

**KUMAIL'S MUSLIM IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION AS SEEN IN *THE  
BIG SICK* (2017): A LACANIAN PERSPECTIVE**

A GRADUATING PAPER

“Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for Gaining the Bachelor  
Degree in English Literature”



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**A FINAL PROJECT STATEMENT**

I certify that this research is my work. I am completely responsible for the content of this research. Other researcher opinions or findings included in research are quoted or cited following ethical standards.

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Saya menyatakan bahwa skripsi tersebut sudah dapat diajukan pada sidang Munaqasyah untuk memenuhi salah satu syarat memperoleh gelar Sarjana Sastra Inggris.

Atas perhatiannya, kami ucapkan terima kasih.

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**MOTTO**

“yun, kamu pasti bisa”



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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this graduating paper to;

Myself and my beloved family.



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Yogyakarta, 27 April 2020

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By: Qurrota Ayun

**ABSTRACT**

Muslim identity is determined by a Muslim who follows religious customs and practices. One example of many Muslim identities can be seen from Muslim immigrants. Immigrant is one of the interesting topics to be discussed. The immigrants discussed are religious minorities in certain areas. *The Big Sick* is a film that tells about a Muslim immigrant in America. The main character in this film Kumail Nanjiani is a young Muslim from Pakistan. He is a man who wants to be an American because of a woman he loves even though he tries to ignore the pressure exerted by his family. The author uses three sequential theories of human reality from Jacques Lacan in analyzing the character identity through behaviors that Kumail has done. Furthermore, this theory will be used to analyze images, dialogues, and actions from the main character. In his behaviors, the author finds several aspects of Kumail's behaviors that can be seen from the symbolic, imaginary, and real that exist in Kumail's life. The analysis creates the patterns that fit to the storyline. Thus, the researcher concludes that a person's identity can change when he has a reason to change it.

*Keywords: Identity, Symbolic, Imaginary, Real, Kumail Nanjiani.*

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**ABSTRAK**

Identitas Muslim ditentukan oleh cara seorang Muslim mengikuti kebiasaan dan praktik keagamaan. Salah satu contoh identitas Muslim dapat dilihat oleh para pendatang Muslim. Imigran adalah salah satu topik menarik untuk dibahas. Imigran yang dibahas adalah minoritas agama di suatu daerah tertentu. *The Big Sick* adalah salah satu film yang mengisahkan tentang seorang imigran Muslim yang ada di Amerika. Tokoh utama dalam film ini Kumail Nanjiani adalah seorang pemuda Muslim dari Pakistan. Dia adalah pria yang ingin menjadi Amerika karena alasan seorang wanita yang dia cintai, meskipun dia berusaha mengabaikan tekanan-tekanan yang diberikan dari keluarganya. Penulis menggunakan tiga teori urutan realitas manusia dari Jacques Lacan dalam menganalisis identitas karakter melalui perilaku yang telah Kumail lakukan. Selanjutnya, teori ini akan digunakan untuk menganalisis gambar, percakapan, dan tindakan. Dalam analisisnya, penulis menemukan beberapa aspek perilaku Kumail yang dapat dilihat dari simbolik, imajiner, dan nyata yang ada dalam kehidupan Kumail. Analisis menciptakan pola yang sesuai dengan alur cerita. Dengan demikian, peneliti menyimpulkan bahwa bahkan identitas seseorang dapat berubah ketika ia memiliki alasan untuk mengubahnya.

*Kata Kunci: Identitas, Simbolik, Imajiner, The Real, Kumail Nanjiani.*

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of Study

A literature is the works of something that can trigger creative feelings coming out. "Literature means to designate fictional and imaginative writings like poetry, prose fiction, drama or any other writings like philosophy, history, and even scientific works that are especially distinguished in form, expression, and emotional power" (Abrams, 2009: 177). Some works of literature tell about the author's imagination or the author's feelings at certain times. As an example, a short story entitled *Bartleby* tells the condition of Wall Street in the 1850s. This short story proves that the author uses his imagination and feeling to create literary works according to the issues.

In this era, watching a film becomes a habit of daily activity for some people to have leisure time because the film is one of the media to entertain them. There are so many genres of films that people can watch, such as comedy, horror, history, animation, motivation, science-fiction, and so forth. These genres are prevalent among young people, not only young people but also almost all circles. Furthermore, the researcher chooses to discuss romantic and comedy films. This film person's change can be influenced by several aspects that show how comedy-romance films can make people interested in discussing someone's change naturally.

A film entitled *The Big Sick* released on 23 June 2017 is chosen to be analyzed. This film is incredible because the storyline is very different from other comedy films. The main character of this film is a comedian. The comedy in this film is interesting because it is shown through a leading role profession.

