

## We Still Live Here—Âs Nutayuneân

Anne Makepeace, dir. 56 min. Lakeville, CT: Makepeace Productions, <http://www.makepeaceproductions.com/buydvds.html>, 2010.

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“Language revitalization can be the source of revolutionary change, and children are the primary agents of this revolution.”

—Jessie Little Doe Baird (Mashpee Wampanoag), Founder and Director, Wôpanâak Language Reclamation Project

*We Still Live Here—Âs Nutayuneân* (2010), the most-recent award-winning film by Anne Makepeace, is about Wampanoag language reclamation and the stunning work of Mashpee Wampanoag linguist and educator Jessie Little Doe Baird, the founder and director of the Wôpanâak (Wampanoag) Language Reclamation Project (WLRP).<sup>1</sup> It is a film that documents the history of linguistic translations and cultural transformations that Wampanoag people have always shaped, even in the bleakest periods of sickness and death inflicted on them by epidemic disease that was brought to their homelands in the 17th century by European colonizers. Wampanoag texts teach this, as we learn from the film, and the extant documents in the Wampanoag language dating back to the mid-17th century comprise the largest body of Native-written texts in North America. As Eva Blake (Assonet Wampanoag) explains early in the film, the language reclamation project has reunited members of contemporary Wampanoag communities with those Wampanoag texts, and the documents themselves have transmitted the immediacy, even the tangibility, of the presence and experiences of the ancestors, such that “touching that document is like touching their hands.”

The film’s account of the life of Wampanoag language and Wampanoag cultural meanings, and of the threats posed to both since the early era of colonization, is not reducible to an allegory for the people’s own endurance. Rather, the film is a crucial articulation of Wampanoag history-making processes in the present moment, of the means by which a purportedly “dead language” is revealed and revived within the context of ongoing community life. We see Wampanoags’ participation in language classes and the language immersion camp, listen to community members talk about the power of ancestral songs and stories, and hear personal accounts of how learning and communicating in Wampanoag opens “a broader perspective on your culture,” as Nitana Hicks (Mashpee Wampanoag) puts it. We learn from the film that community members’ dedication to language reclamation is driven by their desire to ensure a future for their children as Wampanoags, keeping their history and its teachings close. Indeed, that is the first local truth conveyed in the opening scenes of the film, in which Jessie Little Doe recounts how the teachings of Wampanoag ancestors came to her several decades ago in recurring dreams, during which she heard

the language spoken. This was the catalyst for what quickly became Jessie’s lifetime commitment to linguistic research and community-based teaching of Wampanoag language and to her leadership in an unprecedented collaborative effort to create a language reclamation project among four distinct Wampanoag communities: the Herring Pond Tribe, the Assonet Band of Wampanoag, the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe, and the Wampanoag Tribe of Aquinnah, all located in eastern Massachusetts. As a result, the WLRP was formally established in 1993, and Jessie began her study of Algonquian linguistics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where she worked with acclaimed linguist Ken Hale as she completed her fellowship and went on to earn a master’s degree in 2000. In 2010, Jessie was awarded a \$500,000 MacArthur Foundation genius grant to support her continuing linguistic research on behalf of the WLRP and Wampanoag people.

MIT linguist Norvin Richards, a specialist in Wampanoag and other indigenous languages now working with Jessie and the WLRP, notes in *We Still Live Here* that “the idea that death, if we want to call it death, is not permanent for languages. They can come back. It’s a wonderful, hopeful thing to be part of.” Yet Richards also emphasizes the urgency of efforts to preserve endangered indigenous languages, what Ken Hale referred to in 1992 as “embattled” languages—those that are under siege by “politically dominant languages and cultures.” This condition, Hale warned, is “part of a much larger process of loss of cultural and intellectual diversity” and thus is a matter of global concern (Hale 1992:1–2). Two decades later, at a symposium on language revitalization at the University of Massachusetts Boston on April 26, 2012, featuring presentations by Little Doe and Richards, Richards stated that “we are now in an unprecedented phase of linguistic extinction,” which “by the end of the century may result in the loss of 50–90 percent” of the estimated 6,000 languages spoken in the world today.<sup>2</sup> Little Doe’s presentation addressed the essential component of community involvement in abating this trend and of the need for more linguists to do the necessary work with “people on the ground.” Linguists “should not just be working on theory and orthography,” she cautioned, but on “how language is reclaimed and perpetuated” within specific communities (for more on this point, see Amery 2009, Hill 2002, and Sims 2005). Ultimately, Little Doe argues, language reclamation is a matter of community responsibility and continuing community supervision (for further recent discussion of the importance of indigenous control of language revitalization, see Walsh 2005 and 2010). As Jessie summarized the task at hand during the symposium, “The children will have to work hard to walk the language home again.”



