

# TALKING ABOUT OURSELVES; SELF-REFERENTIAL LOCATION INFORMATION IN THE LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE OF DILI, TIMOR-LESTE



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# The Questions

- Under what circumstances are street addresses included *in situ*;
- How quickly and with what degree of accuracy are changes in street names taken up by individual actors;
- Where does variation in street naming practices occur;
- and are there linguistic or economic variables conditioning this variation?

# Starting Point: Timor-Leste



**1400s**

Portuguese  
Colonialism

Streets named after  
Portuguese political  
and colonial figures



**1974**

Indonesian  
Invasion

Street names conform  
to Indonesian ideology;  
*Jalan* 'street' pre-posed



**1999**

United Nations  
Administration

Street names from  
colonial era reinstated  
as much as desired;  
others given outward  
facing names



**2001**

Independent  
Nation

Street names changed  
to more regionally  
relevant names

# Linguistic Legacy: \*Laissezfairlingualism

- Mixture within signs is common, seemingly unpredictable

## Common Elements:

- Shop name (Port, Indo, ?Eng)
- Shop address and contact (Indo, Eng)
- Description of services (Tetun)



# Linguistic Legacy: \*Laissezfairlingualism



# Linguistic Legacy: \*Laissezfairlingualism



# The Data: Collection & Coding

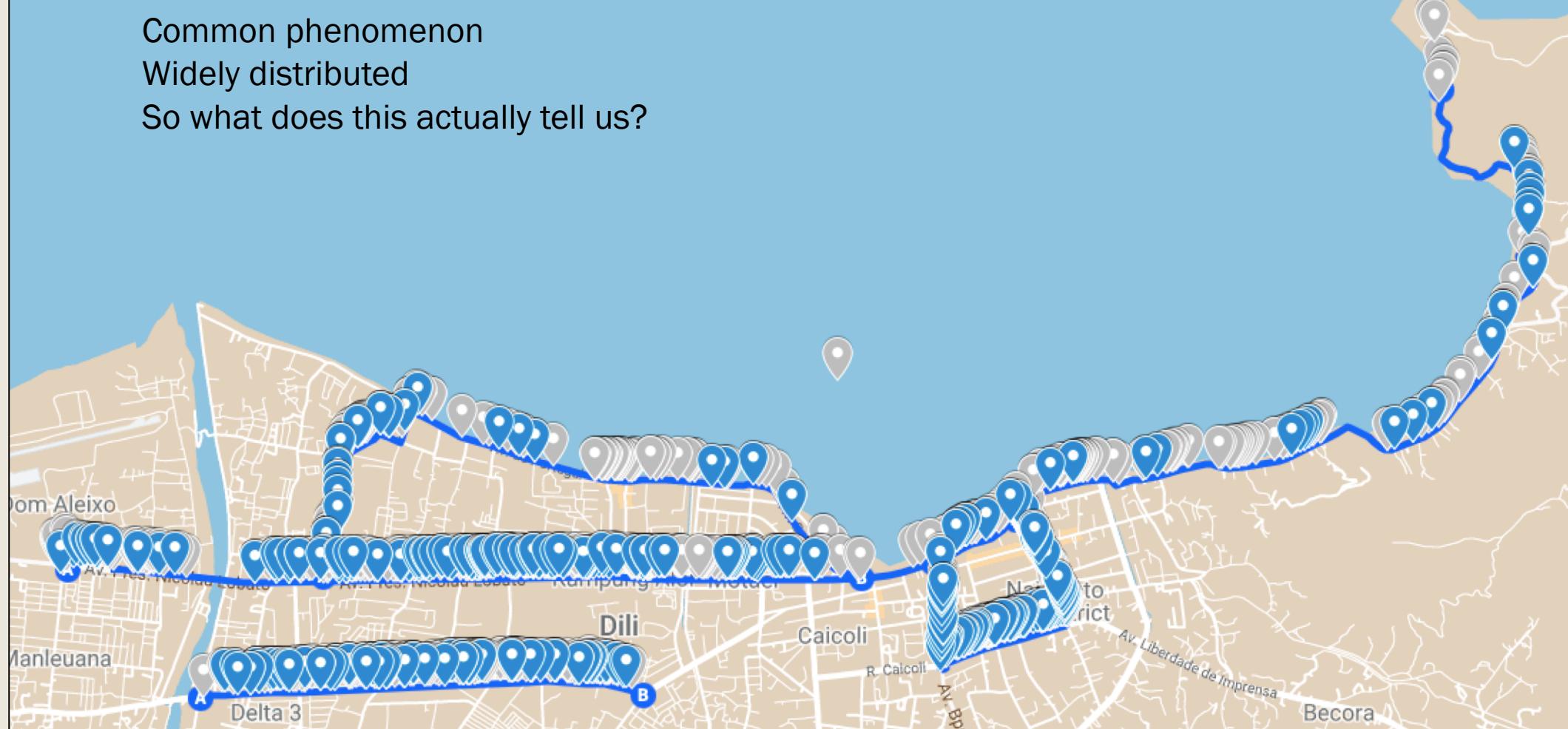
23km  
9 major roads  
1,500 photos  
2,350 signs

