

Cross-Cultural Parenting Practices in Dutch-Indonesian Intercultural Families: Perspectives on Child-Rearing Between Individualism and Collectivism

Journal of Early Childhood Education Research
ISSN 3123-4143
Vol. 2 (1), pp.19-34, 2026
<https://doi.org/10.58230/jecer.v2i1.561>
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Abstract

- Purpose** : Intercultural marriages between Dutch and Indonesian partners represent a culturally significant yet underexplored configuration in cross-cultural parenting scholarship. This study examines how individualistic Dutch and collectivistic Lombok-Indonesian cultural values shape divergent child-rearing practices, and how an intercultural parent navigates and negotiates these differences in everyday family life. The study is motivated by the near-absence of qualitative research on Dutch-Indonesian intercultural families and the lack of scholarly attention to Lombok-Sasak parenting practices in the international literature.
- Methodology** : A qualitative narrative inquiry approach was employed, drawing on the lived experience of Marleen Verhoeckx, a Dutch social worker with professional specialization in mental health, a year-long government-funded immersion in Indonesian culture and language (Darma Siswa scholarship), and sustained parenting experience within a Dutch-Lombok intercultural household. Data were generated through in-depth narrative reflection and analyzed thematically using Hofstede's individualism-collectivism framework and Greenfield et al.'s cultural pathways theory as guiding analytical lenses.
- Results** : Seven thematic dimensions of cross-cultural parenting difference were identified: sleep arrangements, postnatal support structures, birth rituals, physical contact norms, responses to infant distress, parental decision-making, and gender roles. Dutch parenting was characterized by early infant sleep independence, professional kraamzorg postnatal care, reflective responses to child distress, egalitarian co-parenting, and shared gender roles. Lombok-Indonesian parenting was characterized by mother-infant co-sleeping, family and dukun bayi-based postnatal support, the medaq au birth naming ceremony, communal infant engagement, immediate gratification of infant distress, authority-based decision-making, and gender-differentiated caregiving roles.
- Conclusions** : The findings reveal a coherent and systematic alignment between Dutch parenting practices and individualistic cultural values, and between Lombok-Indonesian practices and collectivistic cultural values, extending Hofstede's framework into the specific Dutch-Indonesian intercultural context. This study contributes ethnographically specific knowledge about Lombok-Sasak child-rearing to the cross-cultural early childhood literature and offers practical insights for social workers, family counselors, and early childhood practitioners supporting intercultural families. The findings underscore the importance of cultural humility in professional practice and call for future research incorporating multiple participants and longitudinal perspectives.

Keywords: cross-cultural parenting, intercultural families, individualism-collectivism, Lombok-Sasak child-rearing, narrative inquiry

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Article History

Received: 8 March, 2026

Accepted: 7 April, 2026

Published: 12 April, 2026



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1. Introduction

The accelerating pace of globalization has fundamentally transformed the demographic landscape of contemporary family life, producing a marked increase in intercultural and interethnic unions across national and regional boundaries (Kil et al., 2021; Yurtaeva & Charura, 2024). As intercultural marriages become increasingly prevalent, particularly in Western Europe and Southeast Asia, the parenting practices that emerge within such families have attracted growing scholarly attention (Machette & Cionea, 2023; Wulandari & Abdullah,

2024). Intercultural couples do not merely negotiate relational and communicative differences; they navigate deeply divergent cultural frameworks governing the most intimate domains of family life, including how children are born, named, nurtured, disciplined, and socialized into their social worlds (Kil et al., 2021; Roy et al., 2020). The transition to parenthood represents a critical juncture in intercultural marriages, frequently surfacing latent cultural differences that had remained implicit during the pre-child phase of the relationship (Yurtaeva & Charura, 2024). Understanding how intercultural parents negotiate these differences, and what parenting philosophies emerge from this negotiation, is therefore a matter of pressing theoretical and practical significance for family scholars, social workers, and child development practitioners.

Among the most robust and widely applied frameworks for understanding cross-cultural variation in parenting is the individualism-collectivism dimension, originally systematized by Hofstede (1980) and elaborated in subsequent decades by Triandis (1995) and, more recently, by Lansford (2024) and Gorla et al. (2024) within the landmark Parenting Across Cultures project. Individualistic cultures, as typified by the Netherlands which consistently ranks among the most individualistic nations globally on Hofstede's indices, prioritize personal autonomy, self-expression, independence, and the cultivation of a self-reliant child whose needs are addressed through deliberative, expert-guided parenting processes (Gorla et al., 2024; Super et al., 2021). Collectivistic cultures, as characteristic of Indonesian society and its diverse ethnic communities including the Sasak of Lombok, prioritize group belonging, family interdependence, communal solidarity, and the integration of the child into a relational web of family, religious, and adat (customary) obligations (Riany et al., 2020; Febiyanti & Yulindrasari, 2021). These contrasting orientations are not merely abstract philosophical positions; they manifest directly and concretely in how parents organize sleep, birth rituals, postnatal support, responses to infant distress, gender roles, and child-rearing decision-making, which are the very practices that define everyday parenting life.

