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Visions of Utopia: Sweden, the BBC and the Welfare State

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Abstract:
Drawing on manuscripts and transcripts of BBC programme output, and material from the *Radio Times*, and the BBC's *The Listener* magazine, this article analyses radio talks and programmes that focused on Sweden in the immediate years after the Second World War when the Swedish model was widely popularised abroad. The article argues that BBC output entangled domestic politics and transnational ideas around post-war reconstruction and welfare. Sweden was used as a lens through which a modern welfare state could be visualised and justified. This was however Utopia in two senses since the image of Sweden presented was in itself a highly idealised representation.

Keywords:
BBC; 1940s; radio; welfare state; Sweden; entanglement

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VISIONS OF UTOPIA: SWEDEN, THE BBC AND THE WELFARE STATE

Introduction

In 1946, Marjorie Banks, a Features Producer working for the British Broadcasting Corporation (hereafter BBC), travelled across Sweden as a part of a new radio series on Europe. In the programme billing in *Radio Times* - which filled nearly a whole page and included photographs and an illustrated map over Sweden of her '1000-mile tour' - Banks described Sweden as a look 'to the future'. Sweden, according to Banks, had 'made it'; it had achieved the types of social reforms countries such as Britain in the aftermath of war were hoping for. As she expressed it:

> Sweden is one great Ideal Homes Exhibition and Industries Fair. But with this difference – people are already living with this attractive furniture and working in these model factories. It's not a case of ''Sweden can make it''; Sweden has made it.[1]

A look to the future was a theme that emerged already during the Second World War. Radio at this point was seen as an important social, cultural and political phenomenon, and the BBC took its role in post-war reconstruction seriously. Sian Nicholas has argued that throughout the war the BBC promoted both a vision of a ''Britain we are fighting to preserve'' and a ''Britain we are fighting to create''.[2] The latter point became even more significant after the publication of the Beveridge Report in 1942, which called for reform to social security and welfare, laying the foundation for a future welfare state.[3] By 1944 the vision of a welfare state was fast becoming the new political consensus and commitments to full employment, a national health service, education reform, and family allowances were on the agenda.[4] Furthermore, opinion polls confirmed that people saw housing as the most pressing post-war problem.[5] And, as Nicholas argues, for the BBC, 'reconstruction was becoming impossible to ignore'.[6] There was a new mood of economic and social radicalism, and programmes with idealist titles, such as *The World We Want* (1943), emphasised 'the voices of the people' and tackled topics such as employment, social security, housing and education.[7] At the end of the war, as Sonya O. Rose writes, a powerful image of Britain rising like a 'phoenix from the ashes', was heavily promoted and articulated in popular discourse unleashing a desire for an 'admittedly utopian vision of renewal'.[8] It was less clear, however, what this 'renewal' would look like and who would benefit.[9]

This article responds to the call for attention to the broader connections between 'domesticity, everyday life and political culture in reconstruction Europe.'[10] It explores how post-war reconstruction and the idea of a welfare state was conceptualised and imagined by the BBC through its circulation of images of Sweden. The examples discussed are concentrated in the period 1946-1947, a highly significant time, since they appear when the British Labour government's policies on housing and health were coming into practice, and a social democratic agenda for Britain was being prepared. In 1945, the Labour Party's manifesto *Let us Face the Future* tied in with much of the Beveridge Report; it promised to keep commitments to full employment; social security and a national health service; and to urgently address the housing problem. After a landslide victory in the 1945 general election, Labour began to implement many of its proposed reforms; the National Insurance Act, the National Health Service Act, and the New Towns Act, were all passed in 1946.[11]

The BBC painted a picture of Sweden as a place of aspiration and as a glimpse of a possible future; what a modern welfare state may entail and embody, and, importantly who might benefit. This sets the BBC aside from the British press, for example, which in this early period focused on Sweden's neutrality, military and economic issues, in particular the abundance of consumer goods.[12] This vision, however, was not a 'neutral' representation. In fact it was a rather *entangled* media representation that delicately commented on British domestic politics, through a highly idealised, politico-economic image of Sweden as the model - 'Progressive Sweden'- a model-image that in itself was a transnational media construction that emerged and was circulated abroad in the interwar years and further promoted in the 1940s.[13] Therefore 'visions of Utopia' in two senses.

The concept of *entanglement* is thus fitting when interrelating historical developments between different geographical spaces.[14] *Entangled history* or *histoire croisée* as developed by Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, is further useful here.[15] *Histoire croisée* is interested in historical crossings and intersections that move beyond national histories and instead consider European intercrossings and interconnections. Urban Lundberg and Mattias Tydén suggest that the ''Swedish Model'' a concept often linked to 'qualities such as political democracy, social welfare, and economic equality', was used as a basis for argument by progressive intellectuals within domestic debates in the 1930s (for example in France and the United States).[16] As I will argue, the examples analysed point to a similar objective albeit in Britain in the post-war period. At the same time the examples analysed demonstrate how

Sweden was promoted abroad and how this in itself was a highly curated image that followed an already established narrative.

