

THE CONSEQUENCES OF DEFAMATION IN HAMKA'S NOVEL *TERUSIR*

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Received: 2024-07-10

Accepted: 2024-11-04

Published: 2024-11-30

Abstract

Defamation is an act that harms an individual's reputation through the spread of false statements. It is commonly categorized into two forms: *libel*, which involves written defamation, and *slander*, which refers to spoken or direct defamation. This research focuses on slander as a form of defamation that deeply impacts Mariah, the protagonist in Hamka's novel *Terusir*. The study examines the consequences of defamation on Mariah, who, as a victim, endures severe hardships and social alienation. Adopting a sociological approach to literature, this research situates defamation within the context of real-world social dynamics, emphasizing its destructive potential within both fictional and actual communities. Using a descriptive qualitative method, data were gathered from the novel's narrative, as well as from monologues and dialogues. *Terusir* by Hamka serves as the primary data source, supplemented by secondary references that enhance the contextual analysis. Findings reveal that Mariah suffers extensively from defamation: she is publicly shamed and expelled from her home by her husband during a stormy night, symbolizing her isolation and loss of dignity. This defamatory act not only tarnishes Mariah's identity as a respected mother and wife but also severs her relationship with her son, leading her into a state of near madness fueled by profound emotional turmoil and an overwhelming sense of loss.

Keywords: *defamation; emotional distress; reputation loss; slander*

1. Introduction

Defamation involves actions that harm an individual's reputation through the spread of false or misleading information, resulting in social degradation, personal distress, and often irreversible loss of respect. As noted by Erowati (2019), defamation constitutes a serious violation of societal norms around decency and ethics, challenging the fundamental principles of truth and integrity in human interactions. Cavico and Mujtaba (2018) further classify defamation into two distinct forms: *slander*, which refers to spoken defamatory remarks, and *libel*, which involves written statements. Both forms inflict damage on an individual's social standing, yet their impact differs depending on the medium and the extent of public exposure. Within literature, defamation is frequently employed as a potent narrative device, used to propel the plot and delve into the complexities of character development. Through the lens of

defamation, literature explores the darker facets of social behavior, including manipulation, betrayal, and the impact of public opinion on individual lives.

This study focuses on Hamka's novel *Terusir*, a seminal work that portrays the devastating effects of defamation on its protagonist. In *Terusir*, defamation becomes a central conflict, illustrating how false accusations and damaging rumors disrupt social harmony and exert profound psychological and emotional tolls on the individual. Through the experiences of the main character, Hamka vividly depicts the cascading consequences of defamation, which erodes the protagonist's social status and isolates them from their community. This exploration underscores the severity of defamation not only as a personal affliction but as a societal issue that highlights the fragility of reputation and trust in social networks.

The aim of this study is to analyze the various forms of defamation as they appear in *Terusir* and to examine how these forms shape the character's journey and social relationships. By dissecting Hamka's portrayal of defamation, we can gain insights into the ways literature mirrors real-world consequences of stigmatization and social alienation. This analysis also highlights the psychological resilience—or lack thereof—required to navigate and survive defamation's destructive influence. Such an exploration is critical in understanding the nature of human interactions, as well as the long-term ramifications of societal judgment and exclusion depicted in literary narratives.

In delving into the complex interplay between defamation and social perception, this study seeks to uncover how *Terusir* uses defamation to question moral and ethical standards within society. The novel provides a narrative space to examine the ethical boundaries of speech, reputation, and the collective power of public opinion. By addressing these themes, this analysis contributes to a broader literary and social discourse on how defamatory acts not only define individual character arcs but also reveal collective values, fears, and prejudices embedded within society. Through Hamka's narrative, *Terusir* offers a profound commentary on the pervasive and enduring nature of defamation, making it an essential text for understanding the intersections of reputation, morality, and identity within literary frameworks.

2. Literature Review

Sociology is a branch of the science of human interaction. It means that sociology is a scientific and objective study of man in society, and the study of institutions and social processes. Literature and societal reality are intertwined, as literature is shaped by and influenced by societal changes, while reality in literature represents the creator's perspective on denying or exploring societal reality. Swingewood and Laurenson (1972) emphasize the interconnected nature of literature and sociology, focusing on the social world, adaptation, and the desire for change. Literature, as a by-product of human experience, addresses issues such as family, political, and state relationships, as well as conflicts and tensions between groups and social classes. Swingewood and Laurenson (1972) maintain that although sociology and literature may not coexist, they are complementary to one another in our understanding of society. Sociology of Literature is an approach to literary studies that explores the relationship between literary works and their social context. This theory highlights how social structures, cultural norms, and societal conflicts are reflected in literary works, as well as how literature can influence and be influenced by society.

