Network Against Islamophobia

The Network Against Islamophobia (NAI), a project of Jewish Voice for Peace, was created to serve as a resource to, and work with, JVP chapters and other groups interested in organizing against Islamophobia and anti-Arab racism and to be a partner to the broader, Muslim-led movement against Islamophobia.

We created these materials--a two-session curriculum and resources; a series of modules; and a facilitator guide-- so we can be effective, accountable partners in this work.

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Liberal Islamophobia Module

Purpose of Module:
This module looks at the ways that liberal Islamophobia is present in the U.S. today and how it affects people's perceptions of Muslims and connects to cultural and structural racism and government policies. It analyzes critical distinctions and similarities between blatantly anti-Muslim rhetoric and the racism of liberal Islamophobia, and encourages us to think more deeply about the multiple and structural ways Islamophobia manifests itself--and needs to be challenged. We recommend using this module after, or in conjunction with, the full NAI curriculum or Intro module. Other ideas about how to use the NAI curriculum can be found in the Facilitator Guide.

Goals:
- To develop an understanding of liberal Islamophobia
- To analyze and be mindful of the consequences of liberal Islamophobia
- To think critically about how to challenge the problematic attitudes and narratives of liberal islamophobia

Materials:
Handout #1: Basic Definitions of Islamophobia and Anti-Arab Racism
Handout #4: Liberal Islamophobia
Yasmin Nouh, Fusion, "No Extremists Here" video
NAI Readings and Resources on Islamophobia

I. Introductions and Opening (10 minutes)

Facilitator:
5 minutes: Pass out handout #1, and give a brief overview of the agenda and rationale for this module.

5 minutes: Ask participants to think about what the word "Islamophobia" means to them. After a few minutes, ask participants to share their thoughts with the person sitting next to them. Those who feel comfortable can share with the whole group.

II. What is Liberal Islamophobia? (30 minutes)

Facilitator:
15 minutes: Present the following quote by Deepa Kumar on board or chart paper:

"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."

Provide some 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.

Then also put on board or chart paper:
- What comes to mind when you hear the phrase "good Muslim/bad Muslim"?
- How might this framing of the "good Muslim/bad Muslim" concept perpetuate Islamophobia and anti-Arab racism?

Ask participants to think deeply about Deepa Kumar's quote and and two questions above, and then reflect on:
- What do you think "liberal Islamophobia" means?
- What are some examples of it from things you've heard or read or experienced?
- What are the possible consequences and impacts of ignoring this kind of Islamophobia?

15 minutes: Pass out post-its and ask participants to jot down examples of Islamophobia that they have seen and/or experienced. Then display two pieces of chart paper. On one piece of chart paper, place a circle in the middle with the words, "Islamophobia: Islam-bashing." On the other piece of chart paper place a circle in the middle with the words, "Liberal Islamophobia: Some

Muslims Are 'Problems.'" Ask participants to think about whether the examples they thought of fall under right-wing/conservative Islamophobia or liberal Islamophobia. Ask them to stick their post-its on the piece of chart paper where they think their example fits best.

Guide a whole group discussion on examples that participants posted, pointing out any similarities or differences, anything that stood out or was surprising, etc. The following discussion points can also be used for this conversation:

- Liberals often buy into the "good Muslim-bad Muslim" paradigm. They might, for instance, share the common, but erroneous, mainstream—and Islamophobic—views that, for example: (1) Muslims commit more violence than Jews or Christians; or (2) Muslims in the U.S., unlike those from other religious groups, have some fundamental responsibility to publicly condemn (over and over again) the violent acts of any Muslim who commits an act of violence. Such denunciations, the argument goes, are necessary if a Muslim wants to become someone liberals can view as a potential partner (that is, a "good Muslim").
- Liberals might also lament that the "Muslim community" hasn't been "sufficiently" vocal in its condemnation of such violent acts. Quite apart from the Islamophobic assumptions behind these expectations, research has [found](#) that "Islamophobic statements—released by a small group of anti-Muslim fringe groups—are much more likely to make their way into the American news cycle than statements made by Muslim advocacy groups denouncing terrorism."

IV. Liberalism and Islamophobia (35 minutes)

Facilitator:
20 minutes: Share Handout #4: Liberal Islamophobia. Divide participants into three groups for an in-depth discussion. Ask each group to focus their discussion on a specific section of the handout:

- Group 1: Kalia Abiade's explanations of some of the critical distinctions between right-wing/mainstream Islamophobia and liberal Islamophobia.
- Group 2: Arun Kundnani's analysis of liberals and conservatives in relation to Islamophobia.
- Group 3: Deepa Kumar's and Sunaina Maira's comments on liberal Islamophobia and "feminism."

Explore potential responses to these Islamophobic assumptions as they apply to what you are reading (perhaps writing them on the board or chart paper for groups to see while they are discussing their sections of the handout):

- Profiling Muslims in the community or at the airport keeps me/"us" "safe."
- Muslim women are oppressed./Wearing hijab is oppressive.
- Muslims in the U.S. need to be "vetted" or given more scrutiny when entering this country.

Facilitator will then explain that these are examples of liberal Islamophobia that we will now discuss more fully.

15 minutes: Each group shares a summary of its group discussion with the whole group.

III. Challenging Islamophobia (1o minutes)

Facilitator:
2 minutes: Show Yasmin Nouh, Fusion, "No Extremists Here" video

8 minutes: Guide group conversation with Guiding Questions:
- How can we respond to false, Islamophobic assertions about who commits violence?
- What are the implications of the accusation that Muslims should be responsible for condemning any and all violence committed by anyone calling themselves Muslim, and how can we respond?
- How do we respond to groups within our communities (like the ADL) that oppose acts of Islamophobia, but support the "good Muslim-bad Muslim" paradigm and support state programs that surveil or target Muslims?
- How do we challenge the idea that certain women need "liberating?"

V. Closing (10 minutes)

Facilitator:
10 minutes: Ask participants to discuss any new or lingering thoughts they have about liberal Islamophobia or Islamophobia in general. Ask them to share what they will take away with them, including a next step (perhaps some type of action or community education) they might take or be part of to counter liberal Islamophobia.

Further reading (from nai's Readings and Resources on Islamophobia):

Mohamad Elmasry, "The Brussels Attack and Liberal Islamophobia," *Middle East Eye*, March 22, 2016.

Deepa Kumar, "Islamophobia: A Bipartisan Project," *The Nation*, July 2, 2012.

Alex Kane, "Author Deepa Kumar on the Imperial Roots of Anti -Muslim Sentiment" (interview), *Mondoweiss*, July 2, 2012.

Brandon Jordan, "Interview: Author Arun Kundnani on Islamophobia & the Myth of the Liberal Anti -Racist," *Shadow Proof*, January 8, 2015.