

**The Formation of Pak Kari's Identity in A.A. Navis's Short Story *Topi Helm*:
Herbert Blumer's Symbolic Interactionism Study**

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Article Info	Abstract
<i>Article History:</i> Received 29 September 2026 Approved 09 October 2026 Published 10 October 2025 Keywords: destruction, symbolic interactionism; sociological approach; identity formation; social interaction	This study aims to analyze the process of Pak Kari's identity formation in the short story <i>Topi Helm</i> by A.A. Navis through the perspective of Herbert Blumer's Symbolic Interactionism. This study uses a qualitative method with a literary sociological approach. Data were collected through reading and note-taking techniques from the short story <i>Topi Helm</i> and analyzed descriptively based on three main premises of Blumer's theory, namely meaning, social interaction, and interpretation. The results show that the helmet hat in the story does not have a fixed meaning but undergoes transformation through social processes. Initially, the helmet hat functions as a symbol of authority associated with Tuan O.M.; however, after being inherited by Pak Kari, its meaning is negotiated through social interactions involving attention, ridicule, and the nickname "Si Gunarso". Through the interpretation process, Pak Kari constructs the helmet hat as a symbol of dignity and self-worth. The destruction of the helmet hat then causes a crisis in Pak Kari's identity because the symbol that supports his self-understanding is lost. This study concludes that Pak Kari's identity is formed dynamically through the relationship between symbols, social interaction, and individual interpretation.

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INTRODUCTION

An individual's identity develops through social relationships, evaluations, and symbols that acquire meaning within society. From the perspective of symbolic interactionism, individuals actively interpret their surroundings before determining their actions. Literary works provide a space for examining these processes by reflecting human experiences, social values, and societal issues (Wellek & Warren, 2014). Damono (1978) explains that the sociology of literature examines literary works by considering their social aspects. This study employs Herbert Blumer's Symbolic Interactionism, which builds on George Herbert Mead's ideas concerning the relationship between

the self, mind, and society. Blumer views humans as active interpreters of their social world (Blumer, 1980) and proposes three main premises: individuals act toward things based on their meanings; meanings arise through social interaction; and meanings are modified through individual interpretation (Blumer, 1969). Accordingly, this study uses meaning, social interaction, and interpretation to examine how the helmet hat acquires symbolic value and contributes to Pak Kari's identity formations.

Blumer's framework remains relevant to studies of meaning construction. Laksmi emphasizes individuals' active role in developing and modifying meanings through social Interaction (Laksmi, 2016), while Strohmaier

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highlights meaning-based action, interaction, and interpretation (Strohmaier, 2018). Similarly, Agnia et al. examine how meaning is reconstructed through social experiences (Agnia et al., 2025), whereas Khotimah et al. demonstrate how social practices produce shared meanings within symbolic spaces. These studies reinforce the view that symbolic meaning is socially constructed rather than fixed (Khotimah et al., 2025). This reinforces the idea that the meaning of symbols is not fixed but is shaped and negotiated through social interaction. Its relationship with identity formation is further demonstrated (Yuan, 2022), who explains that identity develops through interactions between social structures and individual self-understanding. Faramita, Azwar, and Maihasni show that social identity can be expressed through culturally meaningful attributes and symbols (Faramita et al., 2024), while Khisbiyah and Susanto highlight the dynamic relationship between social interaction and an individual's self-concept (Khisbiyah & Susanto, 2025).

These processes are reflected in A.A. Navis's short story *Topi Helm*, which portrays Pak Kari, an ordinary brake mechanic who acquires a helmet hat previously worn by Tuan O.M., a respected railway workshop supervisor. Although the helmet hat initially represents authority, its meaning changes when Pak Kari begins wearing it and receives laughter, mockery, and nicknames from his coworkers. Rather than consistently interpreting these responses as insults, Pak Kari sometimes perceives them as attention and envy, gradually associating the helmet hat with his dignity and social standing.

