

## CHILDREN AND ROBOT: POSTHUMANISM READING ON RIKO THE SERIES

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### Abstract

The emergence of Indonesian young celebrities from *Hijrah* movement who made Islamic children's films as a means of *da'wah* (Islamic missionary) is interesting to be studied. Different from *Nussa*, *Riko the Series* is one of the children's Islamic films that raises the issue of religion, children and technology relations. This study aims to find the representation of robots and the relationship between robots and children in children Islamic film *Riko the Series* from the perspective of Post-humanism. This study is library study. The data is in forms of audio visual and verbal transcripts from *Riko the Series* film, official website and from interview with the initiators taken from internet. The data were collected and analyzed using documentation to explore the concepts of post-humanism and its relation to representation of robot and robot-young adult relation in *Riko the Series* film. Content analysis is used as method to analyze the relation between robot and children. The result of the study showed that *Riko the Series* represents post-humanism in the following aspects: 1) New awareness of religion toward technology which represented by the inclusion of robot Q110 to Modern Upper Middle class of Islamic family, 2) It places robot in relation to human being without undermine it as merely object by treat it as modern child caretaker who educate, protect and become the partner of children. However, the relation between robot and children are still unbalance in which robot is more dominant than children so that it creates over reliance and dependence on using robot to children.

Keywords: Post-humanism, Robot-children relation, *Riko the Series* film

### Introduction

*Riko the Series* film is one of Islamic animation films made by Indonesian film maker. It tells about the life of upper middle class Moslem family which have two children and a robot named Q110. Compared with other Indonesian Islamic animation films like *Dodo dan Syamil*, *Alif Alya*, *Nussa*, *Riko the Series* film is unique for depicting the relationship between child and Robot and Islamic teaching presented in the film.

*Riko the Series* film was founded by several Indonesian artists, namely Tengku Wisnu, Ari Untung and Yuda Wirafianto. In the press conference for the launch of the film *Riko the Series*, the founders stated that this film was made as a means of education about Islamic science and religion for people, especially those aged that Islam is very close to science and technology (<https://garissepuluh.com/riko-the-series/>).

Therefore, this film raises a lot about the histories of medieval Islamic scientists such as Al Bantani, Al Farabi, Ibnu Haitam and so on, who inspired the development of science and technology in Europe during the Renaissance era.

The *Riko the Series* film tells the story of the adventures of Riko, smart and curious kid, and his robot friend named Q110. The Q110 robot is told to live in the house of the Riko family without telling the origin of Q110. Riko is the younger of two siblings. Riko is an 8 year old boy, while his older sister Wulan is secondary school age. Riko lives in islamic upper middle class who practice modern Islamic teaching. Her father is a doctor and her mother is a housewife. They live in housing clusters, just like typical of upper middle class families in Indonesia.

This representation of robot in Indonesian Islamic children animation film is interesting. It can open the children

imagination about living together with robot without leaving religion value. This imagination is very important in preparing today's children to the future of Post-human era in the future where human will live side by side with other intelligent robots.

Post-human deals with the crisis of human among intelligent creatures as the result of advancement of technology. Post-humanism study is a critical approach to find the meaning of being a human in the world where human being is not the only reasoned creature (Wallace, 2010) (Simon, 2003). Advancement of information technology, genetic engineering, stem-cell research, cloning, the Human Genome Project, new paleontological evidence, the rise of neuropsychology and artificial intelligent lead to fundamental ethical and ontological crisis of being a human and we need new paradigm about human that different from the humanistic perspective.

To answer the ontological crisis of humanity in the Post-humanist era, religion has returned to its place to provide a solution. Although some discourses place religion in conflict with science and technology, there are many Post-humanist phenomena that can be analogous to religion such as the infinite space of cyberspace, super intelligent powers such as God and others. Graham (2016) states that the post-secular era gave birth to a post-secular era, which provided a place including religion to answer the human existential crisis in Post-human era.

