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Translation as Performance and Engagement: Performing Philemon from a Modern Caribbean Perspective

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Abstract

This introductory article addresses the use of performance criticism in the translation of Philemon as a means of critically engaging a modern Caribbean audience. The aim is to elicit a hermeneutical appropriation, which faces, in one way or the other, the polemic of condoned New Testament slavery, the reality of the Atlantic slave trade, and the liberating message of the gospel, which in the concrete case of Philemon is expressed rather subtly. The point of departure is that oral performance played a key role in the composition and dissemination of the original Scripture texts. This, combined with the salient fact that orality plays a key role in Creole language cultures, provides a fecund terrain for the translator. As an illustration, an integral translation for performance in Papiamentu, a Caribbean Creole, is juxtaposed with a provocative fictional response by the historical character of Tula, the Curaçaoan revolt leader of 1795.

Keywords

Caribbean perspective, Creole language, orality and translation, Papiamentu, performance criticism, Philemon, Tula slave revolt

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1. Introduction: Paul's attitude to slavery and the modern Caribbean perspective

For a while now I have been interested in the silence of churches in the Caribbean region on issues of slavery and the way the New Testament seems to approve the Roman status quo.[1] This silence on the part of the church community and the general failure by a sizable part of the church community to engage the texts meaningfully with regard to these sensitive issues has coalesced with an interest in how orality is key for understanding Caribbean identity. At the same time it is orality that happens to be the more fitting context for the spreading and production of the NT text. These observations have led to a fruitful coming together of orality issues and performance as seen from two poles: the ancient Greco-Roman world and the reality of the Caribbean communities.

The latter is characterized by a situation of interaction and co-existence of different languages and different registers within the same language, that is, *heteroglossia*. The different European languages co-exist, as languages of education, commerce, law, and official communication, with the Creole languages that draw their words from European languages and their underlying grammar from African languages. These Creoles express the very identity of the peoples in a more emotional or visceral manner. The sociolinguistic situation of Creole languages varies from outright self-rejection in many communities, such as the French-speaking and English-speaking Caribbean, and outright acceptance and officialization in places like Haiti, Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao, where the local Creole is part of the school system and very much accepted across racial, socioeconomic, and religious lines.

The year 2013 marked the celebration of 150 years since the abolition of slavery on the islands of the Netherlands Antilles (Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao), which are still linked constitutionally to Holland in one way or the other. But on the island of Curaçao, the celebration that has become more popular over the years is the Tula revolt of 1795.[2] In an attempt to bring the meaning of the text of Philemon to a modern audience in the Caribbean, I propose a performance of the text interlaced with comments in the historical voice of

[1] This article is a practical paper which gives an introduction to issues regarding performance of and engagement with the translated text. A more exegetical discussion of the book of Philemon by the author, which includes another type of suggestion for "performance," will be forthcoming in an article in this journal, "Ethics and Bible Translation: Rethinking Philemon from an Emancipatory Perspective."

[2] This revolt was memorialized in 2013 in the movie *Tula: The Revolt*, featuring a tremendous cast, including the well-known actor, Danny Glover.

Tula, who questions Paul's implicit preference for a more evolutionary approach instead of a more revolutionary one (Leinders and Doyle-Du Breuil 2013).

At times, the old truth that Paul was a "child of his time" in terms of issues like the status of women and ethnic discrimination has prevented the modern reader from finding in his writing the seeds of change, or even a subversive outworking of the gospel in a way that challenges our contemporary society. It is indeed clear that the early Christians advocated in part a policy of accommodation, as in the case of the apostle Paul, so as not to bring unrest to the Greco-Roman world and have the new faith be rejected as a *religio licita* (permitted religion). However, in another sense, it is exactly the letter of Paul to Philemon which, although camouflaged in diplomatic language, seems to give the most encouraging hints of a disapproval of the institution of slavery from a modern emancipatory perspective. In that letter, Paul, when asking the slave master to take back Onesimus, uses redemptive language in which he makes the slave equal to himself and part of the household of God (Phlm 1.10, "my son, whom I begot in prison"; 1.12, "receive him as you would receive me"; 1.16, "more than a slave, as a beloved brother").

