

# **Punished girls: education through punishment at the Araguari preventative center, Minas Gerais (1950-1965)**

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## **Abstract**

Preventative centers were created to shelter children whose father or mother had leprosy. In this article, the object of study is the Eunice Weaver Educational Institution, a preventative center established in Araguari, Minas Gerais, in 1952. The aim is to analyze the practices of physical and/or symbolic punishment against girls – the uniqueness of the body and subjectivity – residing in this institution between 1950 and 1960. The research followed the methodological guidelines of oral history, using interviews with three sisters who resided at the preventative center. The theoretical framework is based on authors such as Bosi (1994), Goffman (1987), Meihy (2002), and Foucault (2016). The results indicate that, at the Eunice Weaver Preventive Center in Araguari (1950–1965), physical and symbolic punishment was used as an instrument to discipline female bodies, leaving marks of shame and silencing that shaped subjectivities. At the same time, the memories reveal small gestures of resistance and solidarity among the girls.

Keywords: Preventative centers. Girls. Pedagogy of punishment. Araguari, MG.

## **Meninas punidas: a educação por meio do castigo no preventório de Araguari, Minas Gerais (1950-1965)**

## **Resumo**

Os preventórios foram criados para abrigar crianças, com pai/mãe com hanseníase. Neste artigo o objeto de estudo é o Educandário Eunice Weaver,

preventório instalado em Araguari – Minas Gerais, no ano de 1952. Tem como objetivo analisar as práticas de punição física e/ou simbólica contra meninas – a singularidade do corpo e da subjetividade – residentes nesta instituição, entre os anos 1950 e 1960. A pesquisa seguiu a orientação metodológica da história oral, ao utilizar entrevistas com três irmãs que residiram no preventório. O aporte teórico se ancora em autores como Bosi (1994), Goffman (1987), Meihy (2002) e Foucault (2016). Os resultados apontam que, no Preventório Eunice Weaver de Araguari (1950–1965), a punição física e simbólica foi utilizada como instrumento de disciplinamento dos corpos femininos, deixando marcas de vergonha e silenciamento que moldaram subjetividades. Ao mesmo tempo, as memórias revelam pequenos gestos de resistência e solidariedade entre as meninas.

Palavras-chave: Preventórios. Meninas. Pedagogia do castigo. Araguari, MG.

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## **Niñas castigadas: la educación mediante el castigo en el preventorio de Araguari, Minas Gerais (1950-1965)**

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#### **Resumen**

Los preventorios fueron creados con el propósito de acoger a niños y niñas cuyos padres o madres padecían de hanseniasis. En este artículo, el objeto de estudio es el Educandario Eunice Weaver, preventorio instalado en Araguari – MG, en el año 1952. Tiene como objetivo analizar las prácticas de castigo físico y/o simbólico contra niñas – la singularidad del cuerpo y de la subjetividad – residentes en esta institución, entre los años 1950 y 1960. La investigación siguió la orientación metodológica de la historia oral, mediante entrevistas con tres hermanas que residieron en el preventorio. El aporte teórico se basa en autores como Bosi (1994), Goffman (1987), Meihy (2002) y Foucault (2016). Los resultados indican que, en el Preventorio Eunice Weaver de Araguari (1950–1965), se utilizó el castigo físico y simbólico como instrumento de disciplina de los cuerpos femeninos, dejando marcas de vergüenza y silenciamento que moldearon subjetividades. Al mismo tiempo, los recuerdos revelan pequeños gestos de resistencia y solidaridad entre las niñas.

Palabras clave: Preventorios. Niñas. Pedagogía del castigo. Araguari, MG.

## Introduction

The history of education in Brazil has given a lot of attention to daily life in school institutions, especially to pedagogical practices: agents, actions, times, places, motivations, etc. One of the axes of analysis focuses on the practice of punishments, as a characteristic of elementary schooling, at least until the 1970s.

With the expansion of research on educational institutions, research has shown a practice of the use of punishment in non-school institutions, such as in the case of Casas da Criança (House of Children), daycare centers, boarding schools, orphanages, and preventive centers.

The preventative centers, specifically, had different purposes from orphanages and the like, aimed at abandoned and helpless children, as in the case of those left on the wheels of the exposed (Marcilio, 2016). In these, the internal public was not necessarily orphaned, but was at risk of being so due to circumstances: the leprosy epidemic. At first, going to such institutions presumed a temporary stay; it would last the time of the treatment of father, mother, and/or guardians. However, it was traumatic, as it assumed the compulsory removal of children from family life.