Coded for:  
Type (commercial, political, etc.)  
Language  
Self-reference



# The Data: Selection

Common phenomenon  
Widely distributed  
So what does this actually tell us?



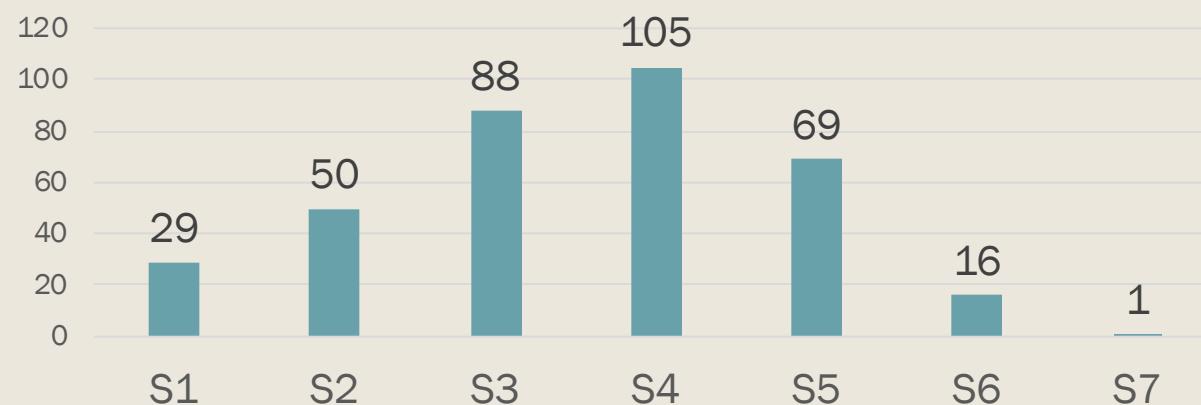
# Complexity Framework 1/3

- An analytical tool to help sort out the variation seen in the signage
- Most common elements: Phone, Street name, City, Country
  - **Least Variation:** City name (3 variations)
    - *Dili* (266); *Díli* (2); *DLL* (1)
  - **Medium Variation:** Country name (6 variations)
    - *Timor-Leste* (100); *Timor Leste* (95); *East Timor* (9); *Timor* (5); *TLS* (4); *TL* (1)
  - **Most Variation:** Contact phone (291 variations)
    - *Tel(f/p/ph)* (111); *[Bare Number]* (39); *HP* (33); *Phone* (32); *[phone symbol]* (24); etc.

Level	No.
Country	261
Municipality	10
City	269
Subdistrict	22
Suco	133
Aldeia	85
Street	280
Number	26
Phone	407

# Complexity Framework 2/3

- An analytical tool to help sort out the variation seen in the signage
- Enabled us to give rough complexity scores to signs (1 for each available box filled)
  - *Regular distribution, but not predictive on its own*



Level	No.
Country	261
Municipality	10
City	269
Subdistrict	22
Suco	133
Aldeia	85
Street	280
Number	26
Phone	407

# Complexity Framework 3/3

- An analytical tool to help sort out the variation seen in the signage
- Enabled us to identify an unusual phenomenon
  - *Why are so many businesses including their city and country on their signs?*
  - *Where does this come from??*

