

SUMBANESE FINGER NAMES:  
SOME COMPARATIVE REMARKS

In an article published in *JASO* concerned mostly with Kédang number use, Barnes (1980, in particular pp.201-204) described the names applied to the fingers in this eastern Indonesian society in relation to data drawn from other parts of Indonesia and elsewhere. The purpose of the following remarks is to present further comparative evidence from another area of Indonesia--the island of Sumba, and more especially eastern Sumba--in order to extend the discussion of a couple of issues raised by Barnes, and to consider certain questions that arise from the Sumbanese data themselves. My initial focus and point of departure will be the names given to the fingers in Rindi, the eastern Sumbanese domain where I carried out fieldwork for two years.

Most of the linguistic evidence from areas other than Rindi that I present below is taken from a comparative word list of the Sumbanese languages compiled by the Dutch missionary linguist and ethnographer D.K.Wielenga (1917). It is useful to note that with regard to language, Sumba has been divided into two regions, an eastern language region and a western language region, which I shall hereafter abbreviate as ELR and WLR. There are however several districts which are geographically (and to some extent culturally) western but which nevertheless have languages that belong to the eastern group (see Onvlee 1973:165). These include Mamboru, Anakalangu and Wanukaka.

The names for the fingers which I recorded in Rindi are listed in Table 1. Following Wielenga (1917:15-16), the same terminology is employed in Kampera, the major dialect of eastern Sumbanese, and indeed in most dialects of the eastern language region, with the

Table 1: Names for Fingers in Rindi

<i>lima</i>	hand, arm, finger
<i>wua lima</i>	finger
<i>bai lima</i> or <i>(wua) lima bai</i>	thumb
<i>(wua) lima patuji</i>	index finger
<i>(wua) lima padua</i>	middle finger
<i>(wua) lima pandadiha</i>	fourth (ring) finger
<i>(wua) lima kakiha</i>	little finger

minor exception that, according to this authority, the middle finger is called in Kambera *wua lima ndau padua* (*ndau*[ngu], 'to stand, be placed'). It should be noted that *lima*, a reflex of PAN\**lima*', 'hand', 'five' (Dempwolff 1938:97), can refer to the entire arm, the hand, and the fingers; and, as in many Austronesian languages, is also the word for 'five'.<sup>1</sup> The fingers can however be distinguished from the hand as a whole, as *wua lima*, a phrase which, since *wua* otherwise means 'fruit', might be glossed as 'fruit of the hand (or arm)'. In Rindi--and, it seems safe to assume, elsewhere in eastern Sumba--the names of the fingers are also applied to the toes, *wua wihi* (*wihi*, 'leg, foot'); thus the big toe, for example, is *bai wihi* or *wua wihi bai* (cf. Table 1).

As is very common in the Indonesian languages, including Bahasa Indonesia/Malay, in Rindi, and indeed throughout the island, the thumb is designated with a phrase that can be translated as 'mother finger' (or 'mother of the fingers'), *bai lima*--*bai* having as one of its meanings 'mother (of animals; a human mother is *ina*)'. But while it is also common in Indonesia to find the thumb and the rest of the fingers distinguished as 'mother' and 'child'--as, for example, in Kédang (Barnes 1980:202)--the Rindi do not do so. In fact, they have no expression that collectively refers to the (other) fingers in opposition to the thumb. This is somewhat surprising, as the terms for 'mother' (*bai* or *ina*) and 'child' (*ana*) are employed in Rindi in a number of other contexts to distinguish large and small (or superior and inferior, major and minor) objects of the same or a similar kind (see Forth 1981:25, 117), a practice which is also found on Roti (Fox 1972:221). In other parts of Sumba, however, the word for 'child' (*ana*) does appear in the names of individual fingers. Thus in Lauili, in western Sumba, the fourth

