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Cultural Negotiation in Child-Rearing Practices Among Interethnic Muslim Couples in Magelang

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ABSTRACT

Inter-ethnic marriage significantly influences parenting practices, especially in multicultural societies like Indonesia. This study analyzes how cultural negotiation shapes parenting among inter-ethnic Muslim couples, specifically focusing on Javanese and non-Javanese partners in Borobudur District, Magelang Regency. Using an intrinsic case study approach, data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The goal was to explore how these couples develop parenting strategies that integrate local cultural values with Islamic educational principles. Findings reveal that cultural negotiation occurs through two main strategies: compromise and consensus. These processes are shaped by childhood experiences, gender-based power dynamics, and extended family solidarity. The negotiations result in diverse parenting styles, including authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive approaches. This study highlights parenting as a social practice formed through the interplay of cultural dominance and collective solidarity. Theoretically, it contributes to the literature on cross-cultural parenting in Muslim families and offers insights for developing inclusive family education policies in a multicultural context.

Keywords: *Cultural Negotiation; Intercultural Parenting; Muslim Couples; Javanese; Multiculturalism*

ABSTRAK

Pernikahan antaretnis secara signifikan memengaruhi praktik pengasuhan anak, terutama dalam masyarakat multikultural seperti Indonesia. Studi ini menganalisis bagaimana negosiasi budaya membentuk pengasuhan anak di antara pasangan Muslim antaretnis, khususnya berfokus pada pasangan Jawa dan non-Jawa di Kecamatan Borobudur, Kabupaten Magelang. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus intrinsik, data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara mendalam, dan dokumentasi. Tujuannya adalah untuk mengeksplorasi bagaimana pasangan-pasangan ini mengembangkan strategi pengasuhan anak yang mengintegrasikan nilai-nilai budaya lokal dengan prinsip-prinsip pendidikan Islam. Temuan penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa negosiasi budaya terjadi melalui dua strategi utama: kompromi dan konsensus. Proses-proses ini dibentuk oleh pengalaman masa kecil, dinamika kekuasaan berbasis gender, dan solidaritas keluarga besar. Negosiasi tersebut menghasilkan beragam gaya pengasuhan anak, termasuk pendekatan otoritatif, otoriter, dan permisif.

Studi ini menyoroti pengasuhan anak sebagai praktik sosial yang terbentuk melalui interaksi dominasi budaya dan solidaritas kolektif. Secara teoritis, studi ini berkontribusi pada literatur tentang pengasuhan anak lintas budaya dalam keluarga Muslim dan menawarkan wawasan untuk mengembangkan kebijakan pendidikan keluarga yang inklusif dalam konteks multikultural.
Kata-kata Kunci: Negosiasi Budaya; Pengasuhan Antarbudaya; Pasangan Muslim; Jawa; Multikulturalisme

1. INTRODUCTION

Interethnic marriage has increasingly become part of the mainstream demographic dynamic in Indonesia. According to data from the Central Bureau of Statistics, approximately 25% of all marriages involve partners from different ethnic backgrounds. This figure reflects a significant shift in the structure of contemporary Indonesian families, particularly in terms of child-rearing practices. Such practices are influenced by the cultural values that each spouse brings from their respective communities, including expectations surrounding gender roles, division of domestic labor, communication styles, and parenting strategies (Kagitçibasi, 2017; Romano, 2008; Kil, Taing, & Mageau, 2021). Consequently, parenting within the context of interethnic marriages becomes a site of cultural negotiation that may present both challenges and opportunities for the holistic development of the child.

