

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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Late December / Fin décembre (2010)

Moez Kamoun

OVERVIEW

Auteur Born in 1962 in Tunis, Moez Kamoun studied cinema at the Ecole Supérieure d'Études Cinématographiques de Paris. Kamoun worked alongside Tunisian directors like Nouri Bouzid and Férid Boughedir as an assistant director. He also collaborated with international directors like Anthony Minghella on *The English Patient* and George Lucas on two Star Wars Films, *The Phantom Menace* and *Attack of the Clones*.

Film *Late December* is a powerful contribution to the consciousness of women in Tunisia and an invitation to men to change their behavior towards women. Aïcha and Adam are allegories of the Tunisian people, called to die at the end of December of the year in progress in order to be mentally reborn in January of the year to come. Thus, the film tackles the issues of patriarchy and the excessive pride of men which alienate women from Tunisia's human capital. The film may be guilty of distracting the viewer's attention from the essential issues by introducing non-essential subplots, such as the search for cheerleaders to entertain the villagers or Dalila's infidelities against Ibrahim. Shot in Tunisia in 2010, the 104-minute film was nominated for the prestigious Golden Tanit at the Carthage Film Festival of the same year.

Background *Late December* is a film about hope. Indeed, December 2010 heralded a new era in Tunisia. Frustrations in the country's underprivileged classes, such as the workers and peasants, as well as women, constituted the overcast sky that augured a tornado. In this regard, the title of the film is a foreshadowing because, unless he was a soothsayer, Moez Kamoun, who released his film in September 2010, was far from imagining that on December 17, 2010, a young fruit vendor named Mohamed Bouazizi would immolate himself in the town of Sidi Bouzid, thus lighting the spark of the Tunisian Revolution and the Arab Spring. One thing is certain, however. The film marks the end of a lost year and the beginning of hope, a lost year for Adam, who loses his girlfriend and sinks into depression and alcoholism; a lost year also for Aïcha, who loses her job, her boyfriend, and her dignity as a woman and becomes a prey to suicidal urges. But *Late December* trumpets also a new year for our two protagonists, who find love and comfort in each other. And, above all, the film heralds a new Tunisia for sensitive men who are capable of feeling emotion, of crying even, and a new Tunisia for women who are determined to fight the obscurantism of patriarchy having by their sides this new breed of Tunisian men.

CHARACTERS

<i>Adam</i>	A young Tunisian doctor
<i>Aïcha</i>	A young Tunisian factory worker and girlfriend of Mourad
<i>Sofiane</i>	A Tunisian immigrant in France
<i>Mourad</i>	The Boyfriend of Aïcha
<i>The Omda</i>	The village chief/Omda

SYNOPSIS

Adam, a young Tunisian doctor in despair, asks to be transferred to a small village in the mountains that needs a doctor. It is the village of Aïcha, a young worker in a nearby factory, who has stopped working to escape the harassment of her manager, and who is waiting for her boyfriend, Mourad, to ask her mother for her hand so that together they can go into exile in Europe. But when Mourad gets Aïcha pregnant and flees, it is Adam's sensitivity that will allow the young woman to survive the ordeals of life.

SCENES

Aïcha is quitting It's break time for Aïcha, a young woman who works in a clothing factory in a town near her village. She goes to have a coffee in the break room, where two women are eating. The factory manager follows Aïcha and signals to the other two women to leave, and they do so. He tries to kiss Aïcha. She rebuffs him and forbids him to approach her. He threatens to put her on the list of workers whom the struggling factory intends to fire to cut costs. The girls at the factory are concerned about the rumors of layoffs. Aïcha tells them that she does not want to work in this environment anymore, and that she will not be coming back. Aïcha does not go back to the village in the factory shuttlebus with the other girls. She decides to go and meet her lover, Mourad.



Aïcha meets Mourad Mourad is playing cards with his friends and talking about emigrating to France. He cannot understand why his friend Kamel, who has a French passport, has chosen to live in Tunisia. He tells him that if he were in his shoes, he would leave "this hole". He asks Kamel to go back to France, just long enough to send him a certificate of sponsorship, which will allow him to get a visa. The arrival of Aïcha takes Mourad away from his friends. Aïcha and Mourad, her lover, meet in the village cave-houses. She tells him that life in the village is hard, and that she would like them to get married and leave as soon as possible. He asks her to wait until he finishes settling some small details and will come to ask for her hand.



