This book explores the question through a site-adaptive 24-hour theatrical performance. Developed between 2013 and 2018 by the Ensemble Kashmir Theatre Akademi and Nandita Dinesh, the play uses a duration, promenade format to immerse its audience within a multitude of perspectives on life in Kashmir. From a wedding celebration that is interrupted by curfew, to schoolboys divided by policing strategies, and soldiers struggling with a toxic mixture of boredom and trauma, Chronicles from Kashmir uses performance, installation and collaborative creation to grapple with Kashmir's conflicts through the lenses of outsiders, insiders, and everyone in between.

Due to varying degrees of censorship and suppression, the play has not been performed live since 2017. This book is, therefore, an attempt to keep Chronicles from Kashmir alive by including filmed scenes, a script, contextual questions, a glossary, and an illuminating introduction by Nandita Dinesh and EKTA founder Bhawani Bashir Yasir. A valuable Open Access resource for practitioners, educators and students of performance and conflict, this book is also stimulating reading for anybody who has asked, 'What is happening in Kashmir?'

This playscript includes:
• Twenty filmed scenes of the play in performance
• A range of contextual questions to stimulate discussion on staging site-adaptive theatre in places of conflict
• A helpful glossary

As with all Open Book publications, this entire book is available to read for free on the publisher's website. Printed and digital editions, together with supplementary digital material, can also be found at www.openbookpublishers.com.

Cover image: Photo by Vladimir Palyanov on Unsplash from https://unsplash.com/photos/Q8qTersW9Fk
Cover design: Anna Gatti
A WEDDING and a CURFEWED NIGHT

Given the nature of this scene, their filmed versions have been intentionally left without subtitles.

Follow the actors’ physicality and their vocalization.

The text was entirely improvised anyway.

Given the complexity of the tasks involved in this eight-hour section of the experience, the format below has been chosen to give the reader a clear idea of what is to unfold. For an even more rigorous breakdown, please see the timeline that has been included at the end of the script.

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Duration: 1 hour and 10 minutes

The audience reaches a home where a wedding is underway. Spectators are offered traditional Kashmiri tea and actors speak with them, in their roles as members of a wedding party.

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This event is the mehandi raat and is a ceremony in which the groom’s little finger is decorated with henna. The next morning, the groom traditionally goes to the bride’s home, to bring her back. A cake is cut during this night; there is dancing and singing. The groom’s friends are the ones who lead the festivities. The groom’s father — the head of the household — coordinates all the events.

Halfway through this time period, a curfew is announced outside. While there is still celebration in the air, the atmosphere in the house changes because of the curfew. The curtains are drawn. Music plays, but the volume is low.

Audience members are asked to help members of the home with tasks (since more guests are supposedly en route and plans have had to be changed because of the curfew). Spectators help with decorating the space; arranging the bedding; cooking; taking photographs. The audience members should be made to feel like part of the wedding — it should also enable them to talk to the actors informally; to share what they have seen in the performance thus far; the questions that they have.

Neighbours interrupt from time to time, asking the wedding party to keep their voices down. Maybe there’s an occasional sound of protests; of teargas shelling; of pellet guns.

Toward the end of this time frame, the groom is brought in, there is song and dance; celebrations reach a peak.

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Duration: 40 minutes

In the midst of the celebration, there is banging at the door. A man, injured by pellets fired by the Indian army, runs in and wants to hide. Some actors playing the wedding hosts rush the pellet victim to another space, where the guests won’t have to see him. Others talk about how to take the injured person to hospital, but no one is ready to risk his life due to the restrictions outside.

Suddenly a few army men enter the house and start asking about the injured man. They spill all the arranged sweets, pull out the clothes that are there, and start an identification parade of all the family members — guests and locals are separated for this. The army officers start searching all the rooms, drag out the pellet-injured man from the room, and take him along with them.

All the family, friends, and guests, after a shock, start rearranging the sweets and redo the arrangements for the mehandi raat. After re-settling the arrangements, the head of the family directs the groom to prepare for the mehandi.
A decorated cake is brought out and put on the table. There is a *wanvun* in the background. The groom is made to sit on a stage. His feet and hands are washed. The mother of the groom applies *mehandi* to the little finger of his right hand. The mother of the groom also applies *mehandi* for the groom’s friends and other guests. Now sweets are distributed among the guests.

Then, the groom cuts the cake; he takes a bite of it, then it is cut into pieces, and distributed among the friends and guests. The sweets are also distributed among the guests.

Since the curfew is still underway, mattresses are laid out in a space, and the GUIDES ask audiences to get some rest while they go out and try to figure out how to continue the tour amidst the curfew. Once the GUIDES leave the space, a projector turns on and the following images/events take place within that framework. Audience members are welcome to stay awake or to sleep for a bit.

***

**Duration: 8 hours**

*Hour 1*

20 minutes of static

20 minutes of a special light on an actor

For these twenty minutes, this actor has one primary action: tweezing the hair on his face. As he does so, he looks into a mirror; looks at his reflection. Each hair that he tweezes, has a story; a voice. A story that only he knows.

