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SOUND RECORDINGS AND DIGNITY TAKINGS:
REFLECTIONS ON THE RACIALIZATION OF MIGRANTS IN
CONTEMPORARY ITALY

GIANPAOLO CHIRIACÒ*

I. INTRODUCTION

In the field of music, questions related to the nature of collaborative projects may offer some insight on how to apply the concepts of dignity takings and dignity restoration within ethnomusicology. Musical collaboration is a space where different individuals and subjectivities share their own artistic practices and products, as well as the musical cultures they represent. The question is, who is going to determine the rules that regulate the sharing of space, artistic practices, and cultures; does collaboration also involve appropriation of any kind; and, if so, under what circumstances do these appropriations constitute dignity takings? Ethnomusicologists should investigate these questions through specific case studies that prioritize the voices of the very people who might (or might not) have suffered a dignity taking.¹

In this Article, I will rely on my encounter with Badara Seck, a well-known vocalist from Senegal who has been active in Italy for about two decades. My interview with this expert in cross cultural collaboration provided interesting insights into the ways in which musicology and discourses around music can involve both dignity takings and dignity restoration. I will propose strategies to address dignity takings and dignity restoration in the practice of ethnographic fieldwork. In addition, I will extend the concepts of dignity takings and dignity restoration to the case study of sound archives.

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1. BERNADETTE ATUAHENE, WE WANT WHAT'S OURS: LEARNING FROM SOUTH AFRICA'S LAND RESTITUTION PROGRAM 21 (2014). Atuahene defines a dignity taking as an instance "when a state directly or indirectly destroys property or confiscates various property rights from owners or occupiers and the intentional or unintentional outcome is dehumanization or infantilization." Bernadette Atuahene, *Takings as a Sociolegal Concept: An Interdisciplinary Examination of Involuntary Property Loss*, 12 ANN. REV. L. & SOC. SCI. 171, 178 (2016) [hereinafter Atuahene, *Takings as a Sociolegal Concept*].



II. BADARA SECK AND THE INTERPRETATION OF HIS WORK

Badara Seck can be considered an expert of musical collaboration because his activity in Italy has been based on collaborations with several prominent popular music musicians.² His voice and presence have also been at the center of several Italian festivals and events aimed at celebrating the multicultural facets of contemporary Italy.³

Nevertheless, Badara Seck—as he has explained in many public interviews and in our conversations—conceptualizes his work as an African artist working in Italy to be a bridge between Italian (or European) culture and African culture.⁴ In doing so, he pursues a twofold agenda. On the one hand, he aims to describe to the public at large, using several details and anecdotes, the perspective of black Africans who live in Italy (or, I should say, what he believes is the perspective of black Africans in Italy). On the other hand, he wants to directly address fellow Senegalese (and, more generally, fellow Africans) based in Italy in order to help them to *not* “lose the way,” as he puts it, to help them to not feel uprooted, and to hold on to values of their cultures of origins. It can easily be seen that his goal is a quite complex one, as he has to continuously negotiate between what he considers to be these two sides. Badara is also motivated by his personal beliefs, including a religious understanding of his musical practices. In his view, the role of a *griot* like him in Italy requires, at times, being a spokesperson for migrant communities, for example, like *Residence Roma*, a complex of buildings that has for several years been the home of different religious and cultural communities.

Badara’s role in *Residence Roma* has been described by literary scholar and postcolonial theorist Cristina Lombardi-Diop⁵: “Badara Seck performs on a regular basis with Italian artist Massimo Ranieri. His visibility outside of Roma Residence represented an asset for those who were inside. When Massimo Ranieri offered Badara an apartment in the prestigious quartiere Flaminio, he refused. As he explained:

2. Safaa Kasraoui, *Ifrane International Festival to Kick Off in July*, MOROCCO WORLD NEWS (June 24, 2017), <https://www.morocoworldnews.com/2017/06/221127/ifrane-international-festival-kick-off-july/> [https://perma.cc/64HV-QZFS].

