



“Sheltering, educating and guiding for life”: the Eunice Weaver Preventorium and the professional schooling of daughters/sons of leprous parents (Araguari, MG, 1952–65)¹

“Acolher, educar e encaminhar na vida”: o preventório Eunice Weaver e a formação escolar profissional de filhas/filhos de pais/mães hansenianos (Araguari, MG, 1952–65)

“Acoger, educar y orientar para la vida”: el Preventório Eunice Weaver y la escolarización profesional de hijas/hijos de padres/madres leprosos (Araguari, MG, 1952–65)

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Abstract

This study addresses professional schooling at the Eunice Weaver Preventorium in Araguari city, state of Minas Gerais. The research was based on the following questions: how did the preventorium come into being? How were admissions and releases processed? How were the experience of admission and consequences characterized? The study's aims were to characterize the origin of the preventorium as institution and to understand the admission process. This is a historical, documentary and empirical research aligned with the history of educational institutions in Brazil, the sources of which were newspapers, laws and interview transcripts. It covers a period going from 1952 (preventorium opening) to 1965 (release of a group of siblings admitted in 1959). Three sisters were interviewed. The analysis followed three categories: *antecedents*, *daily life* and *consequences related to admission*. The results allow us to question discourses about preventorium residents receiving treatment that would alleviate the distance from their families and the lack of affection and love. Instead, what they received was punishment and humiliation, in addition to unpaid work.

Keywords: Preventorium; Leprosy; Admission; Professional school training.

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Resumo

Este estudo aborda o ensino profissional no Preventório Eunice Weaver de Araguari, MG. A pesquisa partiu destas questões: como foi a gênese do preventório? Como se processaram internações e saídas? Como se caracterizava a experiência de internação e consequências? Os objetivos foram *caracterizar* a gênese do preventório e *compreender* o processo de internação. Trata-se de pesquisa histórica documental e empírica alinhada na história das instituições escolares cujas fontes foram jornais, leis e transcrição de entrevista. O recorte temporal vai de 1952 (inauguração do preventório) e 1965 (saída do grupo internado em 1959). Foram entrevistadas três irmãs. A análise seguiu categorias *antecedência*, *cotidiano* e *consequência* relativas à internação. Os resultados permitem pôem em xeque discursos sobre internos/internas terem tratamento que amenizaria a distância da família e a falta de carinho e amor. O que tiveram foram castigo e humilhação, além de trabalho não remunerado.

Palavras-chave: Preventório; Hanseníase; Internação; Formação escolar profissional.

Resumen

Este estudio se centra en la educación con fines profesionales en el Preventório Eunice Weaver, una institución dirigida a hijos de padres emadres leprosos situada en la ciudad de Araguari, MG. Su punto de partida fueron las siguientes preguntas: ¿cómo surgió el preventorio? ¿Cómo eran el internamiento y la liberación? ¿Cómo fue la experiencia de ser internado y sus consecuencias? El estudio pretendió caracterizar la génesis del preventório y comprender el proceso de internamiento. Derivó de una investigación histórica documental y empírica aliñada en la historia de las instituciones escolares en Brasil. Sus fuentes principales incluyeron noticias de periódicos, leyes y transcripciones de entrevistas. Abarca un período comprendido entre 1952 (apertura de la institución) y 1965 (liberación de niños ingresados en 1959). Fueron entrevistadas tres hermanas. El análisis consideró como categorías los *antecedentes*, la *vida cotidiana* y las *consecuencias del internamiento*. Los resultados cuestionan los discursos acerca de que los internos recibían un tratamiento que aliviaba el alejamiento de sus familias y la falta de afecto y cariño. En su lugar, lo que recibían eran castigos y humillaciones, así como trabajo no remunerado.

Palabras clave: Preventório; Lepra; Internación; Formación profesional.

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Introduction

In November 2023, Brazil's president, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (Labor Party), signed a federal law that guarantees the right to compensation for children of leprous parents who were taken away from family care to be put under institutional care. As compensation, the law establishes a lifelong pension of one minimum wage per month (Brazil, 2023). Looking back, news on this law came after publication of several cases involving the claim for rights by people who have such social profile. Represented by associations and the like, these people agreed to talk to the press, which echoed accounts of different kinds of child abuse, family alienation, and attitudes of questionable arbitrariness. It is stories of sadness and suffering, evoked by memories that come to light through great emotional effort². It is no coincidence that these people see the abovementioned law as a victory. Since their parents suffered from leprosy, most of them lived their childhood, adolescence and youth in an institution called preventorium. The institution's origins date back to the second half of the 1930s, while its expansion occurred mostly in the 1940s and 50s.

Such social context permeates this study, which approaches its main subject in a more historical-educational way. It is thought, discussed and analyzed regarding the relationships between the preventorium (as child care institution) and professional education (vocational education and training) aimed at children and adolescents as part of an assistance "policy" to people who used to live in such place and who sooner or later would become homeless, be thrown onto the streets in some way. Given the intentions of this text and its editorial guidelines, the study focuses on a single institution and the experience of six siblings from the same family who lived and studied in the Eunice Weaver Preventorium, in Araguari city, state of Minas Gerais. They were admitted in 1959 and remained there until 1965 as residents.

This study presents results of a historical-educational research on the experience of six sisters and brothers as knowledge useful to the understanding of how it was the experience of being admitted and staying as well as of the professional learning and its consequences for their lives after leaving the preventorium. This experience is discussed here by taking into account memories from the experience of living in such boarding institution, above all of three sisters who kindly agreed to share their memories of their life there. By putting their story in the foreground, this study takes what they have to say as a matter of understanding and historical interpretation of how professional education was in the preventorium and the process of children institutionalization; in other words, it deals with professional education as part of a social assistance policy instead of an educational one.

