



MAD ECOLOGIES

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A RADICAL HARM REDUCTION INQUIRY

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PREFACE

“A community that dreams collectively works their way to freedom.” With these words, the collective Mad Ecologies begins the Philadelphia Principles, a nine-point statement for “Radical Harm Reduction and the World We Want.” Motivating the Philadelphia Principles and this ‘zine is an urgent awareness that harm reduction has been co-opted. This co-optation threatens to neutralize its oppositional orientation. That includes an opposition to the war on drugs, an opposition to the criminalization of drug use, sex work, and houselessness, an opposition to hetero and cis normative ways of relating, and an opposition to the very ways capitalism justifies violence against those it exploits.

The Philadelphia Principles adds another voice to all those sounding the alarm that harm reduction stands at a crossroads. It’s a crossroads that marks a moment when the state has produced profound and widespread trauma and precarity. It’s a moment when the resulting overdose crisis has become a justification for more

criminalization, more policing, and more social cleansing.

The reader may ask, what do we mean by harm reduction? This question is at the heart of the crisis we face. In 2022, Biden became the first U.S. president to mention harm reduction in a State of the Union address. The same year that the administration pledged money towards supposed harm reduction, they also promised to escalate the war on disenfranchised people. Biden increased police budgets and vowed further criminalization of synthetic opioids. And while the need for pharmaceutical stimulants increased, Biden’s administration refused to increase production quotas, thereby forcing people to turn to an illicit market.

The cruelty stemming from the Federal government’s hypocritical stance was not just limited to the policing of medication and the co-optation of harm reduction. Climate catastrophe unfolded in disenfranchised communities, including Jackson, Mississippi which faces an ongoing water

crisis, Puerto Rico which was ravaged by another hurricane, and climate-impacted locations across the country. Instead of addressing the causes of the climate crisis, widespread corruption and war-profiteering bankrupt the country. Concurrently, while the COVID-19 pandemic raged on, capitalists successfully lobbied for the removal of mitigations designed to support poor and working people. The removal of emergency measures further endangered communities already facing crushing precarity. Meanwhile, cost of living increases further devalued wages that have stagnated for fifty years. The tally of crises and their structural causes is endless.

The role of the state, in service of capital and white supremacy, extends to imperialist governments, foundations, and nonprofits.. As communities struggle to survive, the lure of money and accompanying bureaucracies usurps their autonomy. Gatekeepers have locked lifesaving resources behind grant stipulations, demands for data and deliverables, and mean-testing the disenfranchised. As harm reduction gets co-opted by the ruling class, it gets redefined. Harm reduction becomes increasingly limited to medicalized treatment and coercive recovery frameworks. In the mainstream conversation, harm reduction gets reduced to seat

belts and sunscreen, voting for the lesser evils, and careerism. And all we hear from this settler colonial administration is the repetition of the same old song: the pretense of the state to be the saviors of the very communities they tear apart in the service of capital. The state makes life even more of a burden.

Mad Ecologies rejects this co-optation of harm reduction and turns to its radical roots: a history of poor, queer, and disabled people often using drugs, trading sex, and unhoused. It began as a strategy crafted by dispossessed people resisting the status quo to keep each other safe in a world little interested in their survival. As a collective of individuals steeped in the same histories and concurrent realities, Mad Ecologies came together through an art project and sought to draw a line in the sand: Who is harm reduction for? What does it even mean anymore? What is it? What is it not?

This booklet compiles work that came out of an inquiry into those questions. The 'zine is shaped around the Philadelphia Principles, the result of our initial inquiries and first published on January 1, 2023.

It is important to note that we do not see the Philadelphia Principles as the conclusion. Rather, we view the Principles as an iterative document. We hope that both the Philadelphia Principles and the

contents of this 'zine become the catalyst for a greater exploration of harm reduction. Hence, this 'zine follows the Principles with protocols for two workshops designed to spur conversations. We then document our own inquiry process as an example. In "A Militant Sound Inquiry in Philadelphia" we describe the process that led to the Philadelphia Principles. Paired with this are the "Protocols for the September 1, 2022, Listening Session", including discussion questions and the sound objects used to spur a collective conversation. The sound objects were excerpted from interviews conducted over the Spring and Summer of 2022 prior to and in conversations about the Philadelphia Principles. We include the objects here so readers can collectively "listen", analyze, and strategize future actions.

The last two parts of the 'zine compile excerpts from interviews conducted in response to the Philadelphia Principles. These excerpts are edited for brevity and readability. The second part draws from conversations that one of the editors of this publication, Raani Begum, had with members of the Philadelphia sex worker collective, Nightshade and the harm reduction group, Project Safe, also based in Philadelphia. The third part of the booklet draws from conversations conducted with various Philadelphia harm

reductionists. These interviews were done by Raani and fellow editors, Lulu Duffy-Tumasz and Dont Rhine. The overall goal of all the interviews was to garner feedback, to ask community members whether they saw themselves reflected in the Principles, and to hear if people found the Principles useful to their work. The 'zine also features numerous original paintings and drawings from Mad Ecologies member, Nick Angelo. If you want more information about Mad Ecologies and the Philadelphia Principles, please visit our website: madecologies.com.

Finally, the editors want to emphasize that this 'zine is not an instruction manual. Our efforts come out of a specific time and place. The name, Philadelphia Principles, situates our inquiry in a moment where racism, especially anti-black racism, and patriarchal capitalism functions in a specific way within America, in contrast to other places around the world. We encourage readers to use this 'zine as you see fit. We hope this booklet spurs further creativity and community inquiry, and out of this exploration comes a radical harm reduction—not only one that honors its roots and histories, but one that pushes us forward into a new world.

Mad Ecologies
February 2023





PART ONE

PHILADELPHIA PRINCIPLES

1 "PHILADELPHIA PRINCIPLES" RADICAL HARM REDUCTION AND THE WORLD WE WANT

A community that dreams collectively works their way to freedom.

This work is brutalized by white supremacy and capitalism which are dependent on exploitation. It is the function of white supremacy and capitalism to stifle the imagination and squash communal connection. By introducing scarcity in the very fabric of our lives, white supremacy and capitalism break bodies and make souls callous. When surviving becomes a battle, dreaming and connecting become untenable.

Dreaming is a practical tool, a revolutionary tool. For millennia, communities have globally engaged in

drug use and erotic labor for spiritual, medicinal, and recreational purposes. Communities thrive on relationships. Sex work and drug use can foster connection and cohesiveness as well as meet a community's unspoken needs.

One unspoken need is dreaming together.

We have named this document the Philadelphia Principles for two reasons. Philadelphia is where most of the authors of this statement currently live, build community, and imagine our politics. Philadelphia is also one of the many epicenters in the United States where the limitations of criminal justice and public health

approaches to harm reduction delineate the horizon for radical forms of harm reduction. We dream of radical harm reduction that pushes past short-term fixes and gets to the root of the harms in our communities. Albeit, these harms stretch beyond Philadelphia onto a global scale. It is in orienting us towards that horizon in liberatory practice and solidarity that we propose these nine principles. This document is not the conclusion but a beginning that we hope leads to many possibilities.

The following principles are the result of people dreaming together and speaking a new world into existence. These principles are a homage to a core belief that, at the edge of existence, poor, disabled, and disenfranchised people—often using drugs, trading sex, and without shelter—are simultaneously the first responders and

the last line of defense. We are the same people who have created networks of support and direct struggle in order to survive and flourish. For these reasons, radical harm reduction is part of how we turn to ourselves for our own liberation. As we resist systems that attempt to grind us to dust, we dream ourselves into the future.

*WHAT DOES RADICAL
HARM REDUCTION
STAND FOR?*



1.

Relationships are at the beginning of harm reduction and the first principle lost in its co-optation by the state. Building and defending community is the basis of meaningful safety when community emerges from the collective leadership of colonized, poor, and oppressed people of all ages, genders, and dis/abilities.

*WHAT DOES RADICAL
HARM REDUCTION
STAND FOR?*



2.

Wellness centers people's humanity and not their productivity. Radical harm reduction aims to expand people's sense of wholeness, connection with each other, joy, and fulfillment. Radical harm reduction does not discount someone's leadership because they use drugs, sell sex, or otherwise fall off the productive and respectable gradient of white supremacy.

*WHAT DOES RADICAL
HARM REDUCTION
STAND FOR?*



3.

Nothing for us without us is the foundation of truly innovative and transformative care. Harm reduction must prioritize the voices and long-term needs of people with direct experience of oppression. Harm reduction reaches people where they are when it combines critical inquiry and a culturally complex understanding of people, their traditions, and the communities they are part of.

*WHAT DOES RADICAL
HARM REDUCTION
FIGHT TO CHANGE?*



4.

Decriminalize poverty including the full decriminalization of the sex and drug trades. Criminalization is not what protects us but instead spreads the harm, scarcity, and anxiety that we experience in our lives. Decriminalization must be seen as a framework that dares us to imagine fully autonomous communities without cops, uniformed or otherwise.

*WHAT DOES RADICAL
HARM REDUCTION
FIGHT TO CHANGE?*



5.

Resist scarcity and how it distorts abundance into profit. To protect each other, organizing against scarcity must be militant and without compromise. Any funding or service structure that diminishes poor and colonized people's political capacity must be recognized as an extension of white supremacy and capitalism.

*WHAT DOES RADICAL
HARM REDUCTION
FIGHT TO CHANGE?*



6.

Fight profiteering that displaces and replaces poor and colonized people for profit. Land grabbing and gentrification are forms of colonization that impose a culture of scarcity and white supremacist notions of order while eradicating the cultures of poor and colonized people.

WHAT DOES RADICAL
HARM REDUCTION
FIGHT TO CHANGE?



7.

Power to the people, not to the saviors. People who experience social violence hold the potential knowledge and creativity needed to construct effective models of collective care. Radical harm reduction means having skin in the game. This is true for both the dispossessed and for those in solidarity. Without that, community care becomes charity or opportunism.

*WHAT DOES RADICAL
HARM REDUCTION
ENVISION FOR THE WORLD?*



8.

