



## W. Arthur Lewis and economic development

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# W. Arthur Lewis and economic development: a Manchester story

Gerardo Serra

[gerardo.serra@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:gerardo.serra@manchester.ac.uk)

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## Grounding W. Arthur Lewis

Born on the small island of St Lucia (British West Indies), William Arthur Lewis (1915-1991) was the first scholar of African Caribbean descent to be awarded, in 1979, the Nobel Prize in Economics.<sup>1</sup> It was one of Lewis' many 'firsts': he was the first West Indian to win a Nobel Prize in any field, the first Black professor at a British University, and the first President of the Caribbean Development Bank.<sup>2</sup> Some of the insights that led him to become one of the founders of development economics occurred to him in Bangkok when, in 1952, he had the sudden realisation 'that all one needed to do was to drop the assumption – then usually made by neoclassical macroeconomists – that the supply of labor was fixed'.<sup>3</sup> In 1957, Lewis travelled to Ghana, to become the financial advisor to the first British colony in Sub-Saharan Africa to become independent. In 1958 he became the first Principal of African Caribbean descent of the University College of the West Indies (later University of West Indies, where Lewis served as the first Vice-Chancellor) before taking up an appointment at the University of Princeton in 1963. There he spent most of his time until retirement.

These biographical snippets portray Lewis as a cosmopolitan intellectual, who in different guises as an economic theorist (albeit one always inspired by history and guided by empirical

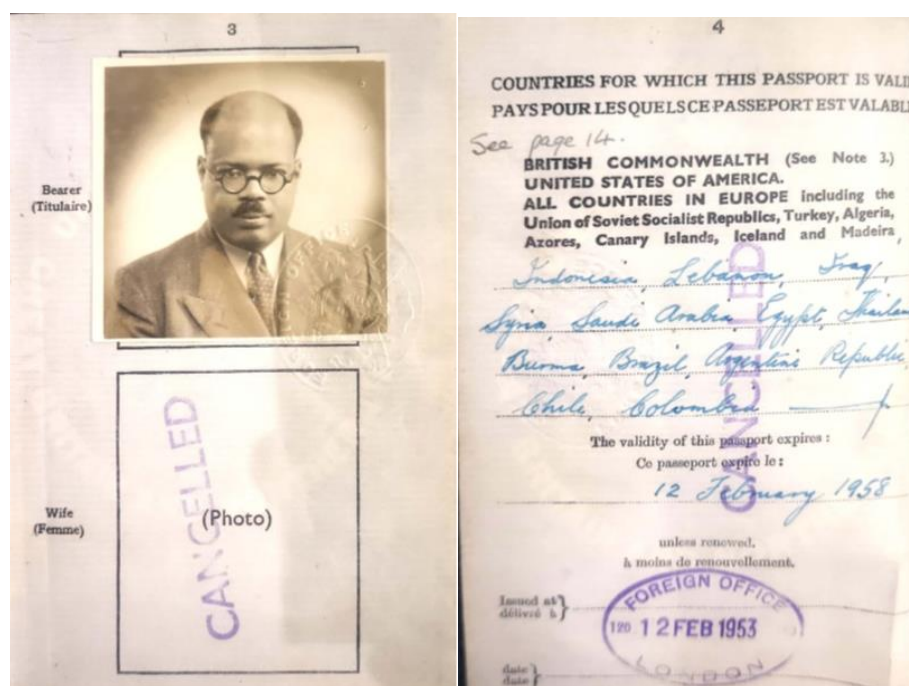
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<sup>1</sup> This chapter draws extensively on two excellent biographies: R. Tignor, *W. Arthur Lewis and the Birth of Development Economics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); B. Ingham and P. Mosley, *Sir Arthur Lewis: A Biography* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). The latter carves a more prominent place for Manchester. I would like to thank Jesús Cháirez-Garza, Jacob Norris, and Kerry Pimblott for their careful reading of this chapter. All errors remain my responsibility.

<sup>2</sup> N. Girvan, 'Sir Arthur Lewis – A Man of His Time, and Ahead of his Time- A Public Lecture', *Journal of Eastern Caribbean Studies*, 34:4 (2009), 82-99, pp. 82-83.

<sup>3</sup> W.A. Lewis, 'Development economics in the 1950s', in G.M. Meier and D. Seers (eds.) *Pioneers in Development*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the World Bank, 1984), 121-137, p. 132.

concerns), as a university head and as an international ‘expert’, built institutions of learning, advised governments, and changed the way we think about growth and development. Yet, this chapter argues, none of these elements in Lewis’ life and work would be fully legible without grounding them in a specific time and place: Manchester in the 1940s and 1950s. Manchester is a central node in the imperial topography within which Lewis, as a colonial subject animated with anti-colonial ideas, built his identity as a social scientist and as an activist. The complementarity of imperial topographies and Lewis’ global reach is exemplified in his passport (figure 1), with stamps from Barbados, Ghana, Egypt, Japan, Mexico and Nigeria, but also Italy, Canada and the United States.



