

Little action, but Kashmir film packs punch

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Watching “[Zero Bridge](#)”, a film set in Indian-administered Kashmir, I have to say I was constantly braced for something nasty — a bomb from nowhere, a gun attack, blood on the streets. Like many Westerners I associate Kashmir with conflict. Unlike many Westerners I have actually been there, but to Muzaffarabad and along the valleys beneath towering mountains on the Pakistani side

of the divided region.

The film, presented at the [Venice film festival](#), is not directly related to the conflict — tens of thousands of people have been killed since 1989 when Muslim rebels launched a violent campaign opposing Indian rule in the Muslim-majority region. Yet it still carried a powerful message.

“Zero Bridge”’s strength is to portray how the fighting, mistrust and political stalemate in Kashmir affect everyday citizens there. The young people at the centre of the narrative are poor, have few employment prospects and little to do in the way of entertainment. They come up against crippling bureaucracy and a zealous police force and are torn between wanting to stay in their homeland with their families, and finding a way to escape to a place where they are free to do what they like and say what they want. The film also examines family traditions in the region — a woman in her 20s is effectively forced into an arranged marriage because her family refuse to support her application for a passport, leaving her with no other option but to stay.

Kashmir has many tragic stories. The characters portrayed in “Zero Bridge” may not be the victims of violence or physical abuse, but they win our sympathy nonetheless.