# DRAGGING CHAINS

An anthropological study on Grenadian jab jab and collective identity formation in the post-colonial context.

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# Abstract

This master's thesis, together with the film that accompanies it, is based on four months of fieldwork done in Grenada from April to August 2023. The aim of this project is to explore the devil-masquerade jab jab, one of several traditional carnival masquerades played in Grenada, as a catalyst for the emergence of a Grenadian national identity. The participants that have taken part in the creation of the project are primarily jab jab practitioners and musicians, as well as organizational and academic actors engaged with carnival. The fieldwork was conducted using a number of methods with a primary focus on the camera as a tool for exploring meaning and symbolism in both the aesthetic, musical, and theatrical aspects of jab jab as it is currently practiced.

I argue that jab jab as it is practiced today is a product of creolization, shaped by influences and circumstances that are specific to Grenada. This is to say that jab jab is in fact, despite its superficial similarity to other devil-masquerades, uniquely Grenadian. Some overt components of the national pride found in jab jab and carnival include flagging and the insistence on Grenadian jab jab music, but these are only surface-level aspects. By exploring the masquerade through the lens of storytelling as a form of negotiation, I argue that jab jab makes visible dynamic processes of national identity formation. Storytelling, in this context, is understood quite broadly, meaning that it includes both literal storytelling, but also different forms of expression found in jab jab such as music, theater, and symbolic aesthetics. This is an approach that has allowed me to make sense of what may initially seem grotesque, but it has also revealed to me the contestation that jab jab gives rise to amongst both practitioners and Grenadians in general. Contestation in jab jab is primarily connected to contemporary interpretation, as different practitioners will emphasize different stories, and will be more or less extreme in their portrayals of said stories. However, despite differences in content the stories mostly concern similar themes, namely themes of resistance and protest, as well as distancing oneself from colonialism, slavery, and the values that allowed for a brutal oppression of the Grenadian ancestor. Ultimately, the space that is created through jab jab is characterized by pride, egalitarianism, and national unity. Storytelling in jab jab thus plays out as a form of negotiation in which practitioners get to authorize notions of who they are as a Grenadian collective.

# Introduction

My personal interest in jab jab was sparked a few years ago when a good friend of mine introduced me to the ravey musical genre of the same name. While I was not necessarily overly fond of the music from the get-go, the striking aesthetic of the masquerade that it accompanied kept me interested. With time I learned to appreciate the sound, but I also began to realize that jab jab meant so much more. As I dug deeper, the ravey sounds gave way for more profound themes of resilience, slavery, and colonialism, and the potential for an anthropological project became obvious. My fieldwork took place in Grenada from the end of April to the end of August 2023, and included sites spread throughout the island (including a short stint on the sister-island of Carriacou), as well as talks with people from all walks of life. The fieldwork has led to a paper and a film that together will pertain to a number of theoretical discussions including creolization, storytelling, and collective identity.
For the theoretical approach, it is important for me to acknowledge that the question of collective identity in Grenada (and the Caribbean in general) is a highly convoluted one. In her article *Popular Culture, National Identity, and Race in the Caribbean*, Helen I. Safa even points towards influential models that seem to contest the very idea of a collective consciousness among Caribbean peoples altogether (Safa 1987, 116). However, I tend to agree with Safa in her favoring of anthropologist Lee Drummonds suggestion in which Caribbean cultures, like their languages, are creole. Rather than regarding the Caribbean as a sort of incoherent patchwork of discrete cultural systems, it is argued that a long history of diverse influences has led to a blurring of such boundaries (ibid., 118). The concept of creolization within the social sciences is summarized quite well by sociologist Robin Cohen in his article *Creolization and Cultural Globalization: The Soft Sounds of Fugitive Power*. Cohen explains that the idea of the creole has had its principal usage within linguistics, where it is used to describe a blend of languages, usually European and local, that results in a new language often incomprehensible to anyone but the speakers of that specific creole themselves (Cohen, 2007, 372). While the linguists use of the term is not necessarily applicable in a one-to-one manner when dealing with cultures, Cohen defines creolization in a somewhat similar fashion within the broader social sciences:

"[…] *it describes a position interposed between two or more cultures, selectively appropriating some elements, rejecting others, and creating new possibilities that transgress*

*and supersede parent cultures*" (ibid., 381).

In the specific case of this paper, one would then have to conclude that Grenadian culture is neither British, French, or West-African. Nor is it a simple mix of the three. Rather, I want to argue that while specific elements of cultural practice in Grenada may be attributed to one or more of the parent cultures, the associated meaning is often highly localized making for a unique cultural space. I also want to argue that the creation of local meaning through creolization is a highly dynamic process, and for this reason, the main aim will not be to bring forth a concrete definition of a collective Grenadian identity. Instead, I will explore the masquerade of jab jab as one of several creative processes that lets people in Grenada position themselves as a national collective in a convoluted space. The main research question I want to answer may thus be phrased in the following way:

How does the carnival tradition of jab jab promote the emergence of a Grenadian national identity?

To answer the above question it is important to understand a bit of the context of Grenada both in terms of the colonial history and the carnival itself.

# Context

My arguments will be based on my own fieldwork which was conducted over the course of four months in Grenada, culminating with the local carnival celebrations at "SpiceMas 2023". Grenada is an island located in the southern part of the Lesser Antilles, north of Trinidad and Tobago. It is a relatively small country with an area of approximately 350 km$^2$, yet the mountainous landscape makes it dramatic and grand in appearance. The main Island, Grenada, is by far the largest and most populous of the islands that make up the country, with Carriacou and Petit Martinique lying north of Grenada at a respective second and third. The island is known as the "Spice Isle" due to its production of nutmeg, a production that is also proudly represented on the Grenadian flag. The population of Grenada is roughly 125,000 people, the vast majority of whom are of African descent. A large majority of the population today adhere to different branches of Christianity, with smaller groups of people adhering to Hinduism and Rastafarianism.

My specific interest was of course jab jab, one of several so-called traditional masquerades played in Grenada's carnival, which is closely associated with J'ouvert, the opening event of Carnival held in the early morning hours. The aesthetic is striking. Traditional jab jab-bands will cover their near naked bodies in a glistening black substance, usually old engine oil, as they drag broken chains along the street with horned helmets on their heads. Usually performed in groups, they will chant to the sound of drums and conch shells as they parade through their neighborhoods in an attempt to instill fear among their onlookers.

A lot of the conversations I had with my participants were based on the origin of jab jab. And while this wasn't necessarily what I had envisioned, it turned out to be a great topic of discussion for understanding the ideas behind the masquerade as it is practiced today. Before continuing, I want to briefly address the historical context of Grenada and jab jab itself. While historical sources dealing with jab jab are scarce, I think it is valuable to familiarize oneself with the little that is known. As anthropologist Günther Schlee puts it

"*Without a skeleton of facts, one would not be able to state what rival interpretations refer to or describe in which direction a given view of history diverges from the facts and for which reasons*" (Schlee 2010, 226).

As for Grenada and the slave-trade, it is important to understand that the island was colonized

twice. First by France in 1649, and later by England in 1762. The plantation system and slavery began already with the French administration and was continued by the English. While slavery was formally abolished in 1834, it persisted in effect until 1838 (Brizan 1984, 126). The vast majority of Grenadians today are direct descendants of West-Africans who were forcibly brought to the islands as slave-labor under colonial rule. Brizan describes the plantation system as a "total institution" (ibid., 84). In the case of the plantation, the total institution is a hierarchical system in which enslaved people are subordinate to their masters. The idea also implies a complete stripping of enslaved peoples' past; a process known as "breaking in" that started with the journey across the Atlantic. On the ships, enslaved people would be packed as cargo with no regard to health and safety, often leading to illness and death. Brizan describes the way in which the corpses of deceased Africans would be thrown overboard, instilling a fear so great that others would throw themselves overboard to escape the horrors ahead. Those who survived the journey would be auctioned off, sold as labor to the owners of plantations. Families would often be separated, as would people speaking similar languages or sharing similar cultural backgrounds (ibid.). Once bought, the enslaved person would be taken to the plantation and be prepared for an 18-hour workday. The brutal treatment of the enslaved people led to a complete breakage of identity characterized by Brizan in the following:

"[...] *low self-esteem, self-hatred, inferiority complex, no cultural pride, contempt for others of one's kind, subservience, rejection of negroid physical features, and giving the epithet of "ugly". The plantation with its physical and psychological violence recreated the African in its own image."* (ibid., 85).

Mortality rates on the plantation were also very high. Although thousands of enslaved people were imported, the total slave-population was stagnant, and at times even declining. In 1779, there were approximately 35,000 enslaved people living in Grenada. Eight years later, in 1787, a further 10,000 enslaved people had been imported, yet the total slave-population had dropped to less than 27,000. A decrease of approximately 18,000 people that can only be accounted for by a sky-high mortality rate (ibid.). Life at the plantation was strictly controlled by the colonizers, limiting the agency of enslaved people severely. Examples of banned practices included dancing in public spaces, drumming after 10 p.m., and any sort of obscene language. The practice of Obeah (African religious practices) and the possession of any material related to Obeah was also strictly forbidden, and perpetrators of above-mentioned

practices would receive corporeal punishment (ibid., 82).
When it comes to jab jab and carnival the exact course of events is unclear, and any attempt at outlining a history would be speculative. Nevertheless, I want to introduce a couple of the earliest known sources. A few of these sources relate to Trinidad rather than Grenada, but due to the similarities between jab jab in Grenada and masquerades such as the jab molassie in Trinidad (and the fact that migration between Trinidad and Grenada is very common), it seems fairly safe to say that masqueraders on the two islands will have influenced each other. An example of such inspiration, although more recent, can be seen in the photographic essay "The Devil in Cumaná" by David M. Guss and Rafael Salvatore, where a Trinidadian masquerader has directly influenced a famous devil character in Venezuela (Guss & Salvatore 2015, 221-223). It also seems fairly safe to say that Carnival, being a Catholic tradition, was brought to the Caribbean centuries ago by the Europeans, and for Grenada specifically, early sources of enslaved people participating in the festivities go all the way back to 1826. In his travelogue, Frederic Bayley briefly mentions the African population in Grenada manifesting a "wonderful ability of playing the devil" (Bayley 1826, 480-481). It is worth noting here, that the word jab is an abbreviation of the French word "diable", of course meaning devil. Charles William Day also wrote a travelogue, his being from the early post-emancipation period and released in 1852, in which he describes a masquerade played by a group of African residents in Trinidad. Although the word jab is never used by Day, the masquerade does seem to share some commonalities with the modern-day version of jab jab:

"*The primitives were negroes, as nearly naked as might be, bedaubed with a black varnish. One of this gang had a long chain and padlock attached to his leg, which chain the others pulled. What this typified I was unable to learn; but, as the chained one was occasionally thrown down on the ground and treated with a mock bastinadoing it probably represented slavery*" (Day 1852, 314).

While the masquerade Day describes shares commonalities in the form of blackening and chains, it seems to be void of any elements connecting it to the devil portrayal described by Bayley. That being said, the modern-day version of jab jab cannot be fully described as a devil masquerade either, as elements of mockery are also very much present. I will get back to this point later. Looking beyond travelogues, etchings of carnival scenes may also give us a clue to the historical appearance of the jab jab. An example of this, once again in Trinidad, is Melton Prior's "Carnival in Port of Spain" from 1888 (see figure 1, next page), in which a

dark, sparsely clad character with a tail takes center stage. So, while no-one can say for certain how the masquerade has evolved since the days of Day, Bayley, and Prior, it seems likely that elements of all three of the masquerades they encountered could have contributed to the current portrayal. When speaking with jab jab practitioners in Grenada today, most stories, although diverse in content, will emphasize the rebellious and resistant elements of the masquerade. Today, jab jab is practiced by the masses at carnival, with thousands of people taking to the streets covered in black. Exactly how jab jab came to be the dominant masquerade in Grenada is also not clear. Some anecdotes will point to the Gairy administration's attempt at banning jab jab altogether in 1973, claiming that the ban had an inverse effect leading to a massive increase in jab jab masqueraders. While a somewhat speculative claim, this could account for both the huge scale of the parades and the rebellious atmosphere seen today. Similar scenes were witnessed recently under the COVID-19 pandemic, when the cancellation of carnival in Grenada was met with resistance in the form of sizable jab jab parades. Either way, it is a cherished and proud part of carnival in Grenada today, that even high-standing officials such as the prime minister himself will take part in.