In fact, understanding the experience of those sisters and brothers as protagonists of the history we're trying to write here requires delving into a larger historical field. It's the one regarding Araguari's preventorium as an institution encompassing public health, epidemic diseases, and social assistance. Therefore, the text goes into a certain level of understanding of the national and regional context to show the movement around assistance to the so-called childhood of leprosy. The focus is on four interconnected cities where it was decided for the compulsory preventorium admission of children of leprous parents who were to be equally isolated in leprosaria. These cities are Araguari, Ituiutaba, Uberaba, and Uberlândia. While Araguari was chosen to be where the preventorium would be built, the other three would have

² Some examples of news on the fight for social justice are the following: "Filhos de pessoas isoladas em colônias de hanseníase lutam por reparação", de 2018 [<https://www.brasildefato.com.br/2018/06/11/filhos-de-pessoas-isoladas-em-colonias-de-hansenias-lutam-por-reparacao>]; "Separados dos pais que estavam isolados em leprosários, filhos buscam indenização na Justiça", de 2019 [<https://g1.globo.com/ciencia-e-saude/noticia/2019/12/20/separados-dos-pais-que-estavam-isolados-em-leprosarios-filhos-buscam-indenizacao-na-justica.ghtml>]; "Órfãos de pais vivos: conheça a história dos filhos separados de pais com hanseníase", de 2023 [<https://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/saude/noticia/2023-11/filhos-de-isolados-por-hansenias-no-passado-vaoreceber-pensao>].

related institutions to identify local cases and recommend children. They include a federal prophylaxis service as the one created in Ituiutaba as well as local civil society groups of aid linked to a national federation. Such groups and the federation acted as agents of philanthropic measures such as identifying and recognizing people with leprosy and their families, taking action to remove them from the community, and taking the initial steps to recommend children to the preventorium.

Given these contextual elements, this study presents a research that started with the following questions: how did the Araguari preventorium come into being as a regional unfolding of a national campaign? How did the admission and the release (deinstitutionalization) take place? How the experience of admission may be characterized and what consequences did it have on the lives of former residents?

With the aim of making sense of the social reality behind these questions, it was defined the overall research aim — to *describe* contextually the regional implementation of a national childcare policy — and two specific aims — to characterize the coming of the Araguari preventorium accordingly to subjects, actions, and articulations between the State and civil society, in addition to the responsibilities and material conditions of its existence; to *understand* the recommendation and admission process (conditions and methods), the daily experience within the preventorium, the release from it and its consequences for the lives of those who left: their place in society, the rebuilding of family, emotional and work relationships, which means group and personal.

As it can be inferred, research aims and questions reveal a looking of two perspectives at the Eunice Weaver Preventorium: an external view — on its condition of being part of social and public political phenomena; an internal view — on its functioning and daily existence. With the second view one tries, too, to go further by penetrating the subjectivity of the institutionalized subjects: the people who can recreate the “inside” of the preventorium as a care and sheltering institution where all was different: routines and times, actions, practices procedures, among other points.

This work stems from a documentary and empirical historical research placed within the recent history of Brazilian education, with a focus on the educative institutions. From this larger historical research field, we derived themes in the history of the female professional education, which we’ve been studying since 2016 as part of a broader research project³. As historical research, this study draws on verbal sources, analyzed in light of the discourse analysis⁴ as method to make a historical-interpretative reading through a critical-analytical reading. In dealing with the sources (contextualizing and relating them to municipal, regional and national dimensions), it was important to associate professional education and (working-class families’) children segregation (institutionalization) to ideals of Getúlio Vargas government, which not only approved the preventorium system, but also encouraged it to some extent within philanthropy groups.

Textual sources come both from face-to-face interviews and from newspapers and magazines pertaining to the Hemeroteca collection of Brazilian National Library’s. Three sisters were interviewed without prior script/questionnaire, but with audio recording. The transcription became the historical evidence (Meihy, 2002)⁵. During the analysis of sources, it was sought the discourses (Orlandi, 2001; Maingueneau, 1997; Fairclough, 2008) permeating the circumstances of Araguari preventorium creation and operation, as well as

³ This study follows the larger, ongoing research project *Educação, política e pobreza: a formação da força de trabalho na nova capital de Minas Gerais (1909–1927)*, approved by Conselho Nacional de Pesquisa (national research council) under registration number 4/2021, process 317625/20 21-7 (Research Productivity Grants).

⁴ Discourse here is understood as the oral and written verbal representation of a given social reality and its subjects. But here is considered only the written one, even when it’s interview transcription.

⁵ Brenda Maria Dias Araújo transcribed and typed the interview.

elements of a childcare policy involving the regional political articulation and local civil society concern. Three categories linked to the preventorium care process guide the analysis: 1) antecedents; 2) everyday life routine; 3) consequences for the life of those who returned to live with their families.

The coming of the preventorium

Judging by the academic studies⁶, the research on education in the preventorium is still incipient; that is to say, it hasn't yet been made a solid study to serve as parameter and a unified basis for this work. Thus, the understanding of preventoria presented here relies on isolated researches addressing leprosy in Brazil and its social consequences, including other preventoria in Brazil. They're not specific studies on the origin of preventórios in Brazil. Even so, reading such texts helped to derive this understanding.

