

MUSLIM DIVORCES IN SINGAPORE:  
AMONGST THE INTER-ETHNIC GROUPS.

By

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the  
requirement of Master of Arts In Islamic Thought and Civilisation

INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ISLAMIC THOUGHT AND  
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## ABSTRACT

While inter-ethnic marriages are becoming increasingly common in society, inter-ethnic couples in Singapore have a higher divorce rate than mono-ethnic ones. Inter-ethnic marriages have proliferated in Singapore in recent years, and it is becoming increasingly required to give an analysis of the potentially critical aspects that might play a significant part in the dynamics of couples from an inter-cultural perspective. Given these facts, it is critical to identify the variables that contribute to the failure of inter-ethnic marriages amongst Muslim couples, but such study has been limited thus far. The study's goal is to discover and analyse the true causes of divorce among inter-ethnic Muslim couples in Singapore. The purpose of this research is to look at the reasons that contribute to the breakdown of inter-ethnic marriages. The research also aims to analyse the legislation and processes in *Sharī'a* courts and to offer measures to reduce inter-ethnic divorces among Singapore's Muslims. The study employs a qualitative approach. Interviews is performing with married couples who are suffering marital problems. The interview will also include *Sharī'a* court administrators in order to get their experience on the subject and to analyse divorce rules and procedures. According to the corpus of research, inter-ethnic marriages and partnerships are more likely to face barriers influencing marital happiness than mono-ethnic marriages. Several factors have been identify as contributing to inter-ethnic divorces, including English as Singapore's common language, an increase in people receiving post-secondary or higher education, a large permanent resident and non-resident population, and multiracial workplaces, universities, and neighbourhoods. According to the study, adultery, cultures, customs, desertion, and financial concerns all play a role in inter-ethnic divorces. The study's implications imply that married couples should take greater steps to compromise and develop their relationships with inter-ethnic couples. This might involve presenting programs developed expressly for preparing persons who choose inter-ethnic marriage. Due to the scarcity of past research, a greater knowledge of the variables impact inter-ethnic couples in Singapore appears to be a critical introduction to the local environment. In conclusion, this study emphasized the need of community education in understanding inter-ethnic marriages in Singapore's unique culture.

## ملخص البحث

تزداد زيجات الزواج المختلط شيوعاً في المجتمع السنغافوري، وفي الوقت نفسه، ترتفع معدلات الطلاق في تلك الزيجات مقارنة بالزواج العادي في سنغافورة. ونظراً لارتفاع معدلات الطلاق في الزواج المختلط في سنغافورة في السنوات الأخيرة، فالحاجة ملحة لتقديم حلول للعوامل الحيوية، والتي قد تلعب دوراً هاماً في ديناميات الزوجين، كما ينبغي تحديد العوامل التي تشير إلى انهيار الزواج المختلط عند المسلمين، وذلك لندرة الدراسات المتعلقة بهذه القضية. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى الوقوف على السبب الحقيقي لانتشار الطلاق في الزواج المختلط أوساط المسلمين في سنغافورة ودراسته، مع بيان العوامل المؤثرة في هذه القضية. كما تسعى إلى تحليل قوانين وإجراءات المحاكم الشرعية وإيجاد حلول لتقليل نسب الطلاق في الزواج المختلط في سنغافورة. تتبنى الدراسة منهجية نوعية. تم إجراء مقابلات مع الأزواج الذين لديهم مشاكل في علاقاتهم الزوجية، كما تم إجراء مقابلات مع منسوبي المحاكم الشرعية للاستماع لأرائهم والاستفادة من خبراتهم في هذا الشأن، وتحليل القوانين والإجراءات المتعلقة بالطلاق. أشارت دراسات إلى أن زيجات الزواج المختلط أكثر عرضة للعقبات التي تؤثر على مستوى التراضي بين الأزواج من الزواج العادي. وهناك عوامل أخرى تؤدي إلى الطلاق في الزواج المختلط منها: اللغة الإنجليزية بحكم أنها اللغة الشائعة في سنغافورة، والأعداد المتزايدة لحملة الشهادة الثانوية أو ما بعد التعليم الثانوي، والعدد الكبير لحاملي الإقامة الدائمة أو من غير المقيمين، بالإضافة إلى وجود بيئة متعددة الأعراق في العمل والجامعات والأحياء السكنية. كما تشير دراسات أخرى إلى أن العوامل التي تؤدي إلى الطلاق في الزواج المختلط وهي: الخيانة واختلاف الثقافات والتقاليد والانفصال والشؤون المالية. توصي الدراسة بتكثيف الجهود لتسوية الخلافات وتوطيد العلاقات الزوجية في زيجات الزواج المختلط، كما توصي بتقديم دورات متكاملة ومتنوعة، وبخاصة للمقبلين على الزواج المختلط. كما توصي الدراسة برفع الوعي في المجتمع لفهم زيجات الزواج المختلط في ظل بيئة متعددة الثقافات مثل سنغافورة.