3. See Press Office, Ministry of Cultural Heritage, *Show Cinema Venice: Tomorrow’s 74 Winners of “Migra-Arts,”* OPINIONE (Sept. 6, 2017), <http://www.agenziagiornalisticaopinione.it/lanciodagenzia/mostra-cinema-venezia-domani-74-cortometraggi-vincitori-migr-arti/> [https://perma.cc/9XFT-JTQ2].

4. Personal Conversation, Aug. 3, 2014.*

5. Cristina Lombardi-Diop, *Roma Residence: Senegal, Italy, and Trans-National Hybrid Spaces*, 11 INTERVENTIONS 400, 401–19 (2009).

I have been living at Residence for three years, I am with my brothers . . . I have chosen to stay very close to my brothers in order to offer my help to my brothers. It is normal, it is not only a form of help, it is a complementarity, a way to be close to them . . . I live here only for one reason, I tell you, how many times journalists who want to interview me, I call them in at Residence, so that they can come and see When they arrive, they don't want to enter. This is the main reason why I live here.

Badara Seck's tactic was to use his visibility, as well as his high degree of participation in Italy's cultural establishment, in order for the entire community of Roma Residence to become more visible. As he nicely put it, this sense of closeness to and solidarity with his own people was achieved through a lived practice of space."⁶

Despite his dedication to social issues, Badara Seck continued to be perceived as the typical "special guest" in Italian pop music, one that will always provide an African tinge to a song, a Senegalese flavor with his distinct timbre and high-pitched, falsetto-like calls. In 2014, after many years of collaborations, Badara Seck was finally ready to embark on a big project under his own name. It is not surprising that he shaped the new project as a collaboration, but of a different sort. Inspired by encounters with persons who had recently crossed the Mediterranean on old and overcrowded boats, and after conducting several workshops with asylum-seekers, Badara Seck created *Galghi* (from a Wolof word that can be translated as *boat*). *Galghi* is a piece of musical theater in which a wreck is used as a stage, and the performers, who speak mainly (but not exclusively) Italian, are immigrant actors who tell their (sometimes personal) stories about crossing the Mediterranean on "illegal" boats. Besides combining poignant singing, dramatic acts and poetry, the work is notably successful in describing the motivations and personal agencies that push the different personalities involved toward that dangerous journey. *Galghi* represents a new step in Badara's career, as he tries to challenge the role of "special guest" in somebody else's production—which benefits from his popularity—by creating a production on his own that addresses such a contemporary issue as migration in and towards Europe.

In addition, faithful to his mission as a musician and *griot* who positions his works on the axis between Italy and Senegal, his first big production includes artists who are migrants or who come from communities that experienced migration for decades. *Galghi* is also the expression of a more

6. *Id.* at 417.



ambitious project, as Badara Seck and his staff aimed to perform the piece not only in Italy, but also in Senegal and other African countries. They explained that the piece—as it deals with the motivations that make people travel the northbound migration route—can also provide some space for discussion between young men and women living on the African continent who are considering whether to embark on that trip.

It is important to note that, since the time of the *Residence Roma* experience, the geography of interrelations between communities in Italy has significantly changed. Following the Arab Spring and the war in Syria, the number of people arriving in the country increased significantly, and so did the racialization of migrants. In fact, a tendency can be observed: on the one hand, people from the Middle East—in particular Syrians—are considered refugees or asylum seekers, as the political situation and the ongoing warfare in Syrian cities are presented daily by Italian mainstream media. Black Africans in Italy, on the other hand, tend to be labeled as economic migrants who reach the shores of Sicily or other Southern Italian areas to gain better economic conditions, with little or no regard towards the legal aspects of their presence and their activities. The current political instability and harsh conditions in Eritrea, Nigeria, Mali, and other regions, are almost totally excluded from Italian mainstream media, and therefore, from the main discourse around migration in Italy.

