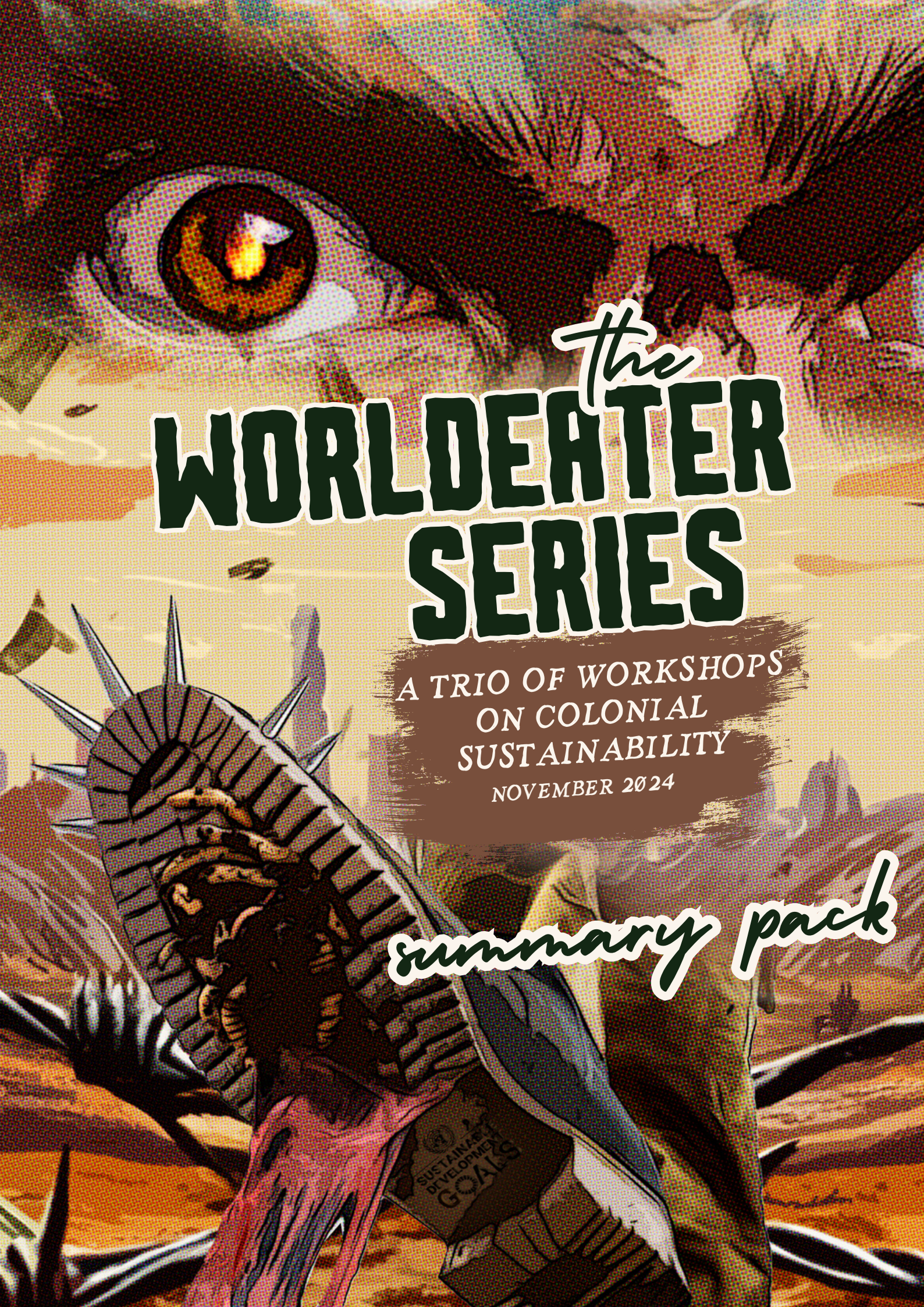

the
WORLDEATER
SERIES
A TRIO OF WORKSHOPS
ON COLONIAL
SUSTAINABILITY
NOVEMBER 2024
summary pack

The sustainability industry is built to sustain a colonial world order. What have been, and continue to be, the narratives, mechanisms and systems that establish and advance colonial sustainability?

Hegemon-spawning epoch

Prof. Nelson Maldonado-Torres introduced colonialism as not a historic ideology but as a centuries-long epoch representing the first global rule of a single human civilisation, imposing its might and power through global and regional hegemony in various arenas. “Sustainability” is a function of sustaining this epoch, particularly in seeking to survive the planetary systems collapse that it has itself created.

