RUST AND REPARATIONS: Memory, Labor, and the Politics of Repair in Senegal's Railway Workshop

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FROM TRANSFER TO TROPICALIZATION

Mbaye took out a map of Indian bogies in the railway depot of Thiès, Senegal's "railway town," to explain how they managed to replace the car axles without new material. Initially, they tried ordering from the Indian company where the trains came from in 2006, but the shipment was too expensive and slow. To keep the trains running, the workers had found an alternative: they repurposed axles from older Pakistani coaches, modifying them to fit Indian wagons. This improvisation reflected a longer trajectory of South-South cooperation. After earlier collaborations with France and then Pakistan, Senegal procured coaches from India for the Petit Train de Banlieue (PTB), a suburban commuter rail line, and for the passenger services on the Dakar–Bamako line. The changes Mbaye described were carried out at the Thiès railway workshop, where machinery like the underfloor wheel lathe used to reshape worn train wheels continued in use, at least what was left of it. By 2019, both coaches and locomotives were deteriorating, as the Dakar-Bamako line, a French colonial-era line built for extraction in the early twentieth century, had not run for four years. This deterioration materialized most visibly in rust: flaking metal, corroded joints, and the oxidation of parts that workers learned to read as signs of both age and neglect.

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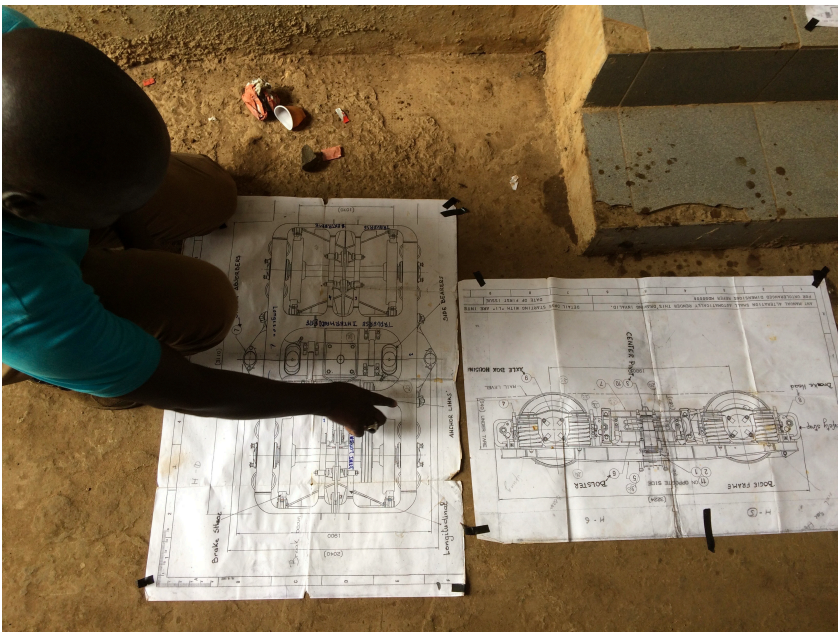

Figure 1. Mbaye studying Indian blueprints of axles and bogies, annotated with French translations in the Thiès workshop. Photo by Charline Kopf.

Only the suburban service and the autocar to Thiès still operated, though increasingly irregularly amid the construction of Dakar's new Train Express Régional (TER). The Thiès workshop remained the main repair site, but, as my interlocutors put it, it now resembled a "railway cemetery." The agency overseeing the express train construction, APIX (Agence Nationale chargée de la Promotion de l'Investissement et des Grands Travaux), had extended the temporary suspension of regional rail traffic. Many feared that the TER would permanently replace the suburban line, threatening the service and the workers' livelihoods. In response, the PTB's manager proposed a new service, the Grand Trains du Sénégal (GTS), extending beyond the TER's route between Dakar and Diamniadio.

These shifts unfolded amid Senegal's urban transformation, initiated under President Abdoulaye Wade in the early 2000s (Melly 2017) and consolidated through the Plan Sénégal Émergent (PSE), a national strategy to position the country as a modern, globally connected hub (Poleykett 2022, 383–85). Signature infrastructure projects such as the Blaise Diagne International Airport, the Bus Rapid Transit system, and the new satellite city of Diamniadio symbolized this state-driven narrative of emergence (Diop and Timéra 2018), with significant implications for urban transport (Sakho and Diongue 2024). The regional

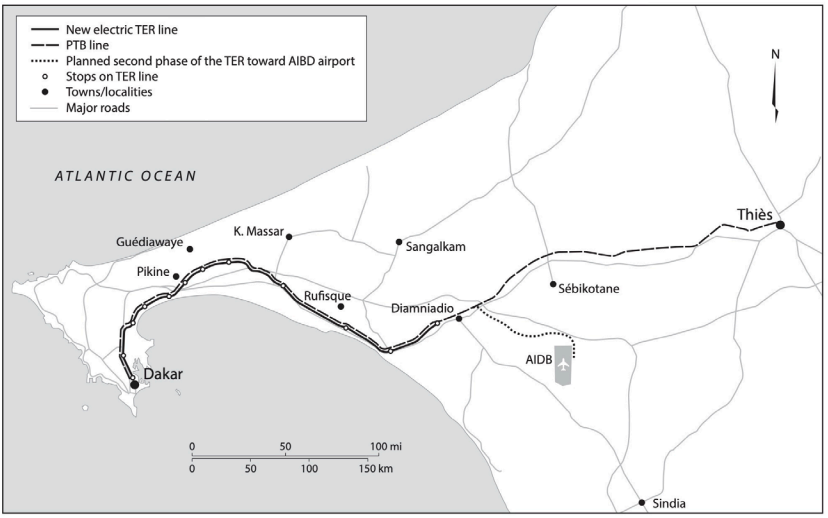

Figure 2. The PTB and TER lines running parallel until Diamniadio. The Dakar–Bamako tracks continue beyond Thiès. Map by Bill Nelson, 2026.

express train was pitched as a flagship of technological progress, but criticized for its high cost, exclusionary impacts, and perceived neocolonial ties to France (Kopf 2020a). Though intended to improve mobility, these projects often disrupted everyday life, causing road closures, detours, and ad hoc alternatives that complicated circulation (Diop 2020; Melly 2017; Ndiaye 2018). Framed as milestones of modernization, everyday Senegalese experienced them as serving elite and foreign interests, sidelining the residents grappling with worsening traffic and deteriorating infrastructure. Gunvor Jónsson (2024) shows how market vendors displaced by urban renewal near Dakar's main train station navigated these ruptures, adapting at the margins of the masterplan. These tensions resonate with the railway workers who, once central to the city's infrastructure, now found themselves increasingly excluded from the country's vision of emergence.

