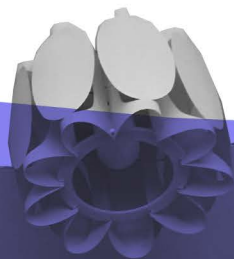


REAL

SYMBOL

ISSUE 1: EVEN THE TREES ARE
BEING DISPLACED



“There’s nothing... the spirit’s gone, we’re hemmed in...”¹

Over the past ten years our community has experienced loss, rupture, violence, displacement. The violence of rapid urban development, gentrification, social cleansing. The land around us has been sold off to developers, pouring concrete into our earth. Creating a new village, a new neighbourhood, a new playground for the rich. At the same time we have no social club, no public house, no community centre, no post office, no community shop and a growing feeling of being squeezed by the high rise luxury developments that surround our 1960s estate. What (or who) is next to go?

“We did not build our own city. We have been thrown out into this alienated camp of rats, in which we are not wanted, in which we are constantly reminded by everything around us that we are powerless. This city is not built for celebration even though it calls itself “Fun City”. Fun is for money. Fun is in buildings where you pay admission... We can dance in the street but that will not change the fact that our buildings are lousy, the rent is too high, the garbage is not taken away, and the backyards look like bomb craters.”²

“HOW CAN YOU BUY OR SELL THE SKY? THE FRESHNESS OF THE LAND? IF WE DO NOT OWN THE WATER, HOW CAN YOU BUY THEM?”⁵ THE SPARKLE OF THE WATER, HOW CAN YOU

“ [THE DEVELOPMENTS] FEEL LIKE AN ENEMY PARKED OUTSIDE OUR GATE ”⁶

This violence of these developments across the world are both real and symbolic. It is a violence that turns people out of their homes, placing profit and “assets” at the heart of housing and development policies. It is also a slow violence. It ruptures the ability to form community, it ruptures memories and belonging. It is sometimes hard to pin down - an uneasy feeling of un-homing. It is the severing of the *memory* of place. We’ve even lost our trees, our access to light, the very grounds of our being, undermining our right to dwell and our ability to exist.

“The life of residents is effectively suspended: there is no longer any incentive to improve the neighbourhood, nor is it clear how they should plan for the future. They are effectively trapped in the present, and displaced before the event.”³

“Rather than the emergence of spaces of communion that announce the healing of the nations through the story of Israel bound up in Jesus... we are now the inheritors and perpetrators of a global process of spatial commodification and social fragmentation.”⁴

