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## Volunteers

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It is 15<sup>th</sup> August, the Assumption of Mary, a special day for anyone who, along with the Vatican and the Syrian Orthodox church, is today celebrating the bodily taking up of the Mother of God into heaven. It is most definitely *not* a good day for Maria Amelia, one of the seemingly countless kind angels who are providing their services free of charge for the Games. Maria Amelia drives one of the brightly coloured vehicles in which prominent visitors are ferried between the Games venues and their hotels. A global car company is playing the role of benefactor here and thereby scoring a few points for itself.

Without getting lost in theological speculation, the army of virtually unpaid Olympic helpers is one of the more mysterious ways in which angels could manifest themselves. They are of both genders and in this are no different from similar embodiments in other parts of the world. However, their creator has, in general, equipped them with more kind-heartedness than knowledge of foreign languages. Does that make the work of the angels more difficult? Sometimes, yes. It is also very rare for the visitors to sporting events to be gifted in other languages. In fact, in the case of some visitors at the various

venues, one has the impression that their vocabulary is limited to lamentably few syllables.

But this inadequacy is all part of the miracle. How much more effort a conversation requires, when its subject has to be addressed by means of different languages and gestures. And how curiously enriching it is for everyone's vocabulary when the visitors to the Games, in their desire to communicate in English, Brazilian, Spanish or any other idiom, come out with new sounds and neologisms not yet to be found in any dictionary.

The ill-fated construction of the Tower of Babel could be regarded as having given rise to enormous diversity in the ways we make ourselves understood.

Maria Amelia, our driver, is a living example of someone who speaks from the heart, with a broad range of linguistic nuances. Anyway, today is not Maria Amelia's day, which is why the car in front of us in the queue brakes unexpectedly while she is still entering the coordinates for our destination into her navigation system... No matter that the only result is the briefest of contacts between the bumpers – unfortunately all the occupants of the other car are men. Consequently, the same thing happens in a traffic incident in Rio as happens anywhere in the world when men enter into a dispute with a woman behind the wheel. Incidentally, there was no visible damage to the car.

"Santo Antonio!" exclaims Maria Amelia, as we continue on our way. The little episode has obviously shaken her, and not only her, but also her digital compass, which now sends us off in all directions, with its intentions becoming ever harder to understand. Maria Amelia calls once again upon Saint Anthony who is, after all, the patron saint of lost things, even here in Brazil. She is now driving our vehicle with the utmost caution, but what use is that today, because others show less consideration and, a few kilometres further on, with the Olympic Village already in sight, an over-confident SUV rams us. I note that it is of a make that comes from somewhere in southern Germany.

In my opinion, all such vehicles are unnecessary and mostly bought and driven by idiots, and I am only confirmed in this view when the "aggressor" makes off as fast as it rammed us. A police car parked in the shade of a palm tree at a nearby junction sets its siren howling and red light flashing, but takes no further notice of our misfortune.

As might be expected, Maria Amelia's nerves were by no means helped by the incident. She stops the car on a pedestrian crossing, stalls the engine, invokes

"Santo Antonio!" again, reaches for her packet of cigarettes and then says: "But perhaps he isn't the right saint for today."

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