

Disgrace to the Knesset:

On Garbage Pail Kids, Caricature and Political Satire in Israel

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Abstract: Originally produced by Topps Chewing Gum, Inc. (Brooklyn, New York), a localized version of Garbage Pail Kids sticker cards was distributed in Israel between 1987 and 1988. Although intended as a children’s product, the Israeli version of Garbage Pail Kids had a significant impact on local political discourse. The Hebrew translation, “Havurat HaZevel,” became a coined term frequently used by publicists and Israeli parliament members to describe the ultimate “other”—be it a movement, group, party, or a faction within the coalition or opposition. Choosing “Havurat HaZevel” as a model for political satire, the artists aimed to express their aversion to what they perceived as wrong, loathsome, and shameful. This paper highlights how the use of “Havurat HaZevel” in the Israeli political arena has led to several spin-offs. The emergence of these creative initiatives over the past three decades reflects political conditions, particularly related to Knesset (Israeli Parliament) and Prime Minister elections, as well as expressions of political dissent and protest. Analyzing both the visual and textual elements employed by illustrators and art directors reveals insights into the public image of Israeli politicians and the political events depicted.

Keywords: Garbage Pail Kids, Satire, Politics, Knesset, Social media

Introduction

The fictional election campaign of the “Garbage Pail Kids” (known in Hebrew as “Havurat HaZevel”)² was led by TREASURE FINDING **RON**³ and was launched on social media on the occasion of the elections to the twenty-first Knesset in 2019. The

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² This Article traces its origins back to an article published in Hebrew in *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Folklore* (34, 2021) and to a comprehensive book published in Summer 2024. I extend my deepest gratitude to my esteemed mentor, Prof. Shalom Sabar, whose guidance and insights have been instrumental in shaping this research.

³ The use of bold capital letters for the first name of each figure appears in the original medium. Names of all figures below will be written as such.

ballots bore the Hebrew initials of Havurat HaZevel, and the catchy slogan consisted of three words: “Treasure. Finding. Ron.” (Fig. 1). It seems that for Israelis it was only natural that Ron was chosen to serve as head of the Havurat HaZevel party. After all, his figure was emblazoned on the most popular of the three sticker albums marketed to Israeli children in 1987–88. Moreover, Ron’s chubby face became the hallmark of Havurat HaZevel. Another reason for choosing him as the image of the campaign was that even though he is sticking his finger deep into his left nostril, Ron is not identified with either of the political wings. Ron is an Israeli consensus. Together with hundreds of other Havurat HaZevel figures, Ron dominated the Israeli toy market during 1987, and although they were sold for only ten months, they left a deep impression on local children as well as—surprisingly—also on Israeli adults. The Hebrew phrase Havurat HaZevel quickly became the idiom for describing the ultimate “other” in political discourse and was often used by opponents in coalitions or oppositions. This article seeks to outline the process by which Havurat HaZevel became a textual, verbal, and visual model for political satire. Moreover, since 1987 a number of Israeli-made spin-offs enhance the thematic and semantic connections between garbage in general, and Havurat HaZevel in particular, to Israeli politics.

The article is based on a synthesis between visual findings, both ephemeral and digital, and historical sources in the daily press and children’s magazines, as well as on personal communication with individuals involved in creating Havurat HaZevel: entrepreneurs, copywriters, artists, and collectors. Reviewing the sources and locating them one after the other on the timeline from the late 1980s to the present (2024), makes it possible to reveal the circumstances and reasons that led to Havurat HaZevel becoming a popular model for political satire among publicists, illustrators, and caricaturists.



Fig. 1. Mc Pukon's fictional election campaign led by TREASURE FINDING **RON** for the Twenty-first Knesset. McPukon, April 2019, September 2019. Photograph courtesy of the artist.

From Brooklyn to Tel Aviv: The Birth of a Hebrew Ecotype

Garbage Pail Kids was—and still is—a series of trading cards produced by Topps Chewing Gum, Inc. of Brooklyn, first released in the United States in 1985. While most Topps products focus on sports-themed trading cards, Garbage Pail Kids was designed to parody the “Cabbage Patch Kids”—baby dolls for young girls.⁴ Though all Garbage Pail Kids characters preserve the dolls’ overall design, at the same time, each character is portrayed bearing a comical and macabre fate, inter alia, body fluids and odors, deformities and abnormalities, pimples, diseases, injuries, and death in comical circumstances.⁵ Together with a name and a sophisticated humorous rhyme or pun, each trading card is designed to attract the main target audience of the brand, that is, elementary school boys.⁶

Shortly after its launch in the United States, the distribution of local versions of Garbage Pail Kids began internationally. In some of the countries the trading cards were produced together with sticker albums, which completely changed the experience of collecting and playing: while American children were busy collecting and trading, but rarely used them as stickers, many children around the globe had a distinct goal—to fill the empty spaces in the sticker albums.⁷ In its broadest sense, the concept of ecotype primarily signifies a variation in an international type that is specific to a particular area or group. In Folklore Studies, the concept of ecotype is commonly interpreted as assuming the type as a standard configuration from which specific local or particular

⁴ Hoffman, *Cabbage Patch*.

⁵ The Original Series were the result of the efforts of concept and art directors, as well as artists, including Art Spiegelman, Mark Newgarden, John Pound, Jay Lynch, James Warhola, Mae Jeon, James Burke, James Bennett, Tom Bunk and others. On the creative process, see Topps, *Garbage Pail Kids*, 6–11; 222–23; Cummins, “The Kids are Alright”; Nadel, “Funny/ Not Funny.”

⁶ Inspired by other non-sport gross-out cards previously released by Topps since the 1960s, including “Ugly Stickers,” “Slob Stickers,” “Nutty Initials,” “Monster Initials,” “Psychedelic Love Initials.” See Topps, *Garbage Pail Kids*, 7; Brunette, “Grotesque Toys”; Bellomo, *'80s Toys*.

⁷ On collecting and trading cards among Israeli children in the 1980s see Katriel, *Key Words*, 19–32.

formations diverge. The formulation typically implies a relationship where the type is considered primary, and the ecotype is secondary.⁸

Among the notable differences between the American and the dozens of international ecotypes, the textual content is the most substantial. Most of the foreign versions received a new and original title in the local language. For example, Garbage Pail Kids were known in Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, Peru, and Spain as “Basuritas” (garbage pail kids), “La Pandilla Basura” (the trash gang), or “Los Asquerositos” (the disgusting kids). The Portuguese version developed in Brazil was called “Gang do Lixo” (the garbage gang), and in France “La Bande des Crados” (the filthy / nastiest gang).⁸ In Italy and southern Switzerland, Garbage Pail Kids were known as “Le Bande degli Sgorbions” (the disgusting / ugly gang) or “Kakkones” (presumably a pun deriving from the Italian word *cacca*, meaning poop). In Germany, Austria, and Denmark they were called “Die Total Kaputten Kids” (the totally damaged / crazy kids) or “Ekel-Kids” (the disgusting kids). The Japanese version was titled “Bukimi Kun” (the horrible / creepy kids). And lastly the Israeli ecotype was titled “Havurat HaZevul” (the garbage bunch). The characters’ names were also adapted to the local language and to the cultural milieu of children everywhere. These were not direct translations of the originals, but rather new creations developed by local franchisees with the help of copywriters who mastered the language of young children. That is exactly how **ADAM BOMB** and **BLASTED BILLY** (Fig. 2) received their international names together with a brand-new context. For instance, **ALEX PLOSIVO**, **מְצוּצֵי פִּצּוּצִי** (= **MUTZI PITZUTZI** in Hebrew) (Fig. 3) and **EXILOSIVO IÑIGO** refer to explosives, **FRÉDÉRIC ATOMIC**, **ATOM-ANTON** and **アト みっくん** (= **ATO**

⁸ Hasan-Rokem, “Ecotypes.” For the fine line between folk culture and popular culture, see Hasan-Rokem, “Folk Culture and Popular Culture.”

MIKKUN in Japanese) are associated with the atomic bomb, CERNO-BILL alludes to the 1986 Chernobyl disaster, and RAMBO BOMBA pays homage to John J. Rambo.

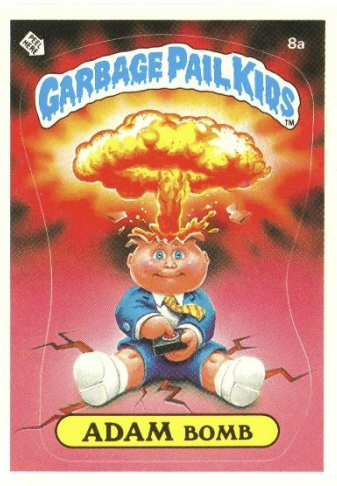


Fig. 2. ADAM BOMB (BLASTED BILLY) Garbage Pail Kids, Original Series 1:8a. Topps Chewing Gum, Inc., 1985 (Artworks by John Pound).

