

Transcript for Oral History Interview Conducted for University of Maryland Course HIST428M – Spring 2018

Instructor: Esther Lee

Interviewer's name: Eric Jefferson

Interviewee's name: Matthias Bannister

Interviewee's Country of Origin: Sierra Leone

Interviewee's Current Residence: Gaithersburg, Maryland, U.S.A.

Date of Interview: March 31, 2018

Place of Interview: Rockville Library, Rockville, Maryland, U.S.A

Eric: Okay so...so this is good? It's not gonna go off?

Matthias: Oh, no.

Eric: It's good? Okay. Ah, man (quietly). Alright my name is Eric Jefferson. I am interviewing my good friend Matthias Bannister and it's March 31st 2018. Thank you, thank you guys for tuning in. Hi Matthias, how are you sir?

Matthias: I'm great.

Eric: You're good? How are ya?

Matthias: Good. Good. Good.

Eric: Great. Nice to meet up with you. Ummm please, please tell where-where you're from? Where are you from?

Matthias: W-Well, I'm from S-Sierra Leone.

Eric: Sierra Leone. Nice. Can you explain what was life growing up like, um (in Sierra Leone)

Matthias: Well, ummm that's a very interesting question. Cause um you know. First of all my name is Matthias Bannister. Matthias W.A. Bannister. Always what I sign my signature. Yeah um. Middle name stands for Warriorous Albert Bannister. Matthias Warriorous Albert Bannister. First of all you would be curious to know why my name is so Afri... not very African at all. But last name Bannister.

Eric: Right.

Matthias: Uh my father came to Sierra Leone with his own father. His father was from Britain. H-h-his father aim to marry and then they had a...racially his father was eh-Scottish...English-Scottish-British man. But he came to Africa as an expatriate. So he produce the railroad.

Eric: Wow.

Matthias: Yes, so...so they brought the railroad to Africa. So and then that time that was the time when I found out cause was that part of the world that's where he grew up with his own dad and then he had me. Yeah. So that's how it became: Bannister!

Eric: Bannister. Ok!

Matthias: Yes. (Unclear)...me and my brothers. But that's how we get we get our background. So we became Africans by heritage. But I have a- my background is Scottish man. As a matter of fact one of my...we just had a baby, god is so wonderful. We just had a baby...the baby looks just like it's coming from a white family but it's not white...it's just uh uh uh God was just trying to show us where we were coming from. So I see him I see a message child.

Eric: Mm.

Matthias: Yes.

Eric: Can you explain to me a story from your childhood in Sierra Leone?

Matthias: Well that's umm yeah I'm coming to that. My childhood was very interesting. Yes I grew up in a small village called Momando. M-O-M-A-N-D-O. Momando! Along the bounds of the Sewa River. Yes. So in growing up it was very very interesting for me because there I was I found myself in a very special village – that village only belong to me and my family.

Eric: Wow.

Matthias: Nobody else. And it has a big tree, big grapefruit tree. The grapefruit tree is over 150 years old now. Yeah it it it gives us fruit all throughout the year.

Eric: 150 Years! Wow.

Matthias: Yes! Huge tree, very huge. So, so I grew up under that tree. My father had a a very special building. That's where he sleeps. He came from a...he he was inter..he married so many women. Yes. So that house was built under that tree. And that's where he sleeps. Nobody, nobody sleeps in there but him.

Eric: But your dad

Matthias: Yes yes. It's a round house. My my dad.

Eric: So your dad has, had a lot of power...I guess.

Matthias: Of course.

Eric: Yeah.

Matthias: Yes.

Eric: How was your, your parents or your father per se...growing up...was he strict?

Matthias: He was very strict! Oh, you say...that is his middle name "STRICT!" As a matter of fact you can't believe it, lying in the middle of nowhere in African village, all his kids e-speak English in that village, we speak English. We don't w-we always speak English and the native language, he does not allow us to speak broken English. But like you said my my uh my childhood was very interesting growing up. My dad after he had retired from uh from the...you know the regular job he was a linguist. A top person in the church in a in a in a the cour- in the courthouse. Yeah he was a linguist. He knew the English language so well that he can break from the native language to the English language from the English language to the native language. At the high court. That was that was his job. He did that. After a short, yeah, after after he retired from that then he became a marshal because he was a tall man like you...

