

D.I.Y.M.I.A.

Mathangi Maya Arulpragasam's Fusion of Old and New DIY Culture

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Abstract

This essay explores the personal and artistic journeys of Mathangi Maya Arulpragasam, becoming the recognised musical and visual artist M.I.A. I argue that her trajectory is inspired by a DIY culture of contamination and collage, which builds upon two eras of participatory culture: a 1970s–80s subculture of zines, graffiti, punk and mixtapes; and a 2000s–10s continuation of digital media practices of posting, mixing and sharing digital content. Her first decade in music reached back to analogue sounds and spaces, yet it was also “futuristic” in style. Traces from Sri Lanka, India and London—and a vision of a world and sound not yet realised—found a conduit, and a convivial, contaminated, sonically challenging cradle in a Roland MC505 groove box.

I The music

London / Quiet down, I need to make a sound^[1]

In the mid-2000s Mathangi Maya Arulpragasam broke through as M.I.A. with the albums *Arular* (2005) and then *Kala* (2007). Both involved African and Australian folk, Brazilian favela funk/baile funk, Jamaican dancehall, hardcore rap, and lyric or music samples from British punk and Bollywood pop. Maya had initially entered the scene posting a free online (digital) mix tape, *Piracy Funds Terrorism*, in 2004. The mix tape—not referred to as an official album—demonstrated that she was not dependent on a company, band or producer to develop as a musical artist and disseminate her work.^[2] If one concentrates on the audio of her first mix tape and records, a productive confusion meets the ears. Who sings? From where? In which genre? A strong cockney accent can be heard. It is a female voice, but ethnicity and musical location as well as musical direction are ambiguous. Purity is difficult to associate with popular culture, yet the chameleonic dynamism—on the second album in particular—is intense: there is a presence of original analogue sounds and instruments, drums and swords alongside beatbox beats. Australian Aboriginal boys (Wilcannia Mob) on one tune. A largely unknown Nigerian kid residing in London (Afrikan boy). Then Timbaland. Then a keyboard run by The Clash, an old Bollywood cover. Also New Order, Pixies and The Modern Lovers. Her use of parts of “Roadrunner” by the latter could be said to fit Maya’s own constant journeying through music and the world. An artist fusing influences or memories looming in the present, haunting?

The verb *to haunt* has in philosophical and musical writings been stretched to the notion of *hauntology*, a

concept that suggests a ghostly or slippery presence of something ungraspable and spooky.^[3] It may share some kinship with the idea of *contamination*. Through an exploration of Maya’s music and trajectories, in this essayistic search I suggest first viewing contamination as a sort of unfathomable hybridity and risk-taking cultural practice, and subsequently as a forced practice of adaptation or survival. As Anna Tsing notes, we change with circumstances.^[4] Contamination can be removed from association with poison and infections in a biological sense, but not in a cultural sense. *Hauntology’s* sibling? When we are *haunted*, we are somehow struck or followed by pasts (plural) that have an uncanny or shadowy presence. This may be close to a common-sensical understanding of contamination—affected, infected? In a dictionary, discourse contamination suggests something unpleasant, an impurity.

Only vaguely acquainted with her when she emerged with records during the 2000s, mostly through reviews, I was quickly bound to M.I.A. after watching Steve Loveridge’s biopic, *Mathangi/Maya/MIA*.^[5] *New matter* opens doors by accident. I am here holding on to the use of *contamination* but adding *hauntology* to the mix, providing a fuzzy and ghostly presence of something that cannot be fully articulated. As with this piece of writing, while attempting to gain shape in an academic context, it is being haunted by the aesthetics of fan/zine collage and a loose DIY version of a narrative essay. However, another reason for bringing in *hauntology* is that it was also a name given to electronic British musical genres that evoke an aesthetics of the past, with artists such as Tricky, Burial and others—a scene related to Maya’s early years. There was a sense of nostalgia, a backwards longing but also a longing for a future that could not be reached, creating a double spectrality one could say. We may see Maya’s first decade in music as on the one hand reaching back for analogue sounds and spaces, yet also “futuristic” in style. Her ethno-musical voices and extracts come across as traces, put into musical encounters and soundscapes, spun out of her own upbringing, living and travelling rather than being imported exotica. The process of the coming together of the second album *Kala* may explain this point.