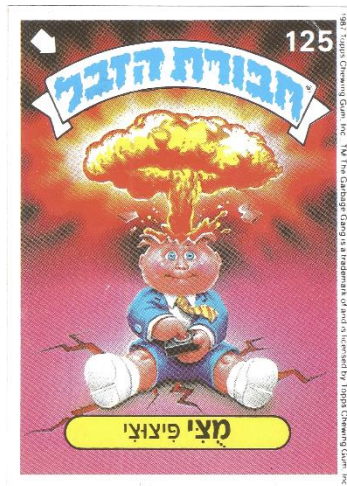


Fig. 3. MUTZI PITZUTZI Havorat HaZavel, first album, no. 125, Hebrew ecotype: Tzipora (Tzipi) Rosensher-Dolan. Distributed in Israel in 1987–88 by Aggressive Marketing Ltd.

The evolution of local ecotypes of Garbage Pail Kids is a captivating creating process. Havorat HaZavel, for instance, which will be one of the focal points in this article, was an offshoot developed and distributed in Israel in 1987–88 by Aggressive Marketing Ltd., founded and directed by Israel Stern.⁹ Stern chose the characters, while Tzipora (Tzipi) Rosensher-Dolan, who served as the main copywriter of Arieli Advertising Ltd., the parent company of Aggressive Marketing Ltd., transformed to the materials into Hebrew.¹⁰ Rosensher-Dolan's main task was to rename and adjust the American characters to the realities faced by children in Israel. In addition, she also wrote the content of the three sticker albums, that include jokes and linguistic riddles, challenges, fortunes, and nonsense proverbs. As I suggested elsewhere, an analysis of

⁹ Israel Stern, personal communication, August 2020.

¹⁰ Tzipora Rosensher-Dolan, personal communication, August 2020.

the Hebrew ecotypes reveals that Rosensher-Dolan adopted four main linguistic approaches: rhymes, alliterations, compound words, and the most sophisticated textual mean: puns that invite the readers, both children and adults, to decipher a linguistic puzzle by splitting words and reassembling them into new ones.¹¹ Another aspect of Rosensher-Dolan's work was the use of events and terms associated with various Hebrew sources which made *Havurat HaZevel* not only an Israeli version but also a Jewish one.¹² While some contemporary columnists criticized the educational value of *Havurat HaZevel* (or the lack of it), others have regarded Rosensher-Dolan's work as a remarkable creative achievement.¹³ From a folkloristic point of view, what Rosensher-Dolan did is extremely important since it unintentionally documents the wealth of nicknames¹⁴ and teasing rhymes¹⁵ used by Hebrew-speaking children in Israel in the late 1980s. Indeed, though some names that Rosensher-Dolan collected already existed in Hebrew, many others created by her were assimilated into the Israeli children's spoken language.

The *Havurat HaZevel* campaign concluded by the end of the 1988 school year, having successfully sold an impressive 17.5 million packs during its ten months of distribution in Israel. This accomplishment was particularly noteworthy considering that, in 1987–88, the total number of Israeli children was around 700,000. On average,

¹¹ Many examples can be found in Noy, "Garbage Pail Kids," 216–17.

¹² See Noy, "We Hate the Holidays."

¹³ For a negative and positive reviews, see, for example, Ofek, "Shalom"; Argaman-Barnea, "Praise."

¹⁴ Nina Pinto Abecasis's research on nicknames among the Jews of Tetuan, Morocco, can be useful for understanding nicknames as a particular genre in folklore to deal with social tensions within the community. See Pinto Abecasis, "Nicknames," 135–54. On humor in nicknames, see Pinto Abecasis, *Peacock*.

¹⁵ Teasing rhymes were common in the literal world of Yiddish-speaking children in Eastern Europe (שאפטלידר באליידיקונגען). As Ganuz has shown, the teasing rhymes targeted first and last names, appearance, clothing, and physical attributes. Compare, for example, a teasing rhyme in Yiddish directed at a boy named Yitzhak: "Itzik Spitzik eats needles, go to the priest and steal a knife" to two characters in "*Havurat HaZevel*"—PEEPING ITZIK (איציק מציציק) and BRAGGING ITZIK (איציק משוויציק). See Ganuz, "Children's Rhyme"; Ganuz, "Folklore," 288–94.

each Israeli child owned as many as one hundred twenty-five stickers.¹⁶ It appears that the success of the Israeli version of Garbage Pail Kids can be attributed to the franchise's proactive efforts in adapting it to Israeli reality, incorporating their unique language and cultural elements. As mentioned above, during the 1980s and 1990s, similar international releases of Garbage Pail Kids surpassed geographical constraints, transforming into a cultural phenomenon that captivated the imaginations of millions of children in more than twenty countries worldwide. Spanning continents from North America to South America, Western Europe to the Middle East, Asia, and Australia, Garbage Pail Kids fostered a global community of collectors and enthusiasts united by their appreciation for the unique gross-out humor and artistic style inherent in the cards.

Setting a bad example: Havurat HaZevel as a watershed for education and values

Perhaps now he [the baby who grew into a boy] no longer smears walls with his poop; perhaps he doesn't put it in his mouth anymore, but he scours himself with Havurat HaZevel. Absorbs it into his mind and his blood cycle, into the drawers of memory and associations; nevertheless, the odor will remain—it will be difficult to get rid of it. The trashy pamphlet claims that Havurat HaZevel stickers are “the hottest” thing amongst 6–14 years old, and apparently [also] among their parents. That is, hot rubbish. Dear mother, this stench is here to stay.¹⁷

¹⁶ The data, based on official publications of the Central Bureau of Statistics, encompass Hebrew-speaking boys and girls aged five to fourteen. When considering only the boys (360,700), the average number of sticker cards per child rises to approximately 30. See Central Bureau of Statistics, *Statistical Yearbook of Israel 1989*, no. 40 (Jerusalem, 1989), 75 Table 20 b (Hebrew).

¹⁷ Ofek, “Playing.” Holtzman, “Introduction.”

Havurat HaZevel sales figures show that most Israeli children were deeply familiar with the brand. These figures can also inform about the effect Havurat HaZevel had on the children's immediate environment. The historical sources shed light on the strong opposition that Havurat HaZevel provoked among adults. It also seems that the very existence of such opposition played a major role in the brand's success among Israeli children, on the one hand, and among their parents and teachers, on the other hand. It must be assumed that the essence of the criticism that was levelled, for example, that of Bina Ofek quoted above, seeped through and reached children as well. One can only imagine the hundreds of thousands of private conversations that took place during 1987–88 between Israeli children and their parents and schoolteachers. The campaign for or against Havurat HaZevel was due mainly to reasons relating to educational values. As the agents of the social order, parents and educators were entrusted with maintaining the norms and limits for children regarding what was culturally considered as disgusting,¹⁸ violent, or non-legitimate. Indeed, Havurat HaZevel exposed Israeli children to the taboo prohibitions and adults were concerned lest engaging with such provocative contents might set them a bad example and affect their behavior. They also worried that children's exposure to such contents at a young age might cause irreversible psychological damage.

The first evidence of a campaign against Havurat HaZevel is documented as early as October 1987, about a month after it was released. The principal of an elementary school in the small town of Kiryat Ono saw children trading Havurat HaZevel stickers. She was shocked and decided—for pedagogical reasons—to

¹⁸ Disgust is a universal human emotion, but its manifestations and characteristics depend largely on culture and environment. Judging by the reactions of the adults in Israel, the Garbage Pail Kids characters chosen for the Israeli Havurat HaZevel successfully aroused similar emotions of disgust and revulsion in the local public as GPK aroused in the United States. On disgust in cultural context, see Douglas, *Purity and Danger*; Elwood and Olatunji, "Disgust."

confiscate the “addictive substances.” The rumor about the banned stickers spread like wildfire; in the following days children of the local school raided the grocery store and kiosks and emptied the shelves of these products.¹⁹ Marketing wizards will probably say that if such an event had not occurred in Kiryat Ono, it would have to be staged. Others will say that even negative publicity is—in the end—good publicity.

Despite that Aggressive Marketing Ltd. anticipated that such negative reactions would actually increase sales, the company embarked on a public relations campaign designed to change public opinion and convince adults and teachers that *Havurat HaZevel* was not only non-harmful but that it may actually benefit their children. The core of the argument, voiced by psychologists, was that exposure to “non-educational” content through humor can address daily impulses and therefore can relieve anxieties related to the social prohibitions involved in satisfying these impulses.²⁰ Indeed, it was found that black humor—jokes, rhymes, or the use of euphemism in daily speech—can be an indication of fear or death anxiety, on the one hand, and can be regarded as a means that helps deal with them, on the other hand.²¹ Research shows that this also holds true when it comes to jokes about injuries, deformities,²² disabilities,²³ and devastating disasters. Similar conclusions regarding ways of dealing with tragic reality

¹⁹ Etgar, “Garbage.” Similar stories were recorded at the same time in the United States. See Noy, *Disgrace to the White House*, 37–52.

²⁰ The PR campaign was led by Dr. Ruth Bar, a psychologist and marketing expert in advertising for brands, who worked with Israel Stern at Arieli Advertising Ltd. Personal communication with Ruth Bar, August 2020.

