

Alexia Leclercq



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SPEAKERS

Alexia Leclercq, Rimsha Syed



Rimsha Syed 00:03

Hi, this is Rimsha Syed with the Institute for Diversity and Civic Life. The date is April 6, 2022, and I'm here on a Zoom call with Alexia Leclercq for the Voices of Change oral history project. How are you today, Alexia?



Alexia Leclercq 00:19

I'm good. How are you?



Rimsha Syed 00:21

I'm good. Thanks for asking. I'm glad we're getting to chat today, and I'm very excited to hear more about your life and your work. For starters, can you introduce yourself and tell us where you're joining the call from today?



Alexia Leclercq 00:33

Yes, so my name is Alexia, I use she/they pronouns, I'm twenty-two years old, and I'm in Austin, Texas.



Rimsha Syed 00:41

Great. So going off of that, I usually like to start these interviews by asking what you remember about your childhood and where you grew up.



Alexia Leclercq 00:53

Yeah, so I actually moved around quite a bit as a kid. I was born in France and a little small town, 500 people. It was an interesting experience, I think, because it was quite a racist small town. And then from there, we moved to the north of France. And then when I was eight, my family moved to Austin, Texas, and then we also briefly lived in Singapore for three years, and then moved back to Austin, Texas. And then I went to college in New York City, and then once I graduated, moved back to Austin, Texas again.



Rimsha Syed 01:26

Wow. So throughout this experience, did you have a favorite city from what you can remember? And how old were you during this timeline?



Alexia Leclercq 01:37

Yeah, so I think I don't necessarily have one place that I find myself particularly drawn to. I think all the places really have so many differences, and it was really interesting seeing that. So France, I lived in the middle of nowhere, I was surrounded by a lot of nature, which is something I really, really enjoyed. The social life was not as great. I think I faced a lot of racism there. And I think moving to Austin and finding more people of color, and more people that look like me, was definitely a cool experience, especially at the end of elementary school, and then going into middle school. And then going to Singapore was also a very different experience. I think also being surrounded by a lot of expats from different parts of the world in Singapore, and then also the local Singaporean community. And then moving back to Austin was also an interesting transition in the middle of high school, and just seeing the differences between Singapore and in Texas, and the international education system and the US public school system.



Rimsha Syed 02:41

Right, and how was your time in New York? And then my follow up question to that is, did you notice anything different between the time you were in Austin, and then you came back to Austin after New York?



Alexia Leclercq 02:55

Yeah, so my time in New York, I think, was very transformational. For me, I think it was really my first opportunity to step out of my home and away from some of the issues that I faced, like trauma at home, and really try to become my own person. And I was really lucky that I actually ended up going to a small school within NYU called Gallatin, where there was a lot of radical professors and a lot of classes that were around justice, and I found a lot of like-minded people and really found a community there. And I think moving back, definitely provided a change of perspective on Austin for me. I think before I was really tied up to some of the trauma that had taken place in Austin and didn't really get to explore Austin, really understand Austin, even though the majority of my life, Austin is the place that I've lived the longest. And it was really cool for me to learn more about Austin from its history to the current politics, and finding people that I connect with more and that have similar values, instead of just going to school

and going back home. So that was a really cool experience for me to actually really learn more about Austin and rediscover Austin. But I've definitely, I think, noticed a lot of changes. I mean, Austin has grown significantly from when I was eight years old to now. And there's a lot of gentrification in Austin as well. So there's definitely a lot of changes happening.



Rimsha Syed 04:28

Right. Did you struggle with school or making friends or all of those things that come with moving around a lot as a kid?



Alexia Leclercq 04:38

Yeah, that was definitely a struggle. I think college was the first time I really had a friend group. I think I'm someone that can be very shy at first, and so moving around from place to place and also switching schools so many times, it really took me a couple years before I started opening up, and then by the time I did, we would move again. So that was definitely a struggle, to connect with other people. And I think culturally as well, having that cultural difference and not understanding some of the cultural norms, or just pop culture references and all of that made it harder for me to connect with other people.



