



TESTIMONIES

THE SABRA AND SHATILA MASSACRES: EYE-WITNESS REPORTS

LEILA SHAHID

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY LINDA BUTLER

The Sabra and Sbatila massacres, whose twentieth anniversary occurs in September 2002, marked the culmination of Israel's second invasion of Lebanon, launched on 6 June 1982. Named Operation Peace in Galilee with the stated intention of remaining within twenty-five miles of the Israeli border, the invasion soon expanded in scope. By 13 June, Israeli forces led by Defense Minister Ariel Sharon had pushed all the way to Baabda, seat of the Lebanese presidency, completely encircling West Beirut, where the PLO was headquartered, and trapping thousands of PLO fighters inside the city. The declared goal of the operation also expanded, from protecting the Israeli citizens of northern Galilee into what Sharon called "ridding the world of the center of international terrorism."¹ More specifically, this meant elimination of PLO headquarters and infrastructure in West Beirut.

The siege of West Beirut continued for seventy days. Though the PLO, as the principal military force fighting the Israeli onslaught, had put up far stiffer resistance than had been expected (the Israelis lost 368 men during the incursion²), losses on the Arab side were staggering. During the first three months of the invasion, 17,825 were killed throughout the areas occupied,³ while in West Beirut alone, 2,461 persons were killed in the systematic air strikes and intensive artillery and naval gunfire directed at the capital.⁴ As of midsummer, the PLO became engaged in negotiations led by U.S. envoy Philip Habib to bring about an end to the siege, which hinged on its own withdrawal.

One of the primary sticking points in the negotiations was the PLO's fear for the fate of the thousands of Palestinian civilians who would remain be-

LEILA SHAHID, Palestinian ambassador to France since 1993, was living in Beirut at the time of the massacres. The six interviews published here, conducted in the immediate wake of the events, were published by our sister quarterly, *Revue d'études Palestiniennes*, vol. 6 (Winter 1983), and have never been published in English. They are part of a larger study conducted by the author. **LINDA BUTLER** is associate editor of *JPS*.

1. Quoted in Jonathan C. Randal, *Going All the Way: Christian Warlords, Israeli Adventurers, and the War in Lebanon* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984), p. 250.
2. The Chronology of *JPS* 46, no. 2 (Winter 1983), p. 116, quotes the IDF figures from 6 June to 10 October as 368 killed and 2,383 wounded in Lebanon.
3. *An Nabar*, 1 September 1982, cited in the Chronology of *JPS* 46, no. 2 (Winter 1983), p. 92.
4. Robert Fisk, *Pity the Nation: Lebanon at War* (London: André Deutsch, 1990), p. 256.

bind in the camps. Agreement was finally reached in mid-August, involving the evacuation of more than 11,000 Palestinian fighters and PLO officials and the dismantlement of PLO offices and infrastructure, to be supervised by a multinational force that would leave within thirty days of its arrival. The agreement also involved written guarantees for the security of Palestinians in the camps personally signed by Habib as representing the United States.⁵ The evacuation was carried out from 21 August to 1 September 1982. By 10 September, the U.S., French, and Italian troops that had overseen the operation had left the country.

Aside from ending the PLO presence in Beirut, Israel's invasion had a second goal: the installation of a Lebanese government friendly to Israel and willing to sign a peace treaty with it. Soon after the Lebanese civil war broke out in March 1975, Israel began cultivating several of the Maronite militias fighting the PLO, particularly the Phalangists under the leadership of Bashir Gemayel. Ever since 1976, these forces had been trained, armed, supplied, and (as of 1982) even uniformed by Israel, its cadres and top lieutenants almost all having received training and instruction in Israel itself. In addition, Israel had largely created a Lebanese border militia, grandiosely titled the Army of Free Lebanon, under the command of renegade Lebanese army major Saad Haddad and stationed in the southern zone that Israeli forces had been forced to evacuate after its first invasion in 1978. Haddad, however, could not serve Israel's larger purpose, having no constituency of his own and being seen, even in most Maronite circles, as a mere Israeli puppet. Gemayel, on the other hand, a charismatic though ruthless leader who had not hesitated to carry out massacres against Maronite rivals (including the son of former president Suleiman Frangieh and his family, along with thirty-two followers, in 1977), was wildly popular among large segments of the Maronite population and enjoyed near godlike status among his men.

On 23 August, as the PLO evacuation was in progress, Bashir Gemayel was elected president of Lebanon, with the Muslim deputies boycotting the vote. Tensions between Gemayel and the Israelis grew following the election as he began to resist pressures to conclude a formal treaty quickly. Still, he represented Israel's best hope for achieving its objectives in Lebanon.

Then, at 4:30 P.M. on Tuesday, 14 September, a week before Gemayel was to assume office, he was killed in a massive explosion at the Phalange party headquarters in East Beirut. Though the perpetrator (who turned out to be a Syrian agent) was found only later, and though the PLO had by this time totally evacuated the city, Sharon did not hesitate to blame the Palestinians. In a declaration that same evening reported by Associated Press, he stated that Gemayel's killing "symbolizes the terrorist murderousness threatening all people of peace from the hands of PLO terrorist organizations and their supporters." According to Washington Post correspondent Jonathan Randal, Gemayel's men, whose hatred for the Palestinians was notorious, were "only too willing to listen to the Israelis' insistent argument that the Palestinians in the camps had killed Bashir and should pay."⁶

5. For the text of the agreement, see *JPS* 44/45, nos. 4-1 (Summer/Fall 1982), Doc. E4.

6. Randal, *Going All the Way*, p. 14.

The stage was thus set for the massacre. Within hours of the announcement of Gemayel's death, Sharon and Prime Minister Menachem Begin, informing only Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir and without consulting the Israeli cabinet, decided to enter West Beirut despite explicit commitments to the United States not to do so. That same night, preparations began for an operation that according to Israeli journalist Amnon Kapeliouk had been meticulously planned long in advance.⁷ Israel Defense Forces (IDF) chief of staff General Rafael Eitan arrived in Beirut that evening. Several hours later, at 3:00 A.M. on Wednesday, 15 September, Eitan, Major General Amir Drori, head of Israel's northern command, and other Israeli officers met with Phalangist military leaders, including Fadi Frem, the militia's new commander in chief, and Elie Hobeika, chief of intelligence. It was at this meeting, according to Sharon's testimony to the Knesset on 22 September 1982, that the Phalangist entry into the camps was discussed.⁸ Sharon's instructions regarding entry into West Beirut, recorded by his personal aide on 15 September and presented as testimony to the Kahan Commission of Inquiry Israel set up after the massacre, emphasized that "Only one element, and that is the IDF, shall command the forces in the area. For the operation in the camps, the Phalangists should be sent in."⁹ Chief of Staff Eitan in his briefing to the Israeli cabinet on the evening of 16 September—when the massacre was just getting underway—explained that while the IDF would not enter the camps, the Phalangists would be sent in "with their own methods."¹⁰ Explaining the advantage of leaving the task to the Phalangists, he noted that "we could give them orders whereas it was impossible to give orders to the Lebanese Army."¹¹

Israel's invasion of West Beirut began at dawn Wednesday morning, scarcely twelve hours after Gemayel's assassination, with Phantom jets overflying the city at low altitude. Israeli tanks and troops advanced in a six-pronged thrust, with Israeli gunboats taking up position to shell the city. With the PLO gone, resistance from the Lebanese National Movement (the coalition of Islamic and leftist forces) was sporadic and light, and with the mines having been cleared a few weeks earlier by French international forces, Israel lost only seven men during its entire stay in West Beirut.¹²

Sharon arrived at 9:00 A.M. to oversee operations. By noon, while the IDF push into West Beirut continued, the IDF had completely surrounded the camps, setting up checkpoints and roadblocks that controlled all entrances and exits. It also occupied a number of multistoried buildings on the perimeter as observation posts and established its forward command post in a seven-story building at the Kuwait embassy traffic circle, which, according to *Time* magazine, enjoyed "an unobstructed and panoramic view" of the Sbatila

7. Amnon Kapeliouk, *Sabra and Sbatila: Inquiry into a Massacre*, ed. and trans. Khalil Jahshan (Belmont, MA: Association of Arab-American University Graduates, 1984), p. 14.

