

DOMESTIC WORKERS UNITED
INTERVIEW afc2015027_03480_ms02
Livicia Antoine interviewed by Ninaj Raoul

English translation of interview conducted in Haitian Kreyòl. For transcription in original language, see afc2015027_03480_ms03.

English Translation

00:00 - 00:24

I'm Ninaj Raoul and I'm here at Haitian Women for Haitian Refugees and we're doing an interview on, for the Domestic Workers United (Archie Green) project to put in, um, the Library of Congress and we're here at the offices of the Haitian Women for Haitian Refugees at 208 Parkside in Brooklyn and today is August 30th, 2016.

00:24 - 00:57

Ninaj Raoul (R): What's your name?

Livicia Antoine (L): My name is Livicia.

R: Speak louder for me please.

L: Livicia.

R: Okay. What kind of work do you do now?

L: Home Aide.

R: Mhm. You work with the elderly?

L: Yes.

R: Okay. And where do you live?

L: Brooklyn, New York.

R: Okay. And where are you from?

L: Haiti.

R: Where in Haiti?

L: Camp Perrin.

R: Okay. How did you get started in domestic work?

00:57 - 01:17

L: My child sent for me.

R: Mhm.

L: When I came, she/he got me into babysitting.

R: Mhm.

L: They would pay me \$40 and gave me a check every week.

R: \$40? Every week?

L: Yea...every week and there was one more so there were two children.

R: Mhm.

L: I was taking care of them. He/She was giving me a little money...

R: Mhm.

01:17 - 01:39

L: Now, when I was telling him/her to come get the children, as I was leaving, he/she said "Oh, Sisi, I'm paying you!" I said to him/her, if you were paying me I wouldn't be earning this little. (*unclear*) you're paying me. I just thought of it as watching my grandchildren, giving me some money to buy some things but I didn't think of it as you paying me...

01:39 - 01:57

L: ...because if I was really behind paid to be a caretaker, I wouldn't accept that little bit of money from them, understand? Then, another time, he/she came by the house to pick up the child and left... the child was either hot, he/she was crying, or he/she was hungry...now, he/she called me and asked, what did I give to the child? I said to him/her, what could I give him/her? Just what you brought for me to give to the child...

01:57 - 02:17

L: ...oh, yes, as soon as the child came, he/she has been crying nonstop. Now, she was telling her husband to call me. The husband didn't want to call me because he's in the army and calling me as if he was the army was supposed to make me afraid. Now, when she told the husband to call me, the husband didn't pay her any mind, he didn't call me. But, he/she came to call me to ask me, what did I give to the child to eat?

02:17 - 02:37

L: ...I said what you brought over (*name unclear*). He/she said, yes, ever since the child came, I see he/she has been crying nonstop. I said to him/her, well if he/she is crying nonstop, either he/she is hot or hungry, go wash him/her up and when you're done, feed him/her. And just like that, he/she went to do that and the child stopped crying, he/she ate, he/she laid down and fell asleep.

R: I understand. Okay. How long have you been doing this work?

02:37 - 03:10

L: It's been six years...

R: Okay.

L: ...since I've been doing it.

R: How many houses have you worked in, during those six years?

L: Hmmm...during those six year, how many houses, I just stay working at my child's home and have been doing "home care" since 3 years.

R: Mhm. But, for example, do you take care of children in two homes?

L: No, he/she usually brings them to the house where I am. There are two children that I bring to school...

R: Okay.

L: I have to go pick them up from school.

R: And in the other type of work that you do, how many other houses have you worked in?

03:10 - 03:33

L: In the other work that I do now, I've worked in 1, 2...

R: Approximately,

L: I've worked in three. I'll say three.

R: Okay. Can you tell me how, like in the work that you do now, what a normal day is, how does it usually go?

L: (*unclear*)

R: From the morning time, when you get in, until you finish. What responsibilities do you have and what do you do?

03:33 - 03:59

L: The responsibility that I have is to prepare food for the person to eat...

R: Ok. At what time do you start?

L: I start at 9:00...

R: Start from the very beginning up to...

L: I start at 9:00 to 1:00 because I only have 4 hours...