²¹ Choosing babies as the characters for the Garbage Pail Kids echoes a genre of jokes and poems common in the United States in the 1970s about babies who die or are murdered in cruel circumstances, among other things as a result of abortions. See Dundes, “Dead Baby Joke Cycle”; Elgee, “Laughing.”

²² For example, jokes about the crash of the Challenger space shuttle in January 1986; see Oring, “Jokes,” 276–86; Smyth, “Challenger Jokes.”

²³ For instance, the Helen Keller jokes were widespread from the 1960s to the 1980s; Barrick, “Hellen Keller Joke Cycle.” By the mid-1980s, with the integration of disabled people into the labor market in the United States, as well as in the educational system, a new type of joke cycle about disabilities appeared. Such jokes usually opened with a question and ended with a pun as an answer, for instance: Q: “What do you call a woman with no arms or legs—on a grill?” A: “Patty.” See Dundes, *Cracking Jokes*. For more on jokes about murdering family members, cannibalism, amputation of various organs, corpses, body fluids and secretions, disabilities and diseases, see Sutton-Smith, “Shut Up.”

emerge from a study of dirty jokes.²⁴ It is more than likely that it was in this folkloristic context that the artists at Topps Chewing Gum, Inc. developed Garbage Pail Kids. One of the main anxieties children suffer from revolve around the way they are perceived by others: children can sometimes be cruel, aggressive, make fun of anyone who looks unusual or behaves differently, and humiliate them. *Havurat HaZevel* unintentionally took care of this as well, by equally humiliating all children. The hundreds of funny derogatory nicknames that have been given to Israeli boys and girls did not necessarily reflect their visual or behavioral characteristics, but rather were based on their names, given by their parents. For most children, the use of such nicknames was natural, so natural that children who were not among the lucky who were given a nickname were quite pleased with the opportunity to come up with original nicknames for themselves.²⁵

There are few people today who were children in the 1980s and can testify that adults maintained a positive attitude towards *Havurat HaZevel*. It seems that, for children, any negative criticism, which sometimes led to the banning and confiscation of the materials, was a perfect opportunity to rebel against what was considered unacceptable. Indeed, the more adults forbade children to collect and trade in these cards, *Havurat HaZevel* became more firmly established in their milieu.²⁶ This phenomenon was not unique to Israel. Similar columns were published in the press in the United States two years earlier, and just like the case of the elementary school in Kiryat Ono, children all over the United States were forbidden to bring Garbage Pail Kids within school walls. Criticism in the United States reached its peak in 1988 when

²⁴ See Legman, *Rationale*.

²⁵ Page 8 of the first *Havurat HaZevel* album included a blank space: "Want to be a Garbage Pail Kid? Make a funny face, take a photo, come up with a funny or disgusting name, and join." Page 31 of the third album also included a similar page, this time under the title "*Havurat HaZevel* Contest," that offered attractive prizes for the most talented artist.

²⁶

Erez, a thirteen-and-a-half-year-old "professional '*Havurat HaZevel*' collector," explained that he loves *Havurat HaZevel* "perhaps precisely because it disgusts father and mother." See Shadmi, "Disgusting."

CBS decided to shelve an animated series based on Garbage Pail Kids characters following the efforts of conservative pressure groups in Congress.²⁷ Similar criticisms were also voiced in Israel's parliament—the Knesset—as early as December 28, 1987, when MK [Member of the Knesset] David Danino, of the National Religious Party sent an urgent question to Minister of Education and Culture Yitzhak Navon:

Recently, the market was flooded by a children's booklet called *Havurat HaZevel*. The booklet is distributed by a company called Aggressive Marketing Ltd., and in the booklet children are asked to paste stickers of disgusting characters. When purchasing these stickers, the children also receive special certificates, including "liar's permit," "stupid student's permit," "a license to hate," "crazy driver's license," and more. The "Crazy Driver's License" (Fig. 4) states, among other things, that "This license allows you to drive on the sidewalks, to bypass traffic jams, to drive forward at stop signs and etc." The "Permit to Be Disgusting" states, among other things, that "this permit gives you the right to be despicable and disgusting just as you really are." These booklets are distributed in public schools, and it seems that teachers do not stop pupils from buying them. I would like to ask: (A) Are you aware of the above data? (B) Does the Ministry of Education intend to prohibit the purchase of this booklet by school students? If so, how?²⁸

²⁷ Noy, *Disgrace to the White House*, 37–52.

²⁸ The Four Hundred and Third Session of the Eleventh Knesset: Wednesday, February 10, 1988, Knesset Plenary Records, Jerusalem, 2018, 1804, no. 4041, "The 'Havurat HaZevel' booklets" (Hebrew).

Minister of Education Navon replied:

The stickers are issued by a private publisher, and the children purchase them in grocery stores and kiosks. The Ministry of Education and Culture has no legal mandate to prohibit the distribution or the purchase of these stickers. Personally, I assume that this phenomenon will pass like all kinds of fashions prevalent in the market, and after this wave, the children themselves will get sick of it. Anyway, it is impossible to legally prevent this.²⁹

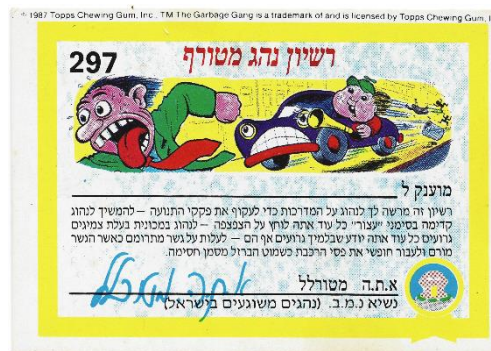


Fig. 4. insane Driver Permit *Havurat HaZevul*, no. 297, Hebrew ecotype: Tzipora (Tzipi) Rosensher-Dolan. Distributed in Israel in 1987–88 by Aggressive Marketing Ltd. From the private collection of Lior Perez, Pethah Tiqva. Photography by Lior Perez.

Almost immediately the Israeli press linked this incident to the already sensitive relationship between religion and state. Danino’s question was perceived by most of the secular public as blatantly interfering with secular education, and in the following days many columns seeking to protect the right of secular children to consume secular garbage to their heart’s content were published in the daily press.³⁰

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ [Anon.], “Ministry of Education”; Haelyon, “Garbage.”

Preoccupation with the quality of the content offered by *Havurat HaZevul* led to the creation of several educational alternatives. For example, the “Council for a Beautiful Israel” created the “Caring Matti’s Cleaning Bunch,” which served as an educational means among elementary school children to promote a clean and healthy environment. The Caring Matti’s Cleaning Bunch included the main character, **CARING MATTI**, as well as characters such as **SHINY TZAHI**, **WASTE DUMPING YIFTAH**, and **JUNK COLLECTOR SHIBOLET**.³¹ Other spinoffs, such as the “Nerd Bunch” and “Cleaning Bunch,” which were promoted by the children’s magazine *Kulanu*, also included educational figures such as **NIGHTINGALE MEIR**, **FLAWLESS SHLOMIT**, and **GENEROUS NADAV**.³² This phenomenon had parallels among other sectors. For example, *Otiyot*, a magazine mostly read by the national religious population, created an artistic project called “40 Blue and White” (Israel’s national colors), which included forty stickers that reviewed Israel’s history, year by year, as well as a large poster on which children could paste their stickers (Fig. 5).

The project was the result of the efforts of Uri Orbach, the editor of the magazine and later an MK on behalf of the National Religious Party, and the well-known caricaturists Shay Charka and Nissim Hezekiah.³³ In May 1988, about two months after this project was launched, Orbach and a group of children met Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir and presented him the poster and stickers on the



Fig. 5. Prime Minister Menachem Begin behind the speaker’s rostrum for the 1977 elections. 40 Blue and White. Illustration: Shay Charka. Creative writing: Uri Orbach. *Otiyot*, March 1988.

³¹ Written by Mira Maor, illustrated by Michel Kichka. See Maor and Kichka, “Caring Matti.”

³² Hauser, “The Nerd Bunch.”

³³ Personal communication with Shay Charka, September 2020; personal communication with Nissim Hezekiah, February 2021.

occasion of Israel's fortieth Independence Day. A reporter who covered the meeting, quoted Orbach and the children as saying: "This is our answer to 'Havurat HaZevul'."³⁴

To some extent, the opposition of Orbach and Danino can indicate the impact Havurat HaZevul had on the Israeli public in general, and among religious nationalist children in particular. It seems that the opposition of both individuals had utilitarian potential. From a political point of view, Danino's question must have gained him and his party some political capital which placed the religious nationalist educational doctrine as a mirror and alternative to the official educational values of the State of Israel. Orbach, on the other hand, used the negative publicity of Havurat HaZevul to promote his magazine and the values it stood for among its readers and their parents.

Disgrace to the Knesset: Havurat HaZevul as a Platform for Political Satire

It seems that although the marketing campaign of Havurat HaZevul products came to an end in Israel three and a half decades ago, their stench can still be felt among Israeli adults and among kids of the 1980s who have since grown up. The best example is the adoption of the Hebrew phrase Havurat HaZevul, which literally means the "Garbage Bunch," as an expression for rivals in political discourse. The connection to politics is rather surprising, mainly because Havurat HaZevul was not intended to deal with political issues, let alone with Israeli politics. It seems that while the stickers could have potentially hurt children's feelings, the use of this trashy adjective in political discourse was meant to tarnish Israeli officials so their names, images, and political acts would arouse public disgust and revulsion.