Eric: (Laughs)

Matthias: He was a big man.

Eric: Big man

Matthias: Yes. He can arrest people without no fight. You can't fight him. He's too big for you to fight him. And he's tall and huge. You know.

Eric: Alright, I know.

Matthias: So he, he, he did that for some time. Then he said well I-I have to help the African people. I'm going to, I'm going to live in, in, the hinterland (His phone made a sound and he tries to turn it off.) Yes so he went to the hinterland and uh...and that's where he uh he raise us.

Eric: Correct

Matthias: He raise up, He raise us up there. But it was very interesting for me because unfortunately I lost my brother Edward.

Eric: Oh no

Matthias: Yes. I lost him there. Edward Bannister. I was talking to his son when I was when I was over there talking...that was his son I was talking to. So Ed, he used to be very interesting because he was my buddy. He looked out for me because my father had all fourteen children, so...

Eric: Was it you and Edward growing up, it was just you guys...?

Matthias: Yes. Yes but he was he was- he was older than me. So he he kind of tried to protect me, you know. So he was my buddy you know.

Eric: So was he your only sibling at the time?

Matthias: No no I had several siblings...

Eric: Oh yes, you know what yes...your dad was married...

Matthias: Yeah. I had several siblings. I was one of fourteen in the family. Yes. I had several siblings. So but Ed always look out for me, so I don't get bullied.

Eric: Going back to your parents...

Matthias: Yes

Eric: I heard about your father a lot but how was your mom? Like umm...growing up

Matthias: Oh, my mom! She was also from a very prominent family. My dad was a tuckar...T-U-C-K-A-R. Yes so, my mom didn't want to marry my dad because my dad was so big and was so tall and huge, right. A man with a feared his personality you know, it was no, it was no kind of a guy you can take light, you know. So my mom my mom wasn't very comfortable to marry my father. She ran away I believe, my uncle told me your mother ran away three times, two, three times uh uh...two times, the third time I had to plead to her, I said please don't don't run away from that man, that man loves you.

Eric: Oh no (laughs)

Matthias: But (laughs) so so my father apparently was able to help control of my mother because my mother wanted to run away she does not stop running away. But my mother was a very very religious woman. Spiritual and religious. She was very holy.

Eric: Holy

Matthias: I said I will observe her. When she get up in the morning she won't step out without she got to pray first before she will step outside.

Eric: Wow.

Matthias: Yes. She pray that, that...is there's no ifs about that. Before she, before she finally goes to bed, she has to pray. So she raise me up, she the first person that taught me about our father. She said you have to learn to say this prayer son, "our father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name" in our native language. Yes. I was wondering you know. She taught me our father in in our native language and I knew how to do it. And I uh. You know. So my mother used to run the store. My father had a very big store. But apparently way down the road, my mother said why why should I be here running the store and my miss? (unclear) are in the village. I need to go and join them because they would be thinking otherwise. They would be thinking that all the finest money belongs to me and that's how we were thinking and your

ances? And all that. And so, so my mother had to convince my dad that she wants to go to the village (phone goes off) and be with the rest of the family.

Eric: Right

Matthias: Yes. This phone, man. It it it don't go off easily. Put it up, still try to...I turn it up, still not ringer (unclear).

(A brief pause in the interview as Matthias tries to turn off his phone)

Matthias: Hang on. Excuse me.

Eric: Oh no, you're good.

Matthias: I'm sorry man.

Eric: Oh no, you're good!

Matthias: So, apparently my mother had to come down and uhm and be with the rest of the family. So, the most interesting part was tha- when I was growing up, you know it's just us - like I said just the family the the nuclear family: me, my brothers and sisters, my aunts...a very- a very nice village.

Eric: So growing up your scope was Sierra Leone...tell me about the time in which you heard of a place called America? When did you first realize it was...