Evidently, it was an exclusion from broad social life for a confined social life, which affected almost exclusively the working class (city and countryside), largely illiterate and, above all, rural areas. Families with leprosy patients were vulnerable to ignorance and, consequently, lack of awareness about diseases and risks of contagion. Thus, when the authority referred the children of a given family to a preventative center, they could do little against the decision; after all, the sick persons were also confined in colonies.

Thus, it seems not to be an exaggeration to say that the preventive centers received a child and adolescent audience coming from contexts already socially marked: that of poor people, who were already experiencing exclusion from the educational system or public health services.

The preventative center, for children susceptible to leprosy at home, emerged in Minas Gerais in the mid-1930s. In the 1940s, it is possible to see elements of a eugenicist and hygienist ideology in the institutionalization of preventive centers, when the motto of the nationalist government turned to form

a homeland of optimal genes for *strong and healthy bodies* (Viana, 2009; Parada, 2005). Therefore, bodies outside the stipulated standards of normality – the disabled body, the homeless body, the sick body, the helpless body, the most vulnerable body, such as that of girls living in preventive center – were subject to the supervision of standards of conduct, to the control of attitudes and gestures, in short, to punishment for *deviations*. All in the name of social assistance and charity.

In this sense, the objective of this article is to focus on practices of physical and/or symbolic punishment against girls – the uniqueness of the body and subjectivity – residing in the prevention center of Araguari, Minas Gerais, between the 1950s and 1960s. We intend to examine the functioning of such an institution, seeking to understand how biological conditions, such as menstruation and enuresis, were treated, triggering psychic factors.

Associated with issues, still little discussed and understood by the general population, menstrual blood flow and urinary incontinence for emotional reasons of the age group, were likely to undergo rigorous interventions considered educational. To this end, it was intended to educate by example, via public punishment, to maximize the feeling of shame for the humiliation suffered. Supposedly, this was how behaviors for docility and obedience were disciplined (as well as reaction and resistance).

Everything is articulated behind a façade, elaborated in such a way that the punishment was invisible to outsiders and it was because the marks left are more on the level of subjectivity: of memory, of insistent memory; in a word, because it was symbolic violence.

Symbolic violence is that form of *invisible* coercion that is exercised *with the complicity* of those who suffer it. It is the mild, insidious violence, often *disguised under forms of education*, guidance, or tradition, that leads the dominated to see the world – and their position in it – as natural and just (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 47, emphasis added).

In the case of girls in the preventive center, one variable is added: the role of gender as discussed by Scott (1991). It is imposed as *sine qua non* to the understanding of the process of (educational) institutionalization in twentieth-century Brazil, as it was the girls' body that was most subject to control

and rigidity, more easily tamed and framed in a moral ideal of femininity and purity.

In this sense, the following questions were imposed as a starting point: How did the girls act to avoid disciplinary acts aimed at the education of their bodies? What effect might punishment and other experiences have had on their lives after leaving the institution, especially as adults? Such inquiries permeate, therefore, the constitution of female identities in institutional environments of social exclusion where they were interconnected: social class and gender, political, medical, educational, and religious ideologies.

Thus, we intend to understand how education based on the conformation and obedience of bodies to the rule affected the formation of subjectivity – the worldview – and the ways of acting in adult life – the life of the present. In this sense, the objective of the study was to analyze the impacts of educational practices centered on the use of punishment: the inculcation of fear in favor of obedience; punishment as a central element of the development process of institutionalized girls.

To this end, the research uses oral reports from three sisters from the city of Ituiutaba, Minas Gerais. Protagonists of a story of resistance, reaction, and hope (along with other sisters and brothers), reported how it was to live in an environment that was the opposite of family life in rural areas. This exercise required resorting to oral history (Thompson, 2002) as a method of research and production of sources, inspired by Bosi (1994, p. 9), because, in the author's expression, it is the memory of "old people".

Overall, oral history goes beyond the collection of information to produce sources, as it becomes an instrument – and place, in the case of the text – to value and convey the memory of people with a lot of historical and subjective life experience.

