

## **The Transformers: The Conflicts between Humans and Cyborgs and the Resulting Discrimination**

Calvin Christian

English Department, Faculty of Humanities and Creative Industries, Petra Christian University,  
Siwalankerto 121-131, Surabaya 60236, INDONESIA  
Email: a11170056@john.petra.ac.id

### **ABSTRACT**

In this study, I want to analyze a movie that came from a series made by Hasbro, which is titled Transformers. In my study, I found out that the conflict between the human characters and the cyborg characters in the movie revolve around discrimination which is caused by the conflict itself. I would also like to explore what are the kinds of discrimination within the movie so that I can determine the cause of it and with the research, to learn about not to discriminate. For the analysis of my study, I will use the theory of Posthumanism by Cary Wolfe, which implies that the process of Posthuman transformation includes cyborg enhancements to improve the capabilities of human beings. I also found that from these so-called cyborg enhancements, comes discrimination from the people who think negatively towards the process of the enhancements, and thus discriminate against them.

**Keywords:** Conflict, Cyborg, Discrimination, Human, Rights, Social Exclusion,

### **INTRODUCTION**

The *Transformers* series, which is also a part of the genre of fantasy and action, introduces a new world where sentient robots live and fight alongside humans. The story mostly tells about the conflicts between two factions of the Transformers, which are the good Autobots who are led by Optimus Prime, and the evil Decepticons and their tyrannical leader, Megatron, and how the conflicts between the two sides involve humankind. Conflicts involving cyborgs and humanity frequently highlight tensions resulting from the evolution of human existence beyond biological bounds. The differences of what make humans and machines different are bit by bit rendered meaningless by the implementation of technology into human bodies. Because they are both human and machine, cyborgs struggle with identity issues and raise doubts about what it means to be a true human.

### **CONFLICT**

Conflict in posthumanism often revolves around the relationships between humans and technologies because the relationship between them keeps changing as time goes by. It also comes from many causes, such as the ethical dilemmas, and also the impact it has on the state of what people call “identity” regarding humanity itself. So, what is posthuman transformation? Posthuman transformation is a movement that is dedicated to the enhancement of many of the human capabilities. The capabilities include intellectual, physical, and emotional capabilities. The said movement is also in order to eliminate the most diseases that may affect the human body, including the unnecessary suffering, and also to extend the lifespan of the body itself. The process of these ‘engineered’ evolution turns the state of these humans to become ‘post-human’, where both their capabilities and appearance are no longer treated as human by common standards. These kinds of processes are done in order to attain a state of human perfectibility (Wolfe, 2010). The issue of post-human itself is that the humans who actually managed to go

past the process of post-human with the help of technology and become 'post-human', lately more well-known as cyborgs, are actually losing their sense of humanity. The issues also go by the opposite way as people who are still normal humans, seeing those who have become the cyborgs, are also not treating them as fellow humans anymore which leads to conflict because there are people who think that mere machines should not act like humans. As we all know, the cyborgs are a part of technology, which also means that there are also chances that the said technology can be 'broken', lose control, and later lead to many different severe cases of the cyborg harming the humans (Lexcellent, 2019).

Conflict is a dynamic process in which structure, attitudes and behaviors are constantly changing and influencing one another. There are many different types of conflict, including interpersonal conflict (involves the person/people around you), intrapersonal conflict (which is usually about the struggles of one-self, like moral and emotion), social conflict (which often involves politics and culture), internal and external conflict (a conflict about a character involving others), and global conflict (conflict that is usually large scale, involving war among countries, or economics). Conflict happens when there are two sides who happen to have differences in something, whether its interest, opinion, or can also be beliefs. However, conflict does not only include that. It can also involve many other things such as power, values or status of a certain individual/group (Galtung, 1996).

In the *Transformers* movie, the discrimination made by the humans against the cyborgs leads them to a conflict between two sides, resulting in a war between two races, even though from the movie, I found out that there is one main kind of conflict that is related to the movie, which is the External conflict. According to Galtung (1996), external conflict is a kind of conflict that involves man against an external factor. External conflict happens because an individual or character(s) happens to have a conflict and / or struggle against something or an individual outside itself/themselves. This type of conflict usually involves two sides which both sides came from totally different beings, as for example when someone is having a conflict against somebody else, like the conflict between a protagonist and an antagonist, but it can also involve man-made subjects, such as machines. In the *Transformers* movie, the humans are having conflicts against machines and technology, which counts as external factors within the role of the conflict.

