

Making Theatre, Making a Difference



Winter/Summer Institute in Theatre for Development

Lesotho • U.K. • South Africa • New York



LESOTHO, 2006

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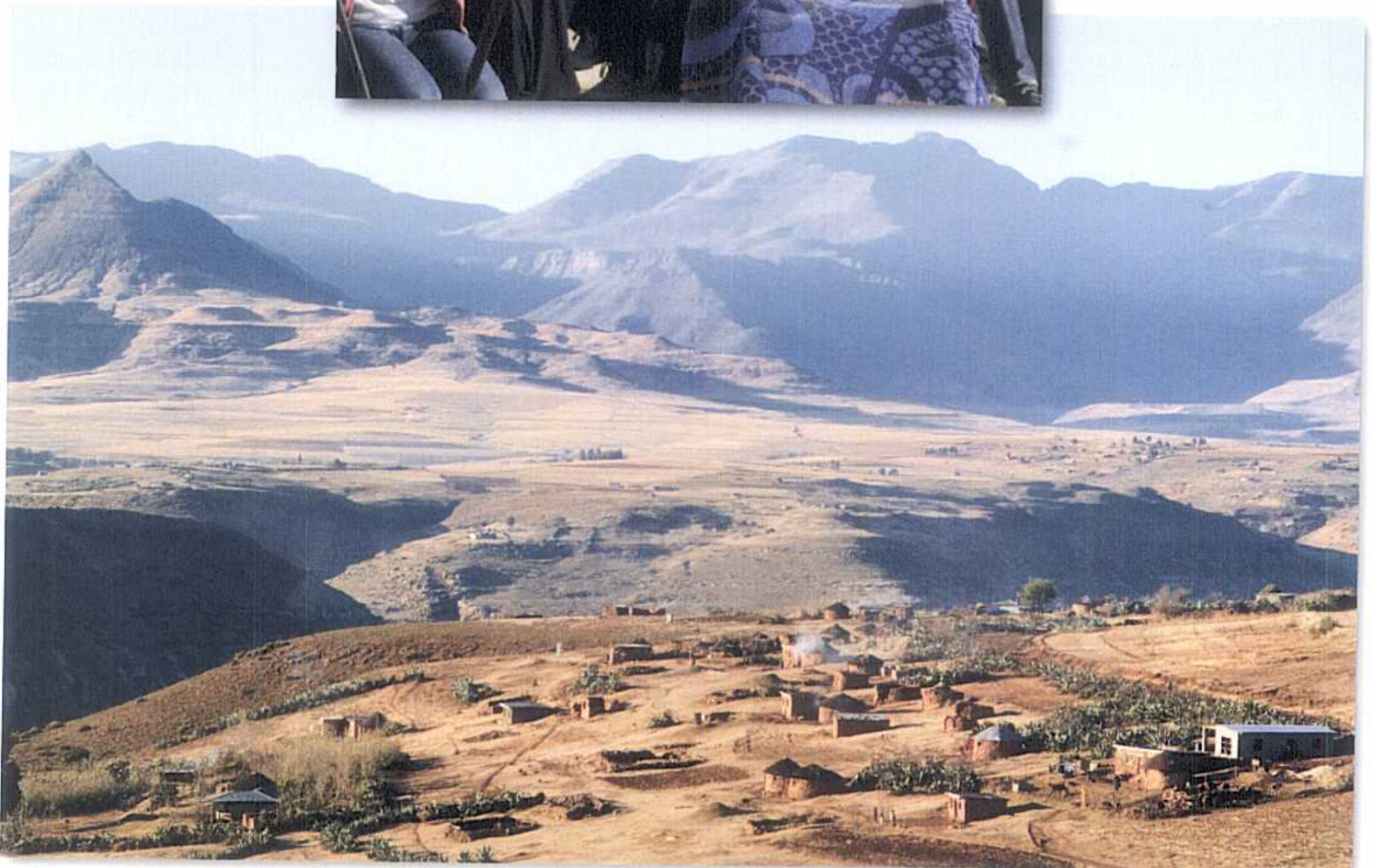
Winter/Summer Institute in Theatre for Development

by Lucy Winner and Katt Lissard

In June of 2006, in the bright, high mountains of Lesotho, Southern Africa, people from four different lands came together to make theatre to try to make a difference. We were 22 students and eight faculty from four countries and three continents. Because our homes were so far apart and the seasons were reversed, we called ourselves the



