The Challenges of the First Black Political Party in Brazil: Seeking Alliances in Unsympathetic Territory

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Abstract

This paper examines the rapprochement between the first black political party in Brazil – Brazilian Black Front - and the fascist party - Brazilian Integralist Action - as a microcosm to assess the challenges faced by Afro-Brazilians in the initial stages of black political activism in the changing Brazilian political atmosphere in the 1930s. The mutual opposition to European immigration, the authoritarian inclinations in the leadership of both parties, and the failure of the other side of the political spectrum, led by the Communist Party, to address race, are the three suggested explanations to explain such political collaboration. This study demonstrates that the first Brazilian black political party faced a twofold challenge. At same time that it attempted to find its own political voice, it needed to assess the best alternatives to seek political coalitions in a setting still dominated by whites who were reluctant to acknowledge racial inequalities in Brazilian society.

Resumo

Este artigo examina a aproximação entre o primeiro partido político negro no Brasil - Frente Negra Brasileira - e o partido fascista Ação Integralista Brasileira como um microcosmo para avaliar os desafios enfrentados pelos afro-brasileiros nos estágios iniciais do ativismo político negro no ambiente político brasileiro na década de 1930. A oposição mútua à imigração europeia, as inclinações autoritárias na liderança de ambos os partidos e o fracasso do outro lado do espectro político, liderado pelo Partido Comunista, em abordar a questão racial, são as três explicações sugeridas para explicar tal colaboração política. Este estudo demonstra que o primeiro partido político negro brasileiro enfrentou um duplo desafio. Ao mesmo tempo em que buscava encontrar sua própria voz política, precisava avaliar as melhores alternativas para buscar coalizões políticas em um cenário ainda dominado por brancos que relutavam em reconhecer as desigualdades raciais na sociedade brasileira.

Brazilian politics is a realm largely dominated by white citizens. The road to black political participation is still in the making. The latest Brazilian census indicates that white politicians hold seventy-five percent of the seats in the lower house. Black political participation is even more underrepresented in the Brazilian Senate, where out of eighty-one Senators, only three declared themselves to be black.[1] These figures drastically contrast with the Brazilian demographics at large.[2] Eighty-nine years after the 1930 revolution that claimed to represent a new era in Brazilian politics, heralding promises of socioeconomic and political inclusion, the obstacles to black political participation still seem immense.

This study examines the surprising rapprochement between the *Frente Negra Brasileira* and the Fascist organization, the *Ação Integralista Brasileira* as a microcosm to assess the challenges faced by Afro-Brazilians in the initial stages of organized black political activism. The scrutiny of the collaboration between the first black political party and a Fascist party sheds light on the struggles of Afro-Brazilians to navigate the changing political atmosphere in the 1930s. At that time, Afro-Brazilians faced a twofold challenge. At the same time that they were attempting to find their own political voice, they needed to assess the best alternatives to seek political coalitions in a setting still dominated by whites who were reluctant to acknowledge racial inequalities in Brazilian society.

The 1930 revolution marked the onset of a political transition in Brazil. With the end of "coffee and milk politics", during which the *Paulista* and *Mineira* agrarian oligarchies dominated the political arena, Brazil provided a propitious environment for new additions to its party-system. *Paulista* and *Mineira* elites had a long history of exerting their economic power to control the political apparatus and to ensure the electoral triumph of their nominees. Brazilian politics at the federal level had thus been restricted to those who had connections to these oligarchical groups.[3] The renewed opportunities for political engagement in 1930 spurred alternative organizations seeking a share of the political void left by the dismantling of the previous political apparatus. It was under this political context that two political organizations emerge to represent a sheer novelty in Brazilian politics: the Brazilian Black Front and the Brazilian Integralist Action.[4]

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1 For a detailed examination of contemporary black political participation in Brazil see: Ollie Johson "Blacks in National Politics" in *Race, Politics, and Education in Brazil*. ed. Ollie Johnson (Palgrave Macmillian 2015).17:35.

2 The latest Brazilian census indicates the following Brazilian demographics: Whites 47%, Brown 44.5%, Blacks 7.5%, Yellows 0.5%, and Indigenous 0.25% For the full report access: https://ww2.ibge.gov.br/english/estatistica/populacao/censo2010/

3 The 1930 Revolution and its impacts on Brazilian society have produced voluminous literature. Some of the more compelling examinations are Thomas Skidmore, *Politics in Brazil: 1930-1964* (Oxford University, 1974) and Boris Fausto, *A Revolução de 1930* (Companhia das Letras, 1997).

4 Before the 1930s, with the exception of the Brazilian Communist Party that was created in 1922, political parties were regional, such as the *Partido Republicano Mineiro*, and the *Partido Republicano Paulista*, the two strongest political

Besides sharing the revolution of 1930 as their breeding ground, at first glance, these two organizations seem to have little in common. While *Integralistas* expressed their admiration of the Italian fascist government of Mussolini, *Frentenegrinos* advocated for the historical rights of black people. Moreover, taking into consideration that fascist racial ideology is rooted in the belief of Aryan race supremacy and repudiation of "crossbreeding with an extra European-race," any sort of collaboration between these two organizations would seem very unlikely.[5] However, despite their seemingly disparate origins and ideologies, the Brazilian Black Front and the Brazilian Integralist Action nurtured a mutual admiration that over the course of the 1930s brought them into collaboration.[6]

What led to the rapprochement between the Brazilian Black Front and the Brazilian Integralist Action? This essay suggests three explanations for this apparent anomaly. First, both political parties opposed what they viewed as a damaging foreign influence caused by government–sponsored European immigration. Second, there were authoritarian inclinations in the leadership of both parties. The third and final explanation is the initial failure of the other side of the political spectrum, led by the Communist Party, to address race, thus losing potential support of Afro-Brazilians. The task of convincing Afro-Brazilians that the acute racial inequality in Brazil was not primarily the product of a racist environment but one of a capitalist and exploitative economic system proved to be costly to the organization's objectives of attracting black supporters.

