

Challenging Prejudice with Humor

Folks: Please read and digest the material below. NOTE: you can access the podcast of this radio interview of the Iranian-American Maz Jobrani here:

<http://onpoint.wbur.org/2015/02/16/maz-jobrani-comedy-stand-up-chapel-hill-shooting>



Humor And Solace In Muslim-America With Maz Jobrani

February 16, 2015 at 11:00 AM

Source: <http://onpoint.wbur.org/2015/02/16/maz-jobrani-comedy-stand-up-chapel-hill-shooting>

With guest host [Anthony Brooks](#).

After the murder of three young Muslim-Americans in Chapel Hill, we'll open the phone lines for some serious talk with Muslim-American comedian Maz Jobrani.

Maz Jobrani's memoir is called, "I'm Not a Terrorist, But I've Played One on TV. And he has. Born in Iran, Jobrani came to the U.S. as a kid during the Iranian Revolution. But it was tough getting used to his adopted culture: baseball didn't make sense and kids blamed him for the Iranian hostage crisis. And when casting directors came calling, they only wanted him to play kebab-eating, bomb-toting, terrorists. So he did. But no more. Now, in the age of *Charlie Hebdo* and Muslim killings in North Carolina, he does comedy. This hour, On Point: Middle Eastern funny man, Maz Jobrani.

– Anthony Brooks

Guest

[Maz Jobrani](#), comedian and actor. Author of the new book, "[I'm Not A Terrorist, But I've Played One On TV: Memoirs of a Middle Eastern Funny Man](#)." (@MazJobrani)

From The Reading List

[POLITICO Magazine: What Makes Muslims Laugh?](#) — "The attacks in France have put satire in the Muslim world front and center. I am a standup comedian who has performed comedy in the Middle East in front of thousands of Muslims. And believe it or not, they laughed at plenty, especially when we poked fun at local culture. The Lebanese loved it when you would make fun of their driving and how in Lebanon a red light is just a *suggestion* to stop. In Dubai, they laughed when you would point out their obsession with doing everything big: the biggest building in the world, the biggest mall, the biggest fireworks show ever—so big that neighboring Bahrain thought it was under attack. The Jordanians laughed when I told them I found out our comedy DVD had a Jordanian distribution deal—which is when one Jordanian buys it and everyone else sees it. Also known as a bootleg."

[Mother Jones: Bombs Sometimes, Kills Often, But Maz Jobrani Swears He Isn't a Terrorist](#) — "Maz Jobrani's parents *really* didn't want him to be a comedian. Perhaps a lawyer, or a prosperous businessman, as his father was before the 1979 Iranian revolution compelled the

family to resettle in Northern California. But Jobrani, now 42, eventually left grad school to follow his dreams. He was cast as an expendable terrorist in a Chuck Norris flick and a reluctant one on *24* before he told his agent enough with the stereotypical roles.”

[Raleigh News & Observer: FBI launches new investigation into Chapel Hill killings; thousands mourn in Raleigh](#) — “As thousands of mourners prayed for the three Muslim-American students killed in Chapel Hill this week, the FBI opened its own investigation into the case Thursday. In a brief news release late in the day, the FBI said it had launched ‘a parallel preliminary inquiry to determine whether or not any federal laws were violated related to the case.’”

POLITICO MAGAZINE

What Makes Muslims Laugh?

As an Iranian-American comedian, I can tell you that plenty does. Just stay away from sex, religion and politics.

By MAZ JOBRANI January 11, 2015

Source: <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/01/charlie-hebdo-what-makes-muslims-laugh-114157.html>

When I first traveled to the Middle East to do shows in 2007 with two other comedians as part of the Axis of Evil Comedy Tour, the promoters would warn us everywhere we went, “No sex, no religion and no politics.” Well, as you can imagine, that pretty much took away all our jokes except maybe any we’d written about our pet turtles—and even those could have been construed as sexual.

It left me wondering why comedy was seen as such a threat in these countries.

