

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE

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THE FROGS (Kurbağalar) 1985

Şerif Gören

Overview

Set in a Turkish Balkans village, the film's events begin with Elmas's husband Halil being stabbed to death in the back one night when he was out hunting for frogs in the swamp. Elmas is alone with her only son and struggles to survive on her own while trying to overcome the pain of her loss.

It depicts conservatism in Anatolian villages, repressed sexuality, and on the other hand, the traditional order that commoditizes and humiliates women and specifically lonely women. In the film, the woman who is restricted from experiencing love and sexuality becomes the sexual desire object of others.

Hülya Koçyiğit, one of the most well-known female stars of Turkish cinema and who has appeared in countless films since the 1960s, plays the lead role. Frogs are among the mature works of Gören, who has been in cinema as a director since the 1970s.

People

Elmas	A peasant woman who was left alone with her young son when her husband died.
Ali	Elmas's ex-lover returns to the village after seven years of imprisonment.
Hüseyin	A young neighbor who completes his military service and returns to the village.
Hasan (minor)	Elmas's school-age son.
Hasan (man)	Elmas's neighbor who repeatedly harasses her.
Havva	Hasan's wife

Synopsis

Elmas's (Diamond) husband Halil, who lives in a Rumeli village, is found in the village square stabbed in the back when he returns from a frog hunt. Elmas blames their neighbors, whose fields are next to their's and there is animosity between them. Gendarmerie searches arriving in the village can find neither a suspect nor a weapon of crime. Ali, nicknamed Balkanlı (from Balkans), had just been released from prison for the murder of his neighbor Nedim's son. He longs with his mother, friends, and villagers. Elmas closed herself in her house in the pain of her husband's death and neglected the paddy field she owned. The girls who come to get water from the village fountain grow hot peppers in pots there. They flirt with the young men of the village who come there. Elmas alone tries to cultivate the paddy field. In the village, everyone, especially the women, starts to rumble about Elmas. Men constantly harass Elmas by trying to get close to her at every opportunity. Despite all the harassment and gossip, Elmas tries to protect herself and continue her life. One of her neighbors' young son, Hüseyin, returns from the military.

Ali and Elmas loved each other in the past. Ali, on the one hand, and Hüseyin, on the other, begin to have feelings about Elmas. Unable to make a living alone from the paddy field, Elmas goes out to collect frogs like men at night. Hüseyin, who is obsessively thinking about Elmas, attacks Elmas at nightfall. Elmas barely get rid of him. All these further increase the dose of gossip in the village. Over time, Elmas and Ali began to get closer again. Despite his mother's objections, Ali sets his mind on marrying Elmas. They sleep together when he opens his feelings to Elmas. However, realizing that Elmas is still mourning her dead husband Halil, Ali leaves in shame.

Scenes

Elmas's husband dies A sick or injured man with a sack and a lantern in his hand collapses to the ground while walking through the village with difficulty. The frogs come out of the sack and spread around. An old man asks for help from people. A woman hurriedly rushes to Elmas's house and brings the news that Halil has died. Elmas runs out crying to Halil's side. Elmas hugs him and realizes that he has been stabbed. She screams and attacks a neighbor's house. She holds them responsible for Halil's death. The gendarmerie comes to the village and searches for the murderer and the murder

weapon but cannot find them. They leave Halil's body where he fell precaution for infectious diseases at night. Elmas cries at her husband's corpse.



Condolence The women who come to Elmas's house for Halil's funeral gossip that Elmas will attract all the men in the village.

Mourning Elmas is very sad and suffering. She goes to the village fountain to take water. In the fountain, young girls and young men are flirting again. Girls grow hot pepper in pots around the fountain. Returning from the fountain, Elmas meets Ali, who offers his condolences. Then another man approaches Elmas and whispers that he can meet her every need.

Bread fight Elmas works diligently in the water with her son in the paddy field. The men in the coffee shop make inappropriate jokes about Elmas, who passes by.



Marriage When Ali returns home, his mother advises him to find a bride worthy of her but to stay away from Elmas. She relays to him the gossips that comes to her ears.