Mourad has left Aïcha has no news of Mourad and goes to ask his friend Salem about his whereabouts. Salem tells her that Mourad sold everything last night and left without saying where. He thinks that Mourad has left for France because he has been dreaming about it for a long time. He promises Aïcha that one day he will also leave. Aïcha looks for Mourad in all his hangouts, at the lake, in the nearby town, in the ancient cave-houses of the village, but cannot find him.



Aïcha's abortion Aïcha visits the doctor. She tells him that she is pregnant. Adam examines her and asks her to be careful and to take good care of herself. Aïcha starts to feel tired, but her mother does not suspect anything about her pregnancy yet. Aïcha does not feel well. She is bleeding. She visits the doctor to find out what is happening to her. The doctor advises her to abort the pregnancy. He gives her an appointment for the next day in a clinic in Tunis. Emna steals the money for Aïcha's fare from her stepmother. Aïcha undergoes her operation. As she leaves the clinic with Adam, her former manager from the factory, who is sitting at a café, spots them and goes to tell Sofiane what he has witnessed.



Aïcha: a possible wife for Sofiane Aïcha comes home late and lies to her mother that she had to wait for a cab because the bus was full. Her mother is not happy and tells her to stop coming home late. Emna, Ibrahim's daughter, tells Aïcha that Sofiane, the son of Habiba, a neighbor, is arriving the next day from Paris, where he emigrated ten years ago. He is coming home to find a Tunisian wife. Aïcha mockingly asks if there are no women in France where he lives. Aïcha's mother is looking for a picture of her daughter that she kept in her closet. She finds it and brings it to Habiba, so that she can send it to her son in France in the hope that he will take her to live in France with him as his wife. Habiba promises to send Aïcha's picture to her son, but she says that she cannot guarantee anything because her son is very much loved by women in France. Aïcha's mother urges her to start preparing her passport because Sofiane, who wants a girl from the village, will



certainly marry her. Aïcha asks her mother if Sofiane, who went to France when she was too young to remember him, is not too old for her. Her mother replies that a man's age is not important, and that she is not very young either.

Sofiane arrives The village is celebrating because Sofiane has just arrived in a car loaded with luggage, honking his horn. The children of the village follow the car, singing his name. His mother cries out of joy and embraces her son. Sofiane sees Aïcha from afar and asks his mother if she is the girl in the picture. His mother tells him that she is the girl, and that they will go see her this evening. Aïcha's mother prepares her for Sofiane's visit. The young man arrives with his mother, and Aïcha serves them tea. For long minutes, Aïcha and Sofiane observe each other without saying a word. Aïcha's mother runs to the shrine of the saints to light candles and pray that God will make Sofiane love her daughter.



Sofiane wants a traditional wife Sofiane and Aïcha go for a walk in the village. He tells her that he has always dreamed of marrying a girl from his village and starting a family with someone who shares his culture. Aïcha asks him why he did not marry one of the French women he knew in France. He explains that marriage is a more serious matter than a simple fling. She asks him why not an Arab girl from France. He tells her that Arab girls in France are rootless. Aïcha asks Sofiane if he is not driven by nostalgia. He reassures her that he is serious. Sofiane invites Aïcha for a drive to the lake in his car. He kisses her and says that she is very experienced. He tells her that the woman he is going to marry must never have been touched by any man. Aïcha gets out of his car and tells him that he is very backward for someone who says he lives in Europe. They quarrel. Sofiane throws her things out of the car and leaves her to walk home.

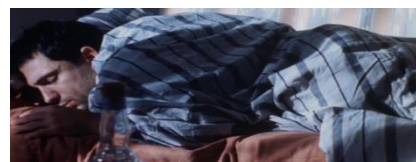


The marriage is off Aïcha comes home upset. Her mother wants to know what happened. She refuses to give her any details, but she tells her that it is over between Sofiane and her. Her mother consoles her. Aïcha's mother goes to see Sofiane to get an explanation, but he refuses to say anything either, except that he no longer wants to marry Aïcha.

