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# **Accounting for the Fascist Ethical State: The “Duce” on Stage at the Alla Scala Opera House (1922-1943)**

## **Introduction**

Accounting practices play a key role in shaping and reinforcing power relationships (Quattrone, 2004; Riccaboni et al., 2006; Maran & Vagnoni, 2011; Bigoni, Deidda Gagliardo & Funnell, 2013; Leardini & Rossi, 2013). Critical accounting research has sought to not only understand how this power is achieved and sustained but the way in which it can “simultaneously transform both itself and that world ...” (Borden & Rendell, 2000, p. 13). For governments, accounting constitutes a set of calculative practices and procedures, or technologies, that represent governmental programmes “in a way which ... re-presents it in a form in which it can enter the sphere of conscious political calculation” (Rose & Miller, 1992, p. 182). Accounting allows political rationalities that are constituted by “the field of statements, claims and prescriptions that sets out the objects and objectives of government” (Miller, 1990, p. 317) to become thinkable and enforceable.

The authority that accounting confers on political discourses and its adaptability to different contexts makes it very appealing as a tool of power. To establish this relationship and its importance for those who seek power, accounting scholars have drawn especially on insights from Foucault’s concepts of power-knowledge and governmentality to document how accounting and accountability practices operate in subtle and unseen ways to discipline, to make people knowable and calculable (Foucault 1976, 1991, 2007; Miller & O’Leary, 1987; Loft, 1986; Miller & Rose, 1990; Stewart,

1992; Armstrong, 1994; Hoskin, 1994; Neimark, 1994; Tinker, 2005; Sargiacomo, 2009; Macintosh, 2009). For authors embracing Foucault's concept of disciplinary power accounting cannot be seen simply as a neutral tool aiming at economic rationality but instead is profoundly implicated in power relations produced in social life (Miller & O'Leary 1987; Napier 2006; Burchell, Clubb & Hopwood 1985; Hoskin & Macve 1986, 1988, 2000; Loft 1986). Accounting and accountability practices can shape, almost imperceptively, the behaviour of individuals, rendering the centralization and concentration of political power possible (Sargiacomo 2008, 2009; Yayla, 2011; Gatti & Poli, 2014). Other studies by Álvarez-Dardet, Baños & Carrasco (2002) and Baños et al. (2005) reinforce the importance of techniques of calculation for the emergence of a "governmentalized" State which relies upon the creation of a collective identity by moulding "the population in the name of the discourse that exerts this domination, irrespective of the specific organizational purposes" (Baños et al., 2005, pp. 207-208).

Although the importance of examining the interrelations between accounting and the process of government is now well recognised (Cooper et al., 1989; Robson, 1994), "(t)he nature and role of accounting techniques and practices in the establishment, emergence and extension of governmental power ..." has not received a similar level of attention (Jones, 2010, p. 81). The present study seeks to address this with reference to Italy during the Fascist regime of Benito Mussolini (1922-43). It will broaden understanding of the complex interrelations between power and accounting as a technology by examining a totalitarian regime which, despite the calamitous historical importance of these forms of power at different times in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, has received little attention from accounting scholars beyond that of Nazi Germany (Funnell, 1998; Walker, 2000; Lippman & Wilson, 2007). With the exception of Cinquini (2007), who focuses on the development of accounting and business studies during the Italian Fascist

regime rather than on the role of accounting in implementing governmental programmes and in enhancing the State's power, Italian Fascism is still unexplored by accounting scholars. This study thereby also responds to Jones & Oldroyd's (2015) call for broadening the institutional and geographical coverage of accounting history by considering a non-Anglo-Saxon setting.

The study is informed by Giovanni Gentile's highly influential conception of the "Ethical State" (Gentile, 1925, 1928a; Mussolini & Gentile, 1961) which provided the ideological foundations and legitimacy for Mussolini's Fascist State from its very inception in 1922 until the fall of the regime in 1943. In contrast to the liberal idea of the State, where the intrusions of the State are to be minimised and the personal freedom of individuals to be the priority, the Ethical State has to intervene in every aspect of an individual's life to secure the political, juridical, economic and moral progress of the Nation (Gentile, 1925). Mussolini (1956c, p. 253) believed that "the individual tends to constantly evade. Tends to transgress laws, not to pay taxes, avoid war. Just a few – heroes or saints – sacrifice their ego on the altar of the State. All the others are in a state of potential revolt against the State". Unlike the more subtle, and even unseen, exercise of power as conceived by Foucault, whereby the observer and the means used to exercise their power could be hidden from the person observed through sets of practices which force individuals to unconsciously cooperate in their subjection to power, in Gentile's Fascist Ethical State these interventions were most effective when their presence was made visible. The Fascist conception of the State demanded that individuals were made aware of their subordination to the interests of the Nation by obvious manifestations of the authority of the State. For the Fascist, the State is the only entity that holds and can exercise power which, crucially, is grounded in the exclusive

right to use both law and physical force to make its will known and respected (Gentile, 1925; Mussolini & Gentile, 1961).

The Fascists recognised that reliance solely or primarily on force and violence would not be sufficient to ensure acceptance of their interpretation of the Ethical State (Partito Nazionale Fascista, 1936). To help to gain the necessary devotion to Fascist values and aims the Fascists enlisted the Italian people's reverence and love for their cultural artefacts and practices, notably performance theatre such as opera. High quality theatrical productions were believed by the Fascists to have the potential to awaken a person's best virtues and make them aware that they belonged to a powerful and glorious Nation (Strobl, 2013). It was seen by the "Duce"<sup>1</sup> himself as an important means of forging the national community according to Fascist ideals (Berezin, 1991). This study considers the case of the most important Italian opera house during the Fascist era, the Alla Scala Opera House in Milan (hereafter Alla Scala) which today is still one of the most renowned stages for opera in the world (Ente Autonomo Teatro Alla Scala, 1963, p. 79). The many performances at the Alla Scala by Maria Callas from the early 1950s were particularly important in resurrecting the reputation of the opera house after the end of the Second World War.

Performance theatre has long played a critical role in allowing totalitarian regimes, whether that of ancient imperial Rome, Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany or Stalin's totalitarian communist state, to secure the ongoing consensus which was the basis of their power (Beacham, 1999; Berezin, 1991; Sporton, 2006; Strobl, 2013). Accounting was a crucial part of the Fascist repertoire of power which sought to make the Alla Scala a vital institution in the creation of a Fascist national culture and identity, thereby strengthening and making manifest the power of the State itself. Accounting practices

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<sup>1</sup> "Duce" was the nickname of Benito Mussolini. It comes from the Latin word *dux*, which means "leader".

were increasingly used to increase the State's control of the Alla Scala to ensure that it became an effective conduit which would expose all sections of the population to Fascist ideology in the pursuit of a new national identity.

The increasing intervention of the Fascist State in the operation of the Alla Scala during the years of Fascist rule encompassed two main phases: the conquest and consolidation of power within Italy between 1922 and 1936 and then expansion at home and abroad between 1936 and 1943. During the first period Fascism was more concerned with achieving power, dismantling any form of opposition and reshaping Italy as a totalitarian State. With their power secure, in the second phase the Fascists sought increasingly to implement policies that would ensure long-term consensus amongst the Italian people as they formulated a new national identity based on Fascist principles propounded by Gentile. In this second phase, in which Italy sought to become an imperial power after it conquered Ethiopia (Morgan, 1995), Fascism intensified its use of cultural artefacts such as the Alla Scala to prepare Italy for the unavoidable clash with other nations, making Italians a people of committed Fascist warriors to fight successfully the expected war.

In the following sections the paper firstly introduces the work of Giovanni Gentile which informs this study and then analyses the socio-political context of Fascist Italy, with particular attention to cultural interventions. Subsequent sections focus on the Alla Scala and the way in which accounting tools became increasingly important as a tool of the Fascist Ethical State before drawing some concluding remarks. To achieve its aims, this study has relied particularly upon original documents in the Historical Archive of the Alla Scala located in Milan which encompass the artistic and economic life of the Opera House from 1815. The materials are classified chronologically and divided into sub-sections related to General Management, Administration and Stage

Management. These provided access to the budgets and financial statements of the Alla Scala and related materials between 1922 and 1943. Also preserved are many government documents which relate to agreements between the Fascist central government in Rome and the Municipality of Milan.

## **Giovanni Gentile and the Fascist Ethical State**

Fascism was most of all a “faith”, a creed which promised to restore social order after the “Red Biennium”, a period of mass strikes and factory occupations which profoundly shook Italian politics and society between 1919 and 1920. The Fascists would restore also Italy’s international prestige which had been weakened by the “mutilated victory”<sup>2</sup> of the First World War. To achieve these goals, soon after the formation of the paramilitary political movement in 1919 which gave birth to the National Fascist Party, the Fasci di Combattimento (Fasci of Combat), Mussolini recognised the importance of providing Fascism with a sound and distinctive ideology “if [it] does not wish to die or, worse still, commit suicide” (Mussolini, 1955b, p. 414). A consistent corpus of principles which “shall be the norm to guide political and individual action in our daily life” (Mussolini, 1955b, p. 414) was seen as essential to securing a future for the Fascist Party. However, at the time the use of widespread violence was much more important for securing power than engaging in doctrinal discussions. Later, Mussolini reminded his followers how

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<sup>2</sup> Italian nationalist and poet Gabriele D’Annunzio defined Italy’s victory as “mutilated” after the treaty of Versailles, where the Triple Entente refused to award Italy the territories promised with the London Pact.

(t)he years preceding the March on Rome<sup>3</sup> cover a period during which the need of action forbade delay and careful doctrinal elaborations. Fighting was going on in the towns and villages. There were discussions, but there was something more sacred and important, death. We knew how to die. A doctrine, fully elaborated, divided up into chapters and paragraphs with annotations, may have been lacking, but it was replaced by something far more decisive: faith (Mussolini & Gentile, 1961, p. 123).

Ideological foundations for the Fascist regime were provided by the renowned philosopher Giovanni Gentile who grounded his work in the Hegelian ideal of the Ethical State (Hegel, 2006). Gentile exercised a remarkable influence over Italy's political and cultural life at the time (Gregor, 2001). In his 1922 introduction to Gentile's work *The Theory of Mind as a Pure Act*, Wildon Carr stated that it "is doubtful if there is a more influential teacher in the intellectual world today. He has become famous in his own country on account of his historical and philosophical writings and even more by the number and fervour of the disciples he has attracted". As Professor of Philosophy at the University of Rome and Director of the Scuola Normale di Pisa, Gentile edited the first edition of the Italian Encyclopaedia and inaugurated the Fascist Institute for Culture. Throughout Fascist rule he was actively engaged in politics, serving as Minister of Education in Mussolini's first government. The contribution of Gentile to Fascist thought was openly recognised by Mussolini himself, who acknowledged that "it was Gentile who paved the way for those who, like me, wanted to walk it" (Mussolini, quoted in Gregor, 1974, p. 256).<sup>4</sup>

Gentile presented Fascism as a new and original force which was antithetic to the existing liberal State. Liberal Italy was seen as the triumph of materialistic positivism where the sense of community and pride of belonging to a nation were lost in

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<sup>3</sup> The March on Rome (28<sup>th</sup> October 1922) by Fascist blackshirts was the time when Fascism came to power.