In a way, the presence of migrants and migration in the public discourse has increased in the last years, but the byproduct has been a more standardized presentation of the experiences of people moving across the Mediterranean. Under these circumstances, one would expect that a work like *Galghi*, from a Senegalese artist who has already gained recognition in Italy, could obtain broad interest from the musical world and general public alike. Yet, the reality is that Badara Seck, so far, has not been able to perform the piece as often and as internationally as he hoped. Besides its premiere at a famous music festival in Rome and some workshops at schools and small institutions, Badara has not performed *Galghi* any further. His practice somehow went back to appearances as a special guest, together with recording activities that will lead to the release of a record under his name.

In an essay that I wrote about Badara Seck's work (Chiriaco 2016), I analyzed his music, and in particular the work of *Galghi*, as a response to the main Italian narrative about migrants, especially African migrants. In the essay, I interpreted the fact that there haven't been many performances of *Galghi* as a sign that the music industry and the general public prefer him in the role of "special guest." Therefore, I suggested that this can be

interpreted as infantilization, as the Italian audience probably lacks the capacity to consider Badara Seck, a black African artist, as an individual who has the autonomy to pursue substantial creative and economic goals on his own. The system is set up in such a way, I argued, that it is just suitable for him to appear and to perform as a semi-professional figure who is brought to the stage or to a recording session, but who is lacking specific agency. In addition, I considered the scarce success of *Galghi* as a sign that even such an articulated work on migration has been swallowed by the pale rhetoric of multiculturalism, according to which a work such as *Galghi* is more suitable for school workshops or small community centers rather than more popular, prestigious venues.

When I met Badara Seck again after the publication of my essay, my aim was to let him speak for himself about my interpretation. Moreover, I was interested in evaluating whether Badara considered my article a dignity taking, which stole cultural property and caused dehumanization or infantilization. When I asked him to comment on my essay, he replied that he did not agree with my perspective. He explained that he has encountered many Italian people who understand the situation much better, especially people who comprehend that “Lampedusa has always been there” (this is one of his favorite expressions, from the fact that the Italian island of Lampedusa itself became a metaphor of contemporary migration due to significant migration from Libya). He contests the idea that migration is a contemporary issue, and maintains that the phenomenon is rather part of a never-ending movement of people across the Mediterranean, people who move both ways, attracted (or rejected) by multiple things.

Furthermore, Badara Seck did not share my idea of *Galghi* as a scarce success. It is a big production, he contested, that requires about 10,000 euros per performance; therefore, unless there is a sufficient grant involved, it is arduous to bring it on stage. However, he explained that various associations that work with migrants have already contacted him, especially through a new governmental program called *Migrart*, to involve him in projects such as a multicultural choir and seminars on the musical traditions from West Africa. He therefore hopes that in the future he will be called by some other associations (or by the same ones) to set up *Galghi* on new stages.

It is worth noting that the governmental program he quoted, *Migrart*—whose goal is to recognize artistic contributions from minorities—is designed to fund only associations that have already worked in the field of artistic production for years and that have already produced significant works of performing arts. As a result, the program almost automatically excludes

any grassroots association that minority communities could create to participate. In practice, it facilitates the production of works that feature the presence of migrant or minority artists, but that are directed and managed by people who have already worked in or with Italian institutions. This scheme, in my opinion, subtly reinforces the image of infant artists coming from other places who need help and guidance.

In our recent interview, I presented the concept of dignity takings to Badara Seck because I wanted to understand if he thought that my portrayal of his work, or of the work of his fellow performers, could have involved any infantilization or dehumanization. Badara affirmed that, even though he contested some of my points, he did not consider my work a dignity taking, based on my attempt to understand the experience of migrants and travelers across the Mediterranean as expressed musically by his work. It is, of course, not easy for somebody like Badara Seck to talk overtly about the way he is perceived as a musician in Italy, and about the way this perception can represent the effect of a systemic marginalization. Even though he is particularly proud of his origins as well as of his artistic talent, he is also profoundly aware that his success is based on musical collaboration.