Adam is depressed Dr. Adam's girlfriend has left him. He is experiencing a period of depression. He cries at work, indulges in alcohol, stays in bed late, and has trouble focusing while at work. His supervisor wants to get rid of him. Adam tells him that he no longer wants to work at that hospital, and that he would prefer to be transferred elsewhere.



Adam arrives in the village Adam is picked up by Ibrahim, the voluble village taxi driver, who thinks of himself as a great poet. Adam arrives in the village at night and is greeted by the Omda, the neighborhood leader, carrying a kerosene lamp. The Omda accompanies Adam to his new home. It is an old and dusty house, without electricity, with only a bed and a chest of drawers as furniture. He explains that the previous tenant left with the furniture and asks Adam to make him a list of things he will need.



Dark sunglasses for the doctor The Omda comes to wake Adam. The midwife needs him because there is a woman giving birth, and her life is in danger. Adam changes clothes and follows the Omda. The woman's husband is waiting for them outside the house. He hands the chief black sunglasses, which he insists Adam must wear while he examines his wife. As Adam protests, the Omda discreetly tells him to take them off once inside. As long as the husband thinks he's wearing them, they can avoid a scandal.

Adam loves the village It is daytime. And Adam, who arrived in the night, discovers his new environment. He is impressed by the beauty and serenity of the small village surrounded by ancient houses carved out of the mountainside.



Adam discovers the village clinic Adam goes to the Omda and asks to see the medical clinic. On the way, little Emna, Ibrahim's daughter, stops him and tells him that she knows everything and sees everything in the village. She says that he should not hesitate to contact her if he needs any information about the people of the village. Adam discovers the clinic. Like his room, it is a dusty, dilapidated room, where almost everything is missing. Adam asks that a cleaning lady be hired to clean the clinic daily.



Adam sees Aïcha at the lake Adam is dropped off at the lake by Ibrahim and asks him to come back for him in the evening. He rents a canoe. While he is rowing, he sees Aïcha lying on the shore with a young man. Their eyes meet. She adjusts her skirt, pulling it down to cover her thighs, and watches him pass by. Aïcha's mother, who believed her daughter was at work, is astonished to see her return early. Aïcha tells her that she is temporarily unemployed because the factory is slow, and that the boss promised to call her back as soon as business picks up. The mother is sad, and Aïcha promises her that she will find something, that she has always been able to manage. The mother wonders what will become of her daughter, without a job and without a husband, in a village that the men have deserted for exile in Europe.



Aïcha meets Adam in the mountains Adam goes to play guitar in the mountains, by the cave-houses. Aïcha hears the music and joins him there. She asks him why he fled Tunis. Adam tells her that he lost a loved one there and is looking for serenity. Aïcha tries to commit suicide by throwing herself off a cliff. Adam calls for help and takes care of her. Aïcha recovers. Aïcha and Adam decide to give their love for each other a chance.



SUB-PLOT 1: DALILA CHEATS ON IBRAHIM (0:32:10; 1:35:42)

Dalila is cheating on Ibrahim Little Emna is awakened by her stepmother's giggling, and she tiptoes over to see what it is all about. She witnesses her stepmother, Dalila, flirting with a man she cannot quite identify. Her stepmother senses a presence and goes to look. Emna returns to her bed and pretends to be asleep. Her stepmother comes in, looks at her to make sure she is sleeping, and leaves the room, making sure to close the door. Emna now has hard proof that her stepmother cheats on her father. She has caught her with the Omda in the house. She goes to tell her father, but as soon as she mentions Dalila, Ibrahim stops her. He urges her to say nothing bad against her stepmother. She insists. He hushes her. She leaves.