Reparations and the destruction of white supremacist social structures are, for radical harm reduction, key to wellness for Black communities. Laws designed to criminalize poverty in the United States are rooted in the history of antebellum slavery and anti-Black racism.

*WHAT DOES RADICAL
HARM REDUCTION
ENVISION FOR THE WORLD?*



9.

Land Back makes possible a globally consistent supply of safe air, water, food, shelter, medicine, and drugs. The crises of land grabbing, climate change, and dangers to the supplies of life's necessities, are rooted in the history of colonial theft. Reclaimed stewardship dreams of a symbiotic relationship with the planet.

2 PROTOCOLS FOR WORKSHOPS USING THE “PHILADELPHIA PRINCIPLES”

A Workshop for Collective Members

This workshop is designed to lead conversations with members of a collective such as sex worker collectives, drug users, unhoused tenants or base leaders in the tenants movement. The conversations are designed to unpack the ideas in the Philadelphia Principles and how those ideas can shape the political work of the collective.

1. Welcome
2. Break into groups of 4 to 5.
3. People in small groups introduce themselves to each other. Discuss some or all of the following questions. The purpose of these questions is to establish trust around values among workshop participants. Make sure that someone takes notes in each small group.
 - a. Describe your day. What's a typical day for you?
 - b. What does safety mean to you? What would make your life more safe?
 - c. What do you like about your drug use? What do you not like about your drug use? How does drug use hurt you? How does drug use heal you? What kind of drugs do you actually want? What kind of drugs do you like to use and how do you like to use them?
 - d. How do you currently raise money for your needs? What is your relationship to work? What is your relationship to sex work? In your ideal world, what would you want your relationship to making money and getting your needs met look like?"
 - e. Talk about an experience of accessing services. What are your long-term goals and

- short-term goals for thriving or for living a full life? Are there organizations that help with long-term goals? If not, why not?
- f. What questions would you want to ask people in power?
 - g. What does harm reduction mean to you?
 - h. Who in your community interacts with harm reduction, and why?
4. As a large group, people take turns reading the Philadelphia Principles aloud.
 5. Return to the small groups, discuss the following questions. Make sure that someone takes notes in each small group.
 - a. What's the first thing that comes up for you as you heard the Philadelphia Principles?
 - b. What are the "Philadelphia Principles" for and what are they against?
 - c. Who is the audience for the Philadelphia Principles?
 - d. What are the politics of the Philadelphia Principles?
 - e. Given the responses to all of the questions, including what was written on the original sticky notes, what has changed and what has stayed the same in terms of the meaning of harm reduction in your small group?
 6. Bring all the small groups together and report on the last question (6.e.) to everyone.
 7. As a large group, what do we do with the "Philadelphia Principles"?
 8. Closing.

A Workshop for Facilitators

This workshop is designed to lead conversations with community facilitators, organizers, and activists about the ideas in the Philadelphia Principles and how those ideas can impact political work in the community.

1. As people arrive ask them to start writing on sticky-notes answers to these questions:
 - a. What does harm reduction mean to you?
 - b. Who in your community interacts with harm reduction, and why?
2. Welcome
3. Break into groups of 4 to 5.
4. People in small groups introduce themselves to each other. Share what's written on the sticky note. Make sure that someone takes notes in each small group.
5. As a large group, people take turns reading the Philadelphia Principles aloud.
6. Return to the small groups, discuss the following questions. Make sure that someone takes notes in each small group.
 - a. What are the Philadelphia Principles for and what are they against?
 - b. What are the politics of the Philadelphia Principles?
 - c. Given the responses to all of the questions, including what was written on the original sticky notes, what has changed and what has stayed the same in terms of the meaning of harm reduction in your small group?
7. Bring all the small groups together and report on the last question (6.c.) to everyone.
8. Closing.

3 A MILITANT SOUND INQUIRY IN PHILADELPHIA

Listening doesn't come easy. It requires practice. It requires the space and time to live with what we've heard in order to make something of it in our lives. The Philadelphia Principles emerged out of a listening process among people building community, engaged in struggle, and committed to radical change.

Even before there was a self-conscious inquiry process involving co-researchers, interviews, and listening sessions, even before that, there were spaces of mutual learning and the nurturing of relationships. Those spaces existed among community members involved in Project SAFE, Nightshade, and Philadelphia Red Umbrella Alliance.

The inquiry process that began in the Spring of 2022 occurred as an episode within a listening community that came before and will continue long after. The Philadelphia Principles mark a

moment, like a snapshot, a poem, or a voice message that holds the particular configuration of solidarity among a group of people struggling for justice for drug users, sex workers, the unhoused.

Here we will describe the inquiry process surrounding the Philadelphia Principles. But we want to be clear: that process took root in rich soil, tended with great care by many people. Some of those people participated in the inquiry, while the voices of others were heard as echoes.

In the Spring of 2022, four harm reduction and sex worker activists began conducting interviews with individuals and small groups of people, all of whom were cis-gendered or trans women, had experience with drug use, homelessness, and most had experience as sex workers. The majority of the women interviewed were Black and brown.

The interview questions guiding the co-researchers were developed by a team of harm reduction organizers interested in finding out what women in the community understood as the core of harm reduction. The team also wanted to understand how community women experienced harm reduction as part of their lives, and how they made sense of their experience with those institutions that control the access to life's necessities such as housing, healthcare, safe injection support, drug treatment, etc. The research team that composed the questions and facilitated the inquiry process was composed of sex worker and harm reduction organizers, Raani Begum (Project SAFE and Philly Red Umbrella Alliance) and Lulu Duffy-Tumas (Project SAFE) and tenant organizer and harm reductionist Dont Rhine from Los Angeles.¹

Between April and August of 2022, ten interviews were conducted with individuals and small groups. Those interviews were then closely discussed by the team which, by July, included Raani, Lulu, Dont, and Nick Angelo, a harm reduction outreach worker and artist based in Los Angeles and a colleague of Dont's with the organization

Community Health Project Los Angeles.² Over the summer months, the four team members studied the recorded interviews closely arriving at a number of contradictions articulated within and across the ten interviews. These contradictions were seen

¹ Dont's involvement in the inquiry process has drawn on a prior history of organizing similar research projects in the context of political struggles. Militant inquiry requires a research team as well as a political context such as a political movement and community. The team organizes a listening session involving the participation of base leaders, organizers, and rank-in-file members of that movement.

From 2013 through 2018, Dont facilitated a multi-year inquiry for Community Health Project Los Angeles. In that context, listening sessions occurred as part of a semi-annual organizational strategic planning meeting involving unhoused people who use harm reduction services, along with staff, volunteers, and board members.

More recently, Dont has worked within a tenant inquiry team made up of organizers from the Los Angeles Tenants Union. Beginning in 2021, listening sessions have occurred as the central activity of the group's annual assembly drawing over one hundred tenant militants

as preliminary, problematics to be tested through further dialogue with community members. Those contradictions are:

1. **Short-term vs. Long-term**

Harm Reduction. Organizations that provide harm reduction

from chapters across the city.

To prepare for listening sessions with either of these two groups, two different research teams conduct interviews and discussion circles with base community members. The conversations are recorded. The team then studies the recordings in order to identify themes, noting the themes, and noting the start and stop times when the themes are articulated. The team members bring audio selections to their meetings so they can listen together and respond to what they hear. The group keeps thorough notes and compiles a list of themes that can then shape the agenda for the final community gathering.

² The co-research phase initially included the artists Jerri Allyn and Maria del Carmen Montoya. By the end of the co-research interview process, the Mad Ecologies team parted ways with the other artists due to political differences about solidarity. Those differences would inform principle seven, “Power to the people not to the saviors.”

as a service can only address short-term needs. Access to clean works, Narcan, and wound care are important but do not address the long-term issues that community members face; specifically, housing security. We can’t define harm reduction excluding people’s fundamental needs.

2. **Serving the Individual vs.**

Serving the Community. The criminalization of drug-use undermines mutual dependence and community, especially for those on the streets. Social service organizations exacerbate that by individualizing people. For community members, relationships and mutual dependence are the primary condition for survival. “Harm reduction” often feels more aspirational than a reality.

3. **Public Health Harm Reduction vs. People’s Harm Reduction.**

Does harm reduction empower people to meet their own goals? Do we define it as community, companionship, care, protection, and liberation? Harm reduction needs to be defined by what we need; showing up for each other; being our own best resource.

Harm reduction means NO POLICE.

4. **The Unhoused as a Problem vs. People Organizing Themselves.**

Everyday, unhoused people organize their own and the neighborhood's safety. Unhoused people work together. Unhoused people learn from each other, teach each other, and create a world together. The primary obstacles are the police and the constant threat of displacement. If it weren't for the need to raise money to self-medicate, some unhoused people would be content to live rent-free.

With those contradictions in mind, the four-person team built an archive of fifty-five short excerpts taken from the interviews. Each of those excerpts were selected for how the speaker puts forward an idea, a critique, or a problem related to harm reduction and the lived conditions of white supremacy, poverty, power, sex work, and drug use—in other words, life and struggle.

Out of that archive, the team eventually chose six recordings, or sound objects, that would serve as catalysts for a listening session held on September 1, 2022.

For the listening session, the research team brought together individuals that have a stake in reclaiming the radical core of harm reduction and liberation politics. The participants included the four-person research team, two of the original co-researchers who conducted the interviews, four members of the Project Safe and Nightshade community who participated in the interviews, as well as a number of individuals who were involved in harm reduction, sex worker organizing, or radical anti-capitalist politics all of whom were in solidarity with the goals of the listening session; to identify the radical core of harm reduction at this moment. At the beginning of the session our group asked the question, what revolutionary potential within harm reduction has been deferred in the current conjuncture? We can define that conjuncture in terms of recent events in Philadelphia but also nationally. Here are six key events in the conjuncture:

1. The attempt to establish a safe consumption site in Philadelphia, Safehouse, and the critique of those efforts put forward by Project SAFE.

2. The impact of law enforcement diversion programs in Philadelphia, particularly for sex workers where diversion programs expand police powers of surveillance and criminalization under the guise of the police performing harm reduction. Once more, Project SAFE's critique of diversion programs in Philadelphia has been crucial.

