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Acre Fringe: a theater festival unlike any other in the world

At the New York or Edinburgh Fringe, you won't see many shows dealing with what it means to be from Manhattan, or the state of Scottish society today. But in Acre, theater is a tool for political identity.

By Ben Kaplan Tags: [Israel culture](#)

Naomi Yoeli insists that her latest show, "Explosive: War Tourism," which opened at the Acre Fringe Theater Festival last week, is not a work of political theater.

The performance features an extended sequence in which a woman (played by Naomi's daughter, Galia) scatters an array of sandbags evoking West Bank settlements across the stage, and then slices them open.

According to Yoeli, however, it is not political undercurrents but "something else" that drives in the point of her show. "We use theatrical tools, means, to detect how politics are involved in our lives," she explains.

"Explosive" recounts the tragedy of Dr. Izzeldin Abuelaish, the Palestinian doctor who lost three of his daughters and his niece when an IDF shell hit their home in Gaza during Operation Cast Lead. At the time, Abuelaish had been reporting on the situation in Gaza via cell phone, and his harrowing screams were caught live on Israeli television. Yoeli says she is not an activist, but "had this urge to do something which would be explicitly... explicit."

"I decided to deal with our very short-term memory, Israeli short-term memory, to ask questions about how memory is adapting itself to reality, how memory is wounded by reality."

The show explores how the event was portrayed in the media and received by Israeli society. Through a combination of multimedia and projections, the performance recreates the experience of being saturated daily with images, from the most significant and disturbing to the most funny and mundane, dramatizing an inability at times to tell the difference.

"We did not have to dig—we had to let it come up. Like a medium who

lets things come up from your memory, from the past. In Hebrew it is called *lehaalot baov*—to raise it up from the limbo” [to conjure].

For Naomi and other artists, theater is one of the few, if only places to have this kind of dialogue. “If I were to say these things on TV, they would ban me. But when I come through the theater, I say, “I am the battlefield, it’s me and my daughter, our stories. We don’t think we are better, but we think things should get a perspective. It’s like being a trickster; they don’t ban you because you say rubbish anyhow.”