There has been a decades-long debate in the academic world as to the exact purpose and nature of Paul's letter to Philemon, with extensive Greco-Roman rhetorical studies having been applied to the text. Indeed, since the work of James Kennedy, New Testament Studies has appropriated a great deal of Greco-Roman rhetorical studies. But it is surprising to note that not much attention has been given to the fact that, despite the existence of written texts, ancient rhetoric had more to do with orality and performance. This is true of Philemon, as of the rest of the New Testament (see Botha 2012 and Horsley 2013, viii-xi). As to orality in ancient times, I do not take a very dogmatic or fundamentalistic stance on this issue: orality was intertwined with written text; written texts were also very important in the Greco-Roman world.

Another question arises when one talks about Philemon and performance. Was Philemon not a more private letter, meant to be read in private so as not to cause the recipient to lose face in public? But then are the references to the different addressees ("the church that meets at your home," "to Apphia," "to Archippus") just rhetorical? Opinions on the matter vary. For an oral performance approach it suffices to point out that even though the letter in its primary setting was private, it became a public letter in a process that ultimately caused it to become part of the canon. Marcion very early on included this letter among the Pauline Epistles. So the public oral performance of the letter very quickly became part of its

distribution platform. On the other hand, it is clear that the letter is explicitly addressed to different people besides Philemon, including the church at his home; as mentioned already, it is also directed to Apphia and to Archippus. Though the references to other people besides Philemon could be a polite nod to the protocol of the days, the letter itself can be divided into three parts, like Romans, Corinthians, or Galatians, which are clearly public letters. This gives even more reason to believe that the letter was meant for public presentation and consumption, even though it has a private "form," at least in part.

Research in different academic areas has shown that the world of the New Testament was dominated by orality and that the very small elite group that could read and write was also oriented towards oral performance, and not just writing and reading as in modernity. After the invention and widespread dissemination of printed books, a new perspective came into vogue. It is not just a matter of saying that most people could not read and write but also a matter of accepting the fact that performance was, and still is, a valuable context for at least placing the text within its correct communication platform. This does not mean that we can or will recover the original context of communication in which the letter was produced. Translation studies has long since moved away from a strict notion of equivalence to a more interpretative view of translation as approximation. Thus even in written translation we can only approximate the different layers which the communicative act of the letter in its initial reading or presentation entailed. In other words, the translator always has to choose which aspects to highlight and which to leave implicit, depending on the constraints and possibilities of the language of translation, its culture, the purpose of the translation act, and its intended audience. The way we perceive translation as a genre is key here: What kind of expectations do we have as a church community or modern readers of Bible translation and its performance, whether it be through silent reading, public reading, performance, and/or other art forms?

Before translating or performing the letter, a letter like Philemon, or any ancient letter for that matter, has to be placed within its proper historical context of delivery and communication:

a. The letters were obviously not all written by Paul himself, but often dictated by him (e.g., Rom 16.22). At different places we find Paul including his own name, either as a kind of signature, or in the case of Philippians and Philemon maybe even as a legal attestation that he will pay or stand in for financial debt or arrangements that had been incurred.

b. Paul's letters often include a co-writer. Until now we have not taken the mention of a co-writer seriously enough in our understanding of the communal nature of authorship. In the case of the letter to Philemon, it was most probably not intended to be a personal correspondence between Paul and Philemon alone. The letter was probably written to be read out in public, so as to exert maximum influence on Philemon, but in a diplomatic manner, so as to honor him in front of the small community. We need to take into account that the house churches were very small groups (Phlm 1.2, "to the church that meets at your house"), which included a sizable proportion of family and household members in the case of wealthy patrons.
c. There are some indications that often letters in the Greco-Roman world functioned as a script for the carrier, who would embody the message in a public or private reading to the recipient, not only reading the letter as such, but also using the letter as a skeleton to explain unwritten motives and thoughts of the writer.

Whatever the exact context of oral performance in ancient times, a modern performance as a way of Scripture engagement would take the following aspects into account:

a. Phonetic and sound features of the text. How would the text have sounded in the Greek language, and how did or do sound patterns in Greek and then in the translation language help the performer memorize and perform the text?[3]
b. A focus on the rhetorically relevant features of the text, which includes a mapping of semantic, rhetorical, and "spatial" units for use in performance, such as:

    1. Timing
    2. Proximics (gestures and body language)
    3. Intonation
    4. Target audience performance setting
    5. Goal and purpose of performance
    6. Spatial mapping (use of available space)
    7. Use of natural and "spontaneous" props (objects)

[3] An extensive example of how one could go about mapping the Greek text according to segments called colons has been presented by Lee and Scott (2009). The point is that, independent of the phonetic system that one applies to Koine Greek and different manners of reading, the system as a sound system functions as a mnemonic aid. There is no claim here of recovering the "original ancient reading or performance" as such.