<sup>4</sup> Gentile was assassinated in 1944 by a group of anti-Fascist partisans.

favour of a spreading individualism (Gentile, 1928a). This was fuelled by the liberal conception of the individual as the empirical Ego and society as a contractual aggregate of individuals who were created equal and free (Gregor, 1974, p. 192). According to liberal beliefs, society and the State are derivative entities created for the security of individuals, the achievement of which required individuals to surrender part of their freedom. In return, the State must have limited functions to ensure that any further and unnecessary restriction of an individual's freedom is avoided. Moreover, when State intervention is kept to the minimum, liberals proclaim that the pursuit of self-interest by every member of society would maximise social utility (Arblaster, 1984; Kymlicka, 1990). This individual-centred conception of society was comprehensively rejected by Gentile. Instead, his vision of the relationship between an individual and society was grounded in the idealism of the "Risorgimento" (Resurgence) in the 1860s, a key epoch in Italian history during which Italy consolidated as a unitary State. In this period, under the guidance of an enlightened elite, the Italian people rose and fought for their homeland, ready to sacrifice themselves in the pursuit of the common good (Gentile, 1925).

Gentile's Fascist doctrine overturned the relationship between the individual and society. If in liberal beliefs society exists for the individual, according to Fascism the individual is there for society: the identity and existence of the individual is derived from society (Rocco, 1996). Profoundly anti-liberal, Gentile denied the possibility for individuals to be free outside society, seeing society itself as prior to the individual who can find their real essence only by contributing to society's spiritual progress (Mussolini & Gentile, 1961). The liberal claim of freedom pre-existing society is groundless. An individual outside society is not free. Therefore, the presence of society and the State does not limit individual freedom but rather provides the means by which it is made

possible (Gentile, 1925, 1929). In stark contrast to liberal beliefs, self-interest was also harshly criticised by Fascist doctrine. Mussolini & Gentile (1961, p. 117-118) pronounced that the State must promote “a higher life, founded on duty, a life free from the limitations of time and space, in which the individual, by self-sacrifice, the renunciation of self-interest, by death itself, can achieve that purely spiritual existence in which his value as a man consists”. Every individual would find their real essence, their ‘ethical, spiritual self’, only when they were part of a society and contributed selflessly to its spiritual progress. Society itself represents the real Ego and, thus, acquires moral or ethical value: “Identifying, in a certain way, the Ego with society means attributing society the same moral value traditionally attached to men as spiritual agents” (Gregor, 1974 p. 192).

Fascist doctrine identified society with the Nation, the sacred repository of the fundamental values and interests of the community (Mussolini & Gentile, 1961, p. 122). According to Anderson (Jones 2011, p. 51), the Nation is a means of allowing the social integration of strangers, of creating “a deep, horizontal comradeship ...” by providing a “coherent narrative of progress ... (of a) coherent group moving together through history towards a common future”. The Nation is not just the sum of the individuals living in a specific territory at a certain point in time but a real “organism” which includes past, present and future generations, with individuals representing its transient elements (Mussolini, 1955a, p. 175). This organism has a life and interests of its own which are separate from those of individuals and result from the coordination of aspirations and desires of current and future generations (Gini, 1927a, p. 102). Therefore, the interests of individuals, social categories and classes can be considered legitimate only if they do not clash with the preeminent aims of the Nation. Since the Nation as a living organism has its own needs which may differ from those of

individuals, it is critical to have an entity which has the power to settle conflicting interests of present and future generations to secure the life of the Nation itself. This is the role of the State, the entity that embodies the Nation and has the duty to pursue its superior interests (Gini, 1927a, 1927b; Gentile, 1925, 1929; Mussolini & Gentile, 1961). It was

not true that first comes the nation and then follows the state; the nation is the state when it has triumphed over the enemy. It must therefore act in such a manner as to realise its own personality in the form of the state beyond which there is no collective will. The nation ... considered as Universal Will, is one with our concrete and actual ethical personality. Italy for us is the fatherland which lives in our souls as that complex and lofty moral idea which we are realising (Gentile 1922a, p.12).

The State has a critical moral role by creating social and political hierarchies which cohere the Nation and spread values which inform every individual's life, thereby allowing the State to be seen as consistent with the supreme interest of the Nation.

The State guarantees the internal and external safety of the country, but it also safeguards and transmits the spirit of the people .... The State is not only the present; it is also the past and above all the future. Transcending the individual's brief spell of life, the State stands for the immanent conscience of the nation (Mussolini & Gentile, 1961, p. 129; see Alter quoted in Quek, Deane & Butler, 2012, p. 10).

The State is the moral order which rules the community (Mussolini, 1951, p. 66). To effectively rule society, the State must have a will of its own, the only one that matters. The interest of the individual is accepted only if it coincides with that of the State (Mussolini & Gentile, 1961, p. 119). Fascism, although profoundly anti-democratic, presents itself as the purest form of democracy where

the Fascist State ... is a people's State and, as such, the democratic State *par excellence*. The relationship between State and citizen (not this or that citizen, but all citizens) is accordingly so intimate that the State exists only as, and in so far as, the citizen causes it to exist (Gentile, 1928a, p. 302).

The State has to be guided by an “enlightened” elite which in Italy coincided with the Fascist Party, the “State-party” (Panunzio, 1925, p. 169; Gentile, 1928a). According to Mussolini, progress is always achieved by elites and never ‘masses’ who are “matter, not spirit” (Mussolini, 1956a, p. 410). The masses do not have a clear purpose and always need a guide. They can be a means but not the protagonist of change. The Party becomes the entity whose will has to be respected and which has the exclusive possibility and right to use force. By taking control of the State’s central bodies, but also *de facto* replacing them with the organs of the Party itself, the Party becomes the ultimate repository of power, the exercise of which allows the Ethical State to make its will known and respected. In Gentile’s conception, State power stems from its moral supremacy over individuals and takes the form of law and force (Gentile, 1925; Mussolini & Gentile, 1961). The law represents the will of the State and must be rational and fully consistent with its aims, without any possibilities for individuals or groups to use it in pursuing their needs. Laws unavoidably apply to the entire community and are a fundamental means to coordinate individuals’ actions toward common aims. Meanwhile, force is the means by which the State makes its will respected and its power manifest.

In the Fascist conception, the State’s monopoly of the use of armed forces is what makes the power of the State unique and irresistible. The importance of ideals, which must inform laws, is not denied, but without a military force that can secure their application they are mere words. Without this kind of force “the government would be at the mercy of every organised group determined to depose it” (Mussolini, 1956b, p. 196). The use of force can be actual, to directly correct an individual’s behaviour, or potential when people align their conduct with the will of the State for they know that misbehaviour would be severely punished. Organizations, both public and private, have

their rules which apply to their members but they do not hold real power; their rules do not apply to the entire community and, most of all, they cannot use force for this is the exclusive prerogative of the State (Gregor, 1974, p. 209).

Crucially for Gentile (1925), the State is ethical in its essence and holds the supreme moral authority, thereby safeguarding the continuity of the community. As a result, this 'Ethical State' operates with no boundaries nor can its functions be limited to enforcing order and keeping peace, as in the liberal conception of the State (Mussolini & Gentile, 1961, pp. 120-121). In Fascist ideology, identity with the community represented by the Nation meant identity with the State which embodied the Nation itself. Being a moral citizen meant pursuing the values promoted by the State. Within this process the importance of a common culture could not be overestimated (Gentile, 1928b). Contrary to liberal States, where power is expected to operate mainly in more subtle and unseen ways (Foucault, 2007; Miller & O'Leary, 1987), in the Fascist conception the exercise of power must be always manifest and visible, it must be everywhere and be known by everyone in order to make clear that the only body entrusted with its exercise is the State itself (Gentile, 1925; Mussolini & Gentile, 1961). The Ethical State has to shape the "modern" individual so that they can actively contribute to society and, thereby, to the glory of the Nation, the only way that they can fully gain their true value (Mussolini & Gentile, 1961, p. 121). The State must show the people how to pursue their real and fundamental interests, leaving individualism aside, and to make them conscious of their substantial identity with the community which represents the real moral essence of every person (Gregor, 1974, p. 195). The unity of the Nation within the powerful State is represented by the emblem chosen by Fascism, the lictor's rod, an axe wrapped in a set of rods tied together to connote the idea of great strength from a unity of purpose.

As an organic nation with no interests tolerated which are outside its field of action and control, the Ethical State is necessarily totalitarian “with a singular, cohesive will” (Mann, 2012, p. 319). The idea and existence of the Nation exists when individuals believe that they belong primarily to a bigger collective than family or local community and “affective attachment and loyalty to that nation override all other attachments and loyalty” (Alter quoted in Quek, Deane & Butler, 2012, p. 10). For Mussolini there could only every be “all within the State, nothing outside the State, nothing against the State” (Mussolini, 1956d, p. 425)<sup>5</sup>. With the creation of a new generation of “Fascistised” individuals, the State would be able to fully express its will to exercise command, both within the Italian State and by extending its power to other territories and nations. The disciplined Italians, after centuries of despicable foreign servitude, would be ready to reassert themselves in the world, reaching the highest conquest of the human spirit, the imperial Nation.

The State, as conceived and realized by Fascism, is a spiritual and ethical entity for securing the political, juridical, and economic organization of the nation, an organization which in its origin and growth is a manifestation of the spirit. ... The forms in which it finds expression change, but the need for it remains. The State educates the citizens to civism, makes them aware of their mission, urges them to unity; its justice harmonizes their divergent interests; it transmits to future generations the conquests of the mind in the fields of science, art, law, human solidarity; it leads men up from primitive tribal life to that highest manifestation of human power, imperial rule (Mussolini & Gentile, 1961, p. 129).

## **Fascism and Culture**

Cultural artefacts have played a crucial and irreplaceable role in constructing the discourse which is the foundation of nationalist movements, a discourse of ‘us’ and ‘them’. Representing such boundaries as natural and self-evident is bolstered by cultural

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<sup>5</sup> This important speech was delivered at the Alla Scala on 28<sup>th</sup> October 1925.

forms, such as opera, which are “imbued with symbolic significance for respective communities” (Jones, 2011, p. 50). According to Fascist ideology, culture is “the creative activity of a people in the spiritual domain; it is an activity which is expressed in the domain of scientific knowledge and artistic creation” (Partito Nazionale Fascista, 1936, p. 4). Thus, culture is considered as the creative contribution that a people makes to progress toward the achievement of their true spirituality (Gentile, 1928b). More generally, culture is a means for “codifying and reproducing social identities” (Jones, 2011, p. 2). It allows individuals to form “imagined solidarities not based on family structures, religion or other traditional social bonds” (Jones, 2011, p. 51). For the Fascist, the role of culture is to promote the conquests of the human mind and spirit in order to inspire the members of the community and help them to walk down the road to spirituality. Culture was to inspire an individual’s spirit and make them conscious of their membership of a glorious Nation which has achieved much in the past and which must do the same in the future (Gentile, 1928b). Cultural artefacts are the expression of social memory which is “bound up with broader questions of politics and social power relations .... They are symbols of wider state projects to codify national publics” (Jones, 2011, p. 94). Everyone needed to contribute to this process (Gentile, 1928b).

Consistent with the idea that Fascism is “action and thought” (Mussolini & Gentile, 1961, p. 117), the cultural and intellectual creation of the human spirit must always be coupled with action. Culture cannot be an end in itself, as it was for liberal intellectuals who were always separated from (and horrified by) society and, therefore, focussed on the achievement of a greater level of knowledge for its own sake (Gentile, 1925). Gentile (1928a, p. 300) clearly states that Fascism “holds in scorn a product peculiarly typical of the educated classes in Italy: the *letterato* – the man who plays with knowledge and with thought without any sense of responsibility for the practical

world". Culture must contribute to the spiritual progress of the Nation. Those who enjoy cultural products must see in them the new spirit of the Nation, the ideals and challenges which characterise everyday life and must draw inspiration from them.

