



Editorial

We are a miraculous mess and that is the only way we can be

Sohail Jannesari 

Brighton and Sussex Medical School; King's College London

Abstract This article introduces the second issue of *Stolen Tools* by exploring the concept of the love and 'the erotic' as described by Audre Lorde. The erotic is a deep, non-rational life force rooted in creativity, self-knowledge, and authentic emotional connections. The erotic embraces a chaotic plurality of identities; creative, free and authentic expression; and meaningful, nurturing solidarity. It is crucial for resisting racial oppression and something that *Stolen Tools* aspires to, even in the face of institutional and personal blocks. The second half of this piece presents the papers that constitute this issue and build on its theme. The papers in this issue include fictional stories and a poem exploring the complexities of identity, resilience, and racism, as well as articles analysing the limitations of equality, diversity, and inclusion initiatives in academic and clinical settings.

Acknowledgements Thank you to everyone who contributed to this issue including Gabi Nieuwoudt, Trevor Brooks, Rubbia Ali, Madeline Katta-Worae, David Lewis, and Hannah Abdalla. Particular thanks to Ricardo Twumasi, who spent long hours making sure this issue got over the line. Thanks also to Ebony Burke, who has been seconded from the King's College London Library and Collections to support our project and is indicative of the creative institutional support that we survive on. I dedicate this issue to my daughter Nika, who inspired the opening article and is one year old at the time of writing.

Keywords: intersectionality, the erotic, EDI, fatherhood, poetry

CRediT:

Sohail Jannesari: Conceptualization, Writing - Original draft; Mama D Ujuaje (mentor): Writing - review & editing; Ricardo Twumasi: Writing - review & editing

1 Reclaiming love

I started writing this introduction on my phone, while I held and rocked my sleeping eight-month-old baby in the abyss of the night. This was after Nika had woken for the fourth time in four hours. I was tired. Exhausted. But her loud breathing, almost a snore, soothed me. Something in her haphazard inhalations brought me a deep peace. Still too young to know the proper rhythm of breathing, yet unfazed by the struggle of life.

In those special moments, there is something utterly irrational, viscerally emotional, and eerily spiritual about the connection I feel with my child. It evokes Lorde's 2017 essay on 'The Erotic as Power'. A power that 'rises from our deepest nonrational knowledge', the 'measure between the beginnings of our sense of self and the chaos of our strongest feelings', and a creative, harmonious love. Audre Lorde writes as a Black lesbian, referencing how she has 'a particular feeling, knowledge, and understanding' for the erotic partly due to her identity and the relationships it brings. She speaks of the erotic as the 'life force of women'.

As a 'Brown' man raised in the UK, it may sound odd for me to be so taken by the idea of the erotic. Accessing and understanding the erotic is an aspiration and never-ending work in progress, like many things in *Stolen Tools*. When my child was lifted and pulled out from my wife's resilient body, I felt shockwaves of joy that trembled my soul. In the intense, immediate, and desperate attachment I felt for Nika, I found a window into the erotic. It is my hope that this issue might also inspire others to glimpse through their windows.

Nika has also made me explore other fundamentals of life and posed challenging questions about identity. A baby's eye colour doesn't usually settle until they are around nine months. Their skin colour can take up to 20 months. Their hair colour might keep changing in the first 60

*Correspondence to: S.Jannesari (S.Jannesari@bsms.ac.uk)

months of their life. As Nika grows, she rolls through many identities. Her hair darkens and lightens, her skin goes brown in the sun and olive in the dark, and her eyes shift and swirl like a chameleon. She is blessed to move quickly enough to avoid labelling. Though society has already started with its brutal pigeonholing, she is still many things to many people. Not least to herself. Nika comfortably holds the chaos of many identities and potential identities within her.

As adults, we also change identities through life, redefining ourselves as we grow, learn, fail, and adapt. All the while, however, we are placed and place ourselves into society's latest, most restrictive boxes. As people from racialised minorities in oppressive societies, we don't often get to define who we are. Rather, we play catch-up with the repressive structures that govern our worlds, trying to think of how best to resist. And, while we attempt to forge a path through the murky forest of identities, society has already built another bear trap. This issue of *Stolen Tools* attempts to clear the dense undergrowth and provide space for racialised minorities to self-define.

2 The many different *Stolen Tools*

Stolen Tools is billed as by and for racialised minorities. As *Stolen Tools* grows up, we find ourselves grappling with the multiplicity of the term 'racialised minority'. It is inadequate, potentially violent in its generalisation, and doesn't help us understand and be honest about who we are as a collective. The term has a stolid culturelessness and lack of emotion reflected by similar labels such as Black or Brown, BAME, or People of Colour. In a bid to counter this, this issue explores the many intersections and many interpretations of identities belonging to people from racialised and minoritised backgrounds.

