all along the way, there was still this process of being questioned around.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm-hmm.

CasSandra Calin: Like why I was choosing to access [00:11:00] it.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yeah.

CasSandra Calin: Um, even if I would tell people from childhood through today, like that my family is Cuban, or I'm Cuban, there was like do you speak Spanish, have you ever been, blah, blah, blah.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm-hmm.

CasSandra Calin: Is it on both sides of your family or just one side? Um,

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): mm-hmm.

CasSandra Calin: And so there was absolutely this rubric that I held myself to and said, I guess I'm not quite that enough, and one day I will be.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm.

CasSandra Calin: Um, but it's, I don't know. I, I did get a chance to visit and I think some of the resonance that I felt when there was more affirmation than coming back and reporting to anybody or like checking off the rubric, just feeling like, oh, this is it. This feels connected to me. This feels like familiar to me even though this is my first time here.

But that was definitely one of the huge and many moments that I- just to push through the shame and the need to [00:12:00] like perform or earn or demonstrate adequacy to some like judging panel of other Latino people.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mostly in our heads because we just keep those questions and keep asking ourselves over and over again, if that's true for you.

CasSandra Calin: Exactly, exactly. And it has been, more than anything, a resource to be able to give back, right? To be able to connect back with rather than like something that I took for myself and claimed and then I'm like taking up space in and might not deserve to. It has been an opportunity to reach for other people, not even necessarily Cuban people, but other like folks who speak Spanish or who

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm-hmm.

CasSandra Calin: Aren't comfortable in particular settings to connect across marginalization.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes.

CasSandra Calin: And oppression with the like Spanish language or just the experience of diaspora and displacement. It's been like such a gift to receive and then be able to offer back and reach out in [00:13:00] connection with as well.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): I wonder if you would talk a little bit about your first trip back to the island, because I do feel like so many of us have as our life goals to go back to where our families are from. And I think we have a variety of experiences, but I know that you had been to multiple places in Latin America when you finally went back to Cuba. And I was grateful enough to be a part of that trip and we were able to go, um, back and not just be in Cuba, but with like queer and trans people in Cuba, which is a very particular subset.

But will you just tell us a little bit about that trip for you? If there was anything particularly memorable or, or what made that thing be like the 'Yes, my soul resonates with this people or this place'?

CasSandra Calin: I mean, one of the things, which is just what my eye landed on when I first got there, was the diversity of skin tones in that country.

It absolutely is represented in my family, on my dad's [00:14:00] side, and was a very familiar kind of palette of color when I got there and just saw all of the people who are Cuban. And yeah, look different from each other. And so that was really affirming, I think particularly because the few conversations that I've been in about Afro-Latinidad

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm-hmm.

CasSandra Calin: Were like tense and uncertain and it was this debate. And there was no debate there in Cuba about like Black, light brown, white, whatever. It's just like everybody there is Cuban no questions asked. And so that was one of the first things that my eye landed on. Not only did we get to be with queer and trans people in Cuba, but with church queer and trans people in Cuba.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes.

CasSandra Calin: And so there, I mean, it was that like, I don't know, maybe the Cuban God then was present too.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): The Orishas were there.

CasSandra Calin: Yeah. Yeah. And we learned a lot about [00:15:00] divinity and spirituality when we were there.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm-hmm.

CasSandra Calin: And all the different ways that that looks and all the ways that that's influenced by different African cultures and what's indigenous to Cuba.

And so. I think it was just so much diversity was disruptive of this idea that there's one way to do it or that you can do it in a right or wrong way. Like all of

these people were all doing it in different ways. Validating and verifying on each other. Like, yeah, that looks about right to me. That I, it was like, I love to, you know, experience that engage and participate in that and have it affirmed as well by that same set of people who welcomed me as a Cuban person. It was amazing.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): I remember this moment in church where the pastors just took a moment to be like welcoming a daughter of the island back, and you had this moment with the congregation. I will never forget that [00:16:00] impromptu ritual.

