



ANTHROPOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

Video Transcript English

Switzerland: Cleanliness meets Security

SERENA O. DANKWA: Fatima Moumouni, thank you very much for coming here.

FATIMA MOUMOUNI: Thank you for the invitation.

SERENA O. DANKWA: You travel a lot, you write texts, perform on stage, rap, make people laugh, and at the same time, you also study anthropology. Above all, you host a talk show called "The New Insecurity".

This course is about security from different anthropological perspectives. It's about security on political and social levels, and it's also about what gives people in their everyday lives a sense of security – or not.

So I'd like to start with "The New Insecurity". What is it about? What kind of format is it?

FATIMA MOUMOUNI: "The New Insecurity" is a conversation format that I've been doing for several years, thinking about it and continually developing it. It's actually already the second version of a format in which my aim is to unsettle my guests.

The first version was called "The End of Security", and now I've arrived at "The New Insecurity", where it's really about not just unsettling my guests, but also myself. It all started with a quote... or actually, it has several origins. I think the first origin is being in Switzerland and realising that Switzerland is a country that is very security-conscious and averse to uncertainty. I think that has an impact on the culture here – how people deal with uncertainty, self-confidence, space, boundaries, and so on.

As a performer, I've noticed that on stage, uncertainty is often avoided, even if it means that you may lie or prefer not to apologise for a mistake, because self-confidence on stage is the top priority.

SERENA O. DANKWA: You came to Switzerland and observed that there is a certain way of dealing with security here. Did that also lead you to create this format? I mean, why this focus on security in a country like Switzerland?



FATIMA MOUMOUNI: Well, I think Switzerland is a country that is very security-conscious, where there is a lot of security, but at the same time, that also means that the securities we have are more difficult to question.

One example of that is the belief that our institutions work well. That's an advantage, but when they don't work, like in cases of police violence or even police killings, it's harder to address that in society and consequently to prevent it. The view towards the USA, where people say, "Things are much better here", leads to the fact that we have countless cases here where the names aren't even known. Countless cases where...

SERENA O. DANKWA: Meaning deaths.

FATIMA MOUMOUNI: Exactly, deaths where the names aren't known, and where the debate around it is met with disbelief. "What? That doesn't happen in Switzerland". That makes it very difficult and even more insecure.

SERENA O. DANKWA: What do you attribute that to?

FATIMA MOUMOUNI: I think it's quite clear that Switzerland is a country that is completely, well, very clean. They even clean the rubbish bins.

SERENA O. DANKWA: Which is good.

FATIMA MOUMOUNI: We're in Basel now. You have these rubbish bins that look so cool and have a solar panel with a transmitter that somehow reports the fill level to some control centre. Even the dirty places in Switzerland often still get a neurotic re-cleaning.

And at the same time, of course, there is a lot of prosperity here. I think that, on the one hand, prosperity helps you feel safe, because you don't have to constantly worry about what tomorrow will bring. On the other hand, of course, it's something you get used to and then become increasingly sensitive to uncertainty.

I think the pandemic showed that. There was a moment when Switzerland, I think, was one of the worst countries in dealing with the pandemic. The countries that Switzerland always felt a bit superior to handled it much better. I thought that was a very interesting moment because it showed that security is not necessarily always a good thing, but that it can be many things and is something that you constantly have to question. What does security do to us?



University
of Basel

I think that Switzerland – this might be the next point – security and cleanliness in Switzerland are a direct consequence of the insecurity found in other countries.

SERENA O. DANKWA: Yes.

FATIMA MOUMOUNI: And that's interesting, because Switzerland has a narrative... a very safe narrative that basically says that hard work and individual effort lead to this security and this prosperity.

And that adds another layer that affects our sense of security, namely, that we can rest on the belief that the security we have here is an earned security. And an earned security feels safe.