This article is based on a large study of children's and adolescents' perceptions of 'multiculturalism' conducted between 2002 and 2013 in a number of state schools in Central Italy. Here, we specifically present a case study on adolescents' conceptualizations of 'national borders' in Italy in order to contribute to research on children's and youths' experiences of ethnicity (Cangià 2012; Gullestad 1997; Pache-Huber and Spyrou 2012; Spyrou 2002; Stephens 1997), in particular to research on the role of 'borders' in children's and youngsters' representations of 'self' and 'others' (Christou and Spyrou 2012; Helleiner 2007; Hipfl et al. 2003). We argue that in order to understand how youths make sense of and represent 'borders' it is necessary to examine the role of emotions more attentively. A focus on emotions will contribute significantly to exploring the conceptual relationship between 'borders' as external territorial frontiers and 'boundaries' as internal social categorization (Fassin 2011). More specifically, a focus on emotions can help us understand better how 'borders' come to work subjectively as markers of collective identities (Donnan and Wilson 2001; Wilson and Donnan 1998), in particular how geographical 'borders' become relevant for individuals when they draw boundaries between themselves and others. We draw on excerpts from open-ended essays written in a number of state
high schools in Rome by adolescents and on semi-structured interviews conducted with them in their classrooms.

Previous research across the social sciences has explored the role of emotions in the experience of migration and in social and political conflicts (Ahmed 2004; Fischer and Manstead 2008; Ezekiel 2002; Graham 2002; Milton and Svasek 2005; Pagani 2014; Pagani and Robustelli 2010; Scheff 2011; Zembylas 2012). In line with these studies, we understand ‘emotions’ as important ‘processes through which individuals experience and interpret the changing world, position themselves vis-à-vis others, and shape their subjectivities’ (Svašek 2010: 868). More specifically, we draw upon the ‘cognitive perspective on emotions’ (Parkinson 1995; Solomon 1993), according to which emotions, as ‘a set of judgments’ (Solomon 1993: 126), structure individuals’ conceptions about the world. In particular, individuals, when expressing their emotions, set up the framework through which they experience their lives, within which they understand facts and within which events acquire personal relevance (Solomon 1993). According to Ahmed, ‘whether I perceive something as beneficial or harmful clearly depends upon how I am affected by something … [T]he process of attributing an object as being or not being beneficial or harmful, which may become translated into good or bad, clearly involves reading the contact we have with objects in a certain way’ (2004: 6).

This article analyses how adolescents aged between 14 and 18 conceptualize ‘national borders’ by expressing and evaluating the way they feel about immigration, by imagining others’ emotions, and by drawing upon those emotion-based representations of immigrants that they borrow from their social milieu. Dominant representations of immigrants (including those offered by media) may affect youths’ attitudes towards immigration and their conceptualizations of ‘national borders’. However, we believe that youths’ conceptualizations of ‘national borders’ are not simply ‘articulations of socially available discourses’ (Zembylas 2012: 200). Dominant emotion-based representations of immigration and border-crossing intersect in various ways with youngsters’ personal emotional world, and are internalized in different manners by these youths, who actively select, personalize and, at times, modify them. We analyse how adolescents use these representations when expressing their views on immigrants, how they associate these with their own emotional states, and how they try to challenge the dominant idea of ‘border’ through emotions. In the next paragraph, we briefly introduce some of the main emotion-based representations of immigration in Italy, in particular those on clandestine immigration flows in the news media and in the political debate.

**Landing on coasts: Italian public debate on immigration flows**

Even before the most recent events occurred near the Italian island of Lampedusa in the Mediterranean sea, when more than 300 African immigrants were reported dead after their boat sank, immigration was represented by the media and in the political debate in Italy with a special emphasis on coastal landings (in Italian, sbarchi). The frequent use of emotional terms relating to immigration flows is a familiar aspect of journalism
and of the political vernacular in Italy, and plays a significant role in affecting people's attitudes toward immigrants (Maneri 2009; Pagani and Robustelli 2010; Sciortino and Colombo 2004; Triandafyllidou 1999). Some of the resulting dominant discourses relate to immigrants’ legal status and socio-economic roles in society, specifically to the sense of insecurity versus the positive social and economic contributions that the newcomers are supposed to bring to the ‘host society’. Some discourses prescribe ‘tolerance for’ immigrants’ cultural diversity in the name of a ‘multicultural and democratic society’, and, at the same time, identify immigrants’ acceptable behaviours (based mostly on common and shared favourable values such as work and family) for integration in the ‘host society’. These discourses refer partly to what Zembylas has defined a ‘multicultural humanistic discourse’ and a ‘socio-economic discourse’, that is the ‘respect for those who are recognized as being “different” yet in reality they are not, they are also humans’, and the ‘respect for the struggles that migrants go through to better their lives’ (2012: 201), respectively.

