Guests of God: Pilgrimage and Politics in the Islamic World

ROBERT R. BIANCHI

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

Guests of God

This page intentionally left blank

Guests of God

Pilgrimage and Politics in the Islamic World

ROBERT R. BIANCHI

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

2004

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Oxford New York
Auckland Bangkok Buenos Aires Cape Town Chennai
Dar es Salaam Delhi Hong Kong Istanbul Karachi Kolkata
Kuala Lumpur Madrid Melbourne Mexico City Mumbai
Nairobi São Paulo Shanghai Taipei Tokyo Toronto

Copyright © 2004 by Oxford University Press, Inc.

Published by Oxford University Press, Inc.
198 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10016

www.oup.com

Oxford is a registered trademark of Oxford University Press

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced,
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means,
electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise,
without the prior permission of Oxford University Press.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Bianchi, Robert, 1945–
Guests of God: pilgrimage and politics in the Islamic world / Robert R. Bianchi.
p. cm
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0-19-517107-1
1. Muslim pilgrims and pilgrimages—Saudi Arabia—Mecca. 2. Islam and politics.
3. Islamic countries—Politics and government. I. Title.
BP187.3.B53. 2004
297.3'52—dc22 2004041484

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed in the United States of America
on acid-free paper

Para Vicki,
quien me lee mejor que nadie

This page intentionally left blank

Preface

I've written books before, but this one got its hooks into me and I fell in love with it. The project grew far beyond my initial ambitions because the people who manage the hajj—or try to—kept giving me more data and insights than I expected, and the connections quickly multiplied in each country I visited. Shortly after I made the hajj myself, I started fieldwork in Pakistan and Turkey. The results were so encouraging that I decided to make additional trips to Malaysia and Indonesia, and eventually to Nigeria and Senegal. I never set out to tackle a work of this magnitude. One step led to another, and I just followed the trail.

Why did I get so wrapped up in the hajj, and why did so many strangers go out of their way to help me succeed? The simplest answer is that everything about the hajj is magical. In many ways, it represents the heart and soul of Islam, Islam at its best—at its most humanitarian and universal, its most pluralistic and egalitarian. These are the very ideals that give Muslims such pride in their traditions and that also cause them great distress when they are ignored or negated.

That raises the second reason for my fascination with the hajj. Although we know that these ideals are real, we also know they are elusive. For all its dignity and nobility, sometimes the hajj seems like just another commodity or business venture, just another status symbol and pool of patronage. The hajj's contradictions are an open secret in the Islamic world. I was constantly amazed at how candid people were in criticizing hajj organizations in their countries and around the globe. Wherever I went, even the directors responsible for shaping and implementing hajj policy expressed their misgivings. At times, it was like listening to friends describing dysfunctional families—once they started, there was no stopping them and no telling what would come next. I merely kept listening and learning to ask better questions.

To meet the needs of both general readers and specialists, I've summarized major trends in the text and created an appendix for those who want a more detailed view of the data. All of the items in the appendix are cited at relevant points in the text so that interested readers can delve deeper whenever they wish.

The original inspiration to write a book on the hajj came from Leonard Binder and the late Fazlur Rahman. Along the way, I had invaluable advice and encouragement from Iliya Harik, Marvin Weinbaum, and John Esposito. My research assistant, Jefferson Gray, did a phenomenal job in helping to collect the core data and make sense of it. I was fortunate to enjoy financial assistance from the U.S. Department of Education, the Division of the Social Sciences of the University of Chicago, and the Chicago Humanities Institute.

My greatest debt is to the dozens of hajj managers who opened their doors and files to me in country after country. Most of them were eager to help because they believed that people of all faiths would benefit from a better understanding of the hajj and its crucial role in Islam.

Several people were so generous with their time and attention that I would like to thank them personally. In Pakistan, I am particularly grateful to Omar Qureshi and his family, Samira Shah, Ijaz Gilani, and Hafiz Pasha. In Turkey, I enjoyed the kindness of Dilek Barlas, Bekir Demirkol, Levant Korkut, Carl Hershiser, Güneli Gün, and Metin Heper. Muhammad Zaini educated me about Malaysia, as did Qadri Azizi concerning Indonesia. My Nigerian experiences were especially enjoyable thanks to La Ray Denzer, Father Joseph Kenny, Father Iheanyi M. Enwerem, Shehu Galadanci, Sani Zahredeen, Kabiru Sani Hanga, Muhammad Sani Umar, Archbishop Peter Akinola, Msgr. D. E. Inyang, Dr. Efosa Oviasu, Michael Hanna, and Olu Makendi. And in Senegal, I received warm assistance from Souleymane Bachir Diagne, Hajj Rawane Mbaye, and Khadim Mbacké.

A number of legal scholars helped me think through the hajj's implications for international law, adding a special dimension beyond the advice I received from colleagues in the social sciences and humanities. In particular, I wish to thank Mark Janis, Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, Alan Raphael, and Cherif Bassiouni. Vicki Mayfield and Theo Calderara guided me through multiple revisions of the manuscript, reading every word and critiquing every idea. Naturally, any remaining shortcomings in the work are solely my responsibility.

Contents

List of Tables, xi

List of Figures, xiii

Introduction, 3

1. What Is the Hajj and How Does Anyone Survive It?, 7
2. What Does the Hajj Mean?, 23
3. Pilgrimage and Power, 37
4. The Growth of the Hajj: Global and Regional Trends, 49
5. Pakistan: “Why Would Our Hajjis Vote against Us?”, 77
6. Malaysia: The Broken Piggy Bank, 113
7. Turkey: The Belated Quest for Religious Tolerance, 141
8. Indonesia: Greening the Pancasila State, 175
9. Nigeria: “One Nation, under God”, 211
10. The West Is Not Alone: The Hajj in World Politics and Law, 253

Appendix, 273

Notes, 311

Glossary, 335

Selected Bibliography, 339

Index, 353

This page intentionally left blank

List of Tables

1.1 Hajj-Related Disasters in Recent Years 11
1.2 Resources and Services Devoted to the Hajj 12
4.1 The Growth of Female Pilgrimage 69
6.1 Regional Distribution of Malaysian Pilgrims, 1969–1995 120
7.1 Turkish Pilgrimage Rates by Region, 1979–1993 154
8.1 Indonesian Pilgrimage Rates by Region, 1950–1996 185

For a list of tables in the Appendix, see pp. 273–274.

