



Visualisation Of The *Tabut Bengkulu* Building As A Reflection Of Social And Cultural Identity

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ABSTRACT

Artworks in a ritual context, such as the *Tabut* structure in Bengkulu, are an important medium for representing and maintaining the continuity of collective identity. This paper examines the visualisation of the *Tabut* as a sociological text to understand the reflection of social reality and the process of cultural identity negotiation among communities that inherit traditions. The study was conducted qualitatively using Arnold Hauser's Sociology of Art and Pierre Bourdieu's Theory of the Field of Cultural Production, supported by visual, historical, and textual analysis. The findings show that the *Tabut*'s visual representation serves two main functions. From Hauser's social perspective, the towering structure and its diverse ornamentation, combining calligraphy, local motifs, and non-Malay elements, reflect the solidarity, acculturation, and plural identity of the Bengkulu community. The transformation of the *Tabut* from a sacred ritual into a public cultural festival also reflects socio-economic dynamics oriented towards tourism. From Bourdieu's cultural perspective, the visualisation of the *Tabut* serves as symbolic capital for the *Tabut* Family Harmony (KKT) in the arena of cultural power. The KKT utilises the iconography of the *Tabut* to negotiate the legitimacy of the Shia minority identity by reframing the ritual as a universal Islamic heritage, while maintaining spiritual authority through the distinction between the Sacred *Tabut* and the Development *Tabut*. Overall, this study concludes that the visualisation of the *Tabut* structure is the KKT's primary strategy for preserving tradition, adapting to social change, and gaining recognition in Bengkulu's heterogeneous society.

Keywords: *Tabut Bengkulu*; cultural identity; symbolic capital; Arnold Hauser; Pierre Bourdieu.

I. INTRODUCTION

Artworks across human civilisations never exist in a vacuum. Art is always linked to the social, historical, and cultural contexts that gave it birth. In Indonesia, the relationship between visual artefacts and the social order of society is closely intertwined, especially in traditional practices and religious rituals. Islam Nusantara is one variant of Islam's development worldwide. The expression of this development of Islam is based on the values, cultural structures, and traditions that exist in the archipelago (Maryani, 2018). The dialectical process gave rise to various cultural products resulting from the fusion of Islam with local culture. These products served not only as ritual objects but also as visual media for reflecting and preserving collective identity. One of the most monumental manifestations of this acculturation process, preserved to this day, is the *Tabut* tradition in Bengkulu.

The *Tabut* tradition is a complex religious and cultural phenomenon. It is performed as an annual ritual between the 1st and 10th of Muharram to commemorate the events of Karbala, a



traditional ceremony held by the people of Bengkulu to remember the heroism and martyrdom of the Prophet Muhammad's grandson, Hussein Bin Ali Bin Abi Talib. The *Tabut* tradition in Bengkulu is a unique and distinctive Islamic cultural heritage rooted in the commemoration of the Karbala event, introduced by a community of scholars from South India in the 18th century (Fransiska et al., 2025). The *Tabut* family is known as the Sipai family or, in the organisation formed today, the Kerekunan *Tabut* Family (KKT). This family consists of Indian Muslim migrants whom the British brought in to build Marlborough Fort, who then introduced the Asyura mourning ritual rooted in Shia tradition. This tradition has undergone cultural acculturation between various religious and cultural groups (Khairuddin & Man, 2023). Studies show that *Tabut* not only serves as a sacred ritual but has also developed into an inclusive cultural festival, strengthening social cohesion and encouraging creative economic empowerment through tourism.

The *Tabut* ritual ceremony continues to evolve. What was originally a religious (sacred) ritual has transformed into the annual *Tabut* cultural festival (Suradi et al., 2020). The *Tabut* structure is the central element that becomes the main focus and canvas for the entire *Tabut* tradition narrative. This artefact is a magnificent vertical structure resembling a tower that serves as the focal point of the entire procession. Visually, the *Tabut* structure is interpreted as a multi-level pyramid-shaped building that gets smaller towards the top, made of boards or plywood, which used to be made of bamboo. The *Tabut* structure is, on average, 5-6 metres tall and is decorated with colourful paper and calligraphic decorations (Rimapradesi, 2021). Beyond its physical description, the *Tabut* structure is a visual text dense with meaning. It is not merely a ritual accessory or an object of spectacle. During festivals and rituals, the *Tabut* becomes a reflection of the social structure and arena of identity struggles of the communities that support it.