**Figure 1: Lewis' UK passport, issued in 1953. W. Arthur Lewis papers (WAL hereafter), Box 1, Folder 12. Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University.**

In conversation with Lord Simon of Wythenshawe (an industrialist, politician and chair of the University of Manchester’s council), Lewis pointed out that ‘the world is his laboratory’, and that ‘if he wants to write sensible and practical things he must spend a lot of time in other countries’.<sup>4</sup> Yet, grounding him in Manchester makes visible the critical interconnections between his lives as an economist, anti-colonial intellectual and social activist. Despite this volume’s primary focus on the University of Manchester, it is only by thinking more broadly about the entanglements of the city’s history with Lewis’s life that the multidimensional nature

<sup>4</sup> Manchester City Library (hereafter MCL), Papers of Ernest Simon, 1<sup>st</sup> Baron Simon of Wythenshawe, M11/13 Lewis, ‘Note by Lord Simon – Prof Arthur Lewis, 24 July 1956’. Thanks to Stuart Jones for making me aware of this source and sharing it with me.

of his commitment to economic development can be holistically reconstructed. Through the lens of Manchester, this chapter shows that this was not limited to the academic task of explaining why some nations are rich and others are poor (and what the latter can do to alter their fate), but also to an anti-colonial interrogation of political and economic forms, and to community building in deprived areas.

### **Reimagining anti-colonialism at Chorlton-on-Medlock Town Hall**

Between 15 and 21 October 1945, Manchester hosted the 5<sup>th</sup> Pan-African Congress (PAC hereafter). This brought together intellectuals and activists like the Trinidadian George Padmore, the African American W.E.B. Du Bois, the Manchester-based Guyanese T. Ras Makonnen, and many African nationalists about to spearhead their countries' struggle for independence (among others, Kwame Nkrumah, Hastings Banda, and Jomo Kenyatta). While barely attracting any contemporary press coverage (with the key exception of the *Manchester Guardian*), the PAC represents a landmark in the history of anticolonialism and is currently remembered as such in Manchester's urban landscape (figure 2).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Thanks to Josephine Nevill for information on the lack of press coverage.



**Figure 2: Plaque commemorating the 5th Pan-African Congress on the front of the former Chorlton-on-Medlock Town Hall building. Photograph by the author.**

Chorlton-on-Medlock Town Hall, where the congress took place, was decorated with ‘the flags of the Republics of Haiti and Liberia’ and the flag of Ethiopia’.<sup>6</sup> The flags of the only independent Black nations evoked simultaneously a world free of colonial domination and the necessity to imagine new political communities. Indeed, despite significant differences, the many souls of the PAC converged in emphasising the necessity to fight imperialism, abolish racial discriminations, and build transnational networks of solidarity.<sup>7</sup> These demands were grounded in a commitment to assert the self-determination of colonial people by summoning political forms that could simultaneously provide alternatives to the nation-state and overcome the economic dependency inherent in the metropolis-colony relation.<sup>8</sup> In the PAC, this

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<sup>6</sup> MCL, Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race Relations Resource Centre, GB3228.34/1/8, ‘Pan-African Congress, Press Release no. 7’, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> The most exhaustive work on the Congress is H. Adi and M. Sherwood, *The 1945 Manchester Pan-African Congress Revisited, with Colonial and ... Coloured Unity (the report of the 5<sup>th</sup> Pan-African Congress)* edited by George Padmore (London: New Beacon Books, 1995).

<sup>8</sup> A. Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), especially chapter 3.

willingness to subvert imperial political topographies resulted in the calls for the creation of a West Indian and a West African federation.<sup>9</sup>

At the time of the Congress, Lewis was already an affirmed economist with significant experiences in academia and policy advice. He dated his Pan-African convictions to his childhood in the West Indies: when he was seven years of age, his father took him to a meeting of the local Marcus Garvey association.<sup>10</sup> Following completion of his education in St. Lucia, a prestigious scholarship took him to Britain, where he obtained a Bachelor of Commerce and a PhD from the London School of Economics. There he became very involved in the Fabian Society. Following an early interest in industrial economics, his work at the Colonial Economic Advisory Committee, the Colonial Economic and Development Council and the Colonial Development Corporation contributed to shift his focus to the economic issues of the developing world and taught him some hard lessons on the nature of policy-making.<sup>11</sup> Although there is no archival evidence suggesting that Lewis attended the Congress, the PAC is crucial to understand his life and thought. Lewis' anticolonial networks in London included several of the Congress' key individuals (like Padmore and Nkrumah).<sup>12</sup> In 1946 Lewis contributed to organising a Fabian Colonial Bureau conference that brought together British socialists, representatives of the Colonial Office, and spokespersons from West Africa and the West Indies.<sup>13</sup> Despite Lewis' ambivalence towards its more radical facets, inscribing Lewis within the anticolonial moment epitomised by the PAC allows capturing the entanglements between his politics and his economic thinking. In his own words: 'my interest in [economic development] was an offshoot of my anti-imperialism'.<sup>14</sup>

Lewis' first key work, the Fabian pamphlet *Labour in the West Indies*, described the 1930s workers' protests that arose from halved export prices, widespread poverty and unemployment.<sup>15</sup> Lewis identified a wide range of economic policies to improve Caribbean living standards, including 'increased preferential trade treatment', import substitution,

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<sup>9</sup> The Congress' resolutions are reproduced in Adi and Sherwood, *Manchester Pan-African Congress*, pp. 102-114.