The dynamics of parenting within interethnic marriages become more intricate when each spouse upholds differing cultural constructions of family, such as in the case of marriages between Javanese Muslims and non-Javanese Muslims. Javanese culture typically emphasizes hierarchy, harmony, and paternalistic values, while non-Javanese cultures such as those of the Batak, Minangkabau, or Bugis peoples may uphold distinct value orientations, particularly in the division of roles and parent–child relations (Geertz, 2014). These differences may be understood through the dual poles of familial interaction: the dominance of authority and control in decision-making processes, and solidarity, which encompasses empathy, commitment, and cooperation (Roy, James, Brown, Craft, & Mitchell, 2020). The tension between authority and solidarity, shaped by cultural constructions, constitutes the primary arena of negotiation within child-rearing practices.

To date, the dynamics of child-rearing within Muslim families have been a frequent subject of study (Febiyanti & Yulindrasari, 2021; Hunaida, Halim, & Hadiyansyah, 2024; Parinduri, 2022). However, such research has generally tended to separate cultural and religious dimensions, failing to adequately address the intersection and negotiation between the two. This highlights a critical gap in the Indonesian academic literature on cross-cultural parenting within Muslim families, both in terms of the volume of research and the diversity of theoretical frameworks employed (Dwinandita, 2024). Moreover, existing studies often rely on normative approaches and don't adequately address the dynamics of cultural negotiation within multicultural families.

While global research on intercultural parenting has seen significant advancement (Bhugun, 2017; Crippen & Brew, 2007; Neoh et al., 2021). Nonetheless, in the Southeast Asian context, such studies remain in their early stages of development. Research in this area has mostly focused on intercultural parenting practices among immigrant families (Xiong & Detzner, 2004; Yim, 2022). Such studies highlight the critical need to understand how each partner's sociocultural dynamics shape their parenting. In contrast, limited research exists on cross-cultural parenting within Indonesian Muslim families, particularly concerning the interplay of social processes and the integration of cultural and religious values.

This study aims to bridge the gap in the scholarly discourse on cross-cultural parenting in Indonesia by analyzing the process of cultural negotiation in child-rearing among interethnic Muslim couples in Borobudur District, Magelang Regency. Specifically, it seeks to examine how interethnic Muslim spouses construct parenting strategies by integrating cultural values with Islamic educational principles, including the division of gender roles, parent–child communication, and the moral and religious character formation of children. Using sociocultural approaches and cultural reconciliation theory (Bhugun, 2017b; Kagitçibasi, 2017), the study will uncover the negotiation styles couples employ to reach agreements on parenting, whether through compromise, cultural dominance, neutrality, or consensus. Furthermore, the outcomes of these parenting agreements will be analyzed using Baumrind's (1966) parenting style theory (Baumrind, 1966).

In light of the foregoing, this study contributes to the body of cross-cultural parenting literature by emphasizing the importance of understanding parenting as a social practice shaped by the interplay of power dynamics and cultural collectivism. The application of the dominance–solidarity framework is intended to illuminate how couples navigate power relations and value differences in making parenting decisions. The findings of this research are expected to offer practical insights for multicultural families seeking to establish more inclusive and adaptive parenting models. Moreover, this study can serve as a reference for developing family education policies and fostering harmonious multicultural communities.

2. METHOD

This study uses an intrinsic case study approach (Merriam, 1998; Starman, 2013) to gain a deep understanding of child-rearing practices within inter-ethnic Muslim families (Javanese and non-Javanese). This approach is particularly suitable because the selected cases clearly show the dynamics of cultural negotiation among Islamic values, Javanese culture, and non-Javanese cultures. In a multicultural society, understanding these dynamics is crucial for exploring how parenting values are negotiated, reshaped,

and compromised in daily family life. In essence, this approach aims not for generalization but to thoroughly explore and understand a complex context.

The research took place in Borobudur District, Magelang, a region known for its multicultural community, openness to migrants from various areas, and status as an international tourist destination. Informants were selected based on specific criteria: married couples where at least one partner is from outside Java and has resided in Borobudur District for approximately eight years, have children aged 3-8 years, are caregivers or household assistants, and neighbors or close family members. These criteria were determined using purposive sampling, aligning with the principles of in-depth data quality inherent in phenomenology and ethnographic studies (Moser & Korstjens, 2018).

