

THE BELIEF IN *HANTU* IN THE MALAY CULTURE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ISLAM

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Abstract

The belief in "*hantu*" is the result of animism and dynamism among Malays before the arrival of Hindu, Buddha and Islam. *Hantu* is portrayed as the incarnation of evil souls wishing to harm humans. This belief is related to the concept of soul existence or "*semangat*" (essence) in everything including the human body. This ancient belief is integrated into their new religions through adaptation process. After embracing Islam, the belief in *hantu* is not totally dispelled since its features are similar to that of *jinn* and *shaitan*, whose existence are acknowledged in Islam. The belief is also supported by the concept of human soul in the afterlife, where it is deemed as immortal. *Hantu* is portrayed as the soul of the dead, dwelling in certain places and harming the humans. Based on the analysis of the texts of the *Quran* and *Sunnah*, it is found that the soul of the dead could never become *hantu*, as opposed to the Malays' belief. It is because the soul of the dead is in *barzakh*, the impassible barrier between the world and the Hereafter. It is a place where the soul is either rewarded or punished for his or her deeds in the past life. The souls cannot act independently by themselves as they are under the control of Allah. Based on this, the belief in *hantu* is against the Islamic teachings. This belief is capable in affecting a Muslim's faith as it indirectly leads to the denial of rewards and punishments in the afterlife.

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Introduction

Modern Malays still believe in “*hantu*” even today. Many of them still watch horror films, leading to the growing numbers of such films in the film industry. Horror films, with images of ghastly figures and apparitions, in some ways are capable of inducing this old belief. These films, done in the interest of the arts, perplex the audience with portions of Islamic practices of *zikr*, prayer (*du’a*), and fragments of verses of the *Quran* as well as the entities mentioned in the *Quran* such as *jinn*, *shaitan*, and *Iblis*. This has sparked many arguments, either for or against, between religious authorities and local film producers.

Ghosts, which are said to be incarnations of the souls of the dead or evil spirits, are remnants of the Malays’ ancient belief before Islam came. The action of mixing this paganistic belief with Islamic teachings could confuse Muslims, hence affecting their faith. In addition, the belief in ghosts is considered as a superstitious belief that relies on fantasy and imagination which leads to *khurafat* that contradicts the teachings of Islam. Yet, there is no specific *fatwa* issued by National Fatwa Council regarding this matter. However, there is a *fatwa* issued to rule against the exhibitions of *hantu* and supernatural beings such as Exhibition of Jinn, Ghosts and Coffin as it contains elements of supernatural and superstitious beliefs that could undermine the Muslims’ faith.¹

There are many journal articles regarding the belief in *hantu* among Malays, such as Swettenham,

¹ JAKIM, *Keputusan Muzakarah Jawatankuasa Fatwa Majlis Kebangsaan Bagi Hal Ehwat Ugama Islam Malaysia* (Kuala Lumpur: Pengurusan Fatwa, JAKIM, 2009), 17.

McHugh, Winstedt, De Danaan, and Laderman.² These journal articles however present an anthropological perspective. The belief is also observed in the articles written by Malaysian researchers, such as Mohd Taib Osman, Amat Johari Moain, Mohtar bin H. Md. Dom, Asmad, and Nicholas.³ However, the study on the matter from the religious perspective is limited. By extension, the study on the belief in *hantu* from the Islamic perspective is similarly very limited and not widely covered. In light of this, this article will elaborate the Malays' belief in *hantu* that refers to Malay culture that is based on Islamic perspective.

***Hantu* According to Malay Culture**

Before embracing Islam, the Malays believed that *hantu* is the opposite element of God. The Malay word for God i.e. “*Tu-Han*” represents the good element while the word “*Han-Tu*” represents the bad element.⁴ It is similar to the Hindu's belief in good *devas* and evil *devas*.⁵ The harms that *hantu* bring were very much feared and sometimes the fear could take precedence over the fear of God.⁶ *Hantu* is believed to possess supernatural powers

² See: Frank Swettenham, *Malay Sketches*, trans. Zubaidah Ibrahim, *Perihal orang Melayu* (Kuala Lumpur: Penerbitan Universiti Malaya, 2003), 154; J.N. McHugh, *Hantu: An Account of Ghost Belief in Modern Malaya*, 2nd Ed. (Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, 1959); Richard O. Winstedt, *Malay Beliefs and Religion*. (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1961), 5-81; Llyn De Danaan, “Performance and transformation: mystery and myth in Malay healing arts” (PhD diss., The Union for Experimenting Colleges and University, 1984), 27; Carol Laderman, *Taming the Wind of Desire: Psychology, Medicine and Aesthetics in Malay Shamanistic Performance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