Maya plans to go to the US straight after the first album *Arular* to record *Kala*.^[6] Her machine-gun semiotics and political profile may have played a role. In any case, the approval of her USA visa is delayed. This leads her to go on a great “detour” to West Africa, India and Australia, to explore ideas for what later becomes the *Kala* album. While absorbing new influences and experiences on this *walkabout*, she is able to create kaleidoscopic soundscapes reaching into the past and then remodelling it into original material. She digs into geographically and genre-wise very different sources of effects, samples, melody, rhythm and lyrical snippets, which she incorporates into her compositions. Hers can at first be mistaken for a form of techno music, using rap. The rap is there, but, as Irene Lönnblad notes, unlike techno music, in which new sounds emerge through careful work with amps and distortions, Maya’s sounds on the records derive from appropriating existing material, such as guitar riffs, drumbeats, vocals or lyrics.^[7] Adding to Lönnblad, I would also like to note that techno music—an umbrella label for many genres—is also created through *new* sounds generated by digital tools and programming. However, Maya layers found sounds into her own sonic architecture. “Using technology to mutilate, cut and distort music that already exists out there.”^[8] This extracting of layers into her own sonic “poison” can be likened to disturbances, or a collaboration between sounds, where the contaminated or “under transformation” element creates something third, or a new “happening”.^[9]

A more challenging sound is introduced on her third, more electronic and rough-noise-cacophony album *MAYA* (2010), comprising distorted industry on a “burning” sequencer following the second album’s sparkling globalism. Once I play *MAYA* while driving our old diesel car on a rainy evening.^[10] The right sort of car and weather to give her high volume. My two girls and wife beg to have it taken off—and I am not sure if there is something wrong with the used CD. The CD is fine, and I will keep it forever. The car is taken to the scrapheap soon after.^[11]

II Mum and Dad: The Sri Lankan Resistance Fighter and the Seamstress for the Royal Family

Maya is born in London in 1975 to Tamil Sri Lankan parents. Two months pass and her dad leaves, “He went out to buy a pint of milk but did not come back for four months.”^[12] He is in Lebanon to train with the PLO. When he comes back, it is to convince the family to go back to Sri Lanka so he can continue political work on the ground there. Her dad nurtures contacts with the Tamil diaspora in London and forms one of the resistance movements, the Eelam Revolutionary Organization of Students. The family leaves for Sri Lanka when Maya is still a baby. During most of the next ten years she lives in Jaffna, northern Sri Lanka, during civil unrest. The new Tamil movements are fighting for autonomy and the Sri Lankan army harasses the Tamil minority, looking for their resistance fighters, trying to stall the opposition. After almost a decade in Sri Lanka, the family relocates to Chennai, India, for a few years, hiding from the army, then returning to Jaffna. She recounts how they were hiding under the tables at school, when the army or police were shooting through the windows. However, happy times are also given space, “on our street, there were maybe 50 kids, it was brilliant.”^[13] At her home they rent a TV and a video around once a month. The entire neighbourhood huddles together and watches Tamil films for 24 hours, putting ice on their faces to stay awake.^[14]

The Indian film *The Disco Dancer* (1982) also plays a role in her life. At around seven years of age, she earns money dancing to *Jimmi Aaja*, a tune in that film—25 years later it turns up as a cover on *Kala*. However, life in Sri Lanka is very difficult and the family decides to flee to a Tamil area in India again. When they return once again to Sri Lanka a few years later, the army shows up asking for “Dad”. Putting little Maya on a knee, the soldier asks, is this toy from your dad? “I would be, like, ‘I wish’,” she reflects in 2010, her remark capturing a childhood longing for a father paying attention.^[15] When Maya is close to eleven, her mother Kala and the three kids leave again. This time back to London, where they have not been for ten years. Arul Pragasam, dad, now using the code name *Arular*, stays in Sri Lanka to continue his resistance work. The family is granted asylum in the UK and Maya, close to her teens, continues life in the South London Phipps Bridge estate. She is called “Paki” now and then, but that is not as bad “compared to being shot at by Sinhalese government forces chasing her father”, as Kitty Empire quotes her saying.^[16] While dad appears to have been a centre for longing as well as an inspiration for her fighter’s stance, Maya brings in her uncle: “everyone thinks my story is to do with my dad, you know, it’s my uncle in Morden (south London) on my mother’s side who is my inspiration.” He smuggled himself into the UK and sold clothes out of a car.^[17] Maya also credits her mother: “she was incredibly strong for having three jobs and three kids and not knowing English.”^[18] Her mum uses her experience with sewing working as a seamstress for the UK Royal family.^[19]