This page intentionally left blank

List of Figures

1.1 Major Steps of the Hajj 9
1.2 Main Sites at the Grand Mosque in Mecca 10
4.1 The Growth of the Hajj, 1882–2004 50
4.2 Worldwide Pilgrimage Rates, 1961–1987 55
4.3 Pilgrims by Region 56
4.4 Hajj Growth in Indonesia, Pakistan, Turkey, Nigeria, and Malaysia, 1947–2004 74
5.1 The Growth of the Pakistani Pilgrimage, 1947–2004 85
5.2 Pakistani Pilgrimage Rates, 1947–2004 86
5.3 Geographic Patterns of Hajj Participation under the Governments of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and General Zia-ul-Haq (map) 87
5.4 The Districts of Pakistan (map) 88
5.5 Pilgrimage in Pakistan's Rural Districts, 1974–1990 89
5.6 Pilgrimage in Pakistan's Urban Districts, 1974–1990 90
5.7 Pakistani Districts with High Hajj Participation, 1974–1990 (map) 97
5.8 Pakistani Districts with Low Hajj Participation, 1974–1990 (map) 98
6.1 The Growth of the Malaysian Pilgrimage, 1947–2004 116
6.2 The States of Malaysia (map) 121
6.3 Pilgrimage Rates in Malaysia, 1947–2004 129
6.4 Hajj Participation and Barisan Nasional Electoral Losses, 1995–1999 135
7.1 The Growth of the Turkish Pilgrimage, 1947–2004 146
7.2 The Provinces of Turkey (map) 151

7.3 Turkish Pilgrimage Rates, 1947–2004 152
7.4 Turkish Pilgrimage Rates by Province, 1979–1993 (map) 155
7.5 Percent of Female Pilgrims by Province in Turkey, 1979–1993 (map) 158
7.6 Regional Patterns of Religiosity in Turkey (map) 161
8.1 The Growth of the Indonesian Pilgrimage, 1947–2004 180
8.2 Pilgrimage Rates in Jakarta, Java-Sumatra, and the Outer Islands, 1950–1996 186
8.3 The Provinces of Indonesia (map) 187
8.4 Centers of High and Low Pilgrimage in Indonesia, 1974–1996 (map) 196
9.1 The Growth of the Nigerian Pilgrimage, 1947–2004 222
9.2 Hajj Rates in the States of Nigeria (map) 226
9.3 Hajj Rates in the States of Nigeria, 1977–1982 and 1997–1999 229
9.4 The States of Nigeria (map) 230
9.5 Pilgrimage Rates in the Local Governments of Kaduna State, 1999 (map) 239
9.6 Percent of Female Pilgrims in the Local Governments of Kaduna State, 1999 (map) 240
9.7 Pilgrimage Rates in the Local Governments of Lagos State, 1999 (map) 242
9.8 Average Ages of Female and Male Pilgrims in the Local Governments of Lagos and Kaduna States, 1999 246
9.9 Percent of Female Pilgrims in the Local Governments of Lagos State, 1999 (map) 247
9.10 Christian Pilgrimage in the States of Nigeria, 1995–1998 (map) 251

For a list of figures in the Appendix, see pp. 274–275.

And proclaim to humanity the Pilgrimage,
and they shall come unto thee on foot
and upon every lean beast. They shall come from every deep ravine
that they may witness things profitable to them.

Qur'an (xxii: 27–28)

All humankind is from Adam and Eve, an Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab nor a non-Arab has any superiority over an Arab; also a white has no superiority over a black nor a black has any superiority over a white except by piety and good action. . . . This day have I perfected for you your religion and fulfilled My favor unto you.

Muhammad, 570–632 ("Farewell Sermon at Mount 'Arafat")

The longer the way, the more companions are necessary—the way to the *Ka'ba* is hard, one needs a long caravan and a caravan-leader . . . and how much more difficult is it to come closer to God through so many veils, steep mountains, and highway-robbers!

Mevlâna Celâleddin Rumi, 1207–1273 (Annemarie Schimmel,
The Triumphal Sun, p. 293)

Behold the secret building before it is too late, and thou wilt see how it takes on life through those who circle round it and walk round its stones, and how it looks out at them from behind its veils and cloaks! And then I saw it take on life, as he had said.

Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi, 1165–1240 (Meccan Revelations, in
Fritz Meier, "The Mystery of the Ka'ba," p. 161)

The darkest thing in the world is the Beloved's house without the Beloved. . . . When the lover turns his eye away from created things, he will inevitably see the Creator with his heart.

'Ali Bin 'Uthman al-Hujwiri, d. ca. 1072 (*Kashf al-Mahjub*,
The Uncovering of the Veils, translated by R. A. Nicholson,
pp. 327, 330)

I went to the *Ka'ba*, and from there I yearned for your street.
        I beheld the *Ka'ba*, and remembered your face.
When I saw the black covering of the *Ka'ba*,
        I stretched the hand of my desire towards the black dress of your hair.

When I seized the knocker of the *Ka'ba* with a hundred cravings,
I made a prayer for your musk-scented curl.
The people in the sanctuary bowed their faces in humility to the *Ka'ba*,
I turned, amidst all, the face of my heart to you.
In every stage I turned my footsteps to no other than you;
The *tawaf* and the *sa'y* I performed in search of you.
The people stood praying at 'Arafat;
I closed my lips for the prayer, and talked about you.
While the people in Mina were subject to their desire and their inclinations,
I craved for you, empty as a cup.

Nur al-Din 'Abd al-Rahman Jami, 1414–1492 (Anna Livia F. A. Beelaert, "The Ka'ba as a Woman," pp. 118–119)

The King of the mice jumped back into his hole and rejoined his subjects.

"How is the King of the cats after his Pilgrimage?" they asked. "Let's hope he has changed for the better."

"Never mind the Pilgrimage," said the King of the mice. "He may pray like a Hajji, but he still pounces like a cat."

"The Cat Who Went to Mecca" (Syrian folktale in *Arab Folktales*, edited and translated by Inea Bushnaq, p. 216)

One day a pesky villager came to Sheikh Jaha's house. Jaha asked, "What are you looking for?" and he answered, "I'm a Guest of God." Then Jaha said, "Come on, let's go." The man followed him through the town until they arrived at the gate of the Friday Mosque. Then the Sheikh said, "Since you're a Guest of God, you came to me by mistake. This is God's house."

"A Guest of God Belongs in God's House" (Hausa folktale in *Hikayoyin Shehu Jaha* [Stories of Sheikh Jaha], edited by Tijjani M. Imam, p. 21)

Between us and the house of God there is a secret
Which even Gabriel the faithful does not know.

Sir Muhammad Iqbal, 1877–1938 (Annemarie Schimmel, *Gabriel's Wing*, p. 199)

He who does not realize the essence of the hajj only brings back from Mecca a suitcase full of souvenirs and an empty mind. . . . These conventions are not assembled by heads of states or their representatives, diplomats or political leaders, members of parliament, cabinets, senators, university professors, scientists, intellectuals or spiritual leaders. No! No! Only Almighty God has the right to decide for the people because the people are His representatives on earth. This is the reason for the convention in Mina where God is the director of the people who have gathered by His invitation.

'Ali Shari'ati, 1933–1977 (*Hajj*, pp. 83, 111–112)

You may be shocked by these words coming from me. But on this pilgrimage, what I have seen, and experienced, has forced me to re-arrange much of my thought patterns previously held, and to toss aside some of my previous conclusions. . . . During the past eleven days here in the Muslim world, I have eaten from the same plate, drunk from the same glass, and slept in the same bed, (or on the same rug)—while praying to the same God—with fellow Muslims, whose eyes were the bluest of blue, whose hair was the blondest of blond, and whose skin was the whitest of white. . . . We were truly all the same (brothers)—because their belief in one God had removed the "white" from their minds, the "white" from their behavior, and the "white" from their attitude.

Malcolm X, 1925–1965 ("Letter from Mecca" in *Autobiography*, p. 340)

Guests of God

This page intentionally left blank

Introduction

The hajj is the greatest gathering of humanity on earth. Each year, more than two million people from every corner of the globe come to the same place at the same time to visit “God’s house”—the holy *Ka‘ba* in Mecca—and participate in an emotional week of rituals that Muslims have been reenacting for fourteen centuries. Nowadays, much of the hajj is televised live so Muslims all over the world can accompany the pilgrims as they play out sacred dramas renewing their bonds with God, with ancient prophets from Adam to Muhammad, and with the entire community of believers.

