

Reality show on a quest for Middle East peace

LIZZY DAVIES | LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM - Jun 25 2010 10:49

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Most reality television shows keep their aspirations modest: good ratings, plenty of gossip and at least one participant who makes his or her way on to the front pages.

But a French programme debuting later this year is aiming rather higher. Its mission -- for 12 teenagers who choose to accept it -- is nothing less than a road map to peace in the Middle East.

Les Accords de Marseille, which is expected to be broadcast on the public channel France5 in September, will bring together a dozen 18-year-olds -- six from Israel, six from the Palestinian territories -- and make them cohabit as they hold negotiations aimed at establishing a peace deal.

Although the show's creators admit such an aim is more of a symbol than a realistic target, they insist the most important part of the programme will be the process the participants will undergo in carrying out the talks.

French director Mohamed Ulad, who co-wrote the scenario with Franco-Israeli philosopher Sophie Nordmann, has rejected the idea that the programme could be provocative.

With the biggest populations of Jews and Muslims of any Western European country, France often experiences bouts of violence related to developments in the Middle East.

"We are not going to make trash TV ... We will try to take part in discussions between young people, Israelis and Palestinians, who will be socialising for the first time," he said, adding: "These young people born in the hope of peace [in 1991, year of the Madrid conference] have known only conflict."

For the three weeks of filming, the 12 participants will live together in a house on the Frioul archipelago off the coast of Marseille. To distance the programme from the standard reality TV formula, Ulad has insisted there be no filming in bedrooms, no live broadcasts and no 24/7 camera footage.

He chose to film the show in France, he said, because it would provide the young people with a "relatively isolated and sheltered" environment in which to discuss highly controversial issues. Among topics to be debated are the status of Jerusalem and the Palestinian right of return.

"This kind of project ... would be impossible to do there [in the Middle East], where everyone is stuck in their own convictions, clichés and milieu," he told La Provence newspaper.

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Ulad, whose partner, Mazarine Pingeot, is the daughter of the former president, Francois Mitterrand, hopes to be able to get high-profile personalities to act as "coaches" for the participants.

Speaking on French radio, Nordmann added that the show would be interesting not for its result but for its development: "We are really not trying to get them to find a miracle solution; we know very well they won't," she said. -- © Guardian News & Media 2010

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