Matthias: Well first of all, my dad used to tell me a lot about America as I was growing up. He used to make examples...he say, he say my dad use to say "aye boy, until one day you go to America then you can see your village far away from here. Then you will know what to do to this village. Yes. You will know what to do with this village because this is your home. You should be proud of this village; you have a whole village by yourself. Right on the banks of the Sewa River where there are a lot of diamonds. Yes. And he always said this thing, I look- I - ya know- as a little boy I was wondering, you know. But then I I really came to realize that what my dad was saying to me was a fact. You can only see where you're coming from and realize and appreciate it when you are far away from it, you know. When you go into another man's world...that's when you start to see your own world, how it looks like. How special you are. You can see it in light of that. And that never get out of my head. So that's where he taught me how to read and write. At age of five I have known everything on the metric system, times table, and what not. Everything. Before five o'clock...before five. Before the age five. He took me to- to school. What he did was he just registered me and left me with the- with the people. (Pause) So, they came to realize that e- I cannot be in first grade, I cannot be in second grade, I cannot be I can only be, they can only put me in the third grade. Cause that's how my faculty was. At that time.

Eric: So...

Matthias: It was quite interesting. (unclear) to the farm. He taught us how to do farming because why? He believe that you can't put your hope and trust on your education. Way down the road you might need to come back on the land and do something with the land where you can raise a lot of money. Cause he believe that no matter no matter what you are, or whoever- however the world would be today. Everything that made this world, this society, is coming from the bush from the jungle. Yes. He believes in that. Farming is what made this country a good country. So he use to tell me about America, America is a land of farming, he said the people are farmers. He say and they work very hard. That's why they are very prosperous and that's why they have a very powerful society. And I want you to take farming very very strictly. Make it part of your life because tomorrow you may get tired of whatever job you're doing out there and you would love to come to the land and develop it and and and live off the land. So that taught taught taught, he didn't only teach us that, but his native people. Yes.

Eric: So how old were you when you realize you wanted to migrate to America?

Matthias: Well, when I finish – uh after I finish uh high school. That's when I realize that I have to come over here to continue my studies because my brother was already here. He came here ahead of me. Edward Bannister. So that's when I realize that I have to follow him one day and come and continue my studies over here. Well we grew up in that village Momando and that taught us everything. And he are an M.O. - what I mean by that: Modus operandi. The way he operates. When you finish high school, you have to be a farmer for the whole year. You have to develop the land and uh plant the crops, everything that you need to do for the whole year. Then after that you harvest it, and then you realize you feel the gist of it. You put the rice on the barn, the big barn and my father always had food because he was a producer, you know. And he had a friend that had a (unclear for a moment) a produce bar. So sometime my father would ship most of his produce to him and then after that he would pay our school fees.

Eric: Wow.

Matthias: Yeah my father worked very hard to educate us because there was no free education. And not only us, but he realize that his sister's children (Matthias starts yawn at his words become unclear) he raise them, he educated them. I never called my dad "Dad" like you call your dad "Dad" – no, I never, you know why?

Eric: Why?

Matthias: Because the first person that we saw call our dad "Uncle" was our own cousins that he raise, that he was raising. Yes. From his own- from his own sisters, his- his sister's children - boys. He was raising them, so to call him "Uncle".

Eric: Oh wow, so you called your dad Uncle as well?

Matthias: Yes. So I never call...I-I'm so proud of myself (stutters) you know they call me Dad then call- I get called Grandpa. So what else do I- can I appreciate in this world in the name of the lord? I would say to the lord, thank you father in heaven because I have re- achieve acquired titles. And my father never did. And my father deserved those titles. My father deserved to be called Father or Dad, and he deserved to be

called Uncle at the same time. But he deserved to be called Grandfather which he never dreamt of. But now, so many kids call me Grandpa, Grandpa. That is wonderful.

Eric: Wonderful.

Matthias: So I appreciate God for that.

Eric: So, you just decided to migrate to America...right?

Matthias: To United States. Yeah to come to complete my studies.

Eric: Yes. So when did you realize that this was the perfect fit for me? America. Like, as soon as you went over to United States, you say you studied right?

Matthias: Yes.

Eric: What did you...what did you study?

Matthias: Yes.

Eric: Yes. So...

Matthias: My my first degree was International Relations.

Eric: Ok.

Matthias: And then after that I wanted to go to law school. I wanted to become a lawyer. (stutters) I never lost any debate in my life. Never.

Eric: What year is this? What year?

