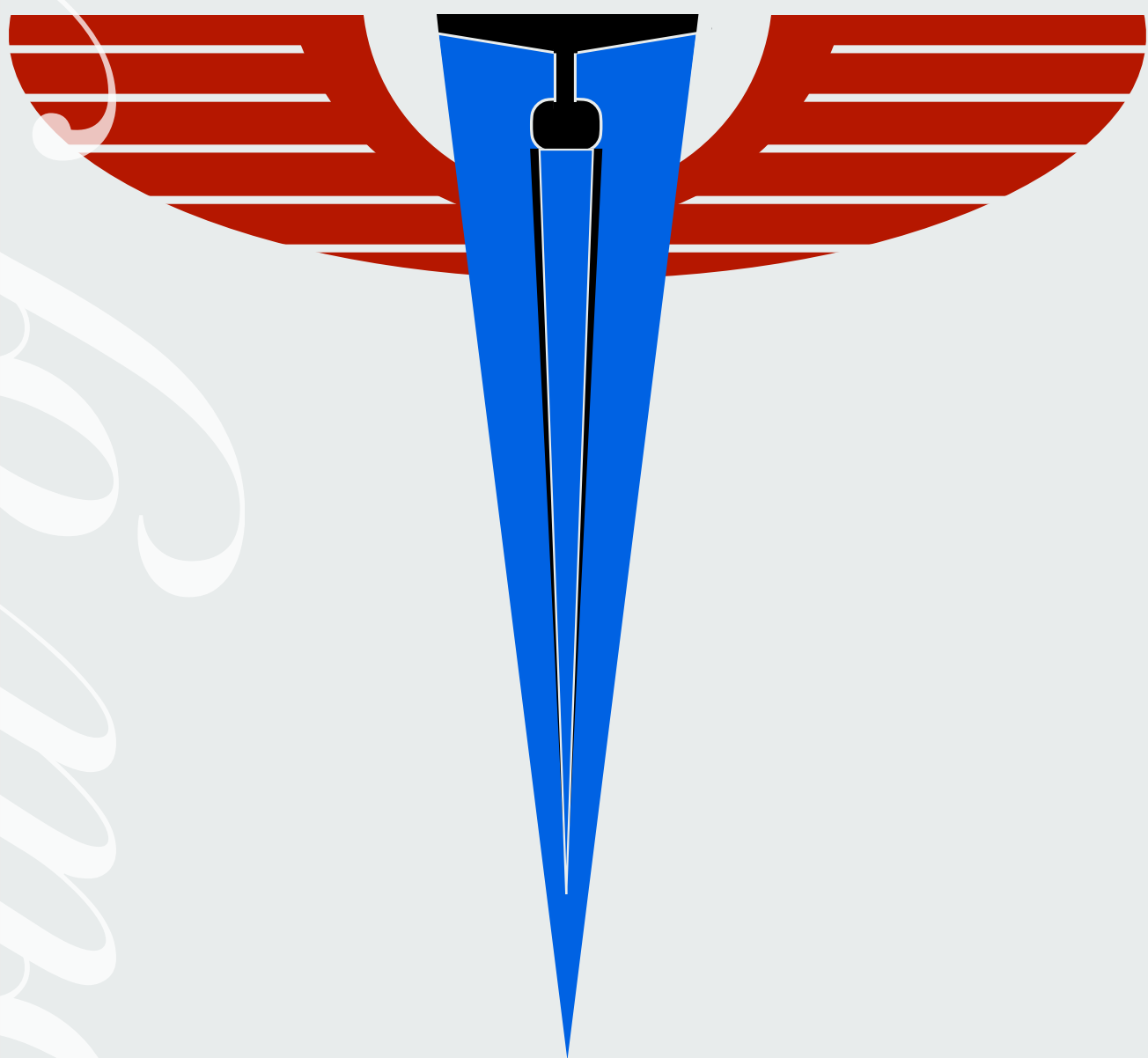
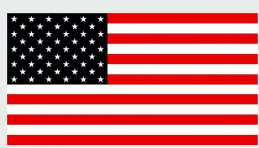


*Soul of Nations*

# LUXEMBOURG

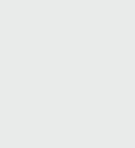


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AFRO-EUROPEAN RESEARCH JOURNAL 2023



**ESPACE\_\_  
CULTURES**

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WE BELONG EUROPE:  
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INTERVIEW SERIES



WEBELONG

Founded on March 8, 2020 by three passionate young women from Luxembourg and Italy, today We Belong Europe counts team members from Luxembourg, France, Bulgaria, Italy and Germany. What unites this team is a common vision for a more inclusive Europe, where diversity becomes a strength rather than a challenge.

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# We Belong Europe: Luxembourg Advocacy Podcast

## Interview Series

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Yasmine Ouirhrane, Jana Degrott

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**W**e Belong Europe explores diverse and inspirational journeys in Luxembourg, highlighting the complex tapestry of identity and diversity. In these interviews, individuals like Aymeric Kabore, Maimuna Djalo, Oumou Aidara, and Igor Tchappi share their unique experiences. They discuss their cultural backgrounds, experiences with discrimination, and passionate advocacy for inclusivity. These conversations offer valuable insights into identity, diversity, and the pursuit of positive change in Luxembourg and beyond.

Aymeric Kabore, a Diversity and Inclusion professional and activist, shares his Afro-European identity forged by a blend of cultures and nationalities. He delves into the complexities of race, nationality, and culture and discusses the persistent challenges of racism and microaggressions in Luxembourg. Aymeric's exploration of intersectionality, as a cisgender homosexual, provides a unique perspective on how various facets of identity intersect, shaping perceptions and experiences. He concludes by offering valuable advice on navigating identity and finding a sense of community.

Maimuna Djalo, a dedicated professional in the education sector, takes us on her remarkable journey of growing up in multiple European countries and the challenges she faced as a young immigrant. Her story is one of resilience and determination, driven by her experiences with discrimination in Luxembourg's educational system. Maimuna passionately advocates for change and emphasizes the urgent need for representation in education. Through moving anecdotes from her students, she underscores the profound impact of cultural sensitivity, issuing a compelling call to action for embracing diversity and fostering inclusivity.

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In these compelling interviews We Belong host Yasmine Ouirhrane engages in thought-provoking conversations with individuals from diverse diverse backgrounds in Luxembourg. Each interview unveils a rich tapestry of identity and experience, shedding light on the intricate dynamics of diversity in this multicultural country.

Oumou Aidara, an environmental and educational researcher with a focus on Luxembourg and Berlin, with Senegalese roots, shares their journey of self-discovery. Oumou also candidly discusses experiences with language-based discrimination in Luxembourg and Germany and the importance of raising awareness about this issue. Throughout the interview, Oumou's resilience, determination, and commitment to embracing their non-binary identity serve as an inspiring testament to following one's creative dreams with confidence

Lastly, Igor Tchappi, a research associate at the University of Luxembourg, narrates his remarkable journey from Cameroon to Luxembourg. His academic pursuits and unique background in computer science and social science provide a rich backdrop for discussing the intersection of AI and social inclusion. Igor emphasizes the importance of addressing biases in AI models and datasets and shares his experiences as one of the few people of color in academic spaces. He underscores the need for increased diversity and scholarship opportunities. Igor also provides insights into life in Luxembourg, describing it as a multicultural and safe environment, albeit with high living costs. His research on AI and diversity highlights his commitment to advancing inclusivity and equity in the field of artificial intelligence.

# BLACK QUEER IDENTITIES: A CONVERSATION WITH AYMERIC KABORE



Aymeric Kabore, a Diversity and Inclusion professional and activist, shares his Afro-European identity forged by a blend of cultures and nationalities. Aymeric's exploration of intersectionality, as a self-identified queer black man, provides a unique perspective on how various aspects of identity intersect, shaping perceptions and experiences. He concludes by offering valuable advice on navigating identity and finding a sense of community.

We Belong Europe  
Podcast transcript #37  
Luxembourg

## YASMINE OUIRHANE, We Belong (WB)

Today, we’re in Luxembourg, joined by Aymeric Kabore, an activist and Diversity and Inclusion professional with a deep passion for the topic we're about to explore. Aymeric, you're based in Luxembourg. Could you tell us more about yourself?

## AYMERIC KABORE (AK)

Yes, I was born in France, in the northern part, near Roubaix, close to Lille. I've been living in Luxembourg since 2001, having returned from university and started working here.

**WB** You mentioned growing up near Luxembourg in France. Did you notice any differences in your experiences?

**AK** Yes, there are some slight differences. I was born in France, but my parents are originally from Burkina Faso, West Africa, a former French colony. We moved back to Burkina Faso shortly after my birth. So, I was only born in France, and then we moved to Luxembourg when I was around five and a half or six years old. It was a completely different experience.

**WB** With such a diverse background, how did you shape your identity within Luxembourgish culture? How would you define your identity?

**AK** In recent years, as I've delved into issues of diversity and inclusion and educated myself, I've become more comfortable identifying as Afro-European. The places I've lived have greatly influenced how I perceive myself, my worldview, and my personal identity. It's fascinating to see how these dynamics manifest in my life story. For instance, I acquired French citizenship because my grandmother married a French man in the 1970s, which allowed my mom to live in France for a safer pregnancy. We moved between

countries freely due to these citizenships. From an early age, I'd visit my dad in Burkina Faso every summer, creating a strong connection to different places. As I lived in Luxembourg, its remarkable diversity encouraged me to embrace my origins more fully. This diversity was particularly evident during my time in primary school in a popular district of Luxembourg City. In my class, there were no Luxembourgish citizens; we were all from diverse backgrounds. My teacher was the only Luxembourgish person. These early experiences led me to embrace an African-European identity. Today, Luxembourg is my home, and I feel Luxembourgish. I even speak the language. My life is here.

**WB** It's interesting how becoming conscious of your identity often happens when you face racism, as I've observed in many interviews. You become more connected to your culture when you encounter differences. Could you share your experiences of facing racism or microaggressions in Luxembourg?