SUB-PLOT 2: THE VILLAGERS WILL NOT MOVE

Don't talk about our women The elected officials of the village hold a meeting to convince the villagers to move to more modern houses that the government has built for them down in the valley. They promise the villagers that their lives will be better in the new village, that their children will be closer to school, and that their wives and daughters will enjoy more leisure time, more shopping, and less boredom. Some men intervene to forbid any mention of their wives and daughters. They insist that their wives and daughters have no intention of going out for walks. Besides, the men complain, why leave the village to go and expose themselves to the gaze of strangers? The men get angry and leave the meeting room. To cheer up the angry villagers and make them open to coming down the valley, the elected officials of the village want to entertain them with an American-style cheerleader show. The girls sent for the show are not up to the officials' expectations and Adam, whom



they solicited to give them his artistic opinion, thinks that it is a ridiculous idea. The idea of the show is quickly buried.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Aïcha Aïcha is a confident and independent woman. She has always worked for a living, and, as she tells Sofiane, she does not intend to be confined to the kitchen of his tenth-floor apartment.

Confident Aïcha is a confident young woman who does not let herself be intimidated, and who knows how to defend herself against the aggressiveness of men. She put the factory manager who was harassing her in his place by ordering him never to approach her again. To Sofiane, who dared to call her an impure woman, she retorted that he was backward and that he would never find in his village the virgin and submissive woman that he came to look for.

Independent When Aïcha's mother worries that her daughter is unemployed, the young woman tells her mother not to worry, that she will find something to do, and that she has always been able to manage. Indeed, through her work, Aïcha has always been the backbone of her small family, consisting of her mother and herself. She is a woman who does not wait to be tied to a man to live, although marriage remains a preoccupation for her, as it is for most Tunisian women.

Adam Adam is sensitive, compassionate, and romantic. He is not afraid to show his vulnerability. He loves nature, enjoys music, and is always ready to support those in need. Aïcha was lucky to have him in the village.

Sensitive Adam is a man whose sensitivity contrasts with the often-projected image of the rigid, cold, and chauvinistic Arab man. The film opens with Adam at work, sitting with his head in his hands, crying over the loss of his lover. When Aïcha asks him what drew him to this small mountain village, he confesses that it was a deception in love that led him to want to get away from Tunis. Adam is not afraid to show his vulnerability.

Compassionate On the day of Aïcha's first visit, after examining her, Adam advised her to take good care of her pregnancy. When she returned to see him in the middle of the night, but this time bleeding, Adam took it upon himself to help Aïcha. She was in danger, and he advised her to abort the pregnancy. He arranged to meet her in Tunis at the hospital where he used to work and entrusted her to the care of his former colleagues. After the procedure, he then accompanied her back to the village.

Romantic The day after his arrival in the small mountain village, Adam, who had traveled by night, discovers with wonder his new environment. He confides to Aïcha that the landscape is sublime. And in the evening, it is while sitting in front of a glass of wine, his guitar in hand, that he enjoys the beauty of the starry nights of the village. He is a nature lover, a romantic.

Mourad Mourad is a lazy man of bad faith. He used Aïcha for as long as he needed her, gave her false hope, and abandoned her with a pregnancy.

Dishonest Mourad is a smooth talker and a dishonest man who made Aïcha hope for a life in Europe. His honeyed language made her hopeful until the very day before he fled the village. While she waited for him, he prepared his exit in secret.

Lazy Mourad is an unemployed young man who would rather spend his days wandering in the village mountains or playing cards with his friends than finding a job. In fact, while looking for Mourad, Aïcha was quite surprised to see a member of Mourad's gang working, as they are not used to it. There is no doubt that he was being supported by Aïcha. To pay for his trip to Europe, he sold the family home.

Sofiane Sofiane is an insecure and reactionary character. He dreams of a patriarchal society that is fast disappearing, but that he refuses to see die. He hopes to breathe new life into Tunisian machismo by starting a family with a religious, pure, and docile woman from his village. Aïcha shatters his dreams when she tells him that he will not find such a woman in the village.

Insecure The first day of his arrival in the village, Sofiane sees the doctor playing the guitar and confides to his mother that Adam does not inspire him with trust. Sofiane already sees in this guitar lover a romantic

seducer, who could steal the girl he covets, Aïcha. Also, Sofiane wishes that Adam catches a good cold. This will teach him, he says, to behave like a charmer.

