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**ISRAEL'S NEW LITERATURE OF THE HOLOCAUST: THE CASE OF
AMIR GUTFREUND'S *OUR HOLOCAUST***

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Abstract

This research paper delves into the evolving landscape of Holocaust literature in Israel by analyzing the novel *Our Holocaust* authored by Amir Gutfreund. With the Holocaust occupying a central position in Israel's collective memory and cultural identity, this study seeks to examine how contemporary Israeli authors navigate the delicate task of representing such a traumatic historical event. Through a close reading of *Our Holocaust*, a poignant and unique narrative that blends historical recollection with fictional elements, this paper uncovers the novel's distinct approach to addressing the Holocaust. By employing a combination of literary analysis and historical contextualization, the study sheds light on how Gutfreund's work reflects the changing perspectives on Holocaust remembrance, emphasizing personal connections, generational shifts, and the interplay between memory and imagination. Furthermore, this paper explores how *Our Holocaust* contributes to the ongoing discourse surrounding Holocaust representation, memory transmission, and the challenges of conveying historical trauma in contemporary Israeli literature. The analysis of this novel provides insights into the broader trends shaping Israel's new literature of the Holocaust and its implications for the evolving nature of cultural memory.

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Key words: Holocaust, Psychoanalysis, trauma, relationship

INTRODUCTION

Our Holocaust is a novel written by Israeli author Amir Gutfreund. It was originally published in Hebrew in 2001 under the title "השואה שלנו" ("Hashoah Shelanu"). The novel gained international recognition and has been translated into several languages. The story is set in a small Israeli town during the 1970s and 1980s. It revolves around the narrator, a young boy named Aharon Appelfeld, who is growing up in a community of Holocaust survivors. The town is populated by individuals who have experienced the horrors of the Holocaust firsthand and are struggling to rebuild their lives in Israel. Aharon's family and their neighbors are haunted by their past traumas, which manifest in various ways. The novel explores the effects of these deep-seated psychological scars on the survivors' relationships, both within their community and with the wider Israeli society.

The narrative weaves together moments of dark humor, poignant reflections, and vivid descriptions of the characters' experiences. Gutfreund employs a distinctive writing style that combines sensitivity with a touch of irony, offering a unique perspective on the complexities of living in the shadow of such a profound historical tragedy. Throughout the novel,

Aharon grapples with the legacy of the Holocaust and tries to make sense of the stories and memories that shape his world. As he matures, he becomes increasingly aware of the weight of history and the impact it has on his own identity. *Our Holocaust* is not a typical Holocaust narrative in that it doesn't focus primarily on the events of the Holocaust itself, but rather on the aftermath and how survivors navigate their lives in a new land. It sheds light on the ongoing struggles, resilience, and coping mechanisms of those who have lived through such profound trauma.

Amir Gutfreund's *Our Holocaust* is a powerful and thought-provoking novel that provides a unique perspective on the enduring effects of the Holocaust on subsequent generations, and the ways in which individuals cope with and attempt to transcend their painful pasts. Israel's collective memory and cultural identity are deeply intertwined with a complex history that encompasses both ancient roots and modern nation-building. The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 marked a pivotal moment in Jewish history, and it is a country shaped by a rich tapestry of narratives, traditions, and experiences. In this essay, we will delve into the

multifaceted aspects of Israel's collective memory and cultural identity, examining historical foundations, key events, social dynamics, and contemporary challenges.

To comprehend Israel's collective memory and cultural identity, one must start with its historical foundations. The Jewish people's connection to the land of Israel has deep roots dating back thousands of years. It is a land revered in Judaism as the Promised Land, where biblical events unfolded, and where Solomon's Temple once stood in Jerusalem. The destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE by the Romans marked a pivotal moment in Jewish history, leading to widespread dispersal (diaspora) of Jewish communities. Over the centuries, Jews maintained a longing for Zion, expressed in prayers, poetry, and rituals. This longing is encapsulated in the phrase "Next Year in Jerusalem," an enduring symbol of the Jewish diaspora's collective yearning to return to their ancestral homeland.

