

GLOSSARY OF HAITIAN PHRASES

Throughout *Blan Fou*, the Haitian language is written without direct in-line translation. Kreyòl Ayisyen (Haitian Creole) is as beautiful and complicated as Haiti and its history. It survived as an oral language and was written sparingly, using vaguely French phonetics (in my notes, in any case). The events of the novel occurred when Haitian Creole was first being adopted as an official language, in addition to French.

In 1991, non-Haitians (blan) referred to the language as "Haitian Creole" while Haitians claimed it as "Kreyòl Ayisyen". So without further negotiation, both sides settled into "Creole" and "Kreyòl" since they sound the same audibly and no one wrote much down anyway.

In Chapter: Escape...

“Mal leve”

English: Not a direct translation. Similar to “Someone not raise properly”

Usage: General use term for anyone who is causing trouble for someone else. Often followed by “bastard” or other slur.

In Chapter: Arrival...

"Koupe tet. Boule kay."

English: “Cut off their heads. Burn their houses.”

Historical context: Attributed to Jean-Jacques Dessalines, leader of Haiti’s revolution against French slave owners.

It is thought to be both a rallying cry for his troops, but also a strategy to prevent the French from recolonizing Haiti after it became the world’s first republic of former African slaves. It is important to note that the statement was directed specifically at French interests. Polish

legionnaires (who defected from the French) and Germans (who did not participate in the slave trade) were spared and offered full Haitian citizenship.

In Chapter: Missionaries...

"Voodoo"

English: The term "voodoo" is often a term used disparagingly by Westerners to describe Haiti's folk religious traditions. Haitian practitioners use the term "Vodou" or "Vodoun."

Usage: An aspect of Vodoun that has been portrayed in Western literature, are the gods or "lwa" or "loa". Lwa are spiritual figures rooted in West African religious traditions, often blended with names of Catholic saints. In this novel, Baron Samdi (Lwa of the Dead) and Agwé (Lwa of the Sea) are mentioned.

"Kompran?"

English: "Understood?"

"Tout sanble."

English: "Everything looks the same."

Usage: Literal or in this case, "I hear you, but my mind remains unchanged."

"Sak pase?"

English: "What's up?" or "What's happening?"

Usage: Casual greeting. Less formal than "How are you?"

"M'a boule!"

English: Direct translation is difficult. Can be meant literally as "I'm fired up!"

Usage: Often used with facial expression to indicate sarcasm, "I'm barely making it" or "maintaining".

In Chapter: Networks...

"Komo o ye? Non mwen se..."

English: "How are you doing? My name is..."

"Gro neg"

English: "Big man"

Usage: Not a direct translation. General term for any man, regardless of skin color (not just a "black" man)

"Tap-Tap" or "Camion"

English: "Taxi" or "Truck" (Public transit)

Usage: Used interchangeably to describe the public transport vehicles painted with vivid decorations:

"Tap-tap" usually refers to the small Toyota pickup vehicles

"Camion" is often used to describe the larger school bus or truck sized vehicles

"Ti kob"

English: "A little bit"

Usage: Implies a financial donation. Similar to English phrase, "Can you spare some change?".

"M pa gen anye pou ou."

English: "I don't have anything for you."

Usage: Not, "I don't have anything". Acknowledges that the request was fair and valid, but indicates no help will be provided at this time.

Alternative usage: Each word can be emphasized for different effect. For example, if "anye" is emphasized it is much more emphatic, "I don't have ANYTHING for you."

“Andeyo”

English: “Over there”

Usage: Not a direct translation. Refers to anywhere other than Haiti

“Mayin moulin”

English: “Corn meal”

Usage: Term for a meal of beans over corn meal (instead of with rice).

“Ki kote”

English: “Where is”

Usage: Followed by a noun

In Chapter: Protect and Serve...

“Cherie, pi belle peyi, pase lot peyi”

English: “Haiti my dear, my beautiful country. More beautiful than any other country”

Usage: Opening stanza to Haiti’s national song

“Tout blan sanble”

English: “All white people (foreigners) look the same”

Usage: Ironic reversal of the racist phrase used by southern American Marines during the US invasion and occupation of Haiti (1915 – 1934).

“Ti Mon”

English: “Little Man”

Usage: Common general nickname. Can be dismissive or affectionate.

“Ou vle dlo coconut?”

English: “Would you like water of coconut?”

Usage: Coconut water (not milk) which is lost in the processing of coconut for export.

In Chapter: Self-Defense...

"Ti vagabon"

English: "Little thief"

"Tet cho"

English: "Hot head"

Usage: A crazy person with very bad judgment.

"M pa pale Angle"

English: "I don't speak English"

"Titid"

English: "Little one"

Usage: Fond nickname for President Aristide, because he's so diminutive in size.

"Bouki net"

English: "Maximum Bouki"

Usage: Reference to a Haitian proverb where "Bouki" constantly gets himself in trouble due to stupidity and gullibility

"Pale cho"

English: "Hot talk"

Usage: Dangerous or particularly heated speech.

"M' ale"

English: "I'm going"

Usage: Anywhere else, not specific. Can be followed by place, as in "M ale Zeta Zuni".

In Chapter: Safety First...

"Bagay"

English: "Thing"

Usage: Singular or plural. Can refer to a single item or a whole collection of "stuff"

In Chapter: Resilience...

"Ti legliz"

English: "Little church"

Usage: Little is used to emphasize that this church is not necessarily a part of the "big" Catholic church hierarchy.

"Ti groupma"

English: "Little group"

Usage: "Little" emphasizes the relationship of the small group to the small church, without the hierarchy.

In Chapter: Choices...

"Mwen regret sa. M' bezuin ale."

English: "I'm sorry. I need to go."

"M' ap tounen"

English: "I will return."
