



Impact Objectives

- Advance research on German and Jewish history through academic discussion and the critical exchange of ideas and views
- Foster dialogue between academics working on German and Jewish history

Building a common language

Amos Morris-Reich is Director of the Bucerius Institute for Research of Contemporary German History and Society. Below, he discusses his important work fostering sustained research collaboration on contemporary German and Jewish history



Can you firstly introduce yourself?

My academic background is in Jewish history and German history and since

my dissertation I have been working on connecting these both to the history of science. If I had to explain in one sentence what I'm interested in and what my driving question is – the question that underlies and organises most of the diverse things I have published – I would say that it relates to the ways science affected Jewish history in the 19th and 20th centuries (although clearly they come in union and influence is reciprocal, without neglecting the impact of Jewish history on science, for Jewish history the former is more important).

What is the importance of the work of the Bucerius Institute for Research of Contemporary German History and Society at the University of Haifa?

One of the achievements of the Bucerius Institute – alongside a handful of other institutes in Israel or Germany – is to contribute to the establishment of a historical 'language' which is shared by Israeli and German historians working on German and Jewish history. Of course there

are individual differences in values, views, and interests between historians, but the effect of the Bucerius Institute as a platform for continuous and sustained research collaboration is that the 'language' of German and Israeli historians is the same. If there are differences they are no longer the result of German or Israeli background. I think this is an enormous achievement. This is apparent if one compares the situation today with that only two or three decades ago. One implication is that German and Israeli historians sometimes have more in common with each other than with their respective national publics.

In what ways does the Institute's work impact on society?

The main objective of the Institute is to advance research on German history. And the main impact that it strives to achieve, and this is the way it should be, is academic, through the advancement of research, academic discussion, critical exchange of ideas and views, ultimately expressed in academic publications (which, if successful, open further questions and lead to further research and publication). In this sense its main aim is to foster academic dialogue between academics working on related fields. But at the same time we want events and publications to speak to a wider public as well.

From your perspective, what is the significance of looking at politically and ideologically charged subjects?

The subjects I find most interesting are those that are charged, because if they are charged they still contain something in them that is important to us because it still is part of our world and experience. I personally don't find that addressing such subjects from external viewpoints (by 'external' I mean external to the context of study) is very productive. A much stronger and more interesting path, in my view, is of entering into sometimes problematic contexts and subjects and trying to re-construe them on their own terms, from within, with their internal logic, structures, expectations and sought ends.

With a vast number of published works under your belt, what is your proudest achievement to date?

For me, it's more about how gradually the publications build up to something which is more significant than the separate publications, bringing together subject matter and forms of treatment together to show the extent of the importance of science for the understanding of Jewish history.



Exploring the complexities of shared histories

The Bucerius Institute for Research of Contemporary German History and Society is an innovative, well-respected hub of activity where some of the brightest, most inquisitive historical minds are dedicated to unravelling the complex relationships between German and Jewish history

The Bucerius Institute for Research of Contemporary German History and Society, which is based at the University of Haifa in Israel, was initiated by Professor Manfred Lahnstein, a former German Federal Minister of Finance and the first and only German and non-Jewish Chair of the Board of Governors. Established in 2001 with the goal of facilitating research in the field of German history, the Institute seeks to explain the complexities of contemporary German history through research, collective projects and analyses of the history of science, visual history, identity formation, and citizenship.

Bucerius Institute is one of two Institutes outside of Germany supported by funding from the Hamburg-based Ebelin and Gerd Bucerius Zeit Foundation. Also playing a major role in the University and with ongoing support for the Foundation is Lahnstein's wife Soja Lahnstein-Kandel, Chairwoman of the Board of the German Friends Association and Vice Chairwoman of the Board of Governors of the University of Haifa, and Professor Michael Göering, Chair of the Board of Directors of Zeit Foundation.

UNRAVELLING CONCEPTS

Professor Amos Morris-Reich is Director of the Institute and also works in the University's Department of Jewish History. In his work he strives to connect Jewish history and German history to the history of science, exploring the ways in which science affected Jewish history in the 19th and 20th centuries. He highlights the scope and complexity of this work: 'The effects are so wide, diverse, pervasive, profound, far-reaching, dramatic (and tragic) and contrary that I don't think

it's possible to address them all in one single book-length study.'

According to Morris-Reich, the effects of this history involve categories of thought. This is underlain by the perspective of the subjects to be studied, and involves the way thoughts shaped how Jews were perceived by others and perceived themselves. It is also related to the ways these thoughts impacted relations between different kinds of Jews, or definitions of Jews, Judaism and Jewishness, or the relations between Jews and non-Jews. He explains the complicated nature of the concept: 'The impact of science on modern Jewish history is hard to grasp because it is part of the tissue of Jewish history and therefore seems self-evident. The perspective is therefore crucial for bringing to the surface a particular aspect of the impact.' To overcome this, the team at the Institute has sought to break the question into smaller, workable questions and bodies of knowledge that are based on a specific perspective each time.

POWERFUL PARTNERSHIPS

Since its inception, the Institute has served as a platform for the development of a wide research agenda with a collective scope. 'From 2009 the focal points of the Institute have been history of science and scholarship, visual history and history of photography, and history of relations between German and Jewish (particularly Israeli) scientists in the first decades after 1945,' explains Morris-Reich. The collaborative nature of the work is extremely important to this scientist and his peers: 'As Director of the Institute my central aim is to create a network of collaborations

with other scholars and institutes.'

According to Morris-Reich, the reason for this is twofold: first, the resources of the Institute are limited and such a network multiplies the volume of research that the Institute can be involved in; and second, it is only through collaboration that projects – the scope of which is by definition collective – can be advanced.