Reactionary Sofiane is a reactionary who refuses to accept the changes in Tunisian society. What he has come to the village for is a woman from the Tunisia of his grandparents, a virgin, docile and submissive woman, whom he would confine to his apartment and manipulate as he pleases. And when he tells Aïcha that the woman he will marry must never have been touched by anyone, she replies that all the flowers have been touched by the wind, and that the woman he is looking for no longer exists in the village.

THEMES

SOCIETY (patriarchy, gender, class)

Patriarchy The voice of men is considered not only the dominant voice, but also, and above all, the only voice worth listening to because it speaks for all. Indeed, no woman from the village is invited to the meeting convened by the elected officials to ask the people to move down to the valley in order to inhabit the new houses made available to them by the government's urbanization program. However, it is undeniable that women, as much as men, and perhaps even more than men, will be impacted by the decisions that are made. Yet women's voices have not been included in the debate. What is worse is that it is men who, in their presumption of dominance, speak on behalf of women and assume what is good or not good for them. For example, the elected officials argue that in the new town, women and girls will enjoy themselves and be less bored because they will have the opportunity to go out and shop. The villagers, on the other hand, ask the elected officials to stop talking about their women, whom they know well, and who have no intention of going out. Without asking the women and girls, the village officials, who are all men, and their male constituents, assume that they know what is good for them.

Gender *Late December* shows the link between social mobility and gender. Exhausted by being constantly harassed by the factory foreman, who threatens her with dismissal if she does not accept his advances, Aïcha decides to quit her job. The factory is no longer a healthy work environment for her. The consequence of the manager's behavior is that it exposes Aïcha to precariousness and contributes to the feminization of poverty in Tunisian society, where harassment of women in the workplace is commonplace. To climb the social ladder, a woman needs to be bound to a man. And Aïcha's mother, who laments the loss of her daughter's job, says it well: How can Aïcha manage without a job and without a husband, in a village that has seen all its men emigrate? However, providence seems to offer Aïcha's mother a solution. Sofiane, the son of the neighbor Habiba, is returning from France after ten years of exile to find a Tunisian wife. Aïcha's mother brings a picture of her daughter to Habiba so that she can show it to her son, in the hope that he will like Aïcha and make her his wife. Aïcha's mother lights candles to God, apologizing for taking up his valuable time, and imploring him to perform a miracle so that Sofiane might find her daughter to his liking and marry her to give her a better future in France, and give her, too, the opportunity to fly to visit Aïcha there. It is therefore by clinging to the male gender that the female gender can hope to have a place on the ladder of social mobility.

Class "Money doesn't buy happiness," the saying goes. Social class, it could also be said, does not constitute happiness. For money and social class to bring happiness, it seems, they need to be accompanied by love. Adam is a doctor in the big city of Tunis and belongs to a social class that most of his fellow citizens would envy. However, the breakup with his girlfriend has plunged him into depression and drinking, and it is in a small village in the mountains that he has come to find solace. And it is perhaps Aïcha, the end of the film seems to suggest, who will make him recover the taste for life. Similarly, by Tunisian standards, Sofiane, who lives in France, is successful. He can afford to return to Tunisia with a car loaded to the brim with suitcases full of gifts for his mother. He leads the kind of life that Aïcha's ex-boyfriend, Mourad, dreams of. Nevertheless, he feels the lack of love, in the form of a virgin and submissive woman from his village. Adam and Sofiane's social classes have not spared them unhappiness.

APPEARANCE (dishonesty-betrayal, secret)

Dishonesty-betrayal Dishonesty and betrayal are observed in several characters in *Late December*. First, it is the foreman who betrays his profession by his dereliction of duty, and who betrays the trust his employees have in him by harassing them, making their professional space toxic. Because of him, Aïcha

preferred to leave her job. Omda, the village chief and Ibrahim's friend, betrays their friendship by sleeping with Ibrahim's wife. Aïcha's companion, Mourad, promises her marriage and a life together in France. Trusting him, she offers herself to him. Meanwhile, however, he was preparing his trip without her. Aïcha gets pregnant with his child, and he disappears, leaving her alone with a pregnancy to manage in a community where an unmarried pregnant woman is seen as an outcast.

