

○ VOLUME 11 NUMBER 1, 2012

Missing In Action

By all media necessary

Suvendrini Perera

School of Media, Culture & Creative Arts, Curtin University

This essay weaves itself around the figure of the hip-hop artist M.I.A. Its driving questions are about the impossible choices and willed identifications of a dirty war and the forms of media, cultural politics and creativity they engender; their inescapable traces and unaccountable hauntings and returns in diasporic lives. In particular, the essay focuses on M.I.A.'s practice of an embodied poetics that expresses the contradictory affective and political investments, shifting positionalities and conflicting solidarities of diaspora lives enmeshed in war.

In 2009, as the military war in Sri Lanka was nearing its grim conclusion, with what we now know was the cold-blooded killing of thousands of Tamil civilians inside an official no-fire zone, entrapped between two forms of deadly violence, a report in the *New York Times* described Mathangi 'Maya' Arulpragasam as the 'most famous member of the Tamil diaspora' (Mackey 2009). Mathangi Arulpragasam had become familiar to millions across the globe in her persona as the hip-hop performer M.I.A., for Missing in Action. In the last weeks of the war, she made a number of public appeals on behalf of those trapped by the fighting, including a last-minute tweet to Oprah Winfrey to save the Tamils. Her appeal, which went unheeded, was ill-judged and inspired in equal parts. It suggests the uncertain, precarious terrain that M.I.A. treads: teetering between triviality and trauma, yoking popular culture to geopolitics, trading the hypervisibility of the media celebrity circuit against the faceless desperation of lives abandoned alike by governments and global institutions.¹

In addition to being nominated for an Academy Award and two Grammys, in 2009 M.I.A. was named on *Esquire* magazine's list of the 75 most influential people of the 21st century and on *Time's*

annual *Time 100* list for 2009, indicating a level of public significance that exceeds the reach of her music alone. In January 2009 in the final months of the war, M.I.A. appeared on Tavis Smiley's influential talk show on US public television:

Tavis: My time with you is up. Will you indulge me just one time? I want to hear you say your full name. Just say it for me one time, your full name.

M.I.A.: It's Mathangi 'Maya' Arulpragasam.

Tavis: I just wanted to hear that. That's all. (Laughter.) I knew I never could. I'll just call her M.I.A.

M.I.A.: It's a Tamil thing.

Tavis: Yeah, it's a Tamil thing.

(Smiley 2009)

In what follows I want to consider the transformation of Mathangi 'Maya' Arulpragasam into M.I.A., Missing in Action, as a Tamil thing, an emblematic diaspora story. This essay weaves itself, uneasily, improbably, around the figure of M.I.A, threading fragments of memory, music, cultural politics and history into its fabric of violence and survival, presence and absence, resistance and complicity, loss and self-making. Its driving questions are about the impossible choices, willed identifications, ethical and emotional imperatives with which we are presented in a dirty war, a war in which both sides are mired in brutal violence; a war experienced as at once remote and intimate. It is about the forms of language and creativity they engender, in their inescapable traces and unaccountable hauntings and returns in diasporic lives. In particular it focuses on M.I.A.'s practice of an *embodied poetics* that expresses the contradictory affective and political investments, shifting positionalities and conflicting solidarities of diaspora lives.

Missing in Action is a name that speaks a whole history of loss, damage and pain in a war where no clear distinction separates military from civilian casualties. A term that attests to the military desire for order, *Missing in Action* designates that which is not to be found in the theatre of war, but that still remains within it through the very naming of its non-presence. *Missing in Action* classifies someone whose body cannot be located either on a battlefield or outside it. It may signify the unburied or undead, as well as the fighter held captive or who has simply given up the battle; it encompasses the untraceable and the disappeared, the absconder and the escapee. Missing in Action is a paradox that attempts to assign a fixed status to an unknown state; it is precise yet indeterminable, situated yet unfixed, provisional yet capable of indefinite extension.

As a figure for 'a Tamil thing', Missing in Action invokes the gone-missing, the here and not-here of the diasporic. Missing in Action is a state reminiscent of amputation, the part of a whole that is not to be found, yet is still deeply felt; present in the gash and ache of loss. At the same time, to be Missing in Action may still hint at being 'in action'

elsewhere: to remain active while being missing; to be active and present in one place while being missing or absent from another. In this sense it is a state that speaks not only of vacancy and loss, but also of participation or engagement, through both presence and absence, in more than one location.

The immediate context for the essay is the release in 2011 of two international documents relating to the last days of the war: the UN's *Report of Secretary-General's Panel of Experts on Accountability in Sri Lanka*, and a British Channel 4 documentary, *Sri Lanka's Killing Fields*. Though only made recently available to a global audience, the events recorded in these texts form part of a much older, continuing, asymmetrical narrative of terror and mass slaughter where violence piles upon violence, a lethal accumulation of historical acts that continues to ramify and repeat through ever-widening circles of reception, in the type of deadly exchange that Robert Young (2009, p. 4) describes as a 'dialectic without transcendence':

First, there is the act, which achieves impact, destruction, maiming, death. And then, ever more, violence operates as a kind of haunting: Sethe waiting for her Beloved's ghostly return in Toni Morrison's novel, the state still haunted by its own former fury, the torturer possessed by his victim's ghostly faces. But the victim is haunted too, can remember the face, still hears the voice, echoing in her sleep, preventing peace.

And even those who have only lived it imaginatively, as everyone has, cannot get away from its lingering whispers. We hear it every day of our lives: the news broadcasts a litany of violence, threatened violence, retribution for violence, accidental violence, natural violence. Our lives, however tranquil, remain haunted by its insistent spectral repetitions, some visible, and others secret, by its tortured interruptions.

How do such spectral repetitions and tortured interruptions of a violence that is both distant, in space or time, and deeply connected, both public and secret, resurface, in unannounced, recomposed forms—for example, among youthful diaspora groups? What are the expressive and cultural forms in which they re-appear or re-sound, sometimes when least expected? How do they address, and how are they received by, multiple audiences, both those intimately possessed by its memories and those who have 'only lived it imaginatively', at many removes, yet cannot escape its 'lingering whispers': relayed in family stories or historical events that continue to resonate through the decades, in fragments of verse or echoes of song, the flash of images from a news story on television? A blank-faced child holding a rifle in its hands, a tiger poised to spring, a ruined house of many rooms, a bus trip to nowhere, a field of slaughter: these are the hidden tracks and obscured traces that, figured forth through the elusive sign, Missing in Action, stitch this essay together.

But this essay of presences, absences and returns, of multiple names and locations, of fixed yet unfixable positions, begins somewhere else, with someone I'll call Peter, an escapee from another intractable war. Peter spent much of his teenage and young adult years in a refugee camp in Africa before arriving in Australia. He is guarded in his first conversations with me until I mention that I am a Tamil from Sri Lanka and can guess at some of the more unspeakable aspects of life in uncivil war zones. 'Oh, I thought you were from South America', he says. Before I can elaborate on the determinants and choices that mark a Tamil-Lankan-Australian woman with a name familiar in both South America and South Asia, but originating in an obscure corner of imperial Europe, he starts to tell me a different story—though this too is a story of the strange circulations and the violent, unaccountable trajectories of names.

