

Moving gender: Home museums and the construction of their inhabitants

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Abstract

Home museums in Israel and Germany produce a representational space in which the public figure, usually a ‘great man,’ is effectively ‘dragged home’ to the so-called private sphere so as to make the domestic worthy of musealization. Based on three years of ethnographic research in nine such museums (four in Israel and five in Germany), this article shows that when the sphere most identified with women is represented through the life and work of the men who lived there, the place of the wife and children is sidelined, belittled, and at times concealed. In representing famous persons through material space and objects in the private abode, museal techniques determine which specific domestic areas, such as the kitchen and the bedroom, become the prime location of telling stories about women who lived in the house. They provide a shared perspective for visitors who find the stories about the wives endearing, recognizing home through them.

Keywords

Collective memory, gender in museums, home museums, museum visitors, museums in Israel and Germany, private sphere

In an interview conducted walking through the David and Paula Ben-Gurion home museum in Tel Aviv, the director stated that the room she likes the most is Paula’s bedroom : ‘the uniqueness of the room’ the director said ‘is that here, Ben-Gurion lost

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consciousness and was taken to the hospital. His last conscious moments were in this room' (14 September 2014). What makes the wife's room important is that the protagonist died there, showing that the *raison d'être* of turning a home into a museum is displaying the achievements of its protagonist, almost always a man. As we demonstrate in the following, the wife's past-presence, as well as that of other family members, is physically and symbolically removed in order to make room for the protagonist who was brought to the center of the home, often celebrated in the museums at 'his' home. Exploration of the stories of family and home objects with the focus on gender enlarges the scope of understanding heroic veneration (Young, 2015) to encompass the modes through which telling the story of a home involves containing or constraining the story of the woman who lived there.

Visitors' fascination with home intimacy, and the rare opportunity to peep behind famous people's closed doors, force home museums to face the challenge of maintaining a private appearance despite functioning as a public museum. In order to 'tell a home,' together with its recognizable architecture, material objects, curation and guiding (Albano, 2007), we found that visitors expect to hear about 'the woman of the house' by default. The literature on gender and domesticity likewise claims that women are associated with the private sphere in general (Pateman, 1988) and with the family dwelling in particular. Thus, following Scott (2010), we ask what stories of women are told, where and how in the home museums and in what ways those stories hold together museums' narratives, without claiming that those narratives are neatly written as one cohesive story. The emplotment of stories of women in home museums is not tightly crafted; not because the directors and curators failed to consider how to present those homes, but rather because telling the story of a home over time involves tensions such as that between work and family life, intimacy and childrearing, public and private persons.

We thus suggest that home museums present an intertwinement of public and private/intimate spaces that frame their stories in a process we call 'moving gender.' In this process, room is made for his-story at home, both in the sense of the history of the man as a domestic figure and in its taken-for-granted public, often national stage as formal 'history.' As we show, the women who were without exception at the center of everyday home activity are either erased, or their work at home and elsewhere bracketed in ways that render it insignificant for larger historical narratives. These museums both exemplify and enhance narratives that place the classical role of women as the signifiers of domesticity regardless of the life they had and work they did. This process also takes place in the single case of a home museum we studied that is dedicated to a woman (Käthe Kollwitz in Germany).

At the center of our article lies a theoretical question: what happens when material conditions that constitute public and private switch roles? We analyze the practices used by museum curators and guides within a museal space whose existence is justified by it being an authentic home of 'great men.' The men are placed at its center while the women are relocated as marginal and domesticated subjects. This 'moving gender' process is especially thunderous since those public figures often led extensive international, political, scientific, artistic and literary careers traveling abroad or working in their home office in solitude; hardly being 'at home' in their time's conventional way

The process we discuss is threefold: first, through architectural changes, object arrangement and storytelling, women and children are removed from the home, a practice we call 'making room – first act.' Second, the male protagonist and 'history' are positioned in the home, a practice we call 'making room – second act.' Finally, women are brought 'back home' – a practice we call 'making home' only to be placed in the traditional role of domesticated subjects. Put simply: even when men are brought into the sphere most associated with women, this is not a game changer – the gendered segregation of public and private remains intact and women, in most cases, are cast as neither 'working' nor 'public.' In the work of curation, this process unfolded over decades of arranging, adding, and omitting the home exhibits; rearranging its furniture, renovating and modernizing the premises while investing in the authentic home looks and composing its tour and educational plans. While we join the critiques of the private/public divide of Butler (1990), Fraser (1990) and Habermas (1991), which direct attention to the exclusion of women in the public sphere, we also consider the relative lack of attention to the second side of the pendulum, namely, how the spheres most identified with women change, when the story of men is presented in them.