Previous literary studies have explored symbolic interaction and identity formation from different perspectives. Purnomo and Indarti in their study of Andrea Hirata's *Ayah dan Sirkus Pohon*, demonstrate how symbols and social experiences shape characters' self-concepts (Purnomo & Indarti, 2023). Susilastri identifies differences in symbolic interpretation that generate conceptual conflicts in Benny Arnas's short stories (Susilastri, 2019). Similarly, Khisbiyah dan Susanto, through their analysis of Dee Lestari's *Partikel*, reveal how social activities, positions identities and self-understanding. Differences in interpretation may also create misunderstandings

in social relationships (Khisbiyah & Susanto, 2025). Meanwhile, Faramita et al. in their study of Acehese cultural identity in Padang, demonstrate how social interactions and symbolic attributes contribute to identity formation and representation (Faramita et al., 2024).

Research specifically addressing A.A. Navis's works was conducted by Sari et al., who examined social conflicts in *Robohnya Surau Kami*, including Pak Kari's poverty and employment circumstances in *Topi Helm* (Sari et al., 2026). However, their analysis focuses on classifying social conflicts rather than examining how the helmet hat's symbolic meaning is constructed, negotiated, and transformed through social interaction. Although previous studies have addressed symbols, self-concept, identity, and social conflict, research specifically examining the transformation of a material object's meaning through Blumer's three premises and its implications for a character's identity remains limited. This study addresses that gap by analyzing Pak Kari's identity formation through the interconnected processes of meaning, social interaction, and interpretation.

Accordingly, this study asks how the helmet hat's meaning is constructed, negotiated through social interaction, and modified through individual interpretation, ultimately shaping and transforming Pak Kari's identity. It aims to examine these processes using Blumer's three premises and explain their contribution to identity formation. This study is significant because Navis's narrative illustrates how status-related symbols influence both social treatment and self-perception. As symbolic attributes and social interactions contribute to identity formation (Chintia Faramita et al., 2024), Pak Kari's experience demonstrates how identity can be constructed, reinforced, weakened, and disrupted through changing symbolic meanings.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research design with a sociological approach to literature to examine the relationship between characters and their social environment in A.A. Navis's short story *Topi Helm*. The analysis applies Herbert Blumer's Symbolic Interactionism through its

three main premises: meaning, social interaction, and interpretation. The research data consist of words, phrases, sentences, dialogues, and narratives concerning the helmet hat's symbolic meaning, Pak Kari's social interactions, and his interpretation of his surroundings. Data were obtained through a literature review, with Topi Helm from the collection *Robohnya Surau Kami* serving as the primary source, supported by relevant books and scholarly articles as secondary sources.

Data were collected through repeated reading, observation, and note-taking techniques, then analyzed descriptively by classifying relevant excerpts according to Blumer's three premises. Meaning was used to examine the helmet hat's symbolic value; social interaction to identify how its meaning was constructed and negotiated; and interpretation to analyze Pak Kari's internal meaning-making process. These findings were subsequently synthesized to explain the formation and transformation of his identity. Blumer's framework was selected because symbolic interactionism examines not only objects and their meanings but also how individuals construct, maintain, and modify those meanings through social experiences. This approach emphasizes understanding social reality through human interpretive processes (Blumer, 1973).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Pak Kari's identity evolved through the interplay of symbolic meaning, social interaction, and the way he interpreted the reactions of his work environment. The helmet hat, which had originally been associated with Tuan O.M.'s authority, took on new meaning when it passed to Pak Kari. Teasing, nicknames, and attention from coworkers gradually influenced the way Pak Kari viewed himself, until the helmet hat was no longer merely an object but a part of his self-esteem and dignity. When that symbol was belittled and destroyed, the shift in meaning shook the way Pak Kari understood himself and prompted changes in his attitudes and actions.

The Material Artifact and Constructed Meaning of the Helmet Hat

From the perspective of Herbert Blumer's Symbolic Interactionism, people act toward things based on the meaning those things hold for them. Meaning is not directly inherent in an object but emerges based on how that object is understood in social life (Herbert Blumer, 1969). In the short story "Topi Helm," this first premise is evident in the helmet hat, which initially functions as a material object worn on the head but acquires social meaning as a symbol of prestige and authority through its association with by Tuan O.M., a respected locomotive engineer in the railway workshop community. This distinction between the physical function and social meaning of the helmet hat is illustrated in the following excerpt.