R: Mhm.

L: And after that, every 15 days, I have 2 days. I used to start at 9:00 all the way to 5:00. But they came to change it. Now, it's 9:00 to 4:00.

R: Okay, give me an example of a typical day...

03:59 - 04:28

L: One day...I work... with someone.

R: What do you do?

L: Now, the woman came to ask me about "clock" that messed up her phone, that I should not "clock" and she messed with me for that, she spilled oil on the ground in a way that when the old person would get up, he/she would have fallen.

R: She spilled oil on the floor?

L: Oil on the floor. Now, when I arrived, I saw that in time and I went to get some detergent and water and I put...

04:28 - 04:52

L: ... I even almost fell because my sneakers were slippery on the bottom. I was wondering where that oil came from, she poured the oil...but before I had left in the afternoon, I cleaned.

Now, when I came in the morning, I took (*unclear*). I ran. She did it on purpose so that the old person would fall on my watch. But, I was able to clean it up in time. Now, when she looks at me, sometimes she cuts her eyes at me, as if to say that she has a problem with me.

04:52 - 05:25

R: I understand. So, what qualities do you need in order to kind of work?

L: What do you need? I need to know since the old person isn't able to, when they're eating, when they are taking food to eat, his/her hand is trembling...now, I usually take the food, and put it in his/her mouth and he/she will say, thank you my child, not everybody will do the things that you do for me. Now, I make some stew for him/her. When I make the stew for him/her, I will try to put to feed him/her. Now, I see that every time I put food in his/her mouth, he/she has a tendency to choke...

05:25 - 05:50

L: ...so now I try to make it easier for him/her. I blend it up. The person's child says, no, don't blend it up, just give it to him/her like that. Sometimes he/she will go to the bathroom, as if to go pee, and I try to go with him/her so that I can help him/her so that he/she doesn't smell like pee, and he/her child will come by and block me from entering. He/she will say to the elderly person, you can do everything by yourself, you don't need anyone, understand? That's how he/she does it.

R: Mhm.

05:50 - 06:23

L: And the elderly person will always talk about me, even when I'm not there because he/she says that I treat him/her well. The work that I do for him/her, not every child will do that for a parent.

R: Mhm. But what other things do you have to know in order to do this kind of work?

L: Other things that you have to know, like...

R: Regarding food for example...

L: Regarding food, you can't give people just any kind of food. Just what he/she can eat. What he/she likes to eat. And there are ways you must prepare the food for him/her. You have to always rub his/her head, talk with him/her a bit. Ask him/her if they like what you do for them, understand?

06:23 - 06:53

...that's how I deal with them.

R: Mhm. What kind of training must you have in order to do that work that you do?

L: The training that I have in order to do this work, because when I went to take the HHA course, they showed me how to work well with people, understand? Now, if the person tells you to do something for him/her, you must do it. You can't tell them you're going

to do what you want to do. Where they send you is where you have to go...

06:53 - 07:20

...what he/she tells you to do is what you have to do. That's the training, understand?
You can't just do what you want to do.

R: You've never had any other training for this work?

L: No, it's in...the training I've had, there are some places that treat me very well, understand?

R: You've never earned a certiicate, a...?

L: Yes, I've earned a certificate.

R: What did you learn?

L: Home Health Aide.

R: Mhm.

L: A certificate in...

R: Nothing else?

L: After that, I took some at Domestic Workers, understand, which helped me a lot...

R: Mhm...

L: Understand?

07:20 - 07:48

L: Because, now I am able to support myself, after God, I can say it is because of Domestic Workers. If it were for my children, I wouldn't know anywhere. When they go out with you, they go out in a car. Even if, for example, you don't know how to speak English and they are speaking and you ask them to speak with you in English and the translate in Kreyòl, they say to you, well, I spent a lot of money learning how to speak English, why should they speak Kreyòl with someone who speaks Kreyòl, or speak English with you. Understand?

07:48 - 08:12

R: Okay. Is there anything else that you learned?

L: Another thing that I learned was CPR at the HHA, in Domestic Workers.

R: Mhm.

