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## Ethical and methodological challenges of conducting research of ‘asylum institutional elites’

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### **Abstract**

*Research with elite groups poses a number of challenges for researchers. The study of asylum institutional elites brings even further difficulties, considering the political interests surrounding the topic. This paper considers these difficulties in the context of studying asylum institutional elites in Brazil in the author's own PhD research, and provides the answers found to overcome some of these challenges. Albeit important, being able to access closed-door meetings, to observe the daily political plays and struggles that reverberate on how refugees are produced, managed, seen and controlled, creates a challenging ethical backdrop to ensure the care responsibility that should underscore any ethical research standards. As such, this paper particularly focuses on how a double role in the field – as a professional and a researcher – can contribute to and enrich institutional research, and how to overcome the methodological and ethical challenges of doing research this way.*

**Keywords:** *Elite Research; Qualitative Methodology; Autoethnography; Observation-Intervention; Refugee Studies*

### **Introduction**

The issue of hierarchies of power and positionality in research is widely debated, especially relating to studies aiming to understand situations and social contexts involving minority groups. Problems differ when doing research with and about elites, or ‘researching up’. The term ‘elite’ elicits different conceptions in academic literature, but in general they involve ‘elevated decision-making authority within any formal or informal organization, such as an NGO, political party, government agency or business’ (Morse, 2019:278). According to Liu (2018:01), elite status derives from ‘the possession of knowledge and prestige and the close proximity to power’, whereas Morse (2019) highlights elites are holders of ‘insider information’ relevant to a specific research topic. Although highly relevant to the study of social and political contexts, studying elites remains a challenge across the social sciences, particularly related to issues of access. Investigation about and with *elites* involve various delicate negotiations amongst researchers and participants in multiple contexts and with various power relations concerning the possibility to gather information and the ability to interpret and analyse data (Castilho *et. al.*, 2014). Elites’ abilities to use *gatekeepers* to avoid intrusion, as well as their power to protect themselves, make them relatively understudied in some contexts (Liu, 2018), showcasing an important gap in research in some fields.

This paper will address elite research in the context of my own PhD studies, which sought to understand the race-migration-asylum nexus in asylum policies, practices and decision-making in Brazil. Its focus, however, was to understand such nexus in institutional policies and

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practices towards asylum, rather than issues of interpersonal or societal biases and racisms. Although the research used multiple data sources<sup>2</sup>, such as secondary data and publicly available documents, it also intended to gather primary data concerning the day-to-day role played by the institutional elite in Brazilian asylum decision-making procedures.

Brazil is an important case-study because, although access to asylum elite members is not prohibitive, it was mostly done informally – substantially differing from studies with institutional elites in the Global North –, meaning challenges were somewhat of a different nature. Observation of asylum claims' documents and the elite's procedural day-to-day activities, for instance, is still nearly impossible for researchers. In depth analysis of asylum decisions, interactions amongst the members of the 'asylum elite', asylum interviews, key to widen the understanding of the decision-making process, remain underexplored. As such, a clear gap emerged, which I hoped to bridge during my PhD. Considering I was already a refugee lawyer, I used this double role to access otherwise unavailable data. However, although this position benefitted access in some ways, it also created other barriers, and two main methodological and ethical challenges arose: how to develop fieldwork ethically in this highly closed environment and considering my 'double-role'? and 2) how to analyse data if I am personally embedded in building the field I am observing?

This paper will discuss how I addressed these challenges. I will first discuss what I understand as 'asylum institutional elites' in Brazil and the specificities of this context. I will then discuss the methodological approach to overcome such challenges and, lastly, how I addressed the research ethical issues. This paper thus engages with debates concerning challenges of 'researching up' and provides a novel way to overcome issues in elite research design, thus contributing to the scholarly debate on qualitative methodologies more generally, whilst providing the specific example of access to the 'asylum elite' institutions in Brazil.