With specific regard to news media, the name ‘Lampedusa’ and the idea of the ‘Italian coasts’ are often associated with ideas of ‘security’, ‘emergency’, and the like. For instance, the most recent reporting of the 2011 Arab Spring and of the resulting migration flows from North African countries to Lampedusa made use of terms like ‘military intervention’ and ‘war against illegal immigration’, and involved headlines such as ‘Immigrants: record of landing’ (Immigrati: sbarco record), or ‘An assault that our country cannot stop’ (Un assalto che il nostro paese non può arrestare), to name just a few (Osservatorio Carta di Roma 2013). The use of the term ‘invasion’ and the portrayal of immigrants in poor and desperate conditions are very common in the media language about immigration. On the one hand, terms and phrases such as ‘illegality’, ‘undocumented persons’ or ‘clandestines’ (clandestini) invading the country’ have been news media leitmotifs for years. On the other hand, adjectives and phrases (‘poor’, ‘slaves’, ‘desperate’, ‘in line, naked and in the cold’) describing immigrants escaping from difficult and dangerous situations, as well as more personal and individual stories of immigrants, are also very common (Binotto and Martino 2004; Sciortino and Colombo 2004).3

More recently, in the political debate in Italy, immigration has been represented through conflicting descriptions that mix ‘humanitarian’ attributes with more alarming nuances. On October 2013, the Italian government launched the ‘Operation Mare Nostrum’ to tackle immigration flows in the Mediterranean Sea, and presented it both as a ‘humanitarian’ and as a ‘security operation’ aimed to ‘save human lives’.4 On the occasion of the outbreak of the Ebola virus in Guinea in March 2014, an official statement from the Italian Minister of Health declared ‘the activation of appropriate measures of surveillance at all international access points to Italy’.5

Although the mobilization of emotions is a common characteristic both of international journalism and of the global political debate on immigration, the case of Italy seems especially interesting, considering the critical political and socio-economic moment that the country has been in over the last few years. The political instability of the latest governments and the numerous recent scandals involving institutional corruption have contributed to fuelling a general sense of social and
economic insecurity and distrust among the population. A number of social phenomena were re-framed at the institutional level within the ‘crisis’ and its consequent collective emotions. For instance, immigration policies of border management, recently subject to a strong political debate between different parties, have been linked to the problems in the Italian economy and in the labour market sector. To give a recent example, the Secretary of the Northern League (Lega Nord), a centre-right party that has officially opposed immigration, on the occasion of the government’s decision to abolish the crime of illegal immigration in Italy, accused the former Congolese-born Minister for Integration of the Democratic Party of ‘throwing open Italy’s doors even further’ and of ‘working against Italians’. In particular, the Secretary of the Northern League explicitly justified the need to contrast new immigration flows in Italy in view of the high unemployment rate among Italian citizens and among regular immigrants. Such a political debate, based on the representation of the issue in term of ‘security’ and socio-economic competition between ‘citizens’ and ‘newcomers’, certainly plays a role in affecting the perception of the population on immigration.

In the next paragraphs, we present some concrete examples from our data in order to analyse how adolescents draw upon and personalize some of these representations in different ways through the explicit and implicit expression of their emotions. At times, youths try to more creatively challenge these representations through an accurate evaluation of their and others’ emotions, and can propose alternative meanings to the issue, rooted in their more personal hopes, expectations and desires.

Fieldwork

The article draws on a large study of children’s and youths’ conceptualizations about ‘multiculturalism’ conducted in Central Italy since 2002 by Pagani and Robustelli (Institute of Cognitive Sciences and Technologies, Italian National Research Council), partly within the Project Migration of the Department of Social Sciences and Humanities, Cultural Heritage (Italian National Research Council) (Pagani 2014; Pagani in press; Pagani and Robustelli 2010; Pagani and Robustelli 2011; Pagani, et al. 2011). On the occasion of this study, various state schools, including elementary, middle and high schools in Central Italy (Rome, the province of Rome, and the province of Florence) were involved. In their classrooms, children and adolescents were asked to anonymously write open-ended essays about their opinions and feelings concerning the fact that people of different cultural backgrounds now live in Italy. On other occasions, focus groups were conducted at school.

In 2013, similar fieldwork was carried out in a state high school in the east of Rome in four classes with 79 pupils ranging in age from 14 to 18 (Cangìa and Pagani in press).

In each class, one of the authors illustrated the principal activities of our Institute and the aim of the study. The pupils were informed that the main goal of the research was to identify and analyse their attitudes toward ‘multiculturalism’. Youths were asked to indicate only their gender and were not requested to specify whether they were immigrant or Italian. Some participants explicitly stated they were Italian, immigrant or with parents of mixed nationalities. Sometimes, when
no explicit mention was made of their cultural background, it was possible to infer from the text whether a pupil was Italian or immigrant. The participants’ age could be inferred from the grades they were attending, as their essays were collected separately from each class.