It may be said that the idea of the preventorium as a care institution appeared in the 1920s, in association with the tuberculosis epidemic, then ravaging the country. Leprosy was already being spread, but not to the extent of tuberculosis, which required all efforts of treatment, prevention, and containment. It was in the 1930s that the preventorium was redesigned to serve home institution to deal with leprosy's consequence to the family unit and became a concern within the Brazilian government. The leprosaria prescribed by federal health legislation (Brazil, 1920) were already expanding; they were intended for the social isolation of sick people. Only partially, however, it was solved the problem of sheltering people suffering from the disease, because their children were left helpless, which created another problem: caring for older children who didn't get the disease despite living with sick patients and children aged 0–3 years (early childhood). Admission of parents to a leper colony meant that their daughters and sons became automatically separated to avoid contamination.

In 1935, it was launched a campaign intending to achieve national coverage as to assisting children who had been separated from their parents and had no one to take care and raise them (cf. Monteiro, 1998; Santos, 2009; Silva, 2009; Carvalho, 2012; Pacheco, 2018). Strictly speaking, the preventorium childcare began locally, through philanthropic initiatives in Minas Gerais. Leading them was Eunice Weaver, a Brazilian married to Charles Anderson Weaver, a North-American working as teacher at Grambery School in Juiz de Fora city, MG, among other activities. In 1931, coming back from an international trip of almost ten years, the couple settled in Juiz de Fora, with Charles Weaver returning to his teaching position, while Eunice Weaver, in addition to becoming a teacher as well, would embrace the philanthropic work aimed at people with leprosy.

⁶ In the field of academic research in education and history, the preventório has been studied, in the vast majority of approaches, in its relation with leprosy and public health. Education is a secondary theme, as an argument unfolded from a larger object. In addition to this limitation, there are quantitative limits. To date, the Catalog of Theses and Dissertations of the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel has no more than five master's dissertations and two doctoral theses that, published between 2002 and 2022, analyze education in preventoria. In the journal *Cadernos de História da Educação*, no articles on this topic were found; the same is true for the *Portal de Periódicos da Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior*. However, there are two articles from 2020 to 2024 in the field of health. In the Scientific Electronic Library Online, the results for studies about *preventório* and education were null. Thus, there are few studies that correlate *preventórios*, education and vocational training; that is, such a correlation has been made even by the major research project underlying this text. From the point of view of studies on the history of school institutions, the preventório remains somewhat unexplored, at least not like daycare centers and orphanages, which have been projected as worthy of research, reflection, conceptualization and theorization — see studies on the history and sociology of children, childhood and their institutionalization. For the *preventório*, there is no such prior apparatus; it is in its first steps.

During her trip with her husband, she visited places as Calcutta, India, where she learned more on the disease and on ways of dealing with it (Santos, 2011; Silva, 2013; 2023). Thus, from 1931–2 onwards, she dedicated herself to founding a philanthropic association in Juiz de Fora, the so-called Sociedade de Assistência aos Lázaros (lepers' association assistance) and to launching a campaign to raise awareness and funds for the construction of what would be the country's first preventorium, located in Belo Horizonte, capital of Minas Gerais. The assistance association was formed exclusively by women.

By the end of the 1930s, the São Tarcísio Preventorium began operating. It was built near the Santa Isabel Colony, a leprosarium where people lived in isolation. Initially, around two hundred children were sent to the preventorium (Carvalho, 2013; Gazeta do Triângulo Mineiro, 1954).

Eunice Weaver would then found a national federation to congregate assistance associations and tackle the problem nationwide. What's more, she took her initiative to the Getúlio Vargas government, which endorsed it. On the one hand, Eunice Weaver could count on Pan Air planes to travel the country; on the other hand, Vargas asked some states' government to welcome her and be willing to help her meet needs such as physical space (land) to house a preventorium. Once Eunice Weaver arrived in a given capital, she would meet formally local government authorities, sought out civil society institutions, and found a local assistance association to duties such as raising funds and campaigning. This process intensified from 1940 onwards, because of the intention of setting up preventoria in all states. By the end of the decade, there were twenty-five units operating as boarding institutions and offering medical, food, and educational assistance (Santos, 2011; Silva, 2013; Carvalho, 2013).

The Araguari preventorium

The articulation between philanthropic initiatives and government policies is the scenario where the Eunice Weaver Preventorium emerged to become a central institution in the Triângulo Mineiro region. Its creation and building resulted from a collective effort of four major cities in the area, especially Uberaba, the most prominent in the 1940s, followed by Uberlândia (whose economic rise would gain momentum and substance in the 1950s, as a result from the building of Brasília, Brazil's new capital).

However, judging by news from the first half of the 1940s, Eunice Weaver's presence in the Triângulo Mineiro region was more noticeable in Uberlândia, while in Uberaba the press highlighted her being to other states. An example is given in the *Lar Católico* newspaper, which informed in 1944 on Eunice Weaver activities in Piauí state due to the inauguration of the Educandário Padre Damião preventorium, built two kilometers away from Parnaíba city. Capable of accommodating "fifty children", it was said to be "one of the many links in the vast chain of preventorium institutions in the country" and resulted from the efforts from the local lepers' association assistance, especially the fundraising campaign coordinated by Eunice Weaver (*Lar Católico*, July 23, 1944, p. 11). Nevertheless, it was *Correio de Uberlândia* the newspaper that published news on more concrete actions of the philanthropist and federation leader as to children of parents with leprosy in the region. An example is a text from October 1949 by the clinical physician, Miron de Menezes. To fulfill an invitation made by a "technical committee" gathered to manage the institution building, he wrote about "future preventive measure for the children of lepers and their needs in the Triângulo Mineiro region". The physician highlighted Eunice Weaver's role in leading the campaign, which began in Uberaba, and made clear his opinion on leprosy: he saw it as "one of our great health problems". At the same time, he showed he was aligned with Weaver's conceptions regarding how to deal with the problem: by isolating sick people and supporting their healthy daughters and sons to "prevent the disease spread once and for all" (Menezes, 1949, p. 3).