## **Asylum Institutional Elites in Brazil**

For the purposes of my research, I defined the Brazilian 'asylum institutional elite' as a hybrid body of institutions responsible for asylum decision-making in the country, with varying power degrees and thus, of different accessibility issues. It includes members of Brazil's National Refugee Committee (CONARE). CONARE is a collective body within the Ministry of Justice (MJ) comprised of the following members: a representative of the MJ, the Ministry of Foreign Relations, the Federal Police, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Education, and of a non-profit organisation working with refugee issues. All these members vote in asylum claims. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is also a member, but does not hold the right to vote<sup>3</sup>. Over the years, the only non-profit which has represented a non-profit in CONARE is Caritas Arquidiocesana do Rio de Janeiro and Caritas Arquidiocesana de São Paulo. Other non-permanent members, and without the right to vote,

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<sup>2</sup> The study looked at postcolonial continuities and ruptures of antiblackness in migratory and asylum policies and practices in Brazil over the years. As such, it analysed a large period of secondary (and some primary) archival data from late 19<sup>th</sup> century until the 1990s. The goal was to understand how such antiblack institutional and policy structure translated (or not) to contemporary practices in Brazil. Primary data was then collected through a mixed-method approach, i.e., observation-intervention/autoethnography, as will be analysed in this paper, covering the period of 2017-2019, and also through publicly available primary data, which was collected and analysed, concerning official meetings' reports and minutes covering the periods of 2014-2020, and quantitative datasets of the Federal Police, the Ministry of Foreign Relations, the Ministry of Justice, and the National Committee for Refugees which were analysed covering a period from the 1990s until 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Law 9.474/1997, article 14



have been added over the years, as was the case of NGO *Instituto Migrações e Direitos Humanos* (IMDH), the Federal Prosecutors Office (MPF) and the Public Defenders' Office (DPU). Amongst other roles, CONARE members have the responsibility to decide all asylum claims in regular official meetings, henceforth called 'plenaries'.

Although these are the main representatives of what I frame as the 'asylum ultraelite' in Brazil that have the 'last word' on who is or not recognised as a refugee in the country, asylum decision-making is an ongoing process, happening over the course of a series of procedural stages involving a less powerful elite. Although they carry less authority and responsibility, they can also remain more invisible; they are, for instance, the official interviewers of asylum claims, those that write the decision reports that will later influence decision-making in the plenaries, and the lawyers of the CONARE's NGO members. All of those actors have a more or less direct impact on asylum decision-making and are therefore an important part of studies that hope to fully understand the dynamics of asylum decision-making.

The degree of such impact, how these elite members interact with each other, what the main elements are for decision-making in different cases, amongst other questions, albeit relevant, remain understudied. Although many researchers have been able to access institutional agents amongst the Brazilian 'asylum ultraelite' for interviews with not much difficulty (see Facundo, 2017; Hamid, 2012; Rodrigues, 2020; Martuscelli, 2019; Espinoza, 2020; among others), only few have had the ability to conduct research with a different approach, such as accessing asylum interviews, decision reports, and the plenaries themselves, where members debate asylum cases (see for instance Magalhães, 2014 and 2016; and Bittencourt, 2016). As a result, even if 'ultraelite' members normally do provide interviews, with a more 'official' discourse, other parts of the asylum-decision making process remain largely invisible, demonstrating a key research void.

Fully understanding of the asylum institutional elite and their varied roles in the asylum decision-making process therefore necessarily requires a more ample access to the day-to-day asylum procedural activities, all of which is incredibly difficult, or nearly impossible, to obtain as a researcher, due to three main reasons. First, because even if researchers have permission by asylum seekers to access these files, asylum seekers themselves cannot easily access the documents of their own claims, meaning they could not automatically transfer them to researchers. Second, asylum seekers do not know when their cases are judged, and cannot attend plenary meetings, which means researchers would also be unable to do so. Even in the case of asylum interviews, regardless of asylum seekers' consent, it is unclear whether or not CONARE interviewers would allow a researcher to participate in such capacity – and if they can deny access – and if this could damage the asylum seeker's interview. Lastly, there is no official mechanism within CONARE to obtain permission to develop such studies, which makes researchers highly dependent on the CONARE's coordination discretionary decision. All these reasons echo the common challenges of 'researching up' shared by qualitative researchers in general, as seen above, demonstrating that, although Brazil's asylum institutional elite does not necessarily have excessive formal access mechanisms and that some members normally provide access for interviews, there are still major challenges.

As such, I hoped to overcome these challenges by taking advantage of my prior role as a refugee lawyer in Brazil in order to access the fairly unexplored world of the asylum elites. Below, I further explain how I developed this methodologically and how I overcame the specific ethical issues that this approach created.