Winter/Summer Institute in Theatre for Development (WSI). Our goal was to challenge ourselves to create collaborative, issue-based, aesthetically provocative theatre. We wanted to empower both student and community participants with the tools and resources necessary to create similarly inspired work in their own communities and lives.



Mountains of Lesotho

Principal photography by Rik Walton

National University of Lesotho Roma, Lesotho

FACULTY

Rethabile Malibo, Selloane Mokuku,
Sele Radebe

STUDENTS

Lereko Lekena, 'Masoai Matala,
Relebohile Mokone, Litšeo Mosenene,
Mosele Peshoane, 'Matšepo Sethunya,
Motjoka Ramonono

Empire State College State University of New York, U.S.A.

FACULTY

Katt Lissard, Lucy Winner

STUDENTS

Tamu Favorite, Eric Feinblatt,
Marjorie Moser, Jussara Santos,
Melissa Shetler

University of Sunderland Sunderland, U.K.

FACULTY

Kath McCreery, Nigel Watson

STUDENTS

Jacqueline Cadger, Ufoma Komon,
Neil Marshall, Bernie McLaughlin,
Sara Owen

University of the Witwatersrand Johannesburg, South Africa

FACULTY

Alta Van As, Gillian Attwood

STUDENTS

Phumlani Dimon, Kim Hess,
Ditchaba Lekaota, Thobile Mtsweni,
Thembeni Phoseka

Malealea Project Advisors

Gillian Attwood, Moso Ranoosi



Winter/Summer Institute students and faculty

In Lesotho

The institute included students and faculty from the National University of Lesotho (NUL) (our host); Empire State College, State University of New York, New York City; the University of Sunderland, United Kingdom; and the University of the Witwatersrand, Republic of South Africa.

*We worked together to create
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In Roma, Lesotho, we worked together to create a piece of theatre focused on the role of gossip and silence in the spread of HIV, a play which would ultimately be taken into the rural communities of the Malealea Valley for further collaboration with local villagers. The focus of this first institute was a response to the community health situation inside our host country, Lesotho. Along with most of sub-Saharan Africa,

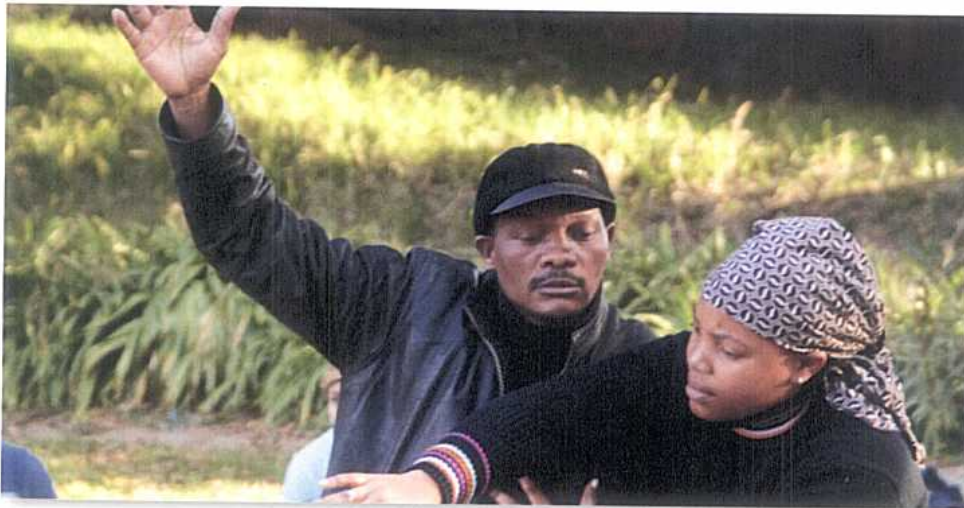
Lesotho has a staggering HIV infection rate – currently estimated at 37 - 50 percent, and disproportionately affecting young women between 18 and 24. We wanted to look at how gossip and silence, in Lesotho and in each of the cultures we represented, could lead to disempowerment and danger in the face of the most significant challenges of modern life.