³⁴ Bachar, "Children."

Examination of the daily press in the days following Danino's question in the Israeli parliament reveals that it gave rise to a chain reaction of articles and columns. Part of these were a number of textual and visual caricatures which relate to, or were inspired by, *Havurat HaZevul*. For instance, a limerick spoofing politicians by the satirist Didi Menosi was published only three days after the political incident (Fig. 6). In his limerick Menosi established a conceptual and visual connection between garbage and politics, while at the same time creating an etymological connection between the [Knesset] members *חברי* and the [garbage] bunch *הבורה* by using the same root word. In Menosi's perspective, *Havurat HaZevul* is the prototype of the Israeli politician. Nevertheless, *Havurat HaZevul* is not responsible for corrupting the youth but rather the politicians in the Knesset are to blame.

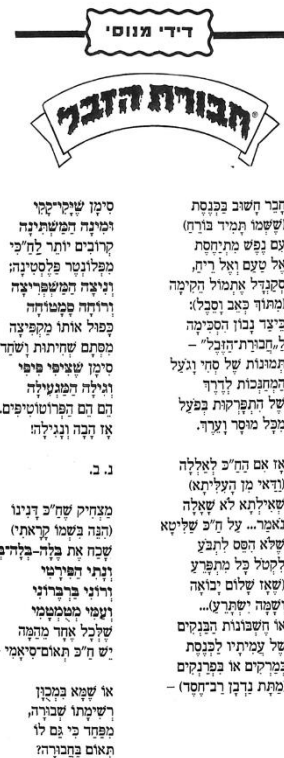


Fig. 6. *Havurat HaZevul*, a limerick by Didi Menosi *Yedioth Ahronoth*, January 1, 1988, 15.

Another textual response was created by Michal Kafra, who used the *Havurat HaZevul* model to spoof and ridicule parliament members: Why doesn't anyone develop this game in other areas. Political, for example. What's the problem? Instead of PEE- DIPPER **TZIPI** [First Album, no. 4] let's have POOP-DIPPER **GEULA** (referring to MK Geulah Cohen), BLOCKHEAD **PERES** (Acting Prime Minister Shimon Peres), and **CHOPPED SHAMIR AND PARSLEY** (Prime Minister Itzhak Shamir).³⁵

³⁵ Shamir in Hebrew is *dill*. Kafra, "Scoop."

Ziva Yariv, who published her own variation two months later, stated:

I want to ask him [Danino]: how would you feel if someone would separate you from your dear friends—**CHOKING YITZHAK** (referring to Minister of Defense Yitzhak Rabin), **SOMEONE TOUCHED GEULA** (MK Geulah Cohen), **POTBELLY SHIMON** (Acting Prime Minister Shimon Peres), **MIDGET SHAMIR** (Prime Minister Itzhak Shamir), **TAX-LEVYING NISSIM** (Minister of Finance Moshe Nissim), **HURL ARIEL** (Minister of Industry and Commerce Ariel Sharon), **IMPOTENT RAFUL** (MK Rafael Eitan), **CARROT TIP EZER** (Minister without portfolio Ezer Weizman).³⁶

The use of *Havurat HaZevel* as a linguistic platform to describe political figures was not a novelty. In fact, rhetorical devices similar to the ones used in *Havurat HaZevel* already served for political satire in antiquity.³⁷ The objective of satire was always to place a mirror against reality, mainly by giving officials,³⁸ as well as contemporary political issues or events, an additional new meaning employing one of the strongest rhetorical weapons—humor. The use of satire may give the audience (readers, listeners, or viewers) opportunity to process certain issues that may bother them in reality in a subtle manner. Indeed, when it comes to dealing with difficult, annoying, or disturbing issues, satire may serve as a softener. Humor seemingly cannot hurt anyone.³⁹

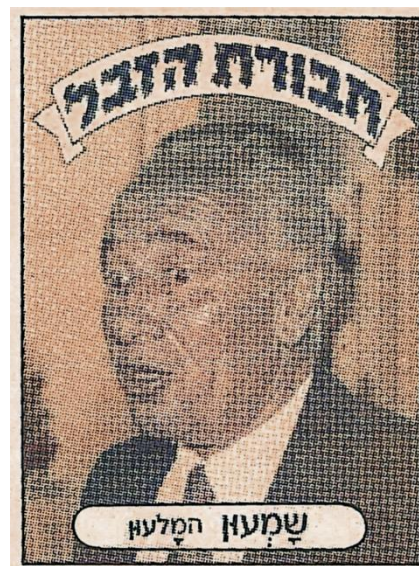
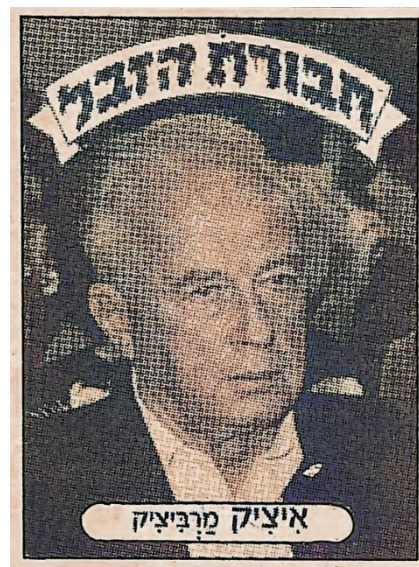
³⁶ Yariv, “*Havurat HaZevel*.” It is important to note that the National Religious Party, to which Danino belonged, was a partner in the unity government at the time, and that both Menosi’s and Yariv’s satirical criticisms were in fact an attack against the entire coalition.

³⁷ For ancient Greece and Rome, see Schultz, *Political Humor*; Corbeill, *Controlling Laughter*. In general, see Speier, “Wit and Politics,” 1360–68.

³⁸ On physical and moral flaws of politicians and humor, see Speier, “Wit and Politics,” 1372–79.

³⁹ Salamon’s study of David Levi (Likud party) jokes as a signifier and generator of the process of levantinization of Israeli culture can be beneficial here: Salamon, “David Levi Jokes.” Jokes about Levi Eshkol were also designed to deal with issues that troubled the Israeli public at the time. See Gan, “Eshkol Jokes.” See also Ben-Amos, “Jokes”; Bendix and Hasan-Rokem, “Israeli Political Humor”.

In February 1988 the first transition from rhetorical-textual to visual means was also recorded. A column by Amnon Birman was followed by a spin-off collage of Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres (figs. 7, 8).⁴⁰ In the Friday issue of *Yedioth Ahronoth* in which Ziva Yariv's column was published, Roni Apelboim, a copywriter at Arieli Advertising Ltd., initiated and created with the designers Hanan Fein and Einat Schneider and caricaturist Arnon Avni a political spin-off of *Havurat HaZevel* called "*Havurat HaHevel*," literally: the "Vanity Bunch." These illustrations, printed on the front page of the weekend edition, included six politicians (Pl. 1).⁴¹ Apelboim used rhetorical devices similar to those employed by Michal Kafra and Ziva Yariv. In visual terms, Avni decided to steer clear of the smiling infantile figures of *Havurat HaZevel* and depicted the Israeli politicians in a more caricatured and exaggerated manner, which was based on their physical appearance and characteristics.



Figs. 7, 8. BEATING YITZIK and WICKED SHIMON, *Kol Ha-Ir* Jerusalem, February 5, 1988, 16.

⁴⁰ Birman, "Havurat HaZevel."

⁴¹ REMNANT OF YOSSIE (Yossi Sarid), SMEAR SHAMIR (Itzhak Shamir), GULLIBLE SHIMON (Shimon Peres), BAD RABIN (Yitzhak Rabin), SOMEONE TOUCHED GEULAH'S TERRITORIES (Geulah Cohen) and SWALLOWING ARIEL (Ariel Sharon). A seventh card with the image of MK David Levi (CHEEKI DAVID) appeared by the table of contents. *Yedioth Ahronoth*, Seven Days supplement, February 19, 1988, 1, 7 (Hebrew). Personal communication with Roni Apelboim, January 2021.



Pl. 1. The Vanity Bunch Creative writing: Roni Apelboim. Illustrations: Arnon Avni. *Yedioth Ahronoth*, February 19, 1988.