Matthias: So I-I-I when when I got here I arrived, on the third of January 1979. That's when I arrived here. Third of January 1979. And I was staying in Arlington. That's where my brother was. Edward was in Arlington. Edward came here ahead of me. He studied, he had his degree. MBA with honors. Yes. So he became the director of insurance for the United States government in Washington D.C. He become the commissioner of insurance. Edward J. Bannister. Yes. So uh I then wanted to go to law school like I said, but from the get go my father had told me that "Matthias, I don't want you to become a lawyer. I don't like lawyers. And they are crooks. And I don't want you to be a crook" (laughs).

Eric: Wow

Matthias: That's interesting right? He say I don't want you to be a crook, and tha-that's why I don't want you to be a lawyer. So you are going to be a preacher man. See what I'm saying? See you have to preach the gospel of the lord Jesus Christ. And I want you to preach the gospel. I said "yes sir". So, there I

wanted to go to law school you can't believe it I had a dream that I may go to law school and your dad tell you can't go to law school. One foot was in the door to go to law school and then he told me that I had to go to the seminary. So I went to the seminary. Where I acquired my Master of Divinity in Sociology and Religion. Yes.

Eric: So your father clearly had a great influence in your life...

Matthias: Big time.

Eric: Yes. So would you say he- he was the one that motivated you to come to America...

Matthias: Of course.

Eric: Yes. Would you say he was the first one to know about it?

Matthias: Yes.

Eric: Ok. So, January 12, 1977 you came here as a student. What was the first image of America you-you can remember from that day?

Matthias: (laughs) That's very interesting. The first thing that I remember when I arrived at JFK is that all the people are so huge they are so big. Wow the people are big man! You know they are so big- big you know, the people are huge people big they are they are regular people (unclear for a moment) but realizing that Americans are big people.

Eric: Big people, we are strong.

Matthias: Tall big like my father. My father was a big man you know.

Eric: So Americans are much bigger to you...

Matthias: Yes.

Eric: ...than Sierra Leoneans.

Matthias: Exactly so. That was the impression that -that was the first impression on my brain. That these people are big people. And not only that, they are very aggressive the way they behave, the way they act. (unclear) that's something that's part of them.

Eric: What was the, the first, the first smell you can remember of America? What-when I say America....

Matthias: First of all, (stutters) when I arrived in America...

Eric: Yeah.



Matthias: The first odor or the first odor was something very very very powerful.

Eric: Yeah.

Mattias: The same experience I had when I entered the American embassy. When I tell you man Americans they maintain their image wherever they are. See this what people don't understand about culture, you can start to know people the first day you start deal with them, you start to know who they are. When you enter the American embassy, anywhere, when you enter the embassy, you will smell America right in there. Oh yes man!

Eric: Wow

Matthias: That same odor, that same aroma that I smell when I enter that embassy...when I enter the embassy for the first time, is when I arrived at the JFK when I when I enter into the immigration- that same aroma, that kind of aroma immediately remind me that yes that I am now in a different society. And at that time (unclear) was very cold. I arrive on the third of January 1970-, 1979.

Eric: So growing up, you father and your family, the reputation of America they had was dreamland, umm if you make it there, you can make it anywhere.

Matthias: Hallelujah.

Eric: But, from being an immigrant at America on January 12th 1977.

Matthias: 1979.

Eric: 1979, yes. What was the representation of Africa in America? What was that like? Did you um – did it shock you how they perceive you guys in America? Or?

Mattias: Of course. I uhh...I umm of course as I was adapting I started to see some famil...you know, culture shock, you know. I started to get some culture shock. You know. The way of, the way people do things here, is quite different from the way we do most of what we do. So that culture shock kind of really yeah it had a impact on me and one of the things that that kind of really (unclear for a moment) was the fact that nobody calls me by my last name, everybody calls them the- they call you by your first name. Rather you are a kid or a big man they don't- they don't care. You are you called by your first name and that's it. They don't say Mr. Bannister. They call you Matthias. Or Eric. Kid or no kid. Everybody from any age group they call you by your first name. That was very, that was a big shock to me to start with. Cause that is, my culture, you call somebody by the way you see him. He's a big man, he's a Mister...you know, you call him Mister.

Eric: Right.

Matthias: If he's a little boy or a young man, you call him by his first name. But as long as that man is older and we're older than you, you don't call him by his first name. So that was the first thing that really hit me.

Eric: So during the 1970s many Sierra Leoneans went from Sierra Leone to America to study in uh law and medicine.

Matthias: That's right.