Zionism emerged in the late 19th century as a political and ideological movement seeking to reestablish Jewish sovereignty in the land of Israel. Theodor Herzl, often considered the father of modern political Zionism, articulated this vision in his seminal work "Der Judenstaat" ("The Jewish State") in 1896. The Zionist

movement galvanized Jews around the world, ultimately culminating in the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. The establishment of Israel in 1948 represents a foundational moment in the nation's collective memory. The proclamation of the State of Israel by David Ben-Gurion on May 14, 1948, was met with both celebration among Jews and resistance from neighboring Arab states. This triggered the Arab-Israeli War, which lasted until 1949.

The War of Independence (the Arab-Israeli War 1949) was a defining event, shaping Israel's collective identity in several ways. First, it solidified a sense of Jewish nationhood and the idea of the Jewish state as a haven for Jewish refugees and survivors of the Holocaust. Second, it established the physical boundaries of the newly formed nation, albeit in a fragile and contentious state. The Holocaust holds a central place in Israel's collective memory and cultural identity. The genocide perpetrated by Nazi Germany during World War II led to the systematic murder of six million Jews. Many survivors of the Holocaust sought refuge in Israel after the war, contributing to the country's demographic and cultural landscape. Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Center in

Jerusalem, stands as a testament to this memory. It serves as a repository of names, stories, and artifacts, and is a site for education, research, and commemoration. Holocaust Remembrance Day (Yom HaShoah) is a solemn national event observed annually in Israel to honor the victims. The memory of the Holocaust is also embedded in Israel's policies, influencing its commitment to safeguarding Jewish lives worldwide and its insistence on self-reliance in matters of security.

Israel's identity is deeply connected with its role as a homeland for Jews from diverse backgrounds. The concept of Aliyah, or Jewish immigration to Israel, is central to this narrative. The Law of Return, enacted in 1950, grants Jews from around the world the right to Israeli citizenship. This ingathering of exiles encompasses various waves of immigration. Mizrahi Jews, originating from the Middle East and North Africa, brought their own distinct cultural heritage, cuisine, and music. Ashkenazi Jews, primarily from Europe, contributed their own traditions, intellectual pursuits, and political ideologies. Ethiopians, known as Beta Israel, embarked on a remarkable journey of return to their ancestral homeland. These diverse communities have enriched Israel's cultural mosaic, though not without challenges.

Socioeconomic disparities, integration issues, and occasional cultural tensions underscore the complexities of this dynamic. The kibbutz movement is a testament to Israel's commitment to communal living and shared responsibility. Emerging in the early 20th century, kibbutzim (plural of kibbutz) were collective agricultural communities that emphasized self-sufficiency, equality, and cooperative labor.

The kibbutz movement played a pivotal role in nation-building, fostering a sense of collective identity among its members. It contributed significantly to Israel's agricultural development and served as a model for socialist ideologies. While the influence of kibbutzim has waned in recent decades, their legacy endures as a symbol of a formative period in Israel's history. Israel's security concerns and the pivotal role of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) have indelibly shaped the nation's collective identity. Surrounded by hostile neighbors and facing persistent security threats, the ethos of self-defense and resilience runs deep within Israeli society. The compulsory military service, beginning at age 18, is a rite of passage for most Israelis. The IDF is viewed not only as a guardian of national security but also as a unifying force, drawing individuals from diverse

backgrounds into a common experience. This shared military service has contributed to a strong sense of social cohesion and a collective responsibility for the nation's well-being.

Israel is a land of religious significance for Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike. Jerusalem, revered by these three Abrahamic faiths, is a focal point of religious devotion and conflict. The Western Wall, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound are among the most sacred sites in the world. This religious diversity underscores both the complexity and the potential for interfaith dialogue in Israel. The relationship between religious and secular Jews, as well as between different religious communities, remains a topic of ongoing debate and negotiation. Israel's collective memory and cultural identity are dynamic and multifaceted, shaped by a history replete with triumphs, challenges, and complex narratives. As a nation, Israel continues to grapple with questions of identity, including the tension between Jewish and democratic values, the status of minority communities, and the pursuit of peace and security in a turbulent region. The ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, geopolitical complexities, and questions of territorial

sovereignty further contribute to the evolving nature of Israel's identity. Nonetheless, the enduring connection to the land, the memory of the Holocaust, and the commitment to a thriving, vibrant society continue to be foundational elements in Israel's collective memory and cultural identity.

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