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### Research Article

# Performance Without Interiority: Kristevan Strangeness and Bhabha's Third Space in Sahar Khalifeh's *The Inheritance*

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| Abstract                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Manuscript Information                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
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| <p>This paper reads Sahar Khalifeh's <i>The Inheritance</i> (al-Mirath, 1997; trans. Aida Bamia, 2005) through two paired theoretical frameworks: Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytic account of the foreigner as a subject constitutively estranged from herself (<i>Strangers to Ourselves</i>, 1991) and Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial theory of the Third Space as a productive site of hybrid cultural enunciation (<i>The Location of Culture</i>, 1994). The Palestinian-American protagonist Zayna occupies a position of cultural in-betweenness that Bhabha's theory should celebrate as generative, yet her experience is one of emotional anaesthesia and structural incapacity rather than hybrid agency. The paper argues that <i>The Inheritance</i> decouples hybridity from agency: Bhabha's Third Space, the paper contends, requires a self-capable of occupying its own displacement strategically, but Kristeva's foreigner — whose language, affect, and psychic coherence have been dissolved before selfhood can form — has no such capacity. Close readings of Zayna's linguistic dissolution, her rocking-chair hauntings, her emotional unresponsiveness, and her father's street-performance mimicry demonstrate that the novel holds both frameworks simultaneously in tension, using their friction to produce a critique of hybridity theory from within the very scene of hybridity. The inheritance of the title is ultimately neither property nor identity, but a transmitted wound that has become indistinguishable from the self that carries it.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ ISSN No: 2583-7397</li> <li>▪ Received: 12-06-2026</li> <li>▪ Accepted: 14-07-2026</li> <li>▪ Published: 16-07-2026</li> <li>▪ IJCRM:5(4); 2026: 221-226</li> <li>▪ ©2026, All Rights Reserved</li> <li>▪ Plagiarism Checked: Yes</li> <li>▪ Peer Review Process: Yes</li> </ul> <p><b>How to Cite this Article</b></p> <p>Thomas R, Chacko A. Performance Without Interiority: Kristevan Strangeness and Bhabha's Third Space in Sahar Khalifeh's <i>The Inheritance</i>. Int J Contemp Res Multidiscip. 2026;5(4):221-226.</p> <p><b>Access this Article Online</b></p> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <p style="text-align: center;"><a href="http://www.multiarticlesjournal.com">www.multiarticlesjournal.com</a></p> |

**KEYWORDS:** Exile studies, Palestinian diaspora, Sahar Khalifeh, Julia Kristeva, Homi K. Bhabha, Third Space, Hybridity, Postcolonial theory, Arabic Fiction, Psychoanalysis and Literature.

## INTRODUCTION

In the opening pages of Sahar Khalifeh's novel *The Inheritance* (al-Mirath, 1997; trans. Aida Bamia, 2005), the Palestinian-American protagonist Zayna delivers one of the most precise diagnoses of exilic subjectivity in contemporary Arabic fiction: "My language was lost before I was lost and so was my identity" (Khalifeh 19). The sequencing is not incidental. Language dissolves before the self does; the instrument of belonging fails before belonging itself is recognised as lost. This single sentence, embedded in a narrative that moves between Brooklyn and the West Bank, between the debris of Palestinian diaspora and the disillusionment of post-Oslo Palestine, crystallises the twin theoretical concerns that this paper will bring to bear on the novel: Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytic account of the foreigner as a subject constitutively estranged from herself, and Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial theory of the Third Space as a productive site of hybrid enunciation. Reading Khalifeh through these two frameworks, and attending to the tension between them, produces an argument that neither framework alone can support: that *The Inheritance* presents hybridity not as emancipation but as anaesthesia, and cultural in-betweenness not as a site of agency but as the condition of a subject whose psychic preconditions for selfhood have been dissolved before she can deploy her displacement strategically.