**AK** Yes, this process takes different forms. I'd like to acknowledge Jana Degrott for her remarkable work and reelection in Steinsel. It's unfortunate that despite Luxembourg's diversity, microaggressions still occur. One common microaggression I face is the surprise people express when I speak Luxembourgish, often due to my background in the food and beverage industry and during my studies. People are so accustomed to speaking French or English with foreigners that they sometimes don't realize that I am Luxembourgish and speak the language. These nuanced signals can make you feel excluded. Then there are more overt instances of racism, such as name-calling or being denied entry to places like nightclubs or bars because of my race, especially in predominantly white spaces. While it might be less frequent, it's disheartening that it still occurs in 2023. These dynamics also intersect with social class. As an educated person, fluent in all of Luxembourg's languages, and working in corporate, I've learned to navigate these





Aymeric's exploration of intersectionality, as a self-identified queer black man, provides a unique perspective on how various aspects of identity intersect, shaping perceptions and experiences. He concludes by offering valuable advice on navigating identity and finding a sense of community.

spaces and handle microaggressions. However, for our parents' generation, who moved here, it may be more challenging.

**WB** Intersectionality plays a significant role, considering different facets of your identity. You also mentioned your gender identity and sexuality. How has this impacted your experiences or discrimination you've faced?

**AK** I identify as cisgender and homosexual, adding another layer to my identity. I believe that people often make judgments based on all these aspects of me. I am convinced that my queerness and my comfort with my feminine side, compared to others, intersect with my blackness and affect how people perceive me. I'll share an example: one night, I was walking behind a woman after leaving a club. My physical appearance can be imposing as I'm 1.90 meters tall. I sensed that her body language was apprehensive. Then, I received a phone call from my friend, and we started chatting animatedly, using a different tone and mannerisms. I believe the person in front of me heard this conversation and assumed that I was LGBTQ+. Subsequently, I felt her relax, and I seemed less threatening to her. This encounter highlights how people often form initial impressions of me as a black male, and as they get to know me better, different clichés emerge. Intersectionality underscores how homophobia, racism, and various elements collide to create unique problems. Awareness and education are essential to deconstruct these concepts and help people understand that the experiences of my mom, for instance, are different from mine or those of my light-skinned brother.

**WB** Your insights into intersectionality and its impact on personal experiences are invaluable. As we wrap up, if you could offer one piece of advice, especially to newcomers in Luxembourg who may be struggling to navigate their identities, what would it be?

**AK** I would encourage them to seek out and establish a sense of community. There's nothing more empowering than sharing spaces and connecting with people who share similar backgrounds and experiences. Luxembourg offers initiatives to connect people and foster a sense of belonging. Don't hesitate to engage and find like-minded individuals who share similar experiences.

**WB** Thank you, Aymeric, for this valuable advice and for sharing your experiences with us.

**AK** Thank you for having me.

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Yasmine Quirhrane. Co-Founder & Podcast Host of We Belong Europe. Yasmine is an advocate for social and gender justice. She was recognised Young European of the Year 2019 by the Schwarzkopf Foundation, EDD Young Leader by the European Commission, Women Deliver Young Leader and she is a member of the Gender Innovation Agora at UN Women. She has also worked with numerous institutions such as the European Union, African Union and the World Bank.

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Jana Degrott Co- Founder & Head of Partnerships of We Belong Europe. As a believer in the importance of representation and youth voices in government, Jana ran her first electoral campaign at the age of 21 and serves currently as a councilor in her hometown of Steinsel (Luxembourg) and counts therefor as one of the youngest elected officials in Luxembourg. She has been appointed as a councilor at the Apolitical Foundation and has been selected to join the newest cohort of the Obama Foundation as an Obama Leader.

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## TEACHING WITH RESPECT: A CONVERSATION WITH MAIMUNA DJALO



Maimuna Djalo, a dedicated professional in the education sector, takes us on her remarkable journey of growing up in multiple European countries and the challenges she faced as a young immigrant. Her story is one of resilience and determination, driven by her experiences with discrimination in Luxembourg's educational system. Maimuna passionately advocates for change and emphasizes the urgent need for representation in education. Through moving anecdotes from her students, she underscores the profound impact of cultural sensitivity, issuing a compelling call to action for embracing diversity and fostering inclusivity.

We Belong Europe  
Podcast transcript #36  
Luxembourg

### YASMINE OUIRHRANE, We Belong (WB)

Today, we are joined by Maimuna Djalo from Luxembourg. Maimuna is a professional in the education sector, and I'm very happy to have her here today. So welcome, Maimuna! So, Maimuna, you have such an interesting story because you actually lived in several countries in Europe. I mean, you were born in Portugal, right? Can you tell me more about your story? Where did you grow up, and how did you land in Luxembourg?

### MAIMUNA DJALO (MD)

I was indeed born in Portugal. Both my parents are from Guinea Bissau, and my mother decided that she wanted a better future for all of us. So she went to Portugal, had me, and then, afterwards, there was a big crisis in Portugal, so she wanted an even better future. And then we just came to Luxembourg. I've been living in Luxembourg since I was three years old.

**WB** Did you learn the language quickly? How was your experience?

**MD** My experience coming to Luxembourg as a child was, at first, very pleasant because I was always integrated into the Luxembourg system. That allowed me to learn the language properly, and also because my stepfather is Luxembourgish, so I had the privilege of speaking the language at home. However, as I grew older and began to understand more about life, that's when I realized that my life as a Black woman in Luxembourg was not as easy. That's when I started noticing the different prejudices that were directed at me.

**WB** So, you say, at the beginning, it was very pleasant. What happened then? Was it at school that you started experiencing difficulties and discrimination?

**MD** Yes, school was definitely the root of the problem. I always say to people that school is your first introduction to society. So, for me, going to school and facing racism, not only from the children but also from the teachers, made a significant impact on me. I always received hurtful comments, and when I wanted to complain about them, nobody did anything. So, I had to learn how to develop a thick skin.

**WB** For us at We Belong, it's very important to unpack stereotypes and especially to educate people on how to speak to those from different backgrounds. We've been covering a series called "Why this is not a compliment," where we mention some of the sentences that we hear that are very inappropriate, and people may not realize it. Educating them is very important. In your experience, what were some of the sentences that you heard?

**MD** Some of the sentences I heard were what I call backhanded compliments. People often told me that I spoke Luxembourgish very well for an immigrant. I would reply to them, "Of course, I speak Luxembourgish well because my stepfather is Luxembourgish, and I speak the language at home." I also heard comments like I was very smart for an immigrant or that I was lucky to attend a prestigious high school. These comments were often intended as compliments but also felt like insults at the same time. So, you never really knew whether to say thank you or just look at the person and wonder what they were actually saying. As I grew older, I learned how to deal with these situations.

**WB** You know, the sentence "you speak well this language for your background" is something we hear so often in different countries, and it's really bothersome because people might think it's a compliment, but it's actually not. I know that sometimes people weren't very nice, and this also came from teachers. What did they say to you?



**MD** I think my first memory of receiving negative comments was when I was in first grade. The other children always called me "chocolate pudding." I was never addressed by my name; it was always "chocolate pudding." At first, you might think, "Oh, chocolate pudding, everybody likes chocolate pudding, and it's fine." But then when you realize that people are making fun of you because of your appearance and your phenotype becomes the subject of ridicule, that's when you really start questioning your place in society. I went to my teachers multiple times and complained about it. I said, "I know the word might not be very offensive to you, but to me, it is offensive because it's a constant reminder that I do not belong. I would like you to have a conversation with these children." However, they always refused to help me because in their minds, "chocolate pudding" was not an offensive word. So, I always had to navigate and pick and choose my battles, deciding when it was worth going to the teachers to complain.

**WB** It must have been exhausting because you're just there, existing, and your presence makes you the object of mockery. So, I think the fact that you didn't have much support from the teachers is extremely problematic because, at the end of the day, you want people to understand that this is actually insulting. You feel that it should be acknowledged, and people should listen and understand your point of view. What I find interesting about your experience is that you actually decided later to work in the education sector. Was this because of what you experienced or was it an entirely independent choice?

**MD** It was because I realized in recent years how much representation is needed. Representation matters because you want to have a teacher who understands the issues you're going through and is willing to make a difference. I always tell myself that if I have a child coming to me and saying, "Hey, teacher, somebody called me 'chocolate pudding,'" I want to be that person who understands their child and is willing to have a serious conversation with the children in the classroom about why this is unacceptable, why judging people based on their race or ethnicity is wrong. So, I definitely think that this was a significant motivator for why I decided to enter the educational system. My experiences in school really left a profound mark on me, and even today, I can see how they heavily influenced my worldview.

**WB** That's very powerful for you to say because people might not realize how just a joke can deeply impact you over the years. How would you describe the current educational system in Luxembourg?

**MD** I would describe the Luxembourgish education system as essentially the same as when I left it. There are still many issues. For those who are not familiar with the Luxembourg system, it's structured like this: you have primary school from the first grade until the sixth grade, and then when you move on to high school, the children are separated into different sections. There are four different sections, and your placement depends on your final grade in the last year of primary school. The Lycee Classique, which is considered the best high school, is primarily attended by Luxembourgish students. Foreign students typically attend

the lower-level high schools because they may not fully understand the language. I think this is very unfair because I know many intelligent individuals who excel in math, physics, chemistry, but they are not given the same opportunities simply because they do not speak the language. This language barrier is the main issue in Luxembourg, where people are heavily penalized just for not understanding the language. I don't believe that language should determine one's intelligence or potential for greatness.

**WB** I completely understand, especially because this only perpetuates further inequalities that then manifest in society. We know that Luxembourg is a country with a lot of diversity, but in the end, there is still an educational gap, as I gather from your perspective.

**MD** Yes, exactly. There is indeed a significant educational gap, and what people often fail to grasp is the connection between this educational gap and subsequent socioeconomic status. When there's a wide educational gap, people may not have access to a good university or may not be able to attend university at all. This perpetuates a vicious cycle of poverty in immigrant communities. It's not an issue that many Luxembourgish people want to acknowledge, but they need to realize that the separation of students based on language also contributes to poverty. Speaking Luxembourgish provides better opportunities because the school system in Luxembourg is primarily conducted in German. For example, if you come from Senegal and speak French, your six-year-old child may not be able to enroll in a public Luxembourgish school simply because they do not speak German. So if you already speak Luxembourgish at home, it gives you a significant advantage because Luxembourgish is not too different from German. These children will pick up German quickly. In my case, I speak Creole and Portuguese at home, languages that have nothing to do with the Germanic language.

**WB** It's crucial to recognize that there is still much work to be done, but through your daily commitment to teaching, you're striving to make a difference. Do you have a story about a student that particularly touched you?