<sup>1</sup> Dempwolff (1938) gives three Proto-Austronesian forms for 'hand, arm'--\**lima*', \**linga*', and \**tangan* (see Bahasa Indonesia/Malay *lengan*, 'arm', and *tangan*, 'hand, [fore]arm')--but only one--\**lima*'--for 'five'. Reflexes of \**tangan* seem to be at least as common as those of \**lima*' as the word for 'hand' in the Indonesian languages. Moreover, with reference to the 12 Malayo-Polynesian languages that he samples, Brandstetter (1906:46) notes that *lima* is encountered in all of them with the meaning of 'five' but only in a few with the sense of 'hand'.

finger is called *ana lima*, a variant of which (*ana limè*) is applied in Kodi, in the far western part of the island, to the little finger. Similarly, in the western districts of Mamboru, Anakalangu (ELR), Lauli, Lamboya, Wewewa, and Laura (WLR), the little finger is named *ana kaisa* (or with variants thereof); *kaisa* being related to the eastern Sumbanese *kakiha* (or *kiha*), 'little finger'. (A comprehensive list of names of the fingers recorded by Wielenga [1917:15-16] for the Sumbanese languages appears in Table 2 below.)

Table 2

## Finger Names in Different Sumbanese Languages and Dialects

thumb:	
<i>bai lima</i> (and variants)	all languages and dialects
index finger:	
<i>lima patuji</i> (and variants)	Kambara and other eastern dialects
<i>lima patsyuru</i>	Lewa, Nàpu (ELR)
<i>lima duduku</i> (and variants)	Palamidu, Mamboru, Anakalangu, Wanukaka (ELR); Lauli, Wewewa, Laura, Lamboya, Kodi (WLR)
middle finger:	
<i>lima ndau padua</i> or <i>lima padua</i>	Kambara and other eastern dialects
<i>lima nda pangara</i>	Nàpu, Mamboru, Anakalangu, Wanukaka (ELR); Lauli (WLR)
<i>lima talora</i>	Wewewa, Laura (WLR)
<i>lima kahadu</i>	Lamboya (WLR)
<i>limè ndéngi</i>	Kodi (WLR)
fourth finger:	
<i>lima pandadiha</i>	Kambara and other eastern dialects
<i>lima pandangara</i>	Palamidu (ELR)
<i>eri kiha</i>	Mahu (ELR)
<i>kaca lima</i>	Lewa (ELR)
<i>lima mapa'aru</i>	Nàpu (ELR)
<i>aya kaisa</i>	Anakalangu (ELR)
<i>nda to padua</i>	Wanukaka (ELR)
<i>ana lima</i>	Lauli (WLR)
<i>lima ondo</i>	Wewewa (WLR)
<i>lima ndéngi</i>	Laura (WLR)
<i>lima nda pangara</i>	Lamboya (WLR)
<i>limè mandak</i>	Kodi (WLR)
little finger:	
<i>lima kakiha</i> (and variants)	Kambara and other eastern dialects
<i>ana kaisa</i> (and variants)	Mamboru, Anakalangu (ELR); Lauli, Wewewa, Laura, Lamboya (WLR)
<i>ana limè</i>	Kodi (WLR)

[from Wielenga 1917:15-16; all terms have been adapted to current Indonesian orthography. ELR: eastern language region, WLR: western language region.]

In Rindi, as in nearly all parts of Sumba, the name of the index finger (*patuji*, Rindi, Kampera; *duduku* and variants, Palamidu and western Sumbanese languages) means 'to point, indicate'.<sup>2</sup> It is thus called the 'pointing finger', an idiom which is obviously comparable to the English usage. In Kédang, by contrast, the index finger is called *kurkata* (Barnes 1980:202), the meaning of which is unknown to the ethnographer; while in Bahasa Indonesia this finger, although sometimes called *tunjuk*, 'to point', is more commonly known as *telunjuk*, a word which apparently has no other meanings (Echols and Shadily 1963:s.v. *djari*, *telundjuk*).

Although this is the logical place to consider them, I shall postpone discussion of the names of the middle and fourth fingers since these will form the subject of a more extensive treatment further below.