For pilgrims, the hajj is the peak of spiritual life. Cleansed of all sin, they are as pure as the day they were born—assured of Paradise if they should die before returning home. For Muslims everywhere, the hajj is the most powerful expression of the unity and equality of all believers and their common destiny in this world and the next.

The hajj is a time of profound reflection, during which pilgrims critically examine their souls as well as the social and political conditions in their homelands, the global Islamic community, and the world as a whole. This explicit fusion of religion and politics makes the hajj both a pilgrimage and an annual congress of Islam—a massive spiritual assembly where international Muslim society reconstitutes itself and reconsiders its course in history.

The Politics of the Modern Hajj

The hajj has always had far-reaching political ramifications, but today, after a half century of sponsorship and regulation by governments around the world, it is more politicized than ever. In one country after another, state pilgrimage agencies have taken over the lion's share of the booming market in religious tourism from private business. Politicians attempt to lure voters by outbidding one another with costly proposals for pilgrimage subsidies and services. Bankers and entrepreneurs scramble to attract investment capital from aspiring hajjis who prepay their expenses with installment savings plans. The media dispense a cascade of advice and exposés about every aspect of the hajj, beginning as pilgrims are preparing to travel and continuing for months after they return.

The hajj season is no longer confined to a few weeks between Islam's major holidays, the Feast of Fast Breaking at the end of Ramadan and the Feast of Sacrifice coinciding with the pilgrimage itself. Today's hajj is a yearlong cycle of planning, financing, teaching, outfitting, transporting, lodging, doctoring, celebrating, mourning, blaming, and correcting. In the biggest Muslim nations, pilgrimage demands as much mass enthusiasm and cooperation as any activity, including war.

Despite their great attention to organization, governments and politicians seldom envision the results of their own hajj policies at home or abroad. Pilgrims to Mecca are "Guests of God," not of Saudi Arabia or any other nation-state. Hajjis expect broad freedom to visit the holy places and to imagine their spiritual experiences individualistically. The principle of open access, combined with freedom of religious interpretation, preserves the autonomy of the hajj, no matter how many politicians try to manipulate it.

Freewheeling debates about the meanings of the rituals engage Muslims everywhere. Each state energetically publicizes its preferred interpretations, but their views are only a part of a global conversation that touches on every facet of Islam and politics. The more governments claim credit for promoting pilgrimage, the more they invite charges that they distort religion and exploit it for their gain. When it comes to managing the hajj, Muslim rulers learn that no good deed is above criticism.

As the world's greatest pilgrimage grows and becomes more politically charged, it demolishes deep-seated assumptions about religion in modern society, especially concerning the separation of the sacred and profane and the marginal role of ritual in daily life. It is impossible to imagine any set of entrenched powers controlling the hajj—turning it on and off according to their shifting interests or diverting its turbulent course to bolster the status quo while only appearing to question it.

Hajj managers regularly lose control over the institutions they create and the social forces they nurture. The prime example is Saudi Arabia itself. In the 1960s, King Faysal used the pilgrimage to lobby Muslim statesmen on behalf of his project to launch the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). Although the OIC originated as an ad hoc coalition against Saudi Arabia's adversaries, it developed into the leading international organization of Muslim states—the so-called United Nations of the Islamic world.

Faysal's successors relied on the OIC to negotiate a new international regime for the hajj. The new hajj regime enforced an unprecedented and unpopular system of national quotas that checked a flood of revolutionary propaganda from Iranian pilgrims and attempted to curb mounting death tolls caused by disastrous overcrowding. By building an international consensus in the OIC, the Saudis pushed through controversial hajj reforms they would never have dared to adopt unilaterally. Yet their very success diminished Saudi influence over both the hajj and the OIC.

The large Sunni states that aided Saudi Arabia were more advanced than the desert principalities accustomed to dominating Islamic diplomacy. Saudis found they had to share power with important non-Arab countries where modern hajj management was well developed, especially Pakistan, Malaysia, Turkey, Indonesia, and Nigeria. Countries with professional hajj administrations were indispensable to enforcing the new quota system, and they enjoyed a host of advantages that strengthened their leverage in the Islamic world and beyond. Compared with Saudi Arabia, all these nations have economies that are diversified and internationally competitive, cultures that are pluralistic and cosmopolitan, and political systems that are responsive to popular demands for democracy and equality.

Leading Asian and African powers in the OIC helped Saudi Arabia fend off Iran's demand that Riyadh relinquish sovereignty over the hajj and holy cities in favor of an international administration run by all Muslim states. But they extracted a high price for their support. Saudis had to accept a compromise that preserved their sovereignty in the holy cities while internationalizing the pilgrimage. Non-Arab states agreed to a quota system restricting their participation in the hajj, but they insisted on a greater voice in the new pilgrimage regime and the OIC organs supervising it.

Although politicians in many countries are benefiting from Saudi Arabia's difficulties, their efforts to create national hajj monopolies are turning their own citizens against them. In country after country, governments have established centralized hajj agencies providing a full range of state-financed services at every step in the pilgrimage.

As hajj technocrats around the world imitate one another's innovations, modern pilgrimage management spreads with remarkable speed, offering subsidized package tours for all budgets and tastes. Today's high-end tours include online registration, computerized plane and hotel reservations, well-illustrated training materials and videotapes, mobile field hospitals, life insurance, and color-coded clothing and luggage.

But in nearly every case, hajj administration is tainted with favoritism and corruption. All the major pilgrimage programs are explicitly tailored to benefit voting blocks and businesses at home while cultivating prestige and influence abroad. Frequently, pilgrim management is so politicized it subverts the central values of the hajj. Instead of promoting unity and equality, it divides Muslims along every conceivable line—ethnicity, language, class, party, region, sect, gender, and age.

Pakistan's hajj rises and falls with the fortunes of the Bhutto family and the People's Party in their clashes with Punjabi elites who dominate the army and the Muslim League. In Malaysia, the ruling party turned the pilgrimage agency into a state bank that finances political cronies in the big cities and isolates Islamic opponents in the countryside. Turkey's pilgrimage is a revolving patronage pool for several right-wing parties. They compete for the same Muslim voters by trying to outdo one another in pouring hajj subsidies and contracts into pivotal electoral districts. When Suharto began losing support in the military, he tried to shore up his popularity by making the Indonesian hajj the largest in the world and dragging his whole family to Mecca to deflect outrage over their business scandals. Nigerian politicians threw so much money into the hajj that Christians became convinced they were creating an Islamic state. By the time Muslim army officers seized power, the specter of religious warfare drove them to sponsor a Christian pilgrimage to Jerusalem as well.

Discriminatory hajj policies are religiously self-contradictory and politically self-defeating. Manipulating sacred symbols of universality for partisan advantage is transparent hypocrisy unsustainable in even the most cynical environments. Gains in support are quickly outweighed by losses of legitimacy and credibility.

Aggressive sponsorship of the hajj generates at least as much anger as gratitude. Many Muslims, as well as non-Muslims, disapprove of government interference in religion. In their view, spending public funds on pilgrimage is just as offensive as spending them on mosques and religious schools.