This essay relies on an examination of the political propaganda and other primary documents issued by both organizations with special attention to The Brazilian Black Front's newspaper, *A Voz da Raça,* and the Integralist Action's magazine, *Anauê!.* This study also explores the organizations' statements of purpose, and organizational charters, as well as photos, magazines, reports from Brazilian newspapers, and other records that are digitally available in Brazilian archives.

organizations. Getúlio Vargas, the principal leader of the 1930 Revolution, represented a coalition of regional political parties under the umbrella of the *Aliança Liberal.*

5 On July 14, 1938, a group of Italian intellectuals and university professors wrote the *Manifesto of Race.* This document laid the basis for the Italian racial laws of Mussolini´s regime. For more information on this manifesto see*:* Aaron Gillette, "The Origins of the Manifesto of Racial Scientists*" Journal of Modern Italian Studies.* vol. 6 (2001).305:323. As this study will discuss in more detail, *Integralistas* adopted a different stance than their European counterparts concerning race relations.

6 Some examples of how this collaboration played out are: the support of the Front's president, Arlindo Veiga dos Santos, for the Integralistas during the First Integralist Congress in 1934. Also, the publication of an article by Integralista leader Plinio Salgado in the Front´s newspaper, and the Front's adoption of the Integralistas' motto – Family, God, and Nation – with the addition of the word Race.

Race Relations in Brazil: A Thorny Matter.

Scholars invested in studying race relations in Brazil will often observe the recurring reluctance of Brazilian society to talk about it. The shameful past of slavery and salient racism after abolition is still a thorny subject that, to this day, frightens Brazilian politicians and the Brazilian community at large. When asked during presidential debates about the continuation of racial quotas at public universities, current Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro expressed his disapproval of such a policy arguing that it "divides the nation between whites and blacks".[7] Although still a contemporary phenomenon, Brazil's reluctance to acknowledge racism dates back to colonial times. While countries like the United States applied the "one drop rule," establishing that those with a single drop of African blood were to be considered black, in Brazil the Portuguese applied murky criteria to define blacks and whites.[8] This unclear racial classification adopted by the Portuguese still has present implications on how Afro-Brazilians define themselves. In Brazil, it is common for people of color to define themselves as the lighter-skin tone classification "moreno", thus posing major obstacles for Afro-Brazilians to claim their blackness and develop a racial identity.[9] The end of colonial rule (1822) might have symbolized the end of colonial subjugation for white Brazilians. Nonetheless, nothing altered the condition of black slaves who continued to live under this exploitative system until 1888, when Brazil became the last country in the western hemisphere to abolish slavery.

The epitome of the deleterious racial environment fostered since colonial times in Brazil was the period of the Old Republic (1889-1930). During these years, Brazilian political and intellectual elites openly advocated the plan of "whitening Brazil". This process was to be the consequence of two actions intrinsically related to each other. First, the state attempted to alter Brazilian demographics by boosting state-sponsored European immigration in tandem with banning the entry of peoples from Africa and Asia as decreed in the 1891 Constitution.[10] The second strategy was a byproduct of the former. It was rooted in the belief that the superiority of the Aryan race would prevail over lesser races, naturally

7 Folha de São Paulo, "Portugueses Nem Pisaram na África, Diz Bolsonaro Sobre Escravidão", Accessed April 1, 2019. https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2018/07/portugueses-nem-pisaram-na-africa-diz-bolsonaro.shtml

8 For a complete account on slavery in Brazil read the outstanding work by Katia M. de Queiroz Mattoso, *To Be a Slave in Brazil, 1500-1888*. (Rutgers University Press 1986).

9 Gladys Mitchell in her essay "The Politics of Skin Color in Brazil" points out that there is a marked pejorative connotation with the racial category *negro* (black) in Brazil. She argues that, as a result, people of African descent tend to identify themselves with the more ambiguous racial classification *moreno (brown).* Afro-Brazilians could profit from choosing a black identity and demanding racial equality.

10 For more information on the governmental policies of the Old Republic concerning immigration, see Edgar Carone, *A República Velha: Evolução Política*, (Difusão Européia do Livro 1975).

turning Brazil into a white nation.[11] As Oliveira Vianna, a theorist of the whitening ideal enthusiastically proclaimed in the 1920s, "This admirable flow of immigration not only helps to raise quickly the coefficient of the pure Aryan group in our country, but also by mixing and re-mixing with the mixed-blood (mestizo) population it helps, with equal speed, to raise the Aryan content of our blood" (Skidmore, 1993, p.202). Vianna was not alone in his assessment of the future of Brazilian racial composition. A large part of the intellectual elite from that era also shared Vianna's views on the future shifts in Brazilian demographics. However, the foreseeable outcome of their unfounded dreams of breeding a paler Brazilian race were soon evident. The Brazilian population remained highly racially diverse and racial tensions were accentuated in the years following the massive European immigration.