2. The case of Philemon as a performance piece

The performer who performs Philemon for a modern audience has to start with a very strong, clear purpose in mind. Exegetical issues that might remain as ambiguous or optional have to be clarified beforehand by the performer.

A list of relevant questions and issues might include the following:

1) Was Onesimus a fugitive? Or did he seek Paul's mediation for the cruel treatment he had received from Philemon?
2) Is Paul asking Philemon simply to accept Onesimus back as a slave?
3) Is Paul hinting at a subversive and evolutionary overthrow of the slave–master relationship by urging Philemon to accept Onesimus now as a brother, even as he would accept Paul himself? Or is this just a kind of adornment, to make the text sound nice?
4) Is the function of Paul's writing of his own name rhetorical or is it a legal acknowledgment of a debt, as is found in other letters in the Greco-Roman world?
5) Are we asking the audience to sympathize with Paul, Onesimus, or Philemon?
6) Is Paul being manipulative in a negative sense or is he being manipulative in a good sense? What is the difference as acted out in performance?
7) Paul speaks well of Philemon and heaps praise upon him, and thus uses a strategy called the *capitatio benevolentiae*, the purpose being to capture the goodwill of an audience at the beginning of a speech or appeal. Even though the praise is based on reality, is he not using it as a rhetorical device to mold the heart of a very harsh master, who treated his slaves cruelly even though he had accepted the Christian faith?
8) What effect does the choice of different types of persons in the audience, who at times can be asked to impersonate or just "stand in" for Onesimus, Philemon, and others, have on the audience? Does the color or race of Onesimus and Philemon influence the reception of the letter's performance? Do implicit assumptions about race, color, and socioeconomic status that are not expressed in silent reading become key in the interpretation and assessment of the text when they move visually to the foreground in performance? And more generally, what about the race and background of the performer vis-à-vis the audience?
9) What choices of words, intonation, gestures, and body movement could the performer use to color the text in favor of or against Philemon?

10) How does the performer deal with the fact that Onesimus is an "object of discourse" and not so much a "subject"? The play on words with his name ("Onesimus" means "useful") explicitly shows a kind of utilitarian perspective on him as a slave, his position in society, and relationship to Paul and Philemon.

The performer can influence the reading of the play on words ("once he was of no use to you but now he has become useful") through different performance strategies:

a. Qualify the intonation of the play on words as sincere, thus showing that Paul was "a son of his times."
b. Qualify the intonation of the play on words as ironic or sarcastic so as to show that Paul was just echoing the status quo as to the relationship between slave and master.
c. Qualify the intonation as something Paul stumbles upon as a "smart alec" ad hoc remark, where use of the meaning of the name sounds like a parenthetical statement and surely not an important part of his argument.

3. Concrete performance of Philemon

a. Text on its own

The performer can choose simply to perform Philemon as an example of Greco-Roman rhetoric and a way to "engage" the modern reader with the text. As mentioned already, different choices will have to be made as to text, lexicon, proximics (gestures and facial expression), spatial orientation, intonation, and so on.

b. Juxtaposition: Combining integral presentation of biblical text with non-biblical text

The performer can choose to present the text next to another text, which can serve as a way of reinforcing, challenging, or setting another interpretative lens. For example, the letter of Pliny the Younger to Sabianus can be used to contrast the historical situation, drawing parallels or calling our attention to differences between the way Paul pleads for Onesimus and the way Pliny the Younger, a second-century Roman lawyer, pleads for a runaway slave.

Another scenario would be to present the text next to a modern text on slavery and thus invite the audience immediately to consider the

hermeneutical implications of Philemon for their own reality. This is the approach of an experimental performance which I have been working on since 2013. I will end this paper by giving a summary of the way this translation for performance was composed for a Caribbean audience. I alternated between the text of Philemon and a fictional text of a historical slave figure, Tula of Curaçao, who led a failed slave revolt in 1875. The performance piece maintains the integrity of the text of Philemon, although translated for performance. Interspersed with blocks of texts featuring Paul's voice, the voice of the revolt leader Tula is heard. The person of Tula listens to the text of Philemon and challenges the notions of slavery, and, moreover, Paul's and especially Philemon's attitude, from his own perspective. It is left to the audience to determine whether he, Tula, has understood Paul's position with regard to slavery, or whether the voice of the suffering Tula has the right to engage sacred text in a critical manner!

