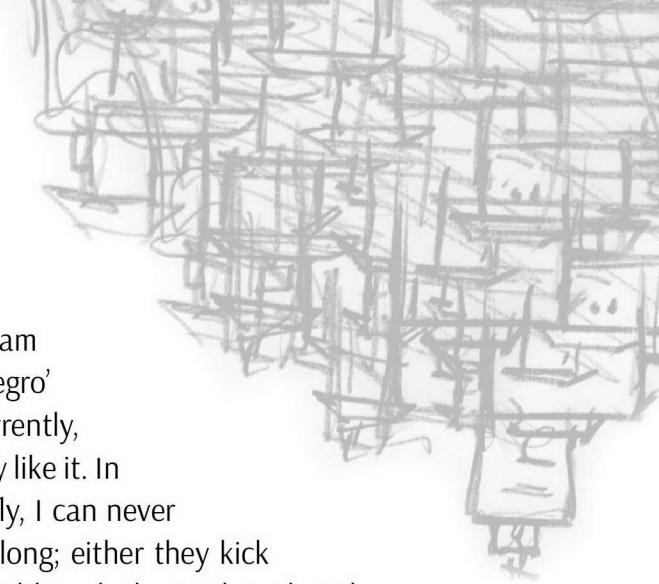


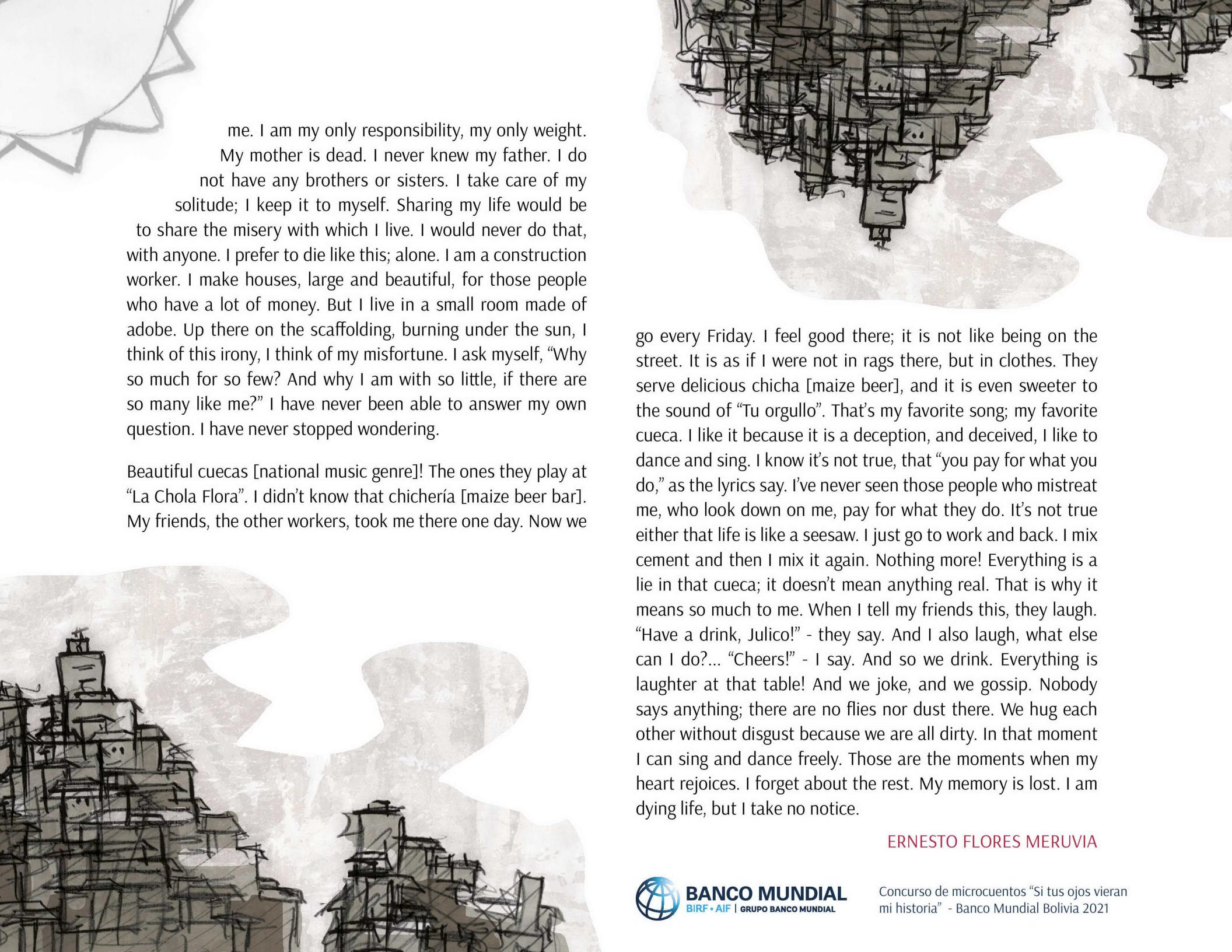


I, JULIO TARQI

My name is Julio Tarqui. I am Aymara. People call me 'negro' because I have brown skin. Currently, I live in the city, but I don't really like it. In the city I feel that I am just a fly, I can never stay in any one place for very long; either they kick me out, or I leave on my own. Although the truth is that they usually kick me out. I cannot even walk peacefully on the street. When I walk by, young ladies whisper about me. "Look at that cholo," they say, as if I couldn't hear them. - "Look at his rags, his hair, his nails!" - they say. Fancy young men brush off their coats and pants, as if seeing me gets them dirty. Surely they look at me as if my face were caked with dust. They don't know how to hide their disgust, their discomfort. Is it because of my skin color that they confuse me with dust? But yes, I am mud! just like them, just like everyone; I am neither dust nor a dust cloud. The thing is that ... they are of another class. "Don't look at me, don't touch me" - That's who they are. When they see me, they are offended. It seems that just walking past them I am insulting them. Their faces change; they get annoyed. That's why I don't like going downtown to go to work.