8. See *JPS* 46, no. 2 (Winter 1983), Doc. C2, p. 215.

9. "Final Report of the Israeli Commission of Inquiry into the Events at the Refugee Camps in Beirut" (hereafter Kahan Report), in *JPS* 47, no. 3 (Spring 1983), p. 94.

10. *Ibid.*, 97.

11. *Ibid.*

12. Kapeliouk, *Sabra and Sbatila*, p. 18.

camp 200 meters away.¹³ Fire by IDF snipers and sporadic tank shelling from higher ground around the camp began that afternoon. Most of the camp residents, mainly old people, women, and children, locked themselves into their houses and waited. That day, a succession of official Israeli statements (and a cabinet statement of 16 September) repeated that the army had been obliged to intervene in West Beirut “in order to forestall the danger of violence, bloodshed, and chaos.”

Even before Gemayel's assassination, Sharon had laid the groundwork for a possible intervention in the camps on 10 September, when he had suddenly announced, without providing any evidence, that “2,000 armed terrorists” had remained in the camps. (Indeed, no evidence was ever provided, and Chief of Staff Eitan had told the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee on 14 September that “only a few terrorists . . . remain in Beirut.”¹⁴ The fact that no weaponry was ever produced after the massacre, the relatively small numbers of Maronite militiamen sent into the camps, and the minimal casualties on the part of the Maronite forces bear out the speciousness of the claim. Even after the massacres, on 24 September, when the absence of any armed presence had become manifest, Sharon said in a television interview that the IDF had had to enter Beirut “because the terrorists had left behind thousands of men” and “very large quantities of arms.”¹⁵ Now that West Beirut was in Israeli hands, the “nests of terrorists” could be dealt with in “combining operations.”

By 11:30 A.M. on Thursday, 16 September, Israel was able to announce that the “IDF is in control of all key points in Beirut. Refugee camps harboring terrorist concentrations remain encircled and closed.”¹⁶ Meanwhile, throughout the day, meetings were held between Phalangist commanders, including Frem and Hobeika, and top Israeli military leaders, including Chief of Staff Eitan, Major General Drori, head of military intelligence General Yeboshua Saguy, a high-ranking representative of Mossad, the head of Shin Bet, and the commander of Israeli forces in Beirut, Brigadier General Amos Yaron. During the meetings, General Yaron coordinated details of the Phalangist entry with the help of aerial photos of the camp and instructed the Phalangists as to the location of the “terrorist nests”; there was also a warning “not to harm civilians.”¹⁷ The last of these meetings took place at 3:00 P.M.

An hour later, 1,500 Christian militiamen, who had been assembled at the staging area of the Israeli-occupied Beirut International Airport, began moving toward the camps in convoys of IDF-supplied jeeps, following large arrows painted by the Israelis the day before on the sides of buildings to mark the best route to the Shatila camp. Most of the forces who participated in the operation were Phalangist, though there was also an undetermined number of militiamen from Saad Haddad's Free Lebanon forces. The actual operation was

13. *Time*, 4 October 1982, reproduced in *The Beirut Massacre: Press Profile*, 2d ed. (New York: Claremont Research and Publications, 1984), p. 94 (hereafter Claremont Research).

14. *Ha'Aretz*, 15 September 1982, cited in Kapeliouk, *Sabra and Shatila*, p. 20.

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Washington Post*, 26 September 1982, reproduced in Claremont Research, p. 83.

17. Kapeliouk, *Sabra and Shatila*, p. 25; Kahan Report, p. 93.

led by Hobeika, well known to the Israelis since 1976, when he had gratuitously killed a number of unarmed Lebanese and Palestinian civilians while assisting an operation of Haddad, and who, like many other Phalange militiamen, had been trained in Israel.

The first unit of 150 militiamen (according to the Kaban Report, "the members of this unit were considered specially trained in discovering terrorists who tried to hide among the civilian population"¹⁸) entered the camp at sunset on Thursday, 16 September, armed with knives and hatchets in addition to firearms. The killing began almost immediately, with groups of militiamen entering homes and slitting throats, axing, shooting, and raping, often taking groups outside and lining them up for execution. There was virtually no resistance, only a very few camp residents having managed to keep a personal weapon for self-protection: throughout the forty hours of killing, there was only a handful of Phalangist casualties. As of nightfall, both Thursday and Friday, Israel began firing illuminating flares over the camps long into the night; according to a Dutch nurse, the camp was as bright as "a sports stadium lit up for a football game."¹⁹

By 8:00 P.M. Thursday, less than three hours after the entry into the camp, a Phalangist liaison officer reported to the Israeli officers at the forward command post, including General Yaron, that 300 persons, including civilians, had been killed so far. At 8:40 P.M. a briefing was held chaired by Yaron. According to the taped transcript of the briefing included in the Kaban Report, the IDF divisional intelligence officer stated that the Phalangists within the camp "are pondering what to do with the population they are finding inside. On the one hand, it seems, there are no terrorists there. . . . On the other hand, they have amassed women, children, and apparently also old people, with whom they don't exactly know what to do." When he began to cite a conversation with a Phalangist making clear the fate of these people, he was cut off by General Yaron.²⁰ At any event, at 11:00 P.M. a report was sent to IDF headquarters in East Beirut that information received from the Phalangist commander in the Sbatila camp indicated that "thus far we liquidated 300 civilians and terrorists." The report was sent to headquarters in Tel Aviv and, according to Jerusalem Post military correspondent Hirsh Goodman, was seen by more than twenty senior officers.²¹ Reinforcements were sent into the camp the following morning.

By Friday morning, 17 September, horrific rumors of massacres had begun to filter out via refugees, several thousand of whom had managed to escape to the Gaza and Akka hospitals during the night, as well as via medical personnel and film crews in the vicinity of the camps; with the camp tightly sealed by IDF troops, the rumors could not be verified. Groups of refugees attempting to flee were turned back by IDF soldiers, under orders to block the exits, but a number of IDF soldiers, dismayed by what they had been told or seen (soldiers at an armored unit 100 meters from the camp themselves witnessed batches of

18. Kahan Report, p. 93.

19. *New York Times*, 26 September 1982, in Claremont Research, p. 76.

20. Kahan Report, p. 96.

21. Kapeliouk, *Sabra and Sbatila*, p. 35.

civilians being executed), reported to their superiors. (Throughout the massacres, Christian militiamen, who made no secret of their activities, regularly came to the Israeli posts around the camps for food and water and for additional ammunition; IDF soldiers questioned later also noted the absence of the "sounds of combat.")

At about 11:30 A.M. on Friday, Yaron, on orders from Drori who had arrived at the forward command post, apparently ordered the Phalangist commanders to advance no further, and Chief of Staff Eitan, back in Tel Aviv and informed that the Phalangists had perhaps "gone too far," returned to Beirut, arriving at 3:30 P.M. At 4:00 P.M., Drori, Eitan, Yaron, and a Mossad representative met with Phalangist commanders at the Phalangist headquarters in East Beirut. According to the minutes of the Mossad representative quoted in the Kahan Report, the chief of staff "expressed his positive impression received from the statement by the Phalangist forces and their behavior in the field" and decided that they could continue their "mopping up" action until 5:00 A.M. the following day, "at which time they must stop their action due to American pressure." The Phalangist request for another bulldozer to "demolish illegal structures" was granted.²² Though it was agreed that no reinforcements would be sent into the camp, in fact fresh fighters were permitted to pass through the Israeli lines.

