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### pedagogues illustrious



### **Margot Machado Padrón: a teacher of mambisa lineage**

### **Margot Machado Padrón: una maestra de estirpe mambisa**

### **Margot Machado Padrón: uma professora de linhagem mambisa**

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**M**argot Machado Padrón was born on September 24, 1909 in Báez, a rural neighborhood of Santa Clara. The Machado Padrón family was of Mambisa lineage, the father fought in the 1895 war of independence. The narrations of the libertarian deed influenced the children, many of whom later assumed a revolutionary position.

In the public school of Báez she received her first instruction with the teacher Hortensia Otero, whose educational influence left a deep mark on her and helped to educate her in patriotic values. He moved to the city in order to prepare for his admission to the Normal School for Teachers of Santa Clara, a center he entered in 1923 when he was only 14 years old. Once graduated, she began to work as a teacher at the Manigua farm in the neighborhood where she lived. He taught at a multigrade rural public school, built with his father's resources.

There she learned about the reality of the Cuban countryside in those republican years: the existing misery, economic backwardness, illiteracy, lack of culture... At that time, when the rural public schools were the most disadvantaged of the existing educational system, "Margot Machado was strengthened by difficulties and reached the dimension of a true teacher, one who fulfills the duty of teaching those most in need". (Azel, 2019, p.72)

His first working years took place within the framework of the Machado dictatorship. The social situation throughout Cuba served him to shape his own convictions. The contact with

the harsh reality that his students and colleagues lived generated in him a process of political awareness. Likewise, the abuses and crimes committed by orders of the dictator Gerardo Machado Morales permeated his conscience, for which he repudiated and opposed that regime.

It was related to the magisterial struggles nuanced by a strong political character. He signed the "Energetic Attitude of Teachers" manifesto in 1933; He participated in the teachers' strikes that took place in 1933 and 1935.

In 1934 he enrolled in the career of Pedagogy at the University of Havana. The sacrifice of studying in Havana served her to achieve a higher professional qualification and enabled her to improve her location in the municipality, when she was promoted in 1935, due to her personal merits, to an urban public school.

He received his doctorate in Pedagogy in 1938, by then the family had moved their residence to the city of Santa Clara. In that year he improved in the ranks and in 1940, he moved to a more central school. In the public schools, he contacted the poor students of the different urban neighborhoods of the locality. He taught with a great responsibility of civic duty, imbued with high civility, consecration to his students and their schools and inspiration in the pedagogical conceptions of the Apostle.

Between 1941 and 1943, she served as director of a local adult night school. There he came into direct contact with the working class, the student body came almost entirely from the sphere of commerce. For Margot, the night school for adults was a kind of Popular University.

In the 1940s and early 1950s, she developed an important professional life in the Villareño territory, as she was a pedagogue fully identified with the educational needs of her

people. Her effort and perseverance led her to promotion, without the need to resort to political maneuvering. It was thus that between 1943 and 1953 she served as provincial inspector of upper primary schools.

Her professional activity brought her closer to the harsh reality in which Cuban peasants and workers lived, she became sensitized with their struggles for economic, political and social demands. His thinking underwent a transformation, which is why he began to interact with prominent local and national fighters.

Following the coup d'état of March 10, 1952, everything changed. Margot and her children became directly involved in the fight against the dictator. As a consequence, they suffered painful conflicts firsthand. The actions of July 26, 1953 and the trial of Fidel Castro with his self-defense plea known as *History will absolve me*, deeply shook her.

In that same year, her professional life was affected when she was appointed as inspector of private schools in Las Villas. In the midst of this situation, the youngest daughter expressed her interest in studying at the Kindergarten Normal School. By that date, Margot had already widowed and did not have money to pay for those studies; but he wanted to respect his vocation and had to find a solution.

For these reasons, in 1954 he founded a preparatory academy for admission to the secondary schools of Santa Clara. During the course of the preparatory course, some parents asked him to open a school dedicated to teaching the baccalaureate for boys that would be incorporated into the Secondary Education Institute. The foundation of Colegio Lincoln would allow him to put into practice advanced pedagogical ideas and the experience he had accumulated.

This process of professional performance and political training reached its peak in the period

of struggle against the Batista dictatorship. For this reason, "...the Lincoln School was not only a space for testing pedagogical experiences and reflection, but it was also a center of revolutionary struggle where clandestine meetings were held, propaganda, weapons and various objects of importance were hidden" (Maura and Azel, 2016: 13).