Besides, *The Big Sick* is a film based on a true story of Kumail Nanjiani, an immigrant from Pakistan. Although films usually talk about political and social pressure, there are still many indirect problems in many ways that are difficult to explain and are not socially appropriate. This film features the conflicts of cultural differences, ethnicities, religions, and racial issues. Since the topics are categorized as massive and complicated, the story in this film intersperse with the main character's comedy that makes it more interesting.

The duration of the film is one hundred and twenty-four minutes. This film shows how the environment in America creates his attitude as a Muslim from Pakistan who lives in Chicago and works as a comedian there. Pakistan, the country containing a Muslim population as the majority, also has many rules toward the Kumail's Pakistani families that do Islamic values. In regard with it, this paper attempts the researcher to find out the psychological influences of the main character to shape his new identity in the new country by the environment or family. This research also explains the factor of condition of Kumail's faith over Islam in America.

The characterization of Kumail Nanjiani is very interesting to be discussed. Kumail loves America very much because he thinks that America can carry his big dream into a famous comedian. He tries to persuade the cafe owner

to appear longer in front of Bob Dalavan, the worker for the Montreal Comedy Festival. The conversation below proves that he wants to be a famous comedian. Besides, it can be seen from him ambition to be a famous comedian. The conversation below shows that Kumail wants to appear in a long standup in front of Bob Dalavan, a person who works at the Montreal Comedy Festival. Kumail appears in a moment, and he hopes that Bob Dalavan will see the potential of Kumail. So that, he invites Kumail to join the Montreal Comedy Club and move to New York.

KUMAIL. Hey, DODD! Uh, Dalavan's in the crowd tonight. Can I do ten?

ANDY DODD. No, five minutes. (*The Big Sick* 00:04:10 --> 00:04:13)

In other cases, because of his biggest dream as a comedian, he forgets who he is and what his identity is, like religion, land, and his family when he lives in America. It becomes a point in which he loves an American woman who makes him prefer her over his family. Her parents dislike Kumail, because they knows that Kumail comes from the Muslim country of Pakistan. They even ask Kumail's opinion about the 9/11 tragedy. It implies that Kumail will be difficult to be accepted in her family because he is a Muslim.

From the description above, the researcher finds out the problem. Kumail Nanjiani is a Pakistani Muslim who loves America so much because of his work and women. Nevertheless, without realizing it, he changes his identity to be an American. According to Abram (a glossary of literary terms, 147, 2009) an



identify refers to “Identity is “Reject the extreme post-structural claims that the human subject is no more than social construction or textual effect, and reposition the subject—as a particular sexual, gender-specific, or ethnic identity—at the center of the scene of writing, interpretation, and political action. In opposition to traditional humanists, on the other hand, identity theorists emphasize the identity of the subject as a representative of one or another group, rather than as a representative of universal humanity”. In other words, a human subject is nothing more than a social construction as a sexual, gender-specific, or ethnic identity using writing, interpretation, and political action.

The character changes of Kumail become an important issue to be discussed. The description of the changes will be analyzed in this case research by using "three sequential theories of human reality from Jaquen Lacan”.

Therefore, this research is an initial attempt to examine the main character of Kumail and the parts of experiences from the identity of a Pakistani who lives in America. His life and experiences show that human characters always changes.

## **1.2 Research Question**

The characterization of Kumail Nanjiani, will be analyzed with questions as follow:

- How does Kumail as a Muslim put religion in his life, According to the Lacanian perspective?
- What are the kinds of identity that makes Kumail become an American and no longer a Pakistani?

### 1.3. Significance of The Study

This research exists because it is an ironic character, and it will be explained more detailed as seen in *The Big Sick*. The researcher and viewers will know whether a family environment affects a person's personality or not. Besides, the reader can understand whether a social condition affects the belief or religion itself. The researcher and viewers will find out whether Kumail places religion as the real. According to the character of Kumail, religion is only a symbol or imaginary in his life as a Muslim.

### 1.4. Literature review

The researcher has searched journals or graduation papers with the same object. However, the researcher does not find any other research or analyses using *The Big Sick* film, and the researcher does not find the graduation paper or thesis or dissertation that has the same object with the researcher. The researcher finds some theses that use psychoanalysis theory.

The first graduation paper title is “*Self-identification of human and giant as portrayed in the BFG novel: a study of psychoanalysis*”. The BFG is a children's novel, Roald Dahl. This novel tells the story of the giant and the humans. The relationship happens because of the process of self-identification. The purpose of this research is to find out and analyze the main character's self-identification and the relationship through self-identification. Self-identification is developed through three orders; the real; the imaginary and the symbolic order.

This research uses the psychoanalysis theory by Jacques Lacan. The writer uses a qualitative method that is done by applying descriptive analysis.