We maintain that the realm of the private or personal can entail entire national communities (Herzfeld, 2016 [1997]). This may explain how feeling personal proximity and comfort in the home enables the same feeling of familiarity and comfort with national narratives (Forchtner and Kolvraa, 2017). We further claim that stories about women, their domestic chores and personal objects serve as narrative connectors which sustain national narratives presented in them as credible, by making them intimately relatable. While it is indisputable that home museums re-enact the stories that national museums tell about great men and their achievement for entire societies, the current state of home museums is not exclusively the story of the nation (Dekel and Vinitzky-Seroussi, 2017) but rather crafts as well as chafes with a domestic version that makes it possible to tell and retell national stories.

In the museums we studied, women are presented as a necessary and marginal annoyance without whom a home cannot be defined, told, experienced and understood. This analysis is furthermore significant since the home museums we studied (all except one) were opened to the public between the 1970s and 1990s during the second and third wave of feminism, at a time in which recognition and representation of women were central (Fraser, 2009). In this period museums strived to become more responsive to the interests of a broad range of publics (Hein, 2000) and turned to everyday culture (Macdonald, 2013). Thus, home museums could carry an epochal change or at the very least fulfill an expectation that women would be respected as laborers of the so-called private sphere and that their public life and voices would be heard. What we however find is that on the mnemonic stage, women matter only as marginal and domesticated subjects. This process reaffirms models of gender relations that were constitutive of the nation building projects in which women, even when granted civil rights, 'were confronted with new oppressions in the name of "custom and tradition"' (Yuval-Davis, 1998). Home museums offer a microcosm of an ongoing macro-social process in which women, already partially included in the job market, are used as guardians of 'custom and tradition' and are presented and experienced as such.

Gender, home museums and national memory

Museums constitute a space that educates and enacts what is perceived at a certain period as worth showing and remembering. In addition, they diffuse and judge ideas, exhibit cultural treasures, while maintaining and negotiating narratives, and collective memory (Bennett, 1995; Hall, 2006; Karp and Kranz, 2014; Proslar, 1996). Home museums are not unique in that sense. In fact, homes mark the original place of museums. Dating back to the early modern period, museums were located in spaces such as churches, palaces and tombs or in private homes where art and craft were enjoyed by the elites (Bennett, 1995). From the eighteenth century, museums left the private and privileged spaces and moved into the public sphere where they hosted collections of art, science and history and were opened to a variety of publics (Abt, 2011; Fyfe, 2006).

From the late nineteenth century, museums of many kinds proliferated in numbers and subjects exhibited (Bennett, 1988), and homes of famous people were opened to the public. It is only now that the focus in those homes is on the protagonists who populated them and on historical moments associated with them. One could say that a full circle has been completed from the first days of the museum to the later course of opening the private home for the public eye. Notwithstanding, the experience of visitors in those homes is different than visiting a regular museum as the boundaries between the protagonist's life and the visitors' understanding of his or her life and home are blurred (Dekel and Vinitzky-Seroussi, 2017).

Home museums embody a recognizable mode of the ways visitors reside in their own homes. Mallet claims that home 'became the focal point for a form of "domestic morality" aimed at safeguarding familial property, including estates, women and children' (2004: 65). According to Rochberg-Halton (1986: 196), home and homey things are 'the repositories of personal and collective memories'. Homes are places that 'spatialize' historical and cultural change. Materially, they symbolize and display status (Bourdieu, 1984; Newton, 2009), presented in room and object organization, observed in mundane actions and regularities (Douglas, 1991). But home also has some structure in time, and because it is the time and space of the people living in there, it has moral and aesthetic dimensions, which are applied to women and their domestic roles as well as to other residents. Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981: 123) claim further that the home 'becomes the most powerful sign of the self of the inhabitant ... and their time'. In our case, by positioning women in the kitchen and in the bedroom, and presenting them as fulfilling roles of gatekeepers and housewives, their stories get told through those of men. As a site of male preserve (Matthews, 2016; Sheard and Dunning, 1973), home museums are gendered spaces which partake in the rearticulation, and reiteration of social power.

According to Bounia, 'museums are a gendered space where women's production and history are under-represented and over-simplified, and where stereotypical notions of masculinity and femininity have been naturalized and perpetuated' (2012: 60). In fact, ever since the introduction of museums into social life, women (together with children and servants) have been represented in exhibitions and displays as marginal (e.g., Deithorn and Bacon, 2003; Østhus and Spring, 2016).¹ Even when the ethos of labor equality was publicly declared – as the was case for the Israeli Kibbutz mythological way of life – women were depicted as service workers rather than productive figures (Katriel, 1997).