The monthly erotic magazine *Monitin* issue for Purim contained a similar spin-off; however, this time instead of *Havurat HaZevul* it was called *Havurat HaHevel* or that is, literally the “Rope Bunch,” a metaphor for the potential end for any politician by the hangman’s knot (Fig. 10).⁴² It was the editor of the magazine, Ran Edelist, who initiated the project, apparently inspired by *Yedioth Ahronoth*’s *Vanity Bunch*. To implement the idea, he recruited the illustrator Doron Rosenblatt. The eighteen caricatures of Israeli and Palestinian politicians were printed on three full pages. Like Apelboim, Rosenblatt, too, replaced the baby-like figures with caricatures based on the true—but rather distorted—faces of the politicians. Much attention was paid to the background which reveals a political event associated with each character. For example, the figure of **LIEING ARIK** (Fig. 9) was inspired by Ariel (Arik) Sharon and the aftermath of the First Lebanon War. The illustration shows Sharon as a schoolboy standing by the blackboard and trying to solve a seemingly simple mathematical equation: how many kilometers separate the Israeli town of Metulah from the Lebanese city of Beirut. Sharon’s image in the *Vanity Bunch* shows **SWALLOWING SHARON** devouring a small child (Fig. 10). Sharon as a child-eater (here Muslims) echoes the Sabra and Shatila massacre carried out by militia of the Lebanese Forces in September 1982. At the same time, his image alludes a medieval European visual tradition associated with blood-libel in which Jews were often described as feeding on small children.⁴³

⁴² Edelist and Rosenblatt, “The Rope Bunch.”

⁴³ The appearance of blood libels in the twelfth century is directly related to the Jewish martyrology in the 1096 Rhineland massacres, perpetrated by armies on the way to the First Crusade. It was manifested not only in suicide, but also in the killing of children by their parents so that they would not fall into the hands of the Christians. This phenomenon left its mark on the Christian milieu which began to accuse Jews of the ritual murder of Christian children, such as the murder of William of Norwich in England in 1144. See Yuval, “Vengeance.” See also Dundes, “Ritual Murder.”



Pl. 2. The Rope Bunch Creative writing: Ran Edelist. Illustrations: Doron Rosenblatt, *Monitin*, March 1988.

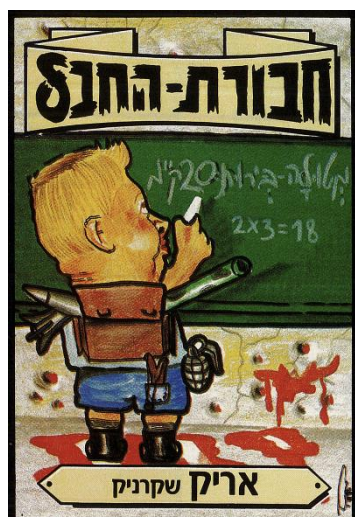


Fig. 9. LIEING **ARIK** Part of the Rope Bunch. Creative writing: Ran Edelist. Illustrations: Doron Rosenblatt, *Monitin*, March 1988.

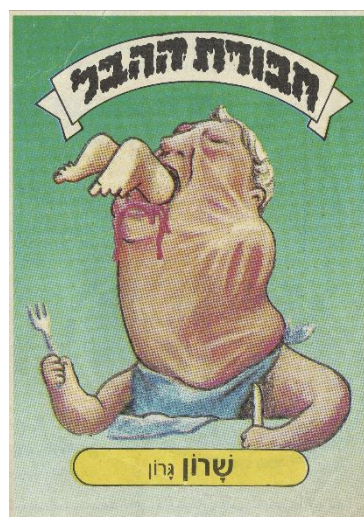


Fig. 10. SWALLOWING **SHARON** Part of the Vanity Bunch. Creative writing: Roni Apelboim. Illustrations: Arnon Avni. *Yedioth Ahronoth*, February 19, 1988.

The arrows of the Vanity Bunch were aimed at politicians' statements and actions, while the Rope Bunch hinted at the end of their political careers. Some would say that timing is everything and, indeed, when clarifying the historical circumstances of 1987–88, it is quite obvious that the creation of such spin-offs was indirectly linked to the elections to the twelfth Knesset later that year. That, however, is not surprising. Examining the use of satire in the State of Israel since its establishment clearly reveals that it is intertwined in the history of the election campaigns for the Knesset and for prime minister.⁴⁴ In fact, political caricatures are recorded in the Hebrew press long before the establishment of the State of Israel,⁴⁵ and more so ever since they became a

⁴⁴ Rafi Mann divided Israeli political humor during election campaigns into four periods: 1948–1973: “humorless elections”; 1973–1984: “television and comedians”; 1988 to the beginning of the 2000s: “more leaders, fewer entertainers”; from the middle of the first decade of the twenty-first century until 2015: “the politician as a comedian.” Mann, “Four Acts.” See also Aronoff, “Americanization”; Alexander, *Jester and the King*, 49–62; Nevo, *Seat of the Scornful*.

⁴⁵ On caricatures in the Hebrew press in Palestine from the beginning of the twentieth century until the establishment of the State of Israel, see Shva “Cartoon”; Machter and Machter, *Caricature*; Sebba-Elran, “Humor, Ideology, and Politics,” esp. 130–31; Naor, “Humor and Satire Periodical.”

standard feature in the daily press in Israel.⁴⁶ Satirists and caricaturists are required to textually and visually respond to political reality. The shelf life of their creation is extremely short, between a few hours and a few days, before it expires and becomes irrelevant. That is why caricaturists must be up to date on any current political event and at the same time develop unique artistic skills that will enable them to illustrate as quickly as possible.⁴⁷ Again, timing is everything.

In contrast to the Vanity Bunch and the Rope Bunch that were created in 1988 as unofficial spin-offs, in the United States Topps' creative writers and illustrators of Garbage Pail Kids were deliberately, formally, and systematically involved with American politics.⁴⁸ Cards that were part of the original series of the 1980s included the then current President of the United States Ronald Reagan (Fig. 14)⁴⁹ and some of the most important figures in American history: George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, and Abraham Lincoln. After a long break, Topps included in the Brand-New Series 2013 two of President Barack Obama as well as of his Republican opponent Sarah Louise Palin. The Garbage Pail Kids "Thirtieth Anniversary" Series released in July 2015 included a subset devoted solely to ten Garbage Pail Presidents: George Washington, Franklin Pierce, Abraham Lincoln, Calvin Coolidge, Dwight Eisenhower, Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush. The 2016 presidential elections gave birth to "The 2016 Presidential Candidates" (a subset of "American as Apple Pie in Your Face" Series), with five candidates included: Hillary Clinton, Bernie Sanders, Donald Trump, Jeb Bush, and Ben Carson. Only a month later

⁴⁶ On the history of press cartoons, see Navasky, *Art of Controversy*.

⁴⁷ On the connection between satire and journalism, in the sense that caricature is derived from opinion journalism, see Alexander, *Jester and the King*, 49–62.

⁴⁸ On the use of satire and humor in the US, by politicians and others, especially in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, see Schultz, *Political Humor*; Sloane, *Humor*; Gardner, *Campaign Comedy*.

⁴⁹ Reagan's image was also included in *Havurat HaZevul* and named **BABBLER RONNIE** (Figs. 14, 15).

Topps released its first online exclusive Garbage Pail Kids sets, which were almost entirely devoted to the 2016 election and followed the political timetable beginning with “Iowa Caucuses” in February, “New Hampshire Primary,” “Super Tuesday,” “Mega Tuesday,” “April Primaries,” “Presidential Losers,” “The Republican National Convention,” and “The Democratic National Convention.”

Between September 2016 and January 2017 Topps released a final set titled “Disgrace to the White House.” Special sets were devoted to the 2017 presidential inaugural ceremony “Inaug-Hurl” and to the first 100 days of the Trump presidency: “Trumpocracy.” The 2020 elections brought back the Disgrace to the White House series. It seems that Donald Trump was the most popular figure since 2016. However, Trump has a long history as a Garbage Pail Kid; already in 2004 Tom Bunk and Jay Lynch created **DONALD DUMP** and **TRUMPED TREVOR** (Fig. 11). The illustration shows Trump sitting on his “throne.” To his left is a suitcase full of dollar bills, and behind him, instead of a can of air freshener, is one of hair spray. He is holding a newspaper with the headline: “You're Fired,” a reference to the NBC reality show “The Intern” that he hosted at the time. This illustration was republished by Colin Walton and Joe Simko in the “2016

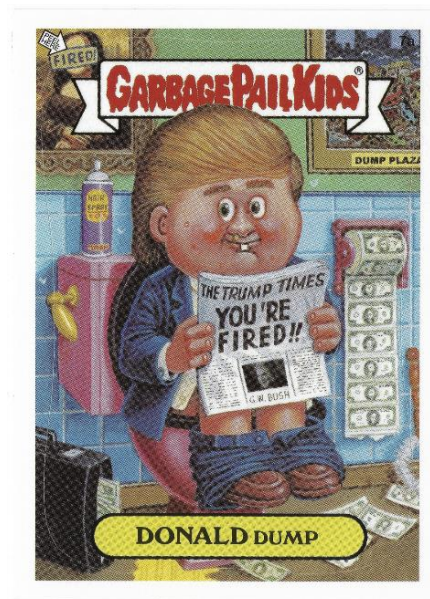


Fig. 11. **DONALD DUMP (TRUMPED TREVOR)** Garbage Pail Kids, All New Series 3:7a. Topps Chewing Gum, Inc., 2004.

