Introduction

In his classic work *Political Systems of Highland Burma* (1954), Edmund Leach illustrated how aspects of Kachin social structure (cf. kinship systems) are constructed in interaction with neighbouring groups. Since Leach laid out his dynamic conception of highland Burmese social systems, subsequent generations of Southeast Asianists have begun to explore the ways in which discourses between groups and institutions have shaped socio-cultural features associated with those groups. For instance, in his discussion of religious rationalization in Bali, Clifford Geertz (1964) suggests that transformations of Balinese religious institutions in the 1950s were in part a product of Balinese attempts to wrestle with their place in the new Muslim-dominated Indonesian nation. More recently, Jane Atkinson (1983) has demonstrated how the construction of the central Sulawesi Wana religion is anchored in a discourse with both world religions and nationalist Indonesian civil religion.

Likewise, a number of the essays in Kipp and Rodgers' volume on Indonesian religions in transition (1987) are concerned with the reformulation of "indigenous" religions as they engage in dialogue with the Indonesian government and world religions (cf. Hoskins, 1987; Tsing, 1987). This essay is broadly concerned with this theme of discourse and religious practices among the Sa'dan Toraja people of upland Sulawesi.

Specifically, I wish to explore some of the ways in which the Torajan mortuary complex of the 1980s and 1990s has been reconceptualized as Torajans' encounters with the wider world intensify. Outward migration (merantau) to urban centres in Indonesia, increased familiarity with the bureaucratic organization of the Indonesian government and the Church, the spread of television, and the ever-growing presence of tourists and anthropologists in Tana Toraja Regency have all fostered Torajans' rethinking of their "traditional" funeral rituals. In short, this article examines how the national media, the travel industry, and Indonesian civil religion have begun to reshape local ideas about what constitutes a "successful" Torajan funeral. As I will suggest, in the 1990s the Torajan funeral is a product of this discourse with the nation and the West.

The ethnographic setting

In the anthropological and touristic literature on Southeast Asia, probably no other group is as celebrated for its mortuary rituals as the Sa'dan Toraja of upland Sulawesi.
Numbering approximately 350,000, the Sa’dan Toraja are a minority group in the multi-ethnic archipelago nation of Indonesia. They are marginalized not only by their relatively small numbers, but by geography and religion, as well. Predominantly wet-rice agriculturalists, the Sa’dan Toraja speak both Tae’ Toraja and the national language of Bahasa Indonesia. Torajans traditionally resided in scattered mountain-top hamlets, maintaining social ties through an elaborate system of ritual exchanges, in which the mortuary complex played a key role (Nooy-Palm, 1979, 1986; Koubi, 1982). These Torajans referred to their system of ritual practices as Aluk or Aluk to Dolo (Ways of the Ancestors).

The Torajan social world is hierarchically organized on the basis of age, descent, wealth and occupation. Traditionally there were essentially three social strata: the aristocracy, commoners and slaves. Rank was determined by birth, although economic aptitude or failure allowed for some degree of social mobility. Both death and life rituals (rambu solo’ and rambu tuka’, respectively) were important arenas for displaying one’s status.

The Dutch colonial incursion into upland Sulawesi in 1906 and the subsequent arrival of Calvinist missionaries in the 1910s heralded changes for the Torajans. For the first time ever, Torajans were united under a single political authority. As the Dutch relocated isolated mountain-top villages to the valleys (where they could be more easily monitored) and as missionaries mounted their proselytizing activities, Torajans began to develop new notions of their identity and place in the world. As Terance Bigalke documents, it was during this period of upheaval that Torajan ethnic identity first began to coalesce (Bigalke, 1981). Today, Christianity is an important aspect of Torajan identity — over 80 per cent of Torajans have converted to Christianity, with only 11 per cent remaining faithful to Aluk to Dolo (Kantor Statistik, 1983).

Following Indonesian independence, Muslim rebellions in South Sulawesi deterred outsiders from visiting the Toraja highlands during the 1950s and 1960s. By the late 1960s, however, the first anthropologists began to arrive and embark on the documentation of Torajan ritual, religion and politics (cf. Crystal, 1970, 1974; Nooy-Palm, 1979). On the heels of these anthropologists came European and American tourists, encouraged both by the Indonesian government (which in 1974 began to promote Outer Island tourist destinations) and by the European airing of a television documentary featuring a pageantry-filled Torajan funeral (Crystal, 1977; Spillane, 1987). The touristic marketing of Tana Toraja was an immense success. Whereas in 1973 only 422 tourists ventured to the Toraja highlands, by 1990 approximately 211,000 domestic and foreign tourists were visiting the region annually (Tana Toraja Kantor Parawista records). Today, tourists interested in visiting what some jestfully term “Club Dead, not Club Med” are very much a part of the Torajan landscape (cf. Groer, 1991).

An early glimpse of the Torajan mortuary complex

Not surprisingly, we find the initial accounts of Torajan death rituals in the writings of the early Dutch missionaries. J. Belksma, an emissary of the Dutch Reformed Alliance, first described the array of Torajan funerals, from the most abbreviated types of funeral for slaves to the lengthy and elaborate mortuary rites for the wealthy.