



Unlearning as resistance and justice: Toward healing and transforming

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ABSTRACT

Multi-trans- and inter-disciplinarity, while important, cannot on their own ensure ontological and epistemic justice or facilitate transformations to justice, sustainability and thriving for all. We need to recognize, problematize, and eventually willfully and consciously let go of the harmful ontological and philosophical assumptions and myths underlying Western science and epistemology. The ontologies and philosophies inform and shape stories we tell, worldviews, values and beliefs we hold, which further shape our actions, habits and behaviours that we are caught in and reproduce. Thus ontological and philosophical views and assumptions inform and guide our day-to-day ways of living, existing, resisting, relating, caring, or not caring. Increasingly scholars of socioecological transformations recognize the importance of ontologies and philosophies in guiding our individual and collective responses to the metacrisis, calling for ontological and relational shifts as key to socioecological transformations. This requires questioning, reflecting and deconstructing the harmful ontological bases of modern Western science and knowledge systems, which fine tune our lenses through which we see the world and act accordingly. I refer to this process as a 'deep transformative Unlearning'. I frame it as a precondition for both, holding space for the existing invisibilized ontologies, epistemologies and worldviews, and for cultivating new ontological and philosophical emergences. As we start to question and let go, we take with us the wisdom of the old ways, while making space for the new ways to emerge. Unlearning harmful ontologies and associated worldviews, assumptions, and myths that uphold the Western science and the (neo)colonial-capitalist ideas-structures is a matter of justice, survival, and healing.

1. Introduction

"Unlearning who we are, or who we are taught to be, made to be, involves questioning, and transforming of this version of the self. This self that we have been shaped into by our family and community, our social norms and institutions. Unlearning and letting go of this self is essential for becoming who we already are, but have forgotten; forgotten our true nature – the "true" Self. Unlearning so that we can become aware of, or remind ourselves of who we are as part-wholes of all (relational-Self); become aware of who we are as all (nondual-Self). I am not, if I am not You, and if I am not Them too. 'I' is an expansive category here. Most of us have forgotten, and need to be reminded, need to become aware of, and accustomed to this expansive abundant Self, whom we have been estranged from since birth, and now need to collectively and individually rediscover, relearn and be it".

When I do not think of academic writing, when I am in a state of concentration or contemplation, when I do not bother about the societal and scientific dismissal of self-awareness, authentic self, as 'wu-wu' non-

scientific concepts – the sentences as above are born.

I will argue here that spirituality and science, regardless of what we have been taught, are not all that different. Both aim at understanding and knowing ourselves, society, rest of nature, the Universe at large; and at understanding our roles and relations with each other and the rest of existence. Spirituality and science can be thought off as complementary "methods" into the same inquiries, addressing the same "research questions", such as the nature of reality, the origins of the Universe, roles, relations and ethics of being and doing. As different methods tend to, spirituality and science too use significantly different assumptions, language and tools for observing and knowing. Bringing spirituality in dialogue with science (and vice versa), with our socioecological every day, with capitalism, coloniality, decoloniality, gender, class, race and other injustices, wars, and genocides of the past and present can strengthen our capacities to address them. Nothing can change for us if we do not change and for us to change, we need to look within us. As much as change is affected and triggered by external demands and conditions, the change comes from within – from the inside of our

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provisionally called ‘individual selves’. The only way out is in, as Krishnamurti, the Indian philosopher and spiritual teacher said.

This inquiry is situated in what is often called the polycrisis: the ecocide, accelerating mass extinction, climate disruption with unevenly distributed, racially- and gender-defined burdens. Further, the devastations of lands and seas by extractivist grey and green capitalist ventures, the compounding social fragmentation, polarization, wars, displacement, and genocide. These are not merely “structural problems,” but manifestations of deeper ontological (Escobar, 2018) and spiritual crises, or crises brought about by the loss of meaning (Laduke, 1999; Macy, 2021). Thus, I refer to them as to metacrisis, indicating deeper crises of meaning and sense-making that underpin the ‘polycrisis’ (Cairns, 2025).

Ontological injustices, as I understand them, refer to harms that arise when certain beings, relations, or ways-of-being are denied their own reality, or are devalued within a dominant ontology. The case in point being the Western ontological imposition of the human/nature divide and the treatment of territories and more-than-human as “resources” rather than kin or relations, which delegitimizes many Indigenous knowledge systems. Such injustice enables the erasure of peoples’ world-making practices and of more-than-human agencies, and it legitimizes extractivism and enclosure (Escobar, 2018; Viveiros de Castro, 2014; Krawec, 2022).

Epistemic injustices emerge from the ontological ones, manifesting as devaluation, extraction, and misrepresentation of some knowledges and knowers over others. The case in point again being the Western over Indigenous, place-based, tacit science, knowledges and wisdoms. Epistemic injustice operates through epistemic hierarchies, argued credibility deficits and objectivity bias, but also agenda-setting and “methodological monocultures”, narrowing what counts as knowledge and evidence (McGregor, 2009; Whyte, 2018; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021). Together, these injustices reproduce the coloniality-modernity and colonial-racial-capitalist order (Ramcilovic-Suominen, 2025a). I use the term ‘onto-epistemic’ injustices as an umbrella term to capture these injustices in a broad sense.