Who were the *Frentenegrinos and the Integralistas*?

The *Frente Negra* and the *Ação Integralista* represented a hybrid phenomenon in Brazilian politics. Never before, and never again, did Brazilian politics experience the rise of a black political group and a Fascist party. The 1930 revolution represented the cradle of the two organizations. The changing political milieu aroused expectations among Afro-Brazilians who felt the need to organize politically and clamored for their political inclusion in the hopeful future that the revolution seemed to embody. These sentiments among Afro-Brazilians led to the creation of the *Frente Negra Brasileira* (Brazilian Black Front), first as a civic organization and then as a political party. Originally headquartered in Brazil´s largest city, São Paulo, the Brazilian Black Front quickly expanded its membership, reaching thousands of members in diverse locations across Brazil.[12]

Regarded by scholars of Brazilian society as the most important black association in the nation's history, the Brazilian Black Front became the central vehicle of the black organized movement in Brazil.[13] In the year of its inception, the organization issued a statement of purpose describing the group as a "political and social union of all national black people", and listing its objectives as "the assurance of the historical rights of its

11 For a complete account on racial thought after abolition in Brazil see: Thomas Skidmore, *Black Into White: Race and Nationality in Brazilian Thought*, (Duke University Press 1993).

12 The exact numbers of FNB's membership are not available. While Petrônio Domingues estimates that the organization had more than 20,000 members, Florestan Fernandes set nation-wide membership as nearly 200,000 participants. The numbers of the São Paulo branch seem more reliable; both Gladys Mitchell and George R. Andrews estimate that between 6,000 and 8,000 took part in the São Paulo organization.

13 Historian Petrônio Domingues has devoted most of his academic career to studying the Brazilian black organized movements. He argues that no other black organization was able to mobilize the black Brazilian community to the levels of the Brazilian Black Front. His assertion is in line with other scholars of Brazilian race relations such as Florestan Fernandes, George Reid Andrews, and Teresa Maria Malatian (Domingues, 2007, p.107).

people", along with asserting claims to "their political and social rights".[14] With a broad agenda that stressed the importance of "educating, congregating, and orientating", the *Frente Negra Brasileira* sponsored a wide array of activities (Fernandes, 2007, p.46). Those initiatives ranged from the assemblage of a militia mirrored in the *Blackshirts* paramilitary organization of the Italian fascist party, the establishment of schools that provided free education to all ages, a theater group, a soccer team, a legal department, and medical care. Access to these services was not restricted to its members but to all needy people (de Oliveira, 2003).

Perhaps the area where the organization exerted the most impact was in education. Petrônio Domingues points out that the Front used education as its principal "weapon in the crusade against prejudices of race" and that the *Frentenegrina* leadership viewed schooling as the most conducive vehicle for socioeconomic ascendancy within the black community (Domingues, 2008, p.522). Domingues also notes that the organization did not merely use education as means to gather more members. The establishment of schools that aimed to educate the youth and the elderly were concrete measures taken by the organization to improve literacy levels among the black population. The Front's newspaper, *A Voz da Raça*, routinely addressed the matter of meager access to education among black Brazilians. Its issue of October, 28, 1933, urged black citizens to enroll their children in school to "provide their children with an education that matches their aspirations".[15] While these Front-sponsored educational efforts yielded significant results, the same cannot be said about its attempts to gain political representation. Historian George R. Andrews points out that "despite a long-term campaign to register its members as voters, the Front does not seem to have elected a single candidate during its seven-year existence" (Andrews, 1991, p.150). The Front's electoral failure is a solid piece of evidence of the hardships for Afro-Brazilians in playing an important role in Brazilian politics. These inconsequential electoral endeavors urged the Front to seek political alliances.

On what seems the opposite end of the political spectrum, Plinio Salgado, who was hoping to capitalize on the changing political scenario after the 1930 revolution, founded the Ação Integralista Brasileira in 1932, and set in motion one of the most peculiar political organizations in Brazilian history. To this point, Brazil had never witnessed the formation of an authoritarian conservative and fascist organization. Those who first see photos of the Integralist Movement routinely acknowledge the overt resemblance of the organization's aesthetics with European fascist parties. Brazilian *Integralistas* were required to wear their

14 *Diário Oficial de São Paulo*, São Paulo, Nov.4, 1931. https://www.jusbrasil.com.br/diarios/DOSP/1931/11/04
15 *A Voz da Raça*, October 28, 1933, p. 2.

green-shirted uniforms in official presentations and salute each other by raising an arm into the air. However, while on the surface Integralistas may appear a mere reproduction of European fascist parties, a closer look at the organization makes evident its emphasis on the pursuit of a Brazilian identity.

Historian Rogerio de Souza notes that a considerable share of the Integralist's symbolism represented a "abrasileiramento" of Mussolini and Hitler's semiotics**.** When raising their arms into the air Integralists would chant "Anuaê," an expression that in the *Tupi* indigenous ethnicity meant "my brother". This same indigenous word was the title for the Integralist´s magazine. *Integralistas* adopted the Greek letter sigma as their symbol. They contended that the use of the sigma, a Greek letter that in mathematics means "sum", represented the integration of all Brazilian social forces. This symbol was displayed on their flags, uniforms, and on the cover of their magazine.[16]

The idea of an "abrasileiramento" of European Fascism was not restricted to the visual realm. Fascism and its emphasis on nationalist practices laid the ideological foundations of the Integralist Party. Plínio Salgado ingeniously adapted Fascist European nationalistic discourse to suit his plans for Brazil. Salgado was an open admirer of Benito Mussolini. After a trip to visit him in Italy, Salgado expressed his excitement with Mussolini's government, "I left Italy with an action plan" (Salgado, 1932a, p.108). Salgado was convinced that Brazil needed "aggressive nationalism," and that he was the person who could lead the country to such an ideology (Trindade, 1974, p.83).