What follows is an introduction to the historical context of the Tula character and then a translation for performance interspersed with the voice of the slave leader in Papiamentu, the Iberian Creole language of Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao, three Caribbean islands off the coast of Venezuela.

c. Dramatic performance: Philemon meets Tula, the eighteenth-century Curaçaoan slave revolt leader

Tula (died October 3, 1795) was the leader of the slave revolt on the island of Curaçao, situated in the southern Caribbean Sea, off the coast of mainland Venezuela. The impact of his fight for freedom was so great that until this day the Curaçaoans do not celebrate the day of abolition of slavery in the Kingdom of the Netherlands but are more interested in the day that Tula and his comrades stood up against the colonial regime. In Suriname, for example, which shares in the history of the Dutch slave trade and colonial history with the islands, many slaves of African origin escaped and formed independent communities in the interior. Such people were known as Maroons (from the Spanish-Portuguese word *cimarrón*, meaning "runaway, fugitive, feral"). In the nineteenth century the Dutch government signed a pacification treaty with the Maroons because they could not be defeated, but for the rest of the slaves in the city and other plantations the "keti koti" (breaking of the chains) meant indeed actual freedom, and there was not one great slave revolt which is commemorated to the same degree as in Curaçao. This is probably because the slaves who were prone to revolt had already found an escape inland in the vast tropical rainforest of Suriname with its unreachable waterfalls.

Thus the day of the revolt is more important than the actual abolition day of July 1, 1863. With the passing of the years people's perception of the slave revolt and its leaders, Tula, Karpata, Louis Mercier, and Pedro Wakao, as criminals has changed drastically, leading to a sense of national pride in their role in the fight for human freedom. One of the most crucial and interesting moments during the revolt was when Tula met the Catholic priest Jacobus Schinck. In that conversation it turned out that Tula knew the ideals of the French Revolution and had his own hermeneutical approach to the Bible, which turned out to be more humanistic and more egalitarian than that of the priest. The priest saw it as his duty to pacify the slaves so as to avoid bloodshed, while Tula saw it as his duty to fight for basic human dignity:

> Father, do not all the persons spring from Adam and Eve? Was I wrong in liberating twenty-two of my brothers who were unjustly imprisoned? Father, French liberty [n.b.: Liberty, Equality, Fraternity] was a disaster for us. Each time one of us is punished, we are told: "Are you also looking for your freedom?" One day I was arrested, and I begged mercy for a poor slave, when I was liberated, my mouth was bleeding, I fell on my knees and I cried to God: "O divine Majesty, O Most Pure Spirit, is it Your will that we are ill-treated?" (Lampe 2001, 141, translating Schinck's journal [Paula 1974, 269])

These words of Tula, who had taken his last name "Rigaud" from the great Haitian general Rigaud, who fought in the American war for independence and afterwards became a right-hand man to Toussaint L'Overture in the Haitian revolt, offer a rich insight into the mind of this Caribbean leader (Phaf-Rheinberger 2008, 132). The revolt actually started very peacefully and then turned violent, because of the fundamental difference in views between the plantation owners and the slaves. One thing is clear: the slaves had more sophisticated intellectual arguments at their disposal than many would have thought. There are historical records around the turn of the nineteenth century which show that in Papiamentu, the language of Curaçao, Aruba, and Bonaire, there were children's songs in vogue among the freed slave population in which the dictum of the French revolution, "*liberté, egalité, fraternité,*" was sung.

d. National Bible Society production: A proposal

When we turn then to the annual celebration of the Tula revolt and the manumission of slaves in 1863 by the Dutch crown, we find a unique opportunity for a Bible Society (regional or national) to focus upon the whole issue and to engage it with Scripture promotion. This would also be the case in

many places in the Caribbean and the wider Americas region, both north and south, each with their own slave past. In different seminars on intersemiotic translation (IST), sponsored and organized by the Nida Institute over the past years, experts in the fields of communication and Bible translation have acknowledged the great need for multimedia and non-print Scripture dissemination and engagement. As the summary whitepaper of the second IST seminar states,

