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Italo Pardo. *Managing Existence in Naples: Morality, Action and Structure.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. xvi + 232 pp. $43.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-521-56665-0; $110.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-56227-0.

Reviewed by Harley Schreck (Bethel College)
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Managing Existence in Naples: Morality, Action and Structure presents a description and analysis of moral life and how it structures the world of action and interaction of the *popolino* (ordinary people) of Naples. Italo Pardo is critical of earlier studies of Neapolitan urban life with their imposition of theoretical models onto the ethnographic details they intend to explain. Pardo argues that they are too easily shaped by exterior formulations and fail to arrive at an understanding of the *popolino* because they ignore the basic requirement of "achieving an empathic grasp of the situation through prolonged interactive involvement in the flow of local life" (p. 3). Pardo is a native Neapolitan who extends his previous understanding through extensive fieldwork carried out in three periods–1984 to 1986, 1990 and 1991, and 1992 and 1993.

This book is best read in comparison with other descriptions of Naples that have tended to stress poverty, brutality of human against human, and slippery notions of right and wrong. Pardo points out that, "...Naples confronts the observer with a difficult decision–whether to dismiss it as a chaotic and anarchic place doomed to suicidal extinction through resignation to deprivation, marginality and ruin or to ask whether there is a rationale for its appearance that might explain things differently" (p. xi). He goes on throughout the rest of the book to attempt the latter. What he finds is that, while the *popolino* are immersed in a mixture of large, powerful social, political, and economic forces and structures, their lives are not determined by such forces. Instead, they move between various choices in highly personal and seemingly individualistic ways defined by notions of value and morality that are multifaceted and highly nuanced. Pardo's description and analysis of the *popolino* of Naples challenges the stereotype of the backwater poor desperately clawing for survival, barely informed by any sort of moral or ethical system. They are people who are profoundly affected and constrained by economic fortunes or misfortunes, political systems and operatives, religious structures and beliefs, and the basic shaping fact of geography. As such, they are living in and affected by structures of all types–cultural, social, economic, and political. They transcend these structures and construct closely argued rationales for decisions and strategies that they employ in their day-to-day existence in Naples. This lesson is not entirely new to urban ethnographers, but Pardo extends his description and analysis to new and profitable areas as he investigates these decisions and strategies along the lines defined by morality and rationality, material and non-material, and individual and community.

A central point of investigation in the book is structure versus agency. Pardo opts for a microanalysis of action and interaction as opposed to the collapsing of these into ideal type models. "As long as our task remains the study of the individual in society (urban European or, indeed, any other)," he writes, "our understanding may be made embarrassingly difficult by the multiplicity of real life; nevertheless, it has everything to gain from avoiding abstract and generic references to culture and to action. There is, in other words, an incomparable advantage in coming to terms with the moral and spiritual complexity of people's lives in its multifaceted relation to practical aspects such as work, transaction, choice, risk, investment, capital, property, education, entrepreneurship and contacts–in brief, individuals' management of existence as the pursuit of fulfillment" (p. 187). The result is fine-toothed description and analysis. For example, economic life is seen as more than a mere struggle for survival on the part of the marginalized or an abstract exchange of goods and services. It is partially that, of course, but Pardo goes further to consider economic decisions and transactions in terms of non-material considerations. Worth and respect distinguish from toil. Individual gain, respect, and community responsibilities are all important aspects of economic life. As another example, Pardo notes the various shades of legality and illegality color the lives of his informants. Legality is a situated reality defined by a combination of purposes, history, intent, spirituality, and relationships. It is not structured by

abstract notions created by bureaucracies or presented by the church. It is determined on the basis of highly personalized solutions, informed by cultural values, perceived gains, and social and community relations.

The result of Italo Pardo's description and analysis is a much richer and more complex world than seen in other treatments of Naples. The poverty does not seem so overbearing. The neighborhoods do not seem so run down and decayed. Individuals seem to reach greater levels of generosity and kindness. One wonders if this is a correction or partly due to social and cultural change. Pardo repeatedly refers to changes that have occurred. The *popolino* seem to be taking on bourgeois characteristics and moving into the middle class. This has affected their employment prospects, attitudes toward education, patterns defining the patron-client relationship, politics, and gender relations. The possibility of such rapid change is fascinating.

Managing Existence in Naples is a commendable book. It brings much to bear on the agency-structure question. It fleshes out the descriptions of life in Neapolitans neighborhoods and points to rapid changes that are occurring. It would be a useful text to use in upper level undergraduate and graduate courses.

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