Various ideologies and propagandised narratives are created, cultured, institutionalised, and enshrined in law in order to sustain this colonial hegemon. Dominant narratives across the sustainability industry replicates hegemonic patterns particularly in the concepts of morality and authority -- complimenting the role of more explicit, vulgar and violent forms of colonial control and oppression through the rationale of sustainable development that is “ecological”, “regenerative”, “diverse”, “equitable” and “inclusive”.

The hegemon operates through infiltrating sacred elements of culture. We discussed the complex relationship between Christianity, originating from a local liberation movement against the Roman Empire as regional imperial project, and Christendom, a dominating set of hegemonic beliefs that legitimised coloniality in its first international project of “discovering” the Americas. Later, coloniality similarly infiltrated “science”.

Catastrophic colonial logics

Coloniality’s logics are markedly different from the logics of other and previous empires, bringing a new level to the systemic violence and oppression that is normalised by the hegemon. Coloniality imagines that only coloniality’s perspectives are legitimate. Therefore, when going to a place new to coloniality, despite there already being a local human population, it is in fact its “discoverer”. When meeting other cultures, they were considered “primitive” or “savage”, and the human beings considered “non-people”. When engaging with new ecologies, members of the plant and animal kingdoms are seen primarily as commodities to different extents of usefulness.

The establishment of the Great Chain of Being has continued to justify white supremacy in ideologies, cultures, and systems globally. In “sustainability” and regeneration” discourse, indigenous cultures colonised by the West are now farm grounds for further colonisation and commodification.

“Recolonisation” is a term we have used to refer to this new wave of colonisation under the banner of “sustainable development”, to the colonised earnestly taking up the role of coloniser, and to the “voluntary sale” of indigenous knowledges, proximity or permission to contribute to the sustaining of a collapsing modern Western civilisation.

Making a crooked way seem straight

Gaslighting, a favoured colonial mechanism, is only strong due to the centuries-long project of weakening, undermining or destroying of other ways of knowing, via systematic epistemicide and other violent operations. In denying ecosystemic relationships that once dominated humanity's roles and capacities as simply another animal species on Earth, coloniality objectifies and commodifies everything and everyone to uphold the supremacy of capitalism as a profit structure that benefits coloniality. This is done while building supportive systems to keep this "crookedness looking straight", through wilful blindness, dissonant propaganda, and even through Trojan horses, to use something seen as holy, pure and sacred, to pursue something deeper and darker.

A moral stance often taken by coloniality is the "burden and responsibility" of colonial rule, or of white supremacy. This shows up particularly in colonial innovation, solutionism, and maintenance. Measurement and metrics are promoted as ways to replace relational awareness, since relating too closely to actual realities would require undesirable interactions with the "pagans and saracens" that coloniality says it is trying to "save". Asserting and fulfilling the need to feel correct, invincible and invulnerable provides narcissistic enjoyment through the colonial pattern of asserting the One World.

Many "new" initiatives - such as the Inner Development Goals - advertise decolonial relationality rather than embedding or living it. Such initiatives do not - and may not ever intend to - find Right Relationship. They instead continue to tend to the narcissist's false self, scared of losing the ideal moral image they have invested so much in creating.

Manipulation lasagne

Exploring what makes mechanisms of manipulation actually work, we arrived at the metaphor of the lasagne. Layers that are carefully assembled to work together - a perfect dish of structures, rules, lock-ins, extractive measures - through a range of mechanisms like militarisation, weaponisation, narrative structures, coercion, economic traps, etc. Where one exists in these layers depends on one's privilege. At the bottom of the lasagne, the pressure of it all makes it impossible to unravel people from it or fight it. The manipulation lasagne is a potent combination of different controlling and extractivist approaches, combined into an inseparable and interdependent entity.

At a very foundational level, the manipulation lasagne is designed to exploit our very biology as a social species of mammal, as one of the five great apes on our planet. It manipulates the neurological dynamics that we have, targeting weak points effectively and turning it into industry. We are predisposed to certain cultures of propaganda that lead us into the space of belief systems. We practise the religion of those belief systems, feeding all the other layers of controls (reprimands, rewards) through cultures, systems and institutions. Understanding how the manipulation lasagne exploits us as biological creatures is an important part of acknowledging the power of these mechanisms: a part of us is always having to give permission to the lassagne for it to be able to do its work, consciously or unconsciously. This itself is a question of sovereignty.

Moving the economic goalposts

The Global North would not be able to survive without the Global South, but the Global South can easily and happily survive without the Global North. Westerners tend to not understand this reality, as Global North institutions are consistent in pushing the narrative of economic dominance of the West while obscuring reality.

