

Meeting The Spoken Word Performer [Njideka Iroh aka NJ](#) on Thursday, March, 23, 2023

We had the honor to meet the poet Njideka Iroh during a session of our course “Mapping ‘African Diasporic’ Literary Voices in the Austrian Cultural Scene” with Ass-Prof. Dr. Rémi Tchokothe. Njideka, raised in London by a Styrian mother and an Igbo father, moved to Vienna in her teens and continues to live and write here. She describes herself as a spoken word performer, because **“the spoken word produces a different text every time. The place, time, audience is different. And of course, the ‘I’ is different.”** Eine *Momentaufnahme*, as we say in German. It was precisely such a *Momentaufnahme* she shared with us by performing her poem **“Speech-Less”**. Written in both English and German in 2011, the poem expresses her feeling of being othered by the Viennese population, denying her the ability to speak proper German. **“Eine gesamte Gesellschaft hat sich abgesprochen, um mir die deutsche Sprache abzusprechen“**, says a line in her poem, in which she eventually claims her right to use German the way it suits her: **“Und ich werde Deutsch sprechen, wie es MIR passt. Ich werde mich so artikulieren, ja und einige verlieren, weil es MIR so passt.”** The experience of being BIPOC within a white majority society was and still is the starting point of her work. To sum up the topics discussed, Njideka ended the session by reciting her poem **‘A loving kindness’**, which deals with multiplicity of languages, languages and cultural heritages, (in)visibility and code-switching. Language is a contested field, which is why self-empowerment is all the more important – or, to use Njideka Iroh’s words: „Das gesprochene Wort ist Ehrlichkeit in einem selbstliebenden Ton.“

Listening Recommendations:

[Speech-less // A poem by Njideka - YouTube](#) Retrieved [March 23, 2023]

[Njideka Iroh | Transnational Albatrosses 2021 - YouTube](#) Retrieved [March 23, 2023]

(Anna Hell & Laura Kisser)