

**Through Water and Earth. Migrating as a
Sensory Experience:**



SOAN60992&60993

Elemental Media: Documentary and Sensory Practice

2022



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Introduction: Between Nature and History

"I came by plane via New York and by ship to Liverpool. I traveled with a friend and we were directed to Moss Side to find accommodation when we arrived in Manchester" (Rude awakening, 1992)

England is widely known for its great cultural and ethnic variety, it is a country where you can find a piece of every part of the globe, walking around you can hear over two hundred different languages spoken, diverse spiritual traditions, and multiple foods that belong to the best of every international cuisine. The history of the contemporary English nation combines the traditional ways of life of the local natives of the island with the tradition of the many human beings who left the part of the world they inhabited to settle in the United Kingdom on a semi-permanent or permanent basis. Migration is a natural phenomenon of the human condition that represents a hopeful aspiration to find a life with greater dignity, people migrate because of political, economic, cultural, social, ecological, and environmental conditions.

This project was born out of a quest to understand the constitution of the city of Manchester through the different natural elements and their mutations, such as water, fire, air and earth. During the semester I set out to walk around the city to find different testimonies of migrant people who made Manchester their new home, in relation to the elements, and the sensory experience of walking around looking for human traces in nature led me to meet two young performance artists of African origin. They are migrants and inhabitants of the city of Manchester, who through the elements of water and earth, tell the stories of their encounter with the city, and the importance and impact it has on their formation as individuals, so much so that they describe Manchester as their home, and a fundamental part of their identity.



All the elements of nature are interrelated, and we could not speak of one without the existence of the other, it is these elements that make our human body relate and transform, they are the matter that allows us to survive in the world with certain particularities that differ according to the geographical space and time where we are, as our perspectives are different and variable. There are experiences in life that transform us and shape us in ways that we are never the same again, migration is one of these occurrences. The bodies that migrate are walking memories that have crossed the different portals of the world, always carrying a trace of the places where they have been. In this work we will use the experience of Elmi and Mandla, as migrant beings, and how water and earth converse with the city they now inhabit, and its landscapes. Through the story that the participants narrate, we will enter into a sensorial journey about what it means to be an African migrant in the city of Manchester. Also in a comparative way, different testimonies of migrants of African descent arriving in Manchester in the mid-twentieth century will be used. These testimonies are documented in different texts that were found in the AIU Race Relations Resource archive located in the central library of the city of Manchester, and which curiously share many similarities with the stories of Elmi and Mandla, allowing us to enter into a journey: time-sensory.

Historical Context

"When I got the taxi from Victoria Station, I was told that it's Manchester. It never stopped raining. I thought it was just a saying!" (Stanley, 1999).

Manchester was one of the most important cities in the world, the city of factories, Cottonopolis, the heart of the industrial revolution that changed European and world history. During the 19th century it was well known for being the city of the cotton industry, in 1871 32% of the global cotton production was made in Manchester, being denominated at that time as COTTONOPOLIS, importing up to one billion tons of raw cotton a year, and becoming a model of development and industry. This industry also made Manchester one of the places in England that profited most from the trade and labour of enslaved people along with London, Liverpool, Birmingham, and Bristol. There is evidence of black people in England as far back as Roman times, and today the black British community represents 3.3% of the total population, mostly migrant communities from the West Indies and the African continent.

"Little has been written about the Black communities of Manchester, though they have existed, this century, probably since before World War I. It is quite likely that there were Black people living in the area previously. For example during the 17th and 18th centuries it was fashionable to have Black household servants, most of whom were enslaved Africans brought to Britain by slaving ships' captains and returning planters. There were also Indian seamen in the Manchester area in the 19th century" (Sherwood, 1995).



Various historical records show the existence of black people in the city of Manchester since the 18th century, people from the West Indies and Africa came to the city for different reasons, one of the most significant waves of migration came as members of the various military forces that fought the Second World War on behalf of England, also in post-war times many foreign certified medical personnel, especially nurses, were recruited to come and work within the NHS, "in Britain, around 30% of nurses and doctors are from black and minority ethnic (BME) groups. "(Jones and Snow, 2010), others came because of political and social conditions in their home countries, and several also came seeking employment opportunities due to the comments they heard about the city from family and friends.

