

Clashing Ontologies in African Science Fiction: The Posthuman Condition, Technological Alterity and Identity Crisis in Sarah Lotz's *Home Affairs*

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Abstract

This article investigates the convergence of technological advancement, identity formation, and postcolonial critique within African science fiction, with particular focus on Sarah Lotz's short story Home Affairs. It examines how the incorporation of robotics and artificial intelligence into bureaucratic structures engenders profound identity crises for both human and non-human agents. As machines begin to occupy roles traditionally filled by humans, the narrative emphasises the emotional, existential, and philosophical disorientation experienced by individuals confronting their diminished sense of agency and self-worth in an increasingly automated world. The story portrays a reality in which human characteristics are not only replicated but distorted by machines, complicating the conditions of co-existence and destabilising established ontological distinctions. Through thematic analysis, this study situates Home Affairs within wider discourses of postmodern alienation, analysing how technological otherness disrupts social hierarchies and reconfigures normative human-machine relationships. The robotic figures in the narrative function as allegorical embodiments of neo-colonial power—displacing, regulating, and depersonalising—while remaining unburdened by the moral responsibility borne by historical colonisers. By engaging African science fiction's critical engagement with global capitalism and its discontents, the article foregrounds how automation-driven job displacement triggers not only material precarity but also a deeper crisis of identity and authenticity. Drawing on postcolonial theory, it explores how Lotz critiques a technophilic future that paradoxically undermines the very populations it claims to empower. Ultimately, the story offers a cautionary meditation on the socio-cultural and psychological ramifications of unregulated technological integration in postcolonial African contexts.

Keywords: *African science fiction, Identity Crisis, Robots, Alterity, Postcolonialism, Cognitive Estrangement*

Introduction

In postcolonial discourse, the dynamic between the Self and the Other has served as a foundational framework for interrogating the epistemic violence of colonialism and its enduring aftermath. Rooted in the critical insights of theorists such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Edward Said, and Homi Bhabha, this conceptual binary articulates how colonial regimes construct the colonised subject as the radical "Other"—a figure whose identity is negated, objectified, and silenced within dominant imperial narratives. Spivak's notion of the subaltern, in particular, underscores the systemic disarticulation of indigenous voices from the realm of epistemological and political agency. Colonial discourse, as Said illustrates in

Orientalism, not only imposes a reductive taxonomy of identity but also sustains the hegemony of Western knowledge systems through representational control. Consequently, the colonised subject becomes situated within a matrix of inferiority, dependency, and voicelessness.

Within the context of African science fiction, these postcolonial concerns are neither static nor anachronistic; rather, they are reimagined through speculative narratives that expose, critique, and transcend colonial epistemologies. African speculative fiction offers a unique arena in which to explore the reconstitution of subjectivity, agency, and identity through the lens of hybridity. Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridity, which disrupts the binary logic of coloniser/colonised by foregrounding the "Third Space" of cultural negotiation, proves especially resonant in this context. The speculative terrain of African science fiction not only resists the epistemic closures of colonial modernity but also enacts a techno-cultural synthesis that blends indigenous knowledge systems with futuristic technological imaginaries. In this way, the genre performs a dual function: it deconstructs the colonial legacy of alterity while simultaneously articulating alternative futures rooted in African philosophies and cosmologies. This paper, therefore, examines the convergence of postcolonial theory and hybridity within African science fiction as a means of challenging the residual structures of colonial power and reclaiming agency in speculative terms. By focusing on Sarah Lot's "Home Affairs", which foregrounds hybrid identities, techno-governance, and reimagined traditions, it demonstrates how African science fiction operates as a site of resistance and renewal. These narratives not only reconfigure the relationship between the Self and the Other but also offer a palimpsest vision of African futures, where cultural and techno-innovation are imaginatively inscribed onto the canvas of speculative possibility.

Postcolonialism and science fiction reimagined

Postcolonialism remains a contested concept, as Swartz and Ray assert, stating that "the best way to define postcolonial is to recognise from the onset that its definition is impossible" (4). Nevertheless, since the 1980s, postcolonialism has developed as a critical discourse that disrupts dominant interpretive frameworks governing Western and non-Western relations (Young, 2). Fundamental to this intervention is the prioritisation of the colonised subject's perspective over that of the imperial observer. Young contends that Western engagements with the non-Western world frequently project "a mirror image of themselves and their assumptions" rather than acknowledging the lived realities and self-conceptions of the colonised (2). The Western canon often replaces substantive engagement with constructed

metaphors and imagery of Africa and other colonised spaces, thereby sustaining representational distortions that reinforce imperial ideologies.

