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Nepotism

Burhan, O.K.

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Nepotism

Omar K. Burhan

Nepotism

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door

Omar Khalifa Burhan
geboren te Banda Aceh, Indonesia
in 1986

Promotor : Prof. Dr. D. T. Scheepers

Co-promotores : Dr. E. A. C. van Leeuwen

Commissieleden : Prof. Dr. C. K. W. de Dreu

Prof. Dr. A. C. Homan
(University of Amsterdam)

Dr. C. L. H. S. Remery
(Utrecht University)

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Foreword

The year was 1998. I was 11 years young when I was first exposed to the word “nepotism.” It was a chaotic period for Indonesians. Our country was on the brink of collapse due to a severe economic and political crisis. In some provinces, such as in Aceh, where my family and I resided, a militant separatist group emerged. As civilians, we were confused about whether to fear the separatists or the military. So, we avoided both. Public protests and demonstrations carried out by university students were a common scene throughout the country. In almost all of the protests the students carried a flag, with “anti-KKN” written on it – *Korupsi* (corruption), *Kolusi* (collusion), and *Nepotisme* (nepotism). I did not understand what these three words meant, but from the look of it, I knew that people were disgusted by these words.

Fast forward to 2012, we passed the economic crisis and the political climate was much “cooler”. We were in the global top 5 of most corrupted countries in 1998, but this time, our government was much “cleaner” according to Transparency International. However, I developed an impression that nepotism became more apparent than ever, especially when a case of corruption involving the Governor of Banten, Ratu Atut, became public headlines. What got me interested in Ratu Atut was not how much public funds she allegedly took from the people, but how Atut and her family became so powerful that they practically own the whole province of Banten. Initially, I thought about nepotism as a local phenomenon, something common in a developing society, until I read Adam Bellow’s book “In praise of nepotism.” I was struck by the fact that family ties in business and politics are also pervasive in the U.S.A, a nation I perceived to be so proud of its democracy. The more I read about nepotism, the more I felt a “tingle”. How could something that people view in a negative light at the same time appear to be so widespread and accepted? So, my journey to understand nepotism begun. This thesis presents the documentation of my journey. There is still much to learn, but it is a start, and I hope you enjoy the ride.

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