Currently, the black population in Manchester represents 8.6% of the population, making it the city with the second largest black population in the UK after London (13.3%). Black communities and people live all around the city of Manchester, but are mostly concentrated in the Moss Side, Hulme, and Old Trafford areas, where 5.1% are communities from the African diaspora and 1.6% from other origins, especially from the Caribbean. In most of the migration cases we analysed for this project, the most similar points were: the encounter with the cold weather and the memory of the first winter; the search for a room or a house; the labour market; the food and the differences with the British food; the discriminatory and racist treatment; and finally, the adaptation to the city that piece by piece became their new home.



1. Betty Dorman
 2. Joan Daley
 3. Ann Smellie (nee Ann Daley)
 4. Mrs Blaine
- Others not known.

The Negro Association with some women supporters.
[See also pp.66-7]





Black and white children playing together in Denmark Road, 1958



Carol Baxter (above left) as a first year student nurse standing outside the Nurses' Home, Hope Hospital, Salford (above right) as a second year student nurse on the paediatric ward, Hope Hospital, Salford.

Health Visitor Neisha Fielder (third from left) with colleagues at Longsight Health Centre, Manchester.



The Ethelric Club, St. Gerards Overseas Centre, Denmark Road, Greenheys, c 1962, which Afro-Caribbean newcomers used



Caribbean men gather at the Denmark Hotel, 1963



More press coverage of the Congress



Two children look longingly at the goods in Denmark Road, 1962



Returning from the shops Caribbean people on the east side of Denmark Road, 1962



Ishmael Wright at Manchester Victoria Station, where he worked for most of his life (Courtesy Ishmael Wright)



1. Betty Dorman
2. Joan Doherty
3. Ann Smalley (Joan Ann Doherty)
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Rami Clarke (nee Allen) (right) and in March 1970 receiving her theatre prize from the Bishop of Hereford (left)



Rami Clarke (nee Allen) a student nurse

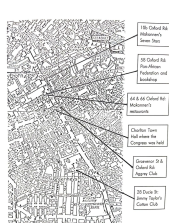
Methodology

"Apart from the bad weather, I don't regret coming to England. I have never been out of work and have put my money to good use" (Rude awakening, 1992).

The methodology used to develop this project corresponds with what Sarah Pink calls Sensory Ethnography, where it is necessary to pay attention to the senses in the midst of ethnographic research, since the sensory is a fundamental part of representing and understanding the lives of the other subjects of the research. The senses are part of our connection to the past, our view of the present, and the visualisation we have for the future. Ethnography is a participatory methodology that is used by anthropologists and different social scientists to study and describe peoples and their culture. This methodology is associated with participatory observation, interviews, different participatory actions, mixed with the production of a field diary, and the use of technologies and techniques to make visual and sound records. Sensory ethnography, unlike traditional ethnographic methodology, focuses on the exploration of sensory practice, moving away from the classical observational approach. "Doing sensory ethnography entails taking a series of conceptual and practical steps that allow the researcher to re-think both established and new participatory and collaborative ethnographic research techniques in terms of sensory perception, categories, meanings and values, ways of knowing and practices. It involves the researcher self-consciously and reflexively attending to the senses throughout the research process: that is, during the planning, reviewing, fieldwork, analysis and representational processes of a project." (Pink, 2015).

Sensory ethnography is a process of creation that draws on the ethnographers' own experiences, and how these connect with the people, places, and things encountered in the course of the research. The visual and sound products are not intended to produce an objective narrative of the reality, but aims to offer versions of reality that are as faithful as possible to the context, to the bodily, sensory and affective experiences, and to the negotiations and inter-subjectivities through which knowledge was produced (Pink, 2013: 35).