CasSandra Calin: It was a baptism, basically.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm.

CasSandra Calin: Not, like there was no water, but that like those hugs, those tears, being there and held in that way was absolutely a baptism.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): I love that. I often talk to lots of mixed people who have a parent, a grandparent, whoever, who came from Latin America, whose families did this like whitening process basically by marrying or having children with white people. Which is this very clear white supremacist strategy of assimilation through aspiring to be white. Which of course we never read as white to, to most, uh, people, but yet there's this fiction that we're taught that if we better the race, which is very Latin American, like if we-

and so I feel like one of the things I feel passionately about for folks who come [00:17:00] from a Latin American identity and are mixed white and something from, from Latin America. To recognize that white privilege and white passing is really important to recognize and to work on, and also it's a strategy of white supremacy to try to get us to, to ignore and erase the parts of us that are not white so that we can be safer or treated better.

CasSandra Calin: Mm-hmm.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Which is so clearly anti-Blackness, like not even, not even veiled. And I wonder if you would talk a little bit about that from the other side. Because I think the other side is also true, that if you present as Black, this Latinidad is a category that a lot of people get erased in that, who live in that category, because it's like if you are Black in the US, there is so much anti-Blackness that there is, like you get lumped together.

That's, one, really hard for a lot of, particularly [00:18:00] Caribbean, um, immigrants, but also I think it's really hard for Afro-Latines per- people who live in the US and mixed or intermarried the other direction with other Black people like African American people and African descended peoples in the US.

CasSandra Calin: Mm-hmm.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Will you talk a little bit about that the other way?

CasSandra Calin: Part of what I've reflected on is there is a hesitancy in me to claim Latinidad and being Cuban because it, it lights people's eyes up in a particular way, that I can tell they're like relieved. They have a, a greater appreciation, a greater like admiration. There's this exoticizing.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm-hmm.

CasSandra Calin: But it's also just like, oh, you're more than just Black, or you're better than just Black.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm-hmm.

CasSandra Calin: Um, and so I, I don't subscribe to that and I don't wanna kind of look for this, almost like lighter [00:19:00] eye color kind of

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): yeah.

CasSandra Calin: You know, analogy to be more appealing, appealing to people. So that's complicated. It's further complicated by my relationship to Blackness and where I grew up.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yeah.

CasSandra Calin: And having not been accepted necessarily as Black enough either. And so not necessarily Latina enough, not Black enough. Nobody's gonna like welcome me into whiteness, which I feel great about. But there's this like kind of thing coming around of like, where can I settle and what do I need to perform around my culture and ethnicity to be, um, accepted.

And being in a mixed family. My mom didn't speak Spanish. And I think that's a part of the story that I was told around why we as kids were not taught span,

taught Spanish. Um, not wanting to exclude my mom. But there was also, yeah, [00:20:00] definitely this superiority kind of too, to, um, to the side of the family that wasn't just Black and had more interesting things going on.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm-hmm.

CasSandra Calin: It was a really weird piece, but definitely part of my experience.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): One, I just wanna like hold that. It's so painful to be like, oh, you're more than just, and I feel like an activist culture in a movement space. It's really important for those of us who have white passing privilege and light skin privilege to also not fall into that trap. Because it's like, oh, you aren't just white, so you can claim a little brownness over here, so maybe you can get out of some of that guilt or shame or whatever. And I think that's also totally not helpful or functional in any kind of solidarity, and it feels so painful.[00:21:00]

To hold that level of anti-Blackness. And then the counter response to whiteness and, and it's like everybody's trying to escape this Black and white binary, but it shows up in this really weird, twisted way where everything is like, we're just clinging to being exotic and it's. And I'm like, that sounds like Christian-Christianity, Christian morality weaponized into Christian Supremacy.

