

## **'The Social and Material Life of Colonial Hotels: Comfort Zones as Contact Zones in British Colombo and Singapore, ca. 1870-1930' by Maurizio Peleggi *Journal of Social History***

In his paper Maurizio Peleggi (History) traces how colonial hotels functioned as unique sites of cross-strata social interaction during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

During the period 1870-1930, from the opening of the Suez Canal to the Great Depression, “European” hotels became a common fixture of the built and social landscapes of many colonial cities, and in particular of Colombo and Singapore, the two main ports-of-call along the Indian Ocean's navigational routes. Compared to travelers' lodgings previously available in the colonies, such hotels offered higher standards of comfort, and the possibility for their patrons to relive the metropolitan lifestyle, thus acting as localizers of modernity in the colonial milieu. Conversely, as sites of foreign capital accumulation that exploited indigenous labor, and as spaces of social definition where Westerners asserted their superiority over locals as much as class and national distinctions among themselves, hotels represented a microcosm of the colonial society. Colonial hotels were thus “comfort zones” as much as “contact zones” where different social, ethnic, and national groups interacted. Their history affords thus critical insights into not only the habits of consumption of a privileged colonial elite, but also the global circulation of consumer commodities and socio-cultural practices, as well as the daily interactions between colonizer and colonized, and between the different strata of the colonial society.

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