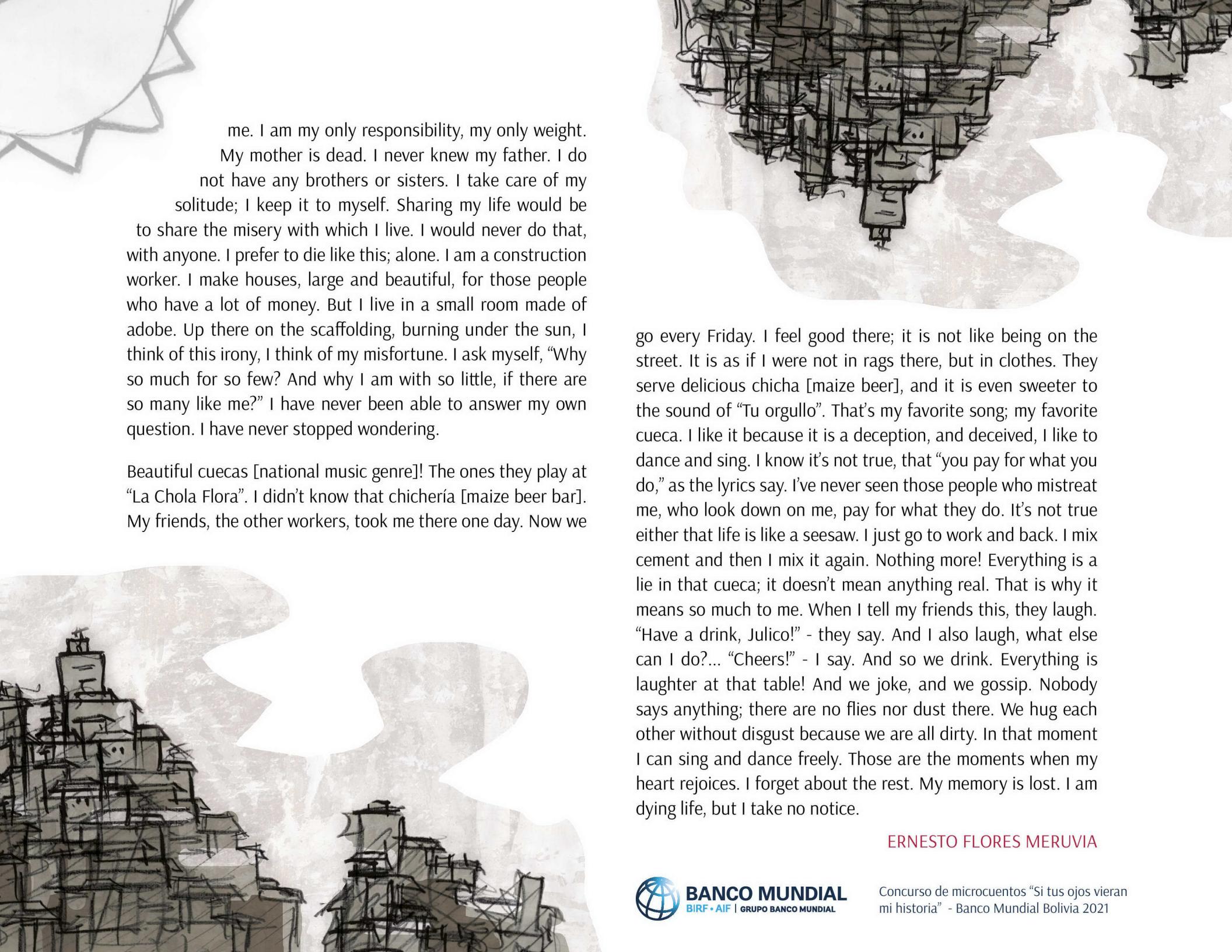
I live on the hillside. That is where my house is, where the sun shines bountifully; a little further beyond the other houses. Every day I go downtown, even on Sundays. I make very little money. Fortunately, I live alone; nobody depends on





me. I am my only responsibility, my only weight. My mother is dead. I never knew my father. I do not have any brothers or sisters. I take care of my solitude; I keep it to myself. Sharing my life would be to share the misery with which I live. I would never do that, with anyone. I prefer to die like this; alone. I am a construction worker. I make houses, large and beautiful, for those people who have a lot of money. But I live in a small room made of adobe. Up there on the scaffolding, burning under the sun, I think of this irony, I think of my misfortune. I ask myself, "Why so much for so few? And why I am with so little, if there are so many like me?" I have never been able to answer my own question. I have never stopped wondering.

Beautiful cuecas [national music genre]! The ones they play at "La Chola Flora". I didn't know that chichería [maize beer bar]. My friends, the other workers, took me there one day. Now we



go every Friday. I feel good there; it is not like being on the street. It is as if I were not in rags there, but in clothes. They serve delicious chicha [maize beer], and it is even sweeter to the sound of "Tu orgullo". That's my favorite song; my favorite cueca. I like it because it is a deception, and deceived, I like to dance and sing. I know it's not true, that "you pay for what you do," as the lyrics say. I've never seen those people who mistreat me, who look down on me, pay for what they do. It's not true either that life is like a seesaw. I just go to work and back. I mix cement and then I mix it again. Nothing more! Everything is a lie in that cueca; it doesn't mean anything real. That is why it means so much to me. When I tell my friends this, they laugh. "Have a drink, Julico!" - they say. And I also laugh, what else can I do?... "Cheers!" - I say. And so we drink. Everything is laughter at that table! And we joke, and we gossip. Nobody says anything; there are no flies nor dust there. We hug each other without disgust because we are all dirty. In that moment I can sing and dance freely. Those are the moments when my heart rejoices. I forget about the rest. My memory is lost. I am dying life, but I take no notice.

ERNESTO FLORES MERUVIA



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