

Article

Whose Peace Counts in German Classrooms? On the Mobilization of School Peace (Schulfrieden) and the Policing of Palestine Solidarity

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Abstract

School peace, or Schulfrieden, is often portrayed in German education as a neutral condition enabling learning. Yet this study interrogates how peace itself becomes a tool of governance, selectively policing who can safely occupy the classroom. Examining the Berlin Senate's October 2023 directive, which banned symbols showing solidarity with Palestine, we show that school peace is less about conflict resolution than about shaping affective hierarchies. Fear, anticipation, and symbolic association circulate to mark some bodies as threats while leaving others unexamined. Through the lens of Sara Ahmed's affective economies and Zembylas's affective ideology, we argue that the directive transforms political expression into a site of emotional correction, preemptively disciplining marginalized students and rendering their solidarity politically suspect. Peace, in this framing, is primarily rule and order: it secures institutional comfort while curtailing engagement with global injustice. The classroom becomes a laboratory of anticipatory governance, where ethical awareness is unevenly distributed, and dissent is contained before it emerges. By tracing how school peace operates affectively, the study reveals the subtle mechanics by which liberal education reproduces racialized hierarchies under the guise of neutrality.

Keywords: school peace; education policy; affective governance; racialized surveillance; Palestine solidarity

1. Introduction

What does it mean for a school to be at peace? In the German educational context, Schulfrieden¹ describes the condition under which orderly instruction can take place, a baseline of calm that allows teaching and learning to proceed. As legal scholar Thorsten Anger notes, the term is understood as “a peaceful and harmonious coexistence of the school” (Anger 2005, p. 53). Peace, in this formulation, names an orientation: a turning toward some bodies and a turning away from others, a distribution of comfort and discomfort, belonging and threat.

This article examines how Schulfrieden operated in a specific case: the Berlin Senate directive of 13 October 2023, which prohibited any expression that “could be interpreted as” supporting Palestinian resistance. The directive banned keffiyehs, maps showing Palestine, and the slogan “Free Palestine”—not because these symbols had disrupted schools, but because they might threaten the peace. We ask: whose peace does Schulfrieden protect? Reading the Berlin directive through Sara Ahmed's concept of affective economies (Ahmed



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2004a), we show how Schulfrieden operates as a technology of governance—through what it prohibits, as well as how its language circulates fear, attaches threat to some bodies and not others, and reframes political expression as disturbance. The directive’s anticipatory logic (“could be interpreted as”), its metonymic lists linking keffiyehs to terrorism, and its pedagogical caveat that invites dialogue only after submission: these mechanisms reveal how liberal institutions manage dissent while appearing neutral. To govern preemptively is also to claim authority over a future that has not arrived yet, and by reading the present for what might come, the future becomes a site of intervention. Thus, the peace Schulfrieden secures is the comfort of those who do not wish to be troubled by difference and dissent rather than creating the condition for pluralism.

The Berlin Directive²

In the weeks following Hamas’ attacks on 7 October 2023, the Berlin Senate Department for Education, Youth and Family issued a directive to all schools addressing student expression and responses related to the events. The letter, dated 13 October 2023 and signed by Senator Katharina Günther-Wünsch, bore the subject line “Dealing with disruptions of school peace in connection with the terrorist attack on Israel.” It opened by acknowledging that the attacks “unfortunately also affect the peaceful coexistence in Berlin schools” (Berliner Senat 2023).

The core provision identifies actions or expressions considered a threat to school peace: “Any demonstrative action or expression of opinion that could be interpreted as advocating for or approving of the attacks against Israel, or supporting the organizations carrying them out, constitutes a threat to peace at school and is prohibited” (Berliner Senat 2023). School peace, the directive outlines, refers to a state of conflict-free interaction and conflict resolution that enables the proper functioning of schools, thereby allowing the state’s educational mandate to be fulfilled. This constitutes a protective purpose of outstanding importance. The prevention of political and religious-ideological conflicts in schools represents a significant common good that justifies a restriction of freedom of expression (Berliner Senat 2023).

The directive specifies behaviors and symbols covered by this prohibition: wearing the Palestinian keffiyeh, displaying “Free Palestine” stickers or flyers, presenting maps showing Palestine instead of Israel, chanting “Free Palestine!”, and expressing support for Hamas. It also encompasses “symbols, gestures, and expressions of opinion that do not yet reach the limit of criminal liability” (Berliner Senat 2023, p. 2), expanding the scope beyond conduct already punishable under law. The legal basis for enforcement is grounded in the Berlin School Act: principals may implement these prohibitions under §46 Absatz 2 Satz 3, while §§62 and 63 provide for disciplinary measures. Alongside prohibitions, the directive instructs staff to maintain a pedagogical approach. Classroom discussion of current events is explicitly permitted, but only after prohibition. Concrete instances following the directive illustrate how schools operationalized these prohibitions. In the *Neukölln*³ school incident of 9 October 2023, a student brought a Palestinian flag to school; a teacher demanded it be removed, and when the student refused, the teacher physically chased the student, used profanity, and struck first. Police and media framed the incident as a student-led attack; the police tweet was viewed more than one million times (Younes and Al-Taher 2024). Younes and Al-Taher (2024) document additional cases where students were told to remove Palestinian flags from clothing or had “Free Palestine” stickers confiscated.

