

Oreet Ashery

staying

Dream, Bin, Soft Stud
and Other Stories

INSTRUCTIONS

Staying: Dream, Bin, Soft Stud and Other Stories twelve Conversation Cards

This pack contains a booklet and twelve **Conversation Cards**.

Each card portrays a character that was developed through a series of creative workshops with twelve lesbian women who have come to the UK to seek sanctuary. The workshops explored alter egos as a way of talking about traumas; overwhelming memories; specific experiences with the legal system in the UK; and pressing questions around sex and relationships. The characters are presented here as a series of archetypes intended to promote and facilitate discussion.

Alongside the characters' description, each card poses relevant questions which could be used as a starting point for conversations. The questions are based on what took place in the workshops. They are general questions, intended to open up and lead into more specific discussions.

The cards are developed from and based on the experiences of lesbian asylum seekers and refugees; however they could be useful for group discussions on sexuality or immigration in general.

This booklet includes an extract of text by each of the characters/participants involved in the project. These texts are taken from transcriptions of group conversations and participants interviewing each other, alongside hand-written material.

Instructions for using the cards

- 1 Lay the twelve cards on a table or surface with the photographs facing upwards.
- 2 One person selects a card and reads the text aloud to the rest of the group.
- 3 Another person finds the accompanying character text in the booklet and reads that aloud to the group.
- 4 The person with the card then reads all the questions and selects one question to start with.
- 5 In your group discuss your responses to the question.
- 6 The conversation can develop around the first question, all the questions or could simply be a reflection on the issues relating to the chosen character.

These instructions suggest a way of using the cards to facilitate discussion but please use them in any way you wish, they could be used as a starting point for art works, creative writing exercises, scripts and any other creative concepts.



TreeMan

TreeMan's character is half-tree and half-man. The tree is strong, energetic and resourceful. The man is weak; he does not know what to do or how to act because the man in power crushes him. The strong and the weak, both embodied in one person, continuously negotiate a series of challenging life circumstances.

Have you had experiences where you felt weak and like giving up, and suddenly a shot of energy came through you and you felt strong?

What experiences have you had of people in powerful positions that affected your life or that of other people you know?

Have you, or people you know, experienced sudden or announced deportation?

What do you think could be done so that people in the Home Office would acquire a better understanding of immigrants as individuals? What would you say to them if you had an hour with them?



Bin

The character of the Bin represents a social structure, a metaphoric space into which gay people are thrown in like trash. The bin, unlike the gay person inside it, is not a victim; it is just a container. This makes for a more empowered statement. The Bin is written in places like a script for a play. It is full with potent rage.

Have you, or people you know, had experiences of being treated like trash because of sexual orientation or sexual identity?

The bin is a metaphor for a social structure. In Bin's text, society throws in the bin and puts the lid down on whatever and whoever it can't understand, or deal with adequately. What do you think could happen next? How would you continue the script?

LGBT people have to write factual accounts of their life in order to build up a legal case to stay in the UK. Do you think fictional texts, such as this one, can play a part in some way to help in the process?



CD

The CD is not just about being a singer and a songwriter or about the healing power of music. The CD combines it all. The CD is inspiration: the sound of trains, of rain and other people's conversations. The CD is about production: performing with a partner and the discipline of being a musician. It is also about a belief, believing twice – having twice the belief, seeing and unseeing, dying and rising again.

What role does music play in your life?
What sounds, conversations and people have inspired you?
What does 'believing twice' mean to you?



Cloud

The Cloud finds ways to cope with whatever life throws at her without losing hope. The Cloud is grey, low, penetrable, porous and changeable, but it can also be dominated by the power of the sun and can disappear at any moment. In everyday life whenever she finds herself negative and fearful like a cloud, she remembers that the sun will soon come and break through the greyness. The sun is probably a lover, but also represents Cloud's inner warmth.

What is your sun? Where do you get your motivation from? What helps you disperse the dark clouds?

What gets you down and how does it make you feel?
Is being in a relationship or having a lover an important part of feeling happy and motivated?

Is being in the UK different to what you imagined? What is the hardest thing about your current situation in the UK?



