

and the need to specify one's study in the discursive grounds of specific and localized locales, including that of the anthropologist herself. In contrast, Amadiume's argument is based on essentialized identities (if not naturalized, as occasionally she turns to biology for rooting practices regarding African women), a relatively simple narrative of African historical processes, and an ease in moving from her study of the Nnobi in the 1980s to Africa writ large.

Her claims can be empirically, historically and politically challenged for their essentialist assumptions about Africa, Europe, gender, and anthropology. Interestingly, her study is anchored not only in Afrocentrism, with her Nigerian roots lending themselves to intuitive insight into what she calls the African grassroots reality, but also in classical anthropology and Western epistemology more broadly. Her project is globally comparative and legitimized by her reading of British social anthropology, which enables her to claim to scientifically find the underlying social organization of traditional African societies. From my interpretation, it is not anthropology she wants to junk, but to promote her own, Afrocentric version of anthropology.

Rather than dismiss her book as thus being contaminated by the Western episteme (which she does, for example, to V.Y. Mudimbe's *The Invention of Africa*), her book is important as it shows how academic works draw on different discursive resources for various projects. Her project particularly speaks to those promoting pan-Africanism, especially in the African diaspora, and her chapters on the challenges of racism and patriarchy facing African women in the classroom, work and in feminist groups in England and North America are insightful and suggestive. While those anthropologists, feminists, and Africanists involved in "anti-essentialist" studies could call her book "strategic essentialism," such a label goes against the grain of her assumption of scientifically grasping the essence of African (and Indo-European) social relations and ideologies. It would have been beneficial if Amadiume engaged explicitly with this expanding literature of the 1990s, but nonetheless *Reinventing Africa* nicely shows that there are very different ways to imagine the "invention of" literature. Like myself, many may situate themselves differently in their anthropology and feminism, but Amadiume's book provides a worthwhile academic and political challenge that is sure to be popular amongst audiences sympathetic to pan-Africanist movements.

Lidia D. Sciama and Joanne B. Eicher (eds.), *Beads and Bead Makers: Gender, Material Culture and Meaning*, Oxford and New York: Berg, 1998, 317 pages (paper).

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This volume brings together 12 articles originally presented at a workshop held in 1995 at Queen Elizabeth House, under

the auspices of the Cross Culture Centre for Research on Women at the University of Oxford. The contributions represent a wide variety of subjects, approaches, time periods and cultural areas. Topics range from the manufacture and trade of beads, to their different forms of consumption and their symbolic meanings, "with gender the overall theme" (p. vii). The authors come from an equally large number of disciplines: Literature, Archaeology, Design, Folklore, Anthropology, History and Women's Studies. Articles span a broad sweep of time from prehistory to the present and cover a wide array of geographical units: cities, regions, countries and even continents throughout the world.

Lidia Sciama provides an interesting overview of bead production, trade and consumption in the introductory essay. She draws attention to the major role of beads as a trade item in all parts of the world since prehistoric times. Glass blowing and bead manufacture have generally been considered a male occupation. Sciama points out that in Europe, although men were responsible for blowing and cutting glass canes to make beads, women would polish, finish and thread them and prepare them for shipment. In certain parts of West Africa, however, women are the principal bead makers. Trade in beads appears more gender specific: whether in Europe or Africa, men were usually responsible for their commerce. Beads have been used in most parts of the world, by both men and women, as a form of body adornment. Sciama explains this widespread use of beads as an efficient way of expressing beauty (the skin has always been considered the first canvas and art object), fertility (beads resemble ovaries, nipples and female genitals) and power (the magical properties of beads are used to acquire power and maintain health). She concludes that beads are of great significance at all levels of society and are "closely associated both with individual and group identity" (p. 17). Sciama's essay goes beyond a simple presentation of the articles in the book; it provides a good survey of recent bead research, including David Graeber's (1996) fascinating work on beads, money and regimes of value.

In Europe, Venice has always been at the centre of glass bead production which was generally assumed to be a male occupation. In her survey of the history of bead manufacturing from the Middle Ages to the present, Francesca Trivellato pays special attention to the role of Venetian women in the industry. Like most European medieval guilds, that of bead makers was based on the principal of male heredity and craft skills were passed down as property from man to man. Female labour was used much more, however, than indicated in official records. Bead stringing was usually done by women and they were also involved in the distribution and sale of beads at the local level. Men kept responsibility for the more lucrative long distant trades.