Building on their work, our article examines the idea and practice of Schulfrieden itself as a technology of governance. While Younes and Al-Taher (2024) document the suppression of Palestine solidarity as an effect of Germany’s Staatsräson⁴, we analyze the conceptual apparatus—Schulfrieden—that makes this suppression legible as legitimate educational regulation in schools. Reading the directive through Sara Ahmed’s concept of

affective economies, we show how peace functions not as the regulation and resolution of conflict but as an affective norm that renders certain political expressions unthinkable within institutional space. The sections that follow trace this operation through the directive's language.

2. Background: Schulfrieden and the Governance of Visibility

Schulfrieden has long served as the legal rationale for balancing individual liberties against the state's educational mandate, but its meaning has never been fixed. Courts treat it as a protected good (Schutzgut) that can justify limiting rights like religious freedom or expression when necessary to maintain orderly instruction. A 2011 Federal Administrative Court ruling defined it as "a state of conflict-freedom and conflict management that enables the orderly conduct of school operations" (BVerwG, 30 November 2011, 6 C 20/10). As Anger notes, the required response depends on the disturbance intensity and the motives of those perceived as disturbers—and while Schulfrieden can be threatened by multiple actors, "school law in the states primarily views students as potential disruptors" (Anger 2005, p. 55). Religious behaviors, including headscarves, have often been highlighted as potential sources of disruption (Nordbruch 2022; Bauknecht 2022), though Anger emphasizes that mere expression does not automatically endanger Schulfrieden (Anger 2005, p. 53).

Analyzing the headscarf debates of the 1990s and 2000s, Henkes and Kneip (2009) show that Schulfrieden was deployed differently depending on which party held power: CDU-led states frequently framed Muslim headscarves as inherent threats and passed bans, while SPD-led states interpreted the same concept more permissively. Some federal states wrote unequal treatment directly into law, explicitly exempting Christian-occidental expressions from neutrality requirements (Berghahn 2009). Weber (2004) demonstrates how Islamic veiling practices have long been "associated with cultural otherness in Germany" (p. 36), activating Orientalist associations that predated any actual classroom conflict. In the Fereshta Ludin case, administrative courts accepted that a teacher's headscarf could disturb school peace, even as adjustments permitted Christian head coverings (Weber 2004). The headscarf became legible as a threat not because of anything its wearer did, but because of associations already attached. The 2015 Federal Constitutional Court ruling addressed these inconsistencies, holding that a blanket ban on headscarves could not be justified by abstract fears of disrupted school peace; the state must demonstrate a "concrete, demonstrable risk" in each individual case (BVerfG 2015). The Court insisted that genuine Schulfrieden requires tolerating diversity: "the principle of equal treatment ensures peace in schools, as it corresponds to the diversity experienced in schools, which reflects the religiously pluralistic society" (Arani 2016, p. 118). Yet this ruling did not prevent the logic of selectivity from persisting. The legal debates were never really about neutrality; they were about which bodies belong, with Muslim women's visibility becoming the problem that "neutrality" was meant to solve.

For Ahmed (2012), institutions become "white" not through explicit racial ideology but through the gradual accumulation of norms, habits, and expectations that orient institutional space around certain bodies. To feel "at home" in an institution is to align with these norms; to be a "stranger" is to be marked as divergent, to become noticeable, to be "stopped" (Ahmed 2012). Institutional whiteness, in this sense, is the affective inheritance of colonialism—the way colonial hierarchies are reproduced not through direct coercion but through the mundane regulation of comfort, peace, and order. Tikly (2004) argues that under classical colonialism, formal education functioned as a "disciplinary institution" where European conceptions of order were imposed on colonized populations, producing "colonial subjects rather than equal citizens" (p. 188). Younes and Al-Taher (2024) extend this analysis to the German context, demonstrating that this disciplinary function is visible

in the state's efforts to stabilize its ideology through surveillance and regulation of those marked as deviant from the national norm. The Berlin directive's invocation of *Schulfrieden* makes visible how this inheritance operates in practice. The directive instructs educators to identify and sanction students whose political expressions disturb institutional peace.