3. The co-optation of harm reduction by pro-gentrification actors. What is harm reduction when, on the one hand, developers use the term as part of community improvement while, for community members, especially the unhoused, the

violence of social cleansing and displacement is a primary driver of harm in people's lives? This also raises questions about the proximity between arts organizations and real estate.

4. The major disruptions of 2020 in Philadelphia including the crises of the COVID pandemic, mobilizations against police violence, racism, the displacement crisis, as well as the ongoing opiate overdose crisis, and the catastrophic failures of neoliberalism.³

5. On March 2, 2022, Biden became the first U.S. President to say the words "harm reduction" in a State of the Union address. AIDS United swiftly praised Biden's words.⁴ Pew Trust released a statement outlining key policies that would turn the President's support for harm reduction into a meaningful reality.⁵ While groups like the National Harm Reduction Coalition and the Drug Policy Alliance pointed out that in the same March address, Biden promised to escalate the war on drugs, increase police funding, and further militarize the border with Mexico. Civil Rights groups pointed out

³ See Christopher R. Rogers, Fajr Muhammad, and the Paul Robeson House and Museum, eds., *How We Stay Free: Notes on a Black Uprising*. Philadelphia: Common Notions (2022).

⁴ Editorial, "Biden makes history with State of the Union harm reduction support." AIDS United (March 2, 2022).

⁵ Jenna Bluestein, "In State of the Union, Biden Supports Proven Policies to Curb the Overdose Crisis." The Pew Charitable Trusts (March 8, 2022).

that Biden's doubling-down on expanding the police state made no mention of racial violence or the rise of armed neofascist groups in the U.S. Neither did the President make any mention of homelessness except to promise more so-called "affordable housing."

6. Recent revelations around sexual and gender violence against trans women within the one harm reduction nonprofit legally permitted to operate in the city.⁶ Anti-trans and misogynist violence in nonprofits becomes a symptom of the history of the city's use of harm reduction as part of a containment strategy for the Kensington neighborhood?

It's important to acknowledge that the September 1 listening session had invaluable support from two members of the Rosine 2.0 collaboration who helped to coordinate the event, secure the venue, organize the hospitality, and take careful notes of the breakout group discussions. Those individuals were Zi Aronow and Yema Rosado, the latter had also been crucial in providing logistical and wide-ranging support for the co-researchers during the

interview phase.

Working through the notes collected during the listening session, the four-person team began to synthesize an analysis of radical harm reduction, in critical and even oppositional relationship to the contemporary discourse and practice of harm reduction as it currently exists in public health. Once the team had synthesized those notes into an initial draft of the Philadelphia Principles, that draft was then used as the basis for another round of recorded interviews involving most of the same people who attended the September 1 listening session. It is those interviews which served as the basis for many of the contributions to this 'zine. In that sense, those texts help to model the way other political groups can use the Philadelphia Principles to reflect using the same prompts used in that second round of interviews.

⁶ Aubrey Whelan, Oona Goodin-Smith, and Ryan W. Briggs, "Ex-employees of Philly's prominent needle exchange say they faced dangerous conditions treating people in addiction." *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (June 16, 2022).

On pages 20 to 22 in this 'zine, we have included two different agendas or protocols that groups can use to facilitate group conversations around the Philadelphia Principles. In that, the goal of this 'zine and the principles themselves, is to advance our struggle in resisting the causes of harm in our lives and creating the world needed for genuine and radical mutual aid among the poor and oppressed.

4 PROTOCOLS FOR THE SEPTEMBER 1, 2022 LISTENING SESSION

Thursday, September 1, 2022
6PM to 9PM

Making Worlds Bookstore
210 S. 45th Street
Philadelphia, PA 19104

Agenda

1. Welcome, meal and socialize (30 min, 6:00-6:30)
2. Introductions (25 min, 6:30-6:55)
 - a. Introductions: name, pronouns, and affiliation.
 - b. Why are we here? What is the crisis in harm reduction? What do we mean by “radical”? What is our goal?
 - c. Form small groups of four or five persons.
 - d. Explain the agenda.
3. Listening (70 min, 6:55-8:05)
 - a. Listen to sound objects 1 and 2, and work through the below discussion questions (20 min, 6:55-7:15)
 - b. Report back on responses to sound objects 1 and 2 (10 min, 7:15-7:25)
 - c. Listen to sound objects 3 and 4, and work through the below discussion questions (20 min, 7:25-7:45)
 - d. Listen to sound objects 5 and 6, and work through the below discussion questions (20 min, 7:45-8:05)
4. Small groups synthesize responses into propositions of any number (25 min, 8:05-8:30)

List all the principles for the radical core of harm reduction that your group has come up with.
5. Report backs on the principles for the radical core of harm reduction (15 min, 8:30-8:45)
6. Next Steps (15 min, 8:45-9:00)

Important Notes

MASKS. In order to protect other participants with compromised immune systems, we ask that all participants wear masks when you're not eating or drinking.

MICS. Since some participants are attending tonight's gathering remotely, we ask that everyone use the microphones to speak, except when you're in a small group.

RECORDING. We will record tonight's conversation **ONLY** to assist in drafting the final public statement that will come out of the analysis that we develop together.

Discussion Questions

Each group works through these questions after listening to each of the six sound objects.

Important: Take detailed notes from the conversation.

1. What did you hear? Describe.
2. What is the main IDEA proposed in this recording?
3. How does this IDEA relate to our experiences; similarities, differences, and contradictions?
4. What principle(s) for the radical core of harm reduction does this IDEA raise?

Photo next page: "Listening for the Radical Core of Harm Reduction," listening session, Thursday, September 1, 2022, at Making Worlds Bookstore, Philadelphia.





Sound Object 1

First Speaker: “We got to stop getting into these spaces and feeling like we’re listening, ‘You put them over there and then we go over here,’ like what we do. When we come in these community spaces, we really need to, this woman right here is a resource. You understand? We really need to understand when we step into these spaces there’s a reason our spirits led us here.

“So understand what’s in the room and network with what’s in the room wherever you go; not just in my space but wherever you go. Network and check your room. Check the temperature of the room. Check who’s in the room. Check what, you know, where you know you can kind of grow and evolve together mentally, physically, financially, and spiritually. Because, like, right now one of the things that this pandemic taught us is that we really need each other.”

Second Speaker: “We need protection. I have shown up for so many people literally putting my body on the line in front of the police and in front of violent landlords. And then I watched the same people throw me under

the bus. And, like, literally I need protection.

“I’ve been evicted from two houses by white women, by cis white women since I moved to Philly. And I’m in a housing situation where I’ve been thrown under the bus and I’m just, I just like. . . . The organizing that I did was all based on, yes, we need to protect people. We need to protect Black people. We need to protect brown, we need to protect indigenous people. And, it’s just, people don’t show up. People don’t show up.

“They don’t, I don’t think, they don’t understand what protection means. They don’t understand when someone’s saying something, you’re actually describing a dangerous situation that requires ongoing checking in about a circumstance so that you know how to show up. It’s not, it’s, there’s different forms of it. And yeah, like I can’t even just cold ask someone in a situation without having enough context and trust to do it.”

Recorded, May 22, 2022.

Sound Object 2

Co-researcher: "From what I understand what you're saying is that you don't like needle boxes being put up in like areas in Kensington because it continues to add to this image of like, drug users."

Speaker: "And not that; just poverty and that everybody is receiving public assistance. Just an image, a stereotype, and I don't see that like, I don't like, I don't think that's helpful with the image. Like, I don't think it's helpful with the image."

"I think buildings . . . see how they rebuild? I remember Fishtown did not look like this. Man, I did not know too much about Fishtown but I know that it didn't look exactly like this. See how reconstruction. This is reconstruction. See how beautiful it is?"

Co-researcher: "Okay, so I find that really interesting, because I think the issue with the image thing has more to do with the stigma around drugs and more specifically, what kind of drugs because now it's becoming more mainstream to be acceptable of, like, weed. Whereas something like heroin is still looked at as like very pointed."

Speaker: "You're right."

Co-researcher: "So, I don't think,

I don't know. I'm not against the needle box idea. I understand where you're coming from with the image thing. But I think the image thing is a larger problem of stigma. If you destigmatized, I think, drugs then people who live up in Mayfair who do drugs won't feel the need to come down here and we can put needle boxes there for them safely."

Speaker: "But you know that's never gonna happen. You know, they're never going to allow that. Just like that school there that the school there that needs to be torn down that it looks like a hot mess, right down with West Moreland Street. A hot mess."

"So I asked the priest, I say, 'Excuse me. Do Catholic services, why they didn't tear that school down?' He said, 'Well, Catholic services don't own it anymore.' So I said, 'Well, who owns it now?' He said, 'Well, I don't know. We don't know who own it now.'

"Right there on West Moreland now, that building has been burnt down, half burnt down, right there at West Moreland. That looks a hot mess. Why isn't that taken down yet? If you was in another area, see. When I call this a dumping zone, Kensington, because sometimes people feel as though they don't have to do certain

Sound Object 3

things. That school should be torn down one way or another.”

Co-researcher: “Right, because it’s just structurally unsafe.”

Speaker: “Yes. Yes, it is, isn’t it? But it’s not.”

Co-researcher: No, I agree with you. I think this is why I was asking earlier about systemic racism and how you think it’s influencing Kensington. Because you mentioned Fishtown earlier and how it didn’t always look this polished. And I agree with you, because it didn’t. But I also know that Fishtown has become more white, like its population has just become more white. That’s just a fact.”

Speaker: “So, do you think that that’s why Kensington is like that because they looking at Kensington like a statistic and they’re looking at this area more as, okay, this is white people live in it?”

Co-researcher: “I think racism and gentrification has a lot to do with what people are willing to, what governments are willing to put their money towards.”

Speaker: “I think so too.”