Then I had to reflect on the United States, where I grew up and have spent most of my life. Let’s not forget that only 50 to 60 years ago, Lenny Bruce was getting arrested for things he was saying at comedy clubs around the country. After him, it was comedians like George Carlin, Richard Pryor and Dick Gregory who were pushing the envelope of free speech in the United States and often being shut down for it.

The attacks in France have put satire in the Muslim world front and center. I am a standup comedian who has performed comedy in the Middle East in front of thousands of Muslims. And believe it or not, they laughed at plenty, especially when we poked fun at local culture. The Lebanese loved it when you would make fun of their driving and how in Lebanon a red light is just a *suggestion* to stop. In Dubai, they laughed when you would point out their obsession with doing everything big: the biggest building in the world, the biggest mall, the biggest fireworks show ever—so big that neighboring Bahrain thought it was under attack. The Jordanians laughed when I told them I found out our comedy DVD had a Jordanian distribution deal—which is when one Jordanian buys it and everyone else sees it. Also known as a bootleg.

Don’t believe me? I have proof. If you want to actually see Muslims laughing you can watch the TED talk I did in Doha a few years back. There are shots of Muslims in traditional Muslim garb laughing. [Here is the clip.](#)

Religion, however, is a delicate subject. I would say that while most Muslims take offense at the portrayal of the Prophet Muhammad in cartoons, they would never resort to violence. It is a minority of extremist Muslims who take such actions, and they do it for political and tactical reasons far beyond just being offended.

But let’s not forget that people in Western and other countries have their sensitivities too. I myself experienced some run-ins with censorship of my comedy as recently as 10 years ago.

I once did a standup show called *Premium Blend* on Comedy Central. At the time I would end my act with a joke that made references to Mercedes-Benz, 7-Eleven and Slurpee. When I submitted my act for approval, the show’s producers came back and said that I couldn’t

mention those three brands because they might have been sponsors on the show. I quickly came to realize that in the Middle East, god is god, and in the West, the sponsor is god — or, as I like to say, Tide detergent is god.

Later, during the Iraq War, I was on stage a few times at the Comedy Store in Los Angeles and I did some jokes about President Bush. One time there was a young girl sitting in the front and she yelled, “You can’t make fun of our commander in chief at a time of war!” She was truly offended by my making a joke about the president and wanted me to stop. I ran into this a few times during the war where people actually got angry with me and chose to leave the club. I had to remind them that one of the pretenses of starting the war with Iraq was that we were bringing democracy to Iraq. I tried to point out the hypocrisy of saying that we were bringing democracy and with it, free speech to Iraq and yet in the United States these people were telling me to limit my free speech because they didn’t agree with my politics. I pointed out that that was the beauty of the United States and the West. We can actually make fun of our leaders and not get in trouble. I couldn’t make fun of the president of Iran in Iran. If I made fun of the president of Iran in Iran you would come up to me after the show and ask, “When’s the next show?” I would have to reply, “There are no more shows. The ministry of ‘no shows’ showed up tonight and my next show will be a farewell performance in prison.”

I mention all this to point out that jokes can offend not just in the Muslim world, but in the West as well. I think the thing to understand about the Muslim world is that the depiction of the prophet Muhammad in any form is offensive. To get a clear view of that watch the 1977 movie *The Message* with Anthony Quinn, in which the birth of Islam is portrayed. In the film, Quinn speaks to the camera as if it were the Prophet (the Syrian-American director, Moustapha Al Akkad, had consulted Islamic clerics before making the movie). Whereas in a movie about Jesus we cast actors to play Jesus, in a movie about the Prophet, it would be sacrilegious to portray the Prophet. It is a weird experience as a Westerner watching this film and not understanding why there’s no actor playing the Prophet. You ask, “Couldn’t they get someone to play the part? Omar Sharif? Marcello Mastroianni? How about Charlton Heston?”