Data collection for this study was conducted in stages through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, as recommended for qualitative research (Darlington & Scott, 2002). Passive participant observation (Soehada, 2018) was carried out over three months to gain a contextual understanding of child-rearing practices in inter-ethnic Muslim families in Borobudur District. Following this, semi-structured interviews and documentation were used to deepen and strengthen the data obtained from the observations. A detailed breakdown of the techniques, objectives, data examples, and sources used in this research is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Data Collection Techniques, Objectives, and Sources

Technique	Objective	Sample Data	Source
Semi-structured Interview	To explore the experiences, perspectives, and parenting practices of informants based on the research indicators.	Interview transcripts from married couples, caregivers, and neighbors.	Interview guide adapted from literature (Kerlinger, 2014).
Documentation	To complement and reinforce data obtained from observation and interviews.	Photographs of parenting activities, family interaction videos, and WhatsApp chat archives.	Field notes and digital recordings.

The data collected served as the primary information source and foundational basis for ensuring the credibility of the findings through triangulation techniques. The researcher employed triangulation to enhance the credibility and validity of the results by comparing information obtained from various types of informants and different data collection methods. Following data collection, the researchers conducted a qualitative thematic analysis (Creswell, 2007). First, the collected data were managed by creating verbatim transcripts and classifying them using Nvivo. Second, the researchers repeatedly

read each transcript to identify specific parenting practices and make brief notes. Third, the social, cultural, and structural backgrounds of each informant were presented to explain the local context influencing parenting practices. Fourth, the read and understood data were coded according to relevant themes, such as negotiation of cultural values, gender roles, and conflict and resolution in child-rearing. This process aimed to group information based on empirically emerging patterns from the data. Fifth, the researchers interpreted the data using two approaches: direct interpretation and naturalistic generalization, to derive common meanings consistent with emerging patterns and based on the connections between field data and relevant theoretical frameworks. Finally, the analysis results were presented comprehensively through descriptive narratives, supplemented with direct quotes from informants, and visualized in thematic tables, figures, and graphs.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on research conducted with eight interethnic Muslim couples residing in the Magelang region, the findings reveal that child-rearing practices are shaped by a complex process of cultural negotiation. The parenting values negotiated within these families include methods of disciplining children, parenting goals, and everyday communication styles. For instance, couples from Batak and Sundanese ethnic backgrounds tend to emphasize discipline and responsibility in character development. These couples adopt a more direct parenting approach, often involving clear consequences for rule violations through both verbal admonitions and tangible actions. As expressed by Informant 3a, "*If our child breaks the rules concerning gadget use at home, we immediately confiscate the device and ban its use for a week. This way, they learn what is right and wrong*." In contrast, couples with Javanese cultural backgrounds generally employ a more gentle approach to parenting.

Parenting practices among Javanese couples tend to emphasize affection, open communication, and courteous behavior, all intended to preserve harmony in parent–child relationships. This is illustrated in a statement by Informant 3b, "*I prefer to advise my child gently so that they feel respected and not afraid of their parents*." These two parenting models highlight how value differences and approaches are adaptively negotiated within the domestic sphere. Such adaptation illustrates the dynamic and interactive nature of cultural values within interethnic Muslim households.

Cultural negotiation in parenting among interethnic Muslim couples typically involves seeking common ground through adjustments to each partner's cultural norms and the socio-environmental context in which the family resides. In some cases, one cultural orientation dominates, often influenced by extended family or prevailing community norms. In other instances, couples reach a hybrid compromise, reflecting a blending of parenting values and strategies. This is exemplified by Informant 1b, who

stated, "*We find a middle ground. When it comes to discipline, I follow my husband's way. But when it comes to communicating with the children, I stick with my own softer approach*." This statement illustrates how child-rearing becomes a site of cultural negotiation, requiring adaptive strategies that account for the child's developmental needs, cultural identity, and familial power dynamics (Bornstein, 2017). Such negotiations underscore the evolving and dialogical nature of parenting within multicultural families, where both cultural heritage and relational dynamics must be balanced to foster an inclusive and supportive domestic environment.