The texts resulting from the interviews were read and analyzed interpretively as discourses; that is, "[...] use of language as a form of social practice [...]", as "mode of action". Through discourse, the individual acts in the world and on the world: influences, induces, convinces, persuades the other (Fairclough, 2008, p. 91); in other words, like "[...] language practice [...]", discourse "[...] mediates the relationship between man and his natural and social reality constituting him and his history [...]" (Orlandi, 2001, p. 19); that

is, it mediates the relationships of people with each other, with other beings and objects through uses and intentions. Likewise, the discourse can be of groups, institutions and agents in their interrelationships (Mainguenu, 1997). Finally, thinking about the discourse presupposes confronting the said with the unsaid; and the said with the referent: objective, extra discursive reality; above all, it presupposes aligning the intention of analysis in principles, instruments, and techniques of discourse (written) analysis. Of course, it is a matter of scrutiny to build an *educational historical-contextual understanding*, and not just of discourses.

## **Between abandonment and prevention: institutionalization, care, and early childhood education**

6 Since the end of the 19th century, measures have been adopted to assist and protect children in situations of risk. In the following decades until the 1970s and 1980s, the institutionalization of childhood and adolescence was put into practice in various types of institutions: shelters for minors, children's homes, boarding schools, orphanages, etc. (Marcilio, 2016). The reasons were from abandonment and orphanhood to the prevention of contagious diseases, in addition to various practices related to health care and education (school). These actions were strongly associated with the strategies of social regulation of certain population segments of the city (working class and strata close to poverty) and the countryside (the rural working class) (Carvalho, 2012).

By the end of the First Republic, the country's health conditions would be put to the test by various epidemics (Marcilio, 2020). Aside from the Spanish flu, which had a devastating effect but lasted for a short time (about six months), there was tuberculosis, which had been killing a lot since the mid-nineteenth century. Not by chance, the fight against the disease, via confinement (segregation), entered the list of Republican concerns. São Paulo would stand out in this regard with the work of a philanthropic social assistance league, which in 1904 would launch the movement "Work for the preservation of the children of poor tuberculosis patients", with the support of ladies of São Paulo society. The intention was to welcome the offspring of sick fathers and mothers in a

*preventative center* in the city of Bragança Paulista (Bertolli Filho, 2001).

Republican efforts would not be enough to create ways to deal with health problems and solve them. Consequently, they would not only pass to the post-revolution government of 1930, but would still expand due to the increase in leprosy cases and the finding of a high degree of infant mortality. On the one hand, the problem of leprosy would be embraced with more vigor and work by the philanthropic initiative; and the mortality would be treated by the federal government. In a speech in January 1931, Getúlio Vargas referred to the problems he intended to solve (Sá; Ribeiro, 2024). It was necessary to invest in elementary and secondary public education, as well as in professional education and, above all, in guaranteeing the public for any schools and vacancies to be opened.

A central step to solve the problem of school education was to create a ministry for the area. Essentially, the agency began to take care of the organization of the sector with the intention of doing what had not been achieved until then; especially regarding a national educational system and a progressive development project (Horta, 1994). To deal with child public health, between 1939 and 1940, a National Department of Children was created and established to meet demands related to maternal and child care, including initiatives in education (Sá; Ribeiro, 2024).

Underlying the Vargas government's intentions, were intentions to form citizens of intense patriotic-nationalist sentiment, aligned with the values of the Estado Novo (New State) and committed to the ideology of work/worker: to be useful to the homeland. Such a context of school education and care for childhood would be permeated by a vision of a human being of great physical vitality (Prado, 1982). Thus, the importance of educating was combined with that of improving the health of these individuals who would be imbued with such a worldview in the name of the country's development. The importance of education was emphasized in official discourses; at the same time, it reflected the authority of the political regime in the name of a public health that was moralizing and ideologized (Horta 1994; Silva, 2019).

There remained the problem of leprosy, which affected childhood: when not with the loss of a father/mother who succumbed to the disease, then with a type of compulsory orphanhood: their departure from family life to avoid

contagion. Often, the exit became definitive because the sick father and/or mother died. Thus, while the Vargas government was articulating around education and health in childhood, people like Eunice Weaver, in Juiz de Fora, launched a campaign to support this offspring who saw themselves as fatherless and motherless in early childhood and adolescence.

A woman devoted to the cause of leprosy, Weaver joined women with her same profile and helped found a philanthropy institution in Minas Gerais for such children. Perhaps inspired by the preventative centers created for the offspring of people sick with tuberculosis, the philanthropists conceived a preventative center model and installed it in 1935, in a rural area of Belo Horizonte. There, children identified as at risk based on health records (health and prophylaxis posts, hospitals, health homes) would be accommodated (Carvalho, 2012; Ribeiro; Araújo; Sá, 2025).