So it’s easy to understand why the portrayal of the Prophet Muhammad in the *Charlie Hebdo* comic strips was offensive to Muslims. Still, most Muslims would not take to violence to protest these cartoons. The terrorists who attacked the satirical newspaper’s offices last week were a minority and did it for obvious political reasons—perhaps, as Juan Cole, a specialist in Islamic cultures, has [suggested](#), to provoke anger and attacks against Muslims in French society and so expand their meager recruitment.

I grew up in the United States and don’t consider myself religious. I also support the freedom of speech and the right for satirists to say what they want. Having been born in Iran, I sometimes say I’m Muslim-ish. I have been shocked by people who learn I’m from Iran and who can’t believe that we actually have a sense of humor. When we did the Axis of Evil Comedy Tour and it premiered on Comedy Central, I went onto a chat room for Sean Hannity to see what people were saying about the special. One guy wrote another guy, “I never knew these people laughed.” I find that to be a shame. Unfortunately, most times when you see Iranians, Arabs, Muslims and other people from that part of the world in an American film or on TV programs, we are playing characters who say things like, “I will kill you in the name of Allah!” You rarely see us playing characters who laugh, dance or sing. And this contributes to people thinking that we don’t have a sense of humor. I myself was guilty of playing such parts early in my career and have since vowed to no longer play terrorist parts that help perpetuate this negative stereotype. To take it one step further, I co-wrote and produced a comedy called “Jimmy Vestwood: Amerikan Hero” in which I play an Iranian who moves to America and actually plays the good guy in the movie. I describe it as the Persian-Pink-Panther-meets-Borat and [hope to have it out](#) later this year.

But don’t just take my word for it that Muslims have a sense of humor. You can also watch a documentary by my friend Ahmed Ahmed, who was one of the other Axis of Evil Comedy Tour members. A few years back he had cameras follow us on one of our tours in the Middle East, and it shows Muslims laughing throughout the region. The film was even called *Just Like Us* to emphasize that these people laugh, just like us. And not only at regional jokes. Some of the comedians in the film are American comedians, like Whitney Cummings, Tom Papa, Sebastian Maniscalco and Erik Griffin, who tell jokes from an American point of view, and the audiences get it. In a time when we have Facebook, YouTube and all the other forms of media, it is amazing how much people in the Middle East know about Western culture. I always say that the rest of the world knows a lot more about America than America knows about the rest of the world. For example, if you went to Saudi Arabia and did a joke about Lindsay Lohan, they would say, “Oh ... that Lindsay ... she so silly ... always in the rehab!”

When we did our first tour in the Middle East, we were told by a leader in the region that we didn’t need to make our material edgy. He told us that just by being in the region and doing standup we were already pushing the envelope. The best comedy is irreverent, and these are societies that place a lot of emphasis on respect. We need to keep in mind that the type of comedy we are now used to in the United States and in the West is relatively new to these Muslim countries—just as Lenny Bruce’s edgy humor was, not so very long ago, new in the United States—and it will take time for a majority of the population to embrace this type of humor.

But the process has begun. And while some will continue to take offense at material that pokes fun at religion or politics, most people will not take up arms and carry out acts of violence like the criminals who did so in France. Most of them want to laugh, just like us.

Maziyar “Maż” Jobrani is an Iranian-American comedian and actor. His book, [I’m Not A Terrorist, But I’ve Played One On TV](#), will be published by Simon & Schuster in February.

Bombs Sometimes, Kills Often, But Maz Jobrani Swears He Isn't a Terrorist

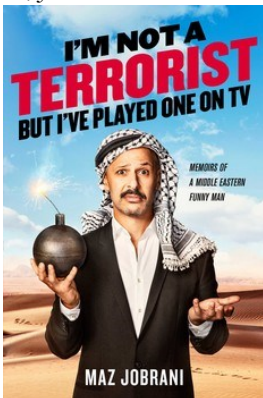
The Iranian-born comic on Persian parents, airport security, and offending the Saudis.

