

Karin Sarja, Centre for Gender Research, Uppsala University

Socialism, feminism and a post-colonial experiment: Barbro Johansson, missionary and politician.

2004-2011

The purpose of the project has been to study the work of Barbro Johansson, a Swedish missionary in Tanzania from 1946 until the 1990s. The focus has been on her work for Tanzanian women and on her political standpoints in the struggle for an independent, socialist Tanzania. Interest has also been centered on her influence on the Church of Sweden, the Church of Sweden Mission and the Social Democratic Workers' Party as regards these organizations' attitudes towards Julius Nyerere's nation building. Finally, the project has studied her importance to Swedish development aid to Tanzania.

The project research has mainly pursued these goals, although slightly less attention has been paid to the latter. The reason is partly that this issue has been difficult to handle within the limits of the project, and partly that it has opened the door to a new, comprehensive research venture (see below). Also, a certain amount of concentration has been necessary in view of the fact that the project period was limited to 1.5 years full-time employment.

An extensive body of material has been gathered within the project, and new basic research has been conducted. The most comprehensive material was found in Barbro Johansson's personal archive and in the Church of Sweden Mission's collections in Uppsala. Barbro Johansson's correspondences have also been found in other archives. Moreover, comprehensive media material on Barbro Johansson from newspapers, radio and television has been collected and studied. In particular, unique material from the 1980s containing several hours of interviews with Barbro Johansson has been made available to the project. Finally, a number of interviews have been carried out with people important to her life and work.

Results

The following three results should be emphasized:

First, the project demonstrates the researcher's responsibility for problematizing source material on a person considered, in her own time as well as by posterity, an important actor in a specific phase of a historical course of events. Second, the project has revealed the various phases of Barbro Johansson's life and work, which serves to nuance some historical writings and biographical accounts of her as a person. Third, a deepened analysis of Barbro Johansson's missionary theology has been carried out.

During her entire life, Barbro Johansson was deeply engaged in the education of girls and women. She stated herself that she was a feminist. The building blocks of her feminism during her first period of work in Tanzania, 1946-1959, were education and religious revival. Education was important, but it could not bring about all the changes in girls' and women's situation that Barbro Johansson wished to see. She held that something more was necessary: Christian faith. In my view, during the period 1946-1959, her outlook on her missionary task was relatively clearly formulated. Barbro Johansson was a well-educated Western missionary who was able to provide the education needed to improve the lives of girls and women. Moreover, she was a missionary who wished to point out the idea of equality found in the Christian message. Given both education and an encounter with Jesus, women's situation could be changed for the better. At the same time, she realized that being white as well as a missionary was problematic in the context in which she served. She was aware of the advent of a new era of nationalism in East Africa and, consequently, of the end of the European's role there. However, she did not feel that either the role of the Kingdom of God or the role of its messengers was over. She realized she needed to adapt to a new time if she was to justify her presence in the country, and a new phase in her life was emerging with increasing clarity.

From the end of the 1950s, Barbro Johansson became more and more engaged in the struggle for national independence, particularly following a meeting with Julius Nyerere, the leader of the independence movement and of the socialist TANU party. Her contacts with Nyerere led her to run in the parliamentary election, and in 1959, she was elected as a member of the parliament of Tanganyika. In December 1961, the country achieved independence with Nyerere as its leader. At that time, Barbro Johansson became a Tanzanian citizen. She served as a member of parliament until 1965 and later between 1980 and 1985. The form of socialism that developed within TANU was known as Ujamaa, an important element of which were villages in which agricultural land was owned and cultivated collectively. Barbro Johansson supported the creation of these villages, herself being a member of one of them. However, the success in organizing Ujamaa villages was limited. In the mid-1970s, when Nyerere and other leaders wanted the villages to have a greater impact, compulsory relocation was carried out and Tanzania was rocked to its foundations. In the 1970s and 1980s, moreover, the country experienced an economic crisis. An attempt was made to overthrow Nyerere. He resigned in 1985, but retained leadership of the country's single permitted political party. In Tanzania, a one-party system had been chosen as an avenue to an independent, socialist nation.

Analyses of the material on Barbro Johansson's political engagement has made it clear that her most important task from 1959-60 onwards was to help build the country. She emphasized that politics was about creating, and that God had led her to her new duties. It would appear that she was unequivocally loyal to TANU and Julius Nyerere. In broad outline, if the material from the first phase does not contain many traces of political

engagement and socialism, then during the second period thoughts of Jesus and other religious matters seem to remain in the background. If, early on, Barbro Johansson held that education and a Christian faith were needed to achieve more equality for women, then during the second phase she saw the potential for such a development in the country's independence and the new political movement.