Rimsha Syed 05:16

Yeah, thanks for sharing that. And more broadly speaking, what was the reason behind why you and your family moved around so much?



Alexia Leclercq 05:26

It was just my dad's job. We basically followed him around, and based on the economy—I know 2008, his factory, the factory that he was working for, shutdown in France, and then he got an offer in the United States, which he took, and then they sent him to another one of their locations abroad, and then back to Austin.



Rimsha Syed 05:54

I see. And do you see yourself living here in Austin or Texas long term?



Alexia Leclercq 06:01

I'm actually not quite sure long term-wise, but definitely for now, and for the next five or ten years, I definitely feel a sense of community in Austin and really want to stay here for a while.



Rimsha Syed 06:16

Right. Okay, so can you tell me a little bit more about your family dynamic? Do you have siblings? What kind of culture were you a part of growing up?

A

Alexia Leclercq 06:30

Yeah, so I'm actually mixed. I'm French and Taiwanese, so I really grew up with my mom's culture. I think my dad wasn't as present growing up, and then had some bad family dynamics there. And I really felt very close to that, but it was definitely a struggle, because I practiced that culture at home, but I knew that it wasn't necessarily cool or typical to express that or show that outside of my house. And we're also Buddhist, which is also interwoven into the different aspects of Taiwanese culture that we practice. And I have two little sisters, they're actually twins, and I feel very fortunate to have them, because I think throughout all these transitions, I think they were a constant, people I could really relate to in terms of our identities, and moving through different cultures, and practicing our own culture. So I think I've always practiced it at home, but it really wasn't until halfway through college that I started sharing my culture with other people and with my friends, and with my community members, and practicing it. And I think a lot of it was, one, I guess meeting the friend group that I have from college and watching them being confident in practicing their culture and sharing elements of their culture that are, in the Western eye, seen as weird or different. And I think also, when I started working at PODER [People Organized in Defense of Earth and Her Resources] and seeing my boss and other people practice their indigenous cultures and integrating that through work also really inspired me to further reconnect with my culture and really be proud about that, and also incorporate elements of it, and share it with the world.



Rimsha Syed 08:26

Right. Do you speak English primarily at home?

A

Alexia Leclercq 08:31

No, I actually speak Mandarin with my mom, and then I guess with my sisters, we switch around depending on the day or the situation, between Mandarin or French or Spanish or English.



Rimsha Syed 08:47

Right, right. So speaking of your religious identity, what role do you think that has played in your life? And has your perspective on religion changed at all throughout your life?

A

Alexia Leclercq 09:04

I think the thing is for me, Buddhism, it is a religion, but it's also not in many ways. It's not about, I guess, praying to a specific god. I guess it's a philosophy of life and incorporating those elements into daily practices, and I think it really shapes my morality and my view of life. And I think it's also interesting, because, I mean, Buddhism is a religion that is practiced in so many

areas, and I think has been mixed with different cultural elements. And so it's all blended in together, when I wasn't specifically taught like, "This was a cultural practice. This is a religious practice." It really was just all of it blended together growing up as my belief. Yeah, I think it really drives the work that I'm doing in the environmental justice space, my relationship to the land, my relationship to other people, and really my moral values.



Rimsha Syed 10:14

Yeah. So would you say that there are some more specific elements or teachings that you're particularly drawn to when you're thinking about your work? Yeah, so



Alexia Leclercq 10:27

Yeah, so I think growing up from a young age, I was really taught that we're not really separate from each other, and that includes other people, that includes other living beings, that includes the land, and that taking care of each other, and taking care of the land and the animals and everything was central to our purpose and our existence. And that practice of constantly caring and serving other people and other beings. And I think that is really central to everything I do from the way I take care of my friends or my family to the work that I do in the environmental justice space, taking care of the land and the community members. Yeah, I think that relationship is deeply rooted in my culture and also in religion.



Rimsha Syed 11:21

Right. So I know that last time we talked, you mentioned that you love horses, and I was a little bit curious to hear more about that, and if you would say that being around nature from a more young age has played a role in your transition to then doing environmental justice work now.



