Field Fright: Studying Urban Poverty in Boston

Lessons from an Ethnographic Case Study 1

Nicolas DUVOUX

How do sociologists deal with fear while investigating underprivileged environments? Drawing on his personal experience of field studies in a deprived Boston neighbourhood, Nicolas Duvoux shows that fear, while partially reflecting the social gap between researchers and their investigatees, can also help us understand the latter's practices and representations.[2]

Understanding poverty is particularly difficult because of the fact that the vast majority of the researchers whose job it is to come up with that understanding have no first-hand experience of poverty, however well they may describe its constraints, frustrations, and social distancing. Several works have described this difficult problem, and, with impressive thematic and methodological inventiveness, have tried to bridge the social distance between investigator and investigatees (Laé et Murard, 1985). In this paper, I want to reflect on an emotion – namely, fear – that I felt while doing ethnographic work on the activities of a philanthropic foundation in some very disadvantaged neighbourhoods with high rates of delinquency and crime, in a big city in the northeastern United States.[3] At first glance, fear felt by an investigator in the place being investigated can appear to be an obstacle to penetrating and understanding the social space, whenever that place comes to have an image or a social reality in which the exposure to threats to person and property is higher than the investigator has experienced in other settings. Indeed, fear is a relational emotion in which the investigator, through psychological and somatic reactions, reveals his or her apprehension about the milieu being studied. So experiencing fear in relation to certain environments, whether or not the fear is based on objective threats, can be seen as the expression of social distance from these environments, and as evidence that the investigator has made prejudgments about the thing that is being investigated.

As a Frenchman trying to penetrate a poor minority neighbourhood in Boston, I was – including in physical reactions over which I had very little if any control – no different from the vast majority of white or middle-class black Americans, who rarely if ever go into these neighbourhoods. And when they do, they keep their presence in public places to a minimum, in order to avoid exposure to direct aggression or simply to being somehow contaminated by contact with people who are

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[2] This paper was first published in French as "La peur de l'ethnographe [The Ethnographer's Fear], *Genèses,* 4/ 2014 (n° 97), p. 126-139.
[3] Some previous works have considered the role of fear in investigations, and have done reflexive work on putting oneself into danger; for example, see Nicolski (2011).

segregated and stigmatized. Fear skews the investigation from the outset: its physical symptoms can obstruct or even paralyze reflection and stop you from moving around, even if only subconsciously, by prompting you to alter your intended course, through a series of Leibnizian "little perceptions" that affect your behaviour and inclinations. In the field, fear makes you retreat, so in this way it is different from the fear felt by the neighbourhood residents, who cannot take themselves out of the neighbourhood.

However, this explanation of investigational bias seems inadequate (Lignier, 2013: 2). By means of an exercise in reflexivity applied to an ethnographic investigation, I want to show how fear can help support research and can actually improve the objectivity of an account of the reality that is experienced by a group of people in which the investigator is an outsider.

Although investigators' fear is seldom referred to in ethnographic literature, it is an emotion that I repeatedly felt during my study of a philanthropic foundation in some poor and segregated neighbourhoods in Boston. This fear manifested itself in psychological reactions (doubts about whether the investigation "deserved" to be conducted), physical reactions (abnormal blood pressure, frozen facial expression, various kinds of somatisation), and behavioural adaptations (strategies for avoiding certain places, for controlling physiological reactions, etc.). As a general term, by fear I mean an emotion felt in psychological and physiological manifestations. It is an affective aspect of the categorization of situations, contexts and interactions. Fear was present in a number of different parts of my investigation, in various shapes, and with variable significance and intensity. The semantic field of fear thus appears as a spectrum, running from misgiving to panic, with several intermediate states, such as concern, anxiety, fright, terror and horror. Learning about fear on the job makes apparent the movement through variable states of intensity, from being frightened by external portraits of the neighbourhood to worries related to particular situations in the field – worries that in some cases can verge on panic. All these terms are to be distinguished from obsession, which can develop by – either directly or through media representations – being put into contact with situations that are categorized as threatening.

I felt fear quite strongly while I was doing the investigation, and fear was also present, although in different ways, in the lives of the investigatees and in the discussion groups organized by the foundation that was at the centre of the investigation (see Box 1, below) as well as by other associations. In spite of their differences, these emotional moments brought with them a shared reconsideration of fear, which is generally thought of as a negative experience. Thinking about fear can establish a connection between something felt by the investigator and the reality experienced by the investigatees, even if this connection is in no way systematic or generalisable. This connection itself is something that calls for investigation. That is the path that this paper seeks to follow by exploring this emotion of fear. And even though the social distance between investigator and investigatees is never banished, it can be worked on reflexively.