As the interview proceeded, I understood that self-reflection was a challenge and it was easier for him to explore the concepts of dignity takings and dignity restoration in the context of cultural property by discussing the experiences of others in the African communities with whom he was more acquainted. So, I asked him if he thought that dignity takings could occur in the musical world, and, if so, if he could provide examples from his own experience. Badara proposed two interesting instances.

The first story was as follows:

I was working with a poet and politician from Morocco who wanted to create some musical projects with me (Badara Seck does not want his name to be revealed). Although we were different on various levels, I was thinking that there was some merit because he could talk to the Mohammed VI, the king of Morocco, and speak with authority on the topic of art. This is a positive thing. He could also receive some funds for it, money that could help weak African productions that lack economic power and a system to push them forward. Africa is a continent with an abundance of art that is badly managed. In my opinion, the poet-politician had an opportunity because his funds were not coming from Europe or America. That was great. So, the King gives money to him. I knew he was not always on the right path, but I

thought that we might be able to work together; that I could help him to understand. He was shocked when I told him that we could use the money to go to villages in the Moroccan hills and meet the women who have a magical tradition over there: music, theatre, storytelling. We could preserve African poetry that is dying because the majority of it was in the oral tradition, not written. We could take time to finance little projects for Morocco, Senegal, or with Tuaregs. Now is the time. But little by little, the relationship changed. He was impressed, at the beginning, but after some time he came out with two books of his own. Just out of the blue. So, he used his words and his expertise to get some money from the King, but he used the money to publish his own books.⁷

The case of the poet/politician who used the Moroccan cultural funds to finance his own books of poetry can be plausibly considered an appropriation of funds destined to support Moroccan cultures, but it is difficult to argue that this appropriation constituted a dignity taking, even though it represents a lost opportunity to support cultural products that are meaningful for other Moroccans and cultures in Morocco. That is, it is difficult to argue that there an involuntary taking of cultural property, which resulted in dehumanization or infantilization.⁸

In a second instance, Badara told me about another experience:

I was invited, some years ago, to a famous area of Africa. An internationally successful band (Seck does not want to reveal the name of the band) invited me to perform together. But when I was there, I realized that the music they were performing was not their original music, they didn't create it. Instead, they took their music from the slaves who work for them. Their servants are also their musicians who entertain people at parties or weddings. They took the music from their slaves, giving them some little tips, and they perform it everywhere in the world. I

7. Personal Conversation, Oct. 16, 2016.*

8. Atuahene, *Takings as a Sociolegal Concept*, *supra* note 1 (“To qualify as a dignity taking, there must be involuntary property loss as well as evidence of the intentional or unintentional dehumanization (the failure to recognize an individual’s or group’s humanity) or infantilization (the restriction of an individual’s or group’s autonomy based on the failure to recognize and respect their full capacity to reason) of dispossessed or displaced individuals or groups . . .”).



was shocked to think that these musicians are supposed to be noble, but for me they took the dignity from their servants.

Despite its brevity, there are many relevant aspects in this personal experience described by Badara Seck. From the point of view of a musician who based his career on musical collaborations, he focuses his attention particularly on the fact that the musicians of the band he is referring to did not share the space of the stage, rather just appropriated the musical repertoire and practices of another community for their own advantage. He did not elaborate further about the reasons why he defined the original creators of the musical repertoire as slaves, but this is of course crucial to understanding whether this appropriation can be properly defined as dignity taking. The fact that Badara Seck is using the word *slaves* (*schiaivi*, in Italian) is a sign that it was not only a matter of disproportionate musical collaboration it was also a matter of infantilization (at the very least) or dehumanization of the bearer of the culture that the international band is drawing upon. For Seck, this is a clear instance of a dignity taking.

III. DIGNITY RESTORATION ACCORDING TO BADARA SECK

From Badara's last statement, it appears that he has a strong, well-developed conception of what dignity is, and how it relates to nobility (the opposite side of the spectrum, from his standpoint). His idea does not necessarily correspond to the idea proposed by Atuahene. Nevertheless, as we will see, what he proposes to restore dignity is particularly interesting in the context of the relation between dignity and music. It is also interesting to notice that the experience from which the instance comes is one of musical collaboration.