The paper a result of a series of academic thought experiments and engagements with the concept of Unlearning, including: (i) my address at a panel discussion at a scientific conference in the autumn of 2022 in Rome (Italy), (ii) a seminar at the University of Ghent in spring of 2023, in Ghent (Belgium), and (iii) three conference sessions on the theme of Unlearning, one organized with Maria Fernanda Gebara in the autumn of 2023 in Santa Marta (Columbia), and two with Maria Erhnström-Fuentes, during 2023 and 2024 in Helsinki and Turku (Finland) respectively. Those academic events are the ground in which the seed of this special issue on ‘Unlearning’ was sown.

This paper is also a self-reflection of unlearning and relearning of the Self, the notions of transforming the Self, and how and why that matters for our current collective socioecological journey on the planet Earth. The “Self” when spelled with capital S does not refer to the individual or ego self (i.e. the body-mind complex), but to a metaphorically speaking ‘expanded’ Self that is *intraconnected* with everything/everyone in and of the Universe, which/who comes to exist in relation to everything/everyone else in and of the Universe (see Ramcilovic-Suominen 2025c; Siegel, 2022; Loy 2019a, 2019b; Thich Nhat Hanh, 2017).

In Steps 2 and 3, I anchor my perspective within Eastern nondual traditions—such as Advaita Vedānta, Buddhism, and Yoga, which even if in different ways, recognize and teach the ultimate oneness and the fundamentally non-separate nature of all existence. These philosophies continue to shape my own process of departure from materialist ontology and the associated mechanistic and dualist worldviews (Ramcilovic-Suominen, 2025b). They are useful not only for their ontological insights (nonduality, emptiness, inter-being), but also for their utility in offering practical pathways for change and transformations (e.g. meditation, yamas and niyamas or ethical observances at personal and societal levels, mindfulness and many others). Also, these philosophical and spiritual teachings have served as inspiration for

various Western philosophies that unsettle dualism, including Stoicism (Sellars, 2016), Spinoza’s substance monism (Garrett, 2006), the process-oriented ontology (Whitehead, 1978), and contemporary analytic idealism that treats mind or consciousness as foundational (Kastrup, 2014, 2021). I engage these Eastern and Western lenses and practices, not as dogma: the purpose is to show how different ontological starting points refract into different epistemic commitments, ethical orientations, and governance logics—and thereby open different possibilities for socioecological transformations.

The novelty of this piece is threefold. (i) It politicizes Unlearning by situating it explicitly against human-nature duality, colonial-capitalist violence, reframing Unlearning as praxis of resistance, solidarity, and justice rather than a neutral tool for personal and organizational growth and improvement. (ii) It theorizes the illusion of separate self as a core generative myth of multiple hierarchies of worth, thereby linking inner/personal work with collective/structural transformations (Ramcilovic-Suominen 2025b, 2025c; O’Brien, 2021; Wamsler et al., 2021). Relatedly it advances radical *intraconnectedness* as nondual ontological proposal foregrounding healing and transforming (Ramcilovic-Suominen, 2025d). (iii) Finally, and taken together, these contributions expand the existing scholarship on the links between inner and outer change, by discussing the importance of unlearning for justice and healing, which happens across the personal, collective, societal and cosmic realms.

The paper is organized in three steps, metaphorically covering my own journey of learning to unlearn. In step 1 I present my original ideas and motivations for thinking about the importance of Unlearning, which I will keep capitalizing throughout the paper, to indicate that it is the concept of Unlearning that I am referring to, rather than the act of unlearning, which will not be capitalized. Step 2 is about the more recent interest and engagement with (un)learning of the Self, the illusion of separate self and the radical *intraconnectedness*, as a nondualist ontological position that inspired me to think and be differently, and the importance this has on personal and collective transformations. Finally, Step 3 is an invitation for us to imagine the process and the conditions for unlearning separation as a state of mind that gives rise to multiple hierarchies of worth and domination, which I argue is at the root of our (neo)colonial-racial-capitalist violence and destruction. It is an invitation to imagine ways of healing from the dis-ease (different from disease) of separation and to imagine and enact radically different realities and societies.

2. Step 1. Unlearning as an act of resistance and solidarity

When in the late summer of 2022 I was asked to join a panel at a FLARE (Forests & Livelihoods: Assessment, Research, and Engagement) Conference in Rome and discuss a topic that currently inspires me, the word “Unlearning” came seemingly out of nowhere. At a time, I was deeply engaged, both academically and personally, with epistemic injustices and the harms of continued imposition of one supreme Eurocentric knowledge throughout the Globe – from colonial to post- and neo-colonial present times. I was actively reading and thinking of the personal and collective, psychological, and other impacts of imposing the Eurocentric mechanistic and dualist knowledge system on the offsprings of both the colonized and the coloniser; learning from scholars such as Franz Fanon, Williams De Bois, Samir Amin, and Boaventura de Sousa Santos. Able to identify and to feel with the drastically different costs and pains for both, I was thinking that we all, from colonised to coloniser, must actively unlearn and undo this ‘colonial worldview’, so that we can relearn, redo different and be(come) different/differently. Roughly half a year after the FLARE conference, I participated in a seminar at the University of Ghent. The title for my seminar talk was: “*Politicizing unlearning: Unlearning as an act of resistance and solidarity*”, followed by two subtitles: (i) “*The old must die so that the new can be born*”: *Unlearning Colonial and extractive knowledges for multispecies justice and survival*” and (ii) “*Unlearning without solidarity is just forgetting*”.