The fieldwork undertaken [4]

The investigation focused on an independent foundation, to which I have given the (fictitious) name "Foundation for the American Dream" (FAD). This foundation is part of a current trend for "social business", which introduces private-sector management methods into the nonprofit sector. It presents itself as a startup. By acting on part of the fabric of the economy – the educational and associational sector of one of the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods in the city of Boston – it tries to create some leverage on the fate of poor neighbourhoods. To do this, one of FAD's main activities is organizing public meetings. Participation in these meetings by the neighbourhood residents is seen both as a sign of their desire to escape from poverty and as a means of doing so; poverty is seen primarily as a mental state of dependence, passivity and fatalism.

This research is based on participant observation in FAD's activities: participation in preparatory meetings, daily work in the office, and activities involving either the general population or some of the residents on a more individual basis. Similar kinds of observations were also done in local nonprofits, particularly those with a mission to help ex-prisoners with re-entry programs. Finally, to understand the varying manner in which these actions were received by residents, I sought to increase contacts with the ones who got involved with the nonprofits, by observing them in other contexts: informal socializing, political and social gathering places, churches, etc. The fieldwork spanned eight months, and involved several dozen days of observation in these various contexts.

The neighbourhoods in which FAD operates – Roxbury, Dorchester and Mattapan – are densely populated by Boston's African- and Latino-Americans. These three neighbourhoods have all of the disadvantages that are characteristic of American "inner cities" where the most disadvantaged strata of minority populations reside as a result of racial and social segregation. Crime is also densely present: the vast majority of homicides, armed assaults, and violent thefts committed in Boston take place in these three neighbourhoods.

First I shall try to conjure up the fear that I felt first-hand, by re-establishing the impressions that came out in the fieldwork. I shall endeavour to show how working reflexively on this lived experience of the investigator can help tie it into a broader sociological understanding. Then I shall show how putting fear into words is a key component of the interaction order established by the Foundation through its public meetings with neighbourhood residents. Observation of some activities bringing together certain residents with a foundation – and such observation necessarily involves the observer's participation in the interactions as they take place – underlined the fact that, for these actors who were socially very precisely situated, this mechanism for internalizing social norms was very important. Restoring the discourse about fear to the context of the interactions and utterances that produced it brings out the "political dimension of [that] emotional discourse" (Krapanzano, 1994: 6). More broadly, reflecting on fear and on the whole range of emotions that are encountered in field studies makes it clear how emotions contribute to combining and separating individuals and communities (Katz, 1999: 16). In contrast to other ways of understanding these emotions, which emphasize that it is necessary to consider them as falling short of any kind of representation (*ibid.*: 4), emotions are the roots of a social order governed by rules that are as strict as they are implicit. This order will here be reconsidered, starting with its expression and the way in which that expression is

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[4]For a general presentation of the investigation, see Duvoux (2014).

prompted.

An apprenticeship in fear

An ethnographic investigator's fear does not completely match the investigatees' fear; nevertheless, the two are connected. Fear felt by an investigator is characterized not only by her or his irreducible outsider status, but also by its being in part transmitted to the investigator by the investigatees. This transmission brings the two types of fear closer together, and connects the ethnographer with his or her investigatees, partially neutralizing the distance between them. However, it is no less true that for the investigator, fear is temporary and circumscribed, whereas for the investigatees it is omnipresent and generalized, and produces effects in the neighbourhood as a whole, insofar as it organizes as much as it disorganizes that neighbourhood.

Fear is one of an ethnographer's learning experiences. It is not present at the outset. This is one of the benefits of being a foreigner: not knowing *a priori* the characteristics and meanings of the places in which you find yourself, and moving around in these places in a pretty innocent way. That was my situation when I started this fieldwork. In the beginning, far from feeling wary, it simply didn't occur to me to be afraid to move freely about the place. In fact fear came to me from outside the place. The southern neighbourhoods of Boston are reasonably close to the city centre; it takes about 20 minutes to travel from South Station (in the centre) to Dudley Station, one of the nerve centres of those neighbourhoods. Nevertheless, this southern district is considered by residents of the central and more affluent neighbourhoods (whether older ones like Beacon Hill or more recent ones like South End) as a different world. Slight but significant linguistic shifts were the first signs that led me to recognize the importance of the "ghetto neighbourhoods" label that had been attached to this district. Instead of finishing a daily interaction with a ritual "take care" or "have a good one", the parting words of people that I talked with, as soon as I had mentioned my southern trips to them, were "be safe"; this suggested that a more immediate physical threat now hung over me.

