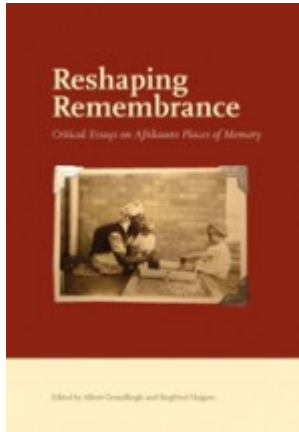# Reshaping Remembrance ~ The Location

1.

I must have been in about standard six when I first heard that the location in our town also had a name: Sandbult. I can't remember whether I heard this by accident or whether I had asked about it, but I do know that I heard the word for the first time from my father. He was the mayor and could be assumed to know the names of the town's suburbs: Harmonie, Buytendag and Murrayville, where the white people lived, and, at the edge of the town, the place I could never think of as a 'suburb' but which was later to become known to me as Sandbult. And that's what it was: a sandy hill next to the Stormberg Stream. There was also a location for Coloureds, with a name reflecting higher aspirations or maybe just the name-giver's mischievousness: Eureka. Names that were not known to many people apart from city planners and municipal officials, names which appeared on town maps in a dusty office, but nowhere else. For the rest of us, white and black, these were simply 'locations'.

Such places are not supposed to exist anymore. Some circumspection has crept into the definitions provided by dictionaries – and soon the little sloppy research I start doing begins to feel like a rather scandalous undertaking. Boshoff and Nienaber**[i]** report in their *Afrikaanse etimologieë* that the word 'location' was, according to the *New English Dictionary*, first used in the United States as a name for the place where one lived. They trace the origin of the term to the Latin locus ('place') and locare ('to appoint a place'). Jean and William Branford**[ii]** define the historical meaning as 'the land granted to a party of Settlers' – a meaning which is recorded in detail with reference to the United States of America in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. In A *Dictionary of South African English* the current meaning of the word ('a segregated area on the outskirts of a town or city set aside for black housing or accommodation') is marked as 'obsolescent'.**[iii]** *The Handwoordeboek van die Afrikaanse Taal* (HAT) from 1965 is more matter-of-fact and succinct: 'Residential area for Coloureds or Bantus, usually near a town or village'.**[iv]**

Thirty years later the Woordeboek van die Afrikaanse Taal (WAT) declares that the word 'is felt to be discriminatory and derogatory, particularly in its application to the policy of apartheid', and adds a meaning which I haven't come across in other sources: 'inhabitants of such a residential area'.**[v]** The WAT also refers to a meaning which deviates from the standard according to which the location is always situated close to or directly adjacent to a town or city: 'Administrative area comprising land for Black people that includes, apart from residential areas, farm-lands and pasture, and which as territorial unit also forms a geo-political and administrative unit, usually under a headman.'**[vi]**

What real help does an Afrikaans-speaking person in his fifties get from these lexicographical sources, in a book on places of memory? The starting-points provided by the dictionaries are scanty, with too little history, too little inspiration, and research in historical and sociological works does not appear to me to be the right place to start. So I decide to go looking for help in the place where one can find the proverbial needle in a haystack: Google.

Location means: place or position. That, at least, we know. According to Wikipedia (not always that expert or reliable, I hear) one can think of it as 'absolute location'. An example would be the location of Location in the Eastern Cape, which, according to the web site Falling Rain Genomics, on Google, lies at latitude 31o 28' south and longitude 27o 21' east, 1 397 meters above sea level.**[vii]** Alternatively, and again according to Wikipedia, the term may be considered more geographically as 'relative location'. In terms of this meaning, once again according to Falling Rain, Location is located 0.9 nautical miles east of Indwe – the closest town, 18.3 nautical miles from Rossouw to the south, 4.3 nautical miles from Ventersrust to the east and 4.3 nautical miles from Milan to the south.

