

KARIN ROGINER HOFMEISTER:  
Remembering Suffering and Resistance: Memory Politics  
and the Serbian Orthodox Church  
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This book offers a lucid, imaginative, and conceptually rich analysis of the Serbian Orthodox Church's role in memory politics. By examining how the Church reinterprets World War II events, actors, and memorials, Roginer Hofmeister explains the influence of religious institution on collective remembrance, particularly in society where religion is intertwined with ethnic and national identities. In a scholarly landscape often preoccupied with the symbolic role of Orthodox churches, this book demonstrates that the Church is not a mere passive custodian of tradition. Instead, it emerges as an influential, adaptive agent who engages with historical narratives to legitimize its role in public life.

The book opens with a robust theoretical framework in Chapter 1, situating religion, tradition, and memory within the dynamics of late modernity. Drawing on (de)secularization and public sphere debates, this foundational discussion sets the stage for the exploration of Serbia's mnemonic landscape. In Chapter 2, for example, Roginer Hofmeister's application of Bourdieu-inspired field theory (notably unreferenced from primary source) is complemented by developing a typology of mnemonic actors that reflects the socio-political tensions in Serbia. This theoretical approach proves particularly effective in Chapter 3's examination of the Jasenovac Committee and Staro Sajmište, where the Church's engagement with Holocaust memory norms highlights its strategic deployment of transnational narratives. Here, author provides details on the Church's involvement in memorial initiatives and its ties with institutions like Yad Vashem, offering specific evidence of how religious leaders and their institutional representatives invoke international memory standards to reinforce national identity. Chapter 4 builds on these findings by examining the Church's rehabilitation of the Chetnik movement, a case that shows how religious authority, liturgical practices, and nationalist mythmaking interact in practice. Together, these chapters reflect the book's methodological strength: its careful integration of theory with ethnographic fieldwork and historical approach. This helps readers to see exactly how discourses translate into on-the-ground activities and commemorations. Author's methodological approach could have been strengthened by examining parish-level commemorative events, which would have provided greater empirical specificity to test the theoretical claims.

Memory studies have long focused on how nations commemorate the past, often relying on dichotomies: official versus vernacular memories, national versus transnational frames, secular versus religious spheres. The sociology of religion, meanwhile, has examined how religious institutions respond to modernity, secularization, and globalization. By bridging these areas, the book draws on thinkers like Bauman, Giddens, and Casanova (Bauman, 2000; Giddens, 1990; Casanova, 1994), along with foundational memory scholarship by Assmann and Halbwachs (Assmann, 2011; Halbwachs, 1992), and Hervieu-Léger's notion of religion as a 'chain of memory' (Hervieu-Léger, 1999).

Roginer Hofmeister shows how the Church has historically sought to link religious symbolism with national narratives, repositioning itself as a crucial agent of collective remembrance. This is particularly salient in post-conflict Serbia, where public identity is contested, and political stability remains fragile. Roginer Hofmeister supports these assertions by detailing how particular bishops, for instance, frame liturgical commemorations of World War II victims to align with contemporary nationalist sentiments. Such examples ground abstract arguments in observable actions, making the Church's mnemonic agency more tangible to the reader.

The book shows that the Church's invocation of Holocaust memory norms is not merely conceptual; it involves partnerships, educational initiatives, and the selective invocation of global standards. By demonstrating how memory is negotiated in real contexts, the book moves beyond textbook dichotomies. However, while author gives examples of Church-led events and partnerships, the analysis could more critically engage with the methodological choices. For instance, the book often highlights the Church's adeptness at adopting transnational norms but could offer more details on the Church's less successful initiatives, or how certain local actors resist official narratives. This would help the readers estimate the Church's actual influence. Nonetheless, the book situates the Serbian Church's actions and narratives within the everyday realities of religious and political life which is commendable.

Roginer Hofmeister's conceptual apparatus challenges entrenched binaries. The book resists portraying memory simply as top-down or bottom-up, acknowledging that the Church operates across multiple scales: local rituals, national commemorations, and transnational dialogues. By forging links with institutions such as Yad Vashem to enhance its moral standing, the Church proves adept at adopting global memory standards. Yet, while the author convincingly illustrates the Church's capacity to maneuver among diverse arenas, a more direct and systematic comparison with other memory entrepreneurs – such as NGOs or secular intellectual groups – could clarify whether the Church's strategies are unique or part of a broader pattern in post-socialist memory politics. Here, more in-depth examination of internal dynamics would be welcome too. For instance, do particular dioceses (e.g. Archdiocese of Belgrade and Karlovac and Diocese of Montenegro and Littoral) emphasize historical suffering differently from others, perhaps due to distinct financial ties or local stakeholder pressures? Such specificity would provide insight into how decentralization and economic interests contribute to shaping or even fragmenting the Church's mnemonic strategies.

The author rightly points out the decentralized nature of Orthodox Churches, noting how this often leads to a multiplicity of narratives. While this decentralization is presented as enabling flexibility, the economic dimension – such as the Church's relationships with state actors that fund memorial sites, or the economic benefits of pilgrimage routes tied to wartime shrines – requires greater attention. Addressing how financial or organizational incentives influence which narratives gain prominence would clarify the Church's role in the larger political economy of memory.

These considerations resonate with current debates on post-secularity, the persistence of religion in public life, and the reshaping of collective identities in fluid, contested environments. The book effectively contributes to these debates by showing that religious institutions in post-socialist Europe are not static remnants of the past; instead, they

actively participate in shaping memory and identity under changing geopolitical conditions. By analyzing how the Church thrives under post-socialist, post-conflict, and post-secular conditions, Roginer Hofmeister reminds us that religion and nationalism remain intertwined in many European societies. This perspective encourages memory scholars to move beyond secular frameworks and acknowledges that religious institutions, like the Serbian Orthodox Church, have the agency not only to reflect but also to actively shape modernity's contested memory landscapes.

For sociologists of religion, the book illustrates that religious institutions do not merely respond to modernity with defensive conservatism. They can also skillfully adopt global discourses – like those surrounding the Holocaust – to validate their positions and influence how communities remember their pasts. In doing so, the book opens new avenues for exploring how economic considerations, transnational pressures, and internal diversity contribute to this strategic memory-making.



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