



LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA presents

# THIS IS NOT A BURIAL, IT'S A RESURRECTION

A film by LEMOHANG JEREMIAH MOSESE

URUCU MEDIA presents "THIS IS NOT A BURIAL, IT'S A RESURRECTION"  
MARY TWALA MHLONGO JERRY MOFOKENG WA MAKHETHA MAKHAOLA NDEBELETSEKO MONAHENG SIPHIWE NZIMA  
Casting by CAIT PANSEGROUW & MOONYEENN LEE Music by YU MIYASHITA Sound Design by PRESSURE COOKER STUDIOS  
Edited by LEMOHANG JEREMIAH MOSESE Cinematography by PIERRE DE VILLIERS Production Design by LEILA WALTER  
Costume Design by NAO SERATI Screenplay by LEMOHANG JEREMIAH MOSESE Produced by CAIT PANSEGROUW & ELIAS RIBEIRO  
Directed by LEMOHANG JEREMIAH MOSESE

# CONTACT

## Press

INDIE PR

Jim Dobson  
jim@indie-pr.com  
+1 323 896 6006

## International Sales

ARTSCOPE - A LABEL OF  
MEMENTO FILMS INTERNATIONAL

Sales: mathieu@memento-films.com  
+33 6 87 88 45 26

Festivals: gaëlle@memento-films.com  
+33 1 53 34 90 33

## Production Company

URUCU MEDIA

Cait Pansegrouw | Producer  
cp@urucumedia.com  
+27 83 395 0088

Elias Ribeiro | Producer  
er@urucumedia.com  
+27 71 844 5435

She finds a new will to live and ignites a collective spirit  
of defiance within her community.





## SYNOPSIS

Amongst the pythonic mountains of land-locked Lesotho, an 80 year old widow winds up her earthly affairs, makes arrangements for her burial and prepares to die.

But when her village is threatened with forced resettlement due to the construction of a reservoir, she finds a new will to live and ignites a collective spirit of defiance within her community. In the final dramatic moments of her life, Mantoa's legend is forged and made eternal.





## DIRECTOR'S BIO

Lemohang Jeremiah Mosese is a self-taught filmmaker and visual artist from Lesotho, based in Berlin. His film *'Mother, I am Suffocating. This is My Last Film About You'*, was selected for Final Cut in Venice in 2018, where it won six awards. It premiered in the Berlinale Forum in 2019. Mosese was one of three filmmakers selected for

Biennale College Cinema with his feature film *'This Is Not A Burial, It's A Resurrection'*, which premiered at the Venice International Film Festival in 2019. Mosese is an alumnus of the Berlinale Talents (2011), Focus Features Africa First (2012), Realness African Screenwriting Residency (2017) and Cinefondation's L'Atelier (2019).

## DIRECTOR'S NOTES

*For as long as  
I can remember,  
I have felt displaced.*

*As though I have  
no homeland.*

When I was a child, we were evicted from our home. Different houses, different schools, different playmates followed. I felt as though something had been taken away from me. I would often go back to my childhood home and steal the toys that belonged to the new kids who lived there. My heart never left that place.

My grandmother's village is on the verge of displacement. I still know every texture of her house's walls, its thatched roof, the smell of oak trees after rain, the stone kraal. Soon this place will be no more. Soon this will be razed and flooded and water will be channeled into the heart of South Africa.

Lesotho's behemoth mountain ranges make up nearly three quarters of its terrain and are responsible for the abundance of water in the country. Lesotho annually exports 780 million cubic metres of water to South Africa through the 'Highlands Water Project', an imperialist system conceived during apartheid in South Africa. I remember when Nelson Mandela came to Lesotho shortly after he was elected president. He had come for a ribbon cutting to celebrate the construction of another dam. As a little boy, I stood at the front of the masses and managed to shake the hand of this lauded knight of

democracy. It was only later in life that I realised that he would be continuing the inherited 'Highlands Water Project', and the irony of it all.

