

Generating an understanding of police brutality in the small island state of Trinidad and Tobago

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Abstract: Trinidad and Tobago (TT), like some other island states, experiences frequent incidents of police use of excessive force and police brutality which often involve individuals from low-income communities. The concepts of police use of excessive force and police brutality are often used synonymously. However, they can be distinguished by examining police brutality through an island studies lens. Hence this study aims to improve how police brutality can be understood and distinguished from police use of excessive force by applying an island studies theoretical framework. Additionally, because there is a dearth of academic literature on how colonialism has influenced police brutality in contemporary TT, and because little is known about how victims experience police brutality, the study also addresses those gaps. The current study bridges these gaps by conducting a phenomenological study to generate an understanding of the lived experiences of victims of police use of excessive force in low-income communities in Trinidad. Based on the analysis of the data collected from in-depth interviews with 18 research participants, six themes emerged. The findings were then analyzed through the lens of island studies and the implications of those findings were discussed. The study ends by making several recommendations.

Keywords: colonialism, islands, phenomenology, police use of excessive force, Small Island Developing States (SIDS), Trinidad and Tobago Police Service

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Introduction

This study aims to explore the meaning of police brutality, on the basis of lived experience, through the lens of island studies. There is a dearth of literature on police brutality in

Trinidad and Tobago even though police brutality is widespread in the country. Island studies has the potential to add clarity to the concept of police brutality. An island studies perspective recognizes that focusing social inquiry on islands has the potential to contribute “towards a better understanding of the world and the furtherance of knowledge” (Baldacchino 2006, p. 6). According to Baldacchino (2006), the core of island studies is the construction of ‘islandness’ and its influence and impact on aspects of life including human behavior. That is to say, what does it mean to be an island and what does it mean to be an islander and how are these distinct from the mainland or a ‘mainlander’? While there has been much discussion in island studies on the construction of ‘islandness’ using spatial features (Baldacchino, 2018; Royle & Brinklow, 2018; Telesford, 2021), the current researcher is of the view that a critical feature of ‘islandness’ is the idea of inferiority, which is distinct from ‘mainlandness’ or the idea of superiority. More plainly, islanders and islands are perceived as inferior to the mainland and mainlanders.

This superiority/inferiority framework motivates islanders to struggle for validation from mainlanders, by mimicking their behaviors, ideas, and culture. This study traces the superiority/inferiority framework as an idea introduced during colonization and argues that the idea remains current in contemporary island states in the Caribbean. This framework is then used to provide an understanding of police brutality in the Small Island Developing State (SIDS) of Trinidad and Tobago. This study is important because although there is broad literature on police brutality, there has been no prior attempt to analyze police brutality through the lens of island studies. Analyzing police brutality through the lens of island studies has the potential to provide a fresh perspective on how police brutality can be understood. Also, the current study is important because there is a dearth of literature on police brutality in Trinidad and Tobago.

Police brutality can be defined as the use of excessive force by police officers to accomplish a lawful police purpose (Barkan & Bryjak, 2011; Grant & Terry, 2008). Force can include verbal or physical force (Grant & Terry, 2008) and may be defined as the amount of effort required by the police to compel compliance from an unwilling subject (IACP, 2001). To say that force is excessive implies that there is a reasonable threshold of force that persuades an unwilling subject to comply with the directions or instructions of a police officer. Thus any amount of force beyond that threshold is considered to be excessive force or police brutality. Hence in the literature on police brutality, excessive use of force and police brutality are often used interchangeably, although the terms can be distinguished based on whether the force was being used to achieve a lawful police purpose or not (Grant & Terry, 2008).

Grant and Terry (2008) preferred to use the term police brutality in cases where police officers use force for another reason than to achieve a lawful police purpose. Therefore, Grant and Terry (2008) argued that police brutality is a form of police corruption that is characterized by the officer’s intent to cause harm to an individual

beyond what is necessary to accomplish a legitimate law enforcement objective. Consequently, while police use of excessive force can be understood as accidentally crossing a threshold while pursuing a lawful police purpose in often tense and dangerous situations, police brutality can be understood as being motivated solely by the intent to cause harm. From this perspective, police brutality may be viewed as a form of police corruption (Grant & Terry, 2008) and cannot be explained using factors purported by the excessive force literature such as the level of violence encountered (Terrill, Leinfelt, & Kwak, 2007), the amount of violence officers expect to encounter (Kania & Mackey, 1977; Jacobs & O'Brien, 1998), level of disrespect towards the officer (Alpert & Smith, 1994; Cooper, Moore, Gruskin, & Krieger, 2004), or personal characteristics of the officer such as age, gender, and stress level (Brandl, Stroshine, & Frank, 2001; Lee & Brotheridge, 2006; Neely & Cleveland, 2012).

However, there is a strand in the excessive force literature that has identified that the socioeconomic status of the suspect is an important predictor of police use of force (Terrill & Mastrofski, 2002; Alpert, Dunham, & MacDonald, 2004). Terrill and Mastrofski (2002) found that male, non-white, and poor suspects were all treated more forcefully, regardless of their behavior toward the police. Alpert et al. (2004), using a different methodology than Terrill and Mastrofski (2002), also found that excessive force (which they referred to as dominant force) was more likely to be used by police officers when interacting with a suspect who was of a lower social status than the officer. The current researcher argues that it is this issue of social status that plays an important role in how police brutality should be understood. An island studies approach fits the concept of social status within the constructs of inferiority and superiority which were forged during colonialism.