For a few days these facts about a place named Location – the only place with this name that I could find on the world-wide web – make me quite restless. How could it be that a place with quite a few inhabitants (around 2 966 in a radius of 7 kilometers, according to Falling Rain) still bears that name today? A further excursion on the net suggests that one should not be too surprised about this, not if Bethlehem, Brandfort, Graaff-Reinet, Heilbron, Klipplaat, Piet Retief, Wepener and Zastron each has a New Location, with its own postal code, which is therefore still officially regarded as a place, 15 years after 1994;**[viii]** or if the municipality of Knysna continues to fund and administer a White Location Clinic.**[ix]** The term

is clearly not totally or universally as obsolescent or derogatory as dictionaries would have us believe – and the web provides abundant evidence for this truth. 'The "location" becomes a trendy fashion term,' the Namibian writes with reference to Katatura, the location at Windhoek.**[x]** In the seventeenth edition of Minawawe on Track,**[xi]** a very cool web-based magazine, I read about 'Kasie style' and 'Location culture' – a term which as Loxion Kulca has become a sexy name for fashionable shoes, clothes, handbags and makeup.**[xii]**

The Falling Rain web site includes a graphical depiction of the cloud cover above Location and the rainfall chart for the past week. Who collects all this information? I look at the images and print them on my Laserjet, but the thought that the place must be a figment of the imagination, that exists only on the world-wide web, will not go away. Having grown up in the Eastern Cape, I have heard of Rossouw and Indwe, but the other neighbouring towns – Fairview, Milan and Guba (two Italian names?) – are completely unknown to me. Lokasie simply must be in the Eastern Cape, however: the closest airport is indicated as being in Queenstown, 36 nautical miles away. Just to make sure of this, I go back to Falling Rain and click on Ventersrust, then on the Tuscan-sounding Guba, then on Milan. Each of these three places appears with its geographical coordinates and neighbouring towns on three maps of Southern Africa, the Eastern Cape and the immediate surroundings respectively. The incredulous browser can move the mouse in all directions and also click on a satellite photo that can be enlarged for a closer look. But now I notice a worrying little warning at the bottom of each map: 'not valid for navigation' (except, of course, on the internet).

During my next Google excursion I suddenly discover a new place on Maplandia.com, a web site with a name evoking all sorts of exotic connotations: Mgwalana, close to Indwe. It has the same coordinates (31o 28' south, 27o 18' east) as the above mentioned Lokasie.**[xiii]** On the same page, there is an advertisement which talks enthusiastically about how one can investigate, plan and pay for a visit to South Africa, and therefore to Mgwalana, by using the services of Expedia.co.uk: 'Expedia offers airline tickets, hotel reservations, car rental, cruises, and many other Mgwalana or South Africa in-destination services from a broad selection of partners. Feel free to use the Expedia travel services from below, start your Mgwalana holidays today!' Those who can't wait are invited to 'dive' immediately into Mgwalana by using Google Earth's unique three-dimensional satellite map.

Is this my Eureka moment, my entry to a place which raises visions of an exotic rural experience in cyber space? The satellite photo makes one suspect a certain aridness. Big erosion marks are clearly visible, and beneath the photograph there is another warning: 'This map is informational only. No representation is made or warranty given as to its content, user assumes all risk of use.'

When I come across 'school Uppuygunduru in Ammanabrolu, Prakasm, Andhra Praddesh, India' and 'Huelmo, Puerto Montt, Lhanquihue, Chile' under Maplandia's 'Latest placemarks' my suspicions get the better of me once again – and so I go searching for someone to consult in Indwe. According to a very friendly woman at the Buyani Cooperation Project, an organisation I track down on the internet via Prodder, 'the NGO and development directory of South Africa', there are indeed quite a few locations near Indwe, but certainly no Location. She talks about 'locations' as if they were nothing to be ashamed of. The nearest location to Indwe is Lupapasi, she says – and indeed, Lupapasi, too, can be found on the web, on Traveljournals.net**[xiv]** and Geonames,**[xv]** where it appears with exactly the same coordinates as Lokasie and Mgwalana; Geonames even has an aerial photograph of it.**[xvi]** A warning similar to those on Falling Rain appears on the Traveljournals web site: 'Maps and coordinates for Lupapasi are approximative and not valid for navigation.'

