# White Cloth/Shroud as Dowry in Islamic Law

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***Abstract***

*This study aims to find out the giving of dowry in the form of a white cloth/shroud in Balaesang Tanjung, Donggala Regency reviewed by Islamic Law. The initial survey was taken through direct information from the Head of the Religious Affairs Office (KUA) in the local sub-district, that the KUA had input data on marriage events as mentioned above. Dowry should be in the form of a materialistic item and can be used by the wife if it is in difficult circumstances. At least, these items can be used for worship as is common, namely a set of prayer tools. Death is a definite thing and not a personal obligation (fardu 'ain) of the wife in its management but is included in the category of fardu kifayah. Although Islam recommends giving the cheapest dowry so as not to be burdensome, dowry in the form of a white cloth/shroud is still very rare. On that basis, how is the review of Islamic Law on the tradition of giving dowry in the form of a white cloth/shroud in Balaesang Tanjung, Donggala regency? The method used is an empirical research method with primary data sources from the community, religious leaders, and community leaders in Balaesang Tanjung, Donggala Regency. The conclusion is that the tradition of dowry of white cloth/shroud in Balaesang Tanjung is in accordance with Islamic teachings, namely including 'urf in the rules of fiqh al-'adatul muhakkamah. Important aspects of dowry in Islam have been included in it such as the existence of women's rights, signs of seriousness in marriage, raising women's dignity, mandatory and should not be eliminated.*

## I. Introduction

The tradition of giving shrouds as dowry in marriage is a cultural phenomenon found in a number of Muslim communities, especially in areas that have strong customary influences in religious practices(Nurhadi, 2018). In the context of legal anthropology, the shroud was chosen not solely as a material item, but as a symbol of simplicity, a reminder of death (zikr al-maut), and an affirmation of spiritual values in the household(Fathoni & Siti Wahyuni, 2025; Sandikci & Ece Ilhan, 2003). Dowry in Islam can basically be anything that is valuable and halal according to sharia, either in the form of property, services, or symbolic objects, as long as it is agreed upon by both parties (al-Kasani, 2003). The practice of giving shrouds is believed to contain a moral message that marriage is a way of worship that must be accompanied by awareness of the transience of life, so that husbands and wives are expected to interpret marriage as a provision for the hereafter (Hasan, 2019).

Despite having a strong symbolic foundation, this practice has caused debate among scholars. Some view it as valid as long as it meets the requirements for dowry, which has benefits and value even though it is not economically significant, as affirmed by many scholars that dowry does not require that it must be expensive or in the form of a certain object (Ibn Qudamah, 1997). However, there are also views that consider the shroud to not meet the practical benefits aspect for the bride at the beginning of the marriage, so that its use is more cultural than normative shari'i (Saeed, 2008). Thus, the giving of the shroud as a dowry reflects the encounter between local customs and Islamic law, where the legitimacy of the sharia depends on the interpretation of fiqh and social acceptance in each community(Waheed, 2009).

The origins of the custom of giving shrouds as dowry in marriage are thought to be rooted in local traditions that combine traditional values and Islamic teachings(Mazhab et al., 2025; Susanto et al., 2021). In some Muslim societies, especially in Southeast Asia, customary elements are often assimilated with the sharia in marriage processions, thus giving birth to unique symbols that are not explicitly regulated in Islamic normative texts (Geertz, 1960). The shroud was chosen as a representation of simplicity and a reminder of death (*zikr al-maut*), which has an important place in Islamic spirituality. This tradition can also be understood as part of a social mechanism to instill awareness of the temporary nature of worldly life and the importance of the hereafter orientation in building a household (Rahman, 2015).

The symbol of moderation attached to the shroud is in line with the Islamic principle that does not burden the couple with a high dowry, as recommended

by the Prophet Muhammad PBUH to facilitate marriage (Ibn Majah, Hadith No. 1887). The value of the reminder of death (*zikr al-maut*) contained in it serves to strengthen the spiritual bond between couples, by emphasizing that marriage is not only a social contract, but also a morally binding worship until the end of life(Saidah, 2018). Thus, the shroud as a dowry contains a deep philosophical dimension, where its material value may be low, but its moral and spiritual message is considered high by the people who practice it (Al-Azami, 2012).