Background

Policing during colonialism

The Trinidad and Tobago Police Service (TTPS) was established in 1592 (Ottley, 1972) in St Joseph. According to Ottley (1972), the entire police force consisted of only six officers who were required to watch over the capital. Between 1592 and 1792, the police force never exceeded that number. After slavery was abolished in 1838, the size of the police force rapidly increased. In 1850, the size was increased to 113 men (De Verteuil, 1984). By around 1862, this number had more than tripled to 435 officers. Here we see that in as many as 200 years (1592-1792), the size of the police force did not change. However, only 24 years after slavery was abolished (1838-1862), the police force was increased from six officers to 435 officers. This expansion likely occurred because 'law enforcement' responsibilities were shifted from planters to the state.

During colonization and in the post-emancipation period, the police force was

engaged in quelling labor conflicts. Some examples of riots include the Hosay riot (1884), the Arouca riot (1891), the Water riot (1903), and the 'Butler' riot (1937). When the police were called in to quell such conflicts, they would focus on suppressing the rioters. On arrival, the police would ask the rioters to disperse. Where the rioters failed to disperse, the Riot Act would be read, and deadly force would subsequently be used by the police officers. Furthermore, according to the Riot Act of 1842, officers killing or injuring anyone during a riot were not held culpable for such death or injury. This can be seen in Section 12 of the Riot Act, Chapter 11:05 as amended. As a result, officers were able to use excessive force and even deadly force in these situations with impunity. As Brereton (2010, p. 8) notes:

Official violence was a reality in colonial Trinidad. Policemen and at times troops were ordered to fire on protestors and demonstrators and deaths and injuries resulted; subsequent inquiries rarely apportioned blame to the men who did the shooting or gave the orders. In 1884, at least 16 Indians were killed, and over 100 injured, in the Hosay massacre outside San Fernando. In 1903, 16 men and women were killed and 43 injured in the Water Riots in Port of Spain, when the police fired on, and in some cases bayoneted, rioters in the area of the Red House. These victims were urban blacks. And in 1937, during the island-wide strikes and riots associated with Butler, 12 civilians were killed and 50 injured (African and Indian) by police action.

Not only did police officers use excessive force in riotous situations, but they also used excessive force during the normal execution of their duties. According to Brereton (2010), the largely 'alien' Trinidad and Tobago Police Force, had already developed a reputation for beating people by the end of the nineteenth century and was hated by the working classes.

Trinidad and Tobago became independent from the United Kingdom on 1 August 1962 and was therefore no longer under colonial rule. The first independent government of the nation brought with it many promises to break the various forms of oppression and injustice that occurred under colonial rule and citizens had a legitimate expectation that there would be a noticeable reduction in the use of excessive force by the police. However, the use of excessive force by the Trinidad and Tobago Police Force (as it was then known) continued, seemingly unabated. For example, during the Black Power Uprising of 1970, there were several reports of police use of excessive force even though much of the movement involved peaceful protest actions. The decades that followed were no different. Consequently, police use of excessive force and police brutality in Trinidad and Tobago must be understood, in part, from the perspective of colonialism and neo-colonialism (Pino & Johnson, 2011).

Police use of excessive force and police brutality in Trinidad and Tobago receive much media attention (Watson, 2016). For example, on 27 June 2020, police allegedly shot and killed three young men in Second Caledonia, Morvant while they were seated in their vehicle. Initial reports in the *Trinidad and Tobago Guardian* newspaper on Sunday, 28 June 2020 indicated that the police recounted the men in the car were armed and fired shots at the police when they were approaching the vehicle occupied by the deceased (Dowlat-Rostant, 2020). The newspaper article also stated that police had received information about men in a brown car in the area. On seeing the vehicle, officers maneuvered their vehicle to stop the brown car. Next, the police alighted from their vehicle and were approaching the brown car when the back seat passenger got out of the car with his hands raised in the air and swiftly returned to a sitting position (Liburd, 2020). Then, an officer saw a firearm and heard shots fired. Officers returned fire hitting the young men about the body, subsequently killing them.

The vehicle driven by the deceased was a golden Tiida. The back seat passenger was not 'known to police'. Video footage showed the back seat passenger exiting and entering the golden car; however, one was unable to see a gun or observe whether shots were fired at police. The video did however show that shots were fired by the police at the golden vehicle. This incident resulted in wide-scale protests in the area, spilling into nearby communities. At these protests, residents shouted their rage at police officers stating they were fed up with the way police treated them and that officers got away with murder in their communities. During these protests, officers unfortunately killed a pregnant protester who was defiantly advancing toward police officers on duty.

Another incident that caught the attention of the entire population was the death of two of the alleged suspects in the kidnapping and homicide of Andrea Bharatt, a court clerk of the Arima Magistrates Court. Preliminary investigations completed by the Police Complaints Authority (PCA), an oversight body for police misconduct, revealed that the suspects detained by police were subjected to torture (Hamilton, 2021). An article in *Trinidad and Tobago Newsday* months after the death of the suspects stated, "The evidence gathered by the PCA revealed that all of the suspects detained were the subject of torture and two suspects were subjects to acts of violence which culminated in their deaths" (Hamilton, 2021). The police reported that one of the deceased suspects, Andrew Morris, was acting violently when he was arrested at his home and had to be subdued (Loop News, 2021). Upon receiving medical treatment after his arrest, Morris allegedly fell off a chair and subsequently died. The Commissioner of Police at the time, Gary Griffith Jr, told the population via a Facebook post which was subsequently removed that Morris died as a result of falling off a chair. Two autopsies revealed that Andrew Morris sustained the following injuries while in police custody resulting in his death: skull fractures, several broken ribs, internal bleeding, burn marks to his back (possibly from a taser), contusion to the right eye, bleeding to the brain, damage to his shoulders and legs (Trinidad and

Tobago Guardian, 2021). The second suspect, Joel Balcon, was in a coma for eight days after he was detained by police (Trinidad and Tobago Guardian, 2021). He subsequently died from the injuries sustained while allegedly in police custody, namely severe brain damage and paralysis (Bruzual, 2021). According to a *Trinidad and Tobago Guardian* newspaper article, Joel Balcon died due to multiple trauma to the body. The pathologist surmised that the injuries could be due to the beating he allegedly sustained while trying to escape police custody (Trinidad and Tobago Guardian, 2021, 21 February).