## APPROVAL PAGE

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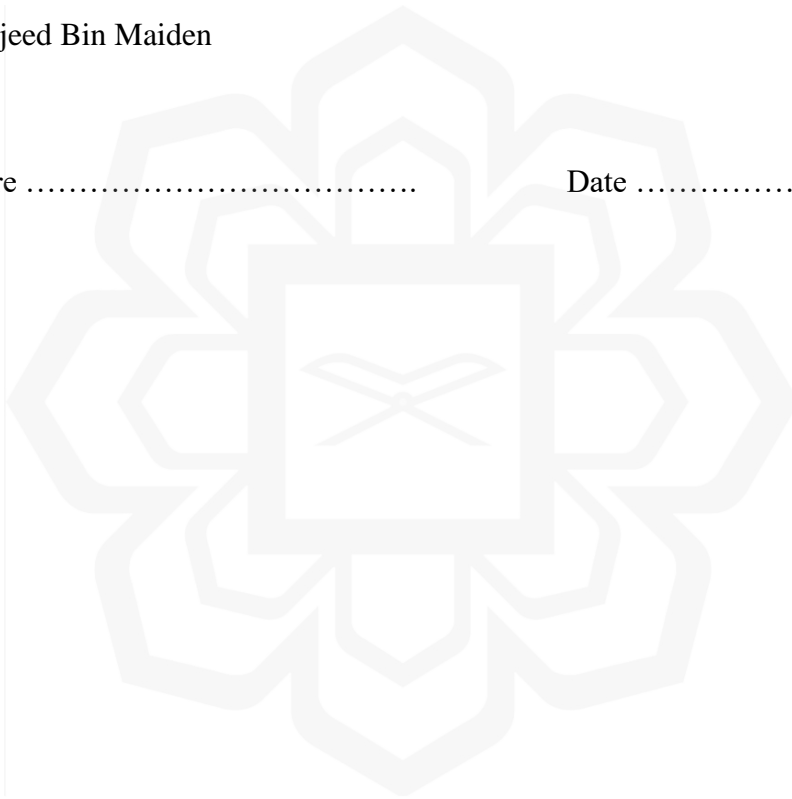
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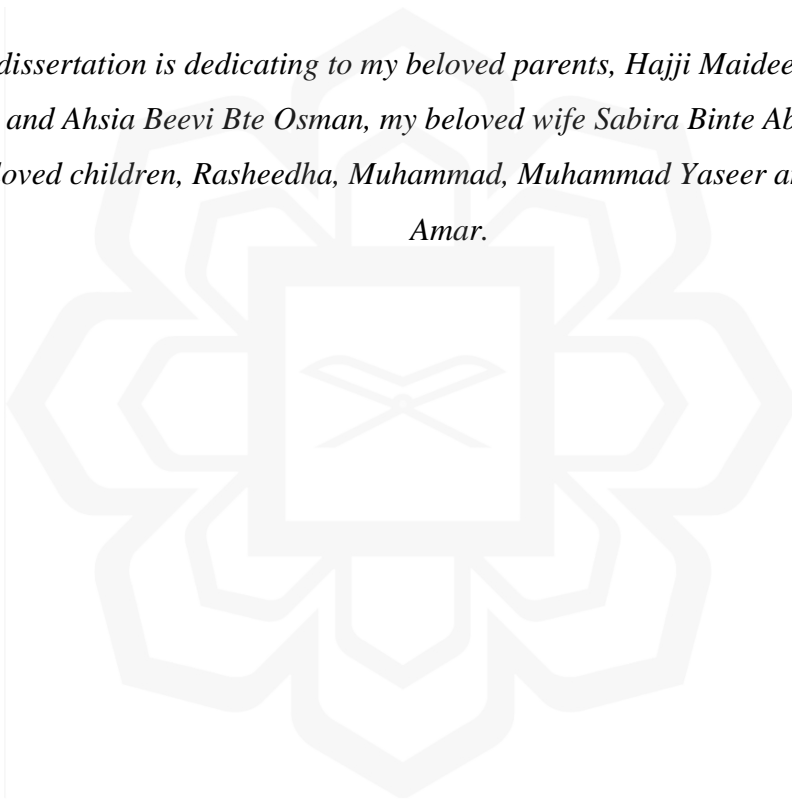
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*This dissertation is dedicating to my beloved parents, Hajji Maideen Bin Hassan Karim and Ahsia Beevi Bte Osman, my beloved wife Sabira Binte Abdul Ghani and my beloved children, Rasheedha, Muhammad, Muhammad Yaseer and Muhammad Amar.*