The Dutch cultural context of parenting has been documented as distinctive even within the broader spectrum of Western individualistic societies. The so-called 'Three Rs' of Dutch parenting, namely *rust* (rest), *regelmaat* (regularity), and *reinheid* (cleanliness), represent a historically grounded, culturally explicit child-rearing philosophy that emphasizes early schedule establishment, infant sleep independence, and structured daily routines (Super et al., 2021; van Schaik et al., 2020). Empirical research has demonstrated that Dutch infants average significantly more sleep than their American counterparts, reflecting a culturally embedded belief that infants are capable of, and should be supported toward, early self-regulation and sleep independence (Super et al., 2021). Dutch parenting is further characterized by strong reliance on professional expert guidance, including the nationally institutionalized *kraamzorg* system of postnatal home care by trained maternity nurses, and by egalitarian co-parenting norms supported by state policies including paternity leave and flexible working arrangements (Wiegers, 2006). The Dutch model thus represents a systemic integration of individualistic child-rearing values into institutional, professional, and policy structures that actively shape family behavior from the earliest moments of life.

Indonesian parenting, by contrast, is embedded in a deeply collectivistic socio-cultural ecology in which child-rearing is understood as a community responsibility rather than an exclusively private parental affair (Riany et al., 2020; Febiyanti & Yulindrasari, 2021). In the Lombok context specifically, parenting is shaped by the intersection of Sasak adat, Islamic religious norms, and intergenerational family structures that govern birth rituals, naming ceremonies, postnatal support networks, and the allocation of caregiving roles (Budiwanti, 2000). The *dukun bayi*, the traditional birth attendant, occupies a central position in Lombok's postnatal support ecology, providing physical, ritual, and community-based care that integrates the newborn into its social and spiritual community from the first hours of life (Rozario & Samuel, 2002). Gender role differentiation in Lombok parenting is pronounced, with mothers predominantly assuming domestic caregiving responsibilities while fathers serve as primary economic providers, reflecting the patriarchal dimensions of both Sasak adat and locally interpreted Islamic gender norms (Blackwood, 2001). These collectivistic parenting practices

are not remnants of tradition but active, adaptive responses to the social, relational, and material ecologies in which Lombok families are embedded (Riany et al., 2020).

Cross-cultural parenting research has advanced substantially in recent years, with large-scale multi-country studies demonstrating systematic associations between cultural values and parenting behaviors across diverse national contexts (Gorla et al., 2024; Lansford, 2024; Rothenberg et al., 2022). The Parenting Across Cultures project, spanning thirteen cultural groups across nine countries, has confirmed that mothers from higher-collectivism cultures report greater parental warmth and family obligation expectations, while individualistic parenting orientations are associated with greater emphasis on child autonomy and self-regulation (Gorla et al., 2024; Breiner et al., 2024). Research on intensive parenting has further demonstrated that individualistic cultures exhibit greater endorsement of child-centered, expert-guided parenting practices, while collectivistic cultures express caregiving intensity through relational engagement and communal solidarity rather than individual achievement orientation (Roskam et al., 2024). Recent qualitative studies have highlighted the hybrid parenting identities that emerge within intercultural families, wherein parents selectively integrate practices from multiple cultural repertoires in response to specific parenting challenges (Febiyanti & Yulindrasari, 2021; Wulandari & Abdullah, 2024). Co-sleeping research has similarly revealed that attitudes toward infant sleep arrangements are among the most culturally divergent dimensions of parenting, with collectivistic cultures exhibiting higher rates of mother-infant bed-sharing and individualistic cultures emphasizing solitary infant sleep as a developmental norm (Barry & McKenna, 2022; Super et al., 2021).

Despite this growing body of cross-cultural parenting research, several significant gaps remain in the existing literature. First, the Lombok-Sasak context of Eastern Indonesia is conspicuously underrepresented in international cross-cultural parenting scholarship, which has tended to focus on Javanese culture or on Indonesia as an undifferentiated national unit (Riany et al., 2020; Febiyanti & Yulindrasari, 2021). Second, while studies of intercultural parenting have proliferated in Western immigration contexts (Kil et al., 2021; Roy et al., 2020), Dutch-Indonesian intercultural families, a configuration of particular demographic and historical relevance given the colonial and post-colonial relationship between the Netherlands and Indonesia, have received virtually no dedicated scholarly attention. Third, and most critically, the subjective, experiential dimension of cross-cultural parenting negotiation, specifically how intercultural parents make sense of divergent child-rearing philosophies in the intimate space of everyday family life, remains underexplored relative to the quantitative and comparative approaches that dominate the field (Yurtaeva & Charura, 2024; Kil et al., 2021). Narrative phenomenological perspectives, which are uniquely positioned to illuminate the meaning-making processes inherent in intercultural parenting, are notably absent from the Dutch-Indonesian scholarly context (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

