

STORY OF THE RICH PEOPLE FROM PANZÓS

As told by six eyewitnesses; translated from Maya-K'ekchi' by M.R. Wilson

In the town of Panzós on the twenty-ninth of May [1978], at great sacrifice and pain the Indians were killed by the rich (i.e. Ladinos) who grabbed land there in Panzós, always [land that] did not belong to them. They just rob because they have a lot of money, money that does not belong to them: they seek a lot of debt [backing] at the bank, [where] well they know the devils (slang for Ladinos).

Not a few of the lowly Indians were killed by the rich; always they deceived the Indians, as did the man called 'Don' (a term used here sarcastically) Playa [=Plalla] Monzón, the very one who was sent there in the town of Panzós, precisely the rich man there in that town who has taken not a little land [and] not a few properties (*haciendas*) [and] thus increased his wealth, and now many of the important people like the lawyer and doctors and the Padres have entered behind [=robbed] the poor Indians. Yet why did the landlords begin to kill the poor Indians? Because 'Don' Playa Monzón, whose wealth is great there in Panzós, persuaded those who had small holdings just like he deceived the poor indigenes; always the Mayor of the town of Panzós was paid (i.e., bribed). Thus they began to deceive the poor Indians and they ordered the taking of many people forever [=killing]; thus not a few people were killed on that day.

So that man did a lot there in Panzós and on account of him those rich people there have no fear. They hired soldiers from Zacapa; all the way from Zacapa came those who killed the poor Indians there at Panzós, and those killed were many—nearly two hundred men, women and children, and the wounded even above two hundred men, women and children. Among the wounded were some with broken bones, some with bullet wounds to the belly, some shot through the throat/neck, even one with a bullet through the head of his penis. Those with bullet wounds went to the hospital in Cobán, and just part of those who came here to Cobán to be treated were allotted medicine: some were sent [on] to Guatemala [City], some were sent to Zacapa, some to Puerto Bárrios, some to El Estór, some to Tukurú [and] we don't know where everyone went because we didn't see everything on account of fright from the shooting.

'Don' Playa Monzón just ordered forty soldiers to massacre the poor Indians and all because the poor Indians feed themselves by the work of their hands, planting milpa, beans, rice, chilis, bananas, manioc, taro, [and] all their crops. That is what the wealthy envied and for it the poor Indians were killed, leaving behind their wives and their children, leaving them in difficulty [and] in poverty on account of the wealthy; always they left what they had in disarray because they didn't know what had come on that hour and day. In the aldeas the village officials (*alcaldes auxiliares*) remained alone; they requested [that] dead people from the town [be sent to them]/ Ever in a pitiful state they arrived on that day. Wherever those shot by the soldiers might be, one couldn't show a bit of space between dead people, [and] they barely recognized those who had been shot by the soldiers from Zacapa; only later did they figure out that the wealthy had shot the poor Indians in the back.

SECOND PART OF MS. (second witness' testament)

Thus when so many were killed there in the town, Sr. Playa Monzón took fright before the people [and] took directly to his house in Panzós. And then there is precisely the rich man who thought up the killing of the many people there at Panzós, 'Don' Shell (Kjell Eugénio Lagerud García, President of Guatemala) who then was "boss". With that boss lies responsibility for the killing of the poor Indians in Panzós; under that boss the wealthy hired [soldiers]; he gave permission to murder the poor Indians. Moreover, 'Don' Shell stepped down as boss in the month of June, 1978; he left as boss in that year and still nothing has been done about the killing of the poor Indians.

The places, the lands that belonged to them [and] that they knew how to work, on account of those [came] the great envy of the rich. Besides, when Indians had many labourers (*mozos*) come to work they cared well for their labourers; they were generous with tortillas and for that the wealthy became jealous; and the wealthy no longer got labourers, leading to greater anxiety and anger toward the poor Indians, and the wealthy no longer provided tortillas so well: they just counted out tortillas for their labourers. As for wages, those wealthy people [Ladinos] paid Q1.50 [per day] and were ungenerous with tortillas while the poor Indians also paid Q1.50 and fed their labourers well. They provided tortillas generously, so among the Indians labourers abounded. With that began the anger of the rich, those who have farms (*fincas*); with that their hearts were embittered towards the poor Indians there in Panzós.

They were used to earlier times when the poor Indians of Panzós worked for them, doing whatever they wished, whether weeding or seeding—but now no longer do they help the wealthy as in days before they paid the Indians so poorly and doled out the tortillas. For that [change] it is that the hearts of the rich are turned against the poor Indians.

When in former days not one person knew how to speak Spanish the rich did just as they wished. "Do this" they said to the poor Indians. "All right", they said, "we will work for the rich even though they pay poorly"; but only when we didn't know at all how to speak in Spanish—that was when they bothered the poor Indians. But now we have a little knowledge of speaking in Spanish [and] with that we have been doing better. Now there are boys [and] girls that have begun to learn [at school]; with that we began to do a bit better, as now there are schools everywhere in the *aldeas*. Thus intelligent children quickly learn their lessons and with that we are getting ahead a little. There are teachers to show us [new ways of] planting and gardening, [to] teach us how to better ourselves and of all of that the wealthy are envious. The wealthy don't like it when poor Indians learn anything; [only] with difficulty do teachers arrive anywhere on the *haciendas*. They prefer that we poor Indians would know nothing—and [so] they massacred the poor Indians because Indians understand in a moment whatever is shown to them by a teacher. Here it ends.

Original ms dated 30-OCT-1978
First typed translation 23-NOV-1985
Revised 20-NOV-1996