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## TRANLITERATION

ء	'	خ	kh	ش	sh	غ	Gh	ن	N
ب	B	د	D	ص	s	ف	F	هـ	H
ت	T	ذ	dh	ض	d	ق	Q	و	W
ث	Th	ر	R	ط	t	ك	K	ي	Y
ج	J	ز	Z	ظ	z	ل	L		
ح	h	س	S	ع	c	م	M		

Short	Vowels
ō	a
ȯ	i
o	u

Long	Vowels
ا + o	a
ي + ȯ	i
و + o	u

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

Divorce is a consequence of marital instability and a form of family disorganization. In Islam, after exhausting all reconciliation methods, if the hatred between the husband and wife is still greater than their tolerance, then divorce becomes inevitable. Here comes the genius Islamic law, which holds practical, rather than unrealistic approaches, towards real situations. The ultimate aims of marriage, and any other aspect of human life, are to achieve happiness and virtue. Therefore, when someone is denied the right to end an unhappy marriage, the two aims of marriage are seriously violated. The couple continues to live in suffering and may involve in marital infidelity. Thus, divorce, in this case, would be less harmful compared to the harm caused due to family disintegration. Even though *Allāh* dislikes divorce, it is permissible in Islam.

In “*ṭalāq al Raji*”, the husband pronounces “*ṭalāq*” once or at the most twice. This is based on the following *Qur’ānic* injunction. (*Qur’ān, Sūrat l-baqarah* verse 229).<sup>1</sup> *Allāh*, the Most Exalted the Highest, decreed the necessities and circumstances after giving a *ṭalāq*.

Singapore is a cosmopolitan country that embraces multicultural demographics. People of different races, languages and religions live harmoniously together in close proximity to an island we call home. Because of such diversifying backgrounds and close proximity interacting with different races in our routine life, it is rather natural that inter-ethnic weddings are becoming common in Singapore. Inter-ethnic marriages

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<sup>1</sup> Abdullah Yusuf Ali, New Revised Edition, the Holy *Qur’ān*, Text Translation and Commentary. Amanah Corporation, Brentwood, Maryland, USA 20722, *Qur’ān, Sūrat l-baqarah* verse 229.

made up more than one-fifth of all marriages in Singapore in 2017 and continued to be more prevalent among Muslims than civil marriages.

Globalization has also played a role in fostering inter-ethnic marriages, as many Singaporeans are exposed to the media's multi-cultural images.

In multicultural Singapore, inter-ethnic marriages have grown significantly over the past few years as inter-ethnic marriages made up more than one-fifth of all marriages in Singapore and continued to be more prevalent among Muslims than civil marriages. This form of marrying outside one's ethnic group is not unique to Singapore.

Why are inter-ethnic marriages on the rise over here? Singaporeans socialize across all races, a result of going through the same education system, addressing the same words, and having more shared experiences.

While inter-ethnic weddings continue to further spread in Singapore, such unions are frequently not a bed of pink roses. Many face family disapproval and some parents oppose the idea, as they believe that marrying outside one's ethnic group causes a soul to be eradicated from his or her own culture, values and customs.

## **1.2 NUMBER OF MARRIAGES IN SINGAPORE (2017)**

The number of marriage registrations totalled 28,212 in 2017, up 0.9 per cent from 27,971 in 2016, as shown in Figure 1.1. The increase was contributed by a rise in both civil and Muslim marriages in 2017. There are 22,162 civil marriages and 6,050 Muslim marriages, higher than 2016, figures of 22,017 and 5,954, respectively.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Singapore Department of Statistic, Statistic of Marriages and Divorces, 2017 access dated 18 July 2018