Making the Play: Research, Presentations and Improvisation

Before we met in Lesotho, we read relevant material, like Catherine Campbell's *Letting Them Die* and University of Pretoria's Jonathan Stadler's work on rumor, gossip and blame. Once in Lesotho, the readings were enhanced by a series of presentations by National University of Lesotho colleagues on topics ranging from language taboos and gender inequities to the role of customary practices in the spread of HIV/AIDS. This established a shared platform from which our multi-cultural company could build creative group work.



Rehearsing in Roma, Lesotho



Improvising and scene building

Winter/Summer Institute Presenters

As a crucial part of our creative process, eight presentations were given for WSI participants (June 22 - 27) on topics related to our dramatic theme. We wish to thank them.

SPEAKERS AND TOPICS

Ingrid Fandrych
Hlonepha and Human Rights

Selloane Mokuku
Tu? Abuse of Women in Lesotho (film)

Chris Dunton
Problematizing Keywords: Culture, Tradition, Modernity

Chris Chitereka
The Role of Customary Practices in the Spread of HIV/AIDS

Victor Nkiwane
The Work of Women's Law Groups on Sexual Abuse

Litšepiso Matlosa
Power of Language in Relation to HIV/AIDS

Makalo Marite
Application of Methods of Social Work to Problems in Discourse on Sexuality and HIV/AIDS

Mamotsamai Ranncileng
HIV/AIDS Counseling

Using ideas and inspirations from the readings and presentations as a starting point, the faculty devised improvisational "tasks" for students/actors, and functioned as facilitators as the work progressed. Creative work was structured and guided by faculty, but the core of the work was actor-driven, actor-improvised and actor-imagined – drawn from a rich and complex cultural interaction of stories, dreams, myths, songs, dances and lived experience.

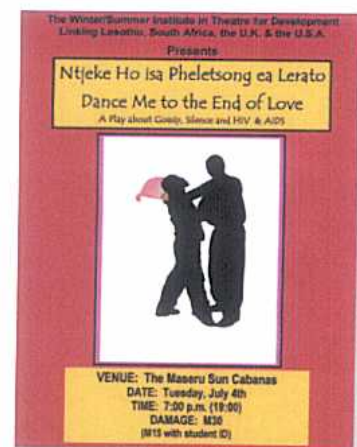
Dance Me to the End of Love

The resulting theatre piece, *Dance Me to the End of Love* (Ntjeke Ho isa Pheletsong ea Lerato in Sesotho), was a montage of scenes derived from the improvisational work that had been deepened and refined through the creative shaping and directing by the faculty.

Using a mixture of primarily English and Sesotho (with bits of Zulu, Portuguese, Tswana, Spanish, Xhosa and Afrikaans), the cast played multiple roles. Four Gossips (two male; two female) served as transitional commentators, scene announcers and translators, and a silent Trickster assisted (or resisted) the Gossips, and helped define the flow of the play.

Performances: Roma, Maseru and Malealea

Dance Me to the End of Love was performed on the National University of Lesotho campus in Roma on July 3 and at the Maseru Sun Hotel's convention center in the nation's capital on July 4. After each



show, a post-play bilingual discussion with the audience was facilitated by WSI faculty member Selloane Mokuku of NUL.



Musicians from three continents rehearse together.



Dance was an integral part of the piece.



The "Gossips" comment on the action.