FIGURE 4. *Jessie Little Doe Baird with daughter, Mae.* (Courtesy of CulturalSurvival.org)

From the beginning of the film, we see how alive the Wampanoag language is right now in Jessie's daughter Mae, a toddler (see Figure 4). As she rides in a car with her mom along the roads of Cape Cod, Massachusetts—part of the ancient Wampanoag homeland—we watch Mae happily eating a sandwich in her car seat. Her feet bobbing, she converses casually with her mom in both English and Wampanoag while the car glides past local street signs bearing Wampanoag names. Makepeace's visual imagery here urges us to question how the everyday, "familiar" representations of Indianness work to mask the realities of indigenous lives in the present. Hartman Deetz (Mashpee Wampanoag), who worked closely with Makepeace and organized interviews with community members for the film, explains that "the lack of awareness about local Native communities" in the region, along with "the lack of presence of local Native peoples in the mass media" are "a discredit to our history, our present, and our future" (personal communication, May 18, 2012). Superficial public acknowledgements of "the Indian presence" are acceptable so long as they bolster the myth of the "disappearance" of Native peoples in New England. Historian Jean O'Brien (White Earth Ojibwe), also briefly featured in the film, observes that New England's "master narrative" of "Indian extinction" is an amalgam of persistent historiographic erasures and rhetorical gestures of "replacement" that "dismiss Indians as long gone" (O'Brien 2010:55). As Hartman phrased it, "We are kept as 'invisible' people" in the imagination of non-Natives. This mythologizing has been necessary also to justifying Euroamerican expropriation of indigenous homelands in the region, and the film compels us to grapple with the ongoing impact of that history as well. *We Still Live Here*—we are still connected to our Native land—is thus another central truth of contemporary life threaded through the film in its images of the landscape and in

the scenes that show us how Wampanoag words and stories continue to bind the people to Wampanoag places. Jessie's description of how only their language can fully convey the nature of Wampanoags' relationship to their homeland is one of the most important moments in the film. To refer to land in Wampanoag language, Jessie explains, is to say "my land that is not separate from my body." Thus, to translate "I lost my land rights" into Wampanoag is to say "I fall down onto the ground," because "for Wampanoag people, to lose one's land is to fall off your feet."

That the film conveys all of this without ever seeming overcrowded with voices and historical details is a fine achievement by Makepeace. Particularly striking is the interweaving of the commentaries and remembrances of contemporary Wampanoags with graceful animation (by Ruth Lingford) depicting Wampanoag historical documents, the words and phrases from which flow into and around outlined images of Wampanoag ancestors that pulse quietly on the screen. In my view, it is the film's eloquently sequenced narrative of Jessie Little Doe's life and work that is its core. Indeed, it is not possible to explain the film's power without talking about the power of Jessie Little Doe, one of those rare individuals of genuine gravitational force. I was fortunate enough to experience this up close during an afternoon with Jessie in March of 2012, when she very graciously invited me to her home in Mashpee, Massachusetts, after I contacted her to request an interview. When you listen to her talk about Wampanoag language and history, and hear her speak her language and talk about her love for her community, it seems as if everything around her is being pulled toward her. Makepeace deftly leads us to this understanding of Jessie's leadership, linking her story and her words with those of Wampanoag elders, leaders, educators, and participants in the language reclamation project, so we comprehend that

the making of leaders and the efficacy of leadership can be understood only in terms of the struggles and strengths of the community and from the perspective of the day-to-day relationships and concerns that remind people of a past and of the possibilities that hold them together.

In an important sense, then, the ongoing story of Wampanoags' language reclamation project, like the film itself, is one of indigenous self-determination. Jennifer Weston (Hunkpapa Lakota), assistant producer for the film and Endangered Languages Program Coordinator at Cultural Survival (<http://www.culturalsurvival.org/programs/elc/program>), stresses a point central in current global discourse on indigenous rights today: that "we have the right as sovereign nations to establish our own language programs and education systems." Thus, language reclamation is "central to self-determination"; particularly, it "comes from within, driven by community-based knowledge" (personal communication, March 2012). At the same time, as I also learned during the interviews I conducted for this review, Wampanoag language reclamation, as well as the impetus for and creation of the film, embodies historic collaborations that come from within but that also extend beyond the internal bonds of Wampanoag communities. First and foremost, as Jessie and Hartman both explained, the WLRP constitutes an endeavor of intertwined cultural and political significance in that the partnership among the four Wampanoag communities includes a unique cooperative effort among their four governments as well. "This aspect of the project is something I never would have imagined," Hartman told me. "This is really a time of cultural renaissance," he explained, "bringing us together in ways that will only help us sustain ourselves in the future" (personal communication, May 18, 2012).

