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**Estelle Marie M. Ladrido, Magandang Gabi Bayan: Nation, Journalism Discourse, and Television News in the Philippines, Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2017. 288 pp.**

Ena Marie O. Dizon

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# BOOK REVIEW

ESTELLE MARIE M. LADRIDO

## **Magandang Gabi Bayan:**

Nation, Journalism Discourse, and Television News  
in the Philippines

Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2017. 288 pp.

Estelle Marie M. Ladrido's *Magandang Gabi Bayan* offers a critical interrogation of the deep ties between news and nation in the Philippine context, foregrounding how television journalism functions as both a technology of power and a site of struggle. The book begins with the premise that news does not merely report on the nation but actively constructs and sustains a discourse of nationhood. Ladrido questions the naturalized belief in the centrality of news to national life, instead probing how such centrality is produced and maintained through journalistic practices, professional norms, and the mediacentric role of the press. By treating news production as a field of power relations, she reveals how journalists negotiate authority and credibility within institutional, political, and cultural constraints that shape and reshape their discourse.

Building on this foundation, the book traces the historical development of Philippine journalism, situating it within broader relations of power. Ladrido demonstrates how journalism evolved through key interruptions, particularly the Japanese Occupation and Martial Law, which paradoxically strengthened demands for professional autonomy and alignment with Western

norms. Yet contradictions persist in a news industry dominated by commercial imperatives and oligarchic ownership. The Philippine press is marked by its dual role: on one hand, claiming a militant watchdog function in checking political power, and on the other, succumbing to sensationalism, shallow reporting, and self-regulation that ultimately protects media and political elites. These tensions reflect the contested nature of truth in news as journalistic discourse is conditioned differently across organizations depending on their positioning within enduring power struggles.

Chapters three to five delve into the newsroom as the site where these power relations materialize through media rituals that govern news production. By comparing government television news, particularly PTV-4,<sup>1</sup> and commercial networks, Ladrado (2017, 180) shows how organizational context shapes the construction of the “nation-on-the-news.” Government newsrooms emphasize resourcefulness while aligning closely with presidential priorities, whereas commercial newsrooms prioritize audience ratings, advertiser demands, and perceived public preferences. Across both, however, decisions about newsworthiness ultimately rest with producers, not field reporters, underscoring how the “truth” presented to viewers emerges from layered negotiations between professional norms and organizational imperatives. These processes discipline not only journalists but also audiences, transforming viewers into citizens by framing what they should know and how they should participate in national life.

In its later chapters, the book underscores how journalism discourse is sustained through the twin imperatives of autonomy and public service, even as these are strategically redefined within power-laden contexts. For commercial networks, autonomy means navigating the pressures of marketing and public relations to produce profitable yet credible news, while for government broadcasters it means sustaining relevance within a limited audience through persistence and survival. Ultimately, *Magandang Gabi Bayan* exposes the unequal distribution of symbolic power in Philippine media: how the authority of

journalism is continually asserted through media rituals, yet always vulnerable to disruption by political alliances, commercial interests, and audience agency. Ladrido challenges taken-for-granted assumptions about media's role in producing social order.

## THEMES AND CHAPTERS

*Maganding Gabi Bayan* was published by the Ateneo de Manila University Press in 2017 as a soft cover book with 288 pages divided into six chapters.

Chapter 1, "Making it National," examined how news in the Philippines has been naturalized as central to national life, often taken for granted without questioning how this centrality is built and sustained. News is shown to be more than just reporting; it is a discourse that constructs an imagined national community. However, this discourse is not neutral; it is shaped and limited by various influences acting on journalists. News production thus becomes a site of power, where journalists compete with other institutions in defining the "nation," while also negotiating their credibility and authority within the profession. This chapter emphasizes that journalistic norms and standards are fluid and shaped by both internal newsroom dynamics and external pressures.

Chapter 2, "*Magandang Gabi, Bayan*," explores the history of Philippine journalism through the lens of power relations, evolving colonial and authoritarian conditions such as the Japanese Occupation and Martial Law. Despite repression, these periods ironically pushed journalists to assert their adherence to Western standards of press freedom. Yet contradictions remain; while journalists claim to serve the public as watchdogs, commercial pressures and elite ownership often lead to sensational or shallow reporting. Moreover, the "Fourth Estate" role of the press is compromised when news threatens the interests of owners or their political allies. Professionalism is demanded but not consistently enforced, and autonomy is protected primarily through self-regulation. News, therefore, is always contested and differently shaped across media organizations depending on their position within broader power structures.

