

MUSLIM IN CONTEMPTUOUS MODE: EXISTING REPRESENTATION OF HOLLYWOOD FILMS

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ABSTRACT:

This study is based on Edward Said's orientalism. The research has sought the nature of representation of the Muslim in Hollywood movies. After going through historical background and review of all available literature, through purposive sampling 15 movies were drawn out which were examined in the light of their respective themes and scenes by applying content analysis. It has been found that the Muslim are represented in a negative, fundamentalist, anti-Americans, low category education/profession and uncivilized portrayal which should be considered an offence and counter narrative should be build to minimize the mainstreaming

Keywords: Orientalism, Portrayal, Muslims, Hollywood, Fundamentalist, Negative

Hollywood: Etymology and Origin

Hollywood is a district of Los Angeles, situated in California State of United States of America which lent its name to American film industry. More precisely, Hollywood is generally referred to the cinema of United States. In 1878, Eadweard Muybridge was the first man who used camera to capture the moving image; However, it was not until 1894, when the world's first commercial motion picture was exhibited in New York City. Initially, New Jersey State of USA was the motion picture head quarter of America but later on advent of studios and extensive film making resulted into its shifting from New Jersey to California from where it derived its famous name of "Hollywood". (Tiger, M. 2006)

Objectives of the study

1. To explore the portrayal of the Muslim in Hollywood after the onset of 9/11 attacks.
2. To seek the nature of America and the Islamic world relation through the movies of Hollywood.
3. To seek the nature of Stereotypes Associated with Portrayal of Muslim World.

Statement of the problem

This study is an effort to interpret the portrayal of the Muslim in Hollywood in selected time period and to determine the fact how this relates with foreign policy of America.

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Literature review has been fragmented into the following two categories for the purpose of this study

- 1) Film as a vehicle to determine international relations.
- 2) Image of the Muslim in Hollywood movies.

Portrayal of Muslim in Hollywood; few analogies

El-Farra (1996) is of the view that Hollywood often associates Islam with terrorism. By the example of the movie “Siege”, they suggest that the terrorists can be seen to be involved in a bombing, purportedly for a sacred cause. The researchers has mocked the repetition of ideas besides superficial and mosaic depiction of the Muslim characters.

Nicholas (1978) continue the same discourse. They claim that “Siege” as a movie, has become watch worthy after September 11 attacks. The researchers have observed that the antagonist of the movie i.e. “samir” is offering prayer at the ending scene of the movie just before he is going to kill a peaceful American demonstrator; on the contrary, Elise, a CIA agent, tries to stop him from doing this act of brutality but Samir kills her in a merciless manner. Meanwhile, CIA agent “Hubbard” appears at the stage killing Samir. Through this commentary, the researchers have evaluated the negative portrayal of the Muslim character; moreover overall impression of the Islam has been blackened by depicting the Muslim villain indulged in the act of praying just before the act of killing.

Hoffman (2010) goes through the analysis of a Hollywood movie “The Mummy (1999)” to find that it was nothing but a racist masterpiece whereby Arab individuals were represented as filthy and greed whereby Arab masses were presented as ignorant, mindless and killing zombies. Shaheen, J. (2001).presents his stance about the afore mentioned movie by describing that it is irrational to claim that racism depicted in “The Mummy (1999)” is merely a period detail or it is lying in the bottom layer of the content. Rather, it is so much evident that this racism is always hanging around while the rest of the movie is fading away. (P.334) Shaheen (2007) has deconstructed the portrayal of Muslim in the movie “Rules of Engagement”. Shaheen registers the presence of this film as standing number one flick over the opening weekend and henceforth a true blockbuster. He labels the film as one of the most anti-Arab and anti-Muslim movie of all time. He says that the film is revolving around the violent Yemeni protestors outside the US embassy in Al-Sana, the capital of Yemen, characterized by a chanting mob of veiled females, bearded men with missing teeth and unruly children throwing stones and bombs. Finally we encounter with brandish anti-US slogans on banner, definitely written in Arabic. He reveals that US marines fired on the Yemeni’s protestors killing 83 males, females and children. During this violent scene, the audience cheered and applauded which simply indicated that Yemeni including females and children deserved to be dead. Shaheen has observed that the impact of ethnic exploitation becomes a naked phenomenon when false image of innocent Yemeni children as killers and enemies of American government is goaded (P.404).