He says that during his childhood (about which I suppose a lot, but know almost nothing), he often heard the commander in a certain rebel army exhort his troops to be 'strong like the Tamil Tigers'. Peter had no idea who the Tamil Tigers were or where they came from, but he remembered those stories about them after he had escaped from this war, found his way to a refugee camp and was able to go to school again. During his years of growing up in the frightening and famishing conditions of a vast refugee camp, Peter somehow made the time to find Sri Lanka on a map and to learn what he could about the war there: about the Tamils, and those fighters—the Tigers (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam or LTTE)—who were held up to him as models during his own years in a battle zone somewhere in Africa.

Peter's flash of memory makes a tenuous and yet palpable bond between him and me, though I have never fought in a battle, or lived in a refugee camp. His story stayed with me for days. The circle of hungry, frightened boys; a hidden camp. A commander who captures the imagination with a single name, as he holds these small bodies hostage with weapons and blows and starvation. Be strong, be like the Tamil Tigers. The global reach of this name kept coming back to me as the Tigers' final military defeat, something that had once seemed unachievable, took shape on my TV screen. I wept for Peter, and children like him, and also for something else, something hidden and suspect: some trace or buried vibration that I found difficult to name.

A Wrath-bearing Tree

The stages of the LTTE's defeat in April-May 2009 were measured by the painful passage of refugees out of the war zone as the Sri Lankan army engaged in murderous, indiscriminate shelling. Ragged, emaciated, wounded, broken, they emerged into camera view in their thousands. Some bore bundles or tattered bags over their heads as they waded across the lagoon that separated government and rebel territory. Others held stained grey rags tied to the ends of twigs, frail messages of surrender. A man shaking with sobs carries the still form

of a dead child in his arms. Unforgettable, the droop of her small head, hair in neatly doubled-up plaits, falling over his arm.

On May 17, 2009, the LTTE conceded that its thirty-year war against the Sri Lankan state had reached its 'bitter end' (Reuters 2009). I spent the night, like thousands of others in all quarters of the globe, in a state of restless agitation, obsessively searching websites for news, sifting and relaying rumours, fearing and doubting, reflecting, remembering. That night I understood, perhaps for the first time, that although it has not struck me with the same direct and ferocious violence that so many have experienced, this war is the determining factor of my life. The war is the unseen horizon of my actions and options, it provides the bare coordinates that locate me, my store of identifications, memories and stories—even those that predate its own chronological beginning. Though I am not a refugee, this war placed me where I am; as it has most of my family, my oldest friends, and a million unknown others with whom I share little but this one intractable, brute fate: the war.

Peter's recollections stirred something in my memory, old talk of daring exploits and audacious improvisations on unequal ground. These long ago, long gone, visions of guerrilla resistance and liberation once inspired thousands, as Tamils faced both systemic discrimination and eruptions of direct pogrom-type violence orchestrated by the ethnocratic Sri Lankan state. Girls and boys left home to train in jungle camps, some with the blessing of their parents, while others stole away in silence.² A whole HSC batch from an elite Jaffna school, it is said, walked out of the classroom one day to enlist en masse in the cause of a separate homeland for the Tamils. The people of Jaffna forgot their legendary thrift to invest in hope; sold jewellery and land to buy into the nation fantasy.³

During the early 1980s the various groups of young militants who took up arms in the cause of Tamil separatism were known simply as 'the boys', as if they were the neighbourhood cricket team or part of an extended family of cousins. What happened to this family relationship has been carefully detailed elsewhere. Sometime during the ensuing years, as the demand for justice turned to unreflexive violence, and national aspirations into Tigerism, the myriad Tamil liberation movements that had sprouted in the 1980s were crushed one by one by the LTTE.⁴ Thousands of Tamil-speaking Muslims who were integral to the area were brutally evicted at a few hours' notice, loaded onto trucks with little more than the clothes they wore in order to fulfill the LTTE's monoethnic vision of a Tamil 'homeland'. The relationship between the people and 'the boys' inverted, bent violently out of shape. Sumathy writes:

The people, Tamils here, rendered passive and static, congeal into the object of the struggle; they are only an end, not the means. They are only to be delivered, not the deliverers ... defined into a hegemonic oneness; the Tamil people, the Tamil cause, the nation. All actors, distinct from the object then neatly fall into the camp of

the liberator/representative or that of the traitor/sell out. (2001, pp. 2-3)

To name the multiple forms of oppression experienced by the people of Jaffna became an act of extraordinary courage as the LTTE's internal violence escalated. The authors of the remarkable volume, *Broken Palmyra*, to name one among several examples, faced extreme intimidation and violence.⁵ The growing opposition or ambivalence many Tamils felt towards the LTTE and other militant separatists was offset, however, by the vocal support of others who took pride in the fact that Tamils, stereotyped as given to book-learning and bureaucracy rather than to sport or war, were at last fighting back. While internal unease and opposition towards the LTTE, though brutally suppressed, continued to manifest themselves among the Tamils of the north, the LTTE's militancy was buttressed by substantial financial and emotional backing from diaspora groups who largely ignored or denied the internal violence perpetrated by the LTTE because of a focus on the greater violence perpetrated by the state.

This phase of the war characterized by a spate of suicide bombings, terror attacks and mass killings by the LTTE, is partly illuminated for me by reference to texts like Hany Abu-Assad's 2005 film *Paradise Now*, shot in Nablus, on the West Bank. At the centre of the film are two young Palestinians who have volunteered for a suicide mission. The political and moral landscape they inhabit is one whose complexities are not obscured (one has a father who was executed after being accused of collaborating with the Israeli state) but seem to be rendered irrelevant by the overwhelming fact of the Occupation. The maneuvering of the unnamed Palestinian resistance group, which organizes the suicide operations with a practiced routine that is both ruthless and cynical—the staging of the farewell video, the perfunctory and cliché-ridden meeting with the organization's charismatic leader, the ceremonial farewell meal, the hollow assurances of paradise—is in stark contrast to the complicated motivations of the would-be suicide bombers, their doubts and hesitations, conflicting allegiances and indefinable emotional shifts. The barely hidden violence the 'movement' directs towards its own, as well as its moral bankruptcy, are evident; as are the peoples' ambivalent responses to it, ranging from fear and revulsion to acquiescence. Yet the alternatives, although they certainly exist, appear either futile or too dangerous to contemplate. The momentum of militant resistance, and the crushing, indiscriminate brutality of the Occupation, carry all before them.