Postcolonialism thus interrogates both the legacies of colonial domination and the enduring power asymmetries between “us” and “them,” or “here” and “there,” while also striving to liberate the Self from the epistemological constraints imposed by the Other. Crucially, the “post” in postcolonialism does not merely denote temporal succession after colonial rule; instead, it signifies an active “contestation of colonial domination and the legacies of colonialism” (Loomba, 16). It challenges colonial epistemologies and their reliance on binary oppositions—centre and periphery, modern and primitive, West and non-West—while destabilising the intellectual hierarchies that continue to inform global knowledge production. In this regard, postcolonial theory disputes the socio-cultural and political attributes conventionally ascribed to the developing world in contrast to the developed West. The latter is frequently associated with modernity, rationality, and civility, while the former is depicted as deficient, derivative, or engaged in mimicry. Such dichotomies obscure the complexity of non-Western societies. As Swartz and Ray argue, “to study this archive is to participate in the politics of dominance” (4). Postcolonialism responds by generating oppositional discourses that challenge the theological and epistemological assumptions underpinning Western academic inquiry.

This aligns with postcolonial science fiction’s subversive potential, as Nalo Hopkinson observes: despite its estranging effects, it empowers postcolonial writers to reclaim narrative agency, engaging with “themes of colonizing the natives and, from the experience of the colonizee, critique it, pervert it, fuck with it, with irony, with anger, with humour, and also, with love and respect, for the genre of science fiction makes it possible to think about new ways of doing things” (9). Given Western academia’s complicity in neo-colonial structures, postcolonial science fiction advocates for alternative epistemologies. These counter-narratives not only “speak back” to colonial authority but also articulate new subjectivities rooted in indigenous perspectives. Postcolonial theory thus evolves through engagements with post-structuralism, postmodernism, Marxism, and feminism, addressing identity, subjectivity, and subalternity in a rapidly changing world.

Unlike predictive scientific models, postcolonialism functions as a constellation of intersecting and often conflicting perspectives. Its analytical rigour derives from this eclecticism. As Robert Young notes, postcolonial theory “involves issues that are often the preoccupation of other disciplines... the position of women, of development, of ecology, of social justice, of socialism in its broadest sense” (7). It extends this critique to colonial and neo-colonial structures,

examining imperialism's enduring effects alongside intersecting systems of patriarchy and economic exploitation (Loomba, 22). It is, therefore, a radical intellectual endeavour aimed at decolonising thought and dismantling historical dependencies (Swartz and Ray, 4).

Despite its significance, postcolonial theory faces criticism because critics question its practical efficacy, arguing that it lacks a coherent agenda for addressing poverty, health crises, and corruption (McEwan, 1). Marxists like Terry Eagleton (cited in Loomba) dismiss postcolonial theory as a "Gaudy Supermarket," critiquing its abstraction and neglect of class analysis (3). Notwithstanding, postcolonialism problematizes global stratification that persists along binary lines, which, as Cheryl McEwan argues, "implies a false set of values between two distinct entities and the valorising of one set of rules over the other" (14). These binaries impose hierarchical and reductive frameworks, erasing complexities, premised on pseudoscientific racial theories advanced by figures like Samuel Morton and Arthur de Gobineau, which historically justified European domination, leading to the colonisation that in the 1930s controlled 84.6% of the world's landmass (Loomba, 19), framing occupied regions as cultural voids requiring salvation.