German schools operate with another administrative category that shapes how students are seen before any conflict arises. The category *Migrationshintergrund* (migration background) was introduced in 2005 to statistically track integration outcomes. As Will argues, it is "a state-administered ethnic category" (p. 552): a person is classified as having migration background if they or at least one parent did not acquire German citizenship at birth, meaning grandchildren of immigrants are included while children of German-born parents who immigrated are not—making it "still an 'ethnic' rather than a migration category" (Will, p. 550). Its treatment of ancestry "echoes—probably unconsciously—the Nazi definition of Aryans: all four grandparents had to be provable of Aryan descent to count as an Aryan" (Will, p. 551), highlighting the racialized logic underlying its classification.

Institutions produce order by making unambiguous what is inherently ambiguous, and categories like migration background are part of a process of Othering that reproduces societal power structures (Mecheril 2014). Almost a third of children and young people in Germany have a migration background; in Berlin, proportions of 40% to over 50% have become the norm in schools (Arani 2016). Students marked by a migration background become legible to institutions not in their complexity but through a single lens: not-German, potentially out of place, requiring explanation. The directive's prohibitions land in a school system where this category has long marked a significant portion of the student body as requiring attention. Furthermore, these students are positioned in a temporal field that reads their bodies prospectively and constructs their futures via potential threats. Policy documents and directives act on and through these existing structures of power and naming.

3. Analytical Approach: On Affective Governance

This study analyzes the Berlin Senate directive of 13 October 2023, alongside media documentation of its implementation (Berliner Zeitung 2023; FOCUS Online 2023; Latz 2023). The directive is our primary text; media reports provide evidence of how its provisions were enacted and framed for public consumption. The directive is an administrative guideline issued by the Senate Department, interpreting existing provisions of the Berlin School Act (§46, §§62–63) rather than creating new laws. Issued in October 2023, it was still referenced as an active measure in February 2024; we have found no evidence of formal revocation. Although the directive is not a formal policy but an administrative guideline, the analytical frameworks developed for education policy remain pertinent. Like policies, directives authorize interventions, construct subject positions, and circulate through institutional contexts.

We do not conduct interviews with students, teachers, or administrators. This is not a concession to practical limitations, but a methodological choice consistent with our theoretical framework. Following Carol Bacchi's "What's the Problem Represented to be?" approach, we treat policies as productive rather than responsive: they do not address problems that exist independently but instead constitute those problems in ways that make certain forms of intervention appear necessary and natural. Bacchi asks: "represented to be in a specific policy or policy proposal? What presuppositions underlie this representation? What is left unproblematic?" (Bacchi 2012, p. 21) We read the Berlin Senate directive as a cultural document that does institutional work through its affective language—language that constructs reality, positions subjects as problems, and enables forms of intervention

designed to respond to the problem it has created. The directive's temporality is preemptive, bringing the threat it claims to solve into being by naming it as a future possibility.

To analyze how this directive's language operates affectively, we draw on Ahmed's concept of affective economies. Through this concept, Ahmed argues that "emotions circulate and are distributed across a social as well as psychic field" (Ahmed 2004a, p. 120). Through this circulation, particular bodies become associated with danger, disruption, or threat, while others become associated with safety, belonging, and normality. As such, emotions reflect social boundaries as well as actively producing them, and we extend them through Zembylas's (2022) framework for analyzing affective ideology in education policy. Following Zembylas, we treat the directive as a "node" where affect travels and attaches to particular concepts; textuality becomes the "trace of affective movements" (Zembylas 2022, p. 518). Our analysis focuses on how the text "sticks" or "fixates" negative affect to certain ideas and symbols (Zembylas 2022, p. 518). His method involves reading for "affective intensity" that exceeds literal meaning and identifying recurring "manifestations" of affective ideology within a text (p. 518). Ahmed asks how emotions work to align subjects with some others and against others, arguing that emotions are not private, interior states but cultural practices that circulate between bodies and signs. They create "the very effect of the surfaces and boundaries that allow us to distinguish an inside and an outside in the first place" (Ahmed 2004a, pp. 18–19). She shows how signs become sticky through repetition, accumulating affective value as they circulate; how metonymic slides link figures through proximity rather than argument; and how fear differentiates between bodies, restricting the mobility of some while enabling the unmarked movement of others (Ahmed 2004b).

Drawing on these scholars, we analyze how the directive's language operates affectively. We examine how its anticipatory logic—the "could be" clause—mobilizes what Ahmed terms fear's futurity, governing through potential rather than actual disruption. We trace how its list form performs metonymic slides (Ahmed 2004a), linking Palestinian symbols to terrorism through proximity rather than argument (Younes and Al-Taher 2024). We also attend to how fear differentiates between bodies, restricting some while leaving others unmarked (Ahmed 2004a). The following sections analyze three dimensions of that problematization—temporal, symbolic, and subjective—showing how the directive's language produces Palestinian solidarity as something that must be pre-empted and pedagogically corrected.