*Figure 1: Melton Prior - "Carnival in Port of Spain" (1888)*

# Presentation of Empirical Material

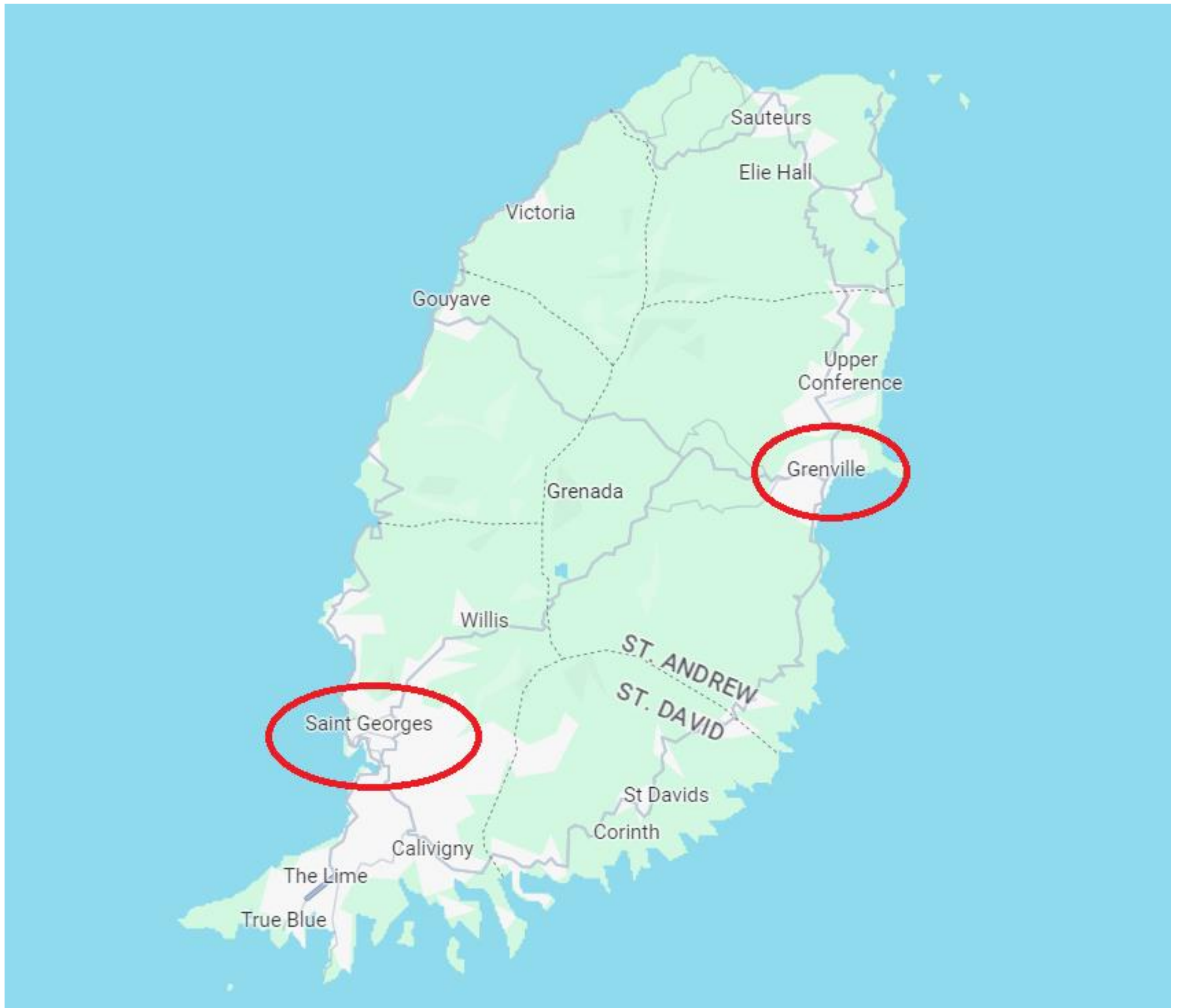


*Figure 2: The main island of Grenada.*

As mentioned, this thesis is based on my own fieldwork in Grenada. Although Grenada is a relatively small island-nation, there are fairly large cultural differences between different areas. I have worked in practically every corner of the island, including the sister-island of Carriacou, but there are two places in particular that I want to present, the first being the capital city of St. George's. St. George's, although not particularly known for jab jab locally, is the venue of the Spicemas Carnival. For this reason, jab jab has become inextricably linked to the city. During the day, St. George's is a bustling city full of people. Markets are vibrant and crowded, restaurants and shops are busy, and along the waterfront on the Carenage people might simply be taking the time to enjoy themselves. St. George's is also the city which cruise ships arrive at and would thus be the face of Grenada to most tourists visiting the island. The

last cruise ship of the season left port in April, and so the number of tourists in the city was fairly small for the duration of my fieldwork, but in high season the numbers are quite significant. St. George's is also a historic city, bearing clear signs of European presence in its architecture. The most recognizable feature of the city is perhaps Fort George, a large fortification built by the French in the early 18th century. St. George's was my base during fieldwork, and as such, I owe a lot of my knowledge on jab jab to the people who I have met and spoken with in this city.

The other place I want to highlight is the town of Grenville and the surrounding area, specifically the area of La Filette. Grenville is located on the opposite side of the island to St. George's and is the capital of the parish St. Andrews. Grenville and the surrounding villages are well-known in Grenada for their engagement in the tradition of jab jab and ended up becoming one of the main sites of my fieldwork when it came to the actual practice. The village of La Filette is located north-west of Grenville and is really only comprised of a couple of streets. But despite its modest size, I often heard it referred to as the jab jab capital of Grenada. The jab jab bands located in La Filette are known for their commitment to tradition and it is therefore a great place to learn about the deeper elements of the masquerade. The commitment to playing jab jab also means that practice sessions are frequent in the weeks and months leading up to the carnival, making it an ideal place to witness jab jab outside of the actual carnival.

Over the course of my four months in Grenada, I have spoken with countless people about jab jab. Some would have been shorter talks in passing, while others were a lot more in depth over multiple meetings. I will not be able to mention everyone who has contributed, so I will stick to presenting a few of the people who have contributed most substantially. The people mentioned here have also all taken part in making the film that accompanies this thesis.

The person I have spent most of my time in Grenada with is John Angus Martin. Angus has also played a slightly different role to most of my other collaborators as he is not actually an active participant when it comes to playing jab jab. Angus holds a PhD in Grenadian history and was, during the period of my fieldwork, working as the director of Grenada's National Museum. Having been raised in the outskirts of St. George's, he is a well-known character in the city. Angus and I lived in the same building in the center of St Georges, and would have talks on jab jab, history, and general current affairs daily. Angus has played a vital role in letting me understand more of the historical context that has shaped jab jab, the wider carnival, and contemporary Grenada as a whole. He was also very helpful in introducing me

to (and teaching me about) Grenadian culture in a wider sense, meaning everything from food and music to kinship and religion.
The second person I want to introduce here is Winston Whiteman. Winston lives on the outskirts of Grenville in the village of La Filette but is also affiliated with the jab jab band located in Paraclete just north of La Filette. Winston is an elderly man, well-known for his long-term engagement with jab jab. His costume is beautifully crafted, and he has become somewhat of an ambassador for Grenadian jab jab, even going to Trinidad and Tobago together with a few bandmates to represent Grenada at Tobago’s carnival. He lives in a small hut built on stilts, surrounded by a few different crops and fruit trees providing him with coconuts, mangoes, and corn amongst other things. I ended up visiting him at his house in La Filette on a couple of occasions and would always be spoilt with fruits straight from his trees. Winston became an important collaborator for me, as he would often write me a message when jab jab bands were planning on meeting for practice sessions. Whenever I would go to witness these sessions, Winston would usually also be present himself. Despite this, I don’t think I have ever seen him in full costume. Dressing up in full costume seemed to be a mess that he would save for the actual carnival. Winston also ended up playing a fairly classic “gatekeeper” role for me, as he would introduce me to other valuable contacts. As jab jab in practice does at times get a little bit rowdy and chaotic, having Winstons presence was also a very comforting factor.
The last person I will be presenting here is Navarro. Navarro is just as actively engaged in jab jab as anyone, being the leader of the jab jab band in his home village of Tivoli, called Capital Jab. Navarro is quite a bit younger than a lot of the other people I have worked with. Navarro, although knowledgeable on traditional jab jab, is also a major actor in pushing jab jab forward. The first time I met him was at his auto-repair shop, which conveniently is also the place where he will collect old engine oil for his costume. He is an avid drummer and drum-builder, providing drums for a lot of the traditional jab jab bands located in his vicinity. At the same time, his dedication to the more contemporary forms of jab jab makes him an important player in bridging the gap between traditional and modern jab jab, or perhaps by extension, the older and the younger generation of masqueraders.

Although these three people only represent a small fraction of the people I have actually worked with, they do end up being somewhat representative of larger groups. Angus is representative of those that do not necessarily participate in jab jab but are still knowledgeable on the subject from an intellectual perspective. Winston is representative of a highly

experienced group of traditionalists, heavily engaged with the practice of jab jab, the conservation of tradition, and passing on knowledge. Navarro, although still engaged with traditional aspects of jab jab, is also a younger practitioner, representative of a more modernized, contemporary form of jab jab. My hope is that the combination of the three groups will provide for a fuller understanding of the nuances found in jab jab.

# Methodology

Before moving on to a theoretical discussion of my results, I want to discuss the implications of the methods I have used in the creation of my empirical material. Throughout my fieldwork I have been relying on primarily three methods, namely interviews, (participant) observation, and film. While the methods stated may be neatly categorized and stylized on paper, my experience tells me that it is often more muddled when it comes to practical use. I will try to reflect this in my discussion.

## Interviews

First of all, I have interviewed a fairly large number of people who have been related to jab jab in one way or another. The interviews have ranged from very casual, informal talks to more structured, formal interviews. Raymond Madden characterizes the interview as a spectrum of exchange where in one end, the most informal, a simple conversation may be described as an interview, while the opposite end of the spectrum would be more akin to a rigid questionnaire (Madden 2017, 65-66). In my own use, the most casual interview may have simply been improvised on the spot when the conversation turned to jab jab and my interlocutor showed an interest in sharing their view. This sort of conversation happened on a daily basis and did not only help me shape my understanding of jab jab but was also highly instrumental in directing the more purposeful parts of my fieldwork. For me, the other end of the spectrum took the form of planned out, formal interviews done on camera. This type of interview was mostly carried out with influential people who were involved with jab jab in ways different from simply participating, for example academics and carnival representatives. This gave me an opportunity to better understand some of the contextual aspects of jab jab such as organization, history, and political debates related to the topic.

## (Participant) Observation

Madden writes that the participation part of participant observation is one of the more distinctive methods employed by ethnographers in their research (ibid., 75). However, the nature of my project has made me somewhat reluctant to describe my engagement with jab

jab as participant observation, hence the brackets earlier. Jab jab involves covering one's body in old engine oil from head to toe, and the meaning of doing so is often related to a struggle endured by enslaved African ancestors. So, despite countless people encouraging me to do so, true participation in playing jab jab was simply not viable or desirable for me. That being said, there were a number of events and situations that allowed me to participate in a more direct manner, most notably concerts and festivals dedicated to jab jab music. Also, with jab jab being a sort of street theater, one could argue that the spectator does play an important part of the spectacle. Madden writes that ethnographers attempt to immerse themselves in the field to get closer to the sociality of the group they are working with (ibid., 77). As Madden points out though, there is a limit, as "going native", or fully immersing oneself in the culture that is being researched, results in a loss of ethnographic value. While participating and understanding, one also needs to be able to step backwards, and maintain a distance (ibid.). For me, there never seemed to be a danger of going native, but I did get to play a somewhat active role at times, for example as the official cameraman documenting the launch of a jab jab band. This allowed me to obtain a position that went slightly beyond what I would consider pure observation. Madden also argues that we need to get close to our participants to understand the emic perspectives that reflect the local point of view yet maintain distance to not lose track of the etic point of view of the researcher (ibid., 19-20).

