



# Reworking Modernity: Capitalisms and Symbolic Discontent (Hegemony and Experience)

*Allan Pred, Michael Watts*

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Using both grand conceptualizations and grounded case studies, Allan Pred and Michael Watts look at how people cope with and give meaning to capitalism and modernity in different times and places. As capital accumulation has grown and taken new forms, it has affected technology and labor relations which in turn have affected people's daily lives. These changes have not always been either welcome or easy. Pred and Watts focus on the symbolic discontent and cultural confrontations that accompany capitalism. They depict people struggling over the meaning of change in their lives and over new relations of power.

Modernity is experienced differently in different times and places. To illustrate this point, Pred and Watts offer four case studies that range across time and space. These studies remind us that there are multiple capitalisms and multiple reactions to capitalisms. Watts begins with a study of a Muslim millenarian movement that arose alongside the Nigerian oil boom of the 1970s. When a Muslim prophet and disenfranchised followers tried to create a distinctive community and identity, they came into brutal conflict with state authorities. Thousands died in the resulting oppression. Watts's next case is less bloody, at least in the short run. He tells us what happened when technological change was introduced in rice production in West African peasant society. Peasants were drawn into the world economy as contract farmers. This changed work relations and affected everyday life in peasant households. Families began to fight over who would work and under what conditions. They struggled over gender identity and property rights. We move back in time and across space for their third case study. Pred discusses changes in the daily life of the Stockholm working class at the end of the nineteenth century. He writes of the various forms their discontent took as they struggled with economic restructuring. Even conflict over street names took on special meaning. For the last case Pred takes us to a steel mill in California. When a South Korean company became half owner of the mill, there was money for modernization and the threat of layoffs was reduced. But the workers remained unhappy. They protested low wages, unsafe conditions, and unfair recruitment practices. Their labor issues turned into issues of nationalism, morality and identity. All four case studies demonstrate the shock of modernity and how the resulting struggles affect daily life.

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