—By Michael Mechanic | Tue Feb. 3, 2015

Source: <http://www.motherjones.com/media/2014/11/interview-maz-jobrani-iranian-comedian-not-terrorist-memoir>

Maz Jobrani's parents *really* didn't want him to be a comedian. Perhaps a lawyer, or a prosperous businessman, as his father was before the 1979 Iranian revolution compelled the family to resettle in Northern California. But Jobrani, now 42, eventually left grad school to follow his dreams. He was cast as an expendable terrorist in a Chuck Norris flick and a reluctant one on *24* before he told his agent enough with the stereotypical roles.

He also teamed up with Egyptian-born comic Ahmed Ahmed and Palestinian American funnyman Aron Kader to perform as the Arabian Knights, whose Axis of Evil Comedy Tour led to a 2007 Comedy Central special and performances around the Middle East. Out this month, Jobrani's new comedic memoir, *I'm Not a Terrorist, But I've Played One on TV*, highlights his attempts to assimilate, make a laughingstock of bigots, and joke his way to the top.



Mother Jones: You were six when your family moved here from Iran. What was the situation?

Maz Jobrani: It was late 1978. Protests were happening, but I don't think anyone really knew that there was gonna be a revolution—everyone thought that the shah would stop it. My father was on business in New York City and he told my mom to bring me and my sister to spend the winter holidays. I always say we packed for two weeks and stayed for 35 years.

My dad owned an electric company and he brought a lot of money to America with him. He bought some properties and was able to turn them around pretty fast, and he figured, "Well, this is great, I'll just be a real estate investor." So he bought a bunch more properties. And then the early '80s recession hit and he wasn't able to get rid of the homes. The next 10 years he basically bled out most of his money.

MJ: In the book, you joke about how your parents always foiled your attempts to fit in in America.

Maz: There weren't many Iranians in Marin. My parents had the thick Persian accent. And my dad went out and bought a Rolls-Royce! Not just any Rolls, but one of his friends' used Rolls-Royces. My dad had so much money that anytime his friends needed money, they would go to him and be, like, "Hey, you wanna buy some suits?" And my dad would say, "Sure, why not?" Tiburon is affluent, but also very liberal and low-key—rich people there are driving Saabs, maybe Volvos, *maybe* Mercedes. And here comes my dad in a Silver Shadow with me in the back, and I'm like, "Oh my God!" They were the loud foreign family that just would out me all the time.

MJ: You liken your dad to Don Corleone.

Maz: I was in awe of my father. His generosity was beyond anything I ever could imagine. The reason I say he's like Don Corleone is he was always breaking off hundreds. I'd be like, "Hey Dad, I'm going to McDonald's with my friends," and he'd just whip out a hundred: "Here, go, have fun." He was larger than life, really deep voice. It wasn't until later in life when it hit me that he drank a lot. You could say he was a functioning alcoholic. And then when I was in college, when he lost his wealth, I saw this lion who had lost his power. In the early '90s, he decided to go back to Iran. The government told people who had left with their wealth, "Come back, we won't persecute you."

And then he wasn't allowed to do business or leave the country until he paid all the back taxes that were owed for the years he'd been gone. He passed away pretty much broke.

MJ: You visited Tehran again when you were in your 20s. What was it like going back?

Maz: I was really excited. I hadn't seen my dad for almost 10 years. I remember smelling the food my aunt was cooking, and it took me back to when I was a kid in Iran. The family was amazing. At the same time it was depressing, because Tehran, even getting past the totalitarian state, was just overpopulated, overpolluted. It felt like there wasn't much opportunity.

MJ: The hostage crisis was a tough time for Iranians living in America. What did kids say to you?

"I'd get called a fucking 'EYE-rain-ian' by this kid. He was bigger than me, so I just kind of smiled and took it."

Maz: The term they used is "fucking *EYE-rain-ian*." There were a handful of Persians at the school: It was my aunt and this girl named Sharona, both in the sixth grade. I'd get called a fucking Iranian by this kid. He was bigger than me, so I just kind of smiled and took it.