Khalifeh is among the most important Palestinian novelists writing today. Her fiction — including *Wild Thorns*, *The Sunflower*, and *The Image, The Icon, and the Covenant* — has consistently engaged the political, gendered, and psychological dimensions of Palestinian life under occupation and in diaspora. *The Inheritance* is distinctive within her oeuvre because it centres the second generation of the diaspora rather than the first generation of dispossession, and because its protagonist is not simply displaced geographically but linguistically and psychically fragmented in ways that no return can repair. The novel is therefore an ideal text through which to test the limits of postcolonial theories of hybridity and to ask whether the category of the 'foreigner' as Kristeva theorises it — rooted in psychoanalysis rather than in cultural politics — offers greater explanatory purchase on the specific damage that Palestinian diaspora inflicts on the self.

The paper proceeds in four stages. The first two establish the theoretical frameworks: Kristeva's account of strangeness as an internal, psychic condition, and Bhabha's account of the Third Space as a site of cultural production between competing identities. The third and fourth stages apply these to the novel in close detail, attending to the figure of Zayna's emotional anaesthesia through Kristeva and to the performances of cultural in-betweenness — especially those of Zayna's father — through Bhabha. The conclusion uses the friction between the two frameworks to articulate what the novel argues about the limits of hybridity theory for Palestinian exile.

### I. Kristeva and the Psychic Geography of Exile

Julia Kristeva's *Strangers to Ourselves* (1991) begins not with migration but with psychoanalysis. The foreigner, for Kristeva, is not primarily a sociological category — a person from elsewhere who must navigate host culture — but a figure who externalises and renders visible what Freudian theory calls the

*unheimlich*: the uncanny, the "un-homely," the strangeness that inhabits the self before it inhabits any geography. Kristeva's central claim is that "the foreigner is within us" (Kristeva 192); that the experience of estrangement from one's culture, language, and identity is a universal condition that exile merely makes undeniable. The foreign subject is not anomalous but symptomatic — she crystallises the difficulty "we have of living as another and with others" (Kristeva 1). Migration does not produce this condition; it reveals it.

Three features of Kristeva's account are particularly relevant to *The Inheritance*. First, the centrality of language: for Kristeva, the mother tongue is not merely a communicative instrument but the primary site of subjectivity — the medium through which the self-first experiences continuity and coherence. To lose one's language, or to never fully possess it, constitutes a psychic wound that precedes and exceeds any cultural loss. Language is, in Kristeva's formulation, the 'first home' (Kristeva 15), and exile from it is a deeper homelessness than geographical displacement. Second, the phenomenology of melancholia: the foreigner, cut off from the social structures — communities, rituals, shared memory — that ordinarily anchor affect, tends toward a form of emotional numbness that Kristeva distinguishes from depression proper. The foreigner 'smiles' and 'adapts,' but underneath 'something cold is growing' (Kristeva 5). Third, the irrelevance of geographic return: because the foreigner's estrangement is constitutive and psychic rather than accidental and spatial, no return to the homeland can repair it. The estrangement goes all the way down.

This last point is especially important for reading Khalifeh's novel, in which the protagonist's journey to the West Bank — the expected narrative resolution of a diasporic return novel — produces no healing and indeed no recognisable emotional response. If, as Kristeva insists, the foreigner has lost not merely a place but the psychic conditions for belonging as such, then return is structurally impossible long before it is geographically constrained. Zayna's failure to be moved by her homeland is not a character flaw or a political statement; it is, in Kristevan terms, the logical consequence of a self that was never constituted in relation to stable belonging in the first place.

Kristeva's account also draws on a distinction between the *semiotic* and the *symbolic* registers of language that she developed in earlier work, particularly *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1974). The semiotic is the pre-linguistic, bodily, rhythmic layer of experience — the domain of drives, tones, and sensory memory that precedes grammar and meaning. The symbolic is the domain of grammar, law, and signification. For the exile, the symbolic order of the mother tongue has been severed, but the semiotic layer — the smells, the rhythms, the melodic shapes of the lost language — may persist as a spectral residue, erupting into consciousness not as coherent memory but as affect without content. This distinction will prove directly useful for reading the rocking-chair scenes in *The Inheritance*, in which Zayna is visited at night by exactly this kind of semiotic haunting.