The process of cultural negotiation among interethnic Muslim couples occurs through two primary strategies: compromise and consensus. The compromise strategy is observed in parenting practices that combine assertiveness, commonly associated with non-Javanese cultures such as Batak and Sundanese, with the gentleness and emphasis on harmony characteristic of Javanese culture. For example, in Javanese-Sundanese couples, disciplinary actions toward children reflect this negotiated approach. As stated by Informant 4a, "*We agreed not to express anger when our child breaks the rules. Our way of advising them starts with storytelling. Only afterward do we explain what is right and why*." The compromise strategy is also employed to create parenting approaches that are responsive to the specific needs of the child. This is illustrated by a Javanese-Minangkabau couple who limit their child's screen time and actively engage them in artistic activities to stimulate verbal and memory development. As Informant 7b explained, "*We restrict TV watching. Our child has a speech delay, and the psychologist recommended that we talk to the child more through singing and storytelling*."

In contrast, the consensus strategy involves the equal integration of both partners' cultural values. This strategy is evident in parenting practices of Javanese-Minangkabau couples, as seen in the following statement by Informant 2a, "*If I take a strict stance, my wife helps by soothing the child. This way, the child doesn't feel pressured*." Such an approach indicates a negotiated division of parenting roles, where emotional regulation is shared between partners. Another example of the consensus strategy includes the adoption of modern parenting values, such as early childhood sex education. A Javanese-Minangkabau couple (Informant 6) emphasized the importance of introducing bodily autonomy and boundaries to their child as early as age three to prevent potential sexual abuse. This perspective highlights the critical role of parent–child communication in fostering body awareness and protective behavior in early childhood (Gerber, 2023).

Beyond the compromise and consensus strategies, the childhood experiences of each partner also serve as a reflective foundation for determining parenting orientations, goals, and attitudes. For instance, Informant 5a noted, "*I was raised by strict parents. I don't want my child to go through the same thing, but I also don't want to spoil them. So my spouse and I try to find a middle path*." These strategies are further shaped by gender role dominance rooted in local cultural traditions, and by family solidarity based on

collectivist values. Thus, child-rearing within interethnic Muslim families becomes not merely a functional task but a site of cultural reflection, adaptation, and relational negotiation shaped by both individual and collective histories.

A prominent pattern that emerged in this study is the dominance of gender roles, particularly among Javanese Muslim couples, especially those residing in communities strongly influenced by Javanese cultural traditions. Local cultural values, which position men as the head of the household, reinforce a patriarchal division of roles. This is consistent with the statement of Informant 3b, a wife in a Javanese–Sundanese marriage, "*When it comes to our child's education, I always discuss things with my husband. But usually, the final decision follows his judgment because he feels a greater sense of responsibility. Especially since he's a native Javanese*." Such dominance is termed hegemonic masculinity (Fernández, 2012). Nevertheless, some couples demonstrated more egalitarian parenting patterns, particularly when both spouses are employed. In such cases, parenting decisions were made jointly through mutual discussion. As expressed by Informant 6b, "*Since we both work, we take care of the child together. But when we're both at work, we ask my mother to help*." This scenario illustrates gender negotiation (West & Zimmerman, 1987), which spouses actively renegotiate household roles based on situational needs.

A second key element in the cultural negotiation of parenting is the role of extended family solidarity. Within the Indonesian socio-cultural context, parenting responsibilities are commonly shared with external actors such as grandparents, siblings, and in-laws. Such solidarity functions as an adaptive mechanism to reconcile cultural differences between spouses. This is evident in Javanese–Minangkabau and Javanese–Sumatran couples who engage their in-laws in introducing traditional etiquette and social norms to their children. For instance, Informant 5b shared, "*When I'm unsure how to deal with our child, especially when they're hard to advise, my mother-in-law usually steps in with suggestions*." This illustrates how extended family networks serve as emotionally connected systems that foster adaptive and compromise-based parenting models.