**MD** Yes, there's one story that stands out. We live in Luxembourg, which is a predominantly Christian country, and this child is from Tunisia and is Muslim. One day, she came to me in tears because she didn't understand why nobody had made a gift for her for Eid, the end of Ramadan. She explained that she was always asked to make gifts for Easter, Christmas, and all the Christian holidays, but nobody had ever taken the time to create a gift for her parents for Eid. It made me reflect on my own childhood because, as a Muslim, I had never had the opportunity to make a gift for my mom for Eid either. So, I invited her to join me, and together, we sat down and crafted a special gift for her and her parents. She was grateful, and even her parents approached me, saying, "We've been living in this country for ten years, and no one has ever thought about making us a gift for Ramadan. This is something we will never forget for the rest of our lives."



**When Maimuna reflects on her childhood and school days, it's worth noting that her family spoke different languages at home. As a result, she had an accent when speaking French. They vividly remember one instance when their French teacher said: "Tu parles français comme un petit nègre" which translates to "You speak French like a little n\*\*\*\*r."**

**WB** Yeah, it's difficult to see openness toward others' festivities, but I'm happy that you were able to bring some joy to that child by helping her create a gift for her family. One more question for you: if you could speak to the young Maimuna, the version of yourself that was bullied and mocked, what would you tell her today?

**MD** That's a fantastic question. I would tell her: "There is immense power in our ancestry. Our heritage is rich and filled with culture, and we should take immense pride in it and fully embrace it. Know that one day, people will seek us out simply because of the way we look. They will want to engage in meaningful conversations with us, and they will seek our help precisely because of our appearance and ancestry. I would tell her never to try to conform to European ideals just for the sake of acceptance. Embrace your uniqueness, as there is extraordinary beauty in being different. Society needs this diversity to progress."

**WB** I wholeheartedly agree, and your words are truly inspirational. It's clear that you've moved from a place of shame to one of embracing your identity, and that's incredibly empowering to hear.

**MD** Yes, when I reflect on my childhood and my school days, it's worth noting that I spoke different languages at home. As a result, I had an accent when speaking French. I vividly remember one instance when my French teacher said: Tu parles français comme un petit nègre" which translates to "You speak French like a little n\*\*\*\*r. I apologize for my blunt language, but this is the translation. I've always felt self-conscious about my accent, and this memory stands out vividly because it took place in a classroom. I felt deeply uncomfortable and violated as this individual ridiculed my origins. It's important to understand that I speak with an accent because I come from a different part of the world. We cannot expect everyone to have the same accent when people originate from diverse countries.

**WB** It's truly disturbing to hear that the N-word was used so casually, especially by a [white] teacher, which is completely unacceptable.

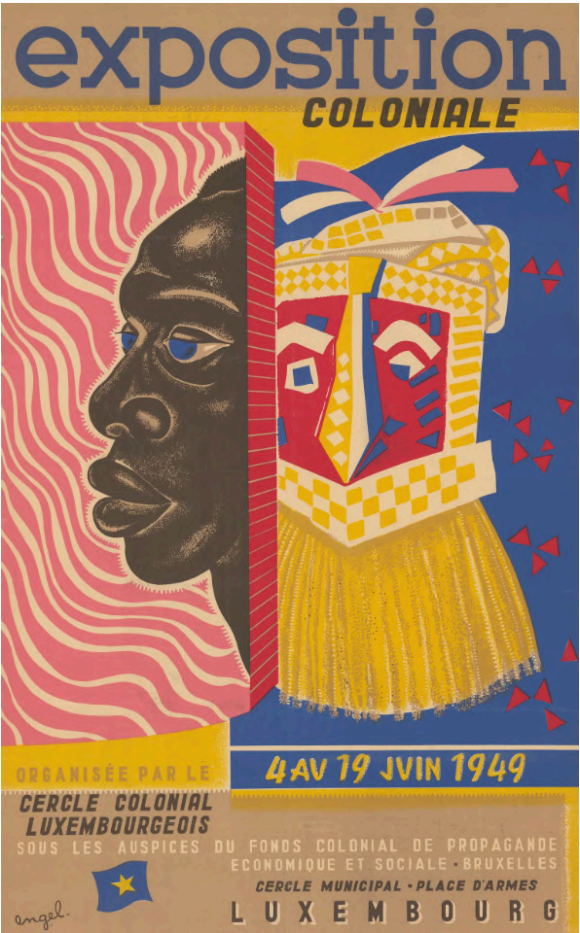
**MD** Yes, the irony is that a teacher used it so normally, when it's not normal to use that word. It also raises the question of how much influence teachers have on children and whether they perpetuate racism in the classroom. I had one class where we were discussing stereotypes, and my teacher asked me to come to the front of the classroom and show how big my lips were. She said it so calmly and confidently that what shocked me the most was her comfort with making such a request. I felt violated in that moment. When I approached her about it, she said, "We're discussing stereotypes, and you do have big lips. I just want to teach the children about stereotypes." I had to educate her about why stereotypes are harmful, that they often lead to negative consequences. I told her that what she did was essentially the same as presenting me as an example of stereotypes, similar to how my ancestors were put in human zoos because of their black features.

**WB** That's absolutely disgraceful. How old were you at that time?

**MD** I was 13 years old.

**WB** That's truly shameful and impactful. These experiences stay with you, and as a teenager, it's challenging to navigate your identity when you're reminded of your differences in such an inappropriate manner. There's still a long way to go for change, but we must remain hopeful, right?

**MD** Absolutely. To anyone listening, if you have goals, visions, or dreams you want to achieve, go for them. There will be someone who needs a person like you in that position. I was called a slave in a classroom, told that my



Poster for the colonial exhibition, organized by Cercle Colonial du Luxembourg at the municipal palace in 1949.

existence isn't relevant because I was supposedly bought for five cents. I was told I shouldn't be in this country because I shouldn't be free, that I'm just a slave. When I reported this to the headmaster, he said he couldn't do anything because it's freedom of speech. But I wondered if the headmaster were black, would the conversation have been different? I truly believe it would have. So representation matters, and it's crucial.

**WB** It absolutely is. Stories like yours are crucial for us because they shed light on the need for change. It all starts with sparking conversations, addressing these issues, and not being ashamed to remind people that such behavior is entirely unacceptable. You mentioned "go for it," and I think that's a fantastic note to end on. Maimuna, would you agree that despite the challenges you faced, you've found a way to turn those experiences into something positive for others?

**MD** Precisely, and that's what matters most. Our power as immigrants lies in our ability to transform our experiences into lessons and positive change.

The National Museum of History and Art, Luxembourg. Exhibition: Luxembourg's colonial past, 2022. Although the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg never exercised political authority over any foreign territory or any of the populations residing there, during the 19th and 20th centuries numerous Luxembourg men and women left to live and work in the colonies of other European states. Abroad, they held all kinds of positions and worked as soldiers, scientists, businessmen, missionaries and even as colonial officials. In fact, Luxembourg actively recruited people for colonial service in the Belgian Congo.

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ART AS RESISTANCE:  
A CONVERSATION WITH OUMOU AIDARA



Oumou Aidara, an environmental and educational researcher with a focus on Luxembourg and Berlin, with Senegalese roots, shares their journey of self-discovery. Oumou also candidly discusses experiences with language-based discrimination in Luxembourg and Germany and the importance of raising awareness about this issue.

We Belong Europe  
Podcast transcript #34  
Luxembourg

YASMINE OUIRHRANE, We Belong (WB)

Today, I'm joined by Oumou Aidara. Oumou is a Non-Binary environmental activist, photographer, creative director, and I'm thrilled to introduce them today. Oumou, can you tell us more about your roots and background?

OUMOU AIDARA (OA)

I'm originally from Senegal, born and raised in Dakar. I later moved to Berlin for my studies, and I completed them during the pandemic. I decided to stay in Berlin because I found a supportive and welcoming community here and am happy to now be working in Luxembourg.

WB That sounds wonderful. Given your artistic background, could you share how you got into photography and directing?

OA Initially, I had a deep passion for watching documentaries while growing up. When I came to Germany for my studies, I pursued an interdisciplinary program with a focus on photography. However, I struggled to express myself within that context due to cultural differences. I began to explore other forms of creative expression by participating in community projects and events. This journey led me to filmmaking, where I found a powerful medium to tell stories, analyze society, and express myself freely. I gained self-confidence by collaborating with others and learning from their experiences. While it wasn't always easy, I am grateful for the progress I've made. Currently, I'm working on a documentary portraying a Turkish artist with an immigrant background, which I'm excited to share.

WB It's inspiring to hear how you've found your creative path. Your work often focuses on visual storytelling with vibrant colors. Can you tell us where you draw your inspiration from?

OA Nature and everyday life inspire me the most. I'm a very observant person, and I see beauty in the colors and details of the world around me. When interacting with people, I focus on their expressions, smiles, and even imperfections. The city itself, with its diversity and various elements, also influences my work. I want my visuals to convey the feelings and emotions I experience when I observe the world.

WB I know you worked on a short film called "Feel the Ground." Could you tell us more about it and what motivated you to create it?

OA "Feel the Ground" explores the concept of sustainable fashion. Growing up in Senegal, I noticed that people sometimes mocked those who wore secondhand clothing, despite it being a sustainable choice. The film is a fictional documentary in which the protagonist, a film student, decides to create a documentary on sustainable fashion after experiencing bullying related to their clothing choices. The film examines society's perceptions of secondhand fashion from various perspectives and aims to raise awareness about sustainable fashion's importance and the social pressures surrounding clothing choices. It was my first film, and I'm proud to have taken on this challenging project.

WB It's a powerful message, addressing stereotypes and advocating for individual freedom in fashion choices. How long did it take to produce, and what challenges did you face while making it?

OA The production took approximately two weeks, with a few days of shooting and several days of editing. It was a challenging project, especially since it was my first film. I relied on friends for various aspects, from acting to location suggestions. Collaborating with others was essential for its success. While it was demanding, I learned a lot from the experience and am grateful for the opportunity to create something meaningful.



ART AS RESISTANCE:  
A CONVERSATION WITH OUMOU AIDARA



Throughout the interview, Oumou's resilience, determination, and commitment to embracing their non-binary identity serve as an inspiring testament to following one's creative dreams with confidence. Their chosen mediums for visual storytelling encompass both still and moving images, as well as the art of written expression and oration. *WORK: MALONDA, 2022.*



**“I'm working towards giving a bigger contribution to a world where animal rights, human rights, women's rights, Indigenous rights, black people's rights, LGBTQAI+ rights, and climate justice is respected and achieved. A world where our system is reformed, mental health is being cared for and the planet is thriving.”**

**WB** Your perspective is empowering, emphasizing the importance of self-acceptance and embracing individuality. Currently, you're working on research with the Soul of Nations Foundation, focusing on language-based discrimination in Luxembourg and Germany. Could you tell us more about the topic you're covering and the importance of this research?