Allan Pred notes that from the 1930s through the 1960s, Sweden served as an international symbol of modernity in which social welfare and social engineering infused daily life. The Swedish model of the *Folkhem* (or the 'People's Home') became widely known. This concept mainly driven by the Social Democratic Party in its building of the Swedish welfare state, aimed as Pred puts it, to create 'a big home for one and all, of a society peopled by rational, enlightened and socially responsible citizens.'[17] The notion of a Swedish welfare state would further be popularised internationally through the travels of the economist and social democratic politician, Gunnar Myrdal, and his wife, the politician and sociologist Alva Myrdal. Popular accounts such as American journalist Marquis W. Childs' book, *Sweden: the Middle Way* (1936), also helped to further, circulate these ideas internationally. It has been suggested, that by the 1940s, images of Swedish prosperity seeped through Western domestic propaganda setting out an idealised post-war future that 'linked modern domesticity to democratization and modern citizenship'.[18] Peter Hennessy suggests that in 1945, Labour intellectuals had their eyes on Sweden, and in particular the social reforms introduced in the 1930s.[19] Martin Francis study of the Labour Party's ideas and policies, further acknowledge Labour's links to Sweden. In the late 1930s Labour figures visited Scandinavia and were reportedly very impressed by Sweden's achievements. Francis suggests that although Labour saw itself as setting a distinctive and unique British approach to democratic socialism - rarely acknowledging foreign models - it did continue to show an interest in Sweden after 1945.[20] The Labour Party looked to Sweden for inspiration and was notably impressed by its achievements in welfare and economic modernisation.

One way to further elaborate on the 'entangled' approach is to consider the concept of *entangled media histories*. Drawing inspiration from *histoire croisée,* entangled media histories is interested in media or communication phenomena that reveal interrelations in a political, social and cultural sense.[21] This includes entanglements of media with other ''social systems'' exploring the role of media in relation to politics, culture and everyday life.[22] This conceptualisation further emphasises transnational/transborder histories assuming that Europe in the twentieth century did not consist of 'isolated societies' and that 'media helped to entangle these societies'.[23] These central features have informed the analysis in this article since post-war reconstruction transcended national settings.[24] Although the focus here is on

the BBC (and not the media as a whole) I hope to show that the examples discussed are of entangled ideas and policies of post-war reconstruction and the notion of a welfare state. The concept of entanglement is therefore useful as a metaphor when exploring the double meaning of these examples.

Finally, this study takes inspiration from Swedish scholarship on mass media and social reform in Sweden, which suggests that discourses around welfare and modernity were circulated and spread through interwoven intermedial connections, for example, via film, press, radio, exhibitions, and architecture.[25] Karin Nordberg has explored how the media, and more explicitly, Swedish Radio: 'in cooperation with the governing authorities and the academic and (primarily) radical elite', popularised the idea of a welfare state, 'with the ambition of both modernising and democratising the Swedish population en masse.'[26] Swedish studies thus show the important connections between politics, society, culture and the media, in the development and conceptualisation of the modern Swedish welfare state. Having explored the BBC, I would argue there are similar parallels to be made about post-war Britain, and here further research is needed. There is still little analysis of the role of the media in the early development of the British welfare state instead histories of economic and social policy have been foregrounded.[27] This article may therefore be considered as an attempt to contribute to what James Curran has described as a 'big hole in the field' of media history – namely the role of the media in the conception, formation and development of the British welfare state.[28]

The first section of the article will explore entanglements of British domestic politics and modern citizenship where Swedish citizens are represented as model citizens and Swedish design and housing as modern, stylish, democratic and accessible. But the examples also promote Swedish functionalist architecture and concepts such as ''Swedish Modern'' – a concept developed internationally in the 1930s – and are therefore not necessarily portraying ordinary and everyday life in Sweden. In the second section the analysis explores narratives about the perceived beneficiaries of the welfare state; workers, children and women, and how these were entangled with expectations on domestic policies and at the same time idealistic images of Sweden abroad. Foreign interest in Sweden was concentrated on social and economic topics, such as the relationship between workers and employers, living conditions in urban and industrial areas, and social reforms.[29] The Swedish Institute, a semi-official organisation founded in 1945 to facilitate the promotion of Sweden abroad, noted an increase

in foreign visitors between 1945-48, described as a ‘‘flood of travellers’’ putting increasing pressure on ‘‘popular institutions, hospitals, industrial companies’’.[30] These are also found in BBC content and are strikingly similar to other attempts in promoting Sweden abroad.

Modern Domesticity, Housing and Citizenship

Due to the extensive destruction of British cities during the Second World War, housing was central in political debates in the immediate post-war years, and the ‘modern home’ was represented as the ‘symbolic, and actual, centre of post-war reconstruction.’[31] Political and public attention was thus focused on housing, the household, its interiors, and on the responsibilities of the citizens themselves. In the period after 1945, ‘modern Swedish homes furnished with modest, well-constructed wooden furniture, plain walls and natural textiles, were commonly invoked in ways that drew connections between modern citizenship and modern aesthetics.’[32] In Britain (as in Sweden) the appearance, and the aesthetics of the home, was in itself seen by experts as a site for improvement.[33]