Theatrical performances were particularly revealing examples of Fascist intervention in cultural arenas in the pursuit of their ideology. They were conceived very early by Mussolini and Gentile as a fundamental means for forging the bonds of the national community (Berezin, 1991, p. 639). Theatre had the ability to "stage noble and masculine actions and passions, which can profoundly excite the soul of the people, awakening their best virtues" (Partito Nazionale Fascista, 1936, p. 31). Theatres, like iconic architecture, were conceived of as "cultural space in which political objects attempt to become socially meaningful and where particular visions of publics are forged" (Jones, 2011, p. 2). Theatrical performances were mobilized by the Fascist State as a political project "as part of a repertoire of cultural symbols that serve to present the Nation as ... natural and inevitable ..." (Jones, 2011, p. 2). In the creation of the Fascist Ethical State, which depended upon developing a common identity, in effect an imagined community, the symbols of cultural artefacts became especially important. Buildings and theatrical performances provide strong reflections of "abstract social values and identities ... (which) give otherwise abstract historic perspectives a tangible reality" (Jones, 2011, p.29). Theatre had long been recognised as a means to monumentalise national pasts to give legitimacy and meaning to the present. It allowed political values to be embedded into socially meaningful forms.

The use of culture, most especially theatre, as a means of spreading ideological values and to reinforce the bonds of the national community was not a Fascist invention. Jones (2011, p. 67) notes that "States have long sought to embed their political-economic projects within socially meaningful forms ...", to attach social and political

meanings to cultural practices. Ancient Rome provided a compelling example which was often recalled in Fascist rhetoric. The Roman Empire represented the zenith of Italian might, when the Nation's superior culture and force allowed it to conquer the entire known world and to "romanise" it according to its values (Huskinson, 2000). Fascism presented itself as the natural heir of the Roman Empire, with its magnificence and culture destined to re-flourish under the guide of the new Augustus, Mussolini (Wilkins, 2005). In ancient Rome theatre, along with other less culturally sophisticated spectacles, such as gladiatorial battles, was an important means not only to show the grandeur and power of the State but also a way of conveying political messages and gaining popular consensus. It provided an emotive, often dramatic, representation of an individual's identity.

Culture had long been a product of the ruling aristocratic class which managed to spread its values through theatre and to show its control over society. The importance and symbolic power of theatre were clearly realised in the last years of the Republic by Pompey who provided the city with the first stone theatre. It was not only the most splendid building in Rome, symbolising the power and splendour of Pompey, but also provided a means for him to assert his control over cultural activity, which he used to promote his political career (Beacham, 1999). Caesar also was aware of the potential of theatre, constantly sponsoring games and plays to win popular consensus. Once he gained absolute power, theatre was not only a means to entertain people with increasingly spectacular shows but also to spread political values and fuel the cult of his personality, with the dictator "becoming part of the spectacle – an expressive element – used to convey through his presence, costume, props, and numinous aura a forceful message to the spectators" (Beacham, 1999, p. 83). Theatre was extensively used as political leverage by Augustus, Mussolini's model in the Roman era, most especially to

present himself as the patron of Rome and the repository of the traditional Roman values endangered by the civil war at the time.

The use of theatre as a vehicle for propaganda did not cease with the fall of the Roman Empire. Theatre, with opera starting to develop towards the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, was an effective means to show the power and magnificence of the princes in Italian courts during the Renaissance (Zan et al., 2000). Expensive and opulent operas sponsored by influential families such as Gonzaga and Medici were used to show personal and dynastic power and glory to guests and visitors. Theatre was also critical in the Holy Roman Empire, where “cultivation of culture was a strategy for the rulers of the smaller German states to compensate for their circumscribed power” (Strobl, 2013, p. 465). Among the rulers of German states, Ludwig II of Bavaria was particularly active and invested conspicuous sums of money seeking to counteract the declining prestige of his kingdom by sponsoring the innovative work of Richard Wagner (Zan et al., 2000).

The rich cultural legacy of the Holy Roman Empire was then cultivated by the Prussian State and most especially by Nazi Germany (Strobl, 2008). Theatre was particularly important in the context of Nazi propaganda, in that not only it represented the exquisite German cultural tradition the government was determined to defend and foster, but also was a means to link culture and ideology. Opulent productions staged in magnificent buildings were an effective medium to present the regime as a patron of arts, and at the same time were used to gather the German people around the regime’s ideological values. Theatre was seen a collective experience, with the crowd sometimes chanting alongside the actors, showing that unity of purpose which had been lost after the defeat in the First World War (Strobl, 2009). The importance of theatre was such that the regime continued to increasingly invest resources in it until the summer of

1941, and even rebuilt theatre buildings damaged by bombings, this also helping Nazis to depict the Allies as “envious barbarians seeking to destroy what they had been unable to equal” (Strobl, 2013, p. 465).

The use of theatre as a cultural weapon was by no means an exclusive of right-wing dictatorships. In Communist Soviet Union the Bolshoi Opera House, one of the most renowned venues for opera and ballet in the world, was extensively used to spread ideological values. After replacing the Tzars’ symbols with the hammer and sickle and refurbishing the interiors in order to convey a more austere and “proletarian” image, the Opera House was used, most especially under Stalin, to stage performances representing Russian society as cheery and full of optimism, in marked contrast with reality (Sporton, 2006).

Italian Fascists seemed to have learnt these lessons well as, consistent with the aim of presenting themselves as the heirs of the Roman Empire, they sought to exploit theatre as a means for propaganda and for reinforcing the sense of belonging to a powerful community around its key beliefs of national pride, unity, force and might (Nelis, 2012). In this endeavour, the remarkable international and national reputation of the Alla Scala Opera House would be especially important.

## **The Alla Scala Opera House**

The Alla Scala was founded in 1778 to replace the Royal Ducal Theatre in Milan, which was destroyed by a fire in 1776<sup>6</sup>. The building of the theatre was financed by members of the aristocracy who previously owned boxes in the Ducal, in exchange

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<sup>6</sup> The main sources used to document the history of the Alla Scala have been Giuseppe Barigazzi’s (1984) monumental work “La Scala racconta” and the Opera House’s website ([www.teatroallascala.org](http://www.teatroallascala.org)).

for possession of the land on which stood the church of Santa Maria alla Scala, hence the name, and for renewed ownership of their boxes. The new theatre soon became the heart of Milan's cultural life and one of its symbols. Under Napoleonic rule the Alla Scala was opened to the working class and used to promote the image of the new ruler, with Napoleon's every triumph celebrated in the theatre. With the Concert of Europe in 1815 and the return of the Austrians, the Alla Scala was again a theatre mainly for the ruling class.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century was a golden age for Italian opera, during which the Alla Scala built its myth by staging performances of the greatest Italian composers, which included Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti, Verdi and Puccini. In the period that followed the Concert of Europe, known as the Resurgence, Italian patriots met in the foyers and boxes of the Alla Scala in an attempt to elude the gaze of the Austrian police. Many operas, such as Verdi's *Nabucco* and *I Lombardi alla prima crociata* or Donizetti's *Belisario* inspired the Italians with their patriotic themes and led to anti-Austrian protests. The arrival of the armies of France and of the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia on 8 June 1856 was celebrated soon after in the Alla Sala in the presence of Vittorio Emanuele II and Napoleon III. From the 1860s operas by famous foreign composers, such as Flotow, Gounod and Wagner, started to be staged.

After Italian unification was completed in 1870 attendance at the Alla Scala began to mirror the changes in Italian society, with an increasing number of rich bourgeoisie seeking to secure a seat in the theatre to affirm their status. With the need to industrialise and modernise the new State, to feed an increasing population and the expenses caused by the wars of unification, the Italian State sought to cut costs perceived as unnecessary. Particularly vulnerable were performance theatres where the increasing costs of staging quality operas became too great for municipal governments

(Ferrara, 2004, p. 17). This was coupled with a very unstable political situation and the perception that theatres were institutions financed by the entire community but enjoyed by only the rich. This led to the Milan Municipal Council in 1897 refusing to provide any further financial support for the Alla Scala with the result that the 1897-1898 theatre season was cancelled. This prompted the creation of a company by Milanese nobles, led by the Visconti di Modrone family, which took the responsibility to fund and manage the Opera House. The Alla Scala was soon to face another crisis with the outbreak of the First World War. The debilitating effects of the war caused a marked decrease in attendance which led in 1918 to the closure of the Opera House until 1921 at the time that the Fascists came to power.

Immediately before the Fascists' seized power the Alla Scala was reorganised in 1920 by the socialist Milan Municipal Council as an "Ente Autonomo"<sup>7</sup> (Autonomous Body, hereafter Ente) which enjoyed a separate legal identity and autonomy from the municipal government of Milan. It also had its own governing body and accounting system. The founders of the Ente were its main contributors; the Municipality, the box holders ("palchettisti") and private donors. The immediate aim of the new Ente was to re-open the Alla Scala after the years of enforced closure caused by the First World War. To promote the diffusion of art and culture among the people they sought to make the Alla Scala more independent and less reliant on public funding by ensuring that the box holders increased their contributions (Minutes of Milan City Council assembly, 25<sup>th</sup> February 1920). The 1920 agreement began a nine year trial period, at the end of which the founders were to decide if the Alla Scala would continue as an Ente and made fully independent. The box holders would be required to transfer the rights to their theatre boxes upon payment of a sum to be calculated at the end of the period (Agreement

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<sup>7</sup> An Ente autonomo is an institution regulated by Italian public law which enjoys autonomy from other public or private institutions, with the aim to pursue the public interest.

between the Municipality of Milan, the box holders, the donors and the Ente Autonomo del Teatro Alla Scala, 9<sup>th</sup> November 1920).

During the nine years trial of the Alla Scala as an Ente, intervention in its operations by the Fascist regime was limited. They were more concerned with settling quarrels within their Party and reinforcing their power rather than propagating their ideological message through a concerted intervention in cultural productions.

### **The Alla Scala under Fascism: Consolidating Power 1922-1936**

When the Alla Scala was re-opened in 1921 a statute was drawn up on the basis of the 1920 agreement which specified the appointment and composition of the board of directors, hereafter the Board, the governing body of the Ente, with all the stakeholders represented and a balance between representatives of public and private interests. The Board was made up of eight members, two of whom were appointed by the box holders, two by the donors, with four members plus the president appointed by the Milan Municipal Council (Statute of the Ente Autonomo del Teatro Alla Scala, 1921). Two auditors were appointed by the Board<sup>8</sup>, which also was in charge of appointing the director of the Alla Scala (Statute of the Ente Autonomo del Teatro Alla Scala, 1921).

During the trial period, the Ente mainly relied on the income generated by the sale of tickets, which ranged from 7 to 15 million lire a season (Income statements 1922-1923 to 1929-1930)<sup>9</sup>. The Ente could also count on subsidies from the Municipality of 350,000 lire per year, reduced to 312,500 in 1925, and from the State in the form of a 2% duty on tickets sold for public performances staged throughout the

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<sup>8</sup> The presence of the two auditors was not mentioned in the 1921 Statute, only in the internal regulations of the Opera House. It is not clear whether they ever prepared a report for, contrary to later practice, no reports appear with the financial statements and the Director's commentary never makes reference to it.

<sup>9</sup> Although the 1921-1922 financial statements have not been preserved in the archive the main elements can be found in time series attached to other financial statements.

province of Milan. The contribution of the State was increased in 1923 to include a further 5% duty on tickets sold in all theatres which had boxes and a fixed amount on bets made on horse races in the province. However, subsidies from public bodies were on average less than 20% of total income during the trial period, ranging from 1.9 to 3.9 million lire (Income statements 1922-1923 to 1929-1930). While ever the Ente was forced to rely mainly on income coming from the sale of tickets to increase its profit, prices were kept high and access to the Alla Scala remained a privilege of the more wealthy.

