

CHAPTER V

Departures

THE DEPARTURE IS THE RITUAL that launches the annual journey of each *folia de reis*. Departures are held at the *festeiro's* house, and at the end of the journey the ensemble returns there to celebrate the festival of the arrival. Although central to the tradition, departures are fairly low-key and intimate events, involving the *foliões*, the *festeiro* and his immediate family, and a few other close relatives and neighbors. They are, however, set apart from ordinary visitations, in that they involve a few ritual acts that are specific to this context. First, departures begin with an obligatory rosary more precisely, a shortened version of the rosary known as the *terço*. The *terço* is also performed at the arrival, but at visitations it is not customary unless the *foliões* have been asked to sing for the soul of a dead relative.¹ Another common ritual act at departures is the performance of the "mission verses" (*versos da missão*), in which the *foliões* state the purpose of the journey. There are also a number of protection rites to ward off any Herods, and the thanksgiving verses are omitted, as the *festeiro* makes no donation to his own festival. Traditionally departures take place at midnight between 24 and 25 December, but such norms can always be stretched to accommodate group requirements, and in São Bernardo only three of the five *companhias* began their journeys in the "traditional" manner while I was among them. The *Folia do Zé Quatorze* departed on Christmas morning so the *foliões* in his group could attend midnight mass; the *Folia do Bacta* departed several days before Christmas, claiming that it was only by starting their journey

early that the group was able to visit all the households that had asked for the blessing of the Kings.²

The departure marks the end of an intense, offstage preparatory phase, in which participants have mobilized their resources to guarantee a successful journey. If the banner has become faded, a new one has to be provided; the *companhia* will have established its itinerary, making sure there are families prepared to provide pouso along the way; the musicians will have prepared their instruments, adorning them with colorful ribbons and plastic flowers, replacing old ones that may have fallen off or become faded over the years; some *companhias* new strings for the instruments are distributed during a final rehearsal so they will sound their best for the journey; some *companhias* wear crowns, and these have to be prepared and distributed to the musicians; other groups have special uniforms which set the musicians apart, and they have to be made ready, as do the outfits, or *farças*, of the *atão*.

These preparations constitute major expenses for the *foliões*, and lengthy discussions take place each year to negotiate how they will be met. Often the *festeiro* takes on part of the expenses, but *foliões* and their families also cover some of the costs, particularly those pertaining to their personal needs. Occasionally the municipal government of São Bernardo helps each of the groups confront some of its initial expenses: in 1987 they each received a check to use as they pleased, but the year before that they were each presented with a new instrument of their choice and several sets of new strings. Sometimes *companhias* are able to secure uniforms for the musicians and other donations by enlisting politicians to mediate on their behalf. In though some financial help may come from outside the community, it is the *foliões* and the families they visit who cover the bulk of the journey's expenses.

On the day of the departure the *festeiro* and his family focus their attention on preparing their house to receive the *folia* and any other guests who might happen to show up. The women prepare coffee and snacks for every-
mobilizing relatives and neighbors to help out in the kitchen and to
cups and other utensils if necessary. The family has to set up an altar for
banner of the Kings in the front room. Some *festeiros* place a manger
on the altar and others surround the banner with flowers and images
saints, such as Our Lady, Saint Anthony, Saint John, Saint George, Saint
nyolo, and other figures of popular devotion. Many of the ornaments
ced on the altar are borrowed from relatives and neighbors for the occa-
on. This intense activity is geared toward setting the stage for the journey,

creating a space distinct from the everyday world. Countless members of the community participate in one way or another in this preparatory process enhancing their sense of involvement in the project even before the actual journey has begun. Their expectations and commitment toward the upcoming journey are thus heightened, predisposing them to a positive evaluation of the event.

Dona Marinha's Departure

In 1987 the Folia do Bacta held the departure on a Saturday afternoon, six days before Christmas. The journey was being sponsored by a *festeira*, Dona Marinha, whose family had made a promise on her behalf to sponsor three folia journeys to help her recover from a severe back problem. For two years running in the early 1980s the family had taken the banner, but the third sponsorship had had to be postponed when her husband died. The family was now in a position to fulfill the final stage of their obligation.

I arrived at her house with some of the members of the *companhia* at around 3:30 in the afternoon, and quite a few people were already there, mostly close relatives and a few neighbors of the *festeira*. The house, a precarious construction of plywood, was set at the far end of a long, narrow plot. Along one side of the plot there were several other smaller constructions, equally precariously built, which were inhabited by the families of a son and a brother, forming an extended family compound, and one other house was occupied by a tenant family. The houses shared a fairly large front patio that had been cemented over, and this provided an ideal space for people to mingle with one another while they waited for the departure to begin.

Soon after I arrived, most of the other *foliões* arrived as well, and some of them were accompanied by a few members of their immediate families. On arrival people greeted everyone, and the *foliões* took their instruments into the house to store them in a bedroom until the singing began. On their way through the front room, most people stopped at the altar for a short moment of individual devotion. A woman who arrived with a few children lifted up the youngest and placed the cloth of the banner over his head and instructed the others to kiss it; she told me this was to protect them against illness during the year. The altar was set on a small table covered with a white cloth, and along with the banner there were a few statues of popular saints, a large framed print of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and two vases of plastic flowers.

The women congregated in the kitchen, while the men remained out on the patio. Some of the musicians were distributing bits of rue that had been rubbed against the banner, and I was informed of its beneficial properties for protecting the *companhia* against Herods during the journey. Occasionally a woman would emerge with a tray of coffee and sandwiches for the guests. The musicians were dressed in everyday clothing, since their uniforms were reserved for special occasions, which meant public presentations and the arrival ceremony; that year, however, they also wore them during the three days they spent making visitations in Arceburgo from 31 December to 2 January.

At around 4:00 P.M. Dona Marinha's son emerged with a bottle of *mé* and a few glasses to serve the musicians a swig or two, which in small medicinal doses was considered necessary to open their throats and help them sing with loud voices. Throughout the departure her son took on all the responsibilities of the *festeiro* considered inappropriate for a woman, so he set off the fireworks at around 4:30 P.M., calling everyone to the rosary. Once everyone had settled into the small front room, approximately thirty people in all, Oswaldir took the role of chaplain (*capelão* or *rezador*) and led the collective prayer, as everyone faced the altar. He recited his own version of the joyful mysteries, which contemplated the Nativity, the journey and adoration of the Wise Men, the Annunciation, and the Presentation in the temple. As is customary, the prayer was recited responsorially, involving everyone in attendance. When they had completed the rosary, the *foliões* formed a queue and each in turn knelt at the altar, where they touched the banner before crossing themselves. Some *foliões* took this opportunity to perform very elaborate expressions of personal devotion, communicating to the Kings—and to others—that, for them, participation in the *companhia* was an act of deep religious commitment. After the *foliões* had blessed themselves, other attendants took their turn at the altar.

After the rosary there was a short break for the *festeira* and the *foliões* to prepare for the musical performance. The *festeira* removed the banner from the altar and took it to the bedroom, where it stayed until called for in the *baixada*. The two clowns, the guards of the banner, remained there with the *foliões* went to the get their instruments, and they tuned them in the bedroom before returning to the altar. Once everyone was back in the front room, the *foliões* positioned themselves to begin their musical performance. When Januário, the *estribilho* player, felt sure that all the musicians were ready, he launched into the instrumental introduction. Oswaldir began the *baixada* with the mission verses:

- 1 Louvado seja meu Deus,
Praise be to my God,
Pra sempre seja louvado.
May He always be praised.
Já rezamo o santo terço,
We have already prayed the holy
rosary,

Já estamos preparado
We are now prepared

- 2 Pra seguir nossa jornada
To follow our journey
Com amor e alegria,
With love and joy,
Pra cumprir nossa missão
To fulfill our mission
E a promessa da família.
And the family's promise.

- 3 Vou pedir para a festa
I will ask the festa
Pra trazer nossa bandeira,
To bring our banner
Pra seguir nossa viagem,
To follow our trip,
Nossa guia verdadeira.
Our true guide.³

As the foliões sang the third verse, Dona Marinha emerged carrying the banner, and she was followed by the bastião, who came out making piercing whoops and howls to accompany the energetic prancing steps they performed on each side of the banner. As the foliões sang, one of the bastião took the banner from the festa and dragged it over the attendants' heads to bless them, and then he returned it to her. The foliões played the estrilho, and the music stopped. In the pause Oswaldir struck up a short conversation with one of the bastião, asking him who he was. He responded by saying that he and his brother were the guards of the banner, and they followed it wherever it went. To provoke the embaixador he asked him if he had any objection to their presence, to which Oswaldir responded that they could stay, as long as they behaved themselves. This the bastião rebutted by warning the embaixador that if he wanted them to behave he should not turn his back on them. This elicited the laughs the bastião was after, and his short performance was over.

Januário struck up the estrilho once again, and Oswaldir introduced the family verses (*versos da família*), which contained the blessings of the Kings. To receive her blessings Dona Marinha stood beside the altar tightly hugging the banner as tears welled in her eyes. Her daughter-in-law stood close

beside her holding her young son, whom she instructed to clutch the banner as well. Though there would be no thanksgiving verses, the foliões expressed their gratitude to the festa and her family by extending the blessing to five verses, which took them nearly twenty minutes to perform:

- 4 Este verso é pra festa
This verse is for the festa
Com toda a sua família.
With all her family.
Está sendo abençoada
They are being blessed
Dos Três Reis de nossa guia.
By the Three Kings on our guide.

- 5 Santos Reis tá despedindo
The Holy Kings are saying good-bye
Pra terra do Oriente.
To the land of the Orient.
Pra festa e a família
To the festa and the family
Deixa a bênção de presente.
They leave the blessing as a present.