Over the next couple of years, I was enthusiastically reading anything I could find on Unlearning. It soon became clear that the concept was mostly, and with few exceptions (e.g. [Tiostanova and Mignolo, 2012](#); [van Oers et al., 2023](#)), proposed and developed in an apolitical or positivist manner. This encouraged me to dig deeper and frame Unlearning as an act of resistance, solidarity and justice. While a lot of literature question the current colonial-capitalist nexus and modernity-coloniality, as it will become clear from this literature review, the theory of unlearning emerged from other fields of science. Its applicability in socioecological realities of today is yet to be harnessed, which is the very reason for this special issue and this paper. Two fields of study that debate Unlearning to significant extents include Psychology and Cognitive Sciences, on the one hand, and Organizational and Management Studies, on the other. I draw on the former to define the concept, while the latter is given as an example of field that applies the concept of Unlearning in a positivist apolitical manner.

2.1. Defining Unlearning

Drawing on psychology and cognitive studies, knowledge can be defined as a capacity to act, at individual and collective levels ([De Holan, 2011](#)). An important working assumption here is that how we think, act and perceive ourselves and others is affected by what we have learned/what we know, as well as by our experiences. In other words, our knowledge influences our action, behaviour and our perceptions of ourselves and others. Unlearning is defined as letting go of (some of) our existing knowledge ([Grisold and Kaiser, 2017](#)), which in turn leads to change in action and self-perception, that can be harnessed to different aims depending on the field of application.

Unlearning is extensively used in the organizational learning and management studies literature, where it is framed and approached as an act of intentional letting go of knowledge that is deemed “old/obsolete”, in order to develop more up-to date knowledge, innovations and better response to external challenges ([Nystrom and Starbuck, 1984](#); [Pighin and Marzona, 2011](#); [Stein, 1995](#)). It is framed as a tool for individual and organisational improvements, with the aim of innovations and crises management. This literature postulates that as our actions and behaviour are driven by our knowledge, we can consciously aim to let go of certain existing knowledge. Such organizational theories on Unlearning flourished from 1980s onwards and can be understood as a static view on the process of unlearning. With time, various critiques of such an understanding of Unlearning emerged ([Howells and Scholderer, 2016](#); [Grisold et al., 2017](#); [Hislop et al., 2014](#)). Questions and disagreements included the issues of letting go or discharging of “old knowledge” as a prerequisite for “new learning” ([Nystrom and Starbuck, 1984](#)), whether this can realistically happen and if so how. In these debates, the difference between Unlearning – as conscious and intentional letting go of information, and Forgetting – as unintentional/unconscious act, is also debated ([Tsang and Zahra, 2008](#)), as is the difference between unlearning and learning ([Hedberg, 1981](#)).

Owing to these debates and disagreements, some scholars grew out of the idea of unlearning as conscious letting go of ‘old knowledge’ and proceeded to define it instead as a “*reduction of the influence of old knowledge*” ([Grisold and Kaiser, 2017](#)). This opened a new set of explorations of the concept, including the exploration of Unlearning as an inward-oriented process of self-reflection, rather than externally driven changes and motivations (e.g. externally derived need for new skills and knowledge to be properly addressed). From here, the concept of individual unlearning ([Hislop et al., 2014](#)) emerged, focusing on self-knowledge and self-improvement and growth ([Grisold and Kaiser, 2017](#)). This individual Unlearning can be further split into fading or forgetting, and deep unlearning ([Rushmer and Davies, 2024](#)), the latter involving questions of unlearning deeper layers of our psyche, such as values and perceptions of reality ([Baumard and Starbuck, 2005](#)). [MacDonald \(2002\)](#) argues that questioning, reflecting and giving up some core values, worldviews and beliefs is an example of transformative

unlearning.

The last two types of individual Unlearning (i.e. deep and transformative) resonate with the original writings on the concept of Unlearning, which dates back to the 1950s ([Hislop et al., 2014](#); [Williams, 1958](#)), but which remain largely ignored in the organizational learning and management literature. This foundational writing explored the concept of Unlearning in relation to the dominant western mode and way of life ([Williams, 1958](#); [Said, 1978](#)). It was to an extent a self-reflection on the part of westerners questioning their own perspectives of the ‘other’ ([Williams, 1958](#)).