**OA** My research delves into language-based discrimination in Luxembourg and Germany, specifically focusing on whether it stems from xenophobia, nationalism, or a lack of education. This research was inspired by my own experiences and encounters with discrimination, where people would insist that I should speak German because I was in Germany. Language-based discrimination is more prevalent than one might think and occurs across various contexts, from healthcare to everyday interactions. It's a form of violence that often goes unnoticed, and my goal is to raise awareness about its impact and contribute to ending it. Language discrimination affects individuals on a deeply personal level, and it's essential to acknowledge its harm and take steps to address it.

**WB** It's essential to address language-based discrimination and promote inclusivity. You've shared a deeply personal incident where you faced such discrimination, highlighting the hurtful impact of words. It's clear that you contribute significantly to the city and society, and your research will shed light on this important issue. To conclude, what's one key piece of advice you would give to young individuals, regardless of their gender identity, who are inspired to pursue creative work but might lack the confidence to start?

**OA** My advice would be to start without hesitation. Don't wait for the perfect moment or conditions. Remember that there's no single right way to create art, so embrace fluidity and explore various forms of expression.

‘Feel The Ground’ is a short documentary-fiction film told in Wolof, English and German. It portrays contrasting cultural views on sustainable fashion consumption and the social issues involved. We follow the journey of a Senegalese woman who studies film in Berlin. A film project dedicated to sustainable fashion brings back memories of a time when she was bullied for wearing second-hand fashion. On her journey, she shares her reflections on the subject and interviews people to find new perspectives. In the end, she confronts the bully.

Founded on March 8, 2020 by three passionate young women from Luxembourg and Italy, today We Belong Europe counts team members from Luxembourg, France, Bulgaria, Italy and Germany. What unites this team is a common vision for a more inclusive Europe, where diversity becomes a strength rather than a challenge.

Yasmine Quirhrane. Co-Founder & Podcast Host of We Belong Europe. Yasmine is an advocate for social and gender justice. She was recognised Young European of the Year 2019 by the Schwarzkopf Foundation, EDD Young Leader by the European Commission, Women Deliver Young Leader and she is a member of the Gender Innovation Agora at UN Women. She has also worked with numerous institutions such as the European Union, African Union and the World Bank.

Jana Degrott Co- Founder & Head of Partnerships of We Belong Europe. As a believer in the importance of representation and youth voices in government, Jana ran her first electoral campaign at the age of 21 and serves currently as a councilor in her hometown of Steinsel (Luxembourg) and counts therefor as one of the youngest elected officials in Luxembourg. She has been appointed as a councilor at the Apolitical Foundation and has been selected to join the newest cohort of the Obama Foundation as an Obama Leader.



## BRIDGING AI AND DIVERSITY: A CONVERSATION WITH IGOR TCHAPPI

Igor Tchappi, a research associate at the University of Luxembourg, narrates his remarkable journey from Cameroon to Luxembourg. His academic pursuits and unique background in computer science and social science provide a rich backdrop for discussing the intersection of AI and social inclusion. Igor emphasizes the importance of addressing biases in AI models and datasets and shares his experiences as one of the few people of color in academic spaces. He underscores the need for increased diversity and scholarship opportunities. Igor also provides insights into life in Luxembourg, describing it as a multicultural and safe environment, albeit with high living costs. His research on AI and diversity highlights his commitment to advancing inclusivity and equity in the field of artificial intelligence.

We Belong Europe  
Podcast transcript #35  
Luxembourg

### YASMINE OUIRHRANE, We Belong (WB)

Today, I'm delighted to introduce Igor Tchappi, a research associate at the University of Luxembourg. Igor, I understand that you came to Luxembourg for your studies. Could you share more about your remarkable journey, from where you were born to how you found yourself in this small yet vibrant country?

### IGOR TCHAPPI (IT)

My journey spans several decades and begins in Cameroon, a Central African nation where I was born in the capital city, Yaounde. There, I embarked on my academic path, completing my high school and university studies, eventually earning my master's degree. Initially, my educational background was in computer science, and I began working in that field in Cameroon. However, my journey took a significant turn when I decided to pursue a PhD. I aimed to broaden my horizons and ventured to Europe. I was fortunate to secure a position in France to pursue my doctoral studies. After obtaining my PhD, I continued my academic journey, working at a French university and also at Orange France, a renowned company. Subsequently, I made the move to Luxembourg. So, my journey has encompassed two distinct fields: computer science and social science.

**WB** Your dual background in computer science and social science is particularly intriguing. How has this intersection influenced your work, especially concerning AI, social inclusion, and diversity?

**IT** My passion for AI has been a driving force in my career. Initially rooted in computer science, I encountered challenges while working on AI solutions developed in Europe for application in Africa. These solutions often fell short due to a lack of consideration for the local perceptions, social behaviors, and cultural nuances. This realization led me to delve into social science. Exploring this intersection has deepened my understanding of the significant issue of bias in computer science, particularly in AI. The prevalence of AI development in Europe has resulted in models that are not universally applicable. Each country, even each continent, has its unique attitudes, habits, and behaviors. Therefore, when we discuss AI, we must account for the diversity of human behavior.

Addressing these challenges requires several potential solutions. First, enhancing datasets by collecting more diverse data is crucial. AI heavily relies on data, and biased

data can lead to skewed models. For instance, an overrepresentation of data from one group can result in gender, racial, or age biases. To mitigate this, we should construct datasets that encompass various population groups. Moreover, research groups should be diverse, comprising individuals from different backgrounds and categories. We are actively exploring numerous solutions to make AI more sustainable and globally applicable. The goal is to ensure that AI transcends geographical boundaries.

**WB** Your insights into addressing bias in AI and fostering inclusivity are invaluable. Bias can indeed manifest in various forms, whether gender-based or rooted in ethnic backgrounds. Shifting our focus to your experience in academia, could you tell us about the diversity you've observed among your colleagues in the University of Luxembourg?

**IT** The University of Luxembourg is renowned for its diverse and multicultural environment, with over 60 nationalities represented. This is a distinguishing feature of the university, setting it apart from many others. However, there is still work to be done, particularly when we examine representation in specific departments. While efforts are being made to enhance diversity, some departments may have fewer individuals from certain backgrounds. It's essential to recognize that this issue is multifaceted. It's not solely about the university's efforts but also about individuals' choices. Some individuals, including those from underrepresented groups, may opt for different fields of study or careers, such as engineering or law. Encouraging people to pursue higher studies and sensitizing them to the benefits of academic careers is part of the solution.

Luxembourg is a remarkable country. Its multicultural environment is a testament to its diverse population, drawing people from all corners of the world. One aspect I particularly appreciate is the safety and security it offers. Luxembourg is notably safe. Additionally, the provision of free public transportation is a significant advantage. However, the country's Achilles' heel is its exorbitant living costs, which present a considerable challenge in finding affordable accommodation. Despite this financial hurdle, the friendly people and positive social interactions create a welcoming atmosphere that I genuinely cherish.



**In March 2023, Igor Tchappi, along with Supporting Fellow Prince Gharbin, established the University of Luxembourg's inaugural Black Student Union, catering to both students and staff.**

**WB** You've shared that in some professional events, you've been one of the few, or perhaps the only, person of color in the room. Could you elaborate on this experience and the impact it has had on you?

**IT** It's a sobering experience, Yasmine. As a researcher, I travel extensively to present my findings at conferences worldwide. It's an integral part of our work to disseminate our research globally. Unfortunately, I often find myself in settings where individuals from diverse backgrounds are a rarity. In some cases, I am the sole representative. I vividly recall one instance at the largest AI conference, which is A-star rated, hosting nearly 1000 attendees. Yet, during the gala dinner, I counted only two black individuals in the room, despite the diverse array of participants from various backgrounds.

Connecting with a colleague from a renowned UK university who shared my sentiments was heartening, but it also underscored the stark reality. These situations are disheartening and emphasize the pressing need to enhance scholarship opportunities. While the United States has made commendable efforts, Europe and Africa need to significantly increase scholarships, especially for those seeking to pursue a PhD or an academic career. Access to funds is vital to nurture research talents.

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**THE SIGNIFICANCE OF DIVERSITY IN**  
**ARTIFICIAL INTELLEGENCE**

by Igor Tchappi

Igor Tchappi, PhD in Computer Science from the University Burgundy Franche-Comté; MA in Social Sciences from the University of Toulouse-Jean Jaurès. Current Research Associate of the University of Luxembourg; Recent publication: Detection of Disturbances in a Monitoring System on ITS and Usage of Ontologies Approaches: A Critical Review and Challenges in Developing Countries.

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# The Significance of Diversity in Artificial Intelligence

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Igor Tchappi

*PhD in Computer Science from the University Burgundy Franche-Comté; MA in Social Sciences from the University of Toulouse-Jean Jaurès*

*[Current Research Associate of the University of Luxembourg; Recent publication: Detection of Disturbances in a Monitoring System on ITS and Usage of Ontologies Approaches: A Critical Review and Challenges in Developing Countries]*

The emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has transformed various sectors of society, bringing numerous benefits and altering how we perceive and interact with the world. As AI becomes increasingly integrated into daily life, concerns regarding its impact on jobs, ethics, privacy, and societal biases have also grown. This paper explores the importance of diversity in AI development and its role in addressing these challenges.

AI's rapid evolution has generated awe and apprehension. Job displacement due to automation, economic disparities, ethical dilemmas, privacy issues, and the potential for information manipulation are among the concerns that accompany AI's rise. Furthermore, AI systems have exhibited biases that can perpetuate societal inequalities, emphasizing the importance of addressing diversity within the AI field.

Bias in AI often stems from biased training data, and its consequences can be profound, particularly for marginalized groups. To mitigate bias and ensure fairness, a diverse group of developers, users, and regulators is essential. However, the lack of diversity within the AI development community presents a challenge.

This paper emphasizes that diversity is not just a moral imperative but a functional necessity for effective AI systems. It highlights the importance of representation from the Black community within the AI field. Historically, the tech and AI industries have seen underrepresentation of Black professionals, leading to potential biases in AI systems. Promoting diversity in AI is crucial to prevent biases, foster innovation, and create more inclusive technology.