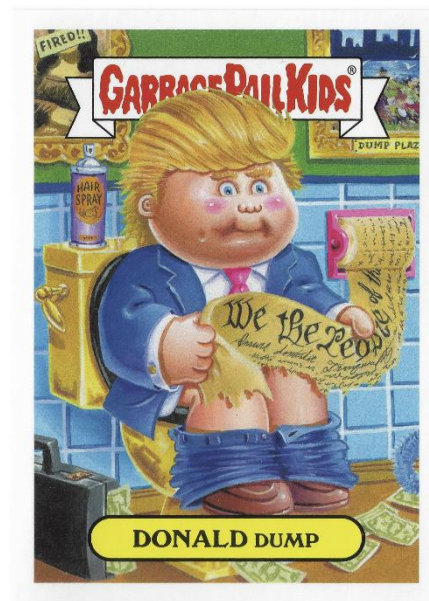


Fig. 12. **DONALD DUMP (TUMULTOUS TRUMP)** Garbage Pail Kids, the 2016 Presidential Candidates, a subset of the American as Apple Pie in Your Face, no. 3a. Topps Chewing Gum, Inc., 2016.

Presidential Candidates” series. Only minor changes were made: instead of the newspaper, Trump—this time as the president of the United States—is holding a roll of toilet paper with the opening phrase of the Preamble to the United States Constitution: “We the people of the...” (Fig. 12).⁵⁰

Returning to the Vanity Bunch and the Rope Bunch and the elections in Israel in November 1988, it is quite obvious that the Vanity Bunch and the Rope Bunch were originally intended for adults only. However, the “Garbage Flies” album that was released in 1989 by Zandler and Levi Ltd. was a completely different story. Unlike Garbage Pail Kids, the 168 Garbage Flies were hatched in Israel and nourished upon local garbage. The Garbage Flies were no longer a group of baby-faced figures but rather humanoid flying insects. In terms of comedy, the choice of flies had a long literary tradition that linked between the existential experience of both flies and humans.⁵¹ This is exactly how Jacob (Yaki) Kaufman illustrated the Garbage Flies: dirty, disturbing, and posing a health hazard, not so much because of their nature (as flies) but rather because of their human nature—as Israelis. It is quite clear that the Garbage Flies album was created during or shortly after the elections, since some flies directly related to this event. For example, **A FLY RUNNING FOR OFFICE** is shown as a runner who jumps hurdles on his way to the finish line, where a seat (in the Israeli parliament) is presented as first prize. Another example is **A FLY IN OFFICE** which is shown as a king holding a scepter and wearing a red royal robe and a gold royal crown (Pl. 3). The monarch rides on the back of another fly, as if on a horse, urges it to speed up with a whip, and calls out “giddyap!” The horse then calls out a saying with which

⁵⁰ For a detailed analysis of the American phenomenon and similar occurrences in countries such as France, Spain, Australia, England, Argentina, Chile, Bolivia, and Peru, see Noy, *Disgrace to the White House*, 73–116, 141–167.

⁵¹ For example, the expression “fly on the wall.” On the use of flies in literature, also in Hebrew children’s literature, see Levin, “Oh, How Wretched.”

every Israeli could and did identify: “Suckers don’t die!!! [but rather are replaced].” It is likely that though Israeli children were well aware of the existence of the elections in 1988, it can be assumed that they did not fully understand the satirical criticism embedded in each of these Garbage Flies.⁵² On the other hand, adults must have understood it immediately.⁵³



Pl. 3. FLY IN OFFICE, PRIME MINISTER FLY, MINISTER OF POLICE FLY. SHARON FLY, Part of The Garbage Flies. Artwork by Jacob (Yaki) Kaufman. Zender and Levi Ltd., 1989.

⁵² The Garbage Flies also include several figures associated with Israeli politics, for example **PRIME MINISTER FLY**, **MINISTER OF TRANSPORTATION FLY**, **MINISTER OF POLICE FLY**. **SHARON FLY** (referring to Ariel Sharon) is dressed as Napoleon. Compare above with other figures of Sharon (Figs. 9,10).

⁵³ Ofek, “Shalom.” Two other flies that deserve attention are an **ARAFAT FLY** (Yasser Arafat), a terrorist armed with explosives and weapons, and a masked **INTIFADA FLY** which throws a large stone from the rooftop of a building. The First Intifada, a Palestinian uprising which broke out at the end of 1987, is also apparent in naming **ADA INTIFADA** in the local ecotype of Sloppy Slobs. On the image of Arafat in the Israeli public, beginning in the mid-nineties, See Almog, Farewell to “Srulik,” vol.1, 269. See also Shifman, “Satire.”

The election campaign in 1988 turned the Hebrew phrase *Havurat HaZevel* into a rhetorical asset for anyone interested in pointing out corruption and political stench. In April 1989, Gan Litani who wrote opinion articles for the *HaOlam HaZeh* weekly, opposed choosing Yossi Beilin as the future leader of the Labor Party, and wrote: “I am surprised that the makers of the *Havurat HaZevel* stickers have not yet created a Beilin figure, as a symbol of virtuoso disloyalty and tireless intrigue.”⁵⁴ Aryeh Bender, who covered the demonstration by homeless persons in Jerusalem in August 1990, reported that as the protesters moved towards the Ministry of Finance buildings, they shouted, “May your name be blotted out Moda’i” (minister of finance) “death to the government,” and “*Havurat HaZevel*.”⁵⁵ Even Israeli politicians used *Havurat HaZevel* as a rhetorical asset.⁵⁶ During the discussion in the Knesset plenum on February 16, 1993, MK Uzi Landau of the Likud party came out against the Labor party’s secretary-general, Nissim Zvili, who promoted peace talks with the Palestinians:

I must say, that Zvili is an honest man. He’s telling the truth. He’ll vote against the law, because he is in favor of the establishment of a Palestinian state, and I respect him for that. But one has to ask: what about all the others, how will they vote? Mr. Prime Minister [Rabin], we shall find out soon through this law, which can be regarded as a lie detector; and this law will answer the question, whether only Nissim is a Zvili [sounding like Zevel, lit. Heb. for garbage], or is the whole Labor party Zvili [garbage], the Zvili Bunch [the garbage bunch].⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Litani, “Trojan Horse.”

⁵⁵ Bender, “As Seen.”

⁵⁶ Comparing Israeli politicians to *Havurat HaZevel* was also prominent in local politics. Tel Aviv Mayor Shlomo (Chich) Lahat stated: “I am in favor of separating the Knesset elections from the municipal elections, the national garbage should be separated from the municipal garbage.” HaCohen, “*Havurat HaZevel*.” See also Zohar, “Menahemiah.”

⁵⁷ The eighty-ninth session of the Thirteenth Knesset: Wednesday, February 16, 1994. Knesset Plenary Records, Jerusalem, 1994, appendix “A proposal prohibiting the establishment of a Palestinian state on the West Bank” (Hebrew). See also Honig, “Zvilli.”

This implicit statement by Landau required his colleagues in the Knesset to have a certain degree of sophistication and familiarity with *Havurat HaZevul* and what it stood for in the political context when deciphering the insult.

Viral Political Garbage: *Havurat HaZevul*'s Satire on Social Media

The children of the 1980s grew up during the 1990s and first decade of the present century, and as citizens began to participate in Israeli politics, either by voting in the democratic elections, by playing an active role in political parties, or by participating in political protests and demonstrations. Some of them were also active as satirists and caricaturists, who gave birth to creative projects such as the “Fund Bunch,” the “Suffer Bunch,” the “Garbage State,” and the fictional election campaign of **TREASURE FINDING RON**, *The Vanity Bunch* and *The Suffer Bunch: Forces of the Light*.

The satirical creation among the children of the 1980s (who are now in their mid-forties) is directly related to technological developments in the Israeli media—internet, smartphones, and social media—which also led to many changes in the distribution and consumption of politics and political satire.⁵⁸ The shift of the electorate to the new media did not go unnoticed by politicians, who increasingly used the internet to convey political messages, while receiving immediate feedback from the surfers and even having the opportunity to hold an open dialogue with them. Towards the second decade of the twenty-first century, the internet gradually became a platform for satire. If until the beginning of the century politicians were a subject of satire as guests on

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One example is “*HaHartzufim*,” a satirical television puppet-show based on Britain's “Spitting Image,” showcasing Israeli politicians, which was broadcast before the 1996 elections on Israel's Channel Two. See Shifman, *Televised Humor*, 168–76. On the blurred lines between the content of current affairs and entertainment, see Levin, “Laughter.” On the importance of television and—from the mid-nineties—the internet for election propaganda in Israel, see Caspi and Leshem, “Propaganda,” 122.

mass media,⁵⁹ by the next decade they became self-producers of satire content on websites, in forums and blogs, as well as official and unofficial social media pages.⁶⁰ As the internet became a political arena, other parties joined in, journalists and publicists. The political caricaturists also moved from the printed press to the internet. The creators, mostly independent artists who foresaw the power of social networks during the “Arab Spring” revolutions, saw cyberspace as a legitimate arena in which they could protest and demonstrate.⁶¹

As mentioned above, the Vanity Bunch and the Rope Bunch were created within established newspapers. On the other hand, the “Havurat HaKeren” literally: the “Fund Bunch” which was published in September 2011 was the initiative of an anonymous artist and can be found only on Facebook. The information page about the Fund Bunch state that “RIPNIF”⁶² is a “liberal right-wing satire page, which aims to deal with all front organization that are funded by the ‘New Israel Fund’ and with organizations that are funded by anti-Semitic countries.” The Fund Bunch was a reaction to the political circumstances, namely the “social justice protests” that filled the streets and squares, but also virtually the highways of the internet. All in all, some twenty-seven figures of

⁵⁹ For a similar phenomenon of politicians participating in political satire television programs in the United States, mainly since 1999, see Baumgartner and Morris, “Daily Show Effect”; Baym, “Daily Show.” On politicians as comedians who convey political messages through humor, see Waisanen, “Comedian-in-Chief.” On satire and self-humor in Israeli politics and in particular on the internet and social networks, see Mann, “Four Acts,” 234–39; Avidar, “Self-Humor.”