The second graduating paper title is “(*The Psychoanalysis of Ophelia’s Character in Savages Film*)”. In this graduating paper, the writer analyzes a fiction film with the title *Savage* which is adapted from a novel with the same title. This film tells about three young men who live in Laguna Beach in California (the United States); they are Ben, Chon, and Ophelia. Ben and Chon are Marijuana farmers and drug dealers in the United States. “Ophelia was a drunkard from childhood. She meets Ben and Chon through Marijuana. The writer is interested in Ophelia's Anxiety which appears in this film.” “Ophelia depicts loneliness in her house because her parents do not live with her. Ophelia also has a unique relationship with Ben and Chon which is called *polyamory*”. This graduating paper aims to identify anxiety which is experienced by psychoanalysis theory.

The last is the book by the title “*Lacanian Perspective of Three Orders and Sexuality In Nabokov’s Lolita*” this chapter summarizes several studies on the imaginary order, the symbolic order, the real, desire, Oedipus complex, and jouissance with an emphasis on the theory of subjectivity in Lacanian perspective. One main consideration should be kept in mind regarding this review. All the concept

From the explanation above, there are previous researches which use psychoanalysis theory. Nevertheless, no research discusses the fantasy in *The Big*

*Sick* film. Therefore, the researcher chooses the issue to complete this research and makes a different research. About muslim identity that lived in Amerika.

### **1.5.Theoretical Approach**

In this research, the researcher uses psychoanalysis theory. In the book of "*Film, Lacan and The Subject of Religion*" a psychoanalytic approach to religious film analysis, Jacques Lacan stated that there are three orders of human reality. The first is symbolic reality, self-awareness that we know what we have to do. It relates to the term of religious cultures or habits. In other words, the analysis is conducted in the medium of language (the symbolic). The second is imaginary. It deals with the stuff of the unconscious (imaginary). Imaginary talks about stepping stones to the real. It is known from people's view of someone awareness of the attainment of human reality. The last is the real, which actually culminates here in what people think, or even what they do, and ultimately aims to reveal the contents of the (real) subject.

The researcher uses film theory as the supporting theory in this analysis. There are the commonly accepted guidelines that define how visual information should be displayed to a viewer in the film. All people have been offered films and television, since they are children, making them trained to understand the meaning of the film's story. There are many hidden meanings from a film. People unconsciously begin to understand the meaning of the expressions contained in the film. People begin to understand the social from paying attention to the pictures that exist in the film. The film maker uses this dynamic system between the shots and the viewer to present better stories (2009, 1 Abrams)"

Moreover, when talking about films, people cannot be far from cinematography. One example is shot; the shot is the recording of one action from one particular point of view at one time. Even though the action may be repeated several times (or takes) from that same angle or camera position to get it right, as with fictional narrative shooting, it is still one shot. People can change the camera angle, camera position, or lens focal length, (all covered in more detail throughout the book) hence the result of that record (2009, 1).

## **1.6. Method of Research**

This part explains the type of research, data source, data collection technique, and data analysis technique.

### **1.6.1. Type of Research**

Based on the study of how the researcher uses, it is qualitative research. "Through qualitative research, we can find out various aspects of the social world, including behavior and habits of daily life, social understanding, experience, and imagination in our research participants, the ways that social processes, institutions, discourses or relationships work, and the significance of the meanings that they generate" (Mason, 1988: 1).

### **1.6.2. Data Source**

There are two sources of data in this study, the cinematography of *The Big Sick* and the dialogue, scene, also action of the film that shows Kumail's identity

as an immigrant from Pakistan. Hence, the photos and the dialogue, scene, also action are the primary data in this research. Then, there is secondary data to support this research. Secondary data is the data from other researches related to this research such as journals, articles, and so forth.

