

## Annex

### **Citation on the 2021 NUS Singapore History Prize Winning Work**

***Leluhur: Singapore's Kampong Gelam***

**by Hidayah Amin**

Established in 2014, the NUS Singapore History Prize seeks to honour the best books in the history of Singapore, which are accessible to a wide audience of non-specialists; contribute to our appreciation of the human dimension of history; bring to light new information and insights into Singaporean history; challenge our pre-existing understanding of the past; and bring Singapore's history alive in new and exciting ways. The Prize aims, in short, to promote the most engaging works on the history of Singapore to a wide audience.

The 2021 Prize is awarded to Hidayah Amin for her book *Leluhur: Singapore's Kampong Gelam*.

In this elegantly crafted and well-researched book, Hidayah brings to light the history of one of the most fascinating districts of Singapore, Kampong Gelam. Named after the *gelam* tree, Kampong Gelam is one of the oldest and continuously inhabited settlements in Singapore. Hidayah paints a rich picture of the area, employing her study to challenge not only the traditional narrative that before Stamford Raffles arrived, this island was inhabited by a small number of sleepy Malay villages, but also the notion of what the word “kampong” connotes.

Hidayah demonstrates that for much of the period from the fourteenth century to the nineteenth century, pre-Raffles Singapore was cosmopolitan and dynamic. Far from being an island of sleepy Malay villages, Singapore often served as an entrepot of the Malay world. The Kampong Gelam area, in particular, was for long periods of time the hub of economic activities in this part of the world, connecting Singapore to the Malay Archipelago and beyond.

Hidayah likewise highlights an oft-forgotten fact: Singapore was, since the early 19th century, the intellectual and religious hub of the Malay world. The printing and publishing houses established in Kampong Gelam printed and disseminated Malay works throughout the region. The kampong was also the place where Muslim pilgrims from Singapore and across the region congregated before they made their way to Mecca.

Turning to the community living and working in Kampong Gelam, Hidayah is keen to tell the stories of whom she regards as her ancestors—*leluhur*. Born and raised in the district, she interweaves the stories of numerous individuals to create a unified tapestry of experiences from multiple viewpoints. Her focus ranges from the craftsmen and entrepreneurs to the restaurateurs and royals. She corrects popular misconceptions that the kampong was home only to the Malay aristocracy and community. She, in fact, fleshes out the sheer diversity of the Malay community, demonstrating that the Malay identity is itself composite, shaped by migrants from the Malay Peninsula, the various islands of the Malay Archipelago, as well as migrants from the Arab world, including Yemen. The Malays further lived and worked alongside people from the other ethnic communities in Singapore. Together they made the kampong a bustling and dynamic place—bound together by the spirit of *gotong-royong*.

Deftly weaving together academic, community, and personal history, Hidayah makes an important contribution to our understanding of the long history of Singapore. Her narrative renders Singaporean history more multidimensional and multifaceted. Her elegant prose, which is accessible and engaging to both the academically oriented scholar as well as,

importantly, the lay reader, is beautifully complemented by illustrations, maps, and photographs.

*Leluhur* is history at its best. At a time when works of history can often risk being confined to ivory tower academia, a book that challenges our collective notions of Singapore Malay history, while also appealing to non-specialists, is therefore particularly worthy of the Prize.