MJ: And then along came Flock of Seagulls.

Maz: Yeah. *I ran, I ran so far away*. Sharona, poor girl, she had to go through "M-m-m-my Sharona." She got the "fucking Iranian" and she got Flock of Seagulls.

MJ: You joke that your Persian friends started pretending they were Italian. Is that true?

Maz: Absolutely. My first cousin continues to go as Tony. He worked at an Italian restaurant and they started calling him Tony and he just kept it. But my buddy Sharokh would be like, "Yeah, that girl thinks I'm Italian. Don't say anything." I remember I was in a San Francisco nightclub and I started talking to some girl, and it was like, "Hey, what's going on, what's your name?" You know, "Where are you from?" I go, "I'm from Iran." And literally she just looked at me and walked away.

MJ: I take it your parents weren't on board with the comedy thing?

Maz: They didn't even know what that meant! We had a really good high school drama program, and the teacher was like, "Hey, you could do this professionally." I told my parents that, and they kind of looked at me like, "What are you talking about?" And I was like, "You know what, my parents are right. I should just be a lawyer."

MJ: But you chose the tougher profession. To put it in terrorist terms, what's your kill-to-bomb rate?

Maz: [*Laughs*.] You get to the point where it's like 95 to 5, or 98 to 2 sometimes. But you're gonna bomb no matter what.

MJ: In the book, you describe one really awful show you did early on in a strip club. What were some other questionable venues?

"Imagine if September 11 happens and here I am, the turban comic? I'm so happy I didn't do that!"

Maz: I did a church basement—two rows of four chairs, eight people sitting, and all eight end up being performers. I did an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting that I thought was gonna be great, but there weren't that many people there. I think I started with: "Yeah, you know, I asked the booker, 'Where is everybody?' and he said, 'They're out getting a drink!'" Total silence. I did a show at a youth hostel where I was about three minutes in with no laughter, and I go, "Who here speaks English?" And one hand in the back was raised.

MJ: Your champion, Comedy Store owner Mitzi Shore, initially wanted you to wear a robe and turban. What would you have done had she insisted?

Maz: Oh man! I think my career would have been over. You lose your integrity when you do that. Mitzi supposedly had helped build the character for Roseanne. Andrew Dice Clay and Letterman used to perform there. Leno. I mean, it was a *famous* club. So when that lady tells you to wear the Muslim garb, your instinct says, *Oh, hell no!* But there's voices going, "Well, you know, she helped these other guys." But I feel like I would've ended up being a one-trick comic, and I just wouldn't have been able to live with myself. And then imagine if September 11 happens and here I am, the turban comic? I'm so happy I didn't do that!

MJ: You write that you considered quitting comedy after September 11.

Maz: I'm a very positive person, but that day just felt like the day the laughter died. It wasn't as much about, "Oh, I'm of Middle Eastern descent" as, "Holy shit, 3,000 people just died." It really hit hard for me.

MJ: You joke about how you profile yourself at airports. How real is that?

Maz: The first time I flew after September 11, I honestly was a little paranoid. As I was going to the metal detector, I was looking at my duffel bag and I'm like, "Do I have anything that's like a weapon?" I was really paranoid they were gonna find something sharp and I was gonna get in trouble. That's what led to the joke about how I'm like, "Check my bags! Check my bags!" The metal detector goes off, and they're like, "It's your belt buckle, sir," and I'm like, "There's gotta be more! I've gotta have something!"

Middle Eastern promoters would say, "No sex, no religion, no politics!... We'd be like, "Well, there goes my whole set!"

MJ: When you first visited the Middle East, you and your partners were already rock stars there. How did that happen?