Liberators and people, actors and acted on: for Tamil militancy the logic of that violent relationship culminated more than twenty years later on a shrinking sliver of ground, a narrow sand spit between ocean and lagoon, at the very edges of the Jaffna peninsula in the obscure hamlet of Nandikadal. At this extremity of the territory they had once controlled, LTTE fighters, accompanied by both their last-ditch supporters and the human shields they had terrorized into compliance, were brutally shelled and pounded into surrender by a Sri

Lankan state that had adopted the tactics of a guerrilla army while shrewdly deploying the rhetoric of the global war on terror (Kilcullen 2011).

That night, lacking words, I emailed some half-remembered lines to a friend in Colombo who had lived through the war, and on whom it had inflicted painful wounds:

Think
Neither fear nor courage saves us. Unnatural vices
Are fathered by our heroism. Virtues
Are forced upon us by our impudent crimes.
These tears are shaken from the wrath-bearing tree.
The tiger springs in the new year. Us he devours.

The lines were from a poem I had hated, but not forgotten, since the days I first read it in the tin shed, hastily slapped down in the middle of a former coconut estate, that served as the English department of our branch of the University of Sri Lanka. They were from T.S. Eliot's *Gerontian* (1920). My friend emailed back immediately, also surprised: 'I had not thought Eliot could be so evocative'.

Think now
History has many cunning passages, contrived corridors
And issues, deceives with whispering ambitions,
Guides us by vanities. Think now
She gives when our attention is distracted
And what she gives, gives with such supple confusions
That the giving famishes the craving. Gives too late
What's not believed in, or if still believed,
In memory only, reconsidered passion. Gives too soon
Into weak hands, what's thought can be dispensed with
Till the refusal propagates a fear.

Wrenched from their context of Christian apocalypse, the lines carried a surge of powerful associations. If the figure of the tiger symbolized Christ's transformative power for Eliot, the Tiger spoke to us of the lethal delusions of the nation fantasy, as it melds the heroic into the criminal, strength into murderous weakness, conviction into hatred.

Since the last days of the war, refugees have streamed out of Lanka, selling what little they owned, borrowing and promising and lying to get on planes or cast themselves away in small boats, fleeing the 'welfare villages' and barbed wire camps set up to hold them, the devastation of the war zone and the vindictive, triumphant ethno-nationalism of the state. Their stories, too, emerge in *Gerontian's* reflections on the aftermath of war and the dispersal of peoples. They speak through Eliot's racist, anti-Semitic, old-man voice, with its thick revulsion for the foreigner. In the years when Eliot was writing *Gerontian*, refugees from the revolution in Russia and the collapsing Ottoman empire were finding their way into Europe. They included Armenian survivors of the 1915 genocide in Turkey, White Russians fleeing the Bolsheviks and Jewish refugees from the greater

Caucasus. Though this mass displacement of peoples would be overshadowed by the horrors still to come, Tom Reiss points out these years between the World Wars saw 'the first refugee crisis of modern times, and ... established many unfortunate patterns that were to play out through the rest of the century' (2006, p. 132). *Gerontian's* rage at a Europe turned into a rented house, occupied by shabby, promiscuous, polyglot tenants, is one that returns, as if for the first time, a century later, after the brief interregnum of European humanitarianism engendered by the disclosure of the Nazi genocides. *Gerontian's* concentrated disgust for the refugee as a figure of the cosmopolitan, the racial interloper in the house of European high culture, is only too recognizable in the fortress Europe of the twenty-first century. This Europe made over by the unruly presence of refugees and survivors, a raucous, motley, hungry people on the move, is the ground from which M.I.A.'s music, with its fierce kinetic energies, its irrepressible defiance, its multiform challenges to the established order, resounds, at once joyous and discordant.

Tenants of the House

M.I.A. was born on 18 July 1975 in London. According to an account in the *Guardian*, her parents had met in a pub in Hounslow:

Arul, her father, had landed a scholarship to learn engineering in Russia when he was 15, after which he came to London; Kala was studying for a few months ... [and] needed to extend her visa, Arul agreed to marry her, and did so, in a matter of days. They had two girls in two years. ... But unknown to Kala, Arul had become involved with some politically minded Tamils, and, when Maya was two months old, he left. 'He went out to buy a pint of milk and didn't come back for four months,' says Maya. He went to Lebanon. To train with the PLO'. (Sawyer 2010)

The early years of Tamil militancy were inflected by the spectrum of liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s: Civil Rights and Black Nationalism in the United States, ideologies of Cuban and Latin American revolution, anti-colonial struggles in Angola, Rhodesia and South Africa and, especially, increasing Palestinian resistance in the Middle East. These combined with regional energies of the rise of Tamil consciousness in South India through the Dravidia Munnetra Kazakam (DMK). When M.I.A.'s father returned from his training in Lebanon, the whole family moved to Jaffna, the Tamil capital in northern Lanka, where Arul became a founding member of EROS (Eelam Revolutionary Organization of Students) taking the *nom de guerre* Arular. Like many young men in Jaffna in these years of growing support for militant Tamil separatism, he left his family to go underground soon after. For their protection, the children were told their father was dead. On the rare occasions they saw him, he was introduced as an uncle. He never lived with the family again.

M.I.A.'s first album, *Arular* (2005) is often taken as a direct tribute to this absent fighter-father figure, but M.I.A. sometimes puts forward a

more complicated genealogy: 'everyone thinks my story is to do with my dad, when, you know, it's my uncle in Morden [South London] on my mother's side who's my inspiration ... the first ever brown guy to have his own stall on Petticoat Lane'. 'Everywhere you look in Maya's vast family', the reporter comments, 'there's a story of adversity overcome, an epic adventure' (Sawyer 2010). The many epic stories of M.I.A.'s formation are characteristic of thousands of diasporic Tamil families in the last decades of the twentieth century. Following the deadly anti-Tamil pogroms in the southern parts of Sri Lanka in 1983 known as 'Black July', separatist militancy in the north rose dramatically, while Tamils who had been directly targeted by the violence fled to camps in South India or, if they could manage it, to the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia as well as to France, Norway and other European states. This was the second major diaspora of Tamil refugees, following a previous dispersal in 1958, after another series of murderous pogroms.

Kala and her children fled the war in Jaffna in the early 1980s, living in South India before returning as refugees in 1986 to a council flat in London. The transformation of Mathangi 'Maya' Arulpragasam into M.I.A. invokes not only the 'Missing in Action' of being both inside and outside the war in Jaffna, but also of being 'Missing in *Acton*', in the dubious refuge that life in London provided in the years following the Brixton riots of 1981 (Empire 2005). M.I.A. explains, 'We were one of the two Asian families that lived there. I used to come home from school and see people burgling my house, just walk past with my telly. But it wasn't as horrible as being in Sri Lanka' (Frere-Jones 2004).

It was in Acton, after her radio was stolen, that Maya first heard the music of Public Enemy being played on it from a neighbouring flat. This Afro-American male voice from New York's mean streets was instantly recognizable to a teenage Tamil refugee girl in South London: 'Hip-hop was the first thing that made me feel like I belonged to something in England' (Shapiro 2005). Paradoxically, the sense of belonging engendered by hip-hop was one structured by exclusion: 'I was already used to that thinking, being a Tamil, a guerilla. Hip-hop was the most guerilla thing happening in England at the time. You had Public Enemy fronting it, and that felt like home, and I could dance while I was feeling shitty. It had a whole aesthetic to it – it was being really crass with pride' (Orlov 2005). Hip-hop's power was its ability to transform the states of abjection and dehumanization that racism and xenophobia produced (the sense of 'being really crass'), into an energizing poetics of pride, defiance and joy.