Her standpoints in favor of a socialist one-party state, the creation of Ujamaa villages and their accompanying population relocations as well as her loyalty to primarily Julius Nyerere will be exhaustively analyzed in a forthcoming monograph.

In 1996, when Barbro Johansson was asked what Christian missionary work meant to her, her answers were both thoughtful and self-conscious. She contended that, as a missionary, she was a bearer of the mysteries of the Kingdom of God rather than of Christianity. Her primary task was not to change people's religious affiliation. At the same time, she emphasized that her calling was clear - she was a missionary. When one compares her words from 1996 with her views during the 1950s, a shift can be seen from a Christocentric to a more theocentric position. This example elucidates a development in Barbro Johansson's missionary theology.

New research questions

In particular, three central areas can be brought to the fore. First, the project shows that more research is needed on the relations between religion and politics within the Church of Sweden Mission in other countries during the latter part of the 20th century, as well as on the possible importance of such relations to Swedish foreign policy. Additional analyses could focus on other Swedish missionaries in, e.g., socialist Tanzania as well as on the Church of Sweden Mission and the Church of Sweden's relations in South Africa during apartheid. Second, the project opens the door to questions concerning the relation between the Church of Sweden Mission and Swedish development aid policies. In this regard, issues concerning the shift from missions, to Christian developmental aid organizations, to current problems in the relation between the secular Swedish state and Christian actors in civil society could be analyzed and deepened. Third, the project on Barbro Johansson has generated additional questions concerning religion as a factor that both liberates women and limits their opportunities. (Such themes have been treated in the articles "Paradoxes and challenges - gender perspectives in mission history" 2010, "Can the Subaltern speak? or Who is sharing a meal with whom?" 2009, and "Afrikas drottning - religion, genus och kolonialism i en Hollywoodskildring av Afrika" [African Queen - religion, gender and colonialism in a Hollywood portrayal of Africa] 2008).

Important publications

The article "On being a Christian missionary in socialist Tanzania: A case study of the two roles of Barbro Johansson, missionary and politician", in *Swedish Missiological Themes* (2009), introduces the research project in an international journal with a wide circulation and readership. It looks primarily at two important periods of Barbro Johansson's work in Tanzania: her work for girls' and women's education and her political engagement. The interplay and/or conflict between her standpoints as a feminist, socialist and Christian missionary is emphasized in particular.

The anthology *12 kvinnor - i 1900-talets svenska kyrkohistoria* [12 women - in the 20th century history of the Church of Sweden] (Artos & Norma bokförlag, 2010) contains a contribution entitled "Barbro Johansson - missionär, feminist, socialist" [Barbro Johansson - missionary, feminist, socialist]. This is an important contribution, as it appears in a book meant for a Swedish readership, including university students. It thus helps to give Barbro Johansson a central place in the 20th century history of the Church of Sweden. It provides a broad overview of Barbro Johansson's life and achievements, among other things in relation to current UN reports on literacy and education in Africa.

The planned monograph will present and analyze the whole scope of the project in line with the aim stated above. The extent and possible complexities of the source material will be discussed.

At present, the monograph contains an introduction and five chapters:

1. Barbro Johansson, Kashasha and women's education
2. Barbro Johansson's political engagement and socialism
3. Society building and citizenship
4. Barbro Johansson and Swedish developmental aid to Tanzania
5. Feminism, socialism and a post-colonial experiment: Barbro Johansson, missionary and politician

Other methods of conveying the project results include the following

Project presentations at a research seminar, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Gävle, and at the Annual Conference of Swedish Historians of Women and Gender in Uppsala, both in November 2007.

Paper presented at an international research conference: "I don't want to talk about this anymore." On being a Christian missionary in socialist Tanzania: A case study of the missionary and politician Barbro Johansson." University of Bergen, Norway, August 2008.

Paper presented at a Nordic research conference: "Modernitetens nya kvinna: mellan kall och familj, Sverige och Tanzania." [Modernity's new woman: between calling and family, Sweden and Tanzania. On Barbro Johansson, missionary and politician] Karlstad University, October 2008.

Paper presented at an international research conference: "Can the Subaltern speak? or Who is sharing a meal with whom?" Uppsala University, May 2009.

Lectures on the project in Stockholm, June 2009, and Karlstad, September 2010.