In Chapter 3, “(Re)producing the Pinoy Nation,” the focus shifts to the actual newsroom practices of government and commercial networks, particularly *Teledyaryo*<sup>2</sup> and a commercial news program.<sup>3</sup> While both follow the same basic production process, their routines and decisions are shaped by organizational contexts such as ownership, goals, and available resources. For PTV-4, news production is guided by the priorities of the Office of the President and resource limitations. For commercial networks, audience ratings and market demands drive decisions, making audience preferences central. In both cases, ultimate control lies with executive producers rather than field reporters. Despite differences, both government and commercial newsrooms rely on rituals that discipline reporters and organize truth-telling. This reveals how the nation is represented differently depending on these localized newsroom “procedures of power” (Ladrido 2017, 252).

Chapter 4, “*Bayani ng Bayan*,” examines how journalists from both government and commercial networks claim to serve the public, though their interpretations of public service differ according to power dynamics. For PTV-4, this means being the “voice of the government” (Ladrido 2017, 172) while still promoting accountability and fairness. For commercial networks, service means giving audiences what they prefer before moving to national issues that citizens should know. Ratings act as a form of audience power, shaping editorial choices. In both settings, truth is not absolute but conditioned by power relations: Journalistic ideals like fairness and objectivity are preserved only insofar as they fit organizational and market constraints. The chapter shows that news production is always implicated in power and that “truth” is produced within these constraints.

Chapter 5, “The ‘Public’ of Public Service,” turns to the audience, showing how news viewers are not just passive recipients but active participants in power relations. Both government and commercial news embed audiences into their stories, perpetuating the idea that news is central to people’s lives. Yet audiences are also elusive, requiring strategies to secure their participation. Practices such as story selection, editing, and conference deliberations symbolically “discipline” audiences,

shaping them into democratic citizens who contribute to nation-building. Ironically, to achieve this, audiences are first “subjugated” into passive consumers of news before being imagined as active citizens. This speaks of the paradox of journalism: While it aims to empower the public, it simultaneously controls and molds audiences through media rituals.

The final chapter, Chapter 6, “Contested Autonomy,” focuses on autonomy as both a goal and a strategy for journalists. Autonomy allows news workers to navigate between public service ideals and organizational demands, but it also reinforces the centrality of the “news-nation relationship.” For commercial networks, autonomy is exercised through negotiations with marketing and sales to produce news that is both profitable and public-oriented. For government journalists, autonomy is more constrained, often expressed through survival and resourcefulness within bureaucratic structures. Ultimately, both sets of journalists maintain authority by preserving journalistic independence, even within limits. Yet this very autonomy sustains unequal distributions of symbolic power, since the representation of the nation remains conditioned by organizational, political, and cultural influences. By deconstructing media rituals, the chapter challenges assumptions about news as a neutral or inevitable institution. It shows instead that it is a contested space where power and knowledge are constantly negotiated.

## **CONTRIBUTION TO THE DISCOURSE**

The study of media and journalism has long emphasized the press as a democratic institution central to public discourse, yet critical examinations reveal that this role is neither natural nor neutral (Carlson 2017). Journalism constructs national identity by selecting and framing stories, but these narratives are deeply shaped by the intersecting forces of politics, commerce, and culture. In contexts such as the Philippines, where news has historically evolved under colonial, authoritarian and market-driven pressures, the press is revealed as a field of contested power where professional ideals coexist uneasily with

external constraints. As Schudson (2001, 150) argues, journalism is not a neutral transmission of information; rather, it consists of institutions and practices shaped by and shaping democracy. Similarly, Tuchman (1978) describes news as a “constructed reality,” produced within organizational routines that reflect and reinforce power relations rather than transcend them. As Zelizer (2004) argues, journalistic authority is not fixed but emerges from ongoing social negotiation and symbolic practices rooted in institutional norms. This shows that objectivity and autonomy are cultural performances rather than guarantees of independence.

News-making, therefore, must be seen not simply as the reporting of facts, but as a ritualized practice that disciplines both journalists and audiences. Studies show that routines within newsrooms are embedded in structures of ownership and governance. These procedures define what counts as news as well as what positions audiences as both consumers and citizens. As Shoemaker and Reese (2014) forward, media content results from a “hierarchy of influences” that operates at multiple levels and that together shape how reality is constructed for the public. The paradox is that while journalism claims to empower publics, it also molds and constrains them. This allows their participation in nation-building projects under specific, often unequal, terms.

