Gender and Politics in the ME

Topics
- How to understand the lack of progress
- religion and patriarchy
- sexuality in the Middle East

Gender
- The state of women’s rights in the region
- An orientalist outlook is self-fulfilling
- The Western interference is seen in colonial terms
  - colonial authorities challenged established views on women
- misunderstanding the distinct features of the Arab society

How to understand the lack of progress
- ‘Deeply entrenched social norms... (and) conservative interpretations of ‘sharia’ subordinate women’ (Kelly 2010, pp.1-2)
- role of religion and patriarchy
- Islamic teachings are open to interpretation
- some argue that Islam has liberated women (Milton-Edwards 2011, 207)
  - Islam regards men and women as moral equals in the sight of God

Islam or Arabic culture to blame?
- Before the rise of Islam in the early 600s, Arabs lived in a traditional, patriarchal society
- men regarded women as their property to be married or divorced at will
  - women did not have a say in the voice of their husband
  - they lacked economic security because the groom’s dowry was paid directly to the bride’s male relatives
  - female infanticide was common