The contrast between the TER and older systems like the Petit Train de Banlieue and the Dakar–Bamako Railway (DBF) underscores the uneven geographies of Senegal's modernization. The PTB, now in decline, symbolizes infrastructure that the state appears increasingly unwilling to sustain, its tickets once more affordable compared to the ones of the TER. The DBF, similarly precarious, suffered from fragmented governance and unresolved questions of sovereignty (Lombard 2022). Yet for decades, the line sustained regional mobility, cross-border trade, and everyday life in towns along its route, supporting traders such as the *bana-bana*—informal, mobile traders engaged in small-scale commerce—connecting markets, families, and social worlds (Jónsson 2019). It

also carried symbolic weight as part of a post-independence project of integration and sovereignty. Tied to the short-lived Mali Federation, the line was briefly suspended after its collapse in 1960 but resumed in 1963, serving as material and political infrastructure into the 1990s (Rodet and County 2018).

After privatization under the Transrail concession in the early 2000s, in the context of structural adjustment programs, and its collapse in 2016, Senegal and Mali created the binational company DBF. This too proved short-lived and was dissolved in 2020, its assets later absorbed by new national companies: Les Chemins de fer du Sénégal (CFS) and La Société de Patrimoine Ferroviaire du Mali (SOPAFER). In contrast, the PTB was carved out in 2003 as a separate company, PTB S.A., remaining under full national ownership. This ownership divergence shaped both material networks and worker trajectories. Despite administrative separation, the PTB and the DBF remain entangled through shared depots, institutional histories, and family ties between employees. As the DBF weakened and came to a halt, PTB workers increasingly feared they would share its fate. Long central to suburban mobility, the PTB had become a relic of an earlier infrastructural regime: out of place in a policy landscape dominated by the polished aesthetic of the new TER. These restructurings reflect broader postcolonial tensions around infrastructure, sovereignty, and the futures of public service.

This was the context in which the PTB's manager proposed the creation of the Grand Trains du Sénégal as a way to ensure the line's survival. But before the proposal could be submitted to the minister of Transport and then president Macky Sall, the PTB's rolling stock first had to pass technical tests. The green light was granted for the November pilgrimage of the Gamou (also *Gammu*), a major religious event held in Tivaouane to commemorate the Prophet Muhammad's birth. To the workers' joy, the train would again carry pilgrims. Rail connections to religious events like the Gamou and the Grand Magal of Touba, the largest annual Mouride pilgrimage, had long offered a source of pride, revealing spiritual rhythms embedded in the rail system. These events evoked a different kind of time: one rooted in cyclical religious calendars and rhythms of devotion, rather than the linear timelines of state infrastructure planning. In this context, the train's return for Gamou was not just a service revival but a reinstatement of spiritual and social continuity. Yet the moment also demanded caution: it was the workers' final chance to prove the trains were still operational.

This was difficult in the current circumstances. Initially enthusiastic about the manager's proposition of the Grand Trains du Sénégal, the workers soon realized they could not carry out the needed repairs because of a lack of funds (see also Kopf 2024). Mbaye's colleague expressed anger:

> This is not going to bring us far; we would have to do way more to actually pass the test in a meaningful way. If we pass it, it's only because of our technical knowledge, but even then, it would be dangerous to continue. Those in management have no idea about the technical issues.

Mbaye agreed, as they showed me how to fill the holes of the battered, bumped, and dented carriages with putty. This is how we would spend the next months: plastering gaps and cavities in train walls and roofs, covering signs of wear and tear, welding broken doors and windows, and carefully wrapping them in paper when we were finally ready to spray-paint over the scars and surgical procedures we had performed. Much of this work aimed less at halting rust than at concealing it, sealing corrosion beneath layers of paint in ways that delayed failure while making it harder to detect.

The railway workers kept repeating how different these measures were from the repairs they once did, and those of earlier generations. Moments of repair and maintenance that we shared often prompted discussions on the type of trains themselves—second-hand units from India and Pakistan—and the modifications required to adapt them to the Senegalese and Indian tracks. While elsewhere I analyze the toxic dust that these train reparations can release (Kopf 2020b), or the workers' felt uselessness when it came to this type of "cosmetic" work (Kopf 2024), I explore here the histories, temporalities, and technological adaptations of Senegalese railway maintenance and repair. Engaging with workers' repair stories and practices in Rufisque and Thiès (2019–2020), I examine repair in its different facets, pushing and problematizing the concept by trying to differentiate it from multiple cognate terms: repair as replacement and bricolage; as reappropriation and adaptation; and finally, as creation and innovation.

In the first part of the article, I look at how repair as replacement in the context of Indian and Pakistani coaches involves careful and ongoing bricolage that can, in the longer run, prove harmful. Building on Ekin Kurtiç's (2023) argument that ruination inherently forms part of infrastructural labor, highlighting the continuum between decay and maintenance, I suggest that ongoing repair and maintenance can ultimately lead to destruction. Maintenance "must attend to decay's temporality" (Gupta 2021, 44) yet it can also accelerate deterioration and thereby contribute to breakdowns. Moreover, practices of repair and stories of maintenance reveal not only the infrastructures' inherent fragility (Denis and Pontille 2014) but also the negotiations they require, that is, convincing bosses, assessing risks and responsibilities, and translating technical guidelines

and international regulations into the local context. In the second part, I focus on repair as reappropriation and the adaptation of technologies by exploring the history of French second-hand wagons and the workers' interpretation of repair as "tropicalization," a colonial term they repurposed to express ingenuity and agency. This blurs the distinction often made between maintenance as preventative and repair as curative (De Coss-Corzo 2021; Gupta 2023). Last, I look at how local adaptations of foreign technologies can yield new creations. Rather than "just" maintenance, I show how what is often glossed as "routine" repair demands skill and expertise from engineers and technicians (Mavhunga 2017), abilities that go hand-in-hand with care, responsibility, and pride (Henke 2000). Despite the dangers involved, this work is both essential and creative (Grace 2021; Mavhunga 2017; Park 2017), revealing how the railway's functioning has relied on workers whose contributions often remain invisible.

Without romanticizing this creativity, I suggest that the stories engineers tell, especially about West African technicians whose expertise was long demeaned under French colonial rule, complicate the notion of repair as mere fix or restoration, becoming a form of historical recognition and reparation. In circulating these narratives, railway workers enact another kind of repair: one that restores dignity and claims authorship over subaltern technical lives. These practices unfold across intersecting temporalities: the *longue durée* of colonial infrastructures, the cyclical rhythms of pilgrimage, and the iterative, precarious time of repair. Rather than operating on a single developmental timeline, repair work knits together these layered pasts and deferred futures.

To ethnographically explore these nuances of repair, the next section engages literature on infrastructural repair and material maintenance, both in general (Dittmar and Tastevin 2016; Jackson 2014; Martínez and Laviolette 2019; Strebel, Bovet, and Sormani 2019) and across African contexts (Grace 2021; Green-Simms 2017; Hart 2016; Mavhunga 2012; Tastevin 2015). I read these works alongside literary and artistic reflections attending to the entanglements of material fragility, historical violence, and creative endurance. In particular, I draw inspiration from Kader Attia's geo-poetic and political work on postcolonial repair, including his 2018 installation *Some Modernity's Footprints*, which evokes both the violence and the afterlives of colonial infrastructure.