In Indonesia, the practice of giving shrouds as dowry has a variety of forms and meanings in various regions(Hardin & Nurjannah, 2020). In some parts of Aceh, for example, shrouds are often included as part of symbolic dowry that symbolizes awareness of death and attachment to simple Islamic teachings (Ismail, 2017). Meanwhile, in Lombok, this tradition emerged in the context of *the merariq* custom, where the shroud is handed over along with other objects as part of the wedding equipment (Sutrisno, 2020). In some Bugis and Makassar communities, the shroud is not the main dowry, but is attached as a complement to the procession *of the panai money*, which reflects the combination of traditional and sharia values. This variation indicates a local adaptation to the shroud symbol, whose placement in the wedding procession depends on social norms and the degree of internalization of religious values in each region (Muhammad & Samiun, 2017); (Handayani & Hidayat, 2025).

Outside of Indonesia, similar phenomena can be found in some Muslim countries, albeit in different cultural contexts(Setyowati, 2021). In parts of Sudan and Egypt, the giving of shrouds is sometimes part of the completeness of dowry or wedding gifts, which are interpreted as a reminder of death and life transitions (Hale, 2005). In Yemen, some rural communities practice the giving of a white cloth similar to a shroud as part of a dowry, with the symbolic meaning of purity and the transience of life (Varisco, 2017). Even in Pakistan, although rare, there is a tradition of giving shrouds as one of the complementary objects of dowry to the family that emphasizes simplicity and spiritual value (Ahmed, 2012). This diversity confirms that the symbol of the shroud as a dowry is not a singular phenomenon, but rather the result of an interaction between universal Islamic values and the unique local cultural constructs of each Muslim community (Nassira, 2015).

Research by Rahman (2015) discusses the flexibility of the form of dowry in fiqh munakahat, where dowry does not have to be of high value, as long as it has benefits and is agreed upon by both parties. Ismail's (2017) research on wedding traditions in Aceh notes that the shroud is often used as a symbol of simplicity and zikr al-maut, which shows how local customs influence the practice of marriage. This finding is in line with the view of Al-Kasani (2003) who emphasizes that dowry can be a simple, even symbolic object, as long as it

does not contradict the principles of sharia (Chowdhury, 2010).

Cross-cultural research also shows that the practice of giving shrouds or white cloth as dowry or wedding gifts does not only occur in Indonesia. Hale (2005) in his study in Sudan, and Varisco (2017) in his study in Yemen, found that the giving of white cloth as part of dowry has strong religious and cultural significance, especially as a reminder of death and a symbol of holiness. However, these studies also highlight differences of opinion among scholars regarding the value of their usefulness for the bride. Thus, this study will fill the literature gap by comprehensively analyzing the practice of shroud as dowry, covering aspects of fiqh, cultural symbolism, and social acceptance in various Muslim communities. Based on this, this study aims to find out the giving of dowry in the form of a white cloth/shroud in Balaesang Tanjung, Donggala Regency reviewed by Islamic Law.

## 2. Research Method

The research method is empirical research with primary data sources from the community, religious leaders, and community leaders in Balaesang Tanjung, Donggala Regency. The normative legal approach is used to examine the provisions of sharia related to dowry based on the primary sources of Islamic law, namely the Qur'an, hadith, ijma' ulama, and classical and contemporary fiqh literature. Analysis was carried out on relevant postulates, criteria for the validity of dowry, and the views of scholars across sects regarding the giving of objects of symbolic value as dowry. Meanwhile, a socio-legal approach is used to understand the social, cultural, and anthropological contexts that influence this practice in various Muslim communities, particularly in Indonesia and several other Muslim countries.

Data collection is carried out through library research on fiqh literature, legal anthropology books, journal articles, and previous research reports, as well as documentation of customary practices in various regions. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with religious leaders, chiefs, and traditional actors in the region who practice giving shrouds as dowry to gain an empirical perspective. The collected data was analyzed using content analysis techniques for normative data and thematic analysis for qualitative field data. The triangulation approach is used to combine normative and empirical findings to produce valid, in-depth, and comprehensive conclusions regarding the validity and symbolic meaning of the shroud as a dowry in Islamic law and cultural contexts.

## 3. Results and Discussion

The term *mahar* etymologically refers to dowry (*maskawin*). In terminological terms, *mahar* is a mandatory gift from the prospective husband to the prospective wife as a sincere expression of his affection, intended to foster love and compassion between the wife and the husband. It is a required offering from the groom to the bride(Sandikci & Ece Ilhan, 2003), which can take the form of material possessions or services such as emancipation, education, and others. This gift serves as a symbol of commitment and respect within the context of marriage. The word mahar comes from the Arabic language and is considered an abstract noun or masdar, derived from the root word mahra (مهر) or the verb mahara (مهرًا - يَمهَرُ - مهر). It was later standardized as the singular noun al-mahr. In Indonesian, this term has been adapted into mahar, and due to the customary practice of paying the dowry with money (mas), mahar is often associated with maskawin, which refers to the dowry or the payment made by the groom to the bride (Cook et al., 2004).

