



For Immediate Release

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“Rain in a Dry Land” Chronicles Families’ Tumultuous Journey From African Refugee Camp to Post-9/11 Urban America; Film Kicks Off P.O.V. Series’ 20th Season on PBS Tuesday, June 19, 2007, Honoring U.N. World Refugee Day

Two Bantu Families Escape War and Drought in Africa for Resettlement
And Future Shock In Atlanta and Springfield, Mass.

A Co-production of the Independent Television Service (ITVS)

“Rigorously intimate and disarmingly affectionate, ‘Rain in a Dry Land’ is in the forefront of the current crop of immigration chronicles. . . .Gorgeously, purposefully shot.” – John Anderson, Variety

After more than a decade in a refugee camp in Kenya, where they had fled to escape the civil wars tearing apart the Horn of Africa, two Somali Bantu families are stunned to learn in early 2004 that they will finally be allowed to immigrate to America. The resettlement plan began under Clinton in 1999, was interrupted by Sept. 11, and began again late in 2003. The families are, in a Somali Bantu expression, grateful recipients of *bish-bish*, which translates literally as “splash-splash,” indicating the first rains after a long drought (“rain in a dry land”) and, by extension, resettlement in America. In a world teeming with desperate refugees, where barren camps like U.N.-supported Kakuma in Kenya become permanent rather than temporary fixtures on troubled borders, a ticket to the United States may be the ultimate *bish-bish*.

The new documentary **Rain in a Dry Land** chronicles, in their own poetic words, the first 18 months of the American lives of Arbai Barre Abdi and her children, and Aden Edow and Madina Ali Yunye and their children. Beginning with “cultural orientation” classes in Kenya, where they are introduced to such novelties as electric appliances and the prospect of living in high-rise apartment buildings, the film follows the Muslim families on divergent yet parallel paths as they learn that the streets in America are definitely not paved with gold, especially for poor immigrants. The families’ sponsors, Jewish Family Services in Springfield, Mass., and World Relief in Atlanta, have pledged six months of support, which gives the families a daunting learning curve to take themselves from the 19th century to the 21st.

Media Sponsor:



Anne Makepeace’s **Rain in a Dry Land** premieres on **Tuesday, June 19, 2007** at 10 p.m. on PBS, kicking off the 20th anniversary season of the groundbreaking **P.O.V.** series. (Check local listings.) The following day, June 20, is the United

20th Anniversary Sponsor:
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Nations High Commissioner for Refugees World Refugee Day, to which P.O.V.'s next film, **Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars** (June 26), also pays tribute. American television's longest-running independent documentary series, P.O.V. is public television's premier showcase for point-of-view, nonfiction films.

Rain in a Dry Land measures the distance from an African refugee camp to an American city and asks what it means to be a refugee in today's "global village." The film provides answers in the story of two families whose response to 21st-century culture shock presents an uncommon portrait of human persistence in the face of social disorder and change.

The journeys of these Bantu families actually began two centuries ago, when their ancestors arrived in Somalia as slaves. African rather than Arab, Somali Bantus lived among the Somalis as a despised minority. They were relegated to the meanest labor, while being excluded from education, politics, and mixing with the dominant Somali clans. When civil war broke out in 1991, various armed factions mercilessly attacked the largely agricultural — and largely defenseless — Bantu. Madina Yunye, for one, saw her mother gunned down before being gang raped in front of her children. She and thousands of others fled to Kenya, where history might have finally orphaned them.

Then, in 1999, the United States announced that it would resettle the 12,000 Somali Bantu refugees who had escaped over the border into refugee camps in Kenya eight years before. After nearly 13 years in camps, and five years after this announcement, Madina anticipates her new life in America with the poetry that is one of the delights of **Rain in a Dry Land**. "If God permits me to get to America peacefully," she says, "and my eyes and ears arrive in a place where the breeze is blowing, I will learn how to live there . . ."

Yet even walking up and down flights of stairs takes some getting used to for these families. Their strong bonds and devout Muslim faith have seen them through terrors and misery, but their culture and life experiences are essentially those of illiterate subsistence farmers in village societies. Whatever the strangeness of America's material culture, far more critical challenges lay ahead. How are they going to adapt — and in quick order — to an urban America devoted to individualism and novelty, haunted by racism and its legacies, and offering these foreigners few economic opportunities? How will they write in a new language when they were never allowed to learn to write in their own?