But how does it begin, when dad is just Arul, before “Arular”, and goes to buy that pint of milk without coming back? He initially comes to London to visit following engineering studies in Russia. There he meets Kala, also a Tamil Sri Lankan, visiting her brother who lives in London. They are in a pub in Hounslow, apparently liking each other, and Kala’s visa is expiring. Arul has a visa. They get married. She can stay. Soon Maya is born. When Maya finally goes to London nearing eleven, she does not hear from Arul for many years. Preparing her first album after college, she finds a way of “calling for him”. She announces the album will be named *Arular*. The media buzz around her music on the internet, including her 2004 *Mix Tape*, is about to make her name known. Her dad reads about it in *Sri Lanka Times*, emails her “This is Dad. Change the title of your album. I am really proud. Just read about you in Sri Lanka Times. Dad.” She does not follow his advice. “It irritates me that I end up giving him so much attention when he has so little to do with my life.”^[20] She cannot get rid of the irritating father who somehow keeps contaminating her work. So, she collages her scarce childhood memories of Sri Lanka and dad into the warrior semiotics of the cover of her first album named after dad’s freedom fighter alias, *Arular*. These are her visuals: a story beginning at the threshold of London’s prestigious Central Saint Martin’s College.

III London: Central Saint Martin's and Beyond

Around a decade after arriving in London, Maya—now around twenty—has set her eyes on the famed Central Saint Martin's College of Art and Design. Several musicians before her went there: Joe Strummer from *The Clash*, the Nigerian-British singer Sade, Jarvis Cocker from *Pulp*. However, entry to the college was difficult. Maya didn't have the grades and she was late with submitting a formal application, but she called the principal and put on all sorts of pressure, including "I'd go and be a hooker in King's Cross and make a film about it and come back in three years' time and be like 'this is what happened to me when I got rejected by Saint Martin's'."^[21] She was finally accepted for her "chutzpah".^[22]

I don't need any audition

I just got my own little mission

It grew bigger than a politician

Yeah, history is just a competition

Do you wanna sign my petition?^[23]

As an aspiring visual artist at the end of her Saint Martin's days, Maya had met singer Justine Frischmann, and before turning to music herself, Maya directed a video, designed an album cover and documented a tour of Justine's band *Elastica*. At Saint Martin's she had written a script about London youth offenders, which she tried, unsuccessfully, to turn into a film production. Her life had taken a turn towards opportunity with these various documentary projects. After completion of her studies, she returned to Sri Lanka to nurture her memories and catch up with what was happening there—and turn that into a documentary. This was in 2000 and the documentary was to be about Sri Lanka's Prevention of Terrorism Act, which allowed the police to detain suspects for up to eighteen months on very little or no evidence. "I worked on it for a year, and then 9/11 happened."^[24] She was in her early twenties, had just graduated, and was following people with a camera. Many were reluctant to speak about the conflict, anxious about being visited by the army at midnight.

The material she shot did not turn into a documentary. She feared her work would be taken as propaganda in the changed global atmosphere after 9/11.^[25] Maya had been put off by the approach of many former fellow students, "making films for the intelligentsia [...] It missed the whole point of art representing society."^[26] However, her footage became stills, photos and stencils with spray paint and graffiti-style appropriations that were accepted for her first art exhibition called "M.I.A."—for "Missing in Action", assigned to combatants reported missing during war, or missing in *Acton*, a West London suburb. This mix of styles reflected her DIY ethos, and ironically became her way into music. "I just had this show, and everything was going really well with the art." Her *Missing in Action* was exhibited at Euphoria Shop^[27] at Portobello Road. Her art pieces sold out quickly and she was nominated for the Alternative Turner Prize. But something else was also happening: "I knew when I found the right medium nothing else would exist. When I rediscovered music nothing else existed. I just shut down, stopped answering my calls, didn't leave the house, never brushed my teeth."^[28]