Youths were given an hour and a half to complete their assignment. Teachers were asked not to be present in order to avoid any kind of interference with the research work. We assured the pupils their essays would not be graded and they would not be judged for what and how they wrote, and that they should try to express their views and feelings freely. We also assured them that their teachers would not read their essays. In addition, we told them that if they wanted to, they would be informed about the results of the research and that we could organize other meetings with them for further discussions. We met each class some time afterwards, and conducted semi-structured group interviews to discuss those points that seemed to be most relevant for them and that had been raised most frequently in their essays.

The methods used to analyse data were largely based on principles of textual analysis, discourse analysis, and content analysis. In addition to the explicit meanings of the texts and interviews, attention was given to implicit meanings, that is those beliefs and emotions that are not expressed explicitly but that can be deduced not only by the content, but also by the form and the structure of individuals’ oral or written texts (Pagani and Robustelli 2010).

In this article, we present a number of extracts from essays by, and interviews with, Italian youths (aged 14-18) enrolled in three schools in Rome. The schools are located in different suburbs of the city, in the east, in the south and in the north of Rome respectively, and include three large secondary schools (a ‘Liceo’ specializing in scientific studies, a professional institute specializing in mechanical and electronic sectors, and a pedagogical secondary school). In Italy, school choice often depends on different variables, including pupils’ interests, the type of future study or work they wish to undertake, and their social and economic background, rather than merely on the proximity of the school. Professional schools usually prepare for work specialization, whereas the other schools are more oriented to university studies. Hence, youngsters participating to this study constitute a varied sample with regard to gender, socio-economic background, and the above-mentioned variations in school typology.

On emotional borders: Italian youths talking about immigration

… we need to put ourselves in their shoes. Because imagine if you go to a country that is completely different from yours and in which there are different habits, [imagine] that maybe often you travel illegally, and that maybe you stay without eating or drinking, like it happened to a friend of my family, who comes from Tunisia and stayed three days without eating or drinking inside the hold of a boat.

Giulia is 16 years old. During the interview in her classroom, she described her friend’s difficult experience arriving in Italy in the hold of a boat. She explained in the interview that she believed that immigrants’ integration in society could be difficult at times, due to
certain different ‘cultural attitudes’, such as ‘the conception of the woman’ and ‘the idea of veil for some populations’. She thought that ‘diversity is a very positive thing for society’ but when ‘diversity becomes so extreme’ (so as to force women to wear the veil) it is not positive anymore. However, her immigrant friend’s story, she said, made her change her ideas about some immigrants. ‘People like this guy,’ she explained, ‘live very difficult experiences because they do not have the support of their families or friends, they come here and have tabula rasa, they do not have anyone.’ The girl’s words provide a good example of how empathic concerns for a member of an ‘out-group’ (often a stigmatized out-group) can be generalized and include members of the whole ‘out-group’ (Bateson et al. 1997; Pagani 2001). This is basically made possible through personal contact with, in this case, the friend of the girl’s family (Allport 1954; Pagani et al. 2011). In part, the girl emotionally identified herself with immigrants who arrive in Italy. Through this process (‘We need to put ourselves in their shoes. Because imagine if you go to a country that is completely different from yours’) which is here typically exemplified by two key phrases – ‘to put ourselves in their shoes’ and ‘imagine if’ – the girl inevitably and probably unconsciously constructed a more fluid and complex definition of her identity, and, thus, of the ‘borders’ between herself and others. This is a very good example of how emotions, in this case ‘positive emotions’, deeply affect the elaboration of conceptualizations regarding ‘borders’.

‘National borders’ are believed to enclose certain identity-related elements that can make crossing borders an emotionally fraught experience both for those who arrive and for those who host. Entering a new place and getting to know different habits, without having the support of familiar people or friends, can represent a highly emotional experience, as this girl and many other Italian youths indicated. ‘Crossing borders’, in pupils’ words, means crossing boundaries between oneself and others, between different cultures and traditions, between personal stories and experiences. ‘Crossing borders’ can be a process that may place at risk a person’s sense of identity, normality, safety, and stability, and for this reason, the process can have a strong emotional impact for those who experience it.

Emotions were explicitly and implicitly evoked by these youths when talking about immigration and border crossing. As we will see, youths frequently used emotional terms relating to the Italian state’s ‘indulgent’ and ‘soft’ attitudes towards immigrants, and often referred to the preservation of individual and national ‘security’. Other constructs used by these youths to describe immigrants were based on moral principles relating to social and economic values, for example ‘honesty’ and ‘goodness’ in referring to those immigrants looking for a better life, and, in contrast, ‘malevolence’ in referring to those immigrants who come to abuse freedom and commit crimes. Finally, youths expressed more personal emotions, like fear, disgust, anger, gratitude, or tried to imagine others’ emotional states, for example, desperation, hope, loneliness, as in the case of Giulia and other pupils.

As noted above, we observed that these adolescents often associated their descriptions of immigration with the news on television or with opinions they had heard from their parents or friends (Pagani and Robustelli 2010). At other times, they challenged the information they gathered from the media and from adults or their
friends, drawing on individual experiences, on their more personal views and feelings, and trying to imagine others' emotions. A 17-year-old girl, for instance, imagined others' emotional experiences when migrating and described immigration as a difficult experience in terms of the loss of stability and security related to one's own roots in a place. Imagining others' feelings helped her explain why borders should be more permeable to immigration.