To Menezes (1949, p. 2), it was “necessary to insist that leprosy is not a hereditary disease”, though “extremely contagious”; what’s more: it hit “all social classes, both the poor and the rich”, and even “those who are dear to us”. In his straightforwardness, the physician pointed out two central measures: “1) Isolate the sick person, in order to avoid contagion to other people; 2) Separate their healthy child, *as soon as it is born*, from contact with relatives” (our emphasis). The preventorium to be created and built would be responsible for the second item — as it was the case for preventoria already operating “in other areas of the State”; but the region required a different institution.

Ours [...] should be a *rural-kind preventorium*, with all facilities needed for the comfort of those who do not have the affection of their parents and with all the departments indispensable for its real *purpose*, which will be *to educate them and reintegrate* them into society. By building the preventorium, with a lodge for each city, its *maintenance will be much more on the State*, knowing that it will have its *own income* in the future through its agricultural and industrial output (Menezes, 1949, p.3; our emphasis).

Among many important meanings in this quote, it is worth highlighting the idea of socio-spatial isolation, which was somewhat in line with the model of leprosarium institution, because the new preventorium was seen as capable of making income and sustaining itself. In this case, we may consider that the maintenance assigned to the State would tend to reduce income; what’s more, it seems that the central purpose of educating and reintegrating residents — children and adolescents — assumed exploiting them as workforce; what’d call into question the centrality of education and integration. It’d be the case of saying that what the physician Menezes said was information on a process already established, at least from the perspective that it was already known the *how* and *what* as to the preventorium existence; what missed was the *where*.

In fact, on October 28, the *Correio de Uberlândia* published a letter from Eunice Weaver to its newsroom signed on October 9th in Rio de Janeiro. Without giving dates, she told she had been to Araguari and that from there she sent a telegram to the newspaper to thank for the efforts in favor of the preventorium campaign. The date of October 9th means two things: 1) she was in Araguari city when Uberlândia’s physician Menezes published his text (on October 6th); 2) she had already decided for the location where to build the preventorium: some farming land near Araguari city. After about two years of fundraising to turn plans into reality, it came out the first news on the preventorium inauguration, as told in September 1952 by *A Noite*, newspaper from Rio de Janeiro.

On the 6th of this month [September], in the city of Araguari, it’ll be opened the first lodge built of *the group of buildings* making up the preventorium for healthy children of leprosy patients. It is called “Uberaba lodge”. This preventorium will *serve the entire Triângulo Mineiro area* and the inauguration ceremony will be presided over by state government high-ranking authorities, besides having present Mrs. Eunice Weaver, president of the Federação das Sociedades de Assistência aos Lázarus (*A Noite*, September 5, 1952, p. 3; italics added).

As the quote suggests, the preventorium was built with the prospect of expansion because it was intended to have regional reach. And it is worth interpreting that inaugurating only one lodge — the “Uberaba” one — may have been a consequence of fundraising, insufficient to go beyond that. This means that it’s possible that until then Uberaba (government and society) had been the most successful city in raising funds.

However, it was of great regional interest, judging by the presence of health authorities and politicians at the inauguration ceremony on September 6, 1952: Minas Gerais state's Health Department's secretary (O Dia, September 6, 1952) and "Leprosy Department" director; Araguari, Monte Carmelo, Cascalho Rico and Uberlândia city mayors; and representatives of the "National Leprosy Department" (O Jornal, October 8, 1952, p. 10).

Different newspapers made various projections of how many children the preventorium would be able to shelter. For example, *O Dia* (1952, p. 3) mentioned "a thousand healthy children of leprosy parents", which would've turned this boarding institution into "the largest of Brazil"; and *Correio da Manhã* (September 18, 1952, p. 6) said that was "about five hundred children". Despite the imprecision, there'd be room enough to the preventorium facilities expansion, since its area was of "about 5,500 square meters" (Jornal do Comércio, September 7, 1952, p. 9). Located "7 kilometers away from the city" [of Araguari], the land belonged to an old farm and was purchased with funds raised by the campaign (1948–52) (Gazeta de Araguari, December 25, 1955).

As an institution of regional interest, the Araguari preventorium would house children sent there from all Triângulo Mineiro region cities; but the admission recommendation would depended exclusively on each city's health and medical authorities. Besides, it required local representatives who had connections directly not only with the preventorium, but also with the federation headed by Eunice Weaver.

First accounts of children being sent to the Araguari preventorium come from Uberaba city, where before 1952 there was already an institution like the preventorium, besides an aid association linked to the Eunice Weaver's federation, as one may read on newspapers at the time.

Uberaba no longer has the "Eunice Weaver" Home, that institution which provided social assistance to healthy children of the leprous parents and such great benefits to childhood by isolating children who were descendants of parents suffering from leprosy [...] Sent to Araguari, they have a *real home* there and all *material and moral* resources to develop themselves and become citizens useful to the community [...] [Even so], the Sociedade de Assistência aos Lázaros [...] [responsible for the] campaign of charity and humanitarianism [...] would continue to be fully active and increasingly in need of popular help (Lavoura e Comércio, January 15, 1953, p.3).

As said above, the first news of children being sent to the Araguari preventorium were published by Uberaba's newspapers as *Lavoura e Comércio*, with headlines like "Yesterday, sixteen children arrived in this city on the express train of the Rede Mineira de Viação bus company, bound for the Educandário 'Eunice Weaver' do Triângulo Mineiro" in Araguari. They were accompanied by "the leprosy service employees" (September 3, 1953, p.4).

Two years after its opening, the Araguari preventorium was commented by the local newspaper *Gazeta do Triângulo Mineiro* (December 25, 1954, p.8). It was highlighted not only the institution admission capacity of "800 children" and total number of only "62 residents", but also its "almost self-sufficiency in farming output" by growing vegetables and raising chicken for eggs production (the extra output was sold in the city).