Level	No.
Country	261
Municipality	10
City	269
Subdistrict	22
Suco	133
Aldeia	85
Street	280
Number	26
Phone	407

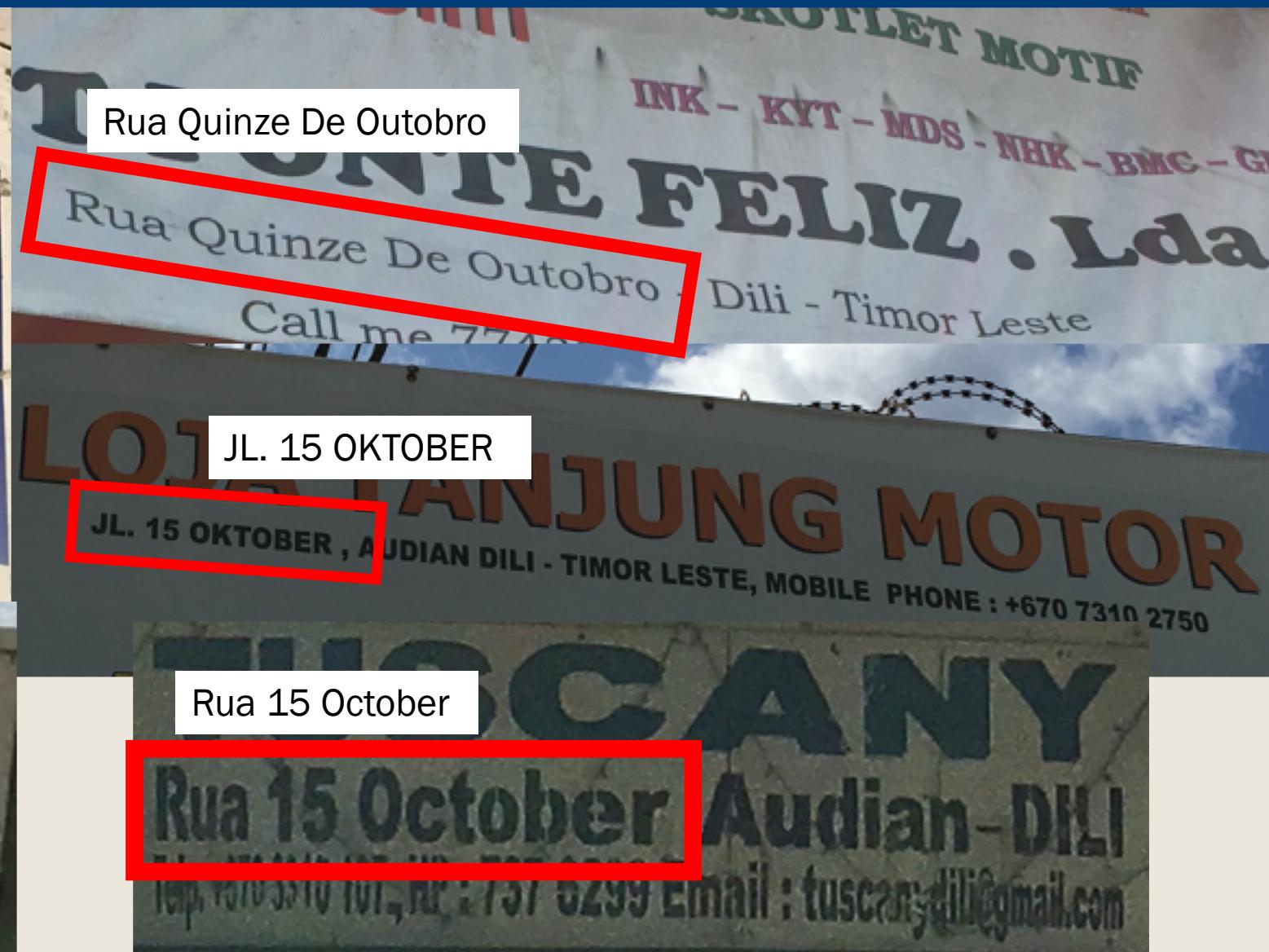
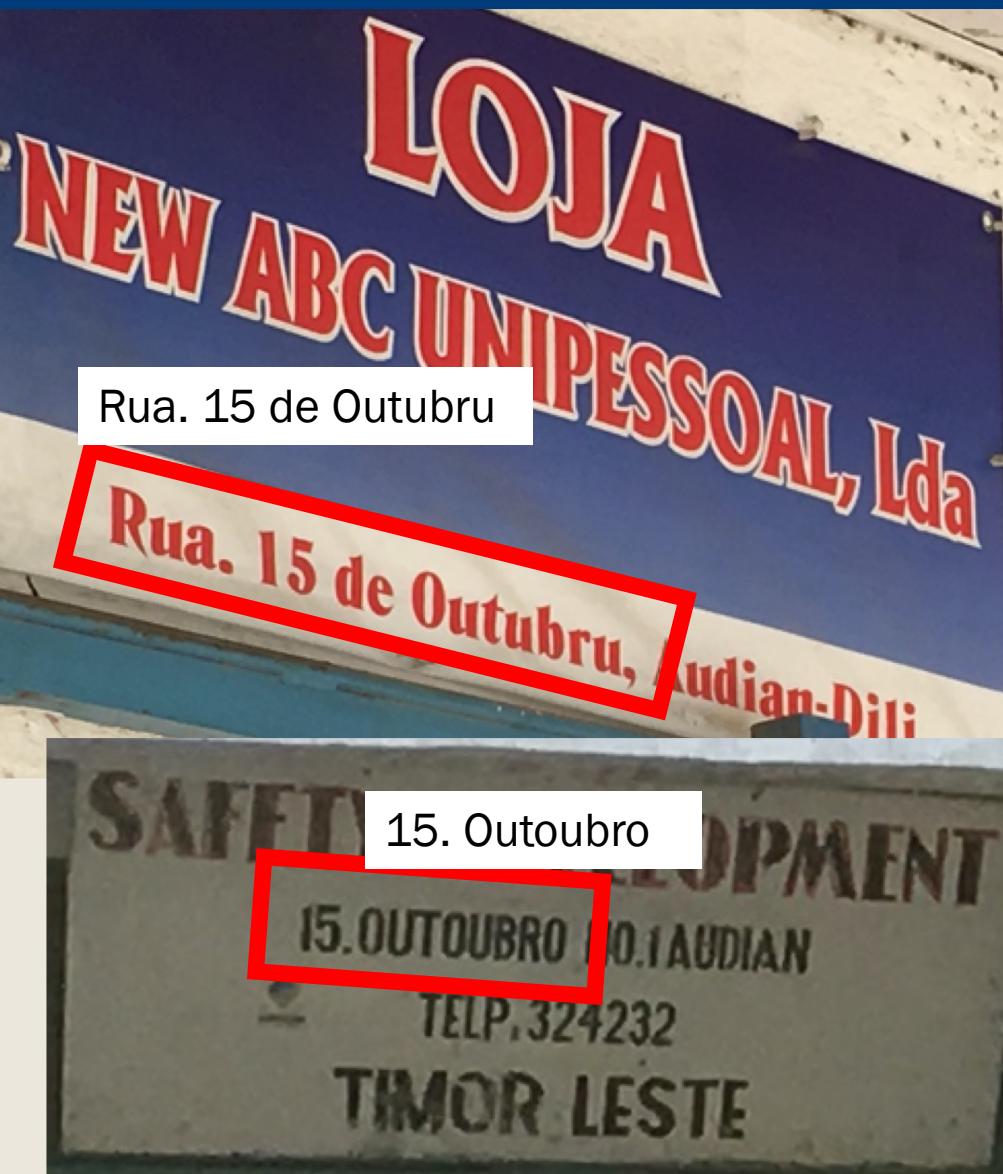
# Zooming in on Street Names