Hip-hop was speaking to other young post-1983 diaspora Tamils in the same terms, linking resistance to the experience of oppression in Lanka—being 'a Tamil, a guerrilla'—to solidarity against racism in their countries of refuge.⁶ The recollections of the performer and activist D'Lo closely reflect those of M.I.A.:

In the 1980s a little Sri Lankan kid in Lancaster, California had her eyes glued to the movie *Breakin'* when it aired on national television... She knew there was a war going on in her parents' homeland and the way her father spoke about it led her to compare it to the way Public Enemy spoke to Black folks ... I know that she will always remember 'Ladies First' whenever she sees Queen Latifah on screen. Never mind that Queen is a multimillion dollar enterprise; this Sri Lankan boy-girl from Lancaster ['Sri Lankaster'] California, remembers finally feeling powerful being born into a woman's body. (D'Lo 2008, p. 138)

Identification with hip-hop provides a way to articulate experiences of Tamil suffering that were invisible in the U.S. or Europe, while also forging broader solidarities with feminist, queer and anti-racist movements. D'Lo writes: 'From a young age I respected hip-hop's place in Black culture, but I also came to realize that hip-hop had a central place in my own identity as a South Asian American' (D'Lo 2008, p. 138). Hip-hop provided D'Lo with a vocabulary, a cultural ethos and, most important, an embodied consciousness that enabled her to see 'the parallels between hip-hop as a voice of Black frustration and the struggles of my own people ... My father's discourses on racism kept my skin sensitive to what was happening in the city we lived in. The KKK was alive and in effect there in Hicksville, so much so that trust issues kept our parents from allowing us to become close with White people' (D'Lo 2008, p. 140).

Like M.I.A.'s acute awareness of growing up as a Tamil girl 'Missing in Acton', South London, D'Lo's life in 'Sri Lankaster', California, produced a powerful consciousness of the pervasive force and violence of whiteness, and an identification with nonwhite, coloured and black identities deeply informed by the anti-racist and Black nationalist roots of hip-hop: 'We danced and wrote and hip-hopped together because we had to stick together; we couldn't afford to be lost in a sea of White' (D'Lo 2008, p. 140). At the same time, as critics like Sujatha Fernandes have pointed out, hip-hop 'has been both global and diasporic since its beginnings' (2011, p. 20). Robin Kelley notes that from its inception hip-hop was marked by an 'incredible hybridity' that 'reflected the increasingly international character of America's inner cities' and the influx of mobile, inexpensive and easily adaptable global technologies (Kelley 1997, p. 39).

Together with the formative rhythms of hip-hop and rap, M.I.A.'s music is shaped by the other sounds of immigrant and working class London in the 1980s and 1990s—dancehall, reggae, punk, bhangra—combining with echoes of Tamil film songs. The title of her first single, 'Galang' (2003), with its refrain 'London Calling/ Speak the Slang now', apparently refers to the Jamaicanization of the quintessential Cockney expression, 'G'wan' ('Galang – M.I.A.'). Released by a small independent company, 'Galang' is a tale of the new Londoner's battle for survival. The video features M.I.A. rapping and dancing against a rapidly changing backdrop of graffiti on a crumbling London wall. The Tamil word *எப்படி?* (*how?*) repeated over and over appears in vividly

coloured, stylised letters behind her, while the stencil outline of a tiger on the prow flashes on and off, lurking among coconut trees or poised in mid-spring, alongside generic mediatized glimpses of a war zone: tanks, helicopters, explosions. The shifting backdrop of graffiti connects the lyrics, with their uncompromising narrative of growing up rough on London's council estates (*they say ... work is gonna save you/ pray and you will pull through/ suck a dick'll help you/ don't let em get to you*) to the violence of a different war in progress somewhere else. The dancer embodies the link between two worlds of violence, multiplying to fill the screen in formations that evoke guerrilla ranks as much as Disco or Bollywood. At the end, the scene darkens with smoke or fog as the dancer, a solitary figure again, her face now hooded and invisible, body shrouded in a standard issue ghetto hoodie, comes forward to graffiti the letters M.I.A. directly on to the camera lens.

Maya Arulpragasam's success as a hip-hop musician followed two previous false starts to her career: as an artist (she once won the Alternative Turner Prize) and a filmmaker. Both were based on her degree from the prestigious St Martins Art School in London, an institution to which, she has said, she gained admission only because she argued that her alternative would be to turn to prostitution. An interview given shortly after her hip-hop success includes a suggestive autobiographical anecdote:

The week I graduated, I got a phone call that my cousin had just died in Sri Lanka. He was kind of my twin: we were the same age, same month ... he's the one who made me how tomboy-ish I am. He joined the Tigers and he died ... Then I got another word that he was still alive, but was brain-dead at some hospital. So I went to find him. It was my first trip back to Sri Lanka since I left, and being that I'd got a film degree, I wanted to make a film about it—called 'MIA.' It was hardcore, because pretty much everybody I met never had access to the press before ... Yet I couldn't do anything with it cause it was Tamil. (Orlov 2005)

The cousin/twin missing in action, a stand-in for the Maya who left the warzone, also stands for a larger loss: a generation of young women and men caught between indiscriminate state violence directed at Tamils in the north as potential terrorists, and the internal violence of the LTTE, which included intimidation, blackmail and forcible recruitment of boys and girls into their ranks.

So a whole youth culture there had gone missing. I went there and filmed it. I wanted to make a young beautiful thing about what had happened to my cousin and to all my other cousins who were still alive, cause that's what I had a connection to. Rather than make a youth culture film in England, it was going to be what a market-stall kid in Africa or India or Sri Lanka experiences today. (Orlov 2005)

The 'hardcore' story of this lost generation of young Tamils might have succeeded in a different kind of London, in another era. Caught in the crude geopolitical binaries of the war on terror, where only two

sides—‘us’ and ‘the terrorists’—were recognizable, their story was impossible to tell (Bush 2001).

