

**GLOBAL
LENS 2008**

The Kite *(Le cerf-volant)*

Directed by Randa Chahal-Sabbag



In Arabic, with subtitles in English

To reach her husband-to-be, a young bride must cross the border, leaving behind her family and the only life she has ever known.

Lebanon | 2003 | 80 minutes

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The Global Film Initiative is a 501(c)3 organization, founded in 2002 with the mission to promote cross-cultural understanding through the international medium of cinema.

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ONE PAGE SUMMARY:

The Kite (Le cerf-volant), 2003, Lebanon
Directed by Randa Chahal-Sabbag
In Arabic, with subtitles in English, 80 minutes

SYNOPSIS

Lamia lives with her family in a Druze village near the Israeli-Lebanese border. From the windy hillsides where Lamia and her younger brother fly their kites, they can see the village where their relatives live, in Israeli-occupied territory. Israeli soldiers monitor the border from guard towers along the barbed-wire fence, their binoculars trained on the single road that connects the villages, through hillsides seeded with landmines. Without modern technology, women use megaphones to communicate with their relatives, shouting their love to cousins so far away they can be identified only by the color of their scarves. They call out the news on their megaphones – how are the children, who’s having a baby, who died.

One day, the news is about Lamia, soon to be sixteen, who upset the whole village by her reckless behavior. The elders agree that Lamia should be married – to Samy, son of a cousin who lives in the village on the Israeli side. The women yell intimate details about Lamia to Samy’s mother, while Lamia’s mother sobs, and a young soldier in the guard tower takes notes. The soldier is Youssef, an Israeli Druze, just beginning his required military service. His orders are to write down what the women shout across the hills, and their details about Lamia have his heart spinning. He has watched this pretty girl by the hour, flying her kite in the Lebanese hills. Now he watches an unhappy bride, walking alone down the long, dusty road, turning to gaze at the life she has left behind. As she walks by the guard tower, Youssef catches her eye.

From the first awkward meeting between bride and groom, surrounded by soldiers and barbed wire, Lamia’s marriage to Samy is doomed, but life in the Israeli-occupied village offers a glimpse of freedom that catches her by surprise. Samy says he only married to help her escape, and he offers to help her return home. Her dreams are filled with confusing images of death and birth – and of the soldier whose gaze was her companion on the road.

CHARACTERS

Lamia	The main character, a sixteen-year-old girl
Nabil	Lamia’s younger brother
Amira	Lamia’s mother
Jamile	Amira’s good friend
Samy	Lamia’s husband-to-be
Mabrouke	Samy’s mother
Youssef	A soldier in the Israeli army



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. As Lamia walks past the guard tower on her way home, Youssef abandons his post, running down the road to catch up with her. Their fingers touch as the lieutenant in the guard tower aims his rifle, and Nabil screams, “Lamia!” **Who do you think the lieutenant means to shoot? Why do you think Lamia and Youssef take the chance of meeting on the road?**
2. The filmmaker says that love is like the kite. **How does love seem like a kite in the film?**

ABOUT THE DIRECTOR: RANDA CHAHAL-SABBAG

COMMENTS AND INTERVIEWS

Once censored by the Lebanese government, this award-winning auteur is now embraced as a cultural ambassador and a voice of conscience in her homeland . . . Beirut's *Daily Star* hailed it as "a triumph for Lebanese film"—a radical departure from the hostile press the controversial filmmaker once received.

Lebanon's submission in this year's foreign-language Oscars race, *The Kite*, is an unlikely love story between a Lebanese girl and an Israeli soldier guarding a border checkpoint between their two countries. Sabbag calls her movie a fairy tale for troubled times. "I chose the subject because of the absurdity of the situation," Sabbag has said. "I like the continuity in communication even though there's barbed wire separating the people....*The Kite* is a pacifist film, without concessions. There are no slogans, there's no good guy or bad guy. The film is like a dream, from beginning to end."

Source: Mai Hoang, "Lebanese Filmmaker: Randa Chahal Sabbag."
World Press Review, March 2004, Vol. 51, No. 3.