Politically committed Muslims are unlikely to change their allegiances simply because a few thousand more people can go to Mecca for a few hundred dollars less. Especially in countries where Muslims are the majority, many believe all governments have an obligation to support the hajj, and they see no reason to reward politicians for simply doing their duty. Given such attitudes, it is no surprise when politicized hajj agencies prop up governments in the short run only to undermine them in the end.

I

What Is the Hajj and How Does Anyone Survive It?

The hajj is a time for centering and ordering, but it is also a time of tumult and chaos. Spiritually, the hajj is a steadying and stabilizing experience. Pilgrims reaffirm their ties to a single, worldwide community—creating it anew with each reunion and touching a common destiny that reaches far beyond their cramped lifetimes and imaginations. Physically, however, the hajj exposes everyone to pervasive uncertainty and danger. For at least a month, pilgrims are uprooted from everything familiar, disoriented at every turn, and thrown into countless perils—some unavoidable, others self-inflicted—shattering any illusion that they are solitary actors controlling their own fates.

The first casualty is a sense of time. Hajjis are constantly amazed at the tricks time plays on their minds and bodies. Everything is too slow or too fast. Speech, thought, and reflexes all go their separate ways. Someone says each day in the Holy Land feels like a month; another insists the days fly away in seconds. Neither uses the correct tenses, and neither remembers what day of the week it is.

The hajj is a grueling and perilous march. Sooner or later, it exposes the best and worst in everyone, as exhaustion dissolves into delirium, and serenity gives way to impatience, anger, and sheer panic. Even the most self-reliant pilgrims realize that being closer to God also brings them closer to death, and the ones most likely to survive are those who help one another. The constant struggle against heat, crowds, and confusion saps the stamina of all pilgrims, forcing them to build instant friendships with strangers from every corner of the world, knowing at several points that a split-second move by anyone can either save lives or end them.

The hajj works because of the good sense and mutual support of the pilgrims, not because of the staggering resources their governments marshal to assist and control them. All the money and technology, the planning and security, are impressive and growing every year, but it is never enough. The decisive factor is the pilgrims' self-control and mutual cooperation. When they pull together, they usually muddle through the thousands of breakdowns in order and services confronting them each day. When they fall apart, nothing else really matters, and no one can save them from disaster.

Flexible Rites in Treacherous Places

Hajjis retrace the steps of Muhammad and Ibrahim, the founders of Islam and ancient monotheism. Even Muslims who never see the Holy Cities know the route and sequence of the rites.[1] Pilgrims flow in a mass procession and recession from the Grand Mosque in Mecca to the Plain of 'Arafat about twelve miles east and back again to the city. Overnight stops punctuate movement in each direction—in Mina on the way out, in Muzdalifa and Mina on the way home (Figure 1.1).

Much of the action dramatizes critical moments in the life of Ibrahim and his family. Circling the *Ka'ba* (the *tawaf*) pays homage to God by visiting his "house" on earth, the building Ibrahim and his son, Isma'il, constructed by following the instructions of the angel Gabriel (Figure 1.2). During the *tawaf*, pilgrims pray briefly at a spot just across from the door of the *Ka'ba* known as "Ibrahim's Place." Here, inside a tall glass showcase, is an ancient rock with an impression resembling a human foot. Many believe this to be Ibrahim's footprint, preserved in a stepping-stone he used while building the *Ka'ba*.

The *sa'y*—running back and forth between the hills of al-Safa and al-Marwa—commemorates the trials of Hagar, the concubine of Ibrahim and mother of Isma'il. When Ibrahim left mother and infant alone in the desert, Hagar frantically searched for water and discovered the sacred well of Zamzam. Pilgrims constantly drink the miraculous waters of Zamzam while in Mecca, and nearly everyone purchases several bottles as gifts for friends and relatives back home.

The highpoints of the hajj are not in Mecca but on the outskirts in 'Arafat and Mina. On the ninth day of the month of Dhu al-Hijjah (the last month in the Islamic calendar), all two million pilgrims assemble at the Plain of 'Arafat for the Day of Standing—a time of prayer and meditation from about noon until sunset. The congregation at 'Arafat replicates the gathering Muhammad addressed during his "Farewell Pilgrimage," when he revealed the final verses of the Qur'an just months before his death. Pilgrims crowd around the Mount

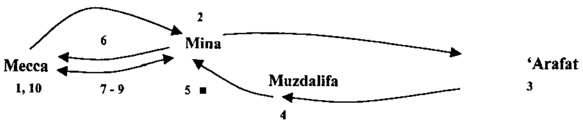

FIGURE I.1 Major steps of the hajj

1 Put on the *ihram* garb and enter the sacred precinct on the outskirts of Mecca; chant the *talbiya* on the way to Mecca and perform the *tawaf* of arrival by circling the *Ka'ba* seven times (before the eighth day of Dhu al-Hijjah)
2 Spend the night in the pilgrims' camp at Mina (eighth day)
3 Gather at 'Arafat for the Day of Standing (ninth day)
4 Leave 'Arafat after sundown, spend the night in Muzdalifa, and gather pebbles for stoning the devil in Mina (evening of the ninth and morning of the tenth)
5 Arrive in Mina, stone the first pillar symbolizing the devil before noon, make an animal sacrifice, and remove the *ihram* (tenth day)
6 Return to Mecca, perform a second *tawaf* followed by the *sa'y*—running seven times between the hills of al-Safa and al-Marwa (tenth or eleventh day)
7–9 Shuttle between Mecca and Mina, stoning all three pillars and spending the nights in Mina (eleventh to thirteenth days)
10 Perform the *tawaf* of farewell and immediately depart Mecca (twelfth day or later)

of Mercy, where Muhammad delivered his sermon, and many believe their prayers reach God more readily from this point than anywhere else on earth.

At sundown, tens of thousands of buses, cars, and vans begin the painful return to Mecca. Throughout the night, they squeeze into the valley of Muzdalifa, where each pilgrim collects seventy small pebbles under a magnificent starlit sky. The pebbles are "ammunition" for the following day in Mina, when pilgrims begin stoning three pillars (*jamarat*) representing the devil. When God commanded Ibrahim to kill Isma'il, Satan appeared three times, telling the father to disobey. Each time, Ibrahim chased the devil away by throwing stones. In stoning likenesses of Satan, pilgrims reenact Ibrahim's struggle and remember it in their own battles with evil and temptation.

When pilgrims offer an animal sacrifice at Mina, they celebrate God's decision to spare Isma'il by allowing Ibrahim to slaughter a ram instead of the boy. Pilgrims make their sacrifices on the tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah—the same day Muslims all over the world observe Islam's greatest festival, Kurban Bayram or 'Id al-Adha, by slaughtering an animal and sharing its meat with neighbors and the needy.