While there is nothing to be lost in documenting an additional case of gender discrimination, the case of home museums takes us one step further since they are anchored in one of the most classic modern distinctions, that between public and private (Duncan, 1996; Fraser, 1990; Hall, 1994). While the distinction between public/men and private/women also substantiates the notions of 'family' and 'domesticity' (Weintraub, 1997), it in no way implies space and gender equality. Honig (1994) claims that private and public spheres are not separate and autonomous; rather, she argues, they interact and constitute each other (see also Mill and Mill, 1970; Pateman, 1989).

Adopting Weintraub's analysis of the public/private divide (1997), we apply dramaturgic and feminist approaches, which study the 'cultural and dramatic conventions [that] make [the public realm] possible' and see the private as the realm of personal life, family and domesticity (Weintraub, 1997: 7). The feminist approach enlarges the understanding of 'the distinction between "private" and "public" to include the distinction between family and the larger economic political order' (Weintraub, 1997: 7). West and Zimmerman (1987) claim that gender is a routine accomplishment performed and embedded in everyday interactions. Within this frame, home museums serve as the ultimate example of the making and remaking of gendered divisions of public and private, and their representation as routine performance. Through this case we can deepen the sociological understanding of how patriarchal order operates and persists in tourist imaginaries (Salazar and Graburn, 2014) and the ways through which they shape and are reflected in memory.

Data and methods

Germany and Israel are two societies that differ considerably in family characteristics and in mothers' employment behavior (Lewin-Epstein et al., 2006: 1150). In Germany, there is a gendered division of labor in which women's work belongs in the domestic or so-called 'private' sphere and men's in the public sphere. Mayer and Rössler (2013) demonstrate that, until recently, despite the expansion of public childcare, support of equal childrearing between family partners and increase in parental allowance, family policies did not adjust to the various family forms, leaving less choice for individuals who chose to have children. In Israel, the weight given to marriage, childrearing and the nuclear family is immense among both Jewish and Palestinian citizens (Frenkel, 2008; Izraeli, 1997), resulting in pressure on women both to be the central caregiver and be employed. Having children is further viewed as crucial for a fulfilled life among individuals and couples (Hashiloni-Dolev and Shkedi, 2007). At the same time, public and private childcare arrangements are offered from the age of three months. And indeed, the rate of working women in Israel who have young children is high compared to European countries (Bowers and Fuchs, 2016). We contend that the unique juncture of home museums could have served as a platform for exhibiting, even celebrating, women's work or at the very least as an example where gender categories could be in flux. But as we will see, despite the social differences between the two societies in regard to gender roles, both countries display the same model of the family at home, based on exclusive female domesticity: both cultures in their home museums chose in the 1970s to portray women in quite similar ways as home makers.

Our case involves two societies that differ in national memory narratives and in commemoration enterprises of their recent and difficult pasts (see, for example, Vinitzky-Seroussi [2009] on the Israeli case and Olick [2005, 2016] on the German case). Germany and Israel also differ in their commitment to social cohesion in cultural memory projects (Assmann, 1995; Handelman and Katz, 1998) and in the modes through which gender, migration and other alterities appear as more and less significant (Rothberg, 2009; Rothberg and Yildiz, 2011). That said, Germany and Israel undeniably share a self-consciousness concerning collective memory, stemming from the Holocaust, expulsion and exile. Moreover, historical and physical ties between some of the protagonists at the homes we studied, such as the close work and personal relations between Adenauer and Ben-Gurion, as well as those between Einstein and the Weizmanns, made this particular comparison especially rich. Be that as it may, as we will shortly demonstrate, both cultures in their home museums chose to depict women as home makers.

We define a home museum as a heritage site in which famous persons lived and which is open to the public as a partial or full reconstruction of a home.² The homes we studied belonged to politicians, artists, scientists and authors. In Germany we studied: (1) Konrad Adenauer's House in Rhöndorf.³ Adenauer (1876–1967) was the first Chancellor of West Germany (1949–1963). He had moved into the house with his second wife, Auguste (Gussie) Zinsser (1895–1948), and five children. Auguste Adenauer studied arts and music. (2) Bertolt Brecht and Helene Weigel House in Berlin: Brecht (1898–1956) was a poet and playwright, and the founder of the Berliner Ensemble Theater in East Berlin; Weigel (1900–1971) was an acclaimed actress and director of the Berliner Ensemble. (3) Albert and Elsa Einstein's summer house in Caputh: Einstein (1879–1955) was a theoretical physicist, awarded the Nobel Prize in 1921. Elsa Einstein (1876–1936) was his second wife. She studied languages and acting and was active in Jewish charities.⁴ (4) Goethe's House in Weimar: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832) is the most acclaimed German poet, writer and a statesman, associated with Romanticism;⁵ Christiane [Vulpis] von Goethe (1765–1816) was known to love theater and dance. (5) Käthe Kollwitz House in Moritzburg: Kollwitz (1867–1945) was a celebrated woman artist, painter and sculptor in Germany, and a hero of the GDR. When Kollwitz moved to the house in Moritzburg in 1944 she was already a widow. Her husband Karl Kollwitz (1891–1940) was a physician.