- Santos Reis já vai embora;
The Holy Kings are leaving;
Quem quiser pode beijar.
Those who wish to may kiss [the
banner].
Dia nove de janeiro
On the ninth of January⁴
Santos Reis tornam a voltar;
The Holy Kings will return;
Deixa a bênção e os milagres;
They leave the blessing and their
miracles;
Eles desceja um bom Natal.
We wish you a good Christmas.

- Se despede da festa
Saying good-bye to the festa
E a família da senhora.
And your family.
Vocês vão ficar com Deus;
You will stay with God;
Nós vai com os Reis da Glória.
We go with the Kings of Glory.

- Leve a bandeira na porta
Take the banner to the door
Foliões vamos beijar.
We, the foliões, will kiss it.
Ela é a proteção
It is the protection
Pra livrar de todo mal.
To free us from all evil.

At this point Dona Mariinha's son took the banner from his mother and held it over the passage of the front door. The foliões began their exit by kissing the banner before passing under it. In this way they received a holy blessing protecting the group against the potential dangers of the journey. Once outside the house, the banner had departed, and the ensemble began its visitations in the neighborhood to collect the offerings for the festival of the arrival. The first house they visited was Dona Mariinha's son's, which was right next door in the same compound.

The Sacred Frame

Folia rituals are staged affairs that construct a sacred space in which the faithful renew their links with the Three Kings, heightening their awareness of the continuous presence of the Magi among them. This is achieved through the framed enactments of an encounter between humans and saints that gives their presence tangibility. The departure demarcates the onset of this symbolic space by introducing the voices of the Magi into the realm of humanity. The performances of the folia redefine the social sphere, effecting a fusion of the divine and terrestrial domains that places humans in direct contact with the saints. Just as the faithful find pleasure in their encounters with the Kings, it is thought that the Kings appreciate the opportunity to commune with humans. Indeed, the journey is conducted in their honor; it is a gift offered by the faithful to the Kings in fulfillment of their promises, but also as an expression of gratitude for their ongoing protection. Embodied in the banner, the Magi lead the foliões from house to house, such that through humans they acquire the means of reliving their mythic journey. Through the mediation of the musicians, humans and saints participate in face-to-face interactions with one another, entering into reciprocal exchanges of blessings and gifts. It is through the foliões that the Magi are enchanted into the presence of the faithful, and a heightened sense of their protective power is sustained through to the arrival.

To orchestrate the encounter of the divine and terrestrial domains, folia rituals mark the distinctions between the two spheres (Bell 1992, 74) through the use of performative devices that set the ritual space apart from the pragmatic world of everyday life (Bauman 1975, 1992). For the departure, the physical space of the home is prepared, and a number of saints are set on the altar together with the banner. The ritual is conducted through a series of formalized modes of communication, such as memorized prayers and

musical performances, media that contrast with the speech mode of daily interaction. The participants take on special roles which are defined by their ritual functions, and each role is clearly identified and named; some of the participants—the *bastião* in particular—wear special outfits, which articulate with their ritual roles. The whole event is organized by a recognized script that provides directionality (Parkin 1992) to the movements of people and objects throughout the journey.

The departure is central to the journey as a whole, as it is in this event that the transformation of the social space is effected. When the foliões and other guests arrive at the *festeiro's* house, they engage in ordinary social activity with one another as they await the rosary. Coffee and sandwiches are served, and they discuss the upcoming journey as well as a series of mundane themes pertaining to their jobs and family life. That a break from the quotidian world is soon to take place is loudly announced when the fireworks begin to explode, calling everyone into the front room for the rosary. During the rosary the faithful face the altar; it is adorned with the banner of the Three Kings and several other iconographic representations of Catholic saints, forming two separate camps of social beings: humans and divinities. Though in the departure described above the attendants remained standing during the rosary, in many folia communities everyone kneels throughout the prayer, conferring to bodily memory a sense of the divide separating humans from the saints (see Connerton 1989). By thus enacting the distance between the two realms, folia communities safeguard the sacred ahistoric and immutable truths of their religious tenets from the ever-changing and corruptible world of humanity.

Sanctified and removed from the everyday world, the stage is set for the Kings to come to earth to commune with the faithful. Their introduction into the ritual frame is prefaced by the mission verses, in which the foliões make "performatives" (Austin 1975, 4–7), declaring themselves spokesmen of the Kings. When the group begins to sing, the *embaixada* proclaims the group's mission, and this declaration mechanizes the symbolic transformation of the ensemble, turning the musicians into representatives of the Magi; by claiming to be their spokesmen, they become their spokesmen. By becoming the voices of the Magi, they can proceed with the distribution of the blessings. For the blessings the banner is taken from the altar, placing the Kings in the midst of the faithful; the voices of the singers—now those of the Kings—transmit the saints' blessings directly to the devotees, who respond through their donations to the festival.

Once the foliões begin to sing, the *embaixada* becomes central to the en-

actment of the ritual script. This is made especially evident in the various commands that emerge in the verses, as in verse 3, above, in which the embaixador asks the festeira to bring in the banner, or in the final verse, in which he orders the banner to be taken to the door. But it is through the performers in the embaixada that much of the ritual action takes place: as the embaixada declares that the Kings are blessing the family, the family is blessed (verse 4); in stating that the Kings are bidding farewell, they take their leave (verses 5, 6, and 7); and so on. Furthermore, the ritual sequence is organized in terms of the sets of verses that are performed in the various ritual acts of the tradition, which include mission verses, adoration verses, family or blessing verses, thanksgiving verses, encounter verses, and so on. For different types of verse sequences a particular ordering of the attendants is required: for the mission verses, for example, all face the altar, directing their collective gaze toward the saints; for the blessings, the family stand facing the musicians, altering the positionality of the attendants; while the musicians and other guests may have their gaze directed at the family, the family members focus upon the musicians and their message. The roles of the *bastião* are also organized through the embaixada, in that their actions coordinate with the type of verse being performed: for adorations and verses for the souls of dead relatives (*versos de intenção*) they kneel on the floor and remove their masks; on other occasions they dance around the banner facing the musicians; their recitations and verbal banter are inserted in the pauses between the singing, but the level of their reverence—or irreverence, as the case may be—articulates with the mood of the occasion as defined by the ritual script.

While the embaixada serves as the primary medium for sustaining the progression of the ritual enactment, the skeletal framework it constructs is elaborated upon—or thickened—through the use of various communicative media, giving symbolic density to the ritual experience of the participants. Throughout *folia* rituals numerous expressive forms, both verbal and nonverbal, are brought into play, and they promote an experience of the extraordinary among participants. Song texts, gestures, ritual objects, food and drink, spatial organization, musical performance, and so on bombard them, stimulating their aural, visual, tactile, and olfactory senses and provide participants with the sense of being immersed in a whirlpool of disparate motifs (Fernandez 1986).

Plunged into this sea of sensory stimuli, the participants become predisposed to read associations into the motifs, linking them into even larger webs of meaning. These associations emerge from many sources: some mo-

tifs resonate with the ritual script, providing a sense of unity to the collective drama; others are constructed in relation to a shared narrative repertoire, particularly the stories connected with the Nativity and with the miraculous power of the Three Kings; others refer to the social universe of the participants: their commonsense notions and aspirations as well as their extraritual experiences of day-to-day interactions; and still others resonate on a very personal level, eliciting private memories, hopes, and fears. The participants are differentially involved in the proceedings, and they bring their distinct biographies with them, such that they experience the ritual from different vantage points. Thus, the associations each participant makes are unique, and the meanings individuals give to their ritual experiences are constructed around the motifs they find personally meaningful. While the ritual script provides the directionality of the event, the complexity of motifs used in padding it out provides a wide fund of resources for the construction of personal meaning through the shared repertoire.

Ritual Resonances

While the multiplicity of media within the ritual context creates the potential for a never-ending proliferation of associations, the clear framework of the ritual script provides a means of periodically refocusing collective attention upon the proceedings. At each stage of the ritual, particular motifs are presented in the form of clusters that articulate with the ritual script. The concept of motif clusters would suggest that a motif is the smallest unit of symbolic significance within the ritual context. However, I do not intend for the term to be taken this literally: since the significance of a motif derives from the associations it invokes, motifs never emerge in consciousness as isolated units; once a motif is recognized it is already a representation. Furthermore, motifs articulate with ritual action, placing the participants within the webs of association they evoke; meaning is constructed through involvement, enhancing the personal significance of the shared heritage.

The density of ritual clusters varies, as some are more prominent during particular ritual acts, foregrounding restricted webs of association, while others evoke more extended associative webs, giving unity to the tradition by linking the restricted webs into larger wholes. Associations elicited by motif clusters that are built into the ritual enactment could be viewed as "scripted resonances," some of which have an integrative effect, in that they transcend specific ritual acts, and others articulate more closely with specific

tion. As we have seen, their costumes integrate elements associated with fancy and animality, creating an image of undomesticated subhumanity. Their behavior is marked by brisk transitions, fluctuating between expressions of extreme irreverence and extreme deference. This juxtaposition of the comic and the serious is common—if not a defining feature—of ritual clowning the world over;⁷ it is prescribed by their ritual role, rendering them ambiguous figures.

The dominant view of the *bastião* within *folia* communities ascribes to them the role of Herod's spies. As emissaries of the evil King Herod, they stand in direct opposition to the musicians, the emissaries of the benevolent Kings. This opposition articulates with other oppositions evident in the roles of these two types of ritual figure, enhancing the associations evinced by each category. First, while the musicians sing, the *bastião* only speak. Singing, as noted above, is the communicative mode of the saints, which by implication renders speech the human medium. While singing—a mode of coordinated collective activity—articulates social harmony and well-being, speech—the medium for argument (Bloch 1974) and for the expression of personal concerns (Sugarmann 1988)—creates the potential for social discord and the fragmentation of collective interests. Song—a medium which unites—is, therefore, sacred, while speech—a medium which divides—belongs to the realm of humanity.⁸

Similarly, the musicians and the *bastião* display contrasting attitudes toward the donations they receive during visitations. The donations collected by the musicians are given to the banner in return for the blessings, and they are redistributed to the whole community during the festival; the *bastião*, on the other hand, arrive at visitations and begin asking for things without offering anything in return; moreover, what they receive they keep for themselves. Thus, the reciprocity embodied in the exchanges between the Kings and the faithful are distinctly absent in the willful and nonreciprocal accumulation of goods by the *bastião*.