It is reality itself that suggests what to think … Daily life, street corners, crossroads, traffic signals show us how the search for a job, the aspiration to a better life, often the crazy and useless wars make more and more people pack … embark … and go far away from their country, eradicate their roots that are so important to assure a minimum of security and stability to a life that seems to offer all but this … and then find yourself unable to plant these [roots] in the tarmac of that crossroad.

Similarly, a 14-year-old girl described the departure from one's country to a new place as a courageous act, fuelled by the desire to get a better life, or to fulfil one's own dreams:

An immigrant is who makes a choice bigger than himself with courage and determination and leaves everything behind: family, friends, colleagues … Most of the times this departure is due to the desire of ameliorating one's own living conditions, or even if to a less degree, to the desire, since one is a child, of living in one's dream place.

These girls referred to the above-mentioned ‘socio-economic discourse’, in particular to the idea that immigrants should be respected as they go through enormous difficulties when migrating. At the same time, in the remainder of the latter essay, the girl defined herself as personally touched by the bad treatment towards immigrants arriving in Italy, especially when she imagined herself living in another country and being treated the same way.

In our analysis, we identified three main clusters of ‘emotional qualities’ constituting the framework within which youths interpreted ‘border-crossing’ in particular by describing both their and others' emotions. These include ‘permeability’, ‘softness’, and ‘morality’, attributes that youths used in order to describe a collective attitude towards immigrants. In particular, ‘permeability’ refers to the state or quality of physical borders that allow ‘strangers’ to pass through. ‘Softness’ refers to Italians and the government’s indulgency towards immigrants crossing the border. By ‘morality’ we mean the ethical value that some youths attached to borders and that makes crossing borders possible only upon condition of respect of certain moral principles. These three qualities also represent three different ways in which borders became personally relevant for these youths, and in which dominant representations of immigration were internalized. In particular, some adolescents in their discourses explicitly and implicitly associated the ‘permeability’ and the ‘softness’ of national borders’ with their own sense of insecurity, and other emotional states that they ascribed to the arrival of immigrants, like disgust, anger and fear of losing their identity and well-being. Other times, ‘permeability’ and ‘softness’ of ‘national borders’, as occasions for change
and discovery, seemed to be linked to more empathic feelings, to youths’ personal interests, hopes, and curiosity. Finally, youths, when describing the ‘morality’ of newcomers crossing the border, could express ambivalent emotions both towards immigrants’ behaviours and motivations, and towards their own ‘in-group’.

On permeable borders

The numerical aspect of immigrants entering Italy is an effective image to describe immigration. The adolescents often used the image of an ‘invasion’ of immigrants landing on the coasts. The following extracts are examples of how youths referred to ‘invasion’, what we defined in a previous study as a ‘barbarian invasions attitude’ (Pagani and Robustelli 2010: 253). They associated this image with social degradation, with the loss of cultural identity, of ‘peace’ or stability, and they often associated ‘invasion’ with more personal emotional states (for instance fear, surprise, worry, anger, and hope).

Personally I don’t mind the presence of immigrants in Italy, in fact I used to have many friends from other countries, and this never affected our friendship. But if we keep letting them enter Italy we risk that they will become more than us, we are already in crisis, already we prefer to hire immigrants with a low salary, if it keeps going like this sooner or later it will be our turn to go and look for ‘fortune’ in other countries (14-year-old boy).

I am surprised by the fact that there are many immigrants with illegal documents around Italy and that the police stops only a few of them and does not send them back to their country, maybe by saying this I can appear cruel, but I guarantee I am a very understanding person, I have tried to understand the situation of these immigrants, and I did, but then when I have seen that the situation got worse and immigrants were endlessly landing, I started changing my mind about these irregularities. I think that’s all, and all I have said I have said it with the hope we will go back to normality, and will have peace again in this Italy that belongs to us (16-year-old boy).

When a border is crossed, ‘security’, ‘identity’ or access to material resources (like jobs or dwellings) can get lost. In these two extracts, concern for an already critical situation worsened by immigrants’ arrival, for losing ‘peace’ and material resources, is expressed to explain why national borders should be less ‘permeable’.

The oscillation between the desire to be more understanding towards immigrants and the expression of a sense of personal insecurity is evident in these two extracts. Here, different emotions involved in the reading of the contact with others can concomitantly contribute to the construction and deconstruction of ‘national borders’. The attempt to deconstruct borders, to make these less salient to the preservation of identities, can be affected by the reference to personal relationships with some immigrants, or by the imagination of others’ emotions, as demonstrated in the extracts analysed in the previous paragraph. The deconstruction of borders can be followed quickly by their re-constitution, as soon as the internal conflict with more ‘negative’ emotions makes one read the contact with immigrants as harmful (‘when I have seen that the situation got worse and immigrants were endlessly landing, I started changing my mind.’) Other times, the deconstruction
can be affected by youths’ need to adjust their opinions so as to conform to mostly shared beliefs and values (their peers or their families’ opinions), due to lack of self-confidence, indifference or, simply, reasons of social desirability (individuals’ tendency to portray themselves in a generally favourable fashion.)