Another prominent Integralist leader, Miguel Reale, expressed similar affinities between his organization and European fascist groups, "There is nothing extraordinary about being Brazilians, and at the same time, embracing values that are also found in Fascist European movements" (Reale, 1936, p.13). One of the most respected scholars of the Integralist Action, Hélgio Trindade, argues that the organization bred in Brazil a hybrid political phenomenon. Integralists embraced Fascist ideas of "revolutionary and nationalist content" along with "a superior orientation of the state" (Trindade, 1974, p251).

While they extolled these virtues of fascism, Integralists believed that the state should be accountable to its citizens and guarantee that it would not "violate the fundamental rights of any individual" (ibid, p.252). This dubious approach to fascism is a recurrent theme in the history of the Integralists. At the same time that adherents praised European fascism

16 For more information on Integralist aesthestics and its use of progapanda see: Rogério Souza Silva, "A Política Como Espetáculo: A Reinvenção da HIstória Brasileira e a Consolidação dos Discursos e das Imagens Integralistas na revista Anauê!" *Revista Brasileira de História* 25 no. 50(July/Dec 2005): 61-95.

and asserted that Brazil could replicate some of its ideas, they repeatedly referred to the peculiarities of Brazil and insisted that they must be acknowledged in the development of any national plans.

Close the Gates: European Immigration, Anti-cosmopolitanism, and the Forging of a National Identity.

The first issue that demonstrates the rapprochement between the Front and the Integralist Action lies in their mutual unrest concerning the large numbers of European immigrants arriving in Brazil during the second half of the nineteenth-century. Although both *Frentenegrinos* and *Integralistas* protested against the massive influx of European labor, their motives arose from different concerns. *Frentenegrinos* resented the lack of opportunities offered to Afro-Brazilians in the fast-paced modernizing Brazil. While their ancestors had exhaustively labored for over four hundred years to build the nation, the newly arrived Europeans were reaping the benefits of racial discrimination. On the other hand, *Integralistas* nurtured an ambiguous relationship towards European immigrants. At the same time that the organization counted on substantial support among European immigrants, the party's project essentially carried a nationalist platform.[17]

Black Brazilians, especially in the state of São Paulo, began to perceive the massive importation of European labor as their main competitor for new opportunities resulting from efforts to industrialize Brazil. An outlet of the Brazilian black media, the newspaper *O Progresso*, criticized "the colonies of foreigners, who organize themselves and discriminate, permitting non-black Brazilians to join them and fearlessly proclaim our inferiority".[18] The Front's publication *A Voz da Raça* was also deeply critical of attempts to internationalize Brazil. In its issue of June 10, 1933, *A Voz da Raça* summoned Brazilians to "annihilate foreigners who want to rule in Our House".[19] This resentment towards foreigners led the Brazilian Black Front to endorse nationalist practices from its inception, and to formulate its status to ensure that the Front "would be rigorously Brazilian in character" (Andrews, 1991, p.153).1974 European laborers were not only robbing Afro-Brazilians of their share of the economic development spurred by industrial and urban initiatives but also hindering black Brazilians from attaining their national identity. By the 1930s, notions of scientific racism

17 For more information on the participation of Italian-descent members of the Integralist Action see: João Fabio Bertonha, "Entre Mussolini and Plínio Salgado: O Fascismo Italiano, O Integralismo, e o Problema dos descendentes de Italianos no Brasil", Revista Brasileira de História 21, no.40 (São Paulo 2001): 85-105. Hélgio Trindade also discuss the European origins of the *Integralistas*, including the German influences in the organization (Trindade, 1974)

18 "Preconceito não se justifica", *Progresso*, January 31, 1930 p.2

19 "A Afirmação da Raça" *A Voz da Raça*, June 10, 1933 p.1

within Brazilian society were withering away. The Front capitalized on this timing and began to champion a racial ideology that would stress the interracial character of Brazilian society.

Integralistas, while critical of European immigration, adopted a more cautious judgmental stance. As historian Hélgio Trindade noted in his examination of the social and ethnic origins of *Integralistas*, a vast majority of them were of European descent. His study observed that the "luso-brazilian ethnicity" prevailed among the high-ranking members, while those of German ancestry constituted a majority in the low-level militancy (Trindade, 1974, p.156). The major presence of members of European descent might have had an impact on the party's attitude towards immigration, making the leaders of the *Integralistas* approach the subject from a nationalist rhetoric rather than bluntly embracing xenophobic attitudes. Plínio Salgado, the party's principal leader, in an article published in the magazine *A Razão* titled "National Construction," set forth the three central themes of his nationalist ideology. Salgado argued that the Brazilian nationalist project was to be underpinned by "national unity, anti-cosmopolitism, and a national consciousness" (Salgado, 1932a, p.3). While the first premise emphasized the maintenance of territorial integration, a task that did not entail great effort in an age absent of internal territorial disputes, the other two were interwoven and expressed his contempt for seeking out Brazil's identity in foreign lands. Salgado frowned upon "the Brazilian elites, who assumed as the vectors of our political and constitutional evolution European ideas of liberty and democracy" (ibid). Salgado believed that Brazil, more than any other country, urged "high doses of nationalism, which represents the supreme salvation of all peoples" (ibid). Stanley E. Hilton noted how Integralist nationalism conflicted with "German cultural interests", as the paramilitary group of the *Integralistas* - the greenshirts -, imposed a cultural assimilation upon all its foreign members, forcing them to speak Portuguese and embrace Brazil as their new nation (Hilton, 1972, p.12).