⁶⁰ Sabag Ben-Porath, Lev-On, and Lehman-Wilzig, “Silent Partners”; Mann, “Four Acts,” 237–39; Mann, “Bibi Sitter”; Avidar, “Self-Humor,” 84–86. On the same phenomenon in the United States, see Baumgartner, “Editorial Cartoons.”

⁶¹ Although some attributed a low level of political involvement to the millennials, as well as a lack of interest or inability to understand political complexities. See Almog and Almog, *Generation Y*, 337–70. See also Bastos, Mercea, and Charpentier, “Tents, Tweets, and Events.” On the 2011 social-justice demonstrations in Israel, see Lev-On, “Facebook Framed.”

⁶² Facebook. “RIPNIF.” The letters “RIPNIF” are probably the acronym for “Rest in Peace New Israel Fund.” Unfortunately, I have not been able to contact the anonymous creator of the Fund Bunch. This phenomenon is very common in Netlor (online popular culture), and can be seen in online parodies, also known as memes, which have been duplicated over and over again until the creator’s identity is no longer relevant. On the internet as an arena for folklore and popular uprising, see Kotler-Fux, “Hitler-pants’ Parodies,” 183–8.

the leaders of the protest such as Daphni Leef⁶³ and Stav Shaffir, politicians, journalists, and other left-wing personalities, were published between the beginning of the protests and the elections in 2013 (Pl. 4). Yariv Oppenheimer, the director of the left-wing “Peace Now” movement at the time, was so important in the eyes of the artist of the Fund Bunch that he was “awarded” several images. One illustration, **OPENHANDED OPPENHEIMER** echoes the cover of “The Giving Tree” by Shel Silverstein, but with changes: the tree is not giving an apple to the little boy but rather a camera to a Palestinian terrorist. The inscription explains: “Then the tree gave the terrorist a camera, so that he could document the crimes of the occupation army. And the tree was happy.” For a right-wing audience, this kind of satire can be used to arouse political solidarity.⁶⁴

Examination of the Fund Bunch’s composition reveals a unilateral interpretation of the political events.

While Vanity Bunch and Rope Bunch criticize all political parties, the Fund Bunch was aimed solely at the left, without any trace of self-criticism. An iconographic and textual examination reveals that the creators of the

Fund Bunch took another step away from *Havurat HaZavel*, both rhetorically and visually. All the images are crude and rude. Most cards lack sophistication and employ a poor linguistic device when using humor or black humor. Moreover, it seems that the artist’s objective was to definitely insult and humiliate the subjects of his illustrations,



Pl. 4. **OPENHANDED OPPENHEIMER, LUNATIC LEFT, ARROGANT YAIR, PUKE-MOVICH SHELLY** Part of the Fund Bunch. Anonymous artist, September 2011. <https://www.facebook.com/RIPNIF/>.

⁶³ Liran-Alper and Tsarfaty, “Daphne’s Laurels.”

⁶⁴ Meyer, “Humor.”

using infantile means: one-fifth suffer from strabismus, and almost half present an angry face. Some images, such as that of MK Yair Lapid and MK Shelly Yachimovich, also bear demonic and communist attributes.

The second wave of the social justice protests of 2011 that was the trigger for the Fund Bunch also generated another creative initiative called the “Havurat HaSevel” literally: the “Suffer Bunch.” It could not be found on social media but rather within a WordPress blog written by Noa Osterreicher and illustrated by Ido Hirshberg.⁶⁵ The

Suffer Bunch includes four characters: **CARTON ANTON**, **DISABLED UDI**, **SINGLE MUM ORIT**, and **BOTTLE COLLECTOR ELIAKIM** (Pl. 5).⁶⁶

From a conceptual and textual point of view, Osterreicher took the Suffer Bunch to the next level.

Since she was not satisfied with the simple combination between an image and its sophisticated name, she added to each of the characters a detailed biography describing their tragic life story.

CARDBOARD ANTON, for instance, is lying inside a cardboard box. Although at first glance one gets the impression that this homeless person is a drug addict, alcoholic, or mentally ill, according to Osterreicher

CARDBOARD ANTON is a normative person. After his divorce, Anton was unable to continue paying the rent as well as the alimony. The fact that **CARDBOARD ANTON**



Pl. 5. **CARTON ANTON**, **DISABLED UDI**, **SINGLE MUM ORIT**, **BOTTLE COLLECTOR ELIAKIM** Part of the Suffer Bunch. Creative writing: Noa Osterreicher. Artwork by Ido Hirshberg, 2012. Photographs courtesy of the artists.

⁶⁵ The Sevel. “The Suffer Bunch.” Osterreicher is a journalist in Ha’aretz and The Marker.

⁶⁶ It also included other images that were not completed and published: **SOCIAL WORKER YAHLI**, **TAX-LEVYING NISSIM**, **BLACKOUT LITAL**, **WATERLESS HAIM**, **PENSIONER AVNER**, **TRASH CAN SEARCHING YIFTACH**, and **DEBTOR DOV** Personal communication with Osterreicher, November 2020 .

was past the age of fifty prevented him from getting a permanent job with a good income; his debts constantly increased, and finally his landlord evicted him from his apartment. Since CARDBOARD ANTON had no family or social safety net to help him, he became a homeless person.⁶⁷ Moreover Osterreicher weaved into his life story some facts taken from the Association for Civil Rights in Israel report that explain why the State of Israel failed to help CARDBOARD ANTON.⁶⁸ As the protests grew, Osterreicher printed and hung the posters all over Rothschild Boulevard in Tel Aviv, the stronghold of the “tent protests.” On each poster, with obvious satire, she added in handwriting “Look for the cards”—which could be only found near ATMs.

Three years after the Fund Bunch and the Suffer Bunch were produced, Gal Shkedi, an illustrator and graphic designer, created a Facebook page called the “Garbage State.”⁶⁹ Similar to the Osterreicher spin-off, Shkedi’s was created in a political context, namely in the period between the 2014 Gaza War and the elections to the Twentieth Knesset in March 2015. Shkedi’s goal was to post a new character every few days, a kind of cumulative project that was intended to reach its peak on election day. The first card was published on December 7, 2014, and during the three months until election day Shkedi released some fifty-three images. Within weeks, the Garbage State became viral on social networks and the online media.⁷⁰

Though the Suffer Bunch and the Garbage State differ from each other in style, they nevertheless both spoof not only political issues but also social issues and topics relating to the economy and the environment. Examination of the Garbage State composition reveals that Shkedi, like Osterreicher, avoided using explicit names of politicians (Pl. 6). One exception is PROMISE MAKING NAVOT, which was released

⁶⁷ Keinan, “The Suffer Bunch.”

⁶⁸ The report is available online: <https://law.acri.org.il/he/22136> (retrieved June 16, 2023).

⁶⁹ Facebook. “The Garbage State.”

⁷⁰ Saar, “Garbage State.”

on January 6, 2015. This image depicts the figure of a politician standing at a lectern. Like Pinocchio, Navot has a long wooden nose, which hints at a political promise, or in other words—a lie. There is a certain physical resemblance between Navot and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Moreover, the blue logo of the “Lie” party that appears on the podium behind Navot echoes the familiar logo of the Likud party.⁷¹ The Garbage State reached its peak a month and a half later, when Shkedi printed the series for the first time and presented it in a group exhibition organized by “AAA - House of Hebrew Typography” called “Alphabet of Elections,” that opened on election day, March 17, 2015.

The political instability that marked the end of the second decade of the present century included election campaigns in 2019 and in 2020. In March 2020, after a long break, Shkedi brought the Garbage State back to life, with the character of ANTI-VOTING LIA intended to criticize the low voter turnout, a result of a disappointed public. Further political instability and tension created by the COVID epidemic led to widespread protests against the government, and especially against its leader, Benjamin Netanyahu. The “Black Flags” (March 2020—June 2021) protests took place every Saturday night outside the prime minister’s residence on Balfour Street in Jerusalem. During the demonstrations, the police used riot control water cannons; these, too, were recorded in Shkedi’s collection. Another image was posted shortly after the passing of the “Great Corona Law” which included restrictions on demonstrations during the epidemic.⁷² The card of YURA WOKE UP TO A DICTATORSHIP is completely black,

⁷¹ It is also reminiscent of the “Black Flags” logo, “Leave,” relating to Netanyahu. Shkedi’s Garbage State was not affiliated with any political party; nevertheless, without Shkedi’s permission, it became part of the “The Guide to the Floating Votes”—an online campaign of the Zionist Union party hosted by comedian Gil Kopatz. Personal communication with Gal Shkedi, October 2020. On the “Black Flags,” see below.

