

**Jørgen Lorentzen,**

***The History of Fatherhood in Norway, 1850-2012***

Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, 190 pp.

ISBN 978-1-137-34337-6

In line with the increasing interest in examining masculinities, the field of men's history is emerging among the students of masculinity. *The History of Fatherhood in Norway, 1850-2012* delivers the task of writing men's history with a specific focus on fatherhood. Jørgen Lorentzen, former Professor at the Center for Gender Research at University of Oslo and current Director of Hedda Foundation, offers a comprehensive work on fatherhood from the mid-nineteenth century up to the present. Requiring a multi-dimensional and multi-disciplinary lens, analyzing the history of fatherhood is important not only as a contribution to the growing body of literature on 'new world order masculinity and fatherhood' but also as a hinge for ethnographic researches. As Lorentzen clearly points out, the aim of the book is not to offer a comprehensive review but "(...) to find a starting point in history that would offer (...) enough source material from which to gain insight into fatherhood, before the effects of modernization and industrialization took hold in Norway toward the end of the 1800s." (p.2). Considering the scholarly interest in the effects of industrialization and urbanization on gender by the early theory of modernization, Lorentzen's aim is valid as it scrutinizes whether Norwegian father has been present in the family before its counterparts. Therefore, having asked the main question of "what is the real history of fatherhood?" (p.1), he tries to shape a historical perspective on understanding of fatherhood. To have such framework, on the basis of how fatherhood is depicted and what are the father's position in the family and society, he uses fictional and non-fictional writings that enabled him to have a comprehensive picture.

The book is organized in four chapters, including introduction. Introductory part draws the aim, scope and content of the book. Alongside the historical sources, the author cites three literary works, “*The Wild Duck*, a play by Henrik Ibsen; *A Day in October*, a novel by Sigurd Hoel; and *My Struggle*, the extensive documentary-novel by Karl Ove Knausgård, published recently” (p.7) and argues that different type of works required different analytical approaches and offered diversity of ideas. This part also briefly reviews the literature on fathers and fatherhood.

Part I covers the period between 1850 and 1927. This part introduces Lorentzen’s identifications of father *in* and *for* the family (emphasis added). In line with the highly cited theory of the literature on gender studies, in general, masculinities, in particular, he discusses the limits of father’s involvement in domestic sphere vis a vis public sphere. Taking the relationship between home and work as a demarcation line, he argues that fathers were involved in the family and a working partnership between the spouses was the norm until early 1900s, especially among farming communities. He also discusses how home represented “man’s refuge” and analyzes the importance of family life in the construction of masculinities. Especially, Lorentzen’s analysis on duality between “(...) role *outside* the home as provider *for* the family, and another *in* the family” (emphasis in original) is very important with reference to father’s construction of manliness (p. 36-37).

The author’s analysis on the gradual weakening of the father’s place within the family in the 1900s marked by the growth of modernization, urbanization and professionalization is also significant. In the context of major transformations in the society at macro, within the family at micro level, father’s presence decreased as examples from the literary works and socio-political contexts throughout Nordic countries confirmed. Father’s lessening role in the family was accompanied by the gradual dominance of women over domestic affairs and Lorentzen highlights the importance of home that was on decline as well (p. 70).

Based on the understanding that gender is a relational construct, Lorentzen's focus on motherhood is also significant so as to analyze the history of fatherhood in Norway. Part II covers the period between 1927 and 1970. This part discusses, first, the glorification of motherhood. Giving the socio-political context, emphasizing progress of modernity, heteronormativity and policy shifts such as the Marriage Act of 1927 that brought greater equality in marriage, the author analyzes how the role of father for the family was glorified. He also touches some incidents from his personal life and mentions "my father's role was *for* the family, and not, on the whole, *in* the family. His participation was neither expected, nor even considered a possibility." (emphasis in original) (p. 71). On the other hand, while father's provider role was institutionalized, a new tone following the end of World War II dominated the country accompanied by economic growth and technological development. Lorentzen offers examples from the literary texts on how a new form of 'democratic family' was glorified that hinted a reinstatement of father's place in the family.

Part III analyzes the period starting from 1970, marking the establishment of the 'feminist project' in Norway. In line with the literature, analysing 'new fatherhood' with reference to transformation and de-legitimation of hegemonic masculinity and also as a response to increase of women's participation in the labor market, the author examines such new model in the framework of "democratization of intimacy" (p.107). To read "new terrains of childcare and housework" (p.111), Lorentzen traces discourses of fatherhood in literary, non-literary and also visual data. For instance, the part analyzes Knausgård's writing project, entitled *My Struggle* in detail. Especially, with a lens focusing on critical studies of masculinities, Lorentzen highlights the importance of the relation between the subjective construction of masculinities and fatherhood. His emphasis is important as it stands at the intersection of the 'philosophy of gender duality'.

This final part also examines the political context and initiatives to support father's nurturing role. The author examines the boundaries of being a 'good father' especially after the introduction of paternity leave

in 1993 and effects of the politics of fatherhood. However, in line with a research that analyzes ‘childlessness’ in Norway, Lorentzen points out a paradoxical development. While the post-1990 era can be described as a glorification of fatherly intimacy, the data offered by the author shows time of living with their own children is very limited for men (p. 140-141). Lorentzen highlights the rise in divorce rates and the tendency of men to have their first child at a relatively older age and tries to juxtapose the dynamics behind this ‘paradox of fatherhood’. It would have been interesting to read more on this paradox and its footprints in the construction of masculinities with an emphasis on ‘politics of fatherhood’

To conclude, *The History of Fatherhood in Norway, 1850-2012* is a valuable contribution to the literature on men’s history and fatherhood. Written for students of masculinities, historians and general audience, the book offers an account of historical developments to frame a general understanding of how fatherhood is depicted. Lorentzen’s conceptualizations of father *in* the family and father *for* the family are also significant especially for the newly emerging field of inquiry on ‘new fatherhood’. It significantly erupts the understanding of newness intrinsic to modernity, industrialization and urbanization. The author’s analysis of fatherhood scrutinizes not only local dynamics but also broader contexts and ideological transformations. Therefore, the manuscript provides an important source for researchers aiming to conduct ethnographical work on Norwegian masculinities and also contributes to the knowledge on men’s lives and experiences.

**Selin Akyüz**  
**Bilkent University**