Alexia Leclercq 11:43

Yeah, so I was really privileged that the town that I grew up in France, very small, there's a lot more nature than there are people. There was a lot of horses and a lot of cows around, lots of trees, lots of forests. So I got to spend a lot of times in the outdoors. And I think that love for the outdoor space and for animals is definitely a huge part of my life. And I think honoring that, I remember from a very young age, me and my mom going to forests, and honoring different tree spirits, and her sharing stories about that, and also the mountains and all of that from Taiwan. And so I think my love for nature has always been there. And also I think because I didn't have as many friends growing up, I've always wanted to hang out with animals. And my parents had a strict no pet policy, but I would find connections and hang out with other people's horses or their dogs or their cats, just because I had a harder time making friends with people. And so I continue to really enjoy spending time with both people and animals.



Rimsha Syed 12:55

Do you have a favorite outdoor activity?



Alexia Leclercq 12:59

I would say spending time outdoors with people, just celebrations or different ceremonies that are outdoors, or just spending time and grounding myself in nature, which I guess is not a traditional activity. But just being outdoors and really being with the land and with the trees and really feeling that and taking time to really ground myself in the physical space.



Rimsha Syed 13:30

And have you been able to continue connecting with horses or other animals in Austin?



Alexia Leclercq 13:37

Yeah, I used to volunteer in a therapeutic riding center. That was an interesting experience. There were some interesting people. I don't know if I necessarily recommend, but I have a lot of horse connections. I know a lot of people who own horses. So that's really cool. That's definitely something I do to take really take a break from from work. And I think working in the political space, it's very chaotic. There's a lot going on, and I try to shut down my brain and my thoughts and really take a step away from that and spend time outdoors and with animals.



Rimsha Syed 14:15

Right. So yeah, aside from horse therapy and being outdoors, do you have any other hobbies?



Alexia Leclercq 14:24

I love doing art. I think that's always been something that I've been drawn to my entire life, just drawing and painting. And I think it's just a beautiful way to express human experience and human emotions, and to connect with one another, and to create stories.



Rimsha Syed 14:43

Yeah. What's your preferred art medium?



Alexia Leclercq 14:47

I would say acrylic painting.



Rimsha Syed 14:53

Okay, so transitioning over to your professional work, broadly speaking, tell me a little bit how

you specifically got involved in the environmental justice space and how far you've come along so far.

A

Alexia Leclercq 15:11

Yeah, so I guess I first started being interested in social environmental justice in high school. I think just seeing the discrepancies and living in so many places, and really seeing the many injustices, and the many forms of pollution and the contradicting messages. I remember being explicitly taught in school that colonization was good, and then hearing from my grandfather who lived under colonization about the horrors and the reality of it. And I think that always really made me interested in history and justice, and when I applied to college, I actually did an individualized major. And so I got to shape my major around those interests. And so I got to create a concentration title, The Politics and Economics of Inequality, and that's when I got to take really cool classes that really started digging into capitalism and colonialism and the impacts on our societal fabric and the impacts on our current society. And environmental justice was also part of many of those classes that I was able to take.

A

Alexia Leclercq 16:19

And then I started getting involved in the climate space around 2017. There was starting to be a lot of youth momentum, and I organized with some of those groups in New York City. And then I attended a law and policy conference in DC in the following year, 2018. And it was [an] interesting wake up call about the mainstream environmental movement, because one of the top lawyers who is part of a very well-known environmental firm, was just essentially talking about the way that he didn't necessarily care about environmental justice, because it wasn't a big enough issue to prioritize. And I felt really betrayed by that comment and really wanted to work in a space that was specifically environmental justice, not just the general environmental movement, which I feel like now is shifting towards more centering environmental justice, but I feel like even in 2017 and 2018, was not really at all. And so I actually found PODER, and I interned with them over the summer when I went back to Austin, Texas, and they're an amazing grassroots environmental justice organization based in East Austin. And from there, I really learned everything I know now about environmental justice, about the history of the movement, about organizing, about policy. And after I graduated from college, I continued working at PODER.