MAINTENANCE AND MODERNITY BEYOND REPAIR?

As historical forms and matter, infrastructures are embedded within wider imaginaries and ideologies of progress and endowed with multiple meanings.

Social scientists have demonstrated how infrastructures like roads and railways are classical technologies of the future that come with "expectations of modernity" (Ferguson 1999; Dalakoglou and Harvey 2015; Ureta 2016; Schwenkel 2013) and the "peculiar and unmistakable dream world that attaches to them" (Larkin 2013, 156). They can be examined as networks of social engineering, conduits of collective rights, and sites of political belonging and citizenship (Anand 2017; Fredericks 2018; Harvey and Knox 2012; Lemanski 2019). Yet they also produce discrimination and estrangement, and as such are often contested (Anand, Gupta, and Appel 2018; Von Schnitzler 2016). Scholars have highlighted their environmental and human costs (Enns and Bersaglio 2020), their role in entrenching inequality (Graham and Marvin 2001), and their racializing effects (Kimari and Ernstson 2020). Railways in particular reveal the violent rationalities of empire and colonial expansion (Headrick 1981; Karuka 2019), including those built across West and Central Africa during the French colonial period for extractive and administrative purposes (Cooper 1996; Daughton 2021; Jones 2002). At the same time, they have also been sites of resistance and political mobilization, their tracks hosting not only goods and troops but also strikes, uprisings, and alternative social imaginaries (see also Ammermann and Sithole 2024).

This ambivalence is captured in the title of Kader Attia's piece *Some Modernity's Footprints* (2018), which gestures to both the promises and violences of infrastructure under modernity. A multimedia installation of visibly repaired objects—rail sleepers stapled together, wooden sculptures bearing the marks of mending, and portraits of *gueules cassées* (broken faces) from World War I—Attia's work reflects on how damage, healing, and survival are entangled in the material afterlives of empire. Reflecting on his work, Attia draws on a conversation with the Senegalese philosopher Souleymane Bachir Diagne, who noted that while the railway served French colonial extractive ambitions in West Africa, it also facilitated the spread of Islam into the interior, carrying imams and preachers to regions once beyond reach and thereby contributing to resistance against French colonialism.[1] This paradox—the colonial railway as both a tool of domination and a conduit for counter-movements—shows how infrastructures can exceed their initial functions, producing unintended cultural and political consequences.

This tension between extraction and resistance also recurs in West African literature. Ahmadou Kourouma's (1998, 73) *Monnè, outrages et défis* (*Monnè, Outrages, and Challenges*) renders the violence of colonial infrastructure in visceral terms: "The task of laying the railway was an immense labor that would consume

men, harvests, livestock, money, and many seasons" (translation mine). Though fictional, the novel draws on real figures like French Governor Faidherbe to explore the toll of imperial ambition. Nearly a century later, Ousmane Sembène's *God's Bits of Wood* (1960) recounts the 1947–1948 railway workers' strike along the Dakar–Bamako line, a landmark in anti-colonial mobilization during which 20,000 workers and their families put a halt to most of the rail traffic across French West Africa for five and a half months (Cooper 1996, 81; see also Lakroum 1987; Sène 1987; Thiam 2019). At its core was the *cadre unique*, a unified wage system for African and French employees (Cooper 1996, 81), making the railway a site of collective struggle for dignity and equal treatment.

Such resistance was shaped not only by politics but also by the railways' inherent fragility, which made imperial control costly, unstable, and vulnerable to disruption. As Manu Karuka (2019, 40) writes, "imperialists . . . built railroads as infrastructures of reaction, as attempts to control the future," but the constructions often proved precarious: costly, prone to breakdown, and requiring constant repair. Even colonial officials acknowledged shortcomings: the French press called the then Sudanese (Malian) section of the Dakar-Bamako railway "our follies of Kayes-Bamako" (Jones 2002, 11), and the Gouvernement Général of French West Africa (AOF) in Dakar described it as "a railway in name only" (Gouvernement Général de l'Afrique Occidentale Française 1931, 8). Archival records note inflated budgets, rival French factions, material and labor shortages, and careless construction (McLane 1992). Termite-infested railroad ties were laid too far apart, drainage systems failed (Jones 2002, 16), and inexperienced engineers created embankments that made long-term maintenance difficult (Ralph 2015, 54).

This infrastructural vulnerability underscores a broader reality: infrastructures require constant maintenance to endure. Scholars of infrastructural labor (Corwin and Gidwani 2025; Gupta 2021, 2023) show how this often invisible work is historically gendered and racialized (Ammermann and Sithole 2024), at times rendering workers themselves infrastructural (Simone 2004). African transport systems have long been shaped by improvisation, adaptation, and constraint as conditions of precarity give rise to both marginality and ingenuity. Studies of African automobility and repair (Hart 2016; Grace 2021; Green-Simms 2017; Mavhunga 2012; Tastevin 2015) highlight how infrastructures function not only as sites of exclusion, shaped by colonial legacies and often conditions of austerity, but also of technical skill and embodied knowledge ensuing in creative adaptation. Joshua Grace's (2021, 14) concept of "breakdown-creativity"

reframes repair as part of an ongoing continuum of making, fixing, and adapting, rather than a simple response to failure. Similarly, Jennifer Hart (2016, 129) shows Ghanaian mechanics using substitution and vernacular expertise in welding to keep vehicles running without formal support. These insights resonate with the practices of Senegalese railway workers, whose repairs address mechanical failure as well as broader political and infrastructural breakdowns rooted in the overlapping logics of imperial extraction, postcolonial fragmentation, and neoliberal austerity. Rust becomes the visible trace of these processes and repair, then, part of what Lindsey Green-Simms (2017, 7), writing on automobility in Africa, calls an "infrastructure of feeling," where the affective and embodied labor of maintenance reflects longer histories of improvisation and tactical adaptation (Verrips and Meyer 2001).

To reflect on these layered meanings, I return to Attia's postcolonial atlas of visibly repaired and damaged forms. His work draws attention to the dialectic between destruction and repair, showing how repair always leaves a trace in the form of staples, stitches, or scars: sometimes healing, sometimes compounding damage, a tension that also underpins discussions of repair as reparation in Senegal and beyond (Sarr and Savoy 2018; de Jong 2022). This is mirrored in the trains of Senegal and Mali, whose refurbished carriages bear visible signs of wear, as well as of adaptation and hybridity. Repair, in this light, proves both necessary and ambivalent: a practice of keeping things going, patching them up and transforming them, but also a reminder of the limits of restoration itself.

Figure 3. Surface repair on a passenger carriage in the Rufisque workshop that improves the exterior while leaving mechanical issues untouched. Photo by Charline Kopf.