In recognising our overlapping, clashing, and shifting identities, *Stolen Tools* has also begun to take a more nuanced view on the role of white 'allies' in our anti-racist cause. At the start of our journey, we were determined to carve out a space for ourselves in the dry, oppressive canyons of academia. We ensured that we were literally by and for racialised minorities. When allies offered help, for instance as mentors, we politely turned them away. We felt that our project could only be delivered by people who have experienced racial oppression. We are still a journal by and for people from racialised minorities and aim to create a space where we can uncompromisingly operate on our own terms. However, in acknowledging the many shades and shapes of our minoritisation, we've opened to the importance of intersections and what allies can bring. Some of our reviewers and artists are from non-racialised or white backgrounds, and we feel like this is a safe place to begin.

At *Stolen Tools*, we believe that Lorde's 2017 idea of the erotic might be a path towards recognising the plurality, vibrancy, and dynamism of the identities we hold within us. We want to embrace the messiness of our beings and unleash the joyful chaos that lies within us. We want to show how self-knowledge, authenticity, and assuredness can be used as a source of energy, a way to connect and build solidarity, and ultimately a path to anti-racist change. It is the erotic that is lacking from our sterile academic meetings and knowledge production, where we talk about 'them' and 'us' and 'they'. Where we blind participants, reviewers, and authors to each other. Where we act as voyeurs attempting to understand another's experience without sharing in their struggle.

Within the erotic is the idea of not 'looking the other way from our experience', from ourselves, and from the connections we hold with others. There is a sense that we need to unapologetically face and embrace the raw emotions of our lives. Of getting nervous, making mistakes, and being misunderstood. This is fundamental to the ethos of *Stolen Tools*. We recognise that people from racialised minority backgrounds are constantly muted and transmuting themselves, staying silent or putting on their 'white voice' (where racialised individuals code-switch in certain situations to avoid implicit bias). We want to create a platform where authors can express themselves freely and creatively. We hope that the accessibility and authenticity of the voices in our journal mean that this expression is understood across racial divides.

The erotic calls on us to form a sensual bridge with others. To build deep and rich relationships through 'physical, emotional and psychic expressions'. It is an incredibly tall order for most of us who have grown in societies that deny and abuse the erotic in favour of the suppressed pornographic. It is something that one might only have space for fleetingly. It is something so foreign and deep that, even when we experience it, it may make us flinch and recoil. It is something that we have no space for in our professional contexts.

Building a space for the erotic is a long-term aspiration for *Stolen Tools*. It requires a sustainability and continuity that is rare in the precarious world of academia. So we are pursuing a crowdfunding model similar to Diamond Open Access initiatives (see Fuchs & Sandoval, 2013). We aim to persuade libraries to partner with us and offer a small, annual 'solidarity subscription' to support our work. Our offer compares favourably to the many thousands of pounds that 'elite' journals often demand per article. Building a space for the erotic may also mean abandoning or postponing our desire to be a biannual journal. In this issue, authors have had to contend with illnesses, the tension between authenticity and

uncomfortable self-disclosure, and the challenge of criticising colleagues constructively on deeply personal issues. If we want to embrace our values, then we must be flexible with the pace of knowledge production.

The erotic is necessary and fundamental to any anti-racist or anti-colonial endeavour. As I write this article, the world is witnessing a genocide in Gaza, Palestine. It is a horror that can only be stopped with a universal rejection and condemnation. However, at Stolen Tools, we have not built the relationships we need to provide meaningful solidarity. This extends beyond Palestine, to revolutionary colleagues producing knowledge in other non-Western countries that is dismissed and denigrated by Western institutions. It is something that we are determined to rectify in future issues. We need to build the erotic into our work, so that the production of our journal is not just a set of administrative tasks but the manifestation of poetic relationships and shared struggles built over many years.

3 Taking pride in our overlapping selves

In our social and academic context, acknowledging the erotic signifies a radical assertion of the complex, fluid, and interconnected identities held in our racialised minority status. Each article in this issue provides a window into the erotic and to identities unconstrained by racial oppression in academic and health settings. In doing so, the articles embrace Stolen Tools' drive for creativity and creative expression, and it is fitting that our issue starts with two fictional pieces and a poem.

We begin with a short fable from Fadekemi, titled 'Cloud the White Tiger'. Her fable explores the oppression of cultural and racialised expectations, particularly in terms of forming relationships and connections. She argues that our identities should not be predicated on performing social stereotypes. Much like Audre Lorde, Fadekemi's White Tiger also finds solidarity in the so-called 'outcasts' and 'oddballs'.