So fear now crept in as a vague apprehension about the neighbourhood that my investigation was gradually centring in on. Confronted with this emotion, my first instinct was wariness. Just imagine: here I was, a white sociologist in a neighbourhood in which whites constituted only a tiny minority of the population. I came from a comfortable background. Add to this personal history the fact that my Massachusetts base was in Cambridge. But now I was in a milieu of mass poverty. So it was quite natural that there arose in me some wariness, if only in the form of an unconscious class ethnocentrism connected to an inability to comprehend the meaning of relationships that initially appeared in the guise of violence. (The most astute observers of the troubled suburbs of Paris have noticed how such violence attends the most trivial exchanges there [Lepoutre, 1997].) At the same time, as a sociologist I was expected to resist fear, for the sake of having good relations with my investigatees. This demanded that I keep my distance from what I no doubt naively perceived as the fear that was felt by the staff of the nonprofits with whom I was working: I had been immediately struck by the fact that they invariably left meetings the moment they ended, in cars that they'd parked right in front of the building. Collecting my information directly, being present in the neighbourhood for long periods, staying there as often as I could, and not missing any opportunity to go there, constituted a way of maintaining a stance of proximity, a stance that not only meshed with a personal wish and a professional requirement but also constituted a "rite of passage" that was implicitly or explicitly imposed on me by my investigatees. Coming to see them was often a test of my commitment to understanding the reality of their surroundings and experience. When I went to see them in their homes, where there was always a warm welcome even in difficult situations (for example stressful child care), I was often greeted by exclamations of surprise and delight expressed in such phrases as

"You showed up!"

My fear, a vague apprehension in the beginning, was heightened by that same determined presence by me in the neighbourhood. The diversity of ways of getting there led me to experience situations in which fear manifested itself more directly than in external warnings. This was especially true when I encountered what were for me unexpectedly vacant public spaces at times of the day when other public areas in Boston were quite crowded. This was an indication first of all that the social conditions for the easy use of public space (the street) – were not in place in the neighbourhood. When (rarely) such conditions do exist in the neighbourhood, it is as the result of a conscious decision, and they are put to the test on a daily basis. These large spaces are interspersed with narrow lanes many of which are also empty, or they are simply vacant lots where grass and plants grow alongside parts of abandoned buildings. Repeatedly passing through such settings can make you lose your bearings and experience an anxiety that is difficult to define but no less difficult to shake off.

This apprehension, once it was linked with more detailed knowledge of local social realities, turned into a greater sense of security. To get to that point, I sometimes had to force myself to go down certain roads, to take new routes, and not to forsake certain paths (in the literal sense of material traces). Deliberate curiosity counterbalanced the idea that an unfortunate encounter – or the excessive anticipation of one – was going to deny or limit my access to the area where my investigation was taking place. After a few weeks in the neighbourhood, this willed effort led to my becoming personally acquainted with several investigatees, particularly in the area of a few streets towards which most of these residents gravitated because that was where they lived, or went along to association headquarters, or did their shopping. These relationships and habits managed to give me a sense of security. This area had become for me a tame environment, and though I was not thoroughly familiar with it, it was a place where I could get my bearings, where I knew where to find certain people, where I always greeted the residents that I met, and so on. After a few months of this immersion, the fear that I felt became rarer, but also more intense because it became increasingly possible for me to distinguish the situations in which a potentially undesirable interaction would be manageable from those in which it would not.

In the longer term, this distancing myself from fear could not be my only strategy, simply because if I had gone on disowning the fear, this would have eventually gone against my objective of developing relationships with my investigatees, if only because some of my investigatees living in the neighbourhood were constantly putting me on my guard against the sense of security that I felt in the micro-neighbourhood that I had taken to frequenting. In fact, to do investigations at all, you have to do some things demanded by fear: you adopt coping mechanisms, you select your routes, and in some interactions you use perceived behaviour control. This standardization of approach becomes all the more necessary because, in addition to the fact that a conscious struggle against the perception of danger – even if that perception was involuntary – would doubtless have been impractical over a long period, such a struggle would above all have had the effect of very visibly labelling me as someone different and distant from the investigatees. After all, your becoming, however rudimentarily, "street smart" (that is, becoming familiar with and avoiding the neighbourhood's "hot spots", and learning to get your bearings quickly in order to avoid street corners with frequent brawls and shootings) is essential if in daily interactions your status of being an investigator is to be, however slightly, forgotten. Detailed knowledge of the neighbourhood, including its internal borders, is an essential part of the social world of its residents, and fear gives privileged access to this knowledge. The fear felt by me turned out to be normal and capable of being studied because of the fact that it was shared, and observable in both the words and the actions of the residents. The many journeys that I made accompanied with local residents, whether on foot or by car, bus or bicycle, taught me that they took