Paddy field While Elmas trying to work inside the water of the paddy field, the women in the side field gossip that she will steal their men. Hüseyin, who came to the field, greeted Elmas and offered his condolences. Ali nearby again races with young horses. Here, Ali encounters his enemies. They pass by staring at each other. A man with a tractor who approaches Elmas on the turn of paddy offers a lift to Elmas the village. Elmas rejects the offer.

Elmas's struggle She milks the cows and takes them to the woman in the dairy. The woman, along with other villagers, gossips about Elmas's condition. When Elmas appears, they change the subject. In the village's coffeehouse, men also gossip about Ali and Elmas. On a corner, Ali chats with his friend. When Elmas arrives at her paddy field nex day, she finds it dry. She notices that her neighbor diverted the water, cutting off the it coming into Elmas's field. Elmas, enraged, walks over to the man with the pickaxe in her hand. The villagers and Hüseyin stop her.



An advice Hasan's wife, Havva, advises Elmas to enjoy freedom and live her sexuality as she wishes. Elmas does not care about her speech.

With friends Hüseyin drinks and chats with his friends on the beach. His friends make sexual innuendoes when he hugs Elmas to stop her during the fight. Hüseyin states that he respects Elmas but does not deny that he likes her.

To be watched Elmas realizes she is being watched, working with all his might, submerged in water in the field. When she stops and looks around, she sees that not only one person but all the men around are staring at her. She gets embarrassed, then angry, and leaves the field. As Elmas returns from the field, a man approaches her and reminds her husband's debts.



Coffeehouse The men gossip about Elmas.

Frog hunt Elmas still feels the pain of losing her husband. She dreams of him. At night, she sees males going on a frog hunt. Taking his son with him, he goes hunting in the swamp. Elmas catches frogs with a great effort in the swamp. Elmas takes the frogs she catches to the merchant in the morning. The man is surprised. She does not care about that and rejoices when she gets the money.



Elmas denizde yuzer Elmas is happy. She goes to the beach with her son and swims. Hüseyin secretly watches her.



Gossips again The men in the coffee house and at the village fountain tell each other about Elmas's frog gathering in an erotic tone. Elmas goes frog hunting again at night. On the way back to her home, Hüseyin offers help. Elmas declines his offer.

Mother Ali's mother warns him to stay away from Elmas and keep her out of his mind. She emphasizes that she does not want a bride from a widow and a woman with children and does not trust Elmas.

A marriage proposal The village women come to Elmas's house and bring her the marriage proposal of the village grocer. Angered by this, Elmas kicks women out of her home.

Assault Elmas is spied on by the surrounding men working in the paddy field. Ali warns Elmas to be careful. She does not care about Ali's speech. Elmas goes out to collect frogs again. Men have fun scaring her. Suddenly, Elmas is attacked by someone she does not recognize in the dark; she barely gets rid of him. She complains to the gendarmerie. However, the attacker cannot be identified.



In the town Elmas goes shopping in town with her son. There they meet Ali. Ali buys them ice cream. They return to the village together.



Hüseyin's obsession Hüseyin appears at Elmas's door drunkenly. He cries out that he is in love and wants to get married. His father beats Hüseyin and takes him away from there.

Holiday The villagers feast among themselves on a religious holiday after the prayer. Ali takes the meat of the ram he slaughtered to Elmas. Ali confesses that he has been in love with her for a long time. Elmas goes to the fountain with a pepper seedling and plants it in the ground under the surprised gaze of the girls.



Elmas and are in love When Ali tells her his intention to marry Elmas, his mother is furious. However, Ali is determined. He goes to Elmas's house and confesses his love; they sleep together. There, Ali sees the postcard Halil had sent to her and reads his loving note. Elmas and Ali are embarrassed about the situation. Ali leaves the house.