In 1939, the government became a "partner" of the federation with the project of spreading the preventative center throughout the country. Eunice Weaver was at the forefront of the movement (Santos, 2011; Lima, 2009). She visited each capital to articulate the acquisition of land, the creation of a female assistance association and the beginning of a permanent fundraising campaign (Carvalho, 2012; Curi, 2002; Schumaer; Brazil, 2000). Thus, the preventative centers were associated with the colonies – a "neighborhood" only for the sick far from the city. In addition to the disease, what united them was the compulsory presence. Fathers and mothers reported with leprosy went to one institution; their children, to another, in the name of prevention and child care. It is like Goffman said:

Total confinement eliminates all family and social supports from the individual's identity. The internal is manufactured by the institution, its personality is undone and, in its place, institutional identity is installed (Goffman, 1987, p. 17).

In other words, hospitalization is institutionalization because it subjects the internal public to a programmed, monitored, and controlled life; norms and rules are accepted as guidance for individual actions and decisions. The conduct is adjusted to the deprivation of freedom and the standardization of behaviors.



The full diffusion of such institution came only after the fall of the Estado Novo (New State), to last until the end of the 1960s; and in the same way, whatever the regime of government: democracy or dictatorship. For example, Law No. 610, of January 13, 1949, which prescribed that children under "preventive" care will have access to " *elementary and vocational* education and will receive *moral* and *civic* guidance in addition to participating in appropriate recreational activities" (Brasil, 1949, emphasis added).

After attracting the attention and action of the Vargas government as an object of diffusion, the preventative center began to be guided by an ideology in which wage labor and its universe became a discursive brand that led to ideological feedback, as it was an instance for government propaganda. To the preventative center would be assigned a role in the Vargas government project as an institution not only sanitary, but still elementary and professional school. Their units would not only be places of medical care; they would also function as instruments of social and moral control, to mold individuals to obedience from childhood, to conform them to the norms of a so-called normal and healthy society and to make them conform to such norms. Behind suggestive facade of a human welcome through promises from health authorities, the reality was symbolic violence at first and physical afterwards. Children were separated from the family abruptly and with severe cutting of essential social bonds to receive warm affection and grow up with a sense that they belonged to a family even within the institution.

In the end, the application of the laws led to a significant increase in the number of children in preventative centers, in which they became institutionalized individuals; but in a logic averse to life in the family institution, that is, marked by regulated conduct. Individual and group behaviors, in addition to schedules and activities, were under restriction, rigidity and control. As Ribeiro, Araújo and Sá (2025, p. 15) point out, more than "[...] away from living with their parents [...]", the children were "[...] subject to a routine characterized by punishments, constraints and unpaid activities [...]". Thus, although in theory the care and protection of children in vulnerable situations were justified, this was not without the severe imposition of manifestations of disciplinary power, such as punishment. This went against a certain official discourse about the preventative center as a second home.

## **Araguari's Preventative Center: watch to punish, resist to react**

This perspective of practice stands out here in the case of Eunice Weaver Educational Institution, the name given to the preventative center of Araguari, MG, established in 1952. The institution resulted from the joint action of the State with philanthropic organizations and segments of civil society; the context was still somewhat hygienist and moralistic about the relationship with childhood. Eunice Weaver played a crucial role in the creation campaign and the joint effort between government and philanthropic institutions. She led fundraising initiatives and partnerships with state authorities to ensure financing and maintenance; as in the broader context of socio-philanthropic action.

The preventative center followed a certain care philosophy that can be called systemic, as it had national guidelines, strict as far as possible. Eunice Weaver frequently visited each preventative center to monitor its operation, that is, to make sure that guidelines were followed (Ribeiro; Araújo; Sá, 2025). In Araguari, the preventative center was constituted in the perspective of being self-sustaining to a certain extent; that is, the production and manufacturing were not only educational activities but also means of generating income and subsistence. With this, it did not depend on direct and frequent relationships with people from the city. This contact was made even more difficult by the area where it was located: seven kilometers from the city. The intention was that it would be a regional service institution, so that neighboring cities that referred children at risk to the institution would contribute to the construction of new pavilions. All under the order of local medical and assistance authorities based on segregationist sanitary and moral criteria.

Thus, Araguari's preventative center constituted itself as the social institution outlined and theorized by Goffman (1987): a total institution. The separation between the internal public and the external social world was total; and, in the identity to be constructed as an institutionalized individual – the molding by the norm of confinement –, even children admitted at the age of 3 were subject to surveillance and discipline.