The name of the little finger in Rindi, as elsewhere in eastern Sumba, is *lima kakiha*. While *kakiha* has no other senses, Kapita in his Kampera dictionary (1974) lists the variant form *kiha* (which can also refer to the little finger) as 'capable, clever' (Bahasa Indonesia *cakap*; *pandai*; *cakap* is also 'handsome') and as 'wise; honest, of good character; well-behaved, nice' (Bahasa Indonesia *berbudi*). I am unaware of any eastern Sumbanese ideas regarding the little finger that might shed light on these attributions. However, the apparent characterization of this finger as being 'of good character', 'well-behaved', and 'nice' is of especial interest, for it would appear to strike a significant contrast with certain ideas concerning the middle finger that are found in other parts of Indonesia.

The uniformity or near uniformity of names for the thumb, index finger, and little finger in different parts of Sumba contrasts noticeably with the variety of terms applied to the middle and fourth fingers (see Table 2). In Rindi the middle finger is called *lima padua*, which, like the name employed in most parts of eastern Sumba, translates literally as 'middle finger' (or 'finger placed in the middle'); *padua* derives from *dua*, 'two', and thus in the sense of 'middle' refers to a division into two). A comparable usage is found in the western Sumbanese districts of Wewewa and Laura (WLR), where the middle finger is named *lima talora*; *talora*, 'in the middle' (Wielenga 1917:15) having in eastern Sumba the meaning of 'intermediate area', 'space between'. In contrast, the Kédang call the middle finger the 'witch finger', because it is longer than the others (Barnes 1980:202), while, as Barnes further notes (*ibid.*:203), in Bahasa Indonesia/Malay it is similarly designated as the 'ghost', 'unlucky', and 'dead' finger (*jari hantu, malang, mati*).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The name for the index finger in Lewa and Nàpu (ELR), *patsyuru*, appears to mean 'to push, stretch (out)' (cf. Kampera *pahurungu*, Kapita 1974:207).

<sup>3</sup> In Bahasa Indonesia/Malay the middle finger is also named *jari panjang*, 'long finger', and *jari tengah*, 'middle finger' (Echols and Shadily 1963: s.v. *djari*).

The notion of the middle finger being of bad character, as it is longer than the others, is also present on Java (see Barnes 1980: 203).

While in Rindi, I did not hear of any comparable ideas regarding the middle finger. I was told, though, that it is forbidden to wear a ring on this finger, a prohibition which is also mentioned by Onvlee (1973: 183). Moreover, in the western Sumbanese district of Lamboya (WLR), the middle finger is called *lima kahadu*. While I do not know the meaning of *kahadu* in this language, with regard to the Malay and Kédang names for this finger it is interesting to consider whether the word might not be related to Kodi (WLR) *hadu*, eastern Sumbanese *hidu*, 'ill, illness'. It is perhaps significant, then, that illness was mentioned in Rindi as a possible consequence of wearing a ring on the middle finger.<sup>4</sup>

In Rindi and in most parts of eastern Sumba, the fourth finger is designated as *lima pandadiha*, 'uncounted (or unconsidered) finger',<sup>5</sup> in regard to which phrase I was further told that 'properly speaking it does not have a name' (*nda ningu tamuna lati*). In a similar way, in Lamboya (WLR) the fourth finger is called the 'finger that is not named, not given a name' (*lima nda pangara*), and in Palamidu (ELR) the 'unnamed finger' (*lima pandangara*). Here, then, we have a situation virtually identical to that which Barnes (1980: 202) reports from Kédang, where the fourth finger has no name at all. Furthermore, van Suchtelen (1921: 298), in his Dutch-Endenese (central Flores) word list, gives no term for 'ring finger' in the *ngab* dialect of that language (though he provides one for the *djab* dialect), which thus suggests that the fourth finger may be nameless in this region as well.