> In the language of ancient rhetoric, media translating in all its aspects (text, audience, introduction, evaluation) asks of Bible societies an investment in ethos, logos, and pathos. An investment in ethos is a reaffirmation of the character of Bible societies and their commitment to presenting Scriptures in multiple languages and formats; an investment in logos is a reaffirmation of the need to critically study the audience and its requirements with the same diligence as we study the source text; and investment in pathos is a reaffirmation of the need to treat engagement not as a hoped-for consequence of Bible translation but as a feature designed into every project thanks to an appreciation of the complex nature of "text," an enlarged understanding of audience understanding, an acceptance of production steps far different than those in the print medium, and a willingness to trust assessment tools and processes that measure success in media presentations of the Bible. (Intersemiotic Translation Seminar 2012)

The proposal to Bible Societies and other Bible distribution agencies is to explore producing material around the issues of historical slavery and liberation in the coming years, where the book of Philemon is used as a way to elicit interest and engage the national debate on the history of slavery, its subsequent impact, and the humanizing essence of the gospel. How does the evolutionary approach to slavery abolition in Christianity function and how do the two different readings of Scripture, as applied to slavery, function? On the one hand, we see how Scriptures were used and abused to condone, approve, and even stimulate slavery, and on the other hand, we see that others take their cue from the liberating passages of Scripture that have condemned slavery.

As part of this production one could propose different presentations where the different voices, and thus different ways of understanding the letter of Philemon in Papiamentu or other Creole languages, can be heard.

e. *Concrete proposal for performance*

Ward and Trobisch (2013, 80) correctly state about modern Scripture performance that

> A performance doesn't have to follow the script literally to be recognized as a faithful rendering of the biblical witness. There are three possibilities:
>
> 1. Following the text closely and interpreting it through gestures and movement.
> 2. Staying within the narrative world of the story, but telling the story in one's own words, exploring the background of the events, switching perspectives, adding details, and embellishing.
> 3. Placing the conflict of the narrative in a contemporary setting.

In this particular situation I would suggest that in order to maximize the rhetorical effect, the performance could contain the following elements or a strategic combination of two or more:

1. A short exegesis of Philemon, focusing on the social-historical context of that writing.
2. A short presentation of elements of Tula's revolt (film can be watched).
3. A presentation of a dramatic piece involving Tula, Philemon, Onesimus, and Fr. Schinck. Preceding or following that dramatized piece, an opening or closing monologue can be presented.
4. A presentation of the translation of Philemon for performance intertwined with the voice of a modern or historical slave figure.[4]

So in a sense what follows is a combination of Ward and Trobisch's proposal to follow the text closely through gestures, intonation, and presentation, and their second suggestion to place the text within a contemporary setting. The benefit of the combination is that the text as text is respected and communicated integrally, while the interspersed "voice from the present or past" functions as a hermeneutical device to heighten the relevance for a particular audience.

Within the limited scope of this writing I have chosen to save an in-depth analysis of translation choices in performing a Creole language for a subsequent writing. Suffice it to say that the translation is more poetic, using emphatic non-default grammatical reformulation in Creole, as compared to when the text is translated as an example of the expository written genre in the language. Lexical choices are made to reinforce each other and to evoke emotional responses. In relevant places we have added footnotes to explain certain translation choices. In a translation for performance, at least in Papiamentu, the tendency is to include fewer discourse markers and fewer

[4] This performance can be seen on the You Tube link, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8lVFbDnadwI.

logical connectors since the audio-visual elements will fill in these gaps. However, the performer must have a clear sense of the relationship of the different elements of the text in terms of semantics, pragmatics, and, of course, rhetorical intention; in other words, the repetition and use of words with the same or contrasting meaning has to be consciously exploited or highlighted, the actual meaning of a phrase in the context beyond its linguistic features has to be kept in mind, and the impact upon the audience both visually as well as in terms of performative speech acts has to be monitored. An actual translation for performance will include directions for spatial movement, facial expression, gestures, intonation, volume, use of silence, and direction of looks between performer and audience. But due to time and space constraints, I will present a much fuller discussion of these features in the future, when tackling the actual interplay among exegesis, hermeneutics, and performance techniques and processes.