The analytical distinction developed here is between concepts that explain institutional processes and concepts that are themselves objects of our critique. Ahmed's work (Ahmed 2004a) on affect, institutional whiteness, and complaint, together with scholarship on affective governance in education (Zembylas 2022), provides conceptual tools for analyzing how power operates. However, *Schulfrieden* is treated as an institutional discourse whose regulatory effects require explanation. The article's contribution is to reconceptualize school peace as an affective technology of governance through which *Staatsräson* is translated into everyday educational practice, regulating which forms of political expression, solidarity, and dissent can appear as legitimate within school spaces.

4. Governing Palestine Through School Peace: An Affective Analysis

4.1. Anticipatory Logic: The "Could Be" of Threat

Turning to the directive's language, we first examine its anticipatory logic. The directive's core prohibition turns on a single phrase: "could be interpreted as" advocating for or approving the attacks. The German is passive and speculative: "could be understood"⁵ (*verstanden werden kann*) focuses not on the speaker's intent but on the hypothetical interpretation of an unspecified audience. The threat to school peace is framed as emanating

primarily from students (Anger 2005), yet the subject of the understanding is both present and absent; what matters is not what the student means but what their expression might be taken to mean. This formulation activates the logic of fear that Sara Ahmed traces in her analysis of political discourse. Fear, she writes, is linked to the ‘passing by’ of the object. ‘... It is the futurity of fear, which makes it possible that the object of fear, rather than arriving, might pass us by. But the passing by of the object of fear does not mean the overcoming of fear: rather, the possibility of the loss of the object that approaches makes what is fearsome all the more fearsome’ (Ahmed 2004a, p. 125).

The directive’s “could be” mobilizes this futurity. It does not require that disruption has occurred; it requires only that disruption could be interpreted. Threat operates in the future tense, and this futurity intensifies rather than diminishes its power. The student wearing a keffiyeh may have no intent to disrupt; but the possibility that their presence could be read as threat is sufficient to justify intervention. The same speculative logic was already at work in the 2006 Düsseldorf beret case, where a student teacher who replaced her headscarf with a beret was prohibited from teaching; the court accepted that the beret could function as a “surrogate” headscarf—a religious symbol not because of what it was, but because of what it could be interpreted as (Landesarbeitsgericht Düsseldorf 2008, p. 5).

Back in 2004, following the Federal Constitutional Court’s ruling, Anger already identified this speculative logic at work in state-level prohibitions. Analyzing Lower Saxony’s law prohibiting any teacher appearance that could create “doubts” about her ability to fulfill the educational mission, Anger found this standard fundamentally speculative: the state was working with “conjecture and insinuation,” imputing meanings to the headscarf without evidence (p. 59). More fundamentally, he emphasized that the state is constitutionally prohibited from assuming “a fixed contradiction between the headscarf and educational goals” (p. 59). Here, “could be” functions as the affective intensity that exceeds its literal content—the unspecified audience whose hypothetical interpretation becomes grounds for preemptive action, the future disruption that has not yet occurred but justifies intervention in the present. The directive governs not through the student’s intent or actions but through the possible interpretations of an unnamed audience. The future—what someone might think, what disruption could occur—becomes a technology of control in the present. Fear circulates not because of what has happened, but because of what has not yet happened and may never happen.

In her analysis of post-9/11 discourse, Ahmed shows how the figure of the international terrorist becomes “detached from particular bodies, as a shadowy figure, ‘an unspecifiable may-come-to-pass’” (Massumi cited in Ahmed 2004b, p. 135), a detachment that justifies restriction on those read as potentially threatening. “And it is precisely this could-be-ness, this detachment, which also allows the restriction on the mobility of those bodies who are read as associated with terrorism. [...] Fear sticks to these bodies [...] but it also slides across bodies; it is the structural possibility that the terrorist may pass us by that justifies the expansion of these forms of intelligence, surveillance” (p. 135).

The directive’s “could be” clause performs precisely what Ahmed and Anger warn against. The threat is unspecified, detached from any particular act, and this detachment justifies restriction on those bodies read as potentially threatening. The student becomes legible not through what they have done, but through what they might do, what they could be interpreted as supporting. Two decades apart, school regulations continue to govern through what has not happened and may never happen: the first speculating about what a symbol might mean, the second about what conflict might arise.

4.2. Metonymic Slides and Racialized Selectivity

Having established how anticipatory logic governs potential disruptions, we now examine how the directive's symbolic enumeration ensures that affective fear attaches selectively to certain bodies. The directive never mentions a migration background. It names no group of students, yet the examples it gives—keffiyeh, "Free Palestine," maps showing Palestine—target symbols carried predominantly by students marked as Other, non-white or those commonly described as having a migration background in German administrative practice. To understand how a policy that names no one nonetheless knows who to target requires attending both to the form of the list and to the institutional conditions that make certain bodies legible as threats.