While I was still evaluating the two instances that he provided, I asked Badara Seck to articulate what he thought were the possible ways to restore dignity in the cases he was describing. In his opinion, if there has been a misappropriation of cultural wealth from communities or countries, restitution must involve an acknowledgment of the value of that wealth together with public apologies. This, he thinks, is a basic requirement.

In addition, both in the case of the internationally-renowned band and in the case of the Moroccan communities, Badara suggests that a plan of "micro-credits" should be started in order to give the people whose musical culture has been taken away the possibility to use the potential of that musical culture, together with the possibility to re-affirm the origins of it.

I find Badara's idea of micro-credit projects to restore and assure dignity particularly intriguing. I consider this to be a crucial point. Although the exchange with the relevant communities is a tendency that already emerged in the wave of ethnographic collaborative research, as we saw, and that led to different strategies "in the field," it seems to me that what Badara suggests is a twofold strategy that requires making the musicians and the communities aware of the potential of their creativity, and making them able to use that potential.

But, any intervention of researchers also bears the risk of influencing, and therefore modifying the ways in which the musical materials are understood and utilized. Whether it means that any intervention to restore dignity can translate into a modification of the cultural product that is intended to be saved is also open to discussion. Nevertheless, I consider the idea of micro-credit projects as part of ethnomusicological research an effective way to avoid inequalities in the practice of fieldwork.

Although more research is needed to develop the scheme designed from Badara Seck's intuition, I think that a model already emerged for ethnomusicological works that aim to learn from the experience of law scholars and from the conceptualization of dignity takings and dignity restoration. Two notable practices emerged: (1) it is fundamental to acknowledge that the musical materials that have been recorded, analyzed, archived, and published are property of the musicians and the communities that have created and performed them; (2) it is also crucial to consider, from the inception, the idea that ethnomusicologists provide musicians or communities the means to protect and develop their own musical material, which they created and that we record for our own purposes.

Obviously, these possibilities have to be related to the resources of the researchers and of the research project, and musicians and communities need to have the chance to decide independently what it means to protect their creations and to use, or even not use, the potential in it. Nevertheless, it is crucial that agency is given to musicians and to communities. Agency is the key to dignity restoration, which is "a remedy that seeks to provide dispossessed individuals and communities with material compensation through processes that affirm their humanity and reinforce their agency."⁹

9. Bernadette Atuahene, *Dignity Takings and Dignity Restoration: Creating a New Theoretical Framework to Understanding Involuntary Property Loss and the Remedies Required*, 41 *LAW & SOC. INQUIRY* 796, 818 (2016).

IV. SOUND REPATRIATION AS DIGNITY RESTORATION

One way to look at collaboration in music is to analyze how the work of ethnomusicologists turned from the interest in the music of the Other—or in musical Othering—to a more collaborative approach between the researchers involved in fieldwork and the communities whose musical traditions are analyzed.¹⁰ Ethnomusicologists became more considerate about their critical tools and the ways in which analyses of repertoires and instruments collected around the world were conducted,¹¹ as their methods were in many ways—implicitly or overtly—nurturing ideas of primitivism, exoticism, and orientalism. Ethnomusicologists, therefore, employed tactics to change the narratives, developed forms of support, and focused on the communities whose musical traditions were being analyzed, as well as on musicians who provided the content.¹²

A meaningful consequence of these new ideas about what the object of interest, or the mission, of ethnomusicology is, is that many researchers now prefer—rather than embarking on long trips—to engage in fieldwork in their own cities or regions, focusing on minorities or diasporic communities.¹³ Such researchers, at least in Europe, are often also members of associations that help migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers.¹⁴ In other instances, they commit themselves to some sort of local, social volunteering work to help communities.¹⁵ This approach is also subject to criticism as, in some cases, applied ethnomusicologists can promote, although unintentionally, a certain “acceptance of a narrow multicultural poetics,” based on appreciation of “decorative” and “entertaining differences,” to borrow Imani Perry’s words.¹⁶

