

**CONVIVIALITY AND REBRANDING: THE T'NALAK FESTIVAL'S
CELEBRATION OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY TOWARDS UNITY IN
SOUTH COTABATO**

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ABSTRACT

The T’nalak Festival in South Cotabato has gained attention in recent years due to its entertaining activities and unique cultural experience. During the festival, the multi-ethnoreligious cultures of the province are being highlighted especially in its street dancing event despite the history of conflicts in Mindanao. With an increasing interest in the festival, this study explores the T’nalak festival in the field of Festival Research particularly on the Cultural Studies perspective. Guided by Gerard Delanty’s Theory on Cultural Encounters specifically the encounter of cultural acceptance and Orly Levy et al’s definition of Cosmopolitanism, this study argues that in South Cotabato’s T’nalak Festival cultural acceptance is actively being reinforced for promoting unity in diversity and cosmopolitanism. Furthermore, this allows the province to utilize the festival in rebranding its image away from a province pictured with conflict and violence to a province of peaceful coexistence. Through an oral interview of festival organizers, initiators, tourism employees, community workers, volunteer, and festival participants along with analyzing government reports, pictures, videos, and existing literatures. This study finds that the T’nalak festival is a conscious effort – an invented tradition for the promotion of harmonious relationship among the multi-ethnoreligious population and a strategy that counters the negative perception about South Cotabato. The festival serves as an avenue for promotion, celebration, education and information, preservation, and unity along with the assertion of the individual local and collective community identities.