



***Nur Misuari: An Authorized Biography* Tom Stern. Anvil Publishing Inc., Manila., 2012, 229 pages**

---

***Maria Luisa S Saministrado, PhD***

Dr Tom Stern's book highlights the accomplishments and agonies of the founding leader and Central Committee Chairman of the Moro National Liberation Front. Its purpose is obviously to share the unique story of Nur Misuari, his perspectives and vision as MNLF frontrunner for empathy and identification with the peace and war advocates in Mindanao and the entire country as well. His protracted struggle for the delivery of basic services and pursuit of rights for his Bangsa Moro brothers and sisters is openly delineated by Stern. Hence, the title adequately encapsulates the message of the book. It is an interesting read not just among the Muslims who are particular with the state of affairs in Mindanao, but also among the Christians for a better understanding of pressing Mindanao issues in relation to the struggles of Nur Misuari for the liberation of the Bangsa Moro people from the bondage of "Philippine colonialism".

The book is rich with historical details. It presents the challenges Stern's principal subject faced against the Philippine government under various presidents namely, Ferdinand Marcos, Corazon Aquino, Fidel Ramos, Joseph Estrada, and Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. While the first chapter of the book starts with a positive note through flashback with Misuari's receiving the UNESCO Peace Prize, it regales as well his incarceration in Manila for charges of rebellion against the country. His prison is a heavily guarded bungalow, and Stern writes an unnerving account that Misuari found one morning "seven poisonous snakes slithering and hissing about his

bedroom” (3) and experienced on one occasion a bullet that “whizzed past his ear”. It is only in the subsequent chapters of the book that the semi-chronological narrative of Misuari’s life starts with Stern focusing initially on Misuari’s childhood and his family on an island in the Sulu archipelago. There, he received his basic and secondary education with colors and then left for Manila to study Political Science at the University of the Philippines on a scholarship grant. It is in the same university that he earned his Master’s degree in Asian Studies in 1964. He eventually became an instructor in Political Science until his resignation in 1968.

Stern’s book can be considered as a Philippine History edition from the perspective of Misuari. The reason is that it incorporates recognized historical events in the Philippines such as The Jabidah Massacre, Martial Law under the Marcos regime, Misuari and his Bangsa Moro Republik, the years under the various presidents, Misuari as leader of MNLF and as ARMM governor, Misuari and the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), and other events important in Philippine history. There are a number of History books that have already been written, but Stern’s book explores the Mindanao conflict with the inclusion of key figures in the political arena. The reading part may entail heaps of effort and grit due to the small font used and number of pages, but the information the writer shares with the readers is thought-provoking and truly interesting because it gives them background knowledge of Philippine history and the Mindanao conflict. Those who hail from Mindanao will surely be grateful to Stern for the valuable information shared in the pages of this book.

The back cover reveals that Dr Tom Stern is a Visiting Fellow at Stanford University. His other books are *River of Reckoning*, *Gold Fever*, and *Escape through the Roof of the World*. With reference to the book, James Borton, an international journalist and author of *Venture Japan*, shared a succinct note about the writer who “offers a masterful accomplishment of historical sweep, narrative and private conversations with the Moro politician and feared MNLF rebel leader, who brandished both word and rhetoric in his more

than 30 years quest for Muslim autonomy.” The book, however, may be more convincing if the writer also conducted interviews of key figures who held disparate views to those of Misuari’s for clarity of the issues raised and for a more balanced presentation of ideas. The writer may have also included a page or two about an update of Misuari’s life in his senior years and the status of MNLF. Overall, the written expression is excellent, and the ideas presented about the subject and the peripheral dynamism that challenged him have historical significance and implications in relation to the conflict in Mindanao and the concerns of the government for a united and peaceful Philippines. 🇵🇭