The story of what might be termed a prophetic collaboration between Jessie Little Doe and Ken Hale (a direct descendant of English colonist Roger Williams, author of the 1643 study of Narragansett language *A Key Into the Language of America* [1997]), is told by Jessie with great reverence and humor in the film. The meeting of these two visionaries resulted in a long-term, shared labor of love. As Jessie told me, Ken wasn't just concerned with linguistic analysis, "he wanted to know about the dynamics of Wampanoag community life"; and she said, laughing, in their weekly discussions over the years, she would keep him updated on "As the *Weetu* Turns"—stories about daily life in her family and community. "It was one of his life's dreams," she said, "to see this language get used and learned again" by Wampanoag people.

For Anne Makepeace, too, the film and the collaborations it entailed are as personal as they are artistically and intellectually driven. "This film means more to me than any other," she told me, and because of the strong connection she has with Wampanoag people and the story of their language, "making the film was like falling in love" (personal communication, April 2012). But she also pointed out the historical irony that shapes this experience for her, "because I am from

New England, and my ancestors are from Massachusetts Bay [Colony]"—some of whom "took part in the Great Swamp Fight on the wrong side" in 1675 during what came to be known as King Philip's War. For Linda Coombs (Aquinnah Wampanoag), program director for the Aquinnah Cultural Center, Anne's contribution to the story of Wampanoag people and their language reclamation project has been a way of "closing the circle." As I understand it, the film, as both a story about and a creative expression of these many collaborations, illuminates interlocked histories, connecting them to the present so that conflicts and injustice generated in the past may be acknowledged, perhaps even resolved.

Some might ask, in the end, how *We Still Live Here—Âs Nutayuneân* is to be formally categorized. Recent analyses of indigenous film identify it as an articulation of "cultural sovereignty" (Singer 2001:2), emphasize its power to "counter dominant media representations of indigenous people" (Dowell 2006:376), and focus on how film is "used by indigenous producers to mediate historical and cultural ruptures within their own societies" and "assert their presence in the politics that encompass them" (Ginsburg 2004:304). This film impacts within all of these areas. But, interestingly, none of those patient and generous teachers I interviewed sought to instruct me about how to classify the film. I will end, then, by thanking them and by recalling a wish Anne shared with me: "I would love to think my films open the doors to a more just world."

## NOTES

1. For a complete history of the Wôpanâak Language Reclamation Project (WLRP), visit the website at <http://wlrp.org/History.html>. See also the website of Our Mother Tongues (<http://ourmothertongues.org/aboutproject.aspx>; Anne Makepeace, Project Director), created and sponsored by Makepeace Productions and Cultural Survival's Endangered Languages Program and featuring the WLRP along with 11 other indigenous language-revitalization projects in North America.
2. See also UNESCO, 'Endangered Languages,' at [www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/endangered-languages/](http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/endangered-languages/).

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## Dancing for the Dead: Funeral Strippers in Taiwan

Marc L. Moskowitz, dir. 40 min. Columbia, SC: <http://people.cas.sc.edu/moskowitz/dancingforthedead.htm>. 2011.

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Marc L. Moskowitz, associate professor of anthropology at the University of South Carolina, has provided the viewer with an informative, yet advocative, film about dramatic performances—entertainment at Chinese funerals in Taiwan, incorporating acts that many would consider obscene. His mission, he says, is to interpret these “phenomena” by “providing interviews with Taiwan’s academics, government officials, and people working in the EFC industry.”

EFC stands for “Electric Flower Cars,” mobile stages that carry performers who sing, dance, bump, and grind as they accompany the dead during the last rites and in procession to the graveyard (see Figure 5). The filmmaker situates this “industry” (entertainment business) in the context of a long tradition of explicitly sexual discourse accompanying ritual performance in China.

Moskowitz uses the term *funeral strippers* to indicate a category of hired professionals who perform at privately funded family funeral rites, whose function is analogous to other performers such as undertakers, priests, eulogists, professional mourners, acrobats, and so forth who are likewise engaged and paid by the family of the deceased to service the dead in socially approved ritual acts; it is not too much to say demanded and sanctioned ways. In the particular case of “funeral strippers,” the focus is on female bodies in motion, who indeed may strip off their clothes and mime—or in some few cases, actually perform—various sexually explicit acts.