When I brought 60 hours of footage back to England, 9/11 just happened and it was considered propaganda material for the Tamils, who are just considered blanket terrorists these days. I could do nothing with it [sic]. So I took single frames from them and made them into disposable fashion-y wallpaper and stencils, working off a need to be instant and immediate ... It was bored and ugly. But it was done in pretty colors, so people didn't know what I was talking about. (Orlov 2005)

The stories Maya sought to tell of the lost and absent—of an *alter ego* Tiger cousin killed or fatally wounded in the war, and of ‘a whole youth culture ... gone missing’—would not bear translation in post 9/11 England. In this climate of suspicion and shut-down, marked by racial profiling at home and rendition and secret torture sites abroad, the raw and hardcore stories which aspired to convey ‘what a market-stall kid in Africa or India or Sri Lanka experiences today’ are rendered doubly invisible: not only silenced, but distorted beyond recognition; wrenched out of their settings, literally cut up and disjointed, as the war in Sri Lanka is subsumed into the war on terror. The Tamil voices and bodies recorded on film become unintelligible and unrecognizable, transposed onto the static, disposable medium of wallpaper. In place of the ‘young beautiful thing’ Maya hoped to make from them, the process of transmutation from film to wallpaper is ‘bored and ugly’, yet done in pretty colours that serve to conceal the uncivil and bloody places from which they emerged.

Two failed artifacts, an unmade film and a ream of disposable wall paper, precede the emergence of the hip-hop persona, M.I.A. Precisely as a hip-hop artifact, the persona M.I.A. recomposes a number of elements. A stand-in for a lost twinself and a generation gone missing, it projects both absence and presence, embodying a link between those lost, here as well as there, in wars of terror. The stories that could not be told in film or wallpaper find expression through hip-hop, as a medium where witness and documentary truth-telling coexist with an aesthetics of verbal and visual play, and an erotics of sexualization and stylized excess. Through the performativity of hip-hop, with its primary reliance on technologies of breath and body, the guerrilla stories of a distant war zone merge with an insurgent metropolitan tactics of survival. It is in these movements across spaces, sites and media that M.I.A., as Shasha Frere-Jones puts it, ‘turn[s] the noxious generalization of “world music” into an idea that represents life as it is lived’ and succeeds in opening out the ‘aesthetic possibilities’ it affords (Frere-Jones 2012).

M.I.A.’s music repeatedly crosses the lines between battle grounds and media: her second single, ‘Sun Showers’ (2003) moved from the stylized evocations of a third world war zone in ‘Galang’ to the scene of a jungle guerrilla camp. The ranks of women soldiers in ‘Sun Showers’, filmed on location in South India, immediately recall the

LTTE's famed female cadres, *Suthanthira Paravihal* (Birds of Freedom). In the video, the lines of armed women march one way, while MIA swaggers in the opposite direction, sweetly singing. In her breakthrough track, 'Paper Planes' (2007), featured in the hit film *Slumdog Millionaire*, allusions to the 9/11 bombings and fake passports are juxtaposed with images of the everyday hustles for survival of refugees and migrants on metropolitan streets.

Together with the publicity generated by M.I.A.'s family anecdotes following the release of *Arular*, her repeated use of tiger motifs and images such as those in 'Sun Showers' inevitably led to her being linked with the LTTE.⁷ Also grist to this mill were her provocative references to being 'a guerrilla' that played on the tensions between popular and literal meanings of the term: between hip-hop as a guerrilla art form, the guerrilla status of racial outsiders in the western metropolis, and the guerrilla war being waged in Lanka. The popularity of M.I.A.'s early singles, and indeed her emergence as an artist, coincided with a period when the Lankan war had achieved a new level of global visibility outside diaspora communities, reinflected by the rhetoric of the war on terror. Some critics accused M.I.A. of exploiting the publicity this generated, while others, the Sri Lankan government among them, accused her of being an apologist of the LTTE (Sarvanathan 2009). Still others saw her as 'simplistic' and unknowing in her references to Tamil oppression (Kadirgamar 2010).

The instant association of Tamil militancy with the LTTE is perhaps inevitable given that by the 1990s the LTTE had ruthlessly eliminated all its rivals for leadership. For many diasporic Tamils the harsh realities of Tigerism had been brought home throughout the late 1980s and 1990s. EROS, the movement that Arular helped found, had been eliminated by the LTTE, along with all other rival groups, several years before. D'Lo notes that her own family's allegiances had shifted in the course of a decade: her father moved from 'being a full-fledged Tiger supporter' in the aftermath of the 1983 pogroms to retracting his support for them after Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated by Danu, a female fighter of the LTTE, in 1991.⁸ In later interviews M.I.A. is careful to distinguish between Tamil people and the LTTE: 'From day one, what I've been saying is that I'm here for the people, talking about the citizens, not the Tigers. I don't know the Tigers, I don't know what they do, I don't give a shit. It's about the Tamil people, because I only know it from that experience' (Sawyer 2010).

Still, a desperate investment in the heroic aura of the LTTE continues to retain a place among diasporic Tamils. As M.I.A.'s own earlier autobiographical anecdotes reveal, affective investments in the symbols and rhetoric of Eelam and Tamil militancy are a complex affair for many young Tamils whose cultural and emotional landscape was shaped, perhaps unconsciously at times, but often more directly, by the politics of the post-1983 diaspora and its support for a separate Tamil homeland, Eelam. These are refugee communities whose everyday lives were deeply entwined emotionally, culturally and

socially, if not necessarily politically and ideologically, with pro-Eelam, and sometimes actively pro-LTTE, diaspora circles. As the exemplar of Black nationalism amply demonstrates, hip-hop is a medium in which nationalism's ambiguities, its liberating *and* destructive energies, can be simultaneously articulated; where violence in its multiple ramifications may be explored, celebrated and disowned, through its characteristic expressive modes of excess and oppositionality. Hip-hop is also a medium that enables the juxtaposition of the banal and the unspeakable that make up the disjunctive everyday of refugee and migrant lives: the realities of survival in strange and hostile new environments; the underground circulation of news from 'home', the bizarre-but-true rumours and suspicions and the tortuous local conflicts that characterize life in fringe communities. In this uncertain, submerged diaspora multiverse, contradictory and competing understandings of the Tigers, as both heroic and murderous, might easily coexist.

The hip-hop historian Jeff Chang best describes the relationship between M.I.A.'s music, war, and her diasporic audiences when he writes:

On *Arular*, she broadcast the sound of those with one foot in the First World door, the other in a Fourth World gutter ... Her spray-can and stencil art featured images of young gunmen flashing peace signs or bereted, bare-kneed Third World female soldiers marching en masse. But those images—like *Arular's* words and sounds—weren't just about war, sex and revolution; *they were about what it means to consume those ideas*. Against a media flow that suppresses the ugliness of reality and fixes beauty to consumption, M.I.A. forces a conversation about how the majority live. She closes the distance between "here" and everywhere else. (Chang 2007, my emphasis)

As attempts to 'force a conversation' about the violent disjunctions *and* the indissociable interconnections that simultaneously define the relationship between 'here and everywhere else', M.I.A.'s music speaks to diasporic subjects in direct and specific ways. Its shifting identifications and uncertain allegiances reflect not only the consumption of *ideas* about war and revolution, but also the representations through which these take hold: mediatized fragments, migrant mythologies and fragments of memory combine with the subterranean histories wordlessly transmitted in diasporic families and communities.