I'm like, that, those feel like they are connected, like it's not just a political project, but there's that piece around the shame that has something to do with you're not good enough, that connects with not being good enough to earn grace or heaven or whatever. Do you ever think about those, your political realities, and I know you reflect on this stuff so much.

But how that connects with Christianity and how you were taught. And maybe give us a little bit more about your context. And that, like [00:22:00] how do I, how do I settle? Where am I enough? Where am I fully myself? Because I feel like that's the narrative Christianity tell, tells us. Like, we don't see color. We're all enough in Christ. Until we're queer trans.

But, will you tell us a little bit about your story and how it connects to that?

CasSandra Calin: I mean, the first memory that comes up for me is, in college, I had a youth or young adult pastor tell me that when we get to heaven, we're all gonna be white. Oh, that was harmful. But outside of that explicitness, it's, that's still gonna be part of the coding, you know?

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yeah.

CasSandra Calin: Even like growing up in a Black Baptist church, there was just this, like, still this distancing from certain types of Blackness.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Hmm.

CasSandra Calin: Still this respectability politics.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes.

CasSandra Calin: Um, that was very present and force fed to people as a way of [00:23:00] earning a membership or belonging in the church context. Yes, I absolutely see a connection between white Christian Supremacy, politics, race and ethnicity, and how pathologized and criminalized and demonized non-whiteness in particular, more than others Blackness is, and that moving away from Black culture, Black identity, will get you closer to being white as snow to being holy, to being pure. And it, you know, it comes with a lot of shame and community level shame.

Um, and I think that the advocacy that we do in community and the activism that we do in community is beyond changing this legislation, but is absolutely about changing these so social and cultural ideas of what, um, what is [00:24:00] ethical and what is criminal.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes. Yes. Oh my God, that seems so right. I wonder if you have experiences around that healing and reclamation work.

Well, maybe we should back up and just try to define a little bit what is spiritual violence, because that's a big part of what we talk about in Soulforce, and I feel like you are a healer of spiritual violence, both in your practice as a mental health clinician for our people, who I trust so deeply, and as an activist and as like a kid of the south and as a movement person through your whole young adult life.

Um, so maybe will you tell us how you would describe what spiritual violence is, and then some of your experiences of. Literally what you just said around how do you heal from these entire [00:25:00] systems and constructs that were fed, as connected with God and Jesus, and salvation and belonging. Mm-hmm. How do you do that?

Because I see you just sabotage that shit all day every day. I do.

CasSandra Calin: It's about power, like Christian Supremacy, spiritual violence is about power. And people wanted to put more power behind their hatefulness and behind their reaching for control. And so they said, if I put God's name on this

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm-hmm

CasSandra Calin: then it has more power. And then you have to do what I say and you have to subscribe to my opinion or toxicity. 'Cause I said that God agrees with me.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Right.

CasSandra Calin: So that's how I would describe spiritual violence. It's when people try to validate their violent, their interpersonal violence

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm-hmm.

CasSandra Calin: With God and divinity and this like religion and church weight to give to it.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes. [00:26:00] Mm-hmm.

CasSandra Calin: Um, and it's effective. And in addition to these ideas around just like God and church, there's heaven and hell and eternity and having access to the resources that you need to survive. All of this is tied up in whether you do what I say God said you should do.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm-hmm.

CasSandra Calin: And it's a psychological type of violence. It's absolutely a physical type of violence. And it is not just, uh, perpetuated from kind of the outside culture into

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yeah.

CasSandra Calin: The marginalized culture. I would say we absolutely extended it to one another. Queer

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yeah.

CasSandra Calin: And trans people, folks of color perpetuate spiritual violence against each other. Maybe having no idea that that's what's happening or thinking that they're, you know, doing good.

Some of the ways that I have found liberation from spiritual violence and white Christian Supremacy was listening more [00:27:00] closely to my inner voice and trying to fit myself into that tiny little space that spiritual violence said I should cut off pieces of myself in order to fit into and failing over again.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes, yes.