The compelling account from Aaron Fox, about a project he designed and implemented for about a decade, can lead to a better understanding of the possibility, as well as the weak points, of projects defined as “sound repatriation,” considered here through the lens of dignity restoration.¹⁷ Inter-

10. See generally LAURENT AUBERT, *THE MUSIC OF THE OTHER: NEW CHALLENGES FOR ETHNOMUSICOLOGY IN A GLOBAL AGE* (2007).

11. *Id.*

12. Elizabeth Mackinlay, *Decolonization and Applied Ethnomusicology: “Story-ing” the Personal-Political-Possible in Our Work*, in *THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF APPLIED ETHNOMUSICOLOGY* 379–97 (2015).

13. *Id.*

14. *Id.*

15. *Id.*

16. See generally IMANI PERRY, *MORE BEAUTIFUL AND MORE TERRIBLE. THE EMBRACE AND TRANSCENDENCE OF RACIAL INEQUALITY IN THE UNITED STATES* (2011).

17. Aaron Fox, *Repatriation as Reanimation through Reciprocity*, in *THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF WORLD MUSIC* 522–54 (2014).

estingly, Fox and his graduate assistant, Chie Sakak, used Laura Boulton's Collection of Traditional and Liturgical Music to confront evident infantilization of the people that Laura Boulton encountered and recorded during her trips among Iñupiat people.¹⁸ Fox explains:

I sent [Sakakibara] four CDs containing all the songs, and a printout of a scan of Boulton's catalogue notes . . . I listed the names of the six adult men and one child whom Boulton identified in her notes as performers on the recordings. I invited 'descendants' of these performers to contact me if they wished to receive copies of the recordings and related notes, along with a copy of the aforementioned chapter from Boulton's autobiography, in which she described her visit to Barrow in romanticized and opaque terms, but in some detail. I also described my broad but still sketchy ambitions to 'repatriate' these recordings.¹⁹

Issues emphasized by applied ethnomusicology often focus on how to address the mistakes of the discipline in the past.²⁰ It is along these lines that projects of restitution emerged. Restitution here is returning recordings made "in the field," and archived in large universities or libraries in Europe and North America, to the communities where they were recorded.²¹ In some cases, such as Fox's account, this phenomenon takes the form of "sound repatriation," a term that emphasizes the value of music and dance in the postcolonial nation-building process.²² In other cases, the world wide web is the arena that provides the space for restitution, on the assumption that an online portal is the most democratic form of giving back. This is partially the case of the work of the "Association for Cultural Equity," which aims at repatriating material and recordings collected by Alan Lomax during his career as one of the most prolific music folklorists of the twentieth century.²³ Such valuable attempts do raise questions, though. For the purposes of this paper, we can focus on one single, problematic aspect: sound recordings that are returned often carry—after years in the hands of scholars—meanings and values that are different from, if not opposite to, meanings and values expressed by the people that were recorded. If we

18. *Id.* at 530–50.

19. *Id.* at 528.

20. *Id.*

21. *Id.* at 550.

22. *Id.* at 550–53.

23. CULTURAL EQUITY, <http://www.culturalequity.org/> [<https://perma.cc/RVS2-6YDK>].

consider the acquisition of sound recordings as a possible generator of dignity takings, an investigation into projects of sound recordings repatriation can reveal aspects of the ways in which such projects should consider acts of dignity restoration.

In *The Audible Future*, published in the scholarly magazine *Ethnomusicology* in 2012, the authors present an examination of the restitution of about 1500 field recordings from Uganda that have been available for decades at the British Library.²⁴ This process of restitution (the two authors use the definition *sound repatriation*) is one example of many different projects that pursue a similar goal. Projects of this kind, notwithstanding their merits, highlight that restitution (or repatriation) cannot be reduced to the simple gesture of giving back what has been taken years ago.²⁵ It is “rather a process that demands attention to cultural, ethical, and legal issues.”²⁶ The authors provide a sample of these issues:

*To whom should these cultural materials be ‘returned’ . . . ? What happens to collections after they have been returned? Should all recordings made public, including genres that were not meant to be heard out of their ceremonial context or by the uninitiated? What is the most effective way for people to access recordings that are stored in an archive . . . ? How should rights to recordings be assigned, and by whom? Which institutions are deemed to be ‘donors’ and which are relegated to the position of ‘receivers’? Who will legislate use of and access to recordings in the future?*²⁷

The ways in which each project addresses these questions vary according to the context. However, this set of questions casts a light on how relations of power intervene directly with choices that can apparently look like “simple” questions of sound.