This paper analyses the visualisation of the *Tabut* building not only as a passive aesthetic object, but also as an active sociological document. To interpret it, the author uses Arnold Hauser's theoretical framework of art sociology as the main lens. Hauser asserts that art is a product of socio-historical conditions, in which the style, form, and content of a work reflect the social structure, worldview, and class struggles of the society that supports it. In this context, the form and visual elements of the *Tabut* structure, from its towering vertical structure and colourful ornaments to its calligraphy and other decorations, can be read as a reflection of the social values of the Bengkulu community. The *Tabut* ceremony is not merely a religious ritual but also embodies the values of tolerance and cooperation and is open to the entire community regardless of religion, ethnicity, or cultural background (Suradi & Surahman in Fransiska et al., 2025). Thus, the visualisation of the *Tabut* structure embodies the values of mutual respect, assistance, and cooperation within the community.

To understand the reasons why this visualisation is maintained and its function in social dynamics, Pierre Bourdieu's approach to fields and capital is used. Bourdieu views the social world as an arena in which individuals and groups compete to acquire and accumulate economic, social, and cultural capital. In the context of *Tabut*, the arena of cultural production is specifically run by the descendants of *Tabut*'s heirs. Before 1991, the *Tabut* Family was not



yet organised. The *Tabut* Family Harmony (KKT) was formed following the designation of Bengkulu Province as the 24th tourist destination by the Minister of Tourism, Post and Telecommunications, Soesilo Sudarman, in 1991. KKT was established in 1993 and has a notarial deed. This organisation aims to organise celebrations and preserve *Tabut* (National & Pillars, n.d.).

KKT, as the main agent, has a strategy of preserving its cultural heritage and community through integration. In this context, integration is defined as an effort to preserve indigenous cultures and cultural contact (Khairuddin & Man, 2023). The *Tabut* building is a manifestation of this strategy. The large, towering *Tabut* building, with its magnificent, artistic, and spiritually rich appearance, serves as a fundamental cultural asset. It is through this building that the *Tabut* Family (KKT) asserts their legitimacy. Therefore, the *Tabut* building has become a visual symbol of the *Tabut* tradition, a physical manifestation of spirituality and inherited history, and a symbol of Bengkulu's cultural identity. More broadly, R. Michael Feener (in Maryani, 2018) explains that *Tabut* is a meeting point for Bengkulu's multicultural society, which includes the Malay, Bugis, Minangkabau, Chinese, and Indian communities. The *Tabut* Festival attracts people from all walks of life to gather and witness the festivities. Although *Tabut* originated from a combination of Islamic and cultural expressions, it has in fact become a local cultural identity. As a result, *Tabut* is no longer the property or responsibility of the *Tabut* family alone, but has become a sense of ownership and unity for the people of Bengkulu, so that the *Tabut* event is referred to as the original celebration of the Bengkulu community.

Analysis of the visualisation of the *Tabut* building as a social reflection from Hauser's perspective and as a marker of identity from Bourdieu's perspective is crucial. Until now, analysis of the *Tabut* has focused only on tradition, history, and tourism, resulting in a lack of study of the *Tabut*'s visualisation as a sociological text. This analysis attempts to fill the gap by focusing on the form and visual elements of the *Tabut* building. The main issues in this study are: 1) How do the form and visual elements of the *Tabut* building in Bengkulu represent the social values of the Bengkulu community? 2) How does the visual aspect of *Tabut* reflect and also negotiate the cultural and spiritual identity of the community that supports the *Tabut* tradition?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This study positions the *Tabut* structure as a visual artefact with social and cultural identity significance, analysed through Arnold Hauser's sociology of art and Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural production fields. Both theories are mapped to interpret the *Tabut* tradition as a cultural and social object. The *Tabut* tradition in Bengkulu has been ongoing for centuries, and in 2023, the *Tabut* Festival was designated as a national event representing Bengkulu's cultural heritage (Aviandy et al., 2025).