Eric: So you already spoke on how your father wanted you to go into more of a religion path...

Matthias: Right. Yes...

Eric: ...uh can you elaborate on that more so? Just tell me how was that experience like? You had to forget about your dream, you had to do what your father said, or else.

Matthias: Exactly I uh...I'm glad he had done that. Because when I uh I was having an interview, my Methodist church. That I told him that my father, I said I wanted to be a lawyer that's what I want to be. I believe that I was made to become a lawyer the way I think the way I behave how I perceive society. I said I wanted to be a lawyer, but uh the old man told me that I should- I should not be a lawyer. In other words, he had the confidence with the Lord, oh mighty God may you bless his soul Father in heaven. He had the confidence with the Lord that Matthias should be a preacher man you must preach my word. So that really hit me hard because I wanted to be a lawyer, yes. I wanted to be a lawyer that was my dream but I had to listen to my dad because my dad had the confidence with God that I must preach the word and the way my dad sees my heart above all the scrutiny my dad happens to realize that my future will be full of responsibilities. So he told me Matthias yo- your future is not going to be easy. Your- you're going to have a lot of family people. The family is gonna count on you. Because you care about them you're going to love them you're going to care about them. So the first word he taught me to spell – say you- say you spell that word “responsibility”, go and write it down. So I like to spell responsibility and what that means.

Eric: Wow.

Matthias: Yes. So you have to be responsible. So you're going to have a lot of people counting on you. And I brought all, apart from my first brother right, all the others that are here: friends' relatives everybody to the United States. That's what I did for him.

Eric: Wow.

Matthias: Yes. I have some of them in Philadelphia, I have one he-he's a doctor now he-he's in Atlanta. Then I have eh “Cholu” he's in Philadelphia. Then I have s-so- you know they're all around the place I brought them here out of my good heart.

Eric: Wow. So let's backtrack.... after you majored into a field that you didn't really expect to major in umm did you, was it hard to manage a love life? You know, was it hard to find someone special because I know that's a very hard field to be successful in.

Matthias: (Unclear) my brother, you are so right. Before I came I fell in love with a- with a lady. With a nice young girl. She was coming from a religious background so I was kind of confident with her. So we came here, started having children. And apparently I told her that I was going to the uh ministry. She was not comfortable with that. She had an attitude about that. So right. So many things I would have acquired today if that woman had stayed with me. Yes, if she had stayed with me there's so many things I would have acquired. I had dreams, dreams of having my own nursing- nursing institution where I can take care of people that I can take care of people where I can help older people to grow to- to have the things that they need as they get older. If they are sick I will help them to get well, I will lay my hands on them and pray on them. So I wanted to open up a nursing institution. But she was very reluctant about it. She started to make many excuses until way down the road our marriage apparently kind of uh went down. Yes. But uh she realize that after she had done the things that she done she did that it's no good for me. She came to realize that I'm a good person. So today she's- she tries to help me, she tries to be kind to me, she tries to be good to me. We had uh three girls and I met her with two- two boys and I raise them up and I brought them to the United States all of them. I brought them here. So, yes. That had an impact on me because she didn't- she didn't want to go my own way. That I want to be a preacher man, I want to be a religious man. And so forth. So I had a problem with that. I'm glad I thought about that. Because if she had work with me I'd have a big nursing home, I'd have a lot of money by now because hey, I have things going my way. You know. But she didn't support me at that time.

Eric: I bet.

Matthias: So that's how things went down for me on on that side.

Eric: How was, how many kids did you have?

Matthias: Well we have- we have uh a total of six kids.

Eric: Mmm. Okay.

Matthias: Yes. Yes.

Eric: Wow. So raising your kids in such a commercialized setting, you know America is more of a materialistic...

Matthias: Very materialistic, yeah.

Eric: Yeah. Um, how can you raise your family with the same values you had growing up in Sierra Leone?

Matthias: Aww man that is, I'm glad...I-I-I'm you know, it's not easy. Especially at this later part of life, this- this part of the century. The kids, my brother, it is - oh man. You know sometimes I feel real real real frustrated about the way the children tend to take their lives in this part of the world. The way the things that they want to do because they think they have to right to do it. So that keeps me at bay, in a way that it's very intimidating to me because why I am the father I'm raising them to be righteous on the side of the Lord. And to do the right thing. For example, how can a girl tell me that she has the right to be with her own fair woman. With that with that, let's use- let's use that example. There's another of mine that...I should have shown you the picture, I- I'll show you the family picture I have it here.

