

MY COUNTRY'S FABLES SAY I AM DEVOTED

The six dollar sunflowers we bought after arguing over the cost of raspberries,
our debates over new cities: Montreal, Ann Arbor, Sydney, Los

Angeles. We measure our navy passports against our marked bodies, practice
our Spanish, the duskskinned French. Silt & fog & our serrated

syntax, tongues constellating on the duvet. My country's fables say I am devoted.
The sun slumps against the snipers on the roofs of my university,

my father's suitcases split at the seam like soft fruit. It's July,
the tile stinks of Lysol. I don't want to buy anything anymore.

Psychology banned in Florida & my country's fables
say I am not endangered. Yes, the poison vowels slicking the floor & my mother

wanted me to have a neutral name. But sprawl of sticky letters
repeating my refusal, but let me winnow my rage into something of use.

Let me remain a spell in a long black skirt, stitched incantation of soot,
sap, roe, silk. My dancing means nothing more than dancing & I'm

simmering grasshoppers for protein, breeding chickens in
the backyard. San Diego stays gray forever & romance is dead & oranges

grow best in deep, well-drained soil & I hear
this music in my food. July & the heat syrups our hair, we stop for gas, you spit

in the dirt & swear the season will never end.

As an Arab woman, I've become accustomed to being the only one of me in most rooms I enter. Growing up legally invisibilized as White on the census while my family endured the post-9/11 ramifications of the Patriot Act (whether clicks on our calls back home to Syria, my mother being needlessly pulled over, or being denied access to infant care services because of our Arabness), I became accustomed to wordlessness. As a community organizer, poet, and aspiring movement lawyer, much of my work since then has been about finding words for my community's experiences where not many exist. I am becoming an attorney because I hope to reorient the law toward dignity, memory, and repair.

That commitment first took shape during my time at Stanford, where I earned both my B.A. in Psychology and M.A. in Sociology in four years while navigating housing insecurity and holding down 3–4 jobs at a time. As President of the Arab Students' Association, I led the successful campaign for Stanford's first-ever Introduction to Arab Studies course. I also served as the Co-Chair of the Institute for Diversity in the Arts for three years, where I mentored underrepresented artists and organized campus-wide programming for students of color.

Outside of academia, I've used my poetry as a vehicle for advocacy. I am the author of three poetry collections, including *How to Make an Algorithm in the Microwave* (University of Arkansas Press), winner of the Etel Adnan Poetry Prize. I've had the opportunity to perform at the Obama White House and Carnegie Hall, working to grow the visibility of Arab and immigrant experiences at the national level. My poetry work also reflects a core tenet of my approach to law: liberation is collective, and our solidarity should be too.

At UCLA Law, I've continued leaning into my community commitments. I serve as Co-Chair of the Middle Eastern & North African Law Students Association, where I help foster belonging for one of the law school's smallest affinity groups. I also serve as Co-Chair of the

Reentry Clinic, helping formerly incarcerated people navigate legal barriers to housing and employment. These roles remind me that law is a relational practice; it is about listening, building trust, and learning how to hold power with humility.

This summer, I am clerking at Innovation Law Lab, supporting litigation on behalf of asylum seekers and unjustly detained immigrants. I'm especially drawn to Law Lab's use of technology and systems design to fight carceral logic and enhance access to justice, an approach I hope to continue in my own legal career. After graduation, I hope to join a litigation-focused nonprofit or public interest law firm advocating for immigrant and racial justice. Long-term, I want to work in impact litigation, advocating for Arab Americans and other immigrant communities often left unprotected. This includes helping defend First Amendment protections for Arab Americans as well as expanding the legal language available to those confronting discrimination without clear legal recognition.

The law alone cannot save us. But it can be a tool - a sharp one, if wielded with precision, purpose, and care. My 1L year challenged me to hold fast to my values in the face of profound grief. I was one of only two Arab women in my entire class, reckoning with the loneliness of being rendered unspeakable. And yet I stayed visible. In the last 7 months, I raised over \$7,000 for Palestinian families, completed my second poetry collection on themes witnessing and resistance, and showed up to my clinics and classes as my full, unapologetic self. As someone who has spent their life navigating institutions not built with me in mind, I bring a unique lens to legal work: one that bridges research and storytelling, policy and poetry.

I'm still learning how to protect the parts of myself that institutions try to flatten. As the first lawyer in my family, it's not easy to build myself a path like this in the face of my own financial precarity and debt burden. The Terry Bryant Scholarship would allow me to continue

pursuing this path with less of that burden. But more than that, it would be a recognition of the communities that have poured into me and of the futures I'm trying to build. I'm not becoming a lawyer because I believe the system is fair; I'm becoming a lawyer because I believe we can make it better. I hope to keep making room - for myself and those who come after me.

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