

## Moments of Opportunities for Gender Equality: Women's Agency in Critical Junctures in a non-Western Context

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This paper aims to develop a conceptual framework for analyzing women's agency – particularly in women's movements - in a non-Western context. Women's agency has been recognized as one of the main driving forces for gender equality changes. Yet, as the analysis shows, such agency often does not unfold continuously but in historical episodes with a high degree of institutional uncertainty – or so called critical junctures. In such instances, various institutional factors constitute complex gendered structures, characterized by both favorable and hindering elements to the way women mobilize, frame their claims and define their alliances and strategies. The paper gives an understanding of contemporary gender institutions by drawing up the link between recently emerging institutional entities– like for instance gender machineries and gender quotas – and how they need to be examined in a conjunction with already existing institutional constellations. The analysis shows how in a non-Western context, more recent gender equality institutions are dialectically connected to historical colonial institutional legacies. While traditionally colonial and post-colonial authors have fostered an artificial dichotomy between historical rupture and total historical continuity, applying historical institutionalism helps to see how colonial institutions - although creating legacies - have not produced outcomes foreseen by the former colonial powers. Illuminating the idea of women's agency in critical junctures through two illustrative case studies – the Philippines and Iran – this paper will delineate how women are not passive recipients of gender equality shifts, but often the main drivers of gender equality changes. In this context, it will particularly focus on the following aspects: the role of critical junctures, the importance of strategic alliances and the way historical institutional legacies served as gendered institutional structures that fostered the creation and the consolidation of women's movements at first place.