While *Frentenegrinos* had primarily economic reasons to fear European immigration, as evidenced by the widespread preference for white workers and the oversupply of labor in Brazil, *Integralistas* held different apprehensions. The economic aspect of the European influx did not constitute a major threat for them, since the Integralist party was essentially a white organization and its members could compete with newly arrived Europeans for job opportunities on an equal or superior basis. The Brazilian elites' search for their roots and essence in foreign lands was viewed by the *Integralistas* as a major obstacle to the forging of a national identity. If Brazil were to develop any sense of nationalism, Integralists argued, it would have to look inward and seek traits of identity in its national traditions. Brazil

otherwise, was destined to become a nation without any traces of "a collective sentiment" that served national interests.[20]

The *Integralistas* emphasis on nativist searches for a Brazilian identity had strong appeal among *Frentenegrinos* since inevitably any inward-pursuit of the Brazilian character would have to acknowledge the role of Afro-Brazilians. The *Integralistas'* exaltation of all that was legitimately Brazilian compelled the organization to address not only the much-avoided debate of race, but more importantly to the *Frentenegrinos*, it also addressed the main ethnic elements that constituted the Brazilian race. The October, 1937, issue of the *Integralistas'* magazine *Anauê!* published a drawing depicting three men along with a woman with the title "Integralism Unifies all Races".[21] Each man represented a different racial category; an indigenous individual shared the drawing with a black and a white person. The same drawing presents a single white woman, who although outnumbered in the illustration, served the organization claims of gender inclusive nature.[22]

Thus, a shared contempt for what was foreign, although for disparate reasons, brought the two organizations closer and compelled a white-based organization to more fully address the issue of race. Although lacking a more substantial plan of action to delineate how their nationalist project would deal in practical terms with the acute racial inequality, *Integralistas'* acknowledgement of the Afro-Brazilian contribution to the Brazilian identity might have been sufficient to attract the attention of *Frentenegrinos*, who were pleased to find another voice challenging the "Europeanization" of Brazilian society. Despite their different motivations, the recognition of both organizations that European immigration constituted a threat played a central role in their collaboration. *Integralistas* needed the support of black Brazilians to claim their racial inclusiveness and legitimize their nationalist rhetoric. On the other hand, *Frentenegrinos* could profit from their association with this emerging political force and exert their influence on the Integralist party to pass their demands for equal opportunities.

Discipline, Authority, and Hierarchy

The second explanation for the proximity between *Frentenegrinos* and *Integralistas* addresses the authoritarian tendencies of both parties' principal leaders and how their

20 Plinio Salgado, "A Constução Nacional", *A Razão*, April 22, 1932.
21 Revista Anauê!, October 1937, year III, no.20, p.1.
22 For more information on women's participation in the Integralist Action see: Lilian Tavares de Barros Ferreira "A Imprensa Feminina da Ação Integralista Brasileira: Algumas Funções Poliiticas e Sociais das Blusas Verdes Representadas na Revista Brasil Feminino", *XXIX Congresso Nacional de História*, 2007.

overall taste for authority, hierarchy, and discipline were elements embodied in the organizational framework of their organizations. Dr. Arlindo Veiga dos Santos, the Front´s first president, and Plínio Salgado, the supreme *Chefe* of the *Integralistas*, are two of the most enigmatic political leaders in Brazilian history. Even though their origins were entirely dissimilar, by the 1930s they both nurtured an appreciation for authoritarian regimes and disdain for cosmopolitism.

Plínio Salgado ruled the Integralist Action as its supreme leader during its entire existence. Scholarly works on Plínio Salgado have placed great relevance on his travels to Europe in the early 1930s as pivotal in the maturation process of his political ideologies (see: Gonçalves, 2014; Bertohna, 2000). It was during this European tour that Salgado manifested his admiration for the Mussolini regime and its accomplishments. In a letter dated July 4, 1930, Salgado writes to a friend, "I am convinced that Brazil cannot continue living this comedy of democracy" (Salgado, 1935, p.15). In an article in the magazine *Hierarchia* titled "Como Vi a Itália" in 1932, Salgado concludes that the solution for Brazil lay in the development of a "nationalism that imposes order and discipline in the countryside, imposing our hegemony in South America" (Salgado, 1932a, p.108). Salgado was critical of multi-party systems and in an article published in *A Razão* advocated for the "extinction of all political parties" and the "implementation of a single-party state" (Salgado, 1932b, p.2).