This paper frames Unlearning as a prerequisite for tackling the onto-epistemic violence and injustices that are prevalent in modern science ([Amin, 2010](#); [Quijano, 2007](#)), including economics ([Røpke, 2020](#)) and sustainability studies more broadly ([Turnhout, 2024](#); [Whyte, 2018](#); [McGregor, 2009](#)). This paper is about unlearning the deeply rooted individualist, materialist, and human-centric worldview, where sciences and education are narrowly defined as objective, solution-oriented knowledge produced through formal education system. In doing so, it contributes to further theorising of the deep and transformative Unlearning ([MacDonald, 2002](#)). For such unlearning to occur, we must first become aware of the harmful, unjust, extractive, colonizing character of such science and education, as well as about our own complicity in it, and how this science and education (and by default we, through our engagement with it) reproduce the harmful extractive colonial-capitalist socioecological relations and sociopolitical patterns.

2.2. ‘Deep and transformative Unlearning’ as a precondition for science that oppresses no body

What first triggered my own thinking and motivation about the Unlearning, was the realization of the sheer scale of violence and injustices of the current scientific paradigm that denies other ways of being, knowing, relating and living ([Amin, 2010](#); [Escobar, 2018](#); [Mignolo, 2011](#); [Viveiros de Castro, 2014](#); [Quijano, 2000, 2007](#)). The assumed universality of western, Eurocentric knowledge has been one of the key drivers of epistemic and socioecological erasure and injustice since the European colonial project to the present day ([Quijano, 2000, 2007](#); [Escobar, 2018](#); [Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018](#)). As [Lahsen and Turnhout \(2021\)](#) argue, hiding behind misguided assumptions of “scientific neutrality”, sustainability science has become a barrier for justice, sustainability, and transformative change. The universality of western science, the human centrism and domination, dualist and extractivist human-nature relations, and the patriarchy-serving “scientific truths” have been challenged over the past many decades ([Amin, 2010](#); [De Oliveira, 2021](#); [Escobar, 2018](#); [Laduke, 1999](#); [Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021](#); [Said, 1978](#); [Quijano, 2000](#)). Contributions by Indigenous, decolonial, critical feminist and black-feminist theories and thinkers have been instrumental in advancing the critique of modernity-coloniality, advancing the onto-epistemic plurality and informing posthumanist ([Haraway, 2016](#)), postdevelopment ([Rutazibwa, 2018](#); [Ziai, 2007](#)), multi-species justice ([Celermajer et al., 2025](#); [Wooltorton and White, 2024](#)), and relational perspectives ([Krawec, 2022](#); [West et al., 2020, 2024](#)). More recently, some of these critiques and approaches have been converged under the so-called ontological or relational turn ([West et al., 2020](#)), suggesting a shift from dualist, realist, and materialist to relational and process-oriented ontologies ([Whitehead, 1978](#)).

Informed by this larger body of research, the paper contributes to a relatively niche, yet emerging scholarship on unlearning in sustainability transformations, which argues that western dualist science and knowledge, rooted in the modernity-coloniality ([De Oliveira, 2021](#)) is one of the main obstacles for sustainability transformations ([van Oers et al., 2023](#); [Røpke, 2020](#); [Turnhout, 2024](#)). As the current sustainability science and policy are not leading to the desired outcomes, or even perpetuate the violence they aim to address, we must problematize and unlearn the underlying assumptions embedded within this science-policy complex. Such assumptions are widespread across

various disciplines and domains of policy and practice, from archaeology and history (Graeber and Wengrow, 2021), to economics (Røpke, 2020), international policy and governance (Rutazibwa, 2018), development studies (Ziai, 2007), philosophy (Kastrup, 2021), psychology (Siegel, 2022) and biology (McFadden and Al-Khalili, 2016; Oliver, 2020) among others. The motivation for unlearning here is a just and unoppressive ontology and epistemology. Unlearning becomes a tool for learning to know, to be, and to act differently. It becomes an act of care and solidarity and an act *for* care and solidarity. Unlearning requires questioning and problematizing the narrowly constructed notions of knowledge that only include certain supposedly objective and universally relevant scientific knowledge. This definition delegitimizes, erases, and misrepresents other than western scientific knowledges and ways of knowing (Krawec, 2022; McGregor, 2009; Laduke, 1999; Kimmerer, 2013; Kimmerer and Artelle, 2024; Whyte, 2018). There are endless assumptions that we as a society and scientists are taking for granted, without much reflection. Think of capitalism and how we take it as a given, and frame it narrowly as economic system only (Fraser, 2022). Same was, and to a significant extent still is the case for patriarchy, sex (ism), race(ism), development, international relations, all of which are based on and manifest unspoken hierarchies of worth and domination between beings, countries, and regions of the world.

2.3. The western scientist's guide to Unlearning

In my recent book, I examine in detail how ontologies and epistemologies — or knowledges and their associated assumptions, values, and beliefs — generate socioecological violence and destruction, drawing on examples from both past and present (Ramcilovic-Suominen, 2025b, 2025c). The question of what unlearning such onto-epistemic and ethical foundations might look like in practice is explored further in a forthcoming paper in this special issue (Ramcilovic-Suominen et al., forthcoming). To avoid repetition and remain within scope, I will focus here on what concretely is to be unlearned. When it comes to this, however, we can ever only provide incomplete lists (see for example Topa and Narvaez, 2022, and Table 1 below).

