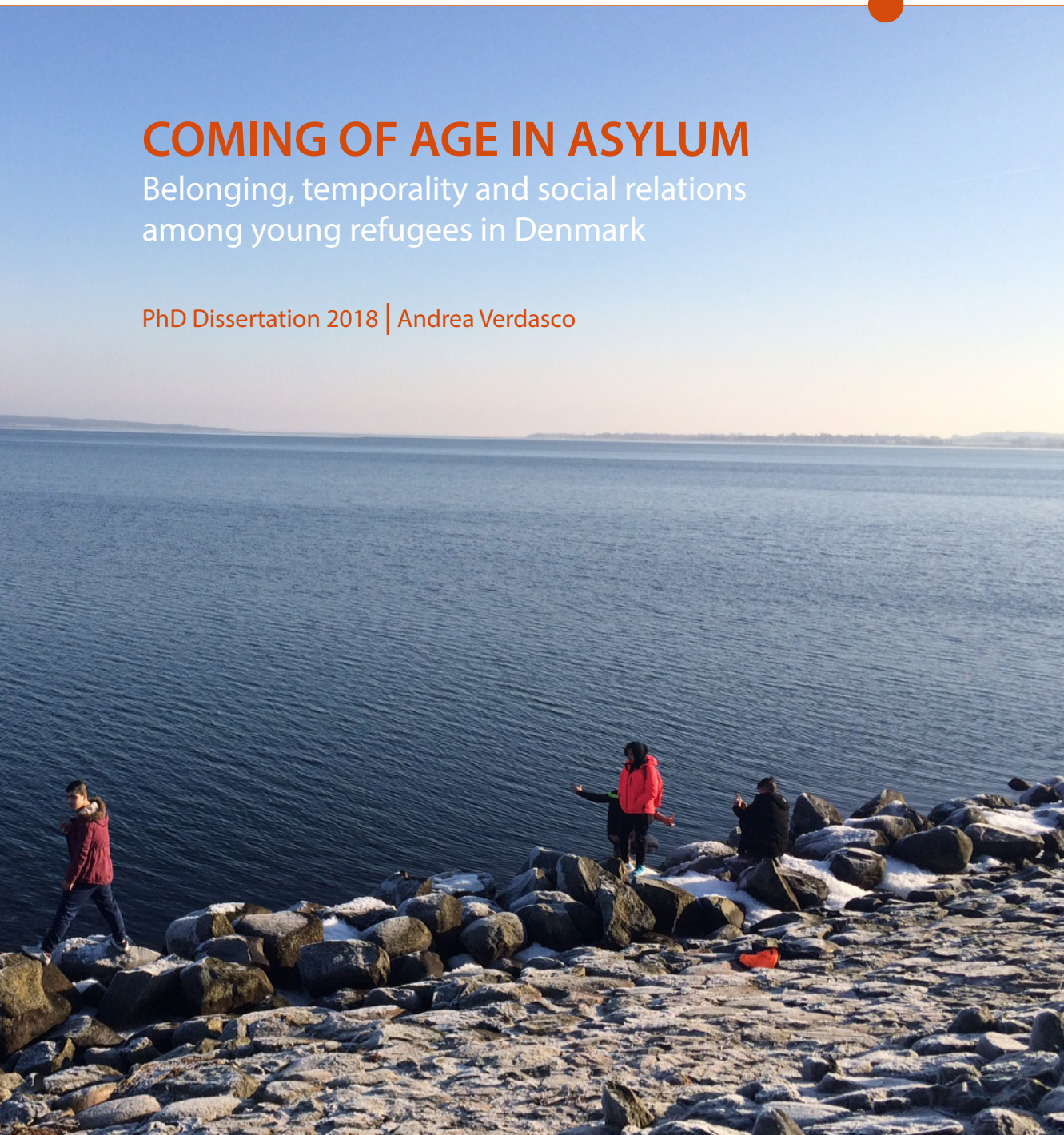




COMING OF AGE IN ASYLUM

Belonging, temporality and social relations
among young refugees in Denmark

PhD Dissertation 2018 | Andrea Verdasco



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Department of Anthropology

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Contents

Acknowledgements	3
Abbreviations	7
Map of Denmark	8
Prologue	9
Introduction	11
Chapter 1. Analytical Perspectives	15
<i>Situating the ‘in-between’</i>	15
<i>Terminology: legal constructions and the sedentary bias</i>	19
<i>The ambivalent social constructions of the ‘unaccompanied’</i>	21
<i>Challenging categories theoretically and empirically</i>	25
<i>A study of ‘young people’</i>	27
<i>The social construction of childhood</i>	30
<i>Constructing relatedness</i>	31
<i>A study of ‘everyday life’</i>	36
<i>‘Anchoring points’: constructing communities of belonging</i>	39
Chapter 2. Contextualizing asylum and refugeehood in Denmark	42
<i>The historical and political context of young refugees in Denmark</i>	42
<i>The Asylum and Refugee Process in Denmark</i>	55
Chapter 3. Methodological reflections	72
<i>New to Denmark: entering the field</i>	73
<i>A field on the move</i>	75
<i>The conundrums of finding interlocutors</i>	77
<i>Gaining rapport with ‘older’ interlocutors</i>	80
<i>Mixing participant observation and informal interviews</i>	89
<i>Interviewing adults</i>	90
<i>Positioning: not a Dane and not Red Cross</i>	92
<i>Learning Danish: opportunities and constraints</i>	95
<i>Social media and my iPhone: my allies</i>	96
<i>Ethical concerns and considerations</i>	98

The Articles. Publication overview	102
Article I. Understandings of self through the category of the ‘unaccompanied asylum-seeking minor’: a Danish ethnography	103
Article II. Everyday rituals of migration: constructing relatedness and agency among young refugees in Denmark	125
Article III. Communities of belonging in the temporariness of the Danish asylum system: Shalini’s anchoring points	156
Conclusion	184
Bibliography	198
Summary	211
Dansk Resumé	213

Abbreviations

CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
DKK	Danish Krone
ERPUM	European Return Platform for Unaccompanied Minors
EU	European Union
EURODAC	European Asylum Dactyloscopy Database
IS	Immigration Services
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
UAM	Unaccompanied minor
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees



MAP OF DENMARK

Prologue