Speaker: “A lot of people started off with the pharmaceuticals. And then ended up, for money, because this is the only place in the world where you can get anything you want in three dollar and five dollar increments anytime. Which I also think is important. I like the fact that you can go out and buy stuff, and have choices of different stamps or different sellers. [noise] This is America, you should have the choices. I just wish that we had a little more say in what went into, what was put into the drugs. Because we’ll do it no matter what harm it does.

“I’ve been shooting, injecting for, god what, almost eight years now. And it wasn’t until a few months ago that I had a problem with abscesses because [noise] the kind of tranq they’re using, because they’re using animal tranquilizer or something, or even the cut. You don’t even know what the problem is, honestly. We’re just guessing.

“So many people are experiencing abscesses [noise] coming out anywhere in the body where we don’t even inject. I have friends who have them all over their legs and they’ve never shot there, type of thing. So, we don’t

even know why it's happening, if it's the xylazine or carfentanyl, or just how it's put together. Is it that it's put together in some guy's basement, and not being put together by legit people with pharmaceutical knowledge type of thing? Is it coming from China where it's made with substances that aren't necessarily FDA-approved? We don't even know.

"But despite all of those possible terrible things it could do to your body, we're still going to do it. Because that's what we need. So, it would be nice to have a product out there that didn't have those risks."

Sound Object 4

Co-researcher: "Do you think that for folks who want to live a life of sobriety, for whatever reasons, do you think there are, that the programs that are in place you mentioned that they are in theory helpful. But, one of the problems that you found was the time length, the longevity was a big one. They wouldn't let you do long-term. Do you think there are other problems in stuff like methadone clinics and rehabs that don't help?"

Speaker: "You have to know what you need. Do you understand what I'm saying? You've got some people who think they can just go to rehab. [interruption] You have to know what you need."

"For me, I knew that thirty days wouldn't be enough. I had gone through some things in life that I just needed to, you know, I wanted to rump up in a hole and make sure that I got it all. You hear what I'm saying? And for me, thirty days wasn't enough. Just to be completely honest. You know what I mean? Do you understand what I'm saying? That's why I wanted to go."

Sound Object 5

First Speaker: “Like I can give and have trans men, trans women housing for a couple of days. But there’s no facilities or units that are really in position to, you know, be safe mentally, physically and spiritually for trans women and trans men and even have an, especially those that are you know, those trans persons that are of color.

“I was working at, I went to work forty hours a week at a facility because the person said hey, listen, I got a whole—are we recording—an apartment building, an old apartment building that I’m going to give you half of it to have just, to house long-term trans women coming home, formerly incarcerated trans women. Only to get there and I’m just like, ‘Yo bitch, I’m triggered every day working with you. I know your triggering traumatized a trans woman.”

Second Speaker: “Right.”

First Speaker: “You’re not mentally safe. Or, you don’t have the capacity to work with this population—[unclear] the person that I was contracting with.”

Second Speaker: “[Unclear] the

capability in.

“And I’m like, yo listen, it ain’t safe. Like there’s no place safe. When you’re talk about housing, what’s your reason for asking for a trans person to come into your facility? Like you say that you got to program. Do they gotta have substance abuse. They got to be on restriction. They got to be mistreated or misgendered by your by your staff. You understand what I’m saying?

“You just got it because you’re getting funding. You’re getting funding for them to be in here. So you’re monopolizing all the funding but you’re not giving them the care that they need holistically to long-term be successful? You understand I’m saying? You got it fucked up.”

Recorded, May 22, 2022.

Sound Object 6

Speaker: “I have a comment. My comment is, if you’re going to put people out here to try to help addicts, or to even give out works, or whatever the case may be that has to do with addicts, you know? Then, these people need to be, honestly, either educated about addicts, or have been an addict themselves, or know what the hell they go through before they attempt to try to work with an addict. Because it’s, you know, not going to work any other way. They’re just going to get the attitude. They’re either going to end up with nasty comments thrown at them, or something. If they say something wrong or just, I don’t know.

“I just feel that anybody that works with that needs to be educated with it first. The person that blends in is the one we want to talk to you. And then they’ll get the actual honest answers because most addicts, with the suit and tie, and the person that acts like they’re big? we’re going to give them the answer they want to hear, not the answers that are true.”





PART TWO

LISTENING THROUGH

THE PHILADELPHIA PRINCIPLES

WITH COLLECTIVE MEMBERS

5 CONVERSATION WITH PORSCHA AND CC DECEMBER 4, 2022

Raani: [After Porscha and CC finish reading the whole “Philadelphia Principles” together aloud] What do you guys think?

Porscha: I think it’s amazing. It definitely hits on our beliefs. Like it says, the white supremacist try to use organizations and social groups as they are helping us but they’re not. It’s creating harm and it’s setting us in certain laws and certain boundaries to where we’re not having freedom. Just like [the Principles] say, give us back the land and our traditions and our beliefs. Give them back to us instead of trying to make political or other benefits based off of what they call our beliefs and our traditions, and making it just for uses by them to capitalize.

CC: This part says, “fight against profiteers. Displacing and replacing poor and colonized people for profit.” Us as colored people, we’ve been put down so long by the whites and they took so much

from us. They don’t want us to do nothing, or to get ahead, or be in front. They still want to control shit. I think it’s wrong. I’m tired of us being mistreated, you know. They did it for so long [because of] the color of our skin, like how the cops beat Black people. If somebody’s white, then they’re all fine. But why do us, as colored people, they put us down? I don’t understand that.

Porscha: They took our traditions and stuff and try to make it for themselves to capitalize off of it.

CC: Who are they?

Porsche: And it just goes against . . . for them. And it is not even beneficial to them. They’re not even thriving off of it either. It’s like you’re trying to take somebody’s ideas and their plans and use it as your own. But you don’t have, what is the word? You don’t have the syllabus in order, you know, to do it. You just got the idea but you don’t have what comes behind it. You don’t have the reason behind the idea. You’re just trying to take something and make it your own. [As a result] it’s not thriving for you guys and it damn sure ain’t going to thrive for us. So, give it to us. Let us do it

how we do it for it to be beneficial to everybody.

CC: Not that you alone were you making a profit off of us, where we're not involved, where you are getting all the game. For example, I use the Bible. I was brought up one way with the Bible. Now that I'm older, finding out different stuff about the Bible and what is in the book that's been hidden from us. You know what I'm talking about.

She can explain the book because she was telling me about it. I didn't know there was a book out there.

Porscha: Well, you know, there are a lot of books that have been put in the Bible for them to capitalize off of us. I became spiritual and not religious due to the fact that I do believe in some of the words in the Bible because it was able to help me find out who I was NOT. But you know, like us being stripped of our ancestry and of our traditions as a whole. And then seeing them being used but being used in the wrong way and for the wrong reasons, like a second race and it's all for capitalism. It's all for a group that's not for us, but a group to be used against us. The [Principles] definitely go towards exactly what we've been looking for, the

revolution. That's what this aims for, I feel like. It's good, because you're either against us or you're with us. That's what a radical harm reduction is. It's important.

* * *

[CC reads aloud the last paragraph of the preamble to the "Philadelphia Principles", "The following principles are the result of people dreaming together and speaking a new world into existence. . . ."]

Porscha: Yes. It's so crazy because when we use the drug and the sex, that's usually comes with taking us away from society and how society is. We just go off into this own world to where we're not depending on the norm of society. We're depending on others that are going through the same struggles as us. It's like we have more freedom, we feel like. Nobody is pointing a light at us or directing us how we have to live in these laws of the land.

We're still considered as breaking the law, but things got so out of hand. So, everybody's turning a blind eye. But this group of people is starting to see a future where, damn, I can survive without the ways of what society had taught us that we had

to survive. 'Cuz I'm doing it, you know! I'm living in a tent and still being able to maintain and learning things spiritually more than physically or as their traditions will be. I feel like I'm getting more out of life than from what these people have instilled. It's going to a point to like where I'm being reborn again, I feel like, because I'm taking myself away from the ways of this land and just going into my natural state of survival.

So, it is not so bad after all, you know? But now it's the way, how we all can survive from this, how we can all make something of it to where it wouldn't be hurting, hurting us. I feel like the [Principles] are doing that.

* * *

CC: [Reads aloud principle three in its entirety, "Nothing for us, without us."] Yes, we can. We have to be the voices. We have to be the leaders. They have to listen to our voice. We can show them the way.

Porsche: Right. Even out here, sleeping in the woods [. . .] everybody can play their part.

CC: And I'm a leader, not a follower.

Porsche: It's very easily seen who the leaders are when come to

society because you're either going to make a way or you going to fall back and make excuses and stuff like that. In order for us to make a change, like these so-called groups out here, they can't make a change without us making it.

There's such a thing as monkey see, monkey do. But it has to be the people that are really out there not only doing it for selfish needs, but they're doing it because they actually care. And that comes to us. We care. Everybody out here don't, but it's a few people that do care. And we're gonna make a difference because that's just how we are. We're going to make a difference because we are going to make a difference. We can't live like this.

CC: It's getting back to what I said about leaders. We going have some people that follow us. We going to have some people that is not [going to follow us]. We looking to strive to have more people that follow us than that we leave behind.

Porsche: There's so many people that believe the same thing as well.

CC: We're the voice. We want to be heard out there. We want people to follow us. Especially where we see positive things. We want to get

them away from the negativity. You've got a lot of negative people and a lot of people feed off that. Like, how about we be the positive people? We can pull them away from that negativity. We want them to listen and that's where we come in. We want to be the voices.

Porsche: They don't look at the things we do. But right now, a lot of borders [all they see], "Oh, they do drugs. They have no reason or any way out of this."

CC: That's Not true.

Porscha: That's not, that's not true. [I don't believe that because] I have a drug issue, then Jesus don't accept me. Where'd you make that up? It's the funniest thing to me.

* * *

6 CONVERSATION WITH GIA JANUARY 19, 2023

Raani: What about the rest of the document?

Gia: That part, "Power to the people, not the saviors" [principle seven]?

Raani: Yeah.

Gia: When I hear that statement, that's why I want to have somebody follow me around with the camera for three days. Because there are so many unseen heroes. It's not like these big corporations and organizations and affiliations that are making us survive.

Raani: Hmm. That is true.

