

Fernando's Abstract

IDENTITY – racial, cultural, ethnic

Individual identity is given a high profile in western psychology, associated with the emphasis on the individual (as opposed to community) and the consequent concern with the concept of 'the other'. The categorisation of people in ethnically mixed societies has been useful for political and social purposes but may have encouraged people to 'fix' identity into a 'unipolar' framework. The talk will argue that while concepts of ethnicity, culture and 'race' may be useful and even necessary for categorisation, the reality for most people in modern societies is of flexible and changeable identities. In doing so, the talk will discuss the current meaning of terms in the title of the talk, relate these to historical contexts, and trace how identities are seen in different cultural traditions as exemplified by philosophies inherent in religious traditions.

Suman Fernando is Sri Lankan by origin but has been living in UK most of his life. He was a consultant psychiatrist in the (British) National Health Service for many years before becoming an academic. He is now attached to the European Centre for Migration & Social Care at the University of Kent at Canterbury (UK) and currently Honorary Visiting Professor at Department of Applied Social Sciences, London Metropolitan University, London (UK).

Since his seminal book in 1988, *Race and Culture in Psychiatry*, Suman has written or edited five others, the latest (in 2010) being the third edition of *Mental Health, Race and Culture* – a book that is used extensively in training of mental health professionals in the UK. Latterly, Suman has been involved in a project of research and capacity building in Sri Lanka within the Trauma & Global Health (TGH) Program co-ordinated by McGill (Montreal); drawing on this and his extensive study of cultural diversity in the understanding of mental health and wellbeing, Suman has co-written a significant publication ('Challenges in Developing Community Mental Health Services in Sri Lanka') on how services should be developed in low income countries in Asia.

For many years, Suman has been in the forefront of groups in the UK resisting oppressive legislation restricting rights of people diagnosed with 'mental illness' and in lobbying for change in psychiatric practice and the way mental health services are structured. Also he has been involved in developing community services for black and minority ethnic people in London (UK), and in providing critical advice on service development generally. Suman has visited Canada many times to give lectures and was involved over ten years ago in developing *Across Boundaries*, a mental health centre for ethno-racial communities in Toronto. Further details of Suman's background and work as well as copies of several of his papers are available on his website <http://www.sumanfernando.com>.