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In the context of Luxembourg, a small but diverse nation, gender diversity in tech and AI remains a challenge. Initiatives, such as Women in Digital Empowerment Luxembourg (WIDE), aim to address this imbalance by supporting women in tech roles. Educational institutions like the University of Luxembourg play a vital role in promoting diversity among future tech professionals. While progress has been made, challenges persist, and continuous efforts are needed to ensure the tech and AI sector is truly inclusive.

The importance of diversity in shaping equitable, fair, and innovative AI systems cannot be overstated. As we navigate the complex landscape of AI, it becomes increasingly evident that addressing the multifaceted challenges of bias, ethics, and fairness within this realm necessitates the active participation of diverse voices and perspectives. In this context, Luxembourg, a nation with a strong commitment to upholding human rights and promoting equality, has a unique opportunity to set an exemplary standard.

By actively fostering and nurturing a diverse tech ecosystem, Luxembourg has the potential to create a thriving environment that not only mirrors its multicultural population but also actively contributes to addressing and mitigating the global challenges posed by AI. This journey towards inclusivity and diversity within the tech and AI sectors not only aligns with Luxembourg's values but also positions the country as a leader in championing equitable and ethical AI solutions that benefit humanity at large.

# THE SIGNIFICANCE OF DIVERSITY IN ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

by Igor Tchappi



Igor Tchappi, PhD in Computer Science from the University Burgundy Franche-Comté; MA in Social Sciences from the University of Toulouse-Jean Jaurès. Current Research Associate of the University of Luxembourg; Recent publication: Detection of Disturbances in a Monitoring System on ITS and Usage of Ontologies Approaches: A Critical Review and Challenges in Developing Countries.

## THE EMERGENCE OF AI

Artificial Intelligence (AI), once confined to the realms of science fiction, has now seamlessly woven itself into the fabric of our daily lives, driving transformations across various sectors of the economy. Its rapid development and widespread adoption have unlocked a multitude of benefits that stand poised to reshape our perception of the world and our interactions with it. AI's far-reaching impact extends from simple tasks such as recommending a song on a music streaming platform to complex operations like predicting medical outcomes or steering self-driving vehicles. As we find ourselves on the threshold of what many term the "AI era," it becomes imperative to pause and reflect on the myriad advantages this transformative technology has bestowed upon society.

From its initial conceptualization to its present advanced manifestations, the evolution of AI has been nothing short of remarkable. It is not merely about machines performing tasks; it encompasses machines learning, reasoning, and, in some instances, making decisions, thereby exhibiting traits once thought to be the exclusive domain of human cognition. This evolution underscores the inherent versatility and dynamism of AI systems. For businesses and industries, AI represents not just an upgrade but a paradigm shift. It offers unprecedented opportunities to optimize operational processes, innovate products, and redefine customer experiences. No longer are businesses solely reliant on human ingenuity; AI complements and often magnifies this ingenuity, ushering in a new era of competitiveness and efficiency.

Consumers too are reaping the benefits of AI. Whether through personalized content recommendations on their

favorite streaming platforms or real-time health monitoring using wearable technology, AI enriches user experiences in subtle yet profound ways. It promises not only convenience but also a level of personalization previously inconceivable. Furthermore, in the realm of research and development, AI acts as a force multiplier. From predicting complex weather patterns to aiding in drug discovery, AI's data processing and analytical capabilities are accelerating breakthroughs and pushing the boundaries of knowledge<sup>1</sup>.

Nevertheless, amid these promising developments, it is vital to acknowledge the apprehensions that many harbor about AI's rapid ascent. Despite the spectacular progress and achievements in AI research, the field is far from flawless. Reports have emerged indicating that AI systems occasionally manifest undesirable human characteristics.

## THE CONCERNS OF AI

The rapid evolution of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has evoked a mixture of awe and apprehension. As AI technologies penetrate deeper into our daily lives, enhancing various aspects of our existence, profound concerns have surfaced that demand our attention. For every tale of AI's remarkable feats, cautionary narratives and warnings about potential pitfalls abound. Foremost among these concerns is the specter of job displacement. The automation of tasks, both manual and cognitive, by AI systems threatens to render several job roles obsolete<sup>2</sup>. This automation spans from factory workers and clerks to professionals in fields such as law and medicine, instilling a growing anxiety about the



potential erosion of traditional job markets. Intrinsically linked to the employment issue is the specter of economic disparity. If AI leads to the concentration of wealth among a tech-savvy elite while the broader populace contends with job scarcity, we may witness the widening of economic gaps, potentially fueling societal unrest.

Ethical quandaries permeate the landscape. Decisions made by AI systems, particularly in critical areas like healthcare or criminal justice, can wield life-altering consequences. Questions surrounding fairness and accountability in the event of AI errors remain murky, presenting significant challenges. The concerns do not end there. AI's ability to process vast amounts of personal data has precipitated pressing concerns about privacy. In a world where data is akin to gold, safeguarding individual privacy and preventing the misuse of sensitive information by AI systems takes on paramount importance. Moreover, the enigma of "black box" AI compounds these issues. When complex AI algorithms make decisions that even their developers cannot fully explain, transparency and trust are thrown into question. Can we, as a society, place our reliance on systems that elude full comprehension?

Another looming concern revolves around AI's role in shaping information dissemination. AI-driven algorithms responsible for curating our newsfeeds have the potential to create echo chambers, reinforcing our biases and isolating us from diverse perspectives. This phenomenon carries profound implications for democracy and informed decision-making.

Furthermore, the potential for AI to be exploited for malicious purposes raises alarms. From deepfakes that manipulate reality to AI-driven cyber-attacks, the darker side of AI poses threats that we are only beginning to grapple with. An existential question looms: as AI systems advance, what implications do they hold for our understanding of consciousness, free will, and the essence of humanity? The philosophical ramifications of AI, while less tangible, are no less profound. When intertwined with concerns about AI bias, they challenge our fundamental concepts of fairness and justice in technology-driven societies.

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## AI BIAS

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As AI systems exert increasing influence over critical aspects of our lives, concerns about bias become ever more pronounced. AI systems, often assumed to be impartial due to their algorithmic nature, have exhibited indications of perpetuating, and sometimes even amplifying, societal biases. The consequences of such biases range from minor inconveniences to severe and systemic discrimination, prompting questions about AI's fairness and its role in cultivating an equitable society. Bias in AI can originate from various sources, with a significant contributor being the data on which these systems are trained. If this data harbors

inherent societal biases, AI systems are likely to replicate and perpetuate those biases. For example, an AI system trained on historically biased hiring data might inadvertently favor certain demographics over others, even in the absence of explicit instructions to do so.

The ramifications of bias in AI are profound. Marginalized groups may face heightened discrimination, reinforcing stereotypes and perpetuating existing societal inequalities. In sectors like healthcare or criminal justice, biased AI can hold life-altering or even life-threatening implications. It is noteworthy that while AI has the potential to perpetuate bias, it also offers tools to detect and mitigate these biases. However, the responsibility for addressing bias lies not solely with the technology but also with its developers, users, and regulators. Another concern is the lack of diversity within the AI development community. A homogenous group of developers may inadvertently embed their perspectives and biases into AI systems, resulting in cascading effects when these systems are deployed in diverse populations.

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## AI AND DIVERSITY

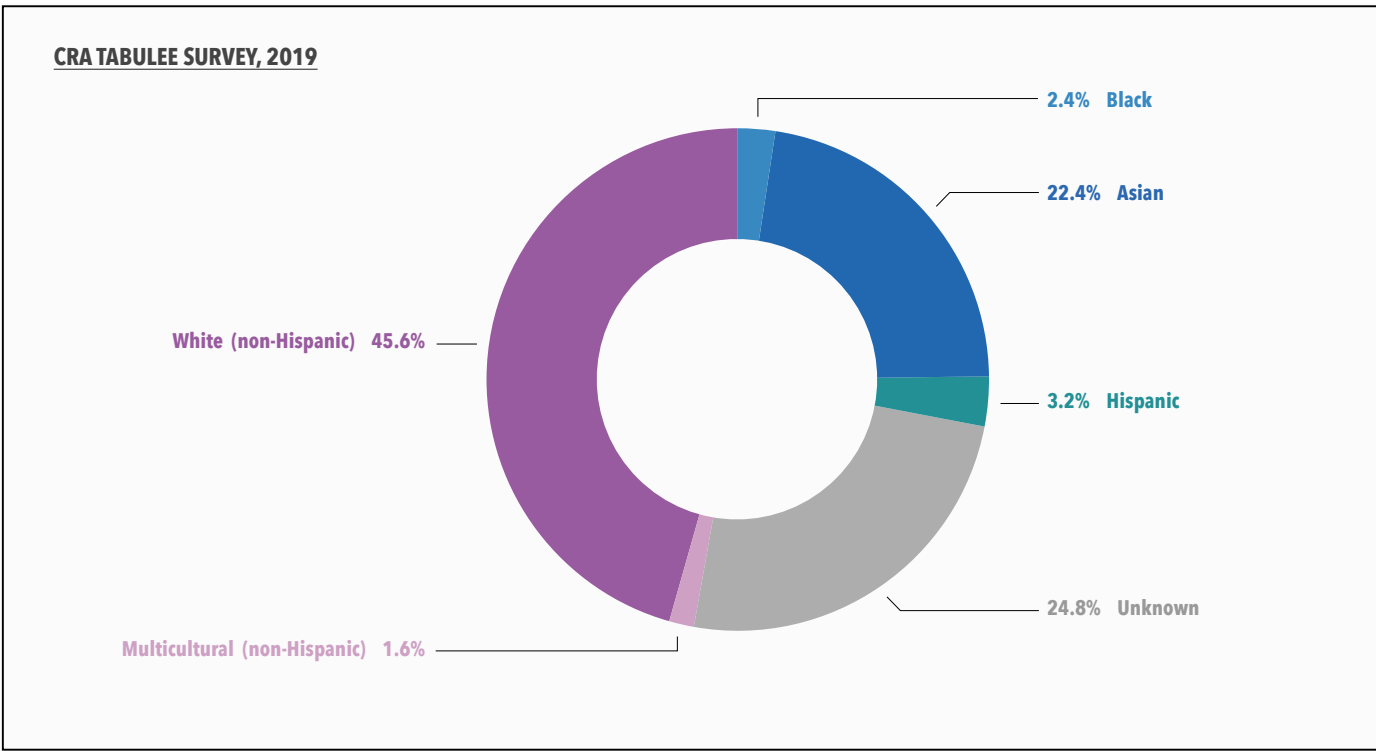
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As previously stated, the development and deployment of AI pose inherent challenges, with diversity occupying a pivotal role. In this context, diversity is not merely a buzzword or a checkbox to be ticked; it represents a fundamental necessity. AI systems learn from data, and this data reflects our society in all its intricacies, biases, and subtleties. If the teams responsible for developing these algorithms lack diversity in terms of race, gender, culture, or socioeconomic background, there exists an elevated risk of creating AI models that mirror and amplify existing biases. Such a scenario not only challenges the principles of fairness and equity but also the effectiveness and efficiency of the AI systems themselves.