certain precise routes, avoiding certain places that were frequented by youths, being careful not to exchange looks with people, and not staying in the street just to chat. Because they face the risk of altercations that can end up involving (widely available) firearms, the neighbourhood's residents contain their reactions in order to avoid provoking conflicts, especially when they interact with youths that they categorize as delinquents.

Fear can be defined as the affective colouration of this linguistic categorization recurrent in daily life, which focuses attention on those that William Julius Wilson, more than twenty-five years ago, referred to as "the truly disadvantaged" (1987): unskilled young black men (and today also Latino-Americans), especially those who adopt the street dress and behaviour code. Once when I was eating in a local fast-food place, three teenagers were imperceptibly edging from playing towards fighting, and their movements were becoming so large and lively that they were bothering the people next to them, who therefore moved their table away. The waitress behind the counter, a Latino-American woman about fifty years old, had to raise her voice to make the teenagers stop. However, she did this with very emphatic respect, so as not to stoke their anger and risk it being diverted in her direction: "Can everyone just calm down, please," she said, stressing and pausing on that last word. Then she added, renewing the politeness which had ended her previous phrase: "Please remember there are other people around you, guys." Only constant awareness by the neighourhood's residents that they live in a threatening environment makes it possible for them to live there on a long-term basis. Relational labour activates the emotions (Theodosius, 2008), among which in these neighbourhoods fear is first and foremost.

Although fear is an emotion that organizes the neighbourhood socially, and (as we saw in the fast-food example) leaves open the possibility of social relations being established with a degree and kind of orderliness, fear also contributes to a general insecurity in the neighbourhood, which tends on the contrary to disorganize and to destabilize it.

Fear and social (dis)organization in the neighbourhood
The fear of a fringe group of the investigatees reveals their entrapment in urban poverty and testifies to the isolation of this stratum of the neighbourhoods under investigation. Being regularly present in the neighbourhood improved my understanding of the nature of its "social disorganization" (Wilson, 1996). First-hand acquaintance confirmed as much as it limited – in other words, it transformed rather than cancelled – the negative and worrisome image transmitted by this neighbourhood, as by other poor neighbourhoods. The literature on contemporary urban poverty, starting out with Wilson's development of the observation of residents' cumulative retreat from public spaces in favour of the fringe group involved in delinquent activities in the 1980s and 1990s, has gradually turned towards portraying the internal diversity of poor neighbourhoods, now often identified as ghettos (Small and Lamont, 2008). This diversity does exist and I shall come back to highlight some issues related to it. It does not apply less in a context in which all of the residents are affected: my investigatees themselves were very cautious. This relates to the fact that the endogenous forms of organization that had developed there were disturbed, and social exchanges were made less controllable, by the volatility of residents' social situations. In fact, in contrast to the period from the end of the First World War to the 1970s when stable endogenous social organization was possible (Drake and Cayton, 1944; Wacquant, 2011), powerful exogenous factors affecting the poorest neighbourhoods radically decreased their residents' sense of security. Deindustrialization fuelled mass unemployment, the development of the informal economy, and high degrees of interpersonal violence. Insecure employment and welfare reforms reduced stable resources. These neighbourhoods' segregation exposed their residents to various forms of discrimination and predation, for example in housing (Massey, Ruth, 2010; Desmond, 2012). Likewise, applying a penal approach to delinquency –

which is massive in the most disadvantaged strata of African- and (to a lesser extent) Latino-Americans (Western, 2007) – had destabilizing effects that extended far beyond convicts' individual situations (Comfort, 2007).