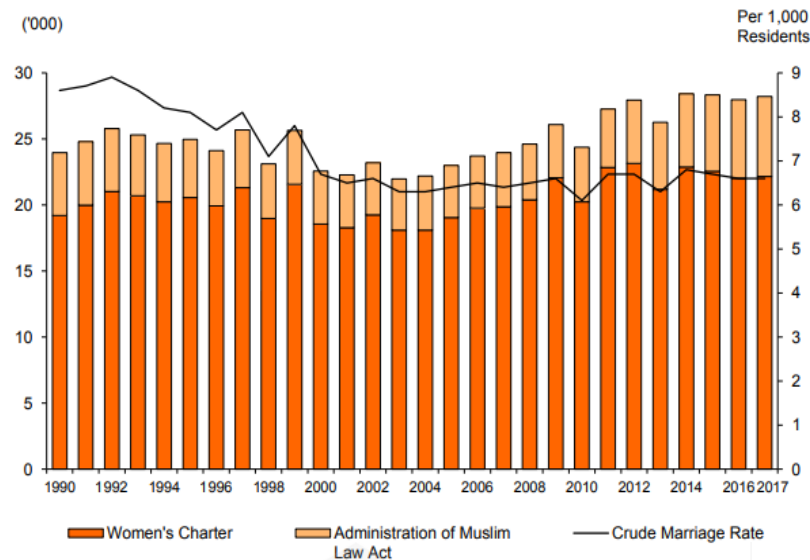


Figure 1.1 Number of Marriages Registered in Singapore (Singapore Department of Statistic, Statistic of Marriages and Divorces, 2017)<sup>3</sup>.

Civil marriages refer to marriages registered under the Women Charter, while Muslim marriages refer to the Administration of Muslim Law Act (AMLA). The analysis on marriages exclude re-registered marriages (i.e. Civil marriages that were contracted overseas or under religious or customary rites and subsequently registered in Singapore in the reference year); in 2017, there were 187 registered marriages.

In many societies, intercultural or inter-ethnic tend to manifest a greater prevalence of divorce than mono-cultural or mono-ethnic marriages. The factors may be influential. Thus, the higher prevalence of divorce may be due to the characteristics of these marriages and marriage partners that are generally known to raise the risk of divorce, such as marrying at an early age, having a large age gap, being less educated or unemployed, having low income or differences in traditions. This may be due to the characteristics of these marriages and marriage partners that generally raise the risk of

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

divorce, such as marrying at an early age, being less educated or unemployed, having low income or differences in traditions etc.

The key indicators mentioned in Table 1.1 below show marriages and divorces from 2012 to 2017. The number of marriages in Singapore has increased from 27,936 to 28,212 and the number of divorces has increased from 7,237 to 7,578 of the total marriages. The proportion of divorces increased from 23.5 % in 2015 and 23.8 % in 2017 respectively, amongst Muslim inter-ethnic marriages in Singapore.

Table 1. 1 Key Indicators on Marriages and Divorces, 2012-2017

<b>Total Marriages &amp; Divorces</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>
Number of Marriages	27,936	26,254	28,407	28,322	27,971	28,212
Number of Divorces & Annulments	7,237	7,525	7,307	7,522	7,614	7,578
	Women's Charter			Administration of Muslim Law Act		
	2015	2016	2017	2015	2016	2017
<b>Marriages</b>						
Number of Marriages	22,544	22,017	22,162	5,778	5,954	6,050
Proportion of Inter-ethnic Marriages (%)	18.4	18.2	17.7	33.8	33.9	38.0
<b>Divorce and Annulments</b>						
Number of Divorces	5,450	5,505	5,570	1,667	1,702	1,637
Number of Annulments	405	407	371	NA	NA	NA
Proportion of Inter-ethnic Divorces (%)	14.8	15.6	15.9	23.5	24.0	23.8

(Singapore Department of Statistic, Statistic of Marriages and Divorces, 2017)<sup>4</sup>

Below are the breakdowns of the inter-ethnic bridegroom under the women's charter law or civil law marriages and Muslim marriages respectively in Singapore in 2017 according to the Statistic Department of Singapore 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

Table 1.2 Inter-ethnic Marriages under Women’s Charter by Ethnic Groups of Grooms and Brides, 2017

Ethnic Group of Grooms	Ethnic Group of Brides						
	Total	Chinese	Indians	Eurasians	Caucasians	Malays	Others
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,925</b>	<b>1,117</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>134</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>2,363</b>
Chinese	2,038	-	39	39	51	37	1,872
Indians	442	198	-	14	43	14	173
Eurasians	104	71	5	-	4	1	23
Caucasians	897	519	49	27	-	22	280
Malays	77	49	5	1	7	-	15
Others	367	280	46	6	29	6	-

(Singapore Department of Statistic, Statistic of Marriages and Divorces, 2017).<sup>5</sup>

Table 1.2 showed that the inter-ethnic couples under the Women’s Charter of Malay grooms and Indian brides are only five marriage and between Malay grooms and others are 15 marriages. However, the most common inter-ethnic marriage between Malay grooms and Chinese is 49 marriages. Others include Caucasians, Europeans.

In Table 1.3 below, the statistics showed that a Muslim couple of Malay grooms and Indian brides are 183 inter-ethnic marriages and between Malay grooms and Chinese brides are 148 marriages. However, Muslim’s most common inter-ethnic marriage is between Malay grooms and others, which are 640 marriages in total. Others will include Caucasians, Europeans and Filipinos.