The main purpose of the *Tabut* tradition is to commemorate the death of Hasan Husein, grandson of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, in Padang Karbala in 61 AH. The *Tabut* ritual involves offerings, music, and *Tabut* equipment, and serves as a tourism asset for Bengkulu, supporting regional development and promotion. The continuity of this tradition is supported



by the *Tabut* Family, the government, economic motives, and community entertainment (Sari Wulan, 2015). Secondly, the visualisation of art as a social reflection, according to Arnold Hauser, who in *The Social History of Art* views art as a reflection of social and historical conditions, meaning that works of art are not autonomous (Gombrich, 1953).

Visual art activities are closely related to social change, both locally and globally. Therefore, successful artworks can reflect social change and require an in-depth understanding. When analysing artworks, it is important not to simply describe them, but to first familiarise oneself with them (Hauser, 1959 in Firdaus et al., 2022). The application of this framework to the *Tabut* allows the visualisation of its structure, along with its ornaments and symbols, as a reflection of the social, economic, and political changes in Bengkulu society over time. Third, the *Tabut* as a field of cultural production according to Pierre Bourdieu. If Hauser explains art as a reflection of society, Bourdieu explains why these art forms can survive and be interpreted. Bourdieu introduces the concept of a field of cultural production as an arena of power and struggle over legitimacy (Nice & Europeenne, 1983).

In the context of *Tabut*, the *Tabut* Family Harmony is understood as the dominant agent in this field, wielding significant power in shaping *Tabut* rituals and narratives. Previous studies indicate that the *Tabut* tradition is a site of negotiation between political, economic, and religious interests. This study analyses the visualisation of *Tabut* buildings not merely as a passive reflection, as Hauser suggests, but as an active product of the struggles of agents in the cultural field, as formulated by Bourdieu in his interpretation of Bengkulu culture.

III. METHOD

This study uses qualitative descriptive methods to analyse the visualisation of the *Tabut* building as a representation of social reality and a space for contesting identities. To meet art study standards, this method is systematically structured through a combination of sociological perspectives and visual analysis procedures.

3.1 Theoretical Framework: Sociology of Art and Cultural Power Relations

This study analyses the object from two perspectives in art sociology: the Perspective of Arnold Hauser, used to position the *Tabut* structure as a visual artefact that records the history and social transformation of the Bengkulu community. Through this approach, changes in the style and form of the *Tabut* are interpreted as manifestations of shifts in the community's social conditions. Pierre Bourdieu's Theory of Cultural Production Fields: Applied to unravel the dynamics of the visual creation of the *Tabut*. The *Tabut* structure is not only understood as a static work of art, but also as the result of the positions of the actors (KKT, government, and public) in competing for authority over meaning and cultural legitimacy.

3.2 Subject and Objectives of the Study

- a) Subject of Study: The main focus (material object) is the physical form of the Bengkulu *Tabut* building, including its morphology, dimensions, materiality, and visual



symbolism. The formal focus lies on the evolution of aesthetics over a specific period of time.

- b) Subject of study: Involving stakeholders in the *Tabut* cultural ecosystem, namely figures from the *Tabut* Family Harmony Organisation (KKT) as producers of tradition and cultural experts as resource persons.

3.2.1 Data Acquisition Strategy

- a) Visual observation: Documentation of the physical structure of the *Tabut* in order to identify artistic details with precision.
- b) Documentary and Archival Studies: Historical data research through old and new photographs, historical records, books, articles, and regulatory documents to track visual changes.
- c) In-depth interviews: Semi-structured discussions with practitioners or parties involved in the tradition to explore the motives behind specific visual choices.