³ See: Mohd Taib Osman, *Patterns of Supernatural Premises Underlying the Institutions of Bomoh in Malay Culture* (S-Grovenhage: M. Nijhoff, 1972), 220; Amat Johari Moain, “Kepercayaan orang Melayu berhubung pertanian” (M.A. diss., Universiti Malaya, 1976); Mohtar bin H. Md. Dom, *Malay Superstitions and Belief* (Kuala Lumpur: Federal Publication, 1979), 1-13; Mohtar bin H. Md. Dom, *Kepercayaan dan Pantang Larang*, (Kuala Lumpur: Federal Publication, 1977), 1-13; Asmad, *Kesenian Adat, Kepercayaan dan Petua* (Melaka: Associated Education Distributor, 1990), 101-135; Cheryl L. Nicholas, “Speaking about ghosts (cerita hantu Melayu): Malay narratives-in-interaction” (PhD diss., University of Oklahoma, 2004).

⁴ Mohtar bin H. Md. Dom, *Tahayul dan Kepercayaan* (Kuala Lumpur: Federal Publication, n.d.), 9.

⁵ Nik Safiah Hj. Abdul Karim, *Kajian Kebudayaan Melayu* (Kuala Lumpur: Pustaka Dian, 1964), 66.

⁶ Nik Safiah, *Kajian Kebudayaan Melayu*.

that could harm the life of humans, bring diseases, scare them, and could even cause injury and death.⁷

Based on a Malay dictionary *Kamus Dewan*, *hantu* is described as bad spirit dwelling in certain places. The phrase “*disampuk hantu*” (possessed) means “*sakit kerana diganggu hantu*” (illness caused by *hantu*). Moreover, the phrase “*tersapa hantu*” (spooked) is given the meaning “*seseorang yang demam kerana ditegur oleh hantu*” (a person with fever due to being spooked by *hantu*).⁸ In essence, *hantu* portrays something bad, evil and capable of bringing harm to humans. The Malays believe that there are numbers of supernatural entities that can harm them, thus it is necessary to discover the relationship between the belief in *hantu* and the existence of supernatural entities around humans.

The Supernatural Entities Regarded as *Hantu*

Hantu, as believed by the Malays, does not refer to one entity but four separate entities. The four entities are discussed in the subsections below.

Semangat

“*Semangat*” or “soul” is defined as “the spirit of physical life; vitality, in contradistinction to the immortal or soul.”⁹ The *semangat* is portrayed as a soul or supernatural force, and possesses human instincts such as hunger and thirst, and human features of good and bad. It is also said that *semangat* possesses the senses and emotions such as anger and love, can be asked to help, leave or come, be persuaded and also destroyed.¹⁰

The belief in *semangat* is the result of animism and dynamism¹¹ among the people since Neolithic Era around 1500 BC before the arrival of Hinduism in Malaya.¹² *Semangat*

⁷ Zainab Binti Ishak, “Pengaruh peradaban Islam ke atas peradaban Melayu dari sudut adat resam dan kepercayaan masyarakat Melayu Islam di Malaysia” (M.A. diss., University of Malaya, 2003), 133.

⁸ *Kamus Dewan* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1994), 403.

⁹ *Kamus Dewan*, 48.

¹⁰ Mohtar, *Kepercayaan dan Pantang Larang*, 1.

¹¹ Zawiah Binti Hj. Mat, “Peranan agama Islam dan kesannya ke atas perkembangan peradaban umat Islam khususnya di alam Melayu” (M.A. diss., University of Malaya, 2003), 78.