As more reservoirs are built, thousands of villagers are forcibly removed from their land and are relocated to urban living environments. Not only do they lose their livestock, crops and way of life, but also their individual and collective identity. The destruction of the land brings the desecration of the dead; villagers are forced to exhume their loved ones or leave them behind to be flooded. When your sense of self is so rooted in the land of your ancestors, this is unthinkable. People that I interviewed have likened this process of displacement to death.

More and more forests, villages and family relics are being erased in the name of progress. Destroyed and forgotten in a soulless march towards

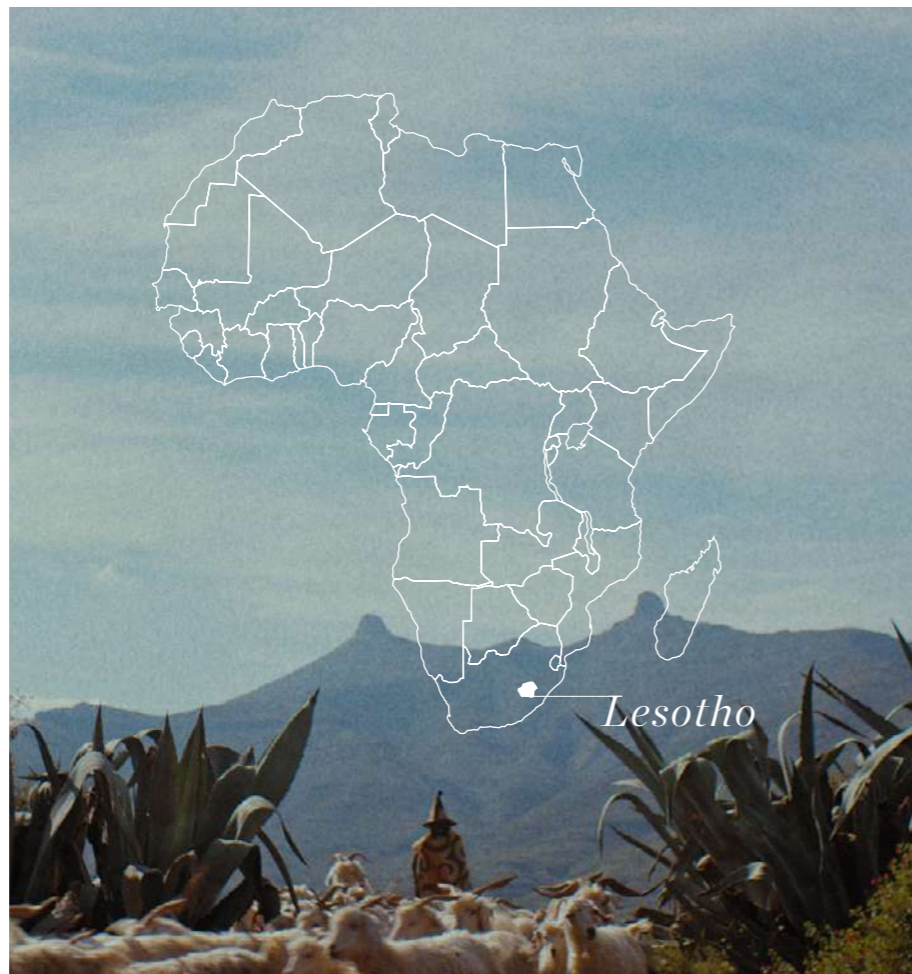
futurity. I am personally not for or against progress. I am more interested in interrogating the psychological, spiritual and social elements that come with it. Long before this film was conceived I have wrestled with the indifference of time, nature and god. Nature is the best exhibition of the vulgarity of god; and his benevolence. The beauty and violence of life is so viscerally translated when a child is born. Flawless and pure. But soon, gravity takes over and the wheel of time weakens the body. Another child is born, grows old and dies. It's a brutal cycle.