This tension is further complicated by questions of autonomy. Journalists frequently invoke independence as a marker of professionalism, yet autonomy in practice is mediated by organizational, political, and economic conditions. As Hanitzsch (2007) theorizes, journalism culture is a set of shared professional ideas, norms, and dimensions that shape journalists’ work.

Commercial networks, for instance, may negotiate autonomy through ratings and profitability, while state-owned newsrooms assert it within bureaucratic and political limits. Mellado (2015) reminds us that journalistic roles are not merely normative ideals but are performed within particular media systems that constrain or enable autonomy. Autonomy, then, is not absolute but relational. It is exercised within negotiated spaces that reveal journalism’s embeddedness in broader systems of power and control (Örnebring 2013).

This perspective accentuates the importance of interrogating news not as a transparent reflection of reality but as a site of symbolic power. Ladrido's historical and structural critique of news-making invites scholars to rethink journalism beyond its normative claims to objectivity and freedom, and instead to analyze how meaning, emotion, and authority are continually produced and negotiated. Although her work does not explicitly center audiences or affect, it opens conceptual space for engaging with the recent "emotional" (Wahl-Jorgensen 2019) and "audience" (Costera Meijer 2020) turns in journalism studies. These turns urge scholars to examine how emotions, publics, and everyday interactions shape journalistic authority and legitimacy. By understanding how journalists, institutions, and audiences are bound together in these dynamics, the field can better discern how journalism shapes and is shaped by the political, cultural, and affective life of societies.

## QUESTIONS AND FURTHER DIRECTIONS

This book's ethnographic exploration of Philippine newsrooms explains how power, ideology, and professional identity converge to shape the mediated nation. Yet it also opens new questions about the evolving terrain of mediation in a rapidly transforming media environment. If, as this study suggests, the nation on television news is a product of continuous negotiation between journalists and the structures of power that constrain them, then how might these negotiations shift in digital spaces where audiences are no longer passive but algorithmically empowered participants? How can we understand mediation when the newsroom, once a clearly bounded site of authority, now exists within dispersed networks of content creators, influencers, and citizen journalists?

One productive limitation of *Magandang Gabi Bayan* lies in its strong reliance on sociological and cultural theories of power, specifically media ritual and Foucauldian perspectives. These frameworks allow Ladrido to convincingly demonstrate how journalistic authority is constructed and sustained, but they also place primary attention on structures and institutions rather than

on subjectivity. As a result, questions of emotion, affect, and lived experience remain largely unexplored. This opens an opportunity for future research to extend Ladrado's insights by examining how journalists' emotional labor, moral judgments, and anxieties shape the very rituals and negotiations she describes, especially in politically volatile media environments like the Philippines.

A second limitation concerns the book's focus on news production rather than reception. While Ladrado richly documents how journalists imagine and construct audiences, the study does not examine how actual viewers interpret, resist, or disengage from the nation presented on television news. This gap is especially significant given the growing "audience turn" (Costera Meijer 2020) in journalism studies which shows how publics actively make meaning rather than simply receive it. Future research could productively connect Ladrado's production-centered framework with audience and reception studies to explore whether the integrative function of news still holds or whether viewers now experience the nation through more fragmented, emotionally charged, and personalized media encounters.

For the third limitation, the book's methodological and empirical focus on broadcast marks a clear boundary for future inquiry. Social media platforms have since transformed how news circulates, how audiences participate, and how journalistic authority is challenged and defended. While Ladrado does not directly address these developments, her analysis provides a valuable foundation for studying how the rituals of public service, autonomy, and audience construction are being reworked in digital spaces. Future research can build on her work by asking how journalists now negotiate symbolic power in algorithm-driven environments, where emotions travel faster than facts and where imagining the nation increasingly happens beyond the newsroom.

Ladrado's book shines when it digs into the everyday routines, rituals, and self-understandings of journalists. It gives us a vivid sense of how the profession works from the inside. But the analysis does not always stretch beyond that frame.

By staying mostly within the boundaries of institutional negotiation and professional ideology, the book leaves bigger questions like structural inequality, the political economy outside the newsroom, or alternative forms of mediation less developed. Situating its findings against other theories of media power or asking where ritual-based analysis falls short, especially in moments of journalistic failure, rupture or complicity give a better view.