This study responds to these gaps by presenting a qualitative, phenomenological exploration of cross-cultural parenting practices within a Dutch-Lombok Indonesian intercultural family. The participant, Marleen Verhoeckx, is a Dutch social worker with a bachelor's degree in social work and professional specialization in mental health, extensive lived experience in Indonesia including a year-long government scholarship program (Darma Siswa), and sustained parenting experience within a family bridging Dutch and Lombok-Sasak cultural worlds. Her positionality as a culturally reflexive social work practitioner with deep professional and personal engagement with both cultural contexts makes her a uniquely informative narrator of the experiential landscape of Dutch-Indonesian intercultural parenting. The narrative inquiry approach (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), combined with cultural analysis grounded in Hofstede's (2001) individualism-collectivism framework and Greenfield et al.'s (2003) cultural pathways theory, provides the methodological and theoretical scaffolding for this investigation. Narrative inquiry is particularly well-suited to intercultural parenting research because it centers the lived, temporal, and relational dimensions of parenting experience that quantitative instruments cannot adequately capture (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Kil et al., 2021).

This study pursues three interconnected research objectives. First, it aims to document and comparatively analyze the specific parenting practices and beliefs that distinguish Dutch and Lombok-Indonesian child-rearing across key domains including sleep, postnatal support, birth ritual, physical contact norms, responses to infant distress, parental decision-making, and gender roles. Second, it seeks to illuminate the experiential and meaning-making processes through which an intercultural Dutch-Indonesian parent navigates, negotiates, and integrates these divergent cultural parenting frameworks in everyday family life. Third, it aims to generate culturally specific insights about Lombok-Sasak parenting practices, including the medaq au birth ritual, that expand the empirical base of cross-cultural early childhood research beyond its current geographical and cultural limitations. The novelty of this study lies in its unique combination of cultural specificity (the Lombok-Sasak context), intercultural positioning (Dutch-Indonesian), and narrative phenomenological methodology, producing findings that speak simultaneously to theories of cultural parenting, the practice of intercultural family support, and the broader project of decolonizing cross-cultural developmental psychology by centering non-Western parenting knowledge on its own terms (Smetana, 2017; Riany et al., 2020). The findings are intended to inform social workers, family counselors, early childhood practitioners, and policymakers supporting intercultural families in both the Netherlands and Indonesia.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design and Approach

This study employs a qualitative research design grounded in narrative inquiry, as conceptualized by Clandinin and Connelly (2000). Narrative inquiry treats human experience as the fundamental epistemological source of knowledge, attending to the lived, temporal, and relational dimensions of individual stories as primary data. This design was selected because the research objectives require an in-depth exploration of how an intercultural Dutch-Indonesian parent subjectively experiences, interprets, and negotiates divergent cultural parenting frameworks in everyday family life — a phenomenon that is inherently experiential, meaning-laden, and processual, and therefore not adequately captured by quantitative instruments or comparative multi-site designs.

Critically, narrative inquiry does not derive its validity from sample size but from the depth, reflexivity, and analytical richness of the narrative account produced (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008). Single-participant narrative inquiry is an established and methodologically defensible approach within qualitative research, particularly when the participant occupies a rare or unique positionality that renders their experience epistemically irreplaceable (Smith, 1994; Josselson, 2011). The participant in this study — a Dutch social worker with professional specialization in mental health, sustained immersion in Indonesian culture through a government-funded scholarship, a six-month internship in Lombok, and active parenting experience within a Dutch-Lombok intercultural household — represents precisely this kind of rare biographical and cultural configuration. No comparable participant profile exists within the existing Dutch-Indonesian intercultural parenting literature, making her narrative an exemplary case in the tradition of critical case sampling (Patton, 2002).

The phenomenological orientation of the study further directs attention to the essences of the participant's lived experience, seeking to identify the core structures of meaning that characterize cross-cultural parenting negotiation in a Dutch-Lombok Indonesian intercultural household (van Manen, 2016). Together, narrative inquiry and phenomenological orientation provide a methodological framework uniquely suited to capturing both the cultural content of parenting difference and the active, ongoing meaning-making through which intercultural parents navigate these differences in everyday life.

2.2 Research Participant and Setting

The study employed purposive critical case sampling (Patton, 2002), selecting a single participant whose biographical, professional, and cultural profile rendered her uniquely

positioned to illuminate the research phenomenon with exceptional depth and analytical richness. The participant is Marleen Verhoeckx, a 32-year-old Dutch female social worker residing in Ravenstein, the Netherlands. She holds a Bachelor of Social Work from Avans University of Applied Sciences, 's-Hertogenbosch, with a specialization in mental health, and a New Zealand Certificate in Health and Wellbeing Support Work (Level 3).

