Dr. Rachel Bolle-Debessay

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Research Profile

I am an early-career researcher in **Anglophone literary and cultural studies**, specialising in **Afro-diasporic literary practices**. My research investigates how these traditions use **sound, voice, and performance** as forms of **knowledge-making** that exceed, and actively contest, dominant literary canons. I focus on practices that survived historical oppression not only through writing but also through oral transmission, bodies, and rhythm. I aim to make visible the aesthetic and epistemological modes that have been **systematically suppressed** by a history of racial exclusion.

Alongside my research, I am committed to dialogue between academia and the wider cultural world. Together with artists, communities, and cultural policymakers, I advance debates around the representation, participation, and visibility of **marginalised voices** in cultural spaces.

Research Interests

Black British literature · Caribbean poetics · dub poetry · sound studies · performance research · Afro-diasporic literary history · postcolonial aesthetics · gendered sonic practices · diasporic archives · créolisation

Education

2020 **PhD** English Literature and Performance Studies, King's College London
Principal supervisor: Paul Gilroy. Second supervisor: Justine McConnell
Focus: Aesthetics and politics of early dub poetry in the postcolonial city of London

2014 **MA** Subject-Matter Didactics and Educational Sciences (English and Music), University Institute of Teacher Education, Geneva

2013 **MA** Music Pedagogy, Haute École de Musique (HEM), Geneva

2011 **MA** English Language and Literature, University of Geneva and University of Sydney (exchange)

2009 **BA** English Language and Literature; Musicology, University of Geneva

Current Academic Position

Feb 2026 – present **Invited Researcher**, ECAL (École Cantonale d'Art de Lausanne). Project: *Parasonic*

Jun 2024 – Oct 2026 **Postdoctoral Researcher**, Department of English and American Studies, University of Vienna. Project: "Poetry Off the Page" (ERC/FWF, PI: Assoc. Prof. Dr Julia Lajta-Novak)

Oct 2025 – Aug 2026 **External Lecturer**, University of Vienna

2021, 2024 **Parental Leave**

Distinctions

2022 **Essay Prize**, *Wasafiri*, "Dub Poetry and Theatre in Conversation: The Development of a Caribbean Performance Poetics"

Grants and Fellowships

2026

- **International teaching collaboration "** DIY: Alternative Modes of Cultural Production in Modern and Contemporary Anglophone Literatures (co-initiator), supported by Circle U
- **Circle U. Postdoctoral Mobility Fellowship** research stay at Université Paris Cité
- **FWF funding** for an open-access grant for the monograph (in progress)
- **ÖFG**, "Sounding the Afro-Diasporic Self: Sonic Practices in Amryl Johnson's Work",, archival research; British Library and Queen Mary University of London.

Teaching Profile

My teaching spans **secondary and higher education** and is guided by a core conviction: that literature shapes how we understand ourselves, others, and the world we share. Across **BA and MA courses**, I work to expand both what we study and how, bringing **underrepresented voices and marginalised traditions** into dialogue with established frameworks. My teaching **equips students with critical tools** to situate literature within broader histories of **cultural production and resistance**.

Courses

2026-2025

- "Quand le texte se fait son : création et pensée aux croisements des arts", BA Theory Seminar, ECAL (École Cantonale d'Art de Lausanne)

2025–26

- "DIY: Alternative Modes of Cultural Production in Modern and Contemporary Anglophone Literatures" (co-initiator), Circle U, MA Literary and Cultural Studies, University of Vienna
- "Son, performance, texte : décloisonner nos manières de créer et penser", BA Theory Seminar, ECAL (École Cantonale d'Art de Lausanne)
- "Black Atlantic Thinkers: Literature and the Struggle for New Worldviews", BA Literary and Cultural Studies, University of Vienna
- "The Power of Sound: Listening to Global Stories", VK Seminar, University of Vienna

2024–25

- "Biografication: Life Narratives across Genres", BA/MA Literary and Cultural Studies, University of Vienna
- "Poetry off the Page", VK Seminar, Literature and Language Education, University of Vienna

2018–19

- Graduate Teaching Assistant, Comparative Literature, King's College London

Guest teaching

2026

- "The Rebel Generation: Black British Writing", BA/MA Literary and Cultural Studies, University of Vienna, 12 May