With the current advancements of technologies these days, they have improved too much to a point where they can act and think like us humans, even in many cases where there are people who actually lost their jobs due to technology. However, no matter how good and advanced they are, they will never become one of us (humans). They lack ethics, emotions, and consciousness. AI or also known as Artificial Intelligence, machines who can act like how humans do, can be simply defined as the creation of intelligent, self-learning machines, or "cyborgs," that think and act increasingly like humans (Lexcellent, 2019).

## **DISCRIMINATION**

Discrimination is a kind of treatment from a certain individual/s, whether it is someone/something or a group of it, that is having a kind of attitude (which is mostly negative) towards others, due to their specific trait. Discrimination is an action or practice that excludes, disadvantages, or merely differentiates between individuals or groups of individuals on the basis of some ascribed or perceived trait. Gerd Leonhard (2019) stated that, machines, no matter how advanced they can be, they can never become like humans. They can be created to act like humans. However, they lack the capacity to be humans in areas like emotions, empathy, and beliefs. In the *Transformers* movie, I found out that there are two kinds of discrimination, namely social exclusion and rights discrimination.

### **Social Discrimination (Social Exclusion)**

Social exclusion, a situation in which some part of an individual or group does not feel as a part of the rest of society, is a case where a certain individual avoids others due to their differences. In the future society, cyborgs and androids alike are being treated as second-class citizens. Unlike the humans, they lack emotions, which makes them unable to show their expression, whether they are happy by smiling, or sad by crying, or showing their anger. Their body is made different from those of actual humans, and their skins are usually made of harder materials, which are totally different from those of a human (Dick, 1999). Philip K. Dick (1999) also stated that, the machines lack the ability to appreciate the existence of another, which is also one of the reasons why they will not fit to live together on even grounds alongside the humans. In the *Transformers* movie, the humans are avoiding the cyborgs due to their machine-like appearance, but not only that, their huge difference in size from one to another is also the main cause of it.

### **Rights Discrimination (Human Rights and Cyborg)**

Human rights are the rights of every human being, that is related to their right to life, to eat and drink, to have freedom, to express their opinion, to work, to have proper education, and to get the 'title' of what makes them a human being. Human rights can also be a cause of discrimination. They are meant to protect those from discrimination and to make sure that all of them are treated as equal. However, in many cases, there are people who misused them. They abused the rights to trigger violence, or discriminate against certain groups (Clapham, 2007). Many people think that the machines should not have the rights because they lack the actual consciousness and emotions of a human. In the *Transformers* movie, even though the cyborgs are sentient, in which they act and feel like humans and also have emotions, the humans refuse to treat them (the living machines) as beings endowed with human rights because they think that machines are not allowed to think and act like humans as they are just tools.

## **CONFLICTS BETWEEN THE HUMANS AND THE TRANSFORMERS AND THE RESULTING DISCRIMINATION**

In the movie *Transformers* (2007), the conflicts between the humans and the cyborgs occur. The first part of this chapter will discuss the conflicts that happen between the humans and the cyborg characters. The cyborg characters in the *Transformers* are divided by two sides, the good ones and the evil ones. Starting with the war from the two sides of the Transformers characters, until they finally have to make themselves move to the planet earth. Upon their arrival, the humans who see the coming of the cyborgs immediately take action by approaching the Transformers, fully armed with army and weaponries, which starts the conflict between the two sides between the humans and the cyborgs.

### **Conflicts between the Humans and the Transformers**

In the "*Transformers*" movie, Sector 7 is a secret US government agency tasked with searching into and dealing with alien threats, including finding and containing the Transformers. The main conflict between the humans and the cyborg characters within the movie involves two sides of factions between the cyborgs, which are the Autobots and the Decepticons. The conflict revolves around three forms of struggle, namely for survival, for power, and for territory. The following sections will discuss them respectively. The Transformers (Autobots and Decepticons) are seen as potential threats by humans, who are represented by groups like Sector 7. The cyborgs, who have more advanced technology and hold much greater power compared to the humans, trigger the concerns among the humans who think of them as a risk for humanity's well-being. The conflict then rises from the humans' perception as to how they are trying to control or even eliminate the cyborgs during their struggles against each other.