## Rua 15 de Outubro

- Commemorates date in 1896 when Portuguese Timor becomes an autonomous colony
- *Jalan* proposed in Indonesian times
- Reverted to original name after 1999
- 1.3 km
  - 17 tokens overall
  - 14 variations in spelling

Street	15	of	October	Tokens
	15	de	Outobro	1
	15		OUTOUBRO	1
JL	15		OUTUBRO	1
JL.	15		OKTOBER	1
Rua	15		OutubrO	1
Rua	15	de	Outobru	2
RUA	15	DE	OUTUBRO	2
Rua	15	de	Outubro	1
Rua	15		October	1
RUA	15		OUTUBRO	1
RUA		DO	OU[...]	1
Rua	Quinze	De	Outobro	1
Rua.	15	de	Outubru	2
RUA.	15		Oktober	1

# Zooming in on Street Names



# Zooming in on Street Names

## Avenida da Liberdade de Imprensa

- The exact same street! Officially changed in 2015 (but announced as early as 2002)
- 1.3 km
  - 6 tokens overall
  - 4 variations in spelling
- Changes taken up in the community?

Street	of Freedom	of	the Press	Tokens
AV.	LIBERDADE	DA	IMPRENSA	1
Rua :	Liverdade	Da	Impressa	1
RUA	LIBERDADO		IMPRENZA	1
Rua,	Liberdade	da	Imprensa	3

# Changes taken up after 2015 Legislation



# Zooming in on Street Names

## Avenida Bispo Medeiros

- Commemorates missionary and Bishop of Macau *António Joaquim de Medeiros* (d.1897)
- 1 km (shortest in the data!)
  - 15 tokens overall
  - 11 variations in spelling
  - NB: Comparatively little variation in name
- 2015 became *Avenida Xavier do Amaral*
  - 4 tokens overall
  - 0 variations!

Street	(of)	Bisho	of	Madeiros	Tokens
Avenida		Bispo	de	Medeiros	3
Rua		biespo	de	modierus	1
Rua		Bispo	de	Madeiros	2
Rua		Bispo		Madeiras	1
RUA	DE	BISPO	DE	MADEIROS	1
Rua.		Bispo	de	Medeiros,	1
RUA: AV.		BISPO	DE	MADEIROS,	1
RUA:		BISPO	DE	MADEIROS,	1
Rua:		Bispo	De	Medeiros	1
Rua:		Bispo	de	Modeiros	1
RUA AVENIDA BISPO DOM MADEIROS					

# Zooming In on Street Names



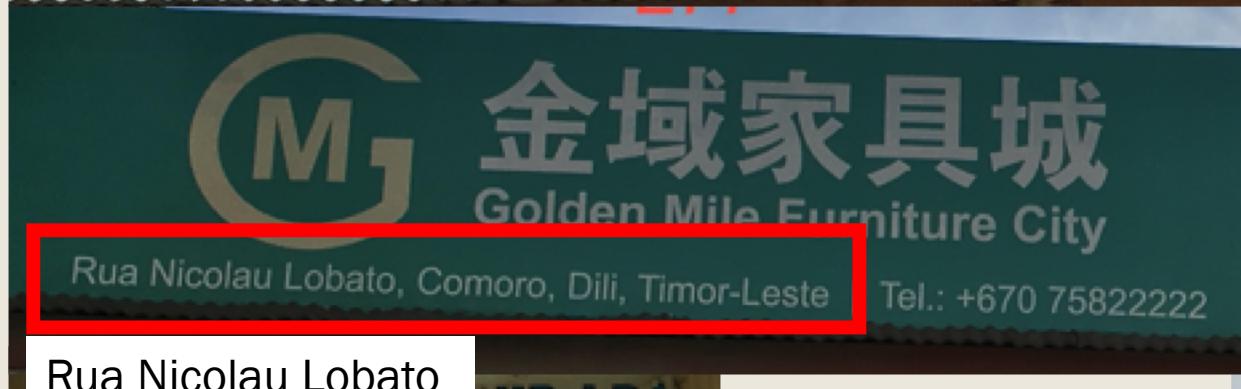
# Zooming in on Street Names

## Avenida Presidente Nicolau Lobato

- Previously *Avenida Almirante Américo Tomás* (Portuguese admiral d.1987)
- Now commemorates TL's first president and freedom fighter (d.1978)
- 5.5 km (longest in the data)
  - 28 tokens overall
  - 12 variations in spelling
  - NB: Comparatively little variation in name