Total institutions exercise comprehensive control over the lives of interns, imposing standardized routines, rigid rules and disciplinary practices that rebuild their identity. The individual enters with a

previous self, but little by little is shaped by a system that redefines who he is, what he must do and how he must feel (Goffman, 1987, p. 22).

The façade of the institutional welcome concealed a rigorous system of observation and discipline according to the characterization made by those who lived there. The pretext of protecting from contamination and preparing for a better life through educational activities and professional formation was relativized according to the practice, the daily life of the internal public due to routines such as corporal punishment and humiliating punishment because of embarrassing situations for girls, instead of expressions of affection, attention, and care. The logic was that of strict obedience, silence, and restraint of crying – in a word, repression, and censorship. It was an institution whose institutional welcome façade concealed a rigorous system of observation, control, and discipline.

This understanding is projected in the memories shared by three sisters who lived at Eunice Weaver Educational Institution for almost six years and whose keynote in their speeches is a doubly painful life: by the abrupt withdrawal from the family breast and by life in the preventative center, which was the opposite of home. The logic of corrective-educational punishment permeated the "system" associated with the violent imposition of fear and other symbolic-repressive feelings that were harmful to emotional and psychological development of personality.

It took sensitivity in the act of listening to historically silent voices; that is, to make the sisters interviewed evoke memories of such a remarkable period in their lives. This attitude was based on the contribution of oral history as a method and ethical parameter to treat and value subjectivities and experiences of people who became invisible in official records (Portelli, 1997; Meihy, 2002). Even though their memories evoke a traumatizing experience as they recount past events, the sisters project themselves as protagonists of their story, a position that was denied to them at the time and fell into the limbo of the past.

However, making them evoke their memory – according to Bosi (1994) – can have the effect of helping them to review the past, so that what is told has a redefinition, a new meaning is inscribed in the lived experience.

In this case, memory would represent a means of resistance and affirmation of an identity even when it resurrects experiences suffocated by time and social silencing. When remembered and verbalized as memory, experiences can be reviewed, in such a way that there is a sense of what is said as a function of memory and there is a new meaning for those who remember and tell. Hence the importance of oral history as seen by Portelli.

The difference between oral history and other forms of documentation is not solely in the use of oral sources, but rather in the nature of oral discourse: subjective, partial, with selective memory. *The speeches do not tell us only what happened, but what people think happened*, and this is essential to understand the lived experiences and the meanings attributed by those who narrate them (Portelli, 1997, p. 63, emphasis added).

12 In fact, when the sisters say what they think happened, their saying is charged not only with the memory of the past; but also with the experience of the present in which they evoke memory, which interferes with the selection of memories. New feelings are added to the memories, as well as new senses. Thus, what was a reason for anger one day can be said with a filter in which anger totally disappeared due to, for example, maturity: the selection of feelings that matter more as life progresses; by virtue of more significant and more valuable experiences than feelings such as frustration, hurt, hatred and the like.

On the other hand, the initial sense of a given experience can crystallize even more when remembered. "In the memories that persist, the essence of each existence lives, especially those that are inscribed in the time of childhood, when the world leaves definitive marks" (Bosi, 1994, p. 39); this is particularly relevant in traumatic situations during childhood.

In the case of the sisters, this memory of childhood that persists tells, precisely, about the impacting moment of the dissolution of the family nucleus, albeit temporary. In 1959, the mother's leprosy led to the separation of the family, and the infant offspring left the municipality of Ituiutaba, Minas Gerais, to reside in the preventative center of Araguari, where they would remain until 1965.

Much of what Bosi said is expressed in the account of the departure told by the sisters: "To this day I cannot forget. This remains vivid in me [...] my

mother crying and my father waving his hands goodbye. It was vividly recorded in my mind" (N, 2023). The moment of farewell – of tears – remains, then, as a memory not only rooted, but still privileged in evocation: it is a representative image of the process; above all because it refers to the first movement of change in their lives – institutionalization. Perhaps it is what Portelli (1997) called the "subjective veracity" of remembrance.