In March 1946, on the BBC Home Service (hereafter HS), furniture designer Gordon Russell explored what Sweden was doing in terms of ‘new ideas in furniture’.[34] Listeners to the HS were perceived by the BBC to be well educated or middle-brow. Russell who was a leading name in British design, was made the director for the Council of Industrial Design (COID), later the Design Council, in 1947 and he was a regular contributor to BBC radio. The COID was established by the Board of Trade in 1944, and its leadership was motivated by its ‘commitment to the democratisation of design’.[35] The COID was also driven by the belief of many of its representatives (including Russell) in modern design and that public taste could be improved, particularly through education and exhibitions as well as broadcasts.[36] Russell’s talk on Swedish design and furniture is informative, aspirational and educational in tone. The need to educate the general public about ‘good design’, was part of a broader discourse after the war. This article opened with the remarks: ‘‘Sweden can make it’’; ‘Sweden has made it’. These words were a clear pun on the *Britain Can Make It* exhibition that opened in September 1946 at the Victoria & Albert museum in London. The exhibition was organised by the COID and was mainly aimed to promote the British export market hence parts of the press gave it the epithet ‘*Britain Can’t Have It’*.[37] However, the exhibition was also used to educate the British public about modern design and the need for ‘good design’, and to further educate consumers, as Jonathan Woodham has observed, ‘about the social, aesthetic and economic benefits of design in everyday life’.[38] The BBC covered the exhibition in a range

of programmes and formats and the exhibition itself sparked a six part series on the BBC Light Programme (hereafter LP) called 'Designed for Living' opened by Alan Jarvis, the Public Relations Officer for the *Britain Can Make It* exhibition, who asked 'why should we know about design?'.[39] The LP was the post-war response to a lighter, and more popular BBC, where the majority of listeners came from a working-class and lower middle-class background, and where a large part of the audience usually consisted of women. The series focused on design in the home and further introduced key people, such as Gordon Russell, who would continue to educate listeners on good design.

Russell's talk on Sweden pre-dates the *Britain Can Make It* exhibition but was part of a discourse that aimed to educate consumers in modern domesticity. His talk was also reprinted in the BBC's *The Listener* magazine with accompanying photographs of a modern Swedish interior and Swedish 'package' (flat pack) furniture from *Nordiska Kompaniet* (NK).[40] One of the photographs shows a small wooden cabinet against a wall, and to the right of the cabinet, a glimpse of a long straight length of curtain with a geometric pattern. Russell described Swedish homes and the practicality and functionality of Swedish furniture and design. Compared to conditions in Britain, one key difference, he noted was the high status given to the architects: 'the architect has immense scope and prestige, not only in town planning, house and factory building, but in designing furniture, light-fittings and other things for the interior.'[41] He visited a furniture factory in Nyköping, likely to be NK's factory since it was based in Nyköping (and the company is referenced later in the talk and in the accompanying photographs). NK was one of the largest department stores in Stockholm at this point and manufactured its own furniture. It pioneered flat pack furniture, which meant a cheaper price for quality design. Russell explained: 'You buy each piece of furniture in a cardboard box, complete, ready for assembly […] and any intelligent person can put it together'.[42] He further concluded that the process of making these (by machine rather than by hand) meant that it was affordable, 'for people like you and me'.[43] Intrigued whether these 'standard types of furniture' produced 'standard rooms', he visited an exhibition at NK where four rooms had been furnished using similar units but with different softer furnishings, to his surprise all the rooms appeared quite different.

A focus on NK and modern design also featured in a BBC radio feature later the same year. Marjorie Banks, the BBC producer who visited Sweden in November 1946, told her listeners about her visit to the NK factory in Nyköping, although here linking Swedish modern design

with British tradition: ‘I’ve told you a little about Swedish homes and textiles. The furniture is even better with designs that are modern and yet owe much to the most beautiful furniture in the world – British styles and craft.’[44] Banks highlighted that even flat pack furniture had style, ‘design and craftsmanship aren’t forgotten’, even if mass-produced cheaply.[45] And a recorded extract with Elias Svedberg, followed while she was shown around the factory. Svedberg was an interior decorator and furniture designer who worked for NK. He developed ‘Triva’ – the first series of flat pack furniture for NK, which were also exhibited in London in 1946.[46] Svedberg had made his name at the New York World’s Fair in 1939 when the concept ‘‘Swedish modern’’ was introduced.[47]

Russell and Banks presented Swedish design and homes as modern, accessible and democratic – something that was aspirational and should be embraced. Flat pack furniture was stylish and did not produce ‘standardised’ rooms and interiors. It represented modern domesticity. At the same time, NK was one of the leading manufacturers, hence these examples tapped into an already established narrative about Sweden internationally. Light-coloured Swedish wooden furniture, monochrome wallpaper and curtains with stylish patterns was a look that dominated Swedish design in the 1940s and was internationally referred to as ‘‘Swedish Modern’’.[48] It did not necessarily reflect the average Swedish home.

Russell ended his observation of Sweden by directing attention back to Britain, and said that people abroad were deeply interested in Britain’s future: ‘[y]oung architects and designers asked about the London Plan, our housing problems, the new Council of Industrial Design and our utility furniture scheme’ and ‘[m]any of them felt this was one of the important social experiments of the war.’[49] A story was then told about a taxi driver he met in Stockholm.

> I was in a taxi at Stockholm with two architect friends. They were discussing where it would be possible to show me one or two occupied flats in the new blocks. The taxi-man overheard their conversation and said, ‘‘Why, I would like to show the Englishman *my* flat. It’s not far from here’’. I was delighted and he drove us to a new block. The stairs were of green Swedish marble and his name was on the door in neat metal lettering. He introduced us to his wife and showed us the balcony overlooking the lake where he ate his breakfast in the summer. They pointed out that many of the trees near had been left, making a pleasant lay-out. He even knew the name of the

> architect. We shook hands and I walked away musing. No…there was no doubt I was abroad.[50]

Whether this was a genuine story or just clever Swedish public relations is never disclosed. Nevertheless, the message was clear; in Sweden people were interested in Britain's ''social experiments'', and Swedish people had themselves showed an active interest in their own social experiment. The house-proud taxi driver had taken a keen interest in the planning and building of the flats – he even knew the name of the architect. It portrayed ordinary Swedish people as participating in the project of modernisation and therefore hinted that the British ought to as well.