In Israel, we studied: (1) the two homes of David and Paula Ben-Gurion in Kibbutz Sde Boker and in Tel Aviv. David Ben-Gurion (1886–1973) was Israel's first Prime Minister (1948–1953, 1955–1963) and is considered the founding father of the state. Paula Ben-Gurion (1892–1968) was a surgical nurse in New York City. After marrying and moving to Israel she gave up her career. (2) Chaim and Vera Weizmann's home in Rehoboth: Professor Chaim Weizmann (1874–1952) was Israel's first President, an acclaimed biochemist and President of the World Zionist Organization. His wife, Dr Vera Weizmann (1881–1966) was a physician, established several healthcare clinics and was the co-founder of Women International Zionist Organization (WIZO). (3) Shmuel Yosef and Esther Agnon's House in Jerusalem: SY Agnon (1888–1970) was an author and received the Nobel Prize in literature in 1966; Esther Agnon (1892–1968) abandoned her plans to be a teacher to serve as his typist (Laor, 2008).

The women at the center of our study include those who had gained public recognition professionally (Kollwitz, Weigel, Weizmann), those who gave up paid work and were known as their husbands' gatekeepers (Ben-Gurion) or personal assistants (Agnon), and those whose biography beyond marriage and family history is absent from public records (Goethe, Einstein and Adenauer). Each home museum we studied was directed by a woman and run by a modestly sized staff. While some might be considered relatively large or luxurious for the time and place in which they functioned as homes, as museums they suffer from many spatial constraints and were certainly not purpose built for being opened to the public. Home museums can be considered small institutions, receiving an annual number of visitors between 6000 and 100,000. The visitors consist of school children, soldiers (in the Israeli case) and tourists (both local and international). From time to time special dignitaries paid a visit to the homes and special programs were offered on holidays (such as Independence Day in Israel or the birthday or day of death of the protagonist in Germany). Each home, except for Goethe's in Weimar, offers daily guided tours. Each offers special seminars, lecture series, conferences, screenings of relevant movies, art workshops and the like. Each has a small gift shop hosted in or adjacent to the home where postcards, albums, books written by and about the protagonist and other memorabilia can be purchased.

Home museums in the cases we studied by definition belong to individuals who were part of an elite. In this context we used the following criteria for selecting the home museums: variety of professions, locations, types of institutional activities and volume of visitors. The research was conducted between 2014 and 2016 and included in-depth and semi-structured interviews with directors and guides, and participant observations of 10–30 tours in each museum. We observed special educational programs and events. We analyzed the presentation of objects and stories told about them in guided tours. We further conducted post-visit questionnaires with visitors of all ages and sampled entries in the visitors' books.

Making room, making home: Men, woman and home museums

The 'invisible work' (Daniels, 1987; Hatton, 2017) performed by the protagonist's wife often foregrounds the story of the home and thus makes the home recognizable to visitors. Curators, architects, directors and guides at home museums in both countries met the challenges of telling a home as a private stage for larger-than-life history by using three interconnected practices: first, they remove or sideline the women and children from the curated space, a practice we call 'making room – first act.' Second, the protagonist is brought to the home – a practice we call 'making room – second act.' Third, in a practice we termed 'making home,' the wives' place at home is re-established. However, now they are acknowledged within the bounded roles stereotypically given to women. By the same token the opportunity for switching roles and intersectionality is nullified. Thus, precisely and only through the act of 'making home,' the women's role as home makers is sealed as in a photographic negative of social convention.

Making room – first act

Whether the women who lived in these homes had careers or not, relied on paid help at home or not, they were responsible for the home and the family: they set up and renovated the home, raised children, took care of everyday chores and hosted guests. Moreover, all of the women discussed wrote letters and some kept diaries. Some were active in their profession, outlived their husbands and continued living alone in their house years after their husbands passed away (Weizmann and Weigel). In other words, there were ample original home artifacts, spaces and texts that were associated with ‘their’ women that could enlarge the frame (or at least not shrink it) through which women could be presented and understood.