Certainly, the experience of bad moments in the preventative center became a memory as fixed and vivid as the farewell of the family; that is, it is equally in the formation of the identity of the sisters (Bosi, 1994). This is the case of experiences associated with internal individual conduct, subject to a regulated environment, where action in daily life and in the functioning of the institution was the target of ostensible and rigid surveillance and control. In practice, it translated into the pedagogy of punishment and guilt (Foucault, 2016; Solazzi, 2007; Longo, 2002), in which a unilateral judgment of a given occurrence internally imposed public punishment as an educational measure.

The sisters' testimonials reiterate an example of such pedagogy.

I used to pee on the bed there. So, they would take the sheet from my bed and put it on my head [...] and put me in front of the refectory line. [...] When I had nocturnal accidents, they pulled the sheet from my bed and put it around my head [...] and I stood in front of the line in the refectory. [...] I used to have nocturnal accidents, and they would take the sheet and put it over my head. Then, they made me stand in line at the refectory with it while everyone watched (Z, 2023).

We did not know how to deal with that piece of dirty [menstrual blood] clothing. If the boys realized we were menstruating, we'd be the target of jokes. I hid the pieces of clothing in my bag out of fear and shame. There was nowhere to wash them. [...] The director displays the girls' dirty rags in front of everyone. And he used to say: "You are descended from people with leprosy". [...] It was very humiliating... The principal woman exposed the girls' dirty clothes in front of everyone (D, 2023).

Sister Z is the youngest; D, the middle sister. They have a fluent and firm speech, without hesitations; except when the evoked memory required more exercises of remembrance, occasions when they wondered if it was a fact what they had remembered. Although they allude to occurrences that

were apparently commonplace (despite the effect of restraint because of punishment), their statements have consequences for the reflection on the institutionalization of children, including schooling. They dialogue with social issues that have occupied many scholars. They tell a range of themes and subjects ranging from childhood traumas to the exercise of disciplinary power, imposed through surveillance and punishment of "deviations": the pedagogy of punishment; the disciplinary power.

The speeches refer to individuals – girls, boys, and woman director; internal hierarchical positions in humiliating situations determined by the woman director and exposed to the laughter of interns; social relations – child being punished by adult people as an educational measure. When seen in this prism, we can think that the boys occupied a place like that of the woman director at the time of the vexatious acts: they were observers; equally, other people who were in the refectory.

Incomprehensible to everyone, the motivating object of punishment comes to the public with elements of violent: the wet sheet being *pulled and torn* from the bed to wrap the girl's head; then, the gesture evolves into torture: forcing them to smell the malodorous odor.

The perversity of the situation shows itself even more when thinking conceptually about the problem of enuresis, included in sleep patterns and disorders. It is not uncommon in children old enough to develop bladder control (3-5 years); and occurs with more incidence among boys over 5 years. Most cases resolve by around 8 years without special help. Therefore, fathers and mothers should be clarified and reassured that it is something common and temporary. In addition, since the causes are beyond the control of the child, he/she should not be punished. The persistence of enuresis tends to be associated with low self-esteem and other related problems, including as a manifestation of grief (Papalia; Feldman, 2003); it can also derive from other "excessive emotional disturbances" (Guimarães, 2003, p. 182), such as a sudden change in the family routine, such as "hospitalization". What is required is trust and not repression" (Guimarães, 2003, p. 183). It seems fitting to see in the younger sister someone who has gone through a strong emotional shock: the sick mother, the separation from the family, the hospitalization in the preventative center. However, the problem that should be seen as a normal part

of growth was considered a lack, deserving of punishment because the cause was not understood.

Also incomprehensible to everyone, menstruation was allied to nocturnal enuresis as a reason for public punishment, although with more discreet violence. Ignorance went to the extreme of not knowing how to take care of even the hygiene of the blood-stained clothing; nor did the personal hygiene education at the preventative center create conditions for such learning. Before, the girls who menstruated not only did not yet know how to deal with the flow, but they were also unable to educate themselves or find a place to take care of their own clothes. It is as if it were a kind of *perverse arrangement* to be caught with dirty clothes and, precisely for this reason, to be subjected to public punishment; after all, the woman director charged the girls with something they did not have at all and punished them for not having it.

At these times, the boys also occupied a privileged place as observers to be animated by humiliation. And in all, there was the symbolic violence of images and words: the supposedly dirty and impure blood and the label of daughters of "leprous people", said by the woman director.

