Surveillance & Society

Asad's Engage and Evade: How Latino Immigrant Families Manage Surveillance in Everyday Life

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A little over a year and a half after Asad L. Asad published *Engage and Evade: How Latino Immigrant Families Manage Surveillance in Everyday Life* (2023), the American public has now been introduced to various Executive Orders signed by President Donald Trump intended to substantially curtail immigration. United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has begun crackdowns throughout various cities, making real what Asad describes as a "perpetual reminder to immigrants that they can be deported, from anywhere in the country, at a moment's notice" (xiii). Aiding this perception, argues the book, is the constant surveillance by two categories of institutions: that of regulatory organizations focused on the administration or enforcement of laws (think police and tax agencies) and service-oriented entities that provide public goods (think hospitals and schools). The balancing act for many immigrants, Asad successfully argues, is finding ways to bolster positive engagements with such systems and avoid negative entanglements that threaten deportation. Through a blend of theory, data, and most importantly, the stories of Latino parents of various legal statuses, Asad successfully shows how immigrants engage with and evade surveilling institutions.

Over the course of four chapters, Asad takes us through the various facets of the immigration experience, beginning with the initial decision to migrate and ending with the dehumanizing experience that is deportation through the immigration courts. Using a tremendous amount of data, interviews, and personal observations, one of the book's accomplishments is that it does not overburden the reader. Asad, for instance, successfully introduces the layperson to the foundational ideas behind why people immigrate, using both people's lived experiences and theory to explain how deprivation is at the root of migration. He uses the stories of Latino parents to challenge notions of what this deprivation means, providing examples not only of individuals who made the journey as a result of material and social deprivation but also of those who made the journey due to the call of adventure. The constant underlying message is that immigrants and the immigrant experience, regardless of legal status, are not a monolith.

The great contribution of the book is challenging this notion that Latino immigrants, particularly those who are undocumented, live through constant evasion. Certainty that occurs for many immigrants, with Asad articulating the fears of deportation through collaboration between law enforcement and immigration. But

as *Engage and Evade* successfully shows, constant evasion from regulatory organizations, like policing and tax agencies, may not be a successful long-term strategy, particularly for those hoping for the arrival of amnesty legislation from the federal government. Paying taxes to the IRS through an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (which does not require a social security number), and immediately paying any tickets received for traffic infractions, are perceived as ways for immigrants to "show that they are as moral as U.S citizens," showcasing "how institutional engagement and evasion can represent two sides of the same coin for this group" (94).

This dance between engagement and evasion is particularly elucidated by Asad's choice of focusing his book on Latino parents, who must constantly interact with service-oriented institutions. Surveillance by these institutions is constant, and as Asad elaborates on the sheer vastness of surveillance by these organizations to the reader, he begins to showcase through stories the challenges for some Latino parents. For those undocumented, a teacher's observation that a child is hungry can threaten a call to Child Protective Services, bringing the specter of deportation to a family's home. But overly engaging with service institutions can label an individual a "public charge," a label that could be grounds for inadmissibility for citizenship and deportation. In this way, Asad challenges our contemporary understanding of surveillance, as it "comes to represent as much about the threat of societal exclusion as well as the hope for inclusion" (133), a theme he comes back to time and time again.

And for those interested in the legal aspect of immigration, Asad ends with a bleak description of immigration court: the lack of representation afforded to those facing deportation, the bias with which judges view defendants, and the significant advantage Department of Homeland Security prosecutors have. The machinery of the immigration court system is made alive through Asad's narrative prowess, as we read story after story of individuals deported only to try again and again to gain access into the United States. Asad concludes by attempting to provide some answers on how to solve the immigration system, a hardy task that, of course, requires more than the ten to fifteen pages Asad spends on it, but his contribution is meaningful.

As we continue to navigate a global order so antagonistic to immigration, particularly in the United States where *Engage and Evade* is focused, Asad provides a reminder of what is at stake. His contributions are not just in expanding the theory behind how we understand surveillance and the ways in which people selectively engage with it, but perhaps more importantly, in showcasing the stories of the communities most impacted by the current nativist regimes. *Engage and Evade* ought to be required reading for those hoping to understand immigration this decade, and thankfully, it is quite an enjoyable read at that.