His authoritarian political views were embodied in the hierarchical structure of the Integralist Action. Hélgio Trindade in his examination of the organizational framework of the *Integralistas*, described the degree of power granted to this position: "The organization's charter assigned him the complete and indivisible administration of the movement, making his authority centralized, total, and permanent".[23] The permanent character of his role exposed the party's disdain for alteration in power and democratic values. No one in the party had the liberty to question the authority of the party´s president, and all members had to pledge absolute submission to the *Chefe*. New *Integralista* militants were compelled to swear before a portrait of their National Leader that they would work for the Brazilian Integralist Action and carry out their assigned work without questioning the orders of the National Chief. Article four of the organization's bylaws stated that the *Chefe* would "control the entire party, being in charge for all its local branches through the command of the National Departments", exposing the centrality of power held by his position (Trindade, 1974, p.172). The totalitarian dimension of his position signified that the *Chefe* as the commander in chief of the *Integralistas* was responsible for defining the political and ideological action of the party (ibid). Plínio Salgado drew up the party's bylaws with the

23 "Estatutos da A.I.B", article 4, *Monitor Integralista* (May 1934).

clear intent of granting his position unchecked powers and making him more than just a human being but the "incarnation of the *Integralista* ideals" (ibid, p173).

Dr. Arlindo Veiga dos Santos (1902–1978), a poor black young man in the state of São Paulo who lived through the years of advocacy for "whitening" policies, despite all odds, was able to get an education and at an early age started to show signs of his journalistic and literary talents (Domingues, 2006). Veiga dos Santos continued his schooling and received his bachelor's degree in philosophy and literature in 1926. He voiced his preference for monarchy as the superior form of political organization and his conservative views of society in an article published in the black newspaper *O Clarim*, "family is constituted by the union between a man and a woman with their children, under a patriarchal system. Family is the prototype of a political society or the most perfect state, namely – monarchy".[24] Given his humble background, it is puzzling that Veiga dos Santos embraced such a conservative vision of authority and hierarchy. Historian Petrônio Domingues noted that the information on the personality and personal life of Veiga dos Santos is scanty, which hinders a more comprehensive analysis of how his life experiences molded his political ideologies (Domingues, 2006, p.522). Since by the 1930s any ideas of reinstating a monarchy were practically nonexistent, Veiga dos Santos turned his intellectual activity to promoting the establishment of a totalitarian state. He despised democratic institutions, elections, political parties, communism, and imperialist capitalism. He was a fervent nationalist, and many of his writings featured xenophobic content (ibid, p.523).

The totalitarian governments taking root in Germany and Italy were observed with appreciation by Veiga dos Santos. For him, the eventual deprivation of individual liberties and unequal treatment towards specific racial groups, introduced by Hitler and Mussolini, were justifiable under the banner of nationalism. In a 1933 article in *A Voz da Raça*, titled "Basta de Exploração!", he enlightened his readers as to how Hitler's government could provide a viable avenue for political change in Brazil: "Why do we need to care if Hitler does not want any African blood in his land? This exclusively demonstrates that the New German is proud of its race. We also, as Brazilians, have our own race" (ibid). In the same text, he advances his contempt for immigration: "We oppose the importation of foreign blood" (ibid). European fascist groups provided Veiga dos Santos with a model that could be adapted to the Brazilian reality. For him, little mattered if these same groups discriminated against people of African descent. If Hitler and Mussolini promoted the

[24] *O Clarim*, October 1926, p.4.

Aryan race in their lands, Brazil had to follow the same example for its particular reality. Thus, Brazilians must embrace the "Mestizo and Black" as the true Brazilians (ibid).

The Front and the Integralist Action also shared a rigid organizational framework and preference for discipline and political authoritarianism. Petrônio Domingues described The Front's "diversified and complex" political and administrative structure, in which a "centralization of power and a rigid hierarchical structure" prevailed (Domingues, 2008, p.520). Twenty *Frentenegrinos* made up the "Grand Council", a top-level administrative team "whose members received military titles like major and colonel" (Alberto, 2011, p.135). Nominations for this restricted group came almost exclusively from appointments made by the Front's president. Below the highest cell within the organization was the "Auxiliary Council", which constituted mid-ranking members that had as one of their main tasks to carry out military training in The Front's paramilitary force. People of poor origins and manual laborers made up the largest portion of the Front's membership. Notwithstanding, top-level positions were filled by blacks in the middle of the social strata who could envision some sort of socioeconomic ascendancy. This intellectual and social divide eventually resulted in a feeling of bitterness with less educated members who resented the "class exclusivity" within the organization. The social rift within the Front was evidenced in an article published in *A Voz da Raça* in 1935: "there exists in the Front a block of blacks who are convinced that they are better than us".[25]

The *Integralistas*' organizational framework also placed power in the hands of a few individuals through a very rigid hierarchical structure, markedly inspired by Fascist models (Trindade, 1974, p172). The *Integralistas*' charter, devised in the Vitoria Congress, established that at the apex of the organizational pyramid resided the uncontested presence of the National Leader. Right below the supreme figure of the *Chefe* there was a National Council whose main task was to advise the president. The next layer of authority was composed of six National Departments that embodied the executive sphere of the organization.[26] *Integralistas* deemed that respect for authority, which in their particular case was embodied in the figure of the National Leader, was central to ensuring individual liberties. Article 3 of the organization's charter stated that "Integralism regards authority as the unifying force that ensures the balance and convergence of all individual wills".[27] A document titled "Protocols and Rituals of the Brazilian Integralist Action" defined an Integralist as "a free

25 "Por Acaso" *A Voz da Raça* (August 31, 1935): 1.
26 For a complete description of the attributions of the six national departments see; Trindade, *Integralismo*, 181.
27 For access to the entire Integralistas' charter see: http://www.integralismo.org.br/?cont=123#.XLNNbjBKjIU

man who sacrifices his personal points of view, his time and his interests, to submit himself to a discipline that envisions the Nations' greatness".[28]

Integralistas and *Frentenegrinos* were the two most similar organizations in Brazil in the 1930s in terms of the authoritarian character of their leadership and the hierarchical order of their organizational frameworks. The parallels between *Frentenegrinos* and *Integralistas* demonstrate that it was natural for the two organizations to realize these similarities. The reciprocal recognition of their similitudes led the two organization to the path of a political rapprochement.