## Researching Up in Asylum Decision-Making Institutional Elites

### Methodological challenges and approaches

As extensively highlighted above, the world of asylum in Brazil is a closed structure, wherein the main documents and meetings concerning asylum decision-making by the institutional elite are dealt in secrecy. Although Brazilian Law understandably determines the protection of refugees' identities and personal data in asylum procedures, this has been discretionarily interpreted and applied by the asylum institutional elites in a way that surrounds both the asylum claims, and the institutional elite's decision-making, in an atmosphere of almost absolute secrecy with no or few public mechanisms of accountability and transparency. Although protection of personal data of asylum seekers could be easily addressed by strong research ethical standards, this has not translated into greater acceptance of research in this elite context, as demonstrated above. Such infeasibility of accessing the closed asylum structures in Brazil, the lack of accountability, and the political and legal relevance of asylum decision-making are key to highlight the importance of studying this context in depth.

As a refugee lawyer since before the research started, I had some (limited) access to the closed, secretive environments researchers could not normally access. Refugees gave me legal authorisation to access their claims, and represent them and their interests before CONARE, which in turn had the legal obligation to give me access as a lawyer. This meant I could reach otherwise inaccessible data for researchers, such as asylum interviews, audio files and transcripts, reports of asylum decisions, to name a few. Importantly, I only had access to those cases wherein the asylum seekers themselves sought my legal advice, which meant access was limited to their claims and to the files and procedural instances CONARE allowed access, which were not all. For instance, getting documents was easier than being invited to and allowed in asylum interviews and plenary meetings, even as a lawyer. As such, being both a lawyer and a researcher reflected this *double-role* that underpinned part of my data collection.

Deborah Bronz' study (2014) was key to help me design my own methodological protocols to research in a professional capacity, as she herself did an ethnography as a professional embedded in her field of studies, calling it *observation-intervention*, wherein not only she observed the field, but simultaneously acted on the field, actively changing it. Unlike other researchers, she had privileged access to information in closed-door meetings she would not otherwise have access to had she asked to be there solely as a researcher. This meant that all results and analysis of this type of research would have to take into account such role and how it influenced data gathering and analysis.

Autoethnographers share similar dilemmas; Taber (2010), for instance, demonstrates how, following a refusal from national defence forces to conduct research about the women's role in the military, she decided to reflect on her own history as a military mother. As a way to 'look up' (and in), she conducted an 'institutional autoethnography' as a method to obtain entry-level institutional data<sup>4</sup>. As mentioned by Anderson (2006: 386-387), 'the purpose of analytic autoethnography is not simply to document personal experience, to provide an insider's perspective. (...) Rather, (...) [it] is to use empirical data to gain insight into some broader set of social phenomena than those provided by the data themselves'. Taber hence

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<sup>4</sup> According to Reed-Danahay (1997:9), 'autoethnography is defined as a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context', and institutional autoethnography places the narrative of the self in relation to institutional practices.



used autoethnography to do an institutional analysis by engaging her personal autoethnographic narrative with publicly textual data, ‘each inspiring and constraining the others in a gradually consolidating loop’ (2010:20).

Both methodologies inspired my approach. Institutional autoethnography allowed me to place the self, particularly the professional self, at the centre in some instances of the research. I observed, described and analysed, from the professional perspective, the day-to-day activities of institutional elites in asylum claims and how that shaped my own actions as a lawyer. For instance, how an asylum interview was conducted, whether I was invited to official interviews, etc, determined how I would ‘defend’ an asylum seeker. This allowed for the understanding of institutional practices as well as my own. This also implied all (or almost all) observed interactions of elite institutions with asylum seekers were shaped by my active presence in the field. My *interventions* also *produced* the field I was studying and helped create the analysed context, which demonstrates its inherent analytical limitations.

This methodological approach resonates debates concerning the *insider-outsider* perspectives in research in the social sciences. Whereas ‘insider research’ refers to studies wherein the researcher is a member of the group or community they are studying (Kanuha 2000), ‘outsider research’ implies a more distanced approach with such observed group (Dwyer and Buckle 2009). Both positionings carry their strengths and flaws; an insider status could mean easier access, relationships of trust, and a less hierarchical relationship between researcher and participants, something that does not happen in ‘outsider research’; however, ‘insider research’ could increase the chances of ‘role confusion’, considering researchers’ dual role (Asselin 2003), whereas outsider status is valued for the ‘objectivity’ it brings to data analysis (Kerstetter 2012). Nonetheless, Kerstetter argued that “all researchers fall somewhere within the space between complete insiders and complete outsiders, [and] (...) will likely occupy different spaces depending on the context of a specific research project” (*idem*:101; also discussed in Hellawell 2006). As such, research does not normally reflect a strict binary, and positionalities may vary not only from how the researcher sees their own positionings, but how others view them in this process (Milligan 2016).