¹² De Danaan, “Performance and transformation,” 27.

is a belief that relates the souls' actions to surrounding events, and that the souls are attached to all objects.¹³

In the context of animism, it is believed that the supernatural entities come from the souls of the dead. The soul of a sinner that harms the human is called *hantu*. As such, there would be worships in the form of praises and food offerings. It is also believed that the soul can help the humans to do good deeds as well as to cause catastrophes.¹⁴

Winstedt defined dynamism as a belief in the forces of certain beings, be it good or bad, and it appears in the form of *semangat*.¹⁵ Everything, either living or not, possesses the *semangat*¹⁶ that resembles a human and capable of bringing good or bad consequences.¹⁷ In order to avoid the bad consequences or for the purpose of bringing good and peace, the *semangat* was carefully kept, by tending to its physical needs such as food and shelter, and attention was also given to its emotions.¹⁸

Semangat is believed to dwell in certain places such as trees, mountains, hills, rivers, watercourses, buildings or vacant houses and the likes.¹⁹ The presence of *semangat* is not limited to certain locations as it can be on all objects including the human body.²⁰ *Semangat* is considered as the guardian of the place or the object.²¹ It is believed that *semangat* can bring misfortune if it is not treated well and respected.²²

It was from this belief that the idea of *hantu* rising from the soul of the dead started. Human body is believed to have various forms of *semangat*.²³ The *semangat* can harm the enemy wishing to injure its host, and will seek revenge for the occasion that

¹³ Edward B. Tylor, "Primitive Culture. Elmer, the Social Science Resource Center," accessed September 13, 2009, <http://socialsciencedictionary.org/index.php?title=Animism>.

¹⁴ Abdul Rahman Abdullah, *Sejarah dan Tamadun Asia Tenggara* (Kuala Lumpur: Utusan Publications, 2000), 27-28.

¹⁵ R.O. Winstedt, *The Anthropology in Indonesia* (S. Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975), 62-63.

¹⁶ Amran Kasimin. *Liku-liku Iblis Menipu Manusia* (Kuala Lumpur: Dinie Publishers, 1992) 79.

¹⁷ Zawiah, "Peranan agama Islam dan kesannya," 78.

¹⁸ See: Amat, "Kepercayaan orang Melayu," 9-10; Winstedt, *Malay Beliefs and Religion*, 75 – 81.

¹⁹ Rahim Syam and Norhala, *Mendekati Kebudayaan Melayu* (Petaling Jaya: Penerbit Fajar Bakti, 1985), 101.

²⁰ Rahim Syam and Norhala, *Mendekati Kebudayaan Melayu*, 101.

²¹ Zainab, "Pengaruh peradaban Islam," 131.

²² Pengeran Mohd. Bin Pengeran Abd Rahman, *Islam di Brunei Darussalam* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa Dan Pustaka, 1992) 19.

²³ Norihan Binti Abdul Majid, "Unsur-unsur syirik menurut Islam: Suatu kajian di kalangan masyarakat Islam di Koding, Kedah" (M.A. diss., University of Malaya, 2008), 102.

caused the host's misfortune.²⁴ Human skulls, *minyak dagu orang mati* (chin oil of the dead), and dead babies are considered to possess *semangat*. *Semangat* can be awakened when it is worshipped in special rituals. Once worshipped, a bad *semangat* can be made as *khadam* or servant of the worshipper to carry out his or her intentions, usually for the purpose of evil and treachery, such as to scare the enemy. When it is used for evil purposes, this *semangat* is then known as *hantu*.²⁵

It can be concluded that the belief in *semangat* has a direct connection to the belief in *hantu*. *Semangat* is also connected to *penunggu* or guardian from the viewpoint that it dwells in certain places and brings harm to the humans.

Penunggu, Mambang and Jembalang

"*Penunggu*", "*mambang*" and "*jembalang*" are three names that carry some similarities. All three resemble the supernatural entities that are considered to be present as dwellers in certain places such as forests, vacant houses, large trees, mountains, rivers, seas, small hills, water, and the likes. Usually named based on their dwellings or their features, they are considered to have extraordinary forces that could cause catastrophes, diseases and misfortunes to the humans. Therefore, they are feared and respected to avoid these harms.²⁶

Penunggu and *mambang* are guardians or dwellers of certain objects or elements such as *mambang tanah* (dweller of land), *mambang angin* (dweller of air), and *mambang air* (dweller of water).²⁷ Children are prohibited to wander around at dusk especially after the rain to avoid being possessed by *mambang kuning* (yellow dweller).²⁸ It is believed that at dusk, the *mambang kuning* roams around to harm the children with jaundice, with yellow dusk sky as a sign of its presence.²⁹

Jembalang is considered as a supernatural entity that is able to influence nature. It is also believed to be the cause of diseases or disasters. For instance, *jembalang tanah*

²⁴ Mohtar, *Kepercayaan dan Pantang Larang*, 2-3.

