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Inspired by a tradition that includes Durkheim and Foucault, the author conceives of law as a social phenomenon that portrays the social, political, and cultural condition of our time in a privileged way. The modern tools and concepts of modern social regulation and emancipation both seem to have lost their efficacy. They are still current as a result of historical inertia but only until credibly replaced by other concepts and tools. This is, therefore, a paradoxical time, in which we confront modern problems – the as yet unfulfilled promises of liberty, equality, and peace for all humanity – for which there seem to be no modern solutions.

Moving between empirical work and innovative theorising, the author argues for extensive shifts in the field of critical social thought and in particular of legal theory. Because globalization has many faces, its impact on law – whether law's scale is local, national or global – is complex and contradictory. The author draws on the distinction between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic globalization to deal with such topics as the law of the oppressed (squatter settlers, refugees, undocumented migrant workers, indigenous peoples), the transnationalisation of the state, European integration, the globalization of the legal field, the global reform of courts, human rights and multiculturalism, and the common heritage of humankind.

He concludes with a path-breaking chapter in which he answers what may be considered the most intractable question haunting social scientists and legal scholars, as well as legal practitioners and social activists: can law be emancipatory? This challenging and inspiring book should be read by all of them.