Living Political

The spatiotemporal rifts and disjunctions of diasporic experience are reconfigured and in some ways even reversed in M.I.A.'s second album *Kala* (2007). While *Arular*, the album named for her father, speaks to diasporic generations who grew up *consuming* the images from a war that was both intimately experienced and spatially distant, *Kala*, named for her mother, is shaped by the post-9/11 years that

brought third world terror and suicide bombing to the heart of metropolitan New York and London. Although the album was originally planned as a collaboration between M.I.A. and U.S. hip-hop artists, M.I.A.'s application for a working visa in the post-9/11 United States was delayed for two years, presumably because of suspicions that she was linked to the LTTE. The Sri Lankan government had been quick to proclaim its commonalities with the U.S. and its allies in these years, claiming the mantle of a sovereign state beset by terrorists; at the same time moves to target violent Islamists and transnational terror networks impacted on the LTTE abroad and contributed to the waning of its grip on Tamil diaspora communities.

Unable to move to New York as planned, M.I.A. travelled to Liberia, India, Angola, Aboriginal Australia, Trinidad and Jamaica. While racial profiling and Islamophobia were rife in London in the years before and after the 7/7 bombings, M.I.A.'s music now comes face to face with third world war zones, slums and border towns, where the sense of being under attack is nothing new. In these places, she comments, 'I had to morph ... from being lyrically political into just living political'. The voice in *Kala* is edgy, grating, often unintelligible and non-verbal, punctuated by shrieks, explosions and gunshots. Yet it is also rhythmic, infectious, erotic, joyous. Sasha Frere-Jones wrote in the *New Yorker*: 'It's a voice from a place where kids throw rocks at tanks, where people pull down walls with their bare hands. It could be the sound of a carnival, or a riot' (Frere-Jones 2004).

By All Media Necessary

The lived insurgent political embodied in *Kala*, the soundtrack to a carnival or a riot, 'a voice from a place where kids throw rocks at tanks, where people pull down walls with their bare hands', evokes Audre Lorde's meditation on the force of the erotic, harnessed through music, dance and other forms of creativity and poesis. As an empowered, specifically feminist, creative force, the erotic fuels resistance, defiance and joy in the face of repression. 'In touch with the erotic', Lorde writes, 'I become less willing to accept powerlessness or other supplied states of being ... such as resignation, despair, self-effacement, depression, self-denial' (Lorde 1984, p. 56). The political force of this creative energy is akin to Anna Agathangelou's description, in the context of the Arab Spring, of a 'revolutionary sexual poetics [that can] hold multiple worlds in all their vicissitudes and embrace the creation of life-sustaining institutions and social relations by being linked in part through their shared attention to the *body*' (Agathangelou 2011, p. 583).

In a production analysis of M.I.A.'s music, Meenakshi Durham turns to Chela Sandoval's groundbreaking articulation of a 'methodology of the oppressed' to understand M.I.A.'s ability to deploy 'do-it-yourself technologies' and alternative distribution networks, bypassing the music industry's corporate processes (Durham 2009). I would extend Durham's analysis to argue that M.I.A.'s adoption of the methodology

of the oppressed encompasses more than the technical aspects of production and distribution alone. Rather, Sandoval's methodology of the oppressed suggests a blueprint for the entirety of M.I.A.'s practice of an embodied hip-hop poetics. 'The methodology of the oppressed', Sandoval writes, 'is formulated and taught out of the shock of displacement, trauma, violence and resistance' (2000, p. 77). For Sandoval, 'the practitioners of the methodology of the oppressed' are those able to 'recognize[e] their places and bodies as narrativized by and through the social body, and who are thus self-consciously committed to unprecedented forms of language, to remaking their own kinds of social position utilizing all media at their disposal—whether it is narrative as weapon, riot as speech, looting as revolution' (Sandoval 2000, pp. 77-8). *Kala*, with its kaleidoscopic mobilization of visual, sonic and kinetic elements is an attempt at just such an unprecedented language.

According to Sandoval, the methodology of the oppressed is characterized by a mobile, differential mode of consciousness, deployed most clearly in the forms of third world feminism developed in the U.S. during the late 1970s and 1980s. Significantly, Sandoval identifies differential consciousness with the work of U.S. third world feminists operating from diasporic or 'third space' locations, such as Audre Lorde's figure of the 'Sister Outsider' or Gloria Anzaldua's new *mestiza* (Sandoval 2000, p. 61). Drawing from the era's various typologies of counter-discourse—'equal-rights' (liberal-integrationist), revolutionary, supremacist (cultural-nationalist), separatist—differential consciousness is above all the ability to 'weave between and among' oppositional ideologies and positions, deploying them as '*tactics* for intervening in and transforming social relations'.

The differential represents the variant; its presence emerges out of correlations, intensities, junctures, crises. Yet the differential depends on a form of agency that is self-consciously mobilized in order to enlist and secure influence; the differential is thus performative. (Sandoval 2000, p. 61)

The differential maneuvering of the methodology of the oppressed produces 'a sleight of consciousness that activates a new space: a cyberspace, where the transcultural, transgendered, transsexual, transnational leaps necessary to the play ... of oppositional praxis can begin' (Sandoval 2000, p. 63). It is in this cyberspace, a realm of transversal energies and sleights of consciousness, that I locate M.I.A.'s most recent production, as it instantiates the methodology of the oppressed, a deliberate attempt to deploy 'narrative as weapon', in order to produce 'unprecedented forms of language', through the 'utilization of all media at [her] disposal'.

In April 2010 the music and accompanying video of 'Born Free', a track from M.I.A.'s then unreleased album *Maya* (2011) was leaked on-line and then later released via her official website. The video, more precisely a 9 minute short-film directed by Romain Gavras, caused instant controversy. It represented, in exacting, graphic detail,

the round-up and wholesale slaughter of a seemingly random group of people in a dawn raid by masked SWAT troops. Every aspect of the raid and mass killing recall news reports of some distant war zone—with the exception of one small but crucial detail: the targets, like the soldiers, are all pale-skinned. And only another small characteristic differentiates the killers from killed: the victims all have red hair. This, then, is a war zone set in an imagined first world, where those being slaughtered in cold blood are *us*, not them.⁹

The dawn raid, the round-up of the targets, the nightmare quality of their transport through urban streets and their brutal massacre in a minefield into which they are forced at gun point, are all rendered in unsparring detail, accompanied by a punishing sound-track of sirens, heavy machinery, electronics, explosions and M.I.A.'s shrieking, discordant, mostly unintelligible sounds. It is a sound track that, as one critic put it, 'takes no prisoners' (Bennett 2010). The video sparked an outcry, presumably because of its collapsing of the distance between 'here' and 'everywhere else' to bring home the unthinkable. One scene in particular, the image of an angelic, freckle-faced, red-haired boy shot dead at close range, provoked outrage among viewers.¹⁰ It was removed from YouTube before being restored on restricted view for audiences over 18 years old: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=leMvUlxXyz8>

