

# “Spice Island” Forts, Colonial Monuments:

A Photo Essay from Ternate Island, Maluku

SARAH G. GRANT

University of California, Riverside

---

## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Sarah Grant is a graduate student in Anthropology at the University of California, Riverside. These photographs were taken by the author in Ternate City, North Maluku in the summer of 2006.

The densely populated island of Ternate is located in the Indonesian province of North Maluku. As one of the most lucrative “Spice Islands,” Ternate remains a telling reflection of the Portuguese, Spanish, and Dutch presence through its forts, monuments, and prominent clove trees. In particular, the forts of Ternate offer a stunning visual presentation of Ternate’s difficult past but also suggest a narrative about contemporary efforts to preserve and retell this history. On 15 March, 2006 in Ternate City, North Maluku, Indo-

nesia, over 50 students demonstrated for the renovation and protection of *Benteng Kastela*, a local Portuguese fort that had collapsed at the hands of the *Dinas Kebudayaan dan Pariwisata Maluku Utara* (Office of Culture and Tourism, North Maluku, Indonesia).

Around the time of the demonstration, a number of newspaper articles at the local, regional, and national level illuminated the contemporary dispute over public and private space as well as raised questions about the



*Pulau Ternate, North Maluku’s most populated island sprawls a mere 42 square kilometers yet contains some of Indonesia’s most prevalent colonial forts.*

importance and responsibility of historical preservation in the city. In addition, the student demonstration and influx of media attention in Ternate brought attention to the ambiguous use of other forts in the city center. For example, *Benteng Orange*, the local Dutch fort situated in the city center, is officially designated as a public historical space, yet it still contains the private residences of military and police families. *Benteng Tolukko*, however, located above the shoreline, remains in immaculate condition although public accessibility is unreliable at best.

Other forts in the city remain in various states of disrepair and neglect, but the successful renovation of *Benteng Kastela* has emerged as one potential model in an ongoing case for the preservation of and access to historical space in Ternate. These photos shed light on the outcome of a community-based effort to preserve historically salient spaces in Ternate but also calls into question the responsibility behind the sustainability of such efforts and the importance of examining more ambiguous historical spaces that blur the line between public and private space.

**Top Left:** *Benteng Kastela*, a former Portuguese fort, recently became a topic of interest as local students staged a successful provincial, and ultimately national, demonstration to uphold its value as a recognized historical and cultural space.

**Top Right:** *Benteng Tolukko*, a Portuguese fort later restored by the Dutch, remains in pristine condition as the public entrance is guarded by a locked gate.

**Bottom:** The renovation and preservation of *Benteng Kastela* resulted in the creation of a public space. Strategically situated pathways separate the original fort walls from the visitors.





Left: This monument at the front entrance of the fort, a recent addition, serves as a pictorial marker of the violent encounter between the Portuguese and the Ternatean sultanate in the late 1500s.

Right Top: Tolukko appears unblemished when compared to the graffiti ridden Benteng Orange, yet public access is discouraged by the entrance donation, suggesting a tourist attraction rather than a public historical space.



Right Center: Despite local discontent over the DISPAR's ambivalence towards the fort's status as an official historical space, little consideration has been given to the relocation options for the 200 plus people living within the fort walls.



Right Bottom: Benteng Orange's location overlooking the city center, situate it as the most visible piece of Ternate's complex colonial history, yet it is also the most problematic space— a space that requires the same care and attention given to Benteng Kastela if it is to live up to its prominent location.

Left: Over one dozen Dutch East Indies Company (VOC) cannons remain inside Fort Orange, with the VOC or Amsterdam Chamber of the VOC logo still visible beneath the graffiti.