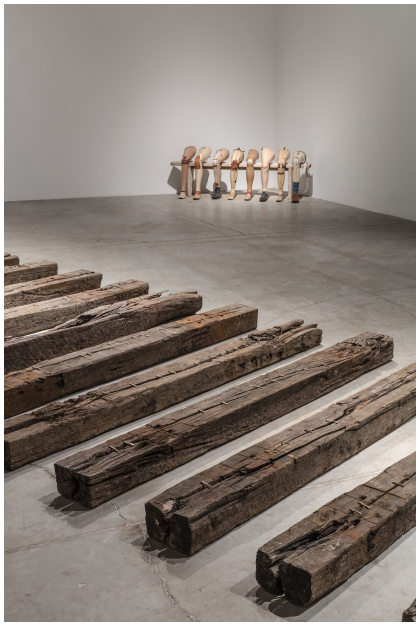

Figure 4 (left). Kader Attia, *Traditional Repair, Immaterial Injury* (2018)—visible mending as both wound and repair. Photo by Tony Hafkenscheid, 2018.
Figure 5 (right). Kader Attia, *Some Modernity's Footprints* (2018)—railway sleepers evoking scars of colonial modernity. Photo by Tony Hafkenscheid, 2018.

As the remainder of the present article shows, the Dakar–Bamako line, rooted in imperial infrastructure and its meter gauge, reflects a history of dispossession and of material and cultural reworking. Also shaped by South–South cooperation and broader geopolitical circuits, the repair practices complicate the binary between colonial imposition and postcolonial adaptation, as the next section explores. They inhabit overlapping temporal worlds where the histories of colonial rail-building intersect with the cyclical momentum of religious pilgrimage and the unstable, improvisational tempo of day-to-day repair. Infrastructural time here is neither smooth nor linear: it loops and stutters, combining promises of modernity with the recursive demands of upkeep highlighting the multiple temporalities of repair.

REPAIR AS REPLACEMENT AND *DÉBROUILLAGE*

Back in the railway depot in Thiès, Mbaye and Mohamed proudly recalled how, in earlier years, they had managed to maintain Pakistani, Indian, and older French wagons. These improvisations built on a longer history of repair that earlier generations had relied on and that they contrasted with the superficial adjustments now made for the Grand Trains du Sénégal and the Gamou pilgrimage.

Globally, transferring rolling stock from wealthier to postcolonial or post-socialist countries is a recurring practice, shaped by center-periphery dynamics. Germany, Austria, and the Netherlands have routinely sent obsolete tram stock to Eastern European countries, including Romania, Bulgaria, and Ukraine (Vozyanov 2017). In West Africa, too, such transfers have a longer genealogy. Earlier generations of Senegalese railway workers adapted French wagons through what was often referred to, drawing on colonial vocabulary, as "tropicalization" (Park 2017, 215): the local reconfiguration and reappropriation of machines for different environmental, technical, or labor conditions, or what might here also be called retrofitting. "New" in this context rarely referred to the year of production, but, rather, to the date of arrival.

With the Indian and Pakistani trains, my interlocutors noted an added distinction, considering them second-class quality compared to those from Europe (see also Kopf 2020b). Still, they had to be made to work. Mohamed recounted how, during one emergency, they realized that no replacement axles would arrive from India. Since wheels could only be re-profiled a few times, they repurposed axles from decommissioned Pakistani wagons, cutting and modifying them to fit Indian coaches. This improvisation was not merely technical: it reflected Senegal's shift under President Wade from earlier colonial partners toward South–South collaborations with India, China, and Brazil. Framed within a postcolonial solidarity discourse rooted in the Non-Aligned Movement and earlier cultural exchanges under President Léopold Sédar Senghor (Jain 2013, 249), this turn brought Indian coaches for the Petit Train de Banlieue and Transrail through RITES (Rail India Technical and Economic Service), a state-owned Indian firm, along with technical training for Senegalese and Malian workers and the deployment of Indian engineers to Senegal.

Yet workers pointed to persistent challenges, including sourcing spare parts and navigating English-language manuals that complicated long-term maintenance. While cheaper than European alternatives, these technologies were often seen as compromises imposed by financial constraints. Technical drawings, including those of traverses and bogies, were mostly in English, so workers scribbled French translations into the margins. Mbaye and his colleagues, who trained in India in 2006, 2007, and 2011, admitted that language barriers rendered the early days difficult, but they quickly adapted. "The logic of railways is universal," they told me, referring to a shared technical language across Senegalese, Pakistani, or Indian rail systems.

Even among meter-gauge systems—used in Senegal, India, and Pakistan, and inherited from the French and British colonial administrations—slight differences in design standards and infrastructure remained. "There are still

variations depending on the wheel manufacturer," Mbaye explained, crouching over a bogie drawing. Retrofitting Indian trains with Pakistani axles meant assessing which pieces were essential, and which could be removed or modified. It was a cautious and precarious enterprise, with substantial risk and responsibility. "Even removing a millimeter or two requires full recalculation," Mbaye said, tapping the diagram with his pen. "One wrong estimate, and the whole train could derail."

Such improvisations reveal the fragilities of South–South cooperation under neoliberal conditions. As Stephanie McCallum (2019, 548) shows in Argentina, adapting imported rolling stock can demand extensive technical labor, highlighting tensions around technological sovereignty and local agency. Jamie Monson's (2009, 101) account of the TAZARA railway in Tanzania and Zambia shows a similar pattern, with Chinese-built locomotives and wagons breaking down and idling in workshops, unable to meet the schedules and load capacities envisioned. In Senegal, these partnerships were framed as alternatives to colonial dependence yet operated within a global economy still shaped by asymmetry. The promise of solidarity came with recurring constraints: equipment that didn't fit, unfamiliar training materials, and scarce spare parts. As Mbaye and Cheikh made clear, keeping these machines running on tight budgets and limited support proved both a burden and a testament to their skill.

Indeed, these acts of risk and improvisation also made for a source of pride. They demonstrated mastery of what Mbaye called "the knowledge of trains" and the ability to negotiate with the administration. As Francisco Martínez and Patrick Laviolette (2019, 11) remind us, repair is "more than a technique"; it demands responsibility, attentiveness, and ethical engagement with material fragility. "If a boss says the train stays in the depot, I can convince him otherwise," Cheikh said. For the 2016 Gamou pilgrimage, a car derailed three times on the way to Tivaouane. Despite official reluctance, Cheikh insisted it could return. "As a bogie technician, you need to acquire the *savoir du rail*. I know my machines by heart. If one derails, I can tell you which one it is, even in my sleep." The error came from a flaw in reprofiling. After replacing the faulty wagon, his judgment proved correct: the train completed its journey without further incident.

Still, the risks were real. Mbaye pointed to the caution box on the bogie diagram: "Any manual alteration should automatically render this drawing invalid." "You try to follow the manufacturer's guidelines," his colleague explained, "but sometimes you don't have the option. You adapt with what's available." This practice of *débrouillage*, "making it up as you go along" (Honwana 2019, 11; see also Diop 2013, 20; Godard 2002), requires both resourcefulness and what Laura Bear (2014, 72), drawing on Thorstein Veblen (1924), calls "senses of

workmanship": a blend of technical know-how, embodied skills, and sensibility for tools and objects (also see Bear 2015, 18). In the workshops, such adaptations of imperfect technologies reveal the *savoir du rail* as a relational form of knowledge, embedded in the workers' tactile, affective engagement with tools.