CameraGunMan

CameraGunMan is born out of a childhood spent having to fend for herself against physical, psychological and verbal forms of attack at home and at school. On arriving in the UK the violent Gun slowly becomes a hard-working Camera. It is not that there is no bullying here, but it seems that the environment is less anarchic and more ordered and so lent itself to other solutions. It is also about the rite of passage from childhood to adulthood, of growing up, calming down and having space for new aspirations.

Have you, or people you know, had experiences of violent behaviour towards them in their childhood because of skin colour or gender/sexual identity? Violence can be verbal, physical or psychological.

What do you think are the best ways for children and young people, in their home countries, to defend themselves against violence from family, friends and the authorities? How best can they cope with the effects of it? Do you think it is different for adults?

Do you feel enough is in place in the UK to defend people from the same sexual and racial assaults they experienced in their home countries?



Rebel With A Cause

Rebel With A Cause is about negotiating with the authorities. 'This is how authoritative figures make me feel: totally blank, confused, lost. And then again, I feel like I'm on a road. I'm not sure if it's extreme hate or if it can also be extreme love, [it] depends on how they make me feel, you know, from one extreme to another. But it never seems to be in the middle. So I try my best just to understand the whole purpose of challenging authority. It is not to go against authority and the law, but to try and create an understanding that people need to be respected and are equal in their views.' (Quote from Rebel With A Cause's text.)

What are your feelings towards the authorities in your home country and here?

How can the authorities best be challenged and contested without resorting to rhetoric of anarchy?

Have you had any positive experiences here, or in your home country, with regards to the authorities?

Do you feel people pity you because you are a refugee or an asylum seeker?

When you meet strangers do you tell them your circumstances, or do you feel this will put you in a box?



House

House is an image of a corridor with doors leading on to many rooms. Each room represents another time in her life and another aspect of her life. There is a door into a difficult childhood; another door leads into the process of making sense of her sexuality; another door is into a room where she had to pretend to be with men as an act of survival. Later, there is a door leading into real love and happiness with a woman. And now her home is in the UK, and this is another room altogether. House's question throughout is whether her search for love in women is also a search for a mother's love.

What would be in your rooms in the house?

Do you ever feel that your romantic and sexual relationships with women are in some way connected to your relationship with your mother?

Have you had to have sex, or pretended to have sex, with people you did not want to? Or in some way pretended to be someone else sexually?

Does it get easier to understand your sexuality or sexual identity over time?



G

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Dream

Dream is about a premonition that comes true. A recurring dream that seems to come out of nowhere, yet feels so real. In Gambia she dreamt that she was in handcuffs, but why? She had never done anything wrong; she is not a criminal. On arriving in the UK, she is taken in handcuffs and the dream became a reality, a reality as surreal as the dream itself. She came over to the UK to be in a country where she could be herself, to be openly gay; she could not continue with her life back home, and she had to leave her son behind. Dream can just about cope with the handcuffs, but the loss is far harder. The dream fulfilled its role: the role of preparing her for what was to come, now it can leave her and new dreams can take its place.

Have you ever had a premonition that came true? What do you think premonitions are? What are they for?

Have you ever felt like you are being treated like a criminal in the UK, or in your home country, because of your sexuality? Or because you are seeking asylum?

Have you left anyone behind that you miss? Do you ever think of going back so you can be with them?



Soft Stud

From the *Urban Dictionary*: 'A somewhat masculine, gay woman with just a hint of a femme in her, ie, she may look like a guy one day but look like a girl the next. She may be a bit more feminine than most studs or wear makeup. A soft stud will usually have a femme for a girlfriend but may also date another stud that is more masculine than her.' The character of the Soft Stud is caught up in what she feels women expect from her because of how she looks. Soft Studs are expected to be like 'studs': tough, take drugs and treat women badly. But our Soft Stud wants to have an equal relationship and fall in love with someone who can motivate her.

What lesbian, gay, bi or trans role models or icons did you have as a child?
Who are they now?

Are studs attractive? Are soft studs attractive? What are the differences?