Street	(of)	President	Nicolau	Lobato	Tokens
AV.		PRESIDENTE	NICOLAU	LOBATO	4
Avenida		Presidente	Nicolao	Lobato	3
Rua :			Nicolau	Lobato	3
RUA :			NICOLAU	LOBATU	1
RUA :		PRES:	NICOLAO	LOBATO	1
Rua :	de	Presidente	Nicolau	Lobato	1
Rua			Nicolao	Lobato	1
Rua			Nicolau	Lobato	5
Rua		Presidente	Nicolau	Lobato	3
Rua: Av.		Pres.	Nicolau	Lobato	1
Rua: AV.		Presidente	Nicolau	Lobato	2
Rua:		Presidente	Nicolao	Lobato	1

# Zooming In on Street Names



# Street Name Takeaways

- Variation on every dimension
  - *Portuguese orthographic conventions*
  - *Linguistic artifacts of colonial regimes*
- Two years after decree law, not many changes to new names
  - *Lack of resources, administrative support, awareness*
  - *Ideologically motivated omissions?*
- Relatively stable spelling of national hero, Nicolau Lobato
  - *More closely aligned with Tetun (and, incidentally, Indonesian) phonotactics*
  - *Inscribed in the national memory?*

# Zooming Out

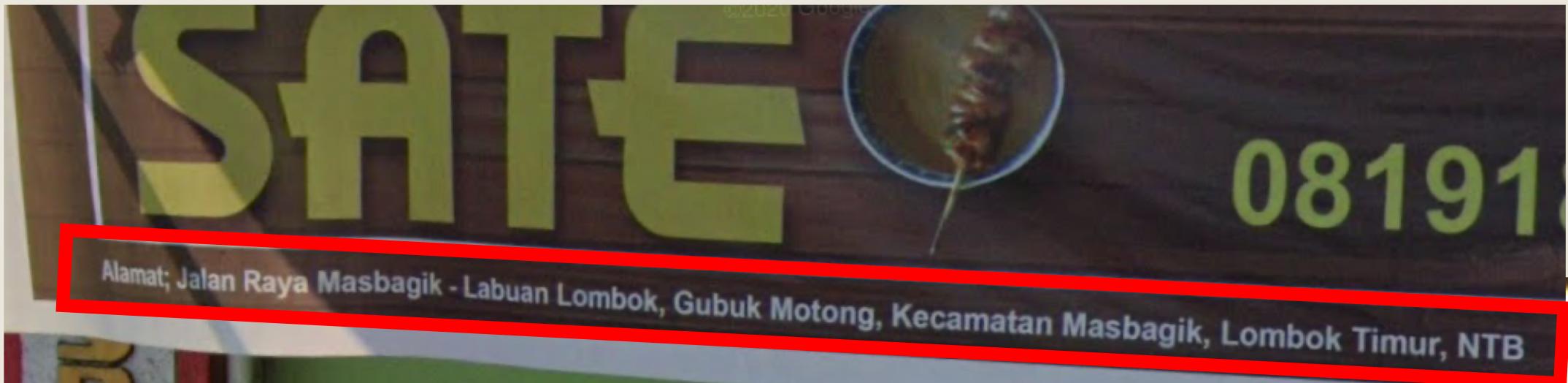


# Zooming Out: Country Name

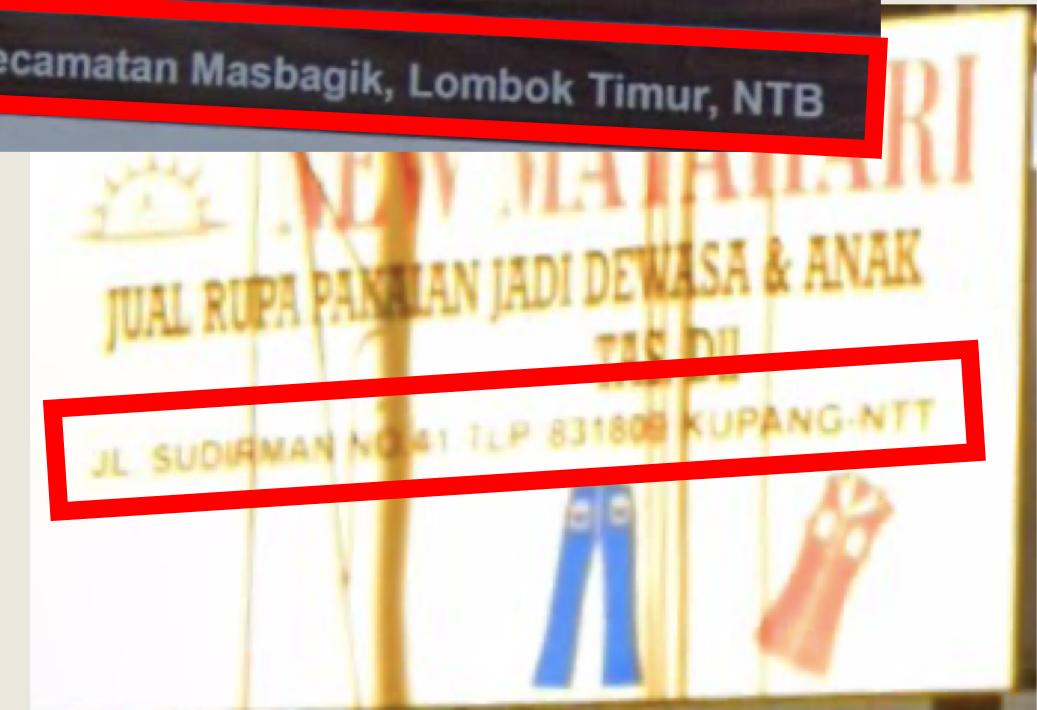
- Observed variations have clear provenance
- Lack of indigenous name and former territorial name
- Source in comparable contexts?
  - ✗ Metropolitan Portugal, Mozambique, Brazil, Australia, Indonesia (Jakarta)
  - ✗ Rural Portugal, Mozambique, Brazil, Australia
  - **Almost!!** Rural Indonesia (Lombok and Kupang)

Variation	Variety	Tokens
Timor-Leste	Port.	100
Timor Leste	Port. “light”	95
East Timor	Eng.	9
Timor	--	5
TLS	--	4
TL	--	1
<i>Timor Lorosa'e</i>	<i>Tetun</i>	0
<i>Timor Timur</i>	<i>Indonesian</i>	0

# Zooming Out: Country Name



- ✗ Metropolitan Portugal, Mozambique, Brazil, Australia, Indonesia (Jakarta)
- ✗ Rural Portugal, Mozambique, Brazil, Australia
- **Almost!!** Rural Indonesia (Lombok and Kupang)



# Country Name Takeaways

- Variation, while surprising, is not the point