In 1929 with a Fascist dictatorship now in place Mussolini was ready to inaugurate a new phase in the construction of the Ethical State, “going out to the people” (Thompson, 1991, p. 81). Fascists were aware that, in order to remain in power, the State they had conceived could not simply rely on the use of violence but had to achieve long-term consensus from its people. It was time to “Fascistise” the Italians in order for the population to identify with the goals of the regime. To demonstrate their commitment all must embrace the values of the Nation, such as courage, obedience, exaltation of rural life and be made aware of Italy’s glorious past and faith in a bright future. Ultimately they must be ready, if necessary, to contribute to the Nation by giving their lives. Each individual had to demonstrate the existence of their Nation “by their willingness to fight and die for its independence ...” (Gentile 1922a, p. 11). To achieve these aims, theatre, radio and cinema (Ferrara, 2004, pp. 21-22) were increasingly used by the Ministry of the Interior and later in 1934 by the Undersecretariat of State for Press and Propaganda. To reinforce the State’s control over the media, in 1931 censorship was centralised within the Ministry of the Interior. With ultimate control of the Italian press, foreign press, propaganda, tourism and cinema, the Undersecretariat became a Ministry in its own right in 1936. In 1935 the Inspectorate for Theatre was

created with the power to control theatrical production by not only exercising censorship but also by controlling artists and institutions, awarding prizes and subsidies. The creation of a specific government body in charge of controlling theatres was a clear signal that theatre was an integral part of Fascist policy and programmes. If in liberal Italy theatre was overwhelmingly a means to entertain (Ferrara, 2004, p. 15), in Fascist Italy it gained a central role in the promotion of a new spirituality and sense of community.

The propaganda initiatives to “Fascistise” Italians were soon evident in the operation of the Alla Scala. The State, through the Municipality of Milan, began to make the Alla Scala an integral part of the Fascist Ethical State and to use it as a means to spread its values. The first step to achieve this aim was to reinforce the ownership of the Alla Scala as an Ente by the public, and not the rich aristocracy, by transferring ownership of the Alla Scala to the Municipality of Milan. In 1928, the Royal Decree n. 562 had disbanded the board of directors of the Ente and a State commissioner was appointed. The commissioner was in charge of managing the Opera House until a new board was put in place (Agreement between the Municipality of Milan and the Ente Autonomo del Teatro Alla Scala with the intervention of a State representative, 18<sup>th</sup> November 1930). Repossession of theatre boxes from the palchettisti and the new management system introduced secured a public monopoly in managing the Alla Scala (Agreement between the Municipality of Milan and the Ente Autonomo del Teatro Alla Scala with the intervention of a State representative, 18<sup>th</sup> November 1930).

The new board of directors, when eventually appointed after long delay in 1934, was made up of eight members, four of whom were appointed by the Municipality with the President of the Board chosen among them directly by the Head of Government, one by the province of Milan, one by the Provincial Council of Fascist Economy and two by

the central government. Three auditors had to be appointed by the Board and their report had to be attached to the financial statements to reinforce their reliability (Statute of the Ente Autonomo del Teatro Alla Scala, 1934). This was fully consistent with the increased control exercised by the Municipality, whose influence on the Opera House was highlighted in the statute which stated that “the budgets and financial statements of the Ente shall be sent in due time to the Municipality of Milan, which invigilates how the Ente itself is managed” (Statute of the Ente Autonomo del Teatro Alla Scala, 1934, art. 14). The Alla Scala would now depend entirely on funding from public bodies and ticket sales.

Subsidies had to be increased<sup>10</sup> when income from tickets began to fall as the Fascist regime sought to spread culture and spiritual values which were consistent with the Fascist creed by making theatre accessible to the working class. Mussolini believed that theatre would have a particularly prominent role in instructing and gaining the allegiance of the masses, that it would not be the privilege of a small elite. Therefore, every effort had to be made to open the theatre to an even larger number of spectators from every social class. To achieve this ticket prices were reduced and low price shows presented (Partito Nazionale Fascista, 1936, p. 31). When the reduction in ticket prices took place for the first time, season ticket sales increased by 107% but the decrease in prices was such that the corresponding increase in income from their sale was just 18% (Income statement, 1932-1933, Director commentary, 1932-1933. p. 9). The use of special reduced price shows became so widespread that toward the end of 1935 they constituted almost a third of total performances (Director commentary, 1934-1935)<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> The Milan Municipal Council almost doubled its subsidy to 600,000 lire with further subsidies from provincial bodies which ranged from 100,000 to 200,000 lire (Income statements 1930-1931 and 1935-1936).

<sup>11</sup> Consistent with this policy, booking fees were cancelled in 1932 (Director commentary, 1932-1933).

Special shows were also offered for free from time to time on special occasions<sup>12</sup> or to Fascist organisations.<sup>13</sup> The success of these measures is testified by the high attendances at performances. In the last season of this period the Director noted that “the Opera House had an average attendance which was nearly 200 spectators per show higher than its seating capacity” (Director commentary, 1935-1936, p. 8). In this way the Alla Scala became a means to address a larger number of people and to make them aware of their belonging to a glorious Nation whose might and talent were mirrored by the magnificence of the performances (Strobl, 2013). It also meant, however, that the gap between the income from tickets and the cost of the magnificent performances constantly increased through time.

The funding was used in the period 1929 to 1936 to produce 112 different operas and ballets, with total of 676 performances, the most popular of which were works by Verdi. His opera *Aida*, in which the civilised Egyptian Nation takes over the primitive Ethiopians, was an occasion of great spectacle with huge crowds on the stage and spectacular choreographies which was used by the Fascists to herald the aspirations and later the triumph of the Fascist imperial State. The protagonist in the opera, Radames, embodies values such as heroism, militarism and love for the Nation when he<sup>14</sup> is ready to die for it after he realises that he unintentionally betrayed it. Love for the Nation is also embodied by the Ethiopian princess Aida who agrees to take part in her father’s plan to make her the bait to trap her lover, Radames. The system triumphs over the individuals who seek to oppose it when the lovers are tragically buried alive together

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<sup>12</sup> An example is the show offered to children during the carnival period (Director commentary, 1933-1934).

<sup>13</sup> In 1932 a number of shows were offered to some Fascist workers’ associations (Director commentary, 1932-1933), and a concert, in the presence of Mussolini, was organised with the receipts given to the Fascist federation of Milan.

<sup>14</sup> The male as hero dominated Fascist and Nazi ideology and the operas staged, with women often portrayed in the operas favoured by the Fascists as a threat to the hero (Tambling, 1996).

(Arblaster, 1992). Verdi's *Rigoletto* was a vehicle to subtly depict the dangers and the spiritual corruption the class struggle brings about (Arblaster, 1992), emphasising the benefits of the organised Fascist society. The opera *La forza del destino* shows the destructive effects of trying to put family and selfish individuality before the Nation. Particularly popular were also operas written by Mascagni, who joined the Fascist Party in 1932. Often staged in the 1930s was his most famous opera, the *Cavalleria rusticana*, which, along with *Iris*, contains a celebration of the rural world and a critique of urban life which was fully consistent with ruralist Fascist policies inaugurated in 1929. Mascagni's opera *Nerone*, which premiered at the Alla Scala in 1935 and was staged 10 times, was specifically linked to Fascist values and the celebration of Italy's glorious past through the remembrance of ancient Rome.

During the period of consolidation of power, when there was an overriding need to "Fascistise" the Italians, a closer control of the Alla Scala and its finances became a priority in ensuring the financial viability of the theatre. In achieving this goal accounting practices played an increasingly important role. During the trial period, the key documents were the income statement, the statement of financial position and a detailed commentary prepared by the Director of the Alla Scala. However, both the financial statements were fragmentary and inconsistent. They included many items which frequently changed from one year to the other, thereby making comparisons between years very difficult. The financial statements which were perceived initially as "intuitive and rough" (Director commentary 1922-1923, p. 2), were used primarily for managing the Opera House, not as political instruments, as testified by cuts to some unnecessary costs and unprofitable performances. More generally, the main purpose of the financial statements during this period was managing the Alla Scala in the form of

an Ente Autonomo, securing for it the means to operate in the future and assessing the amount needed to liquidate the box holders at the end of the trial period.

An example of the income statements is provided in Figure 1 which shows the income statement for 1925-26 in which revenues for the season 1925-1926 are shown to have been made up of four different items, the details of which were provided directly in the income statement. Revenues from season and one day tickets were separated and for each the amount generated by the different types of seats in the Opera House was presented. The third item was miscellaneous revenues, in this statement mainly concessions, rent, sale of materials, interest, discounts and fines. The last item is subsidies from the State, received in two instalments, and from the Municipality.

**Figure 1, Income statement 1925-1926 – Revenues**

<u>INTROITI</u>	<u>PROFITTI</u>	<i>Revenues - gains</i>
<b>INTROITI DI TEATRO: <i>Revenues from performances (season tickets)</i></b>		
Abbonamenti:	Palchi..... L. 3.581.350.=	
	Ingressi.... " 586.300.=	
	===== L.4.167.650.=	
	Platea....." 1.020.912.85	
	===== L. 5.188.562.85	
<b>INTROITI GIORNALIERI: <i>Revenues from performances (single day tickets)</i></b>		
	Palchi..... L. 260.587.15	
1) Quota Ingressi ai Palchi....	" 459.826.20	
	===== L. 720.413.35	
	Platea e Gallerie..... L. 5.520.399.45	
	Quota Ingressi Platea..... " 153.275.40	
	===== " 5.673.674.85	
	Prenotazione Palchi..... L. 15.992.=	
	id. Platea e Gallerie.... " 219.727.55	
	===== " 235.719.55	
	-----	
	L.11.818.370.60	
<b>PROVENTI DIVERSI <i>Other revenues</i></b>		
	Concessioni Teatro..... L. 187.000.=	
	Rendite Immobili..... " 94.791.30	
	Realizzo Materiali Diversi.. " 12.399.40	
	Interessi Attivi..... " 138.729.67	
	Sconti e abbuoni su forniture" 25.763.45	
	Multe..... " 35.=	
	Diversi..... " 8.496.75	
	===== " 467.215.57	
<b>CONTRIBUTI: <i>Subsidies</i></b>		
	Governativo - 1° Semestre 925	L.2.259.733.95
	id. - 2° " "	1.082.139.95
	===== L.2.341.873.90	
	Comunale - Anno 1925	" 312.500.=
	===== " 2.654.373.90	
<b>Total revenues</b>		
Totale Proventi..... L.14.939.960.07		

When the ownership of the Alla Scala was transferred to the Municipality of Milan at the end of the trial, still maintaining its identity as an Ente, a noticeable shift in accounting practices took place. A budget started to be drawn up in 1931 and the

financial statements were more consistent in the information presented, which now included details of creditors and debtors, complemented by statistical attachments. The statistical attachments mainly grouped analytical data on the performance of the Ente, such as detailed comparisons of income and expenses with the previous year, average cost/income per show and a time series for past years' income and expenses. At the same time, the Director's commentary became much more detailed and an audit report was added, with the auditors not only explaining the controls they had performed but also, for the first time, giving their opinion about the reliability of the accounting system and comments on the financial statements. For the present study, the Director's commentaries provide especially compelling evidence of the increasing intervention of the Fascist State in the operations of the Alla Scala. The Director's commentary, which included financial and non-financial information, was the means by which a Fascist discourse was constructed which sought to interpret financial results and the performances at the Alla Scala as evidence of the successful implementation of Fascist priorities and beliefs.