The *bastião* are the focus of attention at several moments during visitations, particularly at *pousos*; yet their comic behavior disqualifies them from being taken seriously. Their self-interested actions, their continuous demands for objects, their manifestations of vanity, and their insulting remarks do not threaten established values; rather, one could say that they elicit the self-satisfied condescension that Arthur Koestler (1964) saw as typically felt toward humorous characters, convincing the audience of its own moral superiority. Because they are unambiguously clowns—or interior beings—they can act in the realm of the forbidden with impunity. In this context, the

actions of the *bastião* allow for a ritualized experience of transgression without threatening the rules of proper social conduct (Eco 1984, 1–3). According to Mary Douglas (1975), however, jokes—or clowning—always have a subversive effect upon the dominant structure of ideas, revealing its conceptual antithesis. Clearly the actions of the *bastião* are undignified; but they also strip those they target of their dignity. Through their clowning, the *bastião* reveal the frailty and the private and the hidden dimensions of people's lives, shattering their self-righteousness. In effect, *folia* clowns reveal the humanity of their victims; behind their public façades lie individuals with the same self-centered urges prominently displayed in the behavior of the *bastião*.

A fundamental aspect of their role, however, is that they repented of their self-indulgent ways on encountering the baby Jesus; thus, their irreverent behavior is juxtaposed to expressions of extreme piety during moments of direct contact with the sacred. At such occasions the clowns remove their masks and kneel humbly in an expression of intense humility. Through these demonstrations of reverence during particularly solemn moments, they appear to state that petty, clownlike behavior is a predicament of the alienated human condition; the transcendence of the self-interested orientation of humankind can be achieved only by allowing oneself to be subjugated by the superior morality of the saints. To domesticate one's infantile and animalistic tendencies and become a moral human being, one must subordinate one's urges to the divinities and the truths they represent. Thus, while entertaining, the clowning of the *bastião* articulates matters of extreme gravity.

Within the ritual context the *bastião*—the embodiment of the human predicament—emerge when the banner is brought into the midst of the faithful. Taking their positions on either side of the banner, they assume their role as its primary defenders. Their emergence with the banner gives dramatic impact to the associations attached to them, while also serving to remind everyone that the moral principles embodied in the figures of the Kings need to be carefully and continuously guarded against human instinct.

While the *bastião* draw forth dense, scripted resonances, their presence can also spark associations among participants that derive from their personal involvement with these figures. Close relatives of *foliões* dressed as *bastião* take a special interest in the performances of their relations; *foliões* who have themselves once worn the *farda* may be reminded of these past experiences when the *bastião* emerge; mothers who made promises on behalf of their sons may remember the miracle the Kings bestowed upon their families; and so on. During a visitation I witnessed in Arceburgo one of the

bastião was taunting some children sitting on the sofa; he would race toward them, head first, mockingly frightening them with his mask, as the children squealed with delight. I was standing nearby with a few other foliões and the head of the household, who seemed particularly absorbed by this playful banter. Noting his interest, one of the foliões told me that the man's son made bastião masks, and a lengthy discussion ensued, in which I was told about how his son's masks were so widely appreciated in the region that even companhias from other municipalities would order them. Then the man produced a stack of photographs of companhias, and he proceeded to methodically point out each of the bastião wearing a mask his son had made.

Closing the Folia

Foliões are highly fearful of forces that might upset the harmony of their associations, and considerable energy is expended to ward them off. The threats requiring protective measures are typically represented through such concepts as Herods, demolitions (*demanches*), works of magic (*trabalhos*), persecutions (*perseguições*), and the evil eye (*mau-olhado*), and the ensemble can be isolated from them through any number of techniques. These rituals are often referred to as *fechamentos* (closures), and they are meant to shield the group against threats to group integrity during the journey. While rituals of closure may occur at any time, they are particularly evident at departures. By performing them in this context, the group embarks upon the journey insulated by a protective armor.

Closures can involve the distribution of amulets of various kinds to the ensemble members, such as ribbons taken from the banner, bits of rue plant, or other small sacred objects, which the foliões attach to their instruments or put in their pockets. Some rituals involve direct contact with the banner; examples of this occurred at Dona Marinha's departure, as when the bastião waved the banner over the musicians at the end of the mission verses, or when the foliões left the house by passing under it. Some embaixadores perform special verses at the departure, which are intended to ward off dangers. At a departure I observed in Arceburgo, Minas Gerais, for example, Antônio Mariano, the ritual leader, began his embaixada by mumbling a few verses that I was unable to make out. I asked a few of the foliões if they had understood them, but no one seemed able to decipher them for me. I was told that only the embaixador knew what he had sung, because he had performed *versos de fechamento* (closure verses) with special magical powers; if the verses were to become public, they could lose their potency.

Rituals of closure are of particular interest to embaixadores, since their prestige is closely linked to their ability to protect their companhias against destructive forces. Thus, for them, they may be the source of dense personal resonances. In mumbling the closure verses, Antônio Mariano drew attention to the breadth of his esoteric knowledge, heightening awareness of his reputation among the members of his group.

The Herods one can encounter during journeys are discussed frequently, and these discussion often elicit extended narratives of how a particular situation was negotiated. Luizinho, for example, once explained to me how he had dealt with a *demanche*:

For example, we arrive at a house where someone wants to do something to us, because at the time of the Kings there was a lot of persecution, wasn't there? There are many foliões in the world who are persecuting others, doing evil, these things, right? The person sometimes says something, or just by looking at them, you already lose your note; the strings begin to break; the instruments start going out of tune. One person sings this way, the other that way, and everything goes wrong. So when we feel it is that thing, we sing three or four verses of the Prayer of Calvary (*Oração do Carrão*), and nothing sticks to us. . . .

Once this happened here in Diadema. I arrived at a house in Eldorado. There was a colored man there who had gone out in a folia de reis, but it wasn't very together, it wasn't good. . . . When we arrived at that house I began to sing. Not a single voice in back came out. The musician tried hard, but nothing came out. And after that everything went out of tune. Even the caixa missed the beat.

I said, "Our Lady!" Then we stopped, tuned all the instruments. When I finished tuning the instruments, we started to sing again. Then I pleaded, "Oh, my good Jesus of Calvary, help me."

Then I began to sing four verses of the Prayer of Calvary. Then the instruments stayed in tune. Then I sang for him there.

He said, "You have an incredible protection, so you do. You were supposed to leave here all out of tune."

Then I said, "The Prayer of Calvary helped me."

Then he showed me everything he had written, all the verses that he was going to destroy me with. He wanted to write them all down for me, but I didn't want them.

"I don't want to destroy anything," I said, "especially of the folia de reis. I belong to the Holy Kings. Who am I going to destroy?" That's what I

said to him. "I don't want it. You can keep it. You can destroy someone else, but you can't destroy me."

"But I wanted to separate you all so you'd never sing Kings again."

You know how it is: bad people, right? You know how it is with bad people, people who are envious of this, who can't do what we were doing. His folia de reis was no good.

During closure rituals, foliões are reminded of stories such as this one, and they enhance the group's self-image, giving the members added confidence to confront threats to the group's integrity.

Though it is generally claimed that the evil forces that affect an ensemble are caused by the envy of outsiders, especially foliões who belong to "disorganized" companhias, foliões are keenly aware that they can be equally—if not primarily—the outcome of internal strife. Stories abound within folia communities of musicians who abandoned their ensembles for having felt slighted by another member of the group. Foliões also tell of companhias that dissolved acrimoniously because of internal discord, but such cases are rather rare, since foliões tend to avoid open conflict by simply removing themselves from humiliating situations.

However hard companhias may strive to preserve a sense of camaraderie within their associations, there is always the possibility that human pettiness will surface at any moment. This danger is particularly acute during journeys, when the foliões remain in close company with one another for long hours over a period of several days. Through the multiplicity of rites and practices in their repertoire, foliões heighten their awareness of the potential conflicts that can emerge in their midst in an attempt to minimize the risks of disintegration. In closing the group they warn themselves to be on guard against their own "bastião-nesses" in order to uphold the harmonious moral ideal of the Magi.

Expressing Devotion

As I stated earlier, departures are rather intimate, low-key events; they are staged for the benefit of the festeiro's family, but the foliões also stage them for themselves. Although the household may be blessed, the departure is not understood as an ordinary visitation, and to demarcate its distinction, it has its own name. The main ritual acts specifically associated with the departure are the rosary and the mission verses, both of which are understood as communal expressions of devotion to the Wise Men. Furthermore, the de-

parture is marked by a number of individual expressions of devotion: when the foliões arrive at the festeiro's house they usually go to the altar to kiss the banner before engaging in conversation with their peers. At Dona Marinha's departure the embaixador scripted in a moment for the expression of individual devotion, which took place between the rosary and the mission verses, and in verse 6 he invited the attendants to kiss the banner.

In popular Catholic communities devotion is understood as a declaration of one's subservience to the moral superiority of the saints, and it affirms one's commitment to uphold their divine truths. In reciprocation for their loyalty, folia communities hope to harness the protective power of the saint. Foliões generally claim that they participate in folia activities because of their devotion to the Kings, and the journey as a whole is conceived of as an act of devotion. The embaixada proclaims their moral order, such that participation in folia activities constitutes a public expression of adherence to these truths. While singing for the Magi is an expression of devotion, it is also a gift to reciprocate for their protective power and to ensure its continued presence in the world. Indeed, many of the foliões participate in a companhia to redeem a promise to the Magi, just as journeys are commonly sponsored to redeem promises.