I decide that on my next trip to the Eastern Cape I should perhaps pass through Indwe and see for myself whether Lokasie/Mgwalana/Lupapasi does in fact exist, and under which, or how many, of the three names that are associated with a given set of coordinates. Maybe even have a cappuccino in Milan or Guba? In the meantime, my little detective work leads me to speculate that perhaps the uncertainty about the valid name may unintentionally provide a clue to what we as Afrikaners have always imagined 'the location' to be: a place that could be named haphazardly, but which always possessed certain geographical and non-geographical coordinates. Always the same place, whatever its name may have been?

2.
The relative position of the location, always thought of in relation to other places, provides one key to its location in both the South African landscape and white memory. The idea of being apart in a place which specifically had to be apart in the Branford definition ('a segregated area on the outskirts of a town or city set aside for black housing and accommodation';**[xvii]** my italics) appears in

all the dictionaries and historical guides that I have consulted. Now and then there is mention of a residential area with greater autonomy, a 'geopolitical or common law unit',**[xviii]** or of 'rural areas where Africans congregated or had exclusive rights of occupation'.**[xix]** But such places are certainly not locations as dictated by memory; they are reserves or homelands or, as my grandfather would have said, part of 'kaffir land'. Although Rosenthal**[xx]** also signals another meaning, the location remains part of a town or city; situated on the outskirts of a town or city; visible from a town or city – or if not visible, then tangible; something one was always aware of somehow.

The hierarchy implied by this adjacent position emerges clearly from Saunders' statement under the heading 'Urban segregation' that 'many whites saw towns as essentially the creation of the white man'.**[xxi]** When I think of the towns of my youth I can recall a few instances apart from the already well-known Soweto where the name of the location was known to us: Duncan Village in East London, for example, or the Mdantsane that was built years later. All other locations, however, belonged to a town. We spoke of 'Aliwal North's location', 'Queenstown's location' and so on, without knowing or asking whether these places had their own names. And suddenly I can't help wondering: what happens to the location in Peter Blum's 'Woordafleiding'?**[xxii]** The location is not mentioned in that poem, even though it is as much part of any town as the Dutch Reformed Church or the post office. A town without smoke coming from the location surely cannot really be a town?**[xxiii]** Shall we then accept that the location, submissively as its status requires, joins Blum's village in being uprooted and disappearing into the unknown – or could this be a case where the location remains long after the village has disappeared down the main road? What a pity Blum didn't write an etymological poem about the location as well.

The characteristic position of the location next to a town is closely related to the fact that, in the course of South African history, there was an increasing insistence on separating locations from white residential areas. In this context, Saunders**[xxiv]** talks about a cordon sanitaire between the location and places where white people lived, and in blank by Judin and Vladislavic I find the following under 'buffer zone':

[*The Native Affairs Department laid down as a general rule that locations were to be separated from areas occupied by other population groups by buffer zones 500 yards wide, and from all other external boundaries by buffer zones 200 yards*

*wide, unless such boundaries were main roads, in which case the zones were to be 500 yards for a national road and 300 yards for a provincial road. Rows of trees could be planted in buffer zones, but the land could not be developed.***[xxv]**

Here we see a glimpse of the statutory consolidation of a South African topography that had started to become the norm under Shepstone in Natal. Did the town planners of my youth think of terms such as cordon sanitaire and 'buffer zone' when they decided that the location would be on the other side of the Stormberg Stream? Or were such ideas superfluous as Black people already knew where their place would be? Everyone from Sandbult who wanted to visit the white town had to cross the dry stream bed, and when the stream was in flood, carrying huge amounts of shit that had been deposited into it, they had to take the longer route over the ramshackle bridge at the other side of a big bend in the stream – a detour of almost a kilometer. The few inhabitants of Sandbult who possessed a vehicle also had to travel this route: past the cemetery and the foot of the mountain, and then right over the bridge.