Among the scholars of Islamic jurisprudence (fuqaha), in addition to the term "mahar," other terms such as *shadaqah*, *nihlah*, and *faridhah* are also used, all of which refer to the concept of dowry. The etymological meaning of *mahar* is a mandatory gift given by the groom to the bride, but the form, type, and amount of the dowry are not specified in the Qur'an or Hadith. In Arabic, the term mahar is seldom used. Instead, scholars of fiqh more commonly use the term shadaq in their works. In contrast, in Indonesia, the term mahar and maskawin are more commonly used(White, 2017). Scholars agree that there is no fundamental difference between the terms ash-shidaq and al-mahar. Some scholars emphasize that shadaq refers to something obligatory due to marriage, such as wathi' subhat, breastfeeding, and witnessing(Nurhadi, 2018). According to Ibn Qayyim, the terms mahar and shadaq are functionally equivalent when referring to a gift given by the groom to the bride in marriage. However, mahar is specifically used in the context of marriage, while shadaq can refer to other types of giving, as it has a broader meaning, including both obligatory and voluntary charity (shadaqah wajib and shadaqah sunnah), such as paying zakat and giving the dowry. The dowry to be given to the bride must meet the following requirements:

1. **It must have value**

A dowry that has no value is not valid, even if the amount is not specified. A small dowry, but of recognized value, is still considered a valid mahar.

2. **The item must be pure and beneficial**

The dowry must not consist of haram (forbidden) or impure (najis) items, such as alcohol, pork, or blood, even if they have value.

3. **The item must not be ghasab**

Ghasab refers to taking someone else's property without their permission, but with the intent to return it later. A dowry given in the form of ghasab is not valid, though the marriage contract remains valid.

4. **The item must not be ambiguous**

The dowry cannot consist of an item whose nature is unclear or unspecified. It must be clearly defined in terms of what is being given. Islam comes as a protector and

respecter of women, granting them the right to own and manage their own property. In the era of Jahiliyyah (pre-Islamic period), women's rights were taken away and disregarded. However, Islam came to restore those rights, giving women the right to a dowry (mahar) and obligating the husband to provide it. The dowry is an essential part of marriage in Islam. Without the dowry, a marriage cannot be considered valid. The dowry must be determined before the marriage contract is performed, and it is a woman's absolute right to decide the amount of her dowry.

Once the dowry has been determined in terms of form and amount, it becomes a mandatory obligation for the husband to pay. However, if the dowry is not specified beforehand and its form is not mentioned at the time of the marriage contract, the groom is required to pay the bride something, whether in the form of money, goods, or services, as long as it does not contradict Islamic law(Fathoni & Siti Wahyuni, 2025). The majority of Islamic scholars, except for Imam Malik, agree that the dowry is an inherent consequence of the marriage contract. Therefore, the marriage contract can be carried out without explicitly naming the dowry. However, if consummation occurs and the wife is divorced before consummation, she is not entitled to the dowry, though she must receive mut'ah—a voluntary gift from the husband, such as clothing, a ring, or similar items.

As explained by Abdur Rahman al-Jaziri, the dowry functions as a substitute for the marital rights of intimacy. Some scholars of the Maliki school of thought view the dowry as compensation for sexual services, while Abu Hasan Ali sees the dowry as an obligatory right for the woman due to the marriage contract. According to the Shafi'i school of thought, there is no limit to the amount of the dowry. Anything that is valuable can be made into a dowry(Yusuf, 2024). Furthermore, Islamic law does not specify a set amount for the dowry, as it takes into account the differences in wealth and circumstances between individuals. Additionally, nearly all societies have their own customs and traditions. Therefore, Islam leaves the amount of the dowry to the discretion of each family's ability.

In the Kompilasi Hukum Islam (KHI), Article 31 states: "The determination of the dowry is based on the principles of simplicity and ease recommended by Islamic teachings." This article explains that the recommended amount of the dowry is one that reflects simplicity, and that simplicity is relative, depending on the financial ability and capacity of the groom. Marriage in Islam is viewed as a sacred contract between the groom and the bride, with the aim of establishing a harmonious family life based on the principles of sakinah, mawaddah, warahmah (peace, love, and mercy). In this context, Islamic teachings emphasize simplicity and sincerity when entering into marriage. Islam encourages that the family of the bride should not reject a suitor due to poverty. Therefore, young men should not delay marriage if they are financially and physically capable, as marriage becomes obligatory if one is unable to control their sexual desires(Fairhead, 2014). The majority of scholars (zumhur ulama) agree that the payment of the dowry (mahar) is obligatory. The types of dowry can be classified into two categories: Mahar Musamma and Mahar

Mitsil. To clarify further:

1. Mahar Musamma

Mahar Musamma refers to a dowry that has been clearly defined in terms of both its form and amount in the marriage contract (shighat akad). This type of dowry is further divided into two categories:

a. Mahar Musamma Mu'ajjal: This is a dowry that is immediately given by the groom to the bride. Prompt payment of the dowry is considered *sunnah* (recommended) in Islam.
b. Mahar Musamma Ghair Mu'ajjal: This is a dowry that has been established in terms of its form and amount, but its payment is postponed.