From an interview with Antonia Naim of Babelmed:

"The story could have taken place on the border between Turkey and Greece, where 180 km. of barbed wire are called "Attila", in Korea, or elsewhere . . . This story is possible where borders transform "the Other" into a stranger, an enemy. I wanted to talk about the violence of fate, the loss of identities, the absurdity of borders and arbitrary annexations of villages. I wanted to speak, without hatred, of the war. It was necessary to reconcile shadows with motion, to reject faith, to be immersed in doubt, and to give this a visual form . . . This is a love story along a border where no shot is fired, that could never be called peaceful."

On remembering her life in Lebanon during the civil war:

"How do people identify themselves in such a situation? Displaced? Refugees? Occupied? We were . . . I have been . . . 'occupied' all my life . . . physically first, like an occupied country, and intellectually, in being obsessed with freedom . . . Separating the two became a daily exercise, when daily reflection was possible . . . Since my birth in Lebanon, the twenty years of civil war that split the city [of Beirut] in two consumed all our time, our longings, our desires, our dreams and fantasies; 'moving' from one area to another was not merely dangerous but deadly. Having done so anyway, the fear hangs on through our lives; we become 'occupied' by anxiety, and never heal."

Source: Antonia Naim, "Roméo et Juliette au pays des frontières."
Babelmed, <http://www.babelmed.net/Pais/Liban/Litt%C3%A9rature/index.php?c=855&m=410&k=4&l=fr>.
Translated by K. Warren

From an interview with Maria Garcia for Film Journal:

"Love is like the kite: You can be suddenly caught by the wind, but you can also be captured . . . You can suddenly find yourself in violence.

"I live in Paris, and I am always amazed at what Parisian women think of Muslim women . . . I ask them: Do you think because you wear a shorter skirt that you are more free than we are?"

Source: Maria Garcia, "Human Connection."
Film Journal, August 1, 2004. URL: <http://www.allbusiness.com/services/motion-pictures/4426125-1.html>

BIOGRAPHY

Born in Tripoli to a Sunni Muslim father and Christian mother, Randa Chahal-Sabbag came to France in 1973 to study at the University of Vincennes and the Grande École Louis Lumière. Coming of age during the long years of civil war in Lebanon, Chahal-Sabbag has focused on the consequences of that war in her work. Her first films were the acclaimed documentary *Step by Step (Pas à pas, 1979)*, about the roles played by neighboring countries in Lebanon's civil war, and the short *Lebanon of the Past (Liban d'autrefois, 1980)*. The success of these early efforts led to a series of film and television documentaries commissioned by the Lebanese government. Her first feature film was *Sand Screens (Ecrans de sable, 1991)*, which was followed by the controversial *Civilized People (Civilisees, 1998)*. *The Kite* is her third feature film. In 2003, Chahal-Sabbag received the highest award in Lebanon, becoming a Chevalier of the Order of the Cedar for her work in film.



FILM AESTHETICS

Film is unique as an art form in its synthesis of visual arts, writing, drama, movement, and sound. The following notes about film aesthetics and technique suggest some things to watch and listen for in viewing *The Kite*.

Music and Sound

Music can be used to intensify the action or dialogue in a scene. At its best, music combines with images to create an experience beyond what either could create alone.

Natural sounds can add a dimension of reality – or heighten the unreality of a scene. Off-screen sounds, such as traffic noise or gunshots – can heighten the drama, or suggest an off-screen space.

Composition of the Image

Color and line; size and distance (long shot, medium shot, close-up). The director frames an image using the elements of setting, costume, colors, lighting and sound. The position and behavior of the actors are crucial to the composition, as is the choice of cameras and lenses, where they are placed and how they move during the shot.

Narrative Structure

The narrative structure of the film establishes the major themes in the story, answering the question, “what is this story about?” The narrative structure in world cinema may highlight events of everyday life, or the focus may be on several characters rather than an individual. The structure may be episodic, or circular rather than linear, and there may be a lack of resolution at the end of the film.