2025

- "Relationalité en basses fréquences: enjeux de la poésie-performance", Littérature française contemporaine (20 Octobre), University of Lausanne
- "The Rebel Generation: Black British Writing", BA/MA Literary and Cultural Studies (2 July), University of Vienna
- "One Riddim, Many Homes: Dub Poetry and the Sonic Poetics of Home", MA Popular and Media Cultures (10 July), University of Vienna

- "Slave Narratives and the Reader", MA English Literature and Culture (7 April), University of Innsbruck

2020

- "The Black Atlantic and Sound", MA Ethnomusicology (7 April), University of Geneva

Invited Lectures

2026

"Low Frequencies and the Politics of Sonic Depth", Word Sound and Power workshop (28 April), University of Oslo

"Voices in the Classroom: The Learning Possibilities of Spoken Word Poetry", Tage der Literaturdidaktik (21 March), University of Vienna

2025 "Jebena : une collaboration innovante : repenser l'interculturalité" (11 November), Haute École de Travail Social (HETS) Geneva

2023 "Dialogue créatif entre littérature et musique : le cas de la *dub poetry*" (5 April), University of Geneva & Museum of Ethnography Geneva

2019 "Une solution locale pour l'accueil de mineurs non-accompagnés" Children's Rights Anniversary (20 November), United Nations, Geneva

Conferences and Presentations

2025

- "Listening to Poetry: Rethinking Sound in Literary Criticism", Fleeting Voices (3 October), University of Applied Arts, Vienna.
- "Poetry Performance and the Future of Anglophone Studies", Anglistiktag (24 September), University of Duisburg-Essen.
- "Low Frequencies, Poetics and Gender" Affect, Sound, and the Postcolonial, CEREP (19 March), University of Liège.

2024

- "Words that Sound like a Bass Line: Low Frequencies and a Poetics of Musicality" Poetry, Music and Sound Art International Conference (20 June), University of Hamburg
- "Dispositif d'aide à l'insertion professionnelle: le rôle de l'art?" Réseau MaTISS (13 September), HETSL, Lausanne.

2023

- "Challenging Professional Practice from the Inside: Local Communities in Jebena" ICME Museums and Change, Museum of Ethnography (4 December), Budapest.
- "Alter | native Readings: Migrations and Museum Representations" IMISCOE Spring Conference (16 March), University of Côte d'Azur, Nice.

2022

- "'...dubbing in the rootsical...': The Case of Dub Poetry", Taking the Mic: Black British Spoken Word Poetry Since 1965, Poetry Off the Page (18 November), University of Vienna.

2019

- "Le rôle des associations locales... contexte migratoire", XVIIe Congrès international de l'ARIC (19 June), HETS, Genève.

Publications

My work has appeared in peer-reviewed journals, including *Caribbean Quarterly* and *Wasafiri*. In 2022, I received the **Wasafiri Essay Prize**, awarded for scholarship that reshapes literary canons by foregrounding diasporic and underrepresented voices. A monograph on the early dub poetry of Linton Kwesi Johnson and Michael Smith is under contract with **Brill** (forthcoming 2026).

Monograph

The Early Dub Poetry of Linton Kwesi Johnson and Michael Smith: Sound, Text, and Performance. Cross/Cultures: Readings in Post/Colonial Literatures and Cultures in English. Brill, forthcoming 2027.

Edited Monograph

Parasonic Listenings: Anti-racist and Decolonial Collective Thoughts on Aural Practices. Errant Bodies Press, forthcoming. Co-curated with Thibault Walter. Co-edited with Purva Dua and Thibault Walter.

Peer-Reviewed Articles

"Poetry Performance and the Future of Anglophone Studies: Reflections from the Poetry Off the Page Project." *Anglistik: International Journal of English Studies*, special issue "Anglophone Studies and the Public: Past, Present and Future Debates and Interventions," vol. 38, no. 1, 2027. Forthcoming.

"…dubbing in the rootsical…: The Case of Dub Poetry." *Textual Practice*, forthcoming 2026.

"A Dangerous Knowing: Four Black Women Poets." *Bloomsbury Encyclopedia of Black British Writing: Volume 2 (1915–1980)*, edited by Jak Peake and Tracey Walters, Bloomsbury, under review. Invited contribution.

"Dub Poetry and Theatre in Conversation: The Development of a Caribbean Performance Poetics." *Wasafiri*, vol. 39, no. 2, 2024, pp. 69–81. [**Wasafiri Essay Prize 2022**]

"Low Frequencies and Poetic Innovations: Revisiting Dub Poetry's Aesthetic." *Caribbean Quarterly*, vol. 68, no. 2, 2022, pp. 251–67.