Regarding the payment of the dowry, it becomes obligatory when the marriage has been consummated (dukhul). Scholars agree that the dowry must be paid once dukhul or khalwat (being alone together) has occurred. If the dowry is not paid after this, it is considered a debt. However, if the wife agrees to waive the dowry payment, and the husband passes away, the heirs are not obligated to pay it. If the wife does not agree, the dowry is taken from the inheritance. If divorce occurs before consummation and the dowry has been specified, only half of the dowry must be paid.

2. Mahar Mitsil

Mahar Mitsil refers to a dowry whose amount and form are determined based on what is customary for the bride's family, since the dowry was not specified during the marriage contract. This type of dowry is typically based on what is commonly given in the community for a woman of similar status.

لاجناح عليكم ان طللقتم انسآء مالم تمسو هن اوتفرضوا لهن فريضة ومتعوهن عل الموسع قدره وعلى مقتر قدره متا عا با المعروف حقا على المحسنين

The translation of the verse is:

*"There is no obligation upon you to pay (the dowry) if you divorce your wives before you have consummated the marriage with them and before you have specified the dowry. And provide them with a gift (mut'ah). The wealthy should give according to his means, and the poor should give according to his means, a gift that is appropriate. This is a duty upon those who do good."(*Q.S. Al-Baqarah 2:236).

Imam Malik's explanation of the verse emphasizes that a man has three possible options regarding the dowry payment. The first option is that the husband may not be required to pay the dowry if the marriage is annulled before consummation. The second option is that the husband pays the mahr mitsil, which is the customary dowry paid to women in the same community(Sandikci & Ece Ilhan, 2003). The third option, which is considered fairer and wiser, is to choose the mahr mitsil, as it aligns with the husband's ability and the usual amount accepted by the bride's family. Islam stresses the importance of respecting women, particularly in the context of the rights of women that were disregarded during the time of Jahiliyyah. One of the rights Islam grants women is related to the dowry. The dowry represents respect and acknowledgment of the woman in the marriage, and it is an obligation for the man as a symbol of seriousness and responsibility in forming a family. In

Islam, the dowry has several important aspects:

1. Women's Right

The dowry is a woman's absolute right. She has the freedom to determine the amount of the dowry based on her preferences and agreement with the man, and the man must honor this request as part of the marriage contract. In Balaesang Tanjung, however, the tradition of using white cloth as a dowry is not based on the woman's preference. The obligation to give a white cloth dowry is dictated by one of the local lineages in Balaesang Tanjung. However, there are women who are brave enough to reject this tradition. As stated by Ibu Cenni: "I reject the white cloth dowry". The rejection is not contrary to Islamic law, because the mahr is the woman's right, not the family's right (Alfian, 2021).

2. A Sign of the Seriousness of Marriage

Mahr is a symbol of the seriousness and responsibility of the man toward the woman. The giving of mahr shows that marriage is not merely a physical bond but also a commitment. The sanctity of the white cloth mahr, as a symbol of purity, represents the seriousness of the marriage. This is even more evident in the tradition, as expressed by Mrs. Asrina: "White is a symbol of purity, so for us, marriage is purity". So, when a man gives a white cloth as mahr, it signifies his seriousness in building a household.

3. Elevating the Dignity of Women

During the Jahiliyah period, women were often treated as objects, and their rights were neglected. Islam came to restore women's rights, including the right to receive mahr, as a form of respect and protection. The mahr in the form of white cloth/kafan in Balaesang Tanjung is an effort to elevate the dignity of women, symbolized by purity. Furthermore, the mahr is not only limited to white cloth/kafan but may also include a set of prayer tools, money, clove trees, and even land for cultivation(Damayanti & Rahmadanti, 2025). As stated by Mrs. Nizar: "In addition to the white cloth mahr, I was also given other mahr, including a set of prayer tools and Rp. 110,000. Some were even given clove trees, land, livestock, and more. The white cloth mahr is just a requirement". This means that the women of Balaesang Tanjung have received a substantial mahr as a sign of respect towards them.