Folk song lyrics are sometimes used, in place of dialogue, to express a character’s feelings. As Youssef lies on the floor of the guard tower after watching Lamia through his binoculars, the lyrics tell him to forget her: “She is better without you . . . Stop your moaning, everyone is laughing at you.” One morning, soon after her wedding, Lamia sits alone and miserable in her room, as Samy and his friends enjoy a swim outside. “An Arab am I,” say the lyrics, as Samy dives into the cool water, “Be afraid of me. Beware should you fall in love with me; my heart is a golden cage.”

Images appear in high contrast – almost in black and white – in Lamia’s dream sequences. An “over-exposed” appearance sets these scenes apart from the natural colors of daily life. The harsh contrasts heighten the sense of danger and dread her dreams convey, in images of coffins passing through the gate, and many hands reaching for a crying infant through barbed wire. A similar “over-exposed” palette is used in the wedding sequence, as Lamia is escorted to the gate that will take her to her husband. For this sequence, the film speed is slowed, intensifying her feelings of dread as she walks “down the aisle” toward her new life.

From the opening scene, when the wind pulls Lamia’s kite over the border and catches it on barbed wire, the film questions the concept of freedom – who is free, and what that freedom means. When soldiers spread barbed wire through their village, Zalfa feels that she has been set free – to go into Israel, to see anyone she wants. Youssef is free to study at the university, but as an Israeli citizen he is obligated to serve in the military. To Lamia, who flees Samy’s beautiful home to live in the woods, freedom means deciding for herself, where she will live and whom she will love.

NARRATIVE THEMES IN THE FILM *The Kite*

"*The Kite* is above all a story of love, desire and disaster," says filmmaker Randa Chahal-Sabbag. Drawing from the genres of comedy, drama and documentary, this is Chahal-Sabbag's "most political film."

Watch for scenes or events that correspond to a particular theme, making mental or written notes as to how the theme unfolds in the film. Note whether the film developed the theme as expected, and if not, what happened instead. Questions for each theme are designed to encourage discussion.

Friends, Enemies and Borders

1. The lieutenant points to Lamia's village in Lebanon as he gives orders to soldiers in the guard tower. "That village is your enemy," he says. "I know they're your cousins and relations. But now they're your enemies . . . No one understands anything. Me, least of all." **What does no one understand? Why does the lieutenant say, "Me, least of all"?**
2. The women yell intimate details about Lamia on their megaphones, "selling" her to Samy's mother, while Youssef, the soldier in the guard tower, takes notes. **Why was Youssef ordered to write down everything the women say? How do you think Youssef feels about his orders?**
3. While the women shout back and forth about the disastrous marriage between Samy and Lamia, Nabil, Lamia's little brother, sits on top of the Lebanese gate watching through binoculars. His mother orders him to get down, but Nabil replies, "I'll get down if I want to. And I don't want to!" **How would you describe Nabil's relationship with Lamia? With his mother?**
4. As Zalfa reads her book late at night, soldiers annex another section of the village, spreading barbed wire barricades near her house. The next morning, as the women of the village cry out in alarm, Zalfa asks Jamile, "Does that mean we can go into Israel? Come and go as we like?" **How would you explain Zalfa's reaction to being separated from the rest of her village? How do you think Jamile feels about living in occupied territory?**
5. Lamia tells Youssef that his "Jewish costume" looks "weird". Youssef tells her it's an Israeli army uniform, but Lamia says that's the same thing. "No," he says, "it's not the same thing." **What does Youssef mean? How do you think Youssef feels about being a soldier in the Israeli army?**