### II. Bhabha and the Third Space of Enunciation

Homi K. Bhabha's theory of the Third Space, developed across the essays collected in *The Location of Culture* (1994), takes as

its starting point the colonial encounter rather than the psychoanalytic subject. For Bhabha, all cultural meaning is produced through an act of enunciation — of utterance — and every enunciation opens a gap between the 'I' that speaks and the meaning it intends to convey. In the colonial and postcolonial context, this gap is vastly amplified: the colonised subject must speak and be understood within a symbolic order — the coloniser's language, the coloniser's cultural codes — that does not belong to him, and whose terms he cannot fully inhabit. The Third Space is the space of this gap: neither origin nor destination, neither native culture nor colonial imposition, but the unstable, generative interval between that is produced in the very act of cross-cultural translation.

Bhabha insists that this space, though produced by oppression, is not merely a site of loss or compromise. It is, on the contrary, a site of agency and counter-narrative production. The figure of the *mimic man* — the colonial subject who reproduces the coloniser's culture 'almost but not quite,' who repeats and thereby distorts the master discourse — is, for Bhabha, a figure of ambivalence that introduces slippage, irony, and instability into any claim to cultural purity or originary identity. Hybridity, in Bhabha's framework, is therefore not a degraded form of authentic identity but a condition that exposes the constructedness of all claims to authenticity. The hybrid subject is, paradoxically, closer to the truth of identity-as-production than the subject who believes himself purely native or purely assimilated.

Three features of Bhabha's account are particularly relevant here. First, the distinction between *cultural diversity* (the liberal model of multiple cultures coexisting, each with its own integrity) and *cultural difference* (the recognition that all cultural meaning is produced in and through the act of differentiation and translation, never prior to it). Khalifeh's novel operates in the register of cultural difference, not diversity: Zayna's experience is not one of navigating between two complete, coherent cultures, but of inhabiting the gap in which neither coalesces. Second, Bhabha's insistence that the Third Space is a *linguistic* phenomenon: it is produced in the act of enunciation, and therefore the novel's systematic attention to language — to code-switching, mistranslation, and performance — is not incidental to its politics but central to it. Third, and most importantly for this paper's argument, the implicit assumption in Bhabha's theory that the hybrid subject has some degree of access to a meta-position — that she can, at least occasionally, occupy her own displacement strategically. This assumption is what *The Inheritance* most rigorously interrogates.

### III. Kristevan Strangeness in Zayna's Self

Khalifeh establishes Zayna's constitutive estrangement from the novel's first pages through a series of scenes that would, in a conventional diasporic narrative, be developmental: scenes of childhood, language acquisition, family conflict, and adolescent crisis. In *The Inheritance*, each of these conventional developmental moments instead registers the progressive dissolution of the self rather than its formation. The sequence mirrors Kristeva's phenomenology of the foreigner with considerable precision: what is lost is not identity as a formed

thing that then becomes lost, but the preconditions for identity to form at all.

The most structurally significant of these scenes is the description of Zayna's linguistic childhood. Growing up in Brooklyn between a father who performs Arabic for immigrant audiences and a stepmother whose English is itself a kind of parody — she pronounces 'apple pie' as 'abble bie' and 'parking lot' as 'barking lot' — Zayna acquires neither language fully:

Our conversation consisted of a strange mix of the two languages, so strange that our American guests wondered whether we went to school to learn reasonably correct English or not. Our relatives didn't hide their dismay that we did not join the Arab club and learn decent Arabic (Khalifeh 19).

This is not bilingualism. It is a form of linguistic homelessness that, as Kristeva would predict, produces a psychic homelessness: "My language was lost before I was lost and so was my identity. My name and address followed suit" (Khalifeh 19). The grammatical subject of the novel's opening self-description — 'I' — is therefore a contested and precarious formation from the outset, one that cannot be taken for granted as the stable origin of narrative perspective.