In performing acts of devotion, the faithful are reminded of their personal experiences of the miraculous power of the Kings, particularly if they are present in the companhia because of a promise. Throughout the journey there are moments for the expression of devotion, but the devotional orientation of the tradition is given special emphasis at departures, as the foliões prepare themselves to confront the journey. By performing a series of devotional acts at this moment in the ritual script, the foliões depart with a heightened sense of spiritual strength to help them safeguard the social ideal of the Kings while en route. While closures may remind the foliões of the types of behavior which can disrupt social harmony, acts of devotion evoke a sense of the ideal toward which they need to strive.

Holding the Banner

Folia communities see the banner as the embodiment of the Three Kings. It depicts the Adoration of the Magi, and foliões refer to it explicitly in their embaixadas as the Three Kings. It is kept on the altar together with other iconic representations of popular saints, and it is held and touched during the blessings to give them greater efficacy. Moreover, it is taken on the journey, the gift of the faithful to the saints, allowing the Magi to relieve their

mythic journey. In folia journeys the banner leads the procession from house to house, serving as a guide to the musicians, just as the star of Bethlehem once led the Wise Men to the Christ Child. To hold the banner is to enter into direct physical contact with the sacred. As an object it is quite heavy, and it seems to get heavier the longer one holds it, continuously reminding one of the weight of the saints—and of the tradition—one is upholding.

The person holding the banner stands facing the *companhia*, becoming a focal point of the ritual act. Blessings are conducted through the improvised couplets of the *embaixada*, and the fact that they are improvised allows the *embaixador* to link their content to the immediate circumstances of the performance context. Thus, they can be taken as personalized messages, and after visitations many people can recite the verses the *companhia* has sung to them during the blessing. During Dona Mariinha's departure, she was systematically referred to as the *festeira*, which marked her relationship to the ensemble. In the second verse, reference was made to her promise, highlighting an episode in her life which her family considered sufficiently serious to warrant three folia sponsorships. Blessings, then, are a means of integrating significant aspects of people's personal biographies into the collective memory of the community.

Just as these telegraphic references spark dense resonances for the person receiving the blessing, they also elicit associations among other participants based on their knowledge of the person's life history. Even though Dona Mariinha had told me about her promise before the rosary had been said, as the musicians moved to the next house one of the *foliões* told me about the pain she had been suffering when the promise was made. Through the blessings different members of the community, each in turn, attract the gaze of the participants, and as they stand before the group bringing back memories of their personal lives, their individuality is publicly recognized and their personhood collectively acknowledged.

It is worth noting that almost every time the *festeira* is mentioned in the *embaixada*, there is also a reference to her family, as in verses 2, 4, and 7. In the folia universe, one's personal identity is defined in terms of one's primary family relations, and the verse sequences through which blessings are transmitted are referred to as both blessing verses and family verses. During blessings people experience a heightened awareness of the place of the family in their social world, and they are reminded of significant family relations in their own lives. To receive the blessing, the family stands as a unit around the banner. By defining the individual in familial terms within the wider social context of ritual interaction, participants are oriented toward an experience

of resonance between family relations and other social relationships, extending their notions of the family to encompass a broader social sphere. Indeed, folia communities perceive themselves in terms of the metaphor of the family, both implicitly and explicitly; through their shared devotion they are integrated into the "family of God." By defining the community in terms of the extended family, people experience a heightened sense of belonging within the wider social network, which reinforces sentiments of mutual obligation and solidarity.

Through the blessings the members of the household are integrated musically into the ritual drama. As they face the *companhia*, they are embraced by the sounds of the music. In the cramped spaces in which folia performances commonly take place, the vibrations of the music generate bodily sensations that heighten the sense of a heavenly presence. These sensations grow as the successive voices enter the ensemble, culminating in the final chord, in which one can feel as though one is resonating sympathetically with the world. The person being blessed carries the weight of the banner while being engulfed by a torrent of sound in which the words refer to the self in terms of collective values. For many people this promotes a powerful emotional experience, and they often cry when they receive the Kings' blessings. Indeed, tears welled up in Dona Mariinha's eyes as she hugged the banner to receive her verses.⁹

Enchanted Webs

Folia journeys are highly scripted traditions, and they are divided into a series of recognized ritual acts and events, each of which is identified by a specific name. To mark the distinctions between the sections, each one is constructed around a specific cluster of motifs that draws attention to a particular aspect of human experience. The departure opens the journey by demarcating a sacred space where humans encounter the Wise Men. As the event that launches the journey, it is geared toward preparing the *foliões* for the days ahead. They assert their devotion to the Kings, and clothed in their will to uphold their moral truths, they acquire the authority to speak on behalf of the saints. However true to their convictions, humans remain humans, and folia rituals remain within a human social space. It is to this truth that *foliões* direct their attention at departures. By reminding themselves of their own humanity, they are made aware of the realities of sociality: if on the one hand it can be the source of rewarding moments of camaraderie, it can

also result in discord, particularly when people remain in proximity to others for extended periods. In highlighting the dangers of the journey, the folíes attempt to reduce the threat of group disintegration and preserve within it an atmosphere of mutual respect and cordiality.

The various motif clusters that emerge during the ritual address specific domains of experience, such as illness, envy, pettiness, generosity, family relations, camaraderie, and so on, each generating its own web of associations. As the associations expand within each web, they start to overlap with one another, and as redundancy sets in, the webs become linked into larger webs, unified by a diminishing set of core motifs. Within the folia tradition the three motif clusters with the densest scripted resonances are unquestionably those that emerge around the banner, the bastião, and the musical repertoire. While the banner is the embodiment of the Three Kings, the bastião refers to the human condition; the music is the means of bridging the divide between humans and saints. The folia repertoire was given to humans by the Kings as a way of domesticating their natural tendencies. Indeed, one could say that the unifying trope of the tradition as a whole is embodied in the final chord of the roada, the ultimate expression of social harmony. It is this chord that punctuates each message from the Magi, and each time it erupts, their vision for humanity is momentarily enchanted into the world.

Adorations

DURING THEIR JOURNEY OF 1987/88 the Folia do Bacta arrived at a house one evening, and as usual the drummers began beating their instruments to let the family know they were outside. However, instead of allowing the ensemble to enter, the head of the household took the banner but remained standing in the doorway with his wife at his side. She held a lit candle, which served as a sign (*sinál*) that there was a manger scene (*pre-sépio*)¹ in the front room. It meant that the visitation would be special, since the companhia would have to “adore” the Holy Family, as the Kings had done on their arrival at the crib, before they could perform the blessings. Acknowledging the signal, Owaldir began the embaixada at the doorstep with the following verses:

Santo Reis veio chegando,	Holy Kings were arriving,
A estrela clarou,	The star brightened,
Avisando nesta casa	Warning that in this house
Nasceu Jesus Salvador.	Jesus the Savior was born.
Dá licença pra bandeira,	Give leave to the banner,
Pro bastião e a companhia.	To the bastião and the companhia
Vou louvar o seu presépio,	I shall praise your crib,
Jesus, Filho de Maria.	Jesus, Son of Mary.

As this verse was being sung, the couple moved into the house, and the companhia followed them in, without interrupting their musical performance. The bastião made their way to the crèche, where they knelt down and removed their masks and hats to show their respect to the sacred figures. The musicians stood behind them and continued their singing.

The crib was arranged in front of a small Christmas tree, and it had been placed on a side table, covered with a white cloth, which gave it the appearance of an altar. Much like manger scenes throughout the Christian world, this one had as its central figure the baby Jesus lying in the straw, and to the right and left immediately behind him were Mary and Joseph, both kneeling with their faces turned toward the child. An angel had been placed immediately behind the baby, and a cow, a mule, and a rooster were also present. These figures were housed within a grotto, and a shooting star was placed at the highest point on the structure, just above the Christ Child. All the other figures of the crèche were placed outside this frame. To one side there was a shepherd with a few sheep, and to the other were the Three Kings. Each of the Kings was made to look different from the others: two were white and one was black; their garments were of different colors; the presents they carried were distinct; and each of them wore a different type of crown. The crèche was further decorated with flowers, candles, images of other saints, and a few small toys.

Positioned before the altar, the embaixada proceeded with verses that rekindled memories of the Nativity:

O presépio é a lembrança	The crib is the memory
Que ficou no coração.	That stayed in the heart.
Os Três Reis chegou contente,	The Three Kings arrived with joy,
Ganhou o seu perdão.	Received their forgiveness.
Pra lembrar da profecia,	To remember the prophecy,
Vou deixar pro meu bastião.	I will leave it to my bastião

At this point one of the bastião stood up and faced the couple being visited. He recited a prophecy, as he had been instructed to do by the embaixador, and this was followed by yet another prophecy by the other bastião. Because the prophecies in the repertoire of the Folia do Baeta are quite long, only the second recitation has been transcribed below:

Cesar Augusto assinou	Augustus Caesar signed
O decreto para se alistar.	A decree to enlist.

Todo povo, neste tempo,	All people at that time
Tinha que se apresentar.	Had to present themselves.
Porque era lei do Criador,	Since it was the law of the Creator,
Ninguém podia faltar.	No one could be absent.

Quando a lei foi decretada,	When the law was decreed
Foi todo o povo intimado	All the people were called
Para apresentar na cidade	To present themselves at the city
Dentro do prazo marcado.	Within the stated period.

E todo povo reuniu	And all the people united
Na cidade de Belém.	At the city of Bethlehem.
José e Maria foram	Joseph and Mary went
E se apresentaram também.	And presented themselves also.

Os hotéis e as pensões	The hotels and the inns
Estavam super lotado.	Were overfull.
Não havia hospedaria	There was no accommodation
Para poder descansar.	To be able to rest.

Avistaram a cabana,	They saw a cottage
Cobertura de sapé,	Covered with straw,
Onde foram descansar,	Where they went to rest,
Maria com São José.	Mary with Saint Joseph.

A cabana estava escura,	The cottage was dark
Sem luz, sem claridade.	Without light, without clarity.
José ascendeu a vela	Joseph lit a candle
Pra ficar mais à vontade.	To feel more at ease.