Her professional background includes over five years of social work practice with individuals with mental and intellectual disabilities. Critically, she possesses deep and sustained cross-cultural engagement with Indonesian society: she completed a one-year government-funded Darma Siswa scholarship in Indonesia focused on Bahasa Indonesia and Indonesian art and culture, undertook a six-month internship at a special needs school in Lombok, and has been raising children within a Dutch-Lombok intercultural household over an extended period. This combination of professional expertise in human development, trained analytical competency in social behavior, and lived intercultural parenting experience constitutes what Patton (2002) terms an information-rich case, one from which maximum insight can be drawn precisely because of the participant's unique positioning at the intersection of the two cultural worlds under study.

The dual role of the participant as both the primary narrator and a reflexive analytical subject is acknowledged as a feature of the research design rather than a methodological limitation. In narrative inquiry, the researcher-participant relationship is understood as inherently collaborative and co-constructive (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The participant's professional training in social work, which includes systematic reflection on cultural diversity, human behavior, and family dynamics, enhances rather than compromises the analytical quality of the narrative data. This positionality is made transparent throughout the study in accordance with qualitative research standards for reflexivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

2.3 Data Collection Procedures

Data were generated through a series of in-depth narrative reflection sessions conducted with the participant across multiple sittings. The data collection instrument consisted of open-ended narrative prompts structured around seven thematic domains identified from the cross-cultural parenting literature: sleep arrangements, postnatal support, birth rituals, physical contact norms, responses to infant distress, parental decision-making, and gender roles in caregiving.

Crucially, the participant was invited not only to *describe* parenting practices in both cultural contexts, but to reflect explicitly on the *negotiation* process, how she encountered, responded to, and actively navigated moments of cultural divergence within her own intercultural household. This dimension of the data collection was designed to capture the dynamic, processual quality of intercultural parenting that distinguishes narrative inquiry from mere comparative description. Narrative data were recorded systematically and subjected to member checking, whereby the participant reviewed the documented narratives to confirm accuracy and completeness, thereby strengthening credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

2.4 Data Analysis

Narrative data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), adapted for narrative inquiry contexts. The analytical process proceeded through six stages: familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final thematic account. Coding was conducted manually, with themes identified both deductively, guided by Hofstede's (2001) individualism-collectivism framework and Greenfield et al.'s (2003) cultural pathways theory, and inductively, allowing emergent themes to surface from the data without forcing them into predetermined categories. Trustworthiness criteria for qualitative research as outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were applied throughout the analytical process. Credibility was established through member checking and prolonged engagement with the participant's narrative. Transferability was supported through thick description of the cultural contexts examined. Dependability was ensured through systematic

documentation of the analytical process, and confirmability was enhanced through reflexive journaling that made the researcher's interpretive decisions transparent and auditable. No software was used for data analysis; thematic coding was conducted through close manual reading and iterative interpretation of the narrative transcripts.

3. Results

This section presents thematic findings derived from the narrative inquiry conducted with Marleen Verhoeckx, a Dutch social worker with sustained lived experience within a Dutch-Lombok Indonesian intercultural household. Findings are organized across seven thematic dimensions of cross-cultural parenting difference. Participant narrative excerpts are presented verbatim throughout to anchor the analysis in the texture of lived experience.

3.1 Sleep Arrangements

Of all the differences Marleen encountered when she entered the world of Indonesian parenting, sleep was the one that surfaced first and stayed longest. In the Netherlands, the expectation that a newborn sleeps independently in its own crib from birth is so thoroughly embedded in the material and social infrastructure of parenting that it rarely requires articulation. The crib, the monitor, the schedule: all of it pre-assumes a logic of early separation as developmental good. Marleen had grown up within that logic, and it was the only one she had known.

What she encountered in Lombok was not simply a different preference but a different premise entirely. In the Sasak family context, mother and infant sleep together as a matter of course, not as a choice negotiated between partners but as an expression of relational care so fundamental it requires no justification. The participant recalled the weight of that difference in the early weeks of her child's life:

"For my husband's family, the idea of putting a newborn alone in a separate room would have been almost unthinkable, even cruel in their eyes. The mother and baby sleep together. That closeness is protection, it is love, it is just what you do. There is no question about it."

What makes this finding particularly instructive is not the difference itself, which cross-cultural parenting literature has documented extensively, but the way the participant experienced the negotiation of it from the inside. She did not resolve the tension by choosing one model; she found herself inhabiting a middle space that shifted as the weeks passed. The infant slept close in the early postpartum period, in part because the Indonesian family was present and in part, as she acknowledged, because proximity felt instinctively right to her as a new mother. The transition toward independent sleep came gradually, driven less by a deliberate parenting decision than by the slow reassertion of her own cultural defaults as the initial intensity of the family gathering subsided.