According to Saunders,**[xxvi]** black people voluntarily settled on the outskirts of Cape Town in the nineteenth century; the first group for whom a location was identified where only they were allowed live was the Indians who arrived as mine labourers in the Transvaal in the late nineteenth century. In Cape Town and Port Elizabeth the outbreak of bubonic plague at the start of the twentieth century provided a handy excuse for the removal of black people from 'white' residential areas. Apart from the view that towns were the creation of white people and therefore places where only they should live, the increasing territorial segregation was also driven by the so-called 'sanitary syndrome': the fear for the spreading of disease.

When I read this I realise how strong I still have associations even today with filth, infection and disease when I think of the 'location'. The sanitary cordon or buffer zone would protect us against the stench and germs of the place on the other side of the stream. In his analysis of 'native space' in East London, Minkley enumerates a number of metaphors of sickness and tumours that were related to the 'black spots' where 'pondokkie aggregations' or 'clottings of pondokkies' or a 'lawless conglomeration of

Coloured and Native persons' could be found.**[xxvii]** 'To the casual observer it is an "eyesore", a "blot on the landscape", the Britten Commission reported in 1942;

'to the scientist it is the natural excrescence of a diseased economy'. Around this time, the word 'pondokkie' became part of South African English. Minkley writes: Pondokkies were linked to dirt, dirt to excrement, excrement to disease, and disease to the moral degradation of the inhabitants.'**[xxviii]** In Duncan Village, the raid at 5 a.m. and the facility for disinfection formed part of a set routine. Police agents examined women's petticoats in search of lice and if one was found, the whole household would be taken to the dip tank. Heads were shaven, bodies sprayed with toxins and clothes thrown into boiling water.

There was considerable disagreement between the planners of apartheid and those who had to implement the policy around the question how permanent the inhabitants of locations were supposed to be. Historically, the location is not so much a place where one could freely choose to live as a place where one was settled and located, or removed to, by someone else. For the settler in America or South Africa the verb locare was activated: someone else would determine where one lived. The later inhabitant of the location, however, was preferably not seen as a settler of any kind.

His or her presence was regarded by the more rigid ideologues of the time as one of complete subservience to the needs of the white inhabitants of the town or city. The most memorable articulation of this view is to be found in the so-called Stallard Doctrine. The Transvaal Commission for Local Government chaired by Colonel Stallard explained this position in its report of 1922 as follows: 'The Native should only be allowed to enter urban areas, which are essentially the White man's creation, when he is willing to enter and minister to the needs of the White man and should depart therefrom when he ceases so to minister.**[xxix]**

These words suddenly remind me of the siren that used to go off in my home town at nine every evening as a warning to all black people to leave the white area. When the Vienna Boys' Choir performed there one evening, the choir master experienced a panic attack: the sound reminded him of the sirens before a bombardment. What explanation, I wonder, would the mayor have given that night? The location which I remember is the kind of place about which the Britten Commission wrote with morbid lyricism in 1942:

The pondokkie (…), in its design, owes nought to any school of architecture, European or Asian, ancient or modern. Its conception is determined entirely by the scraps of material that go into its structure, pieces of corrugated iron, old tins

*and drums, rough boughs, sacking. Anything which can possibly offer protection against the weather. Piece by piece, scrap material is bought, begged, or filched and added to make room for a growing family. There are no windows, no ceilings, and very often no door. Sanitation is non-existent. Many of these hovels would do a disservice to animals. The pondokkie is the lowest standard of human habitation.***[xxx]**

When I think about it carefully, this is the kind of place I remember and not really the kind of place I actually saw the few times my siblings and I drove into Sandbult with Stefaans, whose job it was to deliver groceries for my father's shop. There were streets and street lights and stop signs and little gardens (although, I remember, no pavements) and people in front of their houses or on stoeps (front verandas) or sitting in chairs. But not one of these visual impressions was strong enough to erase the mental image of the location in its dustiness, chaos and unfamiliarity.