The last three days of the hajj are the most hectic and frightening. From the eleventh until the thirteenth of Dhu al-Hijjah, pilgrims are constantly mov-

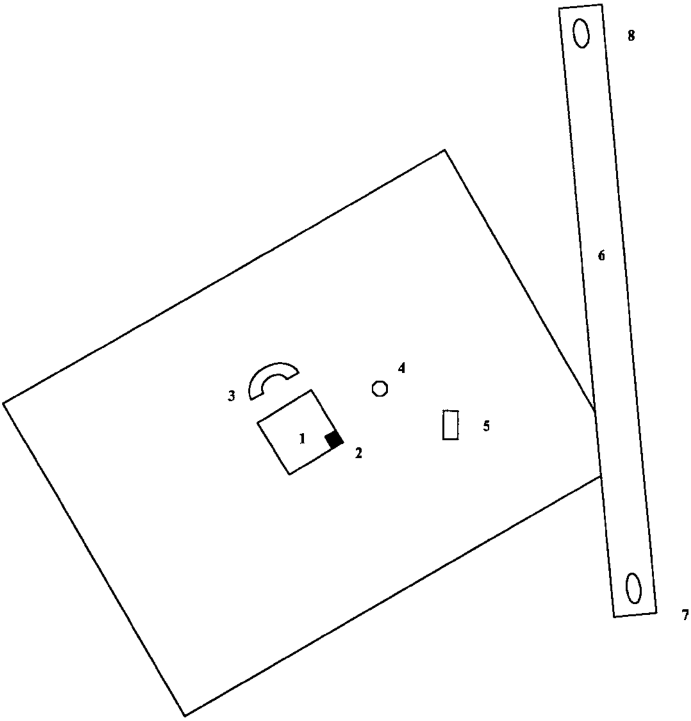

FIGURE 1.2 Main sites at the Grand Mosque in Mecca
1 The *Ka'ba*
2 The Black Stone
3 The Hijr—burial place of Hagar and Isma'il
4 Ibrahim's Place
5 The Well of Zamzam
6 Al-Mas'a, the Place of Running
7 Al-Safa
8 Al-Marwa

ing back and forth between Mina and Mecca, rushing to complete ritual duties at both sites and preparing to return home or make a side-trip to Medina. This is when overcrowding and confusion reach their peak; it is also when the bulk of hajj-related accidents and fatalities occur. In the last three decades, about 2,700 pilgrims have perished in Mina alone, mostly because of fires in the campsite and crushing crowds on pedestrian bridges and in the tunnel leading to the stoning areas around the *jamarat*[2] (Table 1.1).

Saudi Arabian authorities have spent at least $25 billion to accommodate greater numbers of pilgrims and to ensure their safety. Yet death tolls rise year after year. Ironically, vast improvements in hajj infrastructure and services probably worsened the problem by attracting ever larger throngs to tiny areas

TABLE 1.1 Hajj-related disasters in recent years

2004	251 pilgrims die in Mina during stampedes at the *jamarat*.
2001	Crushing crowds at the *jamarat* kill 35 during the stoning of the devil.
1998	Overcrowding and trampling at the *jamarat* leave 118 dead.
1997	Fire sweeps through the pilgrims' camp at Mina, destroying 70,000 tents and causing 343 fatalities and 1,500 injuries.
1994	Trampling kills 270 people near the *jamarat*.
1990	1,426 pilgrims perish during a human stampede in the al-Mu'aisim pedestrian tunnel through the mountains between Mecca and Mina. A power failure cuts the tunnel's air-conditioning and lighting, spreading panic among thousands who fear being trapped inside.
1989	Terrorists set off two bombs in Mecca, killing 1 and wounding 16. Sixteen Kuwaitis are arrested and executed.
1987	Police clash with pro-Iranian demonstrators in the Grand Mosque, leaving 402 dead.
1975	Fire kills at least 200 pilgrims in the camp at Mina.

now more cramped and overburdened than ever[3] (Table 1.2). No matter how rapidly the Saudis demolish and rebuild, they can never keep up with the even stronger surge of pilgrims eager to come under any conditions.

Pilgrimage managers eased the pressure somewhat by adopting a quota system that freezes per capita hajj participation at 1990 levels. Nowadays, most countries can send no more than 1,000 pilgrims for every million people, holding the total number of overseas hajjis at about 1.3 million annually.[4] The international network of hajj agencies created to encourage pilgrimage is now a gatekeeper constricting the flow at its source.

Saudi officials also limit internal pilgrims—resident foreigners and Saudi citizens—who used to equal the number of hajjis from abroad. In 1998, the Saudi government required its own citizens to apply to local pilgrimage boards that grant permits only to those who have not made the hajj for at least five years. Pilgrims from within the kingdom have declined from 50 percent of all hajjis to less than 30 percent—and most of these are non-Saudis.[5]

Saudi authorities tried to lessen the sting of quotas by encouraging people to make fewer hajjs and more *'umras*—briefer visits to Mecca that Muslims can undertake any time of year. In 2001, the Saudis liberalized the *'umra* system, allowing foreigners to travel freely inside the kingdom. In granting *'umra* visitors the equivalent of tourist visas, the Saudis hope to kill two birds with one stone—deflecting anger over new hajj restrictions while building a tourism industry that earns foreign exchange without admitting non-Muslims. Each year, Saudi Arabian tourists spend about $8 billion abroad, three times the amount hajjis spend in their country. A freer *'umra* might offset these costs and lighten pressures in the hajj season.

Overcrowding and fatalities would be far worse were it not for the inherent flexibility of the rituals themselves. All pilgrims must perform essentially the

TABLE 1.2 Resources and services devoted to the hajj

Mosque expansion in Mecca	A 5-fold increase in the area of the Grand Mosque after 1955 and another doubling of the area after 1988, permitting more than 1 million visitors at a time
Mosque expansion in Medina	Four expansions since 1951, creating capacity for 700,000 worshipers
Transportation	A separate terminal at King 'Abd al-'Aziz Airport in Jeddah, receiving 50,000 pilgrims daily (Indonesia alone accounts for more than 450 flights and Pakistan an additional 376 flights); port facilities in Jeddah admitting 70 ships carrying 80,000 pilgrims in less than 3 weeks
Security, health, and service workers	15,000 police, 5,000 doctors and nurses, 35,000 traffic officers, cleaners, bakers, and rubbish collectors
Food	95.2 million loaves of bread; 7.8 million ready-made meals on sale at 1,500 points in Mecca, 'Arafat, and Mina
Water	50.5 million 1-liter plastic bags of water, 113 million bottles of mineral water, and 141 million liters of Zamzam water
Publications	6 million books, 600,000 audiocassettes, 300,000 Qur'ans, and 117,000 videotapes in 5 languages
Health centers	85 in Mecca, including 5 in the Grand Mosque; 133 in Medina, including 7 in the Prophet's Mosque
Fireproof tents	40,000 fiberglass tents, 42,000 water pumps, and 27,000 toilets in Mina
Animals	1.1 million sheep, 172,000 goats, 60,000 cattle, and 60,000 camels; the meat of more than 600,000 animals distributed to 27 countries
The *Kiswa*	450 kilograms (992 pounds) of silk and gold embroidery woven by 200 people at a cost of $4.53 million

same rites in the same places, but they enjoy some leeway in the timing and sequence of movements. Pilgrims can accomplish a valid hajj even if they fail to complete an obligatory act. A hajji's intention is always more important than her ritual exactness. If exigencies of health or safety disrupt her schedule, there are many ways to repair the breach: making an additional animal sacrifice, fasting a few extra days in the year ahead, or increasing her annual *zakat* contribution for the poor.