These conditions led to the school becoming a conspiratorial focus of great relevance in the town. In addition, the teachers at the school were mostly recognized revolutionaries. There, the first copies of *La historia me absolverá* in the province were printed in mimeographed form, which involved its raid by the police forces.

From mid-1955 to early 1956, the MR-26-7 was organized in Las Villas; Among its leaders was his son Quentin. In those first moments, Margot was not a member, but she shared the anti-Batista position of her sons Quintín and Julio.

His dwelling was a center for visits and meetings, in which were, among others, Haydée Santamaría Cuadrado, Gustavo Arcos Bergnes and Melba Hernández Rodríguez del Rey. During the visit of the latter, who had been sent by Fidel, Margot made a tour of the province together with her, under the pretext of her position as provincial inspector. This was her first important task in the revolutionary struggle and, from that moment on, she became a true clandestine fighter who, under the pseudonym of Mercedes, continued to carry out the work undertaken by the Moncada heroine in Villarreal territory.

A short time later, he traveled to Havana to receive guidance from Níco López and Melba Hernández about the objectives of the struggle at that stage, the forms and methods to follow in the conspiracy tasks. Upon his return, he received Vilma Espín at his home, recently arrived from Mexico and sent by the MR-26-7 to remain in Santa Clara until she

was picked up to continue her journey to the East.

Likewise, he traveled to Santiago de Cuba to meet with Frank País, Otto Parellada, Pepito Tey and Vilma, with the aim of knowing the conduct they should follow in support of Fidel's landing. He asked to bring weapons; but Frank's sagacity prevented it, he only brought bullets and bomb detonators.

In Santa Clara all the preparations for the action of November 30 were carried out with efficiency; in his home he welcomed a crowd on the 29th, since on the 30th the streets were blocked. As a consequence, Margot and her daughters hid among their friends, and her son Quintín took refuge in Cienfuegos; meanwhile, his house and school were searched. The situation became extremely dangerous for him and he left for Havana.

He was in the capital when he was notified of the arrest of his son in Cienfuegos and he immediately moved to Santa Clara. He went to the police station, pressured Colonel Cornelio Rojas with demands and shouts until they respected the physical integrity of his son, who was later tried, convicted, and sent to the Modelo Prison. Thus, this brave Cuban prevented the murder of her son.

Faustino Pérez and Frank País were in the city on December 28, 1956 with orders from Fidel to reorganize the MR-26-7 in Las Villas. Faustino named her Finance Secretary; but according to her testimony it was her sister Teté who controlled them and she was in charge of larger tasks.

Her tours of the province were true feats and demonstrated the courage of this woman: she sold bonds, contacted leaders from other towns and on some occasions, resolved difficult situations without affecting the performance of duty. She was detained by police agents in Guayos, Cienfuegos, Sagua la Grande and Santa Clara. She was

permanently monitored, both at home and at school.

Despite this and the constant threat from the Military Intelligence Service (SIM), his revolutionary activity was incessant. However, he frequently traveled throughout the province and to Havana to visit imprisoned revolutionaries and serve as a liaison between those in the Castillo del Príncipe and those incarcerated in the Presidio Modelo. There he met Armando Hart Dávalos.

In May 1957, some incidents of the MR-26-7 took place in Cabaiguán. Margot moved to that municipality on the 26th to clarify situations and misunderstandings, they met at the Presbyterian College. Upon his return, he learned the unfortunate news of the fatal accident of his son Julio, along with his partner Agustín *Chiqui* Gómez - Lubián.

The funerals were watched by the police. His courage was once again on display when he asked family and friends not to buy flowers, but to give him the money to buy bullets to donate to Fidel. That patriotism and courage could be seen when he incited the young people to carry out the burial, since the police officers had superior orders not to allow the coffins to be accompanied. Despite that order, a sea of people accompanied the hearses singing the national anthem and that of the 26th. In the cemetery, the young people wanted to plot against the hitmen and she avoided a massacre.

Despite the endless pain he felt at the loss of his son, he continued his revolutionary activities. It was thus that on July 12, he met with Frank País, in Santiago de Cuba, to discuss certain existing problems in the ranks of the MR-26-7 in Las Villas and to project future plans for revolutionary struggle in the central territory. Upon his return he brought guidance and documents.