Furthermore, the global nature of AI means its applications traverse cultures, societies, and borders. An AI model developed in one part of the world may find applications in entirely different cultural or social contexts. Without a diverse array of voices and perspectives informing its development, the AI may fall short, misinterpret nuances, or even inadvertently cause harm. However, diversity in AI is not solely about avoiding pitfalls; it is about enriching the entire ecosystem. A diverse team assembles a myriad of experiences, viewpoints, and problem-solving approaches, culminating in more innovative solutions and comprehensive AI models. It ensures that AI is not merely a service to a subset of society but is genuinely inclusive, benefiting all.

The challenges entailed in incorporating diversity into the fast-evolving realm of AI are numerous, ranging from addressing systemic issues in tech education and recruitment to reevaluating the datasets on which AI models are trained. Nevertheless, confronting these challenges head-on is not merely an ethical imperative but a necessity for the continued progress and optimization of AI technology.





In the United States, according to the CRA survey, among the new AI PhDs in 2019 who are U.S. residents, the largest percentage (45.6%) are white (non-Hispanic), followed by Asians (22.4%). In comparison, Black comprised only 2.4%, and Hispanics made up 3.2%. [FIG 1]

The challenges entailed in incorporating diversity into the fast-evolving realm of AI are numerous, ranging from addressing systemic issues in tech education and recruitment to reevaluating the datasets on which AI models are trained. Nevertheless, confronting these challenges head-on is not merely an ethical imperative but a necessity for the continued progress and optimization of AI technology.

### A FOCUS ON THE BLACK COMMUNITY

The escalating integration of AI systems into societal frameworks underscores the imperative of these systems being inclusive, comprehensive, and free from bias. Central to this discourse is the critical aspect of diversity in AI, with specific attention to representation from the Black community. The absence of adequate representation can inadvertently result in technological advancements that perpetuate harmful biases, rendering diversity not only a moral imperative but also a functional necessity for effective AI systems.

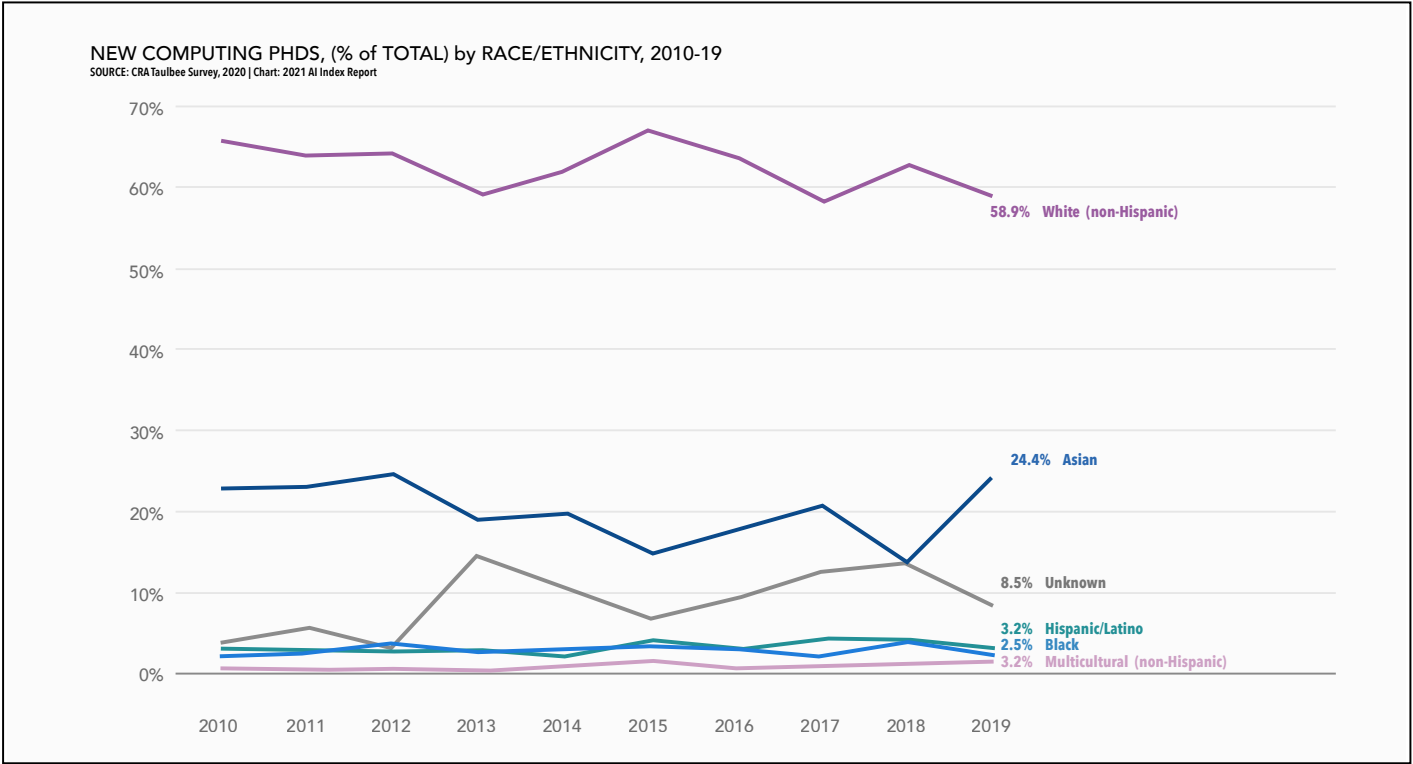
Historically, the tech sector, including the AI industry, has grappled with the underrepresentation of Black professionals. This skewed demographic within the development community can inadvertently introduce and solidify biases into AI systems. Without the critical perspectives and inputs of Black developers, researchers, and thinkers, AI models risk being trained on data that inadequately reflects the rich tapestry of human experiences and values.

The consequences of this lack of diversity are tangible. We have witnessed facial recognition systems struggling to

accurately identify Black faces, leading to misidentifications and unjust repercussions. AI algorithms in healthcare, finance, and other sectors may disregard the unique challenges and experiences encountered by Black individuals, potentially resulting in less effective or even discriminatory outcomes. Moreover, a homogeneous AI industry foregoes the immense innovation and creativity that a diverse workforce fosters. Distinct backgrounds and experiences create a richer environment for problem-solving and innovation. By not harnessing the talent and perspectives of Black professionals, the AI sector essentially operates with a limited toolkit. According to AI experts, visa issues stymie efforts to make their area more inclusive, making technology that discriminates or disadvantages individuals who aren't white or Western less likely<sup>3</sup>.

Promoting diversity in AI transcends numerical representation; it hinges on ensuring that AI systems, which are rapidly becoming arbiters of societal norms, are constructed with fairness, equity, and inclusivity at their core. It entails recognizing the unique historical and socio-economic challenges confronting Black communities and ensuring that AI, as a potentially transformative technology, contributes to overcoming these challenges rather than perpetuating them.

Figure 1     Stanford University, Artificial Intelligence Index Report 2021. Chapter 6: Diversity in AI: In the United States, according to the CRA survey, among the new AI PhDs in 2019 who are U.S. residents, the largest percentage (45.6%) are white (non-Hispanic), followed by Asians (22.4%). In comparison, African Americans (non-Hispanic) comprised only 2.4%, and Hispanics made up 3.2%.



The CRA survey indicates that the percentage of white (non-Hispanic) new PhDs has changed little over the last 10 years, accounting for 62.7% on average. The share of new Black and Hispanic/Latino computing PhDs in the same period is significantly lower, with an average of 3.1% and 3.3%, respectively.

(FIG 2)

THE LUXEMBOURGISH EXPERIENCE

Luxembourg, as one of the most developed countries in Europe, has demonstrated a commitment to integrating and promoting AI across various sectors. The Luxembourg government, in collaboration with public and private entities, has invested in research and development activities aimed at fortifying the AI ecosystem. Luxembourg, despite its small size, boasts a unique multicultural dynamic, with approximately 47% of its residents being foreign-born and originating from 170 different countries<sup>4</sup>. This diversity naturally extends into its workforce, including the tech sector .

Gender diversity remains a concern, both globally and in Luxembourg. Historically, STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields have grappled with gender imbalances, with fewer women participating compared to men. In Luxembourg, there is a significant gender imbalance within the tech domain, with women constituting only 20% of ICT workers<sup>4</sup>. A similar picture emerges in research, where female scientists and engineers accounted for just 28% of the group in 2019, lagging behind the European average of 41%<sup>5</sup>. This gender disparity is also evident at the University of Luxembourg, where the proportion of female ICT students is notably low. In 2018, a mere 9% of ICT students at the University of Luxembourg were female, compared to the European Union (EU) average of 17%<sup>6</sup>. It is crucial that these numbers are greatly increased, as, according to a UNESCO report, this will not only benefit women, but also companies and society as a whole: “Companies and institutions are increasingly aware that a diverse labour force will improve their performance and enable them to reach more segments of their target customer or client base or relevant stakeholders. Diversity in

in research also expands the pool of talented researchers, bringing in fresh perspectives, talent and creativity”<sup>7</sup>.

Globally, women occupy approximately 25% of tech industry roles, and Luxembourg mirrors this trend. However, Luxembourg has undertaken concerted efforts to bridge this gender gap. Initiatives like "Women in Digital," supported by the national Digital Luxembourg initiative, actively encourage and support women in the tech industry. The "WIDE / Women in Digital Empowerment Luxembourg" initiative serves as a notable example<sup>8</sup>. Through mentorship, training, and awareness campaigns, this initiative is progressively augmenting the number of women in tech roles within the country.

Luxembourg's educational institutions, such as the University of Luxembourg, play a pivotal role in fostering diversity in tech and AI. The university has introduced various programs and collaborations aimed at attracting a diverse student body, ensuring that the next generation of tech professionals mirrors the diversity essential to the industry. Despite notable progress in promoting diversity, ongoing efforts from both the public and private sectors are indispensable to ensure that Luxembourg's tech industry is genuinely inclusive and representative of its diverse populace.