CasSandra Calin: I couldn't do it. I tried. I couldn't do it.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes. And because you're bigger than life.

CasSandra Calin: Because I'm bigger. Absolutely.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): And thank God you couldn't because this version of you is just glorious.

CasSandra Calin: And there are people who keep trying and keep trying.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes, yes.

CasSandra Calin: And it didn't work out that way for me.

Partially, like I mentioned earlier, because of the community that I had access to and the other examples that I saw about what was possible.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm-hmm.

CasSandra Calin: Um, partly because of my own inner divinity and magic and that I was able to hear that inner narrative said, no, that doesn't work. It doesn't fit. It's not gonna work.

Let's try something else.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes.

CasSandra Calin: And it was somewhat [00:28:00] incremental. I think, still, trying to, at a certain point, fit those same ideas into like a queer relationship.

And I was like, okay, I can't be straight, but we can be a man and a woman as too, do everything else the same way. And that didn't fit, and that didn't work.

And so, yeah, it was just this, like I went from having tried to shed pieces of myself to

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm-hmm.

CasSandra Calin: Learning how to shed pieces of that, like spiritual violent narrative and Christian Supremacy. Um, and each piece that fell off. The freedom and the connection itself and the joy and the acts of the pleasure.

It was so motivating, yeah. To continue to do that and pursue that and encourage other people to do that as well. Some of that has looked like the relationships that I found myself in. Some of that has just been about. Like the books I read, the music that I listen to [00:29:00] on every level of what we consume and how we talk to ourselves.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes.

CasSandra Calin: There is opportunity to heal from spiritual violence.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): I feel like the narratives, it's like if you plant the seed, we will nurture the seed. And if the seed is I'm terrible and not worthy and God doesn't love me, we can just grow a whole monster that will eat us alive. And the other side I think is true.

It's harder to nurture the seeds of I am divine and I am made in the image and I am capable. Because it's such a hostile climate that we are living in both internally and externally in this moment. But I do believe so deeply that there is so many motivating yeses along the way from like good sex to great conversations, to feeling seen and heard, to joy that pops up when we are like organically ourselves and it sounds like, especially because you were talking [00:30:00] about where do I belong, that it feels like your landing spot is belonging exactly in yourself, in your body. Um, and I wonder if you have any, uh, thoughts or ideas or what you would suggest for other people who are on a similar journey and maybe don't have the same level of community that are constantly mirroring back our divinity or encouraging us to explore something new or something different.

Particularly from a, from those of us who come from church communities who have been told everything is the devil and wrong and bad. How do we break open? How do we break into something new?

CasSandra Calin: I think one of the things that I found tickled by the most and also inspired by the most was that VBS series that Soulforce did about nature

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes.

CasSandra Calin: And animals. And I think that's so important because even if you don't know another. Queer person in the [00:31:00] world. There is queerness all around us. There is

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes.

CasSandra Calin: A refusal to be colonized in nature itself. There is liberation in just like how the grass grows and how the vines take over, right?

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes.

CasSandra Calin: And even if you can't see it reflected back by your best friend or, or your sibling, I think there's still a lot of power to look for where queerness and liberation and decolonization is happening in the world around you.

Um, and yeah, to find in yourself the, what your voice sounds like.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yeah.

CasSandra Calin: What your yes feels like, what your no feels like.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm.

CasSandra Calin: Um, and to try it on and see what affirms it. What says yes to your yes. And what says yes to your no as well.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm-hmm.

CasSandra Calin: And I think that's a p- like so [00:32:00] much of what we're talking about to me, that has nothing to do with sex, is queerness. Like having and setting boundaries is queer, like,

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes.

CasSandra Calin: Being explicit about your expectations and moving to a place that they can be met is queer and asserting yourself and advocating for your needs. All of these ways that we push back against being smooshed into that tiny hole such that we lose ourselves, those are liberatory acts of, um, resistance and rejection of the norm. And so any opportunities that a person has to do that, affirm that in themselves and celebrate that I think is gonna be like movement after movement towards healing from spiritual violence, but also like finding freedom.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes. Uh. I love that roadmap. And I feel like you're talking about exercising the muscle of agency also at every [00:33:00] step.