Making room for the protagonist was achieved by active redistribution of the museal space and removal of artifacts which historically belonged to other family members, and in the kind of stories told to visitors. The room of Ben-Gurion’s daughter is a telling example of this practice. The room is very central to the visit but its public significance is produced spatially and temporarily as the ‘Army room.’ (1) Temporally, it shows and tells how during the 1956 War Ben-Gurion used this room as military ‘headquarters.’ For the sake of creating a shelter, the window was bricked up, and was intentionally kept so after David Ben-Gurion’s death when the house was turned into a museum. (2) Spatially, the room was transformed into the Israeli army memorabilia room where visitors can see gifts that the Ben-Gurions received from army units. The decision to make it an army mausoleum reflects Ben-Gurion’s esteem for the Israeli army as well as temporally anchors the room in the 1950s. This decision allows the daughter and the family more generally into the story only insofar as they are implicated in the larger historical narrative of the heroic father.

The same kind of making room logic is played out in Adenauer’s house, where the children and wife’s private rooms are not included in the guided tour. The story told about Adenauer’s second wife is about her being tortured by the Nazis and her later suicide attempt. The representation left of her is a picture in a family tree located at the entrance to the house. However, a story of hardship during war is evocatively told, but from the perspective of Konrad Adenauer who used the time to tend his garden, and to focus on inventions such as a vegetarian sausage. Perhaps the most telling is the story of Agnon’s house where the space was redesigned as the home was opened to the public. To the great dismay of Agnon’s son,⁶ much of the first floor and all of the family space that included Esther Agnon’s and children’s rooms were erased and turned into a lecture hall, which presents an exhibition about Agnon’s life, the Nobel Prize in literature he was awarded and his works.

The stories told, or absent, during guided tours are also a form through which women are driven out from the home or marginalized. During the tour at Einstein’s home, visitors are confronted with a narrative template of men, bigger than life, that is used in order to shrink the protagonist to human measures. Elsa Einstein is presented as a ‘familiar’ annoyance. Albert Einstein, the Genius, appears funny and affable, his wife is portrayed as a burden:

Guide (man): He could not sail well. ... I can only imagine how Elsa pulled her hair as Albert said ‘yes, I’m going to sail for a short while, honey.’ Ran the way down here to his boat ... And from here he would sail off happily. He once said, that there are two things that would prevent him from working. Have you heard what they were?

Visitor (woman): well, perhaps playing the violin?

Guide: The violin did not distract him. 'The heat and my wife' (*a visitor laughs*). For the wife he had the sailing and [for the heat] walks in the woods. (guided tour, 31 October 2014)

Presenting Elsa Einstein as a noise-producing annoyance at home, both home and roles of family members become intimately relatable to the visitors, together with the time in which the couple lived. The case of Vera Weizmann provides an example of a more inclusive approach, as at the entrance to the home is an exhibition layout where one can see documents that were signed by her and see mention of her public work. Still the most detailed version of her life and deeds is shared not during the regular tour but on a special one, titled 'In Vera's Salon' – alluding to her social skills (rather than her public career), physical appearance, and her volunteer work. Moreover, this particular tour is occasional while the regular one focuses on Chaim Weizmann.

Making room – second act

In the process of turning the homes into museums the protagonists are 'brought into' the center of the house through artifacts and stories. The home of Ben-Gurion in Tel Aviv is probably the ultimate example of this process. The walls of the corridors that used to lead to Paula Ben-Gurion's bedroom, his daughter's room and to what used to be her bathroom (which was turned into the director's office) are now covered with dozens of photos of Ben-Gurion with distinguished guests and various diplomas and honors he received. Thus, for example, one can see a photo of Ben-Gurion with Harry S Truman, then President of United States, and one with Adenauer. Many of the pictures had never been on the walls while the family lived there. Under the photos vitrines (glass display cases) have been placed. In those vitrines, letters and other documents written by David Ben-Gurion are on show. These documents mark historical moments and the recognition Ben-Gurion received as the founding father of the Israeli state. During a typical guided tour of the home, it is stated that the vitrines were not part of the house when the family lived there and were added when the house was opened for visitors a year after David Ben-Gurion died on 29 November 1974. Similarly, gifts from the Pope, from Churchill and others are present in Adenauer's house in an exhibition that visitors enter before taking the home tour.