Shaheen (2008) has also deconstructed the portrayal of Muslim in famous Arnold Schwarzenegger starred movie “True Lies (1994). According to him, this was one of the worst movies for its negative depiction of Palestinians as terrorist. He observed that through this film Arab Muslims were shown to be fanatics who were intending to destroy the world, at the same

time they were racist, idiotic, sexist and last but not least they were incompetent .The ample proof of this quotient is that they were not able to complete the task of mob-destruction through nuclear strike because of an erroneous pattern which even a five-year lad could have not exhibited. The researcher has further observed that this movie wrongly assess that jihad and violence are two aspects of a very same phenomena. Shaheen concludes that watching two hours of this type of violence was immoral, disgusting and cheap. (P.502, 503) Smarts (2013) suggests that “True Lies” was a source of discomfort for the Arab community because it gave them a strong feeling of being negatively portrayed and thus, alienated. They were not only represented as terrorists in this film but they were also shown as idiotic and mindless freaks. In nutshell, the researcher concludes that this movie was a source of an encouragement to the pre-existing stereotype about the Arabs and the Muslims.

3.4. Research Questions

Following research questions have been formulated after duly going through review of available literature;

- 1) How do selected Hollywood movies portray the Muslims?
- 2) Does the violent representation of Muslim characters exceed the peaceful representation?
- 3) Does the peaceful representation of Muslim characters exceed the violent representation?
- 4) Does the uncivilized representation of Muslim characters exceed the civilized representation?
- 5) Does the civilized representation of Muslim characters exceed the uncivilized representation?

Hypothesis

On the basis of review of literature and research questions, the following hypotheses have been formulated;

- 1) It is more likely that negative portrayal of Muslim would be higher in Hollywood movies.
- 2) It is more likely that portrayal of the Muslim would be more violent than peaceful.

Theoretical Framework (Edward Said's Orientalism)

Edward Said (1978) discussed the interplay between “occident” and the “orient”.

Occident is his term for the west which represents England, France, and USA etc.

Orient stands for the misunderstood, misrepresented and misperceived Middle East and Far East.

According to Said, the west has offered a dichotomous view of the orient. It has portrayed a romantic notion of it which is quite different from the reality.

The Middle East and Asia are viewed under the spectacle of prejudice and racism by the occident. But the real misery is that orient is backward and unaware of its own history and culture. Vacuum filler in this realm of unidirectional information flow is west here which has created a parallel culture, history and future promise for them adding its own spice and salt. In

other words, west is offering an image of the orient which is not real and which confirms to political imperialism of Europe in the east.

According to said, contemporary perception of Muslim world has been shaped in the light of the writings of the philosophers and authors of 18th and 19th century. This perception is generally negative because of the prejudices arising from the colonial experiences of the west which was a mere master-slave relationship on the behalf of the west. Said refers to the concept of power raised by Antonio Gramsci and Michael Foucault to determine that by shaping the fabricated history and culture of the east, the west exercise its absolute control and hegemony over the east while undermining a fact that east has its own contribution and role in development of the west. Said concludes that through Orientalist work, west is still controlling the east, despite the fact that colonization is over since the end of the Second World War. Said describes this phenomena as “Neo-colonialism”. Orientalism, when implied on this research, becomes helpful in defining contemporary representation of the Muslim in Hollywood films and described historical process associated with it.

Methodology

For this study content analysis has been used as a research Methodology.

Sampling Techniques

A purposive sample has been taken from the population. Dominick and Wimmer (2001) stated that in purposive sample only those elements are drawn which execute specific characteristics (p-92). For this study, only those movies are selected from the population which has been nominated for the Oscar awards (which is also known as American Academy award and considered as the most prestigious global event of cinema) in any category. The rationale behind this selection is that nomination for Oscar in any category or wining it is a measure of critical acclaim of a movie and its global popularity and worldwide reception.

Data Presentation

Theme as unit of analysis.

For the first unit of Analysis (which is theme of the movie) three categories i.e. Positive, negative and neutral have been constructed .The final sample from Hollywood cinema comprises of 15 Movies

(Table No. 1)

Theme of Hollywood Movies	Positive	Negative	Natural	Total
	2	11	2	15

Table No.1 has shown that out of 15 themes of Hollywood movies, the portrayal of Muslim has been positive in 2, Neutral in 2 and negative in 1.

(Table No. 2)

Categories	Frequency	Percent
Positive	2	13.3
Negative	11	63.4
Neutral	2	13.3
Total	15	100

Table 2 indicates that frequency of positive theme is 13.3% frequency of negative themes 63.4%, and frequency of neutral theme is 13.3%, hence negative themes in Hollywood films are dominating over positive and neutral themes in selected Hollywood movies. Researcher, by using purposive sampling, studied Hollywood movies in selected time period by theme to find out that only two out of fifteen themes were positive where by Muslim characters were represented as peaceful, Progressive, Tolerant towards Americans, educated and civilized. These movies are “The Visitor” and “Life of Pi”.