I'm thinking about how there is like gayness and queerness, and I think lots of folks in mainstream don't understand the difference.

CasSandra Calin: Mm-hmm.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): They're like homosexual or not, and they're like. I think what you described a little bit earlier is that line of, if you want the same, when you're talking about trying to fit, you know, two women into a really, into a straight relationship, it feels a little bit like that of like.

There are a lot of those kinds of churches where it's like we will follow all of your like bloody theology, sacrifice, brokenness and not being worthy of anything. If you'll just let me put like two grooms on the top of the cake instead of two, instead of one man, one woman, whatever. And I feel like the kind of nurturing and listening to, and um, just loving up on the internal voice that is like, I know in my body when it's a [00:34:00] yes, I feel like that is the difference. Because queerness is trying to find what is true and right. Mm-hmm. And recognizing over and over again that because of systems of domination and power, that that what is true and right is gonna go against massive structures of power.

And I wonder if you have experiences that you'll talk a little bit about around the difference or the transition maybe from that. Like, I just wanna be the, just like everybody else and be the same and be normal. Respectable.

CasSandra Calin: Mm-hmm.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): To this like very wild and free and loving and generous and generative way of being. That feels to me at least more like queerness.

CasSandra Calin: It was again, that process of trying failing.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm.

CasSandra Calin: And in any way that I contorted myself. I wasn't accepted. In any way that I performed and people pleased I wasn't accepted. And I just [00:35:00] remember in one particular relationship going through with a therapist like the past two years, every time I visit this person, I try it this way, I try it that way. I talked to 'em this way. I set this up ahead of time. No way that I do it does it succeed. And at a certain point, if nothing I do is gonna work for you, then I get to figure out what works for me.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): That's right.

CasSandra Calin: And so there was that piece and finding, I think, a similar experience in gay to queer relationships.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm-hmm.

CasSandra Calin: I had all these ideas about what romance means and looks like and what it looks like for someone to desire me, and it was the princess fairytale. And I was finding people who loved me and wanted to be with me.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm-hmm.

CasSandra Calin: And I was ultimately trying to like, write that story on them.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm.

CasSandra Calin: Rather than finding people who already had it, you know, written on them.[00:36:00]

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yeah.

CasSandra Calin: Um, because I thought that they were the right person for me to be with. And so if you're the right person. And then I can like feed you line by line the type of love I wanna receive maybe will be all right.

We were not.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes, that doesn't often work out Well.

CasSandra Calin: Yeah, it didn't work out. Um, and so honestly, like there has been.

It feels night and day, the change in the relationship between me and me, that's happened over the last three or four years. And just like choosing to divest and reinvest my energy. From composing and curating and creating outside of myself, all the things that would finally let me exhale. I just turned inward.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm.

CasSandra Calin: And practiced, exhaling. And saw what happened when I did that and what didn't happen. But yeah, that was a lot of what it looked like to stop trying to like [00:37:00] gay and

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm-hmm.

CasSandra Calin: be Queer instead. Um, even now thinking about like the PhD program, thinking about my profession, and

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes.

CasSandra Calin: I have, you know. I have never worked like a nine to five.

You know, like I am a therapist, I see clients, I have this schedule and this way of relating. And I still have these ideas around what it looks like to adult properly, right? And all these ideas around like what's legitimate and what is right, and those 100% unquestionably come from white Supremacist Capitalism.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes.

CasSandra Calin: I'm grateful that I haven't been able to like, make my body do those things and haven't had to. I've had other opportunities. And so it's, it's all the way from like my relationship to food, to my relationship to family, to my relationship to work, to my relationship to self. I've had to reject what the like

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm-hmm.[00:38:00]

CasSandra Calin: Straightest version that I could fit on my body was, and instead like try on things that really, really fit or take it all off and run around and see what happens.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes.