### **1.6.3. Data Collection Technique**

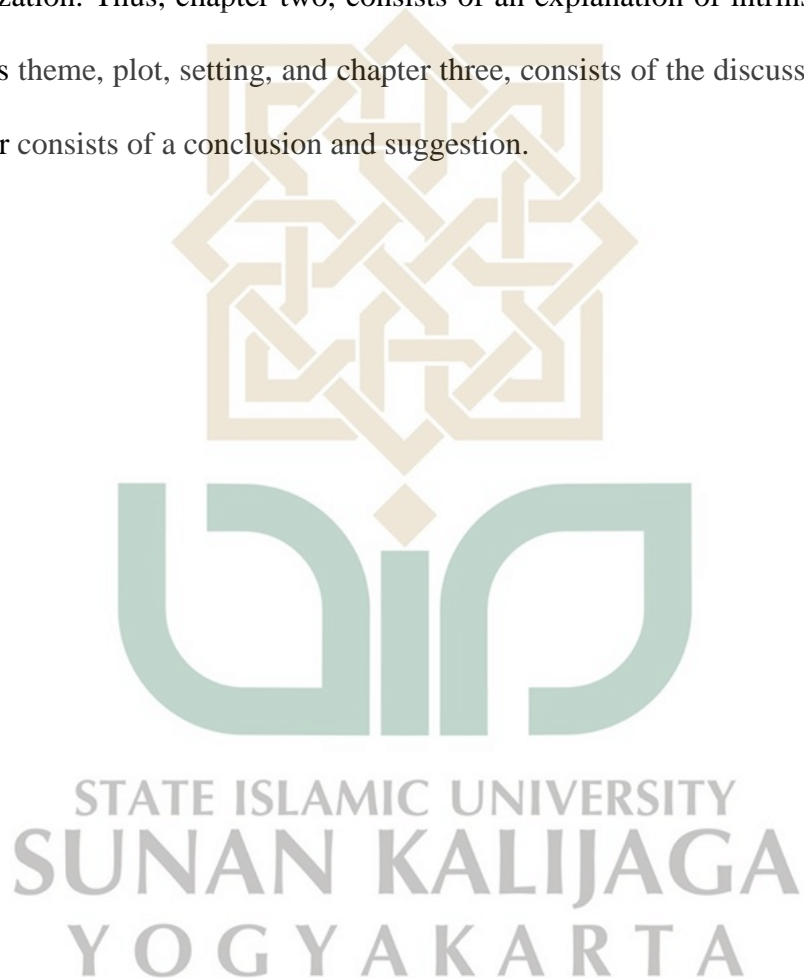
The researcher watches the film, continues to read the film, and makes some notes containing the problem variables and theories. Second, the researcher begins to observe scripts, pictures, and actions that contain key data problems about identity change, such as cultural differences from the characters and scenes that were shown in this film. Third, the researcher collects all data from notes such as dialogues, pictures, and actions. Finally, the researcher classifies the data into three namely symbolic, imaginary, and the real.

### **1.6.4 Data Analysis Technique**

After collecting data, the researcher will analyze the data to complete the research. The intrinsic elements will be analyzed in the first step by the researcher. Second, to analyze primary data, the researcher must categorize the unit database. The researcher categorizes the data through symbolic, imaginary, reality and sign relating to the characterization of Kumail Nanjiani. Thus, the researcher analyzes the data that have been categorized. It means that the researcher tries to find a connection between the data. To analyze the data, the researcher uses two theories which are the Psychoanalysis theory by Lacan and cinematographic theory. The last, the researcher concludes the analysis.

### **1.7.Paper Organization**

This paper consists of four chapters. In chapter one, the introduction consists of a background of the study, problem statement, the significance of the study, literary review, theoretical approach, methods of research, and paper organization. Thus, chapter two, consists of an explanation of intrinsic elements, such as theme, plot, setting, and chapter three, consists of the discussion. The last chapter consists of a conclusion and suggestion.



## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

#### 4.1 Conclusion

The researcher's problem is about Kumail's identity, which changes because of culture, language, norms, and habits. "Kumail Nanjiani" refers to the actor in the film *The Big Sick*. Kumail is an ambitious person, and the only reason Kumail moved to America is to be a famous comedy standup.

From the symbolic, Kumail understands that there are rules as a Pakistani, but he does not implement it as a Pakistani. Then, Imaginary is very helpful in determining the actual position of Kumail in symbolic reality or the real. The real is positioning the true Kumail behavior with pleasure desires.

Kumail's identity can be seen from the three explanations of Lacan theory. Kumail became a person who forgot the culture of his homeland, Pakistan. He lies to cover his desires because he still has a feeling of not wanting to leave his family. Even Kumail began to forget the vocabulary in the pronunciations of some of the words he usually uses in Pakistan. Kumail dares to oppose her parents just because she likes Chicago women. Initially, he respects his parents' decisions, but he already believes in his own decisions.

Pakistan is a country whose people still adhere to cultural values and customs. including religion, Islam is the majority of religions in Pakistan. Using Lacan theory we can see the position of religion for Kumail is symbolic reality. He only puts religion in his knowledge but does not follow the rules of that



religion. He was beginning to abandon prayer and renounce his habits as a Muslim.

#### 4.2 Suggestion

*The Big Sick* film tells the story of a Pakistani immigrant. It not only tells the story of a Pakistani who lives with a new culture but this film also shows a change in one's identity. Furthermore, new research can apply representation to discuss Islamic representation in this film, it is explained how Islam is depicted in this film. The other theory that can be used is postcolonialism theory. This will explain life describing East and West in *The Big Sick*.

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### III. PERSONAL SKILLS

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