## The Camera as Method

The last method I want to discuss here is the use of film. The nature of the program this thesis pertains to meant that film was going to have to be one of my primary methods. What this means is that film did not just play a large role in conducting the fieldwork itself, but also in the stages leading up to the choice of field. Jab jab is a masquerade that has to be sensed and experienced to be truly appreciated, and I do not feel that I would be able to only write about jab jab in a manner that would satisfy. The aesthetic is just as striking and obscure as the sound is fast and aggressive, and film allows me to convey this much more effectively. At the same time, film has its restrictions when it comes to heavy theoretical discussion, so the combination of film and text seems fitting for the subject. The use of a camera allowed my participants and me to focus our attention on the highly symbolic aesthetic and sound of jab jab. This was a realization that led me to an approach that may be described as "tours". Essentially, I would get in contact with people who were actively engaged with the practice

and ask them to give me a "tour" on camera of the elements of jab jab they thought were important for a proper portrayal. Oftentimes people would have one or more aspects that they were particularly interested in, such as helmet making, music production, or shell playing. This became a somewhat collaborative way of learning and filming, and gave way for in depth discussions on quite specific elements of jab jab. The use of the camera in this way also allowed me to quickly pick up on the aesthetic codes of jab jab. Sarah Pink references Cristina Grasseni in her book "Doing Visual Ethnography" and argues that this may be described as a sort of skilled vision, essentially enabling the ethnographer to better see as a participant might see (Pink 2021, 129-130). This is a point that has been brought forth by others in their work with the camera. For example, David MacDougall takes it even further and argues that the use of a camera may allow ethnographers to see things that would have otherwise been entirely invisible to them (Macdougall 2020, 7). When jab jab was actually played, my approach became a lot more observational. Although I attempted to intervene as little as possible in the practice of the masquerade, the very presence of my camera seemed to encourage the performance aspect of jab jab. Time and time again masqueraders would come up to me to show off their unique portrayal, and bystanders would point me towards the most fascinating costumes or the most powerful drummers. So, despite my efforts of adhering to observation, the camera tended to become an active part of the masquerade.
Overall, the use of a camera has been a valuable method for me, but it has also proved challenging at times. For example, the camera may have scared away certain people who could have otherwise contributed in a valuable manner. I also got the impression that the camera may have obscured the nature of the project as an academic endeavor, as people would often connect a large camera to the creation of a commercial project. In this way, the camera may also have been slightly counterproductive in specific situations.
I will discuss the use of film in this project more in depth in the end of this thesis (see "Discussion on Film and Text").

## Positioning and Ethical considerations

There are a number of ethical considerations that have to be discussed. I will start with some more practical issues. Jab jab and carnival is a celebration that for many participants involves heavy drinking, partying, dancing, and it is at times quite sexual in nature. When jab jab is being played by the masses, it is therefore practically impossible to gain proper informed

consent from all the people one is filming. Of course, one could argue that jab jab is really a public performance, and therefore meant to be looked at. Still, I have tried to refrain from including shots of people who were intoxicated to the point of losing control of their behavior. I have also tried to avoid overly sexual shots. At the same time these are important aspects of the tradition that, for a proper representation, should not be left out completely either.
A much more complex issue arises from my own positioning in the field. Jab jab is extremely important and meaningful to a lot of its practitioners. The majority of people I have spoken with were very happy for me to be researching jab jab, with a lot even encouraging me to put down the camera and try on the masquerade for myself. On a few occasions however, I have also met people who did not believe it was my role as an outsider (and especially, I think, a white European one) to be telling the story of jab jab. This type of resistance may itself be interesting from an analytical perspective, but it also points to important questions of representation. The issue of representation and power relations in the research setting is not an issue that I have a solution to. It should be stressed that the arguments put forth in this thesis are created from the viewpoint of a European outsider, and that they may very well differ from similar projects created locally by Grenadians themselves. I believe the combination of both would be the most advantageous, and I hope more research will be done on jab jab by local actors in the future. As for the film, I have attempted to situate myself as an active creator, and an outsider, of this project using a few different strategies. Most obviously, I include a shot of myself with my camera in hand as I am getting ready to go film at J'ouvert. I have also decided on filming everything but sit-down interviews handheld, making it obvious that I am actively exploring jab jab with the viewer. Also, on quite a few occasions, you will see people actively interact with the camera as they play jab jab and show off their portrayals. And vice versa, on a few occasions I have included myself asking the participants questions to position myself as an outsider and a newcomer to the world of jab jab.

## Limitations and Absences

After entering the field, I quickly realized just how many directions a project on jab jab may take, so the ideas discussed in this thesis are only a few of the many possibilities. Also, the meaning of jab jab is highly malleable. It means different things to different participants depending on factors such as age, gender, religious affiliation, location, and so on. Younger participants may be more interested in partying and revelry, while older participants may be

more interested in reflection or introspection. Jab jab as a whole is also dynamic over time, meaning that an analysis of the tradition today may not be an accurate analysis in a few decades. What I have attempted to do in this thesis is put forth an argument that may be applicable to a broader range of participants, but capturing everything seems impossible. Jab jab is also only one of several so-called "traditional masquerades" in Grenada, with a few other popular ones being the Shortknee, Vieux Corps, and Moko Jumbie. All of them are very meaningful to their practitioners, so a more holistic approach to carnival may have been interesting. This would, however, also be a much larger endeavor.

There have also been some practical limitations to the scope of the project. An issue I ran into quite a few times was the question of payment, specifically people declining to participate in the project if not paid. The question of payment is an interesting one and could be discussed at length, but I will stick to discussing my own experience of the issue here. I had decided that I would not directly pay people for participating in the project for a number of reasons. First of all, this being a non-commercial, non-funded student project, my ability to actually pay people was very limited. Second, I was afraid that promising direct payment would obscure the validity of my findings, or at least complicate the nature of these findings. Essentially, I was afraid that people would end up participating out of need, and not out of interest. I did, however, still want to show my appreciation. In a few instances, my participants have sold jab jab paraphernalia. In these cases, I have at times bought one of their products at a price that was perhaps a bit higher than normal after their participation. A sort of indirect payment. In another case, I ended up filming an event that one of my participants was hosting and edited a short "after-movie" for him to showcase on his social media profiles to promote future events. In this case, it became a kind of informal trade of services. In other cases, people have participated solely out of interest.

Another interesting issue I met repeatedly was a reluctance to speak on behalf of jab jab. What I mean by this is that people would often redirect me to what can only be described as "jab jab elders" instead of sharing their own perspective on jab jab. It was a frequent occurrence that seemed to be rooted in a fear of misrepresenting the story of jab jab, particularly by younger people. Often, they would be open to discussion, but not necessarily too fond of going on camera. In practice, this means that the majority of my closer participants have been older men. On camera, not a single woman has been interested in participating. Of course there are interesting analytical points to be made on this, but the fact remains that it was a somewhat frustrating phenomenon to work with as it has limited the width of representation in the project.

# Theoretical Framework

## Creolization

There are a few different concepts that I want to discuss in this thesis in my attempt to answer the research question posed earlier. First of all, I want to bring forth discussions on creolization, as this will help us understand the uniqueness of Grenada. In his article "The World in Creolization", Ulf Hannerz gives us a very straight forward definition of creole cultures. Just like the definition by Robin Cohen that was mentioned earlier, Hannerz argues that creole cultures are akin to creole languages in that they draw upon two or more parent sources (Hannerz 2010, 382). Hannerz argues that people born into Creole societies are thus shaped by the interaction of different systems of meaning that visibly make up the creole society (ibid.). While I do believe parent cultures are visible and active in creating the creole culture, I want to draw on a slightly different take posed by Stuart Hall in his article "Créolite and the Process of Creolization". Hall discusses the usage of the term creole amongst a wide group of theoreticians to arrive at his own understanding of the concept. For Hall, the idea of cultural translation is important to understanding creolization, and I believe this is a fruitful way to tackle both the emergence and importance of jab jab in Grenada. Hall argues that translation entails traces of the original, yet, that the true original is impossible to restore based on the translation (Hall 2010, 29). Drawing on James Clifford, he argues that the "roots" are therefore not the decisive factor in studying creole society, but rather that one should employ a focus on movement and transformation of said cultures (ibid.). The idea of translation itself implies a dynamicity in which culture is being adjusted and interpreted in ways that make it meaningful locally. In my use, cultural translation means that aspects of creole cultures may look similar to parent cultures, but that the underlying meaning may be completely different. This is important if we want to understand the uniquely Grenadian character of jab jab specifically, but also when it comes to separating a collective Grenadian identity from that of parent cultures.

## Collective and National Identity

A large part of my argument will be based on jab jab's role in the emergence of a collective identity. Alberto Melucci takes on the of concept collective identity in his book "Challenging Codes" in which he argues that collective identity is a definition produced by a group concerning the orientation of collective action. He also argues that such a definition is "interactive and shared", meaning that it is a process constantly negotiated between members (Melucci 1996, 70). To make this clearer, he splits his understanding of the concept of collective identity into three parts. First, collective identity involves shared cognitive definitions. Basically, a shared set of languages, rituals, practices and so on, that allow groups to calculate means and ends of action. Secondly, collective identity entails a network of relationships between actors who interact, negotiate, and influence each other, often guided by forms of organization or leadership. Third and finally, there is an emotional investment. The emotional investment is what makes members of the collective feel part of a larger whole, a sense of belonging. This also means that collective identity cannot be understood entirely through calculations of cost and benefit of membership, as members are in part directed by unquantifiable feelings of passion, love, hate, fear, and so on (ibid., 70-71).
Stuart Hall has also attempted to define identity (and specifically cultural identity) in his article "Cultural Identity and Diaspora". Although Hall writes about cultural identity and not collective identity, his ideas imply a high degree of collectivity. Hall argues that cultural identity can be thought about in two distinct ways. The first is based on the idea of *one* shared culture based on a common history and ancestry. An understanding of a common history that gives rise to a stable, shared frame of reference and meaning. He argues that the stability that cultural identity may provide in this sense should be understood in opposition to actual history which is a lot more ambiguous (Hall 1990, 223). Thus, cultural identity can be understood in the retelling of history rather than the history itself (ibid., 224). This leads to the second understanding that Hall posits, which is that cultural identity is of course not based on just one shared history, but also on difference (ibid., 225). This is perhaps especially true for Caribbean identities where the meeting of oppressed and oppressor has been definitive. Cultural identities are not simply a static result of an essentialized history but are constantly negotiated, reflecting a process of becoming (ibid.).

Collective identity can be understood on a number of different scales, but my main focus here will be on national identity. Although jab jab could definitely lend itself to some highly

political discussions on deliberate nation-building efforts, my primary focus will instead be on the emergence of a collective, national identity, and nationalism as a practice performed by the people of the nation. As Benedict Anderson mentions in the introduction of his seminal work "Imagined Communities" (1983), the concepts of nation, nationality, and nationalism are notoriously difficult to define (Anderson 1991 (1983), 3). Anderson of course famously argued that the nation is best described as an imagined community, as members of a nation will never actually know most of their fellow members (ibid., 6). That is not to say that the nation is non-existent, but that it exists as a finite comradeship in the minds of the people that constitute it. Ernst Gellner attempts to define the nation in somewhat similar terms in his book "Nations and Nationalism" (1983). Although he admits the elusiveness of the concept, he argues that a nation requires the members of it to share systems of ideas, behavior, and communication, and that the members of said nation have to recognize each other as belonging to the nation (Gellner 1983, 7). When talking about nationalism, Gellner states that it is "primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent" (ibid., 1). He goes on to argue that nationalist ideology holds that ethnic boundaries should never separate powerholders from the members of the nation (ibid.). Thomas Hylland Eriksen argues in his book "Ethnicity and Nationalism" (2010) that Gellner's use of the term nationalism implies a link between ethnicity and state (Eriksen 2010, 119). This may lead to an understanding of nationalism as a right-wing ideology that strives for ethnic homogeneity within the nation, but Eriksen argues that nationalism could also be understood as more of a left-wing ideology when equality amongst citizens is emphasized (ibid., 129). It is the latter that I find most interesting when discussing national identity in Grenada.

Another seminal work on the nation is Michael Billig´s "Banal Nationalism" (1995), in which the presence of the nation in the everyday lives of people is explored. Where the above-mentioned theorists tend to favor slightly abstract and political discussions, Billig takes a different approach, showing us how everyday reminders found in language and events solidify the collective feeling of a distinct national identity. In the book "National Identity, Popular Culture, and Everyday Life" (2002), Tim Edensor draws upon Billig's work to discuss, amongst other things, how national identity is constantly negotiated through performances of said identity (Edensor 2002, 69). In doing so, he highlights both the mundane, everyday aspect of national identity that Billig explored, but also the dynamic nature of such identities. I will be drawing upon both in my own arguments.

## Storytelling and Rituals in Identity Formation

There are several processes that may lead to the formation or affirmation of collective identity. One interesting approach that I will be exploring in my own analysis is the idea of storytelling. In his book "Politics of Storytelling" (2002) Michael Jackson argues that:

"[…] *stories, like the music and dance that in many societies accompanies the telling of stories, are a kind of theater where we collaborate in reinventing ourselves and authorizing notions, both individual and collective, of who we are.*" (Jackson 2002, 16).

When read in the context of Melucci's definition, Jackson's idea of collective storytelling could be interpreted as a form of negotiation, underlining the idea of collective identity as a process. To Jackson it is not necessarily the story in itself that is important, but the very act of storytelling (ibid., 18). Jackson also underlines the significance of storytelling in moments of extreme distress. Like Melucci, he argues that people have an emotional need for being part of a larger community and continues to argue that this need is most urgently felt when the feeling of such belonging is violently broken (ibid., 33-34). In moments of deep distress, the act of storytelling becomes an important strategy for making sense of and overcoming the effect of the perceived injustice, regaining some sort of agency (ibid., 35-36).

