



The Rhodes Trust community mourns Eusebius McKaiser

In Eusebius McKaiser (*South Africa at Large & St Antony's 2003*) we have lost a fierce mind, community builder and a champion for justice who found his life's work as a broadcaster, author and thinker in South Africa and in the global public sphere.

Eusebius embodied the best ideals that we aspire to as members of the Rhodes Scholar community. He was deeply committed to and involved in transforming that community, here in South Africa and globally.

A scholar-in-residence between 2003 and 2006, Eusebius read philosophy at Oxford, where he was deeply engaged in Oxford intellectual life and the Rhodes community in residence, and had a brilliant debating career at the Oxford Union. Though he did not complete his DPhil thesis, he brought his philosophical training into his later life and work.

A job at McKinsey brought him back to South Africa. He ticked all the right boxes for a smooth ascent on the corporate ladder, but he wanted to become a public intellectual and political commentator. It did not take him long to find his way into the media industry, where he went on to command broadcasting, print and digital formats, working for some of the best-known brands, and also as a self-employed creator.

Eusebius was an active member of the Rhodes Scholar community and served on several selection committees at regional and national level. He took joy in sparring with bright young people. He challenged aspirant Rhodes Scholars to think beyond their preconceptions and comfort zones. This applied to all types of comfort zones: the cultural activist was invited to think about the beauty of the classical music canon, the fiscal centrist to consider the social consequences of her economic posture, the Fallist had to come up with a viable plan for university financing.

Eusebius brought empathy and clarity to the role of sifting through the very best young people our society produced. He could discern talent even when it did not come polished by determined resume-padding and privilege. Despite being a world class, well decorated debater, he was not enamoured of the competitive-debater-to-Rhodes-scholar conveyor belt. He probed for depth and vulnerability from those accustomed to riding on their impressive verbal skills.

With the passage of time, new cohorts of Scholars become increasingly illegible to those that came before them. Eusebius remained an engaged, curious and generous senior scholar. Over the past few days, many people have shared the ways in which he generously gave of his time to mentor fellow Scholars. This practice extended far beyond our community, as many benefited from his wisdom as fledgling debaters at school or university.

Eusebius wrote and spoke openly about his journey as a gay man in South Africa. His courage and openness inspired all of us to embrace our whole selves.

Eusebius was ambitious, yet this did not impede his ability to present himself with authenticity. In a community associated with prestige, the weight of expectation about what a Rhodes scholar should represent could be too heavy on those from modest and marginalised backgrounds. Eusebius had no qualms about chuckling at his own 'code switching' as he moved with versatility in all the spaces he inhabited. He did not conceal his humble origins, even as he cautioned against the glamorisation of struggle.

Just over twenty years into the life of the 'new' South Africa, a wave of student activism swept through university campuses. The rallying cry, "Rhodes Must Fall," centred on the man who seeded our community. Eusebius, a master at forging messy contestations around race, history, power and morality into coherent debate, produced powerful writing on these enduring questions.

He efficiently demolished those strands of argument that sought to bully Rhodes Scholars (and Rhodes university alumni) into grateful defense of the man and his legacy. He protected the space for the full diversity of the community's views to be heard. Of his many interventions on this issue, his March 2015 opinion piece in the *New York Times* is a reminder of the heat and the unresolved tensions of that moment. His warning is unshakeable:

"Mythmaking soothes, but it leaves the country open to future ruptures, which could result, if the core issues are never adequately addressed, in uncontrollable explosions of discontent. And that's far more dangerous for a young democracy than reducing Rhodes to rubble."

Eusebius worked hard to bring rigour and thoughtfulness to South African discourse, to wean us off our addictions to platitudes and rage. The three books he authored bear testament to a mind at work in loving service of his country of birth. He put himself out there, at a time when easier paths were available to such an accomplished man. He did not seek to cultivate his entry into the global elite into personal profit. He loved the Rhodes Scholar community for what it had become - a meeting of mostly brilliant people with potential for great public impact. But he did not spare us from his brand of truth telling and activism.

Eusebius gave vivid expression to our community's injunction *to fight the world's fight*. A thinker at ease in the lecture hall and on the Twitter streets, Eusebius is surely one of the best to have danced in that building on South Parks Road in Oxford.

We invite members of the Rhodes Scholar community to share their tributes to and memories of Eusebius at this link: [Eusebius tributes](#)

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