Their successful negotiations with rail management enabled the trains to run again for the 2019 Gamou despite earlier suspension of services. As November approached, preparations proved exciting and intense. "It felt like going back in time," several workers told me, recalling earlier periods of busyness, now replaced by long pauses and uncertainty. Nine trains departed Dakar for Tivaouane over the long weekend. At each stop, crowds boarded, filling the carriages. The train curved gently through the landscape, usually at 30km/h, sometimes faster, brushing baobab branches and market stalls. Passengers shut the windows against the heat and dust. The scenery shifted quickly: steppes, trees, tight-knit neighborhoods, football fields briefly split in two by the passing train.

These crossings, made without barriers or warning systems, felt like fleeting interruptions, especially after the train's long absence from the Thiès–Tivaouane stretch. In contrast, the Dakar–Rufisque segment looked different: the new Train Express Régional (TER) ran parallel to the PTB, its high-speed rails walled off. The concrete barriers made peripheral areas harder to access (Kopf 2020a). Infrastructures like the TER and toll highway have created "cutting effects" (*coupures*) separating neighborhoods and forcing long detours (see also Lesteven et al. 2023; Diop 2020; Ndiaye 2018). Together with the new Bus Rapid Transit network (BRT), these projects, often promoted by global actors like multinational companies and the World Bank for their promise of "fluidity"

Figure 6. Kader Attia and Senegalese craftsmen, *J'accuse* (2016). Carved busts on metal supports—testimony through scarred faces, repair made visible. Photo by Tony Hafkenscheid, 2018.

and "durability," are layered onto Dakar's urban fabric, disrupting its flexible, informal transport system (Sakho and Diongue 2024, 170). In Pikine, residents found themselves wedged between two monuments to modernity: the Train de l'Émergence and the Autoroute du Futur (Kopf 2020a).

For Souleymane, a rail worker and longtime Pikine resident, these new infrastructures echoed an older colonial urban logic (Kopf 2020a). Dakar, he explained, had long been shaped by segregation: Europeans concentrated in the Plateau, while African residents were pushed first to neighborhoods like Médina and Gueule Tapée, then to peripheral zones including Guinaw Rail Sud and Nord (see also Bigon 2016). Carole Diop and Xavier Ricou (2024, 58–59) trace how colonial planning from 1857 onward used hygienist and spatial ordering principles to reorganize the city. Under French colonial administrators such as Emile Pinet-Laprade, the railway and port became central to Dakar's spatial structure, while African populations were progressively relocated to the margins, most notably through the creation of Médina in 1914. This segregation persisted through subsequent expansions (1918–1938), and from 1938 to 1970, the city's rapid growth brought new subdivisions and social housing to peripheral areas like Pikine, today home to Souleymane and many other railway workers. Today, Dakar is still characterized as a "partitioned city" (Lombar, Bruez, and Diakho 2006), where a persistent "divorce between geographical and functional centrality" (Sakho 2002, 333) produces lengthy daily commutes from the periphery to the center, home to only a minority of residents. More than 70 percent of the population now lives in the urban margins (Lesteven et al. 2023), and this sprawl has exacerbated socio-spatial inequality across the agglomeration. The TER construction displaced more than 15,000 people, many reporting minimal consultation and delayed compensation (Kopf 2020a). Together with the BRT, this "respatialization," while aiming to restructure the public transport network and promote economic development, threatens to eliminate informal transport services such as *cars rapides*, brightly painted shared minibuses; *minibus Ndiaga Ndiaye*, larger-capacity informal buses; and *taxis-clandos*, unlicensed shared taxis, along with the garages, mechanics, vendors, and repairers that support them (Sakho and Diongue 2024, 172–73). Pape Sakho and Momar Diongue (2024, 173) found that more than half of informal transport workers feared job loss due to the BRT, with 22 percent anticipating income loss and widespread anxiety.

Railway workers voiced similar concerns. While this respatialization deepened historical patterns of exclusion for residents, for workers it also redrew the boundaries of belonging. Despite long-standing expertise, often passed down

over generations, they were excluded from staffing the new trains. Recruitment favored younger candidates, seen as more adaptable and less likely to organize or challenge management. For older workers, the message was clear: the future envisioned by emergence had little room for them. This made public events like the Gamou pilgrimage especially significant; they became chances to prove their train still ran and their labor still mattered.

Aboard the PTB during the pilgrimage, vendors moved through the carriages selling *bissap* (hibiscus) and ginger juice, doughnuts, and water. Pilgrims disembarked in Tivaouane at dawn, and we rolled on to Thiès, where the train would rest overnight. One final service was still en route. As the last passengers stepped off, the excitement that had animated the workers softened into fatigue. Yet this joyful return did not come without incident. Half an hour into the return trip, a sudden bang broke the silence. The train braked hard, but we kept sliding. Smoke and the acrid smell of burnt metal filled the cars. When the train finally stopped, Moussa entered the carriage to explain that we had struck a fireman's vehicle attempting to cross the rails. Perhaps it had not expected a train to move? The car was severely damaged, its driver not critically injured, but taken to the hospital. Stranded in the dark, we waited for the brigade manager to arrive and complete the accident report. Some workers dozed, others chatted. After one or two hours, the train was cleared to continue. Cheikh whistled for departure, and we passed the last service's train still waiting at the previous station. Its passengers looked exhausted, their heads against misty windows, condensation tracing soft streaks down the glass.

Back in Thiès, the workers congratulated each other. They had handled the incident well, despite it not being their fault. Still, the accident exposed the limits of the emergency repair work. The braking had taken too long because the wheels' profile was too eroded. Their careful *débrouillage*—reprofiling wheels, combining axles—always meant a compromise. "The consequences often come afterwards," one remarked. Long-term planning had become impossible, and the current repair practices had been geared toward the day-to-day survival of the coaches. Using axles from older Pakistani wagons meant that those coaches were effectively sacrificed, turning them into *ferraille* (scrap). Derailments and crashes had become normalized as routine outcomes of a system held together by continuous improvisation and negotiation. Here, the workers' tinkering concerned materials and tools as well as regulations and relationships: with managers trying to convince them to let the trains run, with manufacturers, and ultimately with each other through compromises that could place them and others at risk.

Figure 7. In Thiès, old axles await reconfiguration, exemplifying the improvization and risk at the heart of Senegalese railway repair. Photo by Charline Kopf.

REPAIR AS REAPPROPRIATION

The current employees were not the first generation to perform such replacement and repair work with all its potential dangers. The *savoir du rail* was steeped in histories of reappropriation and so-called tropicalization, beginning with French trains. In that context, workers emphasized the adaptability of both the material and of themselves: switching with versatility between not only Indian and Pakistani but also French trains from the 1960s and 1970s. Their technical skills were central to keeping the trains running but also integral to their professional identities.