Jack Williams has written an interesting article, "Embodied world construction: a phenomenology of ritual", in which he argues that ritual practices may play an important role in shaping people's view of the world. He also argues that rituals, by virtue of their world-building capacity, can help both individuals and groups to affirm their identities or promote restoration and healing (Williams 2024, 119). The affirmation of identity through ritual, he argues, can be especially powerful in contexts where identity is contested. By drawing upon existing rituals and reimagining them into situations different from their original context, people create new rituals that allow them to perceive the world in a manner that is affirmative of their identity. If, as described by Jackson, storytelling is a way for us to create collective identities, then the idea of rituals as affirmative of a specific world view could reinforce the identity created through storytelling in the first place by physically acting it out.

## Ethnomusicology and Identity

One way that storytelling may take place, at least in the case of jab jab, is through music. Timothy Rice has written an article, “Reflections on Music and Identity in Ethnomusicology”, in which he discusses 17 different articles on the relationship between music and identity. He points out four different ways in which music contributes to either the construction of, or affirmation of, a collective identity. The first connection is a symbolic one. Basically, music may constitute a representation of elements of an either existing or emergent collective identity. Secondly, music may allow a collective of people to imagine themselves as one through the performance of said music. Through music, people are able to experience themselves in action as a collective. Third, Rice argues that music may contribute to the affective qualities of collective identity, essentially what Melucci referred to as the emotional investment. This implies that music doesn’t necessarily create collective identity in the first place, but rather gives it its distinct feel and vibrancy. Fourth and finally, and Rice argues that this point is especially true for subaltern identities, music may contribute to a more positive perspective on one’s identity (Rice 2007, 34-35). In extension of this, I will also be drawing upon the work of Danielle Sirek, who has done extensive ethnographic fieldwork in Grenada as part of her research on musicking and identity. Specifically, I am interested in Sirek’s argument that engagement with music in Grenada becomes a space of negotiation for collective identity formation (Sirek, 2013)

# Ethnography and Analysis

I have now written a fairly lengthy contextual and theoretical framework. I have done this in the hope that the following arguments will become slightly easier to follow, as the arguments may be somewhat convoluted at times. I have split my analytical discussion in to three parts, each pertaining to a different aspect of jab jab. The first part is the portrayal, or the aesthetic of jab jab. The second part is the music. The third and final part pertains to the actual practice of jab jab, with an emphasis on jab jab as it is practiced at J'ouvert. Altogether, this analysis should point towards jab jab as a catalyst for collective identity formation within Grenada as a unique cultural space.

## Chapter I – Portrayal: Jab Jab as an Aesthetic

*Figure 3: Jab jab masquerader in full costume - La Filette*

Before delving into the actual ethnography, I want to clarify what is meant by the portrayal. When speaking of the jab jab portrayal, I am speaking of the aesthetic that differentiates jab jab from other traditional masquerades. The portrayal can vary quite a bit from one

masquerader to the next, but there are a few stables that one can expect. First and foremost, the blackening of the skin. Although usually done with old engine oil, any black substance will do, and some masqueraders will even diverge from the black color to brown mud or paints of different colors. For example, a jab jab band from the northern town of Sauteurs has famously (and perhaps controversially to some) substituted the black color for a bright pink. Next, a horned helmet is important. While hardcore traditionalists will opt for horned chamber pots as their helmets, the rarity of chamber pots has made construction and safety helmets more prevalent. Horns range from smaller goat horns to gigantic cow horns making for a helmet stretching more than a meter in each direction. Less dedicated masqueraders may even wear a helmet with no horns at all. Although up for debate, I would argue that the final imperative of the jab jab portrayal is a dragging chain, again, seen in all shapes and sizes. Apart from these “essentials”, many other items may be part of the portrayal, and the absence of any is just as common. Other common parts of the aesthetic may include jawbones, crosses, coffins, fire, live and dead animals, as well as raw meat carried in the mouth. Also, there is a creative aspect to the jab jab portrayal in which each masquerader gets to influence their own portrayal. This leads to what may at times seem like somewhat random additions. Notable examples from my own experience include wheelchairs, rocking horses, flatscreen televisions, and even entire cars. Suffice to say, the jab jab portrayal is obscure if not terrifying to those who are unfamiliar. Looking back at my own first meeting with jab jab masqueraders, I recall being too intimidated to point my camera at them, let alone talk to them. However, when you do speak with jab jab masqueraders, what initially seems obscure begins to make sense. I want to provide an analysis of a few situations that I have encountered during my fieldwork that have helped me understand current interpretations of the masquerade. It is important for me to note that the stories that people connect with the masquerade, and will be discussed in the following, are often highly dependent on the person you are speaking with.

## An Ode to the Ancestor

The first situation I want to discuss is my meeting with Winston Whiteman. I had arranged to meet with Winston as I had been told he was known for making helmets for the masqueraders in his community. In our meeting I got to film Winston building a helmet as he explained to me the story behind it. He explained to me that the helmets are meant to look fearful. The

fearful image, according to him, being connected to the devil. For Winston, looking fearful seemed to be the main attribute of the jab jab. He explained to me that the portrayal of the devil was truly meant as a form of mockery towards the colonizers. He explained to me that the colonizers had seen black people as evil, as the devil, so they, the formerly enslaved people, decided to take that very view upon them in an attempt to frighten the colonizers. This was a story that I met several times, yet it's only one of many origin stories that one will meet. Most stories seem to be connected to resistance in one way or another. Similarly, Winston explained to me how enslaved people would get hold of horns for their helmets. Essentially, maroons (escaped slaves) would come to plantations and steal animals while freeing up other enslaved people and would subsequently use horns from the stolen animals as part of their costumes (see film: 21:05 – 21:57).

This is a story that is tightly connected to ancestral resistance and rebellion. While the story does not necessarily hold up too well to scrutiny from a historical standpoint, it does point to an interesting understanding of the Grenadian past in which the ancestors bravely fought against the colonizers. It is a story that reveals the symbolism that masqueraders associate with their costumes. If we now look to Stuart Hall and his ideas on cultural identity, Hall argues that the actual history itself is not as important as the retelling of history. I would claim that the historical factuality of the stories that Winston told me are of little importance when it comes to understanding the significance of jab jab. Hall argues that we should never "underestimate or neglect the importance of the act of imaginative rediscovery" (Hall 1990, 224). I want to emphasize the word *imaginative*, as rediscovery would entail a sort of essential identity, hidden but found anew. As mentioned earlier, Hall also argues that identity is partly based on the meeting of different histories (ibid., 225). More precisely, I believe that Winston's story is a great example of identity being formed in opposition to unwanted, outsider categorization. This is a point that Richard Jenkins argues for in his book "Social Identity", as he interprets the work of anthropologist Anthony Cohen (Jenkins 2014, 143). By connecting the horned helmet to an old story of slave-mockery and maroon resistance, masqueraders get to connect their own practice directly to that of their ancestors. It is a story that recognizes the resilience of the ancestor, underlining their agency, and by extension, the agency of the current population. But I want to stick with stories referring to the ancestors a little longer, as this is a very common approach for practitioners to take when discussing jab jab. Another great example of this became apparent in a conversation I had with Nigel, a well-known practitioner based in the city of St. George's.

Being the principal of an Anglican school, Nigel may have seemed a somewhat unlikely practitioner, but several people had told me that his stories would be a worthwhile listen. Nigel was one of few people I have met that didn't seem to stick strictly to a single narrative, but rather drew upon different stories when describing the reasoning behind the jab jab aesthetic. I want to focus on his take on the blackening of the body. He mentioned two different stories, one that I hadn't heard from anyone else, and one that is quite commonly heard. The former was based on the idea of enslaved people being oiled up before being auctioned off to look healthier, therefore fetching higher prices. The latter, more commonly heard story, was that the blackening of the body was done in recognition of an enslaved man falling into a boiling vat of molasses while working on the sugar plantations. In both stories, like in the case of Winston, the aesthetic of jab jab became directly connected to the lived experience of the ancestor. I find the first story, that of jab jab reflecting the oiled-up bodies of enslaved people being auctioned off, particularly interesting. As Nigel was telling the story, he was enthusiastically describing how covering his body in oil was an attempt to look good, to try and fetch a high price, like a bodybuilder proudly showing off his body. I was somewhat baffled by his enthusiasm, as the experience of oiling up the body of enslaved people would have of course been an extremely humiliating and dehumanizing practice. But as he finished off his story, he switched to a more serious tone and told me:

"*We are not happy to play it, but we have to play it. Because if we don't play it, the children would not know about it. They would not know that that is how they treated the ancestor. They would not know their history, their culture, their heritage.*".

The two stories related to the blackening of the skin that Nigel told me are of course quite different, yet they point in the same direction. What this may open up for is an argument made by Jackson, that it is not necessarily the historical validity of the story or what the story embodies that is important, but rather the act of telling the story itself (Jackson 2002, 18). For Nigel and other practitioners proudly sharing their interpretation, the act of storytelling may be a way of regaining agency, bending the narrative to a more favorable one, or perhaps storytelling may even be a form of mockery in itself. An example may have been when I first met Nigel, as he told me that the jab jab wore the horned helmets as a form of mimicry of the Vikings, perhaps teasing me a bit because of my own Scandinavian background. I want to make clear that my point is not to be rejecting the validity of the stories themselves, rather, I am interested in the way in which these stories have become connected to the masquerade of

jab jab which, as mentioned earlier, is essentially a devil masquerade. We have now discussed a number of different stories that deal with the blackening of the body. As a matter of fact, there seems to be as many stories as there are practitioners when one asks about stories of origin. But it seems to me that origin stories as historical facts are not important. Rather, it seems to me that it is the sense of shared experience and/or heritage that emerges from discussing different interpretations that becomes important. In the following, I will look to another situation where jab jab as a vessel for contemporary protest and resistance becomes clear.

## Contemporary Protest

As carnival was getting closer, and events with jab jab were becoming more plentiful, I wrote a message to the organizer of an event that was to be held in Saab, St Andrews. I asked him if he wanted to meet up for a chat about jab jab and explained to him the purpose of my project. We met at the bus station in Grenville, the closest city, and he then told me that he would be bringing me to meet a couple of other people that were more knowledgeable than himself. A situation that seemed recurrent throughout my fieldwork. Although I would've liked to hear his own take on jab jab, I agreed and followed him to La Filette, the village in which I had filmed with Winston a few weeks prior. In La Filette, he introduced me to a man known as iRock. iRock is the leader of La Filette's jab jab band and has been playing jab jab for several decades. After speaking with him for a little while, the three of us went to meet a drum-maker and band leader named Navarro in his auto-repair shop in the town of Tivoli. After greeting Navarro, the three of them began pulling out all sorts of jab jab related paraphernalia. Aside from car parts, the shop was littered with jab jab helmets, chains, drums, and conch shells. iRock pulled out a few drums and they began playing their rhythms. As iRock began chanting, Navarro went around the back to fetch a helmet and a conch shell. After playing the traditional jab jab music for a short while, Navarro asked me if I wanted to see the oil. He had a big, old oil drum on the back of a seemingly totaled truck. A truck that I would later find to be part of his band's outfit. He poured a little bit of oil onto his arm and grabbed a blackened donkey jawbone. As he was showing off the look, iRock explained to me the meaning of covering in black:

"*We use the old black oil to highlight the black! You understand? You see how black we can be? They say we black and we is nothing, we don't have no sense and no value and things. So, take black! You understand? So, we come out and we mock, and we lash out at you. And we say take black, you know what I mean, hold it. Black is beautiful. You see how nice it is?"* (see film: 09:33 – 09:50)