Table 1.3 Inter-ethnic Marriages under Administration of Muslim Law Act by Ethnic Groups of Grooms and Brides, 2017

Ethnic Group of Grooms	Ethnic Group of Brides						
	Total	Malays	Chinese	Indians	Eurasians	Caucasians	Others
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,300</b>	<b>994</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>281</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>778</b>
Malays	993	-	148	183	15	7	640
Chinese	135	99	-	8	2	-	26
Indians	377	248	24	-	2	4	99
Eurasians	24	20	1	1	-	-	2

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

Caucasians	55	36	1	7	-	-	11
Others	716	591	39	82	1	3	-

(Singapore Department of Statistics, Statistics of Marriages and Divorces, 2017).<sup>6</sup>

In Table 1.4, 4,007 were recorded inter-ethnic civil marriages in 2016, 1,150 marriages were contracted between Chinese grooms and brides of contrast, and between Chinese grooms and brides of “Others” ethnic group.

Table 1.4 Marriages under the Women’s Charter by Inter-Ethnic Group of Couple from 2016 to 2017

Year	Total	Chinese	Indian	Others	Number	
					Inter-Ethnic	
2016	22,017	15,944	916	1,150	4,007	
2017	22,162	16,116	1,054	1,067	3,925	

(Singapore Department of Statistics, Statistics of Marriages and Divorces, 2017).<sup>7</sup>

Table 1.5 below shows that 2,300 inter-ethnic Muslim marriages were mainly among Malay grooms or Malay brides with their spouses of “Other” ethnic groups, which accounted for 3,172 marriages and 332 marriages respectively in 2017.

Table 1.5 Marriages under the AMLA by Inter-Ethnic Group of Couple 2017

Year	Total*	Malays	Indians	Others	Inter-ethnic
2017	6,050	3,172	246	332	2,300

(Singapore Department of Statistics, Statistics of Marriages and Divorces, 2017).<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

### **1.3 RESEARCH PROBLEM**

The Singapore government believes that strong families will develop people who will be productive members, especially in a diverse company.<sup>9</sup> There is a reason why the Singapore government has been concentrating on fortifying the family unit. Strong families have often been synonymous with intact, non-divorced households. The rising divorce rates among inter-ethnic Muslim couples shows that marriage is no longer considered a lifelong commitment by many. Divorce becomes a serious illness as a communicable disease in society; this disease should be cured before it gets serious and transmitted to the next generation. The main problem is to bring down the inter-ethnic divorce rate in Muslim families, and factors leading to it must square off and prevent at an early stage. (Appendix C).

### **1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

- i) What are the perceived main reasons for divorce amongst inter-ethnic Muslim couples?
- ii) Are the laws and procedures of the *Shari'a* courts adequate in a marital dissolution of inter-ethnic marriages in Singapore?
- iii) What are the steps to alleviate the inter-ethnic Muslim divorces in Singapore?

### **1.5 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

- i) To discuss the factors leading to inter-ethnic Muslim divorces in Singapore.
- ii) To explore laws and procedures applied in marriage dissolution in *Shari'a* Court Singapore.

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<sup>9</sup>BusinessTimes.com.sg / government-economy, by our Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, 17/2/2015, access dated 11<sup>th</sup> September 2019

- iii) To analyse the views of interviewed Muslim couples on the inter-ethnic Muslim divorces in Singapore.
- iv) To suggest steps in minimising the inter-ethnic Muslim divorces in Singapore.

### **1.6 SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

Inter-ethnic relationships have become more acceptable, and more people are likely to become involved and willing to participate in an inter-ethnic relationship. The researchers reported a change in societal attitudes during recent decades with more individuals engaging in inter-ethnic dating and marriage. Several surveys indicate negative results of inter-ethnic marriage, such as higher rates of marital disruption and divorce and lower degrees of societal support.

The scope of this study has limitations to this group of people who have problems and need to analyse the law and the procedure regarding inter-ethnic divorce. The problem in these marriages seeking divorce is what the researcher intends to study to examine the reason for divorce in Singapore. This study only involves Muslim couples, specifically, those couples who seek arbitration in this matter.

### **1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

Therefore, the increase in numbers of inter-ethnic couples has come to public attention and become a topic of research in recent years, and then to have the problems and concerns facing inter-ethnic couples. The wide variation of cultures taken and situations of the population of inter-ethnic marriages have facilitated suitable samples for conclusive research findings. Very few works have gathered information on inter-ethnic couples. The few studies that exist have modified the number and combination of