E Maria já esperava	Mary was waiting
E seu esposo também	And her husband also
Que a cabana transformasse	For the cottage to be transformed
Numa lapa de Belém.	Into a grotto of Bethlehem.

E foi meia-noite em ponto	And it was exactly midnight
Quando o anjo anunciou;	When the angel announced;
Surgiu um claror no céu	A light emerged in the sky
E os anjos todos cantou.	And all the angels sang.

Os Reis Magos do Oriente,
Pelo anjo foi avisado
Que nascia em Belém
Nosso Jesus esperado.

The Wise Kings of the Orient
Were told by the angel
That being born in Bethlehem was
Our awaited Jesus.

Arriaram seus camelos,
Seguiram caminho afóra,
Seguindo a santa estrela
Que apareceu nesta hora.

They saddled their camels,
They followed the path,
Following the holy star
That appeared at that moment.

E seguindo a santa estrela,
Os Três Reis Santos contentes,
Para ver nosso Jesus Menino,
Nosso Rei Onipotente.

And following the holy star,
The Three Holy Kings were happy
To see our Baby Jesus,
Our Omnipotent King.

A estrela foi abaixando,
Diminuindo o resplendor:
Foi até chegar na lapa
Onde estava o Salvador.

The star started to descend,
Losing its brilliance;
It went until it arrived at the grotto
Where the Savior was.

Eles chegaram na santa lapa
E Simão encontrou.
Foi a primeira visita
Em nome do Salvador.

They arrived at the holy grotto
And found Simon.
It was the first visit
In the name of the Savior.

E tomou Jesus nos braços
E no templo apresentou,
Dizendo as santas palavras
Quando assim pronunciou:

And he took Jesus in his arms
And presented him at the temple,
Saying the holy words
When he thus pronounced:

“Glória a Deus no alto céu!
Pai Eterno que enviou
Jesus Cristo aqui na terra
Para ser o Salvador!”

“Glory to God in the highest!
Eternal Father who sent
Jesus Christ here to earth
To be the Savior!”

E estas santas palavras
No livro ficou gravado.
Quem estuda, sempre aprende:
Está na escritura sagrada.

And these holy words
Were engraved in the book.
Who studies always learns:
It is in the Holy Scriptures.

Já cumpri minha missão
Nesta lapa de Belém.
Pai, Filho, Espírito Santo,
Seja para sempre, amém.

I have completed my mission
At this grotto of Bethlehem.
Father, Son, Holy Ghost,
Be forever, amen.

After the prophecies, the *bastião* called out the “vivas” to end the adoration.

Bastião: Viva os Três Reis Santo! [Long live the Three Kings!]

Everyone: Viva!

Bastião: Viva toda a companhia! [Long live all the companhia!]

Everyone: Viva!

Bastião: Viva o dono da casa e toda sua família! [Long live the head of the household and all his family!]

Everyone: Viva!

Bastião: Viva agora com emoção! Um viva meu e do meu irmão! [Now an emotional “viva”! One for me and one for my brother]

The audience laughed, and some people answered ironic “vivas” to the clowns. After the adoration the clowns put their masks back on, while the group prepared to begin the family verses.

Encounters with Crèches

Adorations occur only when there is a crib in the home being visited. Since most families do not have manger scenes, the ritual of the adoration is relatively rare. During the journey a *companhia* might encounter only one or two manger scenes a day, and they are often in the homes of people providing pouso for the ensemble. In fact, *crèches* are most common in the homes of families with a special devotion to the Three Kings; by setting up a manger scene the family enhances the ritual script of the visitation at their home. The effort foliões put into their performance of the adoration is duly reciprocated through the meals they are offered by their hosts. If the crib is not at pouso the hosts will probably serve them coffee and *mé* as well as some sort of snack, such as sandwiches, cake, or biscuits, to show their appreciation for the special treatment their household has received from the group.

Adorations, then, mark a special relationship between the *companhia* and the household with a crib, based on their common devotion to the Three Kings. Indeed, adorations set up a complex dialogue between the

foliões and the family, which is articulated through the symbolic repertoire of the tradition, marking a mutual acknowledgement among the parties regarding their special relationships with the Magi. In the example above, the companhia arrived at the house, and the couple opened the door holding a lit candle, which the foliões immediately recognized as a sign that the house had a crib.² Since the couple remained in the doorway, Oswaldir realized they expected the companhia to begin their performance outside the house, and in his verse he made reference to the candle, relating it to the star that led the Wise Men to the manger, demonstrating his recognition of their signal. He then asked leave for the group to enter the house, to which the couple responded, and the head of the household took the banner inside, making way for the companhia. He stood with his wife next to the crib, banner in hand, while the group proceeded with the adoration.

Through their actions, the couple indicated their familiarity with the motifs and the procedural repertoire of the tradition, and the companhia acknowledged this by performing a particularly extensive adoration, graced with not one, but two prophecy recitations. Foliões perceive their encounters with creches as moments in which their ritual and mythic knowledge is put to the test. For this reason many foliões—embaixadores and bastião in particular—see adorations as privileged spaces for the public exhibition of the extent of their sacred repertoire, especially when they realize their efforts will be fully recognized by the household. In such cases they often indulge in extending their performances, taking full advantage of the theatricality they afford. In this way, the foliões and the families they visit are coparticipants in the negotiation of each adoration, mutually confirming their common devotion to the Kings through their recognition of one another's ritual competence.³

Because foliões view adorations as tests of their ritual knowledge, there is considerable controversy regarding the way these events should be conducted. Some embaixadores say that the verse sequences must consist of twenty-five verses, while others claim that one verse should be dedicated to each “animal”—that is, each figure—the family has put in its manger scene, constructing the narrative around the role each character played in the Nativity story. Despite these claims, I never observed a companhia that followed either of these prescriptions. Another point of contention centers on the role of the bastião during adorations. Some groups bar their entrance into a house with a manger scene, arguing that they desecrate the ritual context, as in Alcides's companhia. In others their presence is fundamental, since their manifestations of humility enhance the atmosphere of sacredness

of the adoration. Some groups even allow the clowns to “speak the manger scene” (*falar o presépio*), that is, recite the “prophecies,” hastening the ritual process, as in the Folia do Bacta. Oswaldir claimed that if all the necessary verses were to be sung, the adoration alone could last up to two hours. Regardless of whether or not “proper” procedures are followed, it remains a point of honor among foliões that they are aware of how adorations should be conducted; in fact, it appears that embaixadores are more concerned with indicating their knowledge of proper ritual procedure than they are with actually following it.

In practice, adorations—like all aspects of the folia tradition—are highly fluid events, but the foliões' preoccupation with proper procedure marks their attempts to give them stability; after all, their adorations are understood as reenactments of the Adoration of the Wise Men in Bethlehem, and the Magi could have conducted it in only one particular way. Furthermore, the whole adoration is structured around a set of relatively stable elements. The verse sequences used at these occasions, for example, are fairly fixed: the prophecies of the bastião are memorized, and the performances of each clown display little variation from one recitation to the next; most embaixadores have a repertoire of three or four adoration verse sequences, which they repeat with only slight variations from one manger scene to the next. These verses encapsulate the foliões' interpretations of the Nativity and the journey of the Wise Men, articulating their concepts about the immutable realm of the saints, and their relative stability heightens the sense of timelessness and sanctity of their content.

The adoration verses are performed before the manger scene, and this visual representation is also fairly standardized. Indeed, the arrangement of creches in southeastern Brazil is reminiscent of manger scenes throughout the Christian world, even though they often include a few uncommon motifs, such as a rooster, toys, holy water, an offering plate, and other decorations. The rooster is present because it is commonly said that a rooster crowed when Jesus was born;⁴ the toys, such as soldiers, superheroes and action figures, cartoon characters, plastic animals, dolls, and cars, are emblems of childhood which are thought to amuse the baby Jesus; the holy water enhances the sanctity of the altar; and the offerings collected at the manger scene are either donated to the parish church or to a companhia to help finance the festival of the arrival. (See plate 15.)

The figures on the altar are balanced more or less symmetrically on either side of the crib, and all of them are usually arranged so that they face the infant Child. The baby Jesus, however, appears to be looking into space, at

no one in particular. This arrangement draws attention to the central figure, and it creates the impression that all the figures around the baby are paying homage to him. The frame around the Holy Family, however, sets this nucleus apart from the other figures in the complex, marking its significance as a model for the family unit. All the figures, then, become integrated into this unit, forming a symbolic family, through their acknowledgement of the sovereignty of the baby Jesus.

In folia adorations, all participants in the ritual become integrated into the mythic sphere of the crèche, joining the figures on the altar in their act of deference.⁵ Like many of the images in the manger scene, the *bastião* kneel in humility before the crib, while the musicians stand reverently before it. The household is also integrated into this act of homage, as they stand alongside the altar holding the sacred banner. As they reenact the scene of the adoration, the *foliões* recount the events of the Nativity in song and recitations, fusing the past with the present, thus affirming its relevance to their contemporary lives. In effect, the set procedures, the fixed texts of *canções* and prophecies, the repetitive musical mode of the folia tradition, and the fairly stable structure of the manger scene coalesce at adorations to create a sacred sphere of everlasting truth.

The performance of the adoration is a privileged moment within the folia tradition, constituting a unique ritual sphere in which the motif clusters objectify the *foliões'* vision of the immutable realm of the saints. This objectification is embodied primarily in the fixed texts of adoration verses and in the visual representation of the manger scene, which mutually enhance one another. Through these media the *foliões* articulate their interpretations of the Nativity and the journey of the Magi, and in paying homage to the crèche, they acknowledge the ultimate authority of the mythic repertoire that informs their ritual practices.