The directive specifies prohibited behaviors and symbols: "The visible wearing of relevant items of clothing (e.g., the scarf known as the Palestinian keffiyeh). The display of stickers and decals with inscriptions such as 'Free Palestine' or a map of Israel in the colors of Palestine (white, red, black, green). Shouts such as 'Free Palestine!' and demonstrative verbal support for Hamas and its terrorism."

The list form performs what Ahmed terms a 'metonymic slide.' This symbolic proximity allows affective fear to attach to specific student bodies, enabling teachers to interpret the presence of these items as grounds for intervention or confiscation. In other words, the abstract affective logic translates into concrete enforcement practices. In her analysis of far-right discourse, she traces how hate is distributed across various figures—"the mixed-racial couple, the child molester, the rapist, aliens, and foreigners"—that "come to embody the threat of loss" through proximity and repetition (Ahmed 2004b, p. 118). Because the keffiyeh appears in the same list as "support for Hamas," it becomes readable as contiguous with terrorism. The directive never argues that wearing a keffiyeh means supporting Hamas. The slide between figures does not require an explicit argument; it works through the accumulation of affective value across repeated linkages. As Ahmed explains, "the movement between signs is what allows others to be attributed with emotional value, in this case, as being fearsome, an attribution that depends on a history that 'sticks,' and which does not need to be declared" (p. 127).

Lähdesmäki et al. (2020), drawing on Ahmed's notion of stickiness, refer to this as "affective load," showing that only certain things "stick out" (p. 85). Looking at European policy, they demonstrate how texts invest concepts with affective meaning, noting that values like "tolerance," "mutual understanding," and "democratic values" become "sticky concepts" that are "morally hard to resist and critique" because they evoke universal humanist ideals (pp. 86–87). Zembylas (2022) takes this further, examining how "particular ideological views can be affectively mobilized or imparted in education policy" (p. 517).

The directive's list operates through this mechanism. The keffiyeh, the map in Palestinian colors, the slogan "Free Palestine" are placed alongside support for Hamas. The slide occurs through the syntax of enumeration: items joined by commas, collected under a single prohibitory heading, without any explanatory bridge (the 'metonymic slide' here denotes the way affective threat transfers from one symbol to another). The word "support" appears only in relation to Hamas, but its proximity to the listed symbols allows the association to transfer. "The interpellations of Hamas and Antisemitism move effortlessly between racialized student bodies in Berlin and an actual Palestinian armed resistance in the Middle East" (Younes and Al-Taher 2024, p. 404). The keffiyeh does not carry a threat inherently. It has become sticky through prior circulation: histories of media representation, political discourse, and institutional practice that have linked Palestinian symbols to violence and terrorism (Ahdash and Jaber 2025; Azarmandi 2025; Wystrychowski 2024). Together, these instances show a recurring mechanism: prior associations of threat allow affective intensity to be reactivated, producing selective enforcement in contemporary schools without any

explicit mention of student identity. Thus, the directive does not need to recite this history; it merely activates it through juxtaposition.

Yet the significance of the list lies not only in this associative mechanism but in the political field it produces. Following Bacchi's invitation to read policy for how the "problem" is represented within it (Bacchi 2012, p. 21), the list—presented as a solution—reveals an implicit problematization of Palestinian visibility itself. This representation depends as much on omission as inclusion. While Palestinian-associated symbols are explicitly named and prohibited, pro-Israeli symbols remain unlisted and therefore unregulated. Attending to this silence, as Bacchi suggests, means asking "what is left unproblematic" (Bacchi 2012, p. 21). The question reveals that the directive's problematization depends on erasing the very violence that Palestinian solidarity names. The silence here does not simply concern Israeli symbols but the violence that these expressions seek to name and contest. More fundamentally, the policy contains no reference to the broader political context in which these symbols circulate: the ongoing genocidal campaign in, the massive civilian casualties and the destruction of civilian infrastructure. By excluding the conditions that produce the protest, the directive reframes the issue from one of political violence and humanitarian catastrophe to one of problematic expression.

But the list alone does not determine who is stopped. It works because some bodies are already legible to the institution as potentially out of place. Ahmed (2012) argues that the physical and social architecture of institutions reflects and reproduces the norms of the bodies they were designed for. As she explains, "a stranger experience can teach us about how bodies come to feel at home through the work of inhabitation, how bodies can extend themselves into spaces creating contours of inhabitable space, as well as how spaces can be extensions of bodies" (p. 3). Bodies that pass through institutional space smoothly experience the institution as neutral, while bodies that are stopped, held up, or rendered noticeable experience it as regulatory.