In the case of my research, there was a clear fluidity of my positioning; data collection necessarily implied an ‘insiderness’ which most researchers did not share with me. However, when thinking of power relations in the field, I was clearly in a less privileged hierarchical position than asylum institutional elites, both as a researcher and as a lawyer, and was seen as an outsider intruding my way in. Claiming an insider status in some asylum claims unbalanced that unequal relationship, enabling this research. With relation to asylum seekers, as a white, Brazilian lawyer, I had an outsider status. Nevertheless, that ‘outsiderness’ varied depending on the trust developed with some participants over time, or if they saw me as fighting for the same causes as them. As mentioned by Dwyer and Buckle (2009:59), “the core ingredient is not insider or outsider status but an ability to be open, authentic, (...) in the experience of one’s research participants, and committed to accurately and adequately representing their experience”, which in turn demand a “detailed reflection on the subjective research process, with a close awareness of one’s own personal biases and perspectives”, as well as on the power relations developed in the field. Indeed, the *space between* ‘insiderness’ and ‘outsiderness’ demands researchers to “assume a responsibility to understand where they are positioned within this space and to explore how their status may affect the research process and its outcomes” (Kerstetter 2012:101). This was applied throughout my research process, in how

I collected and analysed data, as I continuously reflected on my own multiple positionings in the field, in order to better assess the specific analytic value of the data collected, both on its own, as well as part of my broader database. As mentioned, observation-intervention, albeit significant, was not the core of my research, but was part of a number of data collection strategies, hence was analysed as part of such wider database. It was, therefore, not determinant of research outcomes, but contributed to them, especially covering what the other applied strategies did not directly encompass.

Observation-intervention was therefore a good alternative to conduct research in very closed, secretive *elite* environments which otherwise would not be subject to the academic gaze. Although this does not provide all researchers with a 'way in', it contributes with those that are unsure of how their own professional environments or 'insiderness' can be used for research purposes, especially in those cases of difficulties in access. In this context, however, there are clear ethical challenges to overcome, as will be addressed below.

### **Ethical challenges**

In her research, Deborah Bronz (2014: 223) frequently asks 'how to study power practices from a professional experience, without exposing the portrayed actors, the researcher herself, and even without abandoning an important portion of the ethnographic information acquired through professional links?'. Indeed, even in autoethnographies, which are somewhat more centred on the self than the methodology proposed by Bronz, ethical challenges arise because the self is always relational, therefore involving others (Edwards, 2021; Bochner, 2017). These methodologies also allow the voice of the author – or the self – to be heard. Silencing the voice of the self because others might feel unease with their descriptions is 'a difficult balancing act with regards the competing claims of the right to be heard and oppressive silencing' (Edwards 2021: 4; also in Lee 2018). How then to conduct research ethically without exposing others and without compromising the voice of the self (and the research itself)?

Such questions also guided my main ethical challenges. In my case, I was particularly concerned with protecting the identity of the asylum seekers I interacted with, as, even though they were not directly research participants, they were part of the broader field, and eventually were part of my analysis. After all, it is impossible to understand elite decision-making fully without connecting it to those lives they are affecting. As a refugee lawyer, there was a different hierarchical layer that posed greater challenges; had I asked asylum-seekers to sign yet another form consenting to have access to their claims in the capacity of a researcher, alongside the many other formalities they already had to sign when first meeting me, it could raise a series of ethical issues<sup>5</sup>, related to their dependency on me for legal counsel, but also to them not fully understanding my double role in this first contact. As such, consent was sought on an ongoing basis, particularly because the nature of our interactions was continuous. I constantly reminded them of my work as a researcher so that they knew I was also acting as such, but not *studying them*, as participants, but *the asylum decision-making itself*, and

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<sup>5</sup> Due to my legal role, I also checked whether there would be any potential ethical issues in the Brazilian Lawyers' ethics code. According to this code, lawyers need to maintain 'professional secrecy', which consists in the inviolability of the facts exposed by the client to the lawyer. This does not apply in this research, since I never reveal any confidential or any information secretly shared with me whatsoever by those asylum seekers I represented, nor do I share specific substantial details of their lives or why they are claiming asylum; moreover, they are impossible to identify, which means there were no ethical concerns arising from the specific legal ethics' codes underpinning my professional capacity. See for instance: <<https://www.oabsp.org.br/tribunal-de-etica-e-disciplina/pareceres/e-3-965-2010>>.