If the industrial revolution of the 1850's was actually attempted without the centuries of slavery that the British Empire had built, would it have been a revolution at all? Globalised capitalism wouldn't have happened, industrialisation would have been insanely expensive given the resources required at scale - and it wouldn't have been possible to fund further colonisation. In this way we can see that colonisation does indeed have a central survival mechanism where it devotes significant research, development and innovation to feed colonisation. Exploitation is seen as a fundamental need to be able to power Empire and attain advancements that are then framed as "revolutionary" and "beneficial to everybody". This is the narrative that justifies colonisation's violence and oppression - by insisting it will all work out when we have scaled implementations of the benefits of "advanced systems" - the same gaslighting narrative that justifies Sustainability, Inc.

The gaslighting becomes clearer in arenas of economic competition where the Global South actually outcompete the Global North. In these arenas, "sustainability" is used as a rationale to box out Global South competition. This is often done through regulations and standards, driven by a selective moral narrative. It is effective: Global South competitors can never quite catch up with the new regulations and standards, and the ones who are harmed are the smallholders, informal workers, indigenous people and ecologies. The advertised morality of "sustainable development" is in itself directly harming those whom are, in other conversations, identified as those who "must not be left behind", but have already been harmed for centuries without real avenues for justice.

Living on the edge of collapse

The threat of all-out nuclear war looms over us as an existential risk that is more probable today than it has ever been, with seasoned commentators assessing tensions to be higher today than during the Cold War. This is one context in which, as modern Western civilisation collapses, one development may be catastrophic on one front but present opportunities on another. Trump coming back into power in the US, for example, unmasks fascism and corruption within the American left, and may perhaps represent humanity's best chance at averting nuclear war in the short term.

Be it COP29's dismal result on a global climate fund, or Kemi Badenoch's branding of the Global South's demand for reparations as "a scam", coloniality pulls out all the stops to deny justice for those who have endured systematic dehumanisation now for centuries in favour of modern neocolonialism. There can be no healing without justice and reparations on a political and collective level.

This is a process of healing for both the coloniser and the colonised, and everything in between. When we don't engage in decolonial activity in combat zones of global coloniality, everyone loses, both in the periphery and in the metropolis.

Relinquishment vs. Abolition

In seeking real and enduring change, there are two similar but different goals in ending coloniality in specific contexts. Relinquishment is the movement seeking change from those in power; abolition is the movement seeking to take power away from the incumbents, to redraw power structures.

There are many paths to relinquishment and to abolition. Here we note that they are different processes requiring different approaches. In taking the path of seeking relinquishment, expect exponential resistance, as the powerful are afraid of losing their privilege, status, wealth, and, above all, relevance.

Abolition, on the other hand, is by itself a generative process. The decolonial struggle towards abolition is inherently generative, creating anti-colonial structures and relationalities. There is no such thing as standing on the sidelines waiting for collapse. Collapse happens in the process of abolition, as we engage in the process of reconstituting our subjectivity, our frames of mind, our desires, and attuning ourselves to a reality that is really beyond the colonial logics. This can only be done in the difficult work of coming together in committing to decolonisation, and organising through collectives of different forms, with different intervention arenas. This is how abolition and regeneration are intertwined.

Getting our own house in order

Conservatism and liberalism within a colonial world order operate as two arms of the same body, advancing coloniality in every arena. The proximity of liberalism to decolonisation also exposes confusions and dissonances within the decolonial movement itself. Words are spoken when not meant; betrayals happen all the time in favour of complying with a colonial world order to receive validation and other rewards.

Accountability must remain a core practice within decolonisation.

In pursuing decolonial interventions and growing collectives of decolonisation, finding connection in the struggle is an important remedy in guarding against the harms of coloniality as it flexes throughout the collapse of modern Western civilisation.

In nurturing worlds beyond the Worldeater, we must grow our agency, our creativity, and our resourcefulness to gain necessary stamina, motivation and power.

Decolonisation is a movement that started centuries ago, and will continue centuries into the future. We take up responsibilities in our present contexts, accountable to decolonial futures yet to emerge.

Colonial sustainability

Sustainability, Inc. fails to name and address its relationship with colonial violence because doing so would entail confronting the white supremacist origins of its existence. It would entail recognizing itself as the Worldeater it is: thriving by stamping out decolonial counternarratives, bulldozing its way through solutionism that is willfully blind to its own so-called externalities. It advances a governance system that kills other worlds to perpetuate itself, using the concern for our common future as self affirming practice.

Sustainability, Inc. spreads by converting followers that feel attracted by the possibilities of contributing to a better world while earning a good salary. Very quickly, people become passionate believers, holding the SDGs as religious commandments, repeating the same mantras, and idolising the same old *crusty white dudes*.

The indoctrination grows in the brain like a cancer without self regulatory functions. Instead of growing by expanding itself, sustainability needs to "grow up" instead: it needs to sit with its complicity in the problems it is trying to solve, and interrupt its continued investments in the very systems that created those problems in the first place. Sustainability professionals need to disinvest from their entitlements to secure the futurity of the world as we know it, or to determine the direction of its change.