²⁵ Swettenham, *Malay Sketches*, 154.

²⁶ Amat, "Kepercayaan orang Melayu," 51-53.

²⁷ See: Zawiah, "Peranan agama Islam dan kesannya," 133; Mohtar, *Kepercayaan dan Pantang Larang*, 10.

²⁸ Zawiah, "Peranan agama Islam dan kesannya," 134.

²⁹ Asmad, *Kesenian Adat*, 108.

(dweller of land) is believed to be able to spoil harvests with rats, insects and birds. The attack is believed to be the reaction of an angry *jembalang*. Moreover, it is believed that the pests belong to *jembalang*, as their actions seem to be controlled by it.³⁰

Penunggu, mambang and *jembalang* are identified as *hantu* as they are feared as threats to human. However, in the perspective of dwelling and guarding certain objects, they have some similarities to the concept of *semangat*.

Orang Bunian/Bunyian

“*Orang bunian*” or “*bunyian*” is also known as “*orang halus*”. It is called “orang” because it is thought to have human features and social life. Some people use the term “*hantu bunyian*” as it makes sounds but is not visible.³¹ *Orang bunian* is believed to dwell in certain places such as areas with water, forests and quiet areas.³²

Orang bunian is known for its habit to hide anyone intruding its dwelling. That might be the other reason it is called *orang bunyi*, for *bunyi* comes from the word *sembunyi* (hide). Sometimes it can happen in regular places and not necessarily in their dwellings.³³ It will appear before its victims and sometimes hide them. They are known to be in groups, and there are individuals that claimed to be married to *orang bunian* and produce offsprings.³⁴

There is an opinion from some people that *orang bunian* descended from *jinn*,³⁵ whilst there is also an opinion that it is a Muslim *jinn*.³⁶ *Orang bunian* is rarely called *hantu* as it is best known for its kindness over its bad deeds.

³⁰ Amat, “Kepercayaan orang Melayu,” 51-53.

³¹ Nicholas, “Speaking about ghosts,” 26.

³² Mohd. Aris Othman, “Ugama Islam dan kepercayaan tradisional dalam sebuah kariah di Selangor” (M.A. diss., Universiti of Malaya, 1970), 192.

³³ Asmad, *Kesenian Adat*, 108.

³⁴ Asmad, *Kesenian Adat*, 108.

³⁵ Aris. “Ugama Islam dan kepercayaan tradisional,” 192.

³⁶ Nicholas, “Speaking about ghosts,” 26.

Jinn and Shaitan

The word “*jinn*” is a Malay word which originates from Arabic.³⁷ According to the Malays, *jinn* exists as either Muslim or non-Muslim. The Muslim *jinn* is as a good *jinn* and dwells in decent places such as *musalla* and mosque, whilst the non-Muslim *jinn* is called *shaitan* and dwells in dirty places such as lavatories.³⁸ *Shaitan* is known for its malice to harm and lure the human to stray from the straight path. *Shaitan* is sometimes called *Iblis*.³⁹ Following the same features of being evil, both *shaitan* and *Iblis* are also called *hantu*.⁴⁰

The Malays believe that *Iblis* and *shaitan* are creatures cursed by Allah for refusing to bow to Adam. Consequently, *Iblis* vowed to seek revenge by diverting Adam’s descendants from the straight path until the Day of Judgement. Due to their vengeance, *Iblis* and *shaitan* continuously attempt to harm the humans. They appear in various forms including frightening ones.⁴¹

It can be summed up that the belief in *hantu* among the Malays is influenced by their previous beliefs and religions.⁴² The word *hantu* refers to an evil supernatural entity which intends to harm humans. Because of this threat, there are efforts to please the *hantu* in various forms such as worshipping them or giving them food as evident in practices such as *puja pantai* (the act of worship at a beach).⁴³ The purpose of this ritual is to either avoid the ghost’s harms or to gain benefits from it.

Concept of *Hantu* in Malay Culture According to Islamic Perspective

Based on the previous discussion, it is found that the Malays believe that *hantu* is related to three different entities, which are *roh orang yang mati* (soul of the dead), *semangat*, and *jinn* or *shaitan*. The following part will assess the relationship between the said entities and *hantu* as analyzed from the Islamic perspective.

