

**Community Advocacy and Palestine:
Written Advocacy in Literature and Online**

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1. Introduction: Written Advocacy

Advocacy—coming from latin *advocare*—means to be summoned, or to come to aid. Written advocacy doesn't always have the immediacy oral advocacy offers, but it is still a very useful tool that can greatly impact various communities. In this paper I explore how written advocacy can be an effective tool for advocacy in a more digital age. First, I discuss why written advocacy is beneficial and how it's used in a digital world. In section 2, I showcase three advocates, and their multimodal approach to written advocacy on social media specifically, and discuss how this form of advocacy is effective. In section 3, I explore advocacy in literature, dividing the examples given into non-fiction and semi-fictional narratives, primarily focusing on Dr. Nora Lester Murad, who I had the opportunity to interview.

The writing process allows time to refine the message being communicated, as advocates have more opportunities to edit and revise what they write. This heavily recursive process allows advocates to be intentional with what they say, helping them to communicate concisely and comprehensibly. Written advocacy is rapidly becoming more important. For example, in 2021 the National Down Syndrome Society turned to social media as a way to advocate more widely during the pandemic. Through their efforts, they were able to reach a globalized audience (Nasereddin). Although a video or a post might not seem like writing in the traditional sense, it is still considered a text (Burnell et al.). The creators of almost any video go through a writing process where they come up with an idea, figure out what to say, even write a script of sorts (Palmer). Written advocacy in children's literature is on the rise, with more organizations like

OurShelves emailing publishers and supporting authors in order to counter increased book bans (“Take Action”).

2. Examples of Palestinian Advocacy: Online

Many advocates for Palestine employ written advocacy and social media as a “tool for advocacy, information sharing, and mobilization” (Al Mousawi). There is a large community of advocates that use social media to advocate for Palestinian liberation and independence. Common posts are videos documenting life, calls for aid for specific people or families, and promotions of boycotts or letter writing campaigns to government officials.

Plestia Alaqad and Bisan Owda—two well-known Palestinian journalists and advocates very active on the social media platform Instagram—have almost nine million followers combined. They both heavily use reels and videos, and they both post pictures and “stories” to bring visibility to Palestinians, and to tell their own stories. Advocacy through social media is beneficial for both Alaqad and Owda, especially Owda, as she has no other connection to the world outside of Gaza. Social media allows her to be heard by more people. Another advocate—Nora Lester Murad—doesn’t have quite as many followers on social media but still posts on Instagram regularly. She also employs a very different form of advocacy through writing children’s books. Below, I will examine the online efforts of Alaqad, Owda, and Murad. I will also explore how all three of them engage with online advocacy in different ways, and that their endeavors all have similar effects.

2.1. Plestia Alaqad: Telling Palestinian’s Stories

Twenty-three year-old journalist and author Plestia Alaqad utilizes social media to increase visibility about Palestinians. The vast majority of her posts are about other

people—journalists who were killed, friends who needed medical assistance, and children she met in the hospital. While a few posts are about her life, book, and articles she either wrote or was featured in, her posts mainly draw attention to other people, telling their stories.

A recent Instagram post from Alaqad is exemplary of her style of digital written advocacy, showing an article from Vogue Australia where Alaqad was interviewed. It combines text and photo, and is accompanied by a brief caption, “I’ll keep using every platform I can to speak about Palestine. Words may feel powerless, but they’re all we have, and I’ll never stop using them...” (see Figure 1). This caption encourages the audience to engage in advocacy—written or otherwise—by emphasizing the importance of writing and speaking about Gaza and Palestine.



Fig. 1. Plestia Alaqad, Yasmin Suteja. “Words May Feel Powerless, but They’re All We Have, and I’ll Never Stop Using Them.” *Instagram*, 17 Aug. 2025.

2.2. *It’s Bisan from Gaza—and I’m still alive*

Bisan Owda is twenty-six, and lives in Gaza City. She is a journalist from the Gaza strip, and previously worked with the United Nations, addressing women’s rights issues. She also worked with the European Union, advocating for solutions to climate change (Donnison). She utilizes content creation to further many causes, like women’s equality within Palestine. She is most known for her videos documenting life in Gaza, which she started in 2021, after an Israeli attack.

On her Instagram page, Owda collaborates with various news outlets, showing interviews she participated in and documentaries she’s made. She recently won an Emmy for her war documentary “It’s Bisan from Gaza—and I’m still alive” (“Palestinian Journalist Bisan Owda and AJ+”). She also posts calls for boycotts, strikes, and protests, which encourages the people interacting with her advocacy to be more engaged in advocacy work.

Owda has a recognizable form in the majority of her posts, talking for two to three minutes about how she’s doing, documenting what her life is like—and what others’ lives are like—in Gaza. This provides a very different style of written advocacy compared to Alaqad’s. Alaqad frequently links to articles, and tells other people’s stories, but Owda’s advocacy offers an immediate story, a more visceral text. She rarely links to news articles, because Owda covers what isn’t in mainstream news.

