

ISEAS Series on Islam

MALAYSIA

Islam, Society and Politics

edited by
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CLIVE KESSLER

Some Biographical Reflections

NAOMI KRONENBERG

Clive Samuel Kessler, my brother, was born to Hannah and Albert Kessler in Sydney on 15 September 1942. Our father, Albert, had been born in Sydney in 1905 to Jewish immigrants from Poland. Hannah, also a Jew, was born in Germany in 1909. She met Albert in Antwerp during a business trip he made to Europe and they married, after a short courtship, in London in 1937. At the time of Clive's birth, World War II was raging. That dark backdrop to Clive's arrival, along with situations and events related to the conflict, was to have a profound influence on his formation as a scholar and a member of society.

It is an honour for me to have been asked by the editors of this volume to write a biographical piece about Clive. It has also been a considerable responsibility, as my wish to do him justice is greater than my capacity to do so. There are also more general issues facing the would-be biographer — issues such as scope and purpose, for example. The latter became a focal point for me in this project and

provided me with an organizing principle to use. The purpose of the chapter, I concluded, is to provide biographical material and observations on Clive, in order to shed light on his work and scholarly interests, as depicted in this *Festschrift*. My contribution, therefore, will describe and discuss a number of major themes in his life, rather than provide a strictly chronological and exhaustive list of his achievements and experiences. By selecting what I see as formative and indelible influences and vicissitudes, I hope to give the reader some flavour of what has shaped this exceptional and inspiring person. My purpose is to provide material which will add resonance to the reader's perusal of the other chapters in this commemorative volume.

Clive was named in honour of his maternal lineage (the family name, van Cleef, echoing in "Clive") and his paternal grandfather, Samuel Kessler, who had died some two years earlier. The Dutch, rather than the German, form of the prefix "van" points to the location of our mother's forebears in Ostfriesland, close to the Dutch border. The milieu into which Clive was born was, in many respects, typical of middle-class Sydney. We lived in a rented flat in Darling Point — a rather different suburb from the gentrified retreat it has since become but, nonetheless, with a beauty and graciousness then, which has been lost in its modern, gloating opulence. Our father worked in a small gem trading business, where he earned an adequate but not lavish income, which brought us a comfortable but unadorned standard of living. The business had been established by Albert's father. Unusually for that time, our mother worked in the business alongside our father and her remarkable energy and determination to participate in what was then a "man's world" had a profound influence on her children. Her efforts not only ensured that the family maintained its simple but independent place in the world, during the times when Albert was away serving in the Australian army, but her outlook and daily routines also registered a fundamentally important message in our minds about the equality of men and women (and, by extension, of all people). Married women working outside the home was not a commonplace occurrence in urban Australia in the 1940s. I recall that most of our female teachers in school were spinsters, perhaps because their sweethearts were away, serving in the Armed Forces, some never to