<sup>10</sup> W. Arthur Lewis, 'W. Arthur Lewis', in W. Breit and R.W. Spencer (eds) *Lives of the Laureates: Seven Nobel Economists* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986), 1-19, p. 12.

<sup>11</sup> On Lewis' life and work until 1945, see Tignor, *W. Arthur Lewis*, pp. 1-78 and Ingham and Mosley, *Sir Arthur Lewis*, pp. 1-84.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 44-45.

<sup>13</sup> Y. Mine, 'The Political Element in the Works of W. Arthur Lewis: The 1954 Lewis Model and African Development', *The Developing Economies*, XLIV:3 (2006), 329-55, p. 341. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1746-1049.2006.00020.x>

<sup>14</sup> Lewis, 'W. Arthur Lewis', p. 12.

<sup>15</sup> W. Arthur Lewis, *Labour in the West Indies: The Birth of A Workers' Movement with an Afterword 'Germs of an Idea' by Susan Craig*, (London: New Beacon Books, 1977 – 1<sup>st</sup> edition 1939), pp. 17-43.



industrialisation, and redistribution of income and land.<sup>16</sup> But to overcome their predicament as a group of small islands dependent on exports of raw materials, the West Indies ultimately required a change in political structure.<sup>17</sup> Throughout his life, Lewis remained a vocal proponent of a West Indies Federation. This eventually materialised between 1958 and 1962, this time with the support of the Colonial Office, eager to minimise the financial costs of impending independence (although Lewis' native island of St Lucia became independent only in 1979, the same year that he won the Nobel Prize). Due to diverging visions and incompatible vested interests, the Federation collapsed. This period largely overlapped with Lewis' tenure as Principal of the University College of the West Indies and Vice-Chancellor of the University of the West Indies, which proved to be a veritable microcosm of the political tensions and financial difficulties of federalism.<sup>18</sup> This experience left Lewis disillusioned but did not end his plea for federalism and for a holistic approach to economic issues.<sup>19</sup>

Two decades later, he still maintained that 'In the end, economics is not enough. People of different races, religions, and cultures have to learn to live peacefully with each other, and to develop pluralistic and federal institutions where this is the only way'.<sup>20</sup> Concluding his volume on racial conflict and economic development, this passage suggests that Lewis' federalism entailed more than the achievement of economies of scale (a key concern in the case of the West Indies). Nor did Lewis' federalism only gesture at alternative supra-national orders. Rather, it underpinned his conception of pluralist democracy, which anticipated important aspects of what political scientists would later call 'consociational democracy'.<sup>21</sup> This was particularly evident in West Africa. While sharing African leaders' 'anti-imperialism and their goal of an Africa united in stages', Lewis interpreted federalism as a flexible platform to mitigate at the national level the disruptive legacies of colonial rule, including high economic inequalities and arbitrary boundaries that grouped together heterogeneous peoples with diverging interests and political systems.<sup>22</sup> In combination with proportional representation for

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., pp. 45-49.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>18</sup> For a detailed account, see Ingham and Mosley, *Arthur Lewis*, chapter 7 and Tignor, *W. Arthur Lewis*, chapter 7.

<sup>19</sup> His disillusionment is recounted in W.A. Lewis, 'The Agony of the Eight', reprinted in *Journal of Eastern Caribbean Studies*, 23:1 (1998), 6-26.

<sup>20</sup> W. A. Lewis, *Racial Conflict and Economic Development: The W.E.B. Du Bois Lectures 1982*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), p.121.

<sup>21</sup> Mine, 'Political Element', especially pp. 346-351.

<sup>22</sup> W.A. Lewis, *Politics in West Africa: The Whidden Lectures for 1965*, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1965), Acknowledgments (no page), pp. 49-55.

minorities and coalition government, federalism represented an antidote to the one-party states that came to dominate the West African political landscape shortly after independence.