One issue that is commonly found either in social reality of literary work is defamation. Defamation is a tort action where a defendant provides false, fake, or wrong information to a plaintiff, causing damage, injury, or harm to their reputation or character. Defamation is divided into two main forms: libel and slander. Libel refers to a written or printed statement that speaks ill of someone, while slander refers to the same spoken statement (Cavico & Mujtaba, 2018).

In the context of the novel *Terusir* by Hamka, the theme of defamation is present through characters who experience defamation. Using Sociology of Literature and Dynamic Structuralism approaches, this research analyses the two forms of defamation in the novel *Terusir* and their impact on the main character. Dynamic structuralism is a very relevant approach in analyzing the impact of defamation in the novel *Terusir* by Hamka. This approach allows us to see not only defamation as a fixed and static entity, but also how its impact evolves and changes over time and in interaction with other elements in the story (Ratna, 2010). The two approaches allow the researchers to understand the social and psychological complexity of the act of defamation, as well as how it is reflected in the characters and storyline in the novel.

Two other sources pertaining to defamation are also presented here to support the analysis. The first by Zakaria and Aminah (2020) entitled *Cyber Defamation Awareness Among Adolescents: Case Studies In One Private Institution* revealing that awareness of cyber defamation among teenagers is still at a moderate level. The study analyses cyber pollution among teenagers and reveals that defamation has penetrated various platforms, causing significant changes in daily life.

The second related research is from Zivana et al (2022) entitled "Construction of Defamation Victims in Written Court Decisions". The data from court decisions in 2014 and 2015 are used to analyse the position and role of victims in this discourse. This research uses Fairclough's critical discourse analysis framework to reveal the logic of party reproduction, marginalization of victims, and determining their position in discourse.

This study refers to previous researches and highlights the widespread impacts of defamation, including reputation loss and emotional distress. Defamation, the act of communicating false statements that damage a person's reputation, is far more than just a petty squabble. It can be a dangerous and far-reaching weapon, inflicting serious harm on individuals and eroding the very foundations of a healthy society. The most immediate consequence of defamation is the damage it wreaks on a person's reputation. False accusations, particularly when widely spread, can shatter trust, destroy careers, and isolate individuals from their communities. Imagine a doctor falsely accused of malpractice. Patients may flee, colleagues may doubt their skills, and the stain of the accusation may linger long after any legal vindication. Defamation can rob someone of their livelihood, their social standing, and even their sense of self-worth.

The harm extends beyond the individual. Defamation can sow discord within communities. When trust in people or institutions is eroded through false information, cooperation and social cohesion suffer. Imagine a political campaign based on lies and smears. Voters become divided, facts become secondary to emotional manipulation, and the ability to have a constructive dialogue is lost. Defamation can poison the well of public discourse, making it difficult to address important issues. Furthermore, defamation can have a chilling effect on free speech. If individuals fear being sued for simply expressing their opinions, even if those opinions are critical, they may be less likely to speak out. This stifles healthy debate and hinders the pursuit of truth. A society

where people are afraid to speak their minds is a society ripe for stagnation and injustice. The danger of defamation is amplified in the age of the internet. Social media allows false information to spread like wildfire, reaching a vast audience with lightning speed. Retractions, even when issued, often struggle to catch up with the initial lie. This can leave a lasting negative impression, even if the truth is eventually revealed.

3. Research Method

This research employs a descriptive qualitative method to examine the phenomenon of defamation within a literary framework. According to Sugiyono (2020), descriptive qualitative research is rooted in post-positivist philosophy, which emphasizes exploring the natural state of phenomena through triangulation, inductive data analysis, and qualitative interpretation. Rather than focusing on broad generalizations, this approach prioritizes an in-depth understanding of specific occurrences and their meanings within their context. The research design is descriptive, enabling a detailed examination of the different forms of defamation present in the novel.