3.2.2 Visual Analysis Procedure (Structure and Meaning Analysis)

Data analysis was conducted through the following stages:

- a) Formal Identification: Performing a detailed analysis of the composition, craftsmanship, and physical characteristics of the *Tabut*.
- b) Sociocultural Contextualisation: Linking physical findings with social structures (Hauser) to understand the reasons for visual changes.
- c) Meaning Synthesis: Concluding the analysis as a negotiation of identity in the field of cultural production (Bourdieu) with the correlation between visuals and the battle of interests between agents.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first section examines the visualisation of the *Tabut* Bengkulu building as an artistic phenomenon in a social context through Arnold Hauser's sociological approach, which views art as a product of society and its acceptance as influenced by aesthetics and social factors. The *Tabut* structure is not merely an autonomous object but a reflection of the community's social structure, economic dynamics, and ideology. Therefore, the form, ornamentation, and creation process of the *Tabut* can be read as a social text that represents the values of the *Tabut* Harmony community in Bengkulu City. The visualisation of the *Tabut* reflects the social values of the Bengkulu community through three aspects: 1) architectural form as a reflection of solidarity and cooperation; 2) complex ornamentation as a representation of plural identity and tolerance; and 3) the transformation of sacred rituals into cultural festivals as a reflection of social dynamics and cultural adaptation.



Figure 1. Commander's *Tabut*
(Source: Dea, 2024)

The values of social solidarity and cooperation are reflected in the magnificent, multi-tiered *Tabut*, which takes a long time to make and requires a high level of cooperation. The KKT and the community collaborated to build the *Tabut* structure over approximately 2 months prior to 1 Muharram. The costs of its construction are covered by donations from the *Tabut* Family, the government, and the people of Bengkulu, making its grandeur a testament to the collective efforts of the organisers (Interview with Mr Heryandi Amin, 2025).

From its root, *Tabut* comes from the Arabic *attābūt*, meaning 'wooden chest'. In the Qur'an, Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 248, *Tabut* is described as a sign. In Indonesia, *Tabut* is not only in the form of a wooden chest but has also been made in various forms, such as pagodas and structures resembling mosque towers (National & Pillars, n.d.). Based on its structure, the *Tabut* built today can reach 7 metres in height. A bamboo frame and a bottom chassis or cart support the structure. From Hauser's sociological perspective on art, the monumental, complex physical form of the structure is a direct manifestation of collective labor.

Based on its social structure, the organisers and builders of the *Tabut* are the Kerukunan Keluarga *Tabut* (KKT). The KKT, or sipai, are direct descendants of the organisers of the *Tabut* tradition in Bengkulu. Direct descendants of elders lead the KKT and have rules and norms that must be obeyed. They were the social agents who produced the main artistic features of the *Tabut* building. Therefore, Hauser's theory is relevant because the large and magnificent *Tabut* building was directly conditioned by the KKT and the values of cooperation and togetherness that it upheld.

In the second aspect, the ornamentation and shape of the *Tabut*, as a symbol of tolerance, can be seen in the dominant colours representing the various religions in Bengkulu: green (Islam), yellow (Hinduism), and red (Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism, and Islam). The sacred *Tabut* ritual, which originally served as a symbol of Islam and a commemoration of the death of Al-Husein, later incorporated elements of local culture, thereby attracting people from diverse religions and cultures. This is evident in the stacked, towering shape of the *Tabut*, which



resembles a Balinese Ngaben container, enriched by Chinese artistic influences through the symbol of a coffin and calligraphy. Islamic elements are reflected in the shapes of the dome, moon, and stars, which symbolize Allah's greatness, unity, light, and religious guidance.

In the *Tabut* parade, the procession between *Tabut* groups strengthens social relations within the community. In this context, *Tabut* becomes a unifying medium. Active community participation strengthens social cohesion and economic welfare (Ulfa & Jalili, 2024). This is a physical monument that is rebuilt every year to remind and renew the social commitment of the people of Bengkulu.