Love and Freedom to Choose

6. Lamia tells her friend Zalfa about her pending marriage to Samy. "You're accepting it?" Zalfa asks. "Do I have a choice?" says Lamia, and Zalfa quickly replies, "No." **Why do you think Zalfa asked her if she's "accepting it"? How do you think Zalfa would react if this had happened to her?**
7. Samy and his family watch a videotape that is meant to introduce Lamia to her husband-to-be. "Stop!" she cries on the tape. "I don't want to get married!" Samy looks sad and confused; he tells his mother, "She's not pretty." **Why would the families allow this ill-fated marriage?**
8. Youssef's partner in the guard tower is captivated by Jamile, friend of Lamia's mother. She is "the only woman in the world," he tells Youssef. **What makes Jamile "the only woman in the world"?**
9. Samy's mother hands Lamia the binoculars so she can see her mother. Lamia instead turns toward Youssef in the guard tower, and they study each other through binoculars, as women on both sides shout, "Don't look over there! Stop looking at the soldier!" **How would you describe Lamia's feelings as she holds the binoculars? How would you describe Youssef's feelings?**
10. As Lamia and Youssef gaze at each other through binoculars, Nabil watches them both. Slowly he

lowers his binoculars, and runs back toward the gate. **What do you think Nabil is feeling?**

11. “Enough with the glasses!” shouts the Lebanese woman. “You want to start a war?” Samy’s mother shouts back, “Stop, Shirin! Don’t be afraid. Be afraid for Lamia!” **Why should the women be afraid for Lamia?**

The Kite

12. The wind catches Lamia’s kite, pulling it across the border, where it catches on barbed wire in a field sown with landmines. Lamia carefully picks her way through the fence and across the minefield to retrieve her kite, while the children shout for her to come back, and a soldier fires a shot “to scare her off.” **What does the kite mean to Lamia? Why do you think she risked the danger of the minefield to retrieve it?**
13. “If I leave you, Nabil, don’t be afraid anymore,” says Lamia. “Where are you going?” he asks. “It doesn’t matter where,” she says. That night, a kite appears outside Nabil’s window. **Who is flying the kite? What does the kite represent in this scene?**
14. Youssef scans the horizon with binoculars from his post in the guard tower, as a kite sails through the sky behind him. Whichever way he turns, he never sees the kite. **Who is flying the kite? What does the kite represent in this scene?**
15. “What do you want?” Youssef asks Lamia, as the kite soars behind them. “I want to be with you,” says Lamia, “so you won’t be afraid anymore.” She says she stopped being afraid long ago, because she knows she is going to die. **What is Youssef afraid of? What or who does Lamia think would kill her?**

PROFILE OF LEBANON

SIZE: 4,015 square miles, slightly more than 2/3 the size of Connecticut

POPULATION: 3.8 million (CIA, 2005)

ETHNICITY: No census has been reported since 1932, because of the extreme sensitivity of ethnic identification in a country where political representation is based on religious affiliation. Christian groups regard themselves as descendants of Phoenician/Assyrian ancestors, while Muslim groups regard themselves as Arabs.

RELIGION: Parliamentary elections in 2005 allocated 64 seats to Christian groups (34 – Maronite; 14 – Greek Orthodox; 16 – other Christian), and 64 seats to Muslim groups (28 – Sunni; 27 – Shi'ite; 8 – Druze; 1 – Alawite).