Meanwhile, despite Yaron's apparent order from the morning, the pace of the killing had hardly slowed. As executions, knifings, and point-blank shootings continued, bulldozers were at work digging mass graves inside the camps—one of the largest being in full view of the IDF forward command—and, as witnessed by a Norwegian envoy, loading scoops of bodies onto trucks just outside the camp to be hauled away.²³ A pattern had moreover emerged of executing groups and then bulldozing houses to bury the bodies under the rubble. At the same time, truckloads of Palestinian men, women, and children were seen leaving the camp—a Danish TV crew on Friday filmed groups being herded into trucks near Sbatila.²⁴ The bulldozing and dynamiting of houses (the "illegal structures" referred to by the Phalange to the Israelis), often with the inhabitants inside, accelerated.

The militiamen did not leave the camps at dawn the next day, Saturday, as had been agreed at the IDF-Phalange meeting the previous afternoon. Instead, the killings resumed at dawn after a brief respite after midnight. At 6 A.M., loudspeakers called upon surviving camp residents to come out and surrender. The hundreds of people—some reported more than a thousand—who emerged were marched at gunpoint toward a camp exit, with some being taken out of line and executed while others were loaded onto trucks parked in front of the abandoned Kuwaiti embassy and taken away, never to be seen again. Around 7:00 A.M., militiamen had gone to the Gaza hospital north of Sabra, killing the Arab personnel on the spot and removing the foreign staff, eventually taking them to another part of the city.²⁵ (A similar, though far

22. Kahan Report, p. 103.

23. *JPS* 46, no. 2 (Winter 1983), Chronology, p. 101.

24. *Ibid.*

25. *New York Times*, 22 September 1982; Kapeliouk, *Sabra and Sbatila*, pp. 51–52.

more lethal, operation had been carried out the day before at Akka hospital.²⁶) At 8:00 A.M., the remaining men were herded to the southern entrance, where some, fingered by an informer, were taken away, the others being marched to the Sports City stadium, where interrogations had been taking place. At 10:00 A.M., the militiamen left the camp. The IDF decided not to enter so as not to be implicated, but throughout the day interrogations continued at Sports City conducted by Israelis and their Maronite allies. The Lebanese army took control of the camps on Sunday, 19 September.

Meanwhile, foreign journalists and diplomats began entering the camps as of 9:00 A.M. Saturday to find hundreds of bodies, many mutilated, scattered around the camp as well as hastily dug shallow graves and sandpiles, often with body parts protruding. A little past noon, the first news of the massacre was broadcast to the world.

Israel initially denied involvement in or knowledge of the "alleged massacres." Later, Israeli spokesmen stated that "fierce fighting" between the Phalange and the "terrorists" had resulted in casualties on both sides and that the IDF had had to intervene to prevent a much larger tragedy. There were even Israeli claims of exchanges of fire between the IDF and the Phalangist "extremists" while the IDF attempted to stop the violence. The chief of staff attempted to claim that the killing had not begun until Friday evening, while military spokesmen asserted that the "assailants" had entered "a gap in a part of the camp under the control of the Lebanese Army" (despite the earlier statements that the area was entirely under IDF control). Prime Minister Begin, for his part, insisted not to have known anything about the massacre until 5:00 P.M. on Saturday, seven hours after it ended, and continued to maintain Israeli innocence. It was at a cabinet meeting on 19 September that he delivered his famous line that "Goyim kill other goyim and then accuse the Jews,"²⁷ and the cabinet issued a statement calling charges of IDF complicity in the massacre "blood libel."²⁸

Nonetheless, Israeli efforts to place the entire blame on the Phalangists and to deny any responsibility—despite the fact that they had manifestly provided logistical, operational support as well as food, water, ammunition, and supplies throughout the operation—failed. A unanimous Security Council resolution condemned the "criminal" massacre on 19 September. Even U.S. President Ronald Reagan, who unlike Jimmy Carter during the 1978 invasion had steadfastly refrained from ordering Israel to withdraw in June and had not even protested Israel's entry into West Beirut in violation of its commitments, now proclaimed his "outrage and revulsion" and blamed the killings on the IDF, demanding its immediate withdrawal from West Beirut.²⁹ (Israel began pulling out on 20 September.) Within Israel itself, demonstrations grew in size and intensity, with demands for the ouster of Sharon and Begin, culminating in a massive demonstration of some 400,000 people on 25 September in Tel Aviv, the largest in Israeli history.

26. *New York Times*, 22 September 1982; Kapeliouk, *Sabra and Shatila*, pp. 42–43.

27. Kapeliouk, *Sabra and Shatila*, p. 68.

28. *JPS* 46, Chronology, p. 102.

29. *Ibid.*

With such pressures, the Israeli government on 28 September appointed a three-member commission of inquiry under Yitzhak Kaban, president of the High Court. Its findings were issued on 7 February 1983. Israel was justly praised for establishing the commission, unprecedented in the Middle East, which painstakingly reconstructed events and attempted to ascertain how much the IDF leadership knew or should have known. As a result of the inquiry, Sharon lost his position as defense minister, though he remained in the government as minister without portfolio. Others implicated were also demoted, though all very quickly regained positions of importance.

Nonetheless, many found the commission's findings flawed. One egregious error was the assumption that movements in the camp "were not visible from the roof of the forward command post or from the observation sites on other roofs,"³⁰ a statement vigorously contradicted by the many journalists and diplomats who climbed to the top of the IDF-occupied buildings, where the high-power telescopes equipped with night vision hardly seemed necessary and where the goings on in large parts of the camp could be observed with the naked eye. Amnon Kapeliouk quotes an Israeli officer as saying that watching from the roofs of one of the buildings occupied by the Israelis was like watching "from the front row of a theater."³¹ It was also noted that the commission at no point criticized the invasion itself or called into question the IDF's claims of the presence of "terrorists" in the camps. Finally, the commission found that Israel bore only "indirect" or "moral" responsibility, whereas its own carefully amassed evidence points to far more. In general, the report treats the massacre as an isolated incident rather than as an integral part of the invasion.

In this regard, it is interesting to quote from the independent International Commission of Inquiry that focused on the invasion (and the massacres) from the perspective of international law. In its 280-page report published in early 1983, it noted that the

[Sabra and Sbatila] massacres were low-technology sequels to earlier high-technology saturation bombardment by Israel from land, sea and air of every major Palestinian camp situated anywhere near the combat zone throughout southern Lebanon. The underlying Israeli objective seems clearly directed at making the Palestinian camps uninhabitable in a physical sense as well as terrorizing the inhabitants and thereby breaking the will of the Palestinian national movement, not only in the war zone of Lebanon, but possibly even more centrally, in the occupied West Bank and Gaza.³²

Kapeliouk makes a similar point when describing Israel's provision of bulldozers to the Phalangists during the massacres. In a passage that seems eerily current in this summer of 2002, he writes,

30. Kahan Report, p. 94.

31. Kapeliouk, *Sabra and Sbatila*, p. 31.

32. "Israel in Lebanon: Report of the International Commission to enquire into reported violations of International Law by Israel during its invasion of the Lebanon," published as a special document in *JPS* 47, no. 3 (Spring 1983), p. 121.

