Glossary of Haitian Terms

ajoupa A temporary structure used as a home.
annavan Forward march.
blan White. In the first place, all foreigners in Haiti. Secondly, Haitians who are light-skinned can also be called blan. However, a very dark-skinned foreigner is also blan because he or she is not a native Creole speaker.
bòs Boss: a master in any vocation.
bouret A large wheelbarrow with one single wheel used by sturdy men to transport heavy loads in the cities.
comida A kokorat who waits in front of a MINUSTAH base for a handout. Comida is the Portuguese word for street kid.
degoche The first step in an apprenticeship; a small course to learn the basic principles of any discipline.
ebenis Cabinet maker, furniture maker.
houngan A male Vodou priest.
kafou An intersection of streets.
kantè A truck designed to transport merchandise.
kay A home.
kivèt A tub for washing clothes.
klarin An alcoholic beverage made from sugar cane.
kokorat A street kid. Kokorats search through garbage piles for food and anything that they might be able to sell. They have no home. They live outside of families and are unemployed.
konbit A peasant work collective for a full day.
konpa Style of Haitian music.
koutche  A person who brings together buyers and sellers for a range of products, including real estate, employment, car rental or purchase. A business person touching all interests.

kout lè  The fatal breeze that the San Pwèl blow on their victims.

lakou  A group of several small houses belonging to members of an immediate family.

lougarou  Vodouists who can transform into any animal during the night. They can stay in human form and fly as a result of a fire that burns in their buttocks. They search babies and either steal their soul or suck their blood. In both cases, their little victims die.

lwa  A Vodou spirit.

madriye  Thick planks of wood used in the crafting of furniture and construction.

mambo  A female Vodou priest.

marinad  A spiced dumpling.

mason  Mason.

mawon  During the time of the French colony, a slave who escaped his owner to live free in the mountains. Today, anyone who flees from his or her responsibilities. Also, the colour brown.

mekanik  A mechanic.

mera  A peasant work collective for a half day.

ofis  A piece of furniture like a china cabinet, but with sliding glass doors instead of doors.

pépè  Second-hand goods from North America sold by street merchants throughout Haiti. Although most commonly used to describe second-hand clothing, it refers generally to all second-hand goods sold in Haiti.

plasaj  Common-law marriage.

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**ranyon** Clothes and other fabric too worn, stained, and ripped to be of further use.

**rechau** A small oven that uses gas or coal, hammered out of scrap metal by travelling artisans called “recholye.”

**restavèk** A child given to another family who is victim of abuse and exploitation.

**San Pwèl** A kind of Vodouist who circulates during the night. When they meet people in the streets, they emit a breeze that will be fatal within hours. They also have a magic rope made with human intestines and fibres from the sisal plant with which they lasso their human victims to transform them into animals, such as cows and horses. They can even eat the people that have been transformed into cows.

**sòs pwa nwa** A sauce made out of black beans passed through a strainer or a blender or a mortar and served with rice or cornmeal.

**sousou** A sycophant; a yes-man.

**taptap** A transportation service. A pick-up truck transformed to carry approximately a dozen passengers along specified routes. It is private business in the place of public transportation.

**tayè** Tailor.

**tet ansanm** “Heads together.” A term to call for unity or cooperation.

**ti bourik** A chair used to aid mothers in childbirth (literally, “little donkey”).

**tikounouk** A very little house, often squeezed among others, as in slums; a shanty.

**tonton makout** A soldier in the service of the Duvalier regime.

**vèvè** Symbols to communicate with the Vodou spirits. Each lwa, or spirit, has its own vèvè.

**viejo** Haitians who spend many years in the Dominican Republic.