Gia: At the end of the day, it might be somebody who fucking lives outside that helps me get through the day.

Raani: Absolutely.

Gia: And I live inside.

Raani: Yeah.

* * *

Raani: Is there anything any last thing that you want to say about the whole thing that you read, both back and front?

Gia: Okay, that part, “One unspoken need is dreaming together” [from the preamble].

Raani: Tell Me More.

Gia: My whole idea about the tomorrow morning thing. Okay, so you know at 11:58, 11:59 we all have the same goal, which is to make it to the next day and be better than we were the day before.

Raani: Absolutely.

Gia: So, why is it that everyone is doing everything so differently? [. . .] I learned that at any point in time you can be completely on the other side of the table. [. . .] I think I was on path to really destroying myself. And I would’ve ended up like one of those miserable old ladies probably killing myself. [. . .] So, yeah, at the end of the day, “one unspoken need is dreaming together.” Everybody kind of wants the same thing. They want their kids to be better. World peace. Safety. To not be hungry. So, why is it that everybody’s treated so differently to get there, or we think so differently to get there?

Raani: At the very beginning when you were first reading [the “Philadelphia Principles”], you talked about Adam and Eve. Can you talk about that a little bit more?

Gia: Okay. I have this whole analogy that I think that Adam and Eve, the snake and the apple is all like a metaphor for sex and drugs.

Raani: Yeah. Tell me more. <laugh>

Gia: The snake is like the dick. The apple that they got like was like the substance that got them high and then they started fucking. Then the whole world just went crazy from there.

Raani: <laugh>

Gia: I don’t have it exactly plotted out. But I think it’s not really talking about a snake and an apple.

Raani: What I’m hearing you say is, Adam and Eve wanted relationships, which is something in the Principles. If we think about the apple as drugs, then it allowed them to be in a relationship in a different way. It allowed them to dream in a different way.

Gia: It changed everything.

7 CONVERSATION WITH
TAAHIRA AHMED
DECEMBER 7, 2022

Raani: And the snake sort of facilitated that. The powers that be didn't like that. And so, throwing them away to earth was anxiety inducing. It created the conditions for scarcity.

Gia: Yeah. Why is that Apple forbidden?

Raani: There you go. There you go. I like that. I like that. I'm gonna remember that.

Gia: Yeah. Yeah. Why is that apple forbidden? It comes from the earth, just like weed, coke, heroin.

Raani: There you go. Absolutely. It does. Right?

Gia: God gave us these brains so we figured out what to do with it. So, why are we so bad for it?

Raani: No, I love that analogy. I really love that analogy.

* * *

Raani: If somebody was like “harm reduction principles” and they put this up in [Serenity] House somewhere, what kind of conversations do you think you guys would have about this?⁷

Taahira: I think a lot of people have a hard time with the idea that they just are entitled to things. Everyone says it in a very theoretical [way]; “Yeah, we all deserve free whatever. Everyone should be given free shit, whatever, whatever, whatever.” But then when the conversation turns into more practical, here are steps that you can take to have [those free things], people get ashamed. People

⁷ Serenity House is a “come as you are” community drop-in center in the Kensington neighborhood of Philadelphia for women, queer, and gender-nonconforming people living at the intersection of sex work, drug use, and housing insecurity. For more information see www.serenityhousephl.org.

will have food stamps, but they're so clearly ashamed of it. People are really thrown off when I say, "No, I got food stamps. I'm not fucking ashamed. This is shit the government owes me. If anything, I think the government should give me more money."

It throws people off. But then I think ah yes, because they also see me as a respectable girl. I do think the way people engage with me versus if they would engage with unhoused people, their own peers, it's different because I think I fit into a lot of "respectable politics" in a lot of ways. Clearly I know how to speak in the technically correct way. I know how to present [myself] and I know how to do things correct and all that crap. And so it's like, "respectable."

But I think people have a hard time with practically saying, "Yes, we are entitled to shit." And not "free" but just [the basic necessities] like housing and food. And I think that that makes people very uncomfortable, especially older people. They're like, "No, I come from the generation where like you got to work for it and pull yourself up. I don't get free handout." And I'm like, "It's not a handout, though. It's yours! <laugh> It's not a handout." I

think that is what people can be uncomfortable with.

Raani: Do you think there's room here for affirmation? The fact that you say, "Yeah, I have food stamps," and then people are surprised by it. Do you think there's affirmation in that?

Taahira: Like, affirmation in hearing that I also have food stamps while being housed?

Raani: Affirmation in the sense that there is somebody who is owning [it]. Like, you own that the U.S. government owes you shit. You own it unapologetically.

Taahira: Yeah. Because they do.

Raani: Do you think that it affirms their sense of, "I have a right to this shit?"

Taahira: I think so. To some degree. Yeah, I think so. But I also think, it's not like the openness that I am because other people are also clear that they're on food stamps. It's not a secret necessarily. But there's just baggage that people have with it. And I don't think I carry around that baggage. Yeah, I'm poor as shit. You know what? <shrugs>

Raani: I think in the same way

that I own sex work and I don't feel any type of way about it or feel any need to excuse it.

Taahira: Right. I don't do that because I'm not a sex worker. But yeah, it's similar. I think people are just, "Okay." But I don't think it necessarily ever moves beyond that, "Okay."

Raani: Do you think in that context, do you think that this affirms people, that it affirms all the multiply marginalized. If you stepped away from Kensington, if you thought about other multiply marginalized people, do you think that it affirms them? That's a loaded question.

Taahira: [pause] Yes and no. To some degree. I guess that's my answer. Okay. But I also think in a lot of ways it falls into the trap of the whole theoretical thing of saying, "Yes, we're all entitled to [these things]." Nobody necessarily has a problem with saying, "Yes, the government sucks and they should be doing better and we deserve better from the government." Everybody is cool with saying that regardless of their political stance. Everyone is very much okay with that. And I think that this also falls under

that thing where people would be say, "Yes. But in a theoretical way. Yeah, we stand by it!" But then the cognitive difference comes in, when it's practical. Then why aren't you claiming your benefits? I don't think the Principles necessarily do that part [of the work].

Raani: Say more

Taahira: I don't know how to translate it with this document.

Raani: So, apply it in real life.

Taahira: I think people have a disconnect when it comes to . . . I'll talk to people who are trying to get housing or they technically apply or are qualified for benefits. There's a lot of flaws with social workers and systems and getting shit. But that aside, people will say that they don't really want to [collect benefits] because the don't want the free handout. That's when they have the disconnect. For a while it really confused me because I thought we were all in agreement that this is shit that's owed to us. So, why the fuck are you resistant now that it's an offer. I'm not saying it's gonna be an easy thing because social work sucks.

Raani: But you should still feel entitled to it.

Taahira: Yeah. And so, why the fuck now are you having a wall up over what's yours? And that's when I hear, "I don't want a handout and I don't want this and I don't want that." I think that's what the Principles are. In a very theoretical sense, everybody, or not everybody, but a lot of people will be say, "Yeah, you're right. Harm redux. We all deserve decrim and stuff like that."

Raani: This is also a loaded question. Do you think that this is because you've had a different space to process? You are around family [members who are radicalized] versus other people [who] haven't had [access to radicalized] space[s].

Taahira: Yes.

Raani: Do you think the Principles give them the space?

Taahira: I don't know. I know that my perspective and my upbringing is really unique in the context of like every other person who's grown up in America. [. . .]

Raani: Let me rephrase my original question. In the circle of people that you know to be radicalized to the degree that you are radicalized, what does this

document give them?

Taahira: What does this document give to people that are radicalized to the same degree that I am? I don't know. I feel like it's neutral. I don't think of this as a particularly radical document, but that's because none of this is particularly crazy ideas to me. I'm like, yeah, this is just what we expected.

Raani: You are used to these ideas.

Taahira: Nothing about it stands out to me. [. . .]

Raani: Since you said that for people like you, it is a regular document, but for people who are multiply marginalized and using drugs because that's what harm reduction is targeted at, what I'm hearing is that it lacks something [for them].

Taahira: Yeah, maybe practical connection. Grounded connection. Like this is all very, not general, that's not the right word. Not theoretical, that's not the right word either. It comes down to how the fuck does this actually apply to X person.

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PART THREE

LISTENING THROUGH
THE PHILADELPHIA PRINCIPLES
WITH FACILITATORS

8 CONVERSATION WITH SULTANA BIBI DECEMBER 13, 2022

Raani: Do you think that the Principles give you a good foundation to work with?

Sultana: I think it gives a good theoretical foundation, but there still would need to be more expansion and writing about how we translate this into programming. But I think it's a good theoretical [framework]. These are the things we should be thinking about when building a movement or designing a program. But I think there still needs more laying the groundwork. We still need people to then take these principles and talk about how to translate them [in real time].

Raani: Do you see yourself doing that work of translation? Do you think, in that way, it is useful to you?

Sultana: Well, like I was saying, if we were going to bring these principles to build and grow Nightshade, we would need to do a lot more thinking and strategizing of how to do that. For example, how do we connect the work of reparations to Nightshade? You know the how we still would have to figure out. But I think the Principles make it so, oh yeah, we do need to be talking about reparations at Nightshade.⁸

Raani: I hadn't thought about that actually.

Sultana: Or, what was the other thing in the Principles? Land back. Since, most of our people are housing insecure, how do we connect land back to housing stuff for us? So, I think that the Principles are inspiring. It's laying out the why; why we need to be thinking about all these things. It's giving direction on how these issues that seem so separate are connected and it's bringing a sense of history to it. I think the Principles are useful for other groups to figure out the how.

Raani: Yeah. How that would work for Nightshade wouldn't necessarily work for, I don't know, like in. . . .

⁸ Nightshade is collective for outdoor and low-income sex workers run by Project SAFE and Philadelphia Red Umbrella Alliance.

Sultana: In Whose Corner Is It Anyway?⁹

Raani: Yeah. Even in Whose Corner. You're right.

Sultana: But I think what the Principles could be useful for is they give us a shared language to talk with. Let's say Whose Corner was like, yeah, we love this document, we're gonna use this, these principles. Then it gives us a shared language to talk about the how are you all translating this into every day? And that could give different groups ideas for how to engage.