Despite these criticisms, postcolonialism remains vital for confronting imperialism's legacies. It resists reducing formerly colonised societies to reactive positions, affirming their agency. As McEwan notes, "Postcolonialism addresses issues such as identity, ethnicity, race, and gender, the challenges of developing postcolonial national identities, and relationships between power and knowledge" (22). It remains indispensable for dismantling oppressive structures and envisioning equitable futures. Postcolonial science fiction thus interrogates this objectification, exploring alienation and utopian aspirations—a future free from racial hierarchies. These texts engage with 'otherness,' the 'alien,' and the 'digital divide,' countering narratives that exclude Africa from technological progress, while confronting racial and economic disparities and speculating futures where marginalised subjects reclaim centrality. Postcolonialism, therefore, advocates an epistemic rupture from colonial narratives of subjugation. It rejects the notion that the West provides the "only way of comprehending the world" (McEwan, 14) and constructs alternative knowledge systems. As Swartz and Ray assert, postcolonialism "disturbs the world order and challenges the power structure of the West as the standard prism for viewing and analysing the world, turning knowledge from a static disciplinary discourse to an active political engagement" (4).

As a postcolonial endeavour, "African authors use SF (science fiction) elements to interrogate the socio-political arrangements that inform the African condition in the current age" (Moradewun Adejunmobi, 266). African science fiction is thus Janus-faced, confronting the

past while envisioning self-determined futures. This confrontation becomes necessary because as Achille Mbembe notes that the West depicts Africa as “a headless figure, threatened with madness and quite innocent of any notion of centre, hierarchy or stability...a vast dark cave where every benchmark and distinction come together in total confusion and the rifts of a tragic unhappy history” (3). African science fiction now deconstructs these portrayals, reclaiming narrative agency. African science fiction (ASF) reworks the historical realities of the trans-Atlantic and its effects, reimagining communal myths and ancient conflicts through speculative frameworks, producing the cognitive estrangement definitive of the genre. It then functions as a palimpsest, rewriting Africa’s past and future. While adhering to scientific plausibility (the *novum*), it often emphasises human and societal conditions over technological detail, as seen in Sarah Lotz’s *Home Affairs*.

Darko Suvin’s foundational concept of “cognitive estrangement” (4) positions science fiction as a genre that transcends mere entertainment, demanding instead critical engagement with societal structures. African science fiction (ASF) writers have mobilised this transformative potential—particularly its capacity to foster resistance and critical consciousness among the oppressed—within postcolonial contexts. Their frequent use of dystopian frameworks allows them to assume the role of social conscience, employing the *novum* as a narrative mechanism to estrange readers from contemporary realities while foregrounding sociocultural and environmental crises. In this way, ASF aligns with postcolonial science fiction’s broader objectives: centring marginalised perspectives and asserting an epistemological framework distinct from Western genre conventions.

Crucially, ASF synthesises the archaic and the modern, necessitating analytical approaches that account for both technological speculation and the socio-political conditions informing its production. As Armillas-Tiseyra asserts, “the *novum* can be understood as the hieroglyph that encrypts the larger critical project of a work” (279). Within ASF, speculative technologies (*nova*) function not as autonomous innovations but as interlocutors with pre-existing cultural logics. It is this dialectic—between indigenous traditions and futuristic rupture—that produces the genre’s defining “strange newness,” rendering the *novum* a site of both critique and imaginative possibility. Armillas-Tiseyra notes that:

speculative technologies (the *Nova*) are not simply new inventions; they occur in relation to previously existing customs or practices. It is this interweaving of old (familiar) and new (unfamiliar), rather than the fact of the speculative technology itself that produces the ‘strange newness’ characteristic of the *novum* (279).

Thus, in African science fiction, the fantastic is not divorced from the real; it is the real refracted through a speculative lens. Temporality in this genre becomes fluid, as present and future intermingle to facilitate a form of narrative catharsis. The technological and scientific advancements portrayed in ASF become a part of lived reality that the contemporary world itself begins to resemble a science fiction narrative. This temporal and cognitive estrangement forces a re-evaluation of the present, thereby transforming science fiction from a genre of escapism into a critical tool for socio-political reflection and intervention.

Technological personhood and the crisis of identity in Sarah Lotz’s “Home Affairs”

Sarah Lotz’s short story *Home Affairs* offers a satirical dystopian critique of bureaucratic automation in near-future South Africa. The narrative follows Pendi, a citizen navigating an impersonal government office staffed by a robotic clerk, or *Konabot*, which replaces human agents with rigid, pre-programmed responses. The story exposes the dehumanising effects of AI-driven public services, emphasising the erosion of empathy in institutional interactions. Lotz interrogates technological overreach, diminished personal agency, and the socioeconomic consequences of mechanising essential services. Ultimately, the work serves as a cautionary tale about privileging efficiency over human connection in administrative systems.