The thing that was most real about the location was the noise it produced. On weekend nights the location became a few lights in the distance and a wall of incoherent sound, which to me as a child evoked a sphere of drunkenness and uncontrolled merriment. They could drink, that was for sure. Only later a small question would arise in me about what else the people could do there on a Saturday night, with no amenities for entertainment. My sources explain that the location as place of residence was qualified by two additional views that became ideologically entangled as time moved on. The first was that there really were no black residents in white areas, only people who came there on a brief sojourn and whose actual place of living was somewhere else. The location was by (white, apartheid, our) definition a place of provisionality, a stopover, a place of transit, an outpost of the homeland. In the course of time the right to live there, or even to be there, became more and more curtailed. The second view, which is also recorded in detail by Minkley, was that black people did not need to be accommodated in the same way as we were. A report from 1954 on technical elements in urban Bantu housing therefore states: 'In South Africa, the non-European standard for space is about half that allowed in civilized countries.'**[xxxi]**

3.
The location was in essence a place of paradox: a place that really was no place, a residential area that was in principle deemed to be temporary and inhospitable.

The provisional nature of the location was one of our greatest illusions. The above quote on building standards for Bantus forms a prelude to a remarkable development: the movement away from the amorphous, sandy place on the other side of the stream of my youth and towards the orderly grid of KwaThema, Mdantsane and many other places which would occupy a much larger patch on Google than the elusive locations of the Eastern Cape. In the 1950s, the government decided that the filth, infection and disorderliness of the old locations should be replaced by the utopia of new residential areas based on minimum standards, scientifically determined needs, orderly patterns and Western norms (albeit adjusted and halved) for the use and occupation of space. The NE51/9, the basic four-room house of the 1950s, made its appearance. Within a political framework in which the black person was in principle always seen as a guest, this 'workman's cottage' was, incongruously, designed to serve as family home, in a bizarre interplay between the apartheid official's obsession with control and the modernist architect's dream of scientific design that could call into being a new human subject.**[xxxii]**

Towards the end of the 1960s almost all houses in black urban areas were the outcome of an enormous construction plan by the state, with standardized designs and similar building materials,**[xxxiii]** in a rigorous pattern which embodied the futile hope of creating a new, law-abiding, spotlessly clean and controllable human being out of the mythical chaos and squalor of the location.

I suspect that for most white people of my age anything we may ever actually have seen of the location is archived together with much more compelling images of a place on the other side of a river or railway line or road, a place which could from the beginning, and maybe irretrievably, only be imagined. I look at the satellite images of Lokasie/Mgwalana/Lupapasi and ask myself: are they less real than what I can remember of Sandbult? All this is as near to me and as far away from me as the post-1994 residential areas with four-room houses that I see from the highway.

NOTES
i. 1 S.E. Boshoff & G. Nienaber, Afrikaanse etimologieë. Pretoria: Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns 1967, 393.
ii. J. & W. Branford. A Dictionary of South African English. 4th edition. Cape Town: Oxford University Press 1991, 180.
iii. Ibid.

iv. P.C. Schoonees et al. Woordeboek van die Afrikaanse taal. Klerksdorp: Voortrekkerpers 1965: 513.

v. D.J. van Schalkwyk et al. Woordeboek van die Afrikaanse Taal. Volume 9. Stellenbosch: Buro van die WAT 1994, 352.

vi. D.J. van Schalkwyk et al. Woordeboek van die Afrikaanse taal. Volume 9. Stellenbosch: Buro van die WAT 1994: 352. Here it should be added that the Reverend Pettman distinguishes between an Eastern Cape usage (land next to a village) and a Natal usage (tribal area with a population of 10-12 000) in his Africanderisms. London: Longmans, Green and Co. 1913: 298-299. A Dictionary of South African English on Historical Principles, too, refers to 'rural location' as a meaning that occurred specifically in Natal, and also mentions the meaning of a piece of land allocated for cultivation by a farmer to his workers (Oxford University Press 1996, 425-426).

vii. http://fallingrain/world/SF/1/Lokasie.html. All Web sources were consulted in August 2007.

viii. http://saweb.co.za/postcodes/n.html.

ix. http://capegateway.gov.za/afr/directories/facilities/6422/20448.

x. http://namibian.com.na/2006/December/national/0666DF84EA.html.