Symbolic boundaries, if the physical ones were traversed, also needed to be reassured and preserved for some youths. On several occasions during the interview in her classroom, Roberta, a 14-year-old girl, emphasized the importance of preserving every people’s cultural ‘origins and traditions’. She defined herself as a ‘conservative’ and linked the security of the frontiers and the freedom granted to immigrants to the idea of losing one’s own cultural identity:

Immigrants should respect the rules, Italians too, but immigrants break the rules more often because they think they are in a free country, and abuse their freedom. I am very conservative about origins and traditions, and I have to admit that I don’t like a multi-ethnic Italy. I don’t mean that everybody should stay in their country, but I mean that it’s nice to preserve the origins.

The following lines offer a good description of the association of geographical borders with a specific cultural identity and the need to maintain borders and identities simultaneously:

In my opinion every country must exclusively have its own people like Italy has the Italian people, Africans have their own homeland that is called Africa and America has Americans. All the times I hear in the news that illegal immigrants arrive at the Italian coasts I feel disgusted (16-year-old girl).

This girl reproduced a stereotyped idea of the nation, ‘invaded’ by the arrival of outsiders, as having ‘natural’ rights, namely the right to host a specific population. She represented ‘Italians’, ‘Africans’ and ‘Americans’ as fixed cultural and ethnic identities enclosed within geographical borders. By virtue of its birth in a certain territory, every people is the natural owner of its ‘homeland’. The girl explicitly referred to a sense of disgust when hearing about illegal immigrants arriving at the coasts, and, in other lines of her essay, linked this feeling to other emotions (fear, anger). Geographical borders become emotionally salient and are employed here to express a sense of belonging to a group and to mark collective cultural boundaries (Christou and Spyrou 2012). ‘Crossing borders’ and especially ‘letting immigrants cross the border’ become synonymous of blurring boundaries between self and others, and therefore become the occasion for strong emotions to arise, such as fear of losing one’s sense of belonging or fear for one’s own safety (Pagani and Robustelli 2010). Indeed, the research findings in our previous studies demonstrated that fear, in its different forms, is a ‘negative’ emotion that can play a key role in youths’ attitudes towards diversity (Pagani 2014; Pagani and Robustelli 2010). In the remainder of this essay, the girl described a friend who had been harassed by an immigrant. She also expressed her fear of being harassed, persecuted or robbed by immigrants, thereby marking a boundary between a ‘vulnerable self’ and a ‘threatening other’. In the last lines of her essay, she wrote that she would like to change Italy, to ‘solve the issue of clandestines in
time’, and finally to live in peace. ‘Positive’ and ‘negative’ feelings, in this case the hope for future change and the fear and anxiety for the present, mutually reinforce each other. The tension between two opposed emotions, in a similar way to the tension between positive and negative poles of a battery (Jasper 2011), motivates action. Here, this tension made the girl consider the very existence of physical borders important in order to make her country safer so as to maintain distance between her and the ‘perceived threat’.

On the contrary, a 15 year-old girl did not consider the ‘permeability’ of borders as an issue per se. She tried to describe the problem from another angle and to challenge the idea of a strictly pure national identity:

The borders of Italy are open to everybody: our country has opened the doors to millions of immigrants, not only European ... I think that the problem of immigrants is ... that they cannot mix with the rest of the population, they cannot find a job, they collide with racist mentalities that would like to maintain a strictly and purely Italian society, provided that this exists or has ever existed!

An 18-year-old boy interestingly associated geographical borders with other emotions such as a sense of gratitude for being born in ‘a rich country’. In his essay, he described how he had come across the meaning of geographical borders when he was a child, how he reacted, and about the change of his emotions throughout time. The boy explained how he felt differently once he realized that borders were not natural entities, but constructions, subject to the random will of history:

When I was a child and for the first time I saw a geographical map, my mother told me that the interchange of colours was simply the world, our world. Then I asked her why the earth was so coloured and so full of different signs, she said that the earth is made of many different places and that we live in a sort of broken boot that’s called Italy. When I was a child I didn’t like the idea to live in a ‘boot’ but then I realized how lucky I was. Many other kids and myself are lucky, because we were born within those borders that history has made rich. An African boy, badly nourished and badly mannered, cannot certainly say the same; but I could have been at their place, were it not for my mother being Italian! Then why torture them when they come here and visit us? I am one of those guys who accept everybody. I don’t like the word ‘foreigner’, because the real foreigner is who thinks that the earth is his own property. The earth is ours in equal part and if history drew borders then...fuck history!!!