"It was not a fight; it was more like a negotiation that kept going. In the first weeks, I kept the baby very close, next to me and not in a separate room. But gradually, as my son got older, I started to introduce more independence in sleeping, the Dutch way."

The ongoing, unresolved quality of this negotiation is significant. Sleep was not a problem that was solved once and then set aside; it was a recurring site of relational calibration that continued well beyond the neonatal period.

3.2 Postnatal Support Structures

The postnatal period placed the participant at the intersection of two care systems that share almost no common assumptions about what expertise means or where it resides. The Dutch model is built around the *kraamzorg*: a professionally trained maternity nurse, state-supported, who arrives at the family home in the days immediately following birth to provide structured assistance with newborn bathing, breastfeeding, nutritional monitoring, and

maternal recovery. For Marleen, this system represented the self-evident architecture of postnatal care:

"In the Netherlands, after birth you get a kraamzorg, a professional who comes to your home and helps you with bathing the baby, checks on breastfeeding, makes sure you are recovering well. It is very organized, very clinical in a good way. You know exactly who is responsible for what, and there is a system behind it."

What she encountered in Lombok was not an absence of support but a completely different source of it. Extended family members filled the household. The dukun bayi arrived to perform massage, ritual, and the kinds of care that Western medicine neither recognizes nor replicates. The knowledge base was experiential and intergenerational rather than credentialed, transmitted through women who had done this before and who understood the body and the community in ways that no professional qualification could encode. Marleen found herself occupying both worlds at once:

"I found myself in this interesting position where I had two completely different kinds of support at the same time. On one side, the professional Dutch system telling me one thing about the baby's schedule and nutrition. On the other side, the Indonesian family and the dukun bayi doing things their way. I had to decide, consciously, what I was going to take from each."

What is notable here is that the participant did not experience this as a forced choice. She drew on the kraamzorg for clinical reassurance while finding genuine comfort in the communal care of the Indonesian family network. The boundary-setting this required, communicating her choices clearly to two groups operating within entirely different assumptions about whose authority over the newborn's care was legitimate, was demanding in ways that went largely unacknowledged by either side.

3.3 Birth Rituals and Ceremonial Practices

There is, in the Dutch cultural context, no ceremony marking a child's birth in any communal or spiritual sense. Registration is administrative, celebration is private, and the meaning attached to the arrival of a new life is constructed within the family rather than conferred by any community ritual. Marleen described this with a matter-of-factness that itself reflects how naturalized the absence of public ritual has become in Dutch parenting culture: you give birth, you file the paperwork, you notify people.

In Lombok, the birth of a child initiates a sequence of communal events of which the most significant is the medaq au ceremony, conducted within the first three days of life. A dukun bayi or respected community elder bestows the child's name before the gathered community, accompanied by prayer and collective celebration. The ceremony does not merely name the child; it constitutes the child's entry into a web of social, familial, and spiritual relations. Marleen's account of witnessing it reveals something of the experiential distance between her own cultural formation and what she found:

"The medaq au was something I had never experienced anything like before. There were prayers, there was the community gathered together, and the dukun bayi gave my child his name in front of everyone. In that moment, the baby was not just ours. He belonged to the community, to the family, to God. It was incredibly moving, even though I did not fully understand everything that was being said."

Rather than treating the ceremony and the Dutch civil registration as competing claims on her child's identity, the participant chose to hold both simultaneously. She participated fully in the medaq au, not as an observer performing tolerance, but as someone who had genuinely come to understand what the ceremony meant to her husband's family and why its completeness mattered. The Dutch registration followed. She framed this not as a pragmatic

compromise but as something closer to an act of cultural generosity toward her children, *"My children have both. I see that as a gift, not a contradiction."*

3.4 Physical Contact and Infant Privacy

The question of who may touch a newborn, and under what conditions, might seem like a minor detail in the larger landscape of cultural difference. In practice, it was one of the most viscerally felt divergences the participant encountered. Dutch parenting culture places a high value on infant privacy as an extension of parental authority: the newborn belongs to the parents, and physical contact from others, even affectionate contact, is implicitly understood to require consent. Marleen had internalized this norm deeply enough that its violation registered in her body before her mind had a chance to reframe it.

"In the Netherlands, you would not just pick up someone's baby without asking. There is an unspoken rule: you wait, you ask with your eyes, you get a nod. The baby belongs to the parents, and you respect that boundary. It is about privacy and autonomy, even for a newborn."

