



Center for  
Middle Eastern Studies

## About the Film: “The Kite”

**“The Kite” (Le Cerf-Volant) by Randa Chahal Sabbag**

**Lebanon, 2003**

**In Arabic with English subtitles**

**Running time: 80 minutes**

**Audience:** This film is of general interest and can be used with an adult audience that has a very basic knowledge of Lebanese-Israeli relations. There are no scenes of nudity, sexuality, or violence – and no obscene language. However, there is one bawdy exchange between the women (discussing the prospective bridegroom’s attributes) that would probably make this film inappropriate for use in a high school classroom.

**Brief summary of the film (no spoiler):** “The Kite” is set along the Israeli-Lebanese border and explores the issue of the physical, social, and psychological borders that separate people. The difficulties are expressed through the main characters of Lamia, a strong-willed 16-year-old girl who challenges the restrictions around her, and the Druze-Israeli border guard, Youssef, who struggles with the contradictions of his position. As the two fall in love, Lamia’s marriage is arranged with a relative on the other side of the border, leaving both young people to struggle against the limitations imposed upon them both by society and by international conventions.

### **Extended description of the film:**

The movie is set along the troubled Israeli-Lebanese border. It opens with a group of children and teenagers from a village on the Lebanese side flying kites. When one of the kites comes down in the no-man’s land separating the two countries, 16-year-old Lamia braves barbed wire, a minefield, and her brother’s terror to retrieve it, while a young Druze-Israeli border guard watches through binoculars in mingled horror and admiration.

The village elders (men) decide that it is time to arrange Lamia’s marriage to her cousin Samy in a nearby village on the Israeli side of the border. While they work on the paperwork necessary for the girl to take up residence in another country, the women to arrange the marriage, using megaphones to shout across the no-man’s land separating the two villages. Lamia’s mother, Amira does not want her daughter to leave, knowing they will never see each other again because of the border, but her sister Jamile convinces her that it is the only way Lamia will have

a full life. Jamile tells first the mother then the daughter her regrets about her own choice: to stay home and not cross over to marry her suitor. The man's continuing dissatisfaction (and his empty relationship with a young East European woman) is reflected in brief scenes within the film.

Lamia herself does not want to get married and has only the vaguest ideas of what marital relations entail (as is shown by her discussion with a friend). In her fantasies, she is with Youssef, the Israeli border guard, not with her intended husband whom she has never seen. Yet, she realizes that she has no choice and complies grudgingly with her family's decision.

Meanwhile, the viewer gets to know a little about Youssef, the young man who is the object of Lamia's affection – and who is also in love with her. A Druze who is an Israeli citizen, he speaks Arabic and hears all about Lamia from the shouted conversations of the women. He is a dreamer, who gets in trouble for listening to music instead of actively defending the border. His superior officer reveals his scorn for Youssef and his ambivalence toward the Druze within Israel, derisively explaining to Youssef and his colleagues: "Over there is the border. That village is your enemy. I know that they're your cousins and relations. But now they're your enemies. This is Israel. Even if you're Arabs and Druze, you're Israelis and soldiers now." Youssef listens respectfully but continues to daydream about Lamia.

Lamia's wedding has a surreal quality: the formalities and celebration of the men contrasting with the suffering of the women, children, and the bride herself who are facing permanent separation. The groom, of course, is unable to attend, presumably celebrating the wedding on the other side. At the end of the ceremony, Lamia, clad in her bridal gown, is escorted to the border and allowed/forced to walk alone across the border area to her new home.

The marriage is a disaster from the start. The bride wants nothing to do with her new husband, and he is reluctant to force her. His family is kind to her but perplexed by her attitude. Meanwhile, Lamia continues to dream of Youssef and even flirts with him when allowed to take the binoculars to see her mother. Ultimately, Samy's family decides to send her back, feeling that it is for her own good as well as theirs. Lamia, however, is not eager to return, knowing that crossing back into Lebanon will separate her from Youssef.

As Lamia crosses the buffer zone between the border, Youssef risks censure by passing near her, and the two surreptitiously touch hands without anyone but his friend witnessing it. After Lamia's return, she is considered a failure by some people in her village, but her mother defends her strongly. The ending is ambiguous: Lamia fantasizes about crossing the border to be with Youssef, but it is unclear if this union could ever become a reality.

For a **trailer and information about the director, cast, and crew**, see the webpage on the Global Films Initiative website: <http://www.globalfilm.org/lens08/kite.htm>