

# New Hebrew magazine in Berlin looks to connect Israelis with locals

Ofer Aderet

When Tal Alon's partner tried to persuade her to move from Tel Aviv to Berlin, he made the rookie mistake of taking her there in February, in the midst of the bleak winter. "I told him there was no way I was ever going to live there," Alon recalls, smiling.

Last week, four years after they moved to Berlin with their two children, Alon walked onstage in a convention that brought together Jewish entrepreneurs and tech wizards from Israel and Europe, to present her startup business: Spitz, a Hebrew-language magazine published in Berlin, for the city's Israeli community.

Alon, 38, was unique among the high-tech geeks and fancy PowerPoint presentations, since she pitched an old idea - a printed magazine. Alon, who worked for both Maariv and Yedioth Ahronoth in Israel, says "the printed copy is part of the idea. It proves that our product exists physically, representing an exciting thing that is happening here," referring to the growing Israeli community in Berlin - now about 20,000 strong - that recently prompted criti-



Tal Alon, founder of Spitz, which she describes as like "eating hummus abroad."

Olaf Kühnemann

cism from Finance Minister Yair Lapid.

The seventh issue of the bimonthly magazine responded to the sounds coming from the Holy Land. "That debate really has nothing to do with us," Alon wrote. "Berlin is the zoo, and we're the attractive chimpanzee cage," referring to

the "tourists who come to observe us." These, she wrote, consist of two groups: "Those who would love to be chimpanzees, since the life of chimpanzees is so nice and easy - they play and eat bananas all day long"; and those who enjoy watching the chimps "but enjoy even more the feeling that they're

so happy they're not chimps, that they love themselves as they are."

Alon believes the debate in Israel sparked by Lapid has missed the opportunity of examining the issue seriously. "Israelis in Berlin have become a symbol, used according to the needs of the news item, instead of being



portrayed as a community with questions, complexities and nuances - all these superfluous details that make everyone's life a multipiece puzzle, whether they live in Berlin, Tel Aviv or anywhere else."

Her personal experience is probably different from the many Israelis who chose Berlin because of the hardships in Israel, or exasperation over government policies. "We didn't move here because we had a hard time in Israel or due to difficulties," she says. "I didn't come here for the lower rent or low-priced supermarket. I moved for the experience, the adventure; to satisfy the

will to broaden my horizons."

After two years in Berlin, Alon established Spitz in order to connect the local German and Israeli communities. The magazine's goal isn't to keep the community in an isolated bubble, she says, but rather to "serve as a bridge for Hebrew speakers in the Berlin landscape." The name Spitz (literally, sharp tip) is one sort of connection: "It's a word that moved from German - and some claim from Yiddish - to Hebrew."

Alon is yet to find the financial model that would secure future issues of the magazine, which is currently based on the work of 50 individuals - writers, photographers, editors and distributors - most of whom do not receive any pay. At present it is distributed free of charge to 250 subscribers, and a further 1,750 copies are distributed at Jewish and Israeli businesses throughout the city. One can pick up a copy "in synagogues, at the embassy, at the Jewish Museum, in hummus restaurants, but also in German businesses with Israeli clients, such as the cafes in the Prenzlauer Berg. Spitz is a place that makes you feel at home. It's the media equivalent of eating hummus abroad."