In mid-1953, another lodge was inaugurated (Lavoura e Comércio, May 19, 1953, p.53); in December 1955, the *Gazeta do Triângulo Mineiro* updated information on how the preventorium was evolving as it follows: in all, twenty-eight cities had contributed to it, including the purchase of the farm; in whole, there were 250 residents, occupying three lodges: Uberaba's, Uberlândia's, and Charles Anderson Weaver's (a homage to Eunice Weaver husband).

The “Uberlândia lodge”, which was the second one to be built, in an area of 1,035 square meters, houses *the school with four classrooms*, a library, a secretary’s office and a playground. [...] [and] the “Charles Anderson Weaver lodge”, now inaugurated. With its 3,720 squares meters of usable area, this latter has dormitories for girls and temporarily for boys as well, until the fourth lodge is built. [...] There, they carry out their *initial studies*, both *primary* and *elementary-technical*, compatible with their age (Gazeta do Triângulo Mineiro, December 25, 1955, p. 14; italics added).

As one may read, in its first years of operation the Araguari preventorium offered only elementary education; and the relation between classrooms and number of residents seems to have been a temporarily limiting factor, at least until the building of more lodges. Even so, there was an age division in schooling, between primary education and technical education, which we call here professional. Besides being part of the preventorium’s action, the schooling was aligned with what was dictated on leprosy prophylaxis by the 1949 federal law.

Art[icle]. 15. Every newborn child of a leprosy patients shall be compulsorily and immediately removed from contact with relatives [...] Art. 24. The State shall provide comprehensive social assistance to leprosy patients and their families, including [...] c) children who are interacting with leprous parents and other family members of isolated patients. Art. 26. Children who are interacting with leprosy patients, admitted to preventoria or sent to care homes, shall be provided with *social assistance, mainly as primary and professional schooling, moral and civic education*, and appropriate recreations (Brazil, 1949, italics added).

In accordance to the law, it seems clear that the Araguari preventorium functions followed legal requirements as for the schooling provision within its premises; besides, it specifies professional schooling in a similar way to what was said about schooling of leprous parents’ children. This may be inferred from the words “primary”, “technical” and “professional”.

A problem, however, could be the relationship between the school size — four classrooms — and the number of resident children — 250 in 1955. In a simplistic calculation, the average number per classroom would be over sixty children, if it’s considered one shift for primary teaching and learning and one shift for technical-professional’s; this latter being certainly in smaller numbers because it required elementary level completion, which means the learning of reading, writing and arithmetic. In addition, there was a distinction between schooling and education; the latter would be given in the family setting, which was “dismembered” because sick parents were sent to leprosaria and their healthy children removed from the family environment. This condition is mirrored in the sisters’ memories, for they are former residents of the Araguari preventorium. In an interview, they told the experience of being removed from their family in the municipality of Ituiutaba to be sent to the preventorium institution, where they lived for about six years (1959–65).

From Ituiutaba to Araguari: the preventorium admission of sisters and brothers

In the second half of the 1950s, Ituiutaba hadn’t only been included in the campaigns to raise funds for the preventorium, but also was visited by Eunice Weaver. Her presence was highlighted by the local press. For example, the *Folha de Ituiutaba* newspaper wrote on campaigns such as the “1956 Miss Triângulo Mineiro Contest”, in support of the preventorium — then described as “under construction” — and aiming at “welcoming, educating and guiding

leprosy patients' healthy children in life" (February 25, 1956, p. 1). Besides, the cover story highlighted the presence in the city five days earlier of a committee headed by Eunice Weaver and formed to "lay the foundations for the aforementioned contest". The committee brought together people connected to the Araguari preventorium and the social aid association; it was welcomed by the "couple Dr. Antonio Cunha Campos and Dr. Dirce Leite Cunha Campos, [she being] president of the local similar aid association" (Sociedade de Assistência aos Lázaros). In addition, the mayor and his secretary, the commercial association vice-president and the Ituiutaba Club president were present at the couple's house. It was arranged an welcoming reception to Eunice Weaver in the club, where a more public tribute would be held that evening, that is to say, with more people. Still in December 1956, the local newspaper recalled Eunice Weaver's visit in February of that year. It published the end-of-year message she had mailed to the newsroom team.

Here we are, once more, to congratulate all who had the Christmas spirit during the year that is ending [...] we'd like all our friends, like us, were able to witness the joy and smiles of the children they supported, giving them shelter, and who, *separated from their parental home by force of circumstances, found another home*, which our friends helped to build and maintain. How happy it'd be if everyone could see young people protected from evil, *guided and safe* in healthy care homes, with the resources they sent to them. And it's these children, and these young people, who at this time raise their hands in prayer and beg: "*Do not deny us your Kindness, your Affection, your Love*, which are shelters for our body and our spirit [...]" (Weaver, 1956, p. 3; italics added).

It's possible that one consequence of Eunice Weaver's visit to Ituiutaba had been the federalization of something already happening locally: the leprosy prophylaxis. Until then, the municipality had a "hygiene center" working in tuberculosis and leprosy prevention; under the supervision of a doctor, it took care of actions such as managing the BCG vaccine (Folha de Ituiutaba, 1954, p. 3). In February 1957, a "federal leprosy prophylaxis center" was created to meet Ituiutaba and six neighboring municipalities health needs; initially, it'd conduct a "kind of census of lepers" and their "treatment in their own homes, without sending to an institution" (Folha de Ituiutaba, 1957, p. 1).