Unlike the rest of the home museums we studied, the protagonist of Kollwitz House was a woman. In her case the techniques of 'making room' by removing the women are not used. Notwithstanding, she is positioned within a frame in which her success was made accountable (Butler, 2005) because of the men in her life, compatible with the 'second act' of the 'making room' technique. This is even more significant since she moved to the house on her own after her husband died. However, in guided tours, a central part of the narrative is allocated to three men in Kollwitz's life: first her father, then her husband and finally her son. Her father is portrayed as the one who discovered her talent and without whom she could not have envisioned herself as a painter. Take the following quote from a guided tour:

Guide (woman): Käthe started very early to draw, liked very much doing it, like every child. But she had a big talent and her father realized that and decided to support her by private lessons so

she would be able to study. At that time women were not allowed to study in art schools and her father paid a lot so she could become a great painter. (guided tour, 4 November 2015)

Kollwitz's husband is depicted as the one who supported her international career. Her son is the one who edited and published her diaries. While the importance of the men in her life may be unchallenged, and while her granddaughter, Jutta Bohnke-Kollwitz, also published her diaries and was responsible, with others, for the opening of the Kollwitz museum in Köln, the framing of the Kollwitz story by three men is significant on two accounts: first, while one would expect to find a woman at the center of a home where she lived alone, the visitors encounter men as taking the central role in making the woman who she turned out to be. Second, the same kind of depiction of women is not made in any of the other home museums, and there is evidence that these women played a role in their husbands' life and career.

Relocation: Making home

The scripts written for what has been perceived as important were 'written primarily by men, for men, and about men' (Nagel, 1998: 242–243). This is certainly the case in our research where the overwhelming majority of the home museums are homes of men who lead or were paramount in their societies' constitutive national moments⁷ and are all considered national heroes. However, the main attraction of home museums is their ability to contextualize the protagonist in a domestic sphere and that sphere consisted of a spouse and often a family. According to Fraser (1990: 73), the 'rhetoric of domestic privacy seeks to exclude some issues ... from public debate by ... familiarizing them; it casts these as private-domestic or personal-familial matters in contradistinction to public, political matters.' In other words, when the private is discussed – often it is the private life of women or some interaction between the wife and the protagonist. After being driven out of the home or into its margins, the women are brought back. However, they appear mostly in their traditional role of housewives, gatekeepers, personal secretaries and emotional laborers.

See, for example, the beds of Dr Vera and Professor Chaim Weizmann (Figures 1 and 2).

The beds were curated so that visitors can imagine the public man, wearing a British top hat (marking out formality of dress) and holding a cane, leaving the house, while his wife's depiction is through a fluffy pink bed jacket, draped over a jewelry box, alluding to the imagined sleeping, adorned body of a woman. This presentation makes it hard to picture Dr Vera Weizmann's public work as a physician and the co-founder and treasurer of the Women's International Zionist Organisation. Notwithstanding, there was a sexualization of the woman's presentation and belittling of the significant public contribution Vera Weizmann had in fact made. This was also the case in other homes we studied. For instance, in tour guides and other public biographies, one can learn that Paula Ben-Gurion was an angry gatekeeper. She is described as a 'barking' at his future biographer as she came to interview David Ben-Gurion. He, by the way, welcomed the author 'glowingly' (Shapira, 2015: 9).

While on a tour of the Weizmann house we were given Vera Weizmann's recipe for *Latkes* (potato pancakes), it is also necessary to note that a more elaborate narrative of



Figure 1. Vera Weizmann's bed.
Photo by Irit Dekel.



Figure 2. Chaim Weizmann's bed.
Photo by Irit Dekel.

Vera Weizmann's life and achievements is in fact exhibited in what used to be the foyer of the house alongside Chaim Weizmann's family history. Meanwhile, the staff at Goethe's house admit they know close to nothing about his wife. Therefore, they designed a pink room in which they exhibit 'a collection of family heirlooms and contemporary portraits of Goethe's marriage to Christiane Vulpius and their family' (audio guide).

Women's subjectivity is acknowledged only through its confinement to specific gendered roles. Women are also shown to have possessed some wit and to be practical, as in the following anecdote told in Agnon's house. Agnon 'was upset that the municipality decided to rename the street where he lived from Ezekiel [the prophet] to Klausner [professor of the history of literature whom he didn't like] so he rushed out of the house, crossed the street and yelled at the worker: did you ask the prophet? and only Esther ... who knew how to calm down her husband, approached him and said: "Agnon, at last you can step on Klausner and he will never step on you.'" And this is indeed what calmed him down and the name of the street was changed' (guided tour, 28 April 2015). Even when the story presents a multidimensional picture of the 'woman of the house,' visitors still get an image of a woman as a domestic and private being, bound to her home, performing necessary emotional labor for her husband and the family.