Performance Program Songs and Scenes

Opening Songs: *Tloho, Utlwa, Nko'usubenam* and *Dance Me to the End of Love*

Scene 1: *Bohali Bo Tsoile (The Cattle Have Been Paid)*

Song: *Mama Tembu's Wedding*

Scene 2: *Hoja Tantšoa Ntlo ea Cha (Waltzing While the House is Burning)*

Scene 3: *Kokoana Ha e Tšele Mohokare, kapa Banna ke Mekopu; Basali ke Likh'abeche (The Virus Doesn't Cross the Caledon, or Men are Pumpkins; Women are Cabbages)*

Song: *Amazing Grace*

Scene 4: *Ke Moetlo; Ha Se Moetlo (It's in My Culture; It's Not in My Culture)*

Song: *Tula*

Scene 5: *Monna Eo Ke Sa Mo Tsebenj Likobong Tsaka (Stranger in My Bed)*

Scene 5A: *Seotsoa Sea Bua (Sex Worker Speaks)*

Scene 6: *Boithuto ba ABC (Learning Your ABCs)*

Scene 7: *Bo Ntate ba Ratanang le Banana (Sugar Daddy)*

Scene 7A: *Pale Ea Ka (My Story)*

Scene 8: *Ha re Sa na Makunutu (We Have No More Secrets)*

Scene 9: *Ha a Re "Che" Seo a Hlileng a se Bolelang ke Hone "E" (When She Says "No!" She Really Means "Yes!")*

Scene 10: *U Ne U Ka Etsa'ng? (What Would You Do?)*

Finale/Song: *The Rhythm of Life*

The play began with a procession of songs and movement. Music, played and sung by the actors, was woven throughout the montage.

The company then traveled to the Malealea Valley in southern Lesotho to connect to the locally driven community project there guided by Moso Ranoosi and Gillian Attwood, and based on Brazilian educator Paulo Friere's REFLECT Circles.

After being revised and rehearsed (to translate as much of the play into Sesotho as possible), *Dance Me to the End of Love* was then performed for a Sesotho-speaking audience of Malealea villagers on July 6. The outdoor venue, chosen for WSI by REFLECT Circle members, was in front of the community health clinic where HIV tests are given.

Malealea: Passing it On

The health clinic performance was the first step in community dialogue and collaboration with village residents. After the performance, there was a bilingual discussion with the audience, again facilitated by Ms. Mokuku, and then 30 participating villagers began work with institute actors and faculty. After dividing into three groups, each with enough Sesotho/English speakers to translate, the next five days were spent in intense rehearsal sessions. During this time, facilitating and directing roles were largely passed from faculty to institute actors. Using a process similar to the one they had just experienced, institute actors worked with village actors to improvise scenes based on villagers' responses to the performance. Together they created three new scenes reflective of village concerns.



Performance at the community health clinic, Malealea



Village women singing in rehearsal.



Villagers and students use images to build scenes.



Malealea Festival Performance

These new scenes were interwoven with several scenes from the original show and a new musical finale was created. This new drama, now almost entirely in Sesotho, was the centerpiece of the 20th Anniversary Festival of the Malealea Lodge on July 11.

Forty-nine mounted Basotho ponies led the procession of institute and village actors in song and dance from the lodge to the festival grounds, where over 500 village residents and the village chief watched the show.