Maya's solo music work took advantage of groove boxes/sequencers and the then still relatively new internet for distribution. Having documented the touring of friend Justine Frischmann and her band *Elastica*, Justine formed what was to become an international Brit pop sensation, *Suede*.^[29] In the early 2000s, Maya began to

move her own way with a simple Roland MC505 groove box with drum machine, synth, sequencer and controller in one. The groove box was lent to her by Justine, although it was the artist Peaches who had introduced Maya to this wonder machine in 2001, when she was supporting Elastica on tour. With the Roland MC505, a musical generator and contaminator machine, M.I.A. was in her latent stage, starting to compile a variety of sounds and musical cultures, taking her visual DIY collage approach into the musical field. Maya was encouraged and began working, initially intending to produce music while looking for Caribbean singers in clubs. When this did not work out, Maya herself became the singer. While waiting for the legal rights to use samples, an official album was delayed in 2003–04. However, encouraged by her then co-producer and lover Diplo, she managed to temporarily bypass the legal gatekeepers through her unofficial mix tape *Piracy Funds Terrorism* in 2004. In 2005 the legal issues were resolved and her first album, *Arular*, finally came out.

Despite her absorption into music, the visual aspect of Maya's cultural production remains prominent. The artwork of her albums and the remarkable visual productions that accompanies her songs lifts the material to another level, adding to its already layered meanings and sonic challenges.^[30] These include the Middle Eastern influences of the song "Bad Girls" (2010), which lauds the women to drive movement in Saudi Arabia, or the human architecture and staging of "Borders", the first song on her 2016 album *AIM* (the video for which she directs herself), or perhaps the most interesting and controversial of them all—the genocide of red-haired people in "Born Free" from January 2010. A nine-minute short film, directed by film-maker Roman Gavras, is shot for this song in January and released in April, then banned on YouTube. In March the same year, a similar, less controversial and more well-known short film by two other notable female visual artists in the musical business premieres: Lady Gaga, with Beyonce guest starring in Gaga's "Telephone". In 2016 M.I.A. continues her speaking back to power in the combined video to the songs "Swords" (on bonus edition of *AIM*, 2016) and "Warriors" from *Matangi* (2013). It is shot on location in India and West Africa and includes a remarkable dance (to the song "Warriors") by an unknown member of a Zaoli troupe in Ivory Coast which Maya tracks down. Finally, her documentary practice is paying off when teens performing sword theatrics in India (for the song "Swords") are included. The clang of sword blades aligns well with Maya's sonic habits. Her biggest hit, but not the most remarkable video, is "Paper Planes" from 2007 (on *Kala*). Street kids from around Brixton, South London, are invited to sing the chorus:

All I wanna do is... BANG BANG BANG!

And... Ker CHING!

And take all your money

The three "bangs" are unmistakably the sounds of gunshots and the "ker ching" is that of a cash register opening. Gun shots have to be removed when she goes on the Letterman show. The song reworks a dual guitar and bass line stutter-intro to The Clash's "Straight to Hell" (1982)—with Clash members credited as co-writers of the song.

Gun sounds are a part of our culture as an everyday thing. If you've been exposed to gunfights and violence and bombs and war then I can use those sounds backing my thoughts, ya know? Look, I've been shot at so I'm quite comfortable with gunshot sounds. If you have a problem with it, go and talk to the people who were shooting at me.^[31]

IV D.I.Y.M.I.A.: A Third Place

"I'm just trying to build some sort of bridge," Maya says around the time *Kala* comes out. "I'm trying to create a third place, somewhere in between the developed world and the developing world."^[32] Is this "third place", in her case, an open space where contamination can thrive? As a refugee Maya had her life abruptly disconnected. She was thrown into a new place with strong childhood memories following her. In her art she can offer some kind of articulation to this "third place" or suggest a remodelling. Contamination here becomes an attempt at re-designing and re-imagining the world. We may be close to Homi K. Bhabha's third space, in his vocabulary a space that works as an enabler of "other positions" based on a "spirit of alterity". Not "the tracing of two original moments", as Bhabha argues, but a space that "displaces the histories that constitute it" and "sets up new political initiatives".^[33]

Maya sets up these "initiatives" as non-white and non-European/non-Western female. Following her childhood in Sri Lanka and India, she is growing up as a pre-teen and teen among the British working classes. Her life is inevitably "third space"-like. One may still ponder the cultural circuit though. Her work is produced and exhibited in the West and through Western producers and companies, drawing from a mix of personal experience and an available heritage—and then the music made is sold primarily to Western audiences^[34]—this although she is known in Sri Lanka too and has found fans outside Western Europe and USA. Maya has done what she could to make this about the world *at large*. On the one hand sounds are merged and catapulted into a global sound in space, yet also very "grounded" with those various kids' groups, local rappers, and Tamil drums. M.I.A. has, like other popular musicians, appropriated cultural content and woven it into her music. A contaminating practice or *modus operandi* buys an artist freedom. Always something else, old, or new to invite in.