The elements of the *Tabut* building reflect the community's social identity through rafflesia motifs, Arabic calligraphy, and bright colours. According to Hauser, this ornamental style reflects a worldview and social identity formed by migration and acculturation. The visual appearance of the *Tabut* reflects the values of tolerance and openness, which Suradi, Tabrata, and Surahman (in Satria & Dahri, 2024) refer to as symbols of tolerance. The current visual image of the *Tabut*, which is open, festive, and public, reflects Bengkulu's social identity as a pluralistic society shaped by various waves of migration and cultural integration.

The third and final aspect is visual transformation as a reflection of social dynamics and adaptation. Arnold Hauser emphasises that art changes alongside society. This is evident in the *Tabut*, which has undergone a significant visual transformation reflecting social, economic, and political dynamics. In the past, the *Tabut* was sacred, with religious processions and a simple form no more than three metres high. Now, there has been a shift in the needs of the times, with religious elements diminishing while ethnic and cultural elements have strengthened, so that the *Tabut* festival is now more prominent as an artistic entertainment and folk festival.

The transformation of *Tabut* from a sacred religious ritual emphasising the commemoration of the martyrdom of Hussein bin Ali and the spread of Islam in the early days of Bengkulu. With Islam's dominance, the role of spreading religion diminished, but the role of mourning was retained. Today, *Tabut* has shifted to become a public cultural festival that reflects social and economic changes, driven by government roles, the needs of the times, and tourism development.

Since the 1980s and 1990s, the Bengkulu government has shifted the function of the *Tabut* tradition from a religious activity to a tourist attraction and revitalised it as an annual tourism event. The shift from an internal KKT ritual to a government cultural asset gave rise to the *Tabut* Pembangunan, which emphasises visual splendour. Its large and glittering form not only symbolises the sorrow of Karbala but is also designed to attract tourists through various cultural activities, thereby developing Bengkulu's cultural and economic potential.

In Arnold Hauser's view, the shift in the *Tabut* tradition from a function to a festival indicates a change in the role of art patrons. Previously managed by a genealogical and religious-based KKT community, it has now shifted to the local government with a bureaucratic and economic orientation. This shift has given rise to a new form of art that is more spectacular and secular,



reflecting the dynamic and adaptive nature of Bengkulu society as it transforms its spiritual heritage into cultural values and economic opportunities through tourism.

In the second part of the discussion, the visual aspect of the *Tabut* is analysed as a reflection and negotiation of the cultural and spiritual identity of the community that supports it. Pierre Bourdieu states that the cultural arena, including traditions and the arts, is a field or social space of struggle where individual and group agents compete to acquire and legitimise capital (Mueller, 2020). This means that the cultural environment, including traditions and arts that originate and thrive in a particular region, becomes a social container and public space that accommodates diverse interests, inequalities, and competition for position. Thus, culture is contested over ownership and legitimacy, namely, who and which institutions have the right and responsibility for traditional values and the direction of cultural development.

Tabut artworks cannot be understood as neutral objects, but rather as instruments of action and power and a form of symbolic capital that affirms the values and worldview of their producers in the social sphere. For communities that support the *Tabut* tradition, particularly the *Tabut* Family Harmony (KKT), this structure serves as the primary arena for negotiating cultural and spiritual identity as a minority group with a unique historical heritage within a dominant social environment.

Sociological analysis shows that identity negotiation in *Tabut* manifests itself in three areas: (1) aesthetic architecture as a reflection of hybrid cultural identity; (2) the selection of strategic iconography to negotiate spiritual identity amid Sunni dominance, which is reinforced through Bourdieu's sociological analysis of art in the context of social tension; and (3) visual splendour as a projection of symbolic power and the cultural landscape of Bengkulu.

