

# INCOMPLETED DECOLONIZATION: CASE OF MADAGASCAR

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## Abstract

*This paper examines the concept of 'incomplete decolonization' through the specific case of Madagascar, focusing on its historical struggle for independence from French colonial rule and the persistent territorial dispute over the surrounding islands (Îles Éparses). It highlights that while Madagascar gained independence in 1960, several strategically important islands, historically part of its colonial territory, remain under French control despite United Nations resolutions urging their return. The study delves into the theoretical underpinnings of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and international law, particularly the principle of uti possidetis juris, which dictates that newly independent states should inherit their colonial administrative borders. The paper argues that France's unilateral decision to detach these islands from Madagascar in 1960 directly contravenes this principle, illustrating a broader pattern of former colonial powers retaining influence over strategic territories post-independence. It also discusses the economic implications, noting that Madagascar's colonial economy was largely based on resource extraction, leaving it ill-prepared for self-governance and susceptible to neo-colonial exploitation. The paper proposes transitional justice mechanisms, including truth, justice, reparation, and guarantees of non-repetition, to resolve this dispute and achieve full sovereignty for Madagascar. The recent return of the Chagos archipelago to Mauritius is presented as a hopeful precedent for resolving such unfinished decolonization issues through international legal pressure and diplomatic mobilization.*

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# 1 Introduction

The mid-20th century saw the complicated and multidimensional process of decolonization of Africa, which saw several African countries move from colonial domination to independence. Numerous reasons influenced this process, such as the decline of European empires following World War II, the emergence of African nationalism, and the shifting political climate on a global scale.

## 1.1 The main causes of decolonization in Africa

Where Empires in Europe Weakening After World War II: European colonial powers like Britain, France, Belgium, and Portugal were left politically and economically depleted in the wake of World War II. These empires' weaknesses were revealed by the war, which made it harder for them to keep control of their colonies [1] [2]. The legality of colonialism was also called into question by the ideological shift in the international community brought about by the Soviet Union's and the United States' ascent to superpower status. Undermining colonial rule was further aided by the Atlantic Charter of 1941, which placed a strong emphasis on self-determination [6].

## 1.2 Economic Stressors and Difficulties in Development

As the expenses of colonial maintenance surpassed the advantages, colonial powers encountered mounting fiscal strain. Resources from colonial areas were redirected to Europe to contribute on rebuilding after the war. Furthermore, African communities did not experience significant progress from the colonial economy, which were frequently founded on exploitation and extraction. Demands for independence increased because of this economic stagnation [1] [6]. The **decolonization process** took places in four types (independence through negotiation, armed conflicts and movements for liberation, with the role of nternational organizations and colonial institutions' legacy)

**International Organizations' Function:** Decolonization in Africa was made possible in large part by international institutions such as the United Nations. For instance, trust territories' transition to independence was supervised by the UN Trusteeship Council [3].

**Colonial Institutions' Legacy:** The legacy of colonial institutions also influenced the decolonization process. Colonial administrative systems persisted because post-independence administrations frequently acquired the colonial state infrastructure. African political systems are affected by this heritage for a long time [6].

# 2 Statement of Problem

Hard fighting and procedures led to Madagascar's independence from France in 1960 [13]. Madagascar which is the biggest island in Africa has strategic surrounding islands around, still being controlled by former colonial master France. The decolonization gave the newly independent states' statehood and recognised them as members of the United Nations [14].

In 1979, the United Nations took a resolution asking that the French government immediately begin negotiations for the reintegration of those islands arbitrarily severed from Madagascar, named by their malagasy names: Nosy Ampela, Nosy Bedimaky, Nosy Kely, and Nosy Sambatra.

These islands are strategic due to their potential wealth of natural resources, the details of which require a detailed study.

Reality highlight that, while the United Nations passed a resolution in 1979 acknowledging Madagascar's claim and encouraging France to support decolonization, the islands remain under French control.

A settlement requires land. European settlers in Africa and the Middle East were at one in being land-hungry people. Also, the larger the land acquired, the better-off the settlement would be, and the more the immigrants would come in. [7]

In 1964, France repeatedly abstained from voting on United Nations Security Council resolutions aimed at maintaining peace in southern Africa. Because of its traditional stand that the question is beyond the scope of the United Nations, and held the view that the resolution constituted an intervention in the judicial system [7]

### **3 Significance of the study**

The objectives of the study are to state the strategic and even economic potential of Madagascar through its insular and maritime natural wealth, conditioned by just administration, and sovereignty to be confirmed legally, an optional confirmation. Potentialities that have not so far been directly affirmed and claimed, obscured by only the Malagasy sense of belonging to these islands. [16]

**Case Study of Madagascar:** The paper provides a specific example of Madagascar's struggle for independence from France in 1960, detailing the hard-fought battles and procedures that characterized this process. This case study illustrates the complexities and challenges faced by African nations during the decolonization period.

