An interview with Professor I.M.Lewis  
On  
Success of Somaliland and failure of Somalia  

Farshaxan Group  
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Professor I.M Lewis is a worldwide well-respected anthropologist. He has many writings; books, article, etc. He also delivers many historical and political lectures about Somalia and Somaliland. Not that he used the pen to clarify historical and ground-root differences of Somalia and Somaliland, he went to both countries uncountable times to experience and witness those dissimilarities in Culture, Social, and Political views as a first hand-experience. As a Farshaxan group, we are honored to have him accepted our request of interviewing him. Farshaxan group are established to preserve all historical and cultural events in Somaliland as well as to assist Somalia to learn more from those historical and political achievements which Somaliland established so far. Somaliland people established equivalence and compatibility between cultural authority and democratic authority as neither of them can be ignored nor belittled.

Professor I.M.Lewis recently published a great book with the name of “MAKING AND BREAKING STATES IN AFRICA The Somali Experience”. In this book as well as his other books about Somalia and Somaliland, he emphasized the significant difference of the two countries (Somalia and Somaliland). The truth and reality on the ground field are revealed and supported by him as well as many other scholars. But there are always those who cannot recognize that as they are ignorantly and selfishly acting as supporters of the Somali Democratic Republic, while at the end they are hurting that country’s people(Somalia Community).

Professor I.M.Lewis in this book tried as he always does to present the reality of the ground, so Somalia will progress efficiently and wake up from the illusionary system that they keep adopting since 1991 and for Somaliland to do better politically and economically.
Our Community is of people            Bulshadeenu waa duul
Sincere and great modesty         Daacad iyo xishood badan
Made of silken thread              Dun xariira weeyaan
They mistreat none                  Qofna uma daraadaraan
They live in Allah’s grace            Dar Alley ku dhaqantaa
They are vulnerable to feelings          Dareen waa u dhaqweyn tahay
But mind you, Fools they are not       Ogow doqonse mahee

Daala’an, composed by Mahamed Ibrahin Hadrawi and Translated by Dr. Bulhan

The interview took place as follows:
Farshaxan Group: Professor I.M. Lewis, welcome to Farshaxan group and we appreciate your acceptance of our request.

I.M. Lewis: I welcome your interest.

Farshaxan Group: We would like to start getting to know your background. Can you please give a summary of your lifelong journey starting of where you were born, educated, etc. with dates?

I.M. Lewis: I was born in 1930 in Glasgow Scotland. When my father, a former journalist who had been Editor of the Mesopotamia Times died we moved from London to my mother’s family (Reer Abti) where we lived until I had completed a BSc in Chemistry at Glasgow University in 1948. I then moved to Oxford University to study Social Anthropology, completing first a library research B.Litt. degree on Somali history, ethnography, and culture. I then moved, with my wife, Ann, in 1955 to carry out first-hand field research amongst the Somali people, based originally in British Somaliland (where my first child was born), and moving later to Somalia.

Farshaxan Group: What helped you to be a writer?

I.M. Lewis: My father was a journalist and my parents and grandparents valued literature and poetry.

Farshaxan Group: How many books did you so far write?

I.M. Lewis: About 20 see bibliography in Festchrift ‘Milk and Peace: Drought and War’; Hurst, 2010

Farshaxan Group: How did you get involve in Somali and Somaliland affairs?
I.M. Lewis: By accident, when I was looking for a post-graduate research topic and met B.W. Andrzejewski and Musa Galal (and Abdi Telephone’) who jointly inspired me.

Farshaxan Group: How do you differentiate Somaliland from Somalia culturally and politically?

I.M. Lewis: The democratic pastoral tradition is stronger in Somaliland than Somalia which has also suffered from Mafia corruption in the colonial and post-colonial periods.

Farshaxan Group: More than fourteen conferences were held to establish a central government for Somalia and all failed including the current with the help of all the world financially and politically. But Somaliland established a government of their own with no external support and just held one of the historic presidential elections in the world. What do you think that made that significant difference of both countries?

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I.M. Lewis: Too much outside interference by ignorant people without any genuine interest in the Somali people as a whole. Intellectually their efforts were also vitiated by their obsession with top-down centralized conceptions of the state which did not easily accommodate the decentralised bottom up style of democratic Somali style of decision-making which has been followed in Somaliland with promising results so far.