Book Chapters

"Atlantic Souths: Orality and Performance in Afro-Diasporic Literary Practices." *Cambridge Companion to the Literatures of the Global South*, edited by Pavan Malreddy and Lars Eckstein, Cambridge UP, forthcoming 2026. Invited Contribution.

"Music and Literary Imagination: The Creative Impulse of Sonic Vibrations in Dub Poetry." *Poetry, Music, and Sound Art*, edited by Dürr, Henkel and Keylin, De Gruyter, 2026.

Public Scholarship

"Sounding Home: Notes between Registers." *Post45: Contemporaries*, Septembre 2026.

"Conference Report: Poetry Off the Page, Around the Globe (PoPAG), Vienna, June 2025." *Poetry Off the Page*, University of Vienna, 2025. Co-written with Shefali Banerji.

Interviews with Debris Stevenson, Zena Edwards, Martin Glynn, Sue Brown, Peter Johnson, and Roger Robinson. *Poetry Off the Page*, University of Vienna, 2025.

"Dub Poetry and the Power of Bass." *Poetry Off the Page Podcast*, ep. 4, 2025.

"Jebena, déplacements des manières de faire et de dire le musée?" *Nouveaux récits des écomusées et musées de société*, FEMS, 2024, pp. 80–86. Co-written with Julie Dorner.

"'Human Curiosity Has a Revolutionary Power': An Interview with Paul Gilroy." *King's English Blog*, 2018.

"Entre texte et musique: le cas de la Dub Poetry." *RTS Audio Podcast*, 2018.

Editorial Roles

Network Editor, H-Net Network "Poetry Performance Research" (launching March 2026)

Co-editor, Open Library of Humanities, Special Collection "International Advances in Poetry Performance Research" (forthcoming 2026)

Lead Editor, Project Bibliography and Research Blog, *Poetry Off the Page*, University of Vienna, since 2023

Committee Member, Annotated bibliography "Lectures du monde," ISJM, Geneva, 2023

Organisation of Conferences and Workshops

2027 "Vibration: Bass, Bodies, Affect and Literary Analysis", 2-Day Workshop, CUSO Doctoral School, University of Geneva (co-organiser), June

2026 "Pentathlon de la poésie", Printemps de la Poésie Festival, Switzerland (jury member), September

2025 "Poetry Off the Page Around the Globe" (PoPAG) International Conference, University of Vienna (co-convenor), 13–14 June 2025. https://popconf2025.univie.ac.at/

Professional Memberships

Swiss Association of University Teachers of English | European Society for the Study of English | International Network for the Study of Lyric | Deutscher Anglistikverband

Additional Professional Experience

Secondary Education Teaching

2022–23 English and Music Teacher, Gymnase de Nyon, Switzerland (ages 16–20)

2012–17 English and Music Teacher, Collège André-Chavanne, Geneva (ages 15–19)

Cultural Leadership and Community Engagement

2018–24 Coordinator and Project Manager, Association de Médiatrices Interculturelles (AMIC), Geneva

Conceptualisation, fundraising, and delivery of participatory cultural projects connecting marginalised communities, cultural institutions, and public authorities.

- **Geneva Museum of Ethnography (2022–23):** "Jebena"

  Intercultural programme supporting the museum's shift toward community, co-creation and decolonial exhibition practice.
- **International Museum of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, Musée Bulle, Musée d'Ethnographie de Neuchâtel (2019–21):** "Lectures Alternatives"

  Cultural participation programme for migrants with limited access to museum spaces, funded by the Swiss Commission for Migration.
- **International Film Festival and Forum on Human Rights** (2023): "Kids Guernica"

  Intergenerational art project exhibited at Geneva's leading human rights forum, amplifying the voices of marginalised families to a civic audience.
- **Festival Far° (2024):** "Cohabitations Multiples"

  Bi-national (France–Switzerland) project on intercultural urban cohabitation, engaging unaccompanied young migrants and public institutions

2014–18 Volunteer, Association de Médiatrices Interculturelles (AMIC), Geneva

Supported the integration of unaccompanied minors and young adults through tutoring, cultural activities, and liaison with schools, social services, and cultural institutions.

References

Assoc. Prof. Julia Lajta-Novak julia.lajta-novak@univie.ac.at
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Prof. Dorothee Birke dorothee.Birke@uibk.ac.at