M.I.A.'s comment on the ban was simple: She pointed out that YouTube carries many recordings of real-life killings: 'It's just fake blood and ketchup and people are more offended by that than the execution videos' (Sawyer 2010). The execution videos she is referring to, subsequently authenticated by the U.N., record the systematic shooting of a group of naked, unarmed, blindfolded men, presumably LTTE soldiers, by Sri Lankan government troops. They are explicitly referenced in some of the promotional images for 'Born Free': e.g. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Born_Free_\(M.I.A._song\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Born_Free_(M.I.A._song)). M.I.A.'s response to the ban on 'Born Free' called attention to the dissociations and double standards that enable viewers to be repulsed and offended by the staged death of a red-haired, white-skinned child, and yet to countenance the real-life killings of other innocent (non-white) children, with the tacit complicity, as in Sri Lanka, or active involvement, as in Iraq or Palestine, of western governments.¹¹ In the weeks and months after the war ended recordings captured on mobile phones documented thousands of such killings at Nandikadal and elsewhere.¹²

In the context of the totality of M.I.A.'s cultural production, I read 'Born Free' as a work that mobilizes all media at her disposal to challenge dissociations and asymmetries of spectatorship that have become increasingly intolerable, in the context of wars of terror in Sri Lanka and elsewhere:

I was that kid on the telly when people were watching Sri Lanka on the news. For 10 years I lived like that, and I'm totally proud of it. I'm not about taking sides. I'm simply representing the refugee, a

faceless thing, and I will always speak to that. ... Those are the roots, and I don't think they'll ever beat that out of me. My point is: people are investing millions of [dollars] in ammunition to bomb other people around the world, [and as long as they are] there will always be someone coming up from those places talking about it, because we've got the right. If they don't fill my head up with those images, then I won't be talking about it, and if they don't like it, they should stop first. (Orlov 2005)

Here and Everywhere Else: Fields of Slaughter

Born Free points audiences towards a specific genre of video to emerge from the last days of the war in Sri Lanka. Here, perhaps for the first time, verbal accounts of what happened on the battlefield were accompanied by a relatively new form of testimony: visual narratives and battlefield snapshots recorded on mobile phones by both victors and vanquished. These testamentary and trophy videos circulated internally within diaspora groups before publicly surfacing through YouTube. Eventually, they became the subject of investigation by human rights groups and independent media as well as the United Nations.

The Channel 4 documentary *Sri Lanka's Killing Fields* (<http://www.channel4.com/programmes/sri-lankas-killing-fields/4od>) is the outcome of one such investigation, reconstructing the final weeks and days of the war through the narratives of survivors, NGO and UN officials, and the trophy photographs and mobile phone videos of the victors. Its visual testimony is a collage of chilling representations, ranging from heaps of bodies of civilian dead to excruciatingly detailed recordings of torture and execution. One video shows a torture in process. A naked man is bound to the trunk of a coconut tree. His eyes bulge, unseeing; his teeth are bared in agony, a brilliant white gash against the dark brown of his skin. Later his lifeless body appears, twisted and broken.

Then there are videoed images of piled bodies of naked young women. Close-ups show them bloodied and bruised around their thighs, as they are thrown onto the back of a truck. At least one of these women has been identified: she is 'Isai Priya', the newsreader on the LTTE's media channel. Many others remain unnamed, figures in a type of battlefield narco-pornography, that exceeds the implied or explicit sexual violence of any music video. The soldiers speak casually to one another, and beyond, to an implied audience somewhere off the battlefield. 'This one has the best figure', a man comments, as he surveys a lifeless female body piled on a heap of others. It is a banal moment. Yet what is revealed here is not, or not only, evil's banality, but its relentless performativity. Another man, wearing the uniform of the government, declares for the camera, as he flings another dead woman onto the truck, 'I'd cut her tits off if no one was looking'.

The videos are chilling because their violent testimony is both intimate and public, in ways that are at once similar and different to the frenetic obscenities of the Abu Ghraib photographs recording U.S. soldiers in the act of terrorizing their helpless prisoners. Here, as they preside over the bodies of the dead, the Sri Lankan government soldiers address a listener/viewer in a moment framed as one of consolidation, of unquestioned mastery: an act of national affirmation. Yet these horrific documents, precisely as forms of performativity, do not mark a point of terminus to an ongoing chain of violence and terror. Rather, they ensure the continuation of terror; its ongoing and indefinite circulation; their addressee is the vanquished as much as, perhaps even more than, the victor.

M.I.A.'s production, an unlikely counterpart to the familiar form of the postcolonial diaspora family trilogy in hip-hop form (*Arular, Kala, Maya*), stands as a calculated response by all media necessary to these performances of terror; a new turn in how narratives and testimonies of terror become enmeshed in ongoing forms of circulation, recomposition and return between places and audiences. Outside the sphere of official reports, and addressed to multiple audiences, they are not to be contained by the documentary protocols and tropes of witnessing that govern the telling and reception of survivor narratives. Understood not as transparent documents, but complex media, M.I.A.'s hip-hop poetics bring to the surface the nightmare images and subterranean histories of war, massacre and displacement. Beyond the closed circle of diaspora groups, they bear witness, in the global sphere, to the unspeakable violences of small, hidden wars.

Dedicated to the memory of Suki Thurairajah who always hoped that I would write about diaspora Tamils someday.

Suvendrini Perera is Professor of Cultural Studies and Cultural Criticism at Curtin University. She is the author/editor of six books. Currently she is working with Sherene Razack on the anthology, *At the Limits of Justice: Women of Colour Theorize Terror*. This essay is part of a larger project on the cultural politics of war and diaspora.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Jon Stratton and Panizza Allmark for their generous support and assistance.

Notes

¹ See Weiss (2011), for a meticulous account of the U.N.'s abdication of responsibility at the end of the war. See also Perera (2009, pp. 31-47).

² See, for example, the memoir of a young Tamil Catholic girl who ran away from high school to fight for the LTTE in de Zoysa (2011).

³ See DBS Jeyaraj's series prompted by the response to the release of *Tamil Tigress* (above) which captures some of the energies of this heady period (Jeyaraj 2011).

⁴ On Tigerism, see Manikkalingam (1995).

⁵ See Hoole et al. (1990). On the murder of the activist Rajani Thiranagama, see Helene Klodawsky's documentary *No More Tears Sister* (2005).

⁶ Such moments recall an earlier one in the trajectory of diaspora Tamils. In *A Different Hunger* (1991), A. Sivanandan, the pioneering editor of the journal *Race & Class*, who would arrive in London after the 1958 anti-Tamil pogroms, recalled the day when he first heard the voice of Paul Robeson, played on the radio of a small bakery in Jaffna whose owner spoke no English. Just as Robeson's voice articulated persecution for a previous generation, hip-hop spoke to many young diaspora Tamils after 1983.

⁷ See, for example, Christgau (2005); Fuller (2009) and Getler (2009).

⁸ Danu's motivation is said to be the rape of women in Jaffna by Indian soldiers. India had briefly entered the war as peace keepers but soon found themselves fighting the LTTE.

⁹ For a somewhat different reading of 'Born Free' see Hutnyk (2012). Hutnyk's analysis appeared while this essay was in press and is therefore not discussed here.