Lewis' federalism was very different from Padmore's vision of a British Commonwealth modelled along Soviet lines, or from Du Bois' attempts to radically alter colonial peoples' representation at the United Nations.<sup>23</sup> But it was grounded in many of the same concerns, working as a foil to interrogate the mutual constitution of economic and political forms, and contributing to imagine a postcolonial world of racial equality. The emphasis on federalism makes more visible the institutionalist sensitivity of Lewis' economics, and suggests that the political ramifications of his thought are not simply an appendix to his work as an economist and policy adviser.<sup>24</sup> They represent a necessary embodiment of his conviction that the economics that mattered for the poor countries was 'not the economics of marginal utility'; rather it was 'the economics of laws, institutions, tenures, nationality, race, religion, ideology [...] which were banished [...] as disreputable topics over seventy years ago'.<sup>25</sup> The rediscovery of nineteenth century insights and concerns underpinned the academic contributions for which he is mostly remembered.

### **Unveiling economic development at the University of Manchester**

Christmas 1947 marked the beginning of Lewis' employment at the University of Manchester.<sup>26</sup> In the decade he spent there as Stanley Jevons Chair of Political Economy in the Faculty of Economic and Social Studies, Lewis played a pivotal role in establishing development economics as a distinct and legitimate academic field. Propelled in its political importance by the Cold War and the struggle for decolonisation, development economics provided the leaders of the 'new' postcolonial nations with a vocabulary to articulate aspirations of transforming their economies and societies, while also masking uneven power relations behind new international financial institutions and transnational governance.<sup>27</sup> Many of these concerns were expressed in terms of increasing growth rates, savings and capital accumulation. In

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<sup>23</sup> T. Williams, 'George Padmore and the Soviet Model of the British Commonwealth', *Modern Intellectual History*, 16: 2 (2019), 531-559. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244317000634>

<sup>24</sup> Lewis, 'W. Arthur Lewis', p. 3; F. D'Onofrio and G. Serra, 'Arthur Lewis and the Classical Foundations of "Development": Economic History and Institutional Change', *Research in the History of Economic Thought and Methodology*, 37A (2019), 157-164. <https://doi.org/10.1108/S0743-41542019000037A012>

<sup>25</sup> W.A. Lewis, 'Colonial Development', paper presented at a meeting of the Manchester Statistical Society (12 January 1949), p. 18, cited in Ingham and Mosley, *Sir Arthur Lewis*, p. 262.

<sup>26</sup> W. Arthur Lewis papers (WAL hereafter), box 35, folder 2, 'The Victoria University of Manchester, Conditions of Appointment', [no date].

<sup>27</sup> F. Cooper, 'Modernizing Bureaucrats, Backward Africans, and the Development Concept', in F. Cooper and R. Packard (eds.) *International Development and the Social Sciences: Essays in the History and Politics of Knowledge*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 64-92.



contrast with prevailing orthodoxy, the first generation of development economists maintained that poor countries, characterised by pervasive market failures, dependence on the export of primary products and distinctive institutions, required a new kind of economic theory, tailored to their specific conditions.<sup>28</sup> In forging its unique intellectual identity, development economics mobilised disparate influences that included echoes of 1920s Soviet debates on industrialisation, Keynesianism, colonial policy, and nineteenth century classical political economy.<sup>29</sup> The latter was particularly crucial for Lewis, whose theorising was imbued with history, but uninterested in setting ‘out a theory of the laws of evolution of society’, like ‘Ricardo or Marx or Toynbee’.<sup>30</sup> From classical political economists, Lewis did not only draw the specific assumption that the labour supply should not necessarily be fixed. Rather, he inherited the awareness that the key to unveiling the mystery of economic development lay in the conjoined analysis of capital accumulation and income distribution.<sup>31</sup>

These concerns found expression in Lewis’ most celebrated article, ‘Economic Development with Unlimited Supplies of Labour’.<sup>32</sup> Lewis started from the observation that many developing countries (such as Egypt, India or Jamaica) possess a population ‘so large relative to capital and natural resources, that there are large sections of the economy where the marginal productivity of labour is negligible, zero or even negative’.<sup>33</sup> Countries with these characteristics present the features of a ‘dual economy’, with a large ‘subsistence sector’ employing a vast mass of workers with negligible labour productivity and a small ‘capitalist’ one, which uses ‘reproducible capital, and pays capitalists for the use thereof’.<sup>34</sup> In these cases, economic development occurs by shifting workers from the subsistence sector to the ‘modern’ one. Over time, this absorption leads to a reduction of workers in the traditional sector without any significant loss of productivity, and a scenario in which ‘the capitalist surplus will rise continuously, and annual investment will be a rising proportion of the national income’.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> A.O. Hirschman, ‘The rise and fall of development economics’, in *Essays in Trespassing*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 1-24.

<sup>29</sup> On the historiographical implications of this mixture, see M. Alacevich and M. Boianovsky, ‘Writing the history of development economics’, in Alacevich and Boianovsky (eds.), *The Political Economy of Development Economics: A Historical Perspective*, supplement to *History of Political Economy*, 50 (2018), 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.1215/00182702-7033812>

<sup>30</sup> W.A. Lewis, *The Theory of Economic Growth*, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1955), p. 18.