The Canon

As the *bastião* in the Folia do Baeta proclaimed in the conclusion of his prophecy, his words reiterated what had been inscribed in the Holy Scriptures; therein resided its authoritative canonical status. Indeed, the ritual journey of the folia de reis tradition is based on the biblical passage in Saint Matthew 2:1–12, which narrates the visit of the Magi to the Christ Child, and numerous aspects of the tradition echo motifs of wide diffusion throughout the Christian world, even though they may not be entirely canonical. The

Bible, for example, speaks of "some magi," which Christian tradition has transformed into "three kings."⁶ Theologians often claim that this occurred because the Bible refers to three presents, and in biblical times these articles were associated with royalty. Furthermore, in Psalm 74 there is a passage stating that the Messiah would be visited by kings who would bow before him to offer their gifts. Already in the fifth century various apocryphal texts had emerged which referred to "three kings."⁷ By the late sixth century they had acquired the names by which they became commonly known in many parts of the Christian world: Melkon, Caspar, and Baltazar (James 1926, 83). Throughout Brazil, for example, the Three Kings are generally known as Melquior (or Belquior, Blechíó, or Brechó, among other variants), Gaspar, and Baltazar.

Many of the episodes of the Nativity narrated in folia adoration verses are clearly rooted in Christian tradition, as in the prophecy recited by the *bastião*, above. The text begins by announcing the census which brought Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem. It proceeds by saying that the inns were all booked, which forced the holy couple to seek refuge in a "dark cottage," or stable, where the Christ Child was born. It tells of an angel who summoned the Wise Men, and they followed the star until they reached the crib. This prophecy also includes the Presentation in the Temple.

Other verse sequences concentrate on other episodes and motifs related to the Nativity. Some begin with a reference to the miraculous conception, calling attention to its importance in Christian doctrine. The Kings' encounter with Herod receives considerable attention, and the verses tell how the Magi promised to return to tell the villain where the baby could be found. The verses are quick to remind the audience of Herod's true intention—to kill the baby—and this often leads into accounts of the massacre of the innocents. Adorations also tell of how the Kings were told to return by different route to avoid encountering Herod again, but even so, some versions tell of a second encounter with Herod, going on to narrate how the Kings manage to escape his grasp. There are also verse sequences that enter into considerable detail in their descriptions of the Magi: they are cited each by name; their origins are given, highlighting that one of them was black; reference is made to their gifts; and sometimes it is mentioned that one of them had a white beard, indicating that he was older than the others.

Alongside these more or less orthodox motifs, *foliões* have elaborated upon the Nativity story, creating what are at times quite fanciful narratives with only marginal links to officially accepted canons. While some of these motifs have become widely diffused throughout the southeast, such as the

representation of the Kings as musicians, others are best viewed as the result of a particularly original individual's imagination. Many fanciful versions of the Nativity are likely to have emerged in the relative isolation of bairro culture, where folioes may have indulged in the continuous elaboration of the world to enhance their social environment far from the control of the clergy. With the expansion of the church into even the most remote areas of the country, however, official Roman Catholic symbolism has been reestablishing its hegemony. But even when folia prophesies appear to be constructed around a set of motifs of wide acceptance in the Christian world, the folioes' localized understandings of the texts are often quite idiosyncratic. Consider, for example, the following adoration performed in an embaixada by Luizinho:

Os Três Reis dormiram sono,	The Three Kings slept,
Tiveram sonho profundo.	They had a deep dream.
O anjo anunciou:	The angel announced:
Já era nascido o Rei do Mundo.	The King of the World had been born.
Assim seguiram os Três Reis	Thus, the Three Wise Kings
Magos,	departed,
Todos três um só destino.	All three with a single destiny.
Partiram pro Oriente	They left for the Orient
Pr'adorar Jesus Menino.	To adore the Baby Jesus.
Seguiram os Três Reis Santos,	The Three Holy Kings departed,
De longe terra vieram.	From a distant land they came.
A viagem era de um ano	The trip took one year.
Mas com doze dia fizeram.	But they did it in twelve days.

I was given an explanation for this text by Zé dos Magos, who claimed that these verses tell why the Three Kings are also known as the Three Magi, or *Magos*. To grasp his explanation, one must be aware that in the caipira dialect *rs* are often omitted in the pronunciation of words, such that "magos" is understood as "*mag(r)os*" (thin people). This is what he said: "É que a viagem era de um ano, mas em doze dias eles fizeram. Nessa viagem, eles sofreram bastante. Passaram fome. Emagreceram, né? Ficaram Três Reis Magos." [It is because the trip would have taken a year, but they did it in

twelve days. On this trip they suffered a lot. They went hungry. They lost weight, didn't they? They became Three Thin Kings.]

The formulaic character of the verses in which the narratives are preserved gives them a certain degree of mnemonic stability over time. Moreover, they are performed with considerable frequency year after year, so folioes are generally quite familiar with the episodes and motifs they embody. Because they are presented in verse form, however, the narrative motifs emerge in telegraphic encapsulations, and entire episodes are compressed into a few lines, which requires the audience to fill in the blanks to make sense of them. An audience that knows the stories is able to fill in the gaps of information and follow the narration without any difficulty. As Rosaldo (1986, 104–9) has shown in his discussion of Ilongot hunting stories, telegraphic narrations can communicate a rich body of narrative detail through allusions to a shared repertoire. Thus, the various motifs in the verse sequences function as "metonyms of narrative" (Smith 1975, 97–100); the compressed episodes invoke associations which refer the audience to a wider collective narrative repertoire.

Telegraphic presentation, however, also creates ambiguity, serving as fertile ground for the emergence and diffusion of quite idiosyncratic interpretations. In his attempt to make sense of the traditional verse, Zé dos Magos humanized the Wise Men.⁸ By presenting them as characters who experienced suffering and hunger during their lifetime, he made them more sympathetic to the human condition. Having themselves undergone moments of anguish, they are better placed to intercede with God on behalf of those who call upon them in times of need. Thus, while his interpretation is amusing to people with an orthodox understanding of what a magus is, it articulates with the wider Catholic ethos in which it has emerged. In fact, I was soon to discover that Zé dos Magos was not alone in his deductions; throughout southeastern Brazil I encountered similar understandings of why the Three Kings are also known as the Magi.

While the primary ritual context for the performance of this repertoire occurs during adorations, the episodes and motifs they encapsulate are continuously drawn upon during informal conversations among folioes, and this integrates them into the processes of folia sociability. In their discussions about the use of the accordion in the folia, for example, folioes often remind one another that this was not one of the instruments used by the folioes. In negotiating the itinerary of their journeys, a folião might argue that a particular route is inappropriate, because it would require the group

to backtrack; it is remembered that the Kings returned by a different route to avoid reencountering Herod on their way back. In many instances more than an allusion is made to a well-known episode of the Nativity, but in other cases—particularly when children are about or when there is a “reporter” eager to document their tradition—narrations with elaborate storylines often emerge.

For foliões, discussions relating to folia issues are perceived as social events. For this reason many of the “formal” interviews I conducted took place in the presence of several foliões, replicating to some extent the conversational mode before rehearsals discussed earlier. Often the conversation moved into the realm of the folia Nativity repertoire, and the foliões engaged in exchanging stories. Frequently their theological discussions were aimed at contesting versions of particular episodes they had heard from other foliões, which transformed the storytelling arena into a context of intense debate and negotiation over the truth—or canonical status—of particular versions. These debates have the effect both of generating ever more fanciful stories, as narrators lay claim to highly specialized knowledge which lesser foliões do not possess, and of realigning the narrative repertoire to more global orthodox interpretations, often backed by information obtained from such authoritative sources as old embaixadores, priests, books, television programs, and other visual representations.

A folião from Cordislândia, Minas Gerais, for example, once told me that the Kings had traveled on animals called camels; they were not on horses, as an old embaixador had told him in his youth. He backed his assertion by affirming that these were the animals in the crib at the parish church, and he assured me they still exist, since he had seen them on television. While his reassessment of the mode of transport of the Magi may have aligned his representation with the dominant image within the Christian world, where the Kings are commonly depicted with camels, to this man the strange image seemed to have enhanced the mythical value of the Kings. By placing them on quasi-mythic beings, rather than on such ordinary animals as horses, their otherworldliness—and sanctity—increased substantially.

Paralleling myth among the Kachins, as observed by Leach (1954: 197, 278), the Nativity repertoire of southeastern folia communities is hardly a “chorus of harmony,” but for it to be taken as an effective “language of argument” it must also be accepted that there is an authoritative canon. Indeed foliões do not question the existence of such a canon. This permits individual foliões to lay claim to canonical status for their versions, or it allows them to reassess them in light of new evidence and new deductions. The mu-

monic encapsulations contained in adoration verses generate narrative elaborations of the telegraphic forms in prose styles, just as these reinterpretations reemerge back in verse, in a continuous process of canonical re-creation.

This cacophony—or that which Gramsci (1983) called the “mosaic of tradition,” the “confused agglomerate of fragments” drawn from an infinite fund of conceptual resources—is, however, compiled through processes of selectivity, as successive narrators choose among the motifs available to them in terms of how they conform to their commonsense categories and aspirations. While at the surface level the motifs may be quite different, they evince a series of common themes that embody a more or less coherent moral discourse based on the foliões’ notions of “natural law.” Within these discourses, there are also “hidden transcripts” of symbolic inversions of the world, articulating fantasies of revenge against the persistent assaults the narrators experience against their dignity (Scott 1990). Thus, as foliões debate the truths of their canons, they also forge interpretations of their social universe, constructing visions of the world in which they would like to live.