¹⁰ My colleague, Jon Stratton has suggested that the outrage against the video was because it targeted a group already subject to bullying in the west, red haired people, especially children.

¹¹ See, for example, Haddow (2010).

¹² See Perera (2011, pp. 215-17).

References

Agathangelou, AM 2011, 'Making anew an Arab regional order: on poetry, sex and revolution', *Globalizations*, vol. 18, no. 2, pp. 581-94.

Bennett, M 2010, 'M.I.A. /\\Y\\ Review', BBC, 24 June, viewed 25 October, 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/music/reviews/2cb6>

Bush, GW 2001, Address to Joint Session of Congress, 20 September, viewed 25 October, 2012, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html>

- Chang, J 2007, 'News from nowhere', *The Nation*, 19 November, viewed 25 October, 2012, <http://www.thenation.com/article/news-nowhere?page=0,0>
- Christgau, R 2005, 'Burning bright', *Village Voice*, 22 February, viewed 25 October, 2012, <http://www.villagevoice.com/2005-02-22/music/burning-bright/>
- D'Lo 2008, 'Beats, rhythm, life', in A Nair & M Balaji (eds), *Desi rap: hip-hop and South Asian America*, Lexington Books, London.
- De Zoysa, N 2011, *Tamil Tigress*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney.
- Durham, MG 2009, 'M.I.A.: a production analysis of musical subversion', May, International Communication Association, Feminist Scholarship Division, Chicago, IL.
- Empire, K 2005, 'Flash forward', *The Observer*, Observer music monthly, 20 March, viewed 25 October, 2012, <http://observer.guardian.co.uk/omm/story/0,,1438918,00.html>
- Fernandes, S 2011, *Close to the edge*, Verso, London.
- Frere-Jones, S 2012, 'M.I.A. shouldn't have apologized', *The New Yorker*, 6 February, viewed 25 October, 2012, <http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/culture/2012/02/im-sorry-mia-apologized.html>
- 2004, 'Bingo in Swansea: Maya Arulpragasam's world', *The New Yorker*, 22 November, viewed 25 October, 2012, http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2004/11/22/041122crmu_music
- Fuller, T 2009, 'The Dissonant Undertones of M.I.A.', *New York Times*, 10 February, viewed 25 October, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/11/world/asia/11mia.html?_r=1&
- 'Galang – M.I.A.' n.d., Absolute Lyrics, viewed 25 October, 2012, <http://www.absolutelyrics.com/lyrics/view/m.i.a./galang>
- Getler, M 2009, 'Rapping about genocide', PBS Ombudsman, 12 February, viewed 25 October, 2012, http://www.pbs.org/ombudsman/2009/02/rapping_about_genocide_1.html
- Haddow, D 2010, 'The real controversy of MIA's video', *The Guardian*, 1 May, viewed 25 October, 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/may/01/mia-video-real-controversy>

Hoole, R, Somasundaram, D, Sritharan, K & Thiranagama, R 1990, *The broken palmyrah*, The Sri Lanka Studies Institute, Claremont, CA.

Hutnyk, J 2012, 'Poetry after Guantanamo: M.I.A.', *Social Identities*, vol. 18, no. 5, pp. 555-72.

Jeyaraj, DBS 2011, 'From Shenuka to Niromi: true tale of a 'Tamil Tigress'', 9 December, viewed 25 October, 2012, <http://dbsjeyaraj.com/dbsj/archives/3160>

Kadirgamar, A 2010, Sri Lanka Democracy Forum, in Hirschberg, L, 'M.I.A.'s Agitprop Pop', *New York Times*, 25 May, viewed 25 October, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/30/magazine/30mia-t.html?src=tp&pagewanted=2>

Kelley, RDH 1997, *Yo' Mama's disfunkional: fighting the culture wars in urban America*, Beacon, Boston.

Kilcullen, D 2011, 'The global context of counterterrorism: strategy, ethics, and sustainability in Sri Lanka's COIN experience', Defeating terrorism: the Sri Lankan experience, Seminar, 1 June, viewed 19 June, 2011, <http://groundviews.org/2011/06/01/the-global-context-of-counterterrorism-strategy-ethics-and-sustainability-in-sri-lanka-s-coin-experience/>

Klodawsky, H 2005, *No more tears sister: anatomy of hope and betrayal*, the National Film Board of Canada, review, viewed 25 October, 2012, <http://heleneklodawsky.com/no-more-tears-sister>

Lorde, A 1984, *Sister outsider*, Crossing Press, New York.

Mackey, R 2009, 'Outside Sri Lanka, Tamil diaspora not ready to surrender', *New York Times*, 18 May, viewed 25 October, 2012, <http://thelede.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/05/18/outside-sri-lanka-tamil-diaspora-not-ready-to-surrender/>

Manikkalingam, R 1995, *Tigerism and other essays*, Ethnic Studies Group, Colombo.

Orlov, P 2005, 'Bomp Pop', Interview with M.I.A. from Arthur Magazine, *Arthur*, no. 16, May, viewed 25 October, 2012, <http://www.arthurmag.com/2007/02/11/interview-with-mia-from-arthur-magazine/>

Perera, S 2011, 'Landscapes of massacre', in S Biswas, & Z Zalloua, (eds), *Torture and the human body*, University of Washington Press, Seattle.

———2009, 'Uncivil zones: terror and territoriality in the geopolitical shadowlands', in S Biswas & S Nair (eds), *International relations and*

states of exception: margins, peripheries and excluded bodies, Routledge, London.

Reiss, T 2006, *The Orientalist*, Random House, New York.

Reuters News Agency 2009, 'Tigers say war at "bitter end"', 17 May, viewed 25 October, 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2009/05/17/us-srilanka-war-idUSTRE54D1GR20090517>

Sandoval, C 2000, *Methodology of the oppressed*, Minnesota University Press, Minneapolis.

Sarvananthan, M 2009, 'M.I.A. and the bogey of genocide in Sri Lanka', *The Sunday Leader*, 1 March, viewed 25 October, 2012, <http://www.thesundayleader.lk/20090301/Issues-1.htm>

Sawyer, M 2010, 'MIA: I'm here for the people', *The Observer*, 13 June, viewed 25 October, 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2010/jun/13/mia-feature-miranda-sawyer>

Shapiro, P 2005, 'Talking about her revolution', *The Times*, 17 June, viewed 23 November, 2012, <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/arts/article2400924.ece>

Smiley, T 2009, *Interview on PBS (Public Broadcasting Service)*, M.I.A. Interview with Tavis Smiley, 28 January, viewed 25 October, 2012, <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/tavissmiley/interviews/hip-hop-artist-m-i-a/>

Sumathy, S 2001, *Militants, militarism and the crisis of (Tamil) nationalism*, Marga Institute, Colombo.

Weiss, G 2011, *The cage*, The Bodley Head, London.

Young, R 2009, 'The violent state', *Naked punch* (Lahore), Supplement 02.