Since the beginning of the war in June 1982, the Israelis have repeatedly used bulldozers to destroy homes and force the residents to flee. The refugee camps of south Lebanon were bombarded and then destroyed with explosives and bulldozers. In Israel, this operation was known as "the destruction of the terrorist infrastructure." The objective was to prevent the Palestinians from forming a national community in Lebanon. Therefore, it was necessary to destroy not only homes, but also Palestinian institutions such as schools, hospitals, and social service centers. In addition, the Israelis sought to deprive the Palestinian population of all males by arresting thousands of men and forcing thousands more to flee.³³

In terms of casualties, no census of the dead has ever been attempted. In the days following the massacre, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and other relief agencies collected the bodies and disinterred the shallow graves, giving survivors the chance to identify relatives. But efforts to establish lists of the dead soon fell victim to the priority of "national reconciliation." Bashir Gemayel's brother Amin was elected president of the republic on 21 September (with the Muslim deputies this time participating in the vote), and the Phalange role was soon downplayed or even ignored, exclusive blame being placed on Saad Haddad's men and Israel. After going through the motions in October of appointing a commission of inquiry, whose findings were never released, the subject of the massacre was virtually dropped. Any effort to collect names became virtually taboo, to the point that the ICRC has never published the names it did collect, and those conducting field work on the subject had to do so with extreme discretion. Such was the climate that even death certificates became almost impossible to obtain.³⁴

Nonetheless, there were a number of estimates in the days following the massacre. According to official Lebanese sources published in mid-October 1982, 762 bodies had been recovered in Sabra and Shatila: 212 unidentified bodies reburied in mass graves, 302 bodies identified and cremated by local rescue teams, and 248 identified and buried by the ICRC. In addition, according to the same sources, about 1,200 bodies were claimed and buried by their families. This figure of almost 2,000 does not include those buried in mass graves that were never opened, the bodies remaining under the rubble of more than 200 destroyed homes (above and beyond the some 170 bodies dug out of rubble in the first few days, after which the search was abandoned), and the "missing"—those trucked away during the massacre who never returned. Based on all these categories, Kapeliouk gives a rough estimate of 3,000 to 3,500 dead.³⁵ Bayan al-Hout, who conducted a field study of the massacre from 1982 to 1984, has identified and documented with certainty the names, with sources, of 1,390 victims: 906 known dead and 484 "missing." Her total estimate, however, is also around 3,500, based on information con-

33. Kapeliouk, *Sabra and Shatila*, pp. 45–46.

34. Email correspondence with Bayan al-Hout, Beirut, 28 August 2002.

35. Kapeliouk, *Sabra and Shatila*, pp. 62–63.

cerning mass graves never opened, estimates of dead bulldozed under the rubble (including various neighborhood shelters known to have been bulldozed), and estimated numbers of bodies removed from the area. It should be noted that in addition to Palestinians and Lebanese, there were also workers from Egypt, Syria, and Pakistan among the missing.³⁶ Certainly, precise figures will never be known. When asked how many Palestinians had been killed during the massacre, a Phalangist militiaman who took part in it replied, "You'll find out if they ever build a subway in Beirut."³⁷

THE TESTIMONIES

Sobbia F.

The F. family had lived in the Tal al-Za'atar camp until it was destroyed in 1976, at which time the father and one of the sons were killed. Afterward, the wife, Sobbia, and other children came to Shatila. The oldest daughter, Wasfia, has three children. The other three daughters are Khadija, twenty-two years old, Sawsan, twelve years old, and Zeinab, eleven years old. The only surviving son, Adel, is seven years old. Sobbia's mother-in-law, Umm Salim, was present throughout the interview. Three generations of woman bear witness.

Shahid: Tell me what happened.

Sobbia: Thursday night, we were sitting at home when the sky over the camp was lit by flares. A man came in and said the Phalangists are massacring people. We didn't believe him and went to bed. The next day, someone else came and said the same thing, that there was a massacre going on. My brother-in-law, Sobhi, who lives next door, got dressed and ran out to see what was going on. He saw dozens of bodies in the nearby alleys, along with some wounded. He was going to take them to the Akka hospital, which isn't far. On his way to get his car, he saw for the first time armed men near the Kuwaiti embassy. He ran back and shouted to us, "Quick, get up! You can't stay here, you have to leave!" Just then we heard loudspeakers calling on people to gather at Sports City. They said, "Go there and you will be safe." We were hardly out of the house when three armed men stopped us and asked if we were Palestinian. We said we were Lebanese, and they said they wouldn't touch Lebanese. Then one of them, who was leaning against a wall in khaki trousers, came up and asked to see the identity papers of one of our men, who replied, "By the life of Shaykh Bashir, I am Palestinian." The other said, "So you are all Palestinians, then. Follow me." They grouped all the men together—that is, my sons Khaled and Amr, my brother-in-law Sobhi, and our neighbors Abu Farid and Abu Shihab. They ordered us to start walking. We were five families from this neighborhood, Horch Tabet, across from the Akka hospital. So we walked, the men on one side, the women and children on the other. They had made a path through the camp by opening big breaches in the walls, and so we passed from house to house. We walked like that for some time.

Suddenly, they told the men to stop and ordered us to go on. We started to scream and weep. They said, "If you go on screaming we'll kill you too." We had hardly gone a few meters farther when we heard shots, and we understood that we were lost. So

36. Bayan al-Hout, email communication of 20 August and 28 August 2002.

37. Randal, *Going All the Way*, p. 16.

we screamed even louder. One of them said, "So what do you think? That it's chaos here? We are not killing people. We are questioning them first and then we'll judge." We begged them, "For the love of God, for the love of the Prophet Muhammad, don't kill them." And they said, "You killed Shaykh Bashir!" We swore that we didn't have anything to do with the assassination. We even said "May God kill the one who killed him. We are peaceful, we don't have any weapons, we gave ourselves up without resisting. Why are you doing this?" One of them said, "There is no God, there is no Muhammad. We are God and Muhammad. Get on, now, you whores," and he insulted us.

We had to go on until we came to a house where there was a big pit. There we saw a tank with Israelis. They were inside the camp, across from the Kuwaiti embassy. They said, "Take them to Sports City." But I had time to see, and everyone with me also saw, a deep pit full of corpses. They were killing people and throwing the bodies into the pit. This pit is near the Kuwaiti embassy, along the road. Before they let us leave, they lined us up, and one of the armed men said to another, with a wink, "Choose one. Which one deserves to have her throat slit?" The other replied, "No, we don't want to kill them now." Then they made us walk to Sports City. There, three armed men in a jeep told us to turn around and go back. We said we were getting contradictory orders. We had to go back and forth twice between the Kuwaiti embassy and Sports City. At one point, a mine or a cluster bomb exploded on our path. Some people were wounded and fell, and the men shot at us. Everyone was running in all directions. We ran toward the Arab University. We flagged down a car on the road. There were foreign journalists, but one of them spoke Arabic. They photographed us and asked us what was happening. We told them there had been a massacre but they didn't want to believe us. We told them that we were the first survivors to get out of the camp. This was Friday morning.

Sbabid: You said your sons were killed. How do you know?

Sobbia: My cousin went to look for my boys and their uncle the next day. He was relieved when he didn't find their bodies. But when he heard whistling, he was frightened and ran. Later, I described to him the exact spot where they had separated us. He went the next day, Sunday, and found all their bodies. It was a little farther from the spot where we had been forced to go on, near a pink house. They were all lined up, all six, against the wall. Six men . . . and they had shot them. My son Amr, they shot him in the face and struck him with an axe. His uncle Sobhi met the same fate. My other son Khaled was leaning against the wall, his arms open, as if he had tried to resist. Their cousin did not even recognize them, they were so disfigured. He identified them by their clothing. Khaled was nineteen years old. Amr was fifteen. They were both welders. My brother-in-law Sobhi was forty-three. He was a mason and had six girls and three boys. The oldest was seventeen.

Sbabid: How old was your oldest son when he was killed in Tal al-Za'atar?