Worldeating

The Worldeater is the shape shifting character that perpetuates colonial agendas - that shapes structures and relationships while murdering, eating and eliminating what does not serve itself.

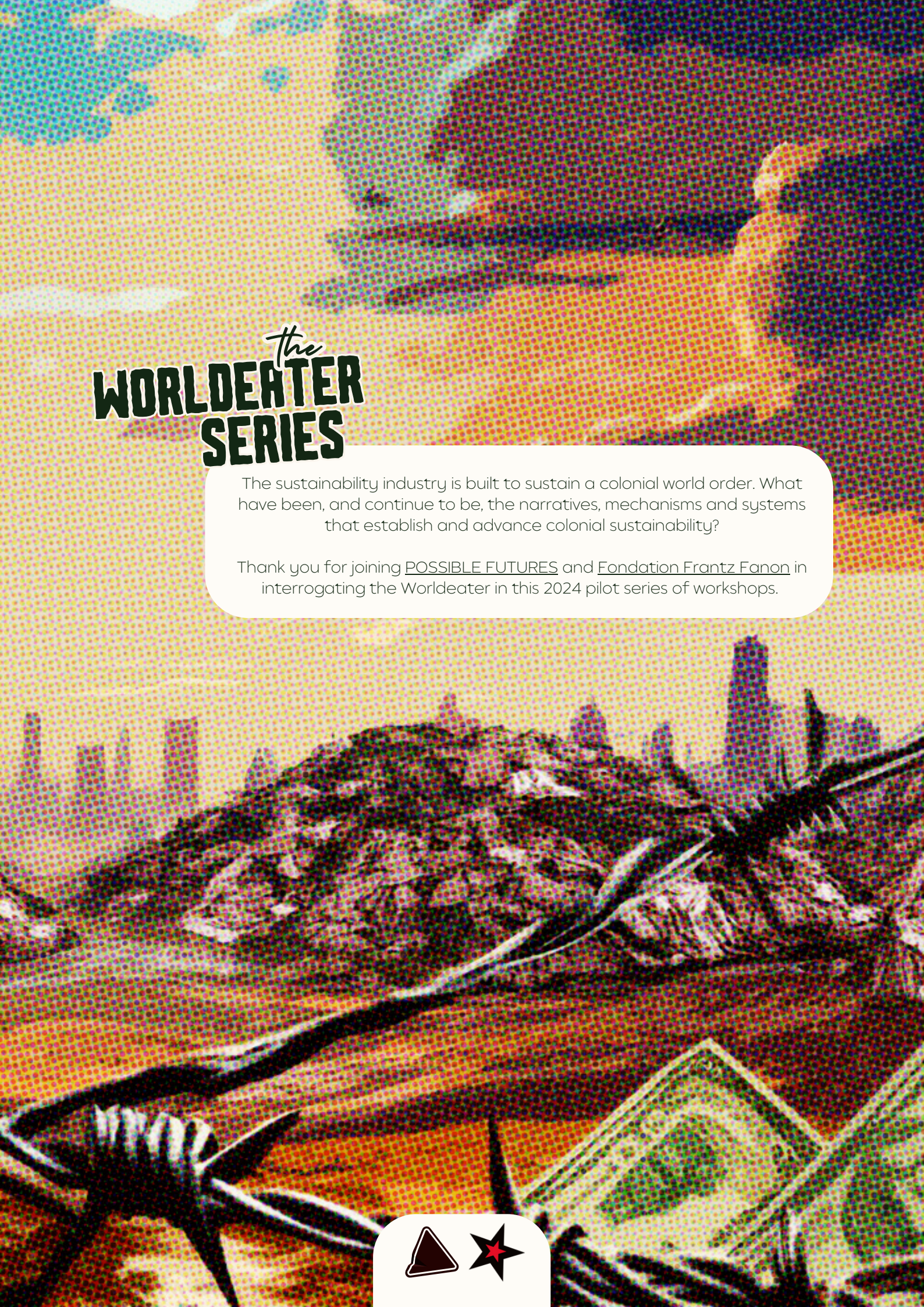
The Worldeater is the colonial and hegemonic world order that hides in good intentions, that justifies its existence to save those who are injured by it, in the name of a greater good that keeps status quo, keeping the same old few in power, often through agents who look and sound very different from them.

The Worldeater is not interested in justice or real change, and it does not feel remorse.

The Worldeater is the personification of those lost in navel-gazing and greed, who are incapable of taking responsibility or holding themselves accountable.

The Worldeater's traps command power and adoration, seducing with moral justifications and stolen wealth.

This is how the Worldeater has eaten entire worlds.



the WORLDEATER SERIES

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Thank you for joining POSSIBLE FUTURES and Fondation Frantz Fanon in interrogating the Worldeater in this 2024 pilot series of workshops.