Not all police encounters where police are accused of the use of excessive force or brutality end in death. The next newspaper account revealed that a man claimed to be at the receiving end of police brutality in September 2021. While spending the night at a friend's house in Cocorite, the Sangre Grande resident claims that he heard a pounding on the front door of his friend's elderly mother's house. When the persons dressed in police uniform entered, he and other residents of the home received slaps, cuffs, and kicks from those whom he perceived to be in authority (Bonn, 2021). The claimant indicated that when he was unable to provide the police with the information they were looking for because he was not a resident of the home, he was beaten with a Lasko fan, kicked in the face, hit with the butt of the gun in his head and finally had the gun shoved into his mouth (Bonn, 2021). At that time, he alleges that the officer was asking him for information about drugs or guns on the premises or he would be killed (Bonn, 2021). The claimant did not however indicate if the police made any discoveries that night. He was calling on the PCA and the Acting Commissioner of Police, McDonald Jacob to investigate this unfortunate occurrence. At the end of the ordeal, he was taken via ambulance to the hospital for treatment.

The above newspaper reports show the use of excessive force by some police officers. In their quest to obtain information, some police officers may become overly zealous and pervert the course of justice (Smith, 1998; Worden, 2015). Police brutality is reminiscent of the brutality the slaves endured (Brand, 2020). One can therefore surmise that the police brutality present in Small Island Developing States is also reminiscent of the brutality African slaves endured by their white masters who over-policed them during colonization (Brand, 2020).

There is a large literature that attempts to explain why police officers engage in excessive use of force and police brutality (Alpert et al., 2004; Brandl, et al., 2001; Jacobs & O'Brien, 1998; Kania & Mackey, 1977; Lee & Brotheridge, 2006; Neely & Cleveland, 2012; Terrill et al., 2007; Terrill & Mastrofski, 2002). This literature has influenced police reform in Trinidad and Tobago. For example, females were believed to be less aggressive than males and their employment in police organizations would result in an overall reduction in police use of excessive force and police brutality (Adams, 1999; Alpert & Dunham, 1999; Brandl et al., 2001; Worden, 2015). This was one of the reasons why women were recruited into the police force for the first time in 1955 under Ordinance No. 6 of 195.

Also, there was a change in the name from the Trinidad and Tobago Police Force to the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service in 1970 (Pino, 2009) to shift the ideological focus from 'force' to service provision. Additionally, in 2011 the TTPS produced its first use of force policy via Departmental Order No 92. The policy recognizes the legal and constitutional right of police officers to use force in the execution of their duty, but notes that the use of such force should be reasonable and necessary. According to the policy, the test of whether force is necessary depends on (1) the need to protect the officer or any other person from unlawful force, (2) the need to overcome any resistance directed at the police officer or another person, (3) to execute a lawful objective such as to make an arrest, or (4) to protect property. The test of reasonableness is guided by a use of force framework which grades the level of force on a continuum from lowest (physical presence of the officer) to highest (deadly force). The policy notes that reasonable force is the minimum amount of force necessary to achieve a lawful police objective. It is often stated in the policy that both the test of necessity and reasonableness are left up to the police officer in the specific context. Therefore, the policy is not intended to usurp the discretion of the police officer but to serve as a guide.

Another reform effort in the TTPS which was guided by the use of excessive force literature was the addition of a Behavioral Science program to the police recruit training program. The Behavioral Science program included courses in customer service, ethics and integrity, communication skills, anger management, and emotional intelligence. These courses were intended to improve some of the situational and personal police characteristics which have been associated with the use of excessive force and brutality as pointed out by the literature (Alpert & Smith, 1994; Cooper et al., 2004; Jacobs & O'Brien, 1998; Neely & Cleveland, 2012; Terrill et al., 2007). Furthermore, between 2013 and 2015, more than 5000 members of the police service were trained in customer service. While these efforts led to noticeable changes in police use of force (Police Complaints Authority 6th Annual Police Report, 2016), those changes were minuscule. Hence the incidents of police brutality continue, which indicates that the problem of police brutality is not fully understood or has not been effectively addressed.

Theoretical framework

The inferiority/superiority complex

Ideation diffusion is a concept used to identify the spreading of ideas, philosophies, practices, policies, or programs from a common point of origin to a recipient (Lenz, 2013; Phillip-Durham, 2020; Stone, 2012). Ideation diffusion occurred throughout the colonization of the small islands in the Caribbean, as ideas, philosophies, practices, and policies from the colonizers (e.g., United Kingdom, France, Netherlands, Spain) were spread to the subjects in the colonies (Girvan, 2015; Phillip-Durham, 2020). Initially, these

subjects were white planters and white overseers from imperial territories, and West Africans who were trafficked to the islands into chattel slavery. By the 1800s, subjects also included a small number of Chinese, Lebanese, and Syrians, and a relatively larger number of Indians who were brought to some islands as indentured laborers.

One of the most powerful ideas of the colonial period was that some human beings are superior, and others are inferior in terms of their humanity. The concept of humanity carried a sense of spirituality, morality, intelligence, dignity, and the right to be treated with human dignity. Hence, individuals who were perceived as inferior human beings were seen as lacking in these virtues or incapable of acquiring these traits and therefore undeserving of the right to be treated as human beings. During colonization and slavery in the Caribbean, Africans, who were distinguished by physical features, especially their dark skin, were deemed inferior to their white counterparts. In the eyes of the colonizers, black skin was a mark of inferiority, an indication that such individuals were less than human and therefore could be treated like an animal. This idea of inferiority would later extend to all non-whites in the Caribbean, in a social hierarchy based on skin color with white skin at the top and black skin at the bottom.