Indeed, earlier generations had adapted French trains after independence. Between the completion of the Dakar-Niger line in 1924 and the introduction of diesel traction in 1956, about two hundred steam locomotives were in operation (Diedhiou 2011). The first came from the French Batignolles company (1883–1886), followed by Weidknecht Frères, Corpet-Louvet, then Baldwin (United States) and Haine-Saint-Pierre (Belgium) (Diedhiou 2011, 89–90). Here, the work of technical and linguistic translation and adaptation required even more effort, as the French machines were second-hand. They had to be converted from standard gauge (1,435 mm) to meter gauge (1,000 mm) for the weekly Dakar-Bamako passenger service.

As one PTB switchman explained: "It has always been like that. They send us models no longer in use." While deploying all their creativity and professional pride, the technicians knew they were handling partially wasted, or at least used, goods. One recalled:

> The French delivered us trains with standard bogies, and when the machines arrived here, we had to change them. Together with French engineers, our Senegalese technicians transformed them into meter-gauge bogies.

In many stories, "tropicalization" was celebrated as a success. Imported infrastructures and plans had to be rescaled, calibrated, and modified to fit a new milieu (Park 2017, 20). The term originated in colonial engineering, describing the adaptation of Western technologies to so-called tropical climates framed by assumptions of non-European incapacity (Verrips and Meyer 2001, 159). Senegalese railway workers reappropriated it, turning it into a marker of ingenuity. Although *tropicalization* did not describe repair in itself, maintaining and repairing tropicalized objects required distinct approaches and continual adaptation. Standard replacement parts often proved insufficient, so that the coaches demanded preventive care tailored to their adapted gauges and environmental conditions. Workers recalled how earlier generations had applied extra protective coatings, cleaned trains frequently to combat salt and rust, and relied on corrosion-resistant, weatherproofed materials. Such constant adjustment—hybridizing foreign technologies to fit local realities, often in ways unanticipated by Western manufacturers—turned tropicalization from a colonial imposition into a demonstration of creativity and expertise. These practices, rooted in broader historical and political legacies, became acts of assertion, allowing workers to claim their

Figure 8. Unloading of an Alsthom diesel locomotive in Dakar. The wagons on the boat are continuing to the Gabonese Republic. Source: *Le Rail et le Monde*, January 1984, 10.

Figure 9. A passenger carriage suspended by crane at the port of Douala, Cameroon, reminders of how railways arrived as cargo before they became modes of transport. Source: *Le Rail et le Monde*, January 1984, 8.

relevance within a system that has long marginalized them. Unlike car mechanics, who typically repair individual vehicles (Grace 2021, 23; Hart 2016), railway workers engage with large-scale colonial infrastructures whose material and symbolic weight has accumulated over generations. Their repairs sustain trains while confronting the afterlives of imperial engineering and its entanglement with successive political regimes.

At the same time, ongoing maintenance reveals the trains' inevitable deterioration over time. Repair does not always signify a "re"-turn to the object's initial state (Graham and Thrift 2007; Martínez and Laviolette 2019). Here, it marks another stage in the lives of the trains and the workers who maintain them. Not everything can be fixed; some parts must be replaced through processes whose duration and complexity often confound expectations. Abdoulaye recounted how local modifications from standard to meter gauge in the French trains had caused derailments: "It's not just about the gauges and bogies but also about the weight of the trains. Some trains were too high for the small base."

Figure 10. A locomotive under repair in the Thiès workshop, surrounded by scaffolding and machinery. Photo by Charline Kopf.

These stories underscore how the apparent solidity of the railway conceals its underlying fragility and the inherent imperfection of repair. Tropicalization, now also used to describe the recent adaptations of Indian and Pakistani stock, entails more than retooling existing mechanisms. It involves a complex interplay of *retrograding* and *retrofitting*, where past and present collide. Unlike Cymene Howe et al.'s (2016, 553) framing of retrofitting as adding new technologies to old systems to "bridge timelines," the Senegalese case troubles such linearities. Here, older parts were grafted onto newer machines to create something different altogether. This did not constitute a return to a previous version but a sideways move, adapting discarded material to meet present demands.

REPAIR AS CREATION AND HISTORICAL RESTORATION

At the same time, these maintenance practices, and the stories passed down from earlier generations of railway men, carried another dimension: one of creation and historical reparation. When one of the current railway workers announced in the depot that "we only repair and fix stuff in Africa, we do not create," Amadou, a retired switchman, quickly contradicted him. Among his proudest memories was the production of the first coach "made in Mali." Now rusting and partly dismantled in front of the Kayes depot in Mali, the coach, Amadou said, was "waiting to be revived." In Senegal, workers had preserved

small booklets documenting the project. As Amadou flicked through one, his face lit up: "See," he exclaimed, pointing to a faded photo of three earnest young engineers. "Those are our three engineers who created the first coach here at home, with our tools and materials." The caption read: "The three engineers whose determination has enabled our country to put on rails a wagon entirely made in Mali (from left to right Fodé Traore, Amady Diallo, and Tounko Dagnoko)."

This was more than a story of adaptation or tropicalization. It stood as a testament to expertise and national pride that Abdoulaye enjoyed recalling. In these narratives, workers did not appear as only passive maintainers of inherited colonial systems. Their relationships, across generations, were forged in the work of keeping machines running, crafting new wagons from old, and preserving shared histories. Built in the wake of the 1960 border closure, when the breakup of the Mali Federation hardened borders and interrupted circulation along the line, thereby also momentarily cutting then Sudanese (Malian) teams off from Senegalese workshops, the wagon they assembled from different parts reflected enforced technical autonomy and the repurposing of materials previously sustained through shared infrastructures. The Dakar–Bamako railway had proved central to the federation's post-independence vision of regional integration and shared sovereignty, linking the two capitals and symbolizing shared independence ambitions (Bajorek 2020, 241). Yet mounting political disagreements

Figure 11. "La Régie en images," archival spread showing Mali's first domestically built wagon, engineers, and workshop scenes. Source: "Connais-tu mon beau pays: 7 régions et 1 district" by Joseph Keita, 1983 76–77.

Figure 12. The first wagon "made in Mali", now rusting at the depot in Kayes. Photo by Charline Kopf.

between Senegalese and Malian leaders, exacerbated by French and regional pressure, put an end to that vision (Foltz 1965). Maintaining the line meant upholding both infrastructure and the traces of a collective political and economic project, even in failure. As Stephen Graham and Nigel Thrift (2007, 4) ask, what exactly is being cared for in maintenance, "the thing itself or the negotiated order that surrounds it, or some 'larger' entity?" Shannon Mattern's (2018) response that "maintenance traverses scales" resonates here. For these workers, repair constituted a way of keeping connections alive: between places, generations, and national or regional aspirations, even if sometimes fragmented.