Sobbia: He was sixteen at the time. He would be twenty-two today. After Tal al-Za'atar, we lived in Damour for a time, then we came here, to Shatila. We've been here for four years now.

[Adel, her seven-year-old son who was present during the interview, refused to answer when questioned. He remained glued to his mother, without speaking. He was with the family the day the militiamen came for them. There was also Sobbia's

mother-in-law, the children's grandmother, who was seventy years old. I turned to her.]

Shabid: When did you come to Shatila?

Umm Salim: In 1948, we came from Jaffa. There were mulberry trees here. We moved in with one of my cousins. Then the director of the camp refused to give us authorization to remain in Shatila. Someone said to my husband, "Don't stay here, they are building a new camp in Tal al-Za'atar." He took us there. What can I tell you? There was nothing but brambles and serpents in Tal al-Za'atar. I wept when I saw the place. I said to my poor husband, "You made me leave my house to bring me here, with snakes!" In Shatila at least there had been tents. In Tal al-Za'atar there was nothing. The director of the camp was named Abu Yusef. We moved there with our children: Salim, Sobhia's husband, who was killed there; my son Sobhi, who was killed here; my son Arafeh; my son Abed; and my son Awad, the youngest, who was three months old at the time. I also had a daughter, Malabee, who is married and lives somewhere else. So I had five boys and a girl when we got to Tal al-Za'atar. Then UNRWA built houses. What can I say? Houses that were more like stables than houses. But since we had no choice, we had to live there. It was a furnace in summer and flooded in winter. We moved in. They gave us one room at first. There were eight of us. We spent three years like that, eight in one room. Then they began to enlarge the houses, and they gave us two rooms. My husband built a little wall around and we lived there for twenty-five years, up until the massacre of 1976. I married my children in these two rooms. Salim, Arafeh, and Sobhi. Then they moved with their families. My sons made good choices—I get on well with their wives. My husband died a natural death. He had a coffeehouse for truckers at Mkalles, near the camp. After his death, the coffeehouse closed.

Shabid: What did he do in Palestine before 1948?

Umm Salim: He was a fisherman. We lived in Jaffa, in the Ajami quarter in the Old City. He had a boat, and in fact it was in that boat that we fled Jaffa during the war. They were shelling the quarter from the village of al-Bireh. We were afraid and we left Jaffa just before the Zionists entered.

Shabid: When the Israelis invaded Beirut, were you afraid?

Sobhia: The day Bashir Gemayel was killed, we had the feeling something terrible was going to happen. We went to Hamra to spend the night with relatives. My sons were still alive then, they were with us. The next morning the Israeli army entered the city. They were looking for fighters but didn't say anything about civilians. So we thought that we could go home. We returned to Shatila Thursday, and Friday the armed men came to get us, at 6:00 in the morning.

Khalil Ahmad

Khalil Ahmad is Lebanese. The day of the massacre, he spent the night at his mother's, who lives in Sabra. He was taken, like most of the men, to Sports City and freed later. The stadiums at Sports City were used as interrogation and detention areas.

Shabid: Where were you when armed elements invaded the camp?

Abmad: I was at my mother's, in Sabra, across from the Gaza hospital. My own house is near the martyrs cemetery, at Ghobeyreh. When the shelling became more violent I sent my wife and father-in-law to a safer neighborhood. I came to my mother's and would return now and then to see if my house was hit or not. A few days earlier, the Lebanese army had established a post near the house. I took the initiative to go there with some neighbors to ask protection. They said they had already received orders to withdraw, and in fact the next day they were gone. That was Wednesday. On Thursday, the sixteenth, I spent the night at my mother's. Frightful rumors were spreading that people were being massacred in the camp. But we didn't believe them. The neighborhood was full of people who came with the same information.

Shabid: Who were these people?

Abmad: Palestinians from Shatila. They were fleeing their neighborhood. We took in as many as we could, in the basement of the building. Most of them left at dawn. Women, children— all civilians. That night, we saw hundreds of flares over the camp. We went to bed anyway, not really knowing what was going on. Saturday morning, around 6:30, my nephew came in. "Uncle! The Israelis are here, they are outside!" I got dressed quickly to go talk to them, to explain that everyone here was a civilian, that there were no weapons. I wanted to speak politely, calmly, thinking that after all it was a regular army so they wouldn't harm civilians. At the entrance of the building, one of the soldiers yelled, "Out! Everyone move out! Get out of the building!" I said to the neighbors, "Come on, come on! It's the Israelis. They won't do anything to us." But when we got close, we saw on their uniforms the Lebanese cedar and the marking "Lebanese Forces" in Arabic. There was no more discussion. They told us to move toward the square. Thinking they meant Sabra square, we stayed where we were. But they shouted, "Not here! The other square, farther down!" They were very crude, violent. They insulted us as they made us go forward. When we protested that we were Lebanese, they replied, "What are you doing among the Palestinians?" We explained that we lived in the neighborhood, that these were our homes. They said, "It's your fault, you just had to drive the Palestinians out." We replied, "Why would we drive them out? They live here. And where should we drive them?"

They had gathered us on the square, with hundreds of others, before ordering us to set off again. There were old people, women, children. Some of the old people couldn't walk, so they had to be carried. Those who didn't walk quickly enough were struck with rifle butts. Palestinian women were trying to pass their babies to Lebanese, but the soldiers noticed and grabbed the babies. In crossing the camp we saw corpses all over, dead bodies everywhere. Only then did we understand that the rumors of the day before had been true. We saw the bodies with our own eyes, bodies of old men, especially, men over fifty. We also saw bulldozers at work: there were human limbs hanging down, caught on the teeth of the bulldozers, legs, entrails. The bulldozers were clearing away piles of bodies. We kept on walking to the exit of the camp.

There, the soldiers ordered, "Women on one side, men on the other!" Then we began to shout, "What do you want of us? We are Lebanese! What are you going to do with us?" They replied with insults and curse words, "Get moving, you sons of whores! You've done enough against us!" I said, "But we are Lebanese!" They replied, "Then how come you're living among them? So you've become Lebanese now, you sons of whores?" And they made us line up and march toward the Kuwaiti embassy. Along the way they would grab people out of the line and throw them on the ground,

forcing them to lie face down in the sands, hands behind the head. Then a big guy would come and jump on the back of the person, who shrieked with pain. Then they'd start in with another.

Shabid: Was anyone telling them whom to take out of the line?

Abmad: No, not at all. They took them at random. A young man I knew had the misfortune to say that he knew of no fighters among us. They set upon him all the harder. "So, sons of whores. You don't know anyone now?" The poor guy had a gold chain and a key chain, which they ripped off him. The old man just in front of me was moving slowly, with difficulty. One of the soldiers punched me, saying, "Move!" I didn't react. I didn't even look at him, for fear that he would throw me on the ground and stomp on me like the others. I saw them do that to about forty. All along the road there were soldiers of the Lebanese Forces in jeeps. They swore at us and yelled at us as if we were a herd of sheep or cattle. We were scared to death, afraid they were going to shoot us at the slightest protest. So no one opened his mouth. When we arrived at the Kuwaiti embassy, they turned us over to the Israelis.

Shabid: Had the Israelis seen what was going on?

Abmad: Of course. The Israeli army occupied the Kuwaiti embassy, which overlooked the whole camp and from where you can see perfectly well the entrance and particularly the road they had us take. At the Kuwaiti embassy the Israelis took charge of us. They made us keep in a line. We asked where they were taking us, and they said, "You'll see." They insulted us too. On the road to Sports City, a bomb or mine exploded. A dozen of us fell. Three didn't get up, the others were wounded. The Lebanese soldiers shouted at us to lie down on our stomachs. The wounded who were bleeding were running in all directions. The soldiers were firing and they kept on running. We were lying face down. Then they told us to get up and keep going. We said, "But there are mines, we don't want to set off the mines." And the soldiers yelled, "So, you knew there were mines here!" "No, we didn't know, but we just saw one explode." The Israeli soldiers who were nearby wanted to help the wounded. The soldiers of the Lebanese Forces tried to stop them, but all the same they did take the most seriously wounded, the dying. The others had to continue on with us.