The influence of gender role dominance and family solidarity suggests that culture in parenting practices is shaped through a dialogical process between structure and agency. On one hand, couples remain situated within strong local cultural frameworks such as male dominance in Javanese contexts. On the other hand, practical demands and the involvement of external actors within the familial network open spaces for negotiation, allowing for modification of roles and values.

The application of compromise and consensus strategies in navigating cultural differences gives rise to various parenting styles, namely authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive. These styles reflect the dynamic outcomes of cultural negotiation in interethnic Muslim families. First, the authoritative parenting style. This style is observed in couples who integrate cultural values with open communication, attentiveness, and

responsiveness to their children's needs. Such parents encourage dialogue and allow children to express their views while maintaining clear boundaries. As noted by a Javanese–Minangkabau couple (Informant 5a), "*We always talk and share stories with our child, especially when they're facing problems. During these conversations, we include advice and guidance so they learn how to make decisions*." This approach aligns with the concept of authoritative parenting, which promotes emotional and social development (Baumrind, 1991).

Second, the authoritarian parenting style. This style is commonly practiced by couples of Batak and Sundanese heritage. These couples emphasize family hierarchy, one-way communication, and strict discipline as a means of controlling the child's behavior. As stated by Informant 3, "*We believe children must obey without too many questions, so they learn discipline and responsibility*." This reflects a control-oriented and compliance-focused parenting approach, consistent with the authoritarian style, which may successfully instill discipline but risks hindering children's self-expression (Muhopilah & Tentama, 2022).

Third, the permissive parenting style. The permissive style is characterized by weak parental control and supervision. This often occurs in couples who struggle with cultural negotiation and are affected by socio-economic conditions, such as work busyness and excessive involvement from in-laws. This pattern leads to a lack of emotional attention, education, and religious instruction for the children. One couple disclosed, "*Since we're both busy working, we sometimes leave the childcare to my mother-in-law. But we feel our child lacks structure and does not receive consistent guidance.*" This scenario illustrates the permissive parenting style, which is marked by excessive freedom and a lack of clear boundaries, often resulting in poor discipline and delayed developmental outcomes (Awiszus, Koenig, & Vaisarova, 2022).

Overall, the three parenting styles identified in this study emerge as direct outcomes of the cultural negotiation processes within interethnic Muslim couples. The authoritative style represents a healthy and adaptive compromise; the authoritarian style reflects the influence of more conservative and hierarchical cultural traditions; while the permissive style tends to result from limited negotiation capacity, often exacerbated by external factors. Understanding the variation among these parenting styles is essential in the context of cross-cultural parenting, as it can inform the development of culturally sensitive and context-specific interventions to support families. Accordingly, it becomes evident that interethnic Muslim couples creatively construct new meanings of parenting that are situational, reflective, and dialogical.

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that parenting practices among interethnic Muslim couples in Borobudur District are the result of continuous cultural negotiation. Spouses

navigate differences in parenting values and practices through compromise and consensus strategies that are adaptive, reflective, and dialogical in nature. The compromise strategy involves selectively integrating elements from each partner's cultural background that are deemed most compatible with the needs of the child and the family's context. Meanwhile, the consensus strategy is reflected in equitable role-sharing and the coherent integration of cultural values. These strategies, however, cannot be separated from gender-based power relations and the influence of extended family solidarity networks. This underscores the notion that culture is not static but rather a social construct negotiated in everyday life. Moreover, cultural negotiation in child-rearing leads to diverse patterns: authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive. Overall, this study affirms that cross-cultural parenting in Muslim families in Indonesia must be understood as a dynamic social practice. The dominance–solidarity framework proposed in this research offers an applicable analytical framework for examining parenting practices in other multicultural contexts.

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