I repeatedly asked whether or not they were still happy for me to continue in this double role in their cases. I also frequently interacted with the leaders of refugee communities and some of them were even invited to watch my PhD viva.

Additionally, because I did not want to focus on them or on their histories as forced migrants, not only just a few cases were mentioned<sup>6</sup>, but I also applied techniques such as masking to ensure the context, asylum seekers, and elite members were anonymised and hence difficult (or impossible) to identify. As such, individual details of persecution, nationality, age, and their fears and traumas, were not part of the analysis. The goal was to trace elite behaviour in interviews, asylum decision reports, and official meetings *despite* the substantive reasons why these individuals claimed asylum. Focus was thus on procedural behaviour<sup>7</sup>.

Similar ethical concerns were given regarding the refugee elite workers. Some of them, especially police officers, with whom I had weekly encounters, knew I was a researcher and frequently mentioned they wanted to read my work. In some cases, I either could not mention my role because participants were unknown to me and I had no direct contact with them – for instance, interviewers of past interviews – or because it could jeopardise my role as lawyer and, consequently, the asylum seekers' claim outcome itself. For example, I could be denied access to interviews, or if I was allowed in, interviewers could inadvertently harm asylum seekers' claims. Although my main concern was to not to harm them and their claims, and despite already having their continuous consent, I knew I also needed a strong ethical protocol regarding elite members I either directly interacted with or not (but were present, for example, in documents). My tactics was to have an ongoing reflection considering how to include others in my research following an ethical practice that ensured care was situated at the centre. As mentioned by Edwards (2021: 5) regarding autoethnography, although there are ways to find 'satisfactory ethical bounds, such as writing the accounts as fiction, or disguising the others extensively, there is a delicate balancing act involved in getting this right', which are contextual and ongoing<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> And only in those instances they were relevant to highlight my decisions as a lawyer to defend them and the institutional actions I was defending them against.

<sup>7</sup> For instance, I focused on cases which elite institutions seemed to have pre-established biases; I broadly described how these biases were translated in interviews and in asylum decision-making. In one case, for example, I mentioned how the interviewer did not seem to believe the interviewee from the get-go, and I mentioned the varied questions and comments throughout the interview that demonstrated those biases, without detailed mention to the asylum claim itself.

<sup>8</sup> The most current Brazilian resolution on research ethics for the Humanities and Social Sciences, Resolution n. 510/2016, of the National Health Committee, states that research using publicly available data and that studies situations that emerge contingently in professional practice, as long as they do not reveal data that can identify the subjects involved, are exempt of analysis by a formal ethical review (see article 1, n. II, III and VII, of the resolution). There is also no clear ruling regarding autoethnographies or similar methodologies. This does not mean there are no ethical concerns or that ethics should not be at the centre of study development. In fact, out of extra care for ethics in research, and in continuous conversation with my supervisors, we developed the ethical protocols presented in this paper, which were also subject of analysis (and approval) of a multi-institutional and interdisciplinary academic committee halfway during the PhD, mirroring traditional ethical protocols, even in the case of 'non-convenient' methodologies, such as autoethnographies. In order to analyse asylum decision-making, my own professional narrative and description became data, alongside publicly available documents (such as minutes of plenaries and databases), and some procedural documents I had access to, also as a lawyer. I however decided to only use those procedural documents if I obtained the ongoing consent from asylum seekers; elite workers who I directly (and most commonly) interacted with (such as some police officers) knew I was also doing research and observing their day-to-day activities in that capacity. However, because I spent several days and hours waiting in public spaces, such as the Federal Police, it was impossible to obtain consent from every single person (elite or otherwise) in those spaces; and I created protocols to protect individuals in my autoethnographic narrative. No sensitive or confidential data was stored. No consent was needed from individuals I did not directly interact with (such as those who interviewed asylum seekers) or whose information was present in publicly available documents. Masking strategies were applied throughout to protect personal identification.