He proceeded to describe much like Winston had, that the portrayal of the devil was meant as a mockery of the colonizers. What iRock and Navarro taught me was that the black color had become a celebration of blackness itself. iRock went on to explain the word "capital", which in jab jab essentially means "say what you want to say". Navarro yelled out the word capital and proclaimed that he was going to spell "police". iRock, with a big grin on his face, interrupted Navarro before he got to do his spelling, explaining how the jab jab would often end up in confrontation with the police and the "headquarters". Navarro then yelled out: "They jail the poor, and they kill the priest. That is police!" and then went to wash his arm clean of old oil (see film: 11:05 – 11:38).
Whereas historically, the color may have simply been used as part of the costume of the devil, the modern interpretation is quite different. In iRocks words, the old oil is used to highlight their blackness, and is as such a representation of both pride and protest. The exclamation of "Black is beautiful" and Navarro's clenched, blackened fist of course gives clear connotations to the American Black power movement of the 1960's and 70's. A time when black resistance and self-empowerment in the United States was on the rise with groups such as The Black Panther Party becoming politically organized. I will not be going into the deeper layers of the American black power movement here but see for example Agnès Vardas "Black Panthers" (1968), where both the clenched fist and the "Black is beautiful" slogan is being used in full effect during the 1968 "Free Huey" demonstrations in Oakland. The critique of the police also seems to be in line with what organizations such as the Black Panthers stood for. A critique that demonstrated to me that jab jab today is more than a recognition of ancestral struggle. It is also a way of commenting upon contemporary issues, thus retaining the purported original spirit of jab jab as a masquerade of protest and resistance.
The idea of identity being formed in opposition to outsider categorization is also quite apparent in this example. While the colonizers had perceived the dark skin-color as worthless, the enslaved people in this story would have highlighted the color in pride. What differs iRock and Navarro's story from Winston's is the emphasis on jab jab's role in current forms of oppression. One way to frame these sorts of interpretations is through the lens of

storytelling as put forth by Michael Jackson. As mentioned earlier, Michael Jackson argues that storytelling is especially important as a strategy for making sense of distress and injustice, and that the act of storytelling may help the involved people regain feelings of agency (Jackson 2002, 35-36). In the example described above, both the injustice and the agency are obvious. Of course, the injustice that is referred to most often in jab jab was that done by the colonizer to the enslaved ancestor. The current injustice, although slightly less clear, was described by Navarro and iRock using the word "Babylon". The word Babylon is often used by Rastafarians in the Caribbean as a general descriptor of the oppressive parts of current society. So, jab jab becomes a vessel for voicing one's criticism of current forms of injustice, and the stories told seem to allow for the practitioner to gain a stronger feeling of agency. At the same time, the critique of current forms of oppression itself may also help create a direct link to the ancestor by implying that jab jab as practiced today has retained an unbroken tie to its original spirit of resilience. Aspects of protest and resilience are also clear in the actual practice of jab jab, and I will return to this point later in my discussion (Chapter III - Practice). In focusing on aspects of resilience when dealing with the brutal historical reality of slavery, the shared history created by the Grenadian people seems to become one of pride.

## The Aesthetic and Creolization

Before moving on to a discussion on music, I want to highlight how the aesthetic of jab jab may also be revealing of the masquerade as a product of creolization that is unique to the country of Grenada. Grenadian parent cultures are definitely visible in the jab jab aesthetic. Christianity, brought to the islands by European colonizers, is still very much visible in jab jab. An evident example is that the bible itself is often included as part of the portrayal. But even more obvious, jab, being a derivation of the word diable, is a devil masquerade. Several aspects of the jab jab portrayal point to this fact, most notably the horned helmets. The black color which we have discussed above could also very well be argued to be part of the devil portrayal, with the devils' black color representing darkness (evil) as opposed to light (good). When looking to Trinidad's jab jab counterpart, the jab molassie, the portrayal may even include wings, tail, and a trifork. Although ambiguous, the introduction of chains could also be attributed to the devil portrayal as one will occasionally see the Trinidadian jab molassie being held back in chains by accompanying imps. Anecdotally, Nellie Payne mentions a song

associated with the Grenadian jab jab in her article “Grenada Mas’ 1928-1988”. Without delving into the song in full, it is essentially a chant in which the jab jab begs for a coin to pay for his passage back to hell (Payne 1990, 55-56). Last but not least, the fearsome aspect of the portrayal is of course very much akin to the fearsome nature of the devil. So, the aesthetic is quite obviously influenced by the European introduction of Christianity. Meanwhile, other features of the masquerade are distinctly non-European. Although slightly more speculative due to the lack of historical records from an African perspective, some of the most obvious non-European elements are found within the musical side of jab jab. The fast-paced rhythms played primarily on goat-skin drums such as the Djembe and bass drums akin to the Dundun seem to be directly traceable to West-African music. Another stable in jab jab music is the conch shell which, although used in different situations throughout the world, could have been used as an instrument in Grenada going back all the way to Amerindian culture. Some, such as Tola Dabiri in her article “How did the Devil Cross the Deep Blue Sea?”, will even argue that the horns of the jab jab masquerade are not necessarily representative of the Christian devil, but could also bear resemblance to certain West-African masquerades (Dabiri 2019, 614-615).

As interesting as discussions on origin may be, I will not attempt to answer the question of origin definitively. Instead, I find the truly interesting aspects of jab jab to emerge once current interpretations of the masquerade are discussed. This is also where Stuart Halls notion of creolization as cultural translation comes in handy. When speaking to jab jab masqueraders in Grenada today, one realizes that what may have originally been described as either Christian or African symbols take on entirely new meanings. To the practitioner, horns are not necessarily a sign of the devil, but may represent the strength it would have taken the ancestors to endure the brutalities of slavery. Equally, the blackening of the skin may not represent darkness and evil, but rather a proud emphasis of the skin-color that was once held against them. Alternatively, it may very well represent the devil, but in a mocking sense, with the personification of the devil representing the evil of the slave-master. And whatever meaning West-African drum patterns may bear in Africa, they have come to be the soundtrack of resilience in Grenada. This, I would argue, is a prime example of cultural translation. While traces of parent cultures can easily be pinpointed, the meaning of the specific elements have changed drastically. The result is a hybrid practice filled with meaning that only makes sense due to the unique circumstances present in Grenada. For a proper understanding of jab jab in its contemporary form, it will therefore not make much sense to simply look for roots of elements in either France, England, or Africa. Rather, one will have to attribute jab jab wholly

to Grenada if one wants to understand the unique character and importance it bears today. I will now move on to a deeper discussion of jab jab as a musical expression.

## Chapter II – Music: Jab Jab as a Musical Genre

Again, I want to explain the sound of jab jab music before going into the actual ethnography. When it comes to music it is important to understand that jab jab can mean two different, but not completely unrelated things. First of all, there is the form of music that would be played by traditional jab jab bands. This form of music is completely analogue, and is performed using a combination of drums, conch shell, and chanting. Although traditionally played using goat-skin drums, other forms of "drums" such as tin-cans and plastic barrels are used as well. Some traditionalists will argue that an authentic jab jab rhythm requires three different drums playing in unison. The bass drum is perhaps the most easily recognizable, and is used to play a steady, fast-paced 4/4 rhythm. In actual practice, bands vary greatly in size and may include just two or several more drummers. Once the drums are playing, the conch shell becomes imperative. Although again, in actual practice it will at times be substituted with other types of horns such as the vuvuzela, airhorn, or whistle. The conch shell will usually be played in a rhythmic manner, complimenting the fast-paced drums. Finally, the chanting is usually led by the band leader in a call and repeat manner. Chants will most often relate to the practice of jab jab itself but may also touch upon current affairs.
The second type of music that one may refer to as jab jab is a subgenre of soca that has been developed over the past 35 years or so by Grenadian musicians. This type of jab jab music has been highly digitalized, usually created on computers using synthesis and sampling. Popular artists include the likes of Mr. Killa, Tallpree, Lava man, Temptress, Jab King, and Mandella Linkz, just to name a select few. For reference, the track "Playing Jab (Wicked Jab)" released in 2010 by Tallpree is a popular and typical jab jab anthem. The sound is aggressive, fast, and at times chaotic. It is insistent and has a powerful "in-your-face" attitude. While the sound of jab jab soca is arguably a lot closer to mainstream music in the Caribbean than the music of the traditional jab jab bands, it does retain a fairly strong link to the traditional music as well. The 4/4 rhythm of the bass drum is almost always present in modern jab jab soca and will often be pushing tempos above 160 beats per minute. The conch shell, or a synthesized emulation thereof, is also usually present. Jab jab soca is most often released as so-called

"riddims", where a producer will create an instrumental beat, and invite a number of artists to add their own vocal take, making for several versions of the same tune.
Jab jab soca is highly popular in Grenada, not just as part of the carnival, but throughout the year too. When strolling through the markets, having a drink at a bar, or even just taking the bus in the morning, chances are you are going to be listening to jab jab (whether you like it or not).

## Jab Jab Soca

Although an acquired taste for me, the music was what initially sparked my interest in jab jab. It quickly turned out, however, that getting hold of artists to work with was a challenge. Perhaps because the few months leading up to carnival are some of the busiest for jab jab artists. Either way, I managed to get hold of a few people, primarily producers.
My very first session of filming was done in mid-May, approximately three weeks after arriving in Grenada. I had planned to film with a music producer in the village of Birch Grove. The producer, named Nordley Frederick, has had a big influence on the current state of jab jab soca. He was active in a band called Rhydum Mix in the 1990's and has also done solo releases under the alias Big Daddy. When arriving in the town of Birch Grove, visitors are greeted by a sign that reads "Welcome to Birch Grove, Home of the Famous Rhydum Mix", testament to Nordleys great influence on Grenadian music. I had prepared a few questions for starters. After completing the interview, I asked Nordley if he would be willing to show me some of the music he had been working on, and specifically music that he would classify as jab jab. In doing so, it became obvious that the elements that define modern day jab jab soca music are directly referencing the traditional elements. The goat-skin drums of the traditional jab jab bands have been replaced by digitally programmed drums, yet a lot of the patterns he showed me are very similar to traditionalist drumming. Likewise, the conch shell has been replaced by digital emulations, yet the overall timbre and pattern is very recognizable. What stood out in his productions compared to traditionalist music was a bigger emphasis on melody and bassline, but still, for Nordley, the defining character of jab jab was the drums. So, while it may initially seem like a lot of modern-day jab jab soca is a far cry from the traditionalist's version, a closer listen reveals that elements obviously remain. He also showed me that jab jab, unlike other forms of soca, is often produced to be more sinister,

dark, and aggressive. While this is not true for all jab jab soca, it is definitely more common than in a lot of other styles of music produced in both Grenada and the wider region.
The sinister atmosphere often found in jab jab soca of course compliments the fearsome aesthetic discussed earlier, and the sinister history that jab jab masqueraders will reference.
He also spoke about the lyrical side of jab jab soca. Themes commonly explored include drinking, getting high, and sex. These are themes that have also been recognized by Danielle Sirek, as she writes about modern Grenadian soca as compared to traditional calypso in her article "Until I Die, I Will Sing My Calypso Song: Calypso, Soca, and Music Education across a Generational Divide in Grenada, West Indies" (Sirek 2018, 22-23). Based on her own experience studying music in Grenada, Sirek argues that soca is primarily aimed at younger generations of Grenadians who, influenced by American culture, prefer the "indifference and individual pleasure" of soca music, to the "intellectual critique of community-based social and political concerns" found in calypso (ibid., 23). Sirek is basing a large part of her analysis on a comparison of the lyrical side of the two genres, but in doing so, seems to be overlooking the deeper layers of soca found in the instrumental. While I think there is truth to her argument, namely the divide of generations with older people preferring calypso and younger people soca, Sirek ends up describing soca instrumentals as "up-tempo melodies on top of sparsely-textured, pre-recorded digital "riddims" that are usually released online for mass consumption." (ibid., 22). A description that completely omits the traditional style of jab jab music that a lot of Grenadian soca music builds upon. What Sirek does recognize, however, is that soca may in fact be a means of expressing values in less overt ways, pointing towards a younger generation's objection to conservatism (ibid., 23). So, while themes of drinking, sex, and profanity may seem unrelated to jab jab as a whole (and for many people, they probably are), a connection to the rebellious sides of jab jab can definitely be made, since Grenada is in many ways a fairly conservative country where even profanity is banned by law. The connection to traditional jab jab music within the soca version is also very interesting since jab jab soca, which is essentially pop-music in Grenada, has permeated into many aspects of the day to day lives of Grenadians. I would go so far as to say that jab jab soca may be interpreted as a distinct national icon, and this becomes especially obvious during the carnival itself.