The primary data source for this study is Hamka's novel *Terusir*, from which data is collected through documentation techniques, including close reading and extensive note-taking. This method facilitates a thorough exploration of the defamation theme as it affects the protagonist and broader social interactions in the narrative. Data analysis is conducted using a qualitative descriptive approach, allowing for a systematic and nuanced interpretation of the defamation phenomena depicted in the novel. By applying this method, the study aims to provide a comprehensive insight into the social and psychological impacts of defamation on the characters in *Terusir*, thereby contributing to an enriched understanding of this theme in a literary context.

4. Discussion

The research focuses on defamation, focusing on slander as a significant form in the novel. The researchers analyze the narrative and dialogue, revealing defamation, emphasizing the importance of truth and integrity in interpersonal interactions. The exploration serves as a cautionary tale, reminding readers of the destructive power of slander. The main character, Mariah, is the victim of defamation, resulting in reputational, and emotional disasters.

4.1 Slander as the Significant Form of Defamation

In the novel, defamation becomes the initial conflict for Mariah, Azhar's wife, and mother of Sofyan. The three of them live in prosperity and harmony. Even though Azhar's family does not like Mariah, this does not affect the harmony of this family. However, Mariah's life changes completely after the defamation carried out by Azhar's family. Mariah is trapped in a difficult situation, facing accusations of infidelity, considered slander, a form of defamation that could damage her reputation. This is seen in the following data:

Sekarang, setelah berbulan-bulan hal itu berlalu. Aku heran, apakah yang akan kuawaskan, kesalahanku tak ada. Tiba-tiba ketika engkau tidak ada di rumah, dari pintu belakang si Hamzah masuk, anakku sedang enak tidur! Ketika aku masih tercengang-cengang melihat perangai si Hamzah, sebelum mulutku sempat mengusirnya, engkau

usir aku pergi, engkau beri aku malu yang sebesar-besarnya, sebelum engkau periksa apa kesalahanku (Hamka, 2016: 4).

The passage above is a fragment from Mariah's letter to her husband, Azhar. Despite the months that have passed since the incident, Mariah remains deeply shocked and devastated by Azhar's decision to expel her abruptly, denying her any opportunity to explain herself. One day, in Azhar's absence, Hamzah enters through the back door, and shortly after, Azhar arrives home to find him there. Without investigating the situation or understanding Hamzah's intentions, Azhar immediately throws him out, subjecting him to public humiliation. Hamzah's unexpected presence and subsequent ejection lead to accusations against Mariah, marking this situation as slander—a form of defamation. The sentence *engkau beri aku malu yang sebesar-besarnya, sebelum engkau periksa apa kesalahanku* (“you humiliated me to the greatest extent without examining my wrongdoing”) encapsulates the severity of this slander. Through his gestures and words, Azhar directly accuses Mariah of infidelity, publicly shaming her without any evidence, and intensifying the harm inflicted on her reputation.

Pada suatu hari, perkara yang selama ini sangat dielakkan oleh Mariah supaya jangan berlaku karena sudah nasib akhirnya berlaku juga. Perkara itu ialah perselisihan dan pertengkaran mulut dengan istri Pakciknya itu. Perempuan itu meraung-raung dalam biliknya mengatakan bahwa cucuk sanggulnya yang terbuat dari emas telah hilang dan Mariah yang dituduhnya mencuri cucuk sanggul itu. Sudah berkali-kali Mariah bersumpah bahwa bukan ia yang mengambil cucuk sanggul itu, namun perempuan itu masih tetap menuduhnya (Hamka, 2016: 24)

The narrative fragment above shows Mariah attempting to avoid a confrontation with Uncle Dul's wife, though conflict ultimately becomes unavoidable. The dispute arises when Uncle Dul's wife begins crying loudly in her room, accusing Mariah of stealing her gold hair bun. The sentence *Perempuan itu meraung-raung dalam biliknya mengatakan bahwa cucuk sanggulnya yang terbuat dari emas telah hilang dan Mariah yang dituduhnya mencuri cucuk sanggul itu* (The woman cried out in her room, claiming her gold hair bun was missing and accusing Mariah of stealing it) reveals that Mariah is directly accused of theft through explicit, defamatory speech. This accusation constitutes slander, a form of defamation targeting Mariah's reputation and integrity without evidence.