This was applied in my own research. Names, roles in the organisations and periods of time were omitted, and all were gendered as 'male' so whenever they are referred to in writing, it is impossible to know who, in said institution, I was speaking of<sup>9</sup>. In this manner, I was able to protect the identity of the individuals I interacted with, or that came across in asylum procedures, without compromising important data. For instance, when I mentioned that, after requesting CONARE access to plenaries and they never responded, I did not disclose who within that committee I emailed it to. Indeed, when e-mailing CONARE's coordination, they are randomly answered, oftentimes without a personal signature, only an institutional one. Considering the various organisations that comprise CONARE, its many employees, and the lack of date of the interaction, it would be impossible to identify who did not answer my request – as even I was unsure of the internal debates regarding it. This example showcases the strategies used to mask institutional agents. My goal was to highlight the institutions themselves, not the persons in them. Ongoing decisions to disguise them were taken throughout the writing process, which also meant that, when anonymisation was not possible, I chose not to disclose data, however valuable they were. Importantly, informal and more confidential interactions were not registered.

Moreover, in order to strengthen the findings as much as I could, I also shared and discussed data analysis at different stages with multiple colleagues who worked with me in the same asylum cases, as an approximation to 'collaborative autoethnography'<sup>10</sup> approaches (albeit not quite), as a way to pool in the many individual accounts (and reflect collectively) over the same issues I studied. In doing so, I was able to protect myself, my professional relationships, and the social actors in my field of studies, 'elite' or otherwise, without compromising the research itself. I agree with Mosse (2006) that fieldwork is highly compromised if researchers are frequently silenced; this is particularly the case for research with elites, considering their relative superior hierarchical position. A broader and politically conscious approach to fieldwork is thus necessary, and observation-intervention, if proceeded ethically, can be one of the ways to decrease issues of studying asylum elites without compromising important research fields.

## Conclusions

Research with asylum seekers and refugees raise a number of issues involving refugees' voices, safe environments, doing no harm, preventing revictimization, among other issues. These types of research are invaluable to the field. In Brazil, specifically, they have amounted to the majority of fieldwork studies, leaving an important gap in scholarly work, particularly with

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<sup>9</sup> Assigning the male gender to all anonymised elite workers as one of the applied masking strategies was a choice based on two main reasons: first, and the most important one, because it would homogenise all elite actors and make them less identifiable; secondly, and relatedly, because this study did not look at gender as one axis of institutional analysis. Although there are studies which demonstrate how gender impact institutional responses, this was not part of the scope of this study. Therefore, assigning all elite workers as male, although still a gendered choice, was a tool to hide gender altogether from the analysis of certain institutional responses. This choice was embedded in the ethical decision to try and mask, as much as possible, the individuals, and highlight the institutions themselves, not the agents in them.

<sup>10</sup> According to Lapadat (2017:589), collaborative autoethnography is a 'multivocal approach in which two or more researchers work together to share personal stories and interpret the pooled autoethnographic data', which creates 'a shift from individual to collective agency, thereby offering a path toward personally engaging, nonexploitative, accessible research that makes a difference'.





elite institutions. Whilst refugees have been more overly studied<sup>11</sup>, refugee elites were only participants in more formal interviews in which they controlled the narrative. Observation-participation of the refugee elites' work whilst they are performing their decision-making activities was much less possible, due to lack of access. This example demonstrated how elite research, while generally facing access challenges, has an ambivalent status in Brazilian asylum contexts, since access to interviews is generally easier, but not to observe and participate in their decision-making activities. This paper provided an example of how this challenge was overcome through a novel, mixed-method approach, that involved a double role of the researcher in her field of studies. Participant-observation became observation-intervention, similarly to institutional autoethnographies, with particular methodological and ethical challenges that required adjustments to both strengthen data collection and conduct research that *does no harm*, while not compromising data collection. This paper also emphasises that doing ethical research is not dependent on an ethics review alone, but requires a constant process of reflection. This research complements existing studies in asylum decision-making, and provides a new look into an environment normally inaccessible for researchers, therefore contributing to wider debates on asylum institutional elites in Brazil, and providing new methodological approaches to overcoming elite research challenges.

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<sup>11</sup> By no means my intention is to say there are enough or excessive fieldwork research involving refugees in Brazil. What I mean is that, in comparison, whilst there are a number of respected scholarly work that highlights refugees' feelings, emotions, voices, opinions, among others, concerning their experiences, there are far less studies concerning the authorities and institutions that actually decide asylum claims, policies, resettlement, leaving a number of gaps in the analysis of the actual system.

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