<sup>31</sup> M. Boianovsky, ‘Arthur Lewis and the Classical Foundations of Development Economics’, *Research in the History of Economic Thought and Methodology* 37A (2019), 103-143. <https://doi.org/10.1108/S0743-41542019000037A009>

<sup>32</sup> W.A. Lewis, ‘Economic Development with Unlimited Supplies of Labour’, *The Manchester School*, 22:2 (1954), 139-191. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9957.1954.tb00021.x>

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 140-141.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 171.

Lewis advocated the creation of an indigenous class that, by virtue of its high savings, could promote capital accumulation, and thus facilitate the structural transformation of the world's 'periphery'. Indeed, Lewis identified this duality also at the global level, with many tropical countries stuck in relations of dependency and adversarial terms of trade for their main (typically agricultural) exports.<sup>36</sup> But while neo-Marxists and dependency theorists invoked different forms of 'de-linking' from the capitalist world system, Lewis argued that to create a new international order it was necessary to increase the productivity of workers employed in food production in the developing world.<sup>37</sup> This would then alter the terms of trade, 'raise the prices of the traditional agricultural exports', and 'create an agricultural surplus that would support industrial production for the home market'.<sup>38</sup> In contrast with many of his contemporaries, who saw in indigenous agricultural smallholders an obstacle to modernisation and industrialisation, Lewis' strategy of economic development invested them – if supported by educational policies that increased their productivity - with the power to unleash structural transformations and alter the course of history.<sup>39</sup>

In 1955, Lewis published his most ambitious work: *The Theory of Economic Growth* (TEG hereafter). Despite the narrow claim that 'the central problem in the theory of economic growth is to understand the process by which a community is converted from being a 5 per cent to a 12 per cent saver', TEG is a book of dazzling complexity.<sup>40</sup> While identifying three main causes for the increase of output per head (the will to economize, increase in knowledge and capital accumulation), Lewis was keen to reiterate the mere analytical purpose of this distinction, and that in practice the causes of growth were overlapping and mutually constitutive.<sup>41</sup> At a time dominated by clashes between seemingly mutually exclusive approaches (e.g., balanced growth vs. unbalanced growth) and monocausal growth models, not only did Lewis masterfully combine theory and empirical evidence to broaden the debate on the causes of growth, but also gestured at the ultimately non-economic nature of the 'causes of these causes'.<sup>42</sup> Even without amounting to a unified growth theory that could be easily summarised or tested econometrically, Lewis' book raised profound questions on the applicability of existing growth models to developing economies, while simultaneously striving for a more universal set of

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<sup>36</sup> W.A. Lewis, *The Evolution of the International Economic Order*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).

<sup>37</sup> A. Brewer, *Marxist Theories of Imperialism: A Critical Survey*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980). Lewis, *Evolution of the International Economic Order*, p. 37.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Ingham and Mosley, *Sir Arthur Lewis*, p. 118.

<sup>40</sup> Lewis, *Theory of Economic Growth*, pp. 225-226.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11. D'Onofrio and Serra, 'Arthur Lewis', p. 158.

variables that could explain – or at the very least formulate hypotheses on - the historical trajectories of economies at different levels of development. Informed by Lewis' vast readings on economic history, sociology and anthropology, TEG is a *tour de force* embodying his belief that the economics of poor countries required a capacious and interdisciplinary approach. From this point of view, the volume did justice to its author's claim that, for breadth of scope and vision, it was the first comprehensive treatise on growth since 'John Stuart Mill's *Principles of Political Economy*, published in 1848'.<sup>43</sup>

The 1954 article and the 1955 book contributed to catapult Lewis to fame, making him one of the most visible experts on developing economies, while simultaneously helping carve a new academic field that, while conversant and overlapping with growth economics, could depart from it in significant ways. During his time in Manchester, Lewis also produced some important policy reports for the Colonial Office and the United Nations.<sup>44</sup> These encapsulate Lewis' firm commitment to make his academic work relevant for the developing world, and testify to his distinctive capacity to weave theory and historical narratives into pragmatic policy prescriptions.

While achieving global visibility, Lewis' ideas were nurtured in the Victorian building in Dover Street that hosted the Faculty of Economic and Social Studies (figure 3). Lewis found a vibrant community of progressive scholars that included refugee economists like Kurt Martin and Gisela Eisner (Lewis's only doctoral student at Manchester), and the anthropologist Max Gluckman (see Chapter 12 in this volume).<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Lewis, *Theory of Economic Growth*, p. 5.

<sup>44</sup> United Nations, *Measures for Economic Development of Under-Developed Countries: Report by a Group of Experts Appointed by the Secretary-General of the United Nations*, (New York: United Nations, Department of Economic Affairs, 1951); Gold Coast Government, *Report on Industrialisation and the Gold Coast by Prof. W.A. Lewis*, (Accra: Government Printer, 1953).

<sup>45</sup> Ingham and Mosley, *Sir Arthur Lewis*, 90-99.