This work uses sensory ethnography to create, together with the participants of the project, visual diaries that use the elements of water and earth to form a series of testimonies that allow us to experience evidence of a part of Manchester's history through the narration of two of its inhabitants. Leading us to question the different migratory processes experienced by people belonging to black communities and other ethnic minorities who have settled in the city of Manchester throughout history. Oral memory, by storytelling, is also part of the methodology used to creatively develop this project, this is because the two participants are artists from the city, who prefer to use their words connecting with the elements to tell us stories that transcend the energies of water and earth, and speaks to us of the human experience. Finally, as part of the methodology to develop this project, I went to investigate the AIU Race Relations Resource archive where in the Africa-Caribbean migration section we found a collection of books and magazines, which tell the stories of the first settlements of black people in the city of Manchester, these testimonies are not only found in books, but also in a photographic archive, and a sound archive with several interviews with the voices and testimonies of the protagonists themselves who lived at the time.*



Some of the important sites in 1965



⁶ The streets of Moss Side in which black people settled in the 1930s and 1940s.



Fieldwork

"The story is a beautiful illustration of the intimate relation between becoming knowledgeable, walking along, and the experience of weather. By becoming knowledgeable I mean that knowledge is grown along the myriad paths we take as we make our ways through the world in the course of everyday activities, rather than assembled from information obtained from numerous fixed locations. Thus it is by walking along from place to place, and not by building up from local particulars, that we come to know." (Ingold, 2010).



This research work began by walking and cycling around the city of Manchester between February and May 2022. Winter was coming to an end and finally the city was showing a blue sky and the sun was showing its face, gradually bringing us warmth. The movement of the city also changed, and we could perceive how people opened up to share more with each other while the atmosphere became friendlier, and bodies were dancing according to the seasons: spring-summer. As a foreign student and ethnographer my fieldwork is directly related to the climatic factors and the experience of being a migrant, Manchester is a climatically unpredictable place and rain is a great friend of the city. By finding myself in this place, and perhaps because of my Caribbean origins, I was curious to understand and listen to the stories of how people of colour, especially communities of African descent settled in Manchester and how to relate these stories to the elements of nature, to the visual and sound recordings.



The fieldwork was carried out thanks to the collaborative participation of two young artists, performance artists, and poets from the city of Manchester, who migrated from Somalia and Zimbabwe, and ended up settling in the city to find their home. The first contact with them was by telephone where we introduced ourselves and I told them about the research, and the idea that they would tell me a story of the city, through the elements of water and earth. To record these visual diaries, I used a Zoom H6 recorder and a Panasonic GH5 camera, these technological tools become the extension of the body of a visual anthropologist, making every detail of the piece not only aesthetically pleasing, but also anthropological, where the priority is to understand and talk about the realities of the other participant in the research.

The audio recordings use the methodology of sound walking, "-by which I mean walks in the outside world guided by recorded sound and voice, usually using a personal stereo - have developed from a number of areas including oral history, museology, sound art and sound ecology" (Butler, 2006), as each of the encounters with the participants was carried out in the middle of a sensitive walk, where we try not only to prioritise the voice of the protagonists, but also to capture the sound of the environment where we are. The visual diary is composed of two films and a portfolio: The videos were recorded from the same angle to generate the sensation of walking through the space from a fixed point. When we look at the pieces, we are not looking at something that moves, but we are looking at a series of images, these figures are still images that move and are reproduced rapidly, every second 25 frames, allowing us to encounter the landscape, at the same time as we listen to the narration of the protagonist.

