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## **Epistemic uncertainty, fluidity and versatility in the Kristang creole/indigenous way of being in contemporary Singapore**

*Kevin Martens Wong*

National University of Singapore (Singapore)

Kristang (iso 639-3:mcm) is a critically endangered creole language spoken mainly in Singapore and Melaka by around 1,000 people including the author; both the language and its associated community, the mainly Roman Catholic Portuguese-Eurasians or Jenti Kristang, have their roots in coercive intermarriages between arriving Portuguese colonisers and local Malay residents starting from the former's colonisation of Melaka in August 1511. Nonetheless, despite this and other deep and long-lasting intergenerational trauma and shame resulting from marginalisation and stigmatisation under the Dutch and British colonial empires and the independent

Singaporean and Malaysian governments, both the Kristang language and community have experienced an unprecedented and dramatic reawakening since 2016 in large part due to the Kodrah Kristang grassroots language revitalisation initiative lead by the author, an openly gay, non-binary Kristang Singaporean and sexual abuse survivor. The tremendous success of Kodrah in not only reinvigorating the Kristang language, but reclaiming psychoemotional space for the community within the public consciousness both regionally and internationally (e.g., Wong, 2017), has hence allowed for a wider excavation and renegotiation of other forms of Kristang identity, culture and thought that were nearly moribund by 2015. Of further particular interest is the very strong connection the Kristang have had with the concept of the Other since Singapore's independence, being literally classed as 'Other' in the state's totalising and over-reductive approach to ethnicity and race, which only permits recognition of four supra-racial identities within Singapore: Chinese, Malay, Indian and this catch-all category of Other, and who therefore have often been unable to locate and site themselves within the complex of Singapore identity to the extent that outward-bound migration of Eurasians from Singapore from the 1960s to the 1980s was stark enough to be commented on in the academic literature (e.g. Lowe, 2018) despite the community's very small size (0.38% of the population). At a further level of autoethnographic consideration, this author's very unusual position as one of the few prominent Kristang in Singapore, and perhaps the only one who has gained both the community's near-universal trust and the fairly rare ability to hold the semi-authoritarian state to account without incident, both in spite of his sexuality and gender identity, also attest to the highly unique approach to identity, reflexivity and self-consideration that the Kristang have adopted in their 500-odd years of existence, again to the extent that the author has been invited without contestation to serve as a keynote speaker on an international event known as Doing Being Other in Global Singapore (Wong, 2023).

This presentation will thus explore the Lembransa Krismatra ('the Dreaming Thinking' or 'Thinking of the Golden Ocean'), the creole foundations of Kristang philosophical self-conception and self-construction that allow for the identification, exploration,

negotiation and adaptation of the many paradoxes inherent in being and performing this particular form of the Other in Singapore, and how they can be observed in various facets of the revitalised Kristang identity and culture in Singapore today. As the title of this presentation suggests, the core of the Lembransa appears to be an ever-ongoing unravelling and reweaving of reality as a fundamentally uncertain, fluid and mutable phenomenon that is co-constructed, co-deconstructed, and co-collaborated upon to achieve a new, more transcendent balance that is natural, safe and secure, and especially for older Kristang, secure from outside interference. Possible reasons for the evolution this approach are thereafter examined, particularly the original, deep-seated shame of being descendants of coercive intermarriage as a likely initial catalyst for our early ancestors' need to find a new way of renaturalising and reconceptualising the self, our subsequent stereotyping as brown-skinned promiscuous, unenlightened and immoral beings under the British as necessitating our heightened consciousness of the performative nature of identity, and finally our marginalisation under the Lee Kuan Yew government (1965-1990) as compelling the development of the 'outer shell' of this epistemology, the highly secretive nature of the truly vital and essential aspects of Kristang culture, identity and language.

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