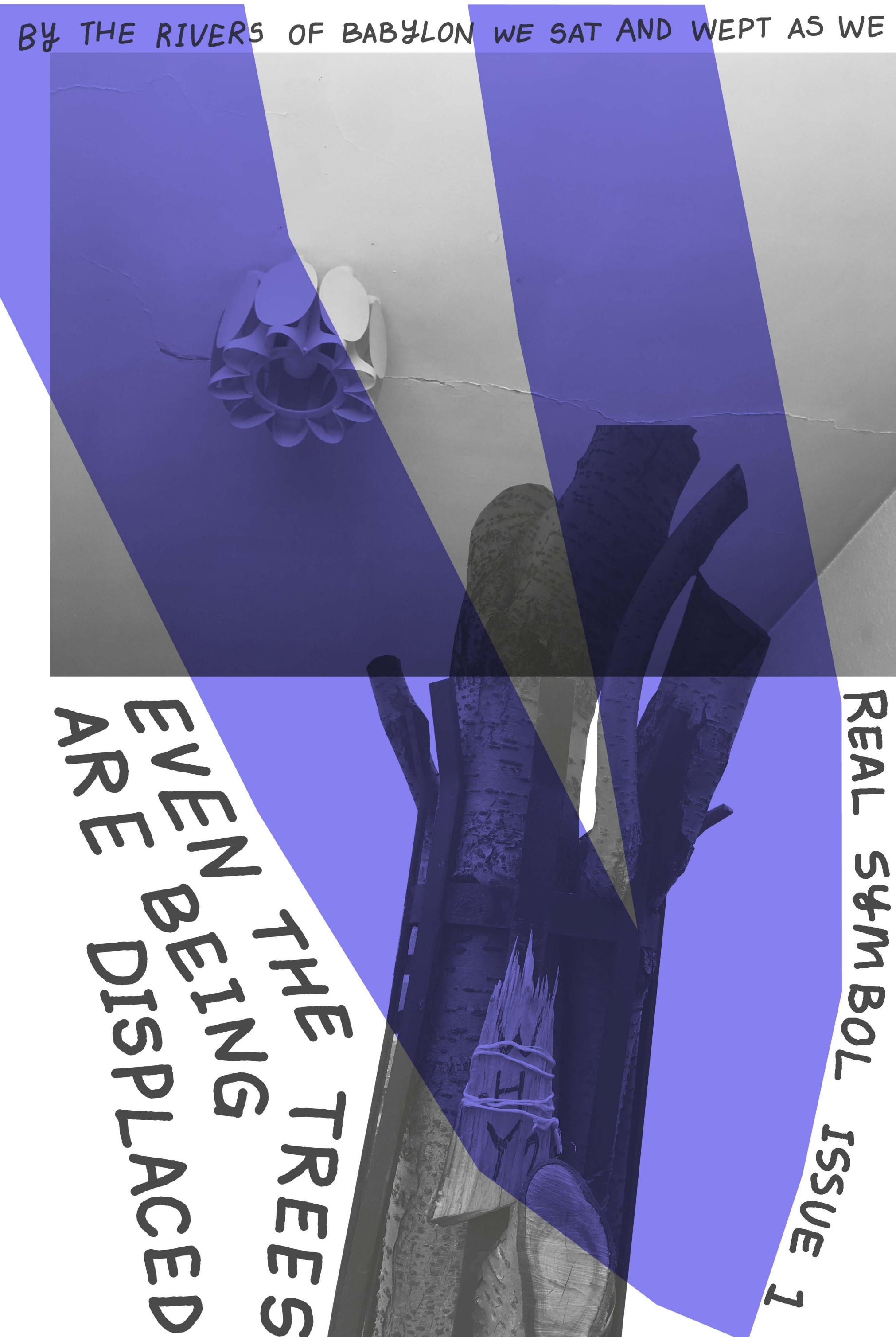


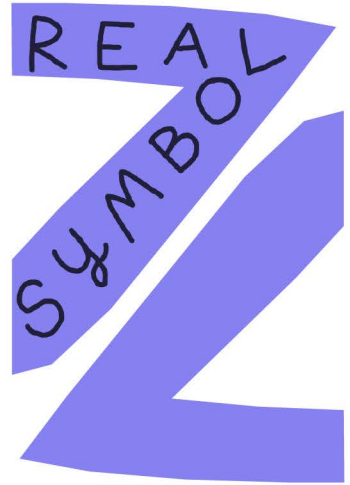
REMEMBERED ZION - PSALM 137

BY THE RIVERS OF BABYLON WE SAT AND WEPT AS WE

REAL SYMBOL ISSUE 1

THE TREES
EVEN BEING
ARE DISPLACED





These posters were produced by Alison Merritt Smith and Benji Spence, they are an accompaniment to the REAL/SYMBOL podcast produced by Alison Merritt Smith and David Benjamin Blower exploring themes of displacement, land and resistance. It is part of the research project REAL/SYMBOL funded by William Leech Research Fellowship Fund which funds research projects in the area of Christian social ethics and practical theology in the North East of England. This research has emerged from Alison Merritt Smith's work with Shieldfield Art Works and Dwell-being Shieldfield over the past 10 years. To listen to the REAL/SYMBOL podcast and for more information about the work, go to realsymbol.org

¹ Sheryl, local resident in Shieldfield

² Thomas Merton, *'The Street is for Celebration'*, (1979)

³ Elliot-Cooper, A., Hubbard, P., Lees, L., (2020), *Moving Beyond Marcuse: Gentrification, displacement and the violence of un-homing*, *Progress in Human Geography*, 44(3), 492-509.

⁴ Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination* (2010)

⁵ How Can You Buy or Sell the Earth? - Chief Sealth's (Seattle's) reply to President Franklin Pierce (1854)

⁶ Mark, local resident in Shieldfield
photographs by Alison Merritt Smith