In Lot’s short story, a profound transformation has occurred in the futuristic landscapes of South Africa, wherein the foundational principles of governance and the conception of human identity have been fundamentally altered. Within this postmodern context, technological systems—particularly robotic and artificial intelligence (AI) apparatuses—have supplanted human functions across multiple sectors of society. In such a world, robots perform administrative duties in government secretariats, manage public databases, police urban spaces, act as health inspectors, conduct biometric scans, and even prescribe medical treatments.

Advancements in artificial intelligence are anticipated to evolve in tandem with human knowledge. However, as Miguel Benasayag cautions, “the word ‘intelligence’ is just a metaphor. While an AI may surpass humans in terms of calculating capacity, it is unable to ascribe any meaning to these calculations... a machine produces calculations and predictions without being able to give them any meaning.” Despite this epistemological limitation, AI systems are increasingly entrusted with the authority to manage and regulate human affairs. A salient example of this inversion of control is evident in the common requirement for humans to verify their humanity—typically through CAPTCHA tests—before accessing online information. These digital gatekeeping mechanisms serve to authenticate the user’s

humanness; failure to provide satisfactory responses results in denial of access, a dynamic that is vividly depicted in Sarah Lotz's "Home Affairs."

In "Home Affairs," Lotz portrays a bureaucratic system in which machines have entirely displaced human functionaries in government offices. These machines are perceived as superior due to their presumed efficiency, incorruptibility, and immunity to physical and emotional constraints. Yet, Benasayag raises a critical objection to this techno-utopian view, asserting that "the question of whether a machine can substitute humans is, in fact, absurd. It is living beings that can create meaning, not computation." Within the story, these machines follow rigid programming protocols, repetitively executing predefined information exchange sequences. This mechanical rigidity undercuts the very ideal of efficiency they are meant to represent because any deviation from the prescribed sequence is perceived as a threat, and those who challenge the system face punitive consequences.

Lotz's narrative thus critiques a future in which technological innovation has eclipsed logical reasoning. The mechanisation of administrative processes—marked by the monotonous repetition of variables and the exclusion of nuance—renders technological advancement hollow. The impersonal nature of machine-human interaction breeds alienation, exacerbates identity crises and results in a form of authoritarianism administered by machines. In this dystopian setting, human individuality and dignity are subsumed under the impersonal authority of machine logic, producing what may be termed a "plastic totalitarianism." This text ultimately chronicles the frustrations of a society wherein robots have assumed control over essential civic functions, including justice administration and population registration.

In this society, existence is mediated by one's presence in a centralised government database. Without registration, an individual effectively ceases to exist in the eyes of the state and is thus denied access to basic social services, regardless of wealth or social standing. These robots are introduced to run the civil service because bribery and corruption have become rampant in those establishments. So, to put a stop to the malfeasance, the government introduced Konabots to administer the system. The narrator at first was in support of the innovation:

she thinks that might not be a bad thing. She can't imagine the Konabots siphoning off taxpayers' money to buy BMWs and Boeings or taking kickbacks from arms manufacturers. Which is the point of them really: You can't bribe a machine, can you? You can't corrupt a robot. (13)

However, the integration of robotic systems into the civic and economic life of society, as depicted in "Home Affairs," results in a significant increase in urban unemployment. These machines, having supplanted humans in various administrative roles, now occupy positions in

sectors such as traffic regulation and banking. A sceptical character laments the societal impact of this technological displacement: “traffic department... Soon it’s the banks. Taking our jobs. It’s not right. They’ll be running the government next” (13). This statement encapsulates the anxieties surrounding the encroachment of artificial intelligence into domains traditionally governed by human labour. The elevation of robotic systems over human beings not only disrupts employment but also fosters a profound sense of disenfranchisement, contributing to what may be termed postmodern frustration.

This frustration is further intensified by the imposition of the machine’s sterile and inhuman logic as the societal norm. When individuals are compelled to conform to mechanised systems devoid of empathy or emotional intelligence, their humanity is systematically eroded. The imposition of such soulless sterility in public life reflects a broader concern about the devaluation of human subjectivity in technologically mediated societies. Despite the programmers’ attempts to render these robotic entities more approachable, the narrative conveys an underlying sense of unease among users (13). This discomfort is not merely functional but also aesthetic and psychological.