This echoed Labour's vision of a 'responsible society'. Building the 'responsible society' meant to improve public taste and to build a community.[51] Herbert Morrison, a key Labour Party member, described in February 1945, 'the spirit of modern socialism as being a ''sober sense of social responsibility''.[52] There was a need for the British to become ''in spirit Socialist''.[53] As Fielding et al suggest, 'everyday social attitudes', needed to be changed by ordinary people taking part in decision-making and by doing so exercise control of their home, leisure or work life.[54] This ideal depended on the encouragement of the individual citizen to be actively interested and involved in the building and planning of this new society.

In *Window on Europe: Sweden*, the one-hour long feature written and narrated by Marjorie Banks, a similar example can be found. Banks met Mr. and Mrs. Alback from Stockholm, an airplane factory worker and his wife, who built their own home from pre-fabricated parts in the suburb of Bromma, 'and everyone in the suburb of Bromma did the same.'[55] In a recorded extract, Mrs. Alback explained how she and her husband did all the work and how the local community came together for support through the building process. She recollected how her finger got bruised by a hammer when she finished the inside on her own 'without help even from my husband.'[56] Banks further explained that the community was also building a day nursery for the children and a communal laundry.

Swedish housing was also explored in *Sweden the Middle Way* broadcast on the HS in June 1946, where husband and wife - writer Amabel Williams-Ellis, and architect and town-planner Clough Williams-Ellis - gave their impressions of Sweden. The title of the talk reflected Childs' idea of Sweden as a 'middle way' between capitalism and communism. The Williams-Ellis' were left-wing and active in left politics in the 1930s, when they also visited

Russia.[57] Amabel Williams-Ellis was the sister of British Socialist and Labour politician, John Strachey, who in 1946 was appointed Minister of Food in the Attlee government. Clough Williams-Ellis was also, later in December 1946, appointed Chairman for the Stevenage Development Corporation. Stevenage was one of the first 'new towns' being planned and built following the New Towns Act of 1946. Between 1946 and 1951 fourteen new towns were planned.[58] Whereas designers such as Gordon Russell belonged to a cultural elite, the Williams-Ellis' belonged to a political elite with close connections to the Labour government. The intention of their visit was: *'*to look out for ways in which the Swedes can give us any hints as to how to solve our own particular plans for living in cities.'[59] The talk provided key examples and visions of what Sweden was doing, and what might be expected – or at least what could be achieved – in British post-war reconstruction.

Amabel Williams-Ellis admired the measures taken to encourage and keep women in the labour force. In Stockholm, one way of achieving this was done through carefully planned housing arrangements: 'the provision of blocks of flats, specially designed to free the mother of a family who has skill which her country needs. These ''Collective Houses'' as they call them seem to me particularly worth attention.'[60] These collective houses, she explained, contained flats with a kitchenette, bathrooms and bedrooms, and communal facilities such as a dining-room; staffed day-nursery (for a small fee as with eating in the dining-room); a shared garden and two laundries (one was fully mechanised). The description of the housing arrangements matched the collective houses designed and opened in 1935 by one of Sweden's leading functionalists, Sven Markelius. Markelius, a modernist architect, developed this concept together with Alva Myrdal as a way of improving life for families where the mother was working outside of the home.[61] Amabel Williams-Ellis was impressed by Sweden's support for the working mother, and in particular how clever planning and architecture could be utilised. This might have been a solution in austerity Britain where women were still needed in the workforce due to the crippled economy. Between 1947 and 1949 Labour actually campaigned to encourage women to come back to paid employment (even married women). In Sweden, however, this type of housing was the exception rather than a rule since most married women were not in paid employment.

Clough Williams-Ellis, the architect and town-planner, described the trees, parks, flowers, and of course the forests and the lakes, and how cities like Stockholm have consciously planned for parks and green alleys. He visited a nine-story block of co-operative flats,

overlooking the city, astonished by the automatic lift, and that these flats were available for working-class people as well as other social groups. The aim, as he put it, was to mix 'everyone up into one community – bus driver and business man, clerk and Cabinet Minister.'[62] This example points to the concept of the 'neighbourhood unit'. For the Labour Party housing was a priority and the concept of the 'neighbourhood unit' became a key element in the building strategy of the new towns following the Act of 1946. The neighbourhood unit was based on an American concept and usually consisted of centrally located schools, parks and greener areas, shops and residential areas – that together would create a sense of neighbourhood and more importantly a sense of community spirit.[63] The British version, however, placed further emphasis on the interaction between people from different social classes. The key intention being that residents with different income levels should live together as a way to eliminate class division.[64] Significantly, this planning scheme that encouraged 'social connections and a democratic society' also became prevalent in Sweden in the 1940s, and Sweden was actually influenced by the British version.[65] The 'neighbourhood unit' would inspire the Swedish idea of the so called 'ABC City', short for *Arbete*, *Bostad,* and *Centrum* (Labour, Housing and Centre) – a concept popular after the war.[66] So, to some extent, Williams-Ellis legitimised a concept that was being implemented in British Town Planning following the Act of 1946.

