

# The Semiotics of Extractive Legality: Symbolic Law and Tin Mining Governance in Indonesia

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## The Semiotics of Extractive Legality: Symbolic Law and Tin Mining Governance in Indonesia

Derita Prapti Rahayu<sup>1</sup> · Faisal Faisal<sup>1</sup> · Yokotani Yokotani<sup>1</sup> ·  
Mieke Yustia Ayu Ratna Sari<sup>2</sup>

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### Abstract

What if the law does not fail by absence, but by design? This study interrogates the juridical paradox at the heart of Indonesia's tin mining sector, where a dense environmental and extractive regulation architecture coexists with rampant illegality and impunity. Focusing on Bangka Belitung, a key tin-producing region, this research challenges the assumption that legal breakdown results from weak institutions or enforcement gaps. Instead, it reveals how law is strategically hollowed out, retaining its formal shell while losing its regulatory substance. Employing a critical socio-legal research design, the study combines normative legal analysis with interpretive document-based inquiry. It draws on statutory texts, court rulings, investigative journalism, NGO reports, and environmental audits to trace how legality is reconfigured through political patronage, shadow governance, and selective enforcement. Analytically, it integrates genealogical contextualization, discourse deconstruction, and theoretical synthesis rooted in Critical Legal Theory, Legal Realism, and Legal Pluralism. The findings show that the law in Bangka Belitung functions performatively: permits are issued, audits are conducted, and awards are granted, even as illegal mining thrives. Regulatory enforcement targets intermediaries while shielding institutional actors such as PT Timah. Systems like SIMBARA, introduced to enhance transparency, operate more as state optics than governance tools. A regime of extractive legality emerges, a juridical mutation characterized by symbolic compliance, fragmented authority, and the instrumentalization of law to legitimize disorder. Drawing from legal semiotics, this study conceptualizes legality as a performative and symbolic order, where law operates as spectacle rather than substance. It advances the notion of the death of law in resource frontiers, arguing that legal failure is not a malfunction but a mode of rule. Ultimately, the paper calls for a radical rethinking of legal accountability, not as institutional repair, but as a political struggle to dismantle juridical impunity's architecture in the Global South.

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