³⁷ Haron Din, *Menjawab Persoalan Makhluq Halus, Kaitannya Dengan Penyakit dan Pengubatan*. (Bandar Baru Bangi: Darussyifa', 2009), 2.

³⁸ Aris. “Ugama Islam dan kepercayaan tradisional,” 192.

³⁹ Aris. “Ugama Islam dan kepercayaan tradisional,” 192.

⁴⁰ Mohtar bin H. Md. Dom, *Bomoh dan Hantu* (Kuala Lumpur: Federal Publication, 1977), 3.

⁴¹ Mohtar, *Bomoh dan Hantu*, 3.

⁴² Mohtar, *Malay Superstition and Belief*, 6-9.

⁴³ Mohtar, *Bomoh dan Hantu*, 7.

Hantu as the Incarnation of Souls of the Dead

The claim that relates *roh orang yang mati* (souls of the dead) with *hantu* has strayed away from the guidance of the Sunnah. It is based on the the following reasons:

(a) Souls are separated from worldly affairs:

Roh manusia yang mati (soul of the dead), whether they belong to people who were pious, religious, *mujahid*, or others will be placed in *barzakh* after his or her death.⁴⁴ This is based on the words of Allah in the Quran, 23:99-100, translated thus: “Until, when death comes to one of them (those who join partners with Allah), he says: ‘My Lord! Send me back, so that I may do good in that which I have left behind!’ No! It is but a word that he speaks, and behind them is *barzakh* (a barrier) until the Day when they will be resurrected.”

According to Mujahid (104H), *barzakh* is a barrier that separates the dead from the world,⁴⁵ until the dead is resurrected on the Day of Judgement.⁴⁶ It is consistent with the opinion of al-Sha’bi (±100H) that once a person is dead, he is no longer in the world and not yet in the Day of Judgment, but in *barzakh*.⁴⁷ The word “*barzakh*” in Arabic means “the barrier between two things.”⁴⁸ Therefore, they are in *barzakh* which is in between of the two worlds. This implies that at the point of death, the soul is separated from the physical world. Thus, *barzakh* is the separator between the physical world and the Day of Judgement. There are certain barriers that make it impossible for the souls to pass through unless it is determined by Allah.

Despite the view that says that the soul is contained within the grave when the dead is buried,⁴⁹ it does not mean that the soul can simply free itself from the grave. There is a barrier between the life in the world and *barzakh*. Therefore, the

⁴⁴ ‘Abdullah bin Abu Bakr Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, *Al-Ruh* (‘Amman: Maktabah Dandis, 2002), 134-164.

⁴⁵ Muhammad bin Jarir Al-Tobari, *Jami’ al-bayan fi ta’wil ayi al-Qur’an* Vol. 18 (n.p.: Mu’assasah al-Risalah, 2000), 53.

⁴⁶ Muhammad bin Ahmad al-Qurtubi, *al-Tadhkirah fi Ahwal al-Mawta wa Umur al-Akhirah* Vol. 1 (Beirut: Dar Ibn Zaydun, 1986), 245.

⁴⁷ Al-Qurtubi, *al-Tadhkirah*, 245.

⁴⁸ Mustafa, Ibrahim, *et al.*, *al-Mu’jam al-Wasit* Vol. 1 (Istanbul: Dar al-Da’wah, 1980), 49.

⁴⁹ Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, *Al-Ruh*, 134-164.

soul cannot simply return to the world on its free will, and its movements are limited.⁵⁰ According to Ibn Hazm (456H), *barzakh* is where the soul is placed, whether the dead is buried in a grave or not. A grave is considered as the place for the soul because most of the humans are buried when they die. However, it does not mean that the soul is also placed into its dead body in the grave.⁵¹

(b) The place of the soul depends on faith (*iman*) and good deeds:

The place of soul in the afterlife is closely related to person's faith (*iman*) and good deeds during his lifetime. According to *Quran*, the soul of the dead is divided into three groups of people. This is stated in reference to 56:88-94 in the *Quran* in which Allah says to the effect that: "Then, if he (the dying person) be of the *Muqarrabun* (those brought near to Allah), (there is for him) rest and provision, and a Garden of delights (Paradise). And if he (the dying person) be of those on the Right Hand, then there is safety and peace (from the Punishment of Allah) for (you as you are from) those on the Right Hand. But if he (the dying person) be of the denying (of the Resurrection), the erring (away from the Right Path of Islamic Monotheism), then for him is entertainment with boiling water, and burning in Hellfire."