The film's first view of Aden Edow and Madina Yunye and their seven children — Ali, Warsame, Aday, Abdulkadir, Hassan, Hindi and Hussein — in America, shivering in the winter cold of Springfield, marks the family's dramatic shift in reality. They are quickly facing other challenges as well. Crash courses in English have ill-prepared them to get along in America. And although the kids progress quickly at school, they are placed in regular classrooms too soon, without access to translations. They fall behind, growing demoralized. The adults struggle even more with translating the skills of pre-industrial farmers to the U.S. job market. The family is soon facing the end of their six months of support — and the prospect of losing the roof over their heads.

In Atlanta, meanwhile, Arbai Barre Abdi and her children Khadija, Sahara, Mainun and Said face a less severe climate but similar social challenges, including America's brand of racism. Though hardly alien to social bigotry — between Arab and African and Muslim and non-Muslim — which contributes to the disorders in their homeland, the families must decipher an American code that makes them triple minorities: immigrant, African and Muslim.

One response to these social confusions and barriers is to fall back more heavily on family and tradition, which Arbai struggles to do. But another response is embodied by Arbai's daughter, Sahara, who — with breathtaking rapidity — gravitates to the streets and pop culture, and is soon talking like a typical teenager with no use for her elders' opinions or authority.

Yet, through it all, the Bantu immigrants in **Rain in a Dry Land** reveal a remarkable buoyancy and determination in dealing with the demands of a journey whose speed and distance — both

psychological and geographic — are astounding. That **Rain in a Dry Land** shows them to be people who will likely forge a way does not disguise the fact that, for all the generosity accorded them, immigrants such as these are not given longer-term support for the radical transitions demanded of them. The film raises the question of whether such relocation programs, for all their good intents, are the best way to deal with the world's mounting refugee crises.

"The years of making **Rain in a Dry Land** were transformative ones for me as well as for the Somali Bantus I got to know," says director Anne Makepeace. "As I followed them through their difficult changes, their story went from one about strangers in a strange land to a tale of incredible strength and resilience."

Rain in a Dry Land is a co-production of Anne Makepeace Productions, Inc., and the Independent Television Service (ITVS), in association with American Documentary | P.O.V. and the Center for Independent Documentary.

About the filmmaker:

Anne Makepeace

Writer/Director/Producer

Anne Makepeace's work as a writer, producer and director of award-winning independent films spans over 20 years. Her most recent credits include the Emmy-winning "Robert Capa in Love and War" (2003) for PBS's *American Masters* series and "Coming to Light" (2001), about Edward S. Curtis, the pre-eminent photographer of Native Americans, also for *American Masters* and which was short-listed for an Academy Award. Makepeace completed a companion book, *Edward S. Curtis, Coming to Light*, and a short film for the National Park Service entitled "Eleanor Roosevelt: Close to Home" (2005).

She had already spent years working in feature films when she made her first documentary, "Baby, It's You," which was the lead film in P.O.V.'s 11th season in 1998. Makepeace's writing credits include the screenplay for "Thousand Pieces of Gold," an *American Playhouse* feature, and the PBS *American Experience* documentary "Ishi, The Last Yahi." She wrote, produced and directed the dramatic films "Night Driving" for Showtime Networks; "Wildest Dreams," starring William Petersen and Rebecca Jenkins; "Moonchild," an award-winning PBS docudrama; and "Whistle in the Wind," a bilingual short drama about a Bolivian boy and his llama.

Makepeace is currently developing the documentary "Jane Fonda, Coming Home," and is in post-production on "Building China Modern, I.M. Pei's Suzhou Museum." She is also writing and producing Part 1 of PBS's *American Experience* series about Native Americans, "We Shall Remain." She grew up in Middlebury, Conn., and attended Stanford University, where she earned her bachelor's degree in English, and master's degrees in education and in filmmaking. Makepeace resides in the northwest corner of Connecticut, and wherever her films take her.