One of her recent Instagram reels (see Figure 2) sheds light on the high temperature during a recent heat wave, and issues with dust from Israeli bombs in Gaza. In the video, Owda talks about how there is no electricity for people living in tents,

which means no fans or air conditioning. This past summer the temperature reached 40 degrees Celsius outside—104 degrees Fahrenheit. She describes how the tents get hotter during the day, almost reaching 112 degrees Fahrenheit (Owda).



Fig. 2. Bisan Owda. “This Heat Wave Has Reached Gaza” *Instagram*, 15 Aug. 2025.

2.3. *Nora Lester Murad*

Nora Lester Murad is an author and advocate, also active on Instagram. She is from a Jewish family and lived in California for many years. She started her bachelor’s degree at UCLA in Near Eastern studies, finishing her coursework for junior and senior year abroad at the American University in Cairo, and Hebrew University, Jerusalem. While visiting Haifa in 1984, she met her husband Hani—a Palestinian—and when she completed her BA, they moved back to the United States. She continued her education

at Lesley University, in Massachusetts—graduating in 1989 with an MA in Intercultural Relations. She graduated with her PhD in 2000, focusing on social change and antiracism. Murad and her husband lived in the Boston area for almost 20 years, where she was an assistant professor at Bentley University, teaching cross-cultural understanding.

Her family moved to the West Bank in 2004 after her daughters and husband experienced increased discrimination after the September eleventh attacks on the World Trade Center. While they were there she engaged in a lot of advocacy work and consulting, for various agencies in the United Nations, and various NGOs. She founded the Dalia Association in 2006, a community foundation that “realizes...rights [for] Palestinians to control [their] resources” (“About Us”). Murad and her family moved back to the states in 2017 (Murad, *About Me*). A few years after they moved back, Murad started writing books and engaging with more written advocacy work.

Dr. Murad engages in many kinds of written advocacy online. She keeps a blog on Gaza, the occupation, how Americans can better empathize with Palestinians, and informational blog posts about the situation in Gaza. She also frequently posts on Instagram. Most of her posts are showing how life is in the Gaza Strip, reacting to news articles, and information about how to help Gaza. She also posts reels about her feelings about the situation, and commentary on news. One recent post discusses the same heatwave Owda covered in her video. Murad shared a picture of a tent and jugs of water, accompanied by a caption which described the situation in Gaza (see Figure 3). Compared to Alaqad and Owda, Murad’s captions are usually longer, and utilize traditional writing to describe what life is like in Palestine, and how dire the situation is. The caption reads,

Seven people live in this tent in Gaza. The temperature inside the tent reaches 104 degrees.

This is how they heat water. They collect contaminated water in dirty containers and leave it in the sun...

The drones are deafening and constant and they can kill at any minute

...

It has been 677 days of US collaboration in the Israeli torture and slaughter of Palestinians. Israel and the US have broken the entire global governance and humanitarian system in order to protect the genocide.

For 677 days, Palestinians and people of conscience have asked, will the world stand by and allow this? For 677 days the answer has been "yes."



Fig. 3. Nora Lester Murad. "Seven People Live in This Tent in Gaza. The Temperature inside the Tent Reaches 104 Degrees..." *Instagram*, 14 Aug. 2025.

Murad may be a smaller content creator in the context of the advocacy medium of social media, with only a couple thousand followers, but her Instagram posts still increase awareness about the crisis in Palestine. Even if it doesn't reach millions of people, it still makes the situation known. Visibility makes more people aware of the situation, and that can help mobilize more support. Additionally, Murad advertises her books online, pledging to her followers that 100% of proceeds go directly to Gaza

2.4 Proving the Effectiveness

Alaqad, Owda, and Murad's posts work to raise awareness about the situation in Palestine because of the wide audience online. Their platforms build a community that allows people to be actively engaged with the news, and encourages people to become involved with advocacy offline—by participating in boycotts and strikes, donating, or attending rallies and protests—and online. The social nature of social media allows viewers to share posts via reposting, adding to one's story, or sending a post to specific people on the platform. This sharing function allows information, news, and advocacy work to be dispersed throughout wider social circles, and can lead to advocacy reaching newer audiences (Weeks et al.). One of the newer audiences is Generation Z. Most of Gen Z relies on social media for their news and as a source of information (Flynn), and because they are more active on social media, they have the ability to be more engaged with advocacy (Abbas et al.).

3. Advocacy Work in the Literary World

In this section I explore how Plestia Alaqad and Nora Lester Murad utilize books and more traditional writing as advocacy. First, I discuss examples of non-fiction collections of Palestinian stories, and why the preservation of these stories is important. I will then explore Dr. Murad's approach to advocacy work in a realistic fiction book,

and how doing so allows readers to empathize more with a situation, and how it has similar effects to non-fictional written advocacy.