Maya's entry into the art and music scenes happen at the threshold between the fading of analogue practices and the spiralling of the digital, with blogging, piracy, social media and streaming in the 2000s. And she appears to sit well on both chairs: the visual inside of the double album (LP) *Kala* is an uneasy dance of Bollywood and punk zine graphics^[35], twelve quarter collages for the twelve songs that integrate elements of hip hop, reggae, graffiti and stencil print. Alongside her analogue visual DIY, there is a strong sense of digital DIY in the sound work.^[36] Combined, her visual and sound work are a prime example of contemporary artistic contamination. She is "preserving" by incorporating inspirational snippets and genres in new tracks.^[37] However, the cradle of sound and vision/ary work is not the primary focus of former college friend Loveridge's biopic. The film, which relies mainly on hundreds of hours of video footage as well as interviews and concert documentation, appears mainly to visualise the period before she really took on music—and times after fame. We do not really get into her laboratory of artistic contamination. Still, Maya, friends and family are seen and heard behind or in front of the camera, direct cinema style, documented in everyday life and social discussions from her early youth onwards.

The biopic came about slowly. The many tapes of "from the inside and out" piling up in Maya's vaults were handed over to her old friend, with whom she hung out during college days, some time around 2009. Loveridge spent years preparing the project, at one stage stopping it due to M.I.A.'s record company halting support, and then restarting when new funding was found. Steve and Maya had a contract that stated that Maya had to keep her fingers off her archive while Steve was working and editing on the film. When it was out, Maya thought it was too much of a personal story with too little focus on her music. It went for a framing of a rebel personality with radical politics, a media angle's portrayal of "the protest singer", the prodigal daughter crossing continents, selling records, gaining followers, etc. Strongly attached to her DIY method but increasingly having to think of the brand M.I.A., was Maya becoming "infected" in the contaminated river of fame, she wondered sitting in a music industry office in Los Angeles, considering what the next step could be in the dances with a global press.

The vaults of footage that Loveridge had at his disposal may not have comprised the visuals necessary to

reconstruct the creative processes well enough—or perhaps this documentation simply did not produce enough drama? However, drama for documentary narrative was found in the siblings’ discussions and reflections on life. Arul and Kala’s three children are captured as young adults providing bursts of reflections on their parents’ predicament in the world. For Maya, despite her note in an interview about being irritated giving her dad so much attention, in these clips she appears to view him as this towering and distant inspiration. “He made us damn interesting. He’s given us a bloody background [...] that made us so strong, we are so independent”, Maya recounts, standing in the middle of the room. Her siblings take the opposite stance. Brother Sugu, talking to the camera when 23 years old, notices with some bitterness that dad came back to his family older, because his life is “at a dead end [...] he could not fight anymore.” Sister Kali also bemoans his absence, not being around when he was most needed, “he could have sent a birthday card at least [...] or anything.” But they did not hear from him.

“Out of the blue we got this phone call, this is your dad speaking, and I am going to be in London tomorrow.” Maya appears to be around twenty in the clip, and it is not clear if he had arrived when the previous discussion took place. She explains that she has not seen him since she was eleven, and when she saw him in Sri Lanka he gave her apples, the first time she had them. “Still, we didn’t know you are (dad), we thought you were uncle.” Dad Arul now sits calmly on the sofa explaining with a grin that he was hiding explosives under a toy duck in this suitcase for Maya and the other kids when on the rare visit home. Mum Kala, the seamstress, is crocheting. This makes for great viewing. Looking back on a two-decade-long career in visual arts and music, Maya’s art material can be seen as productions that *transform* her worlds into something manageable and different. The third place she speaks about, the positive flipside of contamination.

This piece is based on a rewriting/rearrangement and shortening of a longer “track”/chapter in a forthcoming monograph titled *Mix Tape Memories. Movement and Difference in Life Wiring*.. The same chapter also includes the journeys of *Sorrow Songs* (in Du Bois, 1903), *Sixto Rodriguez* and *Dengue Fever*.