Themes

Rumor Rumors are an essential part of the daily life of the villagers in the film. Villagers often communicate with each other through gossiping. When Elmas loses her husband, she soon becomes the object of gossip revolving around sexuality. Both women and men gossip about her. Because Elmas is considered a threat to her men by women as she tries to continue her life in the village lonely. Among men, she becomes an object of desire and the protagonist of the erotic dreams they want to achieve. In fact, neither her behaviors, words, nor appearance carries any sexual messages, and even she seems to avoid them in particular. In contrast, the villagers reflect their sexual fantasies onto Elmas.

Harassment Men harass Elmas unabashedly as she is a lonely woman. Various men from the village first begin to approach and disturb Elmas under the pretext of offering help. Elmas firmly turns down these offers of help to save her dignity. Many men, especially Havva's husband Hasan, one of their neighbors, have their eyes on Elmas. While searching for a way to approach Elmas, they spread the rumor that Elmas is with Ali to hide their own motives.

Hüseyin, who desires Elmas, bothers her by shouting from outside while she is at home at night. When Elmas, who has to earn money, goes on a frog hunt at night, Hüseyin takes advantage of the darkness and assaults her. Elmas barely saves herself.

Anxiety and fear Elmas, alone in the village with her son, is in a state of anxiety and fear. Elmas's concerns are very diverse. The first is the threat of starvation. She does not know how to make a living and how to stand alone economically. Elmas embarks on a great struggle to survive.

She plants the paddy field alone and clashes with her neighbor, who cuts off the water and causes her crops to perish. On the other hand, Elmas overwhelmed and frightened by the endless harassment of the villagers -especially by the men-is also worried about whether she will be able to continue her life in the village. The locals do not leave her alone, but she does not know any other place to live. She feels closeness again towards her former lover Ali but does not dare to have a new relationship with him. She fears the environment's reaction and suppresses her desires.

Besides, Ali, who has returned to the village after being released from prison, is also worried. He worries that the father and brothers of the man he killed may take revenge on him and tries to protect himself. When he comes to the coffee house in the village square, he always leans his back to the wall.

Ali is also worried about how to build a new life and where to start. He often tells his mother about these concerns. Although Ali has Elmas in his heart, he is also afraid of the reaction of his mother and his circle to marrying a widow with children, and he cannot express this openly.

Hüseyin, who has an age difference from Elmas, is also afraid to approach her, although he desires her sexually. He denies the insinuations of his friends on this issue, acts cowardly. Social pressure fuels the fears of all three main characters and shapes their behaviors.

Peasant women are also worried that Elmas will seduce their husbands, and they express this in their conversations, saying that Elmas should be married off as soon as possible and removed from being a threat.

Voyeurism Elmas, who has lost her husband, is under surveillance by the men of the village. In all kinds of public places, she is spied on by the surrounding men. Especially when working in the paddy field with other farmers, the clothes that get wet and stick to her body attract the attention of men. Elmas works hard in the field without caring about her environment. Sometimes secretly, sometimes openly, men's eyes are fixed on her often, and she does not even notice. She feels discomfort from this when she notices. In fact, no matter what Elmas does, her behavior and her existence is eroticized by men and women, and her sexuality becomes a matter of debate.

Hüseyin follows Elmas when he goes to the beach and voyeurs her over the grass as she swims and then lies at the beach.

Eroticism Frogs is a film loaded with eroticism that is not based on nudity but is mostly reflected in words, innuendoes, and behaviors. Sexuality has an important place in conversations between both men and women. The person they turn into the instrument of these dialogues is Elmas. They often carry it around Elmas's sexuality, which is not in sight but envisioned by the villagers.

While flirtatious young women and men sit around the village fountain, the expression that men spend, “*I’ll eat your pepper,*” have direct obscene connotations since it is not initially explained what it is. Although the meaning of this is later revealed, this phrase proceeds in an atmosphere that causes erotic insinuations and jokes in dialogues among young people.

Hasan’s wife Havva is a woman with strong sexual desires. She makes some suggestions to Elmas to live her sexuality freely. Havva first turns to Ali and looks for ways to be alone with him at every opportunity. When she realizes that he cannot seduce Ali, she gets angry and turns to Hüseyin.