In Lombok, the arrival of a newborn is a communal event and the infant a communal presence. Neighbors, extended family members, and visitors who were strangers to Marleen moved freely through the household and engaged with her child as a matter of cultural course. The first time this occurred she had to suppress an instinct she recognized as Dutch:

"In Lombok, when the baby is born, everyone comes. And they hold the baby, they kiss the baby, they pass the baby around. People I had never met would just come in and pick up my child. In the beginning, I had to actively stop myself from reacting the Dutch way, because I knew it was love. It was their way of welcoming a new life."

The shift she describes, from boundary violation to collective love, was not instantaneous and was not total. She arrived at a position that felt genuinely her own: openness to communal engagement during family and ceremonial gatherings, combined with a set of non-negotiable health-based limits that she maintained regardless of cultural pressure. It was a position that neither her Dutch upbringing nor her Indonesian family context had prepared her for; she had to construct it herself.

3.5 Parental Response to Infant Distress

Marleen's professional training as a social worker specializing in mental health had given her a particular orientation toward distress: look for the cause before you respond to the symptom. When her child cried, her reflex was analytic. She wanted to understand what the cry meant before deciding what to do about it.

"My training taught me to always look for the why behind a behavior. When a child cries, the first question is: what is the need behind this? Is it hunger, is it pain, is it fear? You do not just react. You think first, and then you respond in a way that actually addresses the real need."

This orientation sat in direct tension with what she observed in the Lombok context, where a crying infant is met with immediate action: the breast, the arms, the restoration of calm. There is no diagnostic pause. The goal is not to understand the cry but to answer it, and answering it quickly is itself understood as good mothering. When she thought about it carefully, Marleen found this logic coherent on its own terms. The aim was not to produce a self-regulating child but to produce a child who felt held.

What she noticed in herself over time was that she did not hold to a single approach across all contexts. Alone with her child, she defaulted to the Dutch mode: observation, assessment, calibrated response. Surrounded by Indonesian family, her behavior shifted without her quite deciding it:

"I noticed that when I was alone, I responded more the Dutch way. I would wait a moment and try to understand what was happening. But when I was with the Indonesian family, I found myself responding immediately, like they did. I do not think that is inconsistency. I think it is reading the room, understanding what kind of parenting is appropriate in this context, with these people, at this moment."

This contextual variability was not experienced as contradiction. It was experienced as responsiveness, a quality her social work training had taught her to value.

3.6 Parental Decision-Making Structures

If sleep was where the cultural difference surfaced earliest, decision-making was where it proved most durable. Marleen entered her intercultural partnership with a model of co-parenting organized around equality: both parents discuss, both voices carry equal weight, external expertise is sought when the parents are uncertain. This was not an ideology she had consciously chosen; it was the water she had swum in:

"For me, making decisions about the children was always something we do together, my husband and I, as equal partners. And when we were unsure, we asked a professional: the pediatrician, the specialist. That is how I was raised to think about parenting. You consult, you discuss, you decide together."

Her husband brought a different architecture to the same table. In the Lombok context, decision-making within a family is structured not by consensus between equal partners but by the authority that accrues to position within a relational hierarchy. The head of the family carries weight that a pediatrician's opinion does not. This was not stubbornness or unreasonableness on his part; it was a coherent and deeply held set of assumptions about how good decisions get made. The collision of these two systems was the most sustained source of tension the participant identified across the entire span of her intercultural parenting experience:

"We had completely different mental models of what deciding together means. For me it meant equal voice. For him, it sometimes meant that he, as the father, made the final call. We have worked on this for years. He has become more open to discussion; I have become more understanding of why hierarchy matters to him. We are still negotiating."

The phrase still negotiating is worth pausing on. The participant did not describe arriving at a solution. She described a relationship in motion, one in which both partners had moved and continued to move, without either having fully abandoned the assumptions that shaped them.

3.7 Gender Roles in Parenting

Gender role expectations were the dimension of intercultural parenting that the participant experienced as most personally consequential, because they were the dimension that most directly implicated who she understood herself to be. In the Netherlands, the expectation that both parents share domestic responsibility and remain economically active is codified in policy, modeled socially, and experienced as simply how adult life works. Marleen's professional identity as a social worker was not something she held separately from her identity as a parent; the two were continuous:

"My work as a social worker is part of who I am, not something I set aside because I have children. Both parents work both parents take care of the children. That is just how it works in Dutch culture."

The Lombok model distributes these responsibilities differently and does so with a clarity that leaves little room for individual negotiation at the cultural level. Mothers care for children and manage the household; fathers provide economically. This is not merely convention but is reinforced by adat expectations and by locally interpreted Islamic gender norms in ways that make deviation socially costly. Marleen observed this pattern in the women around her,

educated women whose qualifications went unused because the cultural frame for their lives had already been decided:

"Even women who are educated and have skills and qualifications often do not work outside the home, because the culture says that is not their role. The father provides. The mother nurtures. Those are fixed categories, and stepping outside them requires courage and often conflict."