Clough Williams-Ellis also noted how the industrial towns such as Sandviken - 'Sweden's iron centre on the Baltic' - was covered in lush greenery and 'has the most complete and elegant covered-in sports centre and social club I've yet seen: tennis courts, skittle alleys, concert hall, archery gallery, restaurants – what you will.'[67] Similarly to the other examples discussed he ended the talk by lifting out the importance of will-power and agency: 'they do seem to me to display an elegant efficiency, a gay commonsense, that, being achieved by a democracy of just pleasantly ordinary people, is most hopefully encouraging. We could do it all – if so minded.'[68]

Living in Utopia

Amabel and Clough Williams-Ellis provided in their talk a vision of what housing in a welfare state might look like and how clever architecture and town planning could transform everyday life for ordinary people. In the BBC's talks and programmes about Sweden it was soon evident who was benefiting from the social and economic reforms that 'Progressive Sweden' represented and what might be expected in a welfare state.

The beneficiaries of the Swedish welfare state were in focus in *Window on Europe: Sweden*, in which BBC's Marjorie Banks travelled across Sweden, from Stockholm to Östersund in the north, via Mora in the heart of Sweden, to Halmstad in the south. Banks had been in the company of two Swedish engineers, who helped make the recordings. The feature on Sweden was part of a series of feature programmes exploring European countries after the war with a focus on 'ordinary life.'[69] The feature contained a mix of scripted narration and recordings on location with local people and actuality. The programme files reveal that the BBC had already in July 1945 received an invitation from Swedish Radio to visit the country. It was further noted that the method for this series on European countries was to work with the public relations of the military authorities and with the local radio authorities, and a third possible contact was the press or radio officer at the British Embassy.[70] The script does acknowledge that recordings in Sweden were made 'with the cooperation of Radiotjanst [sic] Stockholm.'[71]The proposed features were not to be 'political commentaries, but straight-forward reports', with the aim 'to report what life is like and not to comment.'[72] Although the programme is not commenting on Swedish politics per se, it is nevertheless, highly political considering the British post-war context – and considering the very positive representation of Swedish socio-economic policies. This indeed followed the narrative of 'Progressive Sweden', which in the 1930s, 'captured the ideal of an era in which modernity was achieved through political reforms.'[73]

Banks did not only make connections between Swedish modern design and British traditions (as discussed earlier), in the feature she further drew the attention to similarities and ties between the British and the Swedish people: 'you feel that there are ties with the British people deeper than all the rest. The Swedish have a talented popular Royal Family, a great past, a social democracy, a love of the sea'.[74] Overall the feature portrayed Sweden in a very positive light. Utopian visions of Sweden were not new. For example, in April 1940, the synopsis in *Radio Times* for a feature programme called *The Face of Sweden*, described aspects of modern Sweden as: 'this great Northern democracy where poverty has been abolished, farming scientifically planned, and education carried on at the highest peak of efficiency.'[75] In similar vein, Banks narrated: 'In Sweden you won't find the obvious colour copy of the journalists – the sinister streets, the dustbowls and the slums, - but the ordered organised peace of a social democracy.'[76]

Once again Stockholm's blocks of flats were praised as they 'rise up from the pine and spruce beside the lake, chalky pink, dull sandy-yellow, pale cream, like giant sticks of candy planted among Christmas trees. Man and nature have worked hard to save them from monotony.'[77] Banks followed in William-Ellis' footsteps and continued her journey north towards Gävle, Sandviken and Hofors, towns of the Swedish steel industry, where she learned about workers' homes and lives:

> When I walked down the treelined streets of Hofors and Sandviken and saw the workmen's homes, dull pink and sandy-yellow houses in large gardens, I thought of the packed slums of our own industrial towns. There are no slums anywhere in Sweden.[78]

Einar Lundholm, one of the workers at a ball bearing factory in Hofors, *Svenska Kullagerfabriken AB* (SKF), described how in his spare time in the evenings he worked in his garden, or took his Ford for a drive. In the summertime he enjoyed swimming in a pond and every Wednesday he sang in a male choir. Banks travelled further to Gothenburg, to SKF's head office, to meet with a representative who explained the types of social services that were available to the workers. For example, free medical attendance and regular health examinations - '[t]he factory doctor is the family doctor as well' - and the workers and their families also had access to a 'Summer Home' - rent free.[79] Banks concluded: 'By his home, his summer cottage, his pension and his amusements, the worker in Sweden is bound to his factory and is content.'[80]

The feature did acknowledge that even Sweden was not without industrial unrest, however, this was quickly smoothed over, and not really explained or developed. Banks also acknowledged that Swedes she had met explained that Sweden was not without its squalor: 'in parts of Sweden there is a dirty Sweden' – and pointed to a few places in the South and the North - 'where families of ten live in two rooms with the cattle and pigs in a barn tacked on to the house. Anyway I didn't see any.'[81] This description of a 'dirty Sweden' almost retells the findings of *Lort-Sverige* ('Dirt-Sweden), a ten-part radio series and published book by Ludvig Nordström, broadcast on Swedish radio in 1938. *Lort-Sverige* described Nordström's journey through a Sweden where poverty, and lack of hygiene, particularly in the Swedish countryside were present.[82] After the war, when Sweden enjoyed an economic boom, and the pre-war ideal of a welfare state could be realised, this 'backward' side of

Sweden was to be abolished and her impressions appeared to confirm this. Banks observation though that no slum existed in Sweden was in 1946 an exaggeration. 'Dirt-Sweden' was not the desired projection in this utopian vision, as Banks made clear, this was nothing she had seen with her own eyes, as to almost challenge the claim.

