

We accompany those in clandestinity

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Received 26 January 2026; Accepted 25 February 2026; Published 8 March 2026

Andrea Terceros Hans is a feminist activist and defender of the right to safe abortion whose story is deeply shaped by her identity as an urban middle-class woman. With 18 years of involvement in the women's movement and in various feminist networks, Andrea has dedicated much of her life to the struggle for gender justice.

For the past 17 years she has accompanied abortion processes, providing support and resources to those facing this experience. Her commitment goes beyond activism; it is a call for solidarity and empathy in a context where sexual rights are often dismissed.

Andrea engages actively in this work from her own individual perspective and is part of the local collective Warmis en Resistencia, where she collaborates with other women to promote equality and the right to decide. She is also a member of the regional network Vecinas Feministas por la Justicia Sexual y Reproductiva en América Latina, where she contributes to building connections and strategies that strengthen the struggle for reproductive rights across the region.

The women who come to me will not have to face the stigma of abortion

I have been an activist for eighteen years. My journey began at university, where I had the good fortune to meet one of the members of a countercultural movement in La Paz. I had already been following them closely, I was a fan of their fanzines, and they were deeply involved in the issues that have always fascinated me: sexuality and bodies.

A year after joining the movement, I faced an unwanted pregnancy. They were the ones who gave me information on how to access a safe abortion. That experience, and the weight of the stigma I carried at the time, marked me deeply. I promised myself that no woman who came to me would have to go through the same thing. That is how my first steps in abortion accompaniment began.

Over time, the collective dissolved, but I continued creating spaces with women from different backgrounds who identified as feminists. Later I entered the institutional world, working in gender-focused NGOs. Along that path I had a great teacher: María Ángela Sotelo, a Bolivian feminist and researcher who opened the doors to institutional work for me and helped give structure to my efforts.

I participated in many spaces and activities—some short-lived, others poorly organized—but always with

feminism as the root. In 2016, while working in the Bolivian Amazon, I received a fellowship from DAWN, a feminist organization from the Global South that offers intensive training for feminists from the Global South. That training transformed me: I shared experiences with women from Latin America, Asia, and Africa, and I felt the strength of a truly international movement.

When I returned, I was certain of one thing: I had to share what I had learned. In Bolivia there was no feminist training space as such; the ones I knew were too institutional: leadership schools, promoter trainings, NGO programs. So I gathered friends and women interested in feminist education. In a simple way, I shared what I had learned. The response was enthusiastic, and those meetings became a space for dialogue and collective learning. Eventually eight of us remained. That is how Warmis en Resistencia was founded, not just a circle of self-affirmation, but a feminist collective.

Autonomous activism and institutions: being the “sandwich” and building bridges

In 2015, while working at the Coordinadora de la Mujer, I received an invitation from RESURJ, a transregional feminist organization from the Global South, to participate in dialogues on sexual and reproductive justice in Santiago, Chile. It was a very different environment from the ones I knew: formal, where activists and

institutions shared the same space. I came from a street-based, anarchist environment, and suddenly I was in a room with women from across Latin America, Indigenous and urban, middle-class like me, with diverse trajectories between street activism and institutional work.

From those meetings emerged a declaration for sexual and reproductive justice, which became my entry point into the issue. A year later several of these women gathered in Mexico during a regional conference and formed the regional network Vecinas Feministas, inviting me to join. That was my entry into a new world: regional and global political advocacy in the spaces where sexual and reproductive rights are debated, including intergovernmental forums.

Although I had sworn never to work again in an office or institutional setting, after a bad experience in Beni and the difficulties of returning to the professional “map”, Vecinas Feministas was invited to monitor the Montevideo Consensus in Latin America. I joined the monitoring process in Bolivia. From that articulation came what Cecilia and I called “Alerta Montevideo,” which remains active to this day.

Since then, I have assumed a dual role: being part of the regional team of Vecinas Feministas while also promoting the articulation in Bolivia. Today I remain in both spaces, both through my activism and through my work at MSI Bolivia.

Over the years I have often been the “sandwich.” I come from autonomous activism, critical of institutional feminism, yet I also participate in institutions that are targets of those criticisms. I have received complaints from both sides. But I have also been able to build bridges and open spaces where we can listen to one another. That has been my place.

We accompany clandestinity

With Warmis en Resistencia our focus has been comprehensive sexuality education and abortion. With Vecinas Feministas the work expands: we also speak about progressive autonomy and sexual and reproductive justice across Latin America. In every case there is a common thread: destigmatizing abortion and advancing toward its social decriminalization.

Much of what I do today comes from this articulation with comrades who bring different trajectories, both from structured spaces and horizontal collectives, but always with the same conviction: defending the right to enjoy our bodies and sexualities freely, fully, and with pleasure.

At first their discourses shook me. The jokes about abortion, for example, shocked me because I came from a Bolivian context where abortion—even within feminism, remains deeply criminalized and stigmatized. Little by little I understood that humor was also a way of breaking fear and silence.