As Barnes (1980: 204), citing Pott (1847), points out, the notion of the fourth finger being unnamed or disregarded is not an isolated phenomenon but is one found in many unrelated and widely separated languages around the world, in which this finger is actually called 'nameless'. Yet from this, and from the foregoing instances from Sumba, Kédang, and Ende, it should not be assumed that the idea of a nameless (or uncounted, unconsidered) finger is general in Indonesia or that, where it is encountered, it invariably concerns the fourth finger. Indeed, the fact is that in several dialects and languages in north central Sumba and the more easterly part of western Sumba - namely, in Nàpu, Mamboru, Anakalangu, Wanukaka (ELR), and Lauili (WLR), which districts form together a fairly continuous area - it is the middle finger, and not the fourth finger, which is called the 'nameless finger' (*lima nda pangara*), while, following

<sup>4</sup> Onvlee (1973: 183), on the other hand, says that to wear a ring on this finger would cause it to become 'blunt'.

<sup>5</sup> *Diha*, 'to count', has the further senses of 'to consider, think (about), weigh' and, nowadays, 'to read'. It is also a word for the numeral 'one' (cf. PAN \**et'a*\*, \**it'a*\*, 'one', 'to count', Dempwolff 1938).

Onvlee (1973: 183), in some parts of the island, apparently including Mamboru, the middle finger is referred to as the 'uncounted' (*nda padisa*) finger. It seems that nowhere on Sumba are terms such as 'unnamed' and 'uncounted' applied to both the middle and fourth fingers, so that it is either one or the other of these digits that is designated in this way. According to the evidence Wielenga provides, only in Mahu and Lewa, in the interior of eastern Sumba, and in the far western districts of Laura, Wewewa, and Kodi are both fingers named in other ways (see Table 2).

Such variation between regions that are linguistically and culturally closely related thus poses an interesting comparative problem. Specifically, the question is why in some parts of Sumba, contrary to what is found in many widely separated parts of the world, and indeed in some eastern Sumbanese dialects, it is the middle finger, and not the fourth finger, which is designated as the 'unnamed' or 'uncounted'. While I am unable to provide a complete answer to this question - not least of all because evidence regarding ideas associated with this finger, and with the fourth finger, is mostly lacking - I suggest that some clues may be found in the notions of 'uncounted' (or 'unconsidered') and 'unnamed' as they occur in other areas of Sumbanese life.

It is useful to begin by noting that the term 'uncounted' (*pandadiha* and variants) is further applied in various parts of Sumba - for example, in Mamboru (ELR) in western Sumba (Onvlee 1973: 183) and in parts of eastern Sumba (Forth *in press*) - to an annual period of prohibition and quiet. In this context, the name evidently refers to the fact that this time is characterized by a paucity of activity, so that it might be described as a (relatively) empty interval. In Rindi, where the period of restriction is reckoned to extend from about late May or early June until August, it is known as the *wula tua*, 'revered, respected month(s)', and elsewhere in the eastern region (for example, in Kapunduku, on the north coast) as the 'forbidden, proscribed month(s)' and the 'false month(s)'. Accordingly, Onvlee (1973: 183), referring to Mamboru (where this part of the year is called *wula nda padisa*, 'uncounted month[s]'), describes the period with the Bahasa Indonesia/Malay word *pemali*, 'sacred, forbidden, taboo'; and he further employs this word in reference to the middle finger, which, as he indicates, is in Mamboru also called *nda padisa*.

In this respect, as I have demonstrated elsewhere, the relevant - and indeed the essential - attribute of the yearly period of prohibition is that it is regarded as a time of spiritual danger and potential disaster, for which reason a variety of special restrictions, not in force at other times of the year, must be observed (see Forth 1981: 110; *in press*). As regards the theme of being uncounted, or the very similar idea of being unnamed, then, this inauspicious character calls to mind attributes of the middle finger in other traditions, where it is spoken of as the 'witch finger' (Kédang), and the 'ghost',

'unlucky', and 'dead' finger (Bahasa Indonesia/Malay). In particular, the common feature would appear to be the idea of maleficent and unfavourable spiritual or mystical power. Furthermore, although it is not the middle finger but rather the fourth finger which is designated as the 'unaccounted' in most parts of eastern Sumba, it yet seems possible to detect in this region some connexion between the middle finger and the annual period of prohibition with regard to the previously mentioned eastern Sumbanese rule forbidding the wearing of rings on this finger. In general, however, a more important link is provided by the fact that, in relation to the two major halves of the year (the wet and dry seasons), the period of restriction is medial or transitional, and also ambiguous, in a way that suggests a connexion between times of transition and spiritual or mystical danger (see Forth *in press*). As it is located in the middle of the annual cycle, its position in relation to other parts of the year is thus identical to that of the middle finger in relation to the other fingers.