Maz: I always say it's kind of like *Waiting for Godot*. Middle Easterners were waiting for comedians. After September 11, it was such a negative time that Middle Eastern people were looking for someone to be their voice, and we happened to be there. Next thing you know, we get a call from Jordan: "We'd like you to come do shows here." I was like, "I'd love to, but the show's in English." And he's like, "Yeah, I'm speaking English to you right now, you idiot!" So we go to Jordan, Lebanon, Dubai, Kuwait, and Egypt—and we *were* rock stars.

MJ: When you perform in places like Saudi Arabia, where they have Sharia law and women aren't allowed to drive, do you avoid culturally sensitive topics?

Maz: I don't talk about that stuff anyway. But the first time we went to the region, every promoter would say, "No sex, no religion, no politics." And jokingly, we'd be like, "Well, there goes my whole set!" In the Middle East you're doing theaters, and people will be bringing their kids. So part of it is, listen, you can cuss a little, but don't go humping the chair. "Politics," they mean local politics, so if you're in Dubai, you can make fun of the president of Iran, but don't talk about the leader of Dubai. Yes, I could go onstage and do 45 minutes about, "What's up with your women having to be covered and they can't drive." But do I want to offend them, or do I want them to laugh?

MJ: Which country have you found the most challenging?

"The Middle East has been going crazy for 50, 60, 70 years. So it's not like, "Oh, I need an ISIS joke."

Maz: Probably a couple of the Saudi shows. The most recent show I did was a public show. To my left were all guys, to my right mostly families—they didn't let them sit next to each other. I would do a penis joke and the guys would laugh. And then I would do a political joke and the other side would laugh. I do a joke about how, when you have two kids in the house, you have to be ready to go at any time, anyplace—like a Navy SEAL. So the other day, the kids were sleeping, I went to my wife and I go, "Hey, let's have some sex." She goes, "I'm not in the mood." I go, "I'm not in the mood either, but the enemy's sleeping! Let's go, let's move it, gotta kill bin Laden." So the joke is, I turn to the crowd and I go, "That's right, folks, that's what we call sex in my house: killing bin Laden. And sometimes we go *weeks* without killing bin Laden." Here I am in Saudi Arabia, where the bin Laden family is actually respected. It was another one of those lukewarm situations.

MJ: The Middle East is even crazier than usual right now. Is that good for your act?

Maz: The fact is, the Middle East has been going crazy for 50, 60, 70 years. So it's not like, "Oh, I need an ISIS joke."



‘Where Are You Mr. President’: Turkish Leader Criticizes Obama For Not Speaking Out Against Murders Of 3 Young Muslims In NC

February 13, 2015 8:18 AM

Source: <http://washington.cbslocal.com/2015/02/13/where-are-you-mr-president-turkish-leader-criticizes-obama-for-not-speaking-out-against-murders-of-3-young-muslims-in-nc/>

ANKARA, Turkey (CBSDC/AP) — Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has reproached U.S. President Barack Obama and other senior officials for not speaking out against the killings of three young Muslims in North Carolina this week.

Erdogan said during a news conference in Mexico Thursday that the U.S. administration should take a stance against the killings, saying their silence was “meaningful.”

His words were carried by Turkey’s state-run news agency early on Friday.

Erdogan said: “I ask Mr. Obama: where are you Mr. President?”

Erdogan’s comments come as more than 5,000 people came to the funeral of Deah Shaddy Barakat, 23; his wife, Yusor Mohammad Abu-Salha, 21; and her sister Razan Mohammad Abu-Salha, 19, who were killed Tuesday in the couple’s Chapel Hill apartment.

A self-described “gun toting” atheist with a reputation for bullying his neighbors, Craig Stephen Hicks, turned himself in and was jailed on first-degree murder charges.

Chapel Hill police said they are investigating whether religious or ethnic hatred motivated Hicks in any way, and federal investigators said hate crimes haven’t been ruled out. The FBI also announced Thursday that it has “opened a parallel preliminary inquiry to determine whether any federal laws were violated.”

U.S. Attorney Ripley Rand, the district’s top federal prosecutor, had said Wednesday that there was no immediate evidence Muslims were being targeted.