In literature and other cultural products such as film, Post-human world is not strange one. A lot of science fictions which have predict and tell the story of Post-human. From Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein* novel that give rise to the present of non-human intelligent creature to *The Matrix* and *Transcendence* film that present the intelligent machine and the fusion of human

and machine so we cannot differentiate them. Therefore, science fiction can also the source of exploring the questions of Post-human (Sheryl, 2007).

The study of Post-human will be more interesting when it relates to children and religion. Today's, in some countries, robot are used for education, entertainment, and healthcare service. In Japan, robot is used for childcare (Tanaka & Takeshi, 2020). Even in Islamic country like Iran, robot is also used to teach religion for children (Alemi, et.al, 2020) although it creates controversies at the beginning. *Riko the Series* film raises the issues of robot, childcare and religion; therefore, this film is interesting to be studied in Post-humanism perspective to open the discourse about religion especially Islam, science and technology and future Post-humanistic world.

Unfortunately, *Riko the Series* was not being studied from the perspective of Post-humanism. There were only two previous studies which studied moral value as a mean of Islamic missionary (*da'wah*) (Handayani, 2020) without going deeper into the Islamic perspective toward Post-human in the film and educational value from semiotic perspective (Aisyah, 2020). No previous studies that focus on the representation of Post-human in Islamic film for children.

## Methodology

This study is library study. The data is in forms of audio visual, verbal transcripts from *Riko the Series* film and other sources taken from internet especially the official website of the film. The data were collected and analyzed using documentation and content analysis to explore the concepts of post-humanism and its relation to representation of robot and robot-young adult relation in *Riko the Series* film.

## Findings and Discussion

In the midst of advances in science and technology in western countries and the negative stigma of Islam as a terrorist religion, both abroad and domestically, *Riko the Series* film is one of the responses to construct an image of Islam that is more modern and does not conflict with science and technology since the beginning. In this film, Islam is presented as a modern, tolerant, non-rigid religion without leaving the rules of Islamic sharia and has a tradition of science and technology since the early development of Islam in the middle Ages. The modern impression can be seen in the appearance of the characters, no longer too normative and patronizing like previous Islamic children's films such as *Nussa*. Children's characters are not displayed in Arabic-style clothes such as long robes and large headscarves.

Moreover, the compatibility of Islam and science and technology is represented in the symbol of the intelligent Q110 robot. In addition, the material presented always points to the history of science and technology in medieval Islam and its contribution to modern science. On the one hand, this is nostalgia for the glory of Islam on the other hand, it is an education from an early age about the image of modern Islam which ready to face the future Post-humanism era.

### Robot in Exclusive Modern Islamic Family

Q110 the robot lives with the Riko family, which is a reflection of the ideal image of a modern Indonesian young Islamic family from upper middle class. Father is described as a doctor figure who is young, handsome, gentle and never harsh to his family members. The father figure is depicted as the breadwinner while the mother is a beautiful and gentle young housewife. The

wife no longer needs to work because ideally, the husband is the one who makes a living, especially as the husband's profession as a doctor is very sufficient for the family's needs. Even if the husband has a job with a mediocre income, the wife should ideally stay at home, live simply as depicted in other Islamic cartoons such as the films *Nussa*

As an ideal representation of the modern Islamic family, this family has two children, as is the ideal image of the family Planning with only two kids. Unlike the traditional Islamic picture where many children have a lot of fortune. In other Islamic card films such as *Nussa*, a modern Islamic family is also depicted with two children. Family planning as a product of modernity has been adopted as part of a halal, Islamic lifestyle. It is different from traditional orthodox Islam which tends to prohibit family planning with various arguments.

In addition, the ideal picture of a modern Islamic family can also be seen in the selection of housing as a place to live, not in the village. In the film *Nussa*, a simpler modern Islamic family is also depicted living in housing. Apart from family planning, housing is also a symbol of a modern family that tends to be exclusive, busier with their own lives and less interacting with other people.