This selectivity has long governed Muslim visibility in German institutions. In the Baden-Baden nuns case, courts accepted that nuns could teach in habits without objection, while Muslim teachers were banned from wearing headscarves—the same logic of unequal treatment, with Christian symbols protected and Muslim symbols read as a threat. In the 2017 Nisic case, a Berlin student who had worn a headscarf since fourth grade was denied a gymnasium recommendation despite having the best marks in her year; teachers "advised" her to remove the scarf for better grades, and one greeted her as a "full-body condom." The headscarf was read not as religious expression but as evidence of inability, a deficit requiring correction. In the 2023 Bonn professor case, a university lecturer expelled Gulsen Kurt from his economics class for wearing a headscarf, comparing it to a swastika and calling her an "Islamofascist" (Goethe Institute 2017). Here, the headscarf was equated not just with deficit but with political threat—the same affective load the directive attaches to the keffiyeh.

Because students marked by a migration background are already legible as potentially out of place, the affective stickiness of Palestinian symbols becomes actionable: teachers and administrators are primed to respond preemptively, even in the absence of overt disruption. Schools are sites where institutions defend their self-image as fair and neutral (Ahmed 2012; Karakaşoğlu and Wojciechowicz 2016), while simultaneously producing and reinforcing the ideal German subject as white and Christian (Boger 2014; Chadderton and Wischmann 2025; Younes and Al-Taher 2024). In this context, expressions of anger, grief, or political solidarity by students marked as having a migration background are frequently reframed as disturbances to *Schulfrieden*, rather than recognized as political interventions or claims to justice (Boger and Simon 2022; Ivanova-Chessex et al. 2022). The directive does not need to name them because the category has already done the work of orienting

institutional attention. As Ahmed writes, fear “works to restrict some bodies through the movement or expansion of others” (Ahmed 2004a, p. 127). The institution expands its authority, asserts its right to prohibit, claims its need for protection. The student marked by the keffiyeh is contained—their expression confiscated, their political claims reframed as matters requiring correction. As Gillborn (2015) emphasizes, such interpretations reflect the structural primacy of racism in schooling, where racialized bodies are disproportionately marked as problematic, which reinforces *Schulfrieden* as an affective technology governing visibility in schools.

In sum, the directive’s enumeration does more than prohibit symbols; it orchestrates an affective environment where fear circulates selectively, ensuring that particular bodies are preemptively contained, while others remain unmarked. The nature of the list also adds a temporal logic to how symbols like the Keffiyeh are read: “wearing the Palestinian keffiyeh. . . shouts such as ‘Free Palestine!’ . . . demonstrative verbal support for Hamas.”—first the symbol, then the support. The reader encounters a connection before it has to be inferred because of how futurity is compressed into form and syntax.

4.3. *Schulfrieden as Affective Technology: From Institutional Feeling to Pedagogical Discipline*

The directive defines *Schulfrieden* as “a state of freedom from conflict and effective conflict management that enables the proper functioning of the school, so that the state’s educational and upbringing mandate can be fulfilled. This constitutes a protective objective of outstanding importance.” Peace here is procedural: it names the condition under which the school can function without interruption. But the language of “protective purpose” does additional work.

As Section 2 showed, school peace has long been mobilized to govern Muslim visibility. This governance through abstract possibility has a specific history in German educational policy. As Anger explained in the context of the headscarf controversies, the headscarf could become a problem for school peace only “through students and parents taking offense at it” (Anger 2005, p. 60), making the mechanism relational: without actual offense, there was no disruption. He notes that such reactions had not occurred in the case before the Constitutional Court, “and beyond this specific case, such disturbances have barely been documented to date” (p. 60), yet the debate was focused on what responses were appropriate to the “abstract possibility” of disturbances (p. 60). The directive’s preamble activates this same logic: “However, tolerance reaches its limits where terrorist violence and brutality are supported for propaganda purposes, as has already occurred in isolated cases in schools” (Berliner Senat 2023, p. 1). Tolerance has limits, and those limits have already been tested. The word “isolated” is significant: a few cases are made to stand for a generalized threat. They circulate and accumulate affective value, becoming the justification for preemptive prohibition.

As Younes and Al-Taher argue, addressing the same directive, liberal freedom in Germany operates through “racial frontiers” (Younes and Al-Taher 2024, p. 397) where universalized notions of free speech and education are secured by excluding those who threaten them. They write:

This measure unapologetically shows how Germany’s liberal freedom can only work with the Other’s non-freedom (Lowe 2015; Younes 2022). For Germans to be ‘safe’ and ‘free’ in their education and on their territory, limitations or even prohibitions to free speech and free education are put in place for racialized others. (Younes and Al-Taher 2024, p. 403)

Liberalism exerts power most effectively not through overt coercion but through norms that render force invisible. As Ahmed notes, “force is all the more forceful when it no longer appears as force” (Ahmed 2008, para. 3). Younes and Al-Taher also highlight

how students of color are positioned as “security threat” in order to safeguard a “free and peaceful white Europe”, whose bodies have to be “kept out, removed or eradicated to keep Europe and its liberal order of self-proclaimed ‘freedom’ (Younes and Al-Taher 2024, p. 404). Liberalism thus governs through affect by transforming force into moral expectation. When institutions are organized around ideals of neutrality, tolerance, and peace, violence does not disappear but becomes harder to name, as it is embedded in everyday practices of emotional regulation that appear consensual and benign.

