

Book Review: Kate Zambon, *Interrogating Integration*

KASTURI CHATTERJEE

Zambon, Kate. *Interrogating Integration: Sport, Celebrity, and Scandal in the Making of New Germany*. University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 2025. 277 pages.

¶₁ Zambon's monograph offers an updated and sustained critique of German integration discourse by examining sport, popular music, and other celebrity arenas in which neoliberal German citizenship is staged, tested, and publicly negotiated. The author works skillfully through a series of case studies including films, non-fiction texts, award ceremonies, and their accompanying press and advertising coverage, alongside diverse forms of promotional material associated with state-sponsored integration initiatives. Zambon's central thesis articulates an unsettling insight: Germany's neoliberal educational programs, spanning multiple ages, institutional arenas, and levels of professional training, largely frame integration as a unidirectional process in which immigrants are instructed in how to perform proper Germanness. The absence of reciprocity within these pedagogical and cultural regimes becomes a key critical finding. Rather than fostering mutual sociocultural transformation, the book identifies neoliberal *integrationism* as the dominant paradigm under scrutiny, a framework that ultimately substitutes managerial inclusion for genuine and intergenerationally sustainable social belonging.

¶₂ The book's seven chapters advance a sociologically grounded analysis of this unidirectional

integration process. Each one interrogates the notion of "proper" Germanization of those who migrate to, and work in, this putative heartland of European economic prosperity. Through sustained close readings of popular sport culture and postwar cinema, including films such as *Das Wunder von Bern* (2003), Zambon weaves cultural analysis into a broader critical examination of integrationist discourse that remains unable to transcend its own conceptual limitations (59). This discourse, the author argues, is hyperfocused on productivity and economic utility, a logic that ultimately sustains global circuits of extractivism and exploitation. Throughout the study, Zambon underscores how the language of risk and benefit functions as a classificatory tool through which immigrant-coded communities are governed and managed, particularly those racialized populations rendered simultaneously hypervisible as objects of scrutiny, yet invisibilized as German citizens (134). In a set of compelling case studies on immigrant communities publicly affirming allegiance to the German nation through practices of flag patriotism, the author identifies key shortcomings in earlier scholarship and offers theoretically informed correctives where possible (137-160).

¶₃ In her final two chapters, Zambon turns to the role of scandal within popular and political discourse, giving particular attention to the controversies surrounding the publication of Thilo

Sarrazin's *Deutschland schafft sich ab* (2010), and the conferral of the *Bambi-Integrationspreis* on the Tunisian-German rapper, Bushido in 2011. These case studies bring the book's opening analyses on discourses of alleged "problems" of Islam and Blackness to a critical conclusion. Whereas the first chapter examines the mobilization of the 19th century concept of *Heimat* as a site of pride rooted in productivity, the final chapters look at the strategic deployment of scandal in an attention economy where relevance lives on novelty and provocation. Sarrazin's disproportionate public visibility, secured through his pseudo-philosophical text, recalls earlier and infamous cultural pessimisms, such as those associated with Spengler. Although Zambon's empirical focus is on Germany, the analysis gestures toward Europe-wide media formations, underscoring the reality that integration is best understood as a continental, rather than purely national, issue.

¶4 The book's principal methodological strength lies in its careful synthesis of sociological theory with contemporary postcolonial and decolonial frameworks. Thinkers such as Du Bois, Foucault, Mbembe, Agamben, and El-Tayeb are mobilized to support arguments that remain closely anchored in specific media objects. The analysis thus demonstrates, rather than merely asserts, the limits of German inclusivity and multicultural self-understanding. Moreover, Zambon is transparent in her selection and processing of primary source material from websites and databases.

¶5 Moving beyond familiar critiques of multiculturalism, Zambon shows how model minority figures—particularly racialized athletes, entertainment professionals, and public personalities—are instrumentalized to affirm a Judeo-Christian-coded version of a German *Leitkultur*, while displacing structural questions of race, belonging, and power. Integration here emerges as the central object of critique, a biopo-

litical regime of disciplinary sites that demand affective loyalty, individual productivity, and public visibility without extending full national recognition. Zambon further questions the very idea of "national" as a salient framework for integration under the "globalized conditions of late capitalism" (56).

¶6 Conceptually, the book is strongest where it links integrationism to race-making, neoliberal governance, and unresolved German guilt, showing how postwar moral frameworks continue to police the boundaries between racially and culturally unmarked, and thus validated, "national" subjects, and marked, precariously "integrant" subjects. Zambon's attention to nation and *Heimat* is especially productive, revealing how blood and soil logics continue to render full belonging unattainable to those outside ethnonational imaginaries.

¶7 Various useful terms like "integrant candidates," "immigrant patriotism," "destructive productivity," "politically correct German self hatred," and "sentimental citizenship" are introduced to structure a scholarly discourse on integrationism. Ultimately the book criticizes integrationism as a neoliberal tool which amplifies physical and visual difference, only to erase the diversity of actual lived experience. At the end of her final chapter "Models and Miscreants," Zambon invokes the idiom "auf dem rechten Auge blind," thus drawing attention to how integrationism keeps citizens distracted from durable far-right nationalism. She points to the Bushido-Bambi scandal as an example of such a publicity stunt that reinforced the "well-worn stereotypes of the criminal and illiberal Muslim" (198). In this chapter, Zambon also connects the case of Bushido to that of footballer Mesut Özil, arguing that sportspeople are dressed up as apolitical beings, "floating signifiers" and canvases for mediated national imaginaries (193). She thus shows how exclusionary

logics and techniques of distraction structure the discourse in music performance and sports alike.

- ¶8 The case studies of integrationist campaign archives are clearly structured, but allow for a rhizomatic reading, perhaps a formal choice that mirrors the nature of integration discourse itself. Through her case studies, the author provides the reader with close readings of the selected material archives, many of which may qualify as ephemera, as they include advertising slogans, graffiti and stickers, objects always at risk of erasure and doctoring. The book's structure allows both chronological reading, as well as a consultation of individual chapters. Zambon's discussion of religious and racial orders in a globalized world could perhaps benefit from a more sustained engagement with the media theory of De Bord's *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967), in particular as it concerns the chapter "Models and Miscreants." The inclusion of De Bord along with Agamben, Foucault and Arendt would sharpen Zambon's conclusions about the "imagined status" of sport as "apolitical" (193).
- ¶9 Such minor desiderata aside, *Interrogation Integration* offers a timely intervention in debates on ethnicity and race under neoliberal regimes, the biopolitics thereof, and postmigrant citizenship within its mandates. Its cross-disciplinary approach will also ensure its value as a resource for scholars across fields.