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***Women as “informal workers” in the silver mines of Potosi , 18th century***

The underground mining in Potosi was a male sphere. Women were forbidden, even to get inside the mines (until recently) because it was thought that they would cause misfortunes. Nevertheless, women were involved in one of the most important process: to choose and to select valuable material from discarded tailings (they were known as palliris) outside the mines. This implies that mining is a complex process with a labour and gender division that has been under looked and under estimated. Women appeared also as owners of rudimentary mills (trapiches) where the ore was processed, selling different amounts of silver to the Spanish Authorities. Finally, in Potosi, that grew as an important city in close relationship to the exploitation of silver, women were actively involved in the petty trade and in the open markets of the city. In this paper we will examine these different activities, trying to analyze and to link them with the perceptions and representations about women's role. They were somehow the "informal workers" of the time: receiving less wages, they were always present but not always recognized as such.