The detailed Director's commentary was a means by which the Ente was to show compliance with central government plans and commitment to Fascist values, promoting these with performances. In the case of the 1936 commentary the Director agrees to replace "two foreign operas with Italian ones, in compliance with the instructions provided by the Inspectorate for Theatre, as a countermeasure to the sanctions"<sup>15</sup> (Director commentary, 1935-1936, p. 1). Particularly important non-financial information was data on attendance and quality of performances. The increased attendance was always highlighted along with the number of shows with reduced prices as an indication of the success of the Alla Scala in spreading its message

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<sup>15</sup> The commentary refers to the sanctions issued by the League of Nations after Italy attacked Ethiopia in 1935.

to a wider audience, in accordance with the government's aims. Accordingly, in the 1936 commentary the Director highlights how many of the shows for workers' associations performed in 1935 "have been sold out, testifying to the enthusiastic adhesion of Milanese workers to these artistic products" (Director commentary, 1935-1936, p. 1)<sup>16</sup> and that some reduced price performances, such as a concert directed by Erich Kleiber<sup>17</sup>, "were repeatedly requested by the public" (Director commentary, 1935-1936, p. 22). The enthusiasm of the public was such that in 1935 "the closing of season – set for 30 April XIII<sup>18</sup> – had to be postponed (as for the previous season in Year XIII) to accommodate the pressing demand of the audience for a further performance of "Aida"" (Director commentary, 1934-1935, p. 1). In this way, the Director sought to show not only the success and quality of the Opera House's performances but also its willingness to respond to the requests of the people.

Complementing the Director's observations about the number and types of performances provided, his commentary provided detailed information and a narrative on every entry of the income statement, specifying the main determinants of each element of income and expenditure, along with the causes of any increases or decreases. The report was also an occasion for highlighting problems which were of particular concern to the Opera House. After the Municipality of Milan took control of the Alla Scala the main issue clearly shown in the statement of financial position was the amounts owed by the State which increasingly paid part of its subsidies late. The cash flow problems that this caused for the Ente was seen as a cause of major concern both in

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<sup>16</sup> The commentary uses the emphatic and intentionally incorrect word "esauritissimi", which would mean "more than sold out".

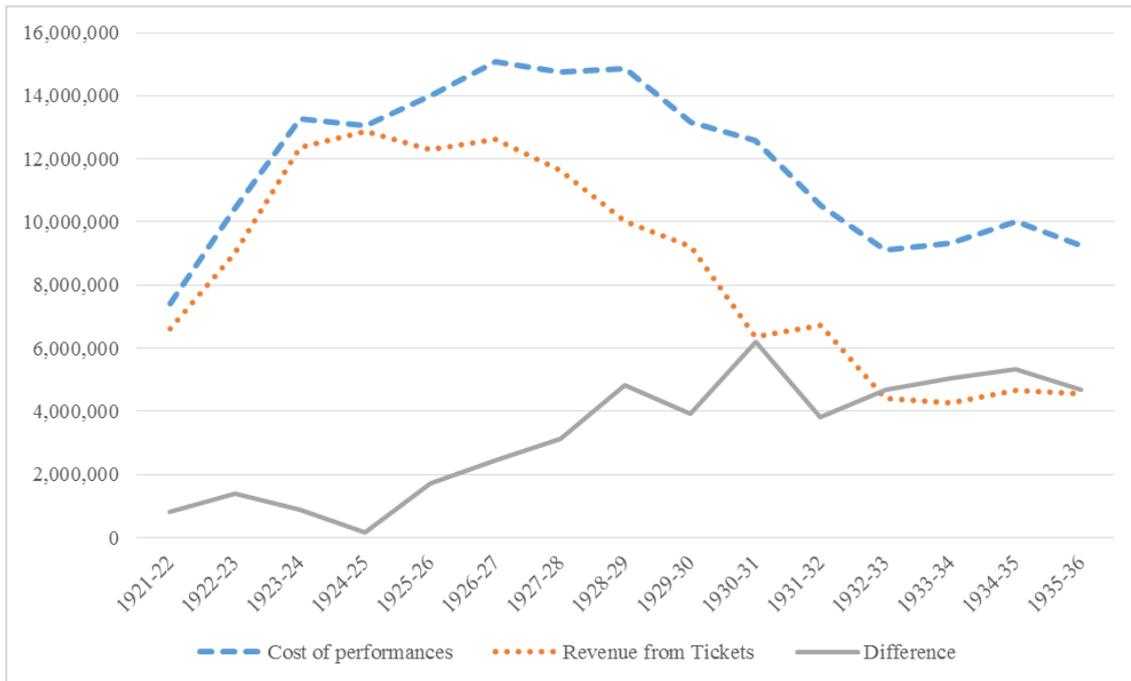
<sup>17</sup> Erich Kleiber suspended his collaboration with the Alla Scala after the Fascist government issued racial laws in 1939.

<sup>18</sup> The Fascist calendar starts to count years from 29 October 1922, the day after the March on Rome. The year begins on 29 October and ends on 28 October. Therefore, the year 29 October 1922 to 28 October 1923 is referred to as I. Consistent with Fascist discourse which often drew from Roman history, Roman numbers were used.

the audit reports (Audit report, 1933-1934, 1934-1935 and 1935-1936) and in the Director's commentaries (Director commentary, 1933-1934, 1934-1935 and 1935-1936). The situation seemed to reach its climax in the 1934-1935 season when the debts of the State to the Alla Scala reached 1.6 million lire (Statement of financial position, 1934-1935). If in 1930-1931 the auditors merely noted the "remarkable" amount owed by the State (Audit report, 1930-1931, p. 3), in 1934-1935, after complimenting the "Municipality of Milan, always vigilant and forward-looking for all that concerns the most important Opera House in the world", they highlighted by contrast how its main "weakness" was represented by the "illogical" delays in the payment of the now crucial State subsidies upon which the very existence of the Alla Scala now depended (Audit report, 1934-1935, pp.1 and 3-4). Building on this, the Director, significantly, defined this situation as "embarrassing" (Director commentary, 1934-1935, p. 27).

Starting from the accounting year 1934-1935, innovative graphs were also used to monitor the trends of income and expenses and also the total number of spectators and the average number for every show. The Director's commentary for the accounting year 1935-1936 provides a graph, reproduced below as Table 1, which clearly highlights the widening gap between income from tickets and cost of performances in the period analysed.

**Table 1, Revenue from tickets and cost of performances during the first period (1922-1936)**



Notwithstanding the increasing gap between income from tickets and cost of performances, which could have limited operations or threatened the very existence of the Opera House, the Director highlighted how the main results achieved by the Alla Scala for the 1934-1935 season were “the creation of a playbill which could interest the audience, the presentation of the best contemporary artists and an adequate reduction in ticket prices” (Director commentary, 1934-1935. p. 5). Thus, indicative of the greater contributions to the values and aims of the Fascist Ethical State now expected of the Alla Scala, income generated by shows was not the main driver to decide whether they would be staged. Therefore, some operas were included in the playbill for their “artistic or celebratory importance” (Director commentary, 1934-1935. p. 10) even though they

provided inadequate returns<sup>19</sup>. In 1935-1936 it was proudly highlighted how the Opera House

has borne the unforeseeable cost of replacing two performances already in repertory with Italian ones which had to be produced for the first time ... (and) has managed to fund reduced prices shows which, apart from the expense for some singers who agreed to reduce their claims, have the same cost of a normal performance but grant low proceeds, as the price asked is minimal. It should be noted, however, how the Alla Scala was the only theatre which did not seek the personal contribution of His Excellency the Head of Government to cover this (Director commentary, 1935-1936, p. 10).

The wealth of information available in the accounts did not lead to any action by the government appointed Board to deal with falling income, testifying to how accounting was not primarily a means for decision making to maximise efficiency but rather increasingly a political tool for controlling the Opera House and influencing its activity in the pursuit of a specific governmental programme, the Fascistising of the Italian people (Miller & Rose, 1990; Rose & Miller, 1992; Miller 2001). The accounts were a means to create specific visibilities (Hopwood, 1990; Miller, 1990; Robson, 1994) fully consistent with the exercise of power by the Municipality of Milan and the government in Rome. The income statement for 1934-35, which on the income side showed that subsidies had increased to almost 50% of total income (see Figure 2), was a clear signal of the unprecedented reliance of the Alla Scala on the Municipality of Milan and on central government. The financial statements therefore were used by the Fascist government to proclaim its beneficence, its devotion to the Italian people and the future of the Nation.

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<sup>19</sup> The celebration of Fascist anniversaries or the hundredth anniversary of the death of important Italian composers such as Bellini or Ponchielli are examples where performances were given which suffered losses.

**Figure 2, Income statement 1934-1935 – Revenues**

<u>INTROITI E PROFITTI</u>		<i>Revenues and gains</i>
<u>INTROITI DI TEATRO</u>		<i>Revenues from performances</i>
Overall Complessivamente .....	L. 4.553.493,==	
<u>PROVENTI DIVERSI</u>		<i>Other revenues</i>
Overall Complessivamente .....	" 483.937,35	
<u>CONTRIBUTI DIVERSI</u>		<i>Subsidies</i>
Overall Complessivamente .....	" 4.438.440,60	
		L. 9.475.870,95
<u>SOPRAVV.ZE ATTIVE</u>		<i>Extraordinary revenues</i>
Overall Complessivamente .....	" 61.539,75	
		L. 9.537.410,70
<i>Total</i>		<i>Totale</i> L. 9.537.410,70
		=====

Consistent with the new political role of the Alla Scala, profits continually fell. The profits for the last three years of the period of Fascist consolidation, 1934 to 1936, were respectively 5,920, 1,125 and 1,331 lire, having peaked very early in the trial period at 2.2 million lire (Income statement, 1924-1925). Perversely, in contrast with the expectations in a liberal State, this could have been seen as a measure of the

importance, virtue and success of Fascist policies, thereby demonstrating that it was the spiritual well-being of the people that was most important, not financial measures of success. The absence of substantial profits to be reinvested in the Alla Scala reinforced even more the reliance on public funding, further curtailing the independence of the Ente even though it was meant to have “full and absolute freedom of action and independence” (Agreement between the Municipality of Milan and the Ente Autonomo del Teatro Alla Scala with the intervention of a State representative, 18<sup>th</sup> November 1930).

After Italy embarked on its imperial mission in 1936 with the military campaign against Ethiopia the Fascists were ready to implement the ultimate aim of the Ethical State, the exaltation of the Nation’s will to power through imperialism (Morgan, 1995). The totalitarian imperative in Fascist ideology became ever more prominent. Fulfilment of the imperialist imperative of the Ethical State (Mussolini & Gentile, 1961) and the certainty of war would require intensive indoctrination in Fascist beliefs at all levels of Italian society. Italians were to be equipped with the physical and spiritual skills needed to successfully confront other nations: “the revolution must impinge upon the habits of Italians. They must learn to be less sympathetic in order to become hard, relentless and hateful – in other words, masters” (Mussolini quoted in Morgan, 1995, p. 158). To achieve this, opera would be used to provide the models from an illustrious past.

## **The Alla Scala under Fascism: Control by the State (1936-1943)**

### **Opera and Fascist Ideals**

The importance of cultural icons to totalitarian and imperial ambitions was confirmed in 1937 when the Ministry for Popular Culture replaced the Ministry for Press and Propaganda (Forgacs & Gundle, 2007, p. 215) to secure tighter control of cultural activities in the creation of an official and uniform Fascist culture (Morgan,

1995). Most importantly, theatre would enable the Fascist State to stage strong and noble exhibitions of passion and power to inspire the audience and to stigmatise ‘selfish’, decadent bourgeois behaviour which was characterised by materialistic pleasure-seeking. An important initiative in the achievement of this aim was the Law 4<sup>th</sup> June 1936, n. 1.570, which required all opera houses, and not just the Alla Scala, to be operated as Ente Autonomi to facilitate the extension of State control over their activities.

Given the critical role of opera houses as agents of propaganda in the implementation of Fascist policies and achieving the ideals of the Fascist Ethical State, control of opera houses was taken from local governments and centralised after the 1936 Royal Decree Law (Gregor, 1974). The Ministry for Popular Culture, and more precisely the Inspectorate for Theatre, was then placed in charge of the financial management of the opera houses. Each opera house was to appoint a board of directors with three of the members to be representatives of Fascist corporations (Cinquini, 2007) and four, including the Podestà<sup>20</sup> who acted as President, to be appointed by the Municipality in which an opera house was located. The key figure of the new Enti<sup>21</sup> was the Superintendent who was directly appointed by the Ministry for Popular Culture. The Superintendent was in charge of preparing the schedule of performances and was responsible for the preparation of the budget and the financial statements. All of these documents had to be approved by the Ministry for Popular Culture.

