Tick, tick, tick... BOOM!
Bomb-themed game show set to debut on TV next month

By NIV ELIS

The relentless tick, tick, tick of the clock reverberates through the woman's head, keeping pace with her pounding heartbeat as she stares at the colored wires of the bomb in front of her. Should she cut the red or the green wire? In a moment of fortitude, she opts for the green, and as she cuts it... BOOM! The walls collapse. The ground shakes. And the audience roars.

It is not a James Bond or Die Hard movie, but Israel's newest television show, which tasks its contestants with answering trivia in order to win a prize. Instead of just answering questions, however, they are confronted with faux bombs adorned with colored wires, each corresponding to a different answer. While a cash prize awaits them at the end of the road, a wrong answer yields an explosion of colorful powder, to be replayed in slow-motion, alongside a shaking studio set.

Boom!, created by Cash Taxi host Ido Rozenblum, is set to premiere on Channel 2 in April and is already raising eyebrows.

In a country that not a decade ago experienced regular suicide bombings, where rockets continue to rain on the South and murmur of a third intifada continue to permeate the political discussions, the choice of a bomb-themed game show could rub some people the wrong way.

"It's something a lot of people ask us about," the Keshet Media Group's vice president for programming, Ran Telem, told The Jerusalem Post. "When you think of a bomb you think of something scary, then the movies, then comics. Ours will be more like comics. When it explodes it will be full of confetti. As soon as people see it they will understand that it's not connected to anything real."

The show's humorous treatment of the subject matter, Telem said, will disabuse people of the notion that it is insensitive. Its edgy, fast pace will pull viewers in, and its combination of action and academic trivia will help it stand out from a crowd of shows that in recent years have favored either intellect or physical ability.

Whether intentional or not, the use of loaded (so to speak) imagery such as a bomb on Israeli television tests the boundaries of what is acceptable to society.

"There's no question that television shows the values, ideology and norms of society," said Amit Lavie-Dinur, deputy dean and head of visual content specialization at the IDC's Sammy Ofer School of Communication. "Something about all this reality television is the idea of humiliation. We always move the red line a bit and we don't pay attention. Bit by bit we've gotten used to it."

Jokes about the Holocaust, for example, no longer cause the national uproar they did a generation ago.

"I think that our sacred cows are disappearing," Lavie-Dinur said.

In other countries, television shows take shock to a totally different level.

An Australian series called Virgins Wanted had two contestants (one man, one woman) try to auction off their own virginity to the highest bidder, while Japan is known for a slew of outrageous, often uncomfortable game shows. In Cambodia, a show called It's Not a Dream addressed the country's bloody history head on, reuniting families that were wrenched apart by the Khmer Rouge.

While the Cambodian show directly dealt with the country's troubled history, Boom! indirectly evokes disturbing images from Israel's past, trying to gloss over it.

"In a sense, it's a coping mechanism," said Yael Daniell, a trauma expert who served as an adviser on terror victims for the office of the secretary-general of the United Nations. "Rather than experience it passively, we make it active. On the surface it could be a way to numb one's self so it's less scary. On the other hand, these methods are mostly unsuccessful. All it does is send the message that it's an acceptable part of life, that it's just a game, that it's not real. But it is threatening nonetheless," she said.

Only time will tell whether the show, already being shopped to foreign television stations, will explode into prime time or turn out to be a dud.

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