Rimsha Syed 17:55

Right, so going back to your individualized major, which, by the way, sounds really amazing, did you have some courses that stuck out in particular? I would love to hear about some of the things that you took and if you had any professors that you would consider mentors or anything like that.

A

Alexia Leclercq 18:14

Yeah, so I guess one of the classes that was a really formative one was actually called "Human Rights and Human Wrongs," and it was with Dr. Vasuki Nesiah. And it really reshaped my understanding of what human rights is, because I think going into it, you hear the phrase,

"human rights," and you're like, "This is great, right? Everyone deserves human rights, and we want human rights." And this class really critically analyzed the history of human rights and how this "rights" language came to be, and the ways that this human rights framework has been used to both oppress people and used by marginalized people to further advance justice. And we looked at capitalism. We looked at colonialism. We looked at really the socio-economic rights, which are often left out. We critically looked at this individualistic rights language, and so many case studies, including ones that were about land and about pipelines, and some of the indigenous movements, and about how governments that are oppressive and are colonial use the human rights framework to their benefits. And so that class, I think, really shaped my thinking in terms of a systemic understanding of how the world operates, and was a really cool class that opened me up to further using these frameworks to understand environmental issues and understand other social issues. So that was one of, I don't know, my favorite classes from undergrad.

A

Alexia Leclercq 19:59

And then I think a couple other classes that I really liked were with Dr. Lisa Daily. And they were about media and humanitarianism and commodity culture and the commodification of activism. And that was just really fascinating to talk about what organizing and activism is in this capitalistic world. And how does it get commodified? And how does the media respond to it and things like that?



Rimsha Syed 20:32

Oh, that sounds really amazing. I'm glad that you got to take those courses. So speaking of commodification of activism, is that something that you notice here in Austin, or in general in the environmental justice space?

A

Alexia Leclercq 20:47

Yeah, I definitely see that happening. You see corporations greenwashing and basically you know, saying, "If you buy this item you're helping further environmental justice, or helping furthering environmentalism," and use that as a strategy to basically market their items and market their products. And I think there's a lot of false solutions being promoted. There's a really good book by Hoodwinked in the Hothouse called, I think, [*Resist False Solutions to Climate Change*] or something like that. And it really goes into details about these false solutions that we promote, that don't actually address the root cause and don't address the fact that corporations are constantly extracting from land and extracting from labor in a very oppressive manner to continue to accumulate wealth for a very small amount of population. And as long as we don't actually address that core system, we're not really actually tackling the climate crisis. And I think the IPCC [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change] report that came out yesterday also finally mentioned colonialism as one of the root causes of the climate crisis. So that was really cool to see. But I think there's still so much work in the climate space that isn't addressing the root causes. And oftentimes that can be can be corporations selling things or certain individuals or influencers that are selling a certain image or certain items that aren't actually sustainable, but they're portraying it as such.



Rimsha Syed 22:22

Right. Well, I'm really glad to hear colonialism is finally being called out for what it is. My next question is going back to PODER and the work that you do. You talked a little bit about this already, but what are some of the key lessons that you've learned so far?



Alexia Leclercq 22:44

Yeah, I've learned so much. Just my skills as an organizer, how to organize. The word "community organizing," I think, is thrown out a lot, but people don't necessarily understand what it means or what it looks like, because that's not something we're usually taught. And so really understanding the strategy behind it, and how we create a plan from the grassroots level to tackle an issue and figure out what action steps need to be taken to tackle that issue. And that it's not just like, "Here's a random protest. Here's a random petition." There's a lot of thought and strategy behind how do we address an issue that is impacting the communities? And how do we do it in a way that's from the ground up?



Rimsha Syed 23:30

Right. Yeah. So going off of that, can you tell me about what a day in the life would look like for you, or maybe a week in the life?