The same reasoning is at work in guided tours in the Weigel and Brecht house. While Weigel is accurately portrayed as a successful actress and theater director, much of the narrative in her part of the house takes place around her bed and the kitchen. In an anecdote that echoes the story told about Einstein's wife, the guides (women) tell the following by her bed (Figure 3):

She laid with her legs up and she worked from bed with actors from the Berliner Ensemble theater. But she was a great cook, and you can see the mushroom by her bed as a sign. Everyone liked her mushroom dishes and Brecht was the only one who did not want to eat them because he was afraid he'd get poisoned. (25 April 2014)

Representing women's work and rest at home does not imply a more balanced presentation of their experience (Mayo, 2003). Whether the society involved sanctifies the family or not, gender ideology as well as home museums' tendency to show nostalgic, apolitical domesticity (Christensen, 2011) might explain the similar symbolic emphasis on domesticity which rests on unequal gender roles in the museums we studied.

In observing the variety of stories about women in home museums, it is important to remember that the 'relocation' of women is not an aim in and of itself. Rather, it is part of a process which is rife with conflicts regarding how to tell a home, reflecting the wish to make the visitors 'leave the house with an experience of visiting home,' as the director of Ben-Gurion house in Tel Aviv (1 February 2014) explained. From the accounts of the directors, the guides and the visitors, women hold the kind of story visitors seek when visiting a home, and they provide such stories within a home-like atmosphere (Dekel and Vinitzky-Seroussi, 2017).

However, in addition to the popular stories that directors and staff confirm, there is some reflective unease (Macdonald, 2009) about the narratives they portray of the women at home. 'She was different,' states a female guide about Vera Weizmann, 'she was a character ... she is not just, mmmm the one who enabled him ... his Zionist



Figure 3. Helene Weigel's bed.
Photo by Irit Dekel.



Figure 4. Agnon's dining table.
Photo by Noam Keren.

breakthrough. More important is that you leave understanding a character that is more complex' (guided tour 12 December 2014). This reflexive position could lead to a narrative change – a possibility we return to in the conclusion.

Let us finally look into the kitchen and dining area as museal spaces. A pertinent example is the one in Agnon's home. A dining table is set for one (Figure 4). The wife either never sat to eat, never sat to eat with him, was there to serve him or even if she (or other family members) sat down with him, this was too insignificant to show.

The process of 'making home' by and for the wife thus completes a well-rehearsed narrative – narrated mostly by women guides – about domesticity in home areas designated for 'her' or in stories that position her alongside her husband and family.

Concluding remarks

The homes we studied were unique already during the lifetime of their protagonists in that they mixed the private and public personae of famous figures. Thus, the boundaries between private and public had already been blurred, and certainly were blurred when they were opened as museums. However, we inquired about the mode through which the transformation occurred: to sustain a homely atmosphere, the museums presented social conventions that make home believable, by positioning women as marginal and belonging to the private sphere. As we demonstrated, the technique that made the home relatable for visitors – *moving gender* – consisted of three steps. First, family members and activities central to the home were either sidelined or driven out altogether. Second, events that took place outside the home were brought into the home museum. Finally, women were 'relocated' to typical female roles in order to make it a relatable home.

The absence of women from nationally shared historical narratives is often, falsely, justified by claims that women seldom participated in commemorated events such as wars, literary circles and the like.⁸ Home museums, however, could offer a different trajectory; for these are spaces that were clearly lived in and managed by women and thus could tell a more robust story which includes and discusses their perspective, their 'invisible work' in and out of home (Hatton, 2017). More generally, as Giles (2002: 23) claims, 'Any attempt to write the histories of women's subjectivities requires an engagement with the ways in which the raw materials of lived experience are transformed into a coherent life narrative.' Our study reveals that on the mnemonic stage, even when or precisely because the context is a home, lived experience is not transformed into coherent life narratives. In this way, women are made visible solely as marginal players who maintain the aura of domesticity. Women, together with the walls, beds and interior spaces (the living room, the kitchen) to which they tended, make the place a home. That this representation is enacted at home museums in two societies that differ greatly, both in their modes of commemorating their pasts and in their perception of gender roles, is evidence of how home museums, even when they mark the 'woman of the house,' do so in a manner that excludes women from public life and negates them as social agents.

Most visitors to German and Israeli home museums lament the loss of great leaders and old times. Even if they were interested in the inequality between the men and the women, they are scarcely presented with narratives that could generate a discussion of the division of labor in the house in the same way leadership, science and genius are

presented. The narrative told in the homes can thus be described as seamlessly flowing. We suggest that it is tailored and accepted precisely as stories of the most traditional gender divisions, some marked by exploitation and deprivation, that serve as narrative nodes through which homes are told, recognized and understood.