The book's commitment to seeing journalism through the eyes of news workers is both a strength and a limitation. It explains tensions rather than interrogates them. For example, sensationalism is treated as a tactical accommodation rather than weighed for its democratic consequences. This empathetic stance is admirable, but it softens the critique. A more explicit reckoning with the ethical stakes, like when negotiation with power turns into normalization of inequality or exclusion, would have added bite. By pressing harder on these questions, the book could have shown not just how journalism survives within power relations, but also where its democratic claims are most fragile.

A key future direction for research is to examine how social media platforms are reconfiguring the rituals and symbolic power of journalism. The traditional newsroom's mechanisms of maintaining authority are increasingly destabilized by the participatory nature of online media. Audiences no longer merely receive the nation as televised; they reconstruct, remix, and even ridicule it in comment threads, hashtags, and memes. Scholars must ask: When the act of witnessing and interpreting national events becomes collective and instantaneous, what remains of the journalist's role as mediator of truth? How does journalistic autonomy survive amid algorithmic gatekeeping and the commodification of attention?

Furthermore, future studies should critically assess how digital mediation reshapes the experience of belonging to the "discursive nation" (Ladrado 2017, 107). A deeper look at digital media, especially social platforms, could have sharpened its claims about audiences and autonomy, showing how those categories shift when journalists no longer control circulation or

interpretation. In that sense, the book stops just short of asking whether the rituals that sustain authority on television still hold up in today's fragmented, emotionally charged, algorithm-driven news environment.

The television news of the past offered a shared symbolic space where viewers were invited to imagine themselves as members of a unified national community. In contrast, social media platforms offer fragmented publics where citizens consume "national" stories tailored to their ideological preferences. This poses profound questions: Does the algorithmic personalization of news erode the integrative function of journalism? Or does it create pluralistic micro-narratives that allow citizens to imagine multiple, even competing, versions of the nation?

The role of power in this new media ecosystem also warrants renewed scrutiny. Whereas this book described the circulation of power within the newsroom, future research should trace how it now flows through platforms and algorithms that determine visibility and virality. In what ways do commercial imperatives of engagement replace or reinforce older power hierarchies in journalism? Are news workers still engaged in the same ritualistic negotiations of public service, or have they internalized platform logics that redefine success as reach and virality rather than civic enlightenment? Such inquiries demand a fusion of ethnographic and computational methods to map digital mediation in the age of algorithmic journalism.

In addition, scholars should investigate how the public interprets and uses news within this digital ecology. The concluding chapter has raised vital questions on reception: How do audiences make sense of mediated representations of the nation, and how does this influence their participation in civic life? Understanding the circulation of symbolic power now requires examining the everyday practices of sharing, commenting, and reframing news content. Do these practices democratize public discourse, or do they amplify misinformation and further obscure the power dynamics that underpin news production?

Another promising direction lies in comparative studies across nations with different media systems but similar tensions

between journalism's normative ideals and the realities of commercial and political influence. The Philippine case, with its hybrid media environment of strong political partisanship and vibrant online communities, offers fertile ground for theorizing "post-broadcast nationalism." Researchers could explore how the performance of journalistic authority is being reconstituted in societies where social media has become the primary arena of national debate. How does this distinctively explain fact, opinion, and propaganda?

Finally, the future of media and journalism studies must move toward **theorizing mediation as a dynamic, multi-platform negotiation of power** that extends beyond the newsroom and into the algorithmic architectures of everyday life. The central question is no longer only "How do news workers mediate the nation?" but also "How do nations now mediate themselves through social media?". As Filipinos increasingly experience national identity through feeds rather than screens, likes rather than ratings, and influencers rather than anchors, the study of mediation must keep pace with how power, truth, and belonging are reimagined in digital spaces. In this sense, the mediated nation is not disappearing. It is simply being re-scripted one post at a time.

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## NOTES

- 1 PTV-4, formally known as the People's Television Network, is the Philippine government-owned broadcast network. Established in 1974, it operates as the country's state television service and primarily airs news, public affairs, and educational content.
- 2 *Teledyaryo* is the prime time news program of PTV-4.

- 3 A commercial news program is a television newscast aired by a privately owned, advertising-funded network rather than a government-operated broadcaster.

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**ENA MARIE O. DIZON**

University of the Philippines Mindanao  
<esolivares@up.edu.ph>