xi. http://minawawe.co.za/news/issue17/17.htm.

xii. http://loxionkulca.com/home.asp.

xiii. http://maplandia.com/south-africa/easter-cape/indwe/mgwalana.

xiv. http://traveljournals.net/explore/south_africa/map/m1829296/lupapasi.html.

xv. http://geonames.org/981340/lupapasi.html.

xvi. On Falling Rain, however, I search in vain for Lupapasi and only find Lupapazi in Limpopo Province.

xvii. J. & W. Branford. A Dictionary of South African English. 4th edition. Cape Town: Oxford University Press 1991, 180.

xviii. D.J. van Schalkwyk et al. Woordeboek van die Afrikaanse taal. Volume 9. Stellenbosch: Buro van die WAT 1994, 352.

xix. C. Saunders, Historical Dictionary of South Africa. Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press 1983, 101.

xx. E. Rosenthal, Encyclopaedia of Southern Africa. 7th edition. Cape Town: Juta & Company 1978, 285.

xxi. C. Saunders, Historical Dictionary of South Africa. Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press 1983, 183.

xxii. P. Blum, Steenbok tot poolsee. Cape Town: Nasionale Boekhandel Beperk 1955, 21-23. In 'Woordafleiding' ('Word Derivation') the word dorp is traced to

words such as dreiben in German and to drive in English, in an etymological play that leads to a surprising metamorphosis, freely translated: 'O you little villagers, guests of Brief Sojourn! / Chosen people of an eternal Exodus / I see you take the open veld on the hoof / following the road – your flimsy ropes get torn – / your walking sticks catch the wind like masts, and you push / always further.'

xxiii. In the second stanza of N.P. van Wyk Louw's 'Karoo-dorp: someraand' ('Karoo Town: Summer Evening') we read: 'en rook uit die lokasie rook / en by die dorpsdam sing / en mense in tennisbroekies loop / die koper skemer in' ('and smoke coming out of the location / and some singing at the town's dam / and people in tennis shorts / walk away into the copper dusk'). N.P. van Wyk Louw, Versamelde gedigte. Cape Town: Human & Rousseau 1981, 253.

xxiv. C. Saunders, Historical Dictionary of South Africa. Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press 1983, 101.

xxv. H. Judin & I. Vladislavic, blank. Architecture, Apartheid and After. Rotterdam: NA Publishers 1998, 11.

xxvi.C. Saunders, Historical Dictionary of South Africa. Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press 1983, 183-184.

xxvii. G. Minkley, '"Corpses Behind Screens": Native Space in the City', in: H. Judin & I. Vladislavic, blank. Architecture, Apartheid and After. Rotterdam: NA Publishers 1998: 203-206. As late as 1995, Du Pré and Eksteen list as synonyms for 'lokasie' 'agterbuurt, ghetto, gops(e), hol, kroek' ('slum, ghetto, low area, den, hovel'), L. Du Pré & L. Eksteen, Groot Afrikaanse sinoniemboek. Pretoria: Van Schaik 1995, 189.

xxviii. G. Minkley, '"Corpses Behind Screens": Native Space in the City', in: H. Judin & I. Vladislavic, blank. Architecture, Apartheid and After. Rotterdam: NA Publishers 1998, 203-206.

xxix. C. Saunders, Historical Dictionary of South Africa. Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press 1983, 165.

xxx. 30 G. Minkley, '"Corpses Behind Screens": Native Space in the City', in: H. Judin & I. Vladislavic, blank. Architecture, Apartheid and After. Rotterdam: NA Publishers 1998, 205.

xxxi. Ibid.

xxxii. D. Japha, 'The Social Programme of the South African Modern Movement', in: H. Judin & I. Vladislavic, blank. Architecture, Apartheid and After. Rotterdam: NA Publishers 1998, 436-437.

xxxiii. O. Crankshaw & S. Parnell, 'Interpreting the 1994 African Township Landscape', in: H. Judin & I. Vladislavic, blank. Architecture, Apartheid and After.

Rotterdam: NA Publishers 1998, 439.

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