⁷² Sebba-Elran, “Pandemic of Jokes.”

except for a pair of sad eyes. Shkedi's daily coverage of the 2015 elections and, more specifically, the protest in Balfour Street during 2020, allowed his 7,500 followers on Facebook and Instagram not only to be updated on the important developments related to the election and protests, but also to take an active part in real time using the means available to them through the social network (comment or share) without leaving their home.

Another artist in this historical review, who wished to remain

anonymous and identifies by the name McPukon, is responsible for the 2019 fake election campaign of the Havurat HaZevul party led by **TREASURE FINDING RON**, which was mentioned at the very beginning of this article. But McPukon involvement in Israeli politics began four years earlier, in 2015, when he published a spin-off commemorating the twentieth anniversary of the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin⁷³ based on the image of Ronald Reagan in Garbage Pail Kids and Havurat HaZevul (figs. 13–15). The political circumstances that led Shkedi to relaunch the Garbage State in 2019–2020 led McPukon to a similar creative response. About a week before the elections to the twenty-first Knesset, which were held on April 9, 2019,



Pl. 6. PROMISE MAKING NAVOT, ANTI-VOTING LIA, YURA WOKE UP TO A DICTATORSHIP and Untitled. The Garbage State. Artworks by Gal Shkedi, 2015, 2020, 2023. Photographs courtesy of the artist.

⁷³ In the background behind Rabin's figure is a sticker with the inscription "Yes to Peace, No to Violence." See Salamon, "Political Bumper Stickers." On Yitzhak Rabin's assassination in Israeli art, see Patkin, "Laughing."

he posted on Facebook the image of **RON PREFERS TO SLEEP** which was intended to inspire the public to wake up and go to vote (Fig. 16). Simultaneously, he released the fictional election campaign of **TREASURE FINDING RON** (Fig. 1). Ron and his trashy party continued their fake campaign also in the elections for the twenty-second (September 2019), twenty-third (March 2020), and eventually for the twenty-fourth Knesset held in March 2021. Disappointment with the political instability is reflected in the updating of the election slogan: “Ron. Treasure. Rule” was first changed to “Ron. Treasure. Depression” then to “Ron. Treasure. Disgrace” and lastly to “Ron. Treasure. Devastation” (Pl. 7).⁷⁴

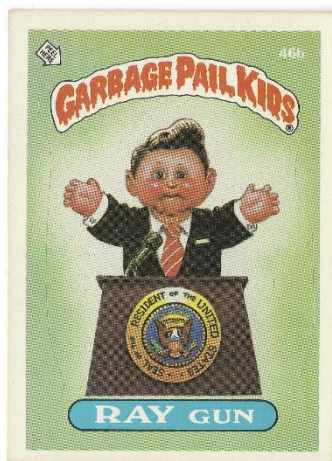


Fig. 13. **RAY GUN** (RAPPIN' **RON**). Garbage Pail Kids Original Series 1:46a. Topps Chewing Gum, Inc., April 1987 (Artworks by John Pound).

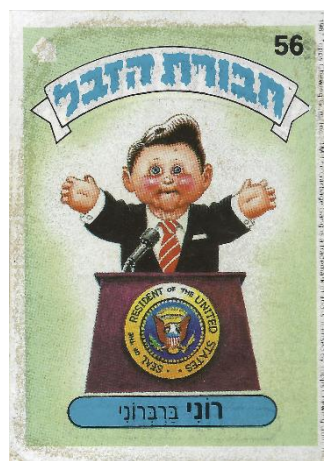


Fig. 14. **BABBLER RONNIE** Havurat HaZavel, First Album, no. 56. Creative writing: Tzipora (Tzipi) Rosensher-Dolan. Distributed in Israel in 1987–88 by Aggressive Marketing Ltd.



Fig. 15. **NO RABIN** A tribute to the late Yitzhak Rabin. Part of the “Yellow” album. McPukon, 2015. Photograph courtesy of the artist.

⁷⁴ The final words in Hebrew rhyme in all three.



Fig. 16. RON PREFERS TO SLEEP McPukon, March 2019. Photograph courtesy of the artist.



Pl. 7. Mc Pukon's fictional election campaign led by TREASURE FINDING RON for the Twenty-first to the Twenty-fifth Knesset. McPukon, April 2019, September 2019, March 2020, March 2021, and November 2022 (respectively). Photograph courtesy of the artist.

In early 2023, Israel's political instability entered a new phase with the government, led by Benjamin Netanyahu, attempting to implement a judicial reform. Protests against the government and the proposed reform intensified shortly after its introduction. Since then, two creators have added their contributions to this body of visual political satire, utilizing AI engines such as Midjourney for the first time. Starting on February 4, 2023, Yishay Raziel began posting his new version of "Vanity Bunch" almost every day on Facebook, spoofing approximately seventy right-wing politicians (Fig. 17). Only four days later Yossi Dray, who identifies with the right wing, released his two versions on the same platform: The "Suffer Bunch," meant to spoof the political left while the "Forces of the Light," to embrace the political right (Fig. 18).⁷⁵



Fig. 17. UNRELIABLE BENJAMIN Part of the AI Vanity Bunch. Artworks by Yishay Raziel, February 2023. Photograph courtesy of the artist.



Fig. 18. THE PEOPLE HAVE SPOKEN Part of the AI Suffer Bunch and the Forces of the Light. Artworks by Yossi Dray, February 2023. Photograph courtesy of the artist.

⁷⁵ See Facebook, "The Vanity Bunch," Facebook, "The Suffer Bunch." See also Sharir, "Trashy Coup d'état." Both Raziel and Dray were not aware of the 1988 "Vanity Bunch" and the 2011 "Suffer Bunch."

Following the tragic events of the 2023 Gaza war and the October 7th massacre later that year, Raziell and Dray, deeply affected by the terrorist attack, chose to channel their shared grief into a collaborative project. United by a desire to express their condemnation of terrorism and criticize the leaders of Hamas and Hezbollah terrorist organizations, they embarked on a joint venture titled: “HamaSS is Isis,” “HamaSS Kill Kids,” and “Hellbollah.” The set included ten cards featuring political and military Hamas leaders such as **YAHYA SIN-WAR** (Yahya Sinwar), **MUHAMMAD DEATH** (Mohammed Deif), **ISMA HELL HANIYEH** (Ismail Haniyeh), and Hezbollah’s secretary-general **HASSAN NAZIRALLAH** (Hassan Nasrallah) (Pl. 8). The set also included special cards for Al-Shifa Hospital in the Gaza Strip, which was used as a base for a terrorist headquarters, and of Antonio Guterres (Secretary-General of the United Nations), who failed to condemn the vicious attack. Raziell and Dray’s new designs instantly became viral on social media.



Pl. 8. **YAHYA SIN-WAR**, **MUHAMMAD DEATH**, **ISMA HELL HANIYEH**, **HASSAN NAZIRALLAH** Part of “HamaSS is Isis” and “Hellbollah” Series. Artworks by Yishay Raziell and Yossi Dray, October 2023. Photographs courtesy of the artists.

* * *

Garbage Pail Kids and its local Israeli ecotype *Havurat HaZevul*, which was marketed in the late 1980s to Israeli children, became a source of inspiration for a number of spin-offs that appealed to adults and dealt with Israeli current affairs, in general, and Israeli politics, in particular. The rise of local spin-offs signifies the development of grassroots politics, expressed by individuals in the daily press or within commercial frameworks by independent artists. Choosing Garbage Pail Kids as a model for political satire, the artists aimed to express their aversion to what they perceived as wrong, harmful, unappealing, detestable, loathsome, and shameful. The visual elements employed in most spinoffs showcase their uniqueness, echoing, to some extent, the visual and textual model of the original Garbage Pail Kids. Nevertheless, the inclusion of realistic components in these illustrations allowed the artists to connect the characters to politics and to the political reality of the time.

This historical review revealed the synchronous connection between the timing of creating and distributing the spin-offs and political events in Israel, mainly elections to the Israeli Knesset (and the office of prime minister) from the twelfth to the twenty-fourth Knesset. This review also reflects the evolving political discourse, transitioning from traditional mass media to the internet, and more specifically, social media. Moreover, it is possible to establish a solid connection between the media and the message the artists wished to convey. This connection is primarily expressed through artistic style and linguistic means, encompassing statements ranging from restraint and sophistication to provocation, degradation, and verbal or visual violence. It seems that as long as politicians maintain their inherent nature, satirists will continue to play a crucial role in critiquing them. One can only hope that the Israeli political landscape

remains fertile ground, inspiring the creation of new, innovative, and creative political satire, contributing to the ongoing comical and satirical disgrace of the Knesset of Israel.

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