LANGUAGES: Arabic is the official language; French, English, Armenian

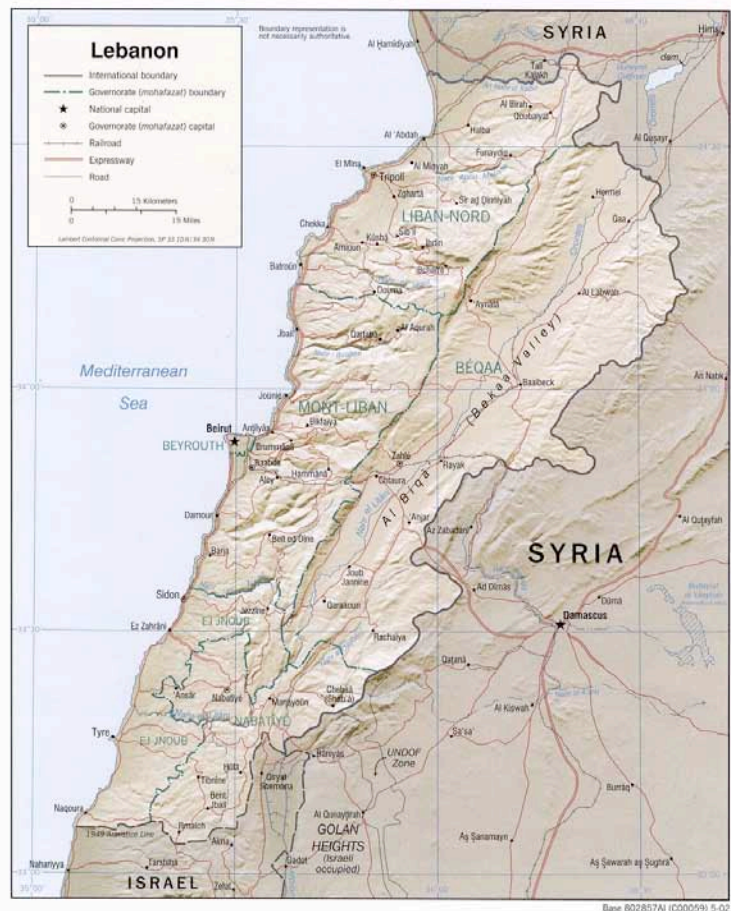
LIFE EXPECTANCY: 73 years.

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE: 18%, 28% of the population lives below the poverty line (CIA, 1999 est. – no recent data available as the country continues to recover from war)

CLIMATE: Mediterranean along the coast, with cool, wet winters and hot, dry summers. Lebanon mountains have heavy winter snows.

INDUSTRIES: Banking and tourism were major industries for Lebanon before the civil war (1975-1991). The country struggles to recover and reduce its debt and to restore banking and tourism to profitability. Agricultural products include citrus, grapes, tomatoes, apples, vegetables, olives, tobacco, sheep and goats. Industries include food processing, jewelry, cement and textiles.

CURRENT ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES: Major reconstruction of cities and southern Lebanon, which were massively damaged in the 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah. Desertification and deforestation; air pollution in Beirut from traffic and burning industrial wastes; coastal water pollution from sewage and oil spills.



Courtesy of The General Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.

BACKGROUND: LEBANON, BORDERS AND DISPUTED TERRITORIES

For more than 5000 years, Lebanon has provided a Mediterranean gateway to the Middle East for seafaring traders, empires and crusaders. The earliest maritime empire was built by the Phoenicians, from their ports at Tyre and Sidon, on what is now the southern coast of Lebanon. They built ships with keeled hulls, for sailing on open seas, and sold wood, glass and textiles throughout the Mediterranean. Over the centuries, Lebanon has been conquered by Greeks and Romans, by Byzantine emperors, Crusaders, and Ottoman sultans.

Mount Lebanon offers refuge While the coastal cities provided harbors and trade centers for empires, the mountain range that dominates northern Lebanon has been a haven for Christian and Muslim communities since the 5th century AD. The earliest to seek refuge in the rugged terrain of Mount Lebanon were Maronite Christians; in the safety of the mountains they built communities, monasteries and schools. In the 9th and 11th centuries, Shi'ite and Druze communities also found refuge in the mountains. For nearly a thousand years, with a total population of less than one million people, Christian and Muslim communities shared Mount Lebanon.

The Switzerland of the Middle East For most of the 20th century, Lebanon was compared with Switzerland for its tolerance of religious beliefs and its elected government, which divided positions of authority among the Maronites, Shi'ites and Druze. The city of Beirut was called "the Paris of the Middle East," a city of banking, trade and universities.

Fifteen years of civil war The decades after World War II were years of turmoil in the Middle East. Establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 displaced hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, who fled into Syria, Jordan, Egypt and Lebanon. As months of living in the camps stretched into years and decades, many refugees took up arms, forming militias and launching strikes against Israel to regain their lost territories. Arab states struggled to provide for growing populations of Palestinians, and to cope with rising levels of violence as armed factions launched attacks against each other and Israel.