The table highlights three major hierarchies as subjects of unlearning—ontological, epistemic, and the primacy of economic growth—each of which generates further hierarchies of worth and domination, as examples of unlearning. These are upheld by colonial-capitalist ideas-structures embedded in the dominant sustainability sciences, especially the notion of human separateness from the rest of nature. How can we, as individuals and societies, unlearn what we have been taught and conditioned to reproduce? How can we cultivate kinder, more healing ways of relating to ourselves, others, and more-than-human, when love and healing are excluded from mainstream science—even from discourses on equity and sustainability. This underscores the need to let go of our unjust knowledge systems, as we

Table 1

Hierarchies and domination that needs unlearning and undoing.

1. **Ontological hierarchies:** Materialist and dualist over idealist, nondual and relational ontologies, reproducing further hierarchies of worth and domination, such as:

- Human over the rest of nature and other beings,
- Some humans over others (race, gender, ethnicity, social class, caste, religion, ability, neurodiversity, etc.),
- Matter over mind.

2. **Epistemological hierarchies:** Rational and intellectual over embodied and intuitive ways of knowing, reproducing further hierarchies of worth and domination, such as:

- Intellect over heart-, body-, and land-based ways of knowing,
- Western over indigenous, expert over citizen; natural science over social science, over humanities and arts.

3. **Primacy and hierarchy of economic growth** over other forms of wellbeing, perpetuating hierarchies of worth such as:

- Competition over cooperation,
- Capital accumulation over planetary health,
- Private property over common use and/or property.

might let go of an outgrown garment. Only by disposing of harmful ontological and epistemic assumptions can we imagine different ones (De Oliveira, 2021).

As researchers and scientists we must reflect on our complicity in reproducing onto-epistemic violence—through both our roles in Eurocentric science and in our daily actions. Yet this work is not only for academics or other ‘elites’; it is a task for all. For an academic audience, I offer guiding questions rather than prescriptions:

- To what extent do our concepts and theories ignore the knowledge of those we interact with in our research?
- To what extent do our methods extract the knowledge embedded in the local people and ecologies?
- To what extent does the promotion of supposed universal and globally defined goals and principles deny and misrepresent the communities that we are supposedly helping, by imposing on them such principles?
- How does the framing of “helping local communities” reproduce the coloniality and the white savior complex?
- Do we have the right to produce knowledge about someone else and their ways of being in the way we do?
- To what extent do our theories help the oppressed, deprived, racialized, and/or dehumanized?

Unlearning the violence of the current knowledge system is hard, if not impossible, within the dominant Western scientific paradigm. It requires reinventing the very idea of science itself—its purposes, goals, and methods. Most importantly, it requires letting go of the illusion of objectivity, certainty, linearity, and universality, as well as the fixation on goals and solutions. When we begin to see how our ontological and epistemic framings reinforce injustice and obstruct transformations, the desire to detach ourselves from them emerges. Yet alternatives are not ready-made; they must be imagined and cocreated. Beyond recognizing the violence of Eurocentric knowledge and reflecting on one’s complicity, imagining of ontological plurality and more just forms of knowing also requires emotional, psychological, and philosophical maturity—a self-knowledge gained through inner work. The next Step explores how self-knowledge and inner change are essential for broader collective or societal transformations, including those of modern science and education.

3. Step 2. The Self and the personal and collective transformations

3.1. Imaginaries of the Self and the illusion of separation

The literature on Unlearning suggests that unlearning the old creates space for different knowledge, and for knowing differently to emerge,

which in turn allows for different ideas and perceptions of the self to be imagined, to emerge, and to eventually manifest in the world. As knowledge shapes our behaviour and perception of the self, unlearning harmful knowledge and/or consciously reducing its impacts on our action and behaviour is key for personal/inner and collective/societal transformations. The same is true the other way around. (Un)learning about the self, through for instance self-study and contemplation, result in questioning the held worldviews, values, beliefs, societal patterns, and therefore triggers their unlearning, leading thus to different imaginaries of the self to emerge and manifest. Such correlations are however less explored in the literature, despite an emerging scholarship suggesting the interlinkages between the inner/personal and collective/societal change and transformations (Wamsler et al., 2021; Woiwode et al., 2021). In what follows, I explore the importance of self-knowledge, self-exploration, learning, questioning, and unlearning the different imaginaries of the Self and how and why that matters for the inner/personal and collective/societal transformations.