Kings

The Three Kings are central figures in the folia tradition, and the foliões’ understandings of these characters objectify core themes in their moral values and social aspirations. While kings are generally represented as sovereigns and hereditary rulers over hierarchical states, this notion seems to be quite muted within the folia tradition. Although echoes of common usage have persisted, it appears that the dominant view within the folia universe does not conceive of the Three Kings as rulers at all. In fact, it is common for foliões to refer to each specific king as a *reis*, employing the plural form of the term in the singular mode: thus, there is Kings Blecho, Kings Gaspar, and Kings Baltazar, which suggests that a “kings” designates a particular type of supernatural being, or a particular species of saint, so to speak. Far from being sovereigns, these beings are commonly depicted as dispossessed: in João Sainz’s story, which opens chapter 2, for example, the Three Kings are represented as Herod’s slaves, who are routinely beaten; in numerous accounts they become thin as a result of their sacrifice and suffering. Zé Canhangá, a folião from Campanha, Minas Gerais, claimed that “[the Three Kings] were not kings of a mandate; . . . they were kings of faith. It was their faith that turned them into kings,” echoing Zezo’s claim that “the Magi were the first pagans to become religious.” According to Pedro Cigano, also from Cam-

panha, it was Jesus who crowned them during the Adoration; they became kings only after acknowledging Christ's sovereignty over them. Beyond the mere humanization of the Kings, the folia tradition has established an identity between the Magi and the faithful based on their shared experience of poverty and exploitation. Through their recognition of the moral superiority of the baby Jesus, the Kings were ennobled and redeemed from their pagan status.

While foliões do not think of the Kings as rulers in the conventional sense, they are "kings" insofar as they each represent recognized collectivities, defined by such categories as age, race, and nationality, but also musical talent and productive activity. João Isaias from Monsenhor Paulo, for example, claimed that Gaspar—who played the viola and brought the incense—was African; Baltazar—who brought myrrh—was Portuguese; and Blechío—who brought the gold—was German. According to Owaldu, "The one from Africa was black; there was a German, and one from Italy." For João Paca from Batatais, Melquior was Spanish, Baltazar was African, and Gaspar was Chinese. Antônio Mariano from Arceburgo used a verse to say that:

Blechío era africano;	Blechío was African;
Baltazar era alemão;	Baltazar was German;
Gaspar era turco,	Gaspar was Turkish,
Na cidade de Adão.	In the city of Adam.

Commonly the Kings are represented as an African, a European, and a Middle Easterner, with the occasional mention of a Far Easterner. Thus, the ethnic origins attributed to the Wise Men among southeastern rural workers draw on their experience of interethnic contact: the African presence is, of course, a legacy of the slave era, while Europeans, Middle Easterners, and Far Easterners became especially visible in southeastern Brazil with the mass immigration program in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁹

While recognizing differences between the Kings, foliões also represent them as a solitary unit, thus defining them as essentially equal. In fact, there are also narratives which depict the Three Kings as brothers, a view vigorously defended by Alcides. João Isaias attributed distinct ethnic origins to each of the Magi while also claiming that they had the same mother. Though the Wise Men came from different places, looked different, played different instruments, brought different gifts, and were of different ages, they became brothers—or equals—through their common recognition of the social

eignty of the baby Jesus. Thus, in Dumontian (1980) fashion, the Kings are encompassed by the Christ Child and join the "family of God"; in turn, the Wise Men, as representatives of human collectivities, encompass the whole of humanity. Like the Kings, humans can become integrated into this "family" by proclaiming their subservience to the Christ Child through their devotion to the Wise Men.

The act of the Adoration of the Magi—the act which asserts the Kings' recognition of Christ's sovereignty—was performed through the donation of gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh; in return for their presents the Kings received their musical instruments, the means of orchestrating social harmony on earth. In offering their voices to the Kings in adoration during their journeys, folia communities are rewarded with an experience of this social reality. By participating in this moral sphere of reciprocal exchange, humans can also be ennobled and redeemed from their human condition.

The folia narrative repertoire is quite explicit about the debased human condition from which people need to be redeemed: it is embodied in the figure of Herod, the central character in the repertoire of hidden transcripts in the folia tradition. Herod, however, is represented in two contrasting ways: first in a plural form, as the petty Herods foliões encounter along their journeys, and second as a particular individual, the evil King Herod who massacred the innocents. In the plural form, Herods are closely linked to the figures of the *bastião*: they embody the trivial everyday expressions of envy and misplaced superiority, that is, the petty "Herod-ness" in everyone. One confronts such Herods primarily among one's peers, and these encounters are the main causes of strife within folia communities. By drawing attention to mundane antisocial behavior, foliões construct a critique of the primary sources of discord within their own social circles. This intragroup critique allows people to project their own behavior onto Herod, gaining a glimpse of how trivial some of their social dramas might appear to others.

King Herod, on the other hand, is conceived of in conventional regal terms: he ruled over a distinct territory, he lived in a castle, he commanded an army and had spies, he owned slaves, and he was very rich. While the three Kings submitted to the moral superiority of the baby Jesus, King Herod tried to destroy the child to guarantee his earthly kingdom. While he claimed that he wished to adore the baby, his gift—or Antigift—was to be the child's death. So preoccupied was he with the threat to his power that he was capable of murdering thousands of children in his attempt to stamp out his enemy.¹⁰ Indeed, the massacre of the innocents receives considerable attention within the folia tradition, highlighting the helplessness of the victims

and their families, with particular reflection upon the sorrow of the mothers at the loss of their babies. Consider, for example, a set of adoration verses performed by Luizinho with the *Folia do Zé dos Magos*:

Os Três Reis saiu andando,
Pisando pelas pedrinha,
Pra visitar Menino Deus
Deitado em suas palhinha.
The Three Kings were walking,
Stepping on the little stones,
To visit the God Child
Lying on his straw.

O Herode perguntou
Os Três Reis aonde vem.
“You visitar o Menino Deus
Que nasceu pro nosso bem.”
Herod asked
The Three Kings where they go.
“I’m going to visit the God Child
Who was born for our good.”

O anjo do Senhor
Avisando os peregrino:
“O Herode quer saber
Pra ir matar o Deus Menino.”
The angel of the Lord
Warning the pilgrims:
“Herod wants to know
To go kill the God Child.”

Herode vendo isso —
E os Três Reis não voltava —
Mandou matar todas criança
Que em Belém ele encontrava.
Herod seeing this —
And the Three Kings did not
return —
Had all the children killed
That he could find in Bethlehem.

Foi a maior tristeza
Que em Belém foi receber:
Acabar tantas criança
Sem ninguém poder valer.
It was the greatest sadness
That Bethlehem was to receive:
End so many children
Without anyone able to stop it.
Coitada daquelas mãe
Que criava seus filhinho,
Vendo o povo matar
Todo aqueles inocentinho.
Pity for those poor mothers
Who raised their children,
Watching the people kill
All those innocent ones.

In his greed for both material wealth and worldly power, King Herod stopped at nothing to achieve his goals; he did not even show mercy toward defenseless little children, setting his powerful army against them. Thus Herod is not in everyone, for unlike the *bastião*, he did not repent of his evil

ways. He represents single willful individuals who through deceit and deviousness appropriate wealth and power at the expense of others.

Just as *foliões* are always able to maneuver their way out of their encounters with Herods during their journeys by invoking the superior power of the saints, divine justice prevails over the will of the evil King Herod, and Jesus is saved. Moreover, in many *folia* narratives Herod is punished by God for his evil acts, and he dies prematurely. Consider, for example, the following verses performed during an adoration by Zé Machado:

O Herode, como perverso,
E de longe apercebeu,
Aperseguido o Menino,
Dizendo que era seu.
Herod, as perverse,
From a distance noted [the star],
Persecuted the Baby
Saying [he] was his.

Sabendo que a estrela guia
É do tempo dos judeu.
Clariava todos canto,
O Herode faleceu.
Knowing that the guiding star
Was from the time of the Jews,
It brightened all places,
Herod died.

Paralleling the denunciations of the injustices of a class society, other hidden transcripts within the *folia* repertoire comment on the unjust experience of racial prejudice, which affects many—if not most—members of *folia* communities. This commentary emerges primarily in the special attention bestowed upon the African King, who is often contrasted with the white Kings. In a story told by Zé Quatorze, for example, the black King receives special protection from the baby Jesus against humiliation from his companions.

A star gave the signal that the baby Jesus was born. . . . Two whites and a colored person set off and took the route, and the star guiding them, the Three Kings.

Then they came to a crossroads. The two whites said to the colored King, “You go this way and we’ll go this way. Whoever arrives first can pass the vision to the others.”

The two light Kings were near Bethlehem and the star was pointing that way, and they sent the colored one along the dark path. . . . The two light ones kept going. After they had walked a few meters, the beam came down for the colored one, who arrived in Bethlehem first.

He received the two white Kings and became the baby’s guard. He

received the other two Kings, that arrived after the colored King. It was Baltazar: the King of the Congo.¹¹

The black King is also singled out for special attention in a story narrated by Matias from Bataraís, São Paulo.

They are Kings Baltazar, . . . who is dark, and then Kings de Águia and Kings Gaspar are white. . . . And so they went to visit the baby Jesus, and there were a lot of people there. . . . Kings Baltazar, he was ashamed, all those people, and he being dark, he didn't want to arrive there first. So they arrived, Kings de Águia and Kings Gaspar, adoring the baby Jesus. And so . . . he stayed away, adoring from afar. And so the baby Jesus raised his sacred hand, called him to him. So . . . he was the last to arrive. . . .

Kings de Águas took gold; Kings Gaspars took incense; and he took myrrh. . . . And then Jesus said, "Ah, I'm sorry, I can't accept gold. I accept incense and myrrh. Put it there. It's to embalm the dead."

So Kings de Águia, feeling badly done by, got up, took his knee off the ground, and returned to his homeland.¹²

In Matias's story the African King has internalized a sense of racial inferiority and is ashamed to approach the baby in front of so many people because of his color. But the Christ Child calls him forward, publicly affirming his equality in relation to the other Kings. In contrast, it is the gold brought by a white King which is rejected—an allusion to the racial dimension of the class divide in Brazilian society.¹³

Subaltern Morality

The "mosaic of tradition" of the folia narrative universe has been constructed out of symbolic motifs of wide diffusion within the Christian world, and undoubtedly many readers will be familiar with them. Yet they have been substantially reshaped, such that the stories are not only unorthodox in content, but often are also understood in ways that contrast with orthodox interpretations. In appropriating Christian themes, the foliões have been highly selective, muting certain elements while emphasizing others, reconfiguring the material in a manner which resonates with their experiences of life as members of the Brazilian lower classes. It is by

viewing the narratives in relation to the lives of the foliões that one is able to glimpse the special significance global themes might have for them.