Those narrative nodes enable visitors to make sense of the inherent contradiction in home museums: they associate 'public' men with the private sphere. The converse function, however, bringing the public sphere (associated with men) into the home, all the while marginalizing women, generates no apparent paradox. From this, we conclude that even when private and public spheres are seemingly mixed, transferring women from the center of the home does not necessarily enhance the credibility of her public presence. Her work and role either stays invisible or becomes visible in a domesticated manner. By the same token, placing the protagonist in his home may add a layer to his presentation – a layer with which visitors can identify – but it certainly does not change the way gender relations and understandings are presented. According to Lewin Epstein et al. (2006), Israel and Germany differ considerably in family characteristics and in mothers' employment behavior. And yet, in the presentation of family life in home museums, they both display the same model of home, based on female domesticity.

In both cases we found the twenty-first century epistemic shift analyzed by Fraser 'from production to social reproduction – the forms of provisioning, caregiving and interaction that produce and maintain social bonds' (2014: 61). Here we draw attention to the fact these museums both stage and reproduce the market perspective and the values and priorities that come from that perspective. These are perhaps the building blocks of domestic morality (Mallet, 2004), and it can thrive only insofar as the men possess a voice, are present in different spaces and have fluidity and mobility. In opposition, women are not presented in work spaces, and so lack the same kind of mobility, voice and fluidity, which accentuates those very differences.

Home museums can and sometimes do offer spaces that will challenge the traditional public and private, male and female division, or even acknowledge the historical nullification of women, their choices and their voices. One example discussed by Christensen (2011), about the design of the Matilda Joslyn Gage⁹ house, shows that is it 'more than possible to utilize household material culture to deal with contentious ... historical subjects ..., and ... contemporary social issues' (p. 164), at the center of which is women's struggle for equality. The 1998 revelation of DNA tests which confirmed that the third President of the USA, Thomas Jefferson, and Sally Hemings, one of the enslaved workers on his estate, had had children together¹⁰ is another case in point. The information is presented in Jefferson's Monticello home museum, and the change in the narrative was praised for acknowledging the story and making museal room for it (Gable and Handler, 2006).

However, Israel provided a recent example of a missed opportunity for such change. In 2017 Levy and Miriam Eshkol's home museum was opened in Jerusalem. Levy Eshkol was the third Prime Minister of Israel (1963–1969). His wife, Miriam Eshkol, was a librarian in the Israeli Parliament when they met. Their dining table is different from the one in Agnon's house as the table is set for two rather than for one. Yet, Miriam Eshkol's work and life are not presented in the house outside the confines of the kitchen. Arnold de-Simine (2018) provides a case of a British home museum of a Victorian family in which a story of a non-elite and non-heteronormative family is presented.

Nonetheless, the home museum frames traumas alluded therein within a national bourgeois context.

We wonder whether the homes we studied will eventually use the stories of the women who lived there to problematize the roles and positions available to women in Germany and Israel and perhaps consider changing or enlarging the script. One such change could begin with presenting in those museums the voice of women, their writing and deeds. For instance, Vera Weizmann (1967: 92) documented the founding of the Women's International Zionist Organization (in 1920) in her autobiography. The first signs of such a change can be seen in a mini-conference organized by Ben-Gurion home museum in Tel Aviv to mark the 50th anniversary of the death of Paula Ben-Gurion (January 2018), dedicated to memories of her (ironically, all presented by men) and to a more general discussion of women who were married to famous figures (lectures given by both women and men).

As experiential and exhibitionary spaces become less material and more virtual, and since family structures, gender roles and distinctions undergo major changes, we wonder what the future of representing home and family might look like. For the time being, the hope that presenting men as part of the private sphere would yield more equality for both men and women seems to be a far cry from what actually happens in the construction of collective memory, at least in the case of home museums in Germany and Israel. As this study shows, we find ourselves on square one – only now both men and women operate within the same sphere; namely, the one we call home.

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Notes

1. In fact, this trend is also evident in the labor market in the museum world, where women are mostly represented at the lower level of the working pyramid and when they achieve the level of director, it is often in less prestigious museums (Heim, 2010).
2. For a detailed discussion of the concept of *home museums*, see Dekel and Vinitzky-Seroussi (2017).
3. The name of the homes we use are exactly the way they are known in public regardless of the fact that in one case the protagonist lived there alone (his wife was already dead), or with a wife and children.
4. Personal communication with Professor Hanoach Gutfreund (a physicist, Hebrew University, December 2015).

5. Goethe's home is the only one among those we studied which is also a national museum.
6. An interview conducted with Agnon's grandson (16 November 2016).
7. On the connection of masculinity and nationalism, see Nagel (1998).
8. It is clear that different mnemonic projects could have generated new protagonists and elevated other events, as Lerner (2005) shows.
9. Founding member of the National Woman Suffrage Association.
10. The Thomas Jefferson Foundation (2000) at: www.monticello.org/site/plantation-and-slavery/thomas-jefferson-and-sally-hemings-brief-account (accessed 25 December 2017).

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