As in the film *Riko the Series*, this family also rarely depicts the social interaction with other people outside the home, even interactions with other fellow residents of housing are also very rare and almost never. In the film *Riko the Series*, family members are rarely depicted hanging out with other people. In some scenes, Riko doesn't even play with her friends in the neighborhood while playing kite. Riko only played with the robot Q110. When the other kites approached Riko's kites, Q110 actually kept Riko's kites away from the kites, which tried

to approach them as a symbol of Riko's family exclusivism. The scenes outside the home were confined to the hospital where Riko's father worked and there were no other people interacting at the hospital.

### **Robot as Part of Family**

*Riko the Series* film shows the sides of Post-humanism in terms of depicting robots and the relationship between robots and humans. In this film, Robot Q110 is seen as member of the family. As family members, robots are not treated as mere objects or objects. Q110 was treated as a subject just like humans. From here, there is a vision of a life together between humans and robots that do not object to each other but instead live side by side with each other's differences.

Robot Q110 as a family member is also symbolized in the logo of the film (fig.1). In that logo, Q110 name is part of Riko name. It means that robot Q110 is cannot be separated from Riko. Robot is already become part of the family. However, we can also interpret it as the inclusion of technology in the family, an upper middle class Islamic family.



Source: <https://twitter.com/rikotheries>

### **Robot as a Modern Nanny for Children**

In this film, the robot Q110 is depicted as a babysitter. In one of the series, Q110 was given the mandate to look after Riko. As a caregiver, Q110 is characterized by Riko as an old, talkative and knowledgeable robot. This characterization is the same as the child's depiction of a parent or caregiver. This also reflects the middle to upper

Islamic community, which even though there is a mother at home as a housewife, a caregiver is still needed. Even though it is a housewife, outside activities such as online businesses, influencers, and so on are still carried out online so there is not much time for parenting.

However, as a child caregiver, Q110 is described as being different from traditional caretakers in general. In one of the series, entitled *Friends*, Q110 is depicted as a friend so that when Q110 dies from being exposed to water, Riko feels as lost as he has lost a friend. Apart from that, Q110 is also considered as a more sophisticated future caregiver who not only takes care of physically, but also guides cognitively. Q110 provides good information about everyday life such as how to play with kites to information about science and technology such as the history of science and technology, especially during the Islamic caliphate, to scientific facts such as the solar system. Like the internet today, Q110 is a source of knowledge. Q110 even taught religious knowledge to Riko.

From the description above, Q110 the robot does seem more dominant than Riko. Riko learns more about information, knowledge, attitudes, and skills from Q110 than Q110 learns about the human nature that robots from Riko don't have. This condition reflects human over reliance and dependence on technology. This dependence can be seen from how Riko is separated from her peers. Never depicted playing with peers at housing or school.

There are still imbalances in human relations, especially children and robots. Robots are described as being smarter than children, so robots tend to dictate and patronize a lot. In the relation between robot and child, it is better if the child is the caretaker of the robot as a child with a pet. Robots that should learn to children about

human development are not the other way around. In some series, there are scenes where Q110 learns about human traits such as emotions towards Riko and Wulan, but the presentation is small. Robots are still more dominant than children.

### Conclusion

The film *Riko the Series* is one of the Indonesian children's films that has touched on the post human vision which is represented from the Islamic point of view of the middle and upper class. In this film, the Q110 robot is placed as a subject and equal which is symbolized by being accepted as a family member, caregiver, friend, and playmate.

However, the relationship between robots and children is still considered unbalanced. Robots are still very dominant than children. This unbalanced relationship is not healthy because children tend to depend on robots. In children's education, the relationship between children and robots should be like the relationship between children and pets, so that children can develop and learn by teaching knowledge to robots. Thus, children and robots will develop together and there will be no dependency as humans depend on technology

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