Margot was concerned that Frank was in grave danger; For this reason, he proposed to

go to Santa Clara to jointly reorganize the MR-26-7, but the Santiago leader did not accept and preferred to leave it pending discussion for another occasion, which never existed, since Frank fell, along with his partner Raúl Pujol, in one of the streets of Santiago assassinated by Batista's henchmen on July 30, 1957.

His death had intense repercussions in the central region, which supported the strike initiated in Santiago; in Santa Clara traffic was paralyzed, because the streets were blocked. A few days later, a document signed by Fidel Castro arrived from the Sierra directing a strike against the horrendous assassination of the leader from Santiago. Margot took all the decisions to carry out the order of the Commander in Chief, wrote a proclamation addressed to the workers to exhort them to participate in the strike. Their patriotism was felt as they roused the entire province on strike (Azel and Estive, 2018).

Then, in the midst of great tension, they organized the September 5 uprising in Cienfuegos. Support actions guided by the leadership of the MR-26-7 were carried out in almost the entire central region. Margot Machado and Allán Rosell Anido finalized and oriented the specific details of the action in Santa Clara, since Julio Camacho Aguilera had moved to Cienfuegos to lead the uprising, in his capacity as the highest provincial leader.

The action failed and the dictatorship unleashed a great persecution. Julio Camacho Aguilera took refuge in another province. Allán Rosell and Margot Machado hid, but were betrayed. Rosell was able to flee, but Margot was arrested, although hours later she was released due to lack of evidence.

The opening of the 1957-1958 school year at Colegio Lincoln on September 11 served as a pretext to restructure the direction of the MR-

26-7 in the province. Margot was named provincial coordinator of the organization.

The situation of the organization at the end of 1957 in the central territory was very complex. At the beginning of 1958, the circumstances in which the revolutionary found herself were very serious. On March 3, she was dismissed from her position as provincial inspector and as punishment she would be sent to the province of Matanzas. She did not accept the transfer to continue the revolutionary struggle from underground, and she acted in this way, despite being registered and knowing the direct order for her assassination.

The leadership of the MR-26-7 decided to send her to Santiago de Cuba and later to the Sierra Maestra, but that initial plan was not carried out. His situation became so critical in the city that he had no other alternative but to go into total hiding; He was in unimaginable places, but he made the mistake of returning home and the police officers showed up there. However, he was able to flee thanks to the help of his youngest daughter. Days later, he handed over the position to Enrique Oltuski Osacki and left for Havana.

From then on another stage of his revolutionary life began: he had a false identity and was far from his home and his environment. He was reunited with his daughter Verena, who was also under revolutionary protection, and helped prepare for the April 9 strike by making the MR-26-7 bracelets to be worn by the revolutionaries in Havana.

Faustino Pérez moved her to an apartment rented by MR-26-7 in Centro Habana; but in that place she was at great risk, since the henchmen were looking for her. For this reason, they took her to the Guatemalan embassy to request political asylum, although she did not request it at the time because she was very disciplined and did not have the

authorization to do so. However, his daughter Verena processed it and it was granted.

In June 1958, he left the country for Guatemala, from where he went to Honduras and, finally, to Venezuela. He was part of the revolutionary groups in Caracas, overcame difficulties and setbacks. Her revolutionary activity was carried out with great dedication, she put all her experience into her performance to the point of being named assistant coordinator of the MR-26-7 in Caracas. He wrote political materials to broadcast them on radio stations in Caracas.

Her life in exile was sad, the memories of her homeland and the concern for her children made her long for the return to rejoin the fight in Cuba. He tried to join the comrades who would meet Fidel in the Sierra; but it was useless. In the midst of sadness and revolutionary work, he learned about the victory of the rebels in Las Villas on the radio news, the escape of the dictator at dawn on the 1st. January 1959 and the revolutionary triumph. His joy was immense and he immediately prepared to return, just like other exiles.

On January 4, Margot arrived in Cuba. The plane first landed in Santiago, where it located Vilma Espín and left the MR-26-7 files with her to be delivered to Commander Raúl Castro Ruz. He asked the pilot to land in Santa Clara, but he claimed that he did not know the runway. For this reason, she did not return to her city or to her usual job as an inspector.