**Figure 3: Dover Street, 1960.**

Yet, there is another, deeper, sense in which Manchester shaped Lewis' understanding of development. The analytical narrative of labour moving from the 'subsistence' to the 'modern' sector mirrors a stylised account of the British industrial revolution, which found in Manchester one of its epicentres. Lewis' embrace of this interpretation (challenged in contemporary economic historiography), was influenced by J.L. and Barbara Hammond's trilogy on British labour history between 1760 and 1832.<sup>46</sup> While accounting for the labour shift across sectors as key to capital accumulation, the Hammonds' works also taught Lewis that 'the industrial revolution had not raised urban wages'.<sup>47</sup> In the Hammonds' books, Manchester 'not thrown up by the Industrial Revolution, but overwhelmed by it' plays a key role, both as catalyst of change in the British 'dual economy', and as a reminder of the misery and poverty resulting from unregulated industrialisation and urbanisation.<sup>48</sup> While for Lewis 'the ugliness of towns or the impoverishment of the working classes' were not the unavoidable and 'necessary' costs

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<sup>46</sup> J.L. Hammond and B. Hammond, *The Town Labourer 1760-1832 The New Civilisation*, (London: Longman Greens and Co, 1919); *The Village Labourer 1760-1832 A Study in the Government of England before the Reform Bill*, (London: Longman Greens and Co, 1919); *The Skilled Labourer* (London: Longman Greens and Co, 1919); Tignor, *W. Arthur Lewis*, 90-93. For an influential contrasting interpretation of the causes of the industrial revolution, see Robert C. Allen, *The British Industrial Revolution in Global Perspective*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>47</sup> Lewis, 'W. Arthur Lewis', p. 14.

<sup>48</sup> Hammond and Hammond, *Town Labourer*, p. 42, p. 45.

of growth, Manchester's history simultaneously offered inspiration to develop new ideas on the dynamics of economic development, and a fertile – if difficult – ground to test them.<sup>49</sup>

### **Building communities in Moss Side and Hulme**

In the 1950s, Manchester still had several key features of a 'dual economy'.<sup>50</sup> These became more visible when assessed along racial and spatial lines. A significant part of Manchester's African and African Caribbean population lived in the Moss Side area, where they were deprived of educational opportunities and housing facilities, trapped in low-paying jobs or in unemployment, and victims of different forms of discrimination.<sup>51</sup> In 1948, the *Manchester Evening News* reported a spokesman of the National Coal Board saying that they would not 'employ coloured men in the mines where it can be avoided'; an enraged Lewis' response was to call for new legislation that could rectify racial discrimination in British labour markets.<sup>52</sup>

Lewis quickly became a pillar of the Mancunian African Caribbean community: his private correspondence contains requests of help (such as that for a desperate girl who had been abandoned by the child's father during her pregnancy), and evidence of his involvement in a wide range of activities, including the organisation of leafleting campaigns and musical events.<sup>53</sup> The situation of the African Caribbean communities was certainly dire: as put in a request for help from Christ Church, the Anglican parish church in Moss Side, the conditions of the thousands of people from Africa and the West Indies represented 'one of the most urgent social problems of our time'.<sup>54</sup> As a consequence, Lewis was committed to gather evidence on the African Caribbean experience of Manchester. The task fell upon Eyo Bassey Ndem, a Sierra Leonean anthropologist introduced to Lewis by Max Gluckman.<sup>55</sup> The resulting report portrayed a city in which significant tensions existed, for example in transport, as the Manchester public was not 'entirely in favour' of Black conductors.<sup>56</sup> An 'intense sex jealousy' also played a role: as many white people resented 'the idea of Coloured male workers fraternising with white girls', this was in turn used as an excuse to avoid employing people of

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<sup>49</sup> Lewis, *Theory of Economic Growth*, p. 429.

<sup>50</sup> Paul Mosley and Barbara Ingham, 'Applying the Lewis Model in Industrialised Countries: W. Arthur Lewis and the Dual Economy of Manchester in the 1950s', *The Manchester School*, 84:1 (2016), 95-124. <https://doi.org/10.1111/manc.12087>

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Mine, 'Political Element', p. 346.

<sup>53</sup> WAL, box 29, folder 5, 'Letter of Larry Walsh to W. Arthur Lewis, 8 October 1953'; 'Letter of W. Arthur Lewis, September 1953'; 'Letter of Lillian Samuels to W. Arthur Lewis [undated]'

<sup>54</sup> WAL, box 29, folder 5, 'Letter of Revd. Canon T.F. Ethell (et al.) to W. Arthur Lewis' [undated].

<sup>55</sup> Ingham and Mosley, *Sir Arthur Lewis*, p. 121.

<sup>56</sup> WAL, box 29, folder 5, 'Memorandum by E.B. Ndem', p. 2.