Ahmed argues that emotions “create the very effect of the surfaces or boundaries of bodies and worlds” (Ahmed 2004b, p. 117). The repeated invocation of *Schulfrieden* as a “protective purpose of outstanding importance” invests the concept with affective intensity, where comfort is understood as normality and discomfort as dysfunction. *Schulfrieden* becomes more than a legal term; it becomes a feeling—the sense that the institution is fragile, that it requires defense, that its peace is always already under threat. Because collectives form through affective orientation, “[t]he turning away from the object of fear hence may involve a turning toward home as a ‘fellow feeling.’ That ‘turning toward’ involves the repetition or reiteration of signs of ‘fellowship’” (Ahmed 2004a, p. 129). The directive’s repeated invocation of *Schulfrieden* as a value to be protected becomes such a turning toward. The school as a site of fellowship—orderly, peaceful, committed to tolerance—defines what threatens that fellowship. The turning toward requires a turning away from those bodies read as disruptive.

This turning toward home is also a turning toward security. Ahmed notes that “it is through announcing a crisis in security that new forms of security, border policing, and surveillance become justified. . . . To declare a crisis is not ‘to make something out of nothing’: such declarations often work with real events, facts, or figures. But the declaration of crisis reads that fact/figure/event and transforms it into a fetish object that then acquires a life of its own” (Ahmed 2004a, p. 132). The directive announces a crisis to school peace, using the real events of October 7 to justify new forms of surveillance and prohibition. The crisis becomes a fetish object that legitimates anticipatory discipline.

Its most pedagogical form is the directive’s caveat. The directive’s pedagogical caveat appears to soften its disciplinary edge:

We must also explain to children and young people why they should not display these symbols and engage them in conversation about their feelings, thoughts, and sources of information, as well as about the values that apply to all people within the scope of the Basic Law⁶. (Berliner Senat 2023)

But the sequencing is crucial: discussion comes after the symbols have been removed and after the prohibition has been enforced. “After the situation has been secured and, if necessary, the items have been confiscated, a pedagogical discussion with the students should be sought” (Berliner Senat 2023). In the context of earlier cases, such as the Nisic case in 2017, where teachers “advised” the student to remove her headscarf for better marks, this pattern recurs: pedagogical concern framed as correction, adapt or be left behind. The pedagogical caveat again offers conversation only after correction and submission.

Ahmed’s analysis of how affect “sticks” to bodies through repetition helps illuminate what this pedagogical moment accomplishes. The directive instructs teachers to explain why certain symbols should not be shown and to engage students in discussion about their “feelings, thoughts and sources of information.” Here, the political content of a student’s expression—solidarity with Palestine, identification with a people under threat—is translated into the language of interiority. Symbols that are initially framed as evidence of support for violent resistance, are swiftly depoliticized through the focus on feelings and sources of information. What might be interpreted as a political claim is reframed as an emotional response or as reliance on “poor sources,” rendering the student an object

of reflection rather than a political actor. In this way, the classroom encounter transforms debate into a site for emotional and cognitive correction: the student is no longer engaged as a political subject making claims about social conditions, but as someone whose feelings must be examined, regulated, and brought into alignment with institutional expectations. Rather than addressing the substance of the student's claim, the response is organized around the regulation of subjective orientation. Zembylas describes this displacement of political questions into the domain of emotional competence as "psychologization." In his analysis of the Council of Europe's Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture, he shows how education policy turns political problems into matters of individual competence, framing democratic culture as something to be achieved through the cultivation of empathy, tolerance, and resilience rather than through engagement with structural conditions (Zembylas 2022). The student is positioned not as a political subject with claims addressing their social world, but as an individual whose feelings require management. Their capacity to make claims upon the world disappear from view. Here, the educational space abandons its role as a space of critical inquiry where students learn to imagine and be part of alternative futures. The place of the school as a site of politicization is removed from view.