Alexia Leclercq 23:39

Yeah, so my schedule—I think one of the things I do really enjoy working at PODER is that my schedule is not consistent, so there's a lot of different things that I do. And then I also work at Start:Empowerment part time as well. I can get into that afterwards. So I would say, I guess, a week, I usually have different meetings with politicians or scientists, professors at UT that we're collaborating with. I do water quality testing. So I'll go down to the Colorado River at some of our specific sites and collect data and do those tests. We have quite a few meetings with community members, or usually on Saturday, we will go door to door to talk to those community members. I also work on some policy things, so I might spend a good chunk of time reading policy, really understanding what it means and the situation and what's happening and the details with the regulation. And so there's definitely a lot of research aspects to my work as well. And then I think just more meetings with different officials, different community partners, and building those relationships, and then coordinating with our volunteers, and I also help with the social media. So it's a lot of variety, which I find really cool because that helps me pay attention to it and have different elements. Some of them are on my computer at home, and then sometimes I have in-person meetings with certain community members or going out by the river. And so I really enjoy that change.




Rimsha Syed 25:22

Yeah, I think one thing many people don't recognize is that organizers wear very different hats and do a lot of different things throughout the day. But out of personal curiosity, I would like to hear a little bit more about how water testing works. What is that process like?

 Alexia Leclercq 25:42


Yeah, so we actually started our water quality testing program this year, so it's pretty new. But basically, we have trained community members in different areas to test for the water quality, so we can maintain consistent records, and then I also do some of it. And so there's basically a giant kit. There's a lot of chemicals in the kit, all the supplies you need. And then we have a couple of different sites that we're testing, so I've been doing the site under the metropolis bridge. And so I go out there, I get a bunch of water, and then there's a couple of tests to run. There's, nitrogen, pH, dissolved oxygen, concentrate, so I basically run those couple tests. It usually takes around forty minutes. It feels high school science classes. Some of them you have to dissolve a little pellet and see what color it turns to, to figure out what the nitrate level is. Or the dissolved oxygen one is a little bit more complicated. There's a couple steps and a couple of different chemicals to add into it. And seeing when it changes color, and recording that number will tell you what the dissolved oxygen number is. I'm definitely—science is not my background, but this is a really fun, I feel like, high school-level forty minutes that I get to spend doing some science. And it's, yeah, pretty easy to do, so that's why we've been training community members to do it by their homes near the Colorado.

 Rimsha Syed 27:14

Yeah, so are these kits something that can be purchased?

 Alexia Leclercq 27:20

You can purchase them, but they are quite expensive, so we're actually working with the LCRA [Lower Colorado River Authority] and Youth River Watch. So that's where we get our kits from, and we're providing them to the community members.

 Rimsha Syed 27:32

I see. Okay, also going back, do you ever feel frustrated when meeting with politicians who may not share the same exact ideologies as PODER?

 Alexia Leclercq 27:46

Yeah, I definitely get frustrated in many different ways. Working at PODER, I think it's very expected when you're working in politics in general, but also in politics in Texas, to see these people and give them a breakdown of what is happening. And then still seeing the inaction, I think, is something that is very saddening, especially when you're showing them the effects that it's having on the community, on their health, and on the environment. But I guess that's just the landscape of Texas politics. And I think having a community of other people that share my values and that are working towards the same goal is really what keeps me going. And there's definitely many times where after I hop off a call, I have to call a colleague or someone that I know, and rant to them about what just happened and how the meeting went. And I think

it's also really easy to be frustrated at, I guess, bigger entities, like the TCEQ [Texas Commission on Environmental Quality], for example, in Texas, have very, very inadequate environmental regulations. They're actually currently in the Sunset Committee, so we're actually trying to get the Sunset Committee to strip their power and have EPA [Environmental Protection Agency] Region 6 step in because of how inadequate they are. But it can be very frustrating, and it can be a very hard job.



Rimsha Syed 29:16

Right. Yeah, you mentioned how difficult it is sometimes organizing in Texas, and that had me thinking that you've also worked with groups in New York. So what are some of those differences that you've observed?



Alexia Leclercq 29:33

Yeah, so I guess that's a little bit different. Because when I was in New York, I wasn't directly working with environmental justice groups yet. I started off with the mainstream movement, which I definitely saw some of the internal issues with not centering justice and not centering the communities that are most impacted by environmental issues. But it was definitely, I guess in terms of policy and politicians, and getting things passed, it was definitely easier in New York City to get some of these things passed, just because of the politicians that are in office.