*This Is Not A Burial, It's A Resurrection* is a meditation of new and old, birth and death. An ecclesiastical reverence to the earth. Through Mantoa's eyes, we see that there is a lot of darkness to face, but ultimately this is a story about the resilience of the human spirit.

# ABOUT LESOTHO

Lesotho is a tiny country completely enveloped by South Africa. Its behemoth mountain ranges make up nearly three quarters of its terrain and these are responsible for the abundance of water in the country, believed to be among the highest quality in the world. Lesotho annually exports an estimated 780 million cubic metres of water to South Africa; this marks Africa's largest water transfer scheme in history.

As more and more reservoirs are built, thousands of highland villagers are forcibly removed from their land and are relocated to urban living environments. Where they not only lose their livestock, crops and way of life, but also their individual and collective identity.



# THE MAKING OF

*'This Is Not A Burial, It's A Resurrection'* is the first narrative feature film ever made by a Mosotho director. The film was shot on location in the remote mountains of Lesotho, where running water and electricity are a scarcity.

Equipment, vehicles, crew and other resources were brought into the country from South Africa. The tiny crew of just fifteen people endured extreme weather conditions while shooting in areas with no road access. Equipment

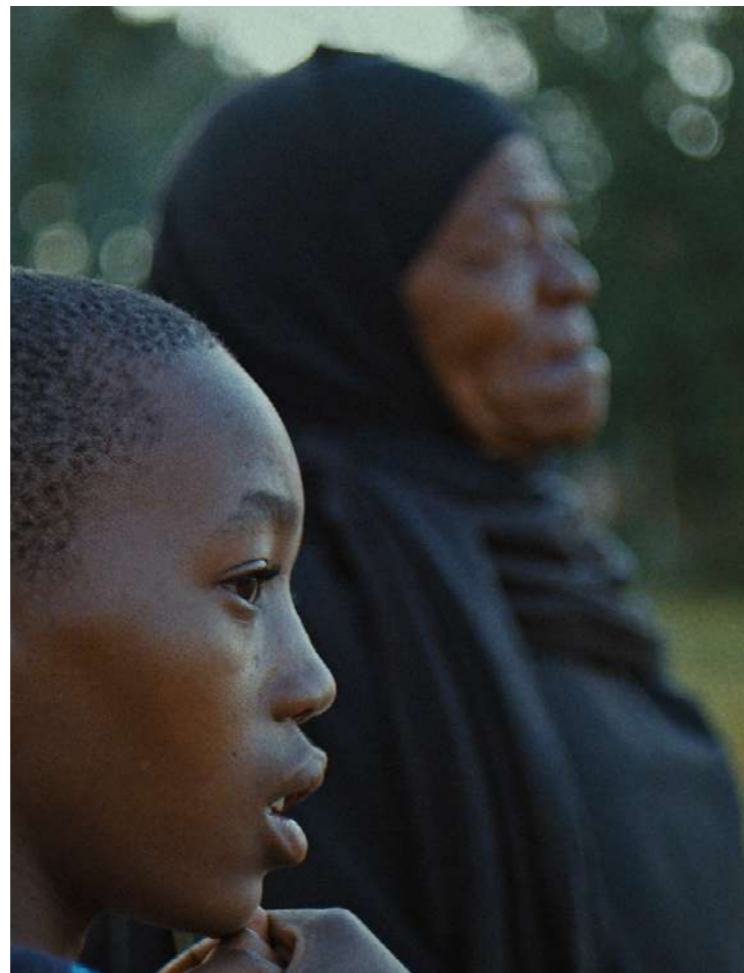
and cast were often transported on horseback and on mules. Apart from the leads, the cast is made up almost entirely of actual residents from the village where photography took place.

# INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR

This is a personal story for you.

Can you tell us about your development process?