Eric: Okay, cool.

Matthias: I'll show you (stutters). Let me know, I will give it to you. You'll see the family picture. I'm glad that I put it in there. How can a girl tell me that she has the right uh whatever she want to do - I am your father. The way I was raised up you talking to me, you going to talk to me that you have the right to do what you gonna to do? You know, America needs to adjust itself second level. To let the children understand that their parents are are next to God. If they believe in God their parents are next to God. Because the children are going their own way. And this society is changing, it's having a very negative impact on us. As family, as spirits. I want you to take note of that. As this society is is evolving, in kids that are very despicable such as homosexuality, lesbianism, some of these things. As long as this society is accepting those kind of behavior, those kinds of behaviors, those kinds of relationships. As long as society is putting legality on them, that is a disgrace to we the parents.

Eric: Wow. So sir I- I notice it's been some time since you migrated here from Sierra Leone? It's been how many years sir? Uh...

Matthias: Oh, 1979...

Eric: 1979, so that's at least over thirty-five years, right?

Matthias: Over that. That's right.

Eric: So, do see yourself as an immigrant or as a American citizen right now?

Matthias: Well, I'm an American citizen.

Eric: Yeah.

Matthias: You know, there's a saying that you cannot go to another man's land and be there as a stranger forever. You have to be like- you have to change. And be a citizen. You have to be a part of that land. You have to see yourself as a person of that land. Because after seven years, your life apparently changes. So I'm a- I'm a U.S. citizen. Yes. I'm a United States citizen.

Eric: Most definitely. So you don't even see yourself as a outsider no more. You don't...

Matthias: No. I don't- I don't see myself....well, in America there's one thing about Americans that yeah sometimes that intimi- intimidates you. You know, uh, it's weird when you have an accent. That can have an- an impact on you. In most corridors, when you go to most places. First of all, the stigma number one is you are black.

Eric: Right.

Matthias: For example, after I finish my studies I was more qualified than most, than most of the- the white students who went for an interview for ordained ministry. But a guy did one thing to me, which today it has an impact on me right now as I speak. He said to me we know you are qualified, you got your Masters in Divinity, you do this that and all you got all these things but we decide what we can do for you or what we can do, what we- we decide your future here. Number one you are black, number two you have an accent. You have two handicaps against you. So we don- and we don't have that many black churches. So instead of giving me my assignment after doing my studies, they did not give me a job. But they expect me to pay the student loan. And uh not that I don't want to pay my student loan. I would love to pay it. I- I paid - I fund myself to get my first degree. Yes. I fund myself with prestigious scholarships. So if I did that for myself, why should I not fund myself to- to finish paying my tuition. But I was- I was unexpectedly charge to take care of that because I'm doing my graduate studies in their corridor and not only that, in their own field. I wanted to be a lawyer. They want me to, the church told me that I'm called- the church said as you are called, you- you supposed to, to work for God. To do his work, to plead the gospel and we like the way you read the scripture. They collect me on all of that. And at the end of the day the- the- the bishop, they tell the pastor to go to the congregation and pay off my tuition. By the time I finished my studies, guess how much I- I had owed? Because I didn't- I was paying some tuition at the same time I pay portion of some of the tuition, I paid it myself. So I only had a few thousand dollar loan.

Eric: Wow.

Matthias: Which is not much right?

Eric: Not at all.

Matthias: So he told him to go and tell the church that they should pay it off and let me forget about it. They never did. That that money. I acquired so many...astronomical interest astronomical interests and they want me to pay and now the IRS is messing me up. Getting, going after my money. My my my little money that I get – they take it. My taxes, they take everything. As a matter of fact, I want to take them to court.

Eric: It seems though that you're hinting at, America may overlook that you're an immigrant, but it can't overlook that you're a black and also poor?

Matthias: Very good.

Eric: Wow.

Matthias: Yes. No, th-th-they don't.

Eric: Wow. So if you're in a middle class, they will let you know.

Matthias: No.

Eric: No problem.

Matthias: Yes.