## Traditional Jab Jab Music

So far, we have primarily been discussing the modern version of jab jab music, but there are also interesting points to be made when considering the traditionalist style. The traditional style of music is, as explained earlier, based on drums, conch shell, and chanting. In the village of Gouyave I met jab jab elder Lester Simon, known locally as Shellman. Shellman, of course, being his nickname as a well-known conch shell player in jab jab. Lester explained to me how he had begun playing the conch shell as a young boy selling jacks on the harbor. The blow of the conch shell would signal the arrival of fish for people in the village to purchase. Lester had brought a number of conch shells to show me, varying in size and tone. One of the first things I asked Lester was how the conch shell had ended up being part of jab jab. He didn't really have an answer to the question, but instead started telling me about the importance of the conch shell in jab jab. He told me that the drums were the main thing, but that the band would not be complete without the conch shell either. That the conch shell gave the music it's drive, and that people would ask him to start playing it if he let the drums play on their own for too long. As the conversation went on, he began telling me about the use of conch shell outside of jab jab too. One of the uses he discussed was the historical use on the plantation, where enslaved people would have supposedly used the conch shell to send messages across the grounds. He also mentioned that the conch shell would be used in all sorts of other situations locally, ranging from signaling the arrival of fish on the harbor, to ceremonial use in religious settings. In jab jab, I've been told, the conch shell was historically also used to signal the beginning of a masquerade, drawing people in the village out to witness or perhaps join the performance.
The drive that the conch shell provides to the music is a point I have met elsewhere, although applied to the traditional drums. In an interview with former CEO of Spicemas, Colin Dowe, he explained to me how the beating of drums provides for a kind of introspection:

"*My preference is not Hi-Fi, DJ music with loud sound. But rather amplified drums, or not amplified at all. Whether it's beating buckets, beating drums. Having that slow, deliberate chip. Recognizing that we are weary. We are burdened by the challenges that we have been carrying from generation to generation.*" (see film: 27:13 - 27:50)

The preference for drums mentioned by Colin Dowe was also echoed by quite a few of my other participants and seems to relate specifically to the African aspects of identity. In a talk

with the music producer Xpert Productions, who is highly recognized and influential in the contemporary Grenadian soca scene, I was told that the jab jab sound is achieved by the use of African percussion.

"*In relation to the instruments… I would say the timpani plays a big role in that jab sound. The conch shell as well. You could go as far as the conga drums, cause when you think jab, you have to think Africa. And in Africa you have all this percussion, just plain. […] Any African percussion you can think about, it will work well with jab.*"

I will not be digging into the history of the exact drums mentioned, but for some (at least the timpani) the African origin is probably debatable. The rhythms played, however, may very well be based on an African influence. The actual origin of a specific drum is also beside the point. To me, it is the connection of the drum to an African heritage that is interesting.
In her PhD thesis on music and identity in Grenada, Danielle Sirek concludes that music in Grenada entails a process of becoming, of negotiating "who we are" and "who we are not" (Sirek 2013, 260). The insistence by some producers to maintain elements of traditional jab jab music in modern-day Grenadian soca is for me a clear case in point. As can be read from Colin Dowe's quote cited above, it is a recognition of the collective history of oppression that is a common denominator for most people living in Grenada today. As such, jab jab music, whether the traditional style or the modern soca-version, can be understood as a reflection of Grenadian identity. But, as Sirek points out, the music is not simply a reflection of identity, but also a constitutive factor, as soca music is a somewhat controversial subject in Grenada leading to constant negotiation (ibid., 261). Colin Dowe may prefer traditional jab jab music as opposed to the soca version that a lot of younger participants will prefer, while others (mainly older generations) will prefer other genres entirely, opposing the corporeal pleasures that jab jab and soca tends to promote (ibid., 261-263). The point I am trying to make here is not that Grenadian identity should be defined in this or that way, but rather that the musical side of jab jab becomes a process that promotes negotiation of a collective, Grenadian identity.

## Jab Jab Music at Carnival

The main carnival celebration is held in the city of St. George's where a route will be

designated by the Spicemas Corporation (the organizing body of Grenada's carnival). Carnival-goers will then parade along the route accompanied by a large number of so-called "DJ trucks". Essentially a humongous sound system on the back of a truck with a DJ on top. Throughout the course of the carnival, people will walk the route several times, as the DJ's will play them music. As carnival is a hugely competitive affair, a set of judges are stationed along the route. One of the things these judges will look out for is the music played by the DJ trucks. The most popular tunes of the season will become the winners of the competition known as Road March. This year, mid carnival, the Spicemas Corporation posted an official announcement on their Instagram page urging the DJ's playing at carnival to play more local music (figure 4), effectively meaning jab jab soca. The reason that was given was that the judges would be unable to proclaim a Road March winner if local music was not being played sufficiently. The comment section quickly exploded with people questioning how this had become an issue in the first place, some even arguing for an implementation of policies that would force the DJ's performing to play local music only. One commenter, asking whether jab jab soca was perhaps being overplayed, was quickly shut down by their fellow carnival-goers. Road March is also only one of several competitions connected to carnival, another large one in music being Soca Monarch, held over several events in the month leading up to the main carnival. Basically, there is a massive sense of pride connected to the sound of jab jab as a uniquely Grenadian expression. The music will also directly influence the aesthetic of the jab jab, adding to the dynamicism of the masquerade. Such an example was easily visible this year. One of the most popular tunes released in the 2023 season was the song "Bag Ah Sugar" by Terra D Governor. Although it is up for debate whether the tune can truly be classified as jab jab soca or not, the repeated chorus lyrics "Dip me head in the bag ah sugar" meant that loads of carnival goers would bring bags of sugar out on the route. Another similar example from 2007 was the tune "Trees"

*Figure 4: Screenshot from the "Spicemasgrenada" Instagram page.*

by Tallpree, which led to people rooting up trees and bringing them with them on route. Although influences may of course go both ways, the musical expression and the actual portrayal are undoubtedly connected. When considering the four ways in which music may contribute to identity that Timothy Rice discusses, it is perhaps the second and third that most obviously apply. As Rice puts it, "[…] musical performance provides the opportunity for communities sharing an identity to see themselves in action and to imagine others who might share the same style of performance." (Rice 2007, 35). A few things will point to this. When reading the comments on social media posts such as the one discussed above, it becomes obvious that jab jab soca is understood as uniquely Grenadian. We can also take the competition of Soca Monarch as an example. While preliminary rounds are open for anyone to compete, the main event is the final, usually held at the national stadium. The crowd at the event is huge, many of whom will be waving the Grenadian flag during the performances. And although the competition is not exclusively for jab jab soca, the style is well represented, and jab jab artists will often take the crown. This, I would argue, is an example of music contributing to a collective identity in the sense described above by Timothy Rice. At the event, there is a great feeling of unity as Grenadian music is celebrated by the masses. Whether this is a process of identity formation or not is up for debate, but it is definitely affirmative of Grenada as a collective. The third of the four points Rice puts forth in his article is the idea of music contributing to the 'feel' of collective identity. The more emotional and affective side of identity (ibid.). Rice references the article "Our Tradition Is a Very Modern Tradition: Popular Music and the Construction of Pan-Yoruba Identity" by ethnomusicologist Christopher Waterman. In this article Waterman argues, amongst other things, that Juju music in Nigeria is a contributing factor to the production of a pan-Yoruban identity. He argues that the music does not just reflect the structure of society, but also adds to "[…] it's ethos or "feel": intensive, vibrant, buzzing and fluid" (Waterman 1990, 376). He goes on to discuss Anderson's theory on imagined communities, arguing that it is not the falsity of the community that is important, but the style in which it is imagined. Music, in Waterman's case as a sort of metaphor for the community, is one such style (ibid.). I would argue that the same is true for jab jab in Grenada.

# Chapter III – Practice: Jab Jab as Street Theater

In this final section of analysis, I will attempt to show how identity is formed through the actual practice of jab jab, and specifically how this identity may be recognized as a national one.

## J'ouvert

J'ouvert itself was perhaps the most important event of my entire fieldwork and took place at the very end of my time in Grenada, in the early morning hours of August 14th. As I had already spent a few months learning about stories and narratives in the tradition directly from practitioners, I had gained a fairly good eye for the symbolism and meaning that one can extract from what may otherwise look like pure chaos. The event is intense to say the least, yet very enjoyable at the same time. The J'ouvert celebrations were already going strong when I joined with my camera at 03.00 a.m., despite not officially starting before a couple of hours later. When I woke up that night, I could already hear the fast, thunderous rhythms of jab jab music being blasted across the bay. As I went outside, signal flares lit up the sky in the distance. The starting point of the parade was located by Pandy beach, a few kilometers from my apartment in St. George's. As I made my way towards the start, the streets got more and more crowded. Eventually, the streets were so packed with people that I could not make it any further. Those first few hours of J'ouvert, before the sun rose, were the most intense moments of the event. The streets were being lit up with fire and flares as people covered their bodies in old engine oil, all dancing to deafening jab jab beats. More and more people showed up, one looking more fearsome and grotesque than the other. By 05.00 a.m., the parade started moving towards the city-center along the harbor, and smaller bands became organized to show off their jab jab portrayals. There was quite an obvious distinction between people dedicated to playing jab jab, and people who were simply dirty with oil from attending. The fearsome aesthetic of those truly dedicated to the masquerade is really too striking to properly convey in words. I was at once relieved to have my camera on hand, yet afraid that the masses covered in old engine oil would ruin my equipment before I got to salvage the footage. The camera itself also played an interesting role in my experience of J'ouvert, essentially provoking the performative aspects of the masquerade. Time and time again people would jump out in front of the camera to show off whatever aspect made their take on jab jab unique.

Before going on to a more theoretical discussion of the event as a whole, I want to briefly touch upon J'ouvert (and this really goes for the carnival as a whole as well) as a unifying event. A lot of Grenadians will move out of Grenada for either education or career purposes. This means that several Grenadian communities are found in different places in the world, especially in Canada, USA, and England. Carnival is a time during which a lot of people will return to Grenada to see friends and family all while playing jab jab or other forms of masquerade. There is a massive feeling of national pride during this time, with many people in the parade waving Grenadian flags. The music being played is also almost exclusively Grenadian Soca. The people attending are people of every walk of life, every age, gender, and color. While I would argue that the people who are most heavily engaged with jab jab are still primarily men, one person explained to me that J'ouvert was really a time in which differences between people were erased. When everyone was covered in old oil and dressed in skimpy old clothes, the differences between participants did not matter. Behind the underlying atmosphere of protest and resilience, one gets a sense that J'ouvert is a celebration of unity and of Grenada.

In their article "Nationalism: What We Know and What We Still Need to Know", Harris Mylonas and Maya Tudor highlight a number of different strands of scholarship on themes of the nation and nationalism. In the case of jab jab, I find the idea of nationalism as practice particularly interesting. According to Mylonas and Tudor, and I would tend to agree with them, the idea of nationalism as a practice highlights the "bottom-up" creation of national identity, pointing to a sense of belonging that is actively created by the members of the nation themselves (Mylonas & Tudor 2021, 120). They juxtapose the nationalism created in public settings by the people of the nation to the more politically planned nation-building efforts done by governments, claiming that both are important spaces for defining the characteristics of a nationalism (ibid.). When the history of jab jab is taken into consideration, it becomes fairly obvious that jab jab is in fact a national icon that has been built from the bottom-up before eventually being embraced by the Grenadian state. Most obviously, of course, jab jab can be traced back to long before a Grenadian state had even been imagined. But, as mentioned earlier, even the first Grenadian head of state Eric Gairy had attempted to ban the practice altogether in 1973, just as Grenada was about to gain full independence. In the early stages of nation-building in Grenada, one would have to conclude that jab jab has survived in spite of the state, due to the people's insistence on playing the masquerade. In 2011, the Spicemas corporation, marketed the carnival with the tagline "Uniquely Rooted in our Rich Ancestral Traditions. Spicemas: Home of 100,000 Jab Jabs.", marking the state's full

embracement of jab jab as a proud, Grenadian tradition (see “Jab Jab as a Nation-Building “Tool”?”). The idea of nationalism happening in the everyday lives of people has been dealt with by Michal Billig in his book “Banal Nationalism” (1995). In this book, he argues that theories of collective identity formation (namely those put forth by social psychologists Tajfel and Turner) fall short when trying to understand the importance of national identity (Billig 1995, 67). He argues that the members of a nation not only have to imagine themselves as a group, but also have to “identify the identity of their own nation” (ibid., 68). Billig’s idea of banal nationalism is of course famously dealing with the ways in which nationalism is reinforced in the day to day lives of people, be it through sporting events or reading newspapers. And while carnival, being an annual event, may seem to transcend the everyday lives of Grenadians, the carnival is an event so large and influential that it permeates into the everyday for months leading up to carnival, some aspects maybe even throughout the year. But I want to explore the idea of “identifying the identity of the nation” a little deeper, as I believe J’ouvert and the situations described above may be understood as examples of this process. Because the process that leads to the formation of a national identity during Grenada’s carnival does go beyond simply waving flags.

To highlight this point, I want to outline a few concrete situations from J’ouvert that I found particularly interesting. Shortly after sunrise a man covered in oil came up to me with a huge book in his hands. With a Grenadian flag wrapped around his head and a quite serious look on his face, he was pretending to study the book. Only, as he was flipping through the pages to show the book to me and my camera, I realized that all the pages were blank. Another man came up next to him, pointed to a white page and told me: “You see this? This is purity!”. He then took his hand, covered in black oil, and planted it on the page to leave a black imprint. He then pointed to the page once again and told me: “You see this? This is dirty!” (see film: 13:19 – 13:34). The idea of bringing a book, supposedly representing the bible, is quite common within traditional jab jab bands. If the pages are not blank, the book would often be held upside down. As with much of jab jab practice, no-one is really able to explain the exact origin, but the symbolism and critique implied in the situation described above is fairly obvious. From these books, jab jab bands will also often do a mock “spelling”, perhaps signifying the forceful teachings of Christianity that the ancestors would have been subjugated to. In jab jab, spelling really becomes a commentary upon the subject of the word that is being spelled. A prime example was given earlier when Navarro and iRock spelled the word “police”.

