

Disability Justice for Palestine

This statement was released August 6, 2014, during a 50-day military bombardment of Gaza by the Israeli Defense Force which killed over 2,200 civilians, wounded approximately 11,000, and destroyed over 20,000 homes. During this time, we were scheduled to premiere our newly released documentary at the Vancouver Queer Film Festival, which included an invitation to be a prominent speaker. However, we learned that the festival had accepted advertising from an organization known for “pinkwashing,” i.e. promoting the gay-friendliness of the Israeli government in order to downplay the occupation and mass murder of Palestinian people.

At the time, our organization included many people of color with intimate connections to genocidal violence, and a number of Jewish people. There were two voices within the core of the Sins Invalid crew for whom the conversation held particular weight, a SWANA Muslim person and a Jewish person of color, and whose personal investment helped guide the group toward putting our politics into concrete action. Through a couple weeks of talking, crying and strategizing night after night, we realized that we could not in good conscience move forward with our plan to attend the festival, and released this statement, along with a “Disability Justice for Palestine” video and the “To Exist is To Resist” graphic, expressing our solidarity. We present it here as a document of that history, and as a continued commitment:

Sins Invalid is a disability justice-based performance project centering disabled artists of color and queer/gender non-conforming disabled artists. Our work celebrates the embodied, erotic humanity of disabled people, and we understand that all bodies live in a multitude of very real social, political, economic and cultural contexts.

We cannot separate the sexuality of people with disabilities, and our right to sexual self-expression and human connection, from the rights of all people to access food, water, shelter, medicine, breath, sovereignty, and peace. We were proud of our work, and were excited to curate an evening of films and discussion for the Vancouver Queer Film Festival (VQFF), including a screening of our documentary film about our performances. It was a valuable opportunity for us to share our work with new audiences.

However, we were angered and disappointed to see the print ad accepted by the VQFF that attempts to portray the state of Israel as a friend to LGBTQ communities, particularly in the current moment as the people of Palestine are living through hell and dying in staggering numbers daily. We recognize that such ads are part of a global effort to “pinkwash” Israel’s image, to persuade LGBTQ people in other

countries that the privileges enjoyed by queer Israelis are reason enough to be silent about the inhumane treatment of Palestinians of all orientations.

Palestinian civil society has called upon the world to exert political pressure and moral persuasion on Israeli society through the nonviolent tools of boycott, divestment and sanctions, and we are answering that call.

As we write these words, the Israeli military continues to kill scores of Palestinian civilians every day in Gaza, including queer Palestinians. The Israeli military is disabling thousands of people, while it continues to bomb hospitals, fire on ambulances, and destroy disability rehabilitation facilities. Of the thousands wounded from this current assault, many will be permanently disabled in a place where the basic necessities of daily life are stopped at the border, and basic medicine – much less adequate medical care, physical therapy, and adaptive technology – is beyond reach. These newly disabled Palestinians have been described by some as a “burden” to Palestinian society. In fact, these are the Palestinians whose bodies most directly bear the burdens of occupation and state violence, and most obviously show its scars.

As a result of the ad, we have decided to withdraw from the program and decline to screen our film, *Sins Invalid*, at the Vancouver Queer Film Festival. We will be screening it at an alternate location in Vancouver on Mon Aug 18th at 7pm PST. All tickets purchased for the VQFF program will be honored at our alternate event. We urge the festival to consider that the issue is not about its lack of advertising policy, but about its unwillingness to acknowledge settler colonialism and the violent occupation of Palestine.

We urge Festival goes to stand with us by asking the Vancouver Queer Film Festival to agree to refuse “pinkwashing” funding in the future, and to stand in solidarity with all queer and gender non-conforming peoples, wherever they may live.

[Image description: A drawing of a Black woman in a wheelchair wearing the orange uniform of the incarcerated, she reaches out and clasps the hand of a woman in white sitting against a wall wearing a hijab, whose arm and leg end short of a hand or foot, and are wrapped in bandages. Through an empty window frame a plane and explosions are visible. Text reads, “Disability Justice means resisting together from solitary cells to open air prisons. To Exist is to Resist.” Image by Micah Bazant & Sins Invalid]