L: I learned CPR. Like, if the child were to have a problem or fell, how I should treat them, all while calling for someone, their parents, or a doctor...

08:12 - 08:27

(voice in the background)

R: Okay, I'm really hot. *(laughter)* I'm hot.

L: I'm hot too. *(laughter)*

Unknown Voice: You want to stop for a moment?

R: Yea.

Unknown Voice: Okay.

R: I'm sorry.

(unclear voice in the background)

08:27 - 08:46

R: What's the last question that I asked you?

(unclear voice in the background)

R: Okay. Well, when you're taking care of a child, we're on? Okay. When you're taking care of a child, is there a certain way that you can make them fall asleep?

L: Yes.

R: Tell to me about that.

08:46 - 09:09

L: As soon as a child looks like they are sleepy, you can see that they are warm, wash them up, feed them, burp them, play with them, tell them "sleep", pat their bottoms, and sing for them.

R: Mhm.

L: And they will fall asleep.

R: Okay.

L: They will lay down and sleep.

R: What other things do you to make a child eat vegetables or food that is good for them?

09:09 - 09:30

L: You have to play with them (*kissing sounds, laughter*) until, and while they are laughing, you put the food in their mouth, saying "eat it, eat it, eat it, good, good, good" and just like that, you play with them so that they can eat.

R: Okay. And what if you need to make them stop crying?

L: If I need them to stop crying?

R: When they are upset?

09:30 - 10:01

L: You'll do the same thing. Place them on your shoulder and rock back and forth with them.

R: Mhm.

L: And you're walking. Say, "Look, look, like that, here". Glve them a toy and play with them as you rock back and forth.

R: Okay.

L: And you do something...

R: Do you ever use something like when they are sick, something natural to help the children?

L: To help them, you can make a little, if they have a cold, they're young, so you can't make just anything to give them...

10:01 - 10:32

L: ... if you have some langichat tea leaves, you don't even have to boil it. You just boil a little water and steam it in the water, make some tea and give it to them. A little bazilik tea, understand? These little things...they are young so you can't give them just anything.

R: Mhm.

L: Yea.

R: Okay. Is there anything special that you've done that you teach the people that, your employer, the people that you are working for?

L: No. (*unclear*) The people that I work for, I don't really work with people. I work.. with my child, those people.

10:32 - 10:57

R: Mhm.

L: I stay working there.

R: And their families?

L: Well, they are the ones, with them. Now, when you do something for them...one time when the child wasn't able to go to the bathroom, now, I took a little straw and I passed some castor oil on his/her bottom. I gave it to him/her so that they could go. I passed a little castor oil so that he/she wouldn't have to push so hard. That's what you have to do to make the child go.

R: Okay.

10:57 - 11:26

R: What part of the work do you like the most?

L: But (*coughing*) the part of this work that I like the most is when the people take me into consideration. You understand? They know that I am a person. I work with them. They don't mistreat me. There are some places where you work, the people mistreat you. Like, I would say, you're not human. They are the ones who are human. They yell at you. Understand? And they do what they want to do and you're the one that has to clean it up. The person won't clean it...

11:26 - 11:57

R: Mhm.

L: Understand? And there are other places there I work, the person's child, for example, like when I'm doing homecare work, if I go to do something, the person's child, if he/she asks me for something, they won't even let me go get it. Tell me that I can relax. And they will go get it for their parent.

R: Mhm.

L: Other places, they just yell at you... it's not good.

R: Okay. This answers another question. What part do you hate the most?

L: That is the part that I hate the most, when the person is yelling at you, giving you terrible work to do, that's what I hate. But the person is paying you so you can't hate them. *(laughter)*.

11:57 - 12:11

R: Where you are working now, what kind of relationship do you have with them?

L: Well, the relationship is good now.

R: Okay. Is there a relationship that you had with a child that you used to take care of that you really miss/remember?

12:11 - 12:41

L: No, the children that I used to take care of are my grandchildren and they are still with me, understand? And when he/she as little, they would come and say "Grandma, where is grandma? Hi grandma!" Sometimes, the mom would make a mess, the way she was, you would have to leave and not stay in the house but because of the children, they way the children are, giving you hugs. Now, you tell yourself, if you leave, this will hurt you, you will miss them and so you stay.