"Terjunjungnya topi helm di atas kepala Tuan O.M. menjamin kelancaran kerja di bengkel kereta api di kota kecil Padang Panjang. Meskipun Tuan O.M. itu pendek, tapi oleh topinya yang besar itu, tersandang jugalah wibawanya sebagai opseter mesin di bengkel itu" (Navis, 1956: 176)

"The helmet perched atop Tuan O.M.'s head ensured the smooth operation of the railroad repair shop in the small town of Padang Panjang. Although Tuan O.M. was short, his large helmet also lent him the authority befitting his role as a locomotive engineer at the shop" (Navis, 1956: 176)

This quote shows that the hard hat functions not merely as an object worn on the head but has acquired social meaning as a marker of Tuan O.M.'s authority. This authority does not stem solely from the physical characteristics of the helmet hat but from the connection between the symbol and Tuan O.M.'s position as a supervisor. Thus, the workshop's workforce developed a shared understanding that the helmet hat was associated with supervision, power, and social status. Its symbolic meaning was reinforced through the workers' responses to Tuan O.M., demonstrating that the authority represented by the helmet hat was socially constructed rather than inherently possessed by the object itself. This meaning is further illustrated by the workers' reactions when Tuan O.M.'s presence is signaled by the nickname "Mr. Helmet Hat," as shown in the following excerpt.

“Ssst. Si Topi Helm,” maka berjungkir-baliklah mereka bekerja dengan tekunnya (Navis, 1956: 176)

“Shhh. ‘The Helmet Guy’,” and immediately they went back to work diligently (Navis, 1956: 176)

This excerpt shows that the mere mention of “Mr. Helmet Hat” was enough to make the workers resume their work with diligence. In this context, the helmet served as a social symbol representing Tuan O.M.’s presence and authority. The workers did not act because of the physical nature of the helmet itself but because of the authority associated with it through their shared experiences. Their obedience demonstrates that the helmet hat had acquired a collective meaning within the workshop, where its presence was understood as a representation of Tuan O.M.’s supervisory position.

This situation aligns with Blumer’s first premise that a person’s action toward an object is determined by the meaning the object holds for them (Blumer, 1969). A similar finding was reported by Agnia, Alfandi, and Afrizal, who demonstrated that the attribution of meaning to a phenomenon is based not only on the object itself but also on an individual’s understanding and experience of that object (Agnia et al., 2025). Thus, the meaning of authority attached to the helmet hat is not an inherent property of the object itself, but is formed because the helmet hat is continuously associated with the figure of Tuan O.M. However, the socially constructed nature of this meaning becomes more apparent when the helmet hat is passed on to Pak Kari. Although the physical object remains unchanged, the authority previously associated with it does not automatically transfer to its new wearer. The narrator directly illustrates this shift in meaning through the following excerpt.

“Namun setahun kemudian topi helm itu tidak punya wibawa benar-benar lagi. Yaitu semenjak kepala Pak Kari yang menjunjungnya” (Navis, 1956)

“But a year later, the helmet hat had lost all its authority. That is, ever since Pak Kari began wearing it” (Navis, 1956)

This quote demonstrates that the same object can acquire different meanings when its social context changes. The helmet hat, which previously held authority when worn by Tuan O.M., lost that meaning after it was passed on to Pak Kari. Although its physical characteristics remained the same, its symbolic value changed because Pak Kari did not occupy the same social position as its previous owner. This shift confirms that the authority is not permanently embedded within the material object but is constructed through the social relationship between the object, its wearer, and the surrounding community. If authority were an inherent property of the helmet hat, changing its wearer would not alter its meaning. However, the loss of authority following its transfer to Pak Kari demonstrates that the meaning of the helmet hat depends on social context in which it is recognized and interpreted.

Based on this analysis, Blumer’s first premise reveals that the helmet hat possesses two distinct dimensions: its physical function as a material object and its socially constructed meaning as a symbol of authority. Its initial association with Tuan O.M. and the workers’ obedience demonstrated how social meaning is attributed to an object through shared understanding and experience. Meanwhile, the shift in meaning after the helmet hat is passed on to Pak Kari reinforces that symbolic authority does not inherently reside in the object itself. This change in ownership becomes the starting point for the negotiation of its meaning through subsequent interactions between Pak Kari and his social environment.