According to an interview Moskowitz gave to a Taiwan newspaper, he made the documentary for two reasons. First, he wanted to show U.S. audiences, who generally “have a

very narrow idea of what culture is, what a proper funeral is and how to grieve.” He also wants to counter the negative perception, if not outright shame, exhibited by Taiwanese government officials, politicians, and the media regarding the practice and folk traditions in general (Buchan 2011). These government officials saw these practices as “backward, local and superstitious. They saw it as a traditional culture that should be shed in favor of modern global culture” (Buchan 2011). The filmmaker goes on to say:

And if I err in the film, I do so more in defending the practice. I think that is because the dialogue I was engaging in at the time was so critical—things you would see on Chinese-language news that would discuss the denigration of today’s morality through this practice. I think it’s a pity that Taiwan is not more proud of this, though I do understand the fear because people tend to condemn things outside the norm very quickly. [Buchan 2011].

Much of the thrust of the voiceover narrative, as in the interviews quoted above, is to advocate for the featured female strippers and their (often-male) managers, so a general mass audience for this film may be assumed. The interviews also provide a glimpse of a seemingly universal pattern of sexual division of labor in this particular industry. The 40-minute length, the historical context provided by the narration, and the vintage footage included in the visuals does make it amenable to classroom use. Its unusual topic of a racy entertainment aspect of popular culture should certainly broaden a Eurocentric audience’s ideas about behavioral etiquette in the presence of the dead; other centricities may be moved off center as well because the interviews with government officials indicate that the “phenomenon” of funeral strippers does not remain uncontested in the local culture.

To this reviewer, who like Moskowitz has spent some years on Taiwan as a foreign observer, the most interesting

## The Polyphony of Ceriana: The Compagnia Sacco

Hugo Zemp, dir. 74 min. Watertown, MA: Documentary Educational Resources, 2010.

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Hugo Zemp lives in Nice, where the Maritime Alps take an eastward turn into Italy and tumble down to the Ligurian coast. A unique form of polyphonic singing emerged in the old fortified villages and hamlets of these hills and is still practiced in several. Zemp is an ethnomusicologist and filmmaker with expertise in the Solomon Islands, West Africa, the Caucasus, Mongolia, and Switzerland (yodeling), where he has made a number of award-winning music documentaries; he was also editor of the pioneering world music recording series, *Collection du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique et du Musée de l'Homme* (Chant du Monde). Given his strong interest in vocal traditions, Zemp was intrigued by resemblances between Ligurian polyphonic practice and the Georgian table singing that he had earlier filmed and much admired. (The similarity was also noted by Alan Lomax in the 1950s.) In 2006 he was invited to a rehearsal of the Compagnia Sacco in the hillside community of Ceriana, just 14 kilometers north of Sanremo, site of Italy's most important festival of popular song. Thus was conceived a film that affords a remarkably revealing and beguiling experience of Italian group singing as it portrays the Compagnia Sacco singing medieval ballads, lyric songs, and popular songs in contemporary Ceriana.

As far as is known, Ceriana (pop. 1,300, from 2,400 in 1861) was originally occupied under Augustus, by the Coelia clan, and emerged as a nucleated settlement in the tenth century. Vines, olives, tomatoes, potatoes, beans, basil, and other horticultural products are cultivated, if only part time, by many; some local businessmen are involved in floriculture. (Agriculture has been practiced in the Ligurian Alps since the middle Neolithic.) Choral singing, very prominent in 20th- and 21st-century Ceriana, has a long history in the community and region (Balma 2005). It is commonly supposed to have liturgical roots in the Renaissance period, in part associated with the religious confraternities of that time, which are still active today. However, because vocal polyphony was widespread throughout rural Northern Italy and Sardinia, even reaching into Tuscany, as well as in Central and southeastern Europe and up into the Baltic region (with a different branch in the mountains of south-central Italy, Sicily, and Sardinia), it is more likely a long-standing secular folk practice, in some instances influenced by liturgical canons and also influencing them (Balma 2005; Zemp and Angiolini 2010:10).

