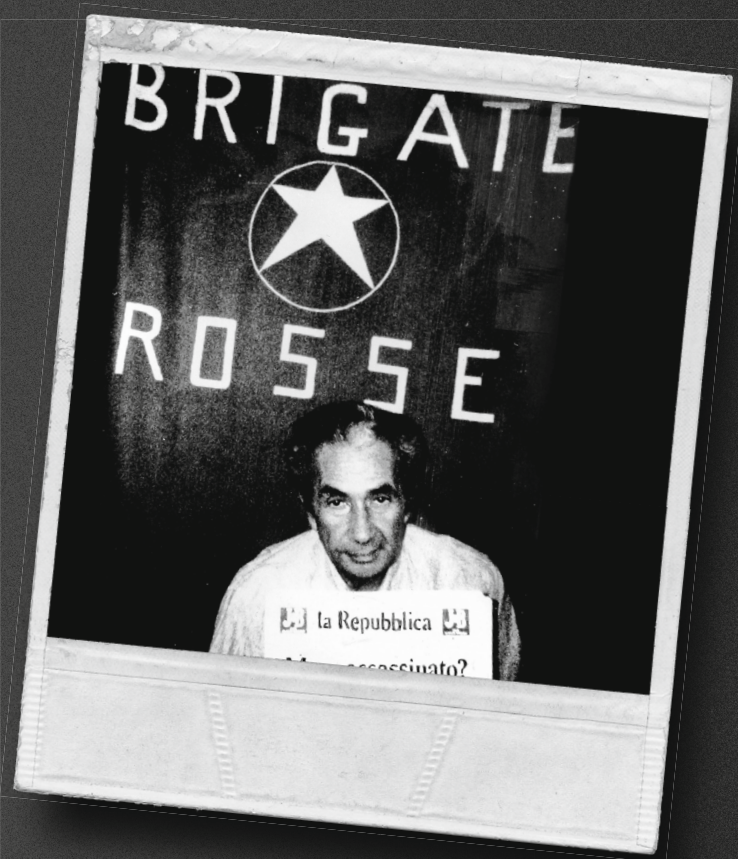


Baldassare Scolari

# State Martyr

Representation and Performativity  
of Political Violence



Nomos



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## Preface

Since the terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers in New York on September 11, 2001, terrorism and, more generally, political violence have become central topics in media representations as well as in academic debates and studies. The recent spread of allegedly religiously motivated suicide bombings and other kinds of attacks involving the deaths of both attackers and victims has caused an attendant surge of interest in the relationship between events of political violence and the martyr figure. Many contemporary studies seek to understand martyrological representations and narratives as forms of propaganda for a particular cause and aim, in order to highlight the mechanisms and procedures by which martyr figures are constructed and contested. This investigation is a contribution to the debate concerning the relationship between martyrdom and political violence. It places emphasis on historical, social and cultural phenomena, which so far have been largely neglected, namely the emergence, aesthetics and performativity of the state martyr figure. Because of the actuality of so-called «Islamicist terrorism», many researchers have focused on the role of the martyr figure in the Islamic religious and cultural tradition, often comparing it in particular with Christian and Jewish concepts of martyrdom. Researchers often highlight the overlap between terrorism and martyrdom by identifying commonalities and differences in the use and function of martyrological representations in different historical and social contexts of struggle. Great attention has been directed towards the propagandistic use of martyrological representation for the legitimization of violence and for the promotion of an ideology aimed at destroying «Western» culture, society, and institutions. Far from denying or criticizing these interpretations, this research study focuses on a structurally related but different phenomenon: the representation of victims of political violence as state martyrs who died for the salvation of the democratic social and political order and state institutions. While I focus on the martyrological representations of a specific case of political violence—the kidnapping, imprisonment and assassination of the Italian Christian Democrat politician Aldo Moro in 1978 by the Red Brigades—this work is not a case study in the strictest sense. The «Moro case» serves as a point of departure for developing critical reflection on the emergence, use and function of state martyrology and mythology in the modern and contemporary world.

*Preface*

I began my PhD studies in 2013, as a joint doctoral degree between the Universität Zürich and the Università degli Studi di Macerata under the supervision of Daria Pezzoli-Olgiati and Carla Danani. In 2016, I matriculated at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, which took over the cooperation agreement for the implementation of joint doctoral supervision with the Università degli Studi di Macerata. This PhD thesis won the 2018 award of the Münchener Universitätsgesellschaft. My research has been supported by two grants from the Universität Zürich (Forschungskredit Candoc) and from the Divisione della cultura e degli studi universitari (DECS) of the Republic and Canton Ticino, to whom I owe much thanks. I would also like to thank the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) for taking on the costs of printing and Open Access publication, as well as the employees of Nomos publishing house for their excellent cooperation. Moreover, I would also like to express my gratitude to my tutors Daria Pezzoli-Olgiati and Carla Danani for their support, without which this study would have never existed. Many thanks also go to the members of the research group Media and Religion—especially Anna-Katharina Höpflinger, Dolores Zoé Bertschinger, Marie-Therese Mäder, Michael Ulrich, Natalie Fritz, Roger Meier, Paola von Wyss-Giacosa and Stefanie Knauss—who have always helped, advised and encouraged me in my work. I'm also grateful to Richard Amesbury, Robert Yelle, Michael Braunschweig, Giulia Giubergia, Sidsel Undseth Bakke, William Arfam and Franc Wagner for the fruitful discussions and their inputs, as well as Annamarie Benson, Joyce Fegan and Martin Ford for proofreading this PhD thesis. Finally, my special thanks go to my father Raffaele, my brother Jacopo and my sisters Luna and Eleonora for their boundless support.

## Author's Note

All translations, Italian and German, are my own unless indicated otherwise in the footnotes.



Es gibt keine Herrscher mehr, keine Könige, die die Masse, die die Meute noch im Zaume halten können; es gibt nur noch das Bild des Märtyrers.

Jacob Taubes, *Die politische Theologie des Paulus*

No martyr is among ye now  
Whom you can call your own.

Dylan, Bob, *I Dreamed I Saw St. Augustine*, from the album *John Wesley Harding*

È incredibile fino a che punto sia giunta la totale confusione delle lingue.

Aldo Moro, *Lettera alla moglie Eleonora*