Hajj managers encourage pilgrims to stick to the basic rites and dispense with others that are only customary or that are potentially life threatening. Each year, they urge pilgrims making the *tawaf* to be content with beckoning to the Black Stone from a distance instead of pushing through the crowd to kiss or touch it. Nowadays, most people make their animal sacrifices by proxy rather than in person, knowing the excess meat is no longer incinerated or buried in the desert but frozen and airlifted to feed needy Muslims in about thirty countries.[6]

Two reforms are particularly vital to crowd control, though they are controversial for breaking revered custom. First, a longer timetable for stoning the *jamarat* in Mina allows pilgrims to pummel the devil throughout the daylight hours instead of piling on top of one another in the hottest part of the afternoon. Second, when the hajj ends, pilgrims must leave Mecca as soon as possible rather than staying on as students or permanent residents, as millions did for centuries.[7]

International management and ritual flexibility save countless lives each year, but neither can ensure a safe and successful hajj. In the end, it is the hajjis themselves who create a pilgrimage where disaster is the exception rather than the rule. The hajj works because two million hajjis of every race and nation are determined to make it work.

Small Groups and Great Deeds: Making Friends on the Move

Even though the core of the hajj is a celebration of unity and equality, it takes time for pilgrims to learn the value of looking after each other instead of looking out for themselves. The group I joined in the United States was no exception. My fifty or so companions came from every part of the country, but most were Indian and Palestinian immigrants who quickly decided they did not like one another.

Their mutual antipathy expressed precisely the national and ethnic jealousy the hajj is supposed to transcend. In retrospect, though, they did us all a great favor. By setting such a bad example in the early days of our journey, they made the rest of us more determined to cement friendships that pulled the group together in the difficult weeks that followed.

Taming Tribalism

The most embarrassing clash occurred in Jeddah, just after arriving in Saudi Arabia. We were getting ready for a pre-hajj visit to Medina, the city where Muhammad established what many regard as the ideal Islamic society. As we boarded, our laughter and chatter faded to awkward silence as we realized there were not enough seats to go around. Nearly everyone was in the throes of jet lag after two-day flights with long stopovers in New York, Frankfurt, and Amman, but somebody had to stand.

The last aboard were also the least capable of enduring more discomfort—elderly Indians, mainly women. No one moved and no one spoke. Then, all eyes turned toward four young men—all in their twenties and all Palestinian—seated together near the center of the bus. More annoyed than ashamed, one of the youths shouted, "The Indian men should stand so their women can sit down. It's their responsibility to take care of their own people."

At that, Dr. Hasan—a surgeon in his sixties and the sole male among those standing—jumped out of his skin. "What are you talking about?" he screamed. "Indian men, Palestinian men. There are no Indians and Palestinians here. There are only Muslims! In a few hours we will be at the tomb of the Prophet, and you are telling us some of these seats are for Indians and others are for Palestinians? What kind of hajj are you making?"

This was merely the first of many impromptu lectures Dr. Hasan gave us on social propriety and ritual correctness. He constantly worried we might "spoil" our pilgrimages by missing a required rite or destroying our state of purity with prohibited behavior. But now it was Dr. Hasan who was on the verge of invalidating his hajj even before it began. Not only did he let the cat out of the bag about how the Indians and Palestinians really felt about one another but also he unleashed a fiery temper that spelled trouble for everyone. We all knew the surest way to invalidate a pilgrimage was to get embroiled in a fight—even if someone else started it.

Within seconds of the doctor's outburst, half those seated jumped up, offering places to the latecomers. We all found some place to squeeze in, and no one cared if their new neighbors were young or old, male or female, Indian or Palestinian. The young men who set the doctor off stayed glued to their window seats, but they had sense enough to hold their tongues. They had gotten the message and, whatever their inner thoughts, were on their best behavior from then on.

Later, a brief crisis nudged the Palestinians a little further out of their cocoon. A Palestinian woman disappeared, and her companions were frantic. Police scoured missing pilgrims' camps all over Medina, hoping someone had found her and led her to safety. Finally, late in the afternoon, Muhammad, leader of our tour, came to me with good news—he was on his way to fetch her from a Turkish dormitory on the other side of town, and he wanted me to tag along.

In the next few hours, we realized the vanishing lady had triggered a spontaneous multinational effort that was repeated thousands of times every day of the hajj season. Muhammad and I—an Egyptian and an American—found a taxi driver from Yemen who knew enough of the city to unravel directions from several Saudi policemen. When we arrived at the Turkish center, the director introduced a withered Moroccan man smiling from ear to ear as he leaned on a wooden walking staff. It was he who had found the Palestinian woman. Then, he insisted on waiting at her side the entire day and personally handing her over to her friends.

When she described her dramatic "rescue," tensions in our group subsided considerably. The "every country for itself" approach was soundly discredited, and the young men who advocated it were doing nothing to watch over their compatriots. Most Palestinian pilgrims in our group were middle-aged and elderly women traveling without male escorts. The only young woman was a bright and dutiful daughter-in-law stuck with the impossible job of riding herd over a dozen bewildered grandmothers. Most of the time she managed to keep them in tow, but it was too much to expect of one person.

The Doctor Learns to Relax

As our companions created more friendships cutting across cultures, their initial squabbles and suspicions faded from memory. Everyone benefited from the comradeship, but it was Dr. Hasan who gained the most. He spurred others to abandon their "tribal feuding," but they, in turn, pressed him to give up his obsession for ritual perfection.

The turning point for the doctor came in the valley of Muzdalifa in the middle of the world's biggest traffic jam. At sundown on the Day of Standing, all two million pilgrims assembled at ʻArafat depart at exactly the same time. More than 100,000 buses, trucks, cars, and vans plunge into a couple of narrow mountain passes, producing complete gridlock. As darkness falls, the lucky ones crawl ahead at one mile per hour. Around midnight or later, they arrive at Muzdalifa, pausing until twilight before moving on to Mina.

Pilgrims do very little at Muzdalifa, and in the past that was exactly why many described it with such ecstasy. They pray and gather seventy pebbles to use later in stoning the devil, but mostly they camp out under the desert sky and gaze at endless stars dancing in the luminous canopy above. Before the hajj became gargantuan, Muzdalifa offered a few precious hours of peace and solitude to recover a bit of energy for the final days of ritual duties that keep pilgrims shuttling back and forth between Mina and Mecca.

Today, that respite is gone. The valley is a grisly parking lot—miles of jet-black asphalt under blinding light towers, where thousands of air-conditioned buses sit, their motors churning clouds of carbon monoxide thick enough to chew. There is room for a fraction of the early arrivals to pitch tents in the desert and pray at a tiny mosque in the foothills. They can bide their time until first light signals a renewal of the trek toward Mina. For everyone else, Muzdalifa is a bleak holding pen where those straying more than a few hundred feet from the bus will probably never find their way back.

For most, the "new Muzdalifa" is a disappointment, but for Dr. Hasan it was a calamity. The leaders suggested that, in view of the impossible conditions, we could legitimately leave the valley a few hours before dawn. This way, we might arrive in Mina early enough to complete the first ritual stoning of the devil before the heat and crowds became truly dangerous. But the doctor would not hear of it. For him, it was cheating, pure and simple. He insisted we stay through the night. "If the rest of you want to spoil your hajjs, I can't stop you," he said. "But let me get off of the bus right here."