Interestingly, as the Kodi (WLR) word for 'nine' Wielenga (1917: 67) gives *banda'iha*, a phrase which he translates as 'that does not count'. But in the absence of further evidence I am unable to say what might be the significance of this usage in relation to the similar characterization of the fourth finger, and the annual period of prohibition, in other parts of Sumba. Presumably, though, it has something to do with the symbolic properties of the number nine in Kodi.<sup>6</sup>

With regard to the term 'unnamed' (*nda pangara*) as applied to the middle finger in several neighbouring districts in the more easterly part of western Sumba, it is relevant to note that this designation is also employed as a reference to higher forms, or the highest form, of divinity. Thus in Rindi and elsewhere in eastern Sumba, God is sometimes referred to as 'the one whose name is not mentioned, whose title is not uttered' (*pandapeka tamu, pandanyura ngara*); and there is the more general idea that the Divinity, in contrast to the deified first ancestors of the clans, does not have a (personal) name.<sup>7</sup> This then affords us

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<sup>6</sup> The Lamboya (WLR) word for 'nine' is *kabani isa* (Wielenga 1917: 67). *Isa* (cf. Kodi *iha*) is 'to count' and 'one', while *kabani* apparently means 'man, masculine' (Wielenga *ibid.*: 17, 19); but I am unable to gloss this phrase as a whole or to guess its import.

<sup>7</sup> This notion should be referred to the general avoidance in eastern Sumba (as elsewhere) of personal names, and most particularly those of persons of nobility; for to utter someone's name, and especially to use a personal name in address, can be taken as a sign of disrespect. This might suggest, therefore, that to have no name at all, or to have one that is never used, signifies the highest form of respect.

additional evidence of a connexion between namelessness or anonymity (and the similar idea of being uncounted or unconsidered) and spiritual power, although in this case the power in question, while it may in some respects be described as excessive (see Forth 1981: 89), is not (exclusively) malign. It is also worth noting that, in eastern Sumba at any rate, God is represented in various ways as otiose, inactive and still - ideas which recall the character of the annual period of restriction, the 'uncounted month(s)', mentioned above (see Forth *ibid.*: 84-5). Moreover, as I have shown in my monograph on Rindi (*ibid.*: 127-28), there are a number of instances in which a 'middle' or 'centre' (*padua*) is identified with a superior, unitary, and relatively inactive and diffuse manifestation of divinity standing in opposition to more active and specialized forms of spiritual power located at certain significant margins. And in several cases, such centres, or medial entities, are characterized as or associated with comparatively empty or vacant locations (*ibid.*: 127-28, 240). Ideas relating to anonymity, divinity, and centrality therefore suggest a wider framework in which the designation of the middle finger as unnamed or uncounted may be usefully considered.

In contrast, there is so far as I am aware no evidence that the fourth finger is similarly associated with spiritual or mystical power anywhere on Sumba, despite the fact that in most parts of the eastern region it is called the 'uncounted finger'. Hence it seems not to be the case that the designation of either this finger or the middle finger as 'unnamed' or 'uncounted', in different parts of Sumba, rests upon a similarity of ideas regarding the two digits. Indeed, in other Indonesian traditions the two fingers appear to have contrasting characters. Thus in Bahasa Indonesia/Malay (where the middle finger is the 'ghost finger' and so on), the fourth finger is called *jari manis*, the 'sweet' or 'nice' finger, while in the *djab* dialect of Endenese it is named the 'fine, beautiful finger' (van Suchtelen 1921: 298). Earlier I mentioned that on Sumba, the little finger, as the 'good, nice, well-behaved' (*kiha*) finger, may be seen as standing in opposition to the middle finger. In this respect, it appears significant then that in some Sumbanese dialects the name of the fourth finger associates it with the little finger. Thus in Mahu (ELR) the fourth finger is called the 'younger sibling of the little finger' (*eri kiha*), and in Anakalangu (ELR), in western Sumba, the 'elder sibling' (*aya kaisa*) of this finger. Furthermore, in Wanukaka (ELR) the name of the fourth finger is *nda to padua*, 'which is not in the middle' (Wielenga 1917: 16), a designation which quite explicitly places it in an antithetical relation to the middle finger.