In the two recently published chapters (Ramcilovic-Suominen, 2025c, 2025d), the notions of the Self originating from distinct ontological positions, including the dualist and materialist and the non-dualist or monist positions, as the two extremes of the spectrum, are mapped out and outlined in some detail. The notions of the self there ranges from the ‘ego-self’, or what Karl Jung refers to as a ‘Persona’ (i.e. collection of our conscious experiences, senses, knowledge, values that build our personal identity) to a Buddhist ‘no self’ (Anatta or Anatman in Pali and Sanskrit respectively), which does not mean that self does not exist, but that there is no unchanging permanent self to begin with, as everything ever changes and is impermanent. There are numerous notions and interpretations of the self between these two extremes (i.e. the ego-self (or Jung’s Persona) and the Buddhist Anatman or ‘no-self’). As I elaborate in detail in Ramcilovic-Suominen (2025d), from a Yogic perspective, we can distinguish between two intracconnected selves: the true Self (*Purusha*), understood as pure consciousness or the light of awareness, and the ego-self (*Prakriti*), the impermanent mind–heart–body nexus. A key concept here is the ‘veil of ignorance’ (*Avidyā*), our mistaken identification of the ego-self as the entirety of who we are. Yogic practice—stilling the fluctuations of the mind (*citta vṛtti*)—helps to see through this veil and recognize our true nature as timeless, limitless consciousness, inseparable from all life (Loy, 2019a; Macy, 2021; Spira, 2017).

Contemplation and pondering on the nature of the Self, questioning, unlearning our identification with the ego-self as the sole layer or dimension of our being is I argue central for inner/personal and collective/societal transformations towards sustainability, peace and justice. While traditionally the inner or personal realm and change have been underexplored in sustainability transformations literature, there is a growing interest in linking the inner or personal with collective or structural change and transformations (e.g. Vogel and O’Brien, 2022; O’Brien, 2021; Sharma, 2017; Wamsler et al., 2021; Woiwode et al., 2021). Most of the above outlined false and harmful dichotomies, hierarchies of worth and domination originate from the false assumption that is the illusion of separate self. Thus, unlearning of this separation, or what Oliver (2020) terms “the self-delusion”, becomes central for not only unlearning the old, but also for healing and transforming individually as collectively, which can hold space for “new” notions of the self and “new” knowledges to be imagined and to materialize. This illusion is at the core of the materialist-dualist worldview and the associated human-nature divide (Ramcilovic-Suominen, 2025c, 2025d).

While informed by the teachings of Buddhism and Yogachara, the notion of the illusion of a separation and the associated hierarchies and harms are also central in Indigenous ontologies and sciences (Viveiros de Castro, 2014; Topa and Narvaez, 2022), as well as some western thinkers including Karl Jung (Jung, 2014). The notion of separate self provides the ideational bases or logics for the destructive socioecological order of colonialism-capitalism-racism (Ramcilovic-Suominen, 2025a, 2025b). The myth of human-nature divide, which was used in defense and

perpetuation of the colonial-capitalist project and imperialism, is hard to justify without an internalized assumption that I am separate, different, better than you, and your suffering does not concern me (Danewid, 2023; Fanon, 1952; Ghosh, 2021; Krawec, 2022; Laduke, 1999). Focusing on this underlying myth complements rather than contradicts the literature that identifies the colonial-racial-capitalist nexus as root cause of socioecological violence, as it reveals its ideational underpinnings.

3.2. Radical intracconnectedness and pathways to Unlearning

I originally proposed the concept of ‘Radical intracconnectedness’ as a response and tenet of radical change and transformations. As argued in Ramcilovic-Suominen (2025d) “*Radical intracconnectedness questions the strict division between the individual self (with a small “s”, also known as ego-self) and the whole, pointing to the “intra”, rather than “inter” connectedness. I build on Siegel (2022) term of “intracconnected” to emphasize a shift from viewing the self as an isolated individual to being a Self fundamentally interwoven with others and the natural world. I frame radical intracconnectedness as a tool for individual and collective change, which relies on and applies reflective activism and “active hope” (Loy, 2019b, Macy and Johnstone, 2012).* Intracconnectedness is about seeing reality with new eyes, seeing our individual selves as unique manifestations of one and same Life process. The term ‘intracconnected’ resonates with Buddhist teachings of ‘intra-being’ i.e. being and becoming in relation (Thich Nhat Hanh, 2017).

Radical intracconnectedness and unity is not about erasing or rejecting individuality, or individual perspectives, opinions, and experiences. Rather, it recognizes and values this diversity, while at the same time understanding that our individual selves and our differences are simply different manifestations of the same force of Life. Radical intracconnectedness emphasizes our individual selves with all its valid layers of experiences, emotions and perceptions as an important, yet only one dimension of ourselves. Unity of all beings is taught across the philosophies of the East, from Hinduism, to Daoism, Buddhism, including Zen Buddhism and mindfulness, to Yoga and their many variations. But the idea of inherent oneness is also found across the Indigenous teachings of coexistence with the rest of nature, expressed through the concepts of fluid identities and kinship, where everything as everyone is and becomes in relation, and has a role to play in maintaining and manifesting life on planet Earth (Viveiros de Castro, 2014; Krawec, 2022; Laduke, 1999; Topa and Narvaez, 2022). The modern sciences are also starting to propose similar ideas and theories, often rooted in or at least supported by quantum physics. For instance, analytical idealism (Kastrup, 2014, 2021) postulates existence of a larger ‘cosmic mind’, or larger intelligence that is interconnected and entangled in ways that can be explained through quantum physics (see also Carr, 2003; Faggin, 2019; Hameroff and Penrose, 2014; Koch 2019). Worth repeating is that the inherent oneness assumed in radical intracconnectedness does not negate diversity; it provides the foundation for it. Diversity is expression of the underlying Self. The metaphors of the ocean and the waves, the branches and the trunk of the tree, the gold and the golden ornaments are often used to capture what is seen as a contradiction between diversity and oneness.