Fox argues that the process of repatriation stimulated new practices of activation of traditions. Thanks to the music he “repatriated” to the ancestors of the persons who provided music for Boulton’s recordings, a grandchild of the leader of the group—Joe Sikvayugak—founded a group of

24. See generally Sylvia Nannyonga-Tamusuza & Andrew N. Weintraub, *The Audible Future: Reimagining the Role of Sound Archives and Sound Repatriation in Uganda*, 56 *ETHNOMUSICOLOGY* 206 (2012).

25. *Id.* at 208.

26. *Id.*

27. *Id.*

dancers and musicians that performs the songs archived in the Boulton Collection, in addition to new material that they create, influenced by their ancestors.²⁸ Fox also tapped into questions related to dignity takings, and let the questions be answered (as they should be) by the community:

I must add that I have made a habit over the last decade of asking my indigenous interlocutors if they feel Boulton stole their music for her own benefit. To a person, out of dozens I have posed that questions to, they have refused that characterization vigorously. When I am feeling particularly frustrated with Boulton's documentation or her ethical lapses, I try to remember the late, revered Iñupiat elder and intellectual Martha Aiken, who told me Thank God for that Laura lady, because without her we wouldn't have these songs back.”²⁹

While Fox does not use the term ‘dignity taking,’ the way he phrased his questions around the concept of music “being stolen” by an ethnomusicologist begs for an analysis of dignity takings in music, even more so when one looks at Fox’s “frustration” with Boulton’s “ethical lapses.”³⁰ The response of his “indigenous interlocutors” is particularly stunning, as it underlines how the sound recordings preserve values within the community of origin regardless of the potential harm inflicted by the researcher in the field.³¹ This leads to my first argument about the possibility of using the dignity takings and dignity restoration framework as a critical tool: as music is often a vehicle to consolidate relationships within a community, projects of repatriation—when conducted with attention towards dignity restoration—can help the community, as well as the families of people who had been recorded, to come together stronger and more conscious about the cultural values that they share.

Although it is difficult, in the discipline of ethnomusicology and—more generally—within the field of cultural properties of sounds, to define the extent of a dignity taking and the most effective practices of dignity restoration, the cases I have presented demonstrate that these concepts are nevertheless useful—for fieldwork as well as for repatriation projects—to design a research framework that not only preserves the musical values that recorded materials hold in the community that originated them, but that al-

28. Fox, *supra* note 17 at 553.

29. *Id.*

30. *Id.*

31. *Id.*



so fosters those values through a generous appreciation of the musical expressions that are at the core of our engagement as researchers.

V. CONCLUSION

I have demonstrated, in this article, the potential of using the concepts of dignity takings and dignity restoration in the field of ethnomusicology. My account suggests that researchers must be aware of the privilege of their positions, whether they are planning a series of interviews with musicians or they are assuming the direction of an archive that itself carries the heritage of previous field research. It is also crucial that researchers and archivists have a deep understanding that sound archives are not dead institutions whose only goal is to collect something from the past. They are the living echoes of relations of power, of which researchers are—intentionally or unintentionally—involved. In some cases, those relations reverberate the appropriation of property and dignity. To think in these terms is to continuously reposition our work as ethnomusicologists in a context in which social justice, or the lack thereof, is often represented. To restore dignity in music is therefore to provide agency, through multifaceted engagements, to communities, in order to give them enough instruments to decide the future of musical materials that historically belong to them.