Social Interaction and the Negotiation of Social Labels (“Si Gunarso”)

The second premise of Herbert Blumer’s Symbolic Interactionism states that meaning arises from a person’s social interactions with others (Blumer, 1969). Therefore, the meaning of an object can change when patterns of interaction and the surrounding social environment also change. In the short story “Topi Helm”, this process becomes evident after Pak Kari acquires the helmet hat previously worn by Tuan O.M. While the helmet hat had been associated with authority when worn by its previous owner, its presence on Pak Kari’s head produces different responses from

the people around him. Rather than receiving the same respect as Tuan O.M., Pak Kari becomes the subject of laughter, teasing and ridicule among his coworkers. These responses demonstrate how the social environment participates in negotiating the meaning of the helmet hat and its association with the status of its new wearer.

This social interaction becomes particularly evident through the nickname “Si Gunarso,” which Pak Kari receives from his coworkers. The nickname refers to the identity associated with Tuan O.M., whose authority had previously been represented by the helmet hat. However, its use among the workers serves as a form of mockery rather than recognition of Pak Kari’s elevated status. This is illustrated in the following excerpt:

“Pak Kari malah merasa bahagia dipanggil Si Gunarso. Bahkan kadang-kadang ia benar-benar merasakan dirinya sebagai Gunarso” (Navis, 1956).

“Pak Kari actually felt happy being called Si Gunarso. In fact, sometimes he truly felt as if he were Gunarso” (Navis, 1956).

This quote demonstrates that the nickname given by Pak Kari’s social environment becomes part of the interaction through which his social identity is negotiated. For his coworkers, the term “Si Gunarso” functions as a form of ridicule that highlights the contrast between Pak Kari’s appearance and his actual position as a brake mechanic. Although he wears the helmet hat previously associated with Tuan O.M.’s authority, his coworkers do not acknowledge him as possessing the same social standing. Instead, the nickname emphasizes the perceived inconsistency between the symbol of authority he wears and the position he occupies within the workshop. Through this form of teasing, the workers indirectly attempt to reaffirm Pak Kari’s original social status, indicating that wearing an attribute associated with a respected figure does not automatically grant him the same authority.

The social negotiation of the helmet hat’s meaning becomes more apparent when the object itself is treated as a source of entertainment by the people around Pak Kari. This is illustrated in the following excerpt.

“Tapi topi itu terbang ke tangan lain. Dan

terus berpindah dari seorang ke yang lain setiap Pak Kari memburunya. Kegembiraan pun bangkitlah. Tukang rem yang tertidur pun bangun, demikian juga penumpang. Semua tertawa dan bersorak-sorak kegirangan. Tapi Pak Kari tidak” (Navis, 1956)

“But the hat flew into another person’s hands. It continued to pass from one person to another whenever Pak Kari chased after it. Excitement arose. Even the brake mechanics who had been sleeping woke up, as did the passengers. Everyone laughed and cheered with delight. But Pak Kari did not” (Navis, 1956)

This excerpt shows that the helmet hat, which previously represented authority when worn by Tuan O.M., is no longer treated as an object deserving respect. Instead, it becomes an object of amusement as the brake mechanics and passengers repeatedly pass it from one person to another while Pak Kari attempts to retrieve it. Their collective laughter and cheering demonstrate that the surrounding social environment does not recognize the authority that Pak Kari associates with the helmet hat. The contrast between the amusement of the crowd and Pak Kari’s reaction further emphasizes the difference in how the object is valued within this social interaction.

Moreover, the act of passing the helmet hat around can be understood as a form of social negotiation that challenges Pak Kari’s association with a higher social position. By treating the helmet hat as an object of ridicule, the people around him undermine the symbolic authority that he attempts to maintain through its possession. Their actions indirectly reinforce the existing social hierarchy by positioning Pak Kari as an ordinary brake mechanic rather than someone who deserves the authority previously associated with Tuan O.M. Thus, laughter, teasing, and collective treatment of the helmet hat become social practices through which Pak Kari’s perceived elevation in status is challenged.

This process illustrates Blumer’s second premise that meaning is formed and negotiated through social interaction rather than determined solely by an individual. The meaning of the helmet hat changes through the responses Pak Kari received from his surroundings, including ridicule, nicknames, and the treatment of the object itself. However, these interactions do not necessarily produce a single shared interpretation. Susilastri

(2019) similarly found that the same symbol can acquire different meanings among individuals, potentially creating conflict in social interactions. Meanwhile, Khisbiyah and Susanto demonstrate that self-concept develops through accumulated activities and the interactions and is influenced by how society responds to an individual (Khisbiyah & Susanto, 2025).