Christian groups in Lebanon, fearing that they would be overwhelmed by the rapid growth of the Muslim population, emigrated by the thousands, to the Americas, Europe and Australia. Christians still living in Lebanon aligned themselves with Israel, taking up arms against their Muslim neighbors. Muslim groups formed their own militias, and centuries of religious tolerance in Lebanon disintegrated when gunmen fired on Christian leaders outside a church in 1975. The Lebanese government sought help from Syria, which sent its army to fight, and eventually to occupy, its tiny neighbor.

The Palestinian Liberation Organization As Lebanon dissolved into civil war, the already-weakened government was compelled by leaders of neighboring Arab states to accept the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), under the leadership of Yassir Arafat, as the effective government in southern Lebanon. The PLO tried to gain control of rival militias while at the same time providing for the needs of 300,000 refugees, but with little success, as the camps in southern Lebanon were flooded with militants expelled from Jordan, Syria and Egypt. The civil war raged in Lebanon, while Palestinian militias launched raids and strikes across Lebanon's southern border into Israel.



Courtesy of The General Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.

Borders in dispute Because of disputes over territories going back to Biblical times, most of Israel's borders with its Arab neighbors have never been settled. Confusion arose after World War I, with the breakup of the Ottoman Empire, regarding which territories would be designated for Jews, and which for Palestinians. Under a League of Nations Mandate, the British were made administrators of "Palestine" in 1920; the region stretched from the Mediterranean Sea to Iraq, and from Lebanon and Syria in the north to Egypt and Saudi Arabia in the south. Although the British improved living conditions, built rail and communications lines, and improved water supplies for Jerusalem, conflicting promises were made to Arabs – who represented 90% of the population – and Jews, as to whose interests were to be served under the Mandate. The population balance began to shift with the arrival of hundreds of thousands of Jews fleeing anti-Semitism in Europe before World War II, causing tensions in the region grow.

The Mandate was set to expire on May 15, 1948, but the future Prime Minister declared Israel to be an independent state on May 14th, and his government was quickly recognized by the United States and other major powers. Soldiers from Lebanon, Syria and Iraq immediately invaded the territory, with support from other Arab states and the British. The 1948 war – known to Israelis as the War of Independence, and to Palestinians as *al Nakba* – "the Catastrophe" – allowed Israel to redefine its borders beyond a "Partition Plan" proposed by the United Nations. In time, the Israeli government negotiated borders with Jordan and Egypt, but no agreement has yet been reached with Syria, Lebanon, or the Palestinians, which means that most of the new state's western and northern boundaries are constantly shifting.

The Suez Crisis leads to the Six-Day War In the 1950s, Egypt planned a major construction project to build the Aswan Dam, with financing from Britain and the United States. When the financing collapsed, the government of Egypt took steps to nationalize the Suez Canal, the prized shipping lane between Europe and Asia, which they had closed to Israeli shipping in 1949. Neighboring Arab states closed their borders to all forms of Israeli shipping, even closing air traffic lanes to incoming Israeli flights. In 1956, Israel responded to these provocations by invading the Sinai Peninsula, with air and sea support from Britain and France. Israel gained control of the Sinai, but escalating tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union in Europe distracted world leaders from a successful resolution to the crisis. Instead, the United Nations sent its first Peacekeeping Force to the Sinai Peninsula, to restore and maintain order.

The Suez Crisis was one among many sources of tension in the region. When Israel began to draw one-third of its fresh water supply from the Jordan River, Syria started building diversions that would reroute water to Syria, Jordan and Lebanon. In 1967, the UN withdrew its Peacekeepers from the Sinai, due to lack of funding, and Egypt quickly moved its soldiers back into the region, sealing the southern end of the Gulf of Aqaba, an important shipping lane for Israel and Jordan. Israel responded with a pre-emptive strike against Egypt's air force, launching an all-out conflict that came to be known as the Six-Day War. Although the war was fought between Israel and Jordan, Egypt and Syria, Arab forces also came from Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Algeria. With its overwhelming military success, Israel gained control of the Sinai Peninsula, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, eastern Jerusalem and the Golan Heights.