From Warmis we accompany, refer cases, and above all weave networks. I feel that is where I found my place: in those concrete actions that save lives, sustain women,

and build complicities, always with the goal of social decriminalization.

Because in the end all of this falls on us, the companions. Every year, in the posters for March 8 or November 25, the same idea appears: that women die because of clandestine abortions, because of the “abortion business.” But that is not true. Women do not die because of clandestinity itself; they die from unsafe abortions. That is the difference we carry and the truth we accompany.

Strategies to move forward: the discourse of sexual and reproductive rights is not enough

At Warmis en Resistencia we never set political advocacy as our main goal. Ours is social advocacy. We believe that even if a law advances, if imaginaries do not change from below, there will be no real change. Our work has been to shift those imaginaries, to transform what people think and feel about our bodies and our decisions.

In Vecinas Feministas the path is different: there we do political advocacy. We participate in intergovernmental spaces, following global agendas such as the International Conference on Population and Development and others. But we do so with a clear conviction: the discourse of “sexual and reproductive rights” is no longer enough.

For those of us sitting here, talking about sexual and reproductive rights may seem easy—we had access to education, health services, and formal employment. But what about the women living in precarious conditions, in rural areas, in peripheral neighborhoods? What about young women, Black women, or sex workers? We cannot continue producing statements that leave them out. The only way to include them is through an intersectional perspective that understands how all these inequalities intersect in their lives.

Not putting all the eggs in one basket: self-criticism to move forward

Today we live in a moment when laws alone guarantee nothing. Just look at what is happening in the United States: the setbacks are evident. In Argentina, even after so many achievements, there is also the risk of losing what was gained.

We must challenge the state, because it owes us much. But we cannot believe that everything happens there. Putting all our eggs in one basket is not only dangerous; it is also a waste of time and resources.

Removing the “bloodbath”

For me, destigmatizing abortion means speaking about it in the first person, openly and honestly. We need to change the narrative, remove the “bloodbath” that always surrounds it.

When an abortion is carried out with adequate information, accompaniment, and proper supplies, it is completely safe, safer than having a tooth removed. We must dismantle the discourse of tragedy.

My first abortion was painful, but because of the stigma, not because of the procedure itself. While I was looking for a place to terminate my pregnancy, one of my best friends was announcing that he was going to be a father. I remained completely silent, carrying guilt, shame, and the idea that abortion was blood and tragedy. That experience marked me, and it is why I support and promote access to abortion. Information is a human right and should not be denied to anyone.

Strengths: our generosity makes us strong

If something sustains us, it is the generosity of certain comrades: sharing knowledge, extending a hand, opening pathways. In my life I have had references such as María Ángela Sotelo and Mónica Novillo, Bolivian feminists who accompanied me with respect, without appropriating my words or mocking my positions.

That is what I try to transmit in *Warmis en Resistencia*. Whatever little or much I know, I share with love. Because every comrade, even the one who thinks she “knows less”, brings enormous experience. Feminism should always amplify that.

Another strength is strategic awareness: knowing when to stay, when to insist, and when to leave. Leaving is not easy, but staying in spaces where you no longer grow or contribute is also a burden. Learning to let go is part of resistance.

Critical knots

One of the critical knots in the feminist struggle and the fight for abortion rights is depoliticization and the lack of an intersectional approach. When we fail to analyze our context in an integrated way, we become trapped in imported discourses that have little to do with the Bolivian reality.

Another obstacle is the persistent “bloodbath narrative.” Many collectives and institutions insist on tragic discourses, “poor women are the ones who die.” That

narrative does not open pathways; it keeps us stuck. If abortion continues to be associated only with death and guilt, how can we advance toward social decriminalization?

Challenges: we all come from different stories

One of the greatest challenges is learning to receive criticism without becoming defensive, and recognizing where it comes from, sometimes with violence, sometimes with love.

We all come from different histories. Not all of us had the same opportunities. Not all of us had someone accompanying us during our abortions, nor access to safe clinics, legal or clandestine. Understanding this is essential.

The question I always ask myself is: what can I do so that my privilege stops being privilege and becomes a right? How do I turn it into a real possibility for others?

We cannot sustain things alone

Institutional feminism needs to articulate with collectives, because in the end we are the ones who go out into the streets, who knock on doors. But we also need academia, even though it often feels like a rigid structure built on patriarchal norms.

Why must I write in the third person about what is my own experience? Why hide my body behind an impersonal voice?

Academia is necessary, but it must come closer to collectives, which are living bodies with their own ways of organizing and even distributing resources. That is why I value feminist narrative methodologies so much: they allow us to tell our stories.

Building bridges between collectives, institutions, and academia is essential. Only by recognizing all these voices will we be able to move toward the social decriminalization of abortion and the full guarantee of sexual and reproductive rights for women in Bolivia.