Performance: Letter to Philemon – reaction of Tula

Letter of Philemon

1 Esaki ta karta
This is [a] letter
di Pablo,
from Paul,
i di ruman Timoteo,
From sibling Timothy
Pablo prezu pa kousa di Kristu-Hesus;
Paul emprisoned for the cause of Christ-Jesus
ta pa Filemon, kompañer'i trabou,
it is for Philemon, fellow of work

2 ta pa Iglesia, reuní na su kas.
It is for the church, gathered at his house
Karta tambe pa Apfia, nos ruman muhé,
Letter also to Apphia, our sibling female
Karta tambe pa Argipo, kompañer'i lucha.
Letter also for Archippus fellow of fight

3 Dios nos Tata, duna boso
God the Father give you
Señor Hesu-Kristu duna boso
Lord Jesus-Christ give you
grasia i pas.
grace and peace

Response by Tula (slave revolt leader)

Filemon, Filemon,[5]
Philemon, Philemon
Skucha bon Filemon
Listen good, *Philemon*
Bo n' tende anto Filemon
Have you not heard (then) Philemon
Skucha bon Filemon
Listen good, *Philemon*

Lesa mi ta lesa den karta sagrado
Read I do read in holy letter
Ta ku masha kachèt mester kumindá bo
(that) with lots of respect you have to be greeted
Pa kombensébo ku hende ta util
(so as to) convince you that (a) human being is useful
Hende ta mas k'util.
(A) Human being is more than useful

4 Mi Dios mi ta gradisí,
My God I do thank
Ora mi kòrdabo den mi orashon,
When I remember you in my prayer

5 pasobra hopi fe den Señor Hesus bo tin
because lots of faith in (the) Lord Jesus you have
Segun mi a tende,
From what I hear
Stimashon pa Dios su pueblo bo tin.
Love for God his people you have.

6 Mi ta resa, pa e fe
I pray for the faith
ku bo ta kompartí ku otro kreyente,
that you share with other believers,
hiba na komprondementu berdadero di tur kos bon
lead to understanding true of all good things
ku pa Kristu nos por hasi.
that for Christ we can do

7 Mi ruman, bo amor
My sibling, your love

[5] The strophe has its own cadence and rhythm and can easily be learned by the audience. It becomes a chorus which challenges the audience to interact with the text of Philemon in an active, critical manner or to react critically against the Tula figure. This will help to ensure a meaningful interaction and/or discussion.

a hasi mi mashá kontentu
has made me very happy
kurashá mi hopi,
encouraged me a lot
pasobra el a sirbi pa animá kurason di e rumannan.
Because he has to animate (the) heart of the siblings

> Filemon, Filemon,
> *Philemon, Philemon*
> Skucha bon Filemon
> *Listen good*, *Philemon*
> Bo n' tende anto Filemon
> *Have you not heard (then) Philemon*
> Skucha bon Filemon
> *Listen good*, *Philemon*
>
> Ta trasta mester trasta ku bo
> *Flatter has to flatter you*
> Hunta stropi na bo boka
> *Put honey at your mouth*
> Pa por bisa bo ku bo ta mal robes
> *So as to say that you are badly wrong*
> Pa por bisa bo ku bo ta mal brua
> So as to say that you are badly confused

8 P'esei derecho mi tin di bisa bo kiko hasi,
That is why with what right I have to tell you what to do,
Ora mi apelá na Kristu.
When I appeal to Christ.

9 Tòg a base di amor,
Though on (the) basis of love,
un petishon mi ta preferá hasi na bo.
A petition I prefer to do to you.
Ami, Pablo un hòmber bieu kaba,
I, Paul a man old already
asta prezu awor pa kousa di Kristu
even imprisoned now for (the) cause of Christ

10 Mi ke pidi bo pa mi yu Onésimo;
I want to ask you for my son Onesimus;
ta den prisón mi a bira su tata spiritual.
it is in prison that I have become his spiritual father.

11 Un tempu e no tabata sirbi bo pa nada,
A time he was not useful for anything
pero awor el a bira útil pa nos tur dos,
but now he has become useful to two of us,

manera su nòmber mes ta nifiká.[6]
just as his name means.

