

## TASK TEAM ON NAMING OF BUILDINGS, ROOMS, SPACES AND ROADS

The task team met 3 times over a period of 8 months, from 9 October 2015 to 20 May 2016. Its composition allowed for a variety of cultural viewpoints and intellectual approaches both to the general question of “naming” public spaces and the specificity of UCT’s current juncture, to shape the proceedings. Debates and exchanges were free-flowing, allowing for mutual understanding and respect, especially when contrasts tended to be sharper than expected.

Members were mindful that the conclusions they would reach and the arguments they would formulate to support their findings, would eventually find their way into public discourse. However this statement is not intended for the general public but for the NOBC, hence its length and details in explaining how the task team reached a thoughtful recommendation.

As a starting point members of the task team agreed on easily understood parameters, namely that there was no need to name or rename every locale on UCT’s campuses; that a distinction could be made between “functional names” (sometimes referred to as “neutral”, which is a misnomer that should rather not be used) and “proper names” that celebrate or evoke persons, places, or events. A further suggestion was made that for some buildings, and the proper names they carry, to stand out there should not be an inflation of “proper names”. And also that room should be left for later generations to name locales on campus.

The task team then embarked on looking at building records, and further soliciting and collating submissions through a public participation process among the University community. This included an invitation to students, staff and alumni. The public participation process delivered some 323 proposals concerning a short list of buildings and tabled at a meeting on 20 May 2016.

The task team focused then their attention on the renaming of Jameson Hall, a practical priority in view of the process to be undertaken and have the Hall renamed for the December graduation ceremonies.

Four arguments emerged that helped the task team form an opinion:

Firstly, naming buildings is an emotional issue and care should be taken in selecting names that illustrate what is at the heart, and in the name, of a “university”, that is, its “universality”, expressed as a pursuit of equality, social justice, reconciliation and human promotion - a university’s space is not merely an assemblage of buildings but a human whole that transcends its components. Naming the Hall should echo this overarching concern.

In this regard, a counter-argument was made by some petitioners who rejected outright any name changes, or most name changes, and specifically for the Hall: the main tenet of their counter-argument was expressed as a deep reverence to History understood as a respect toward the “foundational moment” of the University as it is reflected in the names of buildings. However this counter-argument formulates its own rebuttal: the University is a living organism and as time passes successive generations of students, who then become alumnae/i, must also be given the opportunity to reflect on the ethos of the institution and inscribe in turn their interpretation in names given to buildings. In this regard one submission stands out, which reminded us that we are simply the trustees of the University, that we do not own it: it is precisely on this ground that the task team believes renaming is an act of respectful trusteeship, showing that trust passes on from generation to generation without ever fixing it on a given point of reference. It was mentioned that, in a distant future, the Hall may well be renamed again.

Secondly, the task team agreed that a name does not carry always a meaning in itself; that a name may seem to mean something when it means something else. Naming carries with it a duty to educate about the name chosen. Naming the Hall will impose on the University to educate public, parents, students and staff about the significance to the new name so as not to have it fall into insignificance or popular misconceptions.

Thirdly, regarding the Hall, there was agreement around the notion that, as a locale where the University is seen as performing itself on a grand stage, either ceremonially or festively, thought must be given to the place itself upon which the focal point of the University is situated, its cultural or historical substructure.

Fourthly, the task team recognized that, in trying to find a designation that would respond to those three aspects, there was a risk to engage in creative naming, and repeat the fallacy of made-up indigenous, linguistic coinages under apartheid.

Bearing all this in mind, the task team came to the conclusion that, (i) the Hall that stands proud at the heart of the University, and being in this respect out of the ordinary, should have a name that would straddle the distinction between a “proper name” and a “functional name” so as to reflect its exceptionality; (ii) a thoughtful change of name would elicit support (see above our discussion of the counter-argument), (iii) a new name should evoke something easily recognizable, and with which students, academics, staff and parents could identify when they congregate in the Hall; that, (iv) such name should evoke what is performed in the Hall, that is, a celebration of togetherness around the communal search for knowledge.

In conclusion, the task team thus resolved to put to the NOBC a short list of names which respond to the four criteria defined in the course of the proceedings, ie:

- Memorial Hall
- One of Imbizo, Lekgotla, Pitso, Kgoro, which all means meeting or gathering place, or their khoisan equivalent