Ch. Didier Gondola, *Tropical Cowboys: westerns, violence, and masculinity in Kinshasa*. Bloomington and Indianapolis IN: Indiana University Press (hb US$80 – 978 0 253 02066 6; pb US$30 – 978 0 253 02077 2). 2016, 270 pp.

In his latest book, Ch. Didier Gondola offers an interesting genealogical insight into the historical processes, societal shifts and trans-local cultural trajectories that have produced Kinshasa's self-proclaimed *kinicité* as the city's assumed essence. His analysis focuses on the 1950s 'Bill' or 'Yankee' youth culture and illustrates how and why these urban gangs of young men (and, to a lesser extent, women) left a profound footprint on popular culture, social practices and urban imaginations in present-day Kinshasa. He argues that the iconic figure of the cowboy, introduced by Hollywood films in colonial Léopoldville, provoked such a 'visceral and enduring fascination' (p. 201) that it produced 'a cultural détournement that came to embody the urban experience itself and to define urbanness for decades to come' (p. 67). Moreover, Gondola's analysis shows not only how Billism, with its own slang, style and cowboy costumes, captured popular frustrations and sparked cultural flows that escaped government control, but also how it was first and foremost a gendered movement. Through the 'ritualization and stylization of violence' (p. 82), Billism indeed contributed to the production of a hegemonic masculinity and became a new 'yardstick against which all men in Kinshasa are measured' (p. 198).

Because of this explicit focus on masculinity, *Tropical Cowboys* will be of interest not only to historians of Congo/Zaire and African popular culture but also to gender scholars, making two original contributions at the intersection of these fields. First, it tackles the question of the gendered reproduction of Yankeeism as a script that profoundly affected other interstitial youth cultures that followed in the Bills' wake, such as the well-known *sapeurs* (Congolese dandies), *shegue* (street children), *kadogos* (child soldiers) or *kuluna* (criminal thugs). While Gondola's claim of an enduring Yankeeism undoubtedly raises several questions (the salience of which are captured in the vernacular distinction between 'true' and 'false' Yankees), his genealogy points at an underlying fascination for transgression that structures Kinshasa's popular culture and gender dynamics.

Second, Gondola also foregrounds the homoerotic potential of Yankee masculinity. Not only does he hint at the homoerotic possibilities of hypermasculine cults of violence, gang rape and bodybuilding but he also excavates the 1957 Bissot Report: an unsolicited and censored study of gang members in Léopoldville that exposed 'a recurring pattern of homosexual behavior' (p. 155) and even a 'cult of homosexuality' (p. 157). It is, moreover, striking that Gondola's interviewees and former Bills did not deny the occurrence of homosexuality and 'never once winced when [he] brought [it] up' (p. 156), while, by contrast, the topic of (heterosexual) gang rape 'was usually met with expressions of contrived ignorance or sheepish denial' (p. 125). Although some passages in the book rather clumsily try to explain same-sex sexual practices as a consequence of the relative scarcity of available girls, others effectively destabilize the supposed 'heterosexuality' that is often taken to define hegemonic masculinities in past and present African contexts.

However, despite its originality and courage, *Tropical Cowboys* also suffers from some serious blind spots and shortcomings that prevent it from fully developing its theoretical potential. First, although Gondola aims to present a long history of Congolese masculinity, his treatment of precolonial evidence does not live up to the standards he upholds when dealing with colonial and postcolonial realities and thus ends up reproducing a rather stereotypical image of male dominance (which does not, for instance, take into account African feminist critiques of precolonial patriarchy). Second, although women play an important role in his account, it generally suffers from an absence of female voices. Third, while Gondola

certainly offers horrifying examples of rape (the detailed textual reproduction of which almost betrays a certain fascination, mirroring the Bills' own spectacularization of violence), his analysis of less directly visible gendered inequalities cannot but disappoint gender scholars. Fourth, his selection of theoretical references often privileges essentializing anthropologies of masculinity, and his eclectic use of concepts gives rise to incoherences that limit his analytic precision.

My main concern, however, is Gondola's apparent lack of critical distance towards his topic and informants, so that his stories about legendary Bills and their macho bravura sometimes border on the hagiographic. Over and over again, these men are described as tough, proud and fearless rebels, so that, in many ways, the book itself actively contributes to their name and fame. While Gondola's intimate closeness to some of the former Bills he interviewed is obviously one of the book's greatest strengths, it also becomes its greatest weakness: it structurally narrows his critical perspective and produces a rather phallic text that somehow participates in the glorification of Yankeeism to save Congolese masculinity from colonial emasculation and postcolonial humiliation, written by a writer who obliquely comes to identify as a Bill himself.

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Wale Adebanwi, *Nation as Grand Narrative: the Nigerian press and the politics of meaning*. Rochester NY: University of Rochester Press (hb £95 – 978 1 58046 555 7). 2016, xiii + 391 pp.

In 1991, Benedict Anderson argued influentially that newspapers produce and reflect a national consciousness among readers who have no visible, tangible relationship with one another. In *Nation as Grand Narrative*, Wale Adebanwi introduces politics, power and the political power of narrative into Anderson's – and others' – more benign assessments of the role of newspapers in the postcolonial public sphere. This ambitious book offers a wealth of analysis of Nigerian newspapers' central role in decolonization in the 1950s through to the outbreak of the Biafran war in the late 1960s, the collapse of the Third Republic in the early 1990s and the Ogoni protests in the Niger Delta in the 1990s. Adebanwi charts a clear pathway through Nigerian press history, using the centrality of ideas about the nation for reading other types of power struggle since the 1950s.

Given that the press predated the independent nation state by more than a century, Adebanwi argues that, to a large extent, Nigeria *is* the conception of its press. Modern-day Nigeria was forged in and by newspapers, which generated complex stories about nationhood, patriotism and identity. As a consequence, newspapers have a great deal to answer for politically and ethically. From their inception in the 1850s, he argues, the country's newspapers have always projected the 'vested interests' of 'marginalized groups in their battles against dominant interests', offering space for minority discourse across the country's diverse cultures and representing 'the voice of the disadvantaged' (p. 264). This is not an idealistic representation of the press as a vehicle for representing powerless and voiceless minorities, set over and against a dominant colonial and postcolonial state. Adebanwi's point is that the nation comprises precisely these congeries of 'ties, loyalties, and preferences' between marginalized members of civil minorities seeking to represent themselves – in the full sense of representation as political