Everyone understood the doctor would be exposing himself to great danger if he left the group and tried to catch up at Mina. It took us half an hour to persuade him to stay, marshaling every conceivable argument both personal and theological. We pointed out that sleeping at Muzdalifa was a custom, not a requirement. In recent years, it had become routine for guides to shorten the time there because of terrible overcrowding. None of this impressed Dr. Hasan. We were lazy and looking for any excuse to cut corners. Because the travel agents were motivated only by profit, they had no qualms about bending the rules, and they could always find scholars willing to spout any opinion for which they were paid.

Soon the debate widened as companions added reasons for the doctor to change his mind. Several reminded him that a sincere intention was far more important to a valid hajj than any ritual. Only God decides whose pilgrimage is acceptable and whose is irretrievably flawed. His decision depends on what is in a pilgrim's heart rather than on ritual precision, and no human knows the result for certain. These people said the doctor was the best judge of his own intention, and if he had more confidence in himself spiritually, he would be less distracted by legalisms and appearances.

Others pointed out that even if leaving Muzdalifa early was a technical breach, it was a minor fault that could be remedied by any number of compensatory acts. "Only God is perfect," said a woman near the front of the bus. "And he doesn't expect the visitors to his house to be perfect guests," said another toward the rear. "Especially if perfection means getting killed," added a man standing close to the doctor.

There was yet another argument that swayed Dr. Hasan, though it sprang more from desperation than from common sense or any religious authority we could recall. Several of us proclaimed we were willing to be held personally responsible for the decision to move on. If there was any infraction, the doctor would be absolved, and we alone would be accountable before God.

At last, Dr. Hasan relented. Stepping back from the front door, he nodded to the driver and took his seat. It was the most dubious and emotional argument of all that tipped the balance—a spontaneous declaration of shared responsibility by the very people he scolded in Medina for succumbing to tribalism. Now, everyone pooled their persuasive skills to cajole a proud and obstinate man who had painted himself into a corner and needed a graceful way out. After insisting he had to leave the group to save his hajj, the doctor seemed relieved to discover he could remain with us and enjoy even higher esteem.

Our Composite Hajji

My companions could not have chosen a better time to pull themselves together, for the final days in Mina and Mecca were by far the most difficult. In previous weeks, I had become friends with a handful of men who were also traveling on their own, and before long our makeshift family blossomed into one of the most cohesive units in the group. I spent the bulk of my time with Muhammad, the Egyptian tour leader, who was a university student in Chicago, and Sultan, a towering African American postal worker from Oakland. Most days, we were joined by Ashraf, an Egyptian engineer from Milwaukee, and Hussain, a Pakistani who ran a tourist shop in New Orleans. There were also a couple of married men who enjoyed our company whenever their wives had to share sleeping quarters with the other women. We jokingly called them the "brothers from Ohio," but they were really brothers-in-law—Middle Western farm boys married to sisters from a family of Syrian immigrants.

Muhammad, Sultan, and I got acquainted in Medina. Muhammad arranged for Sultan and me to be roommates and visited us whenever he was free. Sultan spent a day and a half guiding us through the history of Islam among American blacks. He gave a masterly account of the rival factions—describing their social bases, their clashes and reconciliation with mainstream Islam, and their influence on the broader civil rights movement.

Afterward, Sultan asked Muhammad to translate a few verses from the Qur'an because he could not understand if their references to "infidels" and "unbelievers" included Christians and Jews. Muhammad claimed that all non-Muslims including "People of the Book" were unbelievers, so I noted that standard interpretations contradicted him. He readily acknowledged my point, arguing that differences of opinion were beneficial because they forced people to look to the Qur'an for evidence.

Reaching into his shirt pocket, he produced a small Qur'an he carried everywhere. He told us he and his wife had a pact to refer to the Qur'an and abide by its teachings whenever they disagreed about something at home. "If this is the way you read the Qur'an," I said, "your wife must win all the arguments." "That's almost true," he admitted smiling through his curly black beard, "but I win one too now and then."

In addition to the constant teasing and learning from one another, we also developed a keen sense of mutual protection. It began with small things like watching after each other in crowds and attending to constant signs of fatigue and dehydration. In time, it seemed we each lent parts of ourselves to an imaginary fourth hajji we had created to look after us all. Our composite guardian was everything we were and more. He pooled our size and stamina, our senses and instincts, our languages and social skills, our courage and prudence.

There were many occasions where mutual reliance saved us from physical harm, but two incidents stand out. The first was in Medina during a morning visit to the Prophet's Mosque. The focal point of the mosque is a small area toward the front where the Prophet's pulpit and tomb are located. A narrow passage between the pulpit and tomb is known as Rauda al-Nabawiya—the Prophet's Garden—because tradition says he was accustomed to praying there. No matter how many additions the Saudis construct to expand the space for prayer, everyone still wants to be as close as possible to this tiny corner.

Security guards in the mosque allow pilgrims to pray briefly in the Rauda and then to pass quickly by the Prophet's tomb. Pilgrims can greet the Prophet as they would any dear friend, but they are not permitted to pray in front of his tomb because it would seem they were worshiping another human instead of God, especially because their backs are facing the *Ka'ba*. The steady crush of emotion-filled visitors and their recurrent clashes with whip-wielding guards makes this a flash point under any circumstances. But since the Iranian Revolution, guards have become more willing to use force against stragglers, suspecting they might be Shi'ites protesting bans on visitations at Medina's other gravesites.

When we visited the Prophet's tomb, Sultan and I were astonished by the power of Muhammad's emotions. We had already made several trips to the mosque at different hours of the day and night, so we assumed this visit would be like the others—crowded but relaxed and convivial. Then, as we squeezed into the line passing in front of the tomb, we realized Muhammad was weeping uncontrollably.

Overcome by the surge of feeling he experienced in the Prophet's "presence," he froze, closed his eyes, and prayed in whispers, holding his open hands near his temples. Soon, others stood at his side, each in a similar posture. The flow of visitors slowed to a trickle and then stopped completely, putting unbearable pressure on the already weary crowd behind us.

As Sultan made his way to the exit, I pulled his arm. As soon as he saw Muhammad, Sultan's eyes told me he understood what I was just beginning to grasp—the security guards were ready to pounce, and the pilgrims were terrified. In a flash, we grabbed Muhammad, shook him to his senses, and pushed him toward the door. By the time the guards moved in, the lines had almost sorted themselves out, and a few mild swishes were enough to finish the job.

A week later at Mina, we had a much closer call. The crowds were unusually thick around the three pillars where pilgrims throw stones at the "devil." The steep stairways to the stoning area were so littered with abandoned footwear it was hard to avoid stumbling. In the scramble to get down the stairs in one piece, pilgrims were literally running out of their sandals.

It took us thirty minutes to get within striking distance of the nearest pillar because thousands of pilgrims were shoving in opposite directions at the same time. About half were pushing us aside, determined to depart the same way they arrived instead of advancing toward the other pillars in a continuous flow. Stones were flying everywhere. Most landed far short of the target, showering down on screaming pilgrims pinned against the wall surrounding the pillar and desperate to leave by any route.

Sultan and I got close enough to throw our stones over the sea of bobbing heads; then we stepped aside so Hussain and Ashraf could do the same. A few stones hit the "devil," but most whizzed by and went too far. In trying to avoid hitting the pilgrims in front of us, we threw so hard we struck people on the other side of the pillar.