Eric: Wow sir. Um I want to move forward but that's a great point, great point sir. Um so this present day, March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2018 your- your homeland Sierra Leone is-is having a presidential election, right?

Matthias: Yes. They are having a rerun.

Eric: Right.

Matthias: They just had election on the 7th- on the 7th of March.

Eric: Right. So can you...

Matthias: Then...

Eric: Can you...oh my bad...can you explain to me why this presidential election is so crucial for your your homeland right now?

Matthias: Well, we have been through a lot as a country. We have been through quite a lot. Who have been through war, a rebel war. Because of the very party that is trying to take the election by force. They were the ones who had done so much corruption in that society, to the point that the people voted them out. The people went to war. And during the war, a lot of things happened and apparently young gallant soldiers led the war who had to take over to- to put this under control and at the end of the day they brought it under democracy. So my party, the Sierra Leone People's party, ran the country for some time, put it back together after the war, get things going in the right direction, and then when my nephew who is now running he was a he was a young soldier at that time. Yeah he was the one who who took the power and brought it under democracy. And and and and and then made the election to be free and fair. And then these embassy guys who went way back and they never did nothing but corruption. They came back again, they played tricks and - all the time that's what they do they play tricks – they rig the election and then they won. So for the past ten years he did nothing but just steal the moneys. So called Ernest Kubbah stole all the money. Right now as I speak here's what he's still doing. He wants to stay in power. He wants to be - he want to make himself the chairman of his party and then he wants to (unclear) control of the party when he becomes the chairman. So that is what they're doing right now as I speak to you. Right now there is th-there is serious strike going on – on the People. Yes. S-so it is a very sad episode. Your interview has a timing that you can't believe but this is a very serious timing.

Eric: Yes. Yeah it is. Oh my gosh.

Matthias: Okay? No matter what, that is my homeland and my people they want democracy and and I show you pictures of how the people rally behind him that this is the man we want. But this and this cruel man is doing everything that lies in his power because he's in control he's in charge he's trying to swing that election to his own advantage. And if that happens that's going to be problem. That's going to be mayhem. But he don't care. Uh some people in his cabinet have giving ammunitions to to senator officers, to soldiers to go ahead and make sure that th-they intimidate the people and the strongholds where my nephew is going to win to become the president, the next president of of Sierra Leone...

Eric: Please.

Matthias: A young man. He also followed me here. He came and study. He went to George Mason. Yes! He studied. After I- after I have given him that kind of democracy he came and studied.

Eric: So right now there's a election of course taking place in Sierra Leone...

Matthias: Right now!

Eric: Do you have...since you're an American Citizen legally right now, do you have a effect what happen? Can you vote, can you go over there and um maybe...?

Matthias: No, right now - well they're just - this guy (yawns). Excuse me. He's such a crook because he knows that there are people like us that didn't ask for it but that wants and go to vote they are saying that no more they don't allow passports as to vote anymore. They would not allow that. Yes. As a matter of fact, one of the prisoner congregated again was uh was uh uh working for the United Nations, Young Killa, he wanted to to become president. They had done everything to to intimidate him to to (unclear) call him all kinds of names just because he had the the drive to become president th-th-they didn't want him to to become the president of of Sierra Leone. So they have a lot of stuff of his (unclear). They call us the (asperous?). And they call us two cents men because we got two cents in our phones. Yes. So there's a lot of things against us.

Eric: You have um a amazing story sir um and it seems like it's never ending it's never ending because you're you're alive how can your journey end if you are living and you breathing, so with that being said, if you look back at your life, what you been through, all the experiences you had - what's one thing you c- you would change if you, if you had the opportunity to do so.

Mathias: Well, one thing I would change is my country. The way the people - the way they think. If I had my way, but it's all in leadership. I would like them, I-I would love to change the way they think. To make them understand that life for you to make it great it's all in your hands. America is not sleeping. That is why they have a beautiful society like it is today. They are ready to work hard. To change their environment you have to learn to change your environment. You have to learn to understand that it is very - it's not a big deal. What you put your energy, your resources - you put them into your own system. You

can shape it and make it a paradise. That's one thing that I would love to do if I had my way to change that country. So the people would be much safer and they would be much healthier. Because...

Eric: That's beautiful.