Rimsha Syed 30:13

Right. Thanks for sharing. So tell me about Start:Empowerment.



Alexia Leclercq 30:19

Yes. So I guess, personally for me, my journey to environmental justice and organizing that space, I really had to seek it. I, K through 12 education, did not necessarily learn about any of those things. Climate change was briefly mentioned, but no one talked about environmental justice, no one really talked about social justice, and I had many conservative teachers who really taught conservative ideologies in the classroom. And it wasn't really until I started working at PODER and went to Gallatin, that I really had an in depth knowledge of how systems work and how they create issues. And I think learning that and having that knowledge really did empower me to take action and to create change. And I wanted to have some sort of education program available for high school students that talked about these systemic issues. And in the fall of 2019, I attended this conference with my friend here—it's an exposition, not a conference. It's the Wallerstein Exposition, and there was over a hundred environmental groups, environmental education programs, and they all had a table, and they were talking about their programs. And those were really cool programs, but every single one of them focused on environmental science. There was not a single organization that had curriculum or programming around environmental justice.



Alexia Leclercq 31:55

And New York City, like Austin, like most cities, has environmental injustice, where if you know the Bronx, facing high asthma rates, significantly more pollution, and that's where people of color live. And so I was just like, "That's wild that not a single organization out of these over one hundred orgs has anything on environmental justice." And so I applied for a small grant with my friend here from NYU to create an introduction to environmental justice curriculum. And I had another friend, [Name], who had graduated before me and went back to work at a high school. And I was talking to her about this idea, and she was like, "Oh, I think my high school would be a great place to pilot this curriculum, and I think the students that I work with would be really interested." And so it really beautifully worked out, and we were able to implement that curriculum. And we worked with two amazing teachers at that school, and we implemented that curriculum at HSTP. And then from there, it just grew. Other teachers and other schools were telling us that they were interested in teaching environmental justice and teaching our curriculum. And we were able to write more curriculum. We have one focus on food justice and increased our programming. And then we partnered with another org, connected chef, to also provide food to those schools, because there's a lot of food inequities that are happening, and food apartheid. And we're now going to be launching our community school over the summer. So it's just been really cool to see people really interested in that education, and to be able to grow this project into a nonprofit.



Rimsha Syed 33:42

Wow, that sounds like incredible work. So going back to all the different things you were mentioning, like water testing, meeting with politicians, policy, research, social media, would you say you have a favorite niche that you could see yourself honing in on at some point in the future?



Alexia Leclercq 34:03

I would definitely say I enjoy community organizing, speaking with community members, and policy and the research that comes with that. And then also education is a second one that I really love. And I also helped run the Young Scholars for Justice program at PODER and really enjoy doing that.



Rimsha Syed 34:25

Right. What are some of PODER's short and long term goals?



Alexia Leclercq 34:32

I mean, I think short term goals, PODER really works to address whatever current issue is happening with the community. I think PODER is very in tune with what the community needs. Our board is fully all members that represent different neighborhoods and that are part of those neighborhood associations, and we're in partnership with a lot of those neighborhood associations. A lot of community members, my boss Susan Almanza, I feel like, knows everyone living in the area. And so a lot of times we're really responding to some of the immediate

needs. For example, right now there's a proposed tank farm that they're trying to build next to the McCall Lane neighborhood. And so we've really taken that on and worked with Amanda who's leading her neighborhood to advocate and make sure that that doesn't happen. Yeah, it's been a lot of responding to a lot of the urgent current issues. We're also working on addressing a lot of the environmental issues that Tesla is causing, and some of the aggregate mining operations in the eastern Travis County. And so that's how PODER has operated. In terms of long term goal, I guess I can't necessarily speak to that or determine that. But I think fighting for environmental justice and ensuring that people, everyone, has access to a clean and healthy environment, and really addressing the systemic issue and the root cause. And hopefully someday, all these issues are addressed, and we don't have to exist anymore. But that's way long term.