As it may be inferred, the leprosy prophylaxis center wasn't an organization necessarily linked to the Araguari preventorium or the local social aid association; but it certainly interacted with them in some level, because sending children to the institution depended on finding parents suffering from leprosy; and in this case a census to be carried out by the prophylaxis service would be important as to locating sick people and knowing if their children were still immune to the disease.

The former resident sisters

The sisters talked of the time they were removed from their family to be sent to the Araguari preventorium. According to one of them, their family was of thirteen sons and daughters, some older: "one brother was 15 and one brother was 18" (the older stayed "with my mother") and three sisters who were "married, but didn't live with my mother" (N.,⁷ 2023, n.p.). The other children were of varying ages when they left the family home.

⁷ The sisters consent formally the academic use of the information they shared in the interview and disclosure of their full names in texts such as this one. Even so, we prefer to keep them anonymous by abbreviating their names, because the information provided tell of somewhat sensitive, somewhat intimate issues; and because, although the interviews make up the list of sources for a doctoral research, this latter hasn't yet been approved by a research ethics committee.

Z. was 3 [years old], D. was 6, O. was 5, I was 8, 9, J. was 10 and G., who was older, was 12. So, like a small ladder. [...] So *we were taken away from our mother* because at the time we lived on a farm... And we were the only family of six [at the preventorium]. [...] when my mother grew sick of leprosy, we didn't that it was what it was. My father's bosses, Mrs. Dorica and Mr. Geraldo, they were relatives of Dr. Cunha and of Mrs. Dirce. [...] Dr. Cunha already worked in this area, you know? And they were part of the boarding institution. [...] they sent us there. And Dr. Cunha himself took care of my mother. So it was like this: when they found out that my mother had the disease, they immediately took us away from her, right? Then they sent us to this boarding institution there (N., 2023, n. p.; italics added).

This account excerpt suggests two predictable moments in the preventorium admission process: 1) the identification of sick parents and their healthy children; 2) the removal of the healthy children from the family environment. It couldn't be otherwise if one considers the people involved: the couple of doctors that welcomed Eunice Weaver in 1956 in Ituiutaba, since the wife ran the local social aid association. In addition, the identification of the sick mother doesn't seem to have resulted from a possible census carried out by the prophylaxis center created in 1957; rather, it seems to have been the farmer and his wife who made arrangements for a possible visit by the doctor to the farm and the taking of subsequent measures, whether treating the woman or recommending her children to be sent to the preventorium care. In any case, it's clear the need for a medical authority to approve the sending process.

Although the 1949 leprosy prevention law mentioned newborn children, the group of six sisters and brothers sent to Araguari preventorium didn't include a newborn child when taken away from family to be admitted. Because of this, one of the sisters has a very vivid memory of when they left home.

It was very sad. Really sad! I still can't forget it. It's engraved in my mind... I was 9. No, I wasn't 9 yet, because I'd turn 9 in October and we were sent on June 24 [1959], you know? But it's engraved in my mind, because *they really fooled us, saying that we'd have everything there, [...] there'd be a train for us to ride*. It really fooled our heads. As we didn't even know 'bout it [...] What I remember clearly that they announced that we had to go and we didn't understand anything. That one over there [pointing to her sister Z.], [was] practically a baby. [...] So, Mrs. Dorica arranged for us to be sent. Then, everyone thought it was wonderful. *The building is wonderful* (N., 2023, n. p.; emphasis added).

[I was] 3 years old (Z., 2023, n. p.).

The story shows how much the experience of coming to the preventorium marked the sisters' memories. On the one hand, their memory retained the exact date of leaving; on the other, it's emphatic on how much it stuck in their affective memory. Z's words seem to contain a hint of contradiction when state a conception and memory that children were deceived and didn't understand anything happening at that moment. Apparently, they were told they'd have to leave family and not being able enough to really know why. What they knew was what life would be like there: supposedly, better than on the farm, because the farm didn't have everything, much less the possibility of taking a train ride. What was possibly told them by their mother and father as a story — the locomotive — was promised as a possible reality for the children once admitted to the preventorium. At the same time, the institution building seems to have been used to persuade them, because it didn't make up the architectonic landscape of their life on the farm.

Even though it could dispel the siblings' suspicions, the promise of what they'd find in Araguari preventorium wasn't strong enough to relieve bad feelings at the hour of departure, which was remembered in detail.

The day was set for us to go. Geraldo and Franquinho got in their truck and took us. At that time, there was no asphalt, roads were all dusty. There we went, just us and them. My older brother was 12 years old. [...] That one there [pointing to sister Z.] cried the whole time, asking for mom, calling my mom, "I want to go to the house", "I want my mom". We cried all together and it was like that. This lasted about a month, we didn't get used to it. So it was like that... I don't forget when we got in the truck at dawn, the day was breaking [...] I remember very well [...] there was a bend there on the riverbank, there was a river, and the road curved, and *I looked back, my mother crying and my father waving his hand like that* [...] until the moment we turned the curve, when everything grew out of sight. So, that's engraved in my mind to this day. I never forget it, you know? (Z., 2023, n. p.; italics added).

I cried for 45 days (Z., 2023, n.p.).

As these passages suggest, at the time of leaving, what was left was much more important for them than what was to be found out in the preventorium. What made them cry, even the older brother (12 years old), was leaving their father and mother behind: their life references, their affection, love and care, everything they had at home from which they were being removed. Thus, the departure wasn't peaceful.

[A brother] He was 5 years old and he's one of those who didn't forgive dad or mom because they sent us there, because they let him go when he was 5 years old... But dad and mom aren't to be blamed for. No! But it wasn't all of a sudden. It's because of the disease. My mother said: "We've to separate everything" (Z., 2023, n.p.).