The idea of inferiority is not only based on skin color but has been based on wealth, gender, sexuality, religion, ethnic origin, and geography. Islands and islanders by their very conception are seen by the metropole as backward, underdeveloped, poor, intellectually inferior (Stratford, 2003), and therefore incapable of internal self-governance. To mainlanders, islands are seen as places where one goes to have fun and relax; or perhaps to retire but not as a serious or real space but a mythical destination (Baldacchino, 2006; Nimführ & Meloni, 2021). As a result, islanders feel inferior simply because they are islanders. This inferiority complex intensifies if the islander is black or non-white, poor, and lacks connections to the mainland and its culture.

One way that islanders can move up the social ladder for a chance to be recognized as a human is to create and maintain connections with the mainland in any way possible. This can include migrating to the metropole, even temporarily, for work, education, or business. At the very least, such recognition can come through following the cultural dictates of the mainland as represented through media, and policies developed on the mainland. Islanders tend to believe that the more they mimic the cultural behaviors and ideas of the mainland, the more likely they are to be recognized as human and as equal. This is a powerful motivation for the behavior of islanders.

As noted above, inferiority is understood as being less than human; as being sub-human. Colonization promoted the harsh, inhumane treatment of black slaves including harsh forms of punishment (even for the slightest infractions), little or no forms of redress, no autonomy, and having to submit totally to the will of the slave master. In contemporary societies in the Caribbean, the ideas of inferiority and the right to exact harsh punishment on those who are inferior have remained. These ideas are enduring today for several

reasons. First, successive generations are socialized into these ideas and experience them in every aspect of social, economic, and political life. Second, islands due to their small size and minuscule global influence, lack the ability and the potential to make changes that are not aligned with the ideas of the mainland. Since the idea of inferiority has been promoted and maintained by the mainland, it should be no surprise that this idea is also widely accepted in the islands in the Caribbean.

Human rights

Another very powerful colonial idea is universal human rights which posits that all human beings have equal human dignity and therefore must be treated equally. This idea was popularized in different international conventions, including the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (1948), and the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (1966). This idea is in direct conflict with the earlier colonial idea of inferiority/superiority and therefore promotes an identity crisis amongst islanders. They are left to wonder whether they are equal, or inferior, and as one can imagine, “islandness” involves fluctuating between these identities.

Methodology

The current study uses a qualitative, phenomenological approach. The phenomenological method captures both textural and structural descriptions of the phenomenon—from persons who have experienced it—which provides rich, in-depth answers to the research question. Thus, the lived experiences of participants are of utmost significance to the phenomenological method of research. That is, it describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). Since this study attempts to give a description and understanding of what victims of police use of excessive force experience and how they experience it, the phenomenological approach was thought to be best suited.

There are two types of phenomenology: hermeneutic (van Manen, 1990) and empirical (Moustakas, 1994). Creswell (2007) notes that the former focuses on information gathered from texts, while the latter tends to focus on the participant's experiences with the phenomenon. The empirical approach was best suited for this study because the researcher was interested in the participants' lived experiences and not information gathered from texts. This method obtained the participants' lived experiences through in-depth interviews. The information gathered from the interviews allowed the researcher to ascertain themes established from significant statements made by participants. The themes gathered from the significant statements aided in the description and understanding of the phenomenon under study.

Sampling

In the current study, a convenience sampling strategy coupled with purposive sampling was utilized. Participants were selected if they had experienced police brutality. The researcher went into two public areas in Trinidad to select participants. These areas were the Brian Lara Promenade in Port of Spain and the St. Augustine Campus of the University of the West Indies. Data was collected for six days over the course of two weeks. This approach resulted in a group of participants being drawn from several communities instead of just one community. While the study cannot be generalized, having participants from several lower-income communities as opposed to one marginalized community has immense benefits. It adds to the richness of the study and the information regarding this shared phenomenon.

The research sample consisted of 18 participants. The inclusion criteria for the participants were (1) they must be a resident of a low-income community in Trinidad and Tobago, (2) they must have direct experience of police brutality in Trinidad and Tobago, and (3) they had to be over 18 years old. As such, the 18 participants came from four different communities in Trinidad which are considered primarily to be low-income communities. These communities are Beetham Gardens (Port of Spain), Laventille, Maloney, and Caroni. Ten of the participants identified as African, seven identified as Indian, and one identified as Dougla (a mix of African and Indian descent). The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 55 years, and there were 15 men and three women. All 18 participants identified as being of low socio-economic status, two identified as retirees, one as a restaurant worker, five as university students, three as unemployed, three as day laborers, and four as entry-level public servants. Finally, all 18 participants reported that they had direct experience with police brutality in Trinidad and Tobago.

Procedure

Each interview began with a casual conversation aimed at developing rapport between the interviewer and interviewee. All participants were asked to give their consent, which they did. Additionally, participants were asked general demographic questions. Each participant was subsequently asked to describe their experience with police use of excessive force. Following this, they were asked to recall their feelings and emotions associated with the phenomenon. During each interview, other questions arose as it was necessary to probe some participants for clarification of the information revealed. Interviews ranged from 25 to 40 minutes.

Analysis of data

In keeping with the phenomenological method, all data obtained from the interviews were reduced to text. Eighty significant statements were then identified. Of the eighty significant statements, five themes emerged. The process to obtain those themes was a

tedious one. First, each interview was read several times. This was done to ensure the researcher got a general understanding of what participants were saying. Second, significant statements were identified such as those listed above. Finally, the significant statements were grouped and reduced to headings/issues/themes. The statements that seemed to be overlapping were placed into clusters and these clusters were given a name that reflected what the statements were echoing. The second followed the same process. The six themes were then used to produce a single paragraph that captures the essence of the experience of being a victim of police use of excessive force.