CasSandra Calin: And um, so far so good.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes, I would say so far so good. Your own practice, PhD program. Absolutely flush with people who love and adore you and just wanna bask in your light.

Maybe let's shift to your practice a little bit. I am curious what your approach is to clients and how you serve, because I know you primarily serve our community. And so maybe folks on the the call listening in maybe have never conceptualized what it could be to be a person of color, a person who is Queer or trans, a person of faith, and what does accompaniment, particularly from a therapist look like?

[00:39:00] And so how do you approach that work and serving our community?

CasSandra Calin: Mm-hmm. It's such a joy to get to work with other Queer and trans folks, and I consider it like,

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes.

CasSandra Calin: The blessing of my life. I always say that one of my, I guess my two biggest strengths as a therapist are gonna be asking questions and holding a warm container.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm.

CasSandra Calin: And I think that a lot of times that's what people need.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yeah.

CasSandra Calin: Not someone who's gonna tell them what to do. Or even just like tell them that everything they're thinking and feeling is correct and there's nowhere to go from here, but a container to let them reflect, look in the mirror, some questions to think about.

Um, it's, it tickles me how many times a week, let's say. I hear, that's a good question. And there's, they kind of like pop up out of my gut, I guess. But I think, yeah, a lot of times people don't get asked questions, not just about themselves, but about their [00:40:00] options, about different ways of looking at a thing.

And that's a big piece of what I would say my gift is to the clients that I get to work with. And there's also this acceptance piece that I probably take for granted because it's so normal.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes.

CasSandra Calin: I mean, my clients appreciate that they don't have to explain this and this to me.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm-hmm.

CasSandra Calin: I had one client start with me recently. He was like, you understand polyamory? I was like, yes. You don't have to explain, justify. I, we can just start from, yes, I understand and I see it as a valid relationship structure. How can I be supportive to where you're at in your life right now?

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Very few people have ever heard that in their entire lives. Just to be super explicit, that is a very, certainly not from a person of faith, certainly not from anybody who comes out.

I mean, it's just still a very fringe identity and lifestyle and what a blessing. And especially [00:41:00] in communities of color. Let's be clear, like it's a different level of "Wow" because you can start there.

CasSandra Calin: It's exciting, it's fun. I think a lot of queerness and even transness is just about like playing with body.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm-hmm.

CasSandra Calin: And life and connection.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes.

CasSandra Calin: Um, and so there's so much more like flopping around, and seeing what fits, and what works, and what doesn't fit, and why doesn't it fit,

rather than like I think getting as stuck in the shame cycle of what should I be doing and I'm not doing it and I should be doing it, and how do I make myself do it?

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yeah.

CasSandra Calin: So I, I find that other form of work more generative, more creative, more exciting to get to do. If people are still in the like, 'what should I be doing and how do I make myself' we can start there and figure out, you know, where those stories came from and whether they do fit and maybe what doesn't fit about them and what we wanna poke holes in. Um, [00:42:00] but yeah, I, I love the work that I do.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): It feels like a ministry actually that warm place of acceptance, especially for so many in our community who feel like there's nowhere where we get to just like exhale. And so. It makes me absolutely connect that with ministry in, in all of the ways. I'm wondering, in this political moment where things just feel on a thousand all the time, what are the questions you, you are saying like one of your main strategies is asking the right questions.

So I'm wondering from your perspective, what are the right questions that we should be asking ourselves these days? And that could be ourselves as in like. People of color, Queer and trans people, people in the south, people in the United States, Latine people like any of those. But what are the questions that you're sitting with or that you think that we should be thinking through right now?

CasSandra Calin: One [00:43:00] of the things that I find encouraging is what our people have already been through.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm-hmm.

CasSandra Calin: And it makes what's happening now feel not bigger than us.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yeah.