In this setting, fear guides the steps that residents take, on a daily basis, and quite literally. Fear makes it possible for them to survive in this environment, but it also significantly limits their movements and helps reproduce the poverty that created the fear in the first place. Their efforts to adopt strategies for limited and selective movement in the urban space, as well to control their behaviour (especially their gaze), make us appreciate the distance between the world of these impoverished neighbourhoods and the professional world of the middle classes, especially in the service sectors with high intellectual value added, which function largely on the basis of informal transactions and intersubjective confidence. So those efforts also let us see the extent to which the residents of poor neighbourhoods would be obliged to function differently in order to escape being entrapped in their local setting. Indeed, one of the most problematic things about fear is that it acts as a device for entrapment. Being so rooted in daily life, it structures ways of acting, sensing and thinking, including but also penetrating far beyond conscious reasoning and avoidance strategies. We learn from sociological literature that these attitudes, vital to survival by the residents of poor and segregated neighbourhoods, can turn against them the moment that they step out of that environment (Wilson, 1998: 6). Elijah Anderson (1992) has shown how residents of Philadelphia's poor neighbourhoods, when in situations where youths are also present, constantly review their movements and attitudes, and adopt the "street code" of language and dress. Avoiding eye contact is an imperative, and failing to respect the code can very quickly cost you dearly. But of course in job interviews, this behavioural habit can be disastrous, bringing you the disapproval of those expecting you to look them straight in the eye. The behavioural control that investigators must adopt – and being called to order by their allies if they ever stray too far – enables them to gauge the effect of the fear felt by the residents about their chances of participating in society. Fear solidifies the walls of urban poverty.

Therefore it is quite understandable that in the observed foundation's framing of poverty, giving recognition and expression to emotions, even negative ones, is a way of removing their potentially immuring influence. In fact, the foundation is in perfect harmony with the fundamental assertions about poverty that are made in the United States, when it defines poverty less by the absence of material resources than by a mental state consisting of fatalism, defeatism and passivity – a set of subtexts compressed into the term "dependence" (Fraser and Gordon, 1994). This framing obscures the structural factors, at the same time that it justifies programs aimed at changing the way that residents represent themselves and their neighbourhood. Besides putting residents in touch with each other, discussions set up by the foundation are intended to generate speeches that develop a social order related to the will of the assembled residents. However, emotion plays a major role in the attempt to create such a social order – understood in the dual sense of a social differentiation that relies on a "civilizing" of manners (Elias, 1994: 443). It is precisely here that the fear that I felt can be quite revealing. Indeed, talking about fear brought out the fact that some residents were motivated by the desire for the reintroduction of a social distance from their social environment. By making it clear that the neighbourhood being studied is more diverse than it was thought to be before it was penetrated, fear is an indicator of a social distance that the investigator has, but also – and this is the more innovative conclusion – that some of the investigatees have, in relation to their own neighbourhood.

Sharing the fear
Fear was omnipresent in the FAD public meetings that I took part in. Here it seemed to be a massive and overwhelming fact; unlike mine, it never stopped, and for example in sharing it with

others in FAD, the idea was less to see the back of it than to "live with it" as well (or as least badly) as possible. Fear was expressed without letup: mothers' fears for their children, fear for others, fear for oneself, fear of being attacked, fear of having relatives being assaulted or killed, fear of the police [5], and fear of being misunderstood or discriminated against or humiliated. Expressing this fear in public is a way for this particular part of the residents to get together to form a group in order to change the neighbourhood (rather than leaving it).

Fear was the central theme in groups whenever they were stirred to speak up, feeling authorized and protected by the enclosed space of the meeting room and by the beneficent philanthropists encouraging the poor to find solutions to their problems. The tangled web of images, words and emotions was often confused and sometimes apparently incoherent. Seemingly contradictory statements followed upon each other in the discourse activated by the device of the public meeting. For example, in a roundtable on security, the claim expressed in the shape of a critique of the lack of police presence ("The police are not sufficiently present, and we are afraid.") was followed by expressions (by a black woman around fifty years old) of fear of police interventions and brutality. This abundant discussion appeared to me to be confused, but it was nevertheless part of a carefully organized event.

As I have already mentioned, giving recognition and expression to emotions, even negative ones, was seen as a way of removing their immuring influence. In this idea of putting things into words in order to (re-)create an emotional order, silence was transgressive. Failures of interaction (Lichterman, 2005: 275) are instructive. For example: one time, when during a roundtable session there were present – altogether quite unusually – two young men dressed according to the street code (dark bandana, chains, and jeans worn low), and puckering their lips to indicate perhaps hostility, perhaps resignation (it was difficult to say), the moderator of a discussion about fear uncovered a deep misunderstanding. While each of the other participants talked about their fear and their incomprehension, these two refused to say anything. During the several minutes that going around the table had taken, expectations turned more and more insistently in their direction, and they were given suggestions to speak up and express themselves: "And you, don't you fear that something might happen to you?" "Do you know that your mothers feel afraid for you?" Their refusal to drop the "role" that they had adopted was punished by mild signs of reprobation by the moderator and some other participants. Not acknowledging one's fear, not talking about it, puts the individual into a situation of "emotional deviance" (Thoits, 1985). Here we can see the extent to which the function of emotion is to reintegrate the individual into the community (Katz, 1999). Only at the very end of the meeting, when one of the foundation staff announced a gift, did asking for this emotional investment become explicit. At that point, a street-based youth worker asked it of the two youths, by hurling at them: "Hey, how about a smile, then?" Which they shyly gave. The mere sight of their teeth, hitherto invisible in their tightly closed mouths, triggered loud applause – louder than had greeted the gift announcement.