When it was time to leave, we were as confused as everyone else about what path to take. Only Sultan was tall enough to see over the mass of bodies and waving arms. He spotted an opening to the right and told us to walk in front of him as he shouted directions. For the next ten minutes, he guided us to safety one step at a time, as cool as a rush-hour commuter inching toward his regular train. I was never more than a few inches away from him, close enough to feel his chest against my head, like a baby kangaroo peering out of its mother's pouch.

Ashraf kept up with us, but Hussain disappeared. After an hour and a half walk back to our tent, we were relieved to find him talking excitedly with others in the group. Many were asking him to take their stones so he could cast them on their behalf. They were too frightened and weak to return to the pillars, so we agreed to be their proxies. The next day, we set out early with extra pebbles in hand, making sure to beat the afternoon crowds and return before the crush. Amazingly, no one was killed during the days of stoning that year. Before long, however, death tolls became so alarming that *'ulama* in Saudi Arabia and Egypt suggested extending the prescribed hours for stoning so crowds could spread out over the cooler mornings as well as the blistering afternoons.

Transnational Society Galore

Once we learned to recognize it, we saw our informal team approach replicated all around us. Small groups of five or six are not as obvious as larger units traveling on the same airplanes and hailing from neighboring villages. Yet informal groups are the key to organizing daily life inside all the big delegations clustered around national flags and sporting distinctive uniforms.

Everyone marveled at the regimentation of Singaporeans and the utter disarray of Nigerians. Women from Singapore all wore the same clothing—a white head cover and smock with bright red-and-white flags stitched to their backs so they could spot one another at a distance. Wherever we went, they were the tiniest hajjis in the biggest groups. We never saw fewer than twenty at a time, darting past everyone else and locking arms when necessary to hold their ranks together.

The Nigerians were constantly underfoot. The moment we stepped off the plane in Jeddah, we found them sprawled out on the cool pavement, sleeping soundly while the whole world tried to avoid stomping on their heads. Nigerian men—the most destitute of all pilgrims—were turning the Holy Cities into a giant open-air dormitory, camping out behind the mosques and in the streets, with remains of cardboard boxes as their mattresses. Nigerian women were the most enterprising pilgrims. They set up instant street markets at every turn, laying out colorful cloth and dresses that sold so briskly the police hardly bothered to shoo them away.

Most pilgrims were in between the tight-knit Singaporeans and the free-floating Nigerians. Like us, they improvised their own small solutions, adapting each day as they developed more confidence and learned to expect the unexpected. As we mingled with Bangladeshis and Indonesians, we realized they were unusually adept at creating flexible structures invisible to outsiders.

I discovered the Bangladeshis during an embarrassing encounter in Mina, where their tactfulness saved me from starting a needless quarrel. On a sweltering morning after an hour's wait to use the toilet and brush my teeth, I remembered it was my turn to fetch the tea for my companions. When I finally located the nearest tent where refreshments were sold, it looked like a disaster. About fifty drowsy pilgrims were scattered about waiting for a couple of workmen to boil water. At the back of the tent, three barrel-sized cauldrons sat atop sputtering gas burners no match for the job.

I was resigned to waiting in yet another interminable line, but where was it? When I asked how to queue up, they shrugged their shoulders, saying, "We are all waiting together." Exasperated, I snapped back, "Great, no line. I bet you guys wouldn't know a line if it fell on you."

Instead of responding in kind, they stood up and formed three neat rows—one for each cauldron. In less than a minute, they taught me a double lesson without uttering a word. They were urging me to control my temper so I would not risk a spat that would spoil their hajjs as well as my own. They were also showing me that they were far more organized than I realized. Even if they were not standing in line continuously, they carried an agreed pecking order in their heads and could produce it at a moment's notice.

Indonesian pilgrims are renowned for their tradition of teamwork, which their government tries to harness in official groups lead by hajj bureaucrats. Every planeload of Indonesians is divided into regional units outfitted with distinctive costumes and color-coded suitcases and linked in a single chain of command. The Indonesians stand out not just because of their unique appearance but because of their extraordinary generosity.

One of many examples I witnessed was at the Grand Mosque in Mecca during Friday noontime prayers. At the last minute, Sultan, Ashraf, and I managed to squeeze onto the escalator to the second level and nudge our way toward a railing overlooking the vast courtyard. Nearly all the early arrivals were Indonesians, and they had already packed into the tightest ranks imaginable. Yet as soon as they saw a stream of latecomers, they somehow created whole new rows welcoming anyone who wanted to join them.

That day's sermon seemed to last forever, and everyone was wilting from the heat. An orange watercooler with paper cups was located near the railing, but it was inaccessible to everyone except the hundred or so Indonesians seated around it. A few people in the rear asked for water, and before long Indonesians were passing cups back and forth in all directions, never taking a drop for themselves. The cups were disposable, but most empties found their way back to the cooler and were recycled until the water ran out. Afterward, the used cups were dutifully returned to the dispenser, leaving the wastebasket beside the cooler nearly empty when prayers finished.

Our last days in Mecca were relaxed and leisurely. In the lull before the madness of departure, new hajjis were busy shopping and sightseeing. Others tried to catch up on sleep, hoping to remember the normal rhythm of day and night. Most of us had become complacent tourists; a terrorist attack in the heart of the city was the furthest thing from our minds.

The evening the first bomb exploded, Ashraf and I were walking by one of the main entrances to the central market. We had just stepped out of our hotel to round up cold drinks for our roommates when a sudden roar stopped us in our tracks. We stared upward and to the left, searching for some visual clue of what had happened. Instead, we heard another roar coming from the market—first a dull rumbling, then a steady tremor like an earthquake. Suddenly, tides of people began pouring out of the market into the square. It was a stampede—a human avalanche heading straight at us.

Ashraf and I happened to be standing between two of the tall light towers illuminating the plaza. He jumped a few feet to the right, I scooted to the left, and we crouched behind the thick pillars, hoping they might shield us if we remained perfectly still. For the next fifteen minutes we waited and watched, as thousands of people dashed past us on both sides.

Soon, my mind started tricking me. I was floating safely above the panic, no longer standing in its midst. I was just as terrified as the fleeing crowds, but, unable to run with them or away from them, I imagined myself hovering over them instead.

Miraculously, no one fell, and no one was trampled. Two nights later, another bomb exploded farther away, but this time we were in the hotel lobby seeing off friends whose flight left the next day. Several people were injured in the blasts, but a Pakistani pilgrim was the only fatality. The Saudis arrested twenty-nine Kuwaiti Shi'ites, calling them Iranian-trained saboteurs who smuggled in explosives to spread mayhem during the hajj. Within two months, sixteen were beheaded, and four others received long prison sentences.[8]

Once again, we saw that no government could really protect the pilgrims. They could provide basic services and punish criminals, but the rest was up to us. Even on the final day in Mecca, our group was still learning to pull together against common danger. As my roommates returned from the last circling of the *Ka'ba*—the "farewell *tawaf*"—they told remarkably different stories.

After weeks of failure, Sultan finally pushed close enough to kiss the Black Stone, but just a few feet behind him the "brothers" from Ohio lost all their cash to thieves who slashed their clothes and money belts. Back in the hotel, Sultan—fearless and elated—boasted of his feat, giving heart to the hapless brothers, listening intently as they peeked out from their bunk beds, dazed and shaken but unharmed.