Unlearning or ‘letting go’ of the myth of our separateness from the rest of nature and the world at large opens new avenues for personal and collective transformations. It challenges selfish, narcissistic, competitive, and domination-driven values and engagements and allows for cocreating new ways of intra-acting (Barad, 2007) and ‘intra-being’ (Thich Nhat Hanh, 2017), including becoming aware of our entanglements with other human and more-than-human beings and agencies (Haraway, 2016). Letting go of the notion of separate self, challenges the idea of competition and domination that is among the key drivers of the seemingly endless wars for land, resources driven by domination. It provides a renewed enthusiasm for collective wellbeing of the Self, which encompasses everything and everyone in the Universe. Such shifts

in perspective can change day-to-day actions and experiences, the ways we live, relate and interact, especially perhaps at a time of crises and unrest.

Inner transformations are inseparable from outer systemic or structural transformations. Realizing our oneness with what dominant science narrowly calls “environment” can help question the idea-structures of modernity-coloniality that are behind the today’s poly-crises. Yet, embodying this oneness in practice, and therefore dismantling the structures of violence, remains far from straightforward. Our efforts to embody and manifest oneness are constrained by ingrained habits, affective responses, fear of others’ judgments, and by social and institutional structures, which are based on and profit from the myths of separation and individuality. Beyond the cognitive, affective, relational, and institutional conditioning, our unlearning is further obscured by the internalized ‘veil of ignorance’, which similarly to modernity-coloniality, reinforces separation and individuality.

Philosophical and spiritual contemplation and practices can help pierce this veil, for instance through cultivating what Buddhist and Hindu traditions call the “sixth sense”, or the mind’s cognition and consciousness (Thich Nhat Hanh, 2017). But again, this requires going beyond knowing and recognizing oneness at a cognitive level only. It demands manifesting the philosophies of oneness and unity at and across scales, in our ways of showing up, being, interacting and relating. As we are all implicated in modernity-coloniality, no solution from within modernity-coloniality can suffice— “the master’s tools will not break the master’s house” (Lorde, 2023). Embodying relationality and nonduality, personally and collectively can help us break free from modernity-coloniality, but there are no ready-made ways or recipes to follow. Learning to sit with and to embrace this uncertainty and complexity is an important part of the (un)learning process.

4. Step 3. An invitation to unlearn separation for transforming and healing at scale

We can only ever give that which we have. We cannot give love if we do not find love in us. We cannot give safety if we are unsafe. If the best that we can offer with our work, research and science lead to violence and oppression to someone somewhere, unlearning and undoing the harm requires first and foremost healing from within, healing across the entirety of the Self. This is the essence of timeless teachings embedded in many ancestral wisdoms found across all cultures’ morality codes and ancient wisdoms. These concluding paragraphs are an invitation to imagine what healing might mean and look like at personal, collective, planetary and cosmic levels.

In Step 2 I reasoned why unlearning our learned separation is important in the context of deviating from the current path of Self-destruction, highlighting that unlearning at a cognitive level must be supplemented at a practical level too. Knowing something conceptually is an important precondition for change, but it does not effectuate it in practice. Manifesting this knowledge in practice does. What might unlearning separation and relearning an expanded Self look like across the many planes of our existence and intra-being? I do not claim to know the answer. These are not questions to be solved, but questions to be lived. I only know in my heart and bones that it has to do with unlearning of separation and unbecoming the individual selves.

The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali (O’Brien-Kop, 2023), as well as Buddhist teachings (Thich Nhat Hanh, 2017; Loy 2019a, 2019b) teach about the many ‘bodies’ (‘koshas’ in Sanskrit, ‘pañca-khanda’ in Pali), that can be understood as the different layers, or dimensions of the Self, which inter-are. Those ‘bodies’ include physical, intellectual, mental or emotional, spiritual, energetic, cosmic or consciousness body (please note that variations of terms are in use). Some contemporary scholars, such as those working with relational approaches in sustainability sciences (West et al., 2020, 2024), frame those ‘bodies’ as dimensions of being, but also dimensions of healing (Böhme, 2025, LinkedIn post). If we focus on healing, then healing across all the dimensions of the Self,

and across the different levels at which the Self manifests (i.e. inner or personal, collective or societal, planetary, and at cosmic or Universe level) is needed. Such healing might be what it takes for us to evolve beyond Self-destructive colonial-capitalist societies and transform into Self-loving and caring beings and relations (where *Self* refers to the expansive category of oneness and relationality outlined in Step 2). This is an enormous task. But it is also one which if neglected, deems all our other efforts insufficient. We may mobilise and organize transformative movements and initiatives, just to end up with movements that reproduce the same violence (Jauhola et al., 2025); teach meditation and yoga and end up with a global wellness industry hawking the planet; or evoke Georgescu-Roegen’s ‘bioeconomics’ (Georgescu-Roegen, 1971) and ‘limits to growth’ (Meadows et al., 1972) just to end up with another version of capitalism (Eversberg et al., 2023).