3.1. *Collections of Palestinian Stories*

Plestia Alaqad published *The Eyes of Gaza: A Diary of Resistance* in February 2025. It's a compilation of her diaries spanning forty-five days, starting October seventh, 2023. Alaqad said she published this book so people would be able to "...see Gaza. See the people..." (Alaqad, "Plestia Alaqad | بلستيا العقاد on Instagram"). In *The Eyes of Gaza* she also gathered Palestinian stories, and wrote about their experiences. This sort of advocacy humanizes Palestinians on a deeper level than a short social media post. Alaqad's book is also a form of resistance, "demanding recognition of marginalized voices" (Shaik). By publishing her own diary alongside Palestinian's stories, she is demanding that the marginalized community—Palestine—be heard and helped.

Nora Lester Murad's book, *I Found Myself in Palestine*, was published in 2020. The book is a compilation of stories from Palestinian art and culture. Dr. Murad is not Palestinian, but her husband and daughters are, and she recognizes that preserving the Palestinian identity is an important form of advocacy because "to preserve art... [is] to preserve life" (Murad).

The concept of *The Eyes of Gaza* and *I Found Myself in Palestine* are very similar—they are both collections of Palestinian culture and stories. Alaqad focuses solely on the stories found in the forty-five days covered, while Murad takes a wider approach, including traditional Palestinian art, poetry, and stories from displaced Palestinians, and non-Palestinian people who have a connection to Palestine. During a time when Palestinian life and culture is endangered by genocide (United Nations), the work Murad and other advocates are doing is essential.

3.2. Advocacy Through a Fictional Narrative

Nora Lester Murad's *Rest in My Shade: A Poem about Roots*, published in 2018, is a poem told through the perspective of an olive tree, illustrating displacement and Palestinian identity. It's a story, a mostly fictional one, but is still important in literary advocacy for Palestine because it preserves culture and art, similar to *I Found Myself in Palestine*. Murad got the idea for *Ida in the Middle* when her children were younger and reading a lot of literature, with no representation of Palestinian children. Although *Rest in My Shade* and *I Found Myself in Palestine* could be read by a younger audience, Murad wanted something aimed specifically at children and teenagers.

Murad's 2022 novel, *Ida in the Middle* is a fiction book made for a young adult audience. It includes magical olives that transport the main character, Ida, to Busala, the fictional Palestinian village near Jerusalem. She wanted to write something that her children could see themselves in, and something they would enjoy reading (Murad).

In the last chapter set in Busala, Ida has a moment of hopelessness and anger, and Murad—through her character Ida—wonders, “Why does this happen, over and over again? Doesn't anyone care?” (Murad, *Ida in the Middle*, 197). These questions pester advocates and their audiences alike. Many Palestinians are displaced, spread across so many places, and many Palestinians are internally displaced within Gaza and the West Bank. Ida lives in suburban Massachusetts, and felt that the situation in Gaza was helpless. Similarly, the real-world advocate Plestia Alaqad no longer lives in Gaza. She and her family were able to move to Australia shortly after the siege of Gaza began. Even though neither Ida or Plestia live in Palestine, they offer advice on how to deal with the feelings of hopelessness and anger so many people engaging in advocacy feel. In

Alaqad's Instagram post—discussed in section 2—she wrote, “Words may feel powerless, but they're all we have.” and about the importance of continuing conversation around Palestine (Alaqad, “Plestia Alaqad | بلستيا العقاد on Instagram”). Both Ida and Plestia continued speaking about Palestine. Both of these examples—one fictional, one very real—advocate for continued discussion around Gaza. Nora Lester Murad advocates for representation of Palestinians, and continues to speak and write about Palestine, like Alaqad, because words are all she has.

Murad believes advocacy through storytelling is important. In a recent interview, she recounted a New York classroom—mostly made up of students whose first language was not English, who had immigrated to the United States—that read *Ida in the Middle* over the course of the semester, and created a final project about their own story, and how it compared to Ida's story in the book. Murad wanted to help Palestinians—and other displaced communities—to see themselves in a book, to read a piece of literature and say, “This is me, this is me!” (Murad). A Palestinian child seeing themselves in a book is incredibly important because “The books we use to educate our children teach them about the world in which they live. The way that people are—or are not—portrayed in these books ...can shape subconscious defaults” (Adukia et al.). Because Murad is writing about Palestine—Palestinian culture, art, food, and people—more people are able to know and empathize with Palestine. *Ida in the Middle* and other books have a similar effect to a social media post, which is visibility. Because it's a young adult book, it reaches younger audiences, and larger audiences, like school classrooms.

4. Conclusion

Written advocacy is important because it widens an advocate's audience. Social media can introduce young people to advocacy work and allow people to more actively

engage with and share the advocacy. In this new digital age, written advocacy is especially important, as more people are relying on social media as their main source of news and information. Using social media as a platform to advocate through writing allows people to engage in advocacy, through the sharing function of most platforms. Social media allows a cause to spread to many people worldwide, and can make them feel more connected. Literature can advocate in a classroom or school setting, widening the audience to teachers, students, and parents. Additionally, literature is crucial for the preservation of stories, art, culture, and life of underrepresented groups of people. If there is more normalized advocacy and representation of minorities in books and literature, there is more awareness of the steps people can take to become part of the change within a given community. Social media and literature are incredibly useful tools for advocates today, and can open doors for people to step into the world of advocacy.

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