

## SAARS ALUMNI VIRTUAL GET-TOGETHER, 01 JUNE 2022

### POST-EVENT REPORT

In 2008, Philip Ziegler<sup>1</sup>, biographer and historian, wrote that *“the Search for the ideal (Rhodes) Scholar is as pointless as it is misguided. It is the glory of the Rhodes Scholarships that their holders excel in an infinite variety of talents and pursuits.”* This aptly describes the Scholars who addressed a gathering of over 100 Rhodes Scholars from across Africa on 01 June 2022.



Mark Suzman



Dineo Serame



Renée Hložek

From the CEO of a major philanthropic foundation, to an astrophysicist researching the universe; an engineering graduate who writes poetry and champions mental wellness, to the CEO and Warden of the Rhodes Trust, our programme of speakers was a gathering of the unlike-minded; each one inspirational and providing *“food for the mind and soul”*.

Joining the virtual event from Seattle was Mark Suzman (Natal & Balliol 1991), CEO of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Mark’s keynote address was, in the words of SAARS President Lisa Klein, *“an intellectual tour de force”*. He spoke about his work as a journalist and at the UN; the true importance of leadership and Mandela’s ability to *“appropriate the past to reinvent it”* - as exemplified by adding his name to the Mandela Rhodes Foundation rather than replacing the Rhodes name; and redefining the “World’s Fight” to respond to contemporary world challenges, which in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century he believes is about fighting global inequality. Despite the multitude of global issues we face, Mark remains an optimist.

Renée Hložek (South Africa-at-Large & Christ Church 2008) is an Assistant Professor of Astronomy & Astrophysics, Dunlap Institute, University of Toronto. Renée joined the event from Canada and gave a brilliant and mind-bending talk on the *Universe in Five Minutes*, summarized in 5 points:

1. The Universe started in a hot dense state
2. The Universe has tons of Dark Matter in it

3. The Universe has even more Dark Energy in it
4. Dark Matter and Dark Energy are not the same
5. The Universe is going to end with a whimper (*and that is okay*)

Renée shared magnificent images of the universe taken from the research she is doing into dark matter vs dark energy, and inspired many of us to look up at the sky with renewed wonder.

Dineo Serame (Botswana & Hertford 2019), is still at Oxford and reading for a DPhil in Engineering Science. She is an advocate for mental health, and performed her evocative poetry at the event. Dineo noted that “*while mental health seems a relatively new concept in Africa, our people have always found a way to communicate their mental states with one another. We healed ourselves before modern medicine caught up.*” For example, in Setswana, the phrase ‘*ke kotometse pelo/mowa*’ means my heart or spirit has set (like the sun).

*Some days the sun drops one more time to bless us with a good night’s sleep, yet all we see is night and its terror.*

*Ke kotometse pelo; the sun has set with all my cheer.*

*This is no promised land*

*It is not where the king sacrifices his bones for my salvation*

*Here we are more afraid of the stars than we are of people*

Dineo gave a beautiful, vulnerable, courageous performance that touched the soul in a profound way. She has shared her poetry [here](#).

The Warden, Elizabeth Kiss (Virginia & Balliol 1983), gave us an overview of the key highlights of the Rhodes Trust year: the progress being made with the Big Build at Rhodes House; the launch of the Warden’s Book Club for resident Scholars; the recent Promises Auction, which raised funds for the Scholar-led *Africa Impact Finance Initiative*; the first 100 RISE Winners (aged 15-17) and the inaugural residential programme to be held in Cape Town in July 2022; and the upcoming 120th Anniversary Scholar Reunion in Oxford commencing 29 June 2023. Elizabeth’s leadership, commitment, energy and passion for the work that she does at the helm of the Rhodes Trust remains inspiring.

The programme ended with Scholars from similar cohorts connecting with their peers in virtual breakaway sessions.

We were also delighted to welcome seventeen Rhodes Scholars-Elect (2022) from across Africa to their first Rhodes community event. In the breakaway group, the Scholars-Elect were able to meet each other for the first time, share experiences and exchange contact details. We hope that this will enable the newest cohort of Scholars from Africa to form a supportive community that will continue to grow during their time at Oxford.

An in-person dinner is planned for early September 2022 in Johannesburg to bid the Southern African Rhodes Scholars-Elect *Bon Voyage* and to Welcome Back returning Scholars. Further details will follow and we look forward to seeing many of you at this event.

Sincere thanks goes to our small but effective SAARS Organising Committee, comprising Lisa Klein (South Africa-at-Large & St Antony’s 1994) and Charne Lavery (South Africa-at-Large & Balliol 2008). We are so grateful

for all that they do to ensure that SAARS continues to remain relevant, connects the African-elected Rhodes Scholars from across the world, and grows the sense of community.

**Prepared by:**

**Beverley Johnson**

Regional Manager

Rhodes Scholarships for Southern Africa

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**Reference:**

1. Philip Ziegler (2008), *Legacy: Cecil Rhodes, The Rhodes Trust and Rhodes scholarship*, page 334.