Centralisation of the control of opera houses would allow the Alla Scala to become fully an organ of the Fascist Ethical State, to be used to promote further wider access to high quality cultural products by making them affordable to the less well-off.

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<sup>20</sup> After Fascist reform of local government in 1926, the municipality’s council, cabinet and mayor were replaced by a “Podestà” appointed by the prefect.

<sup>21</sup> “Enti” is the plural for “Ente”.

Accordingly, after 1936 the number of reduced price performances increased with new initiatives such as the “Saturdays at the theatre” and new spring and autumn concerts. Special shows continued to be performed for workers and youth associations, but also to celebrate Fascist events such as the opening of the new “house of Fascio” in Milan (Superintendent commentary, 1937-1938). A high number of operas and ballets were staged, 132 in the seven seasons between 1936 and 1943, with 776 performances in total. In this period the Alla Scala was also used to promote the reputation of Italy and of the regime abroad. Thus, gala dinners were hosted in the theatre for international guests, which included the Prime Minister of Yugoslavia (Superintendent commentary, 1937-1938), and also tours abroad were organised to show the magnificence of Italian culture and to reinforce the bond with Italy’s allies (Superintendent commentary, 1940-1941, 1942-1943; Audit report, 1941-1942)<sup>22</sup>.

A greater presence by less educated spectators was reflected in the operas staged at the Alla Scala. To catch the attention of this different type of audience, opera had to be thrilling and had to allow them to relate easily to the characters. Operas by Italian composers continued to dominate performances staged at the height of Fascist rule, most especially Verdi and his operas *Aida*, *Falstaff* and, to a lesser extent, *Rigoletto*, all of which were historical dramas whose protagonists were soldiers and aristocrats (Arblaster, 1992). Composers and artists who openly endorsed Fascism gained increased popularity. Puccini, who was by then recognised as the heir of Verdi (Barigazzi, 1984), Mascagni, Forzano and Giordano had many of their works staged in the Alla Scala many times. Umberto Giordano not only composed very popular operas for the Fascists such as *Andrea Chénier* or *Fedora* but also wrote the official hymn to

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<sup>22</sup> Special shows in the German Opera House of Prague were organised in 1940-1941 (one free for the German army), while concerts of the Alla Scala orchestra were held in Germany in 1941-1942.

celebrate the tenth anniversary of the March on Rome. Giovacchino Forzano, a personal friend of Mussolini, was the composer of the libretto of many popular operas, such as Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi* and Mascagni's *Il piccolo Marat*. He also composed his own operas, one of which, *Cesare*, a celebration of the Roman general and dictator, was written with Mussolini himself.

Consistently, the protagonists of other very popular operas of this period, such as Puccini's *La bohème*, *Tosca* and *Madama Butterfly*, Mascagni's *L'amico Fritz*, *Il piccolo Marat* and *Iris*, Giordano's *Fedora* and *Andrea Chénier*, Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia* or Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci* are working or middle-class people, not rich nobles. The depiction of common people as "heroes", without compromising on the quality of the cultural product, was seen by the regime as fundamental to engaging with the new audience. Although the key themes of these operas were not overtly political they readily recalled Fascists myths and way of life. A dominant theme was violence and cruelty<sup>23</sup> (Tambling, 1996), which were justified if not promoted by the Fascist creed (Arblaster, 1992) as a way to transform Italians into "masters" (Mussolini & Gentile, 1961). Life itself had to be conceived of as a struggle, avoiding the dangers of "decadent" pleasure-seeking. Staging these operas was a means to promote the spiritual progress of the masses through the staging of strong passions, feelings and ideals from which they could draw. Not only would this help to make people feel that they belonged to a glorious Nation, but also make them aware of the new spiritual tension generated by Fascism. People had to perceive the need to be an integral part of a new society, setting individualism aside and fully participating in public life as shaped by Fascism. The effect of this was clearly perceived by Gramsci, one of the fiercest opponents of Fascism, who observed that

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<sup>23</sup> Remarkable examples are whipping and murder in *Pagliacci* or the tragic death of Iris in a sewer, where two degenerates steal from her instead of offering help.

(to) many common people, the baroque and the operatic appear as an extraordinary fascinating way of feeling and acting, a means of escaping what they consider low, mean and contemptible in their lives and education, in order to enter a more select sphere of great feelings and noble passions. ... Opera is ... pestiferous, because words set to music are more easily recalled, and they become matrices in which thought takes shape out of a flux (Gramsci, 2012, pp. 377-378).

Other important themes included the critique of bourgeois society whose liberal values were not compatible with the Nation State, as in *Andrea Chénier* (Tambling, 1996). Puccini's *Turandot* (as completed by Alfano) was particularly dense with Fascist ideals and myths with its protagonist, Calaf, the epitome of the Fascist man. He lives his life intensely and with great confidence in himself. He is not afraid of gambling and putting his life at risk to achieve what he wants. The outcome of this heroic behaviour is necessarily victory. Powerful and inspiring in particular was the "Nessun dorma" (Nobody sleep) aria, where Calaf celebrates his triumph over the beautiful but cruel Turandot, with the last words being "vincerò" (I will win), repeated three times. The opera also is a representation of the almighty will of the hero, who can tame women as the Fascist leader can subdue the crowd (Tambling, 1996), with people ready to sacrifice themselves in his name (as Liu does in the opera).

### **Accounting for Fascist Control**

To promote "popular theatre" extra-subsidies from the State became the norm, increasing each year. In the last three years of Fascist rule State contributions became higher than income from the sale of tickets, reaching 10.7 million lire in 1942-1943 when they had been only 1.9 million lire in 1922-1923 (Income statements 1922-1923 to 1942-1943)<sup>24</sup>. This increased contribution from the State, which allowed the Alla

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<sup>24</sup> A further tax on entrance tickets for horse and hound races, football matches or shooting contests was issued to finance the Alla Scala's activities (Royal Decree Law 10<sup>th</sup> March 1943, n. 86).

Scala to avoid losses and to achieve a tiny profit<sup>25</sup>, was coupled with a reinforced control over the use of resources made possible by accounting tools which were clearly shaped by power to meet the needs of the State itself (Maran & Vagnoni, 2011). Accounting became increasingly important to support State control in the spreading of Fascist values.

As Enti, all opera houses after the 1936 Royal Decree had to provide detailed financial accounts of their operations which gave them a clear, identifiable identity as individual institutions, making them visible to the State (Miller & O’Leary, 1987; Graham, 2010). The only major change in the accounting reports was the removal of many attachments, most especially those detailing the amounts due from debtors which, if retained, would have revealed continuous delays in the payment of subsidies by the Fascist State, thereby contradicting the image constructed by the Fascist (Statement of financial position 1936-1937 to 1942-1943). The key documents to interpret the financial statements, the Superintendent’s commentary and the audit report, changed accordingly but especially the former which became briefer and more focussed on critical information such as the attendance at shows or key data about the performance of the Opera House which would have been especially important to the Fascist State, to make control at the central level easier. Other details were presented in the remaining statistical attachments. The audit committee made up of three members, two of whom were appointed by the provincial prefect and one by the “Podestà”, continued to provide information, although now much more limited, on the financial situation and performance of the Ente, along with a general comment on the main events which characterised the accounting year.

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<sup>25</sup> Profits in the period ranged from 2,634 to 7,166 lire, with the exception of a huge loss in 1940-1941 after the first fall in attendances at shows, and a higher profit in the following year due to an unexpected higher attendance.

The shaping of accounting tools for the exercise of power also created specific visibilities which supported the Fascist view of their achievements (Hopwood, 1990; Miller, 1990; Robson, 1994). Most especially, the income statement flagged the reliance of the *Alla Scala* on public funding which, as shown in Figure 3, in 1942-1943, the last year of the Fascist regime, became 74% of total income (for details of the entire Fascist period see Appendix 1). Therefore the rise and reinforcement of a “relation of funding” (Neu, 2000, p. 181) as a specific technology of government was highlighted by the accounts, rendering the power of the State visible and indisputable. Another relevant change that was fully consistent with the reinforcement of State’s influence was the reporting of both budget and year-end figures in the income statement, thereby providing a clear and direct comparison between what had been allowed and what was achieved. Since both the budget and financial statements were required to be sent to the Ministry for Popular Culture in Rome for approval, this enhanced the ability of the Fascists to control how the resources had been used during the year. As a result, the influence of the State on accounting practices made its power visible, stronger and difficult to resist, thereby securing an increased control and influence over the *Alla Scala*. Thus, accounting was an essential aid in the exercise of power of the Ethical State by reinforcing its force, its never-ending control of an institution which was forced to comply with the will of the State. Control exercised by the means of accounting made it clear that “the authority of the State is absolute. It does not compromise, it does not bargain, it does not surrender any portion of its field to other moral or religious principles which may interfere with the individual conscience” (Gentile, 1925, p. 304).

**Figure 3, Income statement 1942-1943 – Revenues**

<i>Revenues and gains</i> INTROITI E PROFITTI		<i>Budgeted</i>	<i>Actual</i>
		<i>Preventivo</i>	<i>Consuntivo</i>
<i>Revenues from performances</i>	INCASSI DI TEATRO:		
	Stagione Lirica <i>Opera season</i>	L. 2.000.000,—	L. 3.193.747,30
	Concerti Sinfonici Corali <i>Symphony concerts</i>	..	.. 163.657,—
	Proventi vari <i>Other</i>	.. 150.000,—	.. 454.568,35
		<hr/>	<hr/>
		L. 2.150.000,—	L. 3.811.972,65
<i>Subsidies</i>	CONTRIBUTI	.. 4.140.000,—	.. 5.555.358,50
<i>Extra subsidy - Ministry for Popular Culture</i>	CONTRIBUTO STRAORDINARIO MINISTERO CULTURA POPOLARE	.. 5.000.000,—	.. 4.800.000,—
<i>Extra subsidy from Municipality of Milan (for sanitary systems and air-raid shelters)</i>	CONTRIBUTO STRAORDINARIO COMUNE DI MILANO PER IMPIANTI SANITARI - RIFUGI ANTIAEREI	..	.. 400.000,—
		<hr/>	<hr/>
		L. 11.290.000,—	L. 14.567.331,15
<i>Loss (Budgeted)</i>	DISAVANZO	.. 245.000,—	
		<hr/>	<hr/>
		L. 11.535.000,—	L. 14.567.331,15
		<hr/>	<hr/>

The close control exercised by the Ministry meant that the Opera House had to show full compliance with the regime's directions and aims to demonstrate that the new organisation of the Alla Scala and the new accounting system made it an integral part of the "organised Fascist nation". The increased interventions of the Fascist State were increasingly obvious in the language used in the Alla Scala's accounting reports which show a Fascist emphasis in their wording. The role of the annual financial statements and the attached commentaries of the Superintendent as political implements of the Fascist State was consistently and clearly identified by the seemingly unconscious and, at times, extravagant use of expressions and exclamations drawn from the regime's rhetoric, unlike reports in the earlier period which used a more neutral and factual

language. One commentary of the Superintendent made references to the “perfectly functioning Fascist Nation” which was “organised in every sector and in every detail” (Superintendent commentary, 1937-1938, p. 4). The use of Fascist rhetoric was particularly marked during the war, when the military power of Italy and its allies was praised. When commenting on the tour of the Alla Scala orchestra in Germany, the auditors noted how its success “reinforced the artistic bond of the two nations united in the war which victory will crown” (Audit report, 1941-1942, p. 5). After remembering “the mighty Italian soldiers fighting in all frontlines”, the auditors closed their report with the Fascist exclamation “Vincere!” (“Win!”) (Audit report, 1941-1942, p. 7; the same closing remark can be found in Audit report, 1940-1941, p. 13).