Filemon, Filemon,
Philemon, Philemon
Skucha bon Filemon
Listen good, *Philemon*
Bo n' tende anto Filemon
Have you not heard (then) Philemon
Skucha bon Filemon
Listen good, *Philemon*

Pachi[7] Pablo pone preshon
Old man Paul put pressure
Pachi Pablo no papia ko'I kèns
Old man Paul do not speak foolishness
Ku trabou'i katibu n' ta bal nada
(to say) that work of slave is not worth anything
Ku mi t'ei djis pa ta "util."
That I am (exist) just to be "useful"

12 Mi ta mand'é bèk pa bo;
I am sending him back to you
ta manera mi kurason mes
as if my heart itself
mi ta ranka saka manda pa bo!
I rip out and send to you!

13 Gana di ten'é serka mi, mi tin
Desire to have him with me, I have
pa e por a yuda mi na bo lugá,
so that he can help me in your place
tanten mi ta prezu pa kousa di e bon notisia.
while I am imprisoned for the cause of the good news.

14 Sinembargo mi no ke hasi nada sin bo aprobashon,
Although I do not want to do anything without your approval
pa bo no haña bo ta hasi un bondat fòrsá,
so you will not find yourself doing a good, forced,
ma dje manera akí bo por hasié di bo mes boluntat.
but in this way you can do it from your own will.

---

[6] This line had to be included to explicitly explain the wordplay with the name *Onesimus* to a modern audience. It is the equivalent of a footnote in a written text.
[7] Term of endearment for an old man.

Filemon, Filemon,
Philemon, Philemon
Skucha bon Filemon
Listen good, *Philemon*
Bo n' tende anto Filemon
Have you not heard (then) Philemon
Skucha bon Filemon
Listen good, *Philemon*

Ai malai ai malai ei
(lamentation sound)
Ai malai ai malai ei
(lamentation sound)
Si bo tabata konosé doló di katibu
If you do not know (the) pain of slave(s)
Pablito lo bo no a saka bo shiri shiri,
(*Dear) Paul (diminutive)*
you would not have to take out your guts,
Bo yu sin doló, mand'é bèk.
your child-without-pain to send him back.

15 Por ta mashá bon:
Could be very well:
pa un tempu el a alehá for di bo,
For a time he has gone away from you,
djis pa bo hañ'é bèk pa semper.
Just so you can find him back for ever.

16 Pasobra awor e no ta djis un simpel katibu:
Because now he is not just a simple slave:
mas ku un katibu e ta un ruman stimá.
More than a slave he is a beloved sibling.
Anto spesialmente pa mi, e ta mashá stimá!
And especially for me, he is very well loved.
Pero pa abo: mas stimá ainda, komo katibu i komo ruman den Señor.
And for you more: more loved, as a slave/servant and as sibling in (the) Lord.

17 Ke men si bo tin mi pa kompañero,
That is to say if you have me for (a) collaborator,
risibí Onésimo manera lo bo a risibí mi mes.
receive Onesimus as you would have received me.

Filemon, Filemon,
Philemon, Philemon
Skucha bon Filemon
Listen good, *Philemon*

Bo n' tende anto Filemon
Have you not heard (then) Philemon
Skucha bon Filemon
Listen good, *Philemon*

Di Adam ku Eva nos ta bini.
From Adam and Eva we come
Boso Buki mes ta bisa.
Your Book itself says it
Si nos tur ta bin di tera,
If we all can come from the earth
T'un lokura abusá di esun
It is a madness to abuse
ku ta puluwé den tera.
the one who plows the earth.

18 Si el a perhudiká bo den ki forma ku ta
If he has damaged you in whatever manner
òf si e ta debe bo algu,
or if he owes you something
laga esei pa mi kuenta.
leave that for to my account.

19 Awor mi mes man ta skibi esaki:
Now my own hand writes this:
'Ami, Pablo, ta paga bo bèk!'
"I, Paul, will pay you back!"
Mi n' tin nodi' kòrda bo ku bo debe serka mi ta bo mes!
There is no need for me to remind me that your debt with me is yourself!

20 Sí, mi ruman, hasi mi e fabor akí pa Señor;
Yes, my sibling, do this favor for me for (the) Lord;
animá mi kurason komo ruman den Kristu!
animate my heart as sibling in Christ!

Filemon, Filemon,
Philemon, Philemon
Skucha bon Filemon
Listen good, *Philemon*
Bo n' tende anto Filemon
Have you not heard (then) Philemon
Skucha bon Filemon
Listen good, *Philemon*

Esta kurashi!
What (a) boldness!