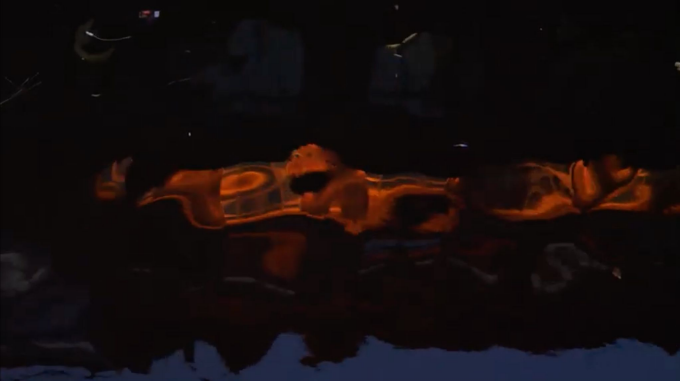
Water: Interceptions By Elmi Ali*

"I was born in Moss Side, Manchester in 1933 of mixed-race parents. My mum was English, my father was an African from Calabar in Nigeria. I know my grandmother was Ibo so I have Ibo and Calabar connections in Nigeria." (Rude awakening, 1992)



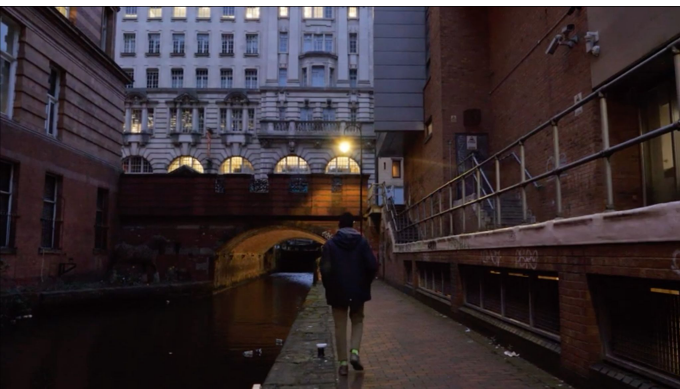
I met Elmi through a conversation I had with a friend from Somalia who lives in London when I told her I was looking for people in Manchester who could tell me a story about water, she looked me straight in the eye and said she had the right person for me. She grabbed her phone, sent a message, and within hours I had Elmi's contact. In a phone call I explained to him the reasons why I was looking for him, he gladly agreed to help me, coordinating our meeting for the next few days. On the 9th of March 2022 we met at four o'clock in the afternoon at the entrance of the HOME theatre, although spring was already beginning, the daylight hours were still in a state of spring winter, and my biggest concern was that there would be no light to make the visual record. I looked to my left and saw a man of dark skin, tall and thin walking towards me, the first idea that came to my mind was that he must be or have Somali roots, when he greeted me: -Hi! are you Ana?- I knew that my intuition had not been wrong. The first thing I asked him about his profession, he simply answered that he is a storyteller, then I discovered that besides being an artist he also works as a teacher in different schools.

*Link to watch the visual diary: <https://youtu.be/bSRQfr56QZg>



Our walk started on First Street, this is a very peculiar place in the city because of the intercession between the past and the present, there are some of the newest buildings, the nearest train station are the Deansgate train station and Manchester Oxford Road, the nearest tramway is Deansgate- Castlefield, below it all are the canals, the water, like paths of the history of the industrial revolution and the British transportation. Elmi begins by narrating the feeling of the rain, as most people in Manchester don't like the fact that it is one of the rainiest cities in England, but he doesn't have a problem with it. This beginning takes us directly into space-time and takes us to Somalia, a warm, desert land of ancestrally nomadic communities, where it strangely rains, all these words lead him to affirm that the stamp of rain with which he has been marked since he was in Somalia makes him value and identify himself as a fan of the rainy city of Manchester. This sound diary is a conversation and a walk with Elmi, who with extraordinary orality, manages to connect the history of the industrial revolution, with the canals, and the life of the city's working class.

At the end of the piece Elmi ends up using a metaphor about the water and the canals as the space where the flow took place through which many benefits came to the city, but also many imbalances, and inequalities, this immediately leads him to reflect on his own condition as a migrant and to acknowledge the existence of many migrants with different nationalities who currently live in the city of Manchester.





“My name is as you have said- Alfred Gaisie and I come from Ghana and I came into this country with my father in 1938. He was working for Unilever. He came, finished his business and left- went back to the Gold Coast. Unfortunately, he passed away and I started here on my own. I was here when the war was declared- and during that period it was very, very difficult for Africans to live in this country.” (Pan-African Congress 50 Years On - Alfred Gaisie, 1995).

