Decolonization of place names is defined as the change of those geographical names that have been imposed by colonial powers into supposedly indigenous names.

Example of decolonized capital names in Africa. (Lilongwe is wrongly linked to Blantyre, as both towns have persisted since their foundation under their own name).

It was one thing to decolonize the place names, another to get them recognised worldwide. In case of Indonesia it took 25 years before school and reference atlases worldwide had recognised the newly changed names as the official ones.

What steps were involved in place name decolonization in Indonesia?

1. the IPA -u- sound was forthwith spelled with -u- instead of -oe- (Madoera > Madura). This was because the u-spelling was thought to be more generally accepted globally then the rendering with -oe-, as this was only customary in the Dutch language area. It was only later, in the 1960s, that - in a failed attempt to merge Bahasa Indonesia (the Indonesian standard language) with Bahasa Malaysia - that -tj- was exchanged for -c- (Tjilatjap > Cilacap) and -dj- for -j- (Djatinegara > Jatinegara) and -j- for -y- (Jogjakarta > Yogyakarta).

2. Vowel combinations were adapted to Bahasa Indonesia (Straat Raäs > Selat Raas).

3. Where for Dutch or other foreign names Indonesian equivalents existed, these were used instead (Onrust > P.Kapal; Mauritbaai > Teluk Pangandaran; Straat Greyhound > Selat Banggai). But: Batavia > Djakarta (instead of Betawi).

4. Dutch generics were changed for generics in Bahasa Indonesia (Tjiaseb-baai > Teluk Tjiasem; Balizee > Laut Bail). (the Dutch generic baai = bay in English = teluk in Bahasa Indonesia; Dutch zee = sea in English = laut in Bahasa Indonesia).

5. Incorrect Dutch spellings of locally used place names were corrected to their correct form in local languages (Grissee > Gresik) in line with the proposals in the 1923 gazetteer.

6. Some Dutch names for which no equivalents in indigenous languages existed were translated into Bahasa Indonesia ( Drie Gebroeders > Kepulauan Tiga Saudara; Noordkaap > Tanjung Utara).

7. Where the Dutch language used no generics, as for islands or rivers, these were added in Bahasa Indonesia.

8. There were some politically-motivated changes (P.Rozenqain > Pulau Hatta).
One of the map series where these rules were applied was the Peta Ichtisar Jawa Madura at the scale 1:250 000, produced in the early 1950s. In the figure below can be seen how the -oe- sound was turned into -u-, how Prinsen-eiland/P.Panaitan was changed in just P.Panaitan, how Prinsen-Straat/Behouden Passage (“safe channel”) changed into Selat Panaitan, how the generic schiereiland (peninsula) changed into ‘pemandjung’, how for the Dutch form Welkomst-baai (Welcome-bay) a new Indonesian translation Teluk Selamat Datang was coined, and how for the faulty spelling ‘kalapa’ in Tjiteloekkalapa the corrected form ‘kelapa’ was mapped(> Tjitelukkelapa) and the faulty form Djoengkoelon was changed into Ujungkulon.

Numbers 1 - 8 refer to the place name decolonization steps listed above.