No one solution exists, no one person, or one group of people hold the key. There is no key to hold to. Many concepts and efforts—rewilding, regenerating, decolonizing, multispecies justice, conviviality, degrowth, living well, the pluriverse, relationality—continue to emerge, as they become named, imagined anew, or adopted—each of them doing their own bit. Some of those are at least partly aligned with and/or inspired by the Indigenous and Eastern, but also Western (e.g. Heraclitus, Plotinus, Jung) philosophies and ethics of nonviolence. Each of them spotaneously leads to shifts in perceptions, ideas, meaning, senses, experiences, and eventually shifts in attitudes, actions, practices, policies, social norms and structures, potentially building the conditions for seeing ourselves as an extension of all Life, and all Life as an extension of ourselves.

Again, no *one* action or initiative suffices. Yet, keeping in mind the intraconnectedness of all, the smallest of actions matter. As systems thinking (Meadows, 2008), fractals of change (O’Brien et al., 2023) and inner-outer change ideas and frameworks (Wamsler et al., 2021) suggest, each action and initiative in the right direction and each endeavour to healing one of the multiple dimensions of the Self, contribute to the healing process. Ripple effects, fractals, patterns of change that scale (O’Brien, 2021; O’Brien et al., 2023; Sharma, 2017) affect and hold space for change in other dimensions and across other levels, affecting thus the Living system in its entirety, at planetary and cosmic levels. These system and fractals of change approaches emphasize the potentiality of many small actions and initiatives to generate change at a higher level of the system, through scaling deep and wide (Moore et al., 2015). For example, one family may heal intergenerational trauma affecting future generations, agroecological farming and the exposure to more-than-human agencies in it may cause ontological shifts, alerting our philosophies and ideas of reality, one farm at a time (Ehrnström-Fuentes, 2025). Such events alter relations, redefine values, changing future patterns and contributing to system change.

These changes should not be underestimated and romanticised. They are hard, especially hard to commence. For example, healing intergenerational trauma, working with the shadow (Jung, 2023), and inner work on the Self are hard processes that demand dedication, time, and persistence. Yet, when we are mindful of practicing them, turning them into habits and default ways of being, teaching them through the ways we show up and through our action, they start to penetrate deeper, changing us, changing the ways we perceive, value, and talk about progress, success, meaning of life and so forth. It is there where post-growth and postcapitalist ideas, initiatives and lifestyles are born. Sometimes meditating, or going to therapy, can be more potent and radical than reading Marx or going to a protest, yet one should do that which resonates with their present state of awareness and way of being. Emerging patterns of change will differ from person to person. Yet when we heal from the illusion of separation, our actions begin to resonate with non-extractive relations to nature and seek lives of symbiosis with one another and the more-than-human world—just as today countless individual actions accumulate into destructive, extractive societal patterns.

To some, even to many, this discussion and proposition to work on

the Self and unlearning of separate Self may appear as depoliticizing, or even co-opting of transformations, as it does not talk about colonialism, capitalism, racism, sexism, directly. Yet, for those who see through this veil of ignorance, attention to the ontological and to the Self—when taken seriously—can strengthen rather than weaken struggles against colonial-capitalist oppression. It does so by moving beyond fight mode, beyond blame and us-versus-them narratives. This is the slow, hidden work that must be done—the mud from which every lotus grows. Speaking out of personal experience, after 15 years of working with structural and policy issues in transformations: unlearning separation far from depoliticization is a radical act. It conditions healing. The thinking with ontologies and philosophies of oneness and unity, relationality and nonduality, and discussion of inner-collective healing and transformations is the groundwork, the ground for a pluriverse of postcapitalist existences to be imagined, to emerge and thrive.

These discussions can be co-opted, narrowed down and reduced to self-care therapies and wellness trips abroad, in the same way the Meadows' et al. (1972) 'Limits to Growth' were co-opted and sold to us as sustainable development goals (SDGs), ensuring millions of euros and dollars for bureaucratic, epistemic and consultancy elites in development, finance, and the environmental governance industry (Lund, 2015). But this paper is not a call to adopt the language of intra-connectedness, inner and outer change, worldview shifts, etc., as concepts or policy jargon. It is an invitation to begin within: to notice our default ways, to study and question them, accept and challenge them, and when needed let them go, so that other ways of knowing and relating can emerge. It is an invitation to step into new REALMs, where we **Recognize** and question our default ways, choices, actions, and beliefs; **Examine** where they come from, how come do we hold them, and what they sustain in and around us; **Acknowledge** them, they had a purpose but they may no longer serve; **Learn and Let go**, and learn to let go, meaning learn from the old and let go of that which reproduces violence and injustice. **Manifest** new ways of responding, engaging and showing up, through everyday practices of care, reciprocity, solidarity, justice and love. Essentially it is an invitation to transform and heal one cell at a time, until the microcosmos that we are is healed, which through entanglement and intraconnection, triggers healing across scales at which we inter-are: the inner/personal, collective/societal, planetary and cosmic.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Ramcilovic-Suominen Sabaheta: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Conceptualization.

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