Esta tribí!
What audacity!
Paga bèk, …..paga bèk??? paga bèk!!!
Pay back,……pay back???? Pay back!!!
Sinbèrguensa ta bo mester paga bèk.
(You-without-shame) you have to pay back.
Paga bèk, t'a bo mester duna bèk.
Pay back, you have to pay back.
Ladron di alma, ladron di bida, ezè chupadó di sanger![8]
Soul robber, life robber, blood sucking vampire!

21 Sigur mi ta skibi,
For sure I write,
Sigur mi ta ku bo ta skucha mi.
For sure I know that you hear me.
I mi sa ku lo bo bai mas leu ku loke mi ta pidibo.
And I know that you will go beyond what I ask you.

Filemon, Filemon,
Philemon, Philemon
Skucha bon Filemon
Listen good, *Philemon*
Bo n' tende anto Filemon
Have you not heard (then) Philemon
Skucha bon Filemon
Listen good, *Philemon*

Changa el a changa bo Filemon
Cornered he has cornered you Philemon.
Komader Liberté na banda suit.
Kamader[9] *Freedom to the south.*

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[8] *Èzè chupadó di sanger!* "Someone who can remove a person's skin and fly through the air at night in search of a new born child from which it can suck blood. It was believed that by throwing salt on the skin of *Zeh* or *èzè* (or *lèngè*) it would leave and never return" (Allen 2007, 244). The use of this term is particularly strong in the mouth of the slave leader and is used to show his indignation with words that come from his own spiritual worldview as an African slave.

[9] *Kompader* (m) and *komader* (f) are terms of endearment used by the parents for the godfather or godmother of their children. They are also used as general terms to express friendship and/or affinity. In this case it is used to show the unity among the three cries of the French Revolution in an attempt to help the audience confront the ethics of Scripture and the ethics of a revolution which was very anti-religious, but did have something in common with the humanizing message of the gospel. Of course, the audience is invited to engage this path after the performance; there is no guarantee it will indeed engage it.

Kompader Fraternité na banda nòrt.
Kompader Brotherhood to the north
I kompèr Egalité no ta bèk ni ost ni west.
And kompèr Equality does not retreat, neither to the east nor to the west.

22 Ahan, . . . prepará un lugá pa *mi* keda,
Aha, . . . prepare a place for me to stay,
pasobra mi ta spera ku Dios lo skucha
because I expect that God will hear,
skucha boso orashon
will hear your (pl.) prayer(s)
i entregá mi bèk na boso.
and give me back to you.

23 Kumindamentu di Epafras, prizonero huntu ku mi,
Greetings from Epaphras, prisoner together with me,
pa kousa di Kristu-Hesus.
for the cause of Christ-Jesus.

24 Kumindamentu di esnan ku ta traha huntu kumi:
Greetings from those who work together with me:
Marko,
Aristargo,
Demas
i Lukas.[10]

25 Grasia di Señor Hesu-Kristu sea ku boso.
Grace of (the) Lord Jesus-Christ be with you (pl.).

Filemon, Filemon,
Philemon, Philemon
Skucha bon Filemon
Listen good, *Philemon*
Bo n' tende anto Filemon
Have you not heard (then) Philemon
Skucha bon Filemon
Listen good, *Philemon*

Ta kua grasia por ta ku bo?
Which grace can be with you?
Hòmber kitadó di libertad,
Man-robber-of-freedom,

[10] The presence in the first verses (1-3) of five names (Paul, Timothy, Philemon, Apphia, and Archippus) and at the end (23-25) another five (Epaphras, Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke) may function as a possible mnemonic device.

Ta kua Hesus a bendishoná
Which Jesus has blessed,
Bo kruel definishon di humanidat?
Your cruel definition of humanity?
Ta kua Dios, Spiritu puru,
Which God, pure Spirit,
B'a mira sklavisá niun hende.
Have you seen enslave anybody?
Mi n' tin kunes ku ta kultura.
Don't care that it is culture.
Mi n' tin kunes ku ta di bo mes koló
Don't care that it is people of your color.
Mi n' tin kunes ku evolushon.
Don't care for evolution(ary change)
P'esei m'a muri den revolushon!
That's why I died in a revoluton!

Filemon, Filemon,
Philemon, Philemon
Skucha bon Filemon
Listen good, *Philemon*
Bo n' tende anto Filemon
Have you not heard (then) Philemon
Skucha bon Filemon
Listen good, *Philemon*

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