The support provided by accounting tools to the ongoing exercise of State power was ultimately aimed at making the Alla Scala an integral part of the Fascist Ethical State rather than at simply generating evidence for better management. Demonstrating the “extraordinary turnout to the performances organised with the usual artistic dignity, which testifies the prestige of the Opera House and the attachment of Milanese people” (Audit report, 1941-1942, p. 3) was ultimately more important than accounting for financial results as the measure of success and achievement of the priorities of the Ethical State. This view of accounting as a political instrument was fully consistent with the underlying ideology which informed the Fascist Ethical State. Profoundly anti-positivist, the Fascist conception of the State rejected the use of accounting as a simple individualistic and materialistic tool for maximising the utility of the single institution through the provision of objective, verifiable information. A good example of the overriding political interpretation and purpose which was given to the accounting reports is contained within the audit report of 1941-1942 where the auditor referred to the “careful, constant and thoughtful attention” paid to the Opera House by the Ministry

for Popular Culture, which “follows with passion and zeal the perpetration of the noble tradition of the Alla Scala” (Audit report, 1941-1942, p. 6). Reference to the Ministry was not casual but showed how the Opera House was aware of having to account to the State for its contributions to the Ethical State. Consistent with this duty, the auditors congratulated the Superintendent and the President of the Alla Scala on their ability to “defend the traditions of the Alla Scala and meet the trust and expectations of the Audience and of the Higher Hierarchies” (Audit report, 1940-1941, p. 11). The need to show the Opera House’s contribution to the State was such that the Superintendent even underlined how the new state-of-the-art mechanical stage of the Alla Scala was “designed by Italian technicians and produced by the very Milanese Ceretti Industries”, consistent with autarchic policies inaugurated by the regime after the sanctions issued by the League of Nations (Superintendent commentary, 1937-1938, pp 5-6).

The Ethical State actively intervened in the life of its people, in marked contrast to the Liberal State which “instead of directing the game and guiding the material and moral progress of the community, restricts its activities to recording results” (Mussolini & Gentile, 1961, p. 129). Therefore, even the tool to “record results” *par excellence*, accounting, becomes a means for intervening in the “management and government of society” (Miller, 1986, p. 101). Even though the data produced by the accounting system would have been also used for decision making, such as to reduce unnecessary costs, its main aim was to help the process of identifying the Alla Scala with the aims of the State to ensure that it would operate accordingly. Accounting was to be used especially for providing the government with information about the success of the Opera House in spreading Fascist values. The contributions of accounting to the operations of the Alla Scala were ultimately to promote the broader interests of the community embodied by the State and the Fascist creed. The Superintendent sought to

reinforce this moral purpose of accounting when he noted that the Alla Scala had “a strong political and social function. In this regard, every formula or accounting result loses its significance” (Superintendent commentary, 1939-1940, p. 5). With every individual expected to identify themselves with the Nation (Gentile, 1925), so every public institution should identify itself with the Ethical State, most especially those entrusted with such a critical role as promoting the cultural education of the masses according to Fascist beliefs and priorities and securing ongoing support for the regime. As the real essence of the individual lay in their active contribution to the spiritual progress of society (Mussolini & Gentile, 1961), so the life of every public institution was to be uniquely devoted to contributing to pursuing the superior goals of the Ethical State.

During the time when the Alla Scala was fully under Fascist control, the accounts highlighted an increasing gap between income from tickets and expenses which was never addressed for it served the purpose of showing the increasing dependence on the State and the role of the Alla Scala in creating the Fascist Ethical State. New activities such as the “Saturdays at the theatre” or the spring and autumn concerts were started and maintained even if it was clear from the income statements that they produced ongoing losses. What really mattered was achieving the “result of this real artistic, patriotic and civil battle” (Audit report, 1941-1942, p. 7), irrespective of its economic impact on the Opera House. Notwithstanding their financial effects, the Superintendent even praised government initiatives in the field of theatre as a “magnificent achievement of the Regime which conveys toward opera a huge number of enthusiastic spectators”. Other relevant issues, however, such as the problems with cash flows caused by the delays in the payment of State subsidies, were hidden and never mentioned in commentaries during the second period. Even though the delays in

payments were potentially detrimental to the Alla Scala, the political composition of the Board ensured that this would be kept from the public and that the government thereby would escape possible censure.

According to Fascist ideology the only good that mattered was that of the State. This was clearly highlighted by Gentile (1922a, p. 13) who noted that the State “must act seriously, sacrificing the individual to the collective whole, and welcoming martyrdom which in every case is but the sacrifice of the individual to the universal”. The Alla Scala was a part of a larger organism and, thus, its interests were to be harmonised with those of the other parts of this organism for the sake of the survival and progress of the community embodied by the State. The tight bond between the Opera House and the State was explained well by the Superintendent when he commented on how the life of the Opera House was linked “to the political, military and economic events of the Nation” and how the “existence and increment in activities are profoundly dependent on the historical events which enliven the Nation” (Superintendent commentary, 1939-1940, p. 1). As a result, contributing to the progress of the Nation necessarily implies “discipline, the coordination of efforts, a deep sense of duty and a spirit of self-sacrifice” (Mussolini & Gentile, 1961, p. 131). In this regard, accounting contributed to making the will of the State manifest and helped it to exercise its power with the aim of making the action of the Alla Scala fully consistent with the goals of the State, even at the cost of putting its financial well-being at risk. Since “no action is exempt from moral judgment: no activity can be despoiled of the value which a moral purpose confers on all things” (Mussolini & Gentile, p. 118), accounting acquired a moral dimension (Bigoni & Funnell, 2015) when it served the higher aim of promoting the spiritual progress of the Nation.

In the case of the *Alla Scala* the functioning of the calculative practices of accounting “can always be traced back to some programmatic ambition” (Spence, 2010, p. 379). Far from being a dry and neutral technique, accounting was a technology deeply embedded in the socio-political context of the time (Burchell et al., 1980; Burchell, Clubb & Hopwood, 1985), reflective of the will of the Ethical State and constitutive of relations of power and dominance (Napier, 2006; Constable & Kuasirikun, 2007). The pervasive influence of the State exerted with the contribution of accounting tools proved to be successful for the *Alla Scala* was fully aware of its role, of the need to actively contribute to the State’s mission and of the contributions of accounting in the pursuit of this goal. The changes to the cultural offer to meet the propaganda needs of the regime were a sign of this awareness. The effectiveness of the regime’s plan to extend the boundaries of the Ethical State and to promote its cultural policy were confirmed by one communist observer in the 1930s who referred to the way in which the State managed “to succeed in influencing the greater part of the masses with its ideology” (quoted in Gentile, 2002, p. 164). The control of sentiments and actions through the manipulation of cultural activity proved to be much more successful than the threat of violence that constituted the “real Fascism” (Thompson, 1991, p. 150). Accounting, through the creation of specific visibilities and allowing a penetrating control that reinforced the force of the State without resorting to a costly and politically dangerous recourse of direct coercion (Neu, 2000), represented an important technology within Fascist programmes of government (Miller, 1990), helping to translate them into practice.

## **Conclusion**

The Alla Scala was an iconic institution which was critical to the success of the Fascist plan to promote the spiritual progress of the community by making citizens aware of their belonging to a glorious Nation. Far from being an apolitical practice in the pursuit of economic rationality, accounting was deeply rooted in the socio-political context of the time and its utility within programmes of government was clear (Miller, 1990). Thus, the use of accounting played an important role in the process of making the Alla Scala an integral part of the Fascist Ethical State. Not only did accounting help to translate governmental programmes into practice but also it was an important means of making the power of the State manifest by increasing its impact without the need to constantly resort to force (Neu, 2000).

Across the two periods of the Fascist regime identified for the purposes of this study, the use of accounting techniques became increasingly important as the ideology and control of Fascism over the Nation developed. In the first period (1922-1936), and most especially during the nine year trial period, accounting was used more for decision making purposes in the management of the Alla Scala, with an attempt to increase efficiency by cutting unnecessary costs and unproductive performances. Moreover, in the absence of a direct intervention by the public, its main aim was to evaluate the “economic feasibility” of managing the Alla Scala in the form of an Ente Autonomo, providing it with all the necessary means to operate in the future and to depict the amount to be paid to the box holders at the end of the trial period.

The situation changed after the end of the trial period in 1929 when the State seized the opportunity to take full control of the Alla Scala, through the action of the Municipality of Milan, dispossessing the box holders so that the Opera House was entirely in public hands. Towards the end of the period of consolidation of power

accounting tools were re-shaped to meet the information needs of the Municipality, which exercised close control of the Opera House and to which the budgets and financial statements had to be sent for approval. To serve this purpose, the accounting documents became more precise with a very detailed commentary of the Director, and later the Superintendent, and an audit report. As State intervention in the operations of the Alla Scala became more evident the detrimental effect on the financial situation and performance of the Opera House was highlighted by accounting documents but not acted upon. Accounting was increasingly used not to provide information to maximise efficiency but as a tool for controlling the Alla Scala and influencing its activity to ensure that it became an effective tool of the Fascist Ethical State, creating at the same time specific visibilities (Hopwood, 1990) such as an increasing reliance on public funding, which made the power of the Municipality and the State manifest.

In the second period (1936-1943), as the Fascist ideology came to maturity and it entered its imperial phase, the intervention in the operations of the Alla Scala, and all other Italian opera houses, was centralised and made even more pervasive as it became an organ of the Fascist Ethical State. The use of the Alla Scala as a vehicle to convey the Fascist message was therefore reinforced and, as a result, it became even more reliant on public subsidies and therefore less independent. Accounting tools were re-shaped by power (Maran & Vagnoni, 2011) and the specific visibilities created, including comparisons between budget and year-end figures and more focussed commentaries dense with Fascist rhetoric. Information potentially useful for the Ente but embarrassing for the government was hidden, thereby testifying to the close control performed by the Ministry for Popular Culture. Even more than in the previous period, accounting was a political means to exercise a strong influence on the Alla Scala and to

make the State's power visible and indisputable by increasing its force without the need to resort to the use of direct coercion.

The use of accounting was consistent with the underlying ideology which fuelled the action of the government. Fascism refused a positivist use of accounting as a simple individualistic and materialistic tool for maximising the utility of a single institution, preferring to employ it as a tool for the implementation of its programmes. The Alla Scala had to become an integral part of the Ethical State, with its operations informed by the need to contribute to the good of the State itself rather than maximising utility for the Opera House. The real essence of every Fascist institution, and most especially those critical to the success of Fascist policies, lay in their active contribution to the spiritual progress of the society embodied by the State (Mussolini & Gentile, 1961). Therefore, the best interests of an institution as an autonomous body had to be put aside in the pursuit of the superior goals of the Ethical State. Accounting represented a powerful tool for constructing the Ethical State, securing an active contribution from a key institution such as the Alla Scala Opera House<sup>26</sup>.

This study adds to existing literature on accounting and government. In particular, it has examined the complex issue of the interrelations between the technology of accounting and governmental programmes and power by considering a totalitarian regime which has attracted little attention from accounting scholars. It has also used a theoretical lens new to accounting studies, Gentile's conception of the Ethical State (Gentile, 1925, 1928a; Mussolini & Gentile, 1961), which is particularly appropriate in the context of right-wing regimes, most especially Italian Fascism. By linking accounting to the ideological context in which it operated, it has been possible to get meaningful insights on the how this technology of government operated in the case

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<sup>26</sup> The Opera House was hit during a bombing a few days after the fall of Fascism, in the night between 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> August 1943 and re-opened in 1946.

