When it comes to narration and oral literature, modern scholars have given a lot of attention to the traditions of Hikaya (storytelling)\(^1\). Both men and women told stories in the Arab world. Telling stories during the day was not common because everyone had work to do, but primarily tradition forbade it because to tell a story is "an act which savours magic". Besides entertainment during the summer or winter times, in the 20\(^{th}\) century storytelling had taken a strong political dimension as well. The storytellers who used to relate inert episodes now bring them alive and introduce into them modifications which are increasingly fundamental. There is a tendency to bring conflicts up to date and to modernise the kinds of struggle which the stories evoke, together with the names of heroes and the type of weapons. The method of allusion is more and more widely used. The formula "this all happened long ago" is replaced by "what we are going to speak of happened somewhere else, but it might happen here tomorrow."\(^2\)

In the process of political struggle, storytelling acquires the function of collective memory. Accordingly, the storytelling tradition can be used not only to tell stories of a glorious past buried deep in the memory of the teller for the sake of entertainment, but also as a political weapon, when other means of struggle are proven to be futile and absent\(^3\). Telling

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1. According to Pellat two distinguished forms of storytelling exist in the Arab world: "The tales of the supernatural, the ancient asmar, which correspond to the German Hausmärchen, are told by women, especially old women, while the heroic tales and historical legends are the province of men." Pellat, Hikaya, Encyclopaedia of Islam
2. Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, 1963
In Iraq it is known as al-muhaddî, in Morocco fiôa, in Algeria al-qawwal, in Turkey al-makla.

The play Faíma is based on the short story Fátimas Tráume, written by Khalil Abd Rabbo. The play was first performed in Berlin in October 2000, directed by Awni Karoumi and acted by Samya Qazmuz al-Bakri.

On the 29th of September 2000, I saw the play at Palast T. in Berlin. This reflects how the issue of renaming with Hebrew names instead of Arabic ones is still alive.

Some of the Palestinian women whose stories the play narrates lived either in villages in the north of the Galilee, or in small villages on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea, now erased.
entry among the waiting crowd and takes her seat, she says every day I read the newspaper, but find no one with whom to talk about it, I said, I will talk. al-Hakawati then invokes the collective memory of Palestinians living in Acre, walks with them through the narrow lanes of the old city to Khan al-Akki (the Acre Merchants’ Court), named after a famous local family, where children used to play before the 1948 War, and now empty. The storyteller also reminds the audience about another famous lane in Acre, Khan al-Umadan, at the centre of the city. In this big alley with its water fountain, merchants from Egypt used to rest in Acre before continuing their journey to Lebanon and Syria. The trading centre - which now exists only in old pictures - was full of merchants and shops selling silk, carpets, flowers, meat, cotton, herbs and spices. It was also a place where during the feast Palestinian children gathered in front of Sunduq al-Agab (The Box of Wonders) where the Khayal used to shout, telling stories with coloured pictures. At this point al-Hakawati abruptly alerts her listeners to the fact that Khan al-Umadan is closed right now and the keys are with an Israeli company for urban development.

al-Hakawati tells stories of past happy events like the ones in al-Ahli Cinema; known among the inhabitants of Acre as Masrah al-Sheik al-Lababidi. In the past this cinema-theatre-hall hosted many Egyptian artists on its stage. The beautiful big building with its wooden Arabesque balconies, its marble corridors, and coloured glass, was torn down, and now in its place stands a branch of the Israeli National Bank. A third striking example is the Pasha Baths in Acre that were turned into an Israeli museum. al-Hakawati impersonates a tourist guide as she informs the visitors to the museum about the different sections of the palace and its famous bath:

Yes, ladies and gentlemen, the bath was turned into a museum in the late 1950s, after the establishment of the state of Israel. It is one of the most beautiful architectural designs and I personally admire it. Here is the steam room, Hader hasSauna. The Pasha used to come with his harem and sit in the middle, while the harem around him massaged his body. I am not going to tell you about the Sultans and their lives, probably you know better, but here I am obliged to tell you that in recent years, the excavations that were done under the Palace, have revealed sites and evidences from the Second Temple.

Travelling in the past, the play reaches its peak as al-Hakawati reminds her listeners not only of important events, but of places and people who have left an impact on the lives of the people of Acre. She mentions what happened to some parts of the seashore - Shatt al-Arab - which was suddenly encircled with a fence and turned into a private beach. The people of Acre cannot go and bathe there anymore without paying an entrance fee, since it has become private property.

In digging up past memories of the people of Acre, al-Hakawati tells a story about the famous doctor Anwar Shuqayri, a surgeon and a gynaecologist. The Shuqayri family owned a big house along the seashore in Acre. In 1948, like many other Palestinians, they fled the country and ended up as refugees in one of the neighbouring Arab countries. Recently, the big house was demolished and in its place an Israeli company built a residential area. During the demolition process, the graves were

7. The quotes in italics are from the play az-Zanub and the English translation is mine.
destroyed, and the remains were collected in a box and were given to the Qadi of the Muslim court in Acre so that he could bury them. al-Hakawati comments that the people of Acre heard that the Shuqayri relatives in the city of Nablus were notified, but even in death one is still a refugee. al-Hakawati explains how she found among the ruins a piece of stone on which was engraved:

Dr. Anwar Shuqayri  
A surgeon and a gynaecologist  
Opening hours from 8 until 13 at noon  
From 16 until 19 in the evening

al-Hakawati deviates from her original text and either updates her story or changes it depending on her audience’s Palestinian experience.8

Towards the end, al-Hakawati tells about Umm Salim, a woman who has been separated from her son for forty-three years.

I am Umm Salim al-Bek from Tarshiha, I have a son in al-Nayrab Palestinian refugee camp in Aleppo. Who knows anything about him? I want to see him.

At the end, al-Hakawati says that Umm Salim left, and her footsteps on the sand of the seashore remained deep until a wave came and erased them as if she was never there, and how many things were erased!

In reviving the old tradition, as al-Hakawati finishes her story, she says our story is finished, then thanks her attentive listeners, steps down from her chair, and mingles with the audience. The actress Samiya al-Bakri revives the ancient Arab tradition of storytelling in Palestine since it is assigned an essential role in the future of national culture and "its riches are equally part of the values which have ordained the struggle for freedom". az-Zarub documents stories of five Palestinian women who survived the events of 1948, a turning point in the lives of Palestinian people whether in Israel, under occupation, or in the Diaspora.

In a society where only stories, cultural statements, and past lives are left to express Palestinian claims to historic Palestine, az-Zarub tells stories not only to remind, but to be used as a political means when a society lacks more potent and effective ones.

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8. Interviewing Samiya Qasmuz al-Bakri on the 2nd of October 2000, in Berlin, the actress said that "as I was performing in an Arab country (she refused to say which) and showed the piece of stone, I could not escape the fact that some members of the audience were crying. After the performance a couple approached me and the man said that al-Suqayri was his father. With tears and emotion, I gave them back the stone'. During the performance in Berlin, many Palestinian refugees who also fled Palestine to Lebanon, and later, because of the civil war there, came to settle in Germany, were constantly agreeing with the events al-Bakri told them. Some of them corrected her if she mispronounced a name and helped her give the directions of how to get to places in Acre.