Shabid: How many were you?

Abmad: About 2,000 at the beginning. But by the time we got to the stadium we were only about 1,300. The others were either killed or taken away, who knows where, in trucks. And then there are those who were blown up by the mine. When we got near the Riding Club, before Sports City, some of the men tried to make a run for it toward the sand dunes, but the Israelis called out over their loudspeakers, "Don't flee! Saad Haddad's men will catch you and kill you. Stay here, and we'll stamp your papers!" We were thirsty, hungry, we had been on our feet for hours. They promised that we could eat and drink once we got to Sports City, and they said it was better to stay with them or they could not be responsible for our lives. We finally agreed to follow them. Inside the stadium, they brought us water in a tanker. The Israeli soldiers were examining the results of their shelling, admiring their handiwork. Then they gave us sugared bread, but there wasn't enough— one loaf for about twenty people. Then they asked older men to bring the young people who remained in the camp. About a hundred were brought. They came with the hope that once their cards were stamped they wouldn't be arrested again. Then the Israelis began to take the men, one by one,

for interrogation. The officer who interrogated me was bearded with glasses. He asked me my name, nationality, and profession. He was Israeli but spoke Arabic with a Palestinian accent. Since I was Lebanese, he went easy on me. The Palestinians were questioned much more closely, and if they were young and strong they were taken away, who knows where. Then the Israelis brought someone who pointed out certain men as having been in contact with the fedayeen or who had carried arms. The guys who were fingered— about twenty-five or thirty— were taken away and no one knows what happened to them.

Toward 2:30 in the afternoon, the Israelis said they were going to let us go and that they were pardoning us even if we were “terrorists.” And they let us go, but they didn’t stamp our papers like they said. Outside, I found my wife, who was waiting for me and crying. We were able to get to the house through Fakhani, without passing in front of the Kuwaiti embassy.

Shabid: And the others?

Abmad: It depends. My neighbor, the grocer, who was let go the same time I was, told me that he had been thrown to the ground and beaten, he and his son. They had wanted to take him away in a truck; they were filling up two trucks, but there wasn’t enough room for everyone. The ones they couldn’t squeeze in they told to go with the others to Sports City. Another told me that they had taken him into one of the rooms under the bleachers of the stadium and beaten him with a riding crop.

Shabid: And your wife?

Abmad: She came looking for us at Sports City along with about sixty other women. They had waited for a long time at the entrance. Soldiers wouldn’t let them into the stadium. They were crying because they didn’t know whether we were dead or alive. At one point, an Israeli officer came by in a jeep and told them, “Whoever among you can bring about the surrender of a fighter in your neighborhood, we’ll free their husband.” Naturally, everyone said there were no more fighters. Then the officer told them to wait.

Umm Ahmad Farbat

Umm Ahmad Farbat is the mother of ten children. Four of them, aged one, two, six, and thirteen, were killed, as well as her husband. Her oldest daughter, eighteen years old, is paralyzed for life. She herself got two bullets in her back but was up the day after the massacre. She makes a great effort to speak and cannot keep back her tears.

Umm Ahmad: We were sleeping in the room— my husband, eight of my children, and myself. There was also our neighbor who had come to sleep at our house because of the shelling the night before. Around 5:00 in the morning, armed men came to the house and ordered us out. We went out in our nightclothes, each carrying the nearest child. I have young children, one and two years. Once we were outside, they asked my husband his nationality. He said he was a 1948 Palestinian* and that he was a

* The “1948 Palestinians” were refugees who came to Lebanon in the wake of the 1948 war. Under the agreements signed with Philip Habib, they had the right to remain in Lebanon.

telephone repairman. He also said he was crippled in one arm. The guy raised his machine gun to strike him and insult him, calling him a “terrorist.” Then he ordered us to face the wall without looking right or left. Then they fired several rounds at us. I was carrying my son two years old. I heard him cry, “Yaba!” [father] just before his skull exploded. I got two bullets in the back of my shoulder. The traces of his brain are still on the wall— and of his little sister too, who was on the shoulder of her big sister and who also got a bullet in the head.

Shabid: How old were the children?

Umm Ahmad: Layla was the youngest. She was a year old. Then Sami, two years old. Then Farid, who was six, and Bassem, thirteen. My husband also was killed. He was forty-seven. The others were wounded, like me. I lost consciousness. When I came to, the armed men were gone. My wound was bleeding a lot. My oldest daughter was seriously wounded and couldn’t walk. The other, Salwa, was wounded in the shoulder but she could walk. Everyone else was dead. So Salwa and I got up and managed with great difficulty to walk to the hospital. On the way, the Good Lord willed that we meet a young girl who helped us get to the hospital, taking us by little alleys to avoid armed men.

At the Gaza hospital they gave us first aid. Then there were rumors about the arrival of Saad Haddad’s men or Phalangists in the coffeehouse near the hospital. I then decided to leave the hospital at all costs—I remembered my niece in Sidon who had sought shelter in a hospital, and the Israelis destroyed it with everyone inside. So I fled with my daughter. I carried her on my back and was bleeding but determined not to stay there waiting for them. We found refuge in the entrance of a building. And while I was waiting for the bleeding to stop, a young man who knew my son recognized us and helped us.

Shabid: And the others?

Umm Ahmad: Suad, my oldest girl, who was seriously wounded, remained on the ground in front of the house until first aid workers arrived— Saturday morning— and took her away on a stretcher. She stayed the whole day of Friday and all night bleeding on the ground. No one could get to her to help her, because the massacre was still going on. She is still in the hospital. Most of the bullets hit her spinal column, and the doctors say she will remain . . . paralyzed . . . [her voice breaks and she starts crying] Suad was very active, she did everything in the house. I don’t dare see her— I don’t dare look her in the face and lie to her.

Shabid: What about your other children [Umm Ahmad also had sons aged twenty, nineteen, twelve, and eight]. Where were they at the time of the massacre?

Umm Ahmad: The older boys were at the house Thursday afternoon, and they noticed from the terrace groups of armed men coming down the hill overlooking the camp. They came running to tell us the news. Their father told them to go stay with someone in town because the Israelis always think young men are fighters. As for us, we thought that being civilians, women and children, the Israelis wouldn’t attack us. The two little ones stayed with us, but they managed to hide in the toilets. When they came out, they found their father and brothers all dead. Then armed men grabbed them.

Shabid: [turning to the eight-year old] Where did they take you?

The boy: They took us to the Kuwaiti embassy, then to Sports City. There, they separated the Lebanese and the Palestinians. They took the young men and killed them. They killed Lebanese too. And they told us that if we opened our mouths they would kill us one by one.

Shabid: Who? Lebanese or Israelis?

The boy: Both. Afterward, they let us leave, and we went to our relatives, near the camp, where we found our mother.

Umm Ahmad: He still wakes up every night asking for his father.

Shabid: Did you hear anything the night before?

Umm Ahmad: Yes, we heard groans. The children were watching television at the neighbors. I told them to come home. There were many flares lighting the sky. We were afraid to go out and see what was happening. We were wrong to trust the Israeli army. They managed to hide the atrocities they committed in the camps in the south, in Rashidiyya, in 'Ayn al-Hilwa and Burj al-Shamali. There, too, they massacred people. We didn't know it yet. Since then, our relatives have come from there, and they told us. I have family in Burj al-Shamali. They buried people alive in their shelters; they also used gas. But all that they have managed to hide from world opinion.