Once in Havana, she was appointed technical undersecretary of the Ministry of Education. It was an important part of the design and implementation of all the transformations of the national education system that took place in these first years of the Revolution in power. His participation in the reorganization and modernization of the Ministry of Education was essential to fulfill the Moncada Program in this important area.

She directed the debates of the Comprehensive Education Reform Law, and enriched them with her accumulated experience as a teacher, director and inspector. Margot Machado stated, without any hesitation, that "the school is the main educational agency, since its essential function is to take charge of education." (Azel and J6, 2019, p. 299) He insisted on the role that the teacher plays in society, entrusting him with the formation of hard-working, supportive, respectful, responsible and revolutionary citizens.

Since 1959, the Literacy Campaign began to be prepared. Its primary objective was to teach almost a million illiterate people in the country to read and write. Margot Machado Padr6n played an important role in the creation of the National Literacy Commission and in the preparations for the campaign. He exchanged criteria in several days of work with Fidel, which were essential for his subsequent success.

At the call of the president, made by television on April 22, 1960, during one of his usual appearances, more than three thousand volunteer teachers joined, made up of young students who responded effusively. "Margot Machado contributed with her work to the constitution of the first Contingent of Volunteer Teachers, in the year 1960" (Azel, 2018, p. 124)

Together with Vilma Esp6n, Asela de los Santos, Hayd6e Santamar6a and other colleagues, she founded the organization of Cuban women. On August 23, 1960, they were meeting at the headquarters of the newspaper *Hoy*, when Fidel intervened in that memorable meeting and suggested calling it the Federation of Cuban Women. They accepted immediately, thus the current name of the FMC was established.

In late 1960, Margot fell ill and asked for her retirement; but he managed to recover and rejoined other revolutionary tasks. She

worked full time in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MINREX), in the national leadership of the FMC, in the Central Committee of the PCC, of which she was a founder; At the end of the 1970s, he returned to the MINREX to later finish his working life at the Cuban Book Institute. She was also the founder of the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution and the National Revolutionary Militias.

After his working days, despite his advanced age, he dedicated himself to collaborating with the FMC. During the battle for the return of Eli6n Gonz6lez, he made an intervention in one of the events organized for this purpose. His analysis was objective, expressing the need for family education as a fundamental element to claim the return of the child.

In 2009, he celebrated his centenary in Santa Clara, enjoying the usual clarity and vitality, plans and hopes. She was decorated with the Frank Pa6s Order by the Minister of Education Dr. Ena Elsa Vel6zquez Cobiella in homage to her centenary "and in recognition of a long career in the field of educational teaching" (Cuadrado, 2009, p. 2). the clarity of its principles despite the years, harsh memories and physical limitations.

She physically disappeared on May 30, 2015. At her funeral, Division General Guillermo Rodr6guez del Pozo said: "Margot Machado stood out since she directed a school in Santa Clara that filled her with even more conditions, to educate and guide the young for the fight". ( Saborit , 2015, p. 2) Brigadier General Armando Choy Rodr6guez, founder of the MR-26-7 in Las Villas, commented: "... this woman is considered today a worthy successor to Mariana and Hayd6e Santamar6a" (Saborit , 2015, page 2)

The mourning farewell included floral offerings from Commander in Chief Fidel Castro Ruz and the then first secretary of the PCC, Army General Ra6l Castro Ruz. The funeral honors were attended by Brigadier General Tet6 Puebla, the Heroine of Labor of

the Republic of Cuba Asela de los Santos, fellow fighters, daughters and other relatives.

Her remains were deposited in Havana until September 24 of that same year, when, in a family ceremony, they were accompanied to the cemetery of the town of Santa Clara by many of the former "boys and girls" that she educated with her example as a teacher. and revolutionary.

Margot Machado Padrón represents an ideal teacher, since she developed a truly Cuban education, a paradigm where the preparation, skills and abilities of the pedagogical profession materialized; the love towards her and the students; the essential moral values in this work and the pedagogical mastery acquired during his performance, but above all for his great patriotism. For this reason, the anti-terrorist hero Antonio Guerrero included it in his collection of drawings of Cuban patriots.

In his professional performance, he evidenced a participatory, practical, but above all patriotic Pedagogy that constitutes demonstrations of the development achieved. Reasons that fully justify the assessment of faithful continuation of the Cuban pedagogical tradition.

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The author participated in the drafting and analysis of the documents



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