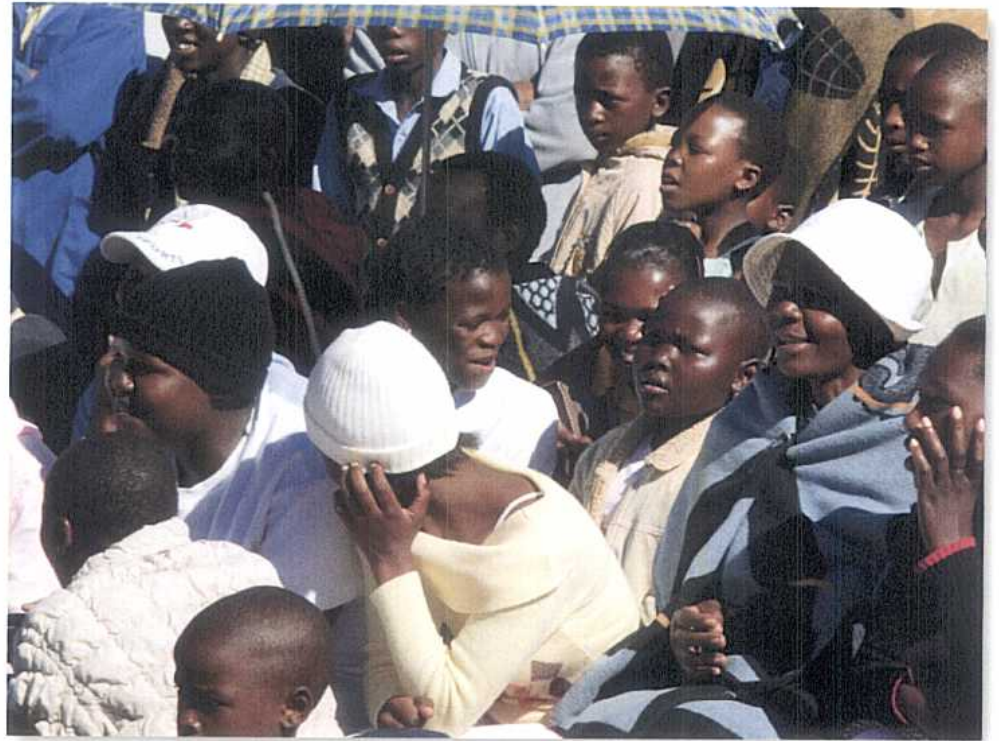


Basotho horsemen lead procession.



Procession to the festival grounds, Malealea

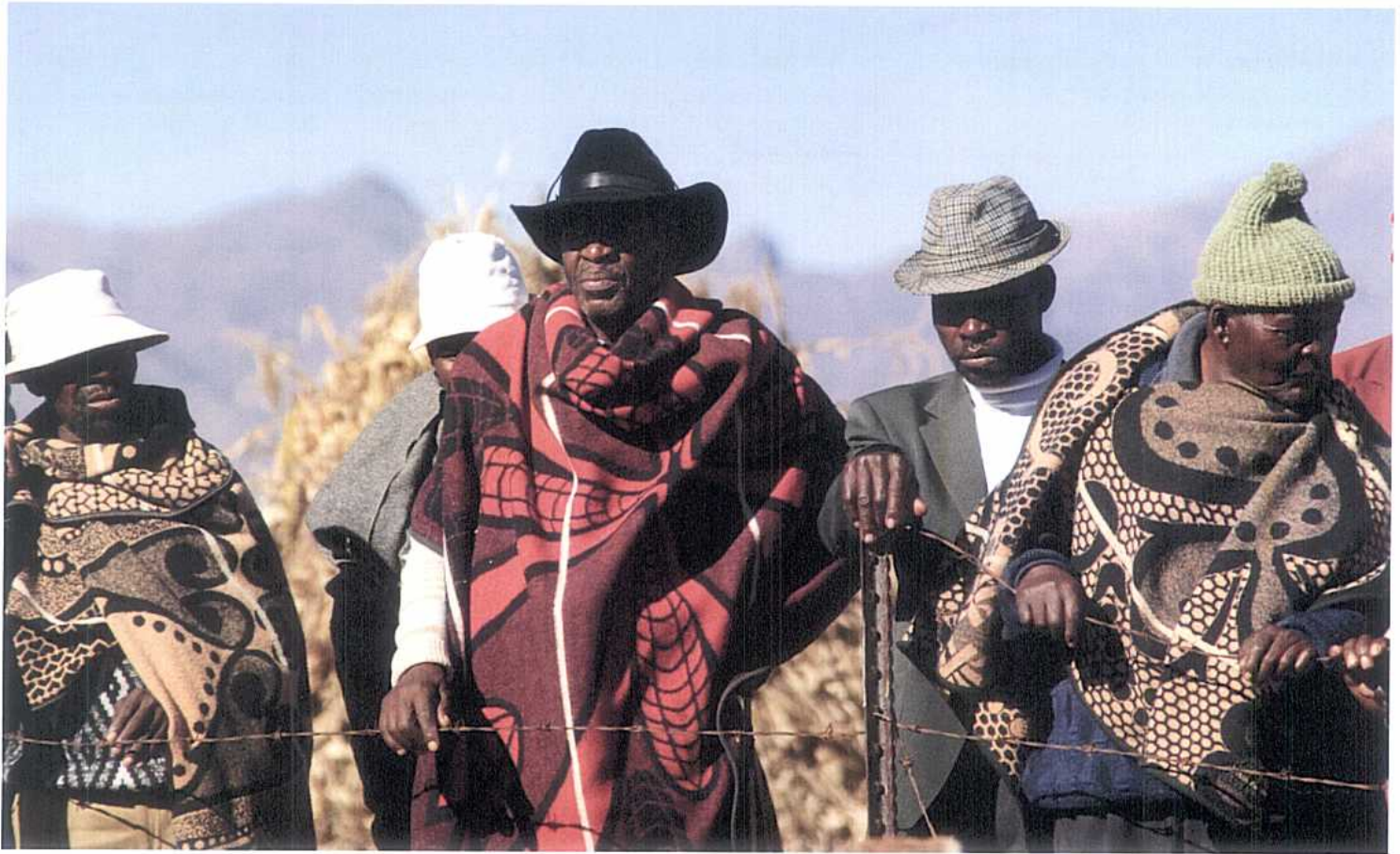
We hoped, also, that the villagers who worked with us would incorporate what they learned into their participation in the Malealea Community Development Project.



