Sometimes a single sentence is enough to make the knee-jerk reactions of a society visible. The past few days have been one of these moments. An Instagram post by the Swiss-Israeli Society GSI, in which the wish was expressed that Palestinianism would one day be a thing of the past, turned into a nationwide furor within hours. Not because the wording was radical, but because its meaning was reinterpreted in a way that reveals more about the political landscape than about the sentence itself.

Within a short space of time, social media profiles committed to the Palestinian cause turned this post into a call for the annihilation of the Palestinian people. Other platforms readily picked up on this and presented it as if the GSI’s Instagram post was an endorsement of racist bigotry. This created a dynamic that was based less on what was written and more on what was readily constructed from it.

This was particularly visible on the Baba News channel, which staged the Instagram entry as an openly genocidal statement and embedded it in a dramatic narrative. In it, the Palestinian-friendly platform claimed that parts of Switzerland had lost their moral inhibitions and were normalizing the idea of ethnic extermination. The narrative was emotionally charged and its conclusion was that the GSI was a danger to society. Moral outrage was deliberately used to reinforce political messages.

The wave of outrage quickly spilled over into the established media. The Tages-Anzeiger adopted the spectacular narrative and presented the sentence as inflammatory. The *Tribune de Genese* and *Le Courier* also followed this interpretation and construed it as an incitement to genocide.

To paraphrase William Shakespeare, this fuss can be described as “much ado about nothing”. After all, the term “Palestinianism” is a direct translation of the English word *Palestinianism*. In international political science and journalistic analysis, this term has been used for decades to describe an ideology (not a people). The core of this ideology is the rejection of Jewish self-determination. Researchers such as Einat Wilf, Ben Cohen and Andrew Fox use the term “Palestinianism” to describe an attitude that does not aim to create a Palestinian state, but to delegitimize the Jewish state.

This is also made clear in an often-cited essay by Steve Kramer from 2014 in *The Times of Israel*. Kramer describes Palestinianism as the “new religion of Europe”, which has replaced the classic forms of anti-Semitism. For the French philosopher Bernard-Henri Lévy, the ideology of “Palestinianism” makes criticism of Israel an

automatic duty.

The pro-Palestinian political activist and university professor Edward Said also understood “Palestinianism” as a political project and counter-narrative to the Jewish claim to self-determination. In “Permission to Narrate”, he describes it as a construction that arises from the rejection of Israel’s historical legitimacy and places the Palestinian cause in permanent opposition to the Jewish state.

The term “Palestinianism” is therefore a purely scientific term and not an ethnic or cultural one. The fact that it sounds unfamiliar in German does not change this. Other ideologies are also designated with the suffix “-ism” or “-tum” without referring to people or peoples, let alone disparaging them. Accordingly, the sentence “May Palestinianism soon be a thing of the past” is not a call for genocide against the “Palestinians”, but solely the wish that the ideology referred to as “Palestinianism”, which in turn denies the right of the Jewish state of Israel to exist, will soon be put to rest.

All in all, therefore, two sobering insights remain from the incident: firstly, the dangerous dynamic that can arise when the public and media – whether out of ignorance or with malicious intent – confuse an ideology (Islamism) with an imaginary people (Palestinians) and thus fuel the mood against those who have used an (academic) term completely correctly and soberly. Secondly, how asymmetrical the media in particular are in their critical behavior. For the same media that remain silent when Islamists and left-wing activists shout anti-Zionist slogans become hyperventilating when they believe that anti-Palestinian statements are being made by Jews. This proves that what Theodor W. Adorno said 80 years ago is true: “Anti-Semitism is the rumor about the Jews.”

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