Figure 2 Stanford University, Artificial Intelligence Index Report 2021. Chapter 6: Diversity in AI: The CRA survey indicates that the percentage of white (non-Hispanic) new PhDs has changed little over the last 10 years, accounting for 62.7% on average. The share of new Black or African American (non-Hispanic) and Hispanic computing PhDs in the same period is significantly lower, with an average of 3.1% and 3.3%, respectively.

Despite advances in promoting diversity, challenges persist. The representation of certain minority groups in leadership roles within tech companies remains limited. Additionally, the intersection of gender and ethnicity poses compounded challenges for individuals from minority backgrounds. Continuous education and training are imperative to address unconscious biases within the workplace, ensuring that hiring practices and workplace environments embrace diversity and inclusivity.

Given its unique geographic and political position, Luxembourg possesses the potential to lead by example in terms of diversity in the tech and AI sector. The country's commitment to human rights, equality, and data ethics lays a robust foundation for constructing a diverse tech ecosystem. Furthermore, as the significance of AI continues to expand, Luxembourg can harness its multicultural workforce to address global challenges related to AI bias and advocate for fairness in AI applications.

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[1] Gallup Report on Tech Industry Gender Disparities - [Gallup Report](<https://services.google.com/fh/files/misc/closing-computer-science-learning-gaps-girls.pdf>)

[2] STATEC (2021). "Population and Employment." Retrieved from the official STATEC website. (<https://statistiques.public.lu/en/themes/population-emploi.html>)

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[7] Women in Digital Empowerment Luxembourg (<https://wide.lu/>)

[8] UNESCO Report on Gender Diversity in Research - [UNESCO Report]([https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/usr15\\_is\\_the\\_gender\\_gap\\_narrowing\\_in\\_science\\_and\\_engineering.pdf](https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/usr15_is_the_gender_gap_narrowing_in_science_and_engineering.pdf))

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LANGUAGE-BASED DISCRIMINATION  
IN LUXEMBOURG

by Oumou Aidara

Oumou Aidara, MA from the University of Europe for Applied Sciences. Current Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Consultant for the Diversity Standards Collective of Germany; U.S. Department of State Alumni Fellow. Research contributions provided by Céline Rodrigues Monteiro and Danielle Sams.

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# Language-Based Discrimination in Luxembourg: Xenophobia, Nationalism, or Educational Deficiencies?

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Oumou Aidara

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*[Current Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Consultant for the Diversity Standards Collective of Germany;  
U.S. Department of State Alumni Fellow]*

*Research contributions provided by Céline Rodrigues Monteiro and Danielle Sams.*

This research systematically investigates the intricate issue of language-based discrimination within the distinctive context of Luxembourg, renowned for its intricate linguistic diversity and international character. The comprehensive study delves meticulously into the historical foundations, contemporary manifestations, and potential remedies associated with language-based discrimination. Benefitting from a population of approximately 655,000 individuals, with 47.3% of its residents classified as immigrants, Luxembourg serves as a particularly compelling setting for this meticulous inquiry.

The historical underpinnings of this issue unveil Luxembourg's linguistically rich evolution, which has been profoundly influenced by successive powers and cultures. This historical tapestry has led to the emergence of Luxembourgish, a Germanic language imbued with substantial influences from French and neighboring languages. Importantly, these historical nuances have given rise to discreet manifestations of language-based discrimination, persisting even following Luxembourg's attainment of independence.

Luxembourg's remarkable trilingualism, formally codified via the 1984 language law recognizing German, French, and Luxembourgish as official languages, further enhances the complexity of its linguistic landscape. A pivotal facet of this diversity is the interplay between spoken and written languages. Luxembourgish primarily thrives in verbal communication, while standard French and German enjoy prominence in written contexts.

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In the present day, instances of language-based discrimination are intricately entwined with xenophobia and nationalism, thus significantly influencing interactions, employment prospects, and social integration. As a multicultural society, Luxembourg has been marked by a steady influx of immigrants and expatriates, creating fertile ground for prejudiced attitudes. This is further exacerbated by populist movements that exploit linguistic differences for political gain.

Xenophobia, stemming from apprehension or aversion toward foreigners, intersects dynamically with the tapestry of linguistic diversity, often leading to linguistic exclusion and marginalization. Simultaneously, nationalism, grounded in a belief in the superiority of one's own nation, can inflame resentment towards individuals who speak languages different from the dominant ones, thereby posing a threat to the integral role of linguistic diversity in national identity.

The societal ramifications of language-based discrimination are profound, encompassing restricted access to education, employment, and social services, thereby perpetuating social disparities and corroding the social fabric. In response to these multifaceted challenges, Luxembourg has initiated a substantial language instruction reform agenda. This comprehensive initiative encompasses the development of language portfolios, fostering student diversity, enhancing scholastic performance, and revising evaluation methodologies.

# LANGUAGE-BASED DISCRIMINATION IN LUXEMBOURG

by Oumou Aidara



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## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Luxembourg's linguistic diversity is intricately interwoven into its historical evolution. Over the centuries, this region has witnessed a succession of foreign powers and cultures, each imprinting its linguistic footprint on the landscape. The evolution of Luxembourgish, a Germanic language profoundly influenced by neighboring languages, notably French, bears witness to the amalgamation of linguistic and cultural elements. The periods of foreign dominion, including the Burgundians, Spanish, French, and Austrians at different junctures, have substantially contributed to the intricate tapestry of Luxembourg's linguistic identity <sup>1</sup>.

This historical backdrop has engendered intricate linguistic hierarchies and simmering tensions. Across epochs of foreign rule, the language of the prevailing authority often ascended, tethered to attendant social and economic privileges. Remarkably, these linguistic hierarchies endured even after Luxembourg's hard-won independence in the 19th century. French, retaining its prestige as the language of diplomacy and the intellectual elite, perpetuated this enduring linguistic hierarchy. This historical underpinning, intricately interwoven with colonial legacies, has sown the seeds for nuanced forms of language-based discrimination <sup>^</sup>. Historically, proficiency in Luxembourgish or German, often linked with rural and working-class communities, occasionally bore the stigma of inferiority when juxtaposed with fluency in French.

Trilingualism, stemming from Luxembourg's historical and geographic placement amidst Belgium, France, and Germany, stands as a pivotal facet of its intricate linguistic milieu. The language law of 1984 officially enshrined the status of German, French, and Luxembourgish as official languages, thereby formalizing the trilingual character of the nation <sup>2</sup>.

This linguistic diversity is hallmarked by a salient distinction between spoken and written language, where Luxembourgish predominantly thrives in oral communication of everyday life, while standard French, German, and English reign supreme in written contexts. The institutionalization of Luxembourgish into the educational fabric in 1912 heralded the formal recognition of a multilingual paradigm, echoing the transmutative journey of this triad of languages across epochs <sup>2</sup>. Racism and discrimination persist as pervasive and enduring issues in contemporary society. A less-explored facet of discrimination, known as Linguicism, was formally introduced by the eminent linguist Tove Skutnabb-Kangas in the 1980s. Linguicism is the confluence of ideologies and institutional mechanisms employed to legitimize, enact, and perpetuate an unequal distribution of power and resources among distinct language-defined groups <sup>3</sup>.

## SOCIETAL IMPACTS

In contemporary times, manifestations of language-based discrimination remain deeply intertwined with xenophobia and nationalism. Against the backdrop of an increasingly globalized world, these sentiments materialize through multifarious channels, encompassing prejudiced attitudes towards immigrants, speakers of minority languages, or those perceived as outsiders. Luxembourg's multicultural mosaic, characterized by an influx of immigrants and expatriates, constitutes fertile terrain for the germination of such discriminatory predispositions. Concurrently, the surge of populist movements sweeping across Europe has contributed to an environment ripe for the exploitation of linguistic distinctions for political advantage.

Xenophobia, signifying the fear or aversion to individuals perceived as foreigners, frequently intersects with linguistic divergence. In Luxembourg, this intersection manifests conspicuously within everyday interactions, labor markets, and societal inclusion. Xenophobic inclinations can culminate in linguistic exclusion, casting individuals who lack fluency in the dominant language as societal outsiders. Likewise, nationalism, predicated on the conviction of one's nation's superiority, can be harnessed to foment animosity towards speakers of different languages, erecting a milieu wherein linguistic diversity is construed as a menacing affront to national identity.

At the societal level, language-based discrimination can perpetuate divisions and reinforce stereotypes, fostering an "us versus them" mentality. This divisiveness can lead to reduced social cohesion and hinder the development of a harmonious and inclusive society. Additionally, when discrimination limits access to education and employment opportunities, it can contribute to social inequalities and economic disparities, exacerbating existing societal tensions. The psychological effects of language-based discrimination are profound and multifaceted, influencing both individuals and society as a whole. On an individual level, those who experience discrimination based on their language may suffer from feelings of isolation, alienation, and reduced self-esteem<sup>3</sup>. The constant fear of being judged or excluded due to one's language proficiency can lead to heightened stress, anxiety, and even depression. Moreover, individuals subjected to such discrimination may develop a sense of internalized inferiority, which can erode their confidence and hinder their ability to fully engage in social and professional interactions.

Language-based discrimination constitutes a longstanding and globally recognized concern, often instigated and perpetuated by underlying factors such as xenophobia and nationalism. This issue is notably exemplified within the context of Luxembourg, a diminutive European nation distinguished for its extensive linguistic heterogeneity and cosmopolitan character. Luxembourg's demographic landscape, currently encompassing an estimated population of 655,000 individuals, wherein immigrants comprise 47.3%, offers an opportune milieu for the meticulous examination contemplated herein<sup>1</sup>. This inquiry is dedicated to the comprehensive exploration of language-based discrimination, encompassing its historical antecedents, contemporary manifestations, and prospective remedial avenues. Through this endeavor, we aspire to unveil the intricate nexus interlinking language, discrimination, and societal attitudes within this distinctive backdrop.

The ramifications of language-based discrimination, both tangible and intangible, exert profound repercussions upon the fabric of society. In practical terms, such discrimination invariably curtails access to education, gainful employment, and essential social services for individuals lacking proficiency in the dominant language. This regrettably perpetuates extant social disparities and impedes concerted efforts at integration. Furthermore, language-based discrimination casts a deleterious impact on social cohesion, impeding meaningful intergroup interaction and fostering schisms amongst linguistically heterogeneous segments of society<sup>4</sup>. This protracted divisiveness, when left unaddressed,

can ultimately contribute to the fragmentation of a once-unified social fabric, rendering mutual understanding an increasingly elusive objective.