### **The First Conflict: The Struggle for Survival**

The first conflict that occurs between the humans and cyborgs characters in the movie started due to the survival struggle of each party. The cyborgs themselves can be divided into two groups in this struggle. The group of the good cyborgs named the Autobots has no intention to hurt the humans at all when they are planning to go to Earth. Instead, their intention to go to the planet is to warn the humans about the upcoming peril that will befall upon them which is caused by the evil group of cyborgs named the Decepticons. On their home planet Cybertron, the Autobots and Decepticons are engaged in a centuries-long civil war. They fight for dominance and resources to secure the survival of their faction on Earth, where their conflict is ongoing. The said misunderstanding between the humans and the cyborgs happened due to the way of thinking of the humans. Even though the Autobot came to the earth with good intentions, the humans, who are already concerned by the Decepticons beforehand and striving for their own survival, immediately think of the Autobots as a potential threat towards their safety and well-being, resulting in an immediate act of violence towards the cyborgs, without asking them first or even without wanting to know about what are the cyborgs intentions. This is due to the appearance of the cyborgs, whose bodies consist of machinery and the size is many times bigger than that of a human. At the later part of the movie, recognizing that the Transformers' ability to defend Earth depends on their own survival, some humans join forces with the Autobots to form alliances. Together, they hope to stop the Decepticons from causing mayhem which the Decepticons' existence eventually endangers humankind. When the Humans and the Autobots work together, a lot of information and technology are shared among and between each other of the two sides. The capacity of both species (the cyborgs and the humans) to exchange resources, knowledge, and technological innovations frequently determines whether one of them will survive. The Decepticons are a threat to Earth's survival, and both humans and Autobots have a stake in keeping it safe from them. They are working together to protect Earth's resources and keep it from being destroyed. However, when it comes to dealing with the Transformers, humans are faced with ethical questions. They debate whether to fear or trust these powerful beings and frequently make decisions that affect both species' chances of surviving.

### **The Second Conflict: The Struggle of Power**

Control over resources, technology, and the corresponding impact of each group are frequently at stake in the power struggle between humans and Transformers. It also explores issues of cooperation, trust, and the moral consequences of exercising authority over creatures that are radically different from humans but have incredible powers. Various factions within the human government or military pursue their own goals throughout the movie, at times, they cooperate with the Decepticons for said advantages or align with the Autobots for mutual benefit. The second conflict that happens between the humans and the cyborgs is involving a struggle about power between the said two sides. The balance of power between the humans and the cyborgs is very far in comparison. Compared to the humans, the Transformers, with their cyborg body consisting of many parts of machinery, is way more advanced than those of the humans' when it comes to technology. Needless to say, the cyborgs' power and strength are far above those of the humans. The humans on the other hand, compared to the cyborgs, are better when it comes to cooperating with each other on their side. They also have greater numbers during the conflict between the two sides because they are literally fighting on the planet of the humans, and not only that, the numbers of the cyborgs they have among their ranks is also very limited compared to the humans. Compared to the humans, the Transformers possess highly advanced technology that grants them significant advantages during their war with and / or alongside each other. The humans see this as a chance in order to obtain the ability to harness and control the power of the cyborgs by learning about the details of their technology, and by doing so, it can also close the gap they have between each other for their conflict. In order to close the huge gap of power between the humans and the cyborgs, the humans intended to

**Christian:** The Transformers: The Conflicts between Humans and Cyborgs and the Resulting Discrimination

capture, if possible, one of the cyborgs alive so they can end up researching their technologies resulting in improvement for their own benefit, which they did.

The misunderstandings, anxiety, and competing goals are the main causes of conflicts between the two sides. Some people among the humankind within the movie are trying to control or destroy the Transformers because they are motivated by power struggles or false beliefs and see them only as tools or threats that need to be avoided. This causes a rift between people who believe that working with the Transformers could be advantageous and people who believe that they pose a threat to human safety or dominance. At first, the humans in the movies frequently see the Transformers as unknown, strong creatures that present both opportunities and risks. While some humans view the Transformers as potential allies or threats to Earth's security, others want to control or utilize their advanced technology for their own purposes. In contrast, the Autobots want to build a peaceful relationship with humans while shielding them from the Decepticons' evil plans. They frequently stress how crucial it is for the two species to get along and understand one another.