The three groups of people as described in these verses of the *Quran* are in different places, which are; firstly, the *Muqarrabin*, i.e. those who are close to Allah, and their souls are sheltered in *al-Na'im* paradise;⁵² secondly, the *Ashab al-Yamin*, i.e. those who are guaranteed safety by Allah, and these souls are in their graves in *barzakh*, with their places in the paradise are shown to them in the morning and evening; and finally, the *Mukadhdhibin al-Dallin*, i.e. those of the denying and the erring, who will be punished with boiling water and heat from *jahim* (hell-fire). A part of the punishment is the revelation of their final place in the afterlife which is the hell-fire, as Allah says in the *Quran*, 40:46, thus: "The Fire;

⁵⁰ Amran Kasimin, *Liku-liku Iblis Menipu Manusia*, 120.

⁵¹ Muhammad Sayyid Ahmad Al-Musayyar, *Roh Menurut Perbahasan Ulama Kalam Dan Ahli Falsafah*, trans. Muhammad Ramzi Omar (Kuala Lumpur: Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia, 2003), 171.

⁵² See: Muhammad bin 'Isa Al-Turmudhi, ed. Bashar 'Awad Ma'ruf (Beirut: Dar al-Gharb al-Islami, 1998), 176; Mahyuddin Yahya al-Nawawi, *Al-Minhaj Syarh Sahih Muslim bin al-Hajjaj* Vol. 13 (Beirut: Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, 1972), 32; Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, *Al-Ruh*, 143.

they are exposed to it, morning and afternoon, and on the Day when the Hour will be established (it will be said to the angels): "Cause Fir'aun's (Pharaoh) people to enter the severest torment!"

The revelation of the infidels' place in the Fire happens before the Day of Judgement. Therefore, it happens in the *barzakh*.⁵³ If *hantu* is said to be the soul of the dead sinner, it is certain that the soul is with those of the denying and the erring. The soul will face the punishments, and it would be impossible for the sinful soul to pass through and become *hantu* to harm the humans. According to al-Qurtubi (671H), after death, a soul will no longer be free as it is in the hands of Allah, whether it is being rewarded or punished.⁵⁴ Although there are evidences (*dalil*) that show the soul of the dead could come upon the humans,⁵⁵ it is only limited to those of the chosen virtuous servants of Allah and not of the sinners.

(c) Incapability of souls of the dead in harming humans:

There has not been any study that found any evidence (*dalil*) that shows the capability of the souls of the dead to pose threats to humans. Furthermore, there is a proof that it can happen in the opposite way. At the point of death, a person's deeds come to an end except for three things as said by Rasulullah (p.b.u.h.), which means: "*When a man dies, his deeds come to an end except for three things: Sadaqah Jariyah (ceaseless charity); knowledge which is beneficial; or a virtuous descendant who prays for him (the deceased).*"⁵⁶

It means death is the border or barrier between this world and the Hereafter.⁵⁷ If the soul is incapable of doing good deeds after his death, it is also impossible for it to bring harm. The belief that the soul of the dead can become *hantu* and pose threats or harm the humans is clearly against the *Shariah* texts. Moreover, bringing harm to others is a sin. It is impossible for the soul of the dead

⁵³ Al-Musayyar, *Roh Menurut Perbahasan Ulama Kalam*, 164.

⁵⁴ See: Al-Qurtubi, *al-Tadhkirah*, 180, 189-190 and 214.

⁵⁵ See: Muhammad bin 'Abdullah al-Hakim, *al-Mustadrak 'ala al-Sahihayn*, ed. Mustafa 'Abd al-Qadir 'Ata (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1990), 416; Ahmad bin Abu Bakr al-Busairi, *Midbah al-Zujajah fi Zawa'id Ibn Majah* Vol. 4 (Beirut: Dar al-'Arabiyyah, 1983), 201.

⁵⁶ *Hadith* Muslim, *Kitab al-Wasiyyah*, Bab مَا يَلْحَقُ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنَ النَّوَابِ بَعْدَ وَفَاتِهِ *Hadith* No. 1631. See: Muslim, *Sahih*, Vol. 4, 2065.

