

The **main goal** of this project is to compare the practices of *curanderas*, traditional medicine women and *curanderos*, traditional medicine men from different locations in Mexico: San Cristóbal de las Casas (urban area) and the nearby village in the state of Chiapas (rural area). This project aims to answer the following **research questions**: 1) how different are the practices of women - *curanderas* and men - *curanderos*, and what are the biggest differences between them, 2) how does the function of traditional medicine specialist correlate with the gender and power in the community in the urban and rural areas, 3) which elements are new and unfamiliar (i.e. Tarot cards or acupuncture) and how does the introduction of those into the traditional practices correlate with the emancipation of *curanderas*, 4) how the pandemic of COVID-19 correlates with traditional medicine and what would change in this field among Maya Tsotsil in the area of Los Altos de Chiapas? *Curanderismo*, as an example of traditional medicine, is not immune to historic and social changes and although is rooted in prehispanic heritage, is modified because of the needs of its users (López Hernández, Méndez 2006). The **research hypothesis** assumes that the practices of traditional medicine specialists reflect their range of agency and influence. The women - *curanderas* from bigger locations, who incorporate new elements to get new clients, have more interpersonal power and are freer to make their own choices. In the smaller location due to the more traditional model of society *curanderas* are limited to certain social patterns. Furthermore, I think that women due to their lower position in the social hierarchy are more eager than men to incorporate new elements, because thanks to that, they can act outside their cultural, well-known frame. Moreover, I assume that the COVID - 19 pandemic could change the dynamic between *curanderas* and *curanderos*, and strengthen the position of women in the family and community.

Traditional medicine can be understood as the sum total of the knowledge, skills, and practices based on the theories, beliefs, and experiences indigenous to different cultures. A good example of such a type of medicine is Pan-American *curanderismo*. In Mesoamerica, *curanderos* are defined as people without any formal, medical training, actively involved in the process of healing. They can be called folk healers.

In this project, I base on the idea of agency, and the relationship between gender and power. The individual **agency** is understood here as the ability of autonomous action, restricted by the cultural context in the society, it means taking control over things and making use of the power but at the same time, it is strictly connected with submission. One of the main pillars of such an agency is power, which is described as access to resources and capabilities. These in turn are unevenly distributed across the society and hence the unequal distribution of the agency. The idea of **power** has an important place in gender theory as well. Reproduction of gender refers to the ways in which individuals assimilate certain behaviours, associated with their biological sex. Lynne Segal stresses that gender role and, by extension, access to power never appear alone, but they are shaped by many affiliations, such as nationality, ethnicity, level of education (Segal 1999). In this project, I adopt the feminist approach and I assume that women's experiences should be described in the wider sociological context. Therefore, I aim to describe *curanderas*, medicine women against the background of *curanderos*, medicine men. This is all the more important given the patriarchal nature of the Mexican society and the mostly submissive role of Mexican women, especially in the rural areas.

In my research, I rely mainly on the ethnographic method, which I understand as consisting of fieldwork, observation, and meaningful interactions with the natives in their natural symbolic environment. This can be achieved only after the long process of bond-making and winning the trust of the people. The fieldwork will include partially structured in-depth interviews and observations of *curanderas* and *curanderos* in their work as well. The respondents will be selected on the basis of specific criteria, such as language, age, profession and location. Thanks to this project, the disappearing phenomenon will be documented and this will translate into a better understanding of the Mexican traditional culture. The project focuses on the role of women in *curanderismo* and will, therefore, contribute to the development of gender studies.