Throughout Italy, many communes, neighborhoods, and even local occupational groups nurtured distinctive musical and linguistic variants. Alan Lomax in 1954 and Robert Leydi in the 1960s, and others who followed them, turned

up dozens of local polyphonic styles. That of Ceriana, first recorded by Lomax (2000a, 2000b) and once heard in other villages of northern Liguria, is in three parts: the *primo*, who begins as a soloist in a reedy high register with some ornament and in free rhythm; the *secondo*, who "responds" in solo voice in middle register; and the low-pitch *bordone*, or drone voices, rendered by many. Older songs such as "Donna Lombarda" and "Lingua Serpentina" are in slow tempo and irregular meter. Like many Italian folk songs from all regions, whether ballads or lyric songs, those in the Ceriana repertoire are implicitly or explicitly formulated as argument, using both dialogue and third-person narrative or abstract poetic imagery (the latter being more common in southern Italian songs). Note, too, that except when a part consisted of a challenging vocal range, often a high register, in Italian folk polyphony of yore, the singers shifted parts as called on or as the mood or progress of the song took them. In Ceriana today, these several characteristics are best represented by the Compagnia Sacco (founded in 1926), whose repertoire and style have been passed down strictly through oral tradition.

Zemp's first influence as a filmmaker was the documentarian Jean Rouch, one of the founders of *cinéma vérité*, who strove to render his subjects with almost real-time naturalism. Zemp brings the viewer directly into the musical and social worlds of the Compagnia Sacco, arranging for the protagonists to tell their story and explain what they are doing in apparently spontaneous and natural sequences, without narration, visual intrusion, or artifice of construction. We come away with the feeling of having been there. Yet the film is in fact finely orchestrated, mediated through the filmmaker's close observation and study of his subject as well as his extensive experience of filming singing. Equipped with these tools, Zemp then allows the progression of the songs and the performances; the personalities, comportment, gestures, and expressions of the singers and speakers; and finally the varied contexts in which the performances happen to drive the film. The result is an unfolding experience of clarity and immediacy.

The film opens with a ten-minute montage of the group singing all the verses of their set piece, "Donna Lombarda," sung in the different formal and informal settings captured in the film, followed by commentary by one of the group members. "Donna Lombarda" is a classic ballad of northern Italy based on the probably true story of the Lombard Queen Rosamunda who murders her husband (who had killed her father and forced her to drink from his skull), plots then to murder his brother, who has helped her, and is finally forced by him to drink poison. The sequence is a brilliant stroke, as it uses this long, slow song to introduce the group in its various surroundings, verse by verse, scene by scene, while



**FIGURE 6.** *Campagna Sacco* members Giovanni Martini (l) and Nicodemo Martini (r) sing with the rest of the group at a picnic. (Courtesy of Documentary Educational Resources)

avoiding having to shorten it. It all goes by so smoothly and naturally that on first viewing I did not notice this. And as the study guide notes, more than one verse needed to be pitch corrected.

Zemp's (2010) original plan was to film the Sacco in as many informal, spontaneous performances as possible. But according to Giuliano D'Angiolini, coauthor of the study guide, many informal occasions such as singing in the *cantinas* (wine cellars), at the inn, or at work in the fields have lost ground. We see the group at an Easter Thursday dinner at their headquarters, at a mountainside picnic on the Feast of St. John, at table at Zemp's home in Nice, and at an October chestnut festival in the countryside. As filming went on, Zemp realized he couldn't ignore the formal concerts that have become a regular part of the singers' activity and vital to their continuance (2010). Orchestrated folk choruses became immensely popular in northern Italy during the interwar and post-World War II era, especially two very large ones from the Alps, who were associated with the heroic exploits of the Alpini, the regiments from Trentino Alto-Adige. These choruses are organized into fixed parts grouped together. They perform facing forward, under the direction of a conductor waving a baton. Perfect rhythmic and harmonic coordination and vocal blend are displayed, and highly controlled dynamics and modulation are meant to provide drama and interest. There were many who followed this model, including small village choruses. Of course, this formation changes the dynamics of singing entirely. Traditional singers coordinate primarily through body movement and stance, embraces, facial expression, eye movements, and gaze, in continuous and fluent interpersonal interaction (see Figure 6). Under the symphonic model of orchestration, all of this disappears, as does, in most cases, the interest of the performances. The *Compagnia Sacco* holds strictly to the

traditional norms of group singing, and this, ironically, has resulted in international recognition and regular invitations to sing abroad.

The triumph of this film is the way in which Zemp reveals the flow and warmth of traditional group singing, and the individuality of singers as well, as his camera follows the interaction and the cues of the singers throughout a song. In it we see how polyphonic singing at the village level is a continuous creator of harmony, both musical and social, for the participants and those who are absorbed by their performance.

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