**Ongoing Territorial Disputes:** It addresses the continuing tensions between Madagascar and France regarding the Surrounding Islands, which have not been returned to Madagascar despite UN General Assembly resolutions urging negotiations. This highlights the lingering effects of colonialism and the challenges of resolving historical grievances in international relations.

- **Implications for International Relations, constitutional and administrative law:** By examining the historical and ongoing issues related to decolonization, the paper contributes to a broader understanding of international relations in the post-colonial world. It underscores the significance of historical context in shaping current geopolitical landscapes and the importance of strategy and negotiation in resolving disputes.

Following Madagascar's decolonization in 1960, France unilaterally decided to remove the surrounding islands (Juan de Nova, Europa, Bassas da India, Glorieuses, and Tromelin) from Malagasy's territory and return them to the administration of the French Antarctic and Austral Islands (TAAF). Given that they were a part of the French colonial administration in Madagascar, this decision runs counter to the principle of *uti possidetis juris*, which guarantees Madagascar sovereignty over these territories.

The General Assembly of the United Nations has repeatedly condemned these French actions, arguing that they went against the new states' principles of sovereignty.

In the context of decolonization, the principle of *uti possidetis juris* has been applied to protect the geographical integrity of newly formed states and prevent potential expansionist reversals. The International Court of Justice has recognized it as a customary rule of international law, including in the 1986 Burkina Faso/Mali case. According to this principle, newly independent states must inherit the administrative borders set during colonization. [15]

## 4 Discussions and Economic Dimension:

France's separation of the surrounding Islands illustrates a broader phenomenon of unfinished decolonization in Africa. Although most African countries achieved independence in the 1960s, some territories were arbitrarily detached from their newly independent states, often for strategic or economic reasons.

This situation reflects a broader trend in which former colonial powers have sought to maintain their influence over strategic territories, even after the colonies' formal independence. This practice has left many African states with unresolved territorial claims, hampering their development and sovereignty [11].

Lending requirements from technical and financial partners frequently compel nations to open up their economies, put public enterprises under guarantee, and draw in international capital. Despite their apparent goal of economic expansion, these actions frequently result in neo-colonial exploitation, in which multinational firms take resources from local communities with little to no gain. [9]

**Economic exploitation unfavorable to development:** The French colonial government prioritized the extraction of minerals, coffee, and vanilla above more extensive social and infrastructure advancement. Large portions of the island remained underdeveloped and cut off from colonial administrative centers because of this unequal economic concentration. [4]

Madagascar inherited a colonial economy that was mostly dependent on resource extraction and export-oriented agriculture upon its independence in 1960. The nation was ill-prepared for self-governance because of the French colonial administration's disregard for social development and infrastructure which did not completely cover the country. Furthermore, attempts to create a single national identity were hampered were made worse by colonial practices. [4] [5]

Similarly, Madagascar has been adopted in a neo-colonial practice as part of its economic integration with the rest of the world. Profits from foreign mining and agricultural investments are leaving the nation instead of being reinvested domestically. [9]

Only a holistic approach, combining legal, political and economic solutions, can put an end to this dispute and enable Madagascar to fully exercise its sovereignty over its historic territories[10].

## 5 CONCLUSION

The discovery of the real economic potential of these islands will not only be of interest to the French, but also to several foreign powers who may be eager to collaborate in the short or long term, depending on the economic openings allowed by Madagascar's legislation.

With the recent return of the Chagos archipelago to the island of Maurice, Africa's unfinished decolonization appears to be making headway and marking a significant milestone in the fight for the sovereignty of former colonies. In 2019, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued a consultative opinion confirming that the 1965 Maurice separation, orchestrated by the United Kingdom, violated international law, including the principle of the right to self-determination of the people [12]. Despite not being harmful, this advice led to a resolution by the UN General Assembly requesting that the UK withdraw its governance of Chagos. This historical decision demonstrates how postcolonial territory restitution can be achieved with a combination of international legal pressure and diplomatic mobilization.

The positive progress of the restitution of the Chagos to Mauritius reinforces the hope for other African nations, such as Madagascar in the case of the Îles Éparses, that unfinished decolonization

can be resolved in favor of former colonies, in accordance with international law and the principles of territorial justice [8].

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