CasSandra Calin: Than who we are. Than who we've been. And all the like choir of ancestors standing behind us.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes.

CasSandra Calin: It's still scary. It's still big.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yeah.

CasSandra Calin: It's still violent, but there's something about being able to say, the people that I come from have been through all y'all's bullshit before.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm, mm.

CasSandra Calin: And found pleasure and fought for agency and human dignity. And

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes.

CasSandra Calin: That's the legacy that we come from and the skillset that we have. And so one of the questions I think that can be helpful for people to start with is like,

what [00:44:00] do I hold?

What was, what did I inherit from my ancestors, whether that's like Queer and trans ancestors that I've never been related to or like my direct aunt so and so, um, that will help me move through today and tomorrow.

What did I inherit that I want to offer to my community now?

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes.

CasSandra Calin: There's another question around like, what, what is my hierarchy of needs? Yes. What do I need for survival? What do I need for joy and pleasure? Does it feel like it needs to happen one at a time, or can I try to move towards and reach for that full span all at once?

I think there's a lot to learn about what people's fight, flight, and freeze looks like.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yeah.

CasSandra Calin: What happens for me when I get activated. Because we can move through the entirety of 2025 in a free state and have no [00:45:00] idea that that's what's happening.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes.

CasSandra Calin: Um, and then maybe it's about when I look at the news.

Is it in the middle of the day? Is it in the evening? Is it in the morning? There's so many just small shifts that we can make to our routine if we understand what activates us and what that looks and feels like. Maybe it's just about noticing that it happened and then the question is, how do I come out of that?

What's helpful to me to ground me back into my body?

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes.

CasSandra Calin: Like I said, the stuff that's happening is scary. And scaring us is absolutely one of the tactics and intentions.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes, yes.

CasSandra Calin: So that we freeze, um, or just like are no longer effective in our own lives, and like moving towards life and pleasure and connection.

And so acknowledging that it's scary, validating the experience that you're having and choosing whatever form of resisting against that effort that they're making [00:46:00] to freeze us. Asking yourself questions around what will help you do that is I think, another helpful strategy. And who, again, it can be ancestry, it can be a book of poetry from a person you've never met, it can be your roommate.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yeah.

CasSandra Calin: Who can help you to move through this?

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yeah. What does spirituality look like for you in this time? Like where, what makes your spirit come alive, or what are the practices that make you feel connected to that thing that is bigger than all of us? Is it still Christianity? Is it a mixture of Christianity plus, plus plus?

Is it your own creation? Like what does that feel like and look like and taste like for you?

CasSandra Calin: I'm glad you had a taste. 'Cause I think food is definitely a part of my spirituality.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes.

CasSandra Calin: If spirituality is, you know, a sense of being embodied, if spirituality is access to pleasure, if spirituality is finding the thing that I can [00:47:00] trust and kind of lean on.

Food is absolutely a part of that for me.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes.

CasSandra Calin: I would say over the last few months. My balcony has been a part of that for me and just being outside in sun and wind is really a part of that. Fire has always been a part of that for me. Being at a, a fire pit or a bonfire or whatever it is. Poetry. Music.

Recently in the last year or so, I've lean deeper into prayer and I don't, you know what I would have said? I don't know who I'm praying to. Now I'm thinking, I don't know if that matters. And I dunno if it's true. I start my prayers with Dear Divine and I actually feel really clear about who and what that is.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes.

CasSandra Calin: Um, and that those prayers do land where I'm directing them. And are held. Sweetly and generously and securely. And so yeah, prayer is a part of that as [00:48:00] well. And the people that love me and that I love and, and being connected to them.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm, yes. That feels so good in my body. And there's so many, call it Christianity or not Christianity, matters really little, but what you're saying about food is like that is literally communing with nature. Like we are literally taking part of creation and incorporating into our being. And that feels so, um, like a direct connect kind of energetically. So I love that.