R: Mhm. How do manage your feelings/emotions while you're working with a family or with a child?

12:41 - 13:08

L: You try, even if you see something, pretend not to see it. You just let it go. You understand, but you don't understand. You pretend that you don't see.

R: Mhm.

L: You tell yourself not to react the same way that the person does.

R: Do you feel that they respect the time that you, the amount of time that you work, your hours, when there are holidays, things like that? Do they respect you?

13:08 - 13:36

L: Yes.

R: That thing...

L: Sometimes. There are times that they pay you and they only pay half...

R: Okay. What does that mean? What do they give you?

L: Like, if I work for 4 hours on a holiday and I go in to work, I work, they are supposed to pay you \$40, they will only give you \$20.

R: Mhm. They never give you a day off?

13:36 - 14:03

L: They pay you for days off.

R: Okay.

L: Even if they don't give you the full amount that they are supposed to give you, they still pay you for the day off. It wasn't always like that long ago. But with the law that Obama passed that says that they have to pay you for your days off, they pay it. But, you know they have to stiff you somehow. They don't give you all of it.

R: Do they ever exploit you or any other worker that you know because of reasons having to do with immigration status.

14:03 - 14:31

L: For immigration status...

R: It doesn't have to be you. It can be someone else that you know too.

L: Yes, that has happened to some people. I don't know...

R: Okay. You never heard of that happening?

L: Yes, I have heard of that. When people are speaking but they don't speak about it with me. I can't (*unclear*) speak about it myself.

R: What have you heard?

L: Sometimes, I hear when people are speaking, they say what has happened regarding their immigration. Either they go and they don't get their papers or they paid some money and what was supposed to be done, didn't happen. I sometimes hear those kinds of things.

14:31 - 15:00

R: Which means, the people that you work for or the people that the people you know work for, do you know if they have ever been mistreated because of their immigration status or if they don't have their papers, are they mistreated, I don't know...?

Do you ever share anything of your culture or family heritage with the people that you work for or help out?

15:00 - 15:32

L: What do I have?

R: Mhm, um, for example, anything cultural, like a song, when you were telling me that you sing for the children...

L: Yes. If a person doesn't know the song, if I know I can... (*unclear*)

R: You can sing in your language...

L: I sing in my language...

R: A story...

L: I can share what I have. If someone says they are going to do something, I can say no, if I were you, I wouldn't do it that way. I would wait for God to work on my behalf.

R: Okay.

L: That's how I operate. I never think badly of others. I always see the good for people.

R: How do you balance your personal life with your family life with your work life?

15:32 - 16:02

L: My personal life... when I am sick, I go to the doctor...

R: Hm?

L: I go to the doctor...

R: Mhm...

L: And I take care of myself because if you don't take care of yourself, there is no one who will take care of you.

R: Mhm. In that case, you won't be able to work.

L: You can't do anything.

R: Okay. So, if you don't take care of yourself, you can't take care of other people?

L: Mhm.

R: Are you part of any organization or group?

L: I am not part of any organization. I take part in my church which I attend...

16:02 - 16:37

...and I also participate in Domestic Workers, Haitian Women for Haitian Refugees. I participate in these. Other than that, I don't go anywhere else.

R: Okay. When you are doing domestic work, do you feel like you are part of a community or a larger group?

L: If you are working in a house, you are part of the community because if someone passes by and puts some dirty dishes in the sink, I will come by and wash it. That means you make up part of the community. If you were not part of it, you wouldn't do that. Because you would leave it there and little critters would just take over the house...

R: Mhm...

16:37 - 17:06

L: Understand? You tell yourself, you shouldn't act the same way as the other person. They dirty things, throw them in the sink and leave them there. You're the one who has to come and take care of it.

R: When did you first start participating in Domestic Workers United? How did you hear about it?

L: Mrs. *(unclear)* invited me to join.

R: Do you remember when?

L: I don't remember *(unclear)*

R: What year...?