Elmi has been living in the city of Manchester for ten years. Somalia, his country of birth, has been suffering for decades from a civil war that has generated one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world, while facing a devastating drought, food insecurity, malnutrition and various diseases that have caused an internal displacement of more than two million people, currently in England there are between 250,000 and 400,000 Somali immigrants. On the road to finding opportunity Elmi came to Manchester, and grew up as an adult there, made it his home, learned its stories, is a resident of Moss Side, a neighborhood that is the heart of the African diaspora in Manchester as it was long one of the few areas where newly arrived people of colour could rent a room, and like so many other African migrants he found in this city a new beginning, and a new perspective.

Earth: Terra Mater (Mother Earth) By Mandla Rae *

"I'm from Bendel State, Nigeria. We had our own languages which we spoke, and learnt english at school. We grew up and married in the native custom. My brother's employer offered me a job, which I could not accept due to my brother's displeasure. I then went to Lagos and got a job with a white man who played golf. I paid for my passport with the wages I received and arrived in Liverpool in 1937. You couldn't get a job as a black man in Liverpool, when it snowed heavily, you are asked to clear the road. (...) I bumped into a friend who was visiting Liverpool from Manchester and I accepted the invitation to live in Manchester." (Rude awakening, 1992).



I had been trying to meet Mandla for a while, different people who know about my searches had told me about her and her work, but I had never met her on the streets before, in the end it was Elmi who linked us since they know each other and have been friends for a long time. When I made the visual diary with Mandla, I had already read and listened to several of the testimonies of the first black Mancunians, which made this exercise a little clearer in its intention and with certain more directed questioning, different to what happened with the water exercise, as at that time I had no clarity that this project would focus on sensitive stories of migration.

*Link to watch the visual diary: <https://youtu.be/S7vPbztDQGo>

To meet Mandla I had to take the train from Manchester Piccadilly to Flower Field Station, a journey that takes approximately 15 minutes, it was the 20th of May 2022 and I had arranged to arrive at the station at 3pm, but the train was delayed and I could only arrive at around 3:45pm, I had previously spoken to her on the phone where I explained that I was gathering stories of black migration in the city of Manchester through the elements, she agreed to be one of the participants, but she told me that her element would have to be earth.



When we met at the station we walked to Hyde Park in the south of Manchester, a space that immediately transports you to another place, takes you out of the city, and makes you feel like you are in the middle of a small forest. Mandla, born in Zimbabwe, came to England as a child, her grandmother was the person who raised her, which allowed her to learn and grow up in her native Ndebele language. In the middle of our walk Mandla confessed to me that as a child she was afraid of other people finding out that she spoke a different language to English, as this could be an additional source of jokes. The visual diary begins with her introducing herself in Ndebele, because it is quite symbolic to talk about the land in your own ancestral language, as languages belong to territories, and generating an auditory and sensory journey to that Zimbabwe that is not seen but heard. In 2016, six years ago, Mandla came to Manchester, she came to visit a friend and ended up staying because she discovered herself in a land where her being could navigate more peacefully than in London, it was in Manchester where she learned to enjoy the Earth and nature more because the areas she has mostly inhabited are urban, and it is here in Manchester where she has been able to understand the Earth as a life source element that has made her call this city her home, and the Earth being the planet where each one of us, human beings, can live.



Conclusions

The idea of this project was to narrate the migratory experiences of Elmi and Mandla through water and earth, and by creating visual and sensory diaries that would allow us to enter the landscapes of the city of Manchester. Throughout the course of this research project, one of the conclusions that emerged was that the migration experience of black people in the last century is still sensorially very similar to the migration processes of contemporary black Mancunians, many of these similarities are due to the climatic issue, and the change that is generated in the body when one comes from a warm land to live in a cold land, we could deepen in this conclusion if we read Fanon in his book *Black Skins, White Masks* (Fanon, 2020) where the first chapter is an analysis of what happens in the body of the black man when he finds himself in the land of the white man.