It seems therefore that we can say little more about the designation of the fourth finger as the uncounted in eastern Sumba, and the unnamed in Palamidu (ELR) and Lamboya (WLR), than that these usages are instances of a widespread phenomenon found in many disparate traditions. As to why the fourth finger should be nameless, called 'nameless', or classified in some other negative way, it may be supposed that this has something to do



with its undistinguished character. The thumb, in contrast, clearly differs from the (other) fingers in respect of both physical form and function, and the index finger with regard to its indicating function and its relation to the thumb. The little finger is by far the smallest finger as well as the outermost of the series, while the middle finger stands apart from the others by virtue of being the longest and because of its central position. Yet, clearly, such considerations cannot fully account for the anonymity of the fourth finger, since in most languages, including a number of Sumbanese languages and dialects, this finger - the 'ring finger' in English and other European languages - does of course have a name, that is, a name which positively attributes to it some distinctive character or function.

Besides those mentioned earlier, other Sumbanese names for the fourth finger include *lima ondo* (Wewewa, WLR), *limè mandak* (Kodi, WLR), and *lima ndéngi* (Laura, WLR). I do not know whether the first two terms have other meanings, but in eastern Sumbanese *ndéngi* means 'to wait, await'. (In Kodi, the same word, *ndéngi*, is applied to the middle finger, thus providing yet another instance of where the names of this finger and the fourth finger are interchanged in different districts.) In the eastern Sumbanese district of Lewa the fourth finger is named *lima kàca*; and *kàca*, I would guess, might be cognate with Kambera *kàha*, 'full, tight; pressed, crowded', in which case it could refer to the intermediate position of this digit between the middle and little fingers.

In Nàpu (ELR) the name for the fourth finger is *mapa'aru*, 'which is the younger sibling', and in Lauli (WLR) *ana lima*, 'child finger'. Like the Mahu (ELR) designation 'younger sibling of the little finger' mentioned above, therefore, these usages indicate the fourth finger to be inferior to the others. As I also noted earlier, however, in Anakalangu (ELR) the fourth finger is by contrast called the 'elder brother of the little finger' (*aya kaisa*); hence apparently not everywhere is it regarded as the most inferior. A similar disagreement can be seen from the fact that whereas the fourth finger is the 'child finger' in Lauli, in Kodi it is the little finger that has this status. Such variation might then be attributed to the fact that while the little finger is inferior to the others in terms of its size - and perhaps also its position, as the outermost and last of the series - the fourth finger is inferior in respect of its undistinguished character. Put another way, we might say that the fourth finger is ambiguous. For while it is the least distinct in terms of form and function, it is also prominent in the sense that it is not inconspicuous; indeed, it is at least as long as the index finger. Interestingly, in this respect the fourth finger, as the 'uncounted finger', may be seen to parallel the aforementioned annual period of restriction, the 'uncounted month(s)' in some parts of Sumba, since the latter too is ambiguous, in that it is not readily classifiable with either of the two major halves of the year (see Forth *in press*).