As these words suggest, the preventorium admission process was traumatic even for the youngest, still unable to understand what they were going through. Likewise, they indicate a fully aware decision-making as to send the siblings to the institution; the mother was fully aware of the process to let her children be removed to stay safe, which means, be away from the risk of being affected by the disease as well. The siblings, however, didn't lose touch with their father and mother.

[The mother] was almost cured and had two more children. She had two children while we were there. Then, [the preventorium directors] they allowed her to go there. [...] It was after three years that we were there that she came. After that, she didn't come anymore. Dad came every month (Z., 2023, n.p.).

The siblings stayed "six years there" in the preventorium. In the meantime, a doctor had taken care of their mother, cured her definitely six years after. Her disease was diagnosed "in time" to react well to the treatment. As the sisters said, "Dr. Cunha [...] saw that she was already cured and allowed dad to take us from there". The doctor gave their father "a written order to get us", but the preventorium direction "didn't want to let dad take us from there, because we were admitted when we were little children, all tiny" (Z., 2023, n.p.).

The six-year period of life in the preventorium was traumatic for the siblings. It was marked by social and psychological violence, among other forms of treatment. Although there was a monthly paternal visit, it is most likely that his children didn't have the opportunity to tell him what life was like there; that is to say, the visit didn't last long enough and was certainly oversaw by institution's management.

As the letter exchanging between siblings and family was prohibited, the sisters had to develop tactics (Certeau, 2008) to let people aware of the way they lived in the preventorium: under punishment, verbal violence and public humiliation.

Z., when she was a little girl, wet the bed and was beaten (N., 2023, n. p.).

I wet the bed there. Then they [employees] would take the sheet from my bed and put it over my head [...] the [part] where I peed and put it there. We'd line up to get into the lunch/dining room, and then they'd put me in front [other residents with the wet sheet over my head] (Z., 2023, n. p.).

Aiming to help her younger sister, N. had an idea. As she was older, she used to sleep in a separate room at bedtime; so, when her younger sister wet the sheet, she'd go to her room and told her. Then she'd "take off my sheet that got wet, and we would go to the bathroom, [where] she would rinse it" and leave it there; then, "she'd take the sheet from her bed [...] and put it on my [mattress]". Early in morning, before everyone woke up, "she's go there, pick up the sheet and put it on her bed". N.'s wit was the intuition that none would "look for [wet sheet] in her bed, because she didn't wet the bed" (Z., 2023, n. p.).

Besides wetting sheets, menstruation was a source of humiliation. When the girls had it, they were humiliated in the lunch/dining room, because it was exposed to everyone in there. As the sisters said, there were humiliation and punishment.

In the lunch/dining room, when everyone was busy, sometimes the girls menstruated. [At 12, 13 years old], no one knew anything, no one was guided by their parents, they were admitted there as little babies, hiding their clothes under the mattress. She [the director] would take them to the lunch/dining room and show them in front of everyone and say: "Children of lepers. You are children of lepers!". That hurt deep down in our hearts, you know? It's humiliation. The humiliation was what hurt me the most (D., 2023, n. p.).

Unable to let it go, N. insisted on communicating with her family through letters.

There was no way for us to write letters, because they wouldn't accept sending them. So, when I was in school, in the fourth grade, fourth year [...], I went to study in the city [of Araguari] [...] at the school there. And I grew more intelligent. That's when I started writing letters. But they wouldn't let me send them and wouldn't deliver them.

Aware that some people used to visit the preventorium and stay there for some time, N. said she found that three female teachers from Ituiutaba were doing internships in the institution and she saw them as a way of sending her letters to her father.

There was a course for teachers from outside the city, and they came in there to take it. So, there were three from Ituiutaba, you know? So, I wrote a letter and asked one of them — she's actually the niece of Geraldo [N's father's boss] [...] — and I asked her to deliver the letter in secret. [As] She was a teacher, they wouldn't search her suitcase. So, I asked her to give it to Mrs. Dorica and she handed the letter. I think I was 12. Then, through this letter, [...] [where] I told her everything I wanted, everything we were going through... I really let it all out in the letter. I told my dad. [...] And then she handed the letter, and everyone, Mrs. Dorica read it, Mr. Geraldo read it, showed it to Dr. Cunha. [...] Because they thought everything was wonderful there (N., 2023, n. p.).

Thanks to N.'s cunning, all siblings were able to get back home, to their family. But not without obstacles imposed by the institution, though.

Then dad came to get us [and take us back home]. Dr. Cunha had already given dad the paper, the authorization, and dad had already gone to a lawyer, he was advised [...] Dad was warned. He got there, and they didn't want to release us out; she [the director] said: "No. They came here when they were little children, *we taught them everything they know*, and they learned here everything they know. You have no rights to your children anymore". Just like that! Then dad said: "Well, then you should find your lawyer, because my papers are here" and showed them to her. [...] He said: "No. I have every right" (N., 2023, n. p.).

The sisters argued that Eunice Weaver wasn't aware of what happened in the preventorium regarding punishments, violence and humiliation.

The owner, the creator of these boarding institutions was Mrs. Eunice Weaver. [...] But she wasn't bad. She didn't know that this was happening (N., 2023, n. p.).

She never knew about it (D., 2023, n. p.).

The same way, they believe she was the one who arranged the coming to the preventorium of the teacher who'd taught two sisters in the professional dressmaking. It was a course offered to the girls by the institution and of which they retained vivid memories.

Professional training and its consequences

For the siblings, the preventorium school attendance felt like a second separation.

The director decided to keep us apart because there was school [...] we studied in, [where] we had to study. I was already old enough to attend school. So, we studied, but [my sister] Z..., my older sister had to take care of her [Z.] all the time, because she cried day and night, calling for her mother, and we cried too, right? (D., 2023, n. p.).