When I was a child, my family was evicted from our home. My grandmother's village is undergoing forced resettlement right now. My experience of displacement has significantly impacted who I am and how I see the world. I was fortunate to be incubated at the Realness African Screenwriter's Residency early on in my development process. There I became part of a cinematic family who are rooted in Africa and I was able to make sense of all these ideas and feelings that I was giving birth to. As someone who has mostly had to learn and create in isolation, Realness provided a loving and nurturing home to me and my musings. It was also where I met my producers, Cait and Elias, who are the founders of this initiative. They both believed in me from the beginning and their passion was the driving force behind *'Resurrection'*.



This is a really tough film, thematically as well as technically since you were shooting in remote locations. And you're depicting stories of actions against indigenous people. How did you work through all these risks and challenges?

It was a very tough, unforgiving landscape we shot in and yet so beautiful. The weather drastically changed constantly, one minute it was sunny and hot and the next we were drenched by torrents of rain and it was dark and cold. We had to wrestle with the gods of nature not just to shoot, but also to get to the next location. It worked in our favour somehow; we kept shooting throughout the storms and we managed to use the footage from this in the film. When the rain stopped, we had to then deal with slippery hills covered in deep mud. Mary, our lead actress, who is 80 years old, had to be carried back and forth on the a long hill by crew members and men from the village. At particularly remote locations, we had to send her on horseback. There were no proper roads and so when it rained, our vehicles would often get stuck or break down completely. I was very grateful for the talented and passionate zealots around me. We really went to war together. Cait Pansegrouw, my producer, lives up to her nickname "Sheela" (as in Ma Anand Sheela that I learnt about through the documentary series *'Wild Wild Country'*); she is really a cult leader. She kept everyone focused. She is not just a producer, she is very creative. I come from the school of underground cinema. It's very rare to have a producer who not only understands, but appreciates that kind of cinema. My cinematographer, Pierre de Villiers was ready and primed to work under such extreme conditions, that allowed little to no creative freedom. In a way, the ideal conditions conspired in our favour. Gods are frequently seen in such places.

How did you work with your actors filming those scenes, getting them into that headspace and providing them the right kind of on-set atmosphere?

One thing I kept stressing was they shouldn't act. A few of the leads came from a South African television background, so they had preconceived ideas about their characters and had picked up some habits that of course got them to where they are now in their careers, but that I wanted to strip away for this film. I talked with them about not doing anything. On my set they are objects, not characters. As for the rest of the local cast, they were not professionals, they had never been on camera, and this was the beautiful part because they came as they were. We were shooting in their village. We were their guests. Of course it took a bit of work to get them in front of the camera and make them comfortable. So I would talk to them in the context of their actual village and their way of life, not necessarily about the role that they were fulfilling on screen.

When you envisioned *This is Not a Burial* in your head, before any shooting began, how did it look?

For me, it was always an observation about life and death. The initial whisperings of *'Resurrection'* spawned from this parable that I wrote about a mute prophet who could not speak his prophecies. He had rhema and logos about the soulless march of time and death, but when he opened his mouth, hail and frogs would flood from it and it was too sickening to behold or withstand. In a way, this illustrated how I feel as a creator who struggles to communicate his ideas in a way that is accessible to others. With *'Resurrection'* I felt as though I had an entire ocean of ideas. They were vast and massive. I am pleased to say that we managed to realise some of them in our film.

The subject matter has more significance and urgency today. Did your journey as a writer and filmmaker shift or evolve over the years, in the way you engaged with the material?

I think it evolved. With a team around me, I was able to refine what I wanted to create. The concept of life, death and the cycle of time has always been something that has preoccupied my mind. I am obsessed with the human condition. To me, the most poetic landscape is the human and our constant battle to reconcile with our carnal selves. So the foundation of what I wanted to explore was always within me, but how I chose to explore it was continually distilled.



Can you talk about your process as creative collaborators with Cait Pansegrouw (the producer) and the team?

