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Report on HSS-Sponsored Panel, “The Emergence of Racial Modernities in the Global South,” at the 2018 American Historical Association Meeting

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by Sebastián Gil-Riaño (University of Pennsylvania) and Sarah Walsh (Universidade de Lisboa)

Braving an extremely cold January weekend, a number of scholars gathered in Washington, DC to discuss race science in the Global South at the American Historical Association's 2018 Annual Meeting in a panel sponsored by the History of Science Society. Responding to the conference's larger theme of "Race, Ethnicity, and Nationalism in Global Perspective," Sebastián Gil-Riaño (University of Pennsylvania), Miranda Johnson (University of Sydney), Ricardo Roque (Universidade de Lisboa), and Sarah Walsh (Universidade de Lisboa) presented papers that examined the complex ways that scientific conceptions of race and ethnicity have been activated across the Global South in the twentieth century. The panel was especially meaningful as it marked the concluding event of the Australian Research Council Laureate Fellowship project "Race and Ethnicity in the Global South," whose director, Warwick Anderson (University of Sydney), served as chair.

The panel, "The Emergence of Racial Modernities in the Global South," was envisioned as an opportunity to reflect on, "the comparative and transnational dimensions of race science in the southern hemisphere...to show how the human sciences, including human biology, look different from southern standpoints." The four presenters were especially encouraged to consider the role of indigeneity and indigenous peoples in the Global South, "whether as the subject of attempted elimination or erasure, or as a legitimating constituent of modern racial formations, or as ambivalent and oppositional presence in modernizing programs." This emphasis on indigeneity was not simply a heuristic to create connections between scholars whose areas of expertise include the potentially disparate fields of the history of science and anthropology, indigenous studies, and Latin American history. Rather, the panel showed that across various regions the human sciences have played a similar role in simultaneously racializing and pathologizing indigenous peoples in settler societies while also providing tools for indigenous elites to discredit those claims.

The panel began with Sarah Walsh's presentation, titled "The Chilean Exception: Racial Homogeneity, Mestizaje, and Nationalism," in which she argued that the acceptance of race mixing among racial theorists, eugenicists, and physicians had the surprising result of contributing to a reframing and reinstatement of racial hierarchy in early twentieth-century Chile. By demonstrating how the myth of Chilean racial exceptionalism in the early twentieth century was predicated on the idea that some types of racial mixture were better than others, Walsh explained how multicultural settler societies have acknowledged the reality of racial mixture while maintaining belief in a racial hierarchy.

Miranda Johnson's presentation drew from her new research project examining the fashioning of identities and the making of racial subjects in the early twentieth century Pacific and focused on the conceptual and affective work conducted by a cohort of young, university-educated and professionally-trained Māori leaders. These founding figures of the "Young Māori Party" grappled with a demographic landscape in which the fate of the Māori population shifted from an expected decline and disappearance to a remarkable and rapid increase. In response, they sought to appropriate settler discourses of racial amalgamation to show that, as racially-mixed subjects, they were uniquely poised to become future-makers. At the same time, Johnson demonstrated how their enterprise was riddled with self-doubt, professional uncertainty, and cultural ambivalence.

Sebastián Gil-Riaño's paper examined debates sparked by an ambitious 1955 conference titled "Race Relations in World Perspective" held at the University of Hawai'i in Honolulu and how social scientists endeavored to turn race relations research into an international and value-neutral field of scholarly inquiry. The conference was organized by white sociologists who were graduates of the Chicago sociology department who imagined the meeting as a sober and objective counterpoint to the Bandung conference, which they described as driven by an overly affective and communist-leaning politics that risked unleashing, in their minds, a global tide of anti-white antagonism. However, as Gil-Riaño's analysis showed, Chicago sociologists' descriptions of Hawai'i as a model of interracial harmony and proposals for an international society made little mention of indigenous peoples and reveal the ways in which the anti-racist politics of social science during the Cold War was informed by orientalist and settler colonial perspectives.

In his presentation, Ricardo Roque focused on the Timorese field work conducted by Portugal's leading anthropologist during the first half of the twentieth century: António Mendes Correia. Correia was primarily a physical anthropologist, theorist, and self-described "armchair" scholar, yet in 1953 he took part in a major anthropological expedition sent by the Portuguese empire's Ministry of Overseas to the colony of East Timor. Correia's month-long sojourn in Timor afforded him with an opportunity to follow up on reports about an anomalous "red-haired race" living in the Timorese village of Aituha and during the month Correia spent on the island he did not concern himself with anthropometric measurements and instead put what little skill he had in field research to work in collecting origin stories from Timorese elders that sought to confirm this story. By demonstrating how Correia used ethno-historical methods to conceptualize racial origins, Roque invited us to think more carefully about the

ways in which twentieth-century race science has also appeared under the guise of ethnographic endeavors "aimed at recovering and interpreting indigenous oral traditions as biological ethnogeny."

Although the participants agreed that the panel was a success, they also regretted the fact that it marks an end to REGS (the name we used for our Australian Laureate project). Though REGS has ended in a formal sense we can take immense comfort in the fact that it has laid the groundwork for future collaborations and for continued exploration of what it means to study racial conceptions and the human sciences from the perspective of the Global South. We might also take inspiration from the fact that securing the legacy of REGS coincided with important institutional changes taking place within the American Historical Association. Indeed, a couple of weeks after our panel in frosty D.C., the *American Historical Review* published an essay titled "Decolonizing the *AHR*," which is now listed as its most read piece. In this essay, the *AHR*'s current editor Alex Lichtenstein acknowledged that when it comes to "decolonization" the *AHR* has a long way to go and that it is now time to take the risk of confronting its own "potential complicity" in the history profession's past lack of openness "to scholars and scholarship due to race, color, creed, gender, sexuality, nationality, and a host of other assigned characteristics"—which might also include geography. Lichtenstein's essay describes a series of actions that the *AHR* is taking in order to begin decolonizing, including diversifying its Board by expanding from thirteen to sixteen members and asking Board members to do outreach work in conferences such as the Berkshire Conference of Women Historians, the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association, the Association for the Study of African American Life and History, and the National Association of Chicana and Chicano Studies. As we learned during our time with REGS, decolonizing the ways we write, teach, and produce history is an ongoing process that requires sustained and difficult effort. At the same time, as the geographic, linguistic, and racial diversity of our panel topics attests, the work of decolonization benefits immensely from collaboration between scholars with differing regional, disciplinary, and theoretical standpoints and we hope that the Global South will continue to act as an organizing rubric for future work.