The nightly rocking-chair scenes are the novel's most sustained and subtle Kristeva passages. Unable to sleep, Zayna sits alone in the dark in her grandmother's house and is visited by waves of sensory memory:

Memories would rush in like a swarm of butterflies, hovering in the room until the morning, filling the darkness with the fragrance of jasmine, rare incense, Arabic coffee with cardamom, almonds and cinnamon, mahaleb and nutmeg, grilled bread and chestnuts. The butterflies would glide like the sails of a boat, a waving hand, a flock of pigeons. My ears would respond to a remote voice calling and singing' (Khalifeh 27).

These are paradigmatically semiotic eruptions in Kristeva's sense: they are pre-linguistic, bodily, and rhythmic — fragrance, sound, visual movement — rather than narrative. They cannot be organised into the symbolic register of coherent memory or identity; they haunt rather than constitute. Zayna is unable to integrate these visitations into a sense of self that could act on them. When her grandmother soothingly tells her 'It's nothing but a dream, Zayna, just a dream,' Zayna's repeated insistence — "No, I'm not dreaming" (Khalifeh 27) — captures the Kristeva impasse exactly: the semiotic residue is too real to dismiss, but too formless to use.

The most clinically precise expression of Kristeva anaesthesia in the novel is the scene in which Zayna's grandmother takes her to see the son she gave up for adoption. Zayna's response is unambiguous: "He smiled, but when I approached to touch him, he withdrew his head and cried, fearful." Her grandmother asks: "Do you feel better?" Zayna replies: "I feel nothing at all" (Khalifeh 25). The grandmother's subsequent lecture — "it wasn't normal to be indifferent and that a mother is expected to feel something" — locates the problem as moral or emotional failure. The novel, reading more carefully, locates it as structural. Zayna has not repressed her feeling; she does not have the affective architecture that would produce it. The psychologist who is eventually consulted identifies the condition as "homesickness" (Khalifeh 26). This diagnosis is the novel's

sharpest irony: a category that implies a home that was once possessed and then lost cannot account for a subject who never possessed the psychic conditions of home in the first place. Kristeva would recognise in the psychologist's error the characteristic failure of institutions to comprehend the foreigner on her own terms.

The same numbness repeats in Zayna's encounter with her mother, who arrives from Los Angeles offering reconciliation and the explanation that she had been "young" and could not 'handle' Arabic culture: 'I couldn't bear it' (Khalifeh 28). Zayna's response — "Lady, I don't blame you, I don't blame anyone. I only wonder" (Khalifeh 28) — is not forgiveness but the absence of the effect that forgiveness would require. 'She only wonders, she wonders!' the mother repeats, scandalised. But wondering — cognitive, detached, anthropological inquiry into why human beings behave as they do — is precisely what remains when feeling has not formed. It is, in Kristeva's terms, the symbolic's operation without the semiotic's fuel. That Zayna later becomes an academic anthropologist — a professional studier of human culture — is the novel's most sustained structural irony: she has turned her constitutive inability to be inside culture into a professional method.

Zayna's estrangement does not resolve upon return to Palestine. When she arrives in Wadi al-Rihan and is finally reunited with her dying father — the ostensible goal of the novel's second half — she finds herself performing the expected response rather than feeling it: "I bent politely to kiss him"; 'I stood in my place and watched him in silence. I saw nothing in my father's face that revealed that he recognised me" (Khalifeh 135). The father, paralysed and unresponsive, mirrors Zayna's own condition. Neither can produce the recognitions — of self, of other, of shared history — that the inheritance plot requires. The homeland does not unlock the frozen affective register. As Kristeva insists, the foreigner's wound is not spatial but structural; geography cannot cure what psychology has dissolved.