We then move to Adaiah's piece, the 'Akani Diagnosis'. She tells the tale of the intergenerational 'sickness' in the Akani family. The story centres on Leilah, her ill-fated daughter Rena and her aptly named mother, Lourdes. It describes the deadly pain and consequences of being dismissed by healthcare professionals due to racism. The problem Adaiah describes can be interpreted as a denial of the erotic in our health settings. Health is so core to our being, our connections, and our self-knowledge. By cherishing the complexity and vulnerability of human experience through the erotic, we can create spaces to safely talk about health. Even in sterile institutional contexts.

Our next piece is a poetic one from Papreen. She discusses her journey to the UK from Bangladesh, the

obstacles she faced establishing an academic career here. She effortlessly glides through her many identities, describing the strength each one gave her to endure the migration experience. In her poem she describes 'wearing her intersectional badge with grace' and how her 'roots are in an intertwining brew'. Her poem and its contextual introduction are testament to how durable, resilient, and flexible our messy identities make us. It embodies the creative 'lifeforce of women' that Lorde (2017) writes about.

Then, we have two pieces on the state of equality, diversity, and inclusion initiatives in educational settings. Sapphire explores EDI in the DClinPsy selection process. She interviews interview panellists and application screeners, finding that not all identities were considered equally. Though characteristics such as gender, sex, and race were frequently considered, religious identities were less salient during the application process. One of the issues was 'standardisation in the application process' around reflecting on a candidate's experiences. Here, then, is a clear example where an 'messy' intersectional approach to identity could improve inclusivity.

While Sapphire remains relatively positive about the impact of EDI programmes in the selection process, Joseph is much more critical in his powerful piece, 'What Master Do You Serve? Struggles in University EDI Committees'. He reflects on his experiences of, and in, EDI committees and the brutal racial categorisation they can entail. He describes the expectation of representation and the inability to represent his 'authentic self'. His paper is a rejection of the desensitised, emotionally regulated bureaucratisation of academia.

Every issue of Stolen Tools also contains pieces that reflect on and develop our ideas of what knowledge is, how it is presented and published, and what it could be. We present three of these in this issue. The first is an 'Explainer' infographic from Benji Ingall. These distil dense academic papers into accessible, visual narratives and we're building a set of them on our website. Working with Benji has helped us consider not only the creation of anti-racist knowledge but also its representation. Through our Explainer series, we can share some of the anti-racist knowledge that has inspired and guided us. For this issue, Benji has created an Explainer for Abdallah et al.'s 2022 article on 'Dispossession in Occupied Palestine: Children's Focus Group Reflections on Mental Health'.

The second reflective and self-educative piece is from Tiarna. She writes on the implications of AI tools such as ChatGPT for academia and Stolen Tools. In the context of an issue that discusses the erotic, AI feels like it might remove and impede the human connections that anti-racist movements desperately need. Tiarna even warns of the racial biases in how AI might be trained. However,

she recommends a transparent and considered embrace of this new technology. We hope to take her recommendations with us into our future issues.

Finally, we have Ricardo and Oliver's piece on racial inequalities in Management and Organisation Studies (MOS) publishing. Their study uses self-reported data from journal editors and estimated ethnicity data of over 30,000 contributors. All 20 journal editors who responded to their study identified as White and only 27% of article contributors were non-White. Ricardo and Oliver argue that this homogeneity makes it difficult for the knowledge produced in MOS to address a 'diverse set of societal questions'. They propose regular auditing and publishing of journal diversity data, implementing automated systems to estimate diversity characteristics, intentional amplification of diverse voices through citation and collaboration practices, and setting diversity targets. Their work aligns closely with the mission of Stolen Tools, emphasising the need for systemic changes in publishing.

4 Conclusion

We hope that we can move away from one-dimensional, sterile, and imposed categorisation and expressions of racialised identities, and towards self-knowledge and acceptance of our messy, viscerally experienced identities. By journeying in this direction, we also learn how to navigate towards each other and centre the erotic in our work and relationships. This, ultimately, is the only way we'll dismantle and reform the health and academic systems we live in.



Figure 1: Art work by Natasha Katashila created based on the article

References

- Abdallah, G., Barron, I., Lala, E., & Oulbeid, B. (2022). Dispossession in occupied palestine: Children's focus group reflections on mental health. *European Journal of Trauma & Dissociation*, 6(2), 100236. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ejtd.2021.100236>
- Fuchs, C., & Sandoval, M. (2013). The diamond model of open access publishing: Why policy makers, scholars, universities, libraries, labour unions and the publishing world need to take non-commercial, non-profit open access serious. *TripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique*, 11(2), 428–443. <https://doi.org/10.31269/triplec.v11i2.502>
- Lorde, A. (2017). *Your silence will not protect you*. Silver Press.