Two out of 15 movies presented neutral Themes. Such movies are “The kite Runner” and “Syriana”. 11 out of 15 movies may be referred as Negative in term of theme. Movies with negative theme are Munich, United 93, The Hurt Locker, Argo, Captain Phillips, Zero dark thirty, Iron Man 3, Lone survivor and American Sniper. In these movies Muslim Characters are represented as fundamentalist violent, anti-American and low-Category Professionals. In movie “Crash” Muslim characters are not represented as anti American or fundamentalist but they are violent and low category professional. Same is the case with “Babel”. Given the fact, violence is the key factor depicted in all negative themes coupled with low-category professions and education.

Scene (In Seconds)

Scene (in seconds) was second unit of analysis for this study which was further divided into three categories i.e. positive, negative and neutral to check the portrayal of Muslim as violent or peaceful, fundamentalist or progressive, anti-American or tolerant towards Americans, low degree profession /education bearing or high degree profession/education and uncivilized or civilized in selected Hollywood movies during selected time period. For the purpose of this study every film was viewed five times to measure the portrayal in term of above variables so as to broaden the scope of the study and aligning the results in a convenient manner.

(Table No. 3)

Categories		Nature of Categories	No. of Scenes	Duration (in seconds)	Mean Duration
1.	Violent	Negative	66	13731	6673.33
	Peaceful	Positive	13	2110	
	Neutral	Neutral	29	4189	
2.	Fundamentalist	Negative	28	1321	680.33
	Progressive	Positive	6	289	
	Neutral	Neutral	11	431	
3.	Anti-American	Negative	47	6318	2477.33
	Tolerant towards Americans	Positive	12	496	
	Neutral	Neutral	19	618	
4.	Low-Category Profession and education	Negative	74	15118	6456.67
	High degree profession and education	Positive	21	3929	
	Neutral	Neutral	7	323	
5.	Un-Civilized	Negative	36	5118	2306.67
	Civilized	Positive	19	789	
	Neutral	Neutral	26	1013	