The point I am trying to make here is not that all the residents, including those who inspire fear, are subject to it. No doubt, in the inspirers, fear is balanced out or counteracted by other emotions, such as the thrill associated with transgression (Katz, 1988), or by the dynamics of emulation that is found in both informal and more structured groups. The important point is that for FAD, whose work is

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[5]This is a particular kind of threat because, in contrast to interpersonal violence, it relates to an institution and a danger that are *directly* understood as political or connected to institutional and social organization, i.e. to a form of collective oppression. Understanding all of the implications of this would require supplementing the work that is developed here on the subject of fear, by studying other emotions, such as anger and indignation. As a working hypothesis, these probably differ from fear by their having the effect of putting into the same symbolic set all of the different strata of African-American people within (and beyond) disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

carried forward by one pretty well-defined part of the residents, to talk about your fear is to demonstrate your belonging to the community. For them it is a way of grouping. The statements about fear are seen to have a performative aspect: they place those who have acknowledged fear alongside those who can and should strive to reverse the conditions that are creating it, the first among them being poverty and the fatalism that leads to it.

This management and articulation of fear are essential to understanding the various ways in which the residents of these neighbourhoods are actively engaged. The encouragement by foundation staff of reflecting and working on emotions (including fear) is an essential aspect of spreading psychological mass culture into the working classes (Schwartz, 2011). It is a tool used by the foundation in its efforts to affect the residents' cognitive and behavioural structures. Like regulatory devices with a much broader influence, it makes this reflexivity a crucial factor in dampening down the effects of social insecurity (Silva, 2013). The residents who participate in FAD's activities do not reject this as a way of making them feel responsible, or – which amounts to the same thing – as a way of concealing the economic and institutional reasons for their poverty; on the contrary, they see in it some things that help sustain an identity that is weakened by their proximity to, and ensuing risk of contamination by, the most disadvantaged segments in their neighbourhood. Those residents who participate in FAD's activities as volunteers are some of the *least* disadvantaged; they have enough resources to try to get organized to better their lot, but not enough to leave the neighbourhood. So they are part of the strata who are likely to adopt a discourse of responsibility that distinguishes them from the more disadvantaged strata.[6] They are subjected to racial, geographical and social segregation from the middle-class white majority in a very polarized city, but they also have daily threats coming from their own immediate environment. They are in a double bind, and in this situation, paying attention to their own emotions seems to be a way of containing their fear, of not being stigmatized on its account, and even of providing a cure for it. This group of people share many moral characteristics with the black bourgeoisie (Patillo, 2007), and in the absence of any clear social boundaries with their immediate environment, they draw symbolic boundaries with it (Lamont and Molnar, 2002) in order to assert their identity. By putting their fear into words, they assimilate their own perceptual categories to those held by the residents of other neighbourhoods, and distance themselves from the residents of their immediate environment. In this way this stratum of the residents establishes a difference between those who feel an emotion that can be felt by all human beings in a context of violence, and those who do not feel it (that is to say, in the actual context of observed interactions, those who do not express it).

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[6]There is undeniably some similarity between the emotional order favoured by FAD and the one that characterizes African-American churches (Nelson, 1996), particularly in the emphasis on positive emotions such as joy and hope (in contrast to the role of fear that is examined in this article). However, the religious influence here has to be seen as indirect, as kind of reactivation that works through calls for self-help, and is part of a more general "psychological mass culture" of conduct which is shaped by religion (Gamoussi, 2013) but which is for the most part emptied of its religious content. In fact, in spite of the presence of several churches in the neighbourhoods in question, the influence of the churches as institutions of social regulation has declined. The social strata involved with FAD activity live in the neighbourhood, so even though their level of resources differentiates them from other residents (by formal qualifications, relative socio-economic stability, etc.), they cannot see "the street" and its threats simply as an externality, either hopelessly evil or at best as a situation to be reformed, which is how these things are seen in the religious discourse in the neighbourhood's African-American churches. In fact, these churches have only a tenuous connection with the neighbourhoods in which they are located. Their congregations pray and erect themselves as a group opposed to the world of "the street" that prevails in the neighbourhoods in which they meet, but in which they do not often reside – an essential difference between them and the residents associated with FAD (McRoberts, 2003).