Findings

Six main themes emerged from the data collected from the 18 participants. These themes are physical abuse, verbal abuse, psychological abuse, distrust, intense feelings of retaliation, and feelings of helplessness. These themes are discussed below, and in each case, at least one quote is given as an example of participants' experiences of police brutality that reflect the identified theme.

Theme 1: Physical abuse

The first theme was physical abuse. Many participants experienced physical abuse at the hands of police officers. This experience was direct (that is, the participant was the object of the abuse) or indirect (that is, the participant witnessed the abuse of another individual). This theme attempts to capture those experiences. The following examples provide a good illustration of how the participants expressed their experiences with physical police abuse.

I was sitting home in my gallery and the police and the soldiers just come just so asking me "whey de man gone? Yuh see him?" So I say "what man allyuh talking bout. I ent see no man!" So they gone by my neighbor and I don't know what happen but they start to beat him. And I hear him bawling. Then he start to say "oh God, somebody help meh nah. They go kill me!". So I shout out "allyuh go kill the man!" Who tell me say that? They leave him and come by me and say "well take some for him. Take for he too". My wife real bawl and they hit she some slaps for bawling. I get licks from the police in front of my wife and children, that really hurt meh and ah couldn't do anything. They hit me nine times with a cable across meh back! (Participant #3, Indian male, 48 years, Laventille).

I have plenty experiences with police brutality. Police beat me already, ah see police beat people so this is a real, real thing. I see police kick people, slap people, cuff them, hit them with gun butt and all kind ah thing. I see too much unjust

brutality by police. There are times when police officers have to use some force, nobody ent saying no to that. But too much ah dem abusing that right to use force. (Participant #2, African male, 50 years, Laventille)

Theme 2: Verbal abuse

The second theme was verbal abuse. In addition to physical abuse, participants experienced verbal abuse at the hands of police officers. As with the case of physical abuse, verbal abuse was also experienced directly or indirectly. The theme 'verbal abuse' attempts to capture those experiences. The following example provides a good illustration of how the participants expressed their experience with verbal police abuse.

Late an evening I was driving down the road in the area where I live. I did not have on my headlights. I wanted to bling so I had the headlights off and I had on red fog lights instead and ah had ah pair of red small lights on the hood too. While I was driving, I see a police officer standing in the road next to a police vehicle. He was in police uniform. Then he just looked at me as I approached him and say "put on yuh fucking headlights!" so I say to him, "you don't have to talk to me so" and he turn and say "you is ah fucking whore, all allyuh girls is whores!" (Participant #1, African female, 28 years, Maloney)

Theme 3: Psychological abuse

The third theme was psychological abuse. According to Section 3 of the Domestic Violence Act of Trinidad and Tobago, psychological abuse (also called emotional abuse) is "a pattern of behavior of any kind, the purpose of which is to undermine the emotional or mental well-being of a person" and includes depriving a person of the use of his property, and interfering with or damaging property belonging to a person. This definition is applied to the theme of 'psychological abuse'. In the current study, there were many cases where participants recounted situations where the police deprived them of the use of their property or damaged their property. Such deprivation or destruction of property was perceived as 'uncalled for' or 'unnecessary'. These behaviors seem to be practiced to undermine the emotional or mental well-being of the victims. Unlike the cases with physical or verbal abuse, these behaviors which were practiced by police officers were directed to objects, usually owned by or in the possession of the victim, and included behaviors such as throwing, smashing, ransacking, or toppling over objects. According to participants, this type of behavior was common in situations where police officers were conducting searches of private property such as houses or cars. Note the following examples:

Oh gosh! The wuss ting that could happen to you is for police to come and search yuh house! Doh prey for that to happen to you at all. Police came by me to search

for some stolen items. They say it was a 40" TV and computer parts that they say was stolen from a store. The officers show me a warrant so I tell them well come in and search because is me, my husband, and my two daughters living there and we don't tief and we don't have any tief ting here. Well boy, the police ransack my entire house! If you see my house when they done with it. Clothes all over the place! They pull out all the drawers with we clothes and throw it all over the ground. They turn over all meh furniture and leave it just so plus they break up a set ah meh wares. When they done they leave it just so and go. My place look like if is Hurricane Katrina pass through! (Participant #6, African female, age 42, Pleasantville)

They search me and my friends right, but they didn't find anything. Then they search the entire car but they didn't find anything illegal neither because we did not have anything illegal, right. But while they searching the car now, they found a pack of cigarettes and they throw it in the drain. They found ah box ah matches and ah lighter too and they just pelt it in the drain too. So I thought to myself, why you doing that? That uncalled-for, cigarettes not illegal! They just took our cigarettes and throw it away. (Participant #5, Indian Male, age 21, Caroni)

Theme 4: Distrust

The fourth theme is feelings of distrust. This theme captures the view expressed by participants that they experienced feelings of distrust towards police officers after being exposed to police use of excessive force. Participants did not trust police officers and preferred to avoid any interaction with them. They expressed the view that police officers are "always up to something" and most of what police officers say should not be believed. Additionally, they felt that police officers seldom acted in the interest of citizens. One participant noted that:

Police is three-quarter part of the crime problem that going on in the country. (Participant #3, Indian male, 48 years, Laventille)

People in my community hate police and they don't trust police at all. (Participant #4, African male, 25 years, Beetham Gardens)

The feeling of distrust also led participants to come up with their explanations of why police officers sometimes fail to respond to calls for help. A couple of comments are recorded below.

Sometimes yuh make ah phone call to them and dey not answering. They never have vehicles because they going for lunch for the Sergeant and Inspector and ting.