#### IV. Bhabha's Third Space: Performance, Mimicry, and Its Discontents

If Kristeva illuminates Zayna's interiority — or rather, her constitutive lack of it — Bhabha's Third Space illuminates the performances of cultural hybridity that structure the novel's first half. The primary Bhabhan figure in *The Inheritance* is not Zayna but her father, Muhammad Hamdan, whose street-selling routine is one of the most remarkable passages of hybrid cultural performance in contemporary Arabic fiction. Selling goods door to door in Brooklyn, Muhammad constructs himself as an 'Arab prince' for American housewives, adapts his commodity descriptions to Orientalist fantasy, and performs an identity that is simultaneously a survival strategy and a form of cultural guerrilla theatre:

He would display his wares — shiny clothes, pins, and threads — and say to the American housewife, 'Look, lady, how beautiful it is! This caftan is hand-embroidered in Arabia, far away, do you know Arabia? The land of sand and camels, dates and incense, gum and the Qur'an. Do you know Mecca?' Seduced by the exotic appearance of the man and his merchandise, she

would answer with great enthusiasm, 'Oh! Mecca! Arabia! Of course, of course, let me see.' (Khalifeh 10)

This is Bhabha's mimicry operating in the commercial rather than the administrative sphere. Muhammad does not simply adopt American market idiom; he exploits the American consumer's Orientalist desires — her fantasy of Arabia as timeless, exotic, and glamorous — and turns it into a sales instrument. He sells Hong Kong merchandise 'as products of the Holy Land made by former 'princes' such as himself' (Khalifeh 11). The commodities are fake in their claimed origins, but the performance of cultural authenticity is rendered effective by its very exaggeration. Muhammad is 'almost but not quite' the Arab prince he performs — just enough to be credible to an audience that knows even less about Arabia than he does. The Third Space here is productive: it generates income, social mobility, and a peculiar form of power over the gaze that had been directed at him.

The Bhabhan reading deepens when Muhammad improvises his most elaborate performance, producing an old photograph of a stranger and presenting it as his father, 'a great prince,' deposed by a Bedouin tribe: "Do you see this, lady? It is my father's photo, he was a great prince, but died... I ran away to Jerusalem, then to Cairo, and later to Marrakech. From there I took a boat to America. Do you see, lady, I am a poor beggar while my father was a great prince!" (Khalifeh 10). The housewife is moved to tears. Muhammad's performance succeeds precisely because it inhabits the gap between authentic origin and performed identity — the Third Space — and produces in that gap a counter-narrative that reverses power: the subject of imperial fantasy momentarily controls the terms of his own representation. That the narrative is entirely fabricated does not diminish its Third Space character; for Bhabha, the Third Space is always a site of fabrication and translation, never of pure origin.

The novel's most analytically important contribution to Third Space theory, however, is its systematic demonstration that such performance does not transform the subject who performs it. Muhammad occupies the Third Space with consummate skill in his commercial life, but this occupation does not produce a hybrid interiority to match his hybrid public presentation. At home, his response to Zayna's pregnancy is not that of a man whose cultural identities have been productively renegotiated in the gap between cultures, but of a man operating entirely within the logic of Arab patriarchal honour: "By God I will suck your blood!" (Khalifeh 23). He chases her with a knife. He tries to kill her. The same man who performed 'almost but not quite' the Arab prince for American consumers — introducing irony and slippage into the representation of Arab identity — becomes in the domestic sphere the unironic executor of Arab patriarchal violence. The Third Space is not portable. It is a *strategic* occupation of cultural in-betweenness in the public sphere that coexists with an unexamined essentialism in the private one. Bhabha's theory, which tends to assume that Third Space performance produces a transformed subject, cannot account for this disjuncture.