**The Third Conflict: The Struggle for Territory**

Territory conflict is a major theme in the Transformers movie, with the main conflict centered on the Autobots versus Decepticons fights. For a variety of reasons, these groups of sentient alien robots fight for dominance over various parts of the planet. Because of its resources, particularly the All-Spark, a potent relic that gives Transformers life, the planet Earth frequently serves as the center of conflict. In an effort to rule their species, the Autobots, led by Optimus Prime, and the Decepticons, led by Megatron, who both pursue the AllSpark. The last conflict that happens between the humans and the cyborgs relates to their fight for Earth, the very planet of where the humans have been living on. Ever since the destruction of their own, the evil group of cyborgs named the Decepticon has been looking for a suitable planet. During their travel, they stumbled into Earth, which is a planet rich in resources but inhabited by humans. The Decepticons, without any consent from the humans, invade their planet and cause destruction over many of their cities in order to rebuild the Earth into a mechanical one, which suits more for the cyborgs but makes it no longer inhabitable by the humans and may lead them to extinction. Earth's strategic importance turns it into a major battleground. Certain places, like cities or sites with distinct energy signatures or old artifacts, become hotspots for battles between the Autobots and the Decepticons as they fight for supremacy. Taking control of an area usually means obtaining access to cutting-edge technology or renewable energy sources. In an effort to improve their own technological prowess and tip the scales in their favor, the factions battle for control of these resources. The Decepticons' motivations for taking over the Earth are behind their main objective, which is to gain power, resources, and advantage against their war with the Autobots, and with the Earth on their grasp and the humans in it out of the Decepticons' way, the Decepticons can easily win the war against the Autobots.

**The Effects of the Conflict: The Humans' Discrimination against the Transformers**

The Transformers are enormous, formidable extraterrestrial robots with cutting-edge technology when they first show up on Earth. Some humans experience fear and anxiety upon their arrival because they view them as a threat because of their unusual appearance and abilities. In addition, a group of hostile Transformers known as The Decepticons represent a serious threat to humankind. Because of this threat, some people make assumptions about all Transformers being dangerous, which makes them discriminate toward them regardless of their true motivations. Ever since the prolonged conflicts and struggles that have been happening between the humans and the cyborg characters in the movie, in order to properly protect the humans from the Decepticons' harm, the Autobots are willingly working together alongside the humans. However, the way they are viewing each other (the humans and the Autobots) is one-sided as how the humans are still holding their grudges and doubts towards the cyborgs even though they know that the Autobots' intentions were good. In the movie, the humans were

trying to exile the Autobots away to outer space and force them to leave the earth because they assumed that the Autobots are the main cause of Decepticons relentless attacks towards the Earth and its inhabitant because the humans think that the reason why the Decepticons arrived to the earth is to hunt the Autobots, which has been causing all the damages and destruction towards both the earth and the humans themselves.

### **The First Discrimination: The Social Exclusion of the Transformers against the Humans.**

The humans react towards the existence of the cyborgs in a negative way, shown in the movie when they first met them for the first time, they immediately took hostile actions towards the cyborgs. This is mainly because the cyborgs' appearance (which is mechanical and much bigger in size compared to the humans) makes the humans think that they are a threat to their life and safety. This later causes fear building inside the humans and later makes them avoid the cyborgs and in severe cases, even being hostile towards them. Not only that, in the movie, the actions of the cyborgs during their operations on earth are strictly limited by the humans because the humans are still trying to control them. At first, the humans were trying to get the cyborgs away from the earth. However, after learning about the Autobots' good intentions, the humans decided to let the good cyborgs stay in order to help them fight against the evil cyborgs, and that is not without putting many conditions and regulations for them beforehand. In the movie, the good cyborgs AKA the Autobots decided that they need to work together with the humans in order to protect them and their planet earth towards the bad cyborgs, which are the Decepticons. They even willingly join the human's military force in order to do so. However, even after knowing that the cyborgs are willingly to assist them, the humans still put restrictions on how the cyborgs can act while they are on earth. The cyborgs are not allowed to go to the cities where the public are, which they are not allowed to be seen by the public no matter the cost. When they have to go to the cities, they have to camouflage themselves in a form of vehicles (the transformers in the movie has the ability to change their shape into vehicles such as cars, etc) so that their 'menacing' appearance will not be shown in the public and will not cause any distress. Not only that, the cyborgs were forced to live far away from public and / or populated areas because the human thinks that they will cause damage to the cities if they were to live there due to their big and mechanical bodies.