Matthias: Yes. They get outbreaks of diseases and what not. It's because they are not doing what they're supposed to do to- to take care of the environment. America was not built in a day. America was not built with all these beautiful fancy buildings with this library- this library was not here. This library came here when the people came here and th-th-th-they decided to work hard to put a library here. But it takes a lot of energy, a lot of experience, a lot of uh brain work to change your environment and make it modern and beautiful. That's the thing that I would like to give them. If I have to denounce my citizenship I will do that for them. Yes. I would do that and change. Then I will run. As a matter of fact if I have run ten years ago, their future their- their future would have been different. But bu-but it was because of my health. I was experiencing some trust issues. So I thought about it and I can't go to Africa. If I go it feels like go they put me on the- under the the knife. They might do something that will kill me, I don't know. So I had to stay here until I got to the age where I can get that support, that help, for me to do the surgery. I've got the surgery. I'm a brand new man sitting here. A lady operated on me. Did my prostate surgery. So I'm good. But this is the situation. This is, this is what is happening in my country and at the same time at this stage of my own life I can say well thanks to God I can give it all to my children. You know, the last one is the one that I'm staying with right now temporarily. Yes. And I will show you I will show you the family picture. Let you see that. So, really to be honest with you I would love to change my society. Their way of thinking...they don't understand that, hey, the Lord has blessed you with everything. It is now up to you to think right and put it together and then you can change your environment. But your environment can be as great United States. Cause America is an example to all society. And I believe as long as I'm alive...maybe not this time, but within the next...th-th-th-the as I said the last ten years ahead of me, I will try to make sure that I do that and if possible if my nephew becomes president, then I'm on the way.

Eric: Mmm.

Matthias: Yes.

Eric: Matthias, thank you so much for this wonderful interview. And um I want to say since you're a pastor and have a history of preaching, would you mind if you end this interview in a prayer? For...you-yeah...

Matthias: Of course.

Eric: For your homeland, and...

Matthias: Very well. I- I would love to do that. (Matthias sings) God is so good God is so good God is so good God is so good God is so good is so good to man God is so great God is so great God is so great God is so great God is so great He's so great to us (Matthias stops singing). Heavenly Father, today is a very special day. My friend Eric came to finish up an interview with me. But today is a special day



because it's the day of the rerun. For Democrats to- to prevail in Sierra Leone. And right now as I speak they are doing their elections. But all kinds of intimidation is going on. I think my own people are against my party. The Sierra Leonean People's party. Where my nephew - the people have chosen him. Even the first run he won. But this guy and his black woman is doing everything to disrupt that election. To intimidate the people. To make sure that the guy that he wants wins the election so that he- he can become the chairman of the party and have a remote control over him. Heavenly Father, thou at God. I mean you will put our faith and trust. You are more mightier than anything that man can imagine in this life. That's why we call you the wall. Because in my native language that means you are so big that nothing can stand up to you. So Father, as Eric is interview me right now, I place that country in your hands. Whatever will be the outcome I have place it in your hands. We put our faith and trust in you. And for this country where I am, Father, I want to thank you for everything that this country has done for me so far. I want to thank you for everything that I've been through here in America. I'm gonna thank you for raising my children here. I wanna thank you for the things that they have achieved the (unclear) that they have achieved in their lives. Father you are a great God. I want to thank you for this interview also. Oh Father wherever my kids are continue to bless them. Continue to direct them. And continue to lead them. For thou art indeed the man, in whom, I put my faith and trust. You called me to Ministry. I wanted to be a lawyer. But you called me to Ministry. And I followed the directions. So Father I thank you for my friend, what he is trying to acquire, what he is trying to achieve, and what are the things he's trying to understand about my culture about where I'm coming from and some of the ideas that I have in my head that I want to promote in my own society as well. Father we thank you for everything. I pray that you give me the strength you give me the bl- the blessings so that I will go home and help my people and develop my village I came from, Momando. Thank you for my family, thank you for everybody that are back there. Protect them. In the name of Jesus Christ I call upon for you at this hour. Thank you Lord for everything let this interview always be an interview that will never be forgotten, because this is a great country. It is a great society. Yes. So Father, help me in everything that I do and Jesus Mary name I pray. Thank you, Mr. Eric.

Eric: Amen.

Matthias: Amen.

Eric: Matthias, thank you so much for your wonderful work.

Matthias: You're very welcome.