Workers were not the only ones benefiting in this Utopia. Through her window at her Stockholm hotel, Banks watched the Children's Day celebration and parade (a Swedish tradition) and commented: 'This is the land of happy healthy children'.[83] And a park playground was described as typically Swedish and 'a good labour-saving idea for mothers.'[84] Recordings with children's laughter and play could be heard and a voice explained:

> This summer we have thirtyfour playgrounds like this in Stockholm parks, with a staff of about a hundred. Playleaders are in charge of every playground – qualified children's nurses who have the job of inspiring the children to play themselves, and all the playgrounds are equipped like this with pools, miniature football grounds, swings, chutes and so on. And there are cottages like this one here, with playrooms. All children up to 14 years of age can come. The small ones up to four years can be left in the special fenced court over there […] Their mothers just leave them and go away to do their shopping, and it's all quite free.[85]

This image was later further reinforced in publications such as the Swedish Institute's *Introduction to Sweden* (1949) where, '[P]laygrounds and recreational opportunities for the small children are standard features', in modern housing architecture.[86] Listeners were further told that most children progress through the educational system, with scholarships available for boys and girls at every stage, and many go through to university. Sweden, and Social Democracy, was not only presented as the land of 'happy healthy children', but also a land of social mobility.

Sweden's approach to housing and modern amenities made an impact on another speaker who appeared on *Woman's Hour* in December 1946. *Woman's Hour* was the BBC's flagship programme aimed at the housewife and broadcast on the LP from October 1946. Georgie Henschel, a contributor to *Woman's Hour,* talked about her visit to Sweden. Henschel was impressed by the practical and functional design of Swedish houses, in particular the good

kitchen arrangements. What impressed her the most, however, was the widespread availability of central heating: 'I must begin by telling that there, every house, hotel, shop, school, block of flats or offices, is centrally heated in winter.'[87] One reason for this, she explained, was the cold weather. She quickly added that Britain especially, suffered from a 'great deal of damp weather. And it does seem to me that some form of central heating ought to be an integral part of our homes of the future, and not just a luxury as it is at present.'[88] Her remark pointed towards a more equal and democratic society, where central heating should be available for the many not simply the few. Henschel continued: 'Oh, I know there are still many people who'll tell you that ''central heating is unhealthy''; but to me, they're rather like the people who, as little as fifty years ago, would have told you that ''bathrooms were unnecessary!''[89] She further explained that central heating does not need to be expensive or wasteful and referred to recent developments in Stockholm and in new industrial towns where one heating plant served several blocks of flats, even a whole street. She concluded the talk by describing how Sweden has harnessed the power of water through its many rivers and therefore electricity is more widespread and available, not just in towns and cities, but also in remote villages. This, she argued, made everyday life a lot easier for the Swedish housewife in keeping her home, clothes and family clean: '[T]he difference this makes to the cleanliness of everyday life is astonishing' and she finally remarked: 'I can't help feeling that we ought to do more in this direction. A point worth considering at the moment – we should all of us need to use far less soap.'[90]

It is worth pointing to the significance of a talk like this on a programme targeting mainly women, and in particular housewives. *Woman's Hour* often collaborated with voluntary women's groups and the programme covered current affairs and national politics, and it was perceived by the political parties, as well as the BBC, to have potential impact on women listeners.[91] In the post-war period voluntary women's groups were important for post-war reconstruction and influenced government policy on housing and defended the right for women to be involved in post-war planning.[92] Henschel's view of Sweden provides an insight into what future housing could look like, and especially, how this would benefit women. Arguably it therefore had political connotations.

A final example that paints a grand vision of what a welfare state may look like, and how families would benefit, can be found on *Woman's Hour* in 1947. As already mentioned *Woman's Hour* was a key programme and in the summer of 1947 several *Woman's Hour*

talks were focused on Sweden. In July, for example, 'Gardening in Sweden' focused on how the Swedes decorated their cities and houses with plants and flowers; 'Each block has its balcony and, almost without exception these balconies are made to look beautiful.'[93] In August it was Alan Ivimey, a regular contributor (and former presenter) to the programme, who told of his visit to a hospital in Stockholm. Ivimey's talk was about new-born babies being christened at this hospital and the novelty was that their mothers, suffering from influenza, could listen-in to the ceremony taking place via radio.