Footnotes

1. From “Bucky Done Gun”, on the album *Arular* by M.I.A., 2007.
2. The notion of mix-taping originates in the 1970s, with home recording of songs from the radio, LPs, other cassettes, reel-to-reel tapes, etc., and often handed out as gifts or dedications. The tapes were often personal and unique, handy and cheap to make artefacts, but also often included a certain amount of labour involving design and visual elements. They emerged at the advent of home-recording technologies, which gave ordinary people opportunities to make compilations to communicate their tastes and feelings. The presence of this type of medium marked a moment from the late 1960s onwards, where listeners gained control over what they heard and in what order, according to Megan Carpenter (using Matias Viegner), p48, in “Space age love song”. *Nevada Law Journal*. Vol. 11. No. 1. Fall 2010. The spirit of mix-taping continues in twenty-first century digital practices and DJ vernacular. In autobiographical literature it is beautifully represented by, for instance, Thurston Moore, who also

- pays attention to the visual element, see Moore, Thurston. Ed. *Mix Tape: The Art of Cassette Culture*. New York, NY: Universe Publishing. 2005; and Rob Sheffield, in Sheffield, Rob. *Love Is a Mix Tape*. London: Piatkus. 2010. Also in academia, with scholars like Melanie Lovatt, in Lovatt, Melanie, “Personalising popular culture: The uses and functions of the mix tape”. MA Dissertation, Department of Folklore. Memorial University of Newfoundland. 2005. In my own work I associate mix tapes with related participatory and cultural forms, such as zines.
3. Derrida, Jacques. *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*. London: Routledge. 2003 [1993]; Fisher, Mark. “What is hauntology”. *Film Quarterly*. Vol. 66. No. 1. 2010. pp. 16–24. In French the “h” in *hauntology* is not heard, making it sound like *ontology*. So, the “h” is there (in writing) and not there (in sound). The term was also used to express the presence of Marx’s ideas after the death of communism and the alleged “end of history”. Various memory and cultural studies in the 2000s used a range of phenomena, ruins, film, etc. See Reynolds, Simon. *Retromania*. London: Faber and Faber. 2011. pp. 328–29. Marx is still here, sort of.
 4. Tsing, Anna W. *The Mushroom at the End of the World*. City, NJ: Princeton University Press. p. 1.
 5. Loveridge, Steve. *Mathangi/Maya/M.I.A.* London: Cinereach (Production). 2018.
 6. From basic tracks laid down on a Roland MC505 (see Section III London) and the added original music and sounds moulded together in the studio, *Arular* came across as collisions of beats and styles and samples, abrasive and switching tempos, and an embracing of syncretism that became her trademark. The syncretism though evolving to a stronger extent on the second album release *Kala*.
 7. Lönnblad, Irene. “Political elements in the music of M.I.A”. MA dissertation. Department of Musicology. University of Helsinki. 2012. p. 12.
 8. *Ibid.*, p 14.
 9. Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World*.
 10. Discography: *Piracy Funds Terrorism* (a mix tape), 2004; *Arular*, 2005; *Kala*, 2007; *MAYA*, 2010; *Mathangi*, 2013 (thanks to colleague Bojana for finding a CD version of this album in a library used sale and giving it to me); *AIM*, 2016; and *MATA*, 2022. In addition, a range of mixes and tunes were released online (via YouTube etc.). Some of them are rather fabulous, such as “Damascus”, “Amen”, “Ohmni”, “Babylon” and “Ctrl.”, to mention a handful from recent years.
 11. While sonic attacks have always been outspoken, her most recent album, *MATA* (out just a few weeks before this article was edited, November 2022), marks a confirmation of M.I.A.’s style of exchanging between catchy beats and refrains smitten/contaminated with irritating and challenging sound, or vice versa.
 12. Maya to in Sawyer, Miranda. “MIA: I’m here for the People”. *The Observer* 13 June 2010. Available at <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2010/jun/13/mia-feature-miranda-sawyer> (accessed 2023-04-21).
 13. *Ibid.*
 14. *Ibid.*
 15. *Ibid.*
 16. Maya in Empire, Kitty. “Flash-forward”. *The Observer*. 20 March 2005. Available at <https://www.theguardian.com/observer/omm/story/0,,1438918,00.html> (accessed 2023-04-21).
 17. Sawyer, “MIA: I’m here for the People”.
 18. Maya in Barlow, Helen. “What really happened to rising rapper M.I.A.?” *Body+Soul*. 11 July 2018. Available at <https://www.bodyandsoul.com.au/mind-body/wellbeing/what-really-happened-to-rising-rapper-mia/news-story/f148ac5b882b428e53aca269d4b6f123> (accessed 2023-04-21).
 19. Hahn, Rachel. “M.I.A.’s new royal honour weaves in some surprising family history”. *Vogue*. 14 January