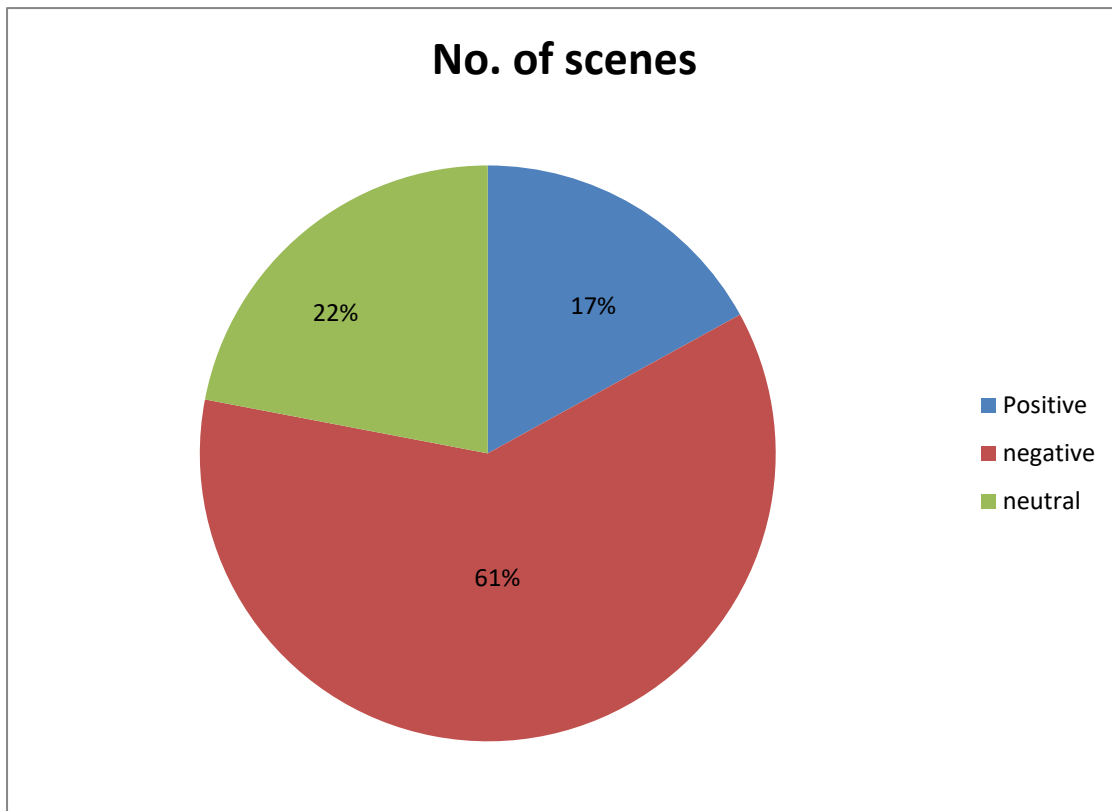
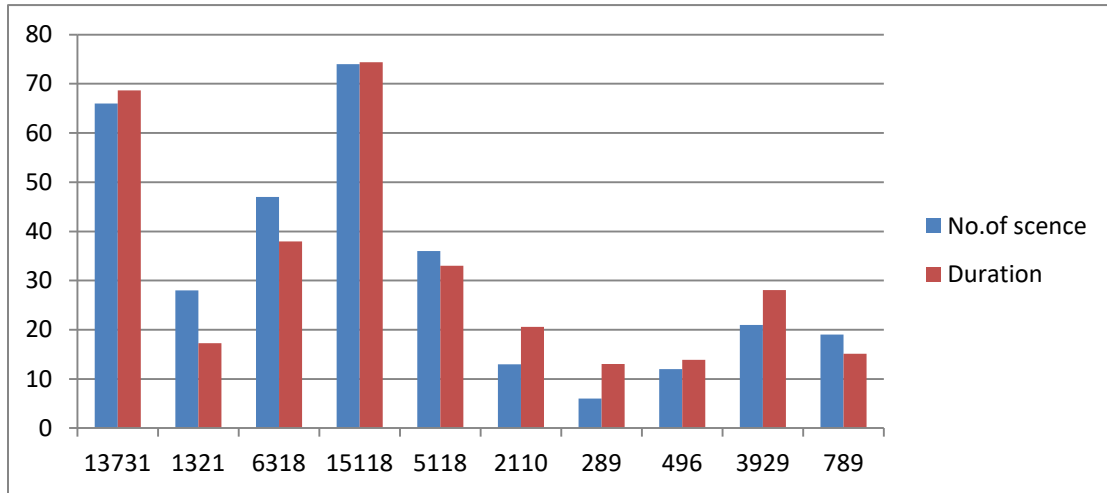
Table .3 presents data about the portrayal of Muslim in various categories. It is evident that violent representation of violent Muslim characters in selected movies is higher than its peaceful representation. Muslim characters are represented as more fundamentalist as compared to its progressive representation. Muslim characters are portrayed as more anti-American than tolerant towards them. Muslim characters have been shown more un-civilized and they are assigned with low-category education/profession contrary to civilized and high category professional and educated background. This unit of analysis reveals that negative portrayal of Muslim characters is higher in Hollywood movies as compared to positive portrayal.

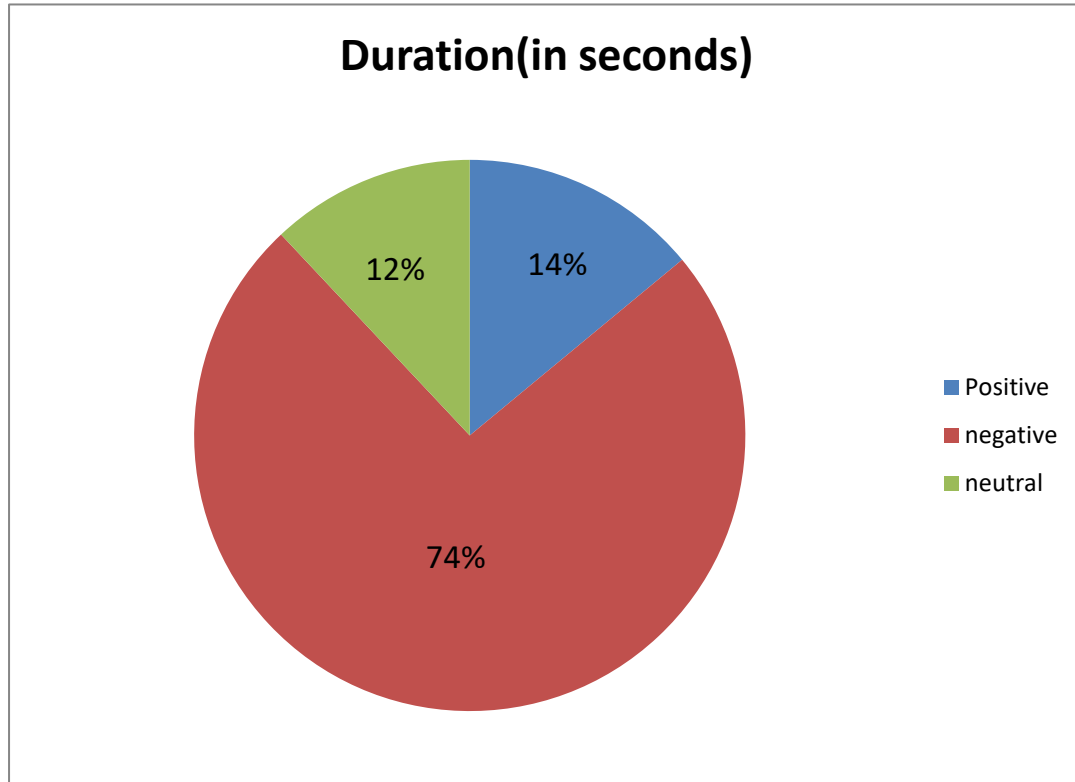
(Table No. 4)