African descent.<sup>57</sup> Discrimination was not limited to work places, as it pervaded recreational spaces like hotels, restaurants and dancing halls, not only in the city centre, but also in Moss Side.<sup>58</sup> Finally, the prolonged experience of police brutality led the African Caribbean communities to ‘distrust the police’, and resulted in the exacerbation of ‘feelings of frustration and exile’.<sup>59</sup>

Lewis identified in limited recreation, unemployment and lack of housing the key areas of intervention to improve the living conditions of the Moss Side working masses (the student population, instead, was in less need of support as their needs were partly catered by the University, student associations, and the British Council, among others).<sup>60</sup> Key to the resolution of these problems was, in Lewis’ view, the support of already existing initiatives (such as a recreation centre set up by Christ Church), the collection of information and establishment and consolidation of relations with both sympathetic employers willing to give jobs to African Caribbean workers, and with landlords who, outside the Moss Side area, ‘would be prepared to give housing’ to Black lodgers.<sup>61</sup> Legislative change did not exhaust the range of instruments required to rectify the racial injustice that was keeping the African Caribbean communities in adjacent poverty: instead, what was needed was a grounded, bottom-up, attempt to intervene in the city and the communities inhabiting it. After finally convincing the Manchester City Council, this vision underpinned the creation of two centres: Community House (in Moss Lane East) and the South Hulme Evening Centre (in Bangor Street) (fig 4).

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 5. For a contemporary reflection on the impact of police racism on Manchester Black communities, see K. Pimblott and K. Foale, (eds.), *A Growing Threat to Life: Taser Usage by Greater Manchester Police* (Manchester: Resistance Lab, 2020): <https://resistancelab.network/our-work/taser-report/index.html> (last accessed on 20 January 2024).

<sup>60</sup> WAL, box 29, folder 5, ‘Manchester Council for African Affairs, Agenda for Meeting on August 20<sup>th</sup> at 7.30 p.m., Methodist Hall, Oxford Road, Memorandum by Prof. Lewis’, p. 1.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., pp. 2-3.



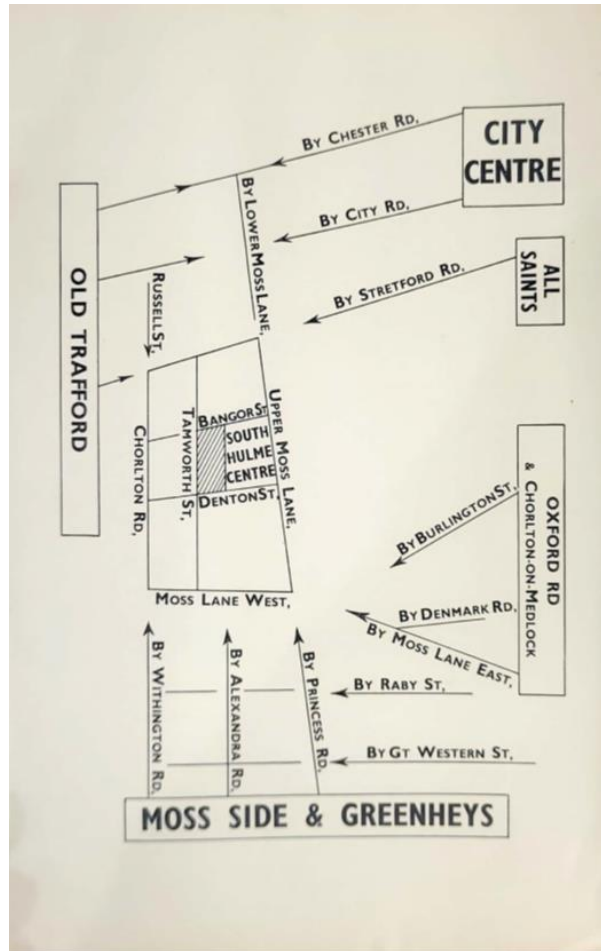


Figure 4: Map showing the location of the South Hulme Evening Centre, WAL, box 29, folder 5.

While drawing inspiration from similar existing experiments in Birmingham, Lewis' scheme was more ambitious.<sup>62</sup> Not only were the centres offering education in a wide range of subjects, they were also geared towards providing 'vertical social capital' in the form of networks and connections with employers and social services, through which the Moss Side workers could overcome discrimination and access jobs and salaries more aligned with their effective skills.<sup>63</sup> Beyond formal education and networking opportunities, the centres also offered legal advice to make the workers more conscious of their rights and of the tools at their disposal to overcome discrimination. The South Hulme Centre proved to be short-lived, already shutting down in 1955, but Community House kept Lewis' dream alive. Both had a positive impact on the economic opportunities of Moss Side communities.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>62</sup> WAL, box 4, folder 1C, 'Letter of W. Arthur Lewis to the Chief Education Officer, Deansgate, Manchester, 28 October 1952'.