The Yom Kippur War The 1967 Six-Day War left Israel's Arab neighbors humiliated, and alarmed at Israel's growing power and prosperity. After years of dangerous talk, Egypt and Syria launched a surprise attack in 1973, against the occupied territories of Sinai and the Golan Heights. The date they chose was Yom Kippur, the holiest day in the Jewish calendar. The Israelis moved to repel the attacks, and after two weeks of war the Syrians had lost additional territory in the Golan Heights, while Egypt regained only a portion of the Sinai. But the Arab governments re-established their authority against Israel with their stunning assault, restoring their ability to negotiate as equals. In the Camp David Accords peace process that followed, Egypt and Israel negotiated a peace agreement for the border between Israel and the Sinai. In recognizing its right to exist, Egypt became the first Arab nation to have normalized relations with the state of Israel.

Ceasefire lines and occupied territories Israel negotiated a peace treaty with Jordan in 1994, establishing a mutual border along the Jordan River. With this agreement, Jordan joined Egypt as one of only two Arab states recognizing the right of Israel to exist as a state. Since the 1973 Yom Kippur War, relationships have continued to deteriorate between Israel and Lebanon, Syria, and the Palestinians, many of whom live in Israeli-occupied territories in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Israel invaded Lebanon in 1978, following an attack on Israeli civilians. Israeli forces occupied much of southern Lebanon within a few days. They withdrew under intense pressure from the United States and the United Nations, and UN peacekeeping forces took their place, but UN troops and a negotiated ceasefire in 1981 could not prevent ongoing attacks by the PLO, and reprisals from Israel. The PLO was by this time training fighters and stockpiling weapons in southern Lebanon; a dangerous faction of highly-skilled fighters would soon break away as Hezbollah, believed by many to be the most dangerous of the Palestinian militias.

The Israeli invasion of 1982 Despite a cease-fire that led to months of peace along the Israel-Lebanon border, the attempted assassination of the Israeli Ambassador to Britain in June 1982, by a Palestinian militant, led Israel to invade Lebanon with a massive force, overwhelming the southern region controlled by the PLO and driving as far north as Beirut. In the settlement negotiated in



Courtesy of The General Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin



The Valley of Tears, Golan Heights
Kerstin P. Johnsson picasaweb.google.com/.../zBRCVqjDX2ZS-

September 1982, the PLO was forced to disband in Lebanon, and was replaced by a multinational force of American, French and Italian peacekeepers. PLO militants dispersed to neighboring Arab states, including Jordan, Syria and Iraq, and PLO headquarters was re-established in Tunisia.

The Golan Heights This is a region of immense strategic importance to Israel. The Jordan River has its source among the peaks of Mt. Hermon, providing a crucial supply of fresh water for Israeli farms and cities. The Golan Heights forms the western shores of the Sea of Galilee, also called Lake Kinneret. The region has fertile farm and pasture land,

essential to Israel's economy. The hills and plateaus of the Golan Heights offer excellent vantage points for monitoring military activity by the Syrians, who use the region as a staging area for attacks against Israel, through the "Valley of Tears" in the north and a second pass further south.

Following Israel's occupation of the Golan Heights at the end of the Six-Day War, nearly all Arabs living in the region fled into Syria, leaving the Golan Heights to the growing number of Israeli settlements, and to several communities of Druze.

The Druze The Druze are a religious community formed in 11th century Egypt, by a caliph who believed himself to be the most recent incarnation of the Divine. The community was named for one of his followers, al-Darazi, who spread the word that the caliph was not dead but absent, and would return. The Druze are sometimes called "a schism within a schism" because they broke away from the Ismaeli sect of Shi'a Islam, but their beliefs are controversial and they are not well accepted by other Muslim sects.