Class versus Race: The Communist Dilemma

The final reason for the collaboration between *Frentenegrinos* and *Integralistas* was the initial failure of The Brazilian Communist Party (BCP) to address the issue of race. The slow move from a discourse utterly grounded in an anti-imperialist agenda based on a class hierarchy, to a more encompassing examination of the Brazilian society that recognized race as an integral element in the acute social inequalities in the country, partially explains what brought the *Frente Negra Brasileira* closer to the Integralist Action than to the Communist Party. The Brazilian Communist Party held the tools to become the most conducive channel for Afro-Brazilian's political integration. Communist claims that an unjust system created deplorable working and living conditions for the poor had great potential to resonate among Afro-Brazilians, as the group occupying the bottom of the social stratum. However, the delay of Brazilian Communists in recognizing that, to become a mass-based party, it would have to add a new layer of racial ideology to its political philosophy cost the organization the potential support of Afro-Brazilians.

The years of *Frente Negra Brasileira's* activism paralleled with the epoch when the Communist Party was taking the first steps to incorporate race into its political platform. The Brazilian Communist Party emerged nearly a decade before the inception of the Brazilian Black Front and the Integralist Action. In March 1922, the city of Niterói in the state of Rio de Janeiro hosted the first Brazilian Communist Congress. This date was strategic to the organization's goal of meeting all requirements to ensure its participation in the IV International Communist Congress taking place later in the same year. In this Congress, the Brazilian delegation offered a historical analysis of Brazilian society. In this presentation, the only time that the Brazilian entourage addressed the issue of race was to

28 "Protocolos e Rituais da A.I.B.", article 11, *Monitor Integralista* (April 1937).

deny the existence of racial conflicts in Brazil. They portrayed the country as a nation where "there is no religious or race discrimination, people of all races and religions, live without any fear that their racial or religious differences will bring them apart" (Sotero, 2015). The participation of Afro-Brazilians in the Brazilian Communist Party was examined by sociologist Edilza Sotero. She noted that in the first six years of the organization, she could not "find any information on the Brazilian Communist Party that indicated the existence of a specific organization within the party for the promotion of Afro-Brazilian activism" (ibid, p.195).

The fast-paced growth of the Brazilian black movement, epitomized by the creation of the *Frente Negra Brasileira*, was addressed in a report issued by the Cominterm South American Bureau in 1931. This same document noted that Brazilian Communists were failing to gather new members among black organizations, "In all its existence, the Brazilian Communist never took any direct action to penetrate black social clubs and cultural organizations with the goal of earning the support of this mass of workers".[29]This report illustrates the difficulties of the BCP in navigating the new political atmosphere generated by the 1930 revolution. Its emphasis on anti-imperialism and opposition to a capitalist system was not encompassing enough to convince Afro-Brazilians who were eager to demand racial equality and to profit from the new avenues to be politically active in the early 1930s.

Eventually, the BCP would realize that in order to gain more substantial support from Afro-Brazilians, its political platform had to be more comprehensive and give the proper attention to how the process of nation building of the Brazilian state was grounded in a racial hierarchy. However, the slow learning curve of the BCP concerning race relations in Brazil cost the party valuable time. Economist Pedro Calvas Chadarevian studied the BCP's contribution to examinations of racism in Brazil. Although his overall conclusion is that the Brazilian Communist Party "despite the limits that its Marxist-Leninist approach" was able to elaborate did not result in "a critical appraisal of racism", he demonstrates that Brazilian communists took valuable years to develop an articulated and complex interpretation of the role of race in the making of Brazilian society (Chadarevnian, 2012, p.255). Chadarevian argues that the years between 1922 and 1933 are marked by an indifference concerning racial issues by the Communist Party. He notes that it is only in 1934 that the BCP underwent "a profound inflexion in its theoretical framework, and began to harshly criticize the condition of blacks and indigenous people in the Brazilian society"

[29] *Teses do Bureau Sul-Americano Sobre a Situação do Brasil e as Tarefas do Partido Comunista*, 1931 (Coleção Internacional Comunista, Arquivo Unicamp/São Paulo).

(ibid, p.256). It was also in 1934 that Brazilian communists called on the support of *Frentenegrinos*. A pamphlet issued by the communists urged black laborers to seize the leadership of the *Frente Negra* and join their fellow white workers in the struggle against imperialism (ibid, p.264).

