TITLE

From camp to camp: mobility, gender and ways of life in small-scale gold mining camps of the Amazon

ABSTRACT

Our research design stems from an initial desire to understand the female component of social activities, normativities, and migrations in the small gold mining camps of the Amazon region. Seeking to understand the specificities of this form of economic production, we observe the spatial, normative and symbolic dynamics of these camps in the historical context of the so-called Amazonian gold cycle. At the same time, we track elements of change and continuity into contemporary life. Our empirical universe centers on the women who work in and around these areas as cooks or saloon girls. We focus on the arrival of these women, their work routines, and other gendered codes of behavior in their communities. Our research methods include individual interviews, participant observation in a non-governmental organization of professional sex workers, a survey in the zones of prostitution in the nearby capital of Belem, as well prolonged stays in mining settlements on the banks of the Tapajós River and in the district of Serra Pelada (all in the state of Para, Brazil). Our work follows a classical ethnographic approach, emphasizing the point of view of the research subjects. Two significant aspects emerge as the result of our reflections: the meanings of migration as women move about in search of different sorts of work, and the perceptions of female labor within the life forms engendered by a specific form of economic production in the mining areas.

Keywords: Amazon gold mining, women labor, migration, ways of life.