As indicated, in the classroom, it may be pedagogically and didactically appropriate to initially allow expressions of opinion that signal differential views on the events in Gaza, with the aim of engaging students in discussion about these views and initiating processes of reflection among them. While it might appear to contradict the prohibition, it extends the directive's reach. The classroom becomes a controlled environment where prohibited speech may be temporarily permitted for the purpose of correction. The pedagogical caveat works only if the student accepts it—only if they treat their solidarity as feelings to be examined, information to be processed, reflection to be demonstrated. If a student instead says, 'this is not about my feelings, it is about Gaza,' they refuse the therapeutic contract. At that moment, the caveat's softness disappears. The student is no longer someone to be understood but someone who has failed to understand. The institution's patience is exhausted. The pedagogical becomes disciplinary directly, not because the directive changes but because the student will not play the role assigned. In Zembylas's terms, the directive here "targets affect as a site of ideological production" (p. 522). The exception does not open space for genuine exchange; it brings even prohibited speech under pedagogical management, transforming dialogue into a technique of policing.

5. Conclusions: Peace as Policing

If Schulfrieden is articulated in administrative and legal discourse as the neutral precondition for teaching and learning, it is more productively understood as a technique of selective policing: a set of anticipatory practices through which some presences and expressions are rendered immediately legible as potential disruption, while others pass unnoticed. What is at stake, in other words, is not simply the regulation of speech, but the differential constitution of students as subjects of governance organized around the future—some encountered as participants in a shared pedagogical space, others as objects of suspicion whose visibility must be managed, interpreted, and, where necessary, curtailed. By channeling particular political expressions into individualized reflection, the directive enforces a hierarchy of vigilance, disciplining students whose identities, affiliations, or solidarities mark them as risky, while leaving dominant or normative bodies and views largely unexamined. Engagement with distant violence, occupation, or mass suffering, which might once have prompted collective ethical reflection or solidaristic action, is now pre-emptively constrained, shaping who may bring the wider world into view within the classroom.

Students learn to anticipate scrutiny, to moderate their presence and political consciousness according to the affective and racialized hierarchies embedded in institutional norms. Knowledge and an understanding of justice emerge within specific institutional conditions. The school determines and shapes what counts as legible, permissible and safe. In effect, the pedagogical space becomes a laboratory of anticipatory governance, where some bodies are habituated to constraint and self-surveillance, while others are tacitly licensed to occupy the world without limitation. Political consciousness is transformed into a matter of risk management, and ethical responsiveness is recoded as a potential source of disciplinary attention. Students expressing solidarity with oppressed communities, or pointing to civilian suffering, are treated as subjects to be contained, not as interlocutors in collective ethical deliberation. In this way, the classroom no longer functions as a space where students confront global injustice together. Here, *Schulfrieden* functions as a system of differential surveillance and correction, ensuring that political awareness and solidarity are selectively policed according to social and racialized norms. It no longer refers to a state but to a forecast where intervention is justified before any student has even spoken. Here, the idea of *peace* secures order not simply by containing dissent within the school, but also by teaching some students that the world's violences are to be observed from the sidelines rather than confronted, normalizing distance from global injustice as a condition of belonging.

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Notes

- ¹ *Schulfrieden* is a term from German school regulations law. While never legally defined, it refers to a peaceful and harmonious coexistence within the school community, based on trust and constructive cooperation among all members of school life. The term appears explicitly in the school laws of some German states in the context of educational and disciplinary measures, while other states describe it indirectly through the goal of ensuring orderly instruction and protecting persons and property (Anger 2005).
- ² The full document is linked in the references under (Berliner Senat 2023). Translations of the large parts of the text can also be found in (Younes and Al-Taher 2024).
- ³ Neukölln is the second largest district of Berlin, where nearly half of residents have a migration background, making it one of the city's most diverse and immigration-impacted areas.
- ⁴ In the German context, "*Staatsräson*" (reason of state) refers to a binding political maxim, which traditionally holds that a state's survival justifies overriding other ethical or legal concerns. Uniquely, Germany applies this concept not to its own survival but to the security of Israel. Since Chancellor Angela Merkel's 2008 speech to the Knesset, it has been official German policy that "Israel's security is never negotiable." (Bundesregierung 2023, para. 1) However, the term remains deeply contested and undefined. As Antje Wiener notes "is not a constitutional principle" but rather "a matter of belief." (Wiener 2024, para. 8) The

German government has given contradictory answers on whether it implies military support (one minister saying ‘it won’t come to that,’ another saying ‘even with military support’). Critics argue the norm functions as an “empty signifier” with few concrete behavioral instructions, creating public uncertainty. One German state (Saxony-Anhalt) now requires citizenship applicants to issue a written commitment to “Israel’s right to existence” explicitly linked to Staatsräson (Wiener 2024).

als Befürwortung oder Billigung . . . verstanden werden kann.

The Grundgesetz (Basic Law) is Germany’s constitution. Adopted in 1949 as a provisional document for West Germany with Allied approval, it became the constitution for all of Germany after reunification in 1990. Article 1 declares human dignity inviolable; Article 20 enshrines democracy, federalism, the rule of law, and the social state. An eternity clause protects these core principles from amendment. The Federal Constitutional Court guards the Basic Law and can nullify laws that violate it.

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