"Pergi kau dari sini, setan! Sudah lama kuperhatikan perangaimu! Memang jalang engkau agaknya, pencuri engkau rupanya! Perempuan tak tak tahu sopan." "Sabar Siah!" kata suaminya. "Terdengar oleh orang kiri kanan, buruk bunyinya!" "Ya, memang selalu engkau pertahankan perempuan lacur ini di sini. Barangkali engkau sudah bermain gila pula sama ia!" (Hamka, 2016: 25)

The quote above captures a conversation between Uncle Dul and his wife, Siah. During this exchange, Siah not only accuses Mariah of theft but also disparages her as a disrespectful woman, further alleging that Mariah has been “playing crazy” with her husband. In Indonesian, the phrase “playing crazy” serves as a metaphor for infidelity.

Siah's accusations of theft and adultery are conveyed through direct statements, constituting slander—a form of defamation expressed openly through spoken words.

4.2. The Consequences of Defamation

4.2.1 Reputation Loss

Sitek (2020) emphasizes that while reputation is typically established through consistent actions, a single incident can profoundly alter how a person is perceived. Defamation—whether positive or negative—can result in significant damage to a person's reputation. In *Terusir*, the loss of reputation is a central consequence experienced by the protagonist, Mariah, who loses her standing as a respected individual. This decline in her social image is illustrated in the following excerpt:

“Heran saya,” ujar Haji Abdul Halim pula. “Mengapa engkau secepat itu mengambil keputusan. Engkau usir istrimu seperti mengusir anjing. Sebab engkau dapati ia berdua dengan seorang lain di kamarmu, belum engkau periksa betul-betul perkara sebenarnya”
(Hamka, 2016: 9)

The passage above captures a conversation between Haji Abdul Halim and Azhar, in which Haji Abdul Halim reproaches Azhar for his unjust treatment of Mariah. He expresses his disapproval of Azhar's hasty decision to expel her without investigating further. The metaphor *mengusir anjing* (“chasing away a dog”) poignantly conveys Haji Abdul Halim's disappointment with Azhar's severe actions. Mariah is cast out as if she were a dog, stripped of her dignity and reputation, enduring a profound and heartbreaking betrayal at the hands of her husband.

Bukankah yang menghubungkan hati suami dan istri itu adalah cinta yang sepenuh hati yang diikat oleh kesetiaan? Sekarang orang lain berada di kamarku, berdua saja dengan ia, walaupun tidak kulihat mereka melakukan suatu perkara buruk, bukankah berdua-duaan itu sudah menunjukkan sesuatu yang buruk? Bukankah kita ini orang Timur? Yang harus senantiasa nipis telinganya dan tegak hidungnya? Kalau kehormatan kita telah diganggu orang lain? Masih bolehkah kita dipanggil seorang laki-laki kalau istri itu masih kita simpan juga?
(Hamka, 2016: 9-10).

In the passage above, Azhar expresses his profound disappointment in Mariah, accusing her of bringing another man into her room. This accusation tarnishes Mariah's reputation as a faithful wife. The data indicate that defamation not only damages Mariah's image as a loyal spouse but also undermines her standing as a mother. As a result, Sofyan concludes that his mother is not a respectable woman with a troubled past, which ultimately compels her to leave and never return.

Tetapi, ada suatu perkara yang sulit bagi seorang anak muda untuk menyimpan kedukaan demikian rupa. Walaupun ke mana kemajuan sekolahnya, walaupun membubung pelajarannya ke langit ke tujuh, tidaklah dapat dikikis dari hati perasaan duka lantaran kehilangan ibu, sedang seorang pun tidak suka memberi tahu. Mengapa hal itu orang rahasiakan, mula-mula belum dapat pikirannya menjalar jauh. Tetapi setelah ia agak besar, pertanyaan hatinya itu dapat juga dipecahkannya; tentu ibunya bukan seorang perempuan yang

terhormat, tentu lantaran kesalahan yang memberi malu dan aib makanya ia keluar dari rumah dan ia ditinggalkan seorang diri. Keadaan yang demikian sangat memengaruhi jiwanya. (Hamka, 2016: 43-44)

This narrative represents Sofyan's struggles to hide his sadness at losing his mother, despite making progress in his education. He questions why his mother leaves without explanation, leading him to believe she is not an honourable woman. This situation affects Sofyan's soul and mind, causing doubt and a deep sense of loss. The narrative also highlights the loss of Mariah's reputation as a good mother, as Sofyan's negative expectations of her.

4.2.2 Emotional Distress

Emotional distress is a severe, overwhelming state of negative emotions such as anxiety, fear, sadness, or anger, which significantly impacts an individual's mental and emotional well-being. Emotional Distress is part of the aftermath of defamation in the novel *Terusir*.

