



Karlovy Vary
International Film Festival
Crystal Globe Competition

the exam

سەزموون

DIRECTOR SHAWKAT AMIN KORKI PRODUCER MEHMET AKTAŞ



ABOUT THE FILM

THE EXAM, by the highly acclaimed Kurdish-Iraqi filmmaker Shawkat Amin Korki, is a touching drama shot against the background of a war ridden region struggling to rebuild. At its heart, it is a story about the selfless love and exceptional care of sisterhood and the fight for emancipation.

In long, slow-paced shots, contrasted with bright, highly suspenseful sequences that mirror both the sense of stagnation and social captivity, the film tells the story of two sisters: The young Rojin, who laments the unexplained disappearance of her fiancé during the war and her older sister Shilan, who struggles with her oppressive husband. In order to avoid Shilan's fate of forced marriage, Rojin must pass the university entrance exam. The path to success, however, is ridden with legally and morally contentious decisions.

This unique work bravely presents an issue that is rarely explored in Middle-Eastern cinema, of women rights and their living conditions in the region. With two female leads, Shawkat exposes a heartbreaking reality in which higher education is the only possible salvation for the weaker parts of society, a factor that is readily exploited by swindlers.

THE EXAM is the second collaboration between Shawkat Korki and Mehmet Aktas, after their previous highly acclaimed work MEMORIES ON STONE (Iraq Oscar Entry 2014). The film will premiere in competition at Karlovy Vary International Film Festival 2021.

LOGLINE

Rojin is a young Kurdish-Iraqi woman about to take the university entrance exam. Rojin's unhappily married older sister Shilan decides to help her pass at any cost, hoping to give her a more emancipated life. Thus, the sisters inevitably become entangled in a huge network of corruption that connects all parts of society.

SYNOPSIS

Rojin, a heartbroken young woman who is suffering from depression after the disappearance of her fiancé, is preparing for her university entrance exam. If she fails, her father will force her into marriage. If she succeeds, however, she might lead a more emancipated life and avoid the fate of her older sister Shilan, who is unhappily married to a conservative man who demands her to be a proper housewife. Seeing that her younger sister struggles to achieve that dream, Shilan becomes desperate to make her pass the exam by any means necessary. This decision puts the sisters under immense pressure from their environment both at home and in school, as they become entangled in a huge network of corruption that is connected through all parts of society.





CREDITS

FILM INFO

Film Title:	The Exam
Original Film Title:	Ezmûn
Language:	Kurdish
Subtitles:	English
Category :	Feature
Genre:	Drama
Country of Production:	Germany, Iraqi Kurdistan, Qatar
Complition Date:	2021

TECHNICAL INFORMATION

Total Running Time:	89 min.
Picture:	Color
Aspect ratio:	2.39:1 (Scope)
Sound Format:	Dolby Surround
Frame Rate:	24 fps

CAST

Avan Jamal	Shilan
Vania Salar	Rojin
Hussein Hassan	Sardar
Shwan Attoof	Jamal
Hushyar Nerwayi	Engineer

CREW

Director:	Shawkat Amin Korki
Producer:	Mehmet Aktaş
Co-producer:	Foad Jalal
Production Company:	mîtosfilm, Masti Film
Screenwriter:	Shawkat Amin Korki Mohamed Reza Gohari
Cinematographer:	Adib Sobhani
Editor:	Ebrahim Saeedi
Production Designer:	Jalal Saed Panah
Music:	Mehmûd Berazî
Sound Recordist:	Shahram Ahmadian
Costume Designer:	Katharina Nesterowa
Make Up Artist:	Karina Evdokimova

PRESS MATERIALS

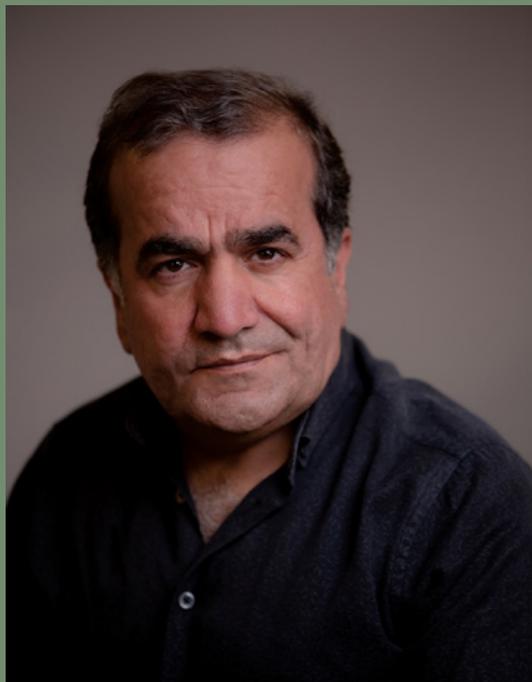
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TRAILER

[Click here for the trailer](#)







SHAWKAT AMIN KORKI
DIRECTOR

BIOGRAPHY

Shawkat Amin Korki was born in 1973. Originally from Zakho, Iraqi Kurdistan, he and his family fled from Iraqi military oppression to Iran in 1975, where they lived in exile for 25 years. Korki studied Cinema in Iran and gained international recognition in 2006 with the completion of his debut feature film in Iraqi Kurdistan, *CROSSING THE DUST*, which premiered at Rotterdam international film festival.