When the archival work was carried out, all the testimonies given by black migrants in the last century revolved around the discriminatory and racist experiences they had suffered when they arrived in the city: both in educational institutions and in the workplace, and the segregated treatment in the search for housing and in pubs. In this work the particular focus was not on discrimination or racism, but on the journey of two black migrants in Manchester who, through water and land, arrived here and built their new home in this space, to such an extent that the participants recognised themselves as Mancunians. England and Manchester continue to be spaces full of contradictions for people of colour, black and minority ethnic migrants, but despite all these contradictions it becomes undeniable that the city of Manchester is also the home of a black community, proudly Mancunian, which is gradually growing stronger every day and finding its own spaces.

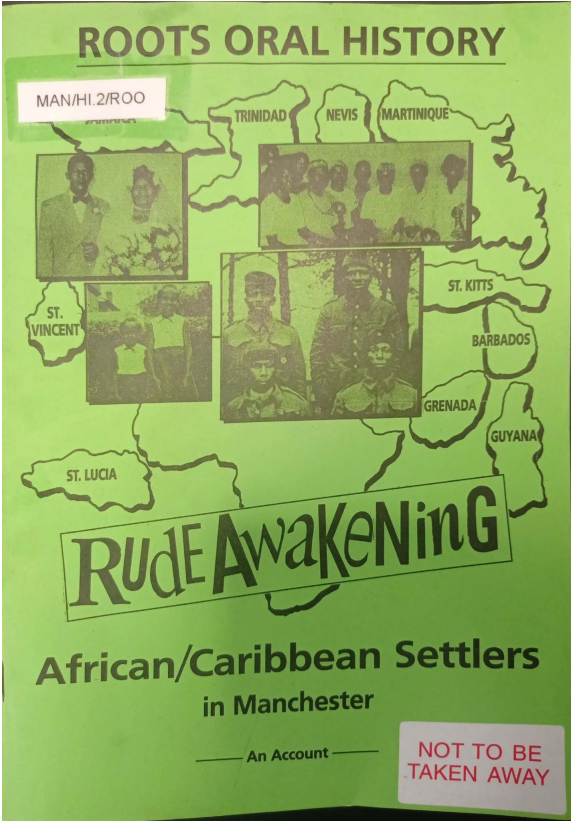
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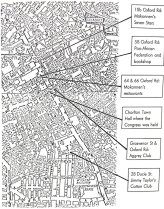
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The Negro Association with some women supporters. (See also pp.66-7)



Some of the important sites in 1945



The streets of Moss Side in which black people settled in the 1930s and 1940s.

The Statesman.

Subject Peoples' Demand For Freedom

LONDON, June 14.—The demand for self-determination in the colonies is not only a moral imperative, it is also a practical one. It is the only way to secure the peace and stability of the world. It is the only way to secure the economic and social progress of the world. It is the only way to secure the political and cultural development of the world. It is the only way to secure the spiritual and intellectual growth of the world. It is the only way to secure the physical and material well-being of the world. It is the only way to secure the mental and emotional health of the world. It is the only way to secure the moral and ethical standards of the world. It is the only way to secure the scientific and technological advancement of the world. It is the only way to secure the artistic and literary expression of the world. It is the only way to secure the religious and philosophical beliefs of the world. It is the only way to secure the historical and cultural heritage of the world. It is the only way to secure the future of the world.

Chicago Defender
Pan-African Conference
Set For Paris In Fall

"Apart from the bad weather, I don't regret coming to England. I have never been out of work and have put my money to good use" (Rude awakening, 1992).





Black and white children playing together in Denmark Road, 1958



Carol Baxter (above left) as a first year student nurse standing outside the Nurses' Home, Hope Hospital, Salford (above right) as a second year student nurse on the paediatric ward, Hope Hospital, Salford.

