
I Am Myself

Sasha Askarian

Abstract

This reflective narrative takes childhood mistreatments as analogous to that of the insidious ways institutionalized power subjugates marginalized peoples. It centers the voice of a young girl who is yet to be proficient in English and thus uses her body as a key source of knowing, activating her embodied rage to articulate the fullness of her humanity. The narrative locates the body as a matrix of cultural-historical-self-knowledge that recognizes its own sovereignty; as that which reminds us of our sacred place within the world; and therefore, acts as a spiritual gateway for collective liberation. As we look through our multiple screens and witness the current state-sanctioned atrocities and many genocides unfolding, this piece asks: what does the body do? What does it do when children are killed, and people are actively erased? Does it feel sick? Numb? Outraged? Shocked? The intellectual mind alone cannot recognize the depths of such complex abjection. It requires a corporeal awakening to remind us of our sacred existence.

Keywords

body, sovereignty, collective, liberation, sacred, narrative

I am myself

When I was a child, a boy grabbed me and locked my limbs with the strength of his newly pubescent body. I remember shaking and yelling, “I am myself, don’t!”

I did not have the same way with words back then.

Teachers often told me that I had my own “special” language—a clever way of letting me know I was grammatically and positionally wrong.

The Othering process begins young and is implemented by multiple sources of power.

Though my tongue could not label it at the time, I recognized grammatical tyranny; tyranny wielded by a teacher emboldened by my overly apologetic immigrant parents.

Those with power crush those who appear too grateful for safety.

“I am myself” is a verbal response to a bodily injustice. A corporeal objection that is yet to be understood intellectually.

Being immobilized by a boy practicing unruly masculinity shocked me to my core. I demanded he recognize my bodily sovereignty, and the uncivility of breaking such a sacred law through the brute force of his body.

With nothing but my awkward phrases and incoherent sounds, I tapped into an anger unconstrained by grammar. But anger, especially unfiltered, is shamed.

Rage is not in the arsenal of the articulate.

As I now move through the highest channels of education, I recognize that my grammar was on point. “I am myself” is a declaration of self-governance. Of the autonomy of the anatomy. Of the captain ushering the sails of their own soul.

The world presents confused gazes, furrowed brows, and shrugged shoulders. But myself I am.

Even as they occupy our bodies. Clamp down our tongues. Bite into our beauty with dry decaying mouths. Squat on our lush lands. Claim ownership of our knowledges and attempt to erase traces of our existence and richness.

We must continue to know that we are our own.

First, they hold down your body. Then they cut off your tongue. Finally, they exercise your spirit. They hold us down until the weight of their cruelty sets each of our limbs into a dreamless sleep, numb, and seemingly weightless. We must not deny the body and being's inherent sovereign power. We are for the giving; we are not for the taking.

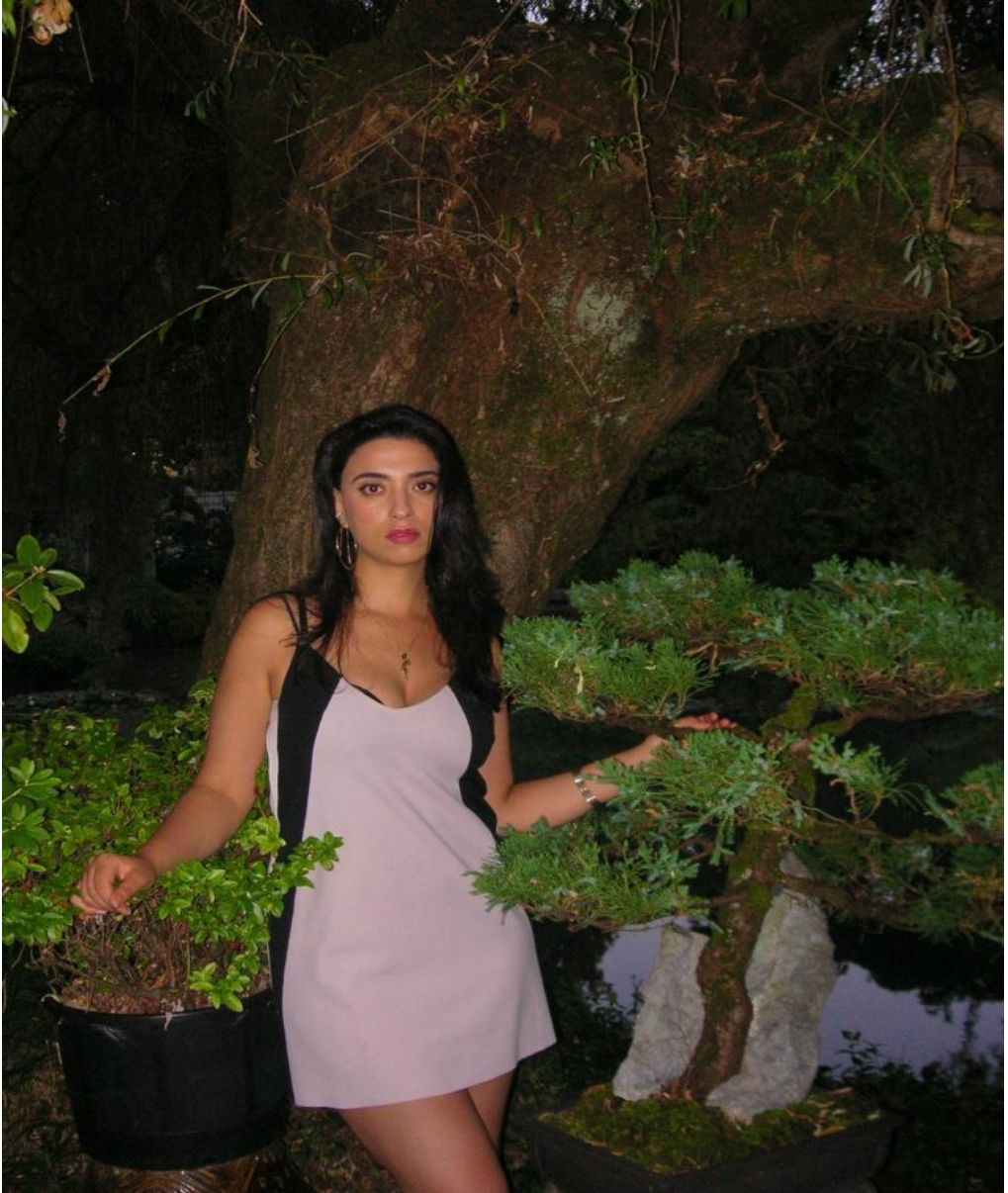


Figure 1. My Body in Place. Image directed and captured by photographer Akhila Appadurai.

Author Biography

Sasha Askarian is an Iranian-Canadian PhD candidate in York University's political science department who specializes in exploring how artificial intelligence shapes the politics of carcerality. Sasha also engages in innovative arts-based research at the University of British Columbia's Centre for Gender & Sexual Health Equity in Indigenous Health. As a Senior Policy Analyst at the First Nations Health Authority (FNHA), she supports the advancement of health and social equity. Sasha's work strives to bridge research, community, and art. Most recently, she co-curated gallery exhibitions that amplify Indigenous knowledges through art. Beyond her scholarly and advocacy roles, Sasha is a poet who utilizes art to deepen cultural and spiritual connections while also reflecting on contemporary social and political realities.