### **The Second Discrimination: The Humans' Discrimination against the Transformers' Rights**

The humans only saw the cyborgs as mere machines and did not even treat them as an actual living being with any living rights. According to the humans within the movie, the cyborgs are mere machines, and machines are mere technology put for humans use, and because of that, the machines should not have any living rights, as they are just tools. This way of their (the humans) thinking, makes them want to 'control' the cyborgs by having the intention to capture them in order to research them later, which they did in the movie. After the capture of Bumblebee, one of the transformers who happen to be captured by Sector 7, a certain military group of the humans, the humans managed to research the poor cyborg and managed to learn about their intention and reasons of why they came to earth. Even after knowing that the cyborgs' intentions were good, the humans still refuse to offer their hospitality. In the very later part of the movie, the humans ended up being hostile towards the Autobots who were the ones they once volunteered to work with. Despite what they did before, helping the humans by protecting the earth against the Decepticons' threat, the humans think that it is time for them to solve the problems regarding the cyborg invasion by themselves. The human's public perception has been shaped by the actions of both Autobots and Decepticons during previous encounters with each other. There is a growing distrust and a desire to remove these alien entities from Earth because many people are afraid of the harm they can cause, so in order to preserve their cutting-edge technology, they made the decision to hunt down the Transformers. The desire to capture or destroy them stems from their aim to reverse-engineer their advanced alien technology for military or personal gain. Some of the important figures within the humans in the

**Christian:** The Transformers: The Conflicts between Humans and Cyborgs and  
the Resulting Discrimination

movie even work with the Decepticons because they think they can benefit from their advanced technology. These partnerships worsen the misunderstandings and mistrust that already exist between humans and Autobots, increasing the conflict between the two sides.

The Cyborgs, like humans, are also sentient living beings which should have their own rights to live. The humans in the Transformers movie however, refuse to accept this as a fact. When they are researching the cyborgs' technologies, instead of asking for the cyborgs' consent, the humans restrict the transformers' living rights of freedom, imprisoning and freezing one of them, even killing many of their kind and treating it as a mere tool in order to serve the humans' purpose as a mere researching material, without considering the cyborgs' feelings.

## CONCLUSION

Based on my analysis on the movie Transformers, I conclude that the conflict between the humans and the Transformers characters in the Transformers movie, resulting in the humans discriminating against the cyborgs. The discrimination resulting from the conflict within the movie is and / or are mainly came from the humans, who are the ones who mostly did the discrimination which they discriminate against the cyborg characters in the movie. Firstly, there are three types of conflict, which is the struggle between humans and the cyborgs. The first one is the struggle for survival among each two sides, the second one is the struggle for power, and the third one being the struggle for territory, which involves the Earth, the very planet of the humans themselves. Upon seeing the appearance of the cyborgs, the humans immediately trigger their sense of survival by immediately fighting back against the cyborgs due to their menacing appearance. While the war between the two factions of the good against the evil cyborgs involved the humans which also threatened their existence, in order to ensure the survival of each other, the Autobots and the humans decided to work together in order to fight the Decepticons. Second, The huge gap in capabilities between the cyborgs and the humans are also very big, as the cyborgs are obviously better and stronger than the humans are when it comes to physical and many other capabilities due to their mechanical bodies made of way more advanced technologies than those of humans'. Lastly, the conflict between the two huge sides also involves the well-being of the very planet where they struggle against each other, which is the Earth. Due to their conflict, most of the important facilities of the humans such as their cities are badly damaged, and in order to protect their very own place to live, the humans obviously had to fight back against the cyborg. Overall, from the movie itself, aside for being a series for the purpose of entertainment, I think the Transformers series can be used as a good reference to analyze the ongoing conflicts between humans and machines / technologies, as how these days most people around us are having issues with the existence of those 'sentient machines' or what we call A.I (Artificial Intelligence).

## REFERENCES

- Clapham, A. (2007). *Human Rights: A Very Short Introduction*. OUP Oxford.
- Dick, P. K. (1999). *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* Harvill Press.
- Galtung, J. (1996). *Peace by Peaceful Means*. SAGE.
- Leonhard, G. (2019, May 13). *Technology Vs Humanity*. The Futures Agency GmbH.
- Lexcellent, C. (2019). *Artificial Intelligence versus Human Intelligence*. Springer.
- Wolfe, C. (2010). *What is posthumanism?* Minneapolis, Minn. Univ. Of Minnesota Press.