2020. Available at <https://www.vogue.in/fashion/content/mia-new-royal-honour-weaves-in-some-surprising-family-history-mbe-medal-made-by-mother> (accessed 2023-04-21). Ironically, the ribbon that M.I.A. eventually was to receive as part of an MBE medal in 2020 was one of her mother's, Kala Pragasam, hand-stitched (a work she did with her cousin) for the Queen after coming to England as a refugee in 1986. The MBE (Most Excellent order of the British empire) is bestowed onto those who have made major contributions to the arts. See Young, Sarah. "MIA receives MBE award that was hand-stitched by her mother". *The Independent*. 15 January 2010. Available at <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/mia-mbe-award-mother-instagram-buckingham-palace-a9284481.html> (accessed 2023-04-21).
20. Sawyer, "MIA: I'm here for the People".
 21. Whitehill, Gaby. "More about M.I.A.". *Gigwise*. 5 Nov 2013. (Whitehall is quoting the web news site *Sunday Times Style*, 2013.
 22. Cheng, Susan. "10 things you didn't know about M.I.A.'s visual art career". *Complex*. 4 November 2010. Available at <https://www.complex.com/style/2013/11/10-things-you-didnt-know-about-mias-visual-art-career> (accessed 2023-04-21).
 23. From "Freedun" by M.I.A., on the album *AIM*, 2016.
 24. Simonpillai, Radheyana. "M.I.A. takes a stand for Tamils". *NowToronto*. 4 May. 2016. Available at <https://nowtoronto.com/news/mia-takes-a-stand-for-tamils/> (accessed 2023-04-11).
 25. M.I.A. in "Not to Missing in action". *Nirali Magazine*. October 2004. Available at <https://www.niralimagazine.com/2004/10/not-so-missing-in-action/>.
 26. Cheng, "10 things you didn't know about M.I.A.'s visual art career".
 27. Published at Floating World Comics. See: <https://floatingworldcomics.com/archives/425>
 28. Empire, "Flash-forward".
 29. Justine is the daughter of Jewish parents, one from Hungary, the other from Russia, the former a Holocaust survivor. The two women thus were both new Londoners with parents who had experienced war.
 30. The sleeve/album design exhibits bursts of colour, graffiti, patterns repeated (including machine guns and the like on *Arular*), GIF image and stencil-styles, early internet imitations, digital art and Eastern inspirations.
 31. Maya, in a 2009 interview, quoted on <https://genius.com/iAMnino> (accessed 2023-04-11).
 32. Bhabha, Homi K. "The Third Space", In *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*. Edited by Jonathan Rutherford. London: Lawrence & Wishart. 1990. p. 211; and Sisario, Ben. "An Itinerant Refugee in a Hip Hop world". *The New York Times*. 19 August 2007. Available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/08/19/arts/music/19sisa.html> (accessed 2023-04-11).
 33. In Bhabha, the notion of "space" indicates an openness towards inscription of meaning, compared to an already inscribed or signified "place". Maya's wording is slightly different; however, I do not interpret this as making a big difference. On the contrary, they both articulate "realms" in which otherness and newness can thrive.
 34. Lönnblad, "Political elements in the music of M.I.A", p. 26.
 35. Zine culture can be traced back to 1940s sci-fi writing, and even to *pamphleteering* as an important early form of public sphere communication several hundred years ago. See, for instance, Verhoest, Pascal. "Seventh century pamphlets". *Theory, Culture & Society*. Vol. 36. No. 1. 2019. pp. 47-62; and Høg Hansen, forthcoming Provisionally titled *Mix Tape Memories. Movement and Difference in Life Writing*, Palgrave.
 36. Michelle Hyun Kim naming Maya as the progenitor of digital DIY in a review of *MATA*, Rolling Stone,

2002. <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-album-reviews/m-i-a-mata-1234608273/>

37. For a discussion of ambiguities of preservationism, see for instance Appiah, 2006, p15)