Korki's greatest success to this date has been *MEMORIES ON STONE* (2014), the official Oscar entry from Iraq. His movies have been presented at world famous film festivals such as Karlovy Vary, Busan, Cairo, Edinburgh, Tallinn, Göteborg, Hong Kong and many more in the past.

FILMOGRAPHY

THE EXAM (2021) - Writer, Director
MEMORIES ON STONE (2014) - Writer, Director
KICK OFF (2009) - Writer, Producer, Director
CROSSING THE DUST (2006) - Writer, Producer, Director





DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

THE EXAM is a suspenseful drama displaying the reality of two young women living in today's Iraqi Kurdistan. The region has long suffered from tragic wars, misery, and constant crises while seeking to become an independent state and the repercussions from these events now begin to unfold within the modern society. Many conflicts arise around the questions of what a successful democratic way of living together looks like and how it can be accomplished.

I have intended to focus on two female protagonists to address the certain kind of pressure that young women experience in Kurdistan. The balance between marriage and motherhood on one side and education on the other is a constant battle and sacrifice for women, especially in this region.

One of the main protagonists, the older sister Shilan, who is frustrated by her own life situation, fights for a better life for her younger sister Rojin. Her strongly motivated actions bring her to experience empowerment herself, while facing her unlucky marriage and her lost dreams. The title THE EXAM is hence not only the physical university exam Rojin must pass in order to have a better life, but it is also a figurative reference to Shilan's personal examination of her own life situation.

INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR

Aside from the physical exam at its centre, the film title hints at many different aspects of the work. Which further parts of society you wished to put through an exam with your story?

As the film title suggests, the exam is not just an educational test that Rojin must pass but also a testament for Shilan to see if she could succeed in steering her family in the right direction. Also, it puts Jamal (the teacher) through an exam of his own, which is whether he could win a battle against corruption within the educational system.

You are both the director and writer of the film, what drew you personally to create this work? Do you feel the story of the protagonists is reflected in your personal history?

I co-wrote this film with fellow film writer Mohamed Reza Gohari, but personally, I was inspired by the plight that students in my country go through during mid-year and final exams. The events of the film are

not based on my personal experience, but are the fruit of a long and thorough research on the topic of exam cheating and the stories and the atmosphere related to it. I do have to mention that finding stories about cheating and the corruption of the education system were not an easy task.

What compelled you to tell a story exclusively from a female perspective of the two leads?

It was necessary for me to tell this story from a female's perspective in order to uncover certain aspects of the Kurdish society, which would otherwise be impossible to present.

Tackling such a volatile subject, how was your project received by local creatives, did you feel supported or were you met with resistance?

We have yet to screen the film therefore I cannot yet tell what the local creatives would think of the film. But I sense the film will have a positive impact.





The two main actresses are practically unknown, how did you come across them?

Both main female actresses are first-time film actors. I chose them from a wide range of people who came to the casting calls. I was pleased with their performances despite them having difficult roles.

When creating the visual language of the film, were you alluding to certain works that inspired you?

I wasn't referencing any specific works. I wanted long shots in order to give the film a realistic feel as well as to allow for better continuity of the characters' emotional process throughout the film. I also used certain lighting techniques in order to show the contrasting characteristics of the actors.

The film presents a very complex morality, with no side being absolutely right, but the choices Shilan makes are the most contentious in the film. Do you consider her an anti-hero?

The life circumstances of the characters certainly make some of them seem like anti-heroes. Shilan, for example, can be perceived as an anti-hero due to the measures she takes in order to help her sister. However, one can also argue that Shilan is a hero because her cause can be justified. The exact same thing can be said about the rest of the characters involved in it as well. Creating a debate as to who are the heroes and anti-heroes of the film is one of its main themes.

The devastating destruction caused by the war against ISIS is constantly present in the background, was that entirely an artistic choice or unavoidable circumstances as well?

The war against ISIS was ongoing during the story of the film, therefore its presence was unavoidable. However, I try to not show the war directly but its effects and its presence and use it simply as a constant threat and reminder of what our people were going through. It is also underlying the irony of Jamal's struggle against corruption

What do you feel is the most crucial aspect that the audience should take from the film?

It is most crucial for me that the audience will enjoy my film and to be able to receive their feedback and to see the impact of the film on them. Secondly, I want the audience to get a glimpse of Kurdistan as a whole from my point of view. THE EXAM will probably present a new and very different picture of Kurdistan than my previous movies, as well as other Kurdish films.

The level of professionalism and sophistication displayed by the schemers is almost absurd, do such events really take place? How much is the story grounded in reality?

Unfortunately, schemers who go the distance in order to monetize the education system do exist in our reality. Although the film is dramatized, while I was doing my research for the film, I heard numerous stories of how there are crooks who have made careers from doing this.