Pak Kari's changing relationship with his social environment becomes clearer when compared to his position before acquiring the helmet hat. Initially, he is portrayed as a brake mechanic with a small, thin build who feels inferior when interacting with his coworkers. After acquiring the helmet hat, he becomes a new center of attention within his social environment. However, this attention is expressed primarily through teasing and ridicule rather than genuine recognition of a higher social position. The nickname "*Si Gunarso*" and the collective act of playing with his helmet hat demonstrate how the surrounding community attempts to reaffirm his original position despite the symbolic attribute he now possesses.

Based on this analysis, the social interaction stage reveals that the meaning of the helmet hat is continuously negotiated through the responses of Pak Kari's social environment. The laughter, ridicule, nickname "*Si Gunarso*," and treatment he receives from others indicate that the authority previously associated with Tuan O.M. is not socially transferred to Pak Kari merely through his possession of the same object. Instead, these interactions function as attempts to maintain the existing social hierarchy and reaffirm his status as a brake mechanic. Nevertheless, the meaning communicated through these social responses does not necessarily correspond to the meaning Pak Kari personally assigns to them. This difference provides the basis for examining his internal interpretive process through Blumer's third premise.

Pak Kari's Internal Interpretive Process and Self-Indication

The third premise of Herbert Blumer's Symbolic Interactionism states that meanings are handled and modified through an interpretive process used by individuals when dealing with the things they encounter (Blumer, 1969). This

premise emphasizes that individuals do not merely respond to the actions of others but actively interpret them through a process of self-indication, in which they communicate with themselves to identify and assign meaning to their social experiences. In the short story *Topi Helm*, this process becomes evident in how Pak Kari interprets the responses he receives from his social environment. Although his coworkers express their reactions through laughter, teasing, and the nickname "*Si Gunarso*," Pak Kari does not necessarily perceive these responses as insults. Instead, he modifies their meanings in ways that reinforce his sense of dignity and the authority he associates with the helmet hat. This interpretive process is illustrated in the following excerpt.

"Di antara suara tertawaan, Pak Kari merasa badannya terlambung setinggi rumah dan membesar seperti gajah" (Navis, 1956).

"Amid the laughter, Pak Kari felt his body soar as high as a house and swell as large as an elephant" (Navis, 1956).

This excerpt demonstrates how Pak Kari interprets the laughter of those around him differently from its apparent social intention. Rather than perceiving the laughter as ridicule, he experiences it as a form of attention that enhances his sense of importance. The description of his body becoming as large as an elephant does not indicate a physical transformation but represents a change in his perception of himself. Through self-indication, Pak Kari assigns a positive meaning to a social response that might otherwise undermine his dignity. A similar interpretive process is reflected in his reaction to the nickname "*Si Gunarso*," as discussed in the previous subsection. Although his coworkers use the nickname as a form of mockery, Pak Kari feels happy being called by it and sometimes even perceives himself as *Gunarso*. This contrast indicates that Pak Kari does not passively accept the meaning communicated by his social environment. Instead, he reinterprets the nickname as a form of recognition that strengthens his imagined association with Tuan O.M.'s authority.

Pak Kari's internal interpretive process becomes more apparent when the railway company introduces a uniform cap for all brake mechanics. Although the regulation applies collectively to the workers, Pak Kari interprets it as

a personal response to his possession of the helmet hat. This is evident in the following excerpt.

"Dan ketika seluruh tukang rem mendapat topi dinas model topi petani di Jawa, Pak Kari merasa bahwa pimpinan perusahaan kereta api telah ikut iri hati karena ia mempunyai topi helm itu" (Navis, 1956).

"And when all the brake mechanics received uniform caps resembling those worn by farmers in Java, Pak Kari felt that the railway company's management had also become jealous because he possessed the helmet hat" (Navis, 1956).