In contradicting the statement that they "only repaired things and did not create," Amadou's story that he passed on to the younger workers emphasized how Senegalese and Malian workers had never been merely recipients of foreign technology, but also active shapers and creators of it. As Clapperton Mavhunga (2014, 12–14) reminds us, Africa has long shaped and transformed technology through context-specific practices (see also Hecht 2014). The story of the "coach made in Mali" when the country had just become independent and the workers reassembled materials into the first nationally produced wagon becomes here an act of invention that asserts authorship. In contexts of chronic precarity and institutional neglect, workers framed their labor not just as a technical fix to brokenness but also as a moral and political claim to expertise, and a history of contribution. The act of telling the story then also maintains memories of creativity often silenced by colonial and postcolonial narratives across generations. Indeed, not only infrastructural labor is invisibilized (Gupta 2023) but also often

the histories of ingenuity that underpin it. By recounting earlier feats, workers enact a form of historical reparation, foregrounding overlooked narratives of African technical expertise. These stories refuse colonial erasures (Thomas 2024) and trace alternative genealogies of invention, grounded in situated knowledge and intergenerational memory.

Drawing on Kader Attia's work, where repair leaves visible marks like stitches, staples, and scars, we might ask how such subaltern histories become legible. Repair here becomes epistemic and political as much as technical: a practice of reassembling both objects and meaning across time. The narratives thus expand our understanding of technological creativity in postcolonial contexts, positioning maintenance as a site of invention, memories that are passed on, and reparative labor. The creation of the first Malian-built coach stands here as both kinds of repair at once: materially assembling a working machine under conditions of enforced separation and symbolically repairing a history in which African technical authorship has too often been effaced.

In the present, this spirit of creativity and reclamation took new forms. While performing routine and often superficial repairs on aging machinery, the railway men also repurposed leftover materials for everyday use. Using surplus metal sheets, they crafted irons and ovens for their wives and mothers. The team followed a well-rehearsed division of labor: Moussa cut the forms, Abdoulaye hammered them into shape, and a third worker welded them together. These were not the only creations. Moussa also showed me chairs they had built out of perforated metal sheets, now used daily during lunch and tea breaks in the depot.

Figure 13. In the Rufisque depot, workers turn offcuts of sheet metal into household irons, extending their technical skills beyond the trains. Photo by Charline Kopf.

Figure 14. From the same workshop remnants, railway workers craft chairs for daily use, transforming leftover materials into communal life. Photo by Charline Kopf.

These personal artifacts, known as "homers" in English, or *perruques* and *bricoles* in French (Anteby 2003a, 454) are crafted from company materials outside official production, for personal or communal use, not for sale. Though technically forbidden and often discreet, such practices are widely recognized in industrial workspaces, fostering intimacy and complicity among workers (Anteby 2003a, 460). Michel de Certeau (1984, 25) interpreted them as subtle acts of resistance in that they are non-profitable but also unsanctioned reappropriations of factory time (see also Paulsen 2015, 353). Others have framed them as "outsider art" (Anteby 2003a, 457–58). They also resonate with Amiel Bize's (2020) concept of the "remainder," where salvage is not merely a response to scarcity but a moral claim shaped by inequality. For railway workers, crafting artifacts from discarded materials also signals a sense of entitlement rooted in their roles as skilled laborers. In this moral economy, remainders function as "in-kind supplements" (Bize 2020, 476): informal compensations for stagnant wages, shortages, or overlooked contributions. These acts blur the lines between formal labor, care, and rightful appropriation, revaluing scraps and the histories they carry as collective assets. The workers' assertion that "La technicité, c'est de l'art: On se débrouille, on bricole" ("technicity is an art: we get by, we tinker") captures this interplay between expertise, creativity, and everyday claims to recognition.

The creation of such objects also echoes a longer history of technical and artistic craftspersonship in the railway workshops. In earlier decades, the workshops in Thiès fabricated weaving looms for the Manufactures Sénégalaises des Arts Décoratifs, part of the National Tapestry Manufacture founded by President

Senghor after independence. During a visit to the tapestry studio in Thiès, Cheikh proudly showed me the engraved stamp of the *Régie du chemin de fer*, the state railway authority, on the looms. More than marks of origin, these stamps show how railway workers used their tools and skills to help materialize a new national vision after independence. Just as the "first coach" created in Mali symbolized regional self-reliance, these looms linked railway labor to a broader artistic and industrial project of postcolonial sovereignty, aligned with Senghor's vision of cultural nation-building. Railway workers were central actors in the construction of the new nation-states of Senegal and Mali, crafting the infrastructures, symbols, and aesthetics of independence itself.

Through these past and present practices, the railway depot emerges as an archive that stores embodied knowledge as well as colonial and postcolonial histories etched into rails, carriages, and tools. At the same time, workers' memories, like the objects they craft—irons, ovens, chairs from scrap—circulate as mobile fragments in broader circuits of value and repair, expressing pride and asserting national belonging.[2] The workers' practices and stories also go further: they sustain a sense of relevance tied to past contributions and collective infrastructural visions that now feels increasingly out of reach. It is precisely this pride, rooted in past inclusion in a national project, that sharpens the sense of being left behind by today's vision of emergence.

Even as the workers blur the lines between infrastructure and artistry, they do so amid the railway's persistent fragility—a system they continually confront, patch, and reimagine. Sometimes repair means a minor cut or refit; at other times, it demands full disassembly and reassembly, breaking to create anew. Repair can become replacement when items or situations can no longer be patched: an act of care in the face of neglect. The fact that failure is nearly always inevitable, and that what is repaired was never fully intact to begin with, generates a particular kind of creative constellation and mending: not a restoration to an original state of perfection, but a continuous keeping-going that lends the infrastructure its material and symbolic persistence. This resonates with Jacob Doherty's (2021) concept of "maintenance space," where repair is never complete but becomes the infrastructure's very logic. Like waste systems in Kampala, Senegal's railway exists in suspended functionality: never fully operational yet never abandoned. Catherine Alexander's (2023) discussion of the Russian term *remont*, meaning repair, also echoes here: a mode of perpetual maintenance, refurbishment, and adaptation under political and material constraint.

The Senegalese railway, always *na remont*, under repair, sustains itself through constant patching and improvisation. In doing so, it introduces its own temporality of iterative return, delay, and endurance where keeping things running becomes the temporal horizon itself.

Highlighting creativity and ingenuity does not mean to romanticize repair. These practices emerge from decades of material scarcity and institutional neglect shaped by privatization, fragmented cross-border cooperation, and mismatched imports from old and new global partners. Repair sustains, but it also exposes. It has yielded extraordinary savoir faire, but its extemporaneous nature ultimately proves unsustainable. As one worker put it, the machines had "eaten themselves" (*les machines se sont mangées*): One wagon after another had been used, that is, "cannibalized," to save another, until none remained (see also Grimaud, Tastevin, and Vidal 2017, 21). That is how they had vanished. While these acts of repair thus maintained certain socialities and held them together, they also entailed new risks and slowly accumulated menaces for passengers and workers alike.