Zayna's own childhood performances enact the Third Space without generating the agency it is supposed to produce. Standing on a chair to recite English verbs for Arab guests, then Arabic grammar and Qur'anic suras for American ones, she



inhabits the gap between two audiences that each require a different performance of her identity:

I would spend part of the evening standing on a chair, surrounded by bottles of araq and plates of mezze, and the cheers and laughter of the visitors as I recited the verb 'to be,' then the verb 'to have,' followed by 'Twinkle, twinkle little star'... I used to end the show with the American national anthem... The scene was repeated with our Arab relatives. I would stand in their midst and stun them with my knowledge of Arabic grammar (Khalifeh 20). This is a childhood lived in the Third Space — between two audiences, two languages, two claims on the self. But where Bhabha's theory would predict the production of a hybrid subject-position that could eventually be inhabited with some degree of freedom, Khalifeh's narrative shows only exhaustion, performance without residue, and the absence of any 'I' behind the performances. Zayna cannot step outside them to occupy them strategically because she *is* the performances — there is no stable self behind them that could. This is where the Third Space and the Kristeva foreigner diverge most sharply as theoretical categories: Bhabha's hybrid subject is constituted *through* performance; Kristeva's foreigner is constituted *as* the absence of constitution. For Zayna, the Third Space is not a site of agency but the description of her condition.

The citadel festival episode in the novel's second half extends the Third Space analysis into the collective register. Mazen's attempt to restore Palestinian cultural heritage through a public celebration — a theatrical performance at the ancient citadel in Wadi al-Rihan, with consuls, journalists, and dignitaries in attendance — is the novel's most ambitious staging of collective Third Space production. The festival is a deliberate attempt to produce, for an international audience, a Palestinian cultural identity that is neither solely 'traditional' nor solely 'modern,' that can speak to global heritage discourse while remaining authentically rooted in place. In Bhabha's terms, it is an attempt to occupy the Third Space between nationalist essentialism and cosmopolitan dissolution and produce from that gap a liveable Palestinian identity for external recognition.

The festival's catastrophic collapse — caused by inadequate planning, crowd chaos, rats from the uncollected rubbish, a woman going into labour backstage, tear gas, and a military checkpoint that prevents an ambulance from reaching the hospital — enacts the limits of Third Space production under conditions of occupation. The Third Space requires, at minimum, the capacity to control the conditions of one's own cultural performance. Under Israeli military occupation and within the dysfunctional infrastructure of the Palestinian Authority, that capacity does not exist. When Mazen discovers that the only practicable route to hospital runs through the Israeli settlement of Kiryat Rahil, the novel's political irony is at its most devastating: the governor must consider driving through the colony in order to reach Palestinian land. The Third Space of cultural production, Khalifeh implies, cannot be inhabited freely when the first and second spaces are themselves controlled by an occupying power. Bhabha's theory, developed primarily in relation to colonial texts and metropolitan diasporas, has limited purchase on a people whose homeland remains under military control.

## V. The Friction Between Frameworks: What the Novel Argues

The most important critical move that *The Inheritance* makes and the move that the pairing of Kristeva with Bhabha allows us to name — is its decoupling of hybridity from agency. Bhabha's account of the Third Space has been enormously influential partly because it offers a theory of postcolonial subjectivity that is not simply victimological. The colonial or diasporic subject, in Bhabha's account, is not merely subjected to power she produces, in the very act of cultural in-betweenness, a form of counter-power. Ambivalence, mimicry, and the Third Space are resources, however constrained. This is theoretically enabling and politically important.

Khalifeh's novel does not refute this account, but it identifies its precondition. In order for hybridity to function as agency — for the occupation of the Third Space to produce a subject who can act from it — there must be a self-capable of strategic occupation. The self must have, at minimum, a relationship to its own displacement that is reflexive rather than simply constitutive. Muhammad, Zayna's father, has this: he knows he is performing 'Arab prince' for the American housewife, and his knowledge is the source of his power in the exchange. Zayna does not. She performs between two audiences without knowing that she is performing, because the performance has become identical with her condition. She is not 'in' the Third Space; she *is* the Third Space, without an exterior position from which to inhabit it as a resource.