We had the whole village community of Ha Dinizulu behind us, willing to 'go places' with us. I am forever grateful for the work that they put into the film. Cait is a force of nature. She has an iron fist covered in a velvet glove. She knows when to say things with a smile and when to say things with a snarl, to keep us sailing to our true north, always. She comes from a film school background and yet she is not pigeonholed by structure or technique or know-how. She believes in art. Among other neurodivergent impediments I am battling with, I am dyslexic, it can be hard for me to communicate clearly. Cait and I were synchronized from the start. We were both very clear about what kind of work we wanted to make. Pierre de Villiers, my cinematographer, a beautiful, creative human being, had an iron will to go all the way at all times, it was inspiring. At times

I think I was confusing, my thoughts always seem flawless and complete in my head, but when I actually say things outloud, they can sound incoherent. But my crew were patient and respected my thought process. It was amazing to work with my long-time friend and sometimes assistant, Pheku (known as 'Keeper'). His generosity and loyalty cannot be bought, same goes to Phillip Letela. My Basotho brothers.

I am used to working in isolation. My previous film *"Mother, I am suffocating. This is my last film about you"* is an essay film. I had a small local crew that had no clue what I was doing, but who provided extra hands on the day so that I could execute what I wanted. In that way I felt safe, because they couldn't question anything or doubt me. With *'Resurrection'* I had to work with a professional crew. It was beautiful to get out of my comfort zone and get to talk back and forth about ideas and have everyone on one page.

What informs your choice of camera and technology, and what techniques do you do to bring out the beauty in your imagery?

I come on set or to the page as a novice, an amateur. I have allowed myself to dream and not filter anything. I have come to understand that ideas have a life of their own, all I have to do is to free them from myself. Technique and language I think is something to be used but not necessarily embraced. Of course this comes with years of making bad art. As far as the camera and composition, Pierre, my DP, and I had synchronised love and passion for beauty. He has a very particular way of seeing light. I called him 'the god of the sun'. I also trusted him with the choice of camera we should use, which was the Sony Venice. It served us best in low light conditions, since we didn't have much lighting gear. We had to make-do with the little we had in no-man's land.

What do you hope audiences will take away with them after seeing the film?

I hope the audience will walk into this film with no preconceived ideas. Specifically as an African filmmaker who set out to explore new forms of cinema. I wanted to develop a new cinematic language. I was heavily inspired by Brechtian Theatre, which recognised the ability of Naturalistic theatre to have great social influence, but at the expense of its capacity to arouse aesthetic pleasure. I am hopeful that 'Resurrection' will provoke rational self-reflection, just as Brecht's Epic Theatre encouraged a critical view of the action on the stage. I hope that each person who engages with the film will allow their own ideas around it to permeate and take on their own form.

What are you ideally seeking in a distributor who might be interested in the film?

I earnestly hope that our film finds the right home. It would be amazing to work with a distributor that is not pigeonholed by preconceived ideas about what African cinema should be. I would like for everyone that works with us towards unleashing our film into the world to appreciate it for what it is and to do what's necessary for it to have a healthy life.

## CAST

MANTOA	Mary Twala Mlongo
LESIBA PLAYER	Jerry Mofokeng Wa Makhetha
PRIEST	Makhaola Ndebele
CHIEF	Tseko Monaheng
PONO	Siphiwe Nzima

## CREW

WRITER & DIRECTOR	Lemohang Jeremiah Mosese
PRODUCERS	Cait Pansegrouw Elias Ribeiro
CINEMATOGRAPHER	Pierre de Villiers
PRODUCTION DESIGNER	Leila Walter
COSTUME DESIGNER	Nao Serati
SOUND DESIGN & FINAL MIX	Pressure Cooker Studios
COMPOSER	Yu Miyashita

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Title: **This Is Not A Burial, It's A Resurrection** | Language: **Sesotho** | Country of Production: **Lesotho, South Africa and Italy**

Image: **Colour** | Aspect Ratio: **Flat 1:85:1** | Sound: **5.1** | Running time: **120 minutes**

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