Raani: Is there something lacking? Is there something that you would like to see that is not in the Principles?

Sultana: I don't see this as like a static document. I feel like it's an iterative document where it would be cool to revisit it once a year and keep building. I don't see it as complete ever. I think this document is a forever evolving process that shifts as we start to put it into practice, as we start to do the how, then it's gonna change.

* * *

Raani: If somebody on the train were to read it, [for instance] one

of our folks who uses drugs and is potentially unhoused or insecure housed, et cetera. If they were to read it on a train, what do you think they would come away [with]?

Sultana: That's hard to say. <laugh>. Okay.

Raani: No, that's fair. That's fair. That's a pretty loaded question.

Sultana: I think that it would give them some language that, maybe, that would allow them to look at their existence a little differently. Which is really big. But I feel like even the folks we work with, I don't know if they even are aware of the conversations that are happening in the harm reduction world. They have different language. That became clear to us when we were doing the using drugs alone guide. The language that people were using wasn't actually vibing with the language that people were using on the street. They did not align with the harm reduction language that was

⁹ Whose Corner Is It Anyway is a collective in Western Massachusetts by and for low income sex workers who use drugs.

in the more service organizations and in the academic areas.

Raani: Such as?

Sultana: Like the things that people were saying at conferences didn't necessarily align with what people's experience on the street was. So like, Philly had this whole campaign of flood the streets with Naloxone. And it was like, no, that's actually terrifying <laugh>. People don't want to be flooded with naloxone. Naloxone is violent. But like people [in the harm reduction world] were saying, oh, that's harm reduction. "Naloxone everywhere." Actually, it's a last resort tool. It's not something that people should have to experience all the time or frequently. The goal is that people actually almost never have to use it.

Raani: I think that's interesting, right? Because one of the things that I struggle with [in] mainstream conversations of harm reduction is that I think that there is always an underlying factor of shame. It really grinds my nerves quite literally on 52nd Street by the Blackwell Library there is a Narcan dispenser, which theoretically is great. But what irritates me about it is that there

isn't a needle disposal box there. I would like to see both. But I think that conversation that's married together that allows for people to use drugs. I think that this is why every time, when we do our little workshops or lectures together, I have noticed myself stressing again and again the aspect that, in and of itself, drug use is not harmful. I think that even for people who are trying to be progressive on this subject, it takes them by surprise when I just say that, when I just say that sentence and I put a full stop. I don't qualify that [sentence] with any other thing. I think that mainstream harm reduction, because it attempts to qualify drug use with and X, Y, and Z, it became easier for our oppressors to co-opt our language.

In that way, I also struggle with the same aspect in sex work. I am tired of having conversations about trafficking every single time I talk about sex work. Sometimes I just want to talk about sex work. I don't want to talk about anything else. When I'm talking about sex work, I can talk about the predatory elements that impact sex workers. But that is a very different conversation versus me saying sex work is work and not trafficking.

You know, it shifts the agenda. And I really struggle with that.

Sultana: Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. Yeah. I think the Principles are working towards having spaces or having conversations where you don't have to do that explanatory thing. Where you don't have to be on the defensive because this is like building out. I think that would be something to explore in the 'zine. It's not like blaming or shaming original traditional harm reduction. It makes sense that it was a defensive strategy, but we're now at the point where we can actually have more agency and not just be on the defensive because we have now figured out a lot of great interventions. We have syringes now and these are all amazing interventions. Now we are situated to not be on the defensive.

Raani: Thank you. I really appreciate this conversation.

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9 CONVERSATION WITH BILLY RAY BOYER DECEMBER 28, 2022

Lulu: Do you have ideas of how you like, envision [the “Philadelphia Principles”] being used?

Billy: In the brain that I'm in right now, we've been re-envisioning onboarding. And so, I'm imagining it as something that we use as a grounding document to use with people and onboarding. I would love to have it as a printed thing. Then when we do trainings, we could give it to people. Because the way that we do presentations, when we do overdose trainings, sometimes it's really hard to get people to think past a certain depth about what the fuck we're doing and why they want to be involved or why it matters.

Lulu: Exactly. We definitely have talked about that in regards to having values conversations. That makes sense, especially in regards to Narcan trainings. Yes, it's specific skill in a way. But then even how you respond to an overdose, I feel like, does bring up

politics and how you think about things like autonomy and race.

Billy: Yeah. We force people to sit through an entire presentation about the racialized breakdowns in Philly and nationally around overdose and criminalization, and around drug history before we even get to the skills training part.

* * *

10 CONVERSATION WITH NAYIMAH SANCHEZ DECEMBER 8, 2022

Raani: I guess my first question about the Principles is: what is your first impression of the document?

Naiymah: It really gives a synopsis of my purpose around my community work, right? Because when I think about harm reduction, when I think about my experiences and the experience of those who I've worked with over the years, the words that are put on this paper is what we've been asking for so long, right?

Raani: Can you talk about that a little bit more in terms of "what we've been asking for so long?"

Naiymah: The question, "what does radical harm reduction stand for", right? It stands for community, for wellness. "Nothing for us without us" [principle three], right? My passion for community work is real. And we've seen this in the nonprofit sector: they always employ people

who are not from our community. But they look like our community or project experience around the issues that we have in our community to come liberate us. So it comes as the savior mentality, it's like they only can save us, right? And literally, the only way that we have gotten to where we are today, the work has come from people who are directly experienced around these issues working to liberate themselves from these issues, right?

So then, "Nothing for us without us. Only by prioritizing the voices and the long term needs of poor, disabled, and disenfranchised people is truly innovative and worthwhile care possible." And really thinking about uplifting direct experience. I hate to say directly impacted because there's, there's so much stigma. There's stigma and there's trauma everywhere. So I try to write, redefine, or reclaim words. But really, directly experienced people around these issues are doing this work. Harm reduction is in our community. It starts with us, right;, the wellness, and the leadership, and the co-empowerment, right? That's where I was going with that, when I was [saying], you know, this really is a

synopsis of what the community members have been saying what the work is. But unfortunately, and I hate to use the term, but unfortunately, we have not been able to galvanize what we've been saying is the work. We've been either gate kept by ourselves or gate kept by organizations that have the resources to continue to do the work, right? We give our all as organizers who are directly experienced around these issues, right? We give our all, we give our everything, and they just give pennies, right?. So, that's where I was going with that. Is that understandable?

Raani: It's understandable. I really appreciate it. And what I'm hearing is that your first impression here is, as you said, that a lot of people have been saying these exact things for an extremely long time and now it's on paper. It's not in the ether anymore. It's now in black and white and that's what you're seeing on paper.

Naiymah: For sure. Look at how it opens: "a community that dreams collectively work their way to freedom," right? And then we get into thinking about the challenges over time. What has hindered us as communities who desire

freedom, right? White supremacy, capitalism, being dependent on that exploitation, right? Look at us now, we're working till our bones fall off for pennies, and we're not the beneficiary. We're [getting] pennies.

Raani: Baby!

Naiymah: Pennies! We're not the beneficiary of the dollars that go into these corporations, these organizations, these entities. But we're exploited. Our labor is exploited while the 1% continue to monopolize off of us. Right? And just thinking about what we've been saying is the problem. Here's a solution. How do we get there and start working toward that? We're starting to see things, yes, in black and white. It's better than just hearing the words in the air and continuously hearing them in every room that we go to, right? It's capturing it in something, you know?

Raani: I really appreciate it. Do you think that this is something that you could use in your work?

Naiymah: Oh yeah, for sure.

Raani: Is there something that you think is lacking?

Naiymah: Not really. Let me see. I don't really think that there's anything lacking. I think that it's a supportive document. Let's just say, this is something that I would use around some decrim initiatives, if you may. Until we focus, until we start really dissecting in every which way a person is hindered, impacted, or experienced in something, we'll be able to get to a point of liberation, right? There's no one way to something. And I believe that the Principles would give people in my entity reason to start dissecting more of the issues that we focus on. The strategies will be more intentional. You understand?

Raani: Yeah.

Naiymah: The outcomes will be better. Unfortunately, until people have it in black and white in front of them, they're not able to create a process of intentionality, being genuine, and then overall success, right? This will help as a supportive document for somebody like me who pushes back a lot, right?

Raani: Right.

Naiymah: And, I don't wanna say push back. But I like to get

us to think more. It's like, this is amazing. Let's think about it in a way where A, B, and C. You know, here's why we should think about this differently.

Raani: I mean, friend. I don't want you to be ashamed of pushing back. I think pushing back is great in a world of white supremacy and capitalism. We gotta push back. I get it.

* * *

11 CONVERSATION WITH MATTHEW SHEPPECK FEBRUARY 1, 2023

Dont: What are your impressions of this statement? What would be useful about it? What would be your critiques?

Matthew: [. . .] The word reparations scares the shit out of most white people the first time, whenever they see it and land back. They're both great openers because they're crucial and important. At the core of what we're fighting is this mixture of capitalist white supremacy that dominates the landscape of our lives. It's at the source of pretty much all the issues that we are actively fighting against.

"Power to the people, not the saviors" [principles seven], I like that a lot because you see a lot of saviorism in this field. As well intentioned as someone can be, so much hubris comes into play. It's not about when "I" am organizing an individual or "I" am trying to help an individual. It's not about me or what, or even what necessarily my perspectives are

always. It's helping this individual or group to actualize what it is that they want, and they need. To come in and to explain to someone what they need or explain to them how you're going to help, that's not empowering. It's not helpful. It's not harm reduction. [. . .]

Our goal isn't to fix people, or save people, or change people in any way. Our goal is to be an aid and assistant. If anything, I come secondary to the individual that I am organizing or helping. My needs and wants in the context of that situation are secondary to what the individual wants. Hopefully that's the way that we get closer to what we might call freedom, equality, and the thousand other things that we would like, which are really at their core, only a few things. Right? It just kind of all branches out. It's all connected. People want dignity, respect. They want a place to live. They want food. Some of them want drugs. Some of them don't want a place to live. And that's fine as well. Number seven is a big one for me.