Secret Aïcha's village is a village of secrets, as the little Emna says, who knows and sees everything that happens there. The secret of the village chief and Ibrahim's wife is their love affair, which they have hidden from the whole village until little Emna discovers it. Emna did everything she could to alert her father, but Ibrahim never wanted to give his daughter the opportunity to speak out against her step-mother. So, Emna keeps the secret to herself. Aïcha also has a secret that she would prefer her mother never to find out. She is pregnant. So she dresses in loose-fitting clothes to hide the pregnancy, and constantly looks at herself in the mirror to ensure that her appearance does not betray her secret. However, she shares her secret with little Emna, who steals money from her mother-in-law for her trip to the clinic in Tunis. Aïcha also shares her secret with Adam, who helps her get an abortion in Tunis. Perhaps the greatest secrets of the village lie in its silent cave-houses, where many love affairs begin and end, like that of Aïcha and her dishonest companion, and of Adam and Aïcha.

PSYCHOLOGY (self-delusion, isolation)

Self-delusion Ibrahim, the cab driver, lives in his world of illusion. He has convinced himself that he is a great poet, and this conviction jeopardizes his family life. In fact, the poems Ibrahim writes are an ordeal for the ears of those to whom he offers to read them. However, convinced of the beauty of his poems, which he spends whole days writing and, as he likes to say, concentrating on, Ibrahim neglects his wife's sexual appetite. And it is the Omda that satisfies them. Emna, his daughter, who has more than once witnessed the infidelities of her stepmother wants to tell him what Delilah is doing. But our poet, immersed in his writings, does not have time to listen to her. Or, perhaps he knows it, but prefers to have a poetic reading of the disloyalty of his wife.

Isolation Sofiane is a lonely man, locked in his apartment on the tenth floor of a building in a Paris suburb. Indeed, despite what Sofiane's mother says about her son's popularity with women, and despite what he himself says about his many French conquests, Sofiane's return to Tunisia in search of a wife from his village is proof that the ten years he spent in France were spent in solitude, in an idea of identity and culture that is long gone. Sofiane remained in mental inertia, deferring his happiness until the day when he would find his ideal of Tunisian identity. And Sofiane is all the more disappointed when he realizes that even in his village protected by the ramparts formed by the mountains, the Tunisia of his fantasies no longer exists and will never exist again. The Arab girls of France that he hates because they navigate between two waters and speak Arabic as poorly as they speak French are the Arab girls of his generation. As Aïcha has proven to him, they will not imprison their sexuality to wait for a backward man like him. Rather, they will abandon narrow-minded men like Sofiane in their towers of illusions and partner up with men like Adam, who are more fluid in their understanding.

Quest Aïcha, just like other young people strives to find a life partner. First she falls in love with Mourad who deserts her and goes to France after getting her pregnant. Then she meets with the town physician. They fall in love too.

FLAWS (pride)

Pride Aïcha was twice the victim of the flayed pride of men. First, it was her manager who, wounded in his pride at having been rejected by Aïcha, threatened to fire her. The young woman thus chose to quit her job to protect herself from her manager's threats. Second, when the factory manager saw Aïcha with Adam, he ran to tell Sofiane that the girl he wanted to marry was promiscuous. Sofiane, too, feeling his pride flayed by the fact that the woman he was about to marry was not a virgin, decided to humiliate her before rejecting her. It is in Adam, a man of moderate pride, that Aïcha finally finds true love. Adam knows her, knows everything she has gone through, and loves her as she is.

QUESTIONS

1. Everything suggests that Ibrahim, the self-declared poet, knows that his wife Delilah is cheating on him, but he doesn't want to hear it from anyone. What could explain this behavior by our poet?
2. The women seem to appreciate Adam's guitar, but the men of the village do not. How do you explain this?
3. Aïcha's mother senses that her daughter is not indifferent to the doctor and asks her to forget about him. Why does the mother who is so keen to marry her daughter try to keep her away from Adam?
4. Do you think that after his experience in the village Sofiane will take a wife in France or do you think that this will dissuade him even more? Please elaborate on your answer.
5. At the abortion clinic, Adam asks Aïcha to wait for him in the waiting room while he talks to the doctor. When the doctor sees Aïcha, she tells Aïcha that Adam has explained everything to her. What do you think Adam told the doctor?