‘Acceptance’ of immigrants coming to ‘visit’ seems to be linked to a sense of impotence, in particular a sense of powerlessness to the will of history, which writes the destiny of people (whether they will be rich or ‘badly nourished’) and then draws borders. These feelings made the boy change his interpretation of ‘borders’, questioning the validity of the physical separation between countries. Immigration can also be seen as an opportunity for personal transformation, for growing up and learning to believe in a world without borders, where boundaries between oneself and others can be blurred:
The presence of immigrants in Italy is useful for us, in order to grow up and foster the firm belief that from a country to another there are no barriers, which would impede the moving from a place to another, and that the world is free, inhabited by people that can freely decide where to live, without being judged by anybody because nobody is the owner of their country (14-year-old girl).

On soft borders
Some of the extracts presented in the previous paragraph indicated a certain attention that these adolescents paid to the management of frontiers, which they often considered to be too permeable. ‘Softness’, ‘generosity’ and ‘openness’ were often evoked to describe the ‘emotional attitudes’ of the nation and in particular an approach towards immigrants that they felt appeared to be too benign. In managing immigration flows, the government was, according to many youngsters, too vulnerable due to its openness and generosity. ‘National borders’ were seen as too ‘soft, weak, porous and easily shaped or even bruised by the proximity of others’ (Ahmed 2004: 2). Roberta, like some of her classroom mates, was very explicit on this point. During the group interview in her classroom, she described Italy as ‘too indulgent, too welcoming’, as a place in which immigrants come and abuse freedom to do everything they want. She made a comparison with the United States where, she explained, immigrants cannot stay without residence permit, and where ‘sending back’ and ‘not letting them return’ represent a desirable attitude of severity towards those who do not play by the rules:

Italy is too indulgent a country, in the sense that it is very free and some immigrants take this as … as an excuse to do whatever they want … for instance it’s true that in America, well, when someone commits a crime they send you back to your country and do not let you return anymore or they don’t let you stay without residence permit. Here instead we are too much … we accept them too much.

Other essays illustrate similar ideas well, through the use of adjectives or phrases like ‘very easy’ and ‘too permissive’, all referring to the management of ‘national borders’:

In the last few years Italy has become a very easy foreign ‘colony’ made of people from all different nations and ethnicities. … It is the Italian state’s fault because it is not hard enough on these immigrants, and lets these bad people arrive by sea (Calabria, Sicily etc.) … I would launch an appeal to the Italian state: ‘be more cruel and hard on these people who make a living illegally. And make very strict laws’ (14-year-old boy).

In the last few years Italy has become ‘the country of everybody … they have invaded Italy in search of a job for a better future but they have also brought criminality … the frontiers have become too permissive, of course we are in Europe but these people cannot enter freely (17-year-old boy).

In other countries they don’t even let you enter, instead in Italy they keep letting them land in Lampedusa which from a very beautiful touristic
spot has become the place with the most African ethnicities in the world (16-year-old boy).

‘Hardness’ and ‘severity’ on immigrants were proposed as a solution by some of these youngsters. They believed that these attitudes make the very existence of physical borders crucial to stop immigrants’ arrival, to protect a collective identity and to maintain security.

In all these extracts, similarly to other extracts examined in the previous paragraphs, references to the state’s generosity and indulgency towards immigrants, and to the resulting insecurity as expressed by these youths, contributed to reinforcing the dichotomy between ‘citizens’ as ‘victims’ on the one hand, and ‘immigrants’ as ‘criminals’ on the other. ‘Negative’ emotions such as fear, hate, resentment, and envy can be basic constituents of these attitudes (Pagani 2014). There was a common association of the idea of immigrants’ arrival and of the uncontrolled frontiers with a sense of personal insecurity. As Michela, a 16-year-old girl, wrote:

I do not have anything against [immigration], but honestly if they come here and do things that they cannot do in their own countries because the state allows them to do so, as it sends them in prison for 48 hours and then it lets them get out. It is my right to feel protected.

The following lines by a 16-year-old boy illustrate the association of immigration and border-crossing with citizens’ security:

Italy is already a country full of shit without them and I don’t see the point to let people of every nationality get into our country … of course I don’t mean that immigrants shouldn’t enter Italy anymore, but that this should be done in a more controlled manner also for the citizens’ security. It is not possible that where I live a girl cannot go out alone in the evening as she is scared of those … going out all drunk … Then there are people who say ‘poor them we should welcome them’ until a tragedy occurs. Why don’t we prevent those bad things from happening?

‘Indulgency’ of those who consider immigrants as ‘poor’ and then willingly accept them was described as one of the causes of these events.