The following three articles deal with beads in Africa. Margaret Carey provides an overview of African beadwork. Gender roles in the manufacture of beads vary according to the materials being used (metal beads are usually made by men whereas shell beads are made by women), the uses

made of the objects (royal regalia is made by men; jewellery for females by women) and the groups involved. Beads are used as status markers, as a vehicle in social intercourse (courtship and weddings), as markers of rites of passage and as expressions of sociopolitical protest. Joanne Eicher's article focusses on the Kalabari Ijo of Nigeria. Here, for both men and women, beads are considered valuable objects and they are kept in containers under lock and key. At death, they are transferred to the closest relatives; the oldest woman in each lineage supervises these treasures which serve as expressions of family genealogy and identity. Ann O'Hear concentrates on the red stone beads called *lantana* made by the Yoruba in the city of Ilorin, Nigeria. These beads have been used for royal and courtly regalia in numerous kingdoms for hundreds of years. Although it is officially identified as a male craft, women participate in different stages of the manufacturing process, such as the grinding and polishing of the beads.

The next two articles take us to South America. Penny Dransart explains the uses made of the Christian rosary amongst the Amerindians of the Andes. They were as much a vehicle for prayer as an item of dress, worn around the neck at religious festivals. The author argues that the use of the Christian rosary by Andean peoples should not be interpreted as a sign of acculturation but rather an expression of the relationship between Andean and Christian values. Andean women have appropriated and "indigenized" the rosary, converting it "into a cultural form of their own" (p. 139). In Ecuador, as Lynn Meisch demonstrates, beaded necklaces, bracelets, earrings and rosaries are worn by both men and women, but they are primarily a female object and, when worn in large numbers, are a mark of indigenous ethnicity.

Chapters eight and nine focus on North America. Drawing on travel literature, portraits and archaeological evidence, Helen Bradley Foster shows that African American men, women and children wore beaded necklaces, bracelets and earrings during the period of slavery in the United States. She argues beads served three basic functions in African American communities: they enhanced physical appearance, they protected the body and they gave prestige which distinguished those who wore them from other Blacks. Laurie Wilkie describes an intriguing custom developed over the last two decades at the New Orleans Mardi Gras: the exhibiting of breasts and sometimes genitalia in exchange for beads. The author concludes that "the solicitation of beads in exchange for a display of nudity, has become a means through which women and men negotiate control over themselves and one another with fake pearl beads" (p. 211).

Monica Janowski explores the meaning of the wearing and possession of beads in the Kelabit Highlands of Borneo. The beads most valued are polychrome—those from the Highland area are preferred to foreign types. However, the most important criteria of value is age because beads are a form of heirloom. Beads are treated as if they were living things and as if they carried a life force; they have the power

to give prestige and distinction to "good" people. The Kelabit believe the potential to be "good" is inherited. Janowski adds: "They place emphasis both on ancestry as a predictor of achievement and on actual achievement. There is, however, a tendency for the former to be a self-fulfilling prophecy" (p. 243). Beads are associated with males rather than females. Those who are able to acquire them can legitimize their claims to "goodness" and to upward status mobility.

The two last articles present the results of archaeological research on beads in Greece and China. Helen Hughes-Brock deals with Greek beads of the Mycenaean Period (ca. 1650-1100 BC). The author explains the very specific nature of archaeological bead research. Archaeology gives direct access to the object and very precise information on its form, colour and composition. Since most beads are found in graves, it is possible to have some idea of who wore them, how they were worn and the context in which they were worn. However, it is much more difficult to acquire knowledge on the provenance of beads and the meanings they had to the people who used them. If, in the ancient civilizations of the West, beads appear in a variety of colours and materials, in China, jade is practically the only type of bead that is prized. In her article on ancient Chinese beads, Cecilia Braghin points out that jade is valued for its physical attributes: translucence, hardness and tactility. In Confucian doctrine, jade is a metaphor for the highest moral virtues. As in the West, beads in China are found primarily in tombs. Braghin provides an overview of how beads were used as grave goods from approximately 3000 to 700 BC.

Although this book covers much ground, there are some important gaps. It does not offer much in terms of theory and method. The mode of most of the articles is descriptive. Authors tend to give too much attention to the manufacture of beads, sometimes with the sole intention of showing that women were involved and not enough to their uses and meanings, where gender issues become more complex and culturally significant. However, the most obvious omission is geographical; the North American historic trade in beads is not represented in the volume. This is unfortunate because some of the most important and fascinating work on beads has been carried out in North America. There has been such widespread interest in beads in Northeastern North America that a specialized journal dedicated to the study of beads was founded by Parks Canada in Ottawa in the early 1990s (called *Beads*) and it has been published regularly ever since.

Apart from these gaps, which are practically impossible to avoid when setting an agenda as ambitious as this one, the volume offers an interesting and stimulating introduction to the study of beads. It contributes to our knowledge of beads and it provides invaluable up-to-date bibliographies. More importantly, it is the first work to seriously attempt to study beads as gendered objects. In this sense, it opens new perspectives for research.