Although the Druze are a Muslim sect, their faith incorporates influences outside of Islam, including Christianity, Gnosticism and neo-Platonism. The Druze believe in the transmigration of souls – the soul does not die with the body, but is reborn in the life of a baby. One cannot convert to become Druze; one must be born into the sect. Much of the Druze faith is secret, based on six books of sacred texts available only to the initiated, usually men and often elders.

To escape persecution for their controversial beliefs, Druze communities fled Egypt, settling in mountainous areas of Israel, Syria and Lebanon, forming tightly-knit communities. Today, there are thought to be as many as one million Druze. Most live in Syria and Lebanon, and more than 100,000 live in Israel. There are also Druze communities as farflung as the United States, India and Australia.

The Druze in the Golan Heights There are about 20,000 Druze in the Golan Heights, living in four villages at the foot of Mt. Hermon, near the headwaters of the Jordan River. These Druze have strong ties with nearby villages in Syria, across ceasefire borders of barbed wire and fields seeded with landmines. Cut off by the occupation from family and friends, and lacking modern communications, they call to their Syrian families using megaphones, at a place called Shouting Hill, near the largest of the four villages.

Despite their reputation as "children of benevolence", the Druze have demonstrated considerable courage in their dealings with Israeli occupiers. This was nowhere more evident than in the Golan Heights in 1982, when they peacefully resisted Israeli efforts to compel them to carry Israeli identity cards.



Source: *The Institute of Druze Studies*
<http://www.Druzestudies.org/Druze.html#origins>

By the late 1970s, after years of harassment by Syrian troops launching attacks through this territory, Israel was intent upon establishing permanent boundaries by formally annexing the Golan Heights. At the same time, Israel faced international criticism after relocating the capital from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, so a strategy other than “annexation” was required.

The new strategy was to absorb the territory by “allowing” the Druze population living in the Golan Heights to request Israeli citizenship, thereby making the region part of Israel. Druze sympathies, however, were with Syria, and they had no desire to declare themselves as “Druze but not Arabs”.

For more than two years, the Golani Druze declined to accept Israeli identification cards. Some lost their jobs in Israel, and those who accepted the cards were shunned by their fellow Druze. In December 1981, Israel passed legislation formally annexing the Golan Heights, but still the Druze said no: “They can kill us. But they cannot tell us who we are.” When their appeals to the government brought no result, Druze workers went on strike. For months, instead of going to work at their jobs, the Druze completed village construction projects, and violated curfew to harvest crops. Groups of women surrounded Israeli soldiers, seizing their weapons and offering them to army officers in return for the release of Druze from jail. The women put cookies and tea out for the soldiers, and engaged them in conversation until the soldiers were confused and demoralized about these Druze “enemies”.

In frustration, the Israeli army laid siege to the Druze, going door to door, confiscating their papers and replacing them with Israeli identity cards. The next morning, the village square was littered with the cards – and many Druze simply went about their business without identification papers, a very dangerous notion in occupied territories. Finally, with growing provocation on the border with Lebanon, Israel negotiated a compromise with the Druze and the crisis was past.

The Druze in Lebanon Having initially established villages along both sides of what is now the border between Lebanon and the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, some Druze moved north, taking refuge in the hillsides of Mount Lebanon. While they have shared the mountain with other religious and ethnic groups for nearly a thousand years, the Druze have been drawn into conflicts which required them to display leadership and military skills. The Druze are a cohesive community with a strong identity, as represented by the five points of the star which is the symbol of their faith.

The Druze in Israel The Druze established two villages in Mount Carmel, where they have lived since the 16th century. Their villages have grown and prospered to become virtual suburbs of the Israeli city of Haifa. There are more than a dozen Druze villages in the western, central and upper Galilee region, where they are known for the quality of their apples, pears and, especially, olives. The Druze did not oppose the Jews in the 1948 War of Independence, and unlike other Arab populations in Israel, they accepted compulsory military service in the Israeli army. They are relatively more prosperous than other Arabs in Israel and find work as laborers, shopkeepers and professionals with comparative ease.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Lebanon: history

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/country_profiles/791071.stm

<http://www.country-studies.com/lebanon/population.html>

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