This excerpt reveals a difference between the social situation and Pak Kari's personal interpretation of it. The distribution of uniform caps represents a company regulation applied to all brake mechanics. However, Pak Kari interprets this collective policy as an expression of jealousy toward the helmet hat he possesses. Rather than understanding the regulation solely as a workplace requirement, he assigns it a personal meaning that reinforces his belief in the helmet hat's special status. This interpretation illustrates Blumer's third premise, as Pak Kari modifies the meaning of an external event through his own understanding of the situation. His response demonstrates that the meaning of a social experience is not determined solely by the action itself but also by how an individual interprets it. In this case, Pak Kari transforms an ordinary workplace regulation into further confirmation of the importance he attributes to the helmet hat.

The relationship between the helmet hat and Pak Kari's self-concept becomes increasingly evident through his dream of becoming Tuan O.M. His attachment to the object develops beyond the desire to wear an attribute associated with authority and begins to influence the identity he imagines for himself. The narrator illustrates this development in the following excerpt.

"Dalam tidurnya ia bermimpi, bahwa ia benar-benar telah jadi Tuan O.M. Berwibawa dan ditakuti oleh semua bawahannya" (Navis, 1956).

"In his sleep, he dreamed that he had truly become Tuan O.M., authoritative and feared by all his subordinates" (Navis, 1956).

This excerpt demonstrates how the symbolic meaning of the helmet hat has become closely

connected to Pak Kari's imagined identity. In his dream, he no longer merely wears an object previously associated with Tuan O.M. but envisions himself occupying the same position of authority and receiving similar recognition from others. The figure of Tuan O.M., initially associated with the helmet hat's social meaning, gradually becomes an ideal identity that Pak Kari wishes to embody. Although his actual position remains that of a brake mechanic, his interpretation of the helmet hat allows him to construct an understanding of himself that differs from his existing social status. The dream therefore reflects how the meanings developed through his previous social experiences have become part of his self-concept.

Based on these findings, Pak Kari's interpretive process demonstrates how individuals actively modify social meanings rather than merely accepting the responses of their surroundings. The laughter of his coworkers is interpreted as attention that enhances his sense of importance, the nickname "Si Gunarso" becomes a form of recognition, and the company's uniform regulation is understood as an expression of jealousy toward his helmet hat. These interpretations gradually strengthen his identification with Tuan O.M., as reflected in his dream of becoming an authoritative figure. Through self-indication, Pak Kari constructs a personal meaning of the helmet hat that differs from the meaning communicated by his social environment. However, this process also makes his self-concept increasingly dependent on the symbolic value of the material object. While his actual social position remains unchanged, the helmet hat becomes central to the identity he constructs for himself. This growing dependence provides the foundation for understanding the fragility of his identity when the helmet hat is eventually destroyed.

The Fragility and Crisis of Identity Formation

Based on an analysis of meaning, social interaction, and interpretation, the formation of Pak Kari's identity takes place through a process of attributing meaning to the helmet hat. This process evolves through social interaction. Initially, Pak Kari is portrayed as a brake mechanic with an ordinary social status who is largely overlooked in his workplace. A change begins to occur when

Tuan O.M.'s helmet hat is passed on to him. The helmet hat, which previously symbolized authority, subsequently becomes a means for Pak Kari to construct a new understanding of himself.

Through various social responses he received such as attention, ridicule, and the nickname "Si Gunarso", Pak Kari begins to associate the helmet hat with an increase in dignity and social standing. Although Pak Kari's position remains that of a brake mechanic, this symbol provides a social experience that makes him feel he possessed the same authority as Tuan O.M. This demonstrates that Pak Kari's identity is shaped not only by his formal status but also by the symbolic meanings that emerge through interactions with his social environment. This finding aligns with the work of Faramita, Azwar, and Maihasni, who explain that social identity can be formed through interactions and the use of attributes that hold symbolic value within a social context (Chintia Faramita et al., 2024).

However, the identity constructed through these symbols is unstable because it depends on the continuity of the meanings assigned to them. Pak Kari's attachment to the helmet hat makes his self-concept increasingly dependent on the existence of a material object rather than an actual change in his social position. The fragility of this constructed identity becomes particularly evident when the helmet hat is destroyed by the locomotive driver. This event is illustrated in the following excerpt.