* * *

Matthew: "Flight profiteering" [principle six], is there anybody that is for profiteering that is not

actively a profiteer?

Dont: The statement when you read it, it goes into the role of gentrification. So it's not just like profiteering from say, treatment. or profiteering from harm reduction. It's also profiteering from land and the expulsion of people.

Matthew: Oh God, I had a wonderful conversation with a libertarian about this yesterday. People are always bringing up that argument that higher density in cities equals lower rents. And every time I say, "Show me the numbers." And this guy pulled this study, you could tell he looked for it for days. And he is like, here's this study that says, building developments in some areas raises affordability in other potentially surrounding areas. I said, are you serious? So you're saying that it's perfectly okay to build these developments in these neighborhoods and then tell people to fuck off and go to the area that is affordable for you now. It's okay to displace people over and over and over, the way I have been displaced every year for the last nine years. I mean, the amount of trauma that puts on a person. My last move was only a block. It's

still not a pleasant experience by any means. Your home is where you're supposed to feel safe. You're supposed to be adjusted to it.

Dont: What that person is describing is, although they're not using the language for it, but what they're describing is, you develop this area and you under-develop that area. The area that you're now developing, you move those people to the under-developed area, which is the other slum. This creates this shell game where you're just moving people around through cycles of disinvestment and displacement.

Matthew: That's what we see here in Philadelphia as the line gets further and further north. [. . .] The street I live on now, I could get dope there. I could get hard drugs there. Now they're putting up four different condo buildings in that area. I say within 1.5 blocks, there are four developments. That's insane. I'm gonna have to move again in nine months and I don't know where that's gonna be to. People's response to that is often, well, you should get a better job. To which my response is, is my job not valued? I thought, like people looked up to healthcare professionals or,

or people that actively helped other people with issues like addiction, especially as rampant as it is today. The only people who are properly compensated are doctors, you know? The rest of us live on crumbs. Every job is important. I mean, it's community. It's civilization. We can't function without any one of these portions. I mean, there are a lot of superfluous jobs created by the powers that be, that don't necessarily need to exist.

Dont: Like the cops.

Matthew: Yes. But when it comes to the bare jobs that are out there, the jobs that actually do something, I'm finding more and more that the people that pursue these career paths are just being taken advantage of.

It comes down to, people don't want there to be homeless drug users in Kensington. They also don't want me, or they don't want to pay me to go help drug users in Kensington achieve a higher level of actualization, self-actualization, whether that be shelter, getting a job, getting on SSI, you know. It also harkens back to, we didn't hear as many gripes from the neighborhood before they cut down all the trees

on the tracks and everybody had to come down from the tracks. So this is one of those out of sight out of mind things. But to boil it down, there's so many conflicting interests, which I believe is a basis of capitalism, right? People often want to summarize it into one conspiratorial effort, but to me it's a bunch of little people fighting each other for scraps. And some people are willing to fight dirtier and meaner than others. And sadly, those are the ones that succeed in this society. What the [Principles] say is that, that's not the way to move forward.

To get almost more spiritual or metaphysical or whatever you like to call it, I ponder often what the purpose of the human race is in its longevity. What our nature is and which parts of us, or parts our nature are not necessarily inherent but learned because we are a society that stands on the

precipice of destruction if we don't choose to change. They've been sounding the bells [about climate change] for the last forty years. [. . .] I would like to see humanity become a whole lot kinder, because if we don't, if we continue down this capitalist path where people are reduced to numbers and profit margins become paramount, then we're going to lose what makes us human. We're going to lose this planet.

* * *

Don: When you were talking about “for the people, not the saviors” you were describing that the aim of harm reduction is to give people what they need with dignity and help them actualize. But I also know, historically, the work that you've been doing with the Philadelphia Tenants Union it's more than that.¹⁰ There's an understanding of an adversary. There's an understanding that it's not simply giving someone something or helping someone find something, it's also defending something and then building up, or strengthening or empowering community. I guess what I'm asking is, how are those two things related? Where do they meet? Where do they support

¹⁰ The Philadelphia Tenants Union was founded in 2016 and is a tenant-led organization dedicated to building organized tenant power and raising tenant political consciousness as a part of the struggle of the entire working class for freedom and dignity. For more information, see phillytenantsunion.org.

each other or are they moving in opposite directions?

Matthew: I think that they align with who the enemy is. You know, the obvious and foremost enemy being the United States government. Who has imposed these laws and these restrictions and these policies that dictate how money moves and where it goes and who it goes to. And it's not just government. We are fighting capitalism on both ends of this.

Dont: Harm reduction and tenant organizing?

Matthew: And tenant organizing, yeah. There would be nobody to organize against if we had a "for all" housing program. I mean, there might still be gripes, we could still organize over those. But first and foremost, I'd like to see everybody housed.

Dont: But most of the people that I know in harm reduction do not see themselves as fighting against capitalism. That's not what they articulate as why they do harm reduction, where they're going, what the organization is that they're employed by. Most people I know in harm reduction, that is not a part of their

conceptualization of what harm reduction is.

Matthew: I'd like to have a really long conversation with a lot of those people. Because in any needs assessment, giving a needs assessment to somebody on the street, and they need all these things. They need food, they need shelter, clothes . . .

Dont: Healthcare.

Matthew: Healthcare. Why can't they get any of those things? Because they don't have money. Why don't they have money? Well, because they're not currently able to work, or they were never able to work, or they're disabled from work currently and will be able to work at a future date. But ultimately it boils down to because you cannot work and provide value to this society, then we no longer value you and we're going to leave you here in the dumpsters. That's a big part of what capitalism is, is this implied threat, right? Work or starve. Work or die. Work or the gutter. Work or you're going to end up like that guy on the streets.

I understand that some people don't see it that way. I hear people say things like, they're in [harm

reduction] for the compassion. They really want to help people. But that's shortsighted in my mind because I could spend the rest of my days helping people. There is still going to be more people to help because we're creating more people that need help every day. So you have to look to the source; where are those people that need help, what's causing them to end up in these situations? It's these stressors. It's these environments. It's all of these things that have been created because of this racist, colonialist, capitalist society in which we live. And that's going to require more than just people on the streets helping other people. That's going to require a paradigm shift of how society as a whole views the individual members and where society places its value and how it chooses to allocate its resources. Right now I can't even comprehend the amount of wealth that some people have. It's incomprehensible.

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12 CONVERSATION WITH ABDUL-ALIY MUHAMMAD FEBRUARY 12, 2023

Raani: How do you connect to your dreaming?

Abdul-Aliy: Hmm! How do I connect my dreaming? I think for me. Dreaming reminds me of my ancestors. I think about them. I think about my mother and how she was able to see beyond our material conditions and see what is promised. What is ours. What is claimed. So I think about, yeah, I think about my ancestors.

When I think about dreaming, or that's what the first place I kinda go, and then I feel like in my imagination when I'm dreaming, I am pushing out past borders. I'm thinking about what I can't even imagine being possible. And that's where I want to live. I want to live in this dual space of respecting and looking back, and also imagining so big that I can't even consider what that might look like for me, and for people in the future.

* * *

Raani: You've done a lot of harm reduction work, both at the intersection of HIV and when it comes to the intersection of drug use. You're also in the Philly movement landscape in all of these different intersecting ways. So, I wanted to know how you would then receive the Principles that were written with all of these intersections in place. How does it read to you?

Abdul-Aliy: I think for me, a lot of the meaning in this document is in the inner space, or I feel like the words here are so dense. You're encompassing so much about all of our struggles. I mean, to talk about displacement and have it be this expansive and global. It's a beautiful document. I just don't know how y'all were able to just be so poetic and also include very real and concrete actions around land back, around reparations. That stood out to me. And in what it means to have radical harm reduction.

To me as someone who thinks about reparations or reparative action, to have it framed as a harm reduction, or a radical harm reduction act is a beautiful thing. I think it's right on point. But it's something that I don't think I've

been able to articulate for myself. So that to me stood out, and I was like, wow. That's really powerful.

Yeah, I think this is a document that holds all of us in a very powerful way, without having to kind of, for lack of better words, get into the weeds of each part. If that makes sense.

Raani: I would love for you to get into the weeds. What are some other things that came up for you?

Abdul-Aliy: Okay, sure. I mean, we could definitely go there. For example, I'm trying to find parts of it that really resonated with me—what I kind of hold on to. This part around, “a community that dreams collectively works their way to freedom.” This idea of struggling together and working together to find freedom, that we are all in this struggle. Diseased people, people who are disabled, people who are colonized, people who are displaced, people who are sex workers, users, like all of this together in the work. Part of the past year has been for me, how do I take the work that I'm doing, revolving around people's afterlives and make that resonant for people alive and to understand that our struggle is connected to even our past and to even people

who we may not ever know their names.

Raani: Yeah.

Abdul-Aliy: The people's names are unknowable because of colonization, because of genocide. So I think, yeah, trying to hold, like an understanding of the work. It's not just localized in our bodies, but in the bodies of others who've lived in the past.

And so, for me. I think this includes all of us, and includes people who are not here, if that makes sense. Radical harm reduction in terms of reparations is talking about the forced labor of our ancestors. And imagining that reparations is a radical harm reduction tool. That it is a way of us combating, you know, interpersonal violence. Like, reparations is connected to our understanding of safety. I think that is something that is gonna resonate with me. And I'm gonna be thinking about it and writing about it. Because it is this thing, if we can get these, use these tools and get what's ours, then the world would be better for it. We'll still be on a planet like we can fly up on and take care of, and steward.

* * *

Raani: Can I ask you, to elucidate a little bit more on what you mean when you say abolition?

Abdul-Aliy: When I think of abolition, I think of communities controlling their destiny, controlling what means of accountability is in place. When I think of abolition, I'm thinking about a world where no one's a cop, when no one is contained in the way that containment happens today globally. When I think of abolition, I think of people being unshackled and borders being disappeared. There is this idea that capitalist-controlled borders where people move are removed. So, yeah, that's my idea of abolition and compasses all that's in the document. I mean, to have land back you need abolition. Right? In order for us to take care of this planet, you need abolition. Right? You need people who are going to protect folks from fracking and from building underwater tunnels for oil to be looted from land. In order to have action around climate change, you have to have abolition.