It is understood that Elmas, who knows the attitude of her environment very well, also suppresses her sexual desires. When Elmas earns money from selling the frogs, she goes to the beach and swims in the sea. She lies on the beach, embracing the sands. This image is intensely erotic for Hüseyin, who secretly watches him.

Character Analysis

Elmas When the film’s main character loses her husband, she is left alone with her young son and starts a struggle for life in the village. A hardworking and determined woman, Elmas becomes the target of gossip and harassment by the villagers despite all her efforts.

Suffering Elmas, whose husband was murdered, is suffering from losing him. We rarely see Elmas happy and laughing. Elmas is constantly anxious and sad throughout the narrative. The painful expression on her face is with her until the finale.

Victim and oppressed Elmas is victimized in the narrative with its various dimensions: First, her husband is stabbed in the back, but the killer is unknown, and law enforcement makes no attempt to solve it. Secondly, her neighbors cut the water of her field, and the crops where she has labored so much are destroyed. Third, Elmas is harassed and sexually assaulted by the men. Finally, her dignity is damaged by the men and women in the village through endless gossip, and she is forced to marry someone or leave the village.

Dignified The village men often offer to help Elmas, but she refuses. Elmas, who knows the hypocritical character of the peasant, struggles on his own, without getting help from anyone, taking care of not to owe anything. She also does not allow women who look for gossip or aspersions. She tries to raise her child by living a dignified life in her way. She struggles with her evil neighbors who try to cut off her water to give damage.

Hardworking and determined Elmas works hard to continue her life. Even though the people around her say she cannot make it, she works in the field alone. In the repetitive scenes, Elmas’s struggle and diligence are visible. When her efforts in the field during the day are insufficient to pay her husband’s debts, she goes frog hunting with the village men at night. She earns her bread regardless of the criticism and aspersions coming from her environment.

Ali Elmas’s former beloved has just been released from prison, where he had been serving a long time for murdering another villager. Ali is timidly worried about how he will continue his life. At the same time, his feelings for Elmas are revived.

Melancholic and thoughtful Ali often ponders. He spent the best years of his youth in prison. He questions whether a new and beautiful life is possible. On the day he first arrived, he said to his mother, “Mother, as long as the bird that is freed from the cage flies, it cannot fly... that is who I am.”

Ali speaks to very few people in the village. He does not mix with the crowd, avoids socializing, and spends time alone. He is primarily idle and thoughtful.

In love Ali was in love with Elmas before going to jail, and he was planning to marry her. When he returns to the village after being released from prison, he is still in love with Elmas. Despite her mother’s pressure, he keeps Elmas in mind. He dreams of a new future with her. In the finale, despite his mother’s objections and threats, he goes to her.

Hüseyin He is younger than Elmas and has just returned from the army. He, too, is at a turning point in his life, and uncertainties about the future worry him as well. Elmas occupies his mind obsessively.

Obsessive Hüseyin begins to desire Elmas, who is older than him and whom she has hitherto regarded as his older sister. He first rejects the situation and ignores the comments of his environment but rapidly develops an obsession with Elmas. He cannot openly admit it, but he follows Elmas

everywhere she goes. In the field, on the seashore, on social occasions, in frog hunting, he is around Elmas at every opportunity. Elmas, however, is not aware of Hüseyin's obsession. When Hüseyin is aware that Elmas is not interested in him, he resorts to other ways to approach her.

One night, when he gets drunk, he arrives at Elmas's home and shouts from outside in the dark. At other times, when Elmas works in the field and swims on the beach, he secretly voyeurs her. Even he tries to rape her in the swamp when she goes on a frog hunt. Elmas barely escapes but is unable to identify him in the dark.

Coward Hüseyin hides his interest in Elmas and tries to harass her secretly, without anyone noticing, not openly like Hasan. It must be because Elmas is a widow and older than him, he is afraid of the reaction of his environment and being ridiculed, and he covers up his feelings. Unable to communicate appropriately with Elmas, Hüseyin diverts his urge to assault to get closer to her. He harasses Elmas in secrecy and hides when he is discovered.