The folia narrative tradition constructs a world based on how the foliões' imagine God envisages it: drawing on their notion of the Three Kings as representatives of all humanity, in the ideal world the essential equality of all would be recognized, regardless of age, ethnic identity, race, class affiliation, musical talent, or any other socially constructed distinction. The foliões' everyday experiences, however, stand in direct contrast to this vision. In accordance with orthodox interpretations, folia communities account for this disparity by contrasting the Three Kings to King Herod: while the Magi acknowledged the moral superiority of the Christ Child and were redeemed from their human inclinations, King Herod did not, giving free rein to his sinful predisposition.

In the dominant Christian tradition, the Magi are represented as gift bearers; there is no representation of a direct exchange between the Kings and the Holy Family; as representatives of humanity, they receive the promise of salvation. In the folia tradition, however, direct reciprocal exchanges are given special prominence: in return for their gifts the Three Kings received their musical instruments. They may have been poor, but they were ennobled and sanctified through this exchange. In contrast, King Herod enters into a (thwarted) relationship of negative reciprocity with the baby: he sets out to kill the child, but is himself ultimately punished by God with a premature death. This opposition presents two contrasting scenarios: life through participation in a system of reciprocal exchanges or death through the accumulation of material wealth. Thus, reciprocity is presented as an equalizing force, while accumulation leads to social stratification, as it can occur only because some people take more from others than they give in return. Ultimately, the asymmetry in such exchanges leaves vast numbers of people with nothing to exchange in order to secure their livelihood. In this moral economy, accumulation is denounced as evil, and it is presented as the source of social deprivation and death.¹⁴

Thus, in the folia worldview God's law—or "natural law"—is the law of reciprocity; to violate this law is to commit an offense against God, and it is through divine intervention that justice is served. Indeed, it is God who punishes Herod for his evil deeds, just as he rearranges the social order to reassert racial equality. God's intervention stands as proof of the everlasting truths of "natural law," marking a clear distinction between God's laws—which are always good and just—and human laws—which are not always so.

While such stories of symbolic inversion articulate fantasies of revenge, they also serve to remind people that the prevailing social order is far from monolithic; they proclaim that it is a constructed order (Scott 1990, 168), and therefore it can be reconstructed. By invoking divine justice in their narratives foliões maintain that the implementation of God's "natural laws" on earth would guarantee an equal and just society among humans.

From this perspective Herod's horrific act of violence is all the more shocking, as it presents a limit case of the extremes to which power holders might go to enforce their will. The daily lives of foliões are marked by arbitrary acts of violence and impositions from others, and the figure of King Herod gives voice to the feelings evoked by such experiences. Folia narratives underline two complementary perspectives on the massacre of the innocents: first, they articulate a sense of indignation at the experience of the helplessness of the population to stop the murders, and second, they single out the pitiful suffering of the mothers over the loss of their children. Since the experience of the mothers is explicitly qualified, by implication one can take the experience of helpless indignation as the embodiment of fundamentally male sentiments. One could say, then, that these feelings articulate (male) commonsense notions about the division of emotional labor within the family, in which women—or mothers—are allocated the "emotional work" (Hochschild 1979), while men—or heads of households—are responsible for the material well-being of their dependents, and the inability to fill this role generates feelings of profound impotence and resentment.

Maternal love as personified in the Virgin Mary is an ever-present image throughout Brazil, and a dominant discourse portrays her as the *mater do lamento*, the sorrowful mother of the dead Christ. Among the Brazilian lower classes people coexist with death, particularly infant mortality, which heightens women's identification with the Virgin (Schepel-Hughes 1992, 357). Soon after I began fieldwork among popular Catholic communities, particularly in rural areas, I learned to brace myself every time I asked a woman especially if she was over the age of forty—how many children she had, because it is customary for mothers to respond by saying how many pregnancies they have had, followed by the number of children that survived. It was very rare for a woman to be able to claim that all her children had lived, and often far more had died in early childhood than had survived. In many cases women would proceed by outlining the circumstances of each death, particularly if the child was not stillborn. The image of Herod massacring thousands of babies, then, resonates deeply with their experiences of loss. In the urban context, the levels of infant mortality have fallen dramati-

cally, but the experience of violence and the premature death of loved ones has remained a part of everyday life.

The folia tradition is, however, fundamentally a male domain, and therefore I had far more access to the ways in which the foliões' interpretations of the massacre of the innocents frames their experiences of everyday violence. Among foliões King Herod is most frequently invoked to articulate encounters with members of the upper classes—particularly employers—which were experienced as exploitative and humiliating, giving voice to their outrage at systematically having to submit themselves to asymmetrical interactions. Zé Machado, for example, once told me that he had encountered many fazenda owners in his lifetime who acted like Herod. One of the most frequent reasons men gave for their constant moves from one large landholding to another during the fazenda era was that the landlord was stingy, and the conditions he imposed did not allow them to support their families. To exemplify this stinginess Zé singled out a specific instance in which he had been employed by such a Herod. Zé was a colono in Espírito Santo when his young son became very ill and needed to see the doctor. Several hours later the landlord finally came to the house and drove them into town, where the doctor prescribed an expensive medication. Although food, grown on the family plot, was plentiful, cash was a rare commodity, since the colonos were paid annually at the end of the harvest. In order to buy the medicine Zé had to borrow the money from his boss. When the harvest was over, Zé discovered that the landlord had docked the cost of the medication from his pay, leaving him with hardly enough cash to get through the following year. Zé's indignation was such that he immediately packed the family's belongings and left in search of a new fazenda. He concluded the story by saying, "I'm the head of the household. I have responsibilities. How could I stay on that fazenda? If something were to happen with someone in my family I have to know the boss will help me. . . . That man was greedy. All bosses are greedy, but he was worse than others. . . . This one would have let my son die."

Zezo also invoked King Herod to frame an experience of interclass conflict, which occurred when I accompanied him to Arceburgo on a short holiday. We were walking around in the town square when we met a local landowner. Zezo had recently purchased a small plot adjacent to the man's property, where Zezo intended to build a house for his retirement. The man offered to drive us out to see the property the next day, reciprocating for his use of the plot to graze a few horses until the construction began. We arranged to meet him in the afternoon at his house, and when we arrived we

were served drinks and tidbits before setting off. Once at the plot the man indicated that he would be interested in buying it from Zezo. He went on to suggest that Zezo should consider buying a ready-built house in Arceburgo, rather than try to construct one on his own, particularly since it would be difficult for him to supervise the construction from São Bernardo. In fact, the man had just finished a house on the outskirts of the town, which he intended to put on the market in the next few days. If Zezo was interested he would consider the plot a down-payment. He then took us to see the house before dropping us back off in the town square. As soon as the man drove off, Zezo said, "Did you see how he treated us? All that drink and all the food, and then the big car and all? That's how Herod treated the Three Kings when he was trying to fool them into thinking that he was sincere about wanting to adore the baby Jesus." Zezo was convinced the man intended to exploit him if he agreed to the exchange. The situation was experienced as all the more humiliating because it was conducted with cunning and deception. Although he did not invoke Herod directly, it is also worth remembering that it was the experience of his daughter's death in the hospital that moved Zezo into political militancy. His anger was directed at the factory, which he claimed had deliberately withheld the news of her death from him, indicating that the bosses felt no responsibility toward the well-being of his family.

Through the figure of King Herod, the *foliões* articulate their ambiguous stance toward patronage. Although patron-client relations were far more explicit during the fazenda era, they continue to color interclass relations even in the highly industrialized complexes of greater São Paulo. In their encounters with members of the upper classes *foliões* expect asymmetry, but the degree of imbalance in the exchange is always an open issue, allowing myths of the "good boss" (*bom patrão*) and the "bad boss" (*mau patrão*) to remain unchallenged. As in the examples discussed above, analogies with King Herod, whether explicit or implicit, are always directed at particular individuals or—in the urban industrial context—at specific organizations; *foliões* are careful not to generalize the figure of Herod to embrace "the rich" as a unified category. This would eradicate the myth of the "good boss," which, as Scheper-Hughes (1992, 108) notes, would be "to admit that there is no structural safety net at all and that the poor are adrift within an amoral social and economic system that is utterly indifferent to their well-being and survival." Herods, then, can be cordoned off as aberrations: those bosses who are greedier than most—while the hidden transcript remains available as a frame for interpreting experiences of humiliation in

interclass encounters, just as it provides a means of voicing subaltern indignation toward their dependence upon asymmetrical relations with the dominant classes.

The lower classes protect themselves from the perversity of interclass relations as best they can by barricading themselves within the confines of their own neighborhoods, leaving them only to go to work. Similarly, the upper classes avoid entering "dangerous" areas, fearing the assaults and violence that have become associated with poor neighborhoods. Thus, in their segregated niches the cultural divide between the rich and the poor progressively widens. As the rich mark their social superiority through ostentatious displays of material wealth, the poor lay claim to moral superiority, ennobled by their adherence to the noncompetitive reciprocal ideal of the saints.

The motif clusters used in adorations articulate with one another to create an atmosphere of stability which marks the enduring truths of God's natural laws. When the *foliões* stand before the *crèche* for their performances, they join the figures on the altar to proclaim their acknowledgement of these truths. Through their adorations, the *foliões* and the families they visit enchant themselves into the "family of God," grounded in their mutual acknowledgement of the moral superiority of the Christ Child. Their ritualized dialogues with one another are guided by the ideal of reciprocity, based on the expectation that among their peers their efforts will be mutually recognized and recompensed.