In the first realm, the *Tabut*'s beautiful architectural form reflects a hybrid cultural identity. This visual element represents KKT's identity through the architectural form of the *Tabut*, a monumental, multi-level, complex, and towering vertical structure. Various sources describe it as resembling a pagoda or container in the Balinese Ngaben tradition. In its construction, the *Tabut* uses a variety of materials, including cardboard, paper, rope, measuring knives, and paper flowers. Etymologically, *Tabut* derives from Arabic, meaning 'wooden box' or 'coffin' (Fitriani, 2024). Iconographically, the *Tabut* refers to ta'ziah in the form of replica tombs in the commemoration of Ashura in South Asia and Persia. In Bourdieu's perspective, the style of artwork reflects the habitus that is formed, functions, and applies in the social field according to the group of its creators (Mueller, 2020). The non-Malay form of the Bengkulu *Tabut* reflects the cultural habits and identity of the KKT as an immigrant group, while also being influenced by the religious and cultural diversity of the Bengkulu community, which has helped shape the *Tabut* building.



Figure 2. *Tabut* on the Night of the Bersanding Ritual
(Source: Dea, 2024)

From a ceremonial perspective, the *Tabut* represents the grief of the Shia Muslim and Banggali Indian families over the death of Hussein in Karbala. The central figure is Sheikh Burhanuddin, who mingled and married residents, so that his descendants are known as the *Tabut* or Sipai family. Visually, the *Tabut* building is the result of cultural acculturation passed down from generation to generation as the local culture of the Bengkulu community.

The *Tabut* tradition, which has existed since before the Bengkulu community predominantly embraced Islam, has now become a form of KKT participation in supporting government programmes in culture and tourism in Bengkulu (Widanita et al., 2021). The visual form of *Tabut* is neither purely Indian nor Malay-Bengkulu, but rather a visualisation of hybrid identity as seen in the use of materials such as bamboo, rattan, and nipah palm leaves. As a minority group, the KKT applies an integration strategy that preserves their original culture while maintaining cultural contact (Marhayati et al., 2017). The visual aspect of *Tabut* is a physical manifestation of this strategy through its unique, multi-level architectural form, which affirms the identity of their ancestors while adopting the surrounding culture, as well as the use of local materials and ornaments, which ensures that the tradition is accepted and understood by the dominant community in Bengkulu.

In the second realm, strategic iconography is used to negotiate spiritual identity amid Sunni dominance, and Bourdieu's sociological analysis of art becomes more acute amid social tension. KKT identity is not only culturally hybrid, but also spiritually complex because the *Tabut* tradition is rooted in Shia rituals practised in Sunni-dominated Bengkulu society. Historically, this situation has caused tension, but the *Tabut* tradition has persisted because it builds social interaction through shared symbols. Religious and cultural activities have proven to be a medium for social cohesion in diversity (Valentine, 2026).



Through visualisation, the *Tabut* serves as a tool for negotiating spiritual identity. KKT strategically uses visuals and rituals to bridge theological differences and naturalise its position, as a strategic practice in Bourdieu's sense, regulated by habitus in the field of power. The main negotiation is carried out by reframing the *Tabut* narrative, namely by not emphasising the Shia aspect and instead presenting *Tabut* as a universal Islamic ritual. The focus is directed at values that are acceptable to all Muslims, namely the commemoration of the heroism of Hussein bin Ali, who is also respected by Sunnis, thereby creating harmony and reducing the potential for conflict.

Further negotiations were conducted through visual and ritual modifications that took place visually and materially. KKT strategically replaced the Punjabi-language Shia ritual prayers, which were considered foreign, with prayers that were more familiar to the local community. From Bourdieu's perspective, this action was a strategy to transform linguistic and ritual capital so that it could be accepted and legitimised within the dominant social field (Bourdieu et al., n.d.).

The final negotiation took the form of inclusive iconography, embodied in the visualisation of the *Tabut* as the result of the negotiations. The iconography uses inclusive symbols with multiple meanings, such as the crescent moon and star adorning the top, common symbols of Islam that are more associated with Sunni and modern Islam than with the exclusive symbols of Shia Islam. This visual choice reinforces the religious meaning and Sunni values that are acceptable to the dominant community in Bengkulu. In addition, the use of the umbrella shape in the archipelago as a symbol of greatness, royalty, and respect, placed at the top of the *Tabut*, affirms Hussein's noble status as the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, recognised by all parties. Through this visual strategy, KKT transforms the art of the *Tabut* from an exclusive, potentially conflictive mourning ritual into an inclusive ethnic-cultural celebration, so that the *Tabut*'s visuals reflect a peaceful path between Sunnis and Shias.