Ibrahim Musa

Ibrahim Musa is thirty years old. He was living in Shatila with his young wife and three children. His family was all killed in the massacre. He himself was hit by a dozen bullets, including bullets in the waist, lung, leg, and thigh, and explosive bullets in the hand that exposed the bone. The interview took place in the hospital where he is being treated.

Shabid: What exactly do you remember?

Musa: I woke up Wednesday morning with the sound of airplanes ripping the sky [breaking the sound barrier]. I thought they were going to the Biqua'. I went to work, not far from the camp. There, we began to get news: "The Israelis are at the Cola roundabout." "The Israelis have reached Arab University." I immediately went home. I spent the entire day with my wife and children. That night, the Israelis surrounded and besieged the camp. Thursday morning, Israeli planes again flew low over the city, terrorizing the population. At 4:00 in the afternoon, the shelling began. I took my wife and children to the shelter a few meters from the house. You know, in Shatila the houses aren't very sturdy, so I thought we would be safer in the shelter. Many families from the neighborhood had the same idea. We put the women and children below; the men and the old men remained above. There was a continuous coming and going in the shelter. People came in and, seeing how crowded it was, left for another shelter. There were almost a hundred people in this shelter that measured about 3 by 4 meters. Mostly women and children.

Around 5:00 in the afternoon, a mortar shell landed very near and our neighbor, who was pregnant, was hit. She was taken to the Gaza hospital. We then began to hear about the Israeli advance. We told ourselves that we would give ourselves up and that we would be civilian prisoners. There were rumors of a massacre in the camp, but we listened to the radio, and there was no mention of it. Toward 7:15 at night, we heard cries, but we stayed in the shelter. My children were sleeping.

Around 7:30 P.M., the owner of my house called the men and said to come out of the shelter. On the threshold, I saw a man in an Israeli uniform. Another asked me who I was. I said I was a plumber. He said, "I mean your nationality." I said, "Palestinian." So they told me to come out. I obeyed, and when I came out dozens of men old and young were lying face down in the street with their hands clasped behind their heads—about fifty of them. They ordered me to do likewise. I laid down, face to the ground.

Then I heard an argument between the armed men and the women, followed by shooting in the air and threats. Then I heard one of the men say, "Take the women to the Red Cross headquarters." I knew that there was no Red Cross in the camp, but I hoped all the same they would spare them. I wanted to believe they would spare them.

Once the women and the children were gone, they ordered us to stand up and emptied our pockets. They took my wallet and identity card and threw them on the ground. Then they lined us up face to the wall and began shooting. At this very moment, twenty-five meters away, some men from our camp, who were armed, burst out and there was a clash. Taking advantage of the panic, I looked around and saw that I was the last one in the row against the wall and the only one standing. The others were on the ground, either dead or wounded. I didn't know whether to flee or stay. I felt a sharp heat climbing my leg and arm. At that moment a grenade exploded, and I threw myself on the ground.

I thought I was going to die. I looked around, the armed men were gone, but there were lots of dead and wounded. I heard moans. A thirteen-year-old boy, his back against the wall, was bleeding from the chest. He was choking on the blood rising in his throat and coughing. My leg was pinning down one of the wounded, who was asking if they were gone. With great difficulty I moved my leg, and he extricated himself, leaving me there with the others. Another of the wounded, who knew me, called me by name and asked me to help him. I said I couldn't stand up. I asked him where he was wounded. "In the back," he said. I said, "Let's at least talk together and we'll see who dies first, you or me." We spoke a little. He tried to sit up and lean against the wall. He cried out in pain and vomited a lot of blood and his body went limp. I understood he was dead. I controlled myself so as not to cry out.

Night was beginning to fall, and I was surrounded by corpses. Near the wall where they shot us there was an open door. I dragged myself and crawled into the house. I found a mattress and laid down and covered myself. I was convinced that I was going to die, but I didn't want rats to devour my body. I recall a lot of flares but I couldn't see where they were coming from. I tried not to move very much so I wouldn't bleed more. I heard voices outside. They were saying that there were lots of dead, and then there was a woman's voice saying, "Let's get out of here before they kill us." I called for help, but nobody answered. I saw a pitcher in a corner and dragged myself to it and drank. It was practically suicidal, because people who are seriously wounded aren't supposed to drink, but I did it anyway. I lay there all night. I took off my shirt and made a tourniquet above my leg wound to stop the blood, and I soaked a cloth and put it on my forehead and lips.

At dawn, I was exhausted. I had lost a lot of blood. Suddenly, I heard steps nearby. I thought that the militiamen were finishing off the wounded. I was afraid they would torture me. I crawled to the darkest corner and covered myself with everything I could find. I heard a voice, "Let's go into this house to see if anyone's here—I see blood on the ground." I started trembling, convinced they were going to kill me. The



Sabra and Shatila, September 1982. (IPS archives)

steps came nearer, and a hand raised the covers. I opened my eyes and saw a familiar face: an old man I knew by sight. I started breathing again and begged him to help me, telling him I couldn't move. He told me to wait for him because armed men were still in the vicinity. He came back a little later with three others. They asked me if there were others wounded. I said I didn't know. They put me in a blanket and carried me through the back alleys of the camp. There were snipers, and they were very careful. I was transported from hand to hand to the Gaza hospital. After they gave me first aid, they said they wanted to send me to a hospital in town just in case the armed men attacked the hospital.

Shabid: And your wife and children?

Musa: My mother came to see me in the hospital. I asked about them, telling her that the men had mentioned the Red Cross. She said there was no Red Cross in the camp, and she didn't know where they were. When my mother-in-law came, she said my wife and children were fine, that they were in the mountains resting. I didn't believe her and said that if they were alive they would have come to see me in the hospital, and that if her daughter didn't come within forty-eight hours I would know that she was lying. The following day I saw photographs in the newspaper of people looking through corpses,* and I saw my mother and mother-in-law among them. When my mother-in-law came again, I yelled at her that she had lied, that I had seen her photo in the paper. She burst into tears and admitted that there was no trace of my wife and children. My mother asked what they were wearing the day of the massacre. My wife was wearing jeans and my daughter a red dress. She told me that they had found the body of a woman difficult to identify because of the blows but whose clothes could

* Every day, the camp inhabitants were asked by the first aid workers to come identify bodies they had found.

be hers. They had found the bodies of a number of our neighbors who were with my wife and children, but not the bodies of mine. There are many bodies not yet found. They must be in mass graves not yet opened.

Shabid: How old were your children?

Musa: Ranna, the oldest, was five. Mustafa was four and little Marwan was ten months. My wife was twenty-three. The two older ones went to school, and I have their notebooks with me here. They were very studious, and I helped them with their homework at night. I teased Mustafa by saying that he couldn't read without the illustrations. So he redoubled his efforts to impress me. Marwan, the little one, was very tender; every day he awakened me by caressing my hair. I can't believe I won't see them again. I was happy with my wife.

Shabid: What will you do now?

Musa: I don't know. I have always lived in Shatila. I grew up here, I married here, and I lost everything here.

Shabid: Had you remained in Shatila during the war?

Musa: I had taken refuge elsewhere, but then I returned not too long ago, thinking that everything was getting back to normal. I didn't believe that the Israelis would enter West Beirut and that they would bring these men whose hearts are so full of hatred that they would massacre children. We did not imagine that the Israelis would enter the camp. There were guarantees by the Americans, Arabs, and Lebanese. We didn't think they would enter.

Shabid: In your view, who carried out this massacre?

Musa: All I know is that the Israeli army brought them in, that they had Lebanese accents, and that they were wearing military uniforms.