The vehicles is for when the Inspector want ah lunch or when the Inspector want ah pizza (Participant #3, Indian male, 48 years, Laventille)

They doesn't respond because they want yuh to lose yuh cool. And when you lose yuh cool, now they will come and lock you up and you go pick up ah case and they would get their promotion. So you report ah man harassing yuh, dey not coming; yuh report dat ah man tiefing yuh fruits, dey not coming. But when you drop some licks on the man or something so, den dey coming to lock you up and get dey promotion! (Participant #2, African male, 50 years, Laventille)

Theme 5: Intense feelings of retaliation

The fifth theme is 'intense feelings of retaliation'. Victims of police brutality expressed an intense desire to retaliate against police use of excessive force. They felt that the frustration of everyday life coupled with police abuse was too much to bear. This intense desire to retaliate was sometimes expressed by verbal and physical aggression toward police officers. This theme also captures the anger and rage expressed by participants because of their exposure to police brutality. The following examples capture this theme.

The younger fellars not taking that (police brutality) from them police and soldiers. They doh want to take shit! Ah police hit yuh, and them want to hit back the police! I see some of them young fellars want to fight with police officers. They don't care. (Participant #3, Indian male, 48 years, Laventille)

They still advantaging people and that does just make me angry. I does be real mad out here. So I does do all kinda wicked things too. I does give people real trouble! I does just have so much frustration because yuh done have to real fight out here to make ah lil dollar to eat. And then on top of that is licks and abuse and harassment from the police. And yuh can't really do them nothing because them is the police. Them big and bad. So right now, I don't care bout nobody. If anybody come around me [if anybody offends me], I not taking it. I dealing with yuh case real dred, is real war. Ah not saying is the police alone causing this yuh know but it contributing in a big way. They have to learn to treat the youths better, like if they is real people. But once you come from a community like Beetham or Laventille the police does treat yuh like if yuh is nothing. Is real licks and advantage for you! (Participant #4-African male, 25 years, Beetham Gardens)

Theme 6: Feelings of helplessness

The sixth theme is 'feelings of helplessness'. This theme captures the view that nothing can be done to stop police use of excessive force. For the participants, going to the police

or to the Police Complaints Authority (PCA) was a waste of time because they believed that when police officers investigated other police officers, they would 'cover up' any breaches or wrongdoing. They argued that whether the report was made at a police station or the PCA, the investigation was always carried out by police officers. Furthermore, they felt that even in the rare case where a proper investigation was conducted, justice was unlikely because the facts, as presented by the police, are more likely to be accepted by a magistrate or judge than the view presented by the victim. As a result, they felt that police officers who were in the habit of using excessive force are virtually untouchable. Note the following examples:

I live Laventille for 20 years and Picton for 9 years and ah see it. They use their authority to advantage people and it doh have nobody to stop them. Nobody not locking them up because police not locking up police. So what you have to do is when you see the police walking there, you walk on the next side because who you going to complain to? (Participant #3, Indian male, 48 years, Laventille)

Yuh can't get no justice. Even if yuh go to the Police Complaints Authority, yuh don't get no justice. It is a waste of time!... But these days ah see like they trying to take it ah little serious. Ah see they charge some police for advantaging people and doing certain wrong tings. (Participant #4, African male, 25 years, Beetham Gardens)

Complaining not making any sense...If you go complaints authority...well I wouldn't even go there because you have to go quite up in Port of Spain. They don't even have one in south. And ah hear they don't really investigate nothing, they does pass it to dem police in the complaints division to investigate...So why waste yuh time? (Participant #6, African female, age 42, Pleasantville)

Discussion

The findings of the study fit within the conceptualization of police brutality as posited by Grant and Terry (2008). The cases described by the participants illustrate that the police used force without any clear demonstration of the need to achieve a lawful objective. In such cases, the question of threshold does not arise. Instead, the cases described in the study illustrate police brutality, a form of police corruption (Grant & Terry, 2008) where police officers set out to cause harm to individuals for some other reason than achieving a lawful objective. In this way, police use of excessive force is distinguished from police brutality.

Victims of police brutality experienced physical and verbal abuse. Physical abuse included kicking and cuffing but was most commonly defined as 'beating'. On the other

hand, verbal abuse was most commonly defined as the use of obscene language by police officers while interacting with members of the public. For example, “put on yuh fucking headlights” (Participant #4, African male, 25 years, Beetham Gardens) and “then they start to curse and say what de fuck allyuh doing here and they real cuss we up and get on and ting” (Participant #15, African male, 32 years, Maloney).

It was also found that victims of police brutality experience psychological abuse. The intent here is to cause some kind of psychological discomfort to victims by engaging in activity that does not amount to physical or verbal abuse. As stated in a previous section, psychological abuse most often occurred in the context of searches where police officers were reported throwing, smashing, ransacking, or toppling over objects.

What is very telling about these experiences is that the physical, verbal, and psychological abuse does not have any lawful objective. For example, in the cases mentioned above, police officers who used obscene language whilst interacting with members of the public were not trying to achieve a lawful objective. Additionally, the use of obscene language in a public space in TT is a criminal offense under the Summary Offenses Act, Chapter 11:02. Therefore, when police officers use obscene language in public spaces while interacting with members of the public, they commit a criminal offense. Further ‘throwing, smashing and ransacking’ during searches and the act of ‘throwing away’ the cigarettes and matches of one of the research participants demonstrate the lack of a lawful purpose or necessity. Again, this lack of a lawful purpose or necessity is reflected in the account of Participant #3 (Indian male, 48 years, from Laventille) who was beaten because he called out to the police to stop beating a man who they had beaten badly. In this case, the participant reported that for this act of apparent insolence, the police entered his house unlawfully, and beat him in the presence of his wife and children. When his wife reacted with horror, she too was beaten by the police.