The third realm is visual splendour as a projection of symbolic power and the cultural landscape of Bengkulu. According to Bourdieu, art not only reflects reality but also functions as an instrument of power. The identity of KKT is not only negotiated to be accepted, but also to be respected and recognised as a cultural centre. The visualisation of the *Tabut* becomes the primary tool in projecting social status and strong symbolic capital.

In Bourdieu's view of the social field, as a minority group, the KKT must struggle to legitimise its position. The KKT's main symbolic capital is its monopoly over the sacredness of the *Tabut* ritual, which is maintained through hidden framing (Aviandy et al., 2025). KKT strategically positions itself as the sole initiator and main organiser entrusted with the mandate of the ancestor Imam Senggalo. This symbolic power is reinforced by the belief that Bengkulu will suffer disaster if the *Tabut* tradition is not held every year.

The symbolic power of the *Tabut* structure is visually manifested in public spaces through the grouping of Sacred *Tabuts* and Development *Tabuts*. The naming of Sacred *Tabuts* explicitly affirms their symbolic power, as they have high spiritual and magical value, as evidenced by



the fact that only these *Tabuts* are considered valid in the peak ritual at the Karabela cemetery complex, which serves as the tomb of Imam Senggolo's ancestors. In contrast, the Development *Tabut* is secular in nature, created by the government or non-traditional communities for festivals and tourism, and lacks symbolic capital, as evidenced by its eventual disposal on beaches or roadsides. In a social context, the visual splendour of the Sacred *Tabut* represents the symbolic capital of the KKT, providing social and spiritual legitimacy and convertible into economic and political capital.

As the holder of a monopoly on sacredness, the KKT occupies a position of patronage over other actors, such as the government and the media, who must negotiate to utilise the *Tabut* as a cultural commodity. Thus, the *Tabut*'s visualisation reflects the KKT's efforts to maintain its cultural identity and social position in Bengkulu. Through its symbolic power and control over sacred rituals, the KKT affirms its existence as a minority group that plays a central and authoritative role in the local cultural order that is inherent to the identity of Bengkulu Province.

V. CONCLUSION

This study views the visualisation of the *Tabut* Bengkulu building not merely as an aesthetic object, but as an active social text that records the historical and sociological conditions and cultural identity dynamics of the community. Drawing on Arnold Hauser's Sociology of Art and Pierre Bourdieu's Theory of the Field of Cultural Production, this study argues that the form, structure, ornamentation, and visual changes of the *Tabut* are key to understanding the social dynamics of Bengkulu. Within Hauser's framework, the *Tabut*'s visuals reflect the community's fundamental social values, such as solidarity and cooperation, which are manifested in its magnificent, complex vertical architecture. The diversity of visual elements, such as Arabic calligraphy, rafflesia floral motifs, and bright colours, reflects a plural, acculturative, and tolerant cultural identity, shaped by cultural interaction and migration. The transformation of the *Tabut* from a private, sacred ritual to a public cultural festival also confirms social changes influenced by the government and the tourism economy.

From Bourdieu's perspective, the *Tabut* structure functions as symbolic capital for KKT, a Shia minority group under Sunni dominance, to negotiate the legitimacy of its spiritual and cultural identity. This negotiation is manifested in a hybrid identity through a combination of non-Malay architecture and local materials as a strategy for cultural integration. Spiritually, the KKT mitigates potential conflict by framing the *Tabut* as a universal Islamic ritual to commemorate the death of Hussein, reinforced by inclusive iconography such as the crescent moon and the umbrella of greatness. The KKT also maintains spiritual authority through its monopoly over the sacred *Tabut*, which has magical value and serves as the centre of rituals, thereby asserting its position in Bengkulu's cultural field. Overall, the visualisation of the *Tabut* becomes a meeting point for spiritual heritage, collective ethos, cultural acculturation, and tourism interests as the KKT's main strategy for maintaining its existence and social legitimacy.

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