Young children, Ituiutaba's sisters had been exposed to risks to their psychic and physical development at the time they were most fragile – childhood. Therefore, everything that happened to them from a negative point of view tended to have a more severe effect on such development, to the point of compromising their lives as adults in the face of designs such as marriage and motherhood. Now of their most fragility as a developing human being, they were subjected to an education guided by physical and symbolic violence: the exposure of their bodies as targets of mockery and public humiliation – origins of feelings such as shame, anger, and hatred, which could crystallize as adult personality traits. Thus, the fragility of childhood was accentuated by exposure to criticism, which became an educational spectacle: public humiliation gave a lesson to the transgressor and a clear message to the others. As Foucault (2016, p. 14) states, "the body is there in an instrument or intermediary position".

Mary del Priore (2011) refers to the educational approach to shame, in which the body was a means to impose discipline on individuals. The historian author examines how public shame was used as a disciplined childhood

educational method in Brazil. The strategy was more intensely applied to women, who from a young age were instructed to be modest, obedient, and controlled in their actions. The goal was to create productive obedient individuals with imputation of punishment and internalization of guilt and fear related to public exposure.

In the preventative center, the purpose of punishment was more than correcting behaviors: it was to shape obedient individuals who internalized feelings of guilt and submission. In this sense, it was aligned with the perspective of constitution and functioning of the school institution in the country.

Throughout history, the school has built a moral knowledge about the female body. A body that should be contained, watched, trained. The girls were educated for silence, for modesty, for self-control. The naturalization of shame in the face of bodily functions was one of the most effective instruments to make docile (Della Piazza, 2012, p. 89).

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In the contemporary school, the status of the institution can be this: place of knowledge construction and socialization, as well as locus-means of controlling the girls' bodies, particularly in relation to sexuality, hygiene, and morality (Louro, 1997).

It is in this educational context that the girls' bodies were targeted in the preventative center, even more vulnerable to norms of conduct. The punishment for wetting the bed at night or for stained clothes during menstruation aimed not only to correct a deviation but also to teach a lesson about who gives the orders and who obeys, about who shouted and who lowered their head, about who laughed and who cried. If with the "[...] gender experience [...]" referred to by Scott (1991, p. 86): created, attributed, and imputed symbolic characteristics to the woman's body that legitimize her submission as a female virtue. This is because "[...] gender differences are built [...]" through social practices that "reflect" and "maintain power relations"; that is, the construction of difference occupies the core of strategies that legitimize inequality, so gender becomes "[...] a primary field within which, or through which, power is articulated [...]"

In this sense, in the preventative center, the discipline was even more rigorous, given the moral standards linked to gender: sexuality and care for the



body, as well as the length of stay. If girls needed – as Scott (1991, p. 86) says – "special skills" to deal with their bodies, then the education they received did not provide them; rather, it demanded them, with coercion and submission. From the direction of the institution, this logic of conducting life in the preventative center leads us to Foucault (2016), to his conception in which punishment and surveillance express something greater: the exercise of disciplinary power over the physical body, which is obliged to be shaped according to certain postures and ways, including being, walking and speaking, as well as the worldview that guides the material existence of each person.

According to the author, in twentieth-century detention establishments, physical and symbolic discipline practices occurred inseparably. Under the pretext of protection and moral education of the internal public, a system of monitoring and correction of bodies was established. As discussed by Foucault (2016), it was disciplinary device that influenced the daily gestures of the detained individuals. In such an environment, the form of existence assumed explicit violence to exercise systematic and constant control of bodies. When exercised with physical punishments in public, control becomes a tactic for disciplining bodies indoors (Foucault, 2016).

The discipline manufactures submissive and exercised bodies, "docile" bodies. *Discipline increases the forces of the body* (in economic terms of utility) and decreases these same forces (in political terms of obedience). The body becomes useful force only when it is, at the same time, a productive body and a submissive body (Foucault, 2016, p. 135, emphasis added).

In fact, in the preventative room, discipline – imposed by regulation – was inflicted to "make docile" the bodies: the rebels and the non-rebels; with violence, sometimes physical, sometimes symbolic, sometimes both in a single gesture. Underlying such disciplinary power was the figure of the woman director – the woman director's strong presence.

However, the increase in body strength due to discipline can have the opposite effect: that of resistance and reaction, through small gestures associated with cunning and not at all with the use of force. This is what the sisters' testimonials shows. They verbalized memories of actions of solidarity and resistance among the interns, even under monitoring and chance of being punished.

Thus, what seemed to be education came down to a social training aimed at maintaining an unbalanced structure: girls learned to obey to serve without questioning or resisting. According to Pinto (1994), this would be a trait of the teaching aimed at women in Brazil, the intention of shaping them to fulfill a social role always close to the domestic-passive.