Among the Institute's valuable collaborations is a partnership with Professor Eli Salzberger, Director of the Haifa Center for German and European Studies (HCGES), a joint project of the University of Haifa and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), and also with Dr Scott Ury and the Stephen Roth Institute for the Study of Contemporary Racism and Antisemitism, which is based at Tel Aviv University. Furthermore, the Institute is a founding member of the International Consortium for the Research of Racism and Antisemitism (ICRAR), working alongside prominent scholars and directors of institutes from Europe, Britain and the US. This particular network is geared towards changing the study of racism and antisemitism in academia. In addition, the Institute engages in collaboration on a more ad hoc basis, as Morris-Reich elaborates: 'The collaboration with Dirk Rupnow on ideas of race in the history of the humanities, or with Dr Vered Maimon from Tel Aviv University and Professor Margaret Olin from Yale University on photography and imagination, are important relationships for us and our work.'

Morris-Reich works alongside Dr Sharon Livne, who is a Senior Researcher at the

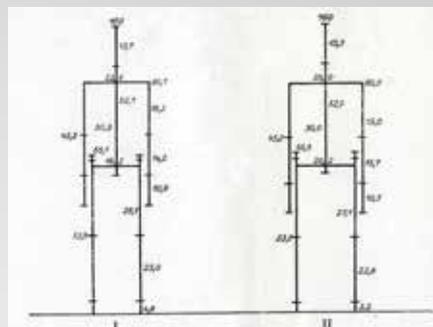
Institute, on joint projects about relations between German and Israeli scientists in the first decades after 1945. Morris-Reich himself has an extensive body of work that he can draw from. In his first book, entitled *The Quest for Jewish Assimilation in Modern Social Science* (2007), he explored the role of the establishment of social science fields of knowledge and academic disciplines such as sociology and anthropology on notions of Jewish assimilation. 'Focusing on assimilated Jews who were prominent in establishing their respective fields of knowledge in the German-speaking context, this study explored the ways that academic disciplines with their conceptual assumptions, guiding questions, kinds of data and evidence, forms of argumentation, and intended scientific and social goals defined how Jewish assimilation was conceived as a form of gradual disappearance of the Jews in anthropology and as a form of partial, incomplete position or situation within majority society in sociology,' he explains.

Morris-Reich's second book, *Race and Photography: Racial Photography as Scientific Evidence, 1876–1980* (2016) investigated the academic and political opponents of those who advocated assimilation and focused on the other end of the scientific and ideological spectrum. 'Here I took photography as a lead and followed the ways scientists and academic writers combined uses of photography for the study of race,' he reveals. Another strand of work under way at the Institute is a project on 'Photography and Ideologies of Vision' which shows how photography established and stabilised a certain class of objects, 'objects of the eye,' that depends on the eye more than other kinds of visual objects. Studying the impact of modern science on Jewish history by focusing on a technological medium is one of the main threads that run through the study concerned with 'racial type'. Morris-Reich explains that the modern notion of race is closely related to the emergence of modern science, and the attempt to study humans, culture and history in material scientific categories as belonging to, rather than somehow uniquely separate from, nature. 'Are there races? Can one speak about racial differences? What does it even mean to answer this question?' he asks. 'What's interesting is the status of race, because it is still effective as a component in reality even after it was negated conceptually. As a historian I think the 'grey area' that race involves can be very productive for historical investigation because it can tell us so many things about historical, sociological, and psychological processes and structures.'

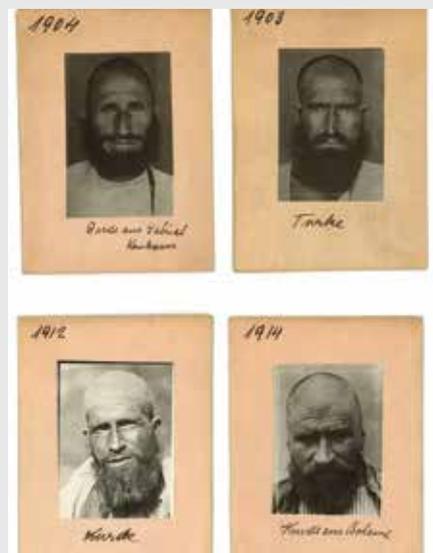
The challenge for historians is how to speak to a wider public without distorting or oversimplifying the findings of their studies

REACHING OUT TO SHARE KNOWLEDGE

According to Morris-Reich, one challenge is to bring the questions, assumptions and methods of inquiry of professional historians to the wider public. 'If historians don't speak in a way that is accessible to non-historians, it's often seen as somehow the shortcoming of historians. The challenge for historians is how to speak to a wider public without distorting or oversimplifying the findings of their studies.' To circumvent this, the Institute's events are open to and attended by the public and its strategy is to bring professional discourse to the wider public through discussion. In order to reach different audiences, Morris-Reich systematically publishes his work in both Jewish and non-Jewish journals, in historical as well as sociologically, philosophically or culturally orientated journals. The Institute also holds successful conferences and events.



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Project Insights

FUNDING

Ebelin and Gerd Buccerus Zeit Foundation, Hamburg

ABOUT THE BUCERIUS INSTITUTE FOR RESEARCH OF CONTEMPORARY GERMAN HISTORY AND SOCIETY

The Institute aims to reveal the complexities of contemporary German history through research, collective projects and analyses of the history of science, visual history, and history of photography. It promotes research in contemporary history as well as the social, cultural and political realities of Germany, and strives to foster greater familiarity and understanding of modern Germany among the academic community. The Institute is attempting to facilitate academic exchange between Israel, Germany and Europe.

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