Linked to these constructs, more personal emotions were evoked explicitly and implicitly in a number of other essays. In the following excerpt from an essay written by a boy of 14, anger seems to be the prevalent emotion (capitalization in the original):

I AM IN FAVOR OF IMMIGRATION, I AM PLEASED BY THE FACT THAT MANY PEOPLE WANT TO LIVE IN ITALY, BUT IT MAKES ME ANGRY THE FACT THAT MANY COME HERE TO CREATE TROUBLES … THOSE WHO LAND IN SICILY I WOULD SEND THEM BACK TO THEIR COUNTRIES, HOLY COW! WE ARE THE ONLY COUNTRY THAT ACCEPTS THEM, THAT’S WHY THEY COME HERE, WE SHOULD SEND THEM BACK TO THEIR COUNTRY BY THE SAME BOAT THEY ARRIVED.
This boy demonstrated an oscillation between a sense of power and of impotence. He continued:

**IN THIS SOCIETY I FEEL LIKE AN AMERICAN WHO LIVED DURING THE GREAT MIGRATION, MORE ‘POWERFUL’, BUT I AM AFRAID TO GO TO NEIGHBOURHOODS INHABITED BY OTHER ETHNICITIES, I WOULD FEEL IMPOTENT.**

To have people coming to one's own country, as he wrote in other parts of his essay, can be flattering and a reason to feel 'powerful'. 'Crossing borders' becomes an experience of competition for power and control. The need to cross the borders of another country is regarded as a weakness of those who enter. In contrast, to willingly accept people arriving in one's country can be regarded as a sign of force of the ones who 'host' and have the material resources that make the country attractive. But what happens when this competition is inverted, and those in a weak position wield power and abuse the possibilities offered to them? Borders are personally and emotionally re-designed to delimitate other emotionally-charged places, like those 'neighbourhoods inhabited by other ethnicities,' those places that can make one 'feel impotent' and in which 'threat' seems immediate and close. As in the extracts analysed in the previous paragraphs, here physical borders become a representation of boundaries between an emotional 'vulnerable self' and a 'threatening other', and are therefore salient for the preservation of one's own sense of security. This boy's outlook on life seems to be completely pervaded by the competitive life pattern now prevailing across the world (Pagani and Robustelli 2010; Pagani and Robustelli 2011; Robustelli and Pagani 1996): in most cases he tended to consider 'the other' a rival, a competitor, an enemy, someone to be basically feared and who tries to overpower him and whom, in their turn, he may try to overpower.

A similar approach is also evident in the following excerpt from a 16-year-old boy's essay, in which his aggressive attitude towards immigrants entering the country is made explicit (capitalization in the original):

**WE ARE FUCKING IDIOTS BECAUSE INSTEAD OF WELCOMING THEM, WE SHOULD KICK THEM OUT ... BETTER KILL THEM ALL THEY MUST NOT EVEN DARE TO TOUCH ONE OF OUR COASTS.**

Most immigrants come here by sea I would punch holes in their rubber boats and let them drown ... the police, they act all tough with kids and then, when there are facts referring to these people, they cover them up. I think there is an EXAGGERATED MAFIA (everything is connected), it seems fishy to me that those assholes enter like this!

The boy seemed to channel his personal emotions through fantasies of brutality carried out on the frontiers. Also in this case, however, anger seems to conceal other complex emotions. The boy, while manifesting anger towards immigrants' alleged malevolence and impunity, implicitly expressed a subtler discontent regarding injustices he tried to associate with other public events (the harshness of the police towards kids). The contradiction between the police's 'toughness' on kids and the police's 'soft' approach on immigrants is mentioned to indicate a sense of 'suspicion' of a
purported conspiracy in which the police and politicians participate in favour of immigrants crossing the border. Here, emotions like generalized fear, resentment, but, above all, envy seem to permeate his views on immigration and borders.

On moral borders
In many of the collected essays and interviews, dichotomies such as ‘good/honest’ and ‘bad/dishonest’ immigrants are recurrent. These constructions usually draw upon a variety of social and moral factors (for instance work, family and legality) and are used to mark a boundary between those immigrants who are well accepted and those who are not. On the one hand, positive attitudes oriented towards social and moral values (namely ‘looking for a job’, ‘starting a new family’) make immigrants ‘good’ so as to be allowed to enter a new country. On the other, those immigrants who come to ‘commit crime’ should not be allowed to cross borders. The following excerpts illustrate this demarcation well (capitalization in the original):

It is our fault, we cannot blame them. THE SYSTEM IS WRONG! Those who do not work should go back to their country; those who do not behave well, SHOULD BE EXPELLED! THOSE WHO COME HERE TO WORK, TO START A FAMILY and to live in BETTER ECONOMIC CONDITIONS, ARE WELCOME! (16-year-old girl)

I am an Italian citizen and for the last two years I have seen Italy, our society, degrading since immigrants have started landing on Italian coasts, on the one hand I am sorry but on the other I feel very angry, I am sorry for those immigrants who come here in Italy willing to work and maintain their families, but I feel very angry on account of those bastards who land in Italy and end up doing evil things to other people, killing, stealing et cetera (15-year-old boy).

In these extracts, the ambivalence between different feelings seems evident, in particular between the need to conform to dominant discourses, both of ‘tolerance’ for those immigrants who behave in society, and of severity towards those immigrants who act as ‘criminals’. These youths could simultaneously express different emotions regarding the ‘morality’ of immigrants: they could worry about or blame their own country that lets immigrants enter, feel angry towards some ‘criminal’ immigrants, and in contrast feel sorry for those who behave themselves.