This is precisely what Kristeva's framework captures that Bhabha's does not. Kristeva's foreigner is not a strategic actor deploying her displacement; she is a subject whose very capacity for strategic action has been undermined by the dissolution of the psychic conditions — stable language, coherent affect, reliable memory — that strategic selfhood requires. The Kristevan foreigner smiles and adapts, performs and endures, but the performances do not accumulate into an identity. Zayna's academic achievement — her success in the symbolic order of American professional life — does not produce a self that possesses that success. It produces, as she notes, only the desire for further success: "The more successful I became, the more I wanted to succeed. Success meant proving myself, but it made me lose touch with the rest of the world" (Khalifeh 25). Success is not selfhood. It is the substitute for it.

The novel thus stages a critique of hybridity theory from within the scene of hybridity itself. It takes the hybrid subject seriously — does not romanticise the homeland, does not suggest that assimilation is a solution, does not produce a nationalist narrative of Palestinian purity against American corruption — and yet it refuses to celebrate the hybrid's in-betweenness as liberation. The Palestinian-American subject, in Khalifeh's hands, is a figure not of creative ambivalence but of creative incapacity: her *betweenness* is a wound, not a resource, and no amount of Third Space theorising can close it without first addressing the psychic damage from which it proceeds.

The novel's title — *The Inheritance* — carries this argument at its most compressed. The inheritance Zayna seeks is ostensibly her father's land and property in the West Bank. But the land, when she arrives, is contested, entangled in family politics, endangered by the post-Oslo political situation, and ultimately

inaccessible in any meaningful sense. The real inheritance, the novel implies, is not territorial but psychological: it is the wound of the Nakba, transmitted through her father's exilic performance and his narrative of lost origin, internalised by Zayna before she was old enough to know what she was internalising, and now constitutive of her very inability to feel. She inherits not a place but a loss — and the loss has been so thoroughly incorporated that it cannot be experienced as loss. It can only be experienced as numbness.

## CONCLUSION

Reading Sahar Khalifeh's, *The Inheritance* through the paired lenses of Kristeva and Bhabha produces a more complete account of the novel's exilic subject than either framework alone can generate. Bhabha's Third Space illuminates the novel's scenes of cultural performance — particularly the father's street-selling routines, Zayna's childhood recitals, and the citadel festival — as instances of the productive but constrained agency available to displaced subjects in the gap between cultures. Kristeva's account of the foreigner illuminates what Third Space theory cannot: the psychic dimension of exile, the semiotic haunting of the rocking-chair scenes, the anaesthetic numbness that neither professional success nor geographic return can cure, and the structural impossibility of repair for a self that was never constituted within stable conditions of belonging.

The tension between the two frameworks is not a methodological weakness but the paper's central analytical finding. Bhabha assumes a subject; Kristeva asks what happens when the subject-forming conditions themselves are foreclosed. *The Inheritance* is a novel about that foreclosure. Its protagonist's hybridity is not a position from which she acts but a condition in which she finds herself — a Third Space without an interiority to inhabit it, a cultural between-ness without the psychic resources that Bhabha's theory requires its subject to possess. In this way, the novel advances beyond both its theoretical frameworks: it accepts the postcolonial insight that identities are produced rather than given, and the psychoanalytic insight that the conditions of production can themselves be destroyed, and holds both truths simultaneously in the figure of a woman who is everything her theory says she could be and feels nothing at all.

Khalifeh's novel thereby makes a contribution to exile studies that is both literary and theoretical. Literarily, it produces one of the most psychologically precise accounts of second-generation Palestinian diaspora in Arabic fiction, refusing both the nostalgia of the first generation and the cosmopolitan ease that Western accounts of hybrid identity tend to project onto the diasporic subject. Theoretically, it demonstrates that the most rigorous literary test of postcolonial hybridity theory is not the text that confirms it, but the text that shows what happens when its preconditions are absent — when the strategic deployment of in-betweenness that Bhabha celebrates has been foreclosed by the very displacement that produced the hybrid subject in the first place. In that foreclosure, *The Inheritance* locates both its tragedy and its truth.

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