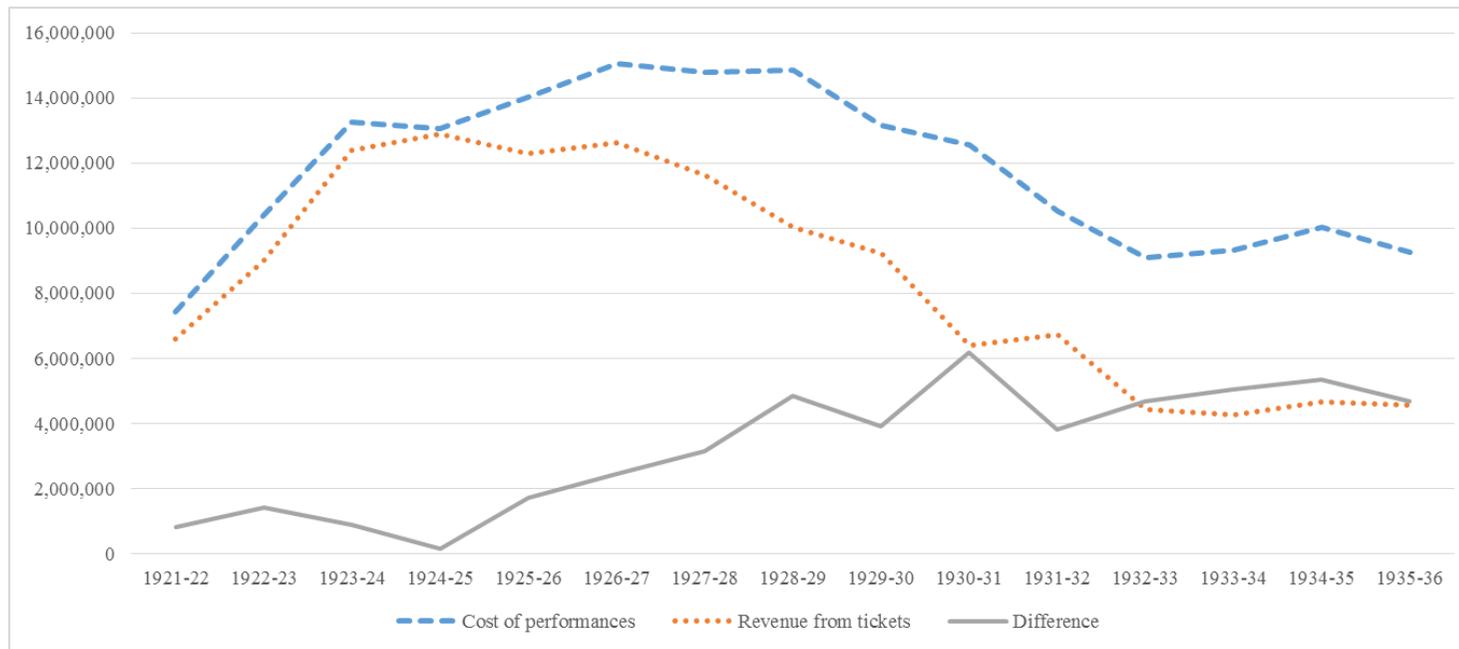
of the Alla Scala during the Fascist rule. Lastly, the study has sought to broaden the institutional and geographical coverage of accounting history by considering a non-Anglo-Saxon setting (Jones & Oldroyd, 2015).

The paper has some limitations. First, it relies on archival material, which unavoidably has some gaps due to the loss of some documents over time. However, in the case analysed, existing gaps did not hinder the possibility of making meaningful speculations about the use of accounting in the context of the Alla Scala. Second, it just focuses on a single, although notable, case study. As a result, in order to deepen the analysis of the interrelations between accounting technologies and governmental programmes in totalitarian regimes, future studies could analyse the intervention on other non-cultural institutions to investigate if the accounting served the same purposes as in the Alla Scala Opera House, analysing if within a totalitarian State accounting works as a tool for domination irrespective of the specific organizational purposes (Baños et al., 2005) or if its use depends on the specific context in which it operates. Within the cultural domain, a comparison between the case of the Alla Scala and similar institutions in other totalitarian regimes could be fruitful, to document differences and similarities which might depend on the different ideologies underpinning the regimes.

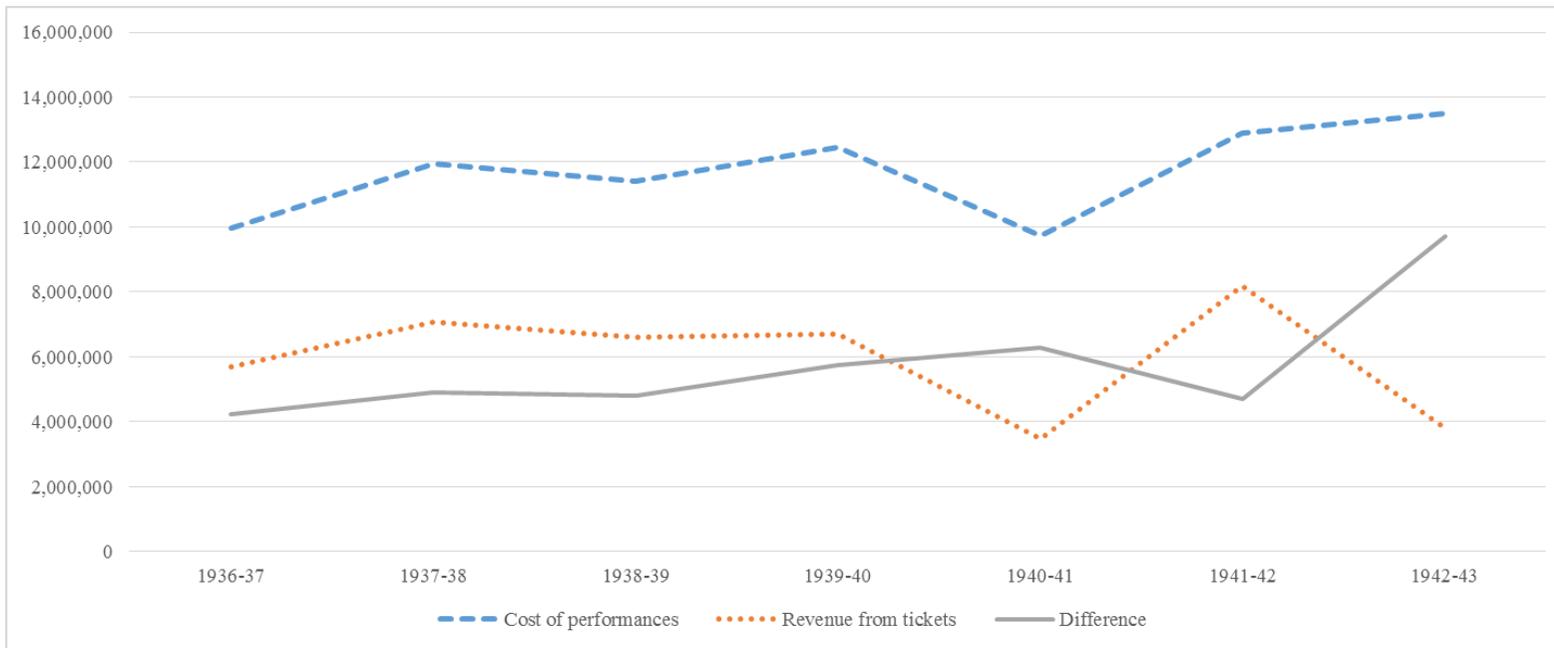
**Appendix 1, Cost of performances and revenue from tickets, 1921 to 1943 (million lire)**

	1921-1922	1922-1923	1923-1924	1924-1925	1925-1926	1926-1927	1927-1928	1928-1929	1929-1930	1930-1931	1931-1932	1932-1933	1933-1934	1934-1935	1935-1936	1936-1937	1937-1938	1938-1939	1939-1940	1940-1941	1941-1942	1942-1943
<b>Cost of performances</b>	7.425	10.400	13.270	13.045	14.005	15.065	14.770	14.865	13.155	12.570	10.535	9.100	9.315	10.020	9.250	9.950	11.950	11.400	12.450	9.740	12.900	13.500
<b>Revenue from tickets</b>	6.600	8.995	12.380	12.885	12.285	12.615	11.635	10.030	9.235	6.380	6.735	4.420	4.670	4.670	4.565	5.700	7.060	6.600	6.700	3.464	8.200	3.800
<b>Difference</b>	0.825	1.405	0.890	0.160	1.720	2.450	3.135	4.835	3.920	6.190	3.800	4.680	4.645	5.350	4.685	4.250	4.890	4.800	5.750	6.276	4.700	9.700

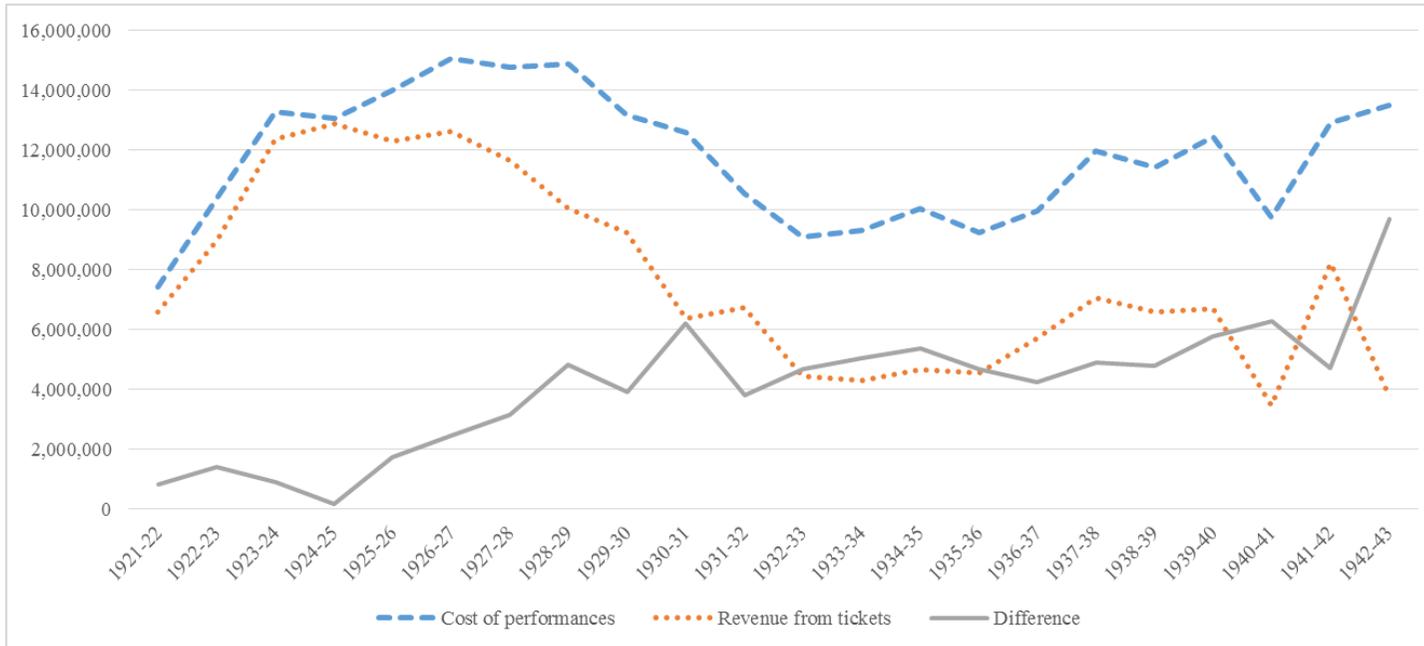
**Revenue from tickets and cost of performances during the first period (1922-1936)**



### Revenue from tickets and cost of performances during the second period (1937-1943)



### Revenue from tickets and cost of performances during the Fascist rule (1921-1943)



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