

IN MY OWN WORDS

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BORN FOR GREATER

My name is Ayanda Mahlaba. I am from Mpolweni Mission, which is a semi-rural community outside of Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. I am in the second year of the MA in Historical Studies. I was part of the 2016 MCF postgraduate scholars' cohort in 2016 while doing my Honours in Public Policy & Administration and returned to the Program again in 2017 as a postgrad scholar for the first year of my MA. I come from a working-class family where my maternal grandmother, late aunt, mother, and uncle collectively raised me. While growing up, things were not easy financially because of the class position of my family and that is partly what motivated me to aspire to do well academically. As a child, I was bullied and so for me, academics and reading books became my refuge.

I have always been interested in understanding society and its institutions and the interactions they have with the state. The community I come from faces immense service delivery backlogs, unemployment, crime, teenage pregnancy, and drug abuse.



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Upon reflection, there is no doubt that the intractable structural challenges I was born to and my attempt to make sense of them have shaped my intellectual interests as seen through the fact that my undergrad degree is a Bachelor of Social Science with majors in International Relations, Industrial Sociology and Public Policy & Administration and the Honours is in Public Policy & Administration. The personal for me has always been intellectual and political hence my intellectual and social interests. These interests have also fuelled me to not only understand my immediate surroundings but the continent and the world as a whole.

In as much as I do not come from a family of graduates and professionals, the value of education was instilled in me from an early age.

Our household was littered with newspapers and magazines because my parents, the aforementioned collective, believed in and loved reading and wanted us to stay abreast of what was happening globally. I strongly believe that this part of my socialization has become somewhat of a guiding light because I actively channel myself to learn and widen the scope of my knowledge. It is something that I constantly try to impart among those I interact with, particularly, the Grade 11 mentees I mentor as part of Inkanyezi.

University for me has not been smooth sailing for numerous reasons. However, I would never have made it without the people who believed in me even when I did not believe in myself. I have realized that regardless of the fact that the world is becoming increasingly inhumane, there are still individuals that genuinely want to help and nurture the talents of others, especially those on the margins of society. Being a recipient of these rare instances of humanity, I actively try to extend it to others myself so as to be an agent of humanness and most importantly to give back to those who follow us, as an attempt at creating a better future.