"Kena air topi ini basah. Kena api bagaimana?" Serentak dengan itu dibukanya pintu api lok itu, dan secepat itu pula dilemparkannya topi helm itu ke dalam api yang sedang nyala. Lalu dia memandang pada Pak Kari yang terkejut melihat peristiwa yang tak disangkanya itu. "Ah, topi biasa saja topimu itu, Kari. Kena air basah. Kena api hangus juga." (Navis, 1956)

"This hat gets wet when exposed to water. What happens when it is exposed to fire?" At that moment, he opened the locomotive's firebox door and immediately threw the helmet hat into the blazing fire. He then looked at Pak Kari, who was shocked by the unexpected incident. "Ah, your hat is just an ordinary hat, Kari. It gets wet when exposed to water and burns when exposed to fire." (Navis, 1956)

This excerpt reveals the contrast between Pak Kari's personal interpretation of the helmet hat

and the meaning assigned to it by the locomotive driver. While Pak Kari considers the helmet hat a symbol of authority and dignity, the locomotive driver treats it as an ordinary material object that can be destroyed by fire. His statement that the helmet hat is merely an ordinary object directly challenges the symbolic value Pak Kari has constructed through his previous experiences. The destruction of the helmet hat therefore represents more than the physical loss of an object. It also undermines the foundation of Pak Kari's self-concept, which has become closely associated with the authority and social recognition he believes the helmet hat provides. Without this material symbol, the imagined identity that allows him to perceive himself as a respected figure loses its primary source of support.

The psychological impact of this event becomes evident when Pak Kari recalls the destruction of his helmet hat. Rather than accepting the loss as an ordinary incident, he continues to associate it with a deep sense of resentment. The narrator describes his reaction in the following excerpt.

"Demi ia ingat topi helmnya lagi, yang telah terbakar habis oleh api dalam tungku di lambung lok yang lagi dibersihkannya itu, mulailah lagi suatu nyala membakar hati dan pikirannya. Yaitu api dendam yang takkan pernah terpadamkan sebelum terbalas dengan lunas." (Navis, 1956)

"Whenever he recalled his helmet hat, which had been completely consumed by the fire in the furnace of the locomotive he was cleaning, a flame began to burn once again in his heart and mind. It was the fire of revenge that would never be extinguished until he had fully avenged himself." (Navis, 1956)

This excerpt demonstrates that the destruction of the helmet hat leaves a lasting impact on Pak Kari's emotional state and understanding of himself. The recurring image of fire, which initially destroys the helmet hat and later metaphorically burns within his heart and mind, emphasizes how the loss of the material symbol develops into persistent resentment. His desire for revenge suggests that the destruction of the helmet hat is experienced not merely as the loss of a personal possession but also as an attack on the dignity and identity he has associated with it. The incident exposes the fragility of his self-

concept because the sense of authority he previously constructed cannot be sustained independently of the object that symbolizes it. Consequently, his response shifts from maintaining an imagined sense of authority to expressing resentment toward the individual responsible for destroying its material foundation.

Thus, this study demonstrates that Pak Kari's identity is formed through a dynamic process in which symbolic meanings are constructed, negotiated, and transformed through social interaction and individual interpretation. The helmet hat initially acquires its meaning through its association with Tuan O.M., undergoes social negotiation when worn by Pak Kari, and becomes part of his self-concept through his personal interpretation of social experiences. However, its destruction reveals that an identity built primarily upon a material symbol remains vulnerable when the object supporting that identity disappears. Pak Kari's identity crisis therefore illustrates how the loss of a meaningful symbol can destabilize an individual's self-understanding and transform the way they interpret and respond to their social environment.

CONCLUSION

Based on an analysis of the short story *Topi Helm* by A.A. Navis using Herbert Blumer's Symbolic Interactionism perspective, it can be concluded that the formation of Pak Kari's identity occurs through the processes of symbolic meaning-making, social interaction, and interpretation. The helmet hat does not have a fixed meaning but rather undergoes changes in accordance with the social relationships surrounding it. Initially, the helmet hat was interpreted as a symbol of authority because it was associated with Tuan O.M.'s position as a respected figure. However, after it passed to Pak Kari, that meaning was renegotiated through various social responses from his work environment, such as mockery, attention, and the nickname "Si Gunarso." Through this process of interaction, the helmet hat subsequently became a symbol related to self-esteem and the way Pak Kari understood his own position.

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