Thus, besides facing the challenge of convincing Afro-Brazilians that their struggle was the result of a system grounded in a class hierarchy rather than a racial order, the BCP had to adapt the universal idea of communism to the Brazilian reality in order to avoid the charge of embodying a foreign political ideology. The Brazilian Black Front viewed communism as another manifestation of foreign domination. This same sentiment had been expressed a few years before the creation of the Brazilian Black Front by another black newspaper, *O Clarim da Alvorada*, declaring that "Communism is a white thing, therefore it does not belong to the issue of the black race".[30] Despite the open admiration for European fascism, *Frentenegrinos* maintained that communists were advocating a foreign political philosophy in a country in desperate need for national solutions. George R. Andrews notes that "its leaders called for a hard nationalist campaign, against the foreign or semi-foreign slime that engineers divisions, Bolshevism, Socialism, and other vile and infamous things" (Andrews, 1991, p.153). *Frentenegrinos* even urged Brazilian president, Getúlio Vargas, to "close the doors of Brazil to foreigners for twenty years of more" (ibid).

Frente Negra´s newspaper *A Voz da Raça*, warned its members that the communist call was a move to create dissent within the organization.[31] Attacks on communism were a recurrent topic in the pages of *A Voz da Raça*. *Frente Negra's* leadership accused communists of being traitors and enemies that served foreign interests.[32] In 1936, *A Voz da Raça* published an article written by the leader of the Front's militia, Pedro Paulo Barbosa, titled "The Red Menace", in which Barbosa alerted *Frentenegrinos* about Russian ambitions to implement a communist regime in Brazil.[33] Nonetheless, the communists' strategy to create dissent within the *Frente Negra Brasileira* was not a complete debacle. Some *Frentenegrinos,* who were discontented with the authoritarian and right-wing inclinations of the Front´s leadership, departed the organization and created the Black Club of Social Culture and the Black Socialist Front.

30 *O Clarim da Alvorada*. (September 1929): 1.
31 *A Voz da Raça* (October 1934): 3.
32 "É o Cúmulo", *A Voz da Raça* (January, 1934):1. "O Momento Político", *A Voz da Raça* (August 1937):4.
33 "O Perigo Vermelho", *A Voz da Raça* (November 1936):1.

Conclusion

Despite the seemly implausible rapprochement between the Brazilian Black Front and the Integralist Action, *Frentenegrinos* found *Integralistas* compelling due to their mutual distaste for European immigration and admiration for authoritarianism. Moreover, the communists' slow-paced acknowledgement of the importance of race impaired early communist attempts to secure significant support from Afro-Brazilians. The three suggested explanations to understand the political proximity between *Frentenegrinos* and *Integralistas* demonstrate how restricted the avenues for political integration for Afro-Brazilians were in Brazil during the 1930s.

Frentenegrinos were not primarily motivated to collaborate with *Integralistas* because this party was proposing a progressive racial agenda. Although *Integralistas* acknowledged the relevance of the black race in the formation of the Brazilian identity, no specific information discussing how the party would fight against racial inequality is found in the *Integralistas*' records. *Frentenegrinos* endorsed *Integralistas* as a conduit to advance their own agenda. Ideological congruence was not the bonding element between the two organizations. Their association follows the pattern of many other political collaborations found in Brazilian political history. *Frentenegrinos* and *Integralistas* attempted to profit from each other to carry out their own political agenda. As the first black political party in Brazil, the Front was aware of the difficulties in claiming higher political participation without a political alliance with a white-based group. The anti-foreign political ideologies discourse of the *Integralistas* found a receptive ear among the racial group that was most affected with the massive influx of European labor.

The *Integralistas* had much to gain with the endorsement by the *Frente Negra Brasileira*. Their nationalist discourse, which stressed the need for Brazilians to search inward for its national identity gained greater legitimacy by having the support of Afro-Brazilians. Both organizations were thirsty for a share of the political void caused by the dismantling of the political apparatus after the 1930 revolution.

As for the reasons that the Front did not opt for the leftist spectrum to claim Afro-Brazilians' their due political integration, the answer seems to lie in the delay of the communists in broadening their political platform. Only after the creation of the Front did the BCP begin to propose a more progressive racial agenda, and recognize that a solution solely grounded in the replacement of the economic system would not resonate among Afro-Brazilians. Had Brazilian communists adopted a different strategy, they might have been able to gain the support of *Frentenegrinos* from the outset. It is important to note that,

eventually, left wing political parties became the most conducive vehicle for black political integration. Besides the BCP, which after 1940 started to count on a more robust black participation, more contemporary left wing political parties such as the *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (Workers Party) and the *Partido Democratico Trabalhista* (Democratic Labor Party) became known for electing some of the most important black politicians in Brazilian history.

Perhaps the fundamental lesson to be drawn from the rapprochement between the *Integralistas* and the *Frentenegrinos* is that the avenues for black political integration were laborious and limited in Brazil in the 1930s. On the ideological level, the *Frente Negra* had to face a polarized political milieu in which a fascist right wing group and the labor-based Communist Party represented conducive channels for political integration. Still lacking a more mature political philosophy, the Front supported the group that made the banning of European immigration one of its main demands. On a more practical level, despite substantial efforts to register its members to vote, the Front ended in 1937 without being able to elect a single candidate. Notwithstanding its electoral failures, the legacy of the *Frente Negra Brasileira* to fight racial discrimination and to educate black Brazilians that political activism was an important tool to improve their role in Brazilian society has been widely acknowledged by scholars.

Moreover, the Front's endorsement of the *Integralistas* forced left wing organizations to address the issue of racial inequalities. It was the realization that labor-based parties were unable to mobilize support among the black population that drove them to reassess their strategies and include the race issue into their political platforms. Thus, the association between *Frentenegrinos* and *Integralistas* catalyzed an unplanned political mobilization to include race as an integral element in the political ideologies of organizations that, until then, paid very little attention to this matter.

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