Ivimey's talk, however, appeared to be about the hospital itself, he spent a lot of time describing the new and modern building, which he referred to as, 'one of the medical wonders of the world' and 'the most enormous building I ever saw.'[94] The hospital was never named but he met with the Chief architect, Hjalmar Cederström, and further described the large white building as looking like blocks of flats, rising high above a cliff, which indicates that the hospital is Södersjukhuset completed in 1944. Södersjukhuset was built in a functionalist style, emphasising space and light. It was already well-known and was to be widely promoted abroad as 'the world's most modern in its provisions for treatment and its technical equipment.'[95] Ivimey explained how Cederström had a great struggle over many years to convince the Stockholm City council about his revolutionary ideas – describing him as a genius – '[F]or this is really more than just a hospital. It is a great centre of social service for a European capital city'.[96] Ivimey was amazed by the grandness of the entrance hall: 'The entrance hall – well, I don't want to exaggerate, but I should say there was room to park and wash down twenty motor coaches with ease. [...] There was a refreshment room, a magazine stall and a flower shop.'[97] Near the reception hall he noticed a small statue of a mother and a child, and ended with these poignant words: 'The little statue of the mother nursing her child was like the quiet goddess of this huge new temple of hope.'[98] In 1946, the National Health Act took hospitals into state control (it was not until 5 July 1948 that the new National Health Service was launched). From previously being a patchwork of private, voluntary-run and national - and charity hospitals, the new National Health Service was nationalised under the government, providing a free and universal service for all. This talk therefore seemed to offer a glimpse of what a new, and modern health service may offer, and again, more importantly, who would benefit from it.

These types of images, even the same geographical locations, can also be found in other attempts to promote Sweden abroad. For example, in *Sweden* (1947) an introduction to

Sweden for Americans, with photographs by Swedish photographer K.W. Gullers, readers were introduced to a workers' community near the porcelain factory in Gustavsberg, the 'modern, hygienically built main hospital in Stockholm (the Södersjukhuset)', and the steelworks in Hofors (SKF Hofors Bruk) and Swedish ball bearings.[99]

Conclusion

Inspired by the concept of entanglement this article has analysed BBC programming on Sweden in the immediate post-war period. The analysis demonstrates how the examples discussed were entangled media representations that connected domestic politics, and transnational ideas on post-war reconstruction and welfare.

Although the examples discussed were on the surface about Sweden, they nevertheless pointed to Britain, and were of a political nature considering the context of reception. Listeners were addressed – to borrow a phrase from Ylva Habel – as 'citizens, consumers, and patients'.[100] The examples analysed appeared at a time when the Labour government were setting out their social democratic agenda and Sweden was used by BBC staff, experts and contributors, as a lens through which a modern welfare state could be visualised and legitimised. Listeners were invited to look inside Swedish homes, equipped with modern amenities and modern design. Social groups such as children, women, and the working-class, were all benefiting from social and economic reforms. A central motif appeared to be to stimulate in the British listener a change in outlook and mentality. That in order to build this future, the citizen needed to take responsibility, something which the Labour government strongly encouraged. The Second World War, as Martin Daunton has observed 'indicated that men and women were driven by a just cause and not only by money' and 'Labour hoped to recreate the same sense of commitment after the war.'[101] It is tempting to suggest that the BBC was therefore aligned with Labour's project of rebuilding Britain. Certainly, there are some intriguing parallels here. But this is too small a sample to confidently suggest that this was the case. And, it is arguably a much more complex picture. What we see is a range of individual contributors – some more progressive than others - and some no doubt closer to the government than others - who all seem to share this desire for a post-war renewal, and the realisation of a new, modern, more democratic Britain.

However, this vision was a Utopian vision in two senses. The examples analysed were in themselves a highly selective and idealised vision of Sweden – 'Progressive Sweden' – an

image that was a construction shaped both from within and outside of Sweden. Companies such as NK, SKF and hospitals such as Södersjukhuset, were all part of a Swedish narrative; the success stories of Swedish Social Democracy, and Swedish modernism.

The concept of 'entanglement', therefore, 'may help to explore both a specific situation or event and a (transfer) process.'[102] Even if this analysis focused on the BBC it further begs the question of what visions or 'model countries' were used by the media, for example, in post-war reconstruction Europe. It is therefore evident that post-war reconstruction and notions of the welfare state should not be considered solely as a nation-bound history, rather it is one that ought to be explored within a wider analysis of European post-war reconstruction.