- The clear preference for the Portuguese (legal heritage, international legitimacy) and the English (crisis intervention, international arbitration) styling of the name subtly but repeatedly re-enregisters the sovereignty of the young nation
- The existence of this phenomena is itself a nationalist enregisterment
  - *Winning by resisting (resistance-era Guevarismo ideology)*
    - “To resist is to win!” autobiography of Xanana Gusmao (another resistance-era hero)
  - *Bourdieu’s Theories of Symbolic Power*
    - “the power to make things with words [...] *symbolic power is a power of consecration or revelation*, the power to consecrate or to reveal things that are already there” (1989:23)

# Discussion: The Questions

- Under what circumstances are street addresses included *in situ*;
  - *Seemingly random; no corollaries to type of business, language etc.*
    - Follow up: Relationship to ownership? Nation's name more explanatory than whole address?
- How quickly and with what degree of accuracy are changes in street names taken up by individual actors;
  - *Not very and not much!*
- Where does variation in street naming practices occur;
  - *Everywhere! Especially in actual 'street' designation*
- and are there linguistic or economic variables conditioning this variation?
  - *Yes to the first (weak evidence that Portuguese may be the confound), not yet to the second (but hopefully in a future analysis)*

# Discussion

- What we observed here is variation which is *motivated*, but not necessarily *principled*
- Two kinds of identifiable variation:
  - *Locally-focused (streets)*
    - Contested narratives of history and memory
  - *Globally-focused (country)*
    - Enregisterment of nationalism
- This ideological place-framing wouldn't have been possible without the framework created to deal with all this data
- Future work requires: stakeholder input; comparison across time of take-up of new names

References and  
Photo Licenses:



Thank you!