Observation: Save Ourselves, Bill's discussion group, 7 August 2013

Save Ourselves is a very small outfit sponsored by the Foundation for the American Dream. It almost equates to its founder, Bill. He is a community leader who is well-entrenched in the district. His boastful demeanour, his habit of literally carrying me on his shoulders (made easier by the difference between his stature and mine), and his highly practiced manner of speaking, make him something of an enigma to me, and an American curiosity: a businessman with neoliberal attitudes, he is also a preacher of a vague religion of personal development and a "therapy" enthusiast in the African-American community. The energy that he devotes to the nonprofit sector (and to providing me with useful openings into the neighbourhood) is apparently inexhaustible. His energy is tied up with the fact that he finds in this activity a positive identity and a place in his community that otherwise he would not have. Bill is a go-between, connecting the local nonprofit associations with actors coming from the city centre. That's why he's invited me, to create or to maintain this connection. To be more accessible to the residents, the meeting takes place around a midday meal in a plain room in a small, four-storey redbrick apartment house in the centre of Dorchester.

Provisions for the meeting are basically (1) the food that Bill brings in two large aluminium crates, and (2) the stories to be shared that are brought by each of the participants. The participants have been recruited through informal networks or on the contrary sent by institutions in charge of programs for the re-entry of ex-prisoners. There are six people in a circle around Bill: three young men, one older one, and two women: one a young woman who helps Bill organize meetings, the other an educational councillor, the only white person at the table (apart from the sociologist). Bill starts the meeting by recalling his experience of incarceration; he has experienced what people have to suffer through in the community today. After this preamble, the older black man speaks. His face is haggard, his articulation slow, his voice low and hoarse, and his dry lips struggle to part. Speaking is obviously painful for him. He talks about his drug addiction, about how drugs had enslaved him and made him do stupid things, and about his hellish time in prison. I realize that his age, which he did not want to give, was perhaps not as advanced in comparison to the others as I had imagined. I was imagining he was in his fifties, but the experience that he describes and the number of years of imprisonment (for armed robbery in connection with his drug addiction) beginning in late adolescence placed him rather in his thirties. He concludes by saying he has changed and is now working for the community. He talks a lot about the HIV around him, and tries to warn the youths against certain kinds of behaviour. He says he is overwhelmed by what is happening around him: the murder, the violence. Eventually he falls silent.
(…)
People around the table take turns speaking, and now it is the turn of a young man with a long Rasta hairdo, who expresses himself slowly. He says he has been traumatized by the death of a friend killed at a street corner a few weeks ago. Everyone at the table knows the exact place and the circumstances. Bill, treating this like a clinical case, says the young man "has to be supported during this rough time, otherwise he will internalize the trauma". The young man says that just talking already does him good because in general people don't talk, because they think not talking is being strong. One of the women supportively declares that it is good for her to understand youths' experience from the inside, by participating in a group discussion like this one.
(…)
Going around the table has ended. Bill starts talking again and goes over what's been said. He connects the difficulty that blacks have in speaking up with their internalization of racism. He recalls that blacks were the first victims of white racism, and that although there are clearly external origins of the evils afflicting blacks both as individuals and as groups, these evils have been internalized in the family and in the adoption of a feeling of impotence, despair, doubt, isolation and fear. With a well-tried way of

talking, he recalls that the symptoms that people had mentioned were those of an internalized oppression that prevents you from dealing with emotions and separates you from others, from your children, from your neighbours, from the community, and even from yourself. For all of that, he says, talking is a remedy. He reiterates the importance for everyone to control their emotions. He again turns to the young men present and says "we" – we black men – "have been conditioned to pull everything in and we all have to process feelings". He reminds them that their decisions are important and can be life-changing, and he emphasizes that they can call him if they ever feel things are getting out of hand. "If something happens, take a deep breath and call me ASAP," he tells them. Finally, he tells them that he loves them and that they can call him anytime, night or day. Then he sits back in his chair, smiles, looks around, checks that the youths have the right mobile phone number for him, and adjourns the meeting.

Everyone stretches and slowly makes their way to the exit. The August afternoon sunshine hits you as you leave the little redbrick building.