Referring to the use of the same names for different fingers

in different parts of Sumba, Wielenga (1917: 16) comments that 'it is remarkable how the names of the fingers in various dialects are used interchangeably...'. The fact is however that it is only the names of the middle and little fingers which are employed in other dialects for the fourth finger. As I remarked just above, the interchange of names for the fourth and little fingers can be ascribed to the fact that they are both inferior, although in different ways. In contrast, as I have endeavoured to show, the designation of either the fourth or middle finger as 'unaccounted' or 'unnamed' in different languages and dialects requires another sort of explanation, and specifically, one that in part relates to Sumbanese ideas concerning such matters as anonymity and centrality. In this regard, since the idea of the fourth finger as the unnamed finger occurs in unrelated languages around the world, there are some grounds for supposing that it may originally have been only the fourth finger that was so designated on Sumba, and that for the reasons suggested above, the designation was later transferred in some regions to the middle finger.<sup>8</sup> As to why the fourth finger is called 'unaccounted' (or 'unnamed') in some parts of the island, one possibility is that this was an independent development motivated by the manifestly undistinguished character of this digit. On the other hand, since the fourth finger is nameless in Sanskrit (Barnes 1980: 204, citing Pott 1847), it is also possible that the idea was, directly or indirectly, introduced to Sumba from western Indonesia, and particularly from Java. But while there can be no certainty in these matters, it may be hoped that the foregoing remarks have illuminated the variation found among Sumbanese finger names, and, more specifically, that they have shown the designation of the middle finger as the 'unnamed' or 'unaccounted' in various parts of Sumba to be consistent with themes encountered in other areas of Sumbanese symbolic thought, as well as with ideas regarding the mystical character of the middle finger in other parts of Indonesia.

#### POSTSCRIPT

As an addendum to this paper I should like to raise one other matter which relates to the use of numbers. As I have demonstrated in my monograph on Rindi (1981), in eastern Sumba the number four figures prominently as a symbol of completeness and unity, as do the multiples eight and sixteen, which in some contexts are interchangeable with four (see also Onvlee 1949: 452). The number four also has ritual value in western Sumba,

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<sup>8</sup> In order to test this hypothesis it would of course be necessary to know whether the designation of the middle finger as 'unnamed', and so on, is not also encountered in other societies which hold different ideas regarding middles or centres, and also anonymity.

and especially it would seem in those western districts which linguistically are more closely related to the east, although evidence concerning its exact significance in this region is wanting. Now in this respect the specification of one of the five fingers - and also toes, since these are named in the same way - as uncounted or unnamed (which, it may be worth recalling, does not occur in the languages of Laura, Wewewa, and Kodi, in the far western part of Sumba) seems to take on an additional significance. For it suggests a representation of the hand (and the foot) as composed of just four digits, a notion which Barnes (1980: 202), alluding to Kédang usage, remarks is 'not entirely improbable'. However, despite this apparent congruity, it must again be recalled that the anonymity or disregard of one of the fingers, specifically the fourth, is a widespread phenomenon. Thus, clearly, a degree of caution is necessary when interpreting this idea with reference to other features of any particular tradition in which it occurs.

As regards the prominence of the number four on Sumba it is perhaps also worth mentioning the use, in Rindi and elsewhere, of terms which refer to sets of four items. Thus *lutu*, for example, denotes four objects of the kind enumerated with the classword *wua* ('fruit'); while eight of such objects is *dua lutu* ('two *lutu*'), and so on (cf. Endenese *wutu*, *sutu*, 'four'; *rua mbutu* (*djab* dialect), 'eight', i.e. 'two times four', van Suchtelen 1921: 315, 254). Similarly, *woku* refers to a group of four small animals; and there is other evidence besides which indicates measurement based on the number four. Yet it needs to be stressed that the foregoing are special words employed only for measuring in bulk - the usual term for 'four' being *patu* - and, more importantly, that the eastern Sumbanese system of numeration is a thoroughly decimal one. Plainly, then, one is not justified in concluding that this mensurational use of four is directly bound up with ideas concerning the fingers, and, even less, that such ideas are determinative of either the mundane or ritual use of numbers on Sumba (cf. Barnes 1980: 201-02). Thus all that can safely be said is that the implicit notion of a four-fingered hand is consistent with the prominence of this number and its multiples in other areas of Sumbanese life.

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