L: *(unclear)* If I tell you that I remember, it wouldn't be true.

R: Mhm. And...mhm? You were going to say something?

L: No, I said I don't remember when.

R: Okay.

17:06 - 17:34

L: But I remember at that time, I had started school...you started/created Haitian Women for for Haitian Refugees in the year 2008...

R: Mhm?

L: And at that time I remember I started. But I don't remember when I started going to...

R: ...to meetings?

L: ... to the meetings?

R: Okay. What did it mean for you and your work when they passed the Domestic Bill of Rights in 2010?

17:34 - 18:03

L: I was very happy because when Domestic Workers passed that law, there was this one person who was doing domestic work in someone's home and they would beat them and not pay them. Domestic Workers protested and there was a lawyer on it and we won the case, which made me very rejoiceful.

R: Ok. As for the law that they passed, when they used to go back and forth...

L: To, to Albany?

R: Mhm.

18:03 - 18:36

R: Talk to me about that? What was your experience?

L: Oh...

R: Did you go?

L: I went to Albany...actually, I can't remember (*laughter*).

R: Mhm.

L: Because you know now, my mind is... (*laughter*)

R: Did you speak with the politicians?

L: Yes, they asked us why did we come there?

R: Mhm.

L: We said, "because..."

R: You can speak freely...

L: (*laughter*) We came there because the people who work in homes are people that are being mistreated. They don't know that they are human beings working. Because the people who are working in the homes are just like any other person...

18:36 - 19:00

...which means they are entitled to their own laws. They are supposed to get vacation days just like their employers do.

R: So, how did that affect your work when the law passed?

L: Mmm...I don't... (*laughter*) I don't remember...

R: No problem. What would you like to see happen with the law that passed?

19:00 - 19:28

L: I would like the law to keep going.

R: Okay. From your perspective, is the Domestic Workers United organization important to people like you who work in homes?

L: Yea, it's important to people who work in homes because they help the people know some things that they didn't know before.

R: Are you happy with the impact that the Bill has had, the law has had?

L: Yea...

19:28 - 20:00

R: What would you like the politicians to know?

L: I want them to know about all the bad things that are happening so that they can start to help them organize. To start and to finish because sometimes they start things that they do not finish.

R: Mhm. What skills would you like to learn?

L: Learn?

R: Mhm.

L: If it were for learning, I would like to learn a lot of things but at this time, I (*laughter*) I don't have...

R: No, for example, if you could take a course on something right now, what would you like to take?

L: If I were to take a course right now, I would like to go to school to learn...

20:00 - 20:30

...to know. I would like a computer course. I would like to learn all the things that are good for me, god willing.

R: Mhm.

L: I would like to learn them.

R: Okay.

L: But, unfortunately... (*laughter*)

R: What did Domestic Workers teach you?

L: It taught me the laws of the work that I do. How to work with people. You have to know the rules of the job because when you are working in someone's home, if you are going to take care of a child, you have to focus on that child. If you are going to take care of a table, you have to focus on that table...

20:30 - 20:55

R: ...Èske w pa gen okenn dènye mo ou ta renmen ajoute?

L: Non.

R: Pa gen anyen ou ta renmen pataje avèk nou ke w poko di?

L: M gen anyen ankò. Ou pa bezwen mande m ankò. M p ap sonje.

R: Enben, nou fini wi. Mèsi Livisia.

L: Ok, mèsi.

R: That seems like it went by faster. (*laughter*) I feel like I skipped some pages. That's

why I was looking (*laughter*). Mèsi anpil Livisia.

L: Okay.

R: Ou byen pale.

(unclear voices in the background.)

20:55 - 21:28

R: ...Do you have any final words that you would like to add?

L: No.

R: There is nothing that you would like to share with us that you haven't already said?

L: I don't have anything else. You don't have to ask me again. I don't remember.

R: Then, we're done. Thank you Livisia.

L: Okay, thank you.

R: That seems like it went by faster. (*laughter*) I feel like I skipped some pages. That's why I was looking (*laughter*). Thanks a lot Livisia.

L: Okay.

R: You spoke well.

(unclear voices in the background.)