⁵⁷ Al-Duri and 'Ilyan, *Usuluddin al-Islami* (Amman: Dar al-Fikr), 372.

to kill or cause injuries, which is categorized as a crime in Islam, when it no longer has the ability to do any deeds.

Death is the first human transition from the world to the Hereafter. 'Uthman (35H) related that Rasulullah (p.b.u.h.) said, translated thus: "Verily the grave is the first stopping place for the Hereafter; so if he is saved therein, then what comes after is easier than it. And if he is not saved therefrom, then that which comes after is harder."⁵⁸ This *Hadith* explains that the grave is the point where the journey to the Hereafter begins and also the beginning of the rewards or punishments. Hence, the punishment has started therein for the sinners in the grave itself.⁵⁹

It can be established that it is impossible for the soul of the dead, particularly of the sinners to return to the world and meet human as there is a barrier between *barzakh* and the world as they are subjected to the punishments or rewards given by Allah depending on their deeds in this world during their lifetime.

Hantu as the Incarnation of Self-Determining Semangat

Based on the analysis done on the *Shariah* texts, there is no evidence (*dalil*) that can be related to the concept of *semangat*. However, there are *Shariah* texts which show that every object has its own life or soul. Hills, stones and plants seem to look lifeless in sight but there is some kind of life or soul attached to them.⁶⁰ This life enables the objects to

⁵⁸ Narrated by Ahmad, No 454, and Al-Tirmidhi, *Kitab al-Zuhud*, Bab Ma ja'a min dhikri al-Maut, *Hadith* No. 2308; Ibn Majah, *Kitab al-Zuhud*, Bab ذِكْرُ الْقَبْرِ وَالْبَيْتِ *Hadith* No. 4267; al-Hakim, *Mustadrak*, *Kitab al-Riqaq*, No. 7942. According to al-Tirmidhi, this *Hadith* is *hasan gharib*, but according to al-Hakim, this *Hadith* is *sahih al-Isnad*. Imam al-Dhahabi believes that this *Hadith* is *sahih*. See: Ahmad bin Hanbal, *Musnad Ahmad bin Hanbal* Vol. 1, ed. Shu'aib al-Arna'ut (n.p.: Mu'assasah al-Risalah, 2001), 503; Al-Tirmidhi, *Sunan* Vol. 4, 533; Muhammad bin Yazid al-Qazwayni Ibn Majah, *Sunan ibn Majah* Vol. 4, ed. Fu'ad 'Abd al-Baqi (Halab: Dar Ihya' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyyah, n.d.), 1426; al-Hakim, *Mustadrak* Vol. 4, 366; al-Dhahabi. *Talkhis* in al-Hakim, *Mustadrak*, 366; Ahmad bin 'Ali Ibn Hajar 'Asqalani, *Taqribal-Tahdhib* Vol. 1, ed. Muhammad 'Awwamah (Syria: Dar al-Rushd, 1986), 306, 570 and 573; Muhammad Ibn Hibban al-Busti, *Al-Majruhin min al-Muhaddithin wa al-Du'afa' wa al-Matrukin* Vol. 2 (Halab: Dar al-Wa'i, 1979), 24; Muhammad al-Busti Ibn Hibban, *al-Thiqati* Vol. 7 (India: Da'irah al-Ma'arif, 1973), 22; Muhammad bin Ahmad Al-Dhahabi. *Tadhhib Tahdhib al-Kamal* Vol. 5 (Kaherah: Al-Faruq al-Hadithah, 2004) 97; Muhammad bin Ahmad Al-Dhahabi. *Al-Kashifi Ma'rifah Man Lahu Riwayah fi Kutub al-Sittah*, Vol. 1 539.

⁵⁹ Al-Qurtubi, *al-Tadhkirah*, 180, 189-214.