And another one of our Sinvergüenzas said that one of the main things that theology and religion had to offer in this moment was prayer, because it does a focusing thing of like, why am I here? What am I supposed to be doing? What am I grateful for? And I hear that so much in what you're talking about. That's definitely what prayer sounds like to me.

That is not necessarily trying to claim a particular God to do [00:49:00] a thing on my behalf, but rather help me in my own body be here and present and now and connected to what my purpose is, what I'm supposed to be doing. So that feels like, yeah, I love how that feels. I also love the permission to not have to be like, well, I am now a Buddhist, or I am a Christian, capital C. I think there's space in that that maybe Queer people understand better because we're often flowing through and between and around. That I think is really scary for folks who are new to the conversation to lay down any particular mantle or title even with the possibility of being able to pick up other things that feel more enlivening. And, and that feels like such wisdom, just by example to be like, I do these things. And some of them are very, or maybe all of them, are very earthly [00:50:00] creaturely

CasSandra Calin: Mm-hmm.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Embodied things. Particularly when white Christian Supremacy is constantly trying to get us out of our bodies and trying to like exploit our bodies, our labor. And this, is all those practices feel like they do that pulling back into one's self. So thank you for sharing a little bit of that journey. I wonder if you would close us out with the last question, which is, where do you come from? It's a question about ancestors. It's who is the cloud of witnesses or what is that well of wisdom, of experience that comes from folks who we are related to, not related to, connected to culturally, um, poets, theorists, whatever.

Who is that for you? Who are those ancestors that you pull from when you need to be restored and reminded who you are and where you come from?

CasSandra Calin: It's interesting because even this brings up [00:51:00] a question around like what should be versus what is.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm.

CasSandra Calin: And I think I come from people who center themselves and take up space.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Mm-hmm.

CasSandra Calin: And I have such a complex about it.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): But you are magnetic. You walk into a room and you just magnetize all of the beings toward you naturally.

CasSandra Calin: Yeah. And so I say I come from that, not just because I see people in my family who operate that way because I absolutely know that it's a part of how I move and I have a lot of feelings about it.

Um, but yeah, I think that's a part of who I am and who I come from and what I have to like reconcile within my body and spirit and mind. I would say I come from people who connect to music and poetry. I had a lot, I experienced a lot of [00:52:00] impact from Andrea Gibson's poetry when I was in like high school and college, trying to figure out everything.

I connect a lot to, I would say like social science theorists, like bell hooks and Audre Lorde and Patricia Hill Collins. And I'm excited in my PhD program to be bringing their voices in and being like,

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes.

CasSandra Calin: I don't know if I relate to that, but this thing that this person said, that's where I come from and what I want to be a part of my lens.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes.

CasSandra Calin: Um, I come from Cuban people. I come from Black non Cuban people. I come from Queer people. I have a group of best friends called the Wolf Pack that I absolutely claim as family and

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes,

CasSandra Calin: where I come from and has helped me to be who and where I am now. And yeah, I would. So much femininity, which sometimes means softness and sometimes doesn't mean softness is also a part of [00:53:00] the soil that I'd say I grow in.

Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio): Yes. Whew. What a full conversation. We could go on and on. I know we could talk all night, but I just wanna say thank you for spending time with Teología Sin Vergüenza. Thank you for sharing your story. There's so much more. I'm sure we'll return back to the conversation, but thank you for, for being here with us.

CasSandra Calin: Oh, I've had so much fun. Thank you.

Thank you for joining us today for Teología Sin Vergüenza. I'm Reverend Alba Onofrio, but you can call me Reverend Sex. Let us know what resonated for you

from today's conversation, and make sure to like, subscribe and share this episode with someone in your life who might need it.

Check out all of our other juicy content on this channel and find us on social media @soulforceorg or @teosinvergüenza in Spanish. Cuídate mucho, and remember, we are Las Sinvergüenzas. Are you one of [00:54:00] us? Oo, sí! Sí, sí, sí.