Figure 15. Preparing a carriage in Rufisque for repainting—a form of cosmetic repair that restores appearance more than function. Photo by Charline Kopf.

CONCLUSION

Examining Senegalese railway workers' precarious engagements with machines in Rufisque and Thiès, the multivalences of repair—as replacement, reappropriation, and creation—also emerge as a form of resistance. This constitutes resistance to the direct transposition of technologies as well as to the substitution of the service and the potential discontinuation of the line. Four years after the 2019 Gamou, in May 2024, the PTB with its coaches and locomotives had effectively taken the name of the Grand Trains du Sénégal and began its service between Diamniadio and Thiès. Yet it once again faced irregularities due both to low demand and persistent technical issues.

Repairing, as I have shown, also means maintaining pride, such as ensuring the transport for pilgrims during religious events. These practices recall busier, more productive pasts, and with them, a distinction between what workers call superficial repair and what they remember as real repair, expressing frustration at relying on improvised solutions without adequate tools or materials. Such patchwork keeps trains running a little longer, but it rarely restores full functionality, fueling political critique that targets both national neglect and historical inequalities.

At the same time, mending machines can also reassert value and dignity. Here, reparation grows directly from material repair. In restoring the wagons, workers also restore the historical record, making African technical authorship visible where long denied. Stories of ingenuity, from building the first Malian coach to adapting foreign rolling stock, reclaim a place in narratives of technological modernity and sovereignty. These acts may not match the form of official reparations, but they reassert expertise and preserve histories.

Yet these stories also reveal that even past "real" repairs rarely existed in an ideal form: wagons were always adapted, reassembled, and reconfigured. There is continuity, then, between past and present moments of maintenance, visible in both creativity and constraints. Repair blends skills, bricolage, and *débrouillage*, whether in fabricating carriages or crafting homers. These practices also carry hazards. Heroic repair narratives sometimes mask feelings of humiliation, dependency, or fear, downplaying how colonial or postcolonial authorities appropriated technical achievements or how workers navigated danger. Yet the accidents that accompany continuous repair also suggest that over time, it may render not only materials but also workers themselves beyond repair.

Taken together, these moments of repair unfold across multiple temporalities: the traces of colonial and postcolonial infrastructures, the cyclical rhythms

of spiritual devotion, and the iterative, precarious time of maintenance itself. These temporalities converge in the everyday work of keeping trains moving where religious calendars, imperial residues, and technical improvisation intersect.

Because repair operates within these layered times, it does not take the form of a one-off restitution that resolves damage once and for all. Repair here is always ongoing and incomplete. Rust captures this condition precisely: it cannot be undone without erasing material itself, and it can only be slowed, thereby leaving repair always partial and reparation necessarily unfinished. As Kader Attia reminds us, repair always leaves a trace, exposing the limits of restoration and revealing how damage and care remain entangled. Attending to repair in this way therefore requires reckoning with the temporal textures of infrastructural labor, rendering visible the individual and collective effort it requires, the time it consumes, and the uncertain futures it sustains. While some repair processes entail going back to previous technical systems, they rarely imply full restoration. Instead, they may entail adaptation, improvement, innovation, or transformation, often displacing breakdown into the future rather than preventing it, and at times moving beyond repair altogether.

ABSTRACT

This essay examines the multivalences of repair in Senegalese railway workshops, where workers maintain and modify aging wagons from suburban and former transnational rail services, originally imported from France, and later from India and Pakistan. I trace three interrelated dimensions of repair. First, I show how repair operates as both replacement and improvisation, challenging the assumption that maintenance necessarily counteracts decay; instead, it can accelerate deterioration. Second, I analyze repair as reappropriation, focusing on workers' "tropicalization" of foreign technologies to fit local conditions. Finally, I explore how the inevitability of failure, stemming from the machines' inherent faults, demands creative mending and continuous perseverance. These practices generate not only new objects assembled from scrap but also narratives of West African railway workers whose engineering contributions have long been marginalized in colonial and postcolonial histories. Material patching thus becomes an act of reparation, asserting technical authorship and forging alternative histories of infrastructure, labor, and expertise. [infrastructure; maintenance; memory; postcolonial technology; railways; repair; West Africa]

TËNK

Xët wii dafay jàngat anam yu bari yi ñuy defaraate ci atelier yu këru liggéeyukaayu saxaar yi ci Senegal. Foofu la liggéeykat yi di defaraate ba noppi di soppi wagon yu

màgget yi bawoo ci sarwiisu banlieue yi ak resó transnasional yu njëkk ya te jóge France, ginnaaw ga Inde ak Pakistan. Maa ngi raññee ñetti mbir yu jëm ci defaraat gi. Li njëkk mooy, damay wone naka la defaraat gi di deme ci wuutu gi itam ci góorgóorlu gi, ak di diiŋat xalaat biy wax ni defaraat dafay xeex yàqu-yàqu; ci geneen wàll gi, mën na gaawloo yàqu gi. Ñaareel ba damay jàngat defaraat gi ni looy moomalaat sa bopp, may bàyyi xel ci «tropicalisation» xaralay bitim réew yi ciy liggéeykat yi di def ngir méngale leen ak anam yi dëkk bi di doxe. Fi may jeexalee mooy, maa ngi jàngat ni masin yi mënul ñàkka yàqoo, te bokk ci ay njuumte yu nekk ci masin yi te loolu dafay laaj xeeti defaraat yu yees ak bañ a xàddi. Jëf yooyu duñu yam ci defar ay mbir yu yees yuñ defaree ak ay jumtukaay yuñ jëfandikoo ba noppi, waaye dañuy nettali itam li liggéeykati raay yi ci Afrique sowwu jant sos, ñoom ñi ñu daanulwoon bàyyi xel ci seen liggéey ci wàllu xarala ci taarix bi fi tubaab yi nekkee ak ginnaaw gi ñu fi jóge. Kon defaraat ay yëf nekk na mbir muy defaraat boo ko xoolee ci wàllu politik, di fësal kiliftéef ci wàllu xarala ak di móol yeneeni jaarjaari infrastructure, liggéey ak xarañtéef. [infrastructure yi; toppatoo; pataliku; xarala ginnaaw gi fi tubaab yi jóge; raay yi; defaraat; Afrique sowwu jant]

NOTES

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1. Kader Attia in conversation with Gabriele Sassone in a piece titled "Injury and Repair," published in *Mousse* in 2018, https://www.moussemagazine.it/magazine/injury-and-repair-kader-attia-2018/
2. Waste and discard studies have proliferated in anthropology, teasing out the tension between waste as decomposing material and as resource, highlighting also the creative and transformative processes that engagements with waste can entail. I here draw inspiration from a variety of sources (Alexander and Sanchez 2019; Alexander and O'Hare 2023; Chalfin 2019; Eriksen and Schober 2017; Harvey 2017; Millar 2014; and, for Senegal specifically, Fredericks 2018).

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