Audiences came from surrounding villages.



The final performance drew over 500 people.



Men from local villages at performance

PHOTO: ERIC FEINBLATT

Passing it Back and Forth

There is one critical question: what is the point of engaging in a project of this kind, unless there is a way for it to sustain itself?

From the very beginning, we began with the notion of passing it on, handing over the reins. This handing over of responsibility, one step at a time, was built into the structure of the work. This first happened in Malealea when the students took on the role with the villagers that the faculty had played with the students.

“No one group is to blame.”

The idea, then, was that all of us would take the model of work that we developed and carry it on in our own lives, passing it on to our own communities. We hoped, also, that the villagers who worked with us would incorporate what they learned into their participation in the Malealea Community Development Project.

Eradicate Negligence

Since we left, the villagers have formed a new collaborative theatre group. They call it Khalemang Bohlasoa, which means Eradicate Negligence. They are focusing their work on issues of HIV/AIDS, drug and alcohol abuse, fighting and domestic violence, rape and theft. They have drawn up a set of plans and goals, which they developed and agreed to. Following are some excerpts of what they wrote:

- We want to use this drama as a means of communicating at village meetings where education can be done.
- Our objective is to see understanding and behavior change in the community.
- We want to use drama as a way of bringing people together. This is important because it's important to be neutral and not take the side of men or women or youth, as this will disunite people and we are all in this together. No one group is to blame.
- Once we have consolidated ourselves as a group and have a sketch ready, we will approach the chief and then perform our drama for the community at a meeting called by the chief. We want to visit many villages and perform drama so as to share important messages with as many people as possible.
- Performances should benefit the members who are performing. We want to see ourselves growing as a group, eventually making videos that might be sold. We also want to perform for TV Lesotho. This could even be a way of making some money for ourselves as a group.
- We want to support each other as members of the group, not only in the group, but also with daily life outside of the group. For example, helping each other to buy seeds for fields and community gardens.

Africa to New York

Since we returned from Lesotho, the Empire State College student participants have given a presentation at the Student All College Conference and performed part of *Dance Me to the End of Love* for the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative's (IAVI) commemoration of AIDS Day at the U.N. on November 30. On December 2 and 3, the student/participants helped run a two-day residency at the Metropolitan Center, called "Gossip, Silence and HIV/AIDS: Theatre for Development, Africa to New York."

