

“I” in borrowed tongues. Karpinski’s heteroglossic reading of immigrant women’s life writing attunes our ear to such voices, thus allowing us to listen to the self writing itself in translation.

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## **BREADWINNING DAUGHTERS: YOUNG WORKING WOMEN IN A DEPRESSION-ERA CITY, 1929-1939**

Katrina Srigley  
Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010

### **REVIEWED BY NINA KAYE**

In *Breadwinning Daughters*, Katrina Srigley paints a detailed portrait of Depression era Toronto from the perspective of the city’s young working women. An extension of Srigley’s doctoral thesis at the University of Toronto, the book is academically rigorous while still being engaging and readable. Srigley’s approach to the subject is influenced by oral history and feminist social history. She is careful, however, to remain balanced in her presentation of the material. Srigley’s book is well-researched and organized, improving and expanding upon existing schol-

arship. Her bibliography cites over one hundred interviews along with approximately three hundred other references. *Breadwinning Daughters* is an important work, offering a new perspective on the Depression era by showcasing the experiences of young working women in Toronto.

*Breadwinning Daughters* attempts to correct the omissions of earlier research on the period which focused on male unemployment, politics, and economics. In contrast, Srigley focuses on social history and women’s experiences, drawing on interviews, court records, newspaper articles, census statistics, novels, memoirs, and history books to detail the lives of young working women. Srigley argues that these young single women, or dutiful daughters, provided financial support for their families when their unemployed fathers and brothers could not. Their experiences, Srigley asserts, are integral to a full understanding of the period.

As Srigley’s research reveals, young single women had better access to employment than their male counterparts during the Depression. As such, many dutiful daughters were suddenly thrust into the role of family breadwinner. This circumstance was important in shifting traditional family structures. Additionally, working had a significant impact on the lives of the young women in question. Certainly, many women felt pride and an increased sense of autonomy as a result of their labour, yet many also felt sorrow at lost opportunities for education and marriage.

*Breadwinning Daughters* offers a detailed overview of life in the Depression for young working women in Toronto; providing an important cultural and social context for the period; exploring how young women’s work experience impacted their family life; outlining the labour market for women in Toronto; discussing sexuality, criminality, and women’s

safety at home and at work; and examining the leisure activities that young working women engaged in during the period. Throughout each chapter, Srigley is careful to point out how race and class were factors that affected women’s experience of the Depression. *Breadwinning Daughters* is an invaluable compendium of women’s lives in the 1930s. However, due to the extensive breadth of the book’s subject, it contains occasional generalizations, and is not always able to fully address the issues that it raises.

Katrina Srigley’s impressive accumulation of subject interviews enriches her portrait of the era. Following in the footsteps of oral history chronicles of the period such as Broadfoot’s *Ten Lost Years*, Srigley argues that personal accounts are instrumental in “allow[ing] scholars [...] to change the focus of history.” The interviews acknowledge the contribution of women’s marginalized voices, preserving memories which would otherwise be lost. The interviews also provide a unique opportunity of understanding the effect that working during the Depression had on the lives of young single women.

Despite its value, Srigley does admit that oral history can be problematic. Memory is subjective, changing over time. The interview process is similarly subjective. Srigley cautions that the circumstances of the interview and the perceived relationship between her and the interviewees coloured the information she attained through this process. Interviewees, for example, avoided discussion of sexuality as inappropriate, perhaps inhibited by Srigley’s youthful age. Srigley is careful to supplement the interviews with other sources of research in order to present a more complete picture of the time period. She delicately navigates the varied sources, conscientiously noting any divergences between them.

*Breadwinning Daughters* is a won-

derful resource that greatly furthers an understanding of Canada during the Depression. The book is successful in shifting the perspective of scholarly research, changing the focus from unemployed men to employed young women. It offers a detailed survey of the experiences of young working women in Toronto during the Depression, and is invaluable in providing a new perspective. Nevertheless, as a survey, *Breadwinning Daughters* can only begin to address the sweeping issues it introduces. As such, Srigley's work invites further scholarship into the experience of working women in Canada from 1929–1939. It is certain, though, that her book will be instrumental to that research.

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## **WOMEN, COMMUNISM AND INDUSTRIALIZATION IN POSTWAR POLAND**

Malgorzata Fidelis  
Cambridge: Cambridge University  
Press, 2010

**REVIEWED BY WERONIKA  
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Malgorzata Fidelis provides a significant and comprehensive research study that questions conventional historical accounts of women and communism within the European context. By centering gender

and women's experiences, Fidelis challenges several notions within the scholarly literature including the perceived natural opposition between, and incompatibility of, a production-oriented regime and family-oriented women; the notion of the "double burden" of labour within and outside the home as a social phenomenon specific to the lived experiences of women under communist rule, and a reading of stalinism as irrevocably detrimental to women's issues and struggles. Her work provides an important and new contribution to the study of communism and women's politico-social and familial roles within postwar Poland.

Through an extensive historical and comparative analysis that examines three industrial centers in Poland with divergent histories, Żyrardów and its textile factories, Zambrow and its cotton factories, and Katowice and its coal mines, Fidelis traces the ways in which the postwar Polish state conceptualized and reconfigured sexual difference and equal rights based upon this difference in order to address social and political pressures, local cultures, and a sense of Polish nationhood resistant to stalinism as well as the economic demands of industrialization and later liberalization and reform. Fidelis uses archival documents including previously undisclosed party and secret police records, ordinary citizen's letters to the press and popular magazines as well as oral interviews in order to account for the ways in which women, who in identifying as producers, mothers, and consumers, utilized essentialist difference between the sexes and gender stereotyping to their advantage in order to advance and gain rights within the context of industrial labour. Fidelis argues that women's perceived inferiority within society provided them with the space to build a strong resistance movement. She states that "[w]hen

politically 'backward' women opposed socialist policies, they did so not as 'enemies' of the system, to be punished, but as *babas*, the 'unenlightened' female members of society, to be instructed and corrected." Their "perceived backwardness" allowed them to mobilize around their rights as workers and as women as well as organize and orchestrate strikes with fewer consequences (than men) during the repressive stalinist era.

This book provides an alternative perspective on communism by recounting the stories of women spinning and weaving in cotton factories; operating heavy-machinery in the underground coal mines; struggling on the shop floors and holding strike meetings within the privacy offered by women's washrooms; attending Party meetings; escaping the confines of village life; raising the next generation of workers and managing the household; struggling to gain access to abortion; and eventually fighting to remain within male-dominated production work that once regarded them as labour heroines. This detailed and well-documented account of postwar Polish realities is integral to the scholarly literature regarding women and communism as it affords women agency, an aspect which is too often discounted within conventional historical accounts, and explores the possibilities and boundaries of women's struggles.

In unearthing the lived experiences of women within the context of postwar reconstruction and socialist state building within Poland, Fidelis provides a rich and nuanced account of the ways in which gender was taken up by state and society who shifted its meaning depending on social and politico-economic needs of the time. Fidelis' book, *Women, Communism, and Industrialization in Postwar Poland*, provides us with the other side of communist regimes within the European context, the human