Another situation I encountered shortly after included a man dragging a long chain. Dragging chains is an essential part of the jab jab masquerade, today symbolizing the breaking free of shackles. This man was dragging a particularly long chain, which a couple of other young men seemed to take note of. One of them ran up to the dragging end of the chain, and the other told me to point my camera at them. The two men holding the chain then started swinging it, with the third guy jumping in to rope skip. As they were skipping the chain, more and more people stopped to watch, and a few even joined in on the fun (see film: 12:24 – 12:44). While this situation may have not been as deliberate of a critique as the people with the blank book, it was still a situation that to any onlooker aware of Grenada's history would be filled with symbolism. It was breaking free of shackles taken to the next level.

So, in trying to understand the process of national identity formation that happens during J'ouvert, portrayals such as the two mentioned above become useful. It is worth pointing out that these are just two examples, but lots and lots of similar situations could be discussed. In the case of Grenada, the identity created seems to be tightly connected to the historical context of the place. As mentioned earlier, the vast majority of Grenadians today are direct descendants of enslaved people who were forcibly moved to the island from different parts of West-Africa. Essentially, their history was forced upon them against their will, and very little of it has ever been recorded from the enslaved persons point of view. And although slavery was formally abolished in 1834, Grenada was not granted full independence until 1974. As we know, Grenada has evolved into its current form under a great number of influences. So how do people make sense of their own place in the world under these circumstances? I want to quickly reiterate the point made earlier using Jacksons ideas of storytelling, that storytelling can be understood as a way for people to makes sense of their own place in the world, defining and redefining notions of self and the collective (Jackson 2002, 16). The situations described above can be understood as a strategic form of storytelling that lets people define themselves as a very proud collective. When it comes to jab jab, storytelling can be understood in primarily two ways. First of all, most people will have their own narratives *about* jab jab. These are often stories of origin like the ones discussed in previous chapters but may also be personal stories based on the experience of witnessing, or partaking in, the practice of jab jab. Second, there is the story that is told *through* jab jab as a form of street theater, such as the above. While there is not really a common story that everyone agrees upon, the stories will often pertain to a common theme of resilience. When it comes to stories of origin, there is no way for us to either confirm or deny the historical validity, but they are a

valuable insight to the modern-day perception of the Grenadian ancestor, and by extension, the current perception of self. While stories told within jab jab may influence notions of self, they are also influential in the construction of a collective identity. Richard Jenkins interprets the work of anthropologist Anthony Cohen in his book "Social Identity" and argues that collective identities are often constructed in response to (or in defense against) outsider categorization (Jenkins 2014, 143). I would argue that the collective identity that the practice of jab jab at J'ouvert points toward is a great example of this, as it is one that is constructed in complete opposition to the ideology that suppressed the Grenadian ancestors into slavery. The dark hand imprint planted on the "bible" is a clear form of mockery, rejecting the colonizers connection of black/white to impurity/purity. The breaking free of chains, even rope-skipping with them, is of course also a rejection of the oppressive system once imposed on the people of Grenada. And as mentioned, these are just a couple of examples amongst many similar performances, all witnessed and played by the masses. While the European colonizers enforced a brutal hierarchy of slavery, jab jab seems to level the playing field. As my participant Colin Dowe told me, when playing jab jab, the differences between people do not really matter. Again, J'ouvert is of course just one day of the year, and inequality is definitely present in Grenada, but the story persists. At the same time, it is a story that massive amounts of people take part in creating, with literally thousands of people from every walk of life taking to the streets across the nation, many proudly waving the Grenadian flag as part of their portrayal. The idea of jab jab being a uniquely Grenadian masquerade is also very prevalent amongst its practitioners, adding to a feeling of national pride. And throughout the parade, the underlying atmosphere of protest and resilience stands as an ever-present recognition (and, at least for some, continuation) of the enduring spirit of the ancestor.

## National Identity as Performance

The idea of storytelling as constitutive of identity during Grenada's carnival may be expanded upon when looking at national identity as a type of performance.

My talks with Nigel may once again be illustrative. Nigel, although a dedicated practitioner, also seemed to have his own limits that may have pointed towards a slightly more conservative performance. He did not endorse practitioners going overboard with the obscurity of their portrayals. For example, at J'ouvert a lot of jab jab masqueraders will have

some sort of raw meat or fish in their mouths, a few extremes even carrying roadkill in their mouths. This, to Nigel, did not have anything to do with jab jab. As he told me, there is a difference between people playing jab jab and people getting dirty from participating in Carnival. He did not endorse people simply joining for the chaotic nature of J'ouvert and thoughtlessly getting dirty.

With jab jab, the idea of performance is of course quite literal, as masqueraders perform the ideas they want to convey. In the book "National Identity, Popular Culture, and Everyday Life" (2002), Tim Edensor discusses the idea of national identity as performative, inspired by Judith Butler's theory of gender as performance. Edensor argues that the idea of identity as performance tends to underline the dynamic nature of the formative process (Edensor 2002, 69). Also, the fact that identity is being developed as a form of negotiation becomes clear from Edensor's perspective of performance. He argues that performance will make visible the competing ideas that make up the negotiation and reveal the exclusive nature of national identities (ibid., 70). I will not be going into the exclusivity of identities, but the process of negotiation is interesting as people obviously do not fully agree on what a proper performance of jab jab looks like, taking it to varying extremes. A man like Nigel, the principal of an Anglican school, may be slightly more modest in his portrayal, while younger generations may be more interested in pushing the boundaries. The idea may also be linked to the earlier discussion on music, somewhat echoing the distinction between calypso and soca mentioned by Danielle Sirek. The distinction referred to by Nigel is really one between introspection and reflexivity on one side, and revelry and indifference on the other. They are two different types of performance, done in the same space, but pointing in two slightly different directions. Ultimately, it is a clash that provides for deeper contemplation on the collective ideas of identity that are generated through the mode of one's own participation in jab jab.

## Rituals

A related argument may be put forth when looking at J'ouvert and the practice of jab jab as a ritualistic event. During fieldwork in Grenada, I would have practically all my participants recount their early memories of jab jab. A common theme expressed was a combination of pure horror and fascination, eventually leading to excitement and participation. A case in point was when my participant Colin Dowe told me about his own way in to jab jab. In a

detailed manner he explained to me how his engagement with jab jab had changed throughout the years. In his early days of attending J'ouvert with his parents, the sight of what had seemed like thousands of jab jab, spewing fire as they made it down Market Hill in St. George's had made him hide behind his mother in fear. As time passed and Colin made it to his teenage years, carnival and jab jab became a time of revelry. Finally, as he grew older and more mature, he gained an appreciation for the deeper meanings of jab jab, and the masquerade became a very serious one (see film: 25:15-27:50). Having experienced Colins jab jab portrayal in person, I can attest to the seriousness of his and his bands participation. Void of revelry, they slowly march the street, dragging their chains with a weary look on their faces (although still with a beer in one hand). So, in short, jab jab for Colin went from a time of pure terror to revelry and finally deep reflection. My impression from speaking with a large number of practitioners is that Colins movement through different forms of participation is a very typical one.

As explained, the exact origin of jab jab is practically unknown, but we know that carnival in Grenada most likely started with the French as a catholic tradition (Payne 1990, 54). Today, a lot of conservative Christians in Grenada will oppose the jab jab masquerade entirely, deeming it demonic, some even calling it devil-worshipping despite practitioners repeatedly refusing this to be the case. The confusion seems to arise from the jab jabs devil-like appearance. In Christian circles, the devil is of course a symbol of dark and evil, but for the jab jab practitioner, the symbolism is something quite different. And if not different, then at the very least, the devil would reflect a time that was indeed dark and evil. What I hope is clear at this point is that the tradition of jab jab is not static over time, but is highly dynamic, reflecting the society which surrounds it. But more than simply reflecting the mindset of its participants, jab jab may also help construct the views participants hold. This is an idea that Jack Williams discusses, as he argues that rituals can be meaningful to people who at the outset do not share the beliefs inscribed in said ritual, as rituals are formative and not just expressive (Willams 2024, 118). The dynamic nature of jab jab and related meanings described by Colin can also be accounted for through William's take on rituals, as repeated practice means that time and dedication will change the experience of participation as one is brought deeper into the beliefs and values inscribed in the ritual (ibid.). As described earlier, younger participants will often go from revelry to introspection as they age and gain a deeper understanding of jab jab. Williams also argues that rituals are closely knitted to identity and can be used actively by individuals both to construct and validate identity when it is contested

(ibid., 119). Through an example of same-sex marriage, he shows us how existing rituals can be appropriated into new contexts, allowing for identity to be affirmed (ibid.). Although the example used by Williams is quite far from the tradition of jab jab, the underlying idea is applicable. The Christian meaning of the devil is more or less void in the jab jab portrayal despite any influence it might have had. In jab jab today, the meaning of the devil has morphed into a critique of the institution of slavery, colonizer oppression, and modern-day injustices. It has become a symbol of the Grenadian perception of self as a people possessing a high degree of agency and resilience. Taking it up a notch, Williams also argues that the world-building capacity of rituals has a use in larger power-structures. Because of rituals formative power, they can be used by institutions to help shape people. Despite of jab jabs turbulent history, the Spicemas Corporation, as a body created by the Grenadian government, may very well have an interest in jab jab today as a tool in the nation-building effort. I will discuss this idea in the following.

## Jab Jab as a Nation-Building "Tool"?

So far, most of my analysis has pointed towards a type of identity formation that for a lot of people will be happening more or less unconsciously. As a final bit of analysis, I want to explore the idea of jab jab as a tool that is used actively in nation-building efforts. I will return to Edensor's book in which he discusses popular culture as an arena for negotiation of national identity. Edensor argues that a lot of seminal works on the nation and national identity, by the likes of Anderson, Gellner, and Hobsbawm, have tended to overemphasize the importance of the spectacular, and a sort of "top-down" implementation of national identity by the elites of society (Edensor 2002, 2-12). Edensor, however, is more interested in the work of Michael Billig who focuses on everyday aspects of identity formation. Essentially, Edensor argues that ceremonies and other extraordinary cultural events gain their power when they are (re)distributed in popular culture, or the everyday lives of people (ibid., 12). I believe that jab jab plays a role that lies somewhere in between these two perspectives. As has been mentioned earlier, jab jab was attempted banned in the 1970's. Such an attempt makes it clear that the initial popularity would not have been the result of an orchestrated effort by the elites. So, initially, we can assume that jab jab gained its popularity in popular culture. But I would argue that it has, in the meantime, been appropriated by state-driven corporations who have

recognized the value of jab jab in creating national consciousness and setting apart Grenada as a unique place. On the official website of the Spicemas Corporation, the following is stated:

"*The Spicemas Corporation is a statutory body created by an act of parliament. The Corporation is responsible for promoting and organizing Grenada's Carnival "Spicemas" and all official Spicemas events.*" (https://www.spicemasgrenada.com/about-us/)

The events referred to go beyond the carnival itself. The official launch-party of the 2023 edition of Spicemas was held in the end of April, almost four months prior to the carnival. The four months between the launch-party and the carnival were also packed with carnival-themed events like kid's carnival, steel-band competitions, and beauty pageants. And as mentioned earlier, the 2011 carnival-theme of Grenada being the home of 100,000 jab jab points to a clear promotional effort. What I'm trying to convey here is the sheer scale of carnival in Grenada. As one participant told me, as soon as carnival is finished, the preparation for next year begins. So, I would argue that jab jab and carnival, although a spectacular event, has become so deeply ingrained in Grenadian culture that it has entered the realm of the everyday (think for example of the music), and that this has happened largely due to state-driven efforts despite an initial reluctance. I do want to point out, however, that these state-driven efforts have of course not been done with the sole intention of creating a national consciousness. The carnival in Grenada is held in August, which is atypical as carnival is traditionally associated with the Christian lent and is thus held in either the month of February or March. But the Carnival in Grenada was moved to August to avoid competition from other Caribbean carnivals, especially the famous Trinidadian carnival, allowing for more participants and tourists to join. So, the promotion of carnival of course has a large economic aspect to it as well, and one may even argue that the national consciousness that follows has formed inadvertently as a sort of by-product. Even though there is a lot to unpack here, I will stick to a short argument based on the idea of competition amongst islands, as this is an aspect of carnival that quite clearly leads to a form of pride that is distinctly national. Basically, you will often hear Grenadians claiming that Grenada has the best carnival (or at least J'ouvert) in the Caribbean. A claim that I am almost certain will not be unique to Grenada.

