

**Zahra, Tara. *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900-1948*. Cornell University Press, 2008.**

Dazzlingly original and beautifully written, this book is a model of creative and meticulous archival research, analytical sophistication, and historical empathy.

Zahra approaches the subject of German and Czech national rivalry from a doubly novel perspective. First, she draws our attention to an underestimated but immensely powerful force she calls “national indifference.” It was precisely because many people in the Bohemian lands were ambivalent, agnostic, or opportunistic about their national loyalties, Zahra demonstrates, that nationalist leaders fought so bitterly to win them over or even force them into the desired groups and attitudes. By examining indifference to nationalism, Zahra reveals the dynamic of escalating radicalism under four very different regimes and transforms our understanding of the links between events too often examined in isolation: persecution of Czech speakers by the Habsburg state, census battles in the 1920s, Nazi Germanization policies, and post-war expulsions of so-called Volksdeutschen.

Zahra’s second major innovation is her focus on children. German and Czech nationalists alike targeted children, she shows, through policies and practices around the family, kindergartens and schools, language training, and social welfare. Indifference to nationalism, as Zahra observes, was not typically recorded, but the ongoing confrontation between nationalist activists and parents has left a wide if at times diffuse archival trail – through court decisions, pedagogical periodicals, government records, and private petitions. Zahra makes brilliant use of a staggering array of sources in German and Czech, and in the process, shows an amazing ability to pull moving accounts of ordinary people, adults and children, from the archives. The result is a book that is at once incisive and sensitive, characterized both by cutting-edge scholarship and by profound engagement with the vulnerability and humanity of its subjects.

**Prize Committee:** Doris Bergen, Alison Frank, Donna Harsch