

## **Abstract for Individual Paper**

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- **Christian Communities and Mission**

**By Berdine van den Toren-Lekkerkerker, PhD candidate at Protestant Theological University Groningen, the Netherlands, and Mission Partner for the Church Mission Society.**

### **Ambivalent belonging: relating and collaborating in a world of inequalities.**

The Church Mission Society, a mission organisation based in Oxford, UK, has redefined themselves as a “Community of Mission Service.” Established as a mission organisation in 1799, its beginnings and roots are deeply connected with the colonial past of the UK. Through its history, and convinced that all people had the capacity to “hear and respond to the challenge of Christ,” and that all peoples shared the necessary abilities and capacities to live as a Christian community (Henry Venn),<sup>1</sup> CMS has sought to develop policies in which this conviction is realised in its relationships with Christians and Churches around the world. Yet, and for many different reasons, this has been a difficult journey.

In this paper, I would like to explore some of these reasons, and how this lived reality has led to an experience of ambivalence, of both pain, powerlessness and exclusion, and at the same time of ongoing commitment and hope towards change and transformation.

This description of the lived reality as an ambivalent experience will lead to the exploration of the notion of ambivalence, not only as a problematic reality, but also as a reality that invites participants to subversive knowledge and action, towards transformation. This subversion carries the possibility of the transformation of the ‘victim’ into a ‘creative agent’, and structures of domination into structures of hope.

Berdine van den Toren-Lekkerkerker, is based in Groningen, The Netherlands. After living and working for 8 years in the Central African Republic, teaching at a school of theology, the family moved to Oxford. Here she started working for the Church Mission Society. In 2014 they moved back to the Netherlands, at which point she became a Mission Partner for CMS, supporting theological education in Africa and Asia, mainly through lecturing and consultation projects. Currently, she is also writing her PhD thesis at the Protestant Theological University in Groningen, looking at the idea of community with a worldwide character, with the CMS as a case study. This research is the basis of the paper proposal.

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Williams, “‘Not Transplanting’: Henry Venn’s Strategic Vision,” in *The Church Mission Society and World Christianity, 1799-1999*, ed. Kevin Ward and Brian Stanley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2000), 149.