The narrator remarks on the general nervousness surrounding interactions with these machines, which is exacerbated by both their auditory and visual presence. Their grating klaxon sound contributes to an atmosphere of anxiety, while their physical appearance evokes disquiet. The robots are described as possessing “multiracial holographic faces” and “smooth metal heads,” with one particularly unsettling unit exhibiting “a glitch on one that makes it look as if its mouth is opening too wide, as if it’s planning on swallowing the fellow updating his status in front of it” (14). Such imagery underscores the uncanny valley effect that these machines produce—an eerie proximity to the human that remains fundamentally other, provoking discomfort rather than familiarity. She notes that:

the multi-racial holographic faces superimposed over the Konabots’ smooth metal heads are designed to make the public less uneasy about dealing with them, but as far as she’s concerned, they have the opposite effect. The machines’ unwavering smiles have a tinge of lunacy about them. (14)

Ultimately, this portrayal reflects a critique of the overreach of technological rationality into domains that demand human sensitivity and presence. The tension between machine efficiency and human subjectivity highlights a central paradox of postmodern technoculture: the pursuit of progress through automation may simultaneously engender new forms of alienation, anxiety, and socio-political marginalisation. These machines lack social skills, and their “holographic faces continue to smile inanely” (15), even when they are threatening a citizen. The narrator

notes that even the “snappish sadists who were lurking behind the counters” (14), were better equipped to deal with the eccentricities of the people, when compared to the abysmal job the robots are doing. But as observed by Busi, the powers that be do not care about the gradual erosion of humanity among the populace. He says, the authorities think:

they are cleaning up the system, getting rid of the bad seeds. That’s their job. The powers that be don’t care. Far as they’re concerned, the system is now running smoothly. No corruption means no problems—at least from the media. (25)

Despite the evident inefficacy and rigidity of the robotic civil servants, the government continues to retain them, driven by the belief that public perception supersedes actual performance. As the narrative suggests, “perception is everything,” and if the media portrays the state as corruption-free, then that portrayal is embraced as reality, even if corruption persists in practice despite the presence of the Konabots. This prioritisation of image over substance is made starkly evident in the experience of Pendi, the protagonist, who attempts to assist a woman struggling to communicate with a Konabot. The machine, unable to accommodate deviations from its programmed procedures, perceives her intervention as an infraction.

In response, it expunges Pendi’s identity from the government system, rendering her officially non-existent. The Konabot also ejects her from the Home Office with violent force, and a bystander informs her: “Even if you go back there, you’ve lost your status... your identity is gone” (21). Pendi is unable to comprehend how a humane act of solidarity could be deemed an offense worthy of such punishment. Given that Konabots are also installed in police stations, even filing a complaint would worsen her situation. Another character explains unequivocally: “There is nothing you can do. There is no record of you now. You have been wiped from the system” (22).

The Konabots’ inability to exercise discretion or moral judgment illustrates the limitations of their linear programming. Designed to process inputs without deviation, they respond to any unforeseen circumstance or question as a threat, often resulting in punitive actions against citizens. These machines, devoid of empathy and incapable of nuanced reasoning, reduce the populace to mere data points. In the name of eliminating corruption, the government has elevated machines to decision-making roles that subject the very people they serve to dehumanising and arbitrary treatment. The population is thereby forced into conformity.

The narrator notes that individuals “wear the same expression of resigned boredom” (20), navigating daily life as if transformed into robotic entities themselves. The so-called “pulse of anti-corruption measures” (21) has mechanised the people into passive recipients of technological authority, leaving them at the mercy of machines. Despite efforts to present an

image of equitable governance, the narrator observes that “the aura of abandonment and neglect is palpable,” as the pervasive “soulless conformity” ensures that “all are filthy; all wear identical expressions of desperation” (24). The Konabots, in their repeated failures to register citizens, exacerbate this sense of exclusion and despair.