4. Mandatory and Cannot Be Abolished

Without a mahr, a marriage is not considered valid according to Islamic law. This strengthens the position of women in marriage and guarantees them fair rights. The requirement of mahr in the form of white cloth/kafan, which has even become a tradition, shows that the giving of mahr cannot be eliminated. Moreover, the mahr is recorded by the Marriage Registrar as an archive in the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA). Ruliansyah, the head of KUA in Balaesang Tanjung, has recorded marriages with mahr in the form of white cloth several times. He said, "I have recorded several marriages with mahr in the form of white cloth. Some were only mentioned verbally and not recorded because for some people here, the white cloth mahr is already common or has become a tradition". Sunda is the term for the mahr/condition of marriage for the Balaesang ethnic group. Based on all of the above, the white cloth/kafan mahr fulfills the essential aspects of mahr in Islam.

With this, Islam positions women not only as partners but also as individuals who have rights and positions that must be respected, including in the economic aspect, through mahr, which can be used by women for personal needs or business purposes. Islam does not burden the man nor make it too easy but sets it according to his capacity. Marriage is not just about the groom, but also about the groom's family, thus there are obligations to be shared together (Nassira, 2015).

The mahr in the form of white cloth/kafan has become a tradition, recognized in Islamic law as a method of ijtihad under the term urf. The concept of al-'urf derives its legal status from something that is not unfamiliar in society, something that has become a habit and integrated into their lives, whether in actions or words. Of course, this concept does not violate the core teachings of Islam as outlined in the Qur'an and Sunnah. Through the concept of al-'urf, Islamic law can become familiar, grounded, and accepted in a plural society without leaving its foundational principles. In Islamic legal principles, there is also the concept of al'adatul muhakkamah. This means customs that are made law. In this case, Islamic law is applied as long as it does not contradict Islamic teachings(Fairhead, 2014). As explained above, one of the basic principles of Islam regarding mahr is that it is obligatory and cannot be omitted. Therefore, the tradition of mahr in the form of white cloth/kafan is considered part of al'adatul muhakkamah. The explanation above shows that Islam is appreciative and cooperative in responding to the cultural phenomena that develop in society. Islam adopts and takes on traditions that exist in the community as part of supporting Islamic law, as long as they do not contradict the core teachings of Islam (Al-rassi, 2018).

## 4. Conclusion

From the results of this study it can be concluded that despite coming from different cultural and linguistic contexts, Heidegger and Eastern thought share similarities in criticizing the objectification of reality and emphasizing the subject's existential involvement in uncovering the meaning of Being. These findings open up spaces for dialogue across philosophical traditions and offer an alternative perspective to a more holistic and transcendent ontological understanding. Significant ontological similarities between Martin Heidegger's thought and Eastern philosophy. Heidegger with his existential approach places Being as the basis of authentic human experience, while the Eastern tradition, through various teachings such as Advaita Vedanta and Taoism, views Being as a fundamental reality that transcends duality and phenomenal boundaries. This convergence enriches ontological understanding by integrating the reflective and contemplative perspectives of both traditions, while challenging the dominance of narrower Western metaphysical approaches.

Furthermore, this cross-tradition study opens up opportunities to develop a

more inclusive, transcultural, and contextual ontology in the face of the crisis of contemporary meaning and existence. This approach of inter-traditional reflective synthesis not only broadens philosophical horizons, but is also relevant in intercultural dialogue, philosophical education, and the development of global ethics responsive to the complexities of the modern world. Thus, revisiting the concept of Being through this comparative lens is an important contribution in deepening and broadening the insights of contemporary philosophy.

## 4. Conclusion

The tradition of mahr in the form of white cloth/kafan in Balaesang Tanjung is in accordance with Islamic teachings, as it falls under urf in the al-'adatul muhakkamah principle of Islamic jurisprudence. The important aspects of mahr in Islam are present in this tradition, such as the right of women, a sign of the seriousness of marriage, the elevation of women's status, and its obligation and non-abolishment. The giving of the shroud as a dowry reflects the interaction between custom and sharia, where its symbolic value as a reminder of death (zikr al-maut) is seen as able to strengthen spiritual awareness in the household. However, this practice requires the right context of understanding so as not to create a negative impression or be misinterpreted as a message of death that precedes domestic life. Therefore, strengthening Islamic law education and cultural understanding is needed to ensure that this tradition maintains its philosophical meaning without reducing the essence of dowry as the right of the bride. This study recommends the need for further studies that compare similar practices in different Muslim countries to enrich the perspective of fiqh and legal anthropology in understanding the relationship between customary symbolism and sharia provisions

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