Yang lebih lagi mengharu-birukan pikirannya ialah perceraian dengan anaknya. Wajah anaknya yang mungil itu senantiasa terbayang di ruang matanya. Kerap kali ia terbangun dari tidur tengah malam, serasa-rasa kedengaran anaknya memanggil ibu. Lalu ia terperanjat dan duduk, dijamahnya tangannya ke kiri dan ke kanan; lupa bahwa ketika itu ia sedang tidur seorang diri. (Hamka, 2016: 23)

The data above show that Mariah feels sad and always imagines her son's face after they are separated. Mariah often wakes up in the middle of the night because she hears her son calling her, illustrating her struggle to overcome her emotional stress. The defamation causes Mariah's sadness until she has got hallucination about her son's attendance.

Disangkanya Sofyan yang tidur di sisinya, tetapi rupanya hanyalah bantal guling yang telah tua. Baru ia sadar setelah beberapa menit berlalu. Di sanalah keluar air matanya, ia menangis tersedu-sedu sambil memeluk bantal guling itu (Hamka, 2016: 23-24).

The data above show that Mariah feels like she is sleeping while hugging her child, even though what she is hugging is a bolster. She cries uncontrollably and hugs a bolster pillow. She even feels Sofyan's touch and cannot hear the other child's voice.

Kalau keinsafan itu naik lagi, sehingga terbayang di hadapannya wajah anaknya yang dicintainya, waktu itulah ia menangis tersedu-sedu, lalu keluar perkataan kutukan kepada bekas suaminya. (Hamka, 2016: 41)

The data show that Mariah experiences emotional distress while staying at Uncle Dul's house. Mariah worries and stresses because of missing her son. Besides that, Mariah feels anxious when she hears children playing outside. The defamation she faces makes her almost crazy.

Kalau keinsafan itu naik lagi, sehingga terbayang di hadapannya wajah anaknya yang dicintainya, waktu itulah ia menangis tersedusedu, lalu keluar perkataan kutukan kepada bekas suaminya. (Hamka, 2016: 41)

In the above data, Mariah still feels sad and continues to be haunted by the image of her son's face which causes her to cry uncontrollably. With curse words, Mariah blames Azhar for every disaster that befalls her. Mariah then relieves his stress by drinking alcohol.

Sadari setahun yang akhir ini, sudah putus asa ia dari hidup, sudah timbul niatnya hendak membunuh diri saja, supaya terlepas dari penderitaan neraka dunia ini. (Hamka, 2016: 77)

The data presented above highlights the profound emotional distress that Mariah endures. She descends into prostitution, experiencing physical fullness while her mind remains empty. Mariah frequently cries as she reflects on her fate and the son she has left behind, attempting to cope with her feelings through alcohol. Overwhelmed by despair, she contemplates suicide, believing that death would alleviate her suffering. The data illustrate the psychological toll of slander on Mariah, revealing her emotional turmoil, particularly the sadness stemming from her separation from her son. She experiences hallucinations of her child's presence and feels heightened stress when hearing the voices of other children. Ultimately, the most troubling aspect of her condition is her contemplation of suicide.

5. Conclusion

The exploration of defamation, particularly in the form of slander, within the narrative of *Terusir* by Hamka illustrates the profound impact such accusations can have on an individual's life, particularly for the protagonist, Mariah. The research has highlighted how slander not only serves as the catalyst for the central conflict but also plays a critical role in unraveling Mariah's identity, reputation, and emotional stability. The dialogues and narrative fragments reveal the destructive nature of baseless accusations, portraying the devastating consequences of defamation on Mariah's standing in her community and her personal relationships. As Mariah becomes increasingly isolated and humiliated by the slanderous remarks of Azhar's family, her journey reflects a broader commentary on the themes of truth, integrity, and the fragility of reputation in social interactions. The emotional turmoil and distress that follow her wrongful defamation lead to a cascade of personal tragedies, including the loss of her maternal bond and the descent into despair. This narrative serves not only as a cautionary tale about the insidious power of slander but also invites readers to reflect on the importance of empathy, understanding, and the imperative to seek the truth before casting judgment. Through this analysis, the research underscores the necessity for societal awareness regarding the repercussions of defamatory speech and the moral responsibility individuals hold in safeguarding the dignity of others. Ultimately, *Terusir* offers a poignant reminder of the enduring scars that defamation can leave, urging a collective commitment to integrity and compassion in our interactions.

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