⁶⁰ See: 'Abdullah bin 'Umar Al-Baydawi, *Anwar al-Tanzil wa Asrar al-Ta'wil* Vol. 4 (Beirut: Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, t.t), 240.

make considerations and give praises to Allah. However, the way and manner in which they live is different from human life. This is explained in 33:72 of the *Quran* in which Allah says to the effect that: “*Truly, We did offer al-Amanah (the trust or moral responsibility or honesty and all the duties which Allah has ordained) to the heavens and the earth, and the mountains, but they declined to bear it and were afraid of it (i.e. afraid of Allah's Torment). But man bore it. Verily, he was unjust (to himself) and ignorant (of its results).*”

The verse shows that the world, consisting of the sky, earth and mountains, are living beings which are able to make decisions. Allah offered them to hold a trust (*amanah*), i.e. to be the caliph on this world, but they declined because they understand that the trust is a responsibility⁶¹ that will lead to either rewards or punishments.⁶²

Every living thing whether they are stones, plants or animals, have their own lives. They have their own ways to remind themselves of Allah and give praises to Him. However, although there is a soul inherent in each object, it should not be considered as a guardian of a particular object, or *semangat*. These souls do not have any direct consequence to humans, be it in good or bad manner. Moreover, these souls are obedient and give praises to Allah. Therefore, the view on the existence of *semangat* in everything, as believed by the Malays, is not supported by authentic texts particularly derive from the *Quran* and the *Hadith*. Objects such as animals, trees, hills, mountains, anthills, steels, woods, houses, hairs, tooth, skin and the likes are not occupied by foreign souls either in the forms of *semangat*, *penunggu*, *jembalang* or *mambang*. Thus, *semangat*, *penunggu*, *jembalang* and *mambang* are actually the incarnations of *shaitan* among the *jinn*s.

Hantu as Incarnation of Shaitan of Jinn Descendant

After it is argued that *hantu* does not come from the soul of the dead or the self-determining *semangat*, it is then clear that *hantu* is the incarnation of *shaitan* of *jinn* descendant. They are the followers of *Iblis* that are always trying to mislead the sons of Adam in various ways.⁶³ Their appearances are the results of their spells used to let the humans see them in their desired forms. They appear in eerie and scary forms to develop

⁶¹ Al-Baydawi, *Anwar al-Tanzil wa Asrar al-Ta'wil*. 240.

⁶² Al-Baydawi, *Anwar al-Tanzil wa Asrar al-Ta'wil*. 240.

⁶³ Ahmad Kilani Mohamed, “Jin dan hubungannya dengan manusia: Satu analisis menurut al-Quran dan Sunnah (M.A. diss., Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1991), 110-112.

the fear of *jinn*. As the Malays believe that *hantu* is the soul of the dead, so they appear in the form that relates to that belief. This will lead to confusion on the part of Muslims on the truth about what actually happens to the soul after death.

Meanwhile, *orang bunian* or *orang halus* is categorized as *jinn* that has many similarities with humans. Some of them are Muslims, whereas the rest are *kufir* or have no religion. Some of them befriend human and become servants to man. Some of them even work together with *Iblis* to mislead humans from the right path. Due to this evil-doing, they are called *shaitan*. In addition, *jinn* from this *orang bunian* category are the ones that are kept by man and given various names such as *hantu raya*, *pelesit*, *bajang*, and *toyol*. They are the ones mentioned in the *Quran* in 72:6 when Allah says, translated thus: “And verily, there were men among mankind who took shelter with the masculine among the jinns, but they (jinns) increased them (mankind) in sin and disbelief.”

Based on this explanation, it is clear that the supernatural entity portrayed as *hantu* is the incarnation of *jinn*. *Jinn* is a minuscule creature that is capable of taking various forms. *Jinn* could be the cause to harm humans if Allah so wills, as humans could find a reason to cause harm to each other. However, that will only happen by Allah’s will.

Conclusion

Based on the explanations given regarding the belief in *hantu* among the Malays, it can be concluded that this belief is against the Islamic teachings. The belief relates to the claim that *hantu* comes from the the soul of the dead or the incarnation of the self-determining *semangat*. In truth, the *hantu* entity is the incarnation of *shaitan* of *jinn* descendants that are made of fire. *Jinn* is not related to the soul of the dead. The belief that relates *hantu* with the soul of the dead is the result of animism and dynamism, whereas the belief that relates *hantu* with *penunggu* is the result of dynamism, Buddhism, and Hinduism.

It is impossible for the soul of the dead to become *hantu* because after death, the soul is placed in *barzakh*, and are either subjected to punishments or rewards. When a person dies, all his deeds end. In other words, there is no longer any opportunity for him to do good things, let alone cause harm on others. However, the belief in *hantu* in the Malay culture has the capacity to affect a Muslim’s faith as it indirectly leads to the denial of rewards and punishments in the afterlife.

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