In general, youths seemed to appreciate all those possible aspects of immigration that might have a ‘positive’ impact on their country. These youths demonstrated they had various opinions on when and how immigration could have a ‘positive’ impact on their country. Some youngsters mostly valued the social and economic advantages provided by immigrants. Immigrants, in this case, could enter as long as they ‘keep the economy rolling’ and if they hold a prestigious job (like businessmen or politicians). Other times, the arrival of immigrants was accepted only if they came as tourists or, in any case, stayed for a limited period of time (‘I would allow only a few tourists to enter but then they should go back to where they came from!’).
Conclusion

This article has aimed to examine how ‘national borders’ are represented through the explicit and implicit reference to emotions by youths expressing their opinions about immigrants in Italy. In particular, the definition, construction and de-construction of ‘physical borders’ by these adolescents were informed by complex and at times ambivalent feelings relating to their sense of identity and of belonging, to their more profound emotional states, and to their and others’ experiences. At times, youths drew upon common representations of ‘national borders’ in order to express their emotions about immigration in Italy, and to interpret variation and similarity between themselves and others, between ‘Italians’ and ‘immigrants’, often with competitive nuances. Other times, youths tried to make use of personal and others’ emotions to challenge dominant discourses on borders and immigration (Waldron and Pike 2006), and to personally re-design or blur borders. More specifically, when expressing their emotions, when identifying ‘immigrants’ as the alleged cause of their emotions, and, finally, when reflecting on the way they felt about immigration, youths could constitute the framework in which they tried to evaluate similarity and difference between themselves and immigrants, and could understand ‘national borders’ as one concrete factor through which it was possible to modulate the relationship of distance from, or of proximity to, others. The existence and maintenance of ‘national borders’ became more or less relevant depending on how youths read the contact they had with immigrants through emotions.

We have tried to demonstrate how a focus on emotions is important in order to understand the conceptual relationship between ‘borders’ and ‘boundaries’. More specifically, a focus on how youths refer to personal emotions and to general emotional constructs to describe migration flows and border crossing helps understand this relationship in two important ways. On the one hand, it can help understand how ‘borders’ come to work as symbolic markers of collective identities, in particular how interpretations of ‘borders’ can be informed by dominant and mostly shared understandings of cultural identity and emotional qualities. In this case, as we have shown, many pupils referred to ‘permeability’, ‘softness’ and ‘morality’ as the main attributes of borders that might either threaten or reinforce collective identities. On the other hand, a focus on emotions can shed light on how ‘borders’ become emotionally salient at the individual level, and on how meanings associated with ‘borders’ can be influenced by more personal ideas, feelings and experiences.

A sense of rules prescribing which, as well as when and how, emotions can be expressed in social relations, frequently represented a constraint in the way these youths talked. As discussed previously, for reasons linked to ‘social desirability’, adolescents may sometimes have adjusted their opinions about immigration and made more ‘positive’ comments so as to conform to socially acceptable values or to avoid negative judgments (Pagani and Robustelli 2010). Some youths expressed ambivalent attitudes, which could be influenced by different and contradictory discourses on immigration or by more personal ideas and experiences. They could try to orient themselves between the need to understand diversity, the need to conform to moral rules and shared beliefs of their ‘in-group’, and more...
empathetic attitudes towards ‘immigrants’ (Zembylas 2012). It is clear that there can be variations in the way adolescents use dominant representations referring to immigration, in youths’ attitudes towards, and in their conceptualizations of ‘borders’, as well as in the way they analyse reality in all its forms and complexity. Underlying this variety are many reasons, the most relevant of which are certainly related to youths’ most significant and earliest affective experiences. We know nothing about these pupils’ lives. What we know is based on what they said or wrote within the context of our research study, and we can rely only on these productions. So, when the pupil of 18, whose words we quoted above, writes ‘When I was a child and for the first time I saw a geographical map, my mother told me that the interchange of colours was simply the world, our world,’ we can easily understand that there being a mother in the boy’s life who underlined the idea of a ‘world’ instead of a ‘nation’ and who defined this as ‘our world’, certainly fostered the development on the boy’s part of a more fluid and blurred concept of ‘borders’.

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Notes

1 In her study entitled ‘The Cultural Politics of Emotions’ (2004), Ahmed analyses the role of emotions in public and political debates on international terrorism, asylum and migration (including newspaper articles and websites, governments reports and political speeches) in various countries.


4 http://www.ansa.it/ansamed/en/news/sections/general-news/2013/10/15/Immigration-Italy-launches-Mare-Nostrum-400-saved_9466386.html


7 In quoting from pupils’ essays, we have not eliminated any spelling, grammatical, syntactic, and lexical mistakes in the form and in the content of the texts.

8 All names are pseudonyms.

9 This essay was also analysed from another perspective, in Cangià and Pagani forthcoming.
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