Jabriil, Ahmed¹ and I are sitting and chatting on the grass while waiting for their turn to play football. We are at *Asylcup* [Asylum Cup], a yearly event organized by the Red Cross at which several hundred asylum-seekers from the different Red Cross-run asylum centres in Denmark have gathered in one place to play football for three consecutive days. I am here with the group from Elmebjerg centre,² a residential asylum centre for unaccompanied minors where I have been doing fieldwork for the past few weeks. *Asylcup* is one of many activities organized at the asylum centre for young refugees. However, this setting is different because, unlike in their everyday lives, when mostly they only interact with other refugees who are also classified as ‘unaccompanied minors’ and with the staff and teachers, for the next three days they will be playing against and interacting with asylum-seekers living in adult centres.

‘I came here [to Denmark] ten months ago and I don’t get any answer, so I get angry’, Jabriil tells me, upset, yet speaking with the calm voice that characterizes his conversation. Ahmed is somewhat dismissive of our conversation, as he is playing pop music on his phone and singing along with it. Jabriil speaks slowly, reflecting on his past months in Denmark. He describes how he arrived in Denmark after a year-long journey across Europe fleeing Somalia. Having arrived alone and claiming to be 16 years old, he entered the Danish asylum system as an ‘unaccompanied asylum-seeking minor’. At the time of our conversation he had been through an age test that established his age as 19 years old. Jabriil had contested this decision, explaining: ‘I asked them [immigration authorities] “How do you know that? You was there when my mother she was born me?” My mother, she told me I was under 18. When I came here I was 16, now I am 17. The doctor, he said he saw something, and I say, “No, I don’t believe that”. Until now they don’t decide’. I then ask Jabriil how he experiences waiting. ‘Sometimes you become crazy, like some person who is in the middle, you are not this side or this side, sometimes you worry about the future. Until now you are not here and you are not here. You think: what will happen if I get here or if I get here’, he tells me, pointing at two imaginary distant points. I then ask him

¹ The names of all informants have been changed to preserve their anonymity.

² The names of all asylum centres are pseudonyms, with the exception of the main asylum centre, Sandholm, where the interviews for all asylum-seekers in Denmark take place. Using the actual name of this centre therefore does not affect the anonymity of my interlocutors.