

# [***The most streamed female Francophone artist has become a target in France's culture wars ahead of Paris 2024***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BWJ-HDS1-JBSS-S06W-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

(CNN) &#8212; Aya Nakamura was born in the former French colony of Mali, raised in France and is widely considered the most streamed female Francophone artist in the world.

The 28-year-old,as well as being Malian, is a French citizen, and a multiple-platinum-selling pop star who was brought up in the Parisian suburbs. However, ahead of Paris 2024, Nakamura finds herself at the center of France's culture wars.

Amid widespread rumors the singer would perform at the Games' Opening Ceremony, singing an Edith Piaf song, some members of France's far-right have questionedwhether she embodies French heritage, values and identity. Piaf is a key figure in France's musical - and national - identity.

"There's no way Aya. This is Paris, not the market in Bamako," said fringe and extreme far-right group Les Natifs (Natives) on X, formerly known as Twitter, in March, referring to Mali's capital.

Nakamura has defended herself on social media, saying on X: "I'm becoming the number one state subject in debates ...but what do I really owe you all? Nothing."

The singer has received support from Rachida Dati, France's Minister of Culture, who spoke out in defence of Nakamura, saying "be careful of the pretext of attacking someone out of pure racism."

Paris 2024's organizing committee told CNN: "We were very shocked by the racist attacks against Aya Nakamura in recent days. We offer our full support to the most listened-to French artist in the world."

Whether Nakamura will perform at the Olympics' opening ceremony is still unconfirmed, with the Paris 2024 organizing committee telling CNN that they "won't be confirming or denying" any rumors or reports, to "leave room for surprises" on the day.

CNN has reached out to Nakamura but she declined to be interviewed on the matter.

'She contributes to French culture'

However, many others in France are all too keen to comment on this cause celebre.

Far-right politician Marion Marechal, who is the niece of far-right National Rally party leader Marine Le Pen and a member of the Reconquete party, told French television stations BMFTV and Europe 1 that Nakamura "does not sing in French," referencing the blend of Parisian and African derived slang that often feature in her lyrics.

"I think that the people who criticize her actually don't accept that she embodies France," French activist Rokhaya Diallo told CNN. "The slang she uses is used by young people and a lot of young French people use slang."

Nakamura often uses a mix of verlan and African derived slang from languages such as Bambara, from her birth country Mali, in her music. Her number one hit song "Djadja," contains the lyric "le monde est tit-pe" - the world is small - with word 'tit-pe' inverting the French word 'petit.'

Verlan, a type of French slang named after the inversion of the French word 'l'envers' - meaning backwards - originates from the outskirts of Paris known as 'la cite' (the suburbs) that have had large immigrant population.

At the inauguration of the Olympic Aquatics Centre earlier this month, French President Emanuel Macron said that Nakamura "speaks to a good number of our compatriots" and claimed that "these games and ceremonies should reflect us, and she contributes to French culture, to French music."

"I want to defend here these choices and defend the fact that there must be artistic freedom and that ***politics*** should not interfere," added Macron.

In an interview with France Inter, Macron's political rival Le Pen, known for her right-wing views, claimed that the President was seeking to "outrage" and "humiliate the French people" when asked whether she thinks Nakamura opening the games would be a good symbol.

When asked to further explain why this choice would be a humiliation, Le Pen responded "she does not sing in French, or a foreign language, she sings nonsense."

Speaking to CNN, Professor of Political Science at the University of Nice, Vincent Martigny, said that while there are those who believe it is right to promote minorities and their role in French culture, there are others, who hold more traditional views, which he terms as racist in relation to the country's colonial past.

1998 World Cup

There have been moments of perceived unity in France's past, notably when the men's national soccer team won the 1998 World Cup.

That triumph helped popularise the slogan "Black, Blanc, Beur" - Black, White, Arab - amid a push for unity and inclusion. Beur' is verlan for the French word 'arabe.'

France's World Cup winning team of 1998 was made up of a diverse group of players, not only of European descent but also from the ex-colonies of France and other countries. Many thought at the time that the 1998 team was a sign of a truly integrated, multi-cultural France.

But notable social and cultural divisions have emerged in France in recent years.

There have been multiple bans and restrictions against Islamic dress. The nationwide ban on public schoolchildren wearing abayas, was denounced as an "Islamophobic campaign" by one politician on the left. Athletes have been banned from wearing a hijab while competing representing France at the Paris Olympic Games.

Then there have been multiple protests and riots over police brutality leading to the death of some French inhabitants of North and West African heritage from the suburbs of Paris, fueling backlash over policing methods in marginalized communities.

Nakamura's birth country of Mali is one of the many former French colonies. There are millions of French citizens, like Nakamura, who are either themselves immigrants or descendants of immigrants from nations formerly colonized by France.

These days France finds itself embroiled in a very public debate over the recognition and acceptance of its immigrants as the country continues to reckon with its colonial history.

Professor Martigny believes that the nationalist party is "stronger than ever" and that nationalists in France are "more nationalist" and more open with their views today than they were in the past.

Activist Diallo also believes that France is struggling to see itself "as it is" and recognize non-White individuals as fully French.

"Despite her successes, despite her undeniable achievements, we still think that it's not an honor for us to have such a woman represent us," Diallo told CNN, referring to Nakamura.

'The Great Replacement' theory

Political scientist Oliver Roy, who is Professor at the EUI School of Transnational Governance, told CNN that a common belief that could be fuelling the culture wars in France is an ideology expressed "not just [by] the extreme right, but also part of the traditional centre right" known as "the great replacement."

He describes the term as "the idea that there is a new population coming from the south, which is replacing the old traditional, French population." However, he maintains that this fear "is not supported by demography, [or] by statistics, and is, of course, very ideological."

According to Martigny, France's cultural divisions are amplified on social media by both extremes of the political spectrum.

"Because of the social networks, public debates are more violent on these issues than they used to be," he said.

"There's a theatre for the expression of extremely strong minded, sometimes racist, very often offensive comments on Twitter, on X, and on other social networks," added Martigny.

"You have a lot of X accounts who are really, really, really pro far-right. And so they played a role in discussing these issues and making it a controversy. And then this controversy is exported to the traditional media."

'Show a very optimistic face for France'

As Nakamura was targeted by fringe and extreme far-right groups as well as far-right politicians, in an interview with BMFTV and RMC, Macron said that "the reactions shocked me ... there were truly racist reactions."

However, Martigny says he sees Macron's condemnation of the attacks as racist as an attempt to balance the scales after the passing of what the professor called a "very restrictive law on immigration" a few months ago.

In December, Macron passed a controversial bill calling for tougher immigration that was endorsed by the far-right, and rejected by many in his own camp.

Politicians such as Le Pen hailed the legislation as an "ideological victory" whilst French health Minister, Aurelien Rousseau resigned in protest. It included many amendments tightening immigration laws, one of which dictated children born to foreign parents on French soil would no longer become automatic French citizens but would have to apply for citizenship.

"He needs to make that forgotten in a certain way by showing that he has a sense of balance on these issues," Martigny states.

By promoting Nakamura, Martigny believes that Macron's ambitions may have been to "show a very optimistic face for France."

"[There are] very strong cultural wars in France revolving around pop stars, and the type of pop stars that you can mobilize or the type of artists that you can mobilize when you want to unite the country."

With less than 100 days to go until the Olympics, many hope Paris 2024 will give France the opportunity to show unity.

However, the heated reactions to Nakamura hints at a more pessimistic outlook.

By Bea Adeleke, CNN

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