**ACTOR:** tweezes hair, looks at it
tweezes hair, looks at it
tweezes another hair, looks at it
tweezes another hair, looks at it

He keeps tweezing.

At some point, another actor comes in and starts threading his face till tears are rolling down his face.

20 minutes of a “guest”

The “guest” appears through Skype; through a documentary video; through screenings of existing artistic responses/commentaries to particular wars in other contexts. This video has a single objective: to place Kashmir amidst global struggles for autonomy; to provide nuanced perspectives about the place for an outsider in these contexts; contemplations about who the outsider might be.

*Wanvun*

A style of choral singing that is particular to Kashmir
In this hour, the “guest video” should focus on Palestine.

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Hour 2
20 minutes of static

20 minutes of a special light on an actor
For these twenty minutes, this actor has one primary action: applying henna, like nail polish, on her hand and toenails. It is a ritual; something she does every day. And in its banality, in being utterly commonplace; she is a vision.

ACTOR: applies henna to one nail, looks at it
   applies henna to one nail, looks at it
   applies henna to one nail, looks at it
   applies henna to one nail, looks at it
She keeps applying the henna.

20 minutes of a “guest”
In this hour, the “guest video” should focus on Kurdistan.

***

Hour 3
20 minutes of static

20 minutes of a special light on an actor
During this time, the actor’s phone is paired with the projector. We see him/her chatting with a Facebook account. Someone who talks to them, asks personal questions, disappears for a minute or two, before coming back and asking more questions. At one point, once intimate details have been revealed, the person on the other end of the Facebook chat, attempts to blackmail the actor; asking to be paid money in order to keep their secrets. The vignette culminates with the actor attempting to discern the identity of the person they are speaking with.

20 minutes of a “guest”
In this hour, the “guest video” should focus on the Zapatistas.

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Hour 4
20 minutes of static
20 minutes of a special light on an actor
   The actor repeatedly does the *nimaaz*; even though it might not be the right time for it
20 minutes of a “guest”
   In this hour, the “guest video” should focus on Somaliland

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Hour 5
20 minutes of static
20 minutes of a special light on an actor
   During this time, the actor makes *chai*, arranges snacks, and hands them out to spectators who are awake
20 minutes of a “guest”
   In this hour, the “guest video” should focus on East Timor.

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Hour 6
20 minutes of static
20 minutes of a special light on an actor
   The actor listens to a Kashmiri musician; someone old; someone unforgotten
20 minutes of a “guest”
   In this hour, the “guest video” should focus on Tibet

***

Hour 7
20 minutes of static
20 minutes of a special light on an actor
   During this time, the actor’s phone is paired with the projector. We see him/her chatting and engaging with articles on news sites: looking at a story and posting a diatribe about it. Engaging, then, in conversational comments with people who agree/disagree with the actor’s post
20 minutes of a “guest”

In this hour, the “guest video” should focus on Kosovo

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Hour 8
20 minutes of static
20 minutes of a special light on an actor, while s/he sleeps
20 minutes of nothing

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In live performances of Chronicles from Kashmir, in order to sustain the sheer duration of this scene, the actors could be versions of themselves. They could keep their own names and lived experiences; they only needed to change their relationship to the situation.

So, Syed — the actor playing the character of the bridegroom — could be called Syed during A Wedding and a Curfewed Night. He could answer impromptu questions from the audience based on his own lived experience. The only aspect that needed to change was that Syed, for the duration of this scene, had to be a bridegroom.

This particular actor-character blend worked for us because EKTA’s performers had the lived experience of the characters in the script. However, if Chronicles from Kashmir were to be staged with performers who do not have that lived experience, how might they be trained? Are scripts like Chronicles from Kashmir simply not meant for performers who do not have the lived experience in question? Or, is there a different choice that might be made in order to involve performers without the relevant lived experience? Like, for instance, setting Chronicles from Kashmir in a world of speculative fiction, rather than that of a South Asian reality?

What kind of speculative fictitious world would you create for Chronicles from Kashmir?
Duration: 40 minutes

The GUIDES walk in, turn on the radio, and begin setting out some food. The audience members are woken up by the GUIDES, who tell each of spectators that the curfew has been lifted, and that they should gather their energy before continuing on with their journey.

Audience members are given time to freshen up and eat before leaving the wedding household. The hosts of the wedding give each audience member a little bag with souvenirs, one of which is a stone that is covered with text about weddings in war zones (like Harris, n.d.).

As the audience members are led out of this curfewed night and into the next space, they have to navigate through a path made of barbed wire.

In addition to the challenge of actors needing to remain in character for an extended duration, the challenge of scenes like *A Wedding and a Curfewed Night* is how to maintain the stakes.

How do you get an audience to buy into the stress of a curfew, while knowing that they are — in reality — safe?

How can the audience be made to experientially understand the gravity of a situation, without blurring the lines between their own realities and fictions?