From an ‘islandness’ perspective, the intervention of Participant #3 was likely to be seen by the police as him stepping out of line. Within an inferiority/superiority social framework, inferiors must ‘know their place’ and must take care to avoid stepping out of it. This is one of the legacies of slavery and colonialism which continues even today due to ideation diffusion (Girvan, 2015; Lenz, 2013; Phillip-Durham, 2020; Stone, 2012).

An alternative explanation for the acts of police brutality identified in this study is based on the perception of police officers as punishers. While it is likely that many police officers are well aware that legally, they are not ‘judge, jury, and executioners’, frustration with the slow pace of criminal justice in TT might motivate some officers to see themselves as ‘judge, jury, and executioner’. Since the police are authorized to use force, since they may be frustrated by the slow operation of the courts, and since the media, researchers, and politicians have identified lower-income males in hotspot communities as the crime problem, then police officers may be engaging in police brutality as a way to punish offenders swiftly and severely to achieve a deterrent effect. After all, it can be

argued that society places tremendous pressure on police officers to bring the crime situation under control and often ignores the role that other institutions must play in the crime control effort. Thus, police officers may engage in police brutality as means of punishment and may therefore see it as a justified means to an end. From this perspective, police brutality may be seen as a form of noble cause corruption. However, this explanation is not sufficiently robust to address cases where no apparent offense is taking place. The accounts of Participants 3, 5, and 6 outlined above provide good examples.

The study also found that feelings of distrust towards police officers, an intense feeling of retaliation/aggression towards police officers, and a feeling of helplessness or vulnerability were part of the experience of being a victim of police brutality, which are in line with the literature on victimology (Lebowitz & Newman, 1996; Lebowitz & Wigren, 2005; Kauzlarich, Matthews, & Miller, 2001). The participants reported that the feelings they experienced resulted from their perception that justice was not available to them. Further, the perception that justice was not available to them led participants to form the opinion that police brutality in TT was executed with a very high level of impunity. This perceived impunity reinforced the sense of helplessness reported by participants.

As argued earlier, islanders and islands are perceived as inferior to the mainland and 'mainlanders' (Stratford, 2003). Ideation diffusion (Lenz, 2013; Phillip-Durham, 2020; Stone, 2012) occurred throughout the colonization of the small islands in the Caribbean, and the ideas, philosophies, practices, and policies of the colonizers (including inferiority/superiority) were spread to the subjects in the colonies (Girvan, 2015; Phillip-Durham, 2020). This superiority/inferiority framework motivates islanders to struggle for validation from mainlanders, by mimicking their behaviors, ideas, and culture.

In the current study, police brutality is explained as the mimicking of the behaviors, ideas, and culture of the colonial period where islanders especially those who were slaves, poor, of non-European descent, and women, were viewed as being inferior and therefore not worthy of being treated with human dignity. These behaviors, ideas, and culture were brought into the post-colonial period, and police brutality is one area of post-colonial life where these ideas are expressed. Every time a police officer engages in police brutality, therefore, he is simultaneously attempting (consciously or subconsciously) to reinforce the idea that the person on the receiving end is inferior and therefore deserving of that treatment and that he, the police officer, is in a superior role. This idea of superiority makes the officer feel more connected to the mainland the more he assimilates into the perceived culture of the mainlanders. This serves to further reinforce his feeling of superiority because, as argued earlier, islanders tend to feel more superior when their behaviors, ideas, and culture are aligned with the behaviors, ideas, and culture of mainlanders. The behaviors, ideas, and culture of mainlanders concerning policing include images of the ideal police officer as someone who is hyper-masculine, aggressive, fearless, and someone who treats very harshly with criminals, especially if those criminals

are poor and non-white (Terrill & Mastrofski, 2002; Alpert et al., 2004). It is not surprising therefore that in TT, the images of the ideal police officer are the same, and if a police officer does not display these characteristics he is seen as soft, cowardly, and as not being a 'real' police officer.

The island studies' theoretical framework shares some similarities with the Marxist conception of society. According to Marx, society is made up of different groups of people that are distinct from each other in terms of their ownership of the means of production and their influence on social institutions (Haralambos & Heald, 2008). These social groups form a hierarchy and therefore contain superior groups (for example, the bourgeoisie) and inferior groups (for example, the proletariat). For the Marxist, the police is a social institution that is controlled by the state and is given the authority to use force within its borders. Thus, the authority to use force as a means of controlling behavior is a defining characteristic of the police (Lyman, 2010). According to a Marxist view, the target of control is often the individuals who occupy a lower status in society. However, while Marxism does identify that social groups are marked by inequality, it does not have a strong focus on inferiority and superiority as captured by the island studies framework.

To conclude this section, it must be restated that police brutality is sometimes conceptualized as being synonymous with police use of excessive force and is therefore understood as a threshold of force that is accidentally crossed when police officers find themselves in tense and dangerous situations. Hence it is often believed that if police officers receive sufficient training, education, and experience, they would be less likely to engage in police brutality. However, the results from the current study demonstrate that police brutality as conceived through the eyes of island studies is not an accidental crossing of a threshold of minimum force required in a particular context. Nor is it marked by tense or dangerous situations since the participants described cases that did not pose any danger to police officers. Instead, police brutality, when seen through the eyes of island studies, is an expression of an old colonial idea of inferiority and superiority and is a demonstration of how inferior people ought to be treated. From this perspective, inferior humans are to be treated as less than human, as not having rights or having a lower measure of humanness. They are to be brutalized for the smallest infractions or sometimes for no infraction at all; simply for being inferior. As in colonial times, the idea of inferiority in many small islands includes the status of being an islander, especially if one is black or non-white, poor, and lacks a relatively high level of formal education. The implications of these findings will be discussed below.