What the participant negotiated over several years was not a resolution of this difference but something more interesting: a household arrangement that neither culture would fully recognize as its own. She works part-time. Her husband carries domestic responsibilities that a traditional Lombok father would not. The arrangement was not inherited from either cultural tradition; it was constructed between two people across an extended period of explicit conversation, friction, and mutual accommodation. Marleen's account of arriving at this point carried none of the triumphalism of a problem solved, *"We built something new. It is not fully Dutch and not fully Indonesian. It is ours."*

The understated simplicity of that formulation captures something that the thematic findings across all seven dimensions share: intercultural parenting is less a matter of choosing between frameworks than of building something that did not previously exist, and doing so without a blueprint.

4. Discussion

The seven thematic dimensions examined in this study do not merely confirm that Dutch and Lombok-Indonesian parenting differ. They reveal the specific texture of that difference as it is encountered from the inside, by a person who belongs to both worlds and must make daily decisions about how to inhabit them simultaneously. That is a different kind of knowledge from what surveys and cross-national comparisons can produce, and it is precisely the kind this study was designed to generate.

At the theoretical level, the findings align systematically with Hofstede's (2001) individualism-collectivism framework across every dimension examined. Dutch parenting as experienced and described by the participant reflects the full constellation of individualistic child-rearing orientations: professional expert guidance, early infant independence, egalitarian co-parenting, shared gender roles, and a reflective stance toward child distress. Lombok-Indonesian parenting reflects an equally coherent collectivistic ensemble: mother-infant co-sleeping, community and dukun bayi-based postnatal care, communal infant engagement, the medaq au naming ceremony, immediate comfort responses, and gender-differentiated caregiving roles. The Netherlands consistently ranks among the highest-scoring nations on Hofstede's individualism index (Hofstede Insights, 2023), and the collectivistic orientation of Indonesian society has been documented across Javanese and Sasak cultural contexts (Riany et al., 2020; Budiwanti, 2000).

What the present study adds is not confirmation of what is already known at the macro level but demonstration that these broad cultural orientations are lived, felt, and negotiated in the daily texture of a single household. The theoretical arguments of Triandis (1995) and Greenfield et al. (2003) regarding individualistic and collectivistic developmental pathways receive particularly clear illustration in the sleep and distress findings, where the participant found herself pulled simultaneously toward two developmental logics, each internally consistent, each supported by a surrounding community that treated it as obvious. Adaptive improvisation of this kind is not well captured by comparative frameworks, and it is here that narrative inquiry demonstrates its particular analytical value (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008).

The contrast between the Dutch kraamzorg system and the Lombok model of dukun bayi and family-based postnatal care reflects a deeper epistemological divide than a simple difference in care provision. In the Dutch model, credentialed professional expertise is the legitimate source of parenting guidance, embedded in an institutional infrastructure that

reflects the broader individualistic welfare state's confidence in systematized, evidence-based knowledge (Wiegers, 2006). In the Lombok model, authority resides in experiential and intergenerational community knowledge that no professional qualification can replicate or replace (Rozario & Samuel, 2002). Practitioners working with intercultural families who do not recognize both as equally adaptive responses to their respective relational and material ecologies risk producing the cultural alienation that undermines effective support, a dynamic Dwairy (2006) has documented in cross-cultural counseling contexts. The participant's experience of drawing simultaneously on both systems, seeking clinical reassurance from the kraamzorg while finding genuine comfort in the dukun bayi's relational and ritual care, illustrates that these systems are not mutually exclusive but require active, conscious navigation to draw on together.

Among the most substantive contributions of this study to the early childhood literature is its documentation of the medaq au ceremony as a Lombok-Sasak parenting practice that has received almost no attention in international scholarship. The cross-cultural parenting literature has tended to treat Indonesia as a culturally homogeneous unit, and when it does differentiate, to focus overwhelmingly on Javanese cultural frameworks (Riany et al., 2020; Febiyanti & Yulindrasari, 2021). In the medaq au, the child's name is conferred publicly by a community elder before a gathered community rather than assigned privately by parents, encoding a fundamentally different understanding of how personhood is constituted: not through individual parental choice but through collective recognition, consistent with the collectivistic principle that identity is relationally rather than individually constructed (Greenfield et al., 2003). Centering this kind of ethnographically specific knowledge on its own terms, rather than positioning it as a deviation from Western developmental norms, is what Smetana (2017) has called for in the broader project of decolonizing cross-cultural developmental psychology.