It is imperative to acknowledge that while addressing discrimination is of paramount import, due recognition must also be accorded to the challenges entailed in acquiring proficiency in additional languages. In response to the linguistic difficulties faced by students, Luxembourg has undertaken a commendable initiative in the form of the "Action Plan for Readjusting Languages." This initiative, inaugurated in 2007 and formulated on the recommendations of the Council of Europe, is designed to confront the multifaceted challenges associated with language acquisition. Its overarching objectives encompass the mitigation of linguistic impediments, the cultivation of linguistic harmony, and the advancement of select languages, notably including Portuguese, English, and Luxembourgish<sup>2</sup>.

The plan discerningly considers a spectrum of factors, ranging from the development of language portfolios to accommodating student diversity, academic performance, and evaluation methodologies. Its foremost aspiration is to forge a more efficacious and equitable educational framework within Luxembourg. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that while commendable progress has been made, there remains a dearth of recent regulatory developments within the domain of language education, particularly those that incentivize language acquisition among adults and those no longer enrolled in conventional educational institutions, yet seek accessible avenues for

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## WIR SPRECKEN: GERMAN COMPARISON

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Pursuant to German legal provisions, discrimination on the grounds of gender, ethnicity, language, or place of origin is categorically proscribed. Monolingualism, denoting the capacity to communicate solely in a single language, is the prevailing linguistic condition. Notwithstanding the coexistence of a plurilingual populace, Germany retains its status as a predominantly monolingual nation, wherein a proficient command of the German language is imperative for purposes of integration and naturalization<sup>5</sup>. It is noteworthy that, at the institutional level, Germany retains a perceptible nationalist orientation, albeit the absence of an explicit designation of the German language as the nation's official language within the constitutional framework, as delineated in the Grundgesetz<sup>6</sup>.

Attempts to enshrine German as the official language of the Federal Republic of Germany, made by entities such as the Association of the German Language and assorted petitions that garnered popular support, have regrettably met with failure<sup>6</sup>. This circumstance is contextualized by Germany's historical legacy, characterized by war, the specter of Nazism, and contemporary sociopolitical contentions vis-à-vis right-wing and extreme far-right ideologies, rendering the notion of constitutional language designation an atypical theorem<sup>6</sup>.





Wir Sprechen is a social awareness campaign against linguicism. Created by Aidara, Its purpose is to inform of discrimination based on someone's language, accent, or dialect. The goal is to highlight the beauty and diversity of the numerous languages that are still spoken today and its mission is to foster empathy, compassion, and assistance in interpersonal communication and comprehension. This advocacy campaign initiative aims to deconstruct imperialist and neocolonial concepts that promote xenophobic, ableist, and racist behavior around the world.

In tandem with the preeminence of the German language, Western European languages, notably French and English, occupy salient positions within the German linguistic landscape. Notably, these languages receive preferential treatment in comparison to languages emanating from regions traditionally classified as "third world" by Western standards. The premise underpinning my hypothesis derives from the overarching perception of Western languages as imbued with a sense of linguistic superiority, a sentiment stemming from the historical legacies of colonialism and imperialism that exerted a profound influence upon colonized societies.

An intrinsic correlation between linguistic accents and manifestations of racism is discernible in the landscape of discriminatory linguistic attitudes prevalent in Germany. It is imperative to elucidate that an accent, in essence, signifies an individual's distinctive mode of speech, encompassing phonological attributes such as stress patterns, rhythm, tonality, and intonation<sup>6</sup>. Counter to popular misconceptions, the phenomenon of employing accents during communication is not limited solely to foreigners or immigrants; rather, it is a ubiquitous facet of human speech. The concept of an accent-neutral discourse is devoid of empirical basis, as linguistic diversity inherently encompasses variances in pronunciation and vocal articulation.

Studies conducted within the ambit of the German housing market have corroborated a discernible connection between linguistic devaluation, characterized by the employment of languages perceived as less prestigious, or the manifestation of discernible accents, and elevated susceptibility to discrimination<sup>6</sup>. This heightened susceptibility, consequentially, translates into heightened difficulties in securing essential accommodations such as viewing appointments and, by extension, rental or purchase of residential properties (Baumgarten, Du Bois, and Gill, as

elucidated in the current discourse)<sup>7</sup>. Evidently, this propensity to discriminate adversely impacts individuals possessing Turkish accents, who, in contrast to their counterparts proficient in the standardized variant of the German language, face an elevated risk of discrimination.

An illuminating survey conducted by Afrosensus, encompassing approximately 6,000 respondents, has furnished insights into the experiences of individuals of African descent within the housing market of Germany. A significant proportion, specifically 83.4% of respondents, have attested to instances of discrimination in the housing sector<sup>9</sup>. While the specific etiology of this discrimination, whether rooted in linguistic factors, remains indeterminate within the purview of this dataset, the data unequivocally underscores the existence of racist and xenophobic undertones pervading these housing-related encounters.

The examination of language-based discrimination in both Luxembourg and Germany reveals nuanced patterns shaped by historical legacies, societal attitudes, and legal frameworks. Luxembourg, celebrated for its linguistic diversity, grapples with language-related bias influenced by xenophobia and nationalism<sup>10</sup>. The intricate interplay between the nation's trilingualism, historical hierarchies, and the rise of populist movements underscores the multifaceted nature of linguistic discrimination in this small European country .

Wir Sprechen is a social awareness campaign against linguicism. Its purpose is to inform of discrimination based on someone's language, accent, or dialect. The goal is to highlight the beauty and diversity of the numerous languages that are still spoken today and its mission is to foster empathy, compassion, and assistance in interpersonal communication and comprehension. This advocacy campaign initiative aims to deconstruct imperialist and neocolonial concepts that promote xenophobic, ableist, and racist behavior around the world.

Liked languages		Disliked languages		School languages	
(N = 2221)	%	(N = 2221)	%	(N = 1439)	%
French	31.2	None	21.5	English	91.0
Italian	26.6	Russian	19.9	French	62.9
English	25.8	Arabic	12.7	Spanish	61.1
Spanish	23.8	Turkish	11.2	Russian	20.8
None	7.8	No answer	10.1	Italian	20.7
No answer	6.4	French	7.0	Chinese	16.4
Dutch	5.0	Chinese	6.5	Latin	12.1
German	4.3	Saxon	5.7	Turkish	6.0
Bavarian	3.4	Polish	5.6	Arabic	4.2
				No answer	0.6

A study with questions about attitudes towards languages and regional dialects, conducted by the Leibniz-Institut für Deutsche Sprache (IDS, Institute for the German Language) in collaboration with the Deutsche Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung (DIW, German Institute for Economic Research) personally interviewing over 5400 respondents. The results showed that languages weren't equally perceived. The most liked languages were from Europeans countries perceived as more educated and prestigious. Russian and Arabic were the most disliked.

[FIG 1]

Conversely, in Germany, language discrimination manifests itself within a socio-linguistic framework characterized by a predominant monolingualism where German proficiency is a prerequisite for integration<sup>10</sup>. This memorandum aims to ensure equal treatment regardless of linguistic background, reflecting a proactive approach to combating discrimination. Nonetheless, the existence of discriminatory attitudes, particularly related to accents and language proficiency, accentuates the socio-cultural disparities shaping linguistic prejudice<sup>11</sup>. Comparatively, both nations grapple with the consequences of linguistic discrimination, including barriers to education, employment, and social integration, along with challenges to social cohesion. However, Luxembourg's multicultural society, driven by immigration and expatriate influx, and Germany's historical role as a destination for diverse populations highlight the unique dynamics each nation faces.

Luxembourg and Germany serve as contrasting case studies within the broader discourse on language-based discrimination. The former's experience underscores the complexities of linguistic diversity in a small, globalized nation, while the latter's journey highlights the intricacies of ensuring linguistic equity within a predominantly monolingual context. Both nations provide valuable insights into the evolving dynamics of linguistic discrimination, emphasizing the importance of fostering linguistic tolerance, promoting intercultural dialogue, and advancing equitable language education to mitigate the pervasive impacts of this form of discrimination in contemporary societies.

STRIDES FOR PROGRESS

To effectively address language-based discrimination in Luxembourg, it is imperative to adopt a comprehensive approach that addresses historical biases, institutes reforms in the educational system, and cultivates a climate of inclusive social attitudes. Central to this strategy is the promotion of bilingual education and language acquisition programs designed to empower individuals from diverse linguistic backgrounds, facilitating their full participation in society. The cultivation of a culture marked by linguistic tolerance and respect can be achieved through targeted media campaigns, community-driven initiatives, and the implementation of policies aimed at fostering intercultural dialogue. Addressing the psychological effects of language-based discrimination requires not only legal and policy measures but also concerted efforts to promote empathy,

Figure 1: Germany Survey 2017 (GS2017), Liked/disliked languages (interview, open-ended question, weighted results; the nine most frequently named categories) and school languages (online questionnaire, open-ended question, not weighted), GS2017.

A study from the Germany Survey 2017 (GS2017) with questions about attitudes towards languages and regional dialects. It was conducted by the Leibniz-Institut für Deutsche Sprache (IDS, Institute for the German Language) in collaboration with the Deutsche Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung (DIW, German Institute for Economic Research). They personally interviewed 4339 respondents and had another 1439 respondents who filled their online questionnaire. The results showed that languages weren't equally perceived. The most liked languages are from Europeans countries perceived as more educated and prestigious. Russian and Arabic are the most disliked. Such hostility can be traced back to the tumultuous past between Germany and Russia, as well conflict with Middle Eastern war refugees.

understanding, and linguistic tolerance. Initiatives aimed at fostering respect for linguistic diversity, promoting intercultural dialogue, and raising awareness about the harmful effects of discrimination are essential steps toward mitigating the psychological impact of this pervasive issue.

The issue of language-based discrimination in Luxembourg, largely fueled by misguided educational bias, underscores the intricate interplay between language, identity, and societal attitudes. Resolving this matter demands a holistic effort to challenge deeply ingrained historical biases, champion linguistic inclusivity, and nurture a collective sense of belonging among all segments of society. By duly acknowledging the inherent value of linguistic diversity and the significance of mutual respect, Luxembourg can earnestly pursue a future wherein language serves as a unifying bridge rather than a divisive barrier. This vision holds the potential to unite its people in a shared trajectory of progress and mutual understanding, adhering to the principles of justice and equality enshrined in international and domestic legal frameworks.

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