A further consequence of this system is the reduction of individuals to numerical identifiers—namely, DNA variables. The machines are unable to engage with human complexity or diversity, resulting in the erasure of names and the corresponding symbolic significance they carry. Instead of configuring robots to accommodate human variation, humans are expected to conform to the limitations of their technological overseers. This shift constitutes an ontological crisis. Onomastics posits that names carry meanings, histories, and aspirations. To strip individuals of their names and replace them with numbers represents a profound erosion of their identity and existential agency. The possession of a DNA number becomes the singular marker of civic identity; without it, one cannot rent property, obtain electricity, or access running water (18). The DNA number, in this regard, is not merely a bureaucratic artefact but a determinant of one’s ontological and civic legitimacy.

The inability of the Konabots to respond flexibly to human emotion and context is further illustrated when a woman attempts to inquire about her son’s status. Despite her calm and respectful demeanour, her deviation from the expected interaction is interpreted as defiance. The robot reacts aggressively, declaring, “Attention. Attention. DNA variable 79776 slash five, please step away from the counter. This is your second warning” (15). The woman’s distress, uncertainty, and polite questioning are irrelevant to the machine, which can only interpret input through its pre-set parameters. Pendi, witnessing the encounter, attempts to advocate for the woman, insisting on fair treatment after a long wait.

Her appeal is both urgent and humane: “Is there anyone up there? Hello? I demand that you send a supervisor... It’s not fine! Hey... You can’t treat her like this. She’s just having a problem understa—” (16). Her protest highlights the stark contrast between human empathy and robotic indifference. Nevertheless, within the framework of techno-authoritarianism depicted in the text, such resistance is not only futile but punishable. The narrative thus presents a dystopian vision in which technological efficiency has supplanted moral responsibility, leading to systemic alienation and the erosion of human dignity. While Pendi tries to make her point:

There’s a grinding sound, the floor vibrates under her feet and before Pendi has a chance to scream, she feels it disappear beneath her. Arms flailing, she drops, lands feet first on a soft, uneven surface. Her knees buckle as she loses her balance and she rolls onto her side to catch

her fall. “Hey!” she screams, finding her voice. “Hey!” She looks up, sees the woman she tried to help and that weird twitchy guy peering down at her. Then the small gap in the ceiling above her slides closed, leaving her in perfect darkness. (16)

Pendi’s punishment for displaying human compassion underscores the extent to which the postmodern surveillance state, as depicted in Sarah Lotz’s “Home Affairs,” criminalises basic expressions of empathy. Her incarceration—effectively a form of erasure—results not from any subversive act, but from her attempt to assist a fellow citizen navigating a rigid, impersonal bureaucracy. She is imprisoned for showing human qualities – her humanness, and subsequently placed in a holding cell characterised by sensory deprivation: “no light source whatsoever and the blackness is impenetrable. The air in here smells musty and she can hear the skitter of rodent claws” (16). This disturbing setting reflects not just physical isolation, but symbolic annihilation. Her very existence is effaced from the system, a punitive measure inflicted for her deviation from the prescribed behavioural norms dictated by the Konabots.

When Pendi attempts to assert her identity by calling the Customer Care line, she is met with a chilling response: “I am sorry, madam, but there is no record of you being in the system... According to my computer, you do not exist, madam” (18). This denial of existence reveals the full extent of techno-bureaucratic control, whereby existence is not determined by consciousness, as in the Cartesian sense, but rather by biometric registration. Without a DNA number recognised by the system, she is denied recognition as a legal and social subject. The service provider confirms this limitation: they are “only at liberty to deal with queries regarding identity status where viable DNA information has been provided” (18). Consequently, Pendi finds herself in a state of ontological limbo: she has “lost her status, and with it, her identity” (21). Her erasure is complete, and recourse is impossible, as a concerned citizen bluntly tells her: “There is no record of you now. You have been wiped from the system” (22). The police, too, are administered by robots incapable of discretion or empathy, making appeals futile.

Ironically, the very machines introduced to combat corruption become tools through which corruption continues to flourish. To restore her identity, Pendi is compelled to engage in the same backdoor dealings the system ostensibly sought to eliminate. She turns to Busi, a former assistant manager of the Home Affairs office, who now operates an illicit service re-registering individuals whose identities have been deleted. He exploits a malfunctioning Konabot—one that evaded the standard factory settings—and uses it to surreptitiously re-integrate delisted individuals into the database. He explains, “Everything can be corrupted... no one has yet managed to hack them. Some people are born bad. This one was just manufactured bad” (26).

This malfunction becomes a loophole through which bureaucratic exclusion can be circumvented—for a price.

