

A close-up photograph of a woman's face, focusing on her eyes and lips. She has dark hair, gold glitter eye makeup, and pink lipstick. A semi-transparent pink banner with white text is overlaid across the middle of the image.

FROM THE BITTERNESS OF MACHISMO TO THE SWEETNESS OF *LIBERATION*

Through social transformations, many youngsters in western Boyacá struggle to be socially included and also accept themselves as they are.



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Like the first line in the soliloquy of Hamlet, the William Shakespeare's play, "to be or not to be, that is the question". That is the daily struggle that many young people confront with themselves and their realities. Many reside in places polluted with machismo, stigmatization by gender, culture or physical traits, war and political position; factors that, at the end of the day, repress thinking, feeling and expressing themselves freely.

Maripí is one of the municipalities that conforms the western province in Boyacá, at the heart of the Colombian mountains. It is known as a sweet and charming land because of its beautiful and flattering landscapes, its panela, coffee and cocoa crafts, considered as one of the best in the department. But, between so many beautiful things that are mentioned about Maripí, there is a social fact that is inevitable not to talk about: its glorious and blessed traditional machismo.

That same one that, at home, educates boys to work hard in the fields and the girls to be good housewives. That one that scares itself of change, that condemns girls driving motorcycles, playing microfútbol with boys, wearing tattoos, piercings, even pants, calling them, undoubtedly, *marimacha*; if a boy plays basketball, has long or dyed hair, or if his social circle is

composed only by girls, you've got to be careful: he is definitely queer.

Better said by a Maripí personality Omar Garzón, president of the JAC of in the municipality, who often mentions in his speeches:

"The man is a man because he is the one who brings food to the table, the woman simply serves our desires and takes care of the chinós (children). Do not come to me with stories of freedom or free speech, because that does not give us bread".

Beyond the myths and legends of this traditional machismo that haunts Maripí, there is a small group of young people who make a difference in a small world of 0 and 1. They are young people of *raca mandaca*, a race of command who are willing to accept all kinds of comments, mockery, pointing, stigmas, discrimination and, even more, for being the way they are: tall, short, skinny, fat, dark, black, or very white, with long, curly, afro hairstyles, for being colorful and openly gay or bisexual.

And the question that this boom raises is to be able to influence more

young people to join this collective that, unconsciously, breaks the barriers of "not being", that prevents "common being" of many in the municipality. Just as the idea that Vicente Romero, an openly gay youth activist, repeats every time he suffers from being signaled out in public:

"I don't live on what people will say, nobody feeds me. I am what I am, what is my truth and nobody has the right to judge me". ♦

THROUGH SOCIAL TRANSFORMATIONS, MANY YOUNGSTERS IN WESTERN BOYACÁ STRUGGLE TO BE SOCIALLY INCLUDED AND ALSO ACCEPT THEMSELVES AS THEY ARE.



BREAKING

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Vicente: I am not ashamed of who I am, actually, I feel proud to say without fear that I am better men than many.



Paola: This is a place where being black is weird and let your hair down is your mark.



Nikols: To be judge is like an storm that won't never stop; but when you least expected, the sun is going up again



Kevin: Don't make it a short trip to enjoy without regrets who you are or what you are going to do.



Lorena: Our body is the reflexion of love that we have for our self, We must not be part of stigmas that hurt us.



Nicolas: The most important kind of freedom, is to be what we are no matter what.