# Discussion on Film and Text

## The Danger of Exoticization

Finally, I want to touch upon the role of the film in my project. In working with jab jab practitioners in Grenada, I realized just how important jab jab really is. This importance, combined with the fact that very little in terms of film and text has been published on jab jab, meant that people met my project with very high expectations. Being aware that the film would most likely be consumed by a larger audience than this written thesis, my main aim in editing the film was to create a product that would be able to convey a meaningful story on its own merits. Also, it was important for me to create a film that would be meaningful to a broader audience rather than an exclusively academic audience.

Thematically, the film I have created might be compared to a film such as Jean Rouch's "Les Maîtres Fous" (1955) on the West-African Hauka movement, but I have attempted to distance myself somewhat from the approach taken by Jean Rouch. In Les Maîtres Fous, we are introduced to members of the Hauka movement in Accra, Ghana, as they are supposedly being possessed by British colonial officers and administrators. The film is a shocking watch. As the members of the movement are possessed into a trance-like state, their movement becomes almost non-human and animal-like. Screaming, frothing from their mouths, they throw themselves around the village in a wild spectacle with pith helmets on their heads and torches in their hands. Eventually a dog is sacrificed, the blood is drunk, and the meat is boiled. The possessed members grab pieces of meat straight from the boiling pot, supposedly without feeling pain, and eat it. The film was deemed highly controversial upon its release for various reasons, even resulting in an outright ban in the British colonies. Paul Stoller writes about the controversy surrounding the film in his book "The Cinematic Griot" (1992). Amongst European scholars the reception was mixed. Some were offended by the African mockery of white Europeans, while others deemed the work a masterpiece. Amongst many African scholars and students however, the film was condemned for exoticization and reinforcing racist stereotypes of African savagery (Stoller 1992, 151). Stoller points to a situation mentioned by Jean Rouch himself during an interview with Dan Yakir in 1978, that exemplifies the worry of the African scholars:

"*Les Maîtres Fous was controversial everywhere. It was criticized by the British and by young African intellectuals. The late Senegalese director Blaise Senghor told me that when he came out of the theater in Paris, the spectators looked at him, saying to each other: "Here's another one who is going to eat a dog!" It took them a long time to understand the real meaning of the film."* (Yakir 1978, 3).

Stoller explains that a lot of the critique that the film was met with was due to a lack of contextualization. Les Maîtres Fous becomes very dependent on prior knowledge about colonialism and the Hauka movement, some arguing that it really only works as a complement to written accounts of the phenomenon (Stoller 1992, 152-153). Michael Taussig, in his book "Mimesis and Alterity" (1993), on the other hand, mentions a specific moment of juxtaposition in the film that should point directly to the mimetic, mocking nature of the Hauka. We see a shot of an egg being cracked over the head of a statue representing the British Governor-General, which is then immediately cut to a shot of the actual Governor-General wearing a plumed helmet (Taussig 1993, 242). While I agree with Taussig that this is indeed a powerful piece of cinematic juxtaposition, it is also subtle in the grand scheme of the film. It is a very implicit form of contextualization that could easily be lost in the otherwise shocking footage, at least by the casual, non-academic viewer. A point clearly illustrated by Rouch in the interview quoted above.
I've written this somewhat lengthy discussion on Les Maîtres Fous because I believe the criticism Jean Rouch was met with is important to take into consideration in a project like my own. Jab jab, although different from the Hauka movement in many ways, is also going to be very exotic and obscure to those unfamiliar with the tradition. What seems to be the pitfall for Les Maîtres Fous is the lack of contextualization, and for this reason, I have decided to include quite a bit of contextualization in my actual film, and not just this thesis. The contextualization is handled in a few different ways and is for the most part, unlike Jean Rouch's approach, very explicit. The sequence in the beginning of the film at the Grenada National Museum is created to provide important historical context, while the "flashbacks" to practitioners explaining their interpretation of jab jab that are scattered throughout the rest of the film provide more of a contemporary context. The combination of both allows the viewer to understand the reasoning behind the obscurity, while an intertitle explains to the viewer that the scenes shown are part of the annual Carnival. Another decision made to prevent exoticization is the early introduction of the jab jab portrayal itself. While editing the film I was considering a much different structure in which the actual portrayal would only be hinted

at until the end of the film, where scenes of carnival and a reveal of the portrayal itself would work as a sort of climax. I eventually decided against this approach, as the effect of building intensity in this manner seemed to add unnecessary drama rather than proper understanding of the masquerade. Similarly, I was considering a film exclusively showing scenes from carnival letting the symbolism of the masquerade speak for itself. And while this may have been a more rewarding viewing experience for those that would pick up on the symbolism, I suspect a majority would miss it. I am not trying to argue that the approach I have gone with in the final cut is going to completely negate the possibility of exoticization. As mentioned earlier, I have even heard stories locally in Grenada of jab jab being misinterpreted as devil-worshipping in conservative Christian communities. Rather, it is important for me to recognize exoticization as a real issue in ethnographic filmmaking, but also an issue that should be attempted to be minimized and handled with care.

## Film and Collaborative Research

The following is a short discussion that pertains to the power of knowledge as created through visual representations. The films we make have the capacity to influence the lives of other people. Take for example the short films and ads made by NGOs in their efforts of fundraising. Films have to be interpreted by an audience, just like any other representation, but I believe films may be perceived of as more "true", due to their resemblance of the things they represent. There is inherently an asymmetric distribution of power in a research project, when the researcher is the person in control of creating the representation of the researched. A "solution" to the issue of just representation that a lot of visual ethnographers have advocated for is the idea of collaborative research and collaborative filmmaking.
Jane Kotaska discusses the idea of collaborative research in her article "Reconsidering Collaboration: What Constitutes Good Research with Indigenous Communities?". Collaboration, she argues, means the sharing of power between researcher and researched (Kotaska 2019, 30). She also argues, however, that the extent to which the power is actually shared when working under the label of "collaboration" varies greatly from project to project. This gives rise to a number of important ethical considerations, but the one I am most interested in here is the idea of lost transparency. As Kotaska states, there can be varying degrees of collaboration in a research project, but ultimately the power lies with the researcher, as letting go of power completely would leave the researcher in a role of pure

advocacy rather than research (ibid.). The danger then lies in claiming that issues of asymmetric power in the creation of just representations have been negated through the use of collaborative methods. Relating this to my own project and my position as a European outsider in a postcolonial context, it feels especially important to prioritize a high degree of transparency.

## Film Versus Text

Finally, I want to discuss the role of the film as opposed to this written thesis, and exactly what each modality may contribute with to the overall project. In her chapter "Anthropological Visions: Some Notes on Visual and Textual Authority", Kirsten Hastrup argues that the visual will never be able to convey the invisible. In her study of Icelandic farms, she describes a ram exhibition which, to her, had been a powerful experience of masculinity and sexuality. An invisible experience that she had been unable to capture with her camera (Hastrup 1992, 9). She argues that the deeper layers of the experience could simply only be portrayed adequately through the medium of text, with her general argument being that the visual often ends up being a naive portrayal of the subject's immediate appearance (ibid., 17). Personally, I've had somewhat of an opposite experience. While I agree that certain aspects of jab jab would have been difficult to capture filmically, the all-important aesthetic that the jab jab masquerade is known for seems impossible to adequately describe in words. Film in the case of my own project has been an essential tool for portraying the fearsome and the grotesque, allowing me to convey the highly provocative nature of jab jab more efficiently. By viewing footage of jab jab in practice, audiences are brought closer to experiencing the intense emotions that the jab jab masqueraders are attempting to provoke in their onlookers. This, for me, has been the main difference between the use of film and text. The film is an important tool for portraying the empirical reality of jab jab, and creating a stronger understanding of the aesthetic and soundscape that makes up jab jab. On the other hand, text has been a much better medium for providing deeper contextualization and theorization of the tradition. I have aimed for my use of the two modalities to become complementary, each contributing differently to the overall project.

# Ideas For Further Research

My engagement with jab jab in Grenada has opened up my eyes to a whole range of interesting research opportunities. Within jab jab itself, there is a lot to be explored. In this thesis I have primarily focused on aspects of collective identity and nationalism. But I have only touched upon a small fraction of the themes that could have been explored. Other obvious directions would have been jab jab's role in the performance of gender and sexuality, tourism and globalization, or perhaps even local class-struggle. If going beyond jab jab, an incorporation of different forms of so-called traditional masquerade (and perhaps newer ones as well) in Grenada could strengthen and nuance some of the arguments I have made. Specifically, I think it would be interesting to look at the relation to other Grenadian masquerades such as Vieux Corps, Shortknee, and the Shakespeare Mas of Carriacou. The Wild Indian also comes to mind. Going beyond the borders of Grenada, a comparative study regionally would be interesting as similar masquerades are played throughout the Caribbean. This, I would like to point out, has been attempted somewhat in the book "Festive Devils of the Americas" (2015) edited by Riggio et. al, where the phenomenon of devil masquerading has been studied throughout the Americas. A deeper dive could still be made to the Caribbean specifically, as I suspect a lot of influence and inspiration has traveled across Islands. At the same time, regional comparisons would also help in revealing the aspects of a masquerade that makes it unique to its specific island/country. In the case of jab jab specifically, a regional study may therefore also strengthen, or provide nuance to, some of the arguments that I have explored in this thesis.

# Conclusion

Quite a few points have been made during this thesis, so to finish it off, I will attempt to collect my thoughts. The question posed in the introduction concerns jab jab as it relates to the emergence of a collective Grenadian identity, a national identity. And while it should be clear by now that jab jab means so much more, I will try to limit myself to this discussion. First of all, jab jab has emerged as a product of creolization under influences specific to Grenada and should thus be understood as a uniquely Grenadian practice. The meaning and symbolism found in the elements that constitute jab jab should not be confused with the meaning of elements of parent cultures that may bear resemblance. This is to say that we are indeed talking about a Grenadian identity.

With this in place, we can start unpacking the ways in which jab jab contributes to the formation of this identity. Storytelling is an important aspect of jab jab that permeates all the different elements that constitutes the masquerade, from its specific aesthetic to the music that accompanies it, and of course the theatrical performance that is practiced during carnival itself. Although these are all different ways of telling stories, the effect is similar. Essentially, my argument has been that jab jab as a form of storytelling becomes a space in which people get to negotiate and define notions of who they are as a collective. There are many examples that could be drawn on, but the blackening of the skin is an interesting one. While some people will claim that the black oil is worn to highlight the beauty of darker skin, others will claim that it is used to look fearsome. And while these seem like two very different stories, they point to a similar thing, namely distancing oneself from the system that allowed for extreme oppression of the ancestors. So, jab jab may be understood as a channel through which people are able to proudly voice their criticism of different forms of oppression, whether historical or current, as a collective. Jab jab then becomes a way for a group of people, who have been brought together through a violent process of colonialism and slavery, to make sense of their place in the world.
I have also argued that the way in which jab jab is performed points to the national character of the practice. The primary arena for jab jab is of course the carnival itself, but carnival-culture has become so substantial in Grenada that it permeates into the everyday lives of people as well. This has happened in part because of the Grenadian state's endorsement of the tradition, used actively to set apart Grenada's carnival from those of neighboring islands. While this may have been done primarily with tourism in mind, I have argued that the local

effect is quite profound, leading to a high degree of national pride. A very obvious example is the waving of flags at Carnival. But the cultural significance of carnival and jab jab in Grenada has also become especially evident through jab jab music, which, at least in its rebellious modern-day soca form, has become popular culture, enjoyed in various settings throughout the year.

Finally, I want to stress the point that national identity is not static, but rather in a constant process of becoming. Again, the music could be illustrative, as different practitioners will have different preferences ranging from more traditional, introspective styles, to more modern styles, focusing on revelry. But the negotiation of identity goes beyond music. When jab jab is practiced at J'ouvert, masqueraders will act out a wide range of performances referencing everything from ancestral struggle to modern injustice, some slightly more modest in character, and some taking the grotesque to the extreme. The result is a space in which ideas collide, as people get to negotiate and authorize notions of who they are as a Grenadian people, both historically and going forward. And while the ideas that allow for this negotiation to happen may at times cause disagreement amongst practitioners, a common, underlying atmosphere of protest, resistance, and pride seems to overshadow contention. Ultimately, jab jab is a practice through which people in a convoluted space get to reject the oppression and domination that has defined their past, leveling the playing field moving forward, and unifying themselves as a proud and uniquely Grenadian people.

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