As one may infer from the siblings age range, some were ready to elementary school (aged 5–7), some had already exceeded that age, and the youngest sister was 3 years old. This means that, while some were free to study, the older sister had to take care of the younger one, which supposedly impacted her schooling.

As to the professional schooling, the sisters' memory was generous. They said they studied weaving, sewing, cooking and even carpentry. But what they really liked was the sewing classes; and it was so because of their teacher, seen by them as a warm and welcoming person.

We called her Tianinha [nickname]. She married a guy from Brasília, she must live in Brasília. One time she left for Rio de Janeiro, [but] she couldn't stand being away from us and came back there [to the preventorium]. She was from Rio de Janeiro. [...] Sebastiana [her name] [...] was cool, everyone liked her. [...] As she was from Rio de Janeiro, it's possible that Mrs. Eunice [Weaver] arranged to send her there (D., 2023, n.p.).

When we were sent there, she had already been there for many years (N., 2023, n.p.).

Nevertheless, the memories of what the classes were like contrast with the good memories of the sewing teacher, especially as to the approval of learning practical activities.

If we did something wrong, they would *rub it in our faces* (N., 2023, n.p.; italics added).

They would make us undo it and redo it (D., 2023, n.p.).

Yes [all were required to go to classes] (Z., 2023, n.p.).

The professional training included cutting and sewing.

There was this one [pointing to sister N.] who cut [...] and there were those who sewed (D., 2023, n.p.).

I sewed buttons (Z., 2023, n.p.).

When I was 10 years old, I was sewing, I cut the shirt, I sewed the shirt (D., 2023, n.p.).

[As to sister] J., I remember that she learned how to make those baskets, those beautiful baskets, those straw baskets (N., 2023, n.p.).

Weaving. I myself worked weaving a long time ago, rugs. I made the rugs (D., 2023, n.p.).

As one may read, cutting, sewing and weaving were professional activities that the sisters studied and learned to be professionals, especially D., who at the age of 10 showed dexterity and talent. However, the learning that could guarantee them a professional occupation for the life outside the preventorium has much to do with a traumatic experience for them, a context of obligation with reprimands when the result wasn't good enough. This way, once back to family life, practicing the profession learned in the preventorium meant reliving times when they had to overcome many obstacles and degrading life conditions.

The godmother⁸ [sister N.] never looked at shoes again (Z., 2023, n.p.).

We learned to like them (N., 2023, n.p.).

I've sewn a lot for others, but nowadays I don't sew. [...] I've sewn too much in my life. I've made suits, wedding clothes, wedding dresses, [...] my daughter's dress was made by me [...]. But it's a gift that we have (D., 2023, n.p.).

As these statements suggest, although the professional schooling at the preventorium could have turned the siblings into professionals trained and, therefore, into positive results in their lives outside the institution, it was no guarantee of continued learning or practicing the professional activity they learned. In the case of D., the continuity resulted more from "a gift", which means from her predisposition to the dressmaking course, than from a consequent process. It's likely that she would've developed into a seamstress even if her destiny had been different in childhood. She has a strong opinion regarding the idea that most people who learned the profession in a preventorium institution didn't continue it after leaving it.

She never wanted to see it again (D., 2023, n.p.).

There's no way, right? When there's no love, there's no way to move forward (Z., 2023, n.p.).

In fact, what they say applies to the case of the their older brother.

He studied at the professional school [...] [But] He didn't move forward (N., 2023, n.p.).

He was traumatized (Z., 2023, n.p.).

Traumatized. The godfather came from Araguari [to Ituiutaba] with more training than we did. We didn't go to the city [of Araguari], where he studied. It was at a vocational school there. And every day he'd go to Araguari, study and come back to sleep. The godfather was already a professional when he came... Because he was, like, forced to do it (D., 2023, n.p.).

According to the sisters, the older brother not only learned shoemaking, but also made shoes for the entire school; that is to say, he worked as a shoemaker. He suffered so much violence that he wanted to leave the institution; and, when he left, he abandoned the shoemaking profession, because his learning came at the cost of much pain. Being a shoemaker would be remembering everything he had been through. In addition, an extra element is added to this condition: child labor, since the siblings started working in the preventorium.

⁸ Among the siblings, the older sister and the older brother are called *godmother* and *godfather* by the youngest ones and expresses a very strong family bond.

I was 12 years old (Z., 2023, n.p.).

I was 15. There, each one had their own obligation. Since there were several rooms, each one had a room to clean (N., 2023, n.p.).

It was just work. We didn't know how to play, we didn't have dolls, we didn't have anything (D., 2023, n. p.).

Certainly, these statements call into question discourses such as that of Menezes, the clinical physician from Uberlândia who wrote about the importance of the preventorium as a place where children would receive treatment that would alleviate the distance from their families and the lack of affection from their father and mother; and discourses such as that of Eunice Weaver in her end-of-year message to the society of Ituiutaba: instead of affection and love in the Araguari preventorium, the siblings from Ituiutaba received punishment and humiliation; instead of studying and having fun, they had to work with no wage.

Final considerations

Given the importance of relations among preventoria, former residents and State social compensation, we understand that studies like this one offers a historical-factual basis to give more fundament to compensation demands from former preventorium residents (children of leprosy parents). Although it isn't literally, this expectation was expressed in the words of the interviewed sisters. They do understand and agree that their experience with the preventorium should be told and published; but receiving compensation "It is not our case, because our mother had leprosy", she was cured, and her children returned to the family environment. Still, they understand that "There are many people fighting to see if they can get compensation" (N., 2023, n. p.). In this sense, these are valuable memories for the history of education, for they show dimensions of what life in a preventorium was like according to eyewitnesses.

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