

## TAKING A STAND

### M.I.A.

**1.** And now let's hear the story of another woman who, like Lillian Vernon, fled her homeland and settled into a career in a new country. It's British rapper and artist M.I.A. I first spoke to her a couple years ago on the program. She's known for songs like this one, «Paper Planes.»

(SOUNDBITE OF SONG, «PAPER PLANES»)

**M.I.A.:** (Singing) I fly like paper, get high like planes. If you catch me at the border, I've got visas in my name. If you come around here, I make them all day. I get one done in a second if you wait.

**Greene:** I also talked with her about her personal story. And it is a story about identity and constantly being on the move. M.I.A. was born in London. But she spent her childhood in Sri Lanka. And she survived a fierce civil war. Her father was fighting alongside separatist rebels. That conflict would go on to last 25 years. And it ignited this mass migration of tens of thousands of Sri Lankans. M.I.A. says she witnessed some really terrible scenes.

**M.I.A.:** We attempted to leave about four or five times. And every time, we'd get stopped. And they would stop the bus and take all the men off the bus. And we never saw them again.

**2. Greene:** That mass movement of people from Sri Lanka is not unlike what's unfolding across much of the Middle East and North Africa today. And after having that conversation with M.I.A. a couple years ago, it didn't surprise me that she would weigh in today.

(SOUNDBITE OF SONG, «BORDERS»)

**M.I.A.:** (Singing) Borders, what's up with that? Politics, what's up with that? Police shots, what's up with that? Identities, what's up with that? Your privilege, what's up with that? Broke people, what's up with that? Boat people, what's up with that?

**Greene:** This is called «Borders.» It's a song and video that M.I.A. has released. The video is visually stunning. It features young men, clearly migrants, traveling on land, by sea, feverishly climbing barbed wire fences. We caught up with M.I.A. again to talk about the song and to hear more about her own journey. You were a child growing up in Sri Lanka. And your dad was involved in the civil war there. And I just wonder, I mean, how hard was life before you left Sri Lanka?

**M.I.A.:** Well, it was pretty bad. And there was definitely no international eyes looking at the situation. You know, luckily, at the time, Britain opened its borders and during that slot of, you know, a few months, my uncle found my birth certificate - 'cause I was actually born in England. And through being born here, I was able to help the rest of my family come with us. So when we came, you know, we didn't want any connection to Sri Lanka and any connection to the experiences we had because they were pretty rough. And we fully embraced being British. And one of the reasons why I loved being British at the time is the music scene at the time was really diverse. And I was exposed to, like, hip-hop and Jamaican dance hall, and house music and drum and bass and these kind of things, which all were born out of mixing of different cultures. And that's kind of what England represented to me.

**3. Greene:** And M.I.A. brought up a couple questions here. If the West is so deliberate in promoting its brands and is using art and culture to inspire people's dreams, how can the West then turn people away, she wonders. She also looks at how virtual borders have been falling away, music, information, goods. They travel so freely. She wonders why people can't as well.

**M.I.A.:** You don't put the borders on Apple. Or you don't put borders on YouTube. And you don't put borders on MTV. So to make the borders even taller when actually what the creative world's doing, what the business world's doing is actually the opposite, then you're always going to have this problem.