Credits:

Writer/Director/Producer:	Anne Makepeace
Editor:	Mary Lampson
Cinematography:	Joan Churchill, ASC; Barney Broomfield
Music:	Joel Goodman

Running Time: 86:46

Awards & Festivals:

- Full Frame Documentary Film Festival, Durham, N.C., 2006 – *Working Films Award*
- Atlanta Film Festival, 2006 – *Women in Film Award for Best Woman Director*
- Fire Island Golden Wagon Film Festival, 2006 – *Golden Wagon Award for Best of Festival*
- Brooklyn Arts Council International Film & Video Festival, 2007 – *Best Feature Documentary*
- Big Sky Documentary Film Festival, Missoula, Mont., 2007
- United Nations Documentary Film Festival, New York, 2006

- Human Rights Watch Film Festival, New York, 2006
- Margaret Mead Film Festival, New York, 2006
- Tri Continental Film Festival, South Africa, 2006
- Vancouver International Film Festival, 2006
- Starz Denver Film Festival, 2006
- Hot Springs Documentary Film Festival, Arkansas, 2006
- Santa Barbara International Film Festival, California, 2006
- Berkshire International Film Festival, Massachusetts, 2006

Original Online Content on P.O.V. Interactive (www.pbs.org/pov)

The **RAIN IN A DRY LAND** companion Web site (www.pbs.org/pov/raininadryland) offers a streaming video trailer of the film, an interview with filmmaker Anne Makepeace (video, podcast and text); a list of related Web sites, organizations and books; a downloadable discussion guide and classroom activity; and interviews with non-governmental aid organizers about refugees settling in the United States.



ITVS funds and presents award-winning documentaries and dramas on public television, innovative new media projects on the Web, and the PBS series *Independent Lens*. ITVS was established by a historic mandate of Congress to champion independently produced programs that take creative risks, spark public dialogue and serve underserved audiences.

Since its inception in 1991, ITVS programs have revitalized the relationship between the public and public television. ITVS is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people. For more information, please visit www.itvs.org.



Produced by American Documentary, Inc. and celebrating its 20th season on PBS in 2007, the award-winning P.O.V. series is the longest-running showcase on television to feature the work of America's best contemporary-issue independent filmmakers. Airing Tuesdays at 10 p.m., June through September, with primetime specials during the year, P.O.V. has brought more than 250 award-winning documentaries to millions nationwide, and now has a Webby Award-winning online series, *P.O.V.'s Borders*. Since 1988, P.O.V. has pioneered the art of presentation and outreach using independent nonfiction media to build new communities in conversation about today's most pressing social issues. More information about P.O.V. is available at www.pbs.org/pov.

P.O.V. Interactive (www.pbs.org/pov)

P.O.V.'s award-winning Web department produces special features for every P.O.V. presentation, extending the life of P.O.V. films through filmmaker interviews, story updates, podcasts, streaming video, and community-based and educational content that involves viewers in activities and feedback. P.O.V. Interactive produces our Web-only showcase for interactive storytelling, *P.O.V.'s Borders*. In addition, www.pbs.org/pov houses *Talking Back*, where viewers can comment on P.O.V. programs, engage in dialogue and link to further resources. The P.O.V. Web site and P.O.V. archives, including special sites from previous broadcasts, form a unique and extensive online resource for documentary storytelling.

P.O.V. Community Engagement and Education

P.O.V. provides Discussion Guides for all films as well as curriculum-based P.O.V. Lesson Plans for select films to promote the use of independent media among varied constituencies. Available free online, these original materials ensure the ongoing use of P.O.V.'s documentaries with educators, community workers, opinion leaders and general audiences. P.O.V. works closely with local PBS stations to partner with museums, libraries, schools and community-based organizations to raise awareness of the issues in P.O.V.'s films. P.O.V.'s *Youth Views* expands these efforts by working with youth-service organizations.

Major funding for P.O.V. is provided by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, the Ford Foundation, the Educational Foundation of America, PBS and public television viewers. Funding for P.O.V.'s *Diverse Voices Project* is provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. P.O.V. is presented by a consortium of public television stations, including KCET Los Angeles, WGBH Boston, and Thirteen/WNET New York.

American Documentary, Inc. (www.amdoc.org)

American Documentary, Inc. (AmDoc) is a multimedia company dedicated to creating, identifying and presenting contemporary stories that express opinions and perspectives rarely featured in mainstream media outlets. AmDoc is a catalyst for public culture, developing collaborative strategic engagement activities around socially relevant content on television, online and in community settings. These activities are designed to trigger action, from dialogue and feedback to educational opportunities and community participation. Simon Kilmurry is executive director of American Documentary | P.O.V.

TAPE REQUESTS: Please note that a broadcast version of this film is available upon request, as the film may be edited to comply with new FCC regulations.