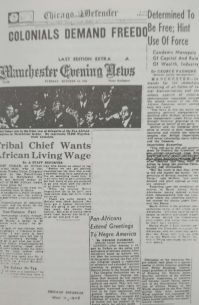
Health Visitor Neisha Fielder (third from left) with colleagues at Longsight Health Centre, Manchester.



The Ethelric Club, St. Gerards Overseas Centre, Denmark Road, Greenheys, c.1962, which Afro-Caribbean newcomers used



Caribbean men gather at the Denmark Hotel, 1963



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Two children look longingly at the goods in Denmark Road, 1962



Returning from the shops Caribbean people on the east side of Denmark Road, 1962



Ishmael Wright at Manchester Victoria Station, where he worked for most of his life (Courtesy Ishmael Wright)



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Jessie Edwards as a student nurse.



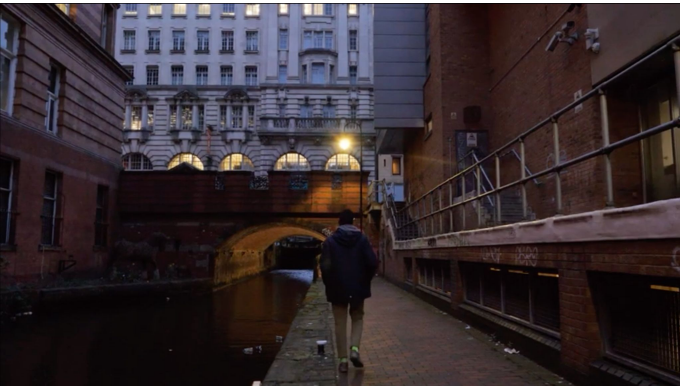
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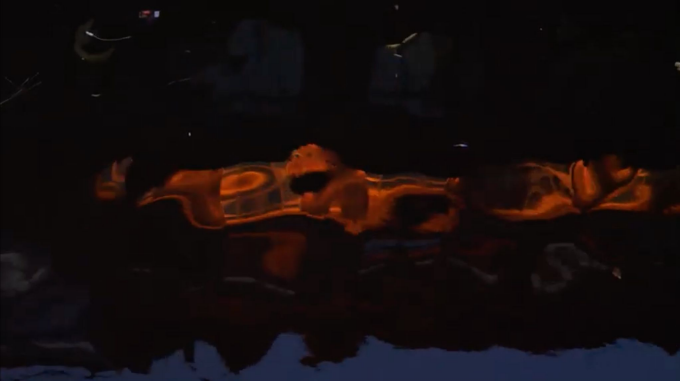


Water: Elmi Ali

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Earth: Mandla Rae

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*Link to watch the visual diary: <https://youtu.be/S7vPbztDQGo>



Conclusions

The idea of this project was to narrate the migratory experiences of Elmi and Mandla through water and earth, and by creating visual and sensory diaries that would allow us to enter the landscapes of the city of Manchester. Throughout the course of this research project, one of the conclusions that emerged was that the migration experience of black people in the last century is still sensorially very similar to the migration processes of contemporary black Mancunians, many of these similarities are due to the climatic issue, and the change that is generated in the body when one comes from a warm land to live in a cold land, we could deepen in this conclusion if we read Fanon in his book *Black Skins, White Masks* (Fanon, 2020) where the first chapter is an analysis of what happens in the body of the black man when he finds himself in the land of the white man.

When the archival work was carried out, all the testimonies given by black migrants in the last century revolved around the discriminatory and racist experiences they had suffered when they arrived in the city: both in educational institutions and in the workplace, and the segregated treatment in the search for housing and in pubs. In this work the particular focus was not on discrimination or racism, but on the journey of two black migrants in Manchester who, through water and land, arrived here and built their new home in this space, to such an extent that the participants recognised themselves as Mancunians. England and Manchester continue to be spaces full of contradictions for people of colour, black and minority ethnic migrants, but despite all these contradictions it becomes undeniable that the city of Manchester is also the home of a black community, proudly Mancunian, which is gradually growing stronger every day and finding its own spaces.

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