

CS501.NA People as Social and Cultural Beings  
Dr. Stanley John  
Jun Zhao  
Fall 2020

## **Worldview Interview Analysis**

### ***Background***

I have a small business in Bronx. Our products and services are related to construction. Majority customers are contractors, some are homeowners. One of the homeowners became my friend, among all these customers he caught my attention. Instead of driving he came to us on a bike, and I always find a safe parking for his “BMW”(that’s what he called his bike). When he came to see me, if I wasn’t there, my coworker will call me saying that my “BMW friend” is looking for me.

We had two interviews which lasted about two hours. His name is Belal, he was born in Bangladesh. He owned a clothing store back in Bangladesh. He came to the State 18 years ago to join his parents here. After three years, he went back to his country to marry his wife, and waited another three years to unite with his wife and kids. Now he has three kids, 10,6,5 grade. After he came to this country, he worked in a florist’s shop for 3 months, then worked in a 99 cents store in Manhattan for 7 years, afterwards he bought a 99 cents store in Bronx.

### **Kinship and family**

When we talked about kinship and family, Belal was very grateful for the support and help from his relatives and family. After he came to this country, he has been living with his parents. His relatives and family are very close to each other. With the money he borrowed from his relatives, he could buy his business, and that borrowed money were interest free and no time limit. Now his whole family are here, they gather together very often. He is very family oriented and very

grateful to his family and relatives, he found his identity in these loving and supportive relationships. Although his business got impacted from the pandemic, I couldn't tell any fear from him, he hopes it'll get better at Christmas time. He always carries a sense of humor and gratitude, his attitude towards people is very positive. He works very hard, each time I called him, he is either in the store or working on his house. As a business man, he keeps his promise. When we worked at his house, he put down some deposit first. Before we started the job, he came and paid in full. Even we made some mistakes, he didn't complain and just patiently waited for us to correct it. That's why I was curious of his family of origin from where all these characters have been built up.

### **Culture**

We talked a lot about his culture. In my mind, in his culture, women are inferior than men, since women normally don't work, men work hard for the family, bring back food on the tables and make decisions, while women stay home taking care of kids and family. He said If let him chose between father and mother, who he respects the most, he'll choose mom. This is not about money. Mom is the one give love, care, and nurture their emotion and soul which is valued the most. In their culture, everyone is taught to respect elders, and it always starts from mom, then father, uncle, grandparents.

Then we talked about marriage. Majority of their marriages are arranged by family or relatives as Belal's. Not like in America, weddings are paid by the bride family. He said normally wedding has two parties, one from the groom family, one from the bride family. As gifts, friends and relatives give money, gold jewelries, like bracelet, necklace, earring, etc. Gold

means pure and precious. After wedding, the new weds normally live with the groom's family until they have more kids.

Belal's wife stayed home during these years, when I asked if his wife is educated and capable for working, what's his opinion on it? He said even it's like this, women would stay home taking care family instead of working, because as a husband he doesn't want to see his wife working with some strange males. I think this shows the masculinity is at a dominating position in their culture.

## **Religion**

Belal was born as a Muslim. He said all kids are taught by their parents, relatives about their belief. As kids they will watch how their parents behave, what they learn will stay in their blood. Often moms and grandparents are those who teach them at home. He told me that whenever there is a conversation with parents or relatives formal or informal, there is always teaching about the fundamentals of their religion. When they have parties, or family gatherings, sometime people will stand up and give a sermon. This is their identity as well as their culture and family of origins. Belal told me that they are facing more challenges because their kids are under the influence of the liberal culture in America, they put more effort in teaching and correcting. They worry that as soon as their kids go out to the world, they might lose their root or identity. They are that kind of subculture among big culture, It reminds me about Jewish culture.

Belal goes to Mosque every Friday, he calls it "Juma". He prays over there, and listen to the preacher giving sermons. One Friday afternoon, Belal came to our office wearing a very fine embroidered dress, very impressive. He told me he just came from Mosque. He gives offering to the Mosque and believe they will use the money to do some charitable things. Besides this, he

prays 5 times a day. He said that his god puts two angles at people's shoulder, to watch his behavior, write it down until the judgement day. His god will judge people according to the records and people will be sending to hell or heaven accordingly. He pays more attention on the ritual, and by so doing he shows his reverence to his god.

When asked if he is required to evangelize, he said they don't force or persuade people from different culture or religion to believe their god, and people could learn their belief through social medium. They are more culture or community oriented about their religion, and it feels like their religion and culture set an invisible wall to outsiders.

The last topic on religion is how they treat someone who converts to other religion. He told me that first of all, their parents and relatives will be heart breaking for letting go their identity and principle. To them it's like losing their son or daughter. They are very angry. Although been deeply love by their parents, the one gone for different religion, will be spelled out of their family and community. In some extreme case, he/she might be killed and were treated like enemy.

### **Views on other cultures**

Belal values his religion and culture, and at the meantime he respects other cultures. He didn't believe his next generation will conform with outside world. He said the possibility is less than 0.001%. It is more like a declaration to me than a statement. He said America is his country now, but he will stay in his own culture as a Muslim, he's grateful for the freedom in America.

When asked about homosexual in America, Belal said that's against his culture and belief and should be condemned. Same as adultery, that's a disgrace to the family. Family and religion play a major role in Belal's life.

Belal will vote for democratic party. He said this decision is not about culture or religion, that's only for the benefit of this nation. He'll vote the one who is good for the country and people. Belal could be very open minded and easy towards people or belief outside of his circle, it might be his kindness, but at the meantime I feel that he's distant to the outside world.

When we talked about how he view other religions, Belal said Judaism and Christianity are similar to Islam, he respects other religions because most of them call people to do good. But he doesn't have interest to know much of them, and will not force people to understand his also. I could tell he's very content with his culture and religion, it's part of his life, and he really lives out what he was taught in his religion, not just a set of theory, I respect him for that.

### **Sufferings**

Belal sees life suffering as test from his god. He thinks that the more people suffers, that means the more love people will get from god, so endurance for him is a way to show his trust to god. He's very patient, he waited for years to get his wife and family here, he worked hard for years to get his own business, he persevered through those experience and received blessings at the end.

### **Common and difference between us**

We are both raised from a culture that's family oriented, and we hold some common values, such as respecting elders, caring and teaching next generations, some moral value are similar too. Family and religion play a major role in both of our lives.

But I'm more open to the world around me, at meantime he's more distant. In Mary Douglas's grid, Belal is "positional", and I am "individuals".

One major difference is theologically. He believes that good deeds will gain approval and reward to his god, as a Christian my salvation is not a reward or gained by what I do, it's a grace from God by my belief through Jesus Christ.

### **Conclusion and reflection**

I was trying to talk to him about my belief, but he sees Jesus and Muhammad are both prophets. As mentioned before, Belal is very content with his family, culture and religion. His identity is composed by these three factors, it's the most difficult thing to persuade people to look themselves differently when there is nothing extremely wrong with their behaviors or characters, especially they're rooted in their only culture and religion, and don't even mention that sometime in some area, they might be better than us.

I will keep praying for Belal that one day God will encounter him in a miraculous way.