Implications

There are several implications for policing practice as a result of the findings that emanated from this study. First, police brutality must be distinguished from police use of

excessive force. In the case of the latter, it is often the accidental crossing of a specified threshold of minimum force required, due to the inexperience, age, and gender of the police officer, and the intensity of the situation (Alpert & Smith, 1994; Cooper et al., 2004; Jacobs & O'Brien 1998; Neely & Cleveland, 2012; Terrill et al., 2007). Excessive force, therefore, reflects the difficulty and complexity of policing. However, police brutality is a different phenomenon. It is illegal, and malicious and should be seen as a form of police corruption as argued by Grant and Terry (2008).

Second, police brutality can be seen as a problem that is linked to the ideas of inferiority and superiority as espoused in the colonial and post-colonial periods. It is subsumed in the view that humans that are deemed inferior can be, and perhaps, must be, treated as though they are not entitled to basic human rights and human dignity. In this vein, police brutality is a continuation of the degradation of human dignity that occurred during colonization; a degradation that leaves individuals feeling distrustful and hopeless, and resentful of those in authority. As a consequence, police brutality serves to drive a wedge between the police and communities, and by extension, between the communities and the state.

Third, police brutality is a human rights issue since, as demonstrated in the current study, police brutality has the sole intent to rob victims of their dignity and basic human rights. As such, the harm intended by police brutality is the destruction of human dignity, including the psychological and emotional injury that accompanies such destruction. Interestingly, the idea of human rights was popularized during colonialism by different international conventions including the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (1948), and the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (1966). This idea of human rights is in direct conflict with the colonial idea of inferiority/superiority and therefore promotes an identity crisis amongst islanders. They are left to wonder whether they are equal or inferior. In the current study, the participants described situations where their human rights were not respected, and generally, there was no recourse available.

Fourth, the current police reform efforts such as the use of force policy from 2011 and the addition of a Behavioural Science Program, which targets police use of excessive force, will be of limited use in countering the phenomenon of police brutality. This is so because police use of excessive force can be attributed to situational and personal characteristics (Alpert et al., 2004; Brandl et al., 2001; Jacobs & O'Brien, 1998; Kania & Mackey, 1977; Lee & Brotheridge, 2006; Neely & Cleveland, 2012; Terrill et al., 2007; Terrill & Mastrofski, 2002), but police brutality, as argued by the current study, is based on ideas of inferiority and superiority. Hence, addressing the problem of police brutality requires a different approach.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and their implications, the current research proposes five recommendations. First, the executive of the TTPS should embark on a more focused drive to curb the occurrences of police brutality. This recommendation is necessary to improve police/community relations, which is imperative if the TTPS is to enjoy a higher solve rate. The TTPS relies heavily on the assistance of citizens to solve crime hence poor police/community relations weaken crime-solving capabilities. If police/community relations continue to break down, it is likely that crime, especially murders, will continue to spiral out of control.

Second, since many research participants were of the view that police brutality often went unpunished, empirical research should be conducted to ascertain the accuracy of this perception. If the perception is found to be accurate then steps should be taken to investigate the causes of such impunity, with the view of finding solutions.

Third, police brutality should be seen by police practitioners and academics as distinct from police use of excessive force. While most agencies have systems in place to address police use of excessive force, they may not have any systems to treat police brutality because they perceive that the concepts are synonymous. Hence, more research needs to identify the current mechanisms which are in place in the TTPS to deter police brutality as distinct from mechanisms to address police use of excessive force and to examine the extent to which those mechanisms are adequate.

Fourth, quantitative studies should be conducted to explore the extent to which officers in the TTPS engage in police brutality. Fifth, the concept of 'islandness' as operationalized in the current study should be used to explore other aspects of social life in Small Island Developing States.

Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the meaning of police brutality through the lens of island studies since islands have the potential to contribute "towards a better understanding of the world and the furtherance of knowledge" (Baldacchino 2006, p. 6). 'Islandness', a core concept of island studies (Baldacchino, 2006), was operationalized as the idea of inferiority and superiority where islands and islanders are viewed as inherently inferior, and the mainland and mainlanders are viewed as inherently superior (Stratford, 2003). It was argued that this superiority/inferiority framework motivates islanders to struggle for validation from mainlanders, by mimicking their behaviors, ideas, and culture. This study traced the superiority/inferiority framework as an idea introduced during colonization and it was shown that policing in the colonial period in TT was marked by violence and a high level of brutality (Brereton, 2010). Additionally, it was argued that the

idea of superiority/inferiority remains current in contemporary island states in the Caribbean due to ideation diffusion (Girvan, 2015; Lenz, 2013; Phillip-Durham, 2020; Stone, 2012). This theoretical framework was then used to provide an understanding of police brutality in the Small Island Developing State (SIDS) of Trinidad and Tobago.

The study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach as espoused by Moustakas (1994). Eighteen research participants were selected using a convenience sampling strategy coupled with purposive sampling. Data was collected using in-depth interviews which ranged in length from 25-40 minutes. The data was analyzed using thematic analysis. The thematic analysis produced six themes (physical abuse, verbal abuse, psychological abuse, intense feeling of retaliation, and feelings of helplessness) which captured what it means to experience police brutality in TT. For each theme presented, the research provided at least one example of the comments of participants which reflected the specific theme being discussed. These six themes were then discussed in terms of the selected literature and interpreted through the lens of the concept of 'islandness' (operationalized as the ideas of inferiority/superiority). Further, the implications of the study were discussed followed by five recommendations.

Overall, the study used the concept of 'islandness' to distinguish police use of excessive force from police brutality and to explain the phenomenon of police brutality in Trinidad and Tobago, a small island developing state. The study also adds to the literature on police brutality in Trinidad and Tobago.

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