Category	No. of Scenes	Percentage	Duration (in seconds)	Percentage
Negative	251	61	41606	74
Positive	71	17	7613	14
Neutral	92	22	6574	12
Total	414	100	55793	100

Table 3 & 4 affirms Hypothesis No.1 and 2 (H_1 & H_2).

Statistical Representation of table No 3 and 4





Frequency representation of table No 3 and 4

Frequencies

		Statistics	
		No of scence	Duration
N	Valid	10	10
	Missing	0	0
Mean		32.20	4921.90

Frequency Table

		No of scence			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	positive	1	10.0	10.0	10.0
	positive	1	10.0	10.0	20.0
	positive	1	10.0	10.0	30.0
	positive	1	10.0	10.0	40.0
	positive	1	10.0	10.0	50.0
	negative	1	10.0	10.0	60.0
	negative	1	10.0	10.0	70.0
	negative	1	10.0	10.0	80.0

negative	1	10.0	10.0	90.0
negative	1	10.0	10.0	100.0
Total	10	100.0	100.0	

Duration

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid positive	1	10.0	10.0	10.0
positive	1	10.0	10.0	20.0
positive	1	10.0	10.0	30.0
negative	1	10.0	10.0	40.0
positive	1	10.0	10.0	50.0
positive	1	10.0	10.0	60.0
negative	1	10.0	10.0	70.0
negative	1	10.0	10.0	80.0
negative	1	10.0	10.0	90.0
negative	1	10.0	10.0	100.0
Total	10	100.0	100.0	

Calculations in regression output

Positive regression line:

SUMMARY OUTPUT

<i>Regression Statistics</i>	
Multiple R	0.674437
R Square	0.454865
Adjusted R Square	0.273154
Standard Error	5.093958
Observations	5

ANOVA

	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Significance F</i>
Regression	1	64.95479	64.95479	2.503229	0.211762
Residual	3	77.84521	25.9484		
Total	4	142.8			

	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>Standard</i>	<i>t Stat</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>Lower 95%</i>	<i>Upper</i>	<i>Lower</i>	<i>Upper</i>
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		<i>Error</i>				95%	95.0%	95.0%
Intercept	10.16514	3.419551	2.972652	0.058943	-0.7174	21.04768	-0.7174	21.0476
X Variable 1	0.00265	0.001675	1.582159	0.211762	-0.00268	0.00798	-0.00268	0.0079

RESIDUAL OUTPUT

<i>Observation</i>	<i>Predicted Y</i>	<i>Residuals</i>
1	15.7566	-2.7566
2	10.93098	-4.93098
3	11.47953	0.520472
4	20.57692	0.423082
5	12.25597	6.744027

Negative regression line:

SUMMARY OUTPUT

<i>Regression Statistics</i>	
Multiple R	0.989547
R Square	0.979203
Adjusted R Square	0.972271
Standard Error	3.246951
Observations	5

ANOVA

	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Significance F</i>
Regression	1	1489.172	1489.172	141.2516	0.001281
Residual	3	31.62806	10.54269		
Total	4	1520.8			