Munir

Munir is thirteen years old. He is the only survivor of his family.

Munir: Thursday afternoon there was a lot of shelling, so we went down to the shelter. I was with my family. There was also my maternal uncle and his ten children and our neighbor and his children. There were a lot of people, especially women and children. Then the armed men arrived and forced us to get out. They lined the men against the wall and shot them, and then they led us, the women and children, to Doulchi.* There, there was a clash. One of the men went mad, crying out, "They killed my brother! My brother has been hit!" and he started firing at us. My mother and my sisters were hit. I was hit in the leg, and a bullet grazed my head but didn't injure me.

Shabid: How many were in your family?

Munir: There was my father, my mother, and my three sisters. The oldest of my sisters was six. There was also my uncle, his wife, and their ten children.

Shabid: What happened to them?

* A grocery store in Shatila, on the main street of the camp.

Munir: My father was shot against the wall. My mother was wounded near me and my sisters. Then the armed men said, "You injured people, get up, and we'll take you to the hospital." I whispered to my mother not to believe them, to stay down. But she saw the others get up, and she did too. They put them up against a wall and shot them.

Shabid: And your sisters?

Munir: One of them was wearing earrings. They said to her, "Are those gold or copper?" She said they were copper, so they got mad and said, "You daughter of a whore, that's copper, is it?" And they ordered her to close her eyes and ripped off the earrings and shot her on the spot. My cousins, they killed them too with the other children with us. I heard them say, "When they grow up, they'll become fighters— we have to kill them." And they killed them.

Shabid: And you?

Munir: I pretended to be dead. They all left, and finally I fell asleep. Then they came back. One of them had a flashlight. He saw that I was still breathing and shot at me again. He aimed at my head, but my hand was up against my cheek, and the bullet cut off my finger but didn't touch the head. All night I lay there in a pool of blood. The next morning, the armed men came back and one of them said, "Look at that one. He's still alive, he's trembling." So he fired. One bullet hit the ground, and the other hit me in the arm. I pretended to be dead. One of them wanted to fire on me a third time, but his friend said, "That's OK, he's dead." When they left, I managed to get to an empty house. I took off my clothes, which were soaked in blood, and put on others that I found there. Meanwhile, they were nearby stealing cars. I stayed in the house waiting for the pain to go down and the bleeding to stop. Suddenly they burst into the house where I was hiding. "You're still there? We're going to kill you." They took their guns, but then one said, "Are you Lebanese or Palestinian?" I said I was Lebanese. So he said to go sit in the room. As soon as they left, I fled by back alleys. I know all the back alleys, and I knew they led near the house of my uncle. There, I met a boy who knew me. He took me to the al-Sharq movie house, and from there a car took me to the Gaza hospital.

Shabid: What did you hear while you were hiding?

Munir: I heard people talking about the bad smell, how bad corpses smelled. And I heard the sound of tanks or bulldozers, I don't know which, near the Kuwaiti embassy.

[Munir is very weak; he had lost a lot of blood. His voice was hardly audible, and I decided not to tire him further.]

Umm Hussein

Umm Hussein, with a scrawny two-month-old baby in her arms, is staying with her children in a classroom of a high school in West Beirut. Hundreds of families of Sbatila and Sabra are living in schools turned into emergency shelters. Umm Hussein lost her husband and two of her sons in the massacre. Her house had been bulldozed. She identified herself as a "1948 Palestinian" who had lived in Sbatila for five years. Before, she had lived near Sports City.

Shabid: When did you leave Shatila?

Umm Hussein: Thursday, Israeli planes were flying over Beirut, making a terrible racket. They circled over the camp while their tanks began shelling us. Around 6:00 in the morning, the shelling intensified. We went into the shelter with our neighbors. Later, about thirty armed men came and started shooting. We ran to hide. Just as we closed the door, they burst in and said, "Why are you slamming the door in our faces? Where do you think you can hide?" Then they lined us up against the wall, separating the men from the women and children. They killed the men right in front of us. There was my husband, Hamid Mustafa, who was only forty-seven. My son Hussein was fifteen, and my son Hassan was fourteen. There was also the son and brother of our neighbor, and others too. In all, seven men they killed and piled one on top of the other in front of the house. They emptied their pockets, taking their watches and whatever they were carrying. Then they dug a pit and buried them.

Shabid: How did they dig the pit?

Umm Hussein: With bulldozers the Israelis gave them. The Israelis also lighted the camp all night for them with their flares and brought them food.

Shabid: And you, women and children, what did they do with you?

Umm Hussein: They took us to Sports City. They made us spend the night there, on the sand, with no covers. There were Phalangists and Israelis. They questioned us now and then. "What does your husband do? Where is your husband?" I told him that they had just killed my husband at our house along with others. "And your children?" I said my children also had been killed, that all that remained were my three daughters and the four little ones. "The youngest, here he is, he's two months old— do you want to kill him too?"

Shabid: You didn't have weapons in the camp?

Umm Hussein: The weapons were removed from the camp, and the fighters were evacuated. They left us disarmed and without defense. There were so-called guarantees that no one would attack us. Guarantees by the Americans, the Europeans, the Arabs. But they lied.

Shabid: Why didn't you leave when the Israeli army came in?

Umm Hussein: When Bashir Gemayel's death was announced, some people preferred to leave the camp. They were afraid that something would happen. But we had just moved back to the camp a week earlier. We had spent the three months of the Israeli siege in this same school where we are now. My baby was born here, in this classroom, where there is no water, no kitchen, no bathroom. We were so happy to return home, to Shatila, after the shelling stopped. We weren't prepared to start wandering again in the streets of Beirut looking for shelter. So we remained, thinking that since we were without weapons and since the fighters had all gone, the Israeli army would not harm us. We couldn't guess that they would make us pay for Bashir Gemayel's assassination. After all, it wasn't the Palestinians who killed him. It was between them. They fought among themselves, and they killed him. How are we responsible? We turned in our weapons; we trusted the Lebanese authorities. Abu Ammar [Yasir Arafat] had signed an agreement with the government that no one would touch the camps after the fighters left. We believed that. The result? They betrayed us.

They even killed women and children. I saw with my own eyes a baby of less than a year in his mother's arms. She was dead, and he was crying all the time. They fired at him, but he wasn't dead. One of the armed men got mad and yanked the child from his dead mother and said he would take it to the hospital. But farther on he strangled it and left it in the sand. I saw it on the ground when we passed. I also saw a woman whose hands were tied and who had perhaps been raped. Her clothing was torn, and she must have been dragged by the rope before being killed with an axe. It was a terrible sight.

Shabid: How did you get out, finally?

Umm Hussein: After a night in Sports City, they ordered us to walk along the road. They knew it was mined, and they wanted us to blow up the mines while walking. But we were extremely careful not to walk on any wires. Then they let us go. We first tried to hide in an apartment building in Fakhani, but the Lebanese inhabitants were afraid and begged us to go elsewhere. So we left, and on the road we flagged down a car that brought us to the public garden of Sanayeh, where the International Red Cross took us and brought us here, to this school, where we had taken refuge during the shelling of Beirut in July. And this is my life, from exodus to exodus. Except that now I am without my husband and my two sons.

I have eight children. What can I do with them? I don't have anyone to help me. My house has been razed. Where will I go? Is that what America wants? Is that what Israel wants? And the Arab countries agree? They took away our fighters, they killed our men. What more do they want of us?

Shabid: Your baby is very pale . . .

Umm Hussein: How could he not be? He was born here during the siege of Beirut and he hasn't had a normal life since. And with all these emotions, I don't have enough milk and don't have the means to take him to the doctor.

[In leaving, I wished health for her child, and she answered, "Why should he live? So they can kill him when he's twenty?"]