So, I think that it's all in this document. All these nine points help us understand what's needed to get there. I think dreaming is

a beautiful way to say, it's not about what you want to take away from the system. It's about the system not existing. That's what dreaming does.

* * *

Raani: Do you think, in your experience of community, do you think that people practice dreaming in their every day? Or do you think that we have been so robbed that it doesn't exist?

Abdul-Aliy: I'm gonna speak for myself in a way to try to answer this question. I have a hard time remembering my dreams. There's often times when what happened in a dream will, I'll be reminded of it by something that's *deja vu*, right? Days later something that might seem like *deja vu*! I'm like, oh, I dreamed about that! Or I'll immediately wake up and have the experience of remembering in that moment. But then forget minutes to hours later. Sometimes dreams present themselves as memories of something that actually has happened and I'll write about them.

And so, I think that people dream. I think that the system is constantly figuring out how to make us forget, or make us not remember, or make it seem like

that possibility is a memory and not something that can live in the future. If that makes sense. I think that's what capitalism, what consumption, in a way that consumption happens, does to us. It helps us be distracted from our dreaming.

Raani: It distracts us from a future that is possible.

Abdul-Aliy: Yes, absolutely. It distracts us from a future that is possible.

* * *

AFTERWORD:
THE PROBLEM WITH
“HARM REDUCTION” (1998)
BY WENDE MARSHALL

The following text is an excerpt from a larger unpublished essay titled, “Let them Eat Opiates: Postindustrial Bodies and Discourses on Illicit Drugs,” written in 1998. Wende Marshall is an organizer and educator living in North Philadelphia. She was an organizer with Stadium Stompers, a group of mostly working-class Black women who in 2017 successfully blocked Temple University from socially cleansing the neighborhood to build a stadium. In the early 1990s, Wende was an intimate observer to the birth of the harm reduction movement in Philadelphia when her partner at the time, the late Jon Paul Hammond and other ACT UP Philadelphia activists started the needle exchange program in Wende’s apartment in North Philadelphia. That needle exchange would become Prevention Point.

The editors of this ‘zine feel that it is important to include the following excerpt from Wende’s 1998 essay. Today we may take

issue with the call to prioritize replacing harm reduction with “demand reduction.” However, Wende’s larger radical analysis resonates deeply with the politics of the Philadelphia Principles.

The inclusion of this text also allows us to be troubled by and to trouble the histories of revolutionary Black and brown struggles in imagining a radical harm reduction politics. Those earlier histories include the 1971 occupation of the Lincoln Hospital in the Bronx by the Young Lords and Black Panthers, the creation of “people’s detox” programs that combined acupuncture drug treatment with anti-capitalist political education, up through the radical forms of mutual aid developed by drug users, sex workers, and unhoused people long before activists coined the term “harm reduction.” We want to thank Wende for allowing us to include this excerpt in the ‘zine.

* * *

What demands does the postindustrial era put on bodies? If industrial bodies were production machines, are postindustrial bodies screens for the projection of limitless desire? Are postindustrial bodies zombies with a ravenous hunger for illusion? When there is no work, what is a body to do?

The film "Trainspotting" suggests that life in postcolonial, postindustrial Scotland is overdetermined by hard drug use and alcoholism.¹¹ Although "Trainspotting" occurs in Edinburgh, hard drug use in Glasgow is even more intense. Glasgow, according to a recent report, "has resigned itself to live and die with heroin." While three in every one hundred Glaswegians in their twenties are "involved in heroin," the city has given up on demand reduction and treatment strategies and has focused on control through medicalization (Pogatchnik).

But is medicalization neutral? Isn't medicalization a technique of power that operates at the level of the suffering body? I argue that medicalization can be construed as a sanitized adaptation of criminalization, which aims still to control. If anatomo-power, in the Foucaultian sense, was

a technique for disciplining the body as a machine, if late nineteenth century discourses on the body gradually came to be regarded as indispensable tools for controlling, regulating and subjugating urban bodies, might we view European and American discourses on harm reduction in the twenty-first century as postindustrial expressions of urban control? I am alarmed at the specter of postindustrial bodies kept quiescent by the medical management of addiction. In America, where the War on Drugs has been criticized as a war on "Black people," (Harris in Lusane 25) would medicalization simply become less bloody means to the same end? Without confronting white supremacy and other structural inequalities would not harm reduction only reproduce a variation based on the same divisions?

Dhoruba Bin Wahad's Black Drug Coalition supported the notion that decriminalization is a precondition of harm reduction, since he viewed the War on Drugs as a war on people of color.¹² But Bin Wahad emphasized demand reduction, acupuncture treatments and "hope, trust, and love" on the front lines along with a harm

reduction approach. I also support decriminalization of marijuana, because the War on Drugs works most harshly against people who live in communities where rampant capital disinvestment has left the field wide open for the drug economy. And I support needle exchange because, clearly, clean needles are saving lives. But I think needle exchange and decriminalization need to be viewed as part of a multiple strategy that includes demand reduction, strategies that do not demonize or penalize, and offer the potential for redemption.

It is worth briefly noting the relationship between colonialism

and opium, well-illustrated with examples from Europe. The British East India Company, for example, held a monopoly on the production of opium from the late 18th to the mid-19th century. China was the dumping ground for East India Company opium, beginning in the late 18th century. From the mid-18th to the mid-19th century opium use in China increased seventy-fold. *The Times* (of London) carried a story in 1887, claiming that of the seventy million inhabitants of Szechwan Province, seven-tenths of the adult male population were opium smokers (Schivelbusch 219).

In colonial Sumatra, the Dutch began importing Chinese laborers to work tobacco plantations in the mid-19th century. Opium concessions were organized features of the plantation system and opium smoking was the major form of sanctioned recreation in plantation life. The sale of opium to Chinese laborers was a lucrative business for the Dutch. The Dutch plantation management stimulated opium use by offering subsidies to encourage the workers to spend more for recreation. It was in the Dutch interest to ensure that Chinese laborers remained in debt

¹¹ Director, Danny Boyle, 1996.

¹² Dhoruba Bin Wahad, a veteran Black Panther, former political prisoner and founder of the Black Drug Coalition, has argued that the United States government was behind the massive influx of drugs into Black communities in the late 1960s and early 70s. According to Bin Wahad, “hard drugs, [like] heroin—were introduced into the African American community for political reasons, to control, to misdirect and ultimately to diffuse the development of revolutionary consciousness” (Weinberg 2).

after their labor contracts expired. Unlimited credit was extended for opium. In this way, the Dutch maintained a sufficient workforce at the lowest possible price (126, 148). In these narratives, drug production is deployed as an economic and political weapon in a field of power relations, and consumption is an effect of subjugation. Addiction here is not natural phenomena, rather it is a socially constructed device facilitating the enrichment and empowerment of colonial Europe.

I raise the issue of industrial bodies, colonialism and opium, and the issue of Black bodies and resistance in order to suggest that drugs are never neutral human artifacts. The production and consumption of drugs is always already embedded in global power and economic relations, just as its effects are perceived variously in specific local contexts. And drug policy, therefore, is never transparent or neutral, but always mediated through such power arrangements. In our discussions on drug policy, do we take into consideration the relationship between opium, addiction and colonial power? And should Dutch colonial opium policies in the last

century be considered in debates on the merits of Dutch drug policy in a postindustrial era?¹³

¹³ Jan Breman's excellent work, *Taming the Coolie Beast*, provides a detailed analysis of the social organization of plantations in Sumatra under Dutch control. The Dutch had imported Indian opium since the mid-seventeenth century, trading it for pepper and using it to bribe Indonesian leadership. In the mid-nineteenth century the Dutch began importing Chinese laborers, known as "coolies," to work the tobacco plantations. The Dutch plantation management stimulated opium use by offering subsidies, in order to encourage the workers to spend more for recreation. It was in the Dutch interest to ensure that Coolies remained in debt after their labor contracts expired. Unlimited credit was extended for opium. In this way, the Dutch maintained a sufficient workforce at the lowest possible price (Breman 126, 148).

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ABOUT THE EDITORS

Raani Begum is a queer, migrant, disabled, full service sex worker, an organizer, and a writer.

Raani is a core organizer in Project SAFE and Philadelphia Red Umbrella Alliance, and a member of Heaux History and Mad Ecologies. Raani reads, builds community, and writes. They are interested in how topics of sentiment and propaganda, anarchist world-building, and global histories of sex work and drug use intersect. She comes from Pakistan and Myanmar and leans on their migrant and sex working knowledge when community building. Raani accepts all pronouns, including her name, in good faith. Find them on raanibegum.com

Lulu Duffy-Tumasz has been immersed in mutual aid based harm reduction efforts for sex workers who use drugs through Project Safe since 2016. They are committed to creating and preserving worlds where the

autonomy of queer people, sex workers, and people who use drugs flourishes.

Nick Angelo is a Los Angeles-based artist and outreach worker. He has been working with the Los Angeles-based harm reduction organization Community Health Project (formerly Clean Needles Now) since 2018. Angelo's work uses mapping, topography, and diagramming as methods of a criticality towards American cultural and political power structures. His work often adulterates, confuses, and meshes subjective and alternative histories with mainstream cultural discourses as a means of drawing questions surrounding mental health, addiction, truth and lies, and power relations. The finished works primarily arrive as paintings, sculptures, and installations.

Dont Rhine is a Los Angeles-based artist and organizer. He has



been involved in harm reduction since 1992 when a group of AIDS activists in ACT UP Los Angeles organized Clean Needles Now. He has been a founding organizer with the L.A. Tenants Union since 2015. Dont is a co-founder of the international sound art collective, Ultra-red. For three decades the collective has experimented with “militant sound inquiry,” a form of popular education for building communism from the ground up.

Photo R to L: Lulu Duffy-Tumaszk, Raani Begum, Dont Rhine, and Nick Angelo.

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Rosine2.org

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