MEHMET AKTAŞ
PRODUCER

BIOGRAPHY

Mehmet Aktaş is a screenwriter and producer. Born in Turkey, he moved to Berlin in 1995 where he founded the film distribution and production company mîtosfilm, which specializes in international co-productions. Mehmet Aktaş has received several awards for his productions and screenplays and his films have been shown in many renown festivals around the world, among them Cannes, Locarno, Berlinale, Karlovy Vary, Toronto and Sarajevo. He is a long time collaborator of Shawkat Amin Korki.

FILMOGRAPHY (SELECTION)

THE EXAM (2021) - Producer
THE LEGEND OF THE UGLY KING (2017) - Producer, Co-scriptwriter
RESEBA - THE DARK WIND (2016) - Producer, Co-scriptwriter
GULISTAN - LAND OF ROSES (2016) - Producer
MEMORIES ON STONE (2015) - Producer
NO ONE KNOWS ABOUT PERSIAN CATS (2009) - Producer
THE LAND OF LEGEND (2008) - Producer
DOL (2007) - Producer





PRODUCER'S STATEMENT

THE EXAM differs from the leading image of Kurdistan defined by war and escape. Shawkat Amin Korki's film provides an insight into the Kurdish society by creating a sociogram that illustrates that the Kurdish independence is not only threatened by external enemies, but also by internal conflicts. Hence does Shawkat Amin Korki not idealize the Kurdish fight for independence, but rather offers a critical view on his own society with a tone of dark humor.

The lack of future perspectives, especially for women, has become an attractive business model for the corruptive 'education mafia'. Driven by the desire for a self-determined life, the two sisters, Rojin and Shilan, find themselves forced to overstep the borders of what is legally and even morally right. While opportunistic men are after achieving economic success, the future of the two young women is at stake.

The production of the film was made possible through the collaboration with Masti Film and the Kurdish TV channel Waar TV. The post production funding was provided by the highly esteemed Doha Film Institute.



ADIB SOBHANI
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

BIOGRAPHY

Adib Sobhani started working in cinema professionally as Mahmoud Kalari's assistant in 2008 and has taken part in nearly 30 productions working his way from assistant, key gaffer, key grip to cameraman in 5 films and director of photography in 4 additional films. Among others he has worked with Asghar Farhadi on his Oscar winning film *THE SALESMAN* (2016), *NO DATE, NO SIGNATURE* (2017) by Vahid Jalilvand and *WHEN WE ARE ALL ASLEEP* (2009) by Bahram Beizai.

FILMOGRAPHY (SELECTION)

BEYOND THE WALL (2021) - Director of Photography
THE EXAM (2021) - Director of Photography
AMIR (2018) - Director of Photography
SHEEPLE (2018) - Cameraman





AVAN JAMAL



VANIA SALAR



HUSSEIN HASSAN ALI



HUSHYAR NERWAYI



SHWAN ATTOOF

AVAN JAMAL
SHILAN

An ardent cinemagoer and a cinephile since childhood, Avan Jamal is a Kurdish actress who's first taste of success was at the local TV series VEKOLIN. Avan is currently attached to several large films due in 2022 that are to be shown in festivals worldwide. The Exam is to be her breakthrough film role.

FILMOGRAPHY

WHO'S THE KILLER (2021)
VEKOLIN (2020)

HUSHYAR NERWAYI
ENGINEER

Born in Kurdistan, Iraq in 1974, Hushyar fled to Iran during the war where he studied cinema directing and began working in the field. He continued his work in cinema upon returning to Kurdistan while studying Economics. Currently based in Erbil.

FILMOGRAPHY (SELECTION)

WHERE IS LAND (2012)
THE LOST SHADOW (2009)

SHWAN ATTOOF
JAMAL

An award-winning Kurdish Actor and Director who appeared in over 50 films, Theatre plays, TV series and TV Shows and has taken part in numerous international film festivals both as an actor and as a jury member. Receiver of the honorary award of Iraqi critics as best actor (2010).

FILMOGRAPHY (SELECTION)

GEZHAW (2000)
APPLE SMELL (2008)
KICK OFF (2009)

VANIA SALAR
ROJIN

A Graduate from the Accounting Dept. of the Sulaymaniyah University with a passion for cinema, Vania has successfully worked on multiple projects as a casting director and assistant director and became one of the best casting directors in the Kurdistan Region Of Iraq. THE EXAM is her acting debut.

FILMOGRAPHY

THE EXAM (2021)

HUSSEIN HASSAN ALI
SARDAR

A well-known film and TV director, writer, and actor from Kurdistan, Iraq and a long time collaborator with Shawkat Amin Korki. His first feature film NARCISSUS BLOSSOM was presented at Panorama Berlinale and TIFF in 2006. Hussein's latest film as writer, director and actor, THE RAIN BRIDE, is now in post-production.

FILMOGRAPHY (SELECTION)

MEMORIES ON STONE (2014)
MARDAN (2014)
CROSSING THE DUST (2006)



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