The very bareness of Bill's group (Box 2) brings out several characteristics of the techniques for managing fear, techniques that spread outwards from actors like FAD as if by capillary action. First, articulating the individual terror that is felt when you are aggressed collectivizes it. The man who recounts the death of his friend is giving an account of an intense and chilling fright, mingled with horror. He is stunned. His narrative invites the other people attending the meeting, all of whom know about the event, to share their fear. Articulating his feelings brings out the concealed panic about a particularly shocking homicide, so that, through conscious effort, the exacerbation of that panic can be averted. That articulation especially aims to prevent the panic from degenerating into a phobia that ultimately is seen as having the capacity totally to inhibit individuals who are exposed to it. For a chorus of fright (often expressed in the most intense terms such as "terror", "shock", or the often heard phrase "scared to death", implying that a direct threat to physical integrity is felt) can give rise to the development of an obsession that can itself be transformed into irrational and permanent fear. As shown in the Observation (Box 2), understanding discourse about emotions sets up a relationship in which that understanding is the basis of an internal hierarchy. Reactions to fear are no more homogeneous than the neighbourhood population is. Bill's reflexivity and distance as a professional mediator is propelled by mediations that are symbolic (his reading) and relational (his training, and his exchanges with other professionals), in which an openness to other milieux assists his control over his own environment. Thus what is being sought – through the effort of articulating the emotions, and first of all those such as fear that are likely to enclose an individual – is to acquire some control over the neighbourhood environment, which is perceived (from outside but also by mobilized residents) in a completely negative way – all "doom and gloom", in the expression Bill uses to reject what he sees as this too negative view of the neighbourhood.

The psychological concept of "technologies of the self" (Foucault, 1982) is thus taken up and adapted by various interconnected actors to achieve a reform that is understood as inextricably both individual *and* collective. In fact, the differentiation carried out by those of the residents who are active in FAD does not constitute a rejection of their neighbourhood identity. Au contraire, that differentiation is the prelude to – and the basis for – reforming that identity, with no separation between the moral and the social. The stratum of residents who are activated by FAD can in this way act for its "community" without questioning the fundamental social rules in the United States: the spirit of enterprise, belief in the American Dream, the importance of social networks, and so on. This is why the way in which these residents define themselves can converge with the kinds of categorization and action that hold sway in

a philanthropic association whose resources, like those of many contemporary foundations, come from a prior accumulation of wealth in the financial sector (Guilhot, 2004). This correspondence makes more comprehensible why the privatized, inegalitarian and punitive governance of the American welfare state in the neoliberal era is received and at least to some extent taken up by one part of those who most endure the effects of that governance.

Conclusion

This paper shows how in various ways, in part from a reflexivity with regard to psychic and physiological reactions experienced in carrying out an investigation, and in part from observations in the field, fear and a reflexive review of that fear provide the ethnographer with some increments of knowledge. At first, fear forms part of the segregating mechanisms endured by neighbourhoods where the poorest parts of racial minorities are concentrated. When an investigator feels fear, that leads her or him towards discovering the effects of being exposed to forms of social and institutional insecurity that are endured on a daily basis by people living in these neighbourhoods. Fear is intimately linked to the experience of the social strata who take part in the activities of a philanthropic foundation whose goal is to redefine their neighbourhood. Collectively expressing fear helps the group to manage that feeling, and at the same time this sharing of emotion helps forge an identity differentiating them from other strata. Participating in discussion groups in which people express their fear takes the ethnographer back to his or her own experience, and can create a mutuality that of course does not amount to integration of the ethnographer into the group, but at the very least lets her or him recapture a continuity of experiences and understand the preconditions for shaping a discourse about the others and therefore about the group of activated residents itself. Feeling and accepting fear makes it possible to grasp the meaning that investigatees give to the social world that they live in. In fact fear leads the way to the internalization of social norms, and this internalization demonstrates to the investigatees, better than any declaration could, that the investigator has some experience with their environment, which leads them gradually to integrate the investigator, though this integration can only be partial. Re-establishing felt and observed fear means that we can add it to the set of previously-identified mechanisms that reproduce urban poverty, and also that we can understand the emotional dimension of the interaction order established by a foundation that is seeking to influence these neighbourhoods. This interaction order involves the articulation and the collective management of emotions. In this interaction, there is clearly a political order seeking to set itself up in order to make up for the disorganization of the neighbourhood. This political order is developed outside the neighbourhood, even though it considers itself as arising from the spontaneous initiative of the residents. It is a political order in which these residents are invited to take the place that has been allocated to them.

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