Liberal Islamophobia:
Deepta Kumar, author of *Islamophobia and the Politics of Empire*, makes a critical distinction when she says, “The way liberal Islamophobia works is that it roundly criticizes Islam-bashing, thereby preempting charges of racism, but then it goes on to champion programs that target and vilify Muslims.”

Context:
- At a time when there is so much focus on the rabid Islamophobia of those in the Trump administration and many of his most outspoken supporters, we need to be extremely mindful of the liberal Islamophobia that has, in significant ways, helped drive key aspects of U.S. domestic and foreign policy.
- We are far more likely to have liberal Islamophobes in our social circles and political groups than virulent anti-Muslim ideologues who believe that “Western civilization” is engaged in an implacable battle with Islam resulting from fundamental “cultural” differences.

Liberal Islamophobia, Politics, and Government Actions
Activist Kalia Abiade, an advisory board member of the Muslim Anti-Racism Collaborative (MuslimARC), provides an example of liberal Islamophobia at the 2016 Democratic National Convention:
- On Day 2 of the DNC, towards the end of President Clinton’s remarks, he suggested that Muslims need to prove love and loyalty to the United States and prove a hatred of violent extremism. “If you’re a Muslim and you love America and freedom and you hate terror, stay here and help us win and make a future together. We want you,” he said. In Clinton’s world, Muslims are inherently not from “here.” And the right to exist here, as Muslims have done for centuries, is still conditional on an unflinching “love” for this country and not steeped in a basic recognition of humanity.

As Abiade explains further:
- During the last eight years, and under the leadership of President Obama and former Secretary Clinton, we have witnessed the expansion of the war on terrorism, the repeal of due process, the premiere of discriminatory countering violent extremism (CVE) programs, the multiplication of drone killings targeting Muslims abroad, and the widespread surveillance of Muslims at home, all while “progressive leaders” celebrate a narrative of inclusion like that featured at the DNC.

- Liberal Islamophobia often leads to the same scrutiny, surveillance, militarization, and warmongering as the more obvious right-wing Islamophobia. And because it comes in a nicer package, we need to be even more attentive in order to identify and stop it.

Liberals and Conservatives:
Arun Kundnani, author of *The Muslims Are Coming! Islamophobia, Extremism, and the Domestic War on Terror*, argues,

- Liberals and conservatives . . . share the same starting point—there is a Muslim problem. Conservatives see that in terms of the clash of civilizations.
Liberals are typically bad at not acknowledging their part. Using these words like terrorism, extremism and radicalization is a way of defining the other guy’s violence as barbaric and fanatic. Thus, your own violence is rational, necessary and legitimate.

For example, a liberal might condemn the defacement of mosques or violence against individual Muslims, but support the New York City Police Department’s discriminatory spying and profiling of Muslim, Arab American, and South Asian communities or be uncritical of U.S. drone attacks in Muslim-majority countries, because they think that such actions aren’t Islamophobic but, rather, keep “us” safe.

“Oppressed” Muslim Women, “Dangerous” Muslim Men:
In addition, it is not uncommon for liberals, as well as those on the left who identify as deeply committed to women’s rights, to articulate, rather than critically analyze, the narrative about Muslim women pushed by neoconservatives and anti-Muslim ideologues alike.

In “Imperialist Feminism and Liberalism,” Deepa Kumar points out that, “As several Third World Feminists have argued, a historical weakness of liberal feminism in the West has been its racist, patronizing attitude towards women of color who have been seen less as allies/agents and more as victims in need of rescue. This attitude prevails both in relation to women of color within Western nation states, as well as women in the global South.”

In “‘Good’ and ‘Bad’ Muslim Citizens: Feminists, Terrorists, and U.S. Orientalisms,” Sunaina Maira provides a cogent intersectional analysis that challenges these problematic attitudes and narratives:

- The preoccupation in the United States with women in hijab, or presumably “oppressed” Muslim and Arab women, coexists with a desire to rescue them from their tradition in order to bring them into the nation. At the same time, there is a deep anxiety about Muslim and Arab men as potential terrorists and religious fanatics who are antithetical to Western liberal democracy and ultimately inassimilable.

- Examining recent controversies about Islam, immigration, and culture in Canada and Norway, Sherene H. Razack argues that the figure of the “imperilled Muslim woman,” who can be emancipated in the West and saved by Western feminists from “forced marriages, veiling practices, and female genital mutilation,” provides “a rationale for engaging in the surveillance and disciplining of the Muslim man and of Muslim communities.”

- The tightening of borders in Fortress Europe—and the U.S. garrison nation—is intertwined with moral panics about defending the modern, liberal, European/“Western” individual against the racialized figures of the “dangerous” Muslim man and the oppressed Muslim woman.

- The politics of rescue of Muslim women is also steeped in liberal concepts of individualism, autonomy, and choice that shape a binary and neo-Orientalist world view. A resurgent imperial feminism assumes that it is the United States or Western culture that must bring “freedom” to certain areas of the world, even if paradoxically via a military force—another case of white men (and white women) trying to save brown women from brown men.