The sisters, however, did not lose heart. They sought to break the rule by acting in the gaps of control. Aware that her older sister had found a way to solve the consequences of enuresis, D went to her dormitory to tell her that she had wet the sheet.

"Godmother! I peed on the bed." Then, she [N] would take it, go to my bed, remove my wet sheet, we would go to the bathroom, she would rinse it, throw it on the stone, and take the sheet from her bed and take it and put it on my [mattress], because they were not going to look in her bed, because she was not used to peeing. Then, at dawn, before everyone woke up, she would go there, pick up the sheet and put it on her bed, so they would not do that to me. It was like this, in front of everyone (D, 2023).

18 In fact, N took care of the younger sisters, preserving them from punishment through gestures of insight, even putting herself at risk. His sense of protection was emphatic.

[...] I fought, I stirred things up, I talked [...] as they say: "kills me, but I will protect her, I will". [...] I defended girls who were bullied [...] I was in revolt. It felt like there was a great revolt inside me (N, 2023).

The older sister's attitude seems to echo the idea of "resistance infrastructures" referred to by Scott.

Everyday forms of resistance rarely manifest in open confrontations, but survive in *covert, disguised practices* that quietly undermine domination. They are *discrete gestures* — refusal, irony, *clandestine solidarity* — that express an invisible policy of the oppressed ones (Scott, 2005, p. 24, emphasis added).

By reviewing what she saw and did, N makes it clear how much she re-signifies his memory through the experience by recognizing marks of

what she went through. Her reworking exemplifies the value of oral history to the individual leading role that each person has in their history. In her leading role, N assumes the role of the heroine: the older sister who defends the younger girls. In this sense, the attribute "godmother" allows us to glimpse the consequences of their actions for their subjectivity: not to lose and strengthen the sense of family left in Ituiutaba. The godmother sister was the strength of brotherly affection that represents resistance on a smaller scale.

## **When memory educates: listening to (re)write the story**

The memories of the three sisters reveal that the pedagogy of punishment, without the content of a merely corrective resource, constituted a disciplinary technology (Foucault, 2016) applied in a particular way to female bodies, in accordance with a moral and hygienist ideology that legitimized submission and silencing in that historical context. By publicly exposing practices such as enuresis and menstruation, the institution transformed intimate experiences into scenes of public humiliation, converting shame into an educational tool (Della Piazza, 2012; Scott, 1991). However, while it disciplined bodies, this regime generated fissures for small resistances, gestures of solidarity and maintenance of emotional bonds, in line with daily forms of resistance, as pointed out by James Scott (2005). In this sense, oral history (Portelli, 1997; Bosi, 1994) not only rescues silenced voices, but allows us to understand how memory (re)elaborates traumatic experience and (re)inscribes it as resistance, as well as exposes practices that are not explicitly manifested in official documents.

By bringing to the public stories marked by moments of imposed silence, we seek to show how the pedagogy of punishment as a measure of institutional education is intertwined with the gender of the punished body and social exclusion in the form of control that annulled personal identities. It is clear how certain methods of education were influenced by moralizing values rooted in public health discourses and gender norms that aimed to control and conform the body to standards of purity, docility, and submission. Physical punishments, public humiliation, restriction of sexuality and suppression of emotional ties formed an environment in which pain was part of the educational process.

Thus, this study of historical intention recognizes the negative side of institutional philanthropy: one in which charity and support perpetuated social inequalities, naturalizing forms of violence and social structures of exclusion. From the oral accounts, a deeper understanding of experience as a genuine source of knowledge of the past emerged, revealed feelings that interfere with meanings and are not shown in other records of the past. The sisters' history records past punishments and constraints, in addition to revealing how their experiences influenced their identities by internalizing values such as obedience and modesty.

In fact, the marks left on the girls' bodies are not physical, that is, they are invisible to the eyes; but they jump to the ears when the sisters report their memories. They shape an updated understanding of the past, in which new components of meaning enter because the sisters are "[...] a *living* source of history when remembering [...]" (Meihs, 2002, p. 15, emphasis added); therefore, they are transformed. Thus, if the history of Brazilian education has chapters marked by institutionalized violence that still directly affects people, then it is important that they are "read" with due attention so that they can produce meanings, including that of denunciation. There is a silence about the suffering experienced, as if they were the "underground memories" referred to by Pollak (1989): they are suppressed, but not forgotten.

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