The goal of the residency was for the WSI participants to take a group of students through a very compact version of the work we did in Africa. Students who attended

read many of the same materials that we read before our trip, and also listened to audio files of some of the presentations that we heard in Lesotho. The WSI students spoke about the project, showed video, and performed a scene from the play. Then they used the same model of work as we used in Africa, breaking the students into groups, giving them improvisational tasks, shaping the scenes, and finding a thread and a shape.

Everyone worked incredibly hard for two very full days, until, by 5 o'clock Sunday evening, we had developed an entirely new piece of theatre. The new piece, about taboo and denial, wove responses to the readings and presentation with the individual and cultural experiences of the residency

participants. Ultimately, all 37 participants performed a 40-minute piece, including music and props.

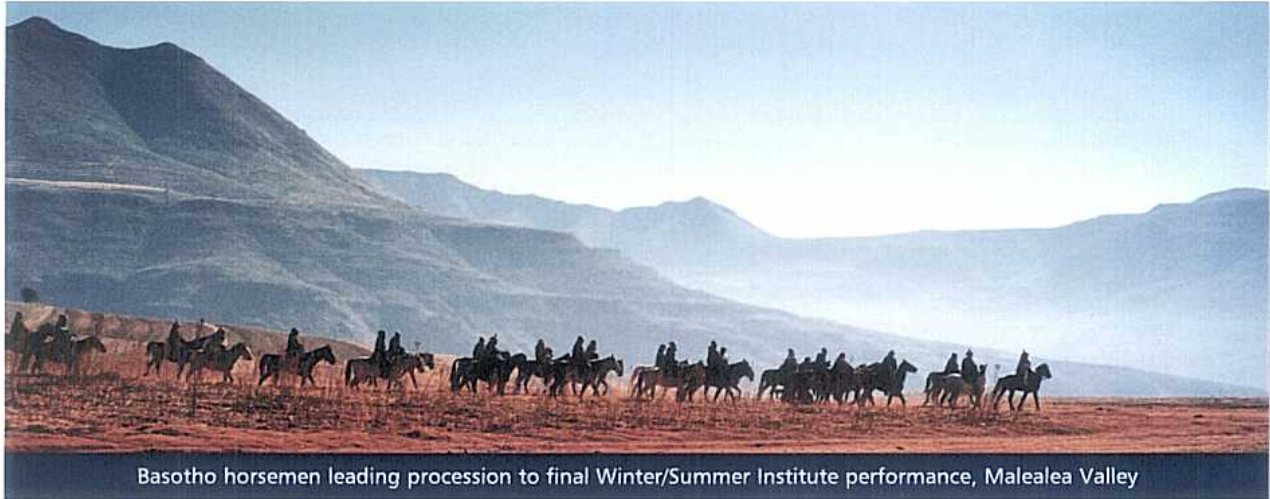
Next Steps

We have all learned more than we could have imagined – about the complexities and challenges, certainly, but also about the possibilities. In some respects, our learning was surprisingly concrete: we were there, we were doing, we found ways together, and we can see what we did ripple and transform, from the work of Eradicate Negligence, to a N.Y.C. residency participant planning a similar project in her native Mexico. In other ways, we continue to be amazed at the layers of learning that are still forming, being learned, and those yet to come. We want very much to continue. Our immediate plans are to complete a short documentary film, and to begin planning for the next Winter/Summer Institute in Lesotho, slated for 2008. In the meantime, we hope that all participants in this project – students from four countries, villagers, audiences, faculty, and residency participants, will continue to make theatre to make a difference.



Back in New York City, our residency passed on the WSI model.

PHOTOS: ERIC FEINBLATT



Basotho horsemen leading procession to final Winter/Summer Institute performance, Malealea Valley

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*The Winter/Summer Institute will return to Lesotho in 2008.
 We need your support to make this happen!*

For more information on WSI and how to contribute, contact:

Lucy Winner at Lucy.Winner@esc.edu or
 Katt Lissard at Klissard@aol.com

or

Make checks payable to the Empire State College Foundation, Acct: #52310
 and send to:



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Thank You!