Rimsha Syed 36:12

Fingers crossed. Are there any historical organizers or figures that you look up to?



Alexia Leclercq 36:22

Quite a few. I actually think one of the things that I also learned in college that I really take inspiration from is a lot of the activism in the US that took place in the 60s. I think looking at, yeah, a lot of that radical movement building shows us that this isn't something new. This is something that people have been fighting for, for a very, very long time, and that continue to do so today. And just knowing that people have been fighting for this and have given up their lives for this, I think really inspires me to keep going.



Rimsha Syed 37:02

Yeah, thanks for sharing. So this question is a bit more open-ended, but if there was something you could say to somebody who may not understand all of the implications of climate change, what would that be?



Alexia Leclercq 37:14

I guess the first thing I would say is, you don't have to understand all of it. It's really complex science. But I think understanding the basics of how our industrial, corporate functions is causing greenhouse gases, and those emissions are causing global warming, and that the effects are happening now. It's not some type of future event. We see increased flooding, we see extreme temperatures, and we see this really disproportionately impacting communities of color. And I think another way I really like to talk about it, because climate change just seems like such a huge topic, is really looking at the local level, and looking at the health issues, because I think health is something that most people can understand and relate to, because we all have our health. A lot of us have experienced health issues or have family members or friends who have experienced health issues. And so I think talking about it through that point of view, and talking about the consequences of pollution, the consequences of living next to those

polluting industries, the consequences, of increase in disease because of increase in heat, and all of that, I think helps people understand, what are the actual concrete impacts that climate change brings to people in their communities or themselves?



Rimsha Syed 38:43

And what are some of the biggest challenges that you face so far through this work?



Alexia Leclercq 38:50

I mean, I think there's a lot of opposition. It's also really hard to get certain things passed or create long-lasting, meaningful change. I think also, because I guess my personal organizing philosophy is I both work within the system and try to work outside of the system, I think some of the things like policy, you can spend twenty years working on a policy and have it passed, and then still have it being stripped down. I think we really saw that happen with NEPA [National Environmental Policy Act] and the Trump presidency, and how a lot of that environmental protection was really stripped down and NEPA was one of the primary acts that environmental justice organizers really used. And so I think at the end of the day, there's a lot of limitations to policy and legal wins. And so for me, it's figuring out, what do we do from there? How can we create long-lasting, meaningful change? How can we organize outside of the system and really build community power to create a radically different new world?



Rimsha Syed 40:01

Thanks for sharing. So speaking of challenges and opposition, one thing I like to ask, especially for people who are involved in this day-to-day political work that can definitely get heavy, definitely can take a toll, what do you find healing, and what do you do when things get overwhelming for you?



Alexia Leclercq 40:23

For me, I definitely think friendships and family has helped me tremendously through everything. I think supporting one another and also just doing fun things. And I think that really reminds me of the beauty of life. I think, especially when you're, for eight hours a day, really addressing negative things that are happening and reading negative things that are happening. So I think that that really helps me, and spending time in nature and spending time with animals and also making art.



Rimsha Syed 40:57

Right. Thanks for sharing that. So I definitely want to be mindful of your time today, so I have one last question, and this one is also a bit open-ended. But seeing as this interview will be archived, and hopefully people will be listening to it several years down the line to come, do you have any words of wisdom or advice to impart to people listening to this down the line, especially as an organizer who's had experience in movement building?



Alexia Leclercq 41:31

Yeah, so this isn't actually original thoughts from me. This is from Mariame Kaba, but just that hope is a discipline, and it takes practice, and it's not something that comes every day. But I think seeing the beauty in friendships and family bonds and community, I think that gives me a lot of hope. And I think anyone who wants to create change has to really practice hope on a day-to-day basis, and that there is strength and power in community. I truly, truly believe that, and I think community organizing is really at the center of creating meaningful change.



Rimsha Syed 42:13

Right, that was beautiful. Thank you so much for sharing, and thank you for your time, Alexia. I'm gonna go ahead and stop the recording.



Alexia Leclercq 42:20

Thank you.