<sup>63</sup> Ingham and Mosley, 'Applying the Lewis Model', 110.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

By the time Lewis left for the Caribbean in 1958, Manchester had exhausted its role in shaping his thought. But the impact had been a rich one: the city had provided him with a vibrant anticolonial hub to re-think the entanglements of political and economic forms, with an analytical narrative to clarify the dynamics of economic development, and with a site to test his ideas on poverty and discrimination.

## Conclusion

Manchester's 'unity of place' brings a certain coherence to Lewis' life and thought. It is easy to see in his work in Moss Side a concrete application of his emphasis on the importance of education for lifting communities out of poverty. It is equally tempting to identify in Lewis' prescriptions for Caribbean economic development an extension of his conceptualisation of dual economies, and on the importance of creating an indigenous business class. Despite this apparent consistency, Lewis' legacies are multiple and fragmented. This is partly the result of Lewis' own choices, as he at times attempted to separate the aspects of his thought that this chapter has sought to unify. This tendency was certainly dictated by the desire to be taken seriously as a scholar who could provide impartial policy advice. The high esteem in which he was equally held by politicians like Nkrumah and by the British Colonial Office shows that this was indeed the case. On the other hand, the bitter disappointment marking the end of many of these experiences confirms that he had little patience for the seemingly irrational and unpredictable nature of politics.

For contemporary economists, Lewis' work still provides a repository of intuitions and hypotheses in need of testing.<sup>65</sup> But specific aspects of his work have not aged particularly well. Lewis' simplistic take on environmental issues – and the idea that economic growth grants humankind more freedom by extending its mastery over nature - is a reminder of the Promethean nature of development economics in the 1950s and 1960s, when the imperatives of capital accumulation turned the environment into a blind spot.<sup>66</sup> On the other hand, Lewis' work offers useful counterpoints to the randomised control trials which have become pervasive in development economics.<sup>67</sup> Specifically, both his academic work and his politics can be read

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<sup>65</sup> E.g., A. Deaton and G. Laroque, 'A model of commodity prices after Sir Arthur Lewis', *Journal of Development Economics*, 71:2 (2003), 289-310. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0304-3878\(03\)00030-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0304-3878(03)00030-0)

<sup>66</sup> Lewis, *Theory of Economic Growth*, p. 421. For a critical analysis, see M. Schmelzer, A. Vansintjan and A. Vetter, *The Future is Degrowth: A Guide to a World Beyond Capitalism*, (London: Verso, 2022). Thanks to Georg Christ for many enjoyable discussions on these issues.

<sup>67</sup> For an introduction see A.V. Banerjee and E. Duflo, *Poor Economics: A Radical Rethinking of the Way to Fight Global Poverty*, (New York: Public Affairs, 2011). Poignant critiques include A. Deaton, 'Instruments, Randomization, and Learning about Development', *Journal of Economic Literature*, 48 (2010), 424-55

as an invitation to rescue a ‘political economy’ (not just ‘economics’) that is guided by common sense, historical awareness (albeit often very stylised) and careful in its handling of empirical material, but that does not shy away from seeking to grasp ‘the big picture’.

For this author, the entanglements of Lewis’ life and thought with the city and the university of Manchester primarily raise questions on the nature of ‘space’ and ‘place’ in intellectual histories.<sup>68</sup> Manchester appears simultaneously as an epicentre of the imperial core and a gateway to anticolonial worldmaking, as the institutional setting in which Lewis could flourish, and as embodiment and perpetuation of past economic and social inequalities. Is Manchester just a narrative device to impose a fictional coherence, or the material anchor and catalyst of Lewis’ ideas? If asked, probably Lewis would have chosen not to answer. Not only did he know all too well that ‘readers who need solutions tend to read them into a text, and to attribute to the writer positions which he does not hold’, but he was also reluctant to become the subject of historical inquiry.<sup>69</sup> An enthusiastic scholar interested in writing about the development of Lewis’ ideas and asking for both his approval and specific information received the following response: ‘I have your letter [...] in which you invite me to collaborate to write my intellectual history, I am not willing to do so’.<sup>70</sup>

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doi:10.1257/jel.48.2.424; I.H. Kvangraven, ‘Nobel Rebels in Disguise: Assessing the Rise and Rule of the Randomistas’, *Review of Political Economy*, 32:3 (2020), 305-341. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09538259.2020.1810886>

<sup>68</sup> E.g. D.S. Allemann, A. Jäger and V. Mann, ‘Introduction: approaching space in intellectual history’, *Global Intellectual History*, 3:2 (2018), 127-136. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23801883.2018.1450614> Thanks to Mélanie Lindbjerg Machado-Guichon for making me aware of this.

<sup>69</sup> Lewis, *Evolution of the International Economic Order*, p. 76.

<sup>70</sup> WAL, box 4, folder 5D, ‘Letter of William Darity Jr. to W. Arthur Lewis, 22 October 1984’; ‘Letter of W. Arthur Lewis to William Darity Jr., 1 November 1984’.