Farshaxan Group: How was it possible for Somaliland people to solve their differences in a democratic way in experience?

I.M. Lewis: Because they-Somaliland people- allow more room for traditional patterns of governance. Southern Somalia has been too strongly influenced by inappropriate European political models, especially from Italy.

Farshaxan Group: Somaliland held a presidential election recently that ended in successful way as well as they did before. What message does that send to the world?

I.M. Lewis: A very encouraging message which has not received as much attention as it should from European and US governments who preach democracy but ignore it when it is practiced in the indigenous cultures of the Third World.

Farshaxan Group: Somaliland people are so great into compromising and solving their issues. This is historically proven. What would you say about that?
I.M.Lewis: I agree with this assessment and think that the Somalilanders are very fortunate in this respect.

Best Wishes
I.M.Lewis
15 September 2010

“Ioan M. Lewis is Emeritus Professor of Anthropology at the London School of Economics and was Director of the International African Institute and Chairman of the Africa Educational Trust. He has taught Social Anthropology in Africa, Asia, North America, and Europe and written over twenty books, seven on various aspects of Somali society and culture. He is widely regarded as a world authority on Somali and a leading British social anthropologist”.

-MAKING AND BREAKING STATES IN AFRICA The Somali Experience-

Nin qabyaalad doojow He who fosters clannism[is a fool]
Doqoniimo waa cudur And foolishness is a disease
Haddii aad dux leedahay If you had substance
Bal doxdaada eeg Just look around you
Inta dumar agoomo ah How many are widow wives
Inta dhiig dad la qubay How much blood was shed
Inta darib nin la cunay How many men were eaten alive!
Inta duul ku qaran jabay How many people suffered national defeat

By: Mahamed Hashi Dhamac "Gaariye" and Translated by Dr.Bulhan

I.M.Lewis was born in January 1930 in Glasgow, Scotland. He is married to Ann with four children. His first child was born in Somaliland. In 1951 he got his Bachelor degree in Chemistry at Glasgow University. At just about that time, he did a research on synthesis of anti-malarials as he had the opportunity to see an advertisement of the Nuffied Foundation. This foundation was established in 1943 by William Morris, later Lord Nuffield. Lord Nuffield left school at an early age, but was able to own the first company that introduced mass production methods in British industrial companies. The main goal of this foundation was to promote what he called “advancement of social well-being”.

After he had applied for that scholarship of Nuffied Foundation, he ended up getting a diploma in Anthropology in Oxford University. This could be given to be the turning point of Professor I.M.Lewis getting into social science field. He finally got his PhD in Social Anthropology in 1957.

He did many field researches in Somaliland and Somali. He had been to those two countries many times such as 1955-1957, 1962, 1964, 1974, 1978, 1980, 1982, 1986, etc.
accomplished many researches in those years that many of the so-called scholars never dreamed of beside them being born to Somali lineage.

He was honored by different institutions for his works and lectures over the years. He was a visiting professor to many universities in the world. Such as the University of California at Berkeley (USA), University of Natal, University of Helsinki (Finland), University of Rome (Italy), Rutgers University, Wolfson College (Oxford), University of Malaya, University of Kyoto, University of Addis Ababa (Ethiopia), Ecole des Hautes Etudes (CNRS) at Marseilles (France), University of Bergen (Norway), etc.

He authored more than twenty books such as Peoples of the Horn of Africa, Somali Poetry (with B.W. Andrzejewski), Understanding Somalia and Somaliland (Culture, History, Society), etc. We, the members of Farshaxan group are so happy to congratulate Professor I.M. Lewis for being honest and courageous to mention how Somaliland succeeded in different aspects of politics and economics, as well as what Somalia could have done to get rid of the illusion of so-called imported governments. He took time from his busy schedule to publish the reality on the field as well as he stated the main differences between the two countries Somaliland and Somalia.

We will publish more details of the biography of I.M. Lewis with his CV insha Allah in recent future.

Farshaxan group are welcoming all the questions about the professor as well as any guidance provided.

By:
Farshaxan Group.

Reference:

- Politics of Cain by Professor H. A. Bulhan
- Making and Breaking States in Africa: The Somali Experience. by Ioan M. Lewis
- Farshaxan Archives.