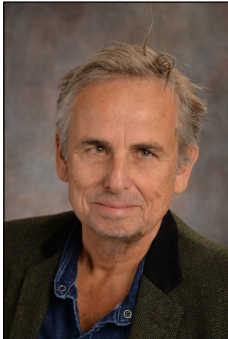


Ahmed is back on his feet

When migration goes wrong and what can be done about it

by Alain Pichard,* Switzerland



Alain Pichard.
(Picture ma)

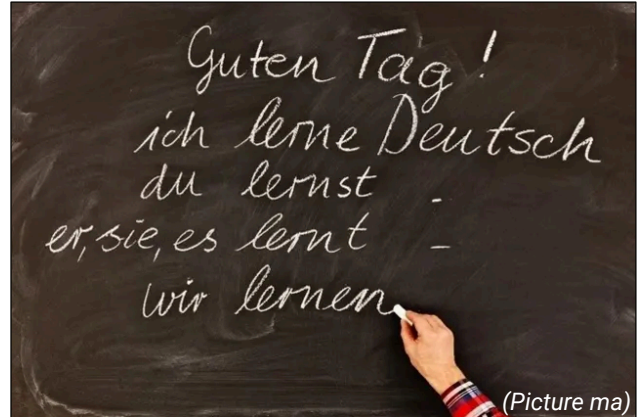
Muslim fathers refusing to shake hands with female teachers hardly attracts any public attention anymore. And that's a good thing! Firstly, the vast majority of Muslims in Switzerland have no problem whatsoever with what we consider to be a simple greeting ritual. Secondly, debates about handshakes usually lead to

fruitless discussions about symbols, which distract us from the serious issues at hand.

A week ago, I met one of these handshake refusers again. After a turbulent school career littered with failures, he greeted me from a smart car. He told me he was now a driving instructor. He asked me with a beaming smile if I was still the teacher who rode a bicycle and didn't have a driving licence. I said yes and invited him for a cup of coffee.

*Ahmed*¹ is the son of *Aysche*,¹ who came to my class in the 1980s at the tender age of nine in a suburb of Biel, a city in the canton of Bern. As she was a very eager girl and also the only foreign language speaker far and wide, she learned German quickly and so well that after school she was able to do an apprenticeship as a pharmacy assistant, which was considered a rather demanding vocational training at the time.

After successfully completing her apprenticeship, she married a man from her village in Turkey and moved to Biel. Her husband did not speak any German, but he had his religious principles. Aysche gave up her job, covered her hair with a headscarf, had a son, then another and finally a third. Her husband could not find a job



(Picture ma)

and the whole family ended up living on social welfare.

When her first son Ahmed started school, he didn't speak a word of German. His school career was therefore predetermined. He ended up in a Biel secondary school class consisting entirely of pupils who did not speak German at home. Although he received three times as many extra lessons as his mother, who still speaks perfect German today, his progress was modest.

In Year 8, he began to compensate by joining a gang and beating up other pupils, hardly doing any of his homework and refusing to shake hands with his class teacher. Not for religious reasons, as he always emphasised, but because this woman got on his nerves. However, he also got on the nerves of his teacher, the class team and the school administrators. When he had one of his fights filmed and posted online, the inevitable happened. He was expelled from school. The Mett-Bözingen and Orpund secondary schools were in close contact. A straightforward deal was agreed with the Biel school authorities. The rascal was sent to me.

Refusing to shake hands would never have occurred to him. Not just because I was a man. He knew that he was dealing with a teacher who cared about him. If he had started with such antics, I would have frozen. No "I want you to be able to do that", no extra time after school to explain proportional distribution to him again. And it would never have occurred to me to call the headmaster or even invoke the rules because he refused to shake my hand. We got along quite

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well. In his last months at school, he tried to make up for his deficits and didn't hit anyone anymore. This was followed by a 10th school year and then an integration programme.

It was important that he was placed in a functioning class with a third of the children having a migrant background. He experienced effective teaching that challenged him. And he realised that he – a Year 9 pupil – was completely unable to keep up in this Year 8 class. He could only just read a simple text and in mathematics he barely knew his times tables.

When I met his mum, Aysche, for a parent-teacher meeting, I asked her straight away, "Aysche, how could you?!" Aysche was desperate. She had recently separated from her husband, taken off her headscarf and realised everything. We were able to focus on the immediate future.

The story of Aysche and her son Ahmed is worth telling because it sheds light on behaviours that repeatedly leave us perplexed and have serious consequences. Apart from the isolation of religious Muslim families from other citizens in the neighbourhood, refusing to shake hands is by no means the only rule for everyday life that our Muslim fundamentalists derive from a book written over 1,500 years ago.

Wearing headscarves during lessons, eating no pork in home economics, halal meat in the canteen, no swimming lessons but a prayer room at school, leaving school early so that Friday prayers are not missed, exemptions from school camps, Ramadan celebrations – the list of demands is long and, in my experience, the longer the list, the lower the academic achievement. Which brings us to the real problem. Be-

cause Aysche and Ahmed are not isolated cases.

People come to us because they are looking for better prospects. And most of them recognise the opportunities that our country offers them. Others, however, want to live exactly as they did where they came from. Economically motivated migrants thus become welfare migrants, because our country offers that too. Reliable laws that ensure a state in which no one is left behind and which also bears the consequences of this attitude to life. The question is how long this will be possible, because it takes two good taxpayers to support Aysche and her family.

The reversal of our values (personal responsibility, diligence, effort and tolerance), as preached by some migration and Islam experts, and their claim that school failure is due to insufficient integration efforts on the part of the host country, are of little use to those affected. Ahmed recognised this. He needed a detour and teachers who took an interest in him. After completing a sales apprenticeship, which he passed with some difficulty, he got back on his feet, helped his brother in a bar in his spare time and trained as a driving instructor. He is married and expecting his first child this year. "When", he asked me with a grin, "are you finally going to get your driving licence?" "As soon as your daughter starts nursery and can speak German", I replied.

Source: <https://condorcet.ch/2025/04/ahmed-hat-sich-gefangen>, 12 April 2025

(Translation "Swiss Standpoint")

¹ Names have been changed.