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Notes

[1] My 1000-mile tour of Sweden by Marjorie Banks', 8 November 1946, *Radio Times*, Issue 1205: 1 November 1946.
[2] Nicholas, *The Echo of War*, 228.
[3] The report is officially titled Social Insurance and Allied Services, however, often called simply the 'Beveridge Report', after William Beveridge, who was commissioned by the government to report on the future of Britain's post-war social security and reconstruction.
[4] See Addison, *Now the War is Over*; Hennessy, *Never Again*; and Jones and Kandiah, *The Myth of Consensus*.
[5] Fielding, Thompson and Tiratsoo, *'England arise!'*, 36.
[6] Nicholas, *The Echo of War*, 252.
[7] Ibid., 253.
[8] O. Rose, *Which People's War?*, 25.
[9] Ibid., 25.
[10] Betts and Crowley, ''Notions of Home,'' 235.
[11] Hennessy, *Never Again*, 119-183.
[12] Hale, ''British Observers.''
[13] Glover, ''Imaging Community.''
[14] Bauerkämper, ''Europe as Social Practice.''
[15] Werner and Zimmermann, "Beyond Comparison".
[16] Lundberg and Tydén, "In search of the Swedish Model," 36.
[17] Pred, *Recognising European Modernities*, 106.
[18] Betts and Crowley, "Notions of Home," 228.
[19] Hennessy, *Never Again*, 121.
[20] Francis, *Ideas and Policies under Labour*, 229.
[21] Cronqvist and Hilgert, ''Entangled Media Histories.''
[22] Ibid., 134-135.
[23] Ibid., 134.
[24]Betts and Crowley, ''Notions of Home,'' 215.
[25] See Tistedt, *Visioner om Medborgliga publiker* [Visions of Citizen Audiences]; Habel, *Modern Media, Modern Audiences*; and Nordberg, *Folkhemmets röst* [The Voice of the People's Home].
[26] Nordberg, *Folkhemmets rost* [The Voice of the People's Home], 369.
[27] See for example Lowe, *The Welfare State in Britain since 1945*.
[28] Curran in Bailey et al., "Roundtable", 250.
[29] Glover, ''Imaging Community,'' 249.
[30] Quoted Ibid, 251.
[31] Langhamer, ''Meanings of Home,'' 342.
[32] Betts and Crowley, "Notions of Home," 229.
[33] In Sweden, see interior and furniture designer, Lena Larsson in Hirdman, Lundberg and Björkman, *Sveriges Historia* [History of Sweden], 551-552.
[34] Russell, Gordon. "New Ideas in Furniture." Listener [London, England] 7 Mar. 1946: 299+. The Listener Historical Archive. Web. 10 July 2014.
[35] Conekin, ''Here is the Modern,'' 236.
[36] Woodham, "Design and everyday life 474.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid., 463.
[39] 'Designed for Living' Light Programme 12 November 1946, *Radio Times*, Issue 1206 8 November 1946, available via: http://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/bb1b16ea6f38457e9c777ad8f38a73fb [accessed 19 April 2017].
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[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.
[44] BBC WAC: 'Window on Europe: Sweden', 8 November 1946.
[45] Ibid.
[46] J Elias Svedberg, Svenskt biografiskt lexikon (art by Jakob Christensson), accessed 2018-04-10. https://sok.riksarkivet.se/Sbl/Presentation.aspx?id=34825.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Robach, ''Design for Modern People,'' 196.
[49] Russell, Gordon. "New Ideas in Furniture." Listener [London, England] 7 Mar. 1946: 299+. The Listener Historical Archive. Web. 10 July 2014.

[50] Ibid.
[51] Fielding, Thompson and Tiratsoo, *'England arise!'*,
[52] Quoted Fielding, Thompson and Tiratsoo, *'England arise!'*, 91.
[53] Ibid., 92.
[54] Ibid., 102.
[55] BBC WAC: 'Window on Europe: Sweden', 8 November 1946.
[56] Ibid.
[57] "Amabel Williams-Ellis [by] Gavin Stamp, 31 August, 1984, page 16", *The Spectator* Archive, accessed May 1, 2017, http://archive.spectator.co.uk/article/1st-september-1984/17/amabel-williams-ellis.
[58] Hennessy, *Never Again*, 172.
[59] BBC WAC: 'In Europe Today: Sweden the Middle Way' by Amabel Williams-Ellis and Clough Williams-Ellis, 23 June 1946.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Rudberg, "Building the Utopia," 155.
[62] BBC WAC: 'In Europe Today: Sweden the Middle Way' by Amabel Williams-Ellis and Clough Williams-Ellis, 23 June 1946.
[63] Homer, "Creating new communities," 63-65.
[64] Ibid., 68-70.
[65] Rudberg, "Building the Utopia," 156.
[66] Hirdman, Lundberg and Bjorkman, *Sveriges Historia* [History of Sweden], 552-556.
[67] BBC WAC: 'In Europe Today: Sweden the Middle Way' by Amabel Williams-Ellis and Clough Williams-Ellis, 23 June 1946.
[68] Ibid.
[69] BBC WAC: File R19/1453 Entertainment: Window on Europe 1945-1951, ADF to Wellington, 23 July 1945.
[70] Ibid.
[71] BBC WAC: 'Window on Europe: Sweden', 8 November 1946.
[72] BBC WAC: File R19/1453 Entertainment: Window on Europe 1945-1951, Wellington to A/C (ENT), 11 March 1946.
[73] Glover, ''Imaging Community,'' 247.
[74] BBC WAC: 'Window on Europe: Sweden', 8 November 1946.
[75] *The Face of Sweden*, BBC Home Service Basic, 18 April 1940, *Radio Times*, Issue 863, 12 April 1940, available: http://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/d002e794dbd84b4187db1cc9ab7f7c72 Accessed: 24 April 2017.
[76] BBC WAC: 'Window on Europe: Sweden', 8 November 1946.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid. (emphasis original).
[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid. (emphasis original).
[82] Nordström, *Lort-Sverige* [Dirt-Sweden].
[83] BBC WAC: 'Window on Europe: Sweden', 8 November 1946.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Andersson, *Introduction to Sweden*, photograph, 74.
[87] BBC WAC: 'Sweden' by Georgie Henschel, *Woman's Hour*, 5 December 1946.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Skoog, "Neither worker nor housewife".
[92] Beaumont, *Housewives and Citizens*, 165-188.
[93] BBC WAC: 'Gardening in Sweden' by Frances Perry, *Woman's Hour*, 28 July 1947.
[94] BBC WAC: 'Christening by radio' by Alan Ivimey, *Woman's Hour*, 1 August 1947.
[95] Andersson, *Introduction to Sweden*, photographs 78 and 79.
[96] BBC WAC: 'Christening by radio' by Alan Ivimey, *Woman's Hour*, 1 August 1947.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Gullers and Reichardt, *Sweden*, 61.
[100] Habel, *Modern Media, Modern Audiences*, 10.
[101] Daunton, *Wealth and Welfare*, 601-602.
[102] Cronqvist and Hilgert, ''Entangled Media Histories,'' 134.