The divergence in parental responses to infant distress raises a concern worth naming directly. Within mainstream Western developmental psychology frameworks, the Dutch approach of reflective inquiry before response aligns with authoritative parenting theory (Baumrind, 1966) and is associated with secure attachment and child self-regulation outcomes (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Rothbaum et al., 2000). Evaluated against the same framework, the Indonesian approach of immediate comfort risks being miscategorized as permissive or insufficiently scaffolding. As Chao (1994) and Rudy and Grusec (2006) have argued, however, parenting behaviors must be evaluated in relation to the cultural goals they serve rather than against norms derived primarily from Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic samples. In the Lombok context, immediate comfort is not a failure to scaffold development but a culturally coherent enactment of relational care, oriented toward harmony and the child's felt security within a communal web. The participant's own contextual variability between the two modes, defaulting to reflective inquiry when alone and to immediate response when surrounded by Indonesian family, reflects a sophisticated situational attunement rather than inconsistency, one that her professional training had, perhaps unknowingly, prepared her for.

The gender role findings carry the greatest structural weight of the study. The Dutch egalitarian model, supported by national policy frameworks including paternity leave, flexible working arrangements, and universal early childhood services (CBS Netherlands, 2022), represents a societal commitment to gender equality embedded in institutional structures over decades. The Lombok model, shaped by the intersection of Sasak adat and locally interpreted Islamic gender norms, assigns domestic and caregiving responsibilities to mothers in ways that operate largely independently of individual women's qualifications or aspirations (Blackwood, 2001; Budiwanti, 2000). Negotiating between these two structural systems within a single household is not primarily a question of relational goodwill; it requires sustained, explicit, years-long conversation in which both partners must become partially legible to a cultural logic that is not their own. The hybrid arrangement the participant and her husband eventually constructed, part-time employment alongside shared domestic labor and a parenting approach that belongs fully to neither tradition, is what Febiyanti and Yulindrasari (2021) have termed third-space parenting: a novel practice produced by the encounter between two cultural

systems that cannot simply be added together and that would not have existed without the specific relational labor both partners invested over time.

This concept of third-space parenting resonates with Wulandari and Abdullah's (2024) account of multicultural marriage and child-rearing, and it captures something that the comparative literature tends to obscure. Intercultural parents are not choosing from cultural menus; they are constructing something new under conditions of genuine uncertainty, without a community that models or validates what they are building. The participant's phrase, we built something new, is understated. It requires both partners to hold their own cultural assumptions lightly enough to be questioned, to tolerate extended periods of unresolved negotiation, and to maintain relational trust across the whole of it. As Kil et al. (2021) and Yurtaeva and Charura (2024) have observed, this kind of sustained cultural negotiation intensifies significantly with the arrival of children, whose care makes previously implicit cultural differences suddenly and unavoidably explicit.

The study's limitations are real. As a single-participant narrative inquiry, the findings reflect the experience of one individual and cannot be statistically generalized to the broader population of Dutch-Indonesian intercultural families. The participant's professional formation as a social worker specializing in mental health may have shaped her narrative in ways that are analytically productive but not representative of intercultural parents without that particular reflexive training. More significantly, the absence of the Indonesian partner's perspective constitutes a gap that cannot be compensated by the richness of the participant's account; the same negotiations she describes from her positionality would look and feel different from his, and that account deserves its own study. Future research engaging multiple intercultural couples, incorporating the voices of Indonesian partners and extended family members, and employing longitudinal designs capable of tracking how parenting negotiations evolve across children's developmental stages, would substantially deepen what the present inquiry has opened. Broader ethnographic attention to underrepresented Indonesian regional parenting traditions, including Acehnese, Bugis, and Batak contexts, would expand a literature that has concentrated too narrowly on Javanese cultural frameworks for too long.

5. Conclusion

This study examined how individualistic Dutch and collectivistic Lombok-Indonesian cultural values shape divergent child-rearing practices within an intercultural family, and how a parent embedded in both cultural worlds navigates those differences in everyday life. Across all seven thematic dimensions, the findings reveal a coherent and systematic pattern: Dutch practices consistently reflect orientations toward autonomy, professional expertise, and egalitarian co-parenting, while Lombok-Indonesian practices reflect collectivistic commitments to communal interdependence, traditional knowledge, and relational caregiving. The explanatory power of Hofstede's (2001) individualism-collectivism framework holds not only at the macro-comparative level but in the lived, negotiated experience of a single intercultural household.

Two contributions stand out. The study provides rare ethnographic documentation of Lombok-Sasak child-rearing, including the medaq au birth naming ceremony, contributing culturally specific knowledge to a literature that has long overlooked this context. It also demonstrates, through the participant's sustained account of intercultural negotiation, that what intercultural parents construct over time is neither one cultural model nor the other but something genuinely new a finding with direct relevance for social workers, family counselors, and early childhood practitioners supporting families navigating similar terrain. Future research engaging multiple participants, Indonesian partner perspectives, and longitudinal designs would build meaningfully on what this inquiry has opened.

6. References

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