Do women expect studs to behave and look in a certain way, for example to take drugs, be fit, dominant and not have their sexual organs touched by their lovers?

Do you think studs and soft studs create their identity by emulating certain men? If so, who are they looking at for inspiration? Are there old studs?



Carer

The character of the Carer: 'If I ever became one I would do it with my whole heart, love and pleasure. I love helping people with difficulties. I like to see people happy, I like helping those in need. I love having a laugh with people and I like giving people without hope the hope they deserve. Although I have never done care-work before I know I can do it well as I was the oldest girl in the family and I looked after my brothers and sisters, so the same care I used to give them is the same care I would give to these people.' (Quote from Carer's text.)

Were you cared for as a child? Do you feel cared for now?

Are you a caring person?

Do you care for and look after yourself?

Is the notion of caring different in the UK to your home country, or do you think caring is a universal term?



Farmer

Farmer's character is life affirming. She chose to be a Farmer over her initial intuitive choice to be a coffin. The Farmer grows bananas, oranges, yam, cassava, onions, green leaves and matooke. She also looks after goats, cows and sheep. The Farmer sells crops, meat, animal skins and milk in the market, and lives with her girlfriend on the farm. The farm is a model based on life back home in Africa, of childhood memories and a farm not her own, but one that belonged to a neighbour. Her vision of having her own farm helps her to anchor and ground herself in her new adult life.

What did you dream of becoming when you were a child or a young person?
Do you still have the same dream? Are they possible to make real?
Do you like nature and animals? Is living in nature a fantasy of escaping city life? Do you like cities? Are your relationships to nature and urbanity different in the UK to your home country?
Did you have a neighbour, or other families you knew as a child, you felt could offer you something you did not have?
Would you like to run a farm? What would you have there?



Super Lover

Super Lover is a character who provides a space to talk about women's sexual desires and women's sexual acts. Super Lover generated conversations about which types of women are attractive to whom. Other conversations were about how power and control features in sex, for example in the relationship between studs and femmes. Another conversation was about the use, or not, of sex toys. Super Lover emerged as a character that has sex continuously with everyone; she is whatever anyone wants her to be, the perfect lover. Super Lover is pure fantasy. As an emblem, Super Lover encourages a completely open dialogue about lesbian sex, and writing about it as a political and cultural necessity.

Do you talk freely about all aspects of sex with friends or lovers? Do you manage to ask for exactly what you want sexually from lovers? Do people find sex hard to talk about?

Do you think there is an erotic and sexual language for women who desire women, for example in television, books, porn, films and art? Can you find material that you can relate to? Is there enough information?

What would Super Lover be for you? What would she look like? What would she be like? What kind of sex would she offer? Would she offer love too? Would she offer intimacy? Is she your Super Lover or everyone's?

What do you think about sex toys? What do you think about porn? What do you think about role playing, power relations and control in sex?

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Artangel has pioneered a new way of collaborating with artists and engaging with audiences in an ambitious series of commissions since the early 1990s. Artangel Interaction develops projects and events that extend opportunities for collaboration and participation beyond the setting of the Institution.

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This publication contains some explicit material which some people may find offensive. We would like to impress that this content is part of the process of the work and does not in any way reflect the attitudes or beliefs of Artangel, City Parochial Foundation, The National Lottery or the Arts Council England.

House: How is life treating you living in Brixton, compared with your home country in Africa? ✂ Bin: I am not living yet. ✂ H: What do you mean? ✂ Bin: I am not living yet in Brixton, I am staying in Brixton. ✂ H: What is stopping you from living? ✂ Bin: I have to wait for the Home Office.

A character transforms her life stories into the rooms of a house; another becomes a bin; others become a dream, a soft stud, a super lover and a gun who transforms into a camera ... The characters are part of ***Staying***, a project by artist **Oreet Ashery** and twelve lesbian women who fled Nigeria, Uganda, Angola, Gambia, Jamaica, Barbados and other countries after suffering traumatising discrimination against their sexual identity and orientation.

This publication has been developed to extend discussion beyond the workshop space. It includes a booklet and twelve conversation cards for use in a group to facilitate discussion, debate, the sharing of information and potential new art works.