	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>t Stat</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>Lower 95%</i>	<i>Upper 95%</i>	<i>Lower 95.0%</i>	<i>Upper 95.0%</i>
Intercept	22.93787	2.714818	8.449135	0.00348	14.2981	31.57763	14.2981	31.5776
X Variable 1	0.003276	0.000276	11.88493	0.001281	0.002399	0.004154	0.002399	0.00415

RESIDUAL OUTPUT

<i>Observation</i>	<i>Predicted Y</i>	<i>Residuals</i>
1	67.92373	-1.92373
2	27.26576	0.734239

3	43.63706	3.362936
4	72.46785	1.532146
5	39.70559	-3.70559

Regression line positive and negative

SUMMARY OUTPUT

<i>Regression Statistics</i>	
Multiple R	0.959651
R Square	0.92093
Adjusted R Square	0.911046
Standard Error	6.961749
Observations	10

ANOVA

	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Significance F</i>
Regression	1	4515.872	4515.872	93.17618	1.1E-05
Residual	8	387.7276	48.46595		
Total	9	4903.6			

	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>t Stat</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>Lower 95%</i>	<i>Upper 95%</i>	<i>Lower 95.0%</i>	<i>Upper 95.0%</i>
Intercept	11.82583	3.049864	3.877495	0.004691	4.792834	18.85883	4.792834	18.85883
X Variable 1	0.004139	0.000429	9.652781	1.1E-05	0.003151	0.005128	0.003151	0.005128

RESIDUAL OUTPUT

<i>Observation</i>	<i>Predicted Y</i>	<i>Residuals</i>
1	68.6652	-2.6652
2	17.2941	10.7059
3	37.97915	9.020855
4	74.40668	-0.40668
5	33.01175	2.988246
6	20.56016	-7.56016
7	13.02215	-7.02215
8	13.87902	-1.87902
9	28.0899	-7.0899
10	15.09189	3.908108

FINDINGS

Following research questions have been replied after duly going through research methodology and data presentation;

- 1) How do selected Hollywood movies portray the Muslims?

It is evident from table 1, 2, 3 & 4 that selected Hollywood movies Portrayl the Muslim in a negative manner. From the selected sample of 15

Movies (100%) 11 movies were seen to portray image of Muslim negatively.

- 2) Does the violent representation of Muslim characters exceed the peaceful representation?

Table no.3 indicates that violent representation of Muslim characters exceed the peaceful representation of Muslim characters. Scene in seconds has been used as unit of analysis in this research and it has been observed that 66 scenes portrayed Muslim characters as violent in comparison to 29 scenes in which they were represented as peaceful.

- 3) Does the peaceful representation of Muslim characters exceed the violent representation?

From table no. 3, it has been revealed that peaceful representations of Muslim characters don't exceed the violent representation of Muslim characters. There are only 29 scenes from selected Hollywood movies which are offering a peaceful portrayal; whereas, their violent depiction is evident in 66 scenes.

- 4) Does the uncivilized representation of Muslim characters exceed the civilized representation?

Table 3 indicates that uncivilized representation of Muslim characters is far higher than civilized representation.36 scenes of selected movies represent Muslim characters as uncivilized as compared to only 19 scenes in which they are depicted as civilized.

- 5) Does the civilized representation of Muslim characters exceed the uncivilized representation?

Table 3 insists that civilized portrayal of Muslim characters doesn't exceed the uncivilized representation. Rather only 19 scenes depict them civilized as compared to 36 scenes comprising of uncivilized portrayal.

Conclusion

In nutshell, it may be concluded that Hollywood film makers are creating a certain narrative about the Muslim, Islam and Islamic world in the awe of "War on terror". Image of the Muslim is being painted with negative and odd connotations besides they are being identified and associated with irrationalism, fanaticism and radicalism. These movies are inculcating and cultivating strong and sordid propaganda themes of ferocity, rigidity, rustic attitude and

intolerance towards other faiths and ethnicities. The analysis of selected movies also deduces that inter-faith harmony and equilibrium has been pushed into jeopardy due to this eccentric depiction of the Muslim.

It is matter of concern for the Islamic world that non-Muslim characters in Hollywood movies are represented as rational, progressive, pluralistic, soft and benign towards kids and women besides being intelligent, educated, expert, dedicated, competent and peace-lover while the Muslim characters are depicted as exactly opposite which draws a line between protagonist and antagonist, hero and villain and hence, friend and the foe. The Muslim antagonist, villains and henceforth, American foes remind us anti-Nazi and anti-communist propaganda strategies which is an alarming sign for the contemporary Muslim population across the globe.

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