

## The Hijabi Monologues

The Hijabi Monologues is an international theatre project which encourages and provides a safe space for Muslim women to creatively communicate their diverse experiences. Through a collaborative process of storytelling, theatre, workshops and discussions, individuals connect, skills and knowledge are developed, stereotypes are challenged and diversity is promoted.

Like race, the hijab has become a physical marker of difference, and identifies a woman as a Muslim at a time when Muslims are subject to a number of stereotypes, public scrutiny and discrimination. Hijabi Monologues aims to see beyond the stereotype to the particular, to the individual and to demonstrate that Muslim women – like all people – have diverse identities, diverse beliefs and diverse views.



These monologues go beyond the much debated hijab, celebrate the gift of the gab, and present personal insights—ranging from the laugh-out-loud funny to the painful—into the true-life experiences of Muslim women. One monologue tells the story of a mother losing her son in a car accident; another focuses on the pick-up tactics used by men who hit on hijab-wearing women.

Sahar Ullah – Founder and Creative Director, *Hijabi Monologues*

*‘The project came about because some of my Muslim friends and I used to tell stories about our day-to-day experiences, when one day our classmate Dan Morrison joked, ‘You know what? We need a Hijabi Monologues. At that moment, we laughed. A few months later, I began writing. Six years later, with a wonderful producer and talented storytellers, ‘The Hijabi Monologues’ has been performed for thousands across North America and now in Europe’.*

## About Hijabi Monologues Europe

Hijabi Monologues first originated in the USA in 2006 where it has been touring to critical acclaim and great success for the past eight years. In 2012, the British Council hosted the European premiere of Hijabi Monologues in Ireland as part of its programme, Transatlantic Network 2020 (TN2020 - <https://www.facebook.com/TransatlanticNetwork2020>), an initiative that works to strengthen ties between Europe and North America through the creation of a network of young leaders.

Alongside the performance, the British Council held workshops aimed at giving European women - from both Muslim and non-Muslim backgrounds - the tools to replicate and perform the ‘Hijabi Monologues’ in their own communities. Participants came from Belgium, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, France, Ireland, the UK and Spain.

Since then, the British Council has had a coordinating role in developing the Hijabi Monologues within Europe, beginning with pilot productions initially in Ireland, the UK and the Netherlands. With 80 years’ experience in delivering cultural relations and international opportunity in over 100 countries world-wide, the British Council is well placed to undertake such a role and adds value through our extensive connections, our expertise in the Arts, Education and Society and our commitment to developing open, inclusive and peaceful societies through creativity.

Hijabi Monologues Europe includes a specially tailored grouping of core monologues paired with local stories gathered from across Europe. The project encourages Muslim and non-Muslim writers, directors, performers, community groups, NGOs, sponsors and academic institutions from across Europe to develop and share skills and learning, to network, to grow, to challenge perceptions and examine key social issues, to influence and to find their individual and collective voices.

The Europe project is a collaboration involving the British Council, the Hijabi Monologues founders (US) and a diverse range of organisations and individuals from the arts, education and civil society sectors across the region. All Hijabi Monologues Europe performances are officially licensed productions of ‘Hijabi Monologues’.



## Outcomes and Results

- Extensive new and diverse audiences reached and a fresh collaborative and cross-sectoral approach to arts production promoted.
- Stereotypes about Muslim women specifically challenged, and instead diversity and social integration across Europe promoted with local communities mobilised to connect, to develop understanding and skills and to work together.
- Hijabi Monologues Ireland pilot with partners, Immigrant Council of Ireland and Axis Theatre: Audience of 844 people across five performances in Dublin, including Muslim and non-Muslim individuals, teachers and school children; extensive outreach and discursive programme engaging 150 Muslim women to encourage story submission and auditioning and over 150 individuals (Muslim, non-Muslim, men, women) to explore and debate relevant themes (Islam in Ireland, Muslim women as pioneers).
- Performance in Belfast, UK as part of the Northern Ireland Arts Festival @ Queen's. Audience of 160 and simultaneous skills workshops and site visits for over 30 Muslim/non-Muslim women from Ireland and Northern Ireland.
- In the Netherlands, 25-30 Muslim women from 3 generations involved in story writing/production workshops and auditions. Coordinated by the renowned Theater Zuidplein, artist Rajae el Mouhandiz and a dynamic production team of Muslim/non-Muslim women. Initial 15 performance tour and discursive programme planned across the Netherlands in November 2014.
- Our aim over the next couple of years is to stage performances across Europe in German, French, Danish and Spanish.

Liz McBain – British Council and Hijabi Monologues Europe Representative

*'The British Council recognises the need to develop a better understanding of different cultures, and the 'Hijabi Monologues' project is an ideal way of doing this. The production is an excellent mechanism for opening people's eyes, ears and minds. It helps us to see beyond the stereotypes and clichés and to value people for who they are, not what they look like. The British Council is delighted to support this work across Europe which breaks down misconceptions people may have about the Muslim community, instead focusing on Muslim and non-Muslim individuals and communities connecting and developing through stories and through working together.'*

Find out more about Hijabi Monologues Europe online at:

Website: <http://www.britishcouncil.org/europe/our-work-in-europe/hijabi-monologues>

Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/HijabiMonologuesEurope>

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCZpiernzyOlz1G6Mwjvy4hg>

Flickr: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/hijabimonologueseuropa/>

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