And that didn’t sit well with many at the funeral, where the victims were hailed as martyrs for their faith.

“When we say this was a hate crime it is all about protecting all other children in the USA,” Dr. Mohammad Yousif Abu-Salha, who lost his daughters, told the crowd. “It’s all about making this country that they loved, where they lived and died, peaceful for everybody else.”

“We need to identify things the way they really are,” Abu-Salha continued. “If somebody picks up a fight about anything they can invent, and they murder three people execution-style, we know what this is about. And they have posted on their Facebook how much they hated faith, there’s no doubt.”

The funeral crowd was so large it had to be moved from a mosque to an athletic field at North Carolina State University in Raleigh, where all three studied before Barakat and Mohammad moved to Chapel Hill to pursue careers in dentistry.

The families viewed the victims’ bodies in a small building before the funeral. Then midday Muslim prayers were held. The crowd was solemn and silent — only a few children crying in the distance could be heard. Finally, hearses carried the three coffins, in gray, white and silver, to an Islamic cemetery outside Raleigh.

Namee Barakat told the AP that Hicks had visited his son’s condo before, flashing his gun as he demanded they stop using visitors’ parking spots.

“Yusor told her dad that this guy, he does not like us,” Barakat said. “He does not like our hijab. She was concerned.”

Abu-Salha told the AP that he’s certain his daughters “were targeted for their religion.”

“This is not a parking dispute,” he said. “These children were executed with shots in the back of the head.”

Police have said they are not commenting on evidence in the case, including manner of death.

“We understand the concerns about the possibility that this was hate-motivated, and we will exhaust every lead to determine if that is the case,” Chapel Hill police Chief Chris Blue said in an email Wednesday.

Hicks, 46, is a Second Amendment rights advocate with a concealed weapons permit who often complained about organized religion on Facebook. “Some call me a gun toting Liberal, others call me an open-minded Conservative,” Hicks wrote.

Neighbors described him as angry and confrontational; His ex-wife told the AP that he was obsessed with the 1993 shooting-rampage movie “Falling Down,” and showed “no compassion at all.” His current wife said she believes the killings “had nothing do with religion or the victims’ faith.” She then announced that she’s divorcing him.

The couple met while helping to run the Muslim Student Association at N.C. State, before Barakat moved to Chapel Hill to study dentistry at UNC. Yusor Abu-Salha, who graduated in December, planned to enroll in the dental school in the fall. Razan Abu-Salha, still at N.C. State, was visiting from Raleigh when they were killed.

Family and friends remembered them as outgoing and optimistic young adults working to make the world a better place. The newlyweds had planned to travel to Rihaniya, Turkey, this summer to provide free dental care for Syrian refugee schoolchildren. To offset the costs, Barakat posted a video on a fundraising website seeking \$20,000 in donations. Contributions surged after their deaths, to more than \$250,000 by Thursday.

Barakat’s family was from Syria, although he was born in the U.S. Yusor Abu-Salha was born in Jordan and came to the U.S. with her family as a young girl. In an interview recorded last year as part of the StoryCorps project and broadcast by North Carolina Public Radio on Thursday, she expressed gratitude for her adopted homeland.

“Growing up in America has been such a blessing,” she said. “And, you know, although in some ways I do stand out, such as the hijab I wear on my head, the head covering, there’s still so many ways I feel so embedded in the fabric that is our culture. That’s the beautiful thing here, is that I doesn’t matter where you come from. There are so many people from so many different places, of different backgrounds and religions. But here we’re all one – one culture.”

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THE HUFFINGTON POST

Obama: Chapel Hill Murders 'Brutal And Outrageous'

Paige Lavender

Posted: 02/13/2015 2:28 pm EST Updated: 02/13/2015 2:59 pm EST

Source: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/02/13/obama-chapel-hill-shooting_n_6661936.html

President Barack Obama released a statement Friday on the [shooting of three members](#) of a Muslim family in North Carolina.

Craig Stephen Hicks was arrested Tuesday on charges of first-degree murder, accused of killing Deah Barakat, 23; Barakat's wife, Yusor Abu-Salha, 21; and Yusor's sister, Razan Abu-Salha, 19. The shooting occurred late Tuesday at the family's home near the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Police said the murders may have been prompted by a dispute over parking, [according to WNCN](#).

Obama called the killings "brutal and outrageous." See his full statement below:

Yesterday, the FBI opened an inquiry into the brutal and outrageous murders of Yusor Mohammad Abu-Salha, Deah Shaddy Barakat, and Razan Mohammad Abu-Salha in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. In addition to the ongoing investigation by local authorities, the FBI is taking steps to determine whether federal laws were violated. No one in the United States of America should ever be targeted because of who they are, what they look like, or how they worship. Michelle and I offer our condolences to the victims' loved ones. As we saw with the overwhelming presence at the funeral of these young Americans, we are all one American family. Whenever anyone is taken from us before their time, we remember how they lived their lives – and the words of one of the victims should inspire the way we live ours.

"Growing up in America has been such a blessing," Yusor said recently. "It doesn't matter where you come from. There's so many different people from so many different places, of different backgrounds and religions – but here, we're all one."

WUNC 91.5

North Carolina Public Radio

Slain Young Woman Yusor Abu-Salha Told Teacher 'We're All One'

By [David Brower](#) & [Bill Chappell](#) & Lauren Spohrer
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Source: <http://wunc.org/post/slain-young-woman-yusor-abu-salha-told-teacher-were-all-one>

One of the victims of the shooting in Chapel Hill this week recorded an interview at the StoryCorps Mobile Booth in Durham, N.C. last summer. Yusor Abu-Salha brought her former elementary school teacher, Sister Jabeen, to the booth.

We'd like you to hear part of their conversation: <https://soundcloud.com/wunc/storycorps-yusor>

"Growing up in America has been such a blessing," Yusor Abu-Salha said in the conversation. She later added, "we're all one, one culture."

The recording gives us a new insight into Abu-Salha, 21, who was killed Tuesday along with her husband, Deah Barakat, 23, and her sister, Razan Abu-Salha, 19, in Chapel Hill, N.C.

The police say the shootings seem to have been sparked by a parking dispute with a neighbor, who now faces murder charges. But the killing of three young Muslims has also raised suspicions that it might have been a hate crime, [as we reported](#).

In the [StoryCorps](#) oral history project, people often record themselves talking with parents and friends about what life has taught them. Some participants speak to former teachers — and that was the case with Yusor Abu-Salha. She recorded a conversation with her former elementary school teacher, Sister Jabeen, of the Al-Iman School in Raleigh, N.C.

Here's more of what Abu-Salha had to say:

"Growing up in America has been such a blessing. And although in some ways I do stand out, such as the hijab I wear on my head, the head covering, there are still so many ways that I feel so embedded in the fabric that is, you know, our culture.

"And that's the beautiful thing here, is that it doesn't matter where you come from. There's so many different people from so many different places and backgrounds and religions — but here we're all one, one culture. And it's beautiful to see people of different areas interacting, and being family. Being, you know, one community."

When her former student asks Sister Jabeen what she would tell the world if she had its attention, she said, "Live in peace."

Sister Jabeen, who is the principal of Al-Iman, later added, "The world would become such a beautiful place when we respect each other and make this world a place where everybody has the right to live, and we don't fight over our differences but learn to accept our differences."

"I love hearing from you," Abu-Salha told her teacher. "You always have the right thing to say, the right answers."

The two slain Abu-Salha sisters attended Al-Iman, as did Deah Barakat.

[Last night, vigils for the three shooting victims](#) were held in Chapel Hill and other cities.

Barakat's older brother, Farris, urged hundreds of people gathered in Chapel Hill to "take the message that my mom wanted to make public and do not fight fire with fire."

We'll have more of that StoryCorps conversation today at noon on The State of Things.