Pendi's disillusionment is palpable. She questions the fundamental premise of the system: "What do you mean corrupted? Like rusty or something? I mean, you can't corrupt them, that's the point of them, isn't it?" To which Busi replies with stark pragmatism, "Everything can be corrupted, lady" (26). The scene reveals the absurdity and futility of the so-called reforms: while the human face of corruption is replaced, its mechanisms remain intact, only now cloaked in the sterile rationality of digital governance. The irony is startling: the displaced human workers become agents of the very corruption they were supposed to eliminate. The narrator wryly observes, "the more things change, the more they stay the same" (27). Busi defends his actions with utilitarian logic: "If I didn't do it, someone else would!" (27). This cynical resignation raises a crucial question: What purpose does technological enforcement serve if its outcome is a reversion to the status quo?

The anti-corruption campaign, rather than uplifting the populace, produces widespread alienation and despair. Those delisted from the database are relegated to living beneath the formal structures of society, both literally and figuratively. Deprived of access to public services and stripped of legal identity, they occupy spaces of social abandonment. Pendi describes their condition starkly: they are "all filthy; all wear identical expressions of desperation" (24). These subaltern individuals, confined beneath the Home Affairs office, possess "no status, no identity" (25). They exist outside the reach of the state, not as a result of their criminality, but as casualties of a mechanical system that cannot accommodate human fallibility or exception.

Ultimately, the corruption that the system sought to eliminate re-emerges in mutated forms. While the government claims success in its anti-corruption measures, this success is based entirely on the absence of visible infractions rather than on substantive transformation. As Busi cynically remarks, "the powers that be don't care. Far as they're concerned, the system is now running smoothly. No corruption means no problems—at least from the media" (25). Thus, the campaign is more invested in managing perceptions than in enacting justice. In this system, truth becomes secondary to image; perception becomes reality; and the lives of the populace are reduced to mere pawns in a political performance designed for public and international approval.

Conclusion

In *Home Affairs*, Sarah Lotz constructs a dystopian vision of a technologically mediated future wherein the purported benefits of administrative efficiency through artificial intelligence culminate in a regime marked by dehumanisation, exclusion, and systemic dysfunction. Although the implementation of Konabots is ostensibly intended to eliminate corruption and inefficiency, their deployment reveals the fundamental inadequacies of mechanised governance. Rather than promoting justice or social equity, the AI-administered bureaucracy imposes an impersonal logic devoid of empathy, adaptability, or ethical discernment. Within this framework, identity is no longer grounded in consciousness, civic engagement, or legal recognition, but is instead contingent upon one's presence within a state-controlled digital registry—an archive maintained by entities incapable of comprehending or accommodating human complexity.

The narrative foregrounds the alienation and disenchantment engendered by a system that compels individuals to submit to algorithmic authority. Instances of compassion, such as Pendi's altruistic act, are not merely unacknowledged but actively penalised. Her erasure from the system—both literal and metaphorical—exemplifies the totalizing logic of a techno-bureaucratic regime in which deviation from programmed norms invites existential negation. In this context, human subjectivity is subordinated to machine objectivity, and qualities such as empathy, moral reasoning, and individuality are construed as threats to systemic coherence. Furthermore, the text underscores the ironic disjuncture between the anti-corruption discourse that legitimates the use of artificial intelligence and the persistence of corrupt practices under its rule. The narrative illustrates how former civil servants, such as Busi, manipulate technological flaws to sustain entrenched networks of patronage and illegality. In doing so, Lotz critiques not only the failure of technological reform to engender meaningful structural change but also the political motivations behind such reforms—motivations more concerned with maintaining appearances and securing international legitimacy than with achieving substantive justice.

Ultimately, *Home Affairs* functions as a cautionary tale against the uncritical embrace of technological solutions in matters of governance. It interrogates the consequences of delegating human judgment to unfeeling algorithms and warns of the epistemological and ethical reductions that ensue when human beings are rendered as data points, and moral complexity is flattened into executable code. In Lotz's speculative future, the state does